Letters & Opinion

Common Core Sales Pitch

To the editor:

We, as a town, were invited to a Common Core informational session at Souhegan High School. I, for one, was looking forward to it, as I want to become well versed on the subject before I pass judgment. Instead of an informational session, we were spoken down to with a sales pitch. I lost count of the number of times we were told to trust them and take their word for it. The two presenters were also unable to adequately answer over half of the questions that were posed to them. When they were repeatedly asked questions regarding privacy, they were unable to give any credible answer. They finally asked if anyone did online banking, and said that it really did not matter that our children's personal information would be kept on the cloud, subject to hacker attacks and the insecure world of the internet. I was outraged that such a cavalier attitude was being taken toward the concerns of the parents in the audience. Since that evening, I have done a lot of digging for information concerning Common Core, and I am disappointed that such a program could be promoted as a way to supposedly increase the standards in our schools. Common Core is actually a thinly veiled effort to indoctrinate and categorize our children for future marketing by the financial institutions and political parties that back it and are pushing for its implementation. Google, Yahoo, Microsoft, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and none other than George Soros are the backers of Common Core, and they are looking forward to the largest database of future potential customers in history. Somehow, they forgot that our schools are meant to educate our children, not act as sales fronts for their products or political programming centers. In addition, information concerning the families of students is also being collected, such as political affiliation, religious beliefs, income and any disciplinary history. Since when do the school standards depend on a family's income or religion? The standards themselves, which Common Core is upholding, are actually below our standards here in Amherst. Furthermore, the materials which are used in Common Core lessons are written to be pro-union, pro-universal healthcare, anti-Constitution, and in some cases sexually explicit. While a class in American Government is appropriate in high school, universal political indoctrination of all our children is not. Lastly, there is the testing that will measure student and teacher performance under common core. This testing will cost us double the current NECAP costs, year after year after year. It was apparent that they came to Amherst thinking that we were gullible, and willing to swallow any pill offered to us. They were wrong.

Sincerely,
Anthony J. Nino Jr.
Amherst

Do Not Be Fooled by Citizens United Critics

To the editor:

Ever since the landmark Citizens United Supreme Court ruling in 2010, critics have sought to reverse the decision. Most frame the argument as a desire to "get big money out of politics" or "give the little guy a voice". However, the reality is quite different. The Citizens United decision was a clear victory for free speech, as the Supreme Court correctly ruled that government censorship of Citizens United constituted a violation of the First Amendment. A brief review of the facts surrounding this controversial case will aid understanding the decision.

The origins of the case go back to the 2004 Presidential election. Just prior to that election, ultra-liberal filmmaker Michael Moore produced Fahrenheit 9/11, a documentary movie highly critical of then President Bush. Citizens United, a conservative political action group, filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission. Citizens United said the movie violated the McCain-Feingold Act, a law that placed restrictions on campaign activities occurring 60 days prior to a presidential election. They felt the movie was clearly intended to influence the electorate to vote against President Bush, and saw the movie as an unregulated political contribution by the opponents of President Bush. The Federal Election Commission disagreed, and no restrictions were placed on the movie.

Fast forward to the 2008 election. Citizens United, having learned a lesson from the previous election, produced their own documentary movie called Hillary: The Movie. This movie was critical of then Senator Hillary Clinton, who was running for the Democratic Party nomination for president. However, this time the Federal Election Commission ruled that such a movie was a violation of the McCain-Feingold Act and thus censored the movie. The United States District Court in Washington D.C. agreed. Apparently the court saw government censorship of right-wing opinions as acceptable, while government censorship of left-wing viewpoints was not allowable.

Faced with this opinion from a lower court, the Citizens United group appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In a narrow 5-4 ruling, the Supreme Court overturned the lower court decision, and said the government cannot censor speech from groups such as political committees like Citizens United. The court further stated that the government cannot censor speech from other groups as well, such as labor unions or corporations.

Today many liberal groups now decry this Supreme Court decision because it allows conservative groups to state their opinions free from government censorship. Do they not realize that at some point in the future, if control of the government shifts to the right, their views could be subject to censorship without the constitutionally guaranteed free speech rights affirmed by the Citizens United decision?

