



WHAT'S WITH OUR GOVERNMENT? WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Pat Galaskas

Somehow the American government does not seem to be working as the founders intended. The graphic that described separation of powers and checks and balances that I studied in high school just does NOT match the way Washington is working (or NOT working) today. It's tempting to lay blame – we wouldn't have these problems if there were a different President or if the majority leader of the Senate or the speaker of the House were more reasonable. However, I believe the problem is more complicated and reflects fundamental changes in our society.

We seem to be living in a culture that reinforces divisiveness and mistrust. One political party wants to kill unborn babies and open all borders to let in criminals and terrorists, while the other is OK with tearing crying infants from their immigrant mothers' arms and has no compunctions about denying the science of climate change. Gross overstatements and distortions? Of course, but the disquieting fact is that a significant portion of our population seem to truly believe them and does not hesitate to repeat them. We know now that some of this is attributable to organized foreign interference in our recent elections through unprincipled use of social media. However, those efforts could not have been as effective as they apparently were, were it not for the willingness of many to accept without questioning what they see on Facebook or in a Twitter feed. Where did we go wrong?

Our founding fathers were products of the rationalism of the Enlightenment. They valued reason but were not above calls to emotion. Both aspects of the human condition need to be recognized and put in their proper place. We need to practice critical thinking and recognize blatant appeals to unreasoned emotion. (Dictators are infamous for their propensity for igniting fear and anger—one need only watch an excerpt from any Hitler rally.) When I got an email headed "Supreme Court in Ruins" last week, it got tossed into the trash file without ever being opened. It was intended to elicit support for term limits for Supreme Court justices

but, in my humble opinion, responding to that sort of messaging just encourages its perpetuation. What this nation needs is more thoughtful analysis and debate for BOTH sides of a question like that.

At a recent library convention I attended, much attention was given to the need to help library users distinguish between real "fake news" which is just what someone doesn't want to hear, and outright lies and purposeful distortions. Interestingly, a study that asked individuals to judge the trustworthiness of internet information found that even practiced scientists could be fooled by websites with an apparently "credible" URL. Only experienced "fact checkers" who depended upon verifying internet information by consulting multiple sources were consistently better at identifying fake news. Most of us, who may lack the fact checkers' skills (or time for checking) might be best served by heeding Friedrich Nietzsche's admonition: "The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently." In other words, always consider the other side's point of view.

Unfortunately, we've recently been reminded that caring about ethics apparently has not been considered important at some levels of our government. However, our leaders function as role models (whether they intend it or not). Thus, caring about how our representatives and leaders live their lives is important. We need to recognize that times change and that standards for attitudes and behavior that were acceptable in the past may be considered "beyond the pale" today. However, I would suggest that what really matters most is whether an individual can (or will) admit past errors and evidences this in his or her conduct today.

If we are to address the dysfunction of our representative government, I believe we must emphasize the value of compromise. Personally, I was appalled that a candidate to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court was denied any consider- (cont'd on page 2)

WHAT'S WRONG? WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT? (cont'd from page 1)

ation in 2016. However, I was equally disturbed in early 2017 when the Senate minority leader seemed to be saying that his party's starting position in approval hearings for White House nominations should be "denial." The constitution gives the President the authority to nominate judges and cabinet officials, etc. while the Senate has the responsibility to carefully consider those nominations. More recently, we are much occupied with the President's insistence on the need for a "big, beautiful wall" on our southern border whereas for many years, our representatives on both sides of the aisle have supported fences that mark boundary lines. OK folks, there is a difference between millions spent on a wall and the lesser amount needed for fencing, but we need some compromise and action on border control that will work and is affordable. Compromise, we must remember, requires BOTH sides to "give" a little. The critical thing is to arrive at a compromise that recognizes the difference between ac-

ceptable trade-offs and abandonment of fundamental principles.

Finally, we all need to accept responsibility. Our representatives are responsible for formulating and approving legislation that will serve the nation as a whole as well as those who elected them. The focus of the legislative process should be serving the populace, not "winning" and insuring re-election. We need to demand that our representatives honor the constitution and apply its hallowed checks and balances. Given that our democracy is founded upon the principle of "the consent of the governed" we also need to address the appallingly low rates of participation in the electoral process. This will involve removing impediments to voting for every eligible citizen while continuing vigilance to insure that ineligible votes are not counted.

