

LONG ISLAND

Opened wells won't hold water



State Sen. Jack Martins, seen on Nov. 4, 2014, wants shut city wells to be abandoned.



THE COLUMN

Joye Brown

joye.brown@newsday.com

Aquifers know no municipal boundaries, but politics sure does. That makes a bill introduced last week by state Sen. Jack Martins (R-Mineola) a practical move.

Martins' proposal would do two things:

Seek to make use of the fact the last of the 23 wells that New York City wants reopened in Queens stopped operating in 2007. As such, Martins wants the state to deem all of the shuttered wells "abandoned."

In addition, Martins — who is seeking an Assembly backer for his proposal — wants to require a state Department of Environmental Conservation-led review before the city could

get new permits to reopen the sites.

"I appreciate that the city has volunteered to do a review, but I think that reopening 23 wells is a big step that should mean that the DEC takes the lead in that review," Martins said.

New York officials say they need to reopen the pumps to provide city residents with 33 million of gallons of water a day by 2020 while officials repair leaks in its upstate aqueduct system.

It's a move that's — no surprise — being viewed by some Long Islanders as tantamount to unwelcome strangers stabbing their drinking straws into the region's cup.

Reopening wells at the three aquifers now providing the region's drinking water potentially could pull down the general water table, increase saltwater intrusion into Nassau's coastal areas and redirect contaminat-

ed underground plumes.

The most serious concern focuses on the potential impact of reopening four Queens wells in the Lloyd — the region's oldest, deepest and purest aquifer. "Nobody should touch that Lloyd unless there is a dire emergency; it cannot be discretionary," Martins said.

Some of the water in the Lloyd, which runs along Nassau's South Shore, is 8,000 years old. Already, Nassau has 44 wells pulling water from it. Nassau already pulls some 275 million gallons a day from the region's aquifers during the peak summer season.

Nassau's use of groundwater has been decreasing during the winter off-season for decades. But peak season use keeps growing.

Why? Sprinklers. Yes, we're using the only source of our drinking water to keep our lawns green.

A 1986 so-called "safe yield"

plan geared toward protecting Nassau's groundwater determined that drawing about 108 million gallons a day out of aquifers during peak season would help conserve supply.

It's been over that, and consistently trending upward, for decades — even with 23 unused wells in Queens.

As opponents of New York's plan to reopen wells note, the region's water supply is precious. Which makes ongoing constructive debate necessary.

But the conversation, at some point, must move beyond politics. And beyond demanding that New Yorkers — remember, geographically Queens is part of Long Island — keep their straws to themselves.

Really?

How can the region demand aggressive protection for Long Island's precious aquifers when we're doing so little to protect them ourselves?