

Letters & Opinion

Pipeline

To the editor:

To be clear, the issue is not whether NH needs better or more affordable access to energy. It's about whether it makes sense to allow an out-of-state company to build a very large pipeline to transport a fossil fuel that will not directly serve Amherst at all.

To repeat what has been stated countless times, the pipeline would terminate in Massachusetts. Sending the gas through NH, versus Massachusetts, doesn't mean NH would get a bigger share of it. The pipeline's daily capacity is almost three times what NH currently uses. So most of it would be sold elsewhere, including abroad.

In return for the kindness of granting Kinder Morgan a right of way, Amherst would receive tax revenue amounting to less than five per cent of the town's current operating budget.

How does that revenue increase compare to the likely hit on real estate values? And couldn't we expect that Amherst would be obliged (if not required by law) to increase spending on equipment, personnel, and training needed to respond to a pipeline accident?

Jon Patt
Amherst

Further Remarks to Firearms Letters

To the editor:

A response to my letter regarding firearm statistics claimed the facts I presented were blatantly wrong. That is not the case. The CDC data, confirmed in a PEW report, states clearly that 31,672 people were killed by firearms in the US in 2010. Homicides accounted for 11,078, suicides for 19,392, and accidental and other deaths for 1,202. My statement was correct, and was misread.

In regard to the UK's rate of violent crime, the Skeptical Libertarian fact checked the broadcasted statement that it is two thirds higher than the US, and found it unconvincing due to the widely different definitions of violent crime used in the two countries. Additionally, according to the World Bank, the US had five times the intentional murder rate of the UK in 2011, which is the last year it presented figures for both countries.

The statement that many gun owners in Amherst are responsible citizens is true, but does not negate the fact that three Amherst citizens have been murdered with guns in the last 5 years, one of whom was a child. There was also a firearm induced suicide.

Respectfully,
Clay Sammis
Amherst

Support Dwayne Purvis for Seat on Souhegan School Board

To the editor:

It is with great confidence that I ask you to please join me in supporting Dwayne Purvis for election to the Souhegan School board. Dwayne is the type of person that we can feel confident will represent the taxpayers, and the students of our town, well. Dwayne not only talks the talk of high academic excellence and awareness, he also walks the walk. Dwayne has been attending both the Souhegan and Amherst District Board meetings for the better part of three years in order to educate himself as a parent, community member, and taxpayer. This is the type of commitment that is necessary to be an informed voting member of a school board.

Mr. Purvis has also served for two years on the Souhegan Advisory Finance Committee. During this time he enjoyed a collaborative working relationship with the board and administration, while still expecting excellence and fiscal responsibility. This experience has allowed him to become very familiar with all of the nuances of a school budget, and the viewpoints of the many stakeholders.

Personally, Dwayne is kind, engaging, and approachable. He is a family man who values the qualities that the town of Amherst offers to his family, and is willing to work toward keeping Amherst a desirable place to live. He seeks this position with an open mind, and without an agenda.

Again, please join me on March 10, in supporting Dwayne Purvis for a seat on the Souhegan Cooperative School Board.

Respectfully,
Bret A. Mullens
Amherst

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.

Let's All Deliberate...

To the editor:

As much as I appreciate the education my children received at Souhegan High School and the hard work put in by the School Board and staff on the proposed school budget, we do need to be realistic and circumspect about the school budget during a period of declining enrollment.

Several attendees at the Deliberative Session the other night spoke in favor of an amendment to lower the proposed budget to the default budget amount, arguing that declining school enrollments should produce larger budget cuts, and that the per-pupil cost of educating Souhegan students is higher than that of surrounding communities. Further, a point was made regarding the impact of increasing budgets on property taxes, and that high property taxes in Amherst are keeping housing prices from rebounding and hurting the marketability of Amherst homes.

Because I share these concerns, my ears perked up when one member of the Finance Committee, Dr. Kathie Nunley, mentioned a specific idea that would help lower a key expense. Dr. Nunley said that there is a better – and cheaper – way to implement special education at Souhegan. Given Dr. Nunley's experience with special education – both as an educator herself and as a parent whose children benefited from special education services – her recommendations deserve serious consideration. And yet, these ideas were later dismissed by a Board Member as simply a 'difference in philosophy'.