Our membership has repeatedly endorsed our organization's non-partisan involvement in political issues and we respond with commentaries on current events. We urge our readers to be critical consumers and active participants through our Quarterly Queries and via email to info@nysrsas or by means of "snail" mail. We welcome your input.

Dr. Pat Galaskas, retired from the Syosset CSD where she served as Elementary Curriculum Coordinator. She currently serves as NYSRSAS' 2nd Vice-President.

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We welcome your comments on articles or current issues.

To start a discussion, contact us at

info@nysrsas.org

NYSRSAS Annual Meeting and Luncheon

***June 12, 2019—12:00 noon
At the Western Suffolk BOCES
31 Lee Ave., Wheatley Heights, NY 11798***

An informal lunch of wraps and salads will be followed by a presentation on
**"Internet Safety—
Protecting Your Identity and Your Finances"**

***Please send this form with your \$20 check to:
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FROM THE DESK OF:
The Reflective Retiree
As Mother's Day Approaches

I REMEMBER MAMA
Corine Lipset-Huberman

I REMEMBER

*The day we walked in the park
 You held my hand in yours
 I was so small and the world so big
 But I felt safe in the circle of your love.*

I REMEMBER

*My fifth birthday party with streamers and chocolate cake
 I was dizzy with joy and the earth spun round and round
 As you and I danced to the tune of "Here We Go Looby
 Loo,"
 My toes and yours in prefect synchronization
 On and on as sun became moon
 Day turned into night
 Stars appeared in the sky and I slept on your shoulder.*

I REMEMBER

*Graduation from elementary school, grade 8 it was
 Grade K through 8 in the same school
 Schools like that no longer in existence
 I wore a white gown which you helped me sew
 We had to make our own, would never happen today
 You hugged me and told me you were proud of me
 I laughed and hugged you back.*

I REMEMBER

*The years go fleeting by, more graduations
 My wedding day, you fixing my veil, holding my hand
 Tears welling up in your eyes and then in mine
 My baby girl was born, your first grandchild
 It was love at first sight
 I thought it was because it was the first
 But you were the same loving Nana with the second and
 the third
 Watching them grow and guiding them, always gently and
 lovingly.*

I REMEMBER

*As the years went by, I became the parent, you the child
 And I held your hand to steady you, to comfort you
 Then one day you were gone
 No hand to hold, no shoulder to pat
 No one to say "I love you"
 Only the photos on the wall, in the picture frames, in the
 albums
 But always in my heart, forever in my heart.*

Rest in peace, my beloved mother.

To Opt Out or Not

Mary Hance

Well, it is that time again when New York State administers its standardized tests in ELA and Math to students in grades three through eight. It is also the time of year when teachers and principals are inundated with letters from parents choosing to opt their children out of these tests.

With the opt-out rate extremely high, especially here on Long Island, what is the value and purpose of the testing? Can the State Education Department really use the data from the testing to make determinations as to the quality of a teacher or how the curriculum is laid out for each grade level?

Before I retired, I was the principal of an elementary school in Nassau County. My school was on a trimester system. Our semesters ended in December, March and June. If the purpose of the testing is to determine if a student grew academically for their grade level, why would you test a student for the grade when the learning is only two-thirds complete? How can you expect a third-grade student to know all the curriculum for third grade in March of that year? In many cases the reading passages for the grade level are well above the students' grade level so with one-third of the learning still to be had, is this a fair test?

These are questions that need to be answered by the Education Department if they want parents to allow their children to be tested. The Regents Exams are given at the end of the school year to test students' learning in many academic areas. That is so reasonable. Why, when high school students have a whole year of instruction before they are tested, do we ask elementary students to demonstrate knowledge of a grade level when it is only two-thirds complete?

The ELA was administered to the students in New York the first week in April. School districts could choose which two days for the paper version of the testing. There was an option of giving a computer based test but this had to be suspended for a day and a half when servers broke down and students were frustrated by difficulties logging on and sometime could not submit their completed exams.

