

JUST SAYIN'



A member of a crew helps take care of a road project.

Albany must act to keep laborers safe

Members of Local 1298 of the Road and Heavy Construction Laborers union who perform essential roadwork to keep Long Island running, to me, are the best people for the job. They've been trained to do it right and safely — protecting themselves, their fellow highway workers and drivers.

The issue here? Outside factors that endanger them: speeding or distracted drivers who won't put down a cellphone.

The issue here? Outside factors that endanger them: speeding or distracted drivers who won't put down a cellphone. Accidents and fatalities in work zones have risen over the past decade. But there's an easy solution: work-zone speed cameras that catch dangerous drivers, who then are fined. Implementing a work-zone speed-camera program isn't a new concept. Several states have done it, and each one had reduced speeding and reckless driving. New York has to play catch-up.

However, our elected officials can include a work-zone speed-camera demonstration program in the state budget. Saving lives isn't a partisan issue. It's not even a union-specific issue.

We're talking about human decency — a common-sense solution that can protect New Yorkers and help ensure people return home to their loved ones at the end of the day. Who would oppose that? Albany must act now.

George S. Truicko Jr.,
Hempstead

Editor's note: The writer is a business manager for laborers Local 1298.

LI roads are an embarrassment

Driving on the Long Island Expressway has at some spots become like an off-road event, secondary roads have huge potholes and residential streets are crumbling. Why? Every year, we watch the state, county and towns pave roads and highways as if in a continuous loop. Some blame the weather, but I've traveled all over the world and have seen Long Island roads temporarily fixed by the lowest bidders instead of being repaired for good. It's time to stop removing the top 1½ inches and replacing it with something that looks OK for six months. Start over, look at Germany's Autobahn and Toronto's highways, and then issue bonds to finally fix the roads correctly.

Robert Krugman,
Dix Hills

It's stressful going for my cancer treatment without the added stress of navigating the LIE. I see the road as an absolute disaster. Cars are on the side with blown-out tires, and I see more accidents. Potholes seem to be the size of craters.

Bob Horsham,
Ridge

JUST SAYIN' invites comment about public policy issues you're not seeing in Newsday. Send letters of up to 200 words to letters@newsday.com, with "Just Sayin'" in the subject line. Include name, address, phone numbers. Letters will be edited.

OPINION

Save the sparrows

Protect LI's saltmarsh sparrow to shore up fragile ecosystems

BY BRIEN WEINER

I started watching birds 20 years ago at the Marine Nature Study Area in Oceanside. It was always a good day when I saw one of the elusive saltmarsh sparrows that nested in the marsh — a flash of color in the muted expanse. Indeed, they were among the "spark" birds that triggered my passion for birding. Now, I watch in horror as their nests are regularly flooded. Over the last 15 years, saltmarsh sparrow populations have declined by an estimated 80%, and they may be the first bird to go extinct due to sea-level rise. More alarmingly, over the last 130 years, New York lost 48% of its tidal wetlands on Long Island Sound and 11.6% on the South Shore.

March 20 is World Sparrow Day. It is a good time to dedicate ourselves to saving the saltmarsh sparrow and all the species that likewise depend on coastal marshes, including us. The saltmarsh sparrow is truly the canary in the coal mine. We witnessed the approximately \$50 billion in damage done by superstorm Sandy in 2012 and the frequent flooding that has occurred since then. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, coastal marshes provide \$23.3 billion in flood protection annually. Our vital coastal ecosystems benefit birds and are the best line of defense for communities facing stronger, more frequent storms.

Further increasing their value, tidal wetlands serve as spawning, nursery, and feeding grounds for shellfish, finfish and waterfowl. They provide nutrient cycling and nitrogen removal, which improves water quality. They play a critical role in carbon sequestration. One of the top three "blue carbon" sinks (carbon captured by ocean and coastal ecosystems), the tidal wetlands of the Long Island Sound area have 12% of the global population of saltmarsh sparrows. When marshes decline, habitat is lost, water quality deteriorates, and communi-



The saltmarsh sparrow, which nests in high marsh, may be the first bird to go extinct due to sea level rise.

ties experience more frequent flooding.

Saltmarsh sparrows nest in high marsh, usually where standing plants mix with dead grass from preceding seasons. Their nests are placed just above the normal high tide mark, but rising sea levels are bringing more nest-flooding tides. Helpless baby birds drowning in their nests is not a sight that our children should see; catastrophic flooding of our coastal communities is not a future that our children should face.

We must focus on high-marsh restoration because it is the most valuable habitat for wildlife, especially nesting birds. But high marsh is between a rock and a hard place as it is regularly submerged by higher tides and prevented from shifting onto formerly dry land by coastal development. Marshes must be protected, enhanced and given more space to stay healthy and protect people and wildlife.

Sunken Meadow State Park in Kings Park was identified by Audubon New York as a priority site for restoration due to potential saltmarsh sparrow habitat

and high coastal resilience to sea level rise. Along with New York State Parks, Save the Sound, and the New York Natural Heritage Program, Audubon New York recently received funding to develop a preliminary saltmarsh restoration design plan that focuses on high-marsh habitat. But large-scale restoration projects can be costly and take many years to complete.

We must push for more funding in New York State's budget and for fast action. We must support federal legislation like the Coastal Barrier Resources Act and Water Resources Development Act, and natural solutions to coastal stabilization and adaptation projects.

On World Sparrow Day, celebrate biodiversity, then advocate for its protection so that future generations can celebrate it, too. Save the saltmarsh sparrow and we can save the coastal world around it.



Brien Weiner of Valley Stream is the president of the South Shore Audubon Society.