

—Editorial Page—  
*Our opinion/*

# Greenbelt held hostage

It took preservationists 20 years to get the Staten Island Greenbelt recognized as an official city park. It has taken Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly just a few weeks to partially undo that work.

Mrs. Connelly, with the help of Sen. John J. Marchi, has managed to block state funding for development of a Greenbelt master plan. She did it to pressure environmentalists into dropping their objections to group homes in Corson's Brook Woods.

If that is the way politics is played in Albany, we want no part of it. It does a disservice to all of Staten Island.

The Corson's Brook dispute, which has been raging for the past year, pits advocates for the retarded against environmentalists. It has been an unnecessarily bitter, divisive dispute that is bound to get more bitter and more divisive with Mrs. Connelly's action.

Under ordinary circumstances, the two causes — saving trees and helping the retarded — would not be mutually exclusive. They are both fine, commendable, goals.

Unfortunately, the two causes now clash at Corson's Brook Woods, a 40-acre property located within the Staten Island Developmental Center. The state, which owns the property, wants to build group homes for the retarded there. The city wants to save the property *in toto*, untouched, as part of the Greenbelt park.

Now Mrs. Connelly has entered the dispute. She has sided with advocates for the retarded, saying the group homes should be built as originally planned, in Corson's Brook Woods.

That is her right. Anyone, including a state assemblywoman, is entitled to an opinion on the subject. She is also entitled to act upon her opinions. We don't begrudge her that.

But Mrs. Connelly is not proposing compro-

mise, or even honest dialogue. Instead, she is holding the Greenbelt money hostage. She says there can be no compromise. Until the matter is resolved "to the satisfaction of the disabled population," the money will be blocked.

It is political blackmail; there is no other word for it. Mrs. Connelly is using her political clout to punish a group that doesn't agree with her, and she will continue to punish that group until they come around to her way of thinking. And Sen. Marchi has gone along with it.

If the shoe were on the other foot — if another Assembly member blocked money for the developmental center until the group homes were moved out of the woods — Mrs. Connelly would be the first to cry foul. And rightly so. Government by threat does no one any good.

The Greenbelt is one of Staten Island's greatest creations. It is the crown jewel of Staten Island parks — indeed, of all all city parks. It is the preservation of our greatest natural resource, a symbol of all that separates Staten Island from the other four boroughs.

Many people have worked many years to create the Greenbelt. Mrs. Connelly does not have to be reminded of this. She has traditionally been a supporter of the Greenbelt, and her work in that regard has always been praiseworthy.

That's why her blocking of the Greenbelt money is so surprising. There is no reason Greenbelt planning cannot go forward while the Corson's Brook dispute is being resolved. There is no practical reason to link the two. There are only ugly political reasons.

For the good of all Staten Island, we ask Mrs. Connelly — and Mr. Marchi, too — to return the Greenbelt money. Staten Island deserves its Greenbelt, regardless of how the Corson's Brook dispute is resolved.