According to *Newsday*, of the students eligible to take the test, 68,035 out of 150,933 opted out. That is 45.1 percent of the students not being tested. Not every district responded to *Newsday's* inquiry, but the reported opt out rate on Long Island remains at 54.4 percent in Suffolk and 35.7 percent (*cont'd on page 7*)

TWO POINTS OF VIEW

Recognizing and respecting the fact that there can be differing points of view within our membership, NYSRSAS takes seriously the need to provide a forum for discussion. One of our Board members recently felt it important to respond to the opinions expressed in our January issue. Because you may not recall the original article, we reprint it here to permit the reader to form his or her own opinion of the views expressed by the respective writers.

NYSRSAS President Eugene Goldwasser

When Congress passed the tax cut bill last year, it was championed by the president and members of the Republican Party as a “middle class tax cut.” According to the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans, “supporters of the tax cuts claimed that workers would see a \$4,000 wage hike, but the opposite has been true. Corporate profits have jumped 8.2 percent, while tax revenue from those same companies have plummeted 44 percent and workers’ wages have remained stagnant. In fact, only four percent of workers have received a bonus or a wage increase since the tax law was passed, and most were not even close to the \$4,000 promised.”

The tax bill promoted a lower corporate tax rate

“ . . . cuts have resulted in a major loss of revenue . . . which will . . . affect programs.”

as well as a tax cut for wealthy individuals making many times more than the members of our association earned during their active years. These cuts have resulted in a major loss of revenue for the government which will have a deleterious effect on social security and Medicare, as well as other programs that serve the poor and the middle class. It seems that the idea is to starve social security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, as well as Head Start and public schools, in general. Claiming a lack of funds to pay for these services, there will be a push to raise the age for social security eligibility and to eliminate unsustainable programs.

What’s more, the cabinet secretaries appointed by President Trump have corrupted the role of their agencies, so much so that:

- the Environmental Protection Agency can now be called the Environmental Pollution Agency as it supports coal and oil production instead of protecting clean air and water programs and promoting higher mpg rates for cars and trucks
- the Interior Department is in the process of opening pristine wilderness lands to mining and oil exploration instead of protecting and enhancing our national parks, national forests and monuments

NYSRSAS Board Member Edward Bellomo

I read your article entitled “Two Years Down, Two to Go, An Assessment.” I have waited a while to respond but I feel I need to share my thoughts. My first candid reaction was, I am listening to CNN talking points against the president. But, considering my respect for you and your expressed beliefs about certain issues, I really am not surprised. In fact, you have some valid points. What concerns me most is that you are only presenting facts that support your perspective. However, since our organization is supposed to be objective there should be a balanced presentation. The tax incentives and de-regulation of this administration have not only benefitted corporations but many Americans. GDP has been at 3 or slightly above, and job creation has been significant which has reduced unemployment to historic low levels, especially for Blacks and Hispanics. Take home pay has increased

“ . . . Take home pay has increased for many . . .”

for many middle class Americans as a result of the tax cuts. In fact, for the last five months average wages have increased, which is a key positive indicator. Many have come off welfare and food stamps which promotes self esteem and self confidence. Can we do better? Sure. Of course, let’s not forget the 401K’s and pensions of many Americans who have seen a dramatic increase in their bottom line.

The notion that the Republican Party is trying to starve revenues so they can sabotage Social Security, Medicare, and public schools is quite the theory. This just perpetuates divisiveness by painting one side as caring and one as not. The fact is that these subsidized entitlements need attention. There is mismanagement, waste and a need to address adequate funding which we have touched on in our group. The answer is not simply raising taxes on the rich. It should only be that easy. Obamacare was a highly flawed program. It included escalating costs for insurance, co-pays, medicine and limited choice of doctors. It also had some excellent features that should be maintained. Not to acknowledge both sides is misleading. Regarding public schools, we don’t need more federal

TWO POINTS OF VIEW (CONT'D)