We need to look beyond whatever philosophical differences we may perceive, and be open to new and creative ways to educate all our children at a cost that taxpayers in our town can afford. I urge the school community to continue to look at ways to lower the cost of education overall, and I urge taxpayers to consider the legitimate concerns raised by a few brave souls at the Deliberative Session.

Kay May
Amherst

Let's Get Real Here

To the editor:

We agree with David Chen's statement that Souhegan High School is the highest cost per student among its chosen peer group. It is also in the highest cost per student top 10 in NH's 70+ high schools. And our SAU 39 students are not at the top of academic excellence in the state or nation. Our schools have yet to achieve National Blue Ribbon status, Newsweek or US News best, or other noteworthy national honors.

In fact, it is our educators/administrators/school boards that are driving our upward spiraling taxes. More medical and dental benefits (teachers/staff contribute only about \$1600+ of the \$27,000+ per year family cost), more salary and retirement benefits for the average 180 days they are required to work. Not even in private industry where the minimum working year averages 240 or more days, are employees given these privileges. Even salary is no longer low. For example, the average SHS salary is \$68,129 and Amherst school salary is \$67,353 for 180 days. These salaries are equivalent to \$90,839 and \$89,804 for 240 days per year. And retirement benefits are amazing compared to an industry employee, who after 40+ years working, will receive Social Security at 13% to 20% of their final salary, plus whatever they've saved/earned via 401K or other investments.

So, lets get real here. Spending \$19,012 per SHS student, at \$6,000 more each than Hollis/Brookline HS doesn't appear to buy us the high standard H/BHS has achieved. Commanding a salary of \$68,129 hasn't improved our status either. Perhaps this is because the SHS mission only includes: Respect, Trust and Courage, but doesn't even mention Academic Excellence! Enrollment will continue to slide downward. Houses are still being devalued, real estate selling but at what cost to the homeowner? The schools take no note of this and keep sucking the poor taxpayer into oblivion.

A success story: In California, a small private Christian elementary school began because a school had to downsize their number of teachers. A new teacher, one year on the job, was being released because of the 'last in, first out rule', but many parents did not want to see this bright teacher disappear, so they decided to open a new school with her at the helm. Tight budget, tiny school building they could afford to rent with a small group of students which has since grown from 11 to 130 (in 4 years) and continues to grow. Add two more moves to larger quarters.

With fundraisers to support their school, they are now two years away from demolishing all buildings due to age and unsuitability on their newly owned campus. That same summer, they will erect new, state of the art buildings to house their growing student population, requiring several million dollars, which they will do without taxpayer help. Dedication of parents, teachers, administration and school board who really do see the future.

Cost per student is \$7000 (adjusted to \$12,000 to compensate for buses/special education they don't provide) versus the Amherst and Mont Vernon elementary school cost of \$18,333 and \$15,166. Student/teacher ratio is higher at 15/1 versus about 10/1 at SHS, AMS and MVVS. And this school's Stanford 10 standardized math and reading scores excel over National Blue Ribbon schools.

So our hearts are not breaking for schools in our district that command more \$\$\$ for what you get than other schools. It is sad and deplorable. And it's not all about the taxes. The students, too, get less.

Our recommendation for MV voters is: Vote Default and No on all MV and SHS Articles. If not, the tax impact on a \$300,000 property will total \$849. The Default and No tax impact will total more than \$200 less, at \$618. For Amherst voters, we also recommend Default and No votes. The tax impact will total \$15 on a \$300,000 property versus \$299 for the proposed SHS and Amherst school budgets.

Here's our prediction. Not too far in the future, these over-bloated schools will begin to deflate with less school population, less children in households to fill them and eventually will be swallowed into a big sink-hole, AKA Florida. And thanks to you, the taxpayer, the spenders will be laughing all the way to the bank! Think it won't happen? Watch for it.

