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NEW POLL SHOWS INCREASING NUMBER OF LONG ISLANDERS CONSIDER LEAVING; HOUSING COSTS A KEY ISSUE

*Area Residents Satisfied with Local Services, but Vote Down School Budgets Because of
Rising Taxes and Distrust of School Boards*

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK (December 1, 2005) - A growing number of Long Island residents expect to move out of Nassau and Suffolk Counties in the next five years to places with lower housing costs and property taxes, according to a survey conducted by Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research. for the Long Island Index project. The report, entitled “**At the Breaking Point? Taxation and Governance on Long Island**”, focuses on the dilemma facing Long Island: How to continue to provide the quality of services expected by local residents while holding the line on taxes.

Over half of Long Island residents report having difficulty paying their monthly housing costs, a figure that has climbed steadily over the past three years and is being felt increasingly by the average middle-income Long Islander. The percentage of residents who said they were very likely to move in the next five years increased from 27% last year to 32% in this poll, a significant increase for a one year period. Among younger people aged 18-34, 46% report being very likely to move as compared to only 40% last year. **The most dramatic increase occurred among those aged 50 -64, with 37% saying they are very likely to leave as compared to last year’s survey when only 30% indicated that they were likely to leave.**

“Through the results of this year’s Index, it is clear that a large number of Long Islanders cannot continue to manage the cost of living here. It is a significant concern that 70% of 18-34 year olds surveyed are seriously considering a move in the next five years. It’s an important time to act as Long Islander’s are ready for something new,” according to Nancy Douzinas, President, Rauch Foundation.

Most Long Islanders rate high taxes as a very or extremely serious problem and many regard taxes as the single most important problem confronting the Island. Tension over the cost of high quality local services and schools has reached the boiling point on Long Island, fostering a tax revolt that has surfaced in voters' rejection of a near record number of school budgets in the spring of 2005. This rejection of local school budgets is further fueled by a mistrust in local school boards.

Long Islanders value their schools, expressing satisfaction with teachers and the overall quality of education (65%). Parents of children in the public schools give especially high marks to teachers, with 80% rating them as good or excellent. However, although generally high, these levels of satisfaction vary widely across Long Island, and are considerably lower in areas with higher poverty rates and more minority students.

According to Dr. Leonie Huddy, Director of the Center for Survey Research, several themes emerge. "Long Islanders are aware of the high quality of local services, including local schools, but are increasingly dissatisfied with the cost. As a consequence they are rejecting school budgets and a growing number are thinking about moving to more affordable areas. High quality schools have always been important to Long Islanders, and the challenge that confronts local leaders is to maintain school quality while keeping the lid on costs."

Key findings of the survey include the following:

A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE

- **Going in the Right Direction:** A majority of Long Islanders say things are heading in the right direction in their county.
- **Satisfied with Local Services:** Most Long Island residents view local services as of high quality, including libraries, sanitation, the police, parks and gardens, and schools.
- **Schools Receive High Scores:** Long Islanders are pleased with their public schools, express satisfaction with teachers, and they rate highly the overall quality of local education.
- **Not all Served Well:** Black and Hispanic residents are satisfied with most local services, but are less content with schools in which educational achievement is much lower than in non-minority school districts.

THE TAX AND HOUSING CRUNCH

- **Tax Woes:** Most Long Islander's view the problem of high taxes as very serious problem, and many cite it as THE major local problem
- **Rising Housing Costs:** Concerns over housing affordability are even greater than last year, and extend more deeply into the middle class.
- **Thinking of Leaving:** The number of Long Islanders who say they may leave in the next five years and move to an area with lower housing costs and property taxes increased dramatically over the past two years.

THE SUBURBAN TAX REVOLT

- **The Price Tag is Too High:** Most Long Islanders prefer a cut in services in order to maintain property taxes at their current levels, and a majority believe that local services are not worth the price tag.
- **Voting Down School Budgets:** Local residents are divided over school budgets, with almost half of voters saying that they voted against their district's budget in May, 2005.
- **Sources of Discontent:** An aging population, a desire to keep the lid on local taxes, and dissatisfaction with local school boards were the key ingredients in the defeat of school budgets in 2005.
- **Lingering Ambivalence:** Despite opposition to school budgets, Long Islanders are of two minds about school spending. A majority oppose cuts to school spending, the single largest item in all town budgets.

HARD CHOICES ON SCHOOL FISCAL POLICY

- **School Consolidation Divisive:** Long Islanders are deeply divided over the consolidation of school districts as a way to cut school costs, although consolidation is more popular among residents of high need school districts.
- **Support for Pooled Commercial Taxes:** A majority of Long Islanders favor the pooling of commercial property taxes across school districts to evenly distribute that wealth.
- **Repairing Inequities; Sharing the Wealth:** A majority of Long Islanders support shifting some resources from wealthier to poorer school districts.

The survey was conducted by the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research during the Summer of 2005 for the Long Island Index project. Telephone interviews were conducted with a randomly selected sample of 1215 Long Island residents, with a margin of error of +/- 2.8%. In addition, interviews were conducted with randomly selected oversamples of 204 African-American and 104 Hispanic residents of Long Island to enable more detailed analysis of opinion in those groups.

“At the Breaking Point? Taxation and Governance on Long Island” was funded by the Rauch Foundation as part of the Long Island Index project and can be downloaded from the project website at www.longislandindex.org. The report was written by Dr. Leonie Huddy, Linda Pfeiffer and Inna Burdein of the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research, with the assistance of Dr. Craig Charney, Senior Research Fellow at the Milano Graduate School of Urban Policy at the New School University.

About the Rauch Foundation: “At the Breaking Point? Taxation and Governance on Long Island” is funded by the Rauch Foundation, a family foundation headquartered in Garden City, New York. In 2002, the Rauch Foundation began commissioning a series of polls on Long Island to determine how the region is faring compared to other suburbs in the NY Metro area. These reports are available at www.longislandindex.org. To obtain hard copies of the reports or provide feedback, please call 516-873-9808 or email questions and comments to info@longislandindex.org.

