

Nelson: 'Debate Change with Integrity'

Tiverton Town Councilor Dave Nelson writes a letter to the editor to clarify points made by the School Committee member regarding the proposed financial town referendum.

To the editor:

In her recent letter to the editor School Committee member Carol Hermann asserted that “even illegal budgets will be allowed on the ballot” for the Financial Town Referendum (FTR).

Preliminary drafts of the FTR proposal had a clause that would have made the Town Clerk the “gatekeeper” to ensure that all elector petitions did not violate any law. However, pursuant to a request from Ms. Laura Epke, this “gatekeeper” role was eliminated, thereby preventing the government from thwarting the “will of a voter”.

In fact, when the committee drafting the FTR went before the Tiverton School Committee, Ms. Hermann also expressed her concern about how this “gatekeeper” function of the Town Clerk could affect the ability for an elector to submit a petition to exceed the State Tax Cap. This was publicly documented by the committee on page 24 of the FTR Tracking Matrix, available at TivertonFTR.org, under ‘Reference’. The FTR committee ultimately removed the ‘gatekeeper’ role to address Epke’s and Hermann’s concerns.

Now however, Ms. Hermann seeks to leverage the change *which she requested* to oppose the FTR by stating “why do we bother with this step...when no one is certifying that the budget proposals...are legal?” Evidently Ms. Hermann was for it before she was against it. She also ignores an important component of the new FTR, where such a budget proposal won't be supported as a practical matter because of advance warning and debate, a feature missing from the current process.

This inconsistent behavior suggests Ms. Hermann harbors no intentions whatsoever to support real reform. It also illustrates the tactics used by those working overtime to prevent reform of the FTM which has produced 27 percent in tax increases over the last four years. While Ms. Hermann expresses concerns about supposedly “illegal” budgets on the FTR ballot, I also note she played a key role approving the 2010 FTM budgets which resulted in an illegal 7 percent tax increase, which spawned a lawsuit against the town. Additionally, in 2011, she supported the School Committees budget request which exceeded the state law maximum, again in violation of existing state law.

The up-coming special election on Nov. 8 allows Tiverton voters, for the first time, to vote to replace the current FTM with the Financial Town Referendum. This initiative will encourage participation, eliminate intimidation, and require minutes of your day instead of a four hour marathon in the high school gym. The Financial Town Referendum is what is right for Tiverton today. See through the spin by reading the whole story at TivertonFTR.org.

Dave Nelson
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