So what does this mean to you, a citizen of Amherst? In our next town election, you will have an opportunity to vote for ballot measure that advocates overturning the Citizens United decision. Voting for this measure is voting for government censorship. I urge everyone to vote against the measure, and vote for free speech.

Russ Hodgkins
Amherst

SHARE Outreach Nears End of Capital Campaign

To the editor:

SHARE is five months into our capital campaign to raise funds to renovate and expand our food pantry and to add a 2,300 square foot addition to our building at 1 Columbus Avenue in Milford. I am pleased to report that we have received donations and commitment totaling almost 90% of our projected cost. While there is still a gap to close, the Board is sufficiently confident that the remaining funds will be obtained and, pending approval by the Town of Milford, we will begin construction this spring.

The Board and staff of SHARE are pleased and gratified by the support of the residents, businesses, and faith and service organizations in the communities we serve. We recognize that raising funds in this economic climate is a challenge and we deeply appreciate this commitment of resources to help us fulfill our Mission.

With one month remaining in our campaign, we still have a $30,000 gap to close and those interested in making a donation to SHARE can do so by sending a check to SHARE Outreach Inc., 1 Columbus Avenue, Milford, NH 03055 (please denote capital campaign), or make an online payment at www.sharenh.org.

On behalf of all at SHARE, we thank those who have responded for their generosity and support.

Paul Spiess
Capital Campaign Chair

Strategic Initiatives Drive ASD Budget

To the editor:

The Amherst School District's proposed FY15 operating budget represents a 0.13% decrease from the current year's voted budget. The overall cost increases are being balanced by a proposed reduction in staff that aligns with our declining enrollment. The budget provides for adequate staffing, appropriate curriculum materials, continues with the planned replacement of aging technical equipment, adds new equipment and infrastructure required for the Smarter Balanced Assessment, allows for improvements and repairs to our buildings and grounds, and provides adequate support for special education needs.

This is a year of strategic initiatives in the Amherst School District. In July 2013, the Amherst School Board met to develop goals for the district in the upcoming school year and beyond. As a result, five commitments were created that would drive our work as a board. Each Board member has ownership of one commitment and is responsible to report monthly on its progress. The commitments include Elementary and Middle School Excellence, Diligent Fiscal Oversight, Inspirational and Effective Teaching, Innovative Technology Integration, and a Commitment to SAU 39 Strategic Planning. The thread of these commitments runs throughout the budget we are presenting this year.

The Amherst School District has many important curriculum and instructional initiatives for the coming school year. Some of them are: 1) implementation of a new math resource to support our students who are in the accelerated mathematics pathway at AMS; 2) continued work of the Teacher/Leader Effectiveness Program Review Committee to finalize development of an evaluation tool to be used in all of SAU39; and 3) implementation of i39, our new on-line digital K-12 learning management system that aids teachers in developing lessons, distributing assignments, assessing test and quizzes, engaging with parents, and more. Initiatives in the areas of facilities and maintenance include removing the portable classrooms from AMS, reconstructing the main entryway roof to address a drainage issue at Wilkins School, and replacing the AMS leaking gym roof, among other things.

The Amherst School Board, SAU 39 and school administrators, and the Amherst School District Ways & Means Committee have spent an enormous amount of time developing, reviewing and optimizing the budget. It supports the initiatives that make the Amherst School District one of the top performing school districts in the state. We continue to be State of New Hampshire leaders in Response to Instruction, our Pre-K program has experienced success and growth, and our students continually have some of the highest test scores in the state.

We appreciate you taking the time to become familiar with the budget and for voting at Souhegan High School on March 11th from 6am – 8pm.

Sincerely,
Amherst School Board Members
Peg Bennett
Lucienne Foulks
Amy Facey
Jim Manning
Paul Prescott

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Carol Holden Candidate For Supervisor of The Checklist

To the editor:

It has been an honor to serve as an Amherst School District Moderator I have been involved with the electoral process for over twenty-five years. For ten years I was in a Leadership Position on the Election Law Committee. In addition, I was Chair of the Campaign Finance Advisory Committee. Other positions included five years on the Right to Know Commission representing the New Hampshire Association of Counties (NHAC).

