

Budget voters could