Eugene Goldwasser (cont'd)	Edward Bellomo (cont'd)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Department of Education is undermining public schools while promoting charter schools and “for profit” institutions the Department of Housing and Urban Development is trying to roll back Obama-era policies dealing with fair housing and anti-discrimination practices and the Department of Energy has been criticized for demanding price supports for coal and nuclear power instead of supporting sustainable energy options. <p>The standoff at our southern border is curious.</p>	<p>government involvement, we need less. During 8 years of Obama we did not see any significant improvement in our public school system. But that discussion would be a good focus group conversation.</p> <p>I see no mention of our energy independence which has enhanced our national security and lowers fuel prices. That does not mean we should not do our part in maintaining a safe healthy environment for America. Contrary to the disparaging remarks of my friends on the left, no sane person wants to jeopardize the safety of our children and grandchildren. At least I hope not.</p> <p>The “wall” issue is just one aspect of our broken immigration system. Enhancing our existing barriers while adding an additional 55-100 miles of “wall” will certainly</p>
<p><i>“... The standoff at our southern border is curious.”</i></p>	<p><i>“... our broken immigration system.”</i></p>
<p>Claiming that the caravan of Central Americans wending their way North from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador is comprised of terrorists, drug dealers, criminals and worse, our president wants a wall, a physical structure to keep them out. Never mind that most illegal immigrants enter through approved checkpoints and apply for asylum, while the drug cartels get their drugs across the border using tractor trailers, airplanes, and boats. Border Patrol agents have difficulty detecting these shipments because of the sheer volume at the checkpoints and the lack of high tech surveillance options. One would think that an upgrade regarding surveillance, manpower, and other methods like the use of drones would do a better job than a wall, which, in the words of one Republican senator, people who want to get in can go over, under or around. Never mind that most of the land that the wall would be built on is privately owned by ranchers whose grazing rights would be damaged by a wall. Who will benefit from the building of a wall and who will it hurt?</p> <p>During the recent government shutdown and in his negotiations with congressional Democrats, the president refused to change his position on the wall other than to change what it could be made of, claiming if he gave in, “I would look foolish.” The longer the shutdown drags out, and the more recalcitrant and intractable he is, the more foolish he looks.</p>	<p>help. The cost is miniscule compared to the overall budget. You have listed several additional worthwhile things that should be included in a comprehensive plan. Sadly, both sides, for years, have been negligent in doing what is necessary to protect our nation. This president didn’t break the system, it was already broken. These measures, including walls, are needed to keep out those who would do us harm like the drug lords, gang members, human traffickers. Those coming here legally will never see that wall. On this issue the Democrats have refused to cooperate on any level. What happened to their concern for the “Dreamers”? They have offered nothing of substance to address the issues that need to be addressed. They need to get off their hatred of the President and focus on what’s best for all of America.</p> <p>Lastly, I read of your concern for the environment, entitlements, schools, and rightfully so; but I see none for the unborn and the born. The disregard for human life boldly demonstrated by the Democratic party is disturbing and alarming. The President might act foolishly at times, along with both parties, but the Democrats are acting in a way that disregards human life and labels those who disagree with them as hatemongers. One could argue that the Democrats have sunk to an even lower level than the man they despise so much.</p> <p>I close with this. I am not here to defend Trump on a personal level. This is about presenting and addressing significant issues that affect all Americans in a healthy balanced way. If we can not respect each other, including all of our differences, we will never be all that we can be as a nation.</p>

QUARTERLY QUERY RESPONSES – WINTER 2019

The Associated Press poll of what Americans viewed as the top 10 stories of 2018 in rank order were as follows: Parkland School Shooting, Trump/Russia Probe, ME2 Movement, Mass Shootings Around the Country, Midterm Elections, Immigration at the Southern Border, Kavanaugh Hearing, Wildfires in California, Climate Change and Jamal Khashoggi Murder.

Readers were asked which of the 10 issues affected them the most – personally, emotionally, logistically? And how did it affect the future of our country?

Response from Edward Price: *(served as superintendent in several NY and NJ school districts)*

All the items noted in the query are of concern and are linked by the major problem facing the US and the world, a lack of visionary leadership especially on the part of the president. Trump turns a blind eye to all these concerns. While he expresses sympathy to victims of mass shootings both in schools and in the general population, he is unwilling to support even the most basic reforms such as background checks prior to purchasing firearms for fear of alienating his allies at the NRA.

While immigration reform has been elusive for many leaders, Trump exacerbated the situation by unilaterally ending protection for the “Dreamers” and separating families at the southern border. By holding national appropriations hostage to obtain funding for his long-promised border wall, he created unnecessary hardship for many Americans without resolving any immigration issues.

Trump’s approach to foreign affairs also reveals a lack of understanding of complex international issues and essential American beliefs. His response to the murder of Khashoggi by a Saudi “hit squad” and his support for autocrats world-wide are contradictory to basic American values. More importantly, his cancelling US participation in numerous treaties and trade relationships not only creates friction with traditional allies but endangers the security of the US. Perhaps the most dangerous of these actions is his withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accords. We see the impact of climate change on a regular basis. The wildfires in California last summer were the most destructive in history. More recently, the Polar Vortex brought life-threatening cold weather to the Midwest and Northeast. Even military planners indicate the consequences of a changing climate can no longer be ignored. It may take flooding of Trump golf courses in Florida to cause a Trumpian epiphany.

On a personal level, Trump is unable to compre-

hend the concerns of women raised by the ME2 movement and Justice Kavanaugh’s response to those who accused him of sexual attacks, speaking at his confirmation hearing. Trump’s recorded comments regarding his own inappropriate sexual advances and his treatment of women in general reveal a lack of respect for women and an “Animal House” mentality which is not now and never was acceptable.

Trump alone cannot take the blame for all our problems. Certainly, congressional leaders of both parties demonstrate a lack of leadership in many areas. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the president to have a positive vision for the future and build support across political and cultural boundaries for policies that will improve the lives and ensure the security of all Americans. In that regard, Trump is a failure.

Response from Martin Mandelker: *(retired principal, Syosset CSD)*

A rather philosophical response to the Quarterly Query . . . Pollution and climate change are the most crucial occurrences that affect us all. Some food for thought! Will pollution and climate change become our self-imposed “punishment” akin to the ten plagues we read about in Exodus?



Quarterly Query SPRING 2019



About this time of year many of us start thinking about a summer vacation and where we might like to go – perhaps some exotic off-the-beaten-track kind of place, or perhaps just a beach resort where we could curl up with a good book while enjoying the soft ocean breeze.

If you have a special place that you have visited and would recommend to others, please do write in and share it with us . . . OR perhaps you had a fabulous winter travel experience that you think others would enjoy, please share that with us as well.

We do hope to hear from you!

*e-mail your response to
info@nysrsas.org.*

*(Please include your name and
the district from which you retired.)*

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF THE NAP

Ken Forman

Napping has significant academic benefits for preschool and kindergarten students, even though schools continue to cut nap time in favor of more academic activities, according to recent research at the University of Massachusetts-Amhurst. "Students perform better if they've napped than if we keep them awake," said Rebecca Spencer, associate professor of psychological and brain sciences and co-author of the study. Focusing on retirees, napping has a similar benefit. A recent study at Johns Hopkins University indicated that an hour nap may improve memory and thinking skills, especially among senior citizens. On declarative memory tasks, the University of Massachusetts-Amhurst study indicated that when students did not nap, they forgot 12 percent of the items learned in the morning. After another day without a nap, the memory gap grew to 18 percent. Likewise, the Johns Hopkins study indicated that as we age, our cognitive functioning declines. We might have problems remembering names, forget where we left our keys, or have trouble learning new information. That has not happened to me...Oh, I just forgot what I wanted to write . . .

There are similarities between preschoolers and retirees! I have found that taking a nap has restorative purposes. According to the National Sleep Foundation, an afternoon nap of around 20-30 minutes is best for boosting alertness and mental performance, without interfering with nighttime sleep. For me a quick nap is purposeful, especially before teaching my graduate class. After 15 minutes I'm restored. I can think clearer and respond more spontaneously. And you can't refer to me as the old forgetful professor falling asleep in front of his class. (I haven't done that YET!)

Research indicates that naps allow for memory consolidation, a process in which sleep reorganizes the storage of memories, and makes it easier to retrieve



information. Moreover, Peg Oliveira, director of the Gesell Institute of Child Development, indicated that virtually all would benefit academically from taking a pause

to process information. You see, when your spouse says "you are napping," just indicate that you are processing information!

Likewise, the conversation around sleep and schooling is beginning to change. For example, many

high schools have delayed school start times to better match the circadian rhythms of teens. The converse is usually true for retirees; we education retirees usually start our day earlier than most. Old habits die hard!

The next time your significant other says to you "I caught you napping" remember to say, "good sleep habits build the cognitive foundations." I've been building this foundation for a lifetime of academic performance from public school leadership through college and onwards to retirement.

Now for a good nap . . . oops, now for a period to process information!

Kenneth Forman, Ph.D, has had extensive experience as an administrator in various New York public school systems. He currently serves as an adjunct professor in the Educational Leadership program at Stony Brook University.

TO OPT OUT OR NOT
(cont'd from page 3)

in Nassau County. The math assessment, scheduled for May, is expected to have a similarly high percentage of students opting out on Long Island reflecting parents' continuing mistrust of the process.

Obviously, we do need to know if our students are comprehending the material taught and testing can provide a measure of learning, but it needs to be fair and reasonable. The use of results from a single annual test as a measure of teaching effectiveness is also problematic.

As principal of a school, I knew who my strong teachers were. I judged the quality of the teaching and learning that went on in each classroom by constantly going into the classrooms and informally observing a variety of lessons. If there was a problem, I reached out to provide professional development to the teacher by various means, including sending them to conferences. It is important to support our teachers to ensure a quality education for our students and not look for unreasonable means to judge them.

With all of the experience and education of the people in the State Education Department, one would think that a more reasonable and fair method of testing elementary school students and evaluating their teachers could be established.

Mary Hance retired as the principal of the Woodland Avenue School in Hicksville, NY. A recent addition to the NYSRSAS Executive Board, she is now serving as our Education Chairperson.

PORT CITY PONDERINGS

Joe Marchese



Most of us began learning about our country's Revolutionary War and its various battles when we were in elementary school, adding to that knowledge (hopefully) as we progressed through high school and college.

We became familiar with battles in such places as Concord, Lexington, Saratoga, Trenton, Long Island and Yorktown. Note that all of these locations, except for Yorktown, were in northern colonies. Indeed, unless we ever attended schools in the South, we were left with the impression that our southern colonies, except for Virginia, played an insignificant, if any, role in our struggle for independence.

At a recent meeting of the Wilmington Lions Club, our guest was Dr. Chris Fonvielle, a noted historian and author who recently retired as an Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina – Wilmington. His area of expertise includes North Carolina history, especially the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and their effect in the lower Cape Fear area. Dr. Fonvielle presented a program discussing the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge which took place on February 27, 1776 and explaining its influence on North Carolina and on the eventual outcome of the Revolution. I would surmise that few Northerners have ever heard of this conflict.

Josiah Martin, the Royal Governor of North Carolina, had directed 1,600 Loyalists from Cross Creek (Fayetteville today) to advance towards the coast to connect with British Redcoats and other Loyalists in

Brunswick, adjacent to Wilmington. In response, Commander Richard Caswell, with about 1,000 Patriots, marched to Moores Creek Bridge, about 18 miles north of Wilmington, to intercept the British and Loyalist forces. Arriving at Moores Creek before the British, Caswell stationed his troops in woods on both sides of the bridge. Dr. Fonvielle noted that the British had advance notice of the Patriots' arrival at Moores Creek, but they mistakenly believed it was only a small force. As they charged across the bridge, they encountered devastating shelling from the Patriots' guns and cannons and were forced to surrender. The Patriots then continued to drive north, eventually capturing the Loyalist camp at Cross Creek.

Not only was the outcome of the battle a morale booster for the Patriots, it also effectively ended the British dominance in the colony. More settlers joined the cause for independence, and the British abandoned their plans for establishing a force on the coast in Brunswick. Of further significance, two months after the battle, on April 12, 1776, North Carolina was the first colony to vote for independence from Britain. Richard Caswell became the first and fifth governor of the state of North Carolina, serving from 1776-1780 and from 1785-1787. The site of the battle is now the Moores Creek National Battlefield managed by the National Park Service.

A former editor of the NYSRSAS Newsletter, Joe Marchese received his Ph.D degree from St. John's University. He retired as Assistant Principal of Half Hollow Hills High School East.



N.Y.S. Retired School Administrators and Supervisors

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