I have been active in town in the school and community, I have served as Volunteer Coordinator at Clark and Wilkins and the Amherst Middle School. Other positions include Vice President of the NHPTA, Vice President of the Amherst PTA, Community Chair Amherst Girl Scouts, Cub Scout Leader, Board of Trustees Child and Family Services, and Vice Chair of the Hillsborough County Commissioners.

I am running for Amherst Supervisor of the Checklist for a six year term. As a former legislator and assistant majority leader in the NH House of Representatives, I am thoroughly familiar with the state election laws; as summarized in the New Hampshire Election Procedure Manual available from the Secretary of State.

The Manual is designed to help the Election Officials carry out the impartial job of conducting fair and impartial elections. NH has completed implementing The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). The Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS) is the source of the checklist for State and General Elections.

The NH Votes online training at http://nhvotes.sos.nh.gov, will provide a helpful guide to which you may refer as questions arise in the election process.

As one of the moderators, I have always helped out the supervisors with any tasks that needed to be done such as putting the ballot folders together and answering questions. I want to ensure the integrity of the ballot and checklist by following all Federal and State voting laws and procedures.

For further information, please contact me at ccommish@comcast.net or call me at 673-8167. Thank you for your consideration of my candidacy,

Carol Holden
Amherst

Current Zoning Ordinances As Written, Protect Our Rural/ Residential Neighborhoods

To the editor:

On the Town's March Ballot, there are 2 articles brought to the ballot by petition. In the State of New Hampshire, a town resident can get an article placed on the ballot so long as he/she gets 25 signatures from registered voters in his/her town. Such is the case of Articles 48 and 49, brought to the ballot by developer Brad Knight in his continued effort to run a for-profit commercial sports and function complex in a rural/ residential neighborhood, on the land he purchased that was formerly known as the controversial Brewster's Fields property on Stearns Road.

As a background to the filing of his petitions: Mr. Knight's proposed plans for his Stearns Road property was turned down by all 3 boards in Amherst: the Zoning Board of Adjustment, the Planning Board, and the Board of Selectmen. At the ZBA after many months of hearings, Mr. Knight's variance request (to change the land's zoning to commercial zoning) was turned down primarily due to the intensity of his proposed use, due to the number of fields (8) and activities that he was seeking, and the resulting incompatibility within the rural/residential Neighborhood. The ZBA of course also factored in the parking, traffic, noise, etc as well. Mr. Knight then went before the Planning Board with the exact same site plan, again a plan which at times would utilize the majority of the land with an 8 fields complex. The Planning Board ruled, in short, that again, it was too intense of use in a residential neighborhood, and that its use appeared that it would be commercial-like in nature, and therefore not appropriate in a residential area. During this time, Amherst's Board of Selectmen also voted NOT to enter into a contract with Mr. Knight for the exclusive right to rent his fields. Why? They felt they did not want to get into another fields renting predicament as the town is currently in with the Cemetery Fields.

Voting in favor of these ARTICLES is NOT in the best interest of Amherst. Why?

First, Article 48 asks the voters of Amherst to delete the protective language afforded in the residential rural areas of Amherst from the town's current zoning ordinances. It also would allow commercial recreation in the rural/ residential neighborhoods. While Mr. Knight's land is on Stearns Road in our neighborhood, be aware that this article affects the ENTIRE town… not just our neighborhood, but yours too. If Mr. Knight would be able to put a commercial sports complex in our neighborhood, what's to stop your neighbors from doing the same? The answer is – without the protections in our current zoning ordinances – NOTHING.

Continued on page 3 ►

Letters To the editor:

The Amherst Citizen is eager to serve as a community forum. We welcome your letters, opinions, and commentaries and make every effort to run them in their entirety. We do reserve the right to edit. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the position of the staff of ***The Amherst Citizen.***

Please direct your letters, views and commentary to the Editor, ***The Amherst Citizen***, P.O. Box 291, Amherst, NH 03031-0291, or e-mail your submission to: news@amherstcitizen.com. We will attempt to run your letter as submitted (space permitting) providing it is signed and phone number is included.

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Jim Wales
Advertising & Production

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