



McCain yesterday

financial institutions.

Clearly, negotiations are stalled, and a taxpayer bailout may yet fail. As of last night there was no consensus, only finger-pointing about who was to blame. But despite misgivings about the cost and nature of the administration's unprecedented proposal, the downside of doing nothing is too dire to risk.

When U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson first proposed the massive, \$700-billion bailout earlier this week, the public erupted in disbelief, outrage and anger. Taking its lead from voters, Congress pushed back, too. The agreement Bush thought he had nailed down starts with a \$250-billion rollout, has greater oversight, limits on executive compensation, a way for taxpayers to share the wealth if rescued companies return to profitability, and help for pressed homeowners.

A deal seemed to be struck hours before McCain and his opponent, Barack Obama, sat down with President George W. Bush at the White House yesterday, a historic tableau designed to reassure a restive public that Bush's response to the crisis is the right course of action. Soon after the photos had been taken, however, the deal began to unravel. By the end of the day, Bush couldn't even convince his own party's candidate for the presidency or Republicans in the House to follow him.

The fact that Bush even had to attempt this bit of political theater to sell his approach to defusing the crisis is a cautionary tale for the next occupant of the White House. The lesson? Credibility is a terrible thing to waste. [X]

A hopeful sign in Riverhead

Adult home helps the underserved

It was once a hotel with a bar favored by lawyers, judges and reporters. Then it was a dingy adult home for about 120 residents with psychiatric disabilities. Now, it is Concern Riverhead, a much-improved home for 50 residents, more like an assisted living facility than a typical adult home. And it's a hopeful sign for the future of this fragile population.

The state's policy of "deinstitutionalization," at its height three decades ago, did not work. Patients did leave large hospitals and move into the community, but the dollars to give them adequate care did not follow them. So they ended up

in grubby adult homes or single-occupancy hotels. Many ended up in prison. That's "transinstitutionalization."

In recent years, due to inadequate state reimbursement, adult homes have been closing, creating a care gap. The good news is that a Medford-based nonprofit, Concern for Independent Living, is working to create studio apartment-style living spaces — with the necessary services — for 50 people each in three locations: West Sayville opened last year, East Patchogue is about seven months from completion and Riverhead has been open for three months.

Yesterday was a ritual grand opening for what used to be the Hotel Henry Perkins in Riverhead. Town, state and county officials gathered to celebrate. Two state agencies, the Office of Mental Health and the Division of Housing and Community Renewal, played key roles. So did the county's Division of Community Mental Hygiene Services and Department of Social Services, and the town itself.

Now, in a space where politicians once gathered for adult beverages and tale-telling, public-private cooperation has produced a better paradigm for the care of the mentally ill. It's a brighter new chapter in a long, sad story. [X]

Providing safe harbor

Paterson was right to sign this bill

Children who are pressed, prodded and pummeled into selling sex should be treated like victims — which is what they are — not like criminals. Shifting that fundamental premise is what makes the law Gov. David Paterson signed yesterday so noteworthy. He did the right thing.

The "Safe Harbor" legislation will change the current practice of routinely arresting, prosecuting and jailing children — those younger than 18 — for prostitution. Authorities would be required instead to provide them with state supervision and services such as shelter, crisis intervention and help toward a better life.

That will cost some money. The state will need to provide safe houses and also some longer-term housing options to provide a way out of the sex trade for teens whose family situations make going home impossible. That should be done as cost-effectively as possible — for instance by adapting current facilities to this new use — but it will be money well spent.

Children can't legally consent to sex. That's recognized when they're trafficked across national borders and forced into sexual slavery. And it's recognized when they're abused by pedophiles. It should be no different when the child is American, the predator is a pimp and the pedophile is a "John." [X]

Short takes

Gov weighs in

In July, Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) asked the federal Commerce Department to declare a commercial fishery failure in the Great South Bay. The goal was federal funding to deal with the brown tide algae and other problems that have all but killed the hard clam fishery. But it takes a governor's clout to really get attention. So, kudos to Gov. David Paterson for adding his voice to the chorus this week. Let's hope the department listens.

Budgets, unclothed

State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli has put financial data for

3,100 counties, cities, towns, villages, and school and fire districts

on his Open Book Web site, www.openbooknewyork.com. The spending and revenue detail allows taxpayers to read exactly where our money is going. It's an important addition to the public record, especially today, when every penny counts.