Tom and Norma McKinney
Mont Vernon

Voters Voice Concern Over Costs at Souhegan Deliberative

By CLIFF ANN WALES

AMHERST – The Souhegan Cooperative School Board chaired by Mary Lou Mullens presented an operating budget with a \$37,845 (0.21%) increase for a total of \$18,161,347 for FY 2016 while the enrollment continues to decline from a high of 1,050 in 2005 to 842 this year. The decline is expected to continue with a projected student enrollment in FY18 of 756 students. This is not just a local issue but is representative of a declining birth rate nationwide. The 842 students this year is up slightly from 811 two years ago and is viewed as an anomaly.

This helps explain why many in attendance are worried about the per pupil cost at Souhegan which is over \$19,000. The board recognizes the high cost per pupil but assures the taxpayer that the budget is fiscally responsible. They expect to take further steps in reducing costs without compromising the quality education at Souhegan.

The SHS Advisory Finance Committee voted 5-2 in support of the budget. Those opposing the budget remarked that the budget does not reflect the decline in enrollment, questions about curriculum and that "Souhegan's goals of differentiated instruction and full inclusion does not align with the proposed budget." Kathie Nunley said the budget was failing special needs students.

The majority report supports the budget and thinks it is responsible and meets the educational standards at Souhe-

gan. A member of the Finance Committee said that Souhegan was the best high school in New Hampshire. "What can the town afford? Saving on your taxes will be offset by the decrease in value in your property."

Bob Brewster tried to amend the budget by replace the operating budget (\$18,161,347) with the default budget (\$17,992,364). It failed.

Margaret McCabe who said she was also concerned with property values asked questions on the salaries and benefits of the teachers which is 75% of the budget. McCabe said that the budget was unsustainable.

A parent said the education her child received at Souhegan was unparalleled. Souhegan offers students the same education as many private schools but Souhegan is "free."

The deliberative meeting spent 2 1/2 hours on the budget. Unfortunately the moderator let the meeting wander and ramble on. Frequently, speakers were not directed to stay on topic and substituted opinion for facts.

Additional cost items

Souhegan Cooperative contract agreement with professional and support staff for first year - \$29,894. SHS track replacement - \$220,000 with \$110,000 to come from School Maintenance Trust Fund. Maintenance Trust Fund \$65,000 from undesignated fund balance. Amount to be raised through taxation: \$204,894.

Dwayne Purvis Has Skill Set Needed For Challenging Times

To the editor:

When I first ran for the school board six years ago, I did so because, while my children were receiving an excellent education at the Amherst Middle School, I saw a few things that might need improvement. Through three years of asking questions and having open discussions, a number of changes were implemented to improve the educational experience for all students such as implementing changes to the way time in "Core and More" was used and implementation of a new Math curriculum. As my children moved to the High School, I moved with them. For the past three years on the Souhegan School Board, I have tried to maintain the same approach of appreciating the wonderful learning experience for the students but asking questions and initiating discussions regarding ways to improve it for everyone. Through discussions of items ranging from the grading system, to how field trips are arranged and approved, a number of changes have taken place making the Souhegan experience better for everyone.

As my youngest child is nearing the end of his senior year and with another anticipated increase in my work travel schedule, I have decided not to run for another term. After my six years on the board, there is nothing I would like better than to see my seat taken by someone with a similar passion for high quality education and a willingness to ask the probing questions needed to initiate healthy discussions. It is for that reason that I am supporting Dwayne Purvis as the next Amherst representative on the Souhegan School Board. Having observed Dwayne at numerous school board meetings, I can verify that he asks very insightful questions in a collaborative, respectful manner leading to constructive discussions. Through personal conversations I have had with Dwayne, I also know that he shares similar concerns as I have regarding the quality of the education offered to all students, challenging all students to perform at the best of their ability and fairness in the grading and evaluation of the work of all students.

There are many challenges ahead for the school board as we try to maintain the highest quality education in light of projected reductions in enrollment. That is why the board needs someone who has a keen understanding of both the needs of the students and the needs of the taxpayers to make sure we responsibly address both. I believe that Dwayne Purvis has the exact skill set needed for these challenging times and I hope you join me in voting for Dwayne as the next Amherst representative on the Souhegan School Board.

Sincerely,
Peter Maresco
Amherst

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