Newsday

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Rochell Bishop Sleets is the editor of Newsday's news operation and has no responsibility for the opinion department. To make that clear, her name is no longer appearing in the masthead on the opinion page.

EDITORIAL

Help ease rising food insecurity

■ **MEMBERS OF THE EDITORIAL BOARD** are experienced journalists who offer reasoned opinions, based on facts, to encourage informed debate about the issues facing our community.

Island Harvest's Randi Shubin Dresner tells the story of a young child who lived in a large home in one of Long Island's wealthier neighborhoods and would regularly go to a friend's house for playdates. Those playdates stretched into dinner invitations, which the child eagerly accepted. At first, no one suspected anything was wrong. But over time, the truth came out: The child's parents had lost their jobs and were having trouble putting food on their own table.

The child was hungry — one of tens of thousands of Long Island children who don't always know when their next meal will be, and how or where they'll get it. Island Harvest estimates about 53,000 children in Nassau and Suffolk counties are now food insecure — a 20% increase from last year. And those children are everywhere, in every community across the region.

About 250,000 Long Islanders live with food insecurity. Island Harvest, one of two regionwide food banks, provides them with 22 million pounds of food annually. The need is massive, and increasing. Since January, Island Harvest has seen 92,224 new visits from those requiring assistance throughout its network.

It's been a particularly difficult year and could be a dark holiday season for those on the edge, as food costs have risen and benefit eligibility with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP has tightened, reducing Long Islanders' benefits by more than $4.2 million.



RICK KOPSTEIN

Volunteers accept donations in Bethpage on Friday to help Island Harvest feed families in need.

But there is hope in this season of giving. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, the House leader of the incoming Democratic majority in Congress, said it will make it a priority to restore full benefits and eligibility standards. But that'll undo only some of the damage, as the Trump administration recently proposed further eligibility reductions through Department of Agriculture rules.

With food insecurity at such an inflection point, more federal help won't go far enough. That's where we come in. And there's much we can do.

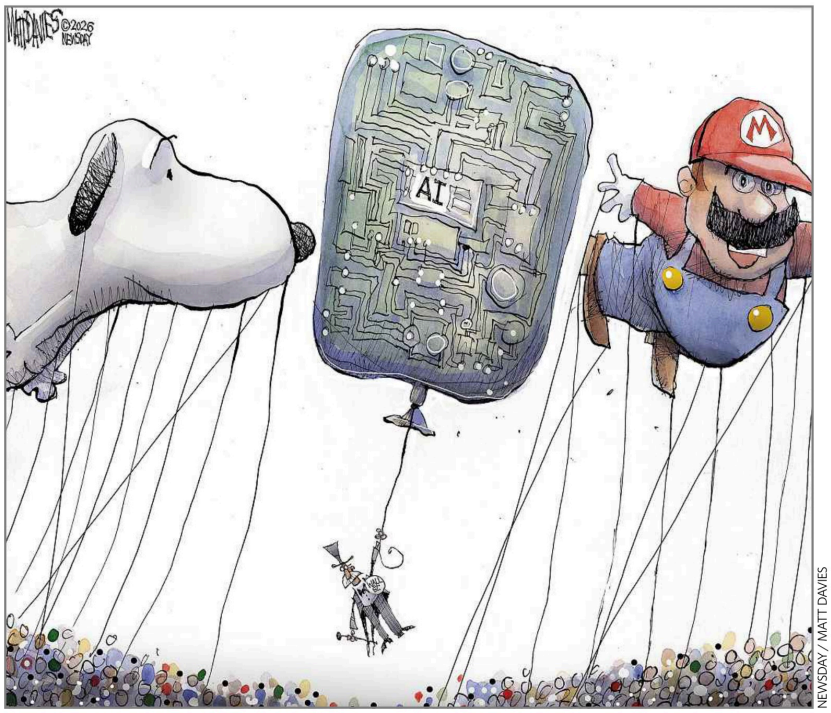
Volunteer at an area soup kitchen or food bank. Provide canned or dry goods to a food drive at your office, school or religious institution. Donate to Island Harvest or Long Island Cares to aid them and their partners in meeting the need. Here's a shout to local merchants who encourage customers to support these charities by rounding up their purchases to the nearest dollar at check out. Hit the button.

Don't stop there. Advocates note that the holidays are a particularly busy time for food organizations, mostly because donations spike. But as No Kid Hungry New York director Rachel Sabella told the editorial board: "Hunger is year-round." So, make a plan to continue to volunteer, donate goods or otherwise help your neighbors even once the holidays have ended — in every season.

And to the thousands of Long Islanders who are hungry today: Please know that assistance is available. Island Harvest and Long Island Cares offer food-finder tools online; there are food banks and other institutions across Nassau and Suffolk.

Long Island is here to help.

MATT DAVIES



NEWSDAY / MATT DAVIES

■ **EDITORIAL CARTOONIST MATT DAVIES'** opinions are his own. You can see more of his work at: **newsday.com/matt**

LETTERS

The bill is ours, wherever it lands

Local and municipal governments are facing increasing costs, but the most pressure is on those who have to pay for these ever-rising bills, the Long Island taxpayers ["Soaring costs bring pressure," Editorial, Nov. 19]. We are exhausted.

We are already having to juggle which high utility and insurance bills to pay and stretch our remaining dollars to pay for our costly groceries and fluctuating gas prices to keep ourselves afloat. We have to be creative with what we have. We wish we could have the luxury of piercing our own cap and having someone else cover our expenses, but that is not our reality.

There has to be greater accountability from our local and municipal stewards. Is the dreaded word "consolidation" off the table?

Town meetings should be held in the evening when more people can attend and voice their sentiments.

Long Islanders have had to pay for the kingdoms of bureaucracy far too long, and this is no longer sustainable. The well of easy fixes has run dry. The status quo has run its course.

— TONY GIAMETTA, OCEANSIDE

The editorial board's proposal to mitigate the tax increases imposed by Long Island towns and villages contains an all-too-common logical flaw. Asking that the state fund a portion of the increase simply transfers the burden from the local taxpayer to the state taxpayers, who in many cases are the same people. The government, be it federal, state or local, does not create wealth; it collects money from taxpayers and redistributes it. So, why should residents of Onondaga County subsidize those of the Town of Huntington?

Many media outlets refer to "federal funding" and "state funding" as if this were manna from heaven instead of taxpayer funding, which, in reality, is the primary source of revenue for most government entities. Our politicians often use this language to deflect their responsibility for the mounting public debt we are facing, but Newsday's editorial board should not reinforce this misconception.

— STEPHEN SULLIVAN, WEST BABYLON

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