

## Kremer: Lots of luck with the Suffolk exec job

by Jerry Kremer

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On Jan. 1, 2012 Steve Bellone will be sworn into office as the new [Suffolk County executive](#). This populous suburban county has faced many problems and headaches over the years, but none has risen to the level that the new executive will confront.

Faced with shrinking tax revenues, a new state tax cap, staggering pension costs and the public's continuing demand for more county services, it's a wonder anyone would want this stressful job. But come the dawn of 2011 the new Suffolk leader will have to face the cold, hard facts.

It seems like it was only yesterday when [Steve Levy](#) took the oath of office for the first of his two terms. On that cold January 2004 morning, the county was a much different place. Tax collections were growing, the political atmosphere was calm and the tremors of the coming recession were far away. Today it's a much different story.

Some of the headaches that the new executive will face are directly connected to the national economic slump. Other issues are directly linked to Steve Levy's governing style, which made him an odds-on favorite for a second term, but left a bushel of issues that must be resolved by his successor.

The national misery has left Suffolk with a record number of real estate foreclosures, a new crop of unemployed people and dwindling government stimulus programs. For over 50 years the Suffolk County business community has had to deal with an increasing mountain of laws and regulations passed by towns, villages and the county, which create uncertainty and confusion.

Bellone has to take bold steps to make local taxpayers believe that while the country may be struggling to get out of its doldrums, the county is committed to taking aggressive steps to speed up the local recovery. How can that happen and what must the county executive do?

Many of the business leaders I speak to feel detached from the all levels of local government. Some towns and villages are aggressive in pushing for new economic development, while others are happy with the status quo. Bellone has to find ways to bring the more progressive local officials into the same room and onto the same page.

Relationships between the county and the growing minority community are frayed and in need of repair. Levy's immigration policies, while popular with some, have alienated others and there is a strong need for a healing process so that everyone who lives in Suffolk County feels that they are in one boat rowing in the same direction.

While Suffolk is a powerful economic engine for New York, in recent years it hasn't had strong relationships with the state government in Albany. At a time when Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) is proclaiming that New York is "open for business" Suffolk County must find ways to take full advantage of that promise for all of its residents and taxpayers.

Political observers have painted the Suffolk County Legislature as being ungovernable and belonging in the Wild West. While that may be true, Bellone should at least try to see if the distance between the two can be shortened for the good of a populace that is tired of partisan bickering from Washington to Hauppauge.

By all accounts, the next Suffolk County budget promises to be a mammoth headache for the county executive. The Legislature's numbers never match the executive's numbers and it will take the wisdom of a Solomon to find the problems and get an honest financial plan. A good, solid budget staff, recruited from among the state's brightest candidates, would be a winning way to get out of the current fiscal mess.

Looking at some of the candidates on the national scene who want to run the White House it is no wonder we have a cynical public. But the new county executive will have a chance to prove that the 2012 version of Suffolk County is on track to be a better-run government than the one on the Potomac River.

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