

## [A legislature in need of care](#)

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*Our opinion:* Albany County lawmakers vote in favor of a new nursing home. They don't care what it might cost.

Ed Koch was talking about the state Legislature earlier this week when he called it “the most devious in America.”

But what if the former New York City mayor turned his attention to the Albany County Legislature? What might he consider it? The most clueless in America, perhaps?

A troubling defiance gave way to outright recklessness Monday night as legislators voted 24-13 to pursue the construction of a \$71 million nursing home.

So what if the county probably doesn't need a new nursing home and almost certainly can't afford one? The County Legislature wants one anyway.

It wants it so badly that it would vote for one — and then leave the state Health Department in the position of possibly denying the county the permission that it needs to proceed. True public health professionals might save amateur legislators from themselves, in other words.

Until then, forgive any Albany County resident or taxpayer who feels compelled to call 911 and report an urgent case of political obstinacy.

It was as if legislators were trying to outdo one another in their determination to reject the state Health Department's warning that a new nursing home would lose as much as \$26 million a year.

Then again, these are the legislators who last year bet on unrealistically high sales tax revenue so they could slash a proposed 19 percent property tax increase all the way to 8 percent, while at the same time reducing a \$565 million budget proposal to just \$557 million. That gap between revenues and spending simply doesn't add up.

Just listen to Gary Domalewicz, chairman of the legislature's Nursing Home Facilities Committee, insist that the state's projections can't possibly be right.

“I don't know what the real number is,” he says. “I know one thing; it's not going to be \$26 million. That's unbelievable.”

Mr. Domalewicz is entitled to his own definitions, we suppose.

What's unbelievable — or should be, at least — is that he could go on like that, without trying to find out what kind of losses a new nursing home could mean for a county that's already in fiscal

trouble. If the \$26-million-a-year projection of losses is “unbelievable,” what number should we believe? Shouldn’t there be such a number before legislators move forward?

Frank Commisso, the County Legislature’s majority leader, is no more responsible.

“I never believed one second that it was the truth,” he says of the estimated loss.

There you have it: Budgeting is an act of faith, not real-world finances and reasonable estimates.

Trying to refute the state is precarious business, though. Its projections, after all, are based on the county’s application to the Health Department and the reimbursement rates for Medicaid patients.

It’s enough, in fact, to give pause to the likes of Christine Benedict, the legislature’s minority leader. She refuses to vote for a new nursing home until she sees evidence that the county can afford it.

Good for her. And good for the other 12 legislators who voted with her.

If only there were a dozen more of them.

As for the other 24, they deserve whatever Mr. Koch, and anyone closer to home, might say about them and their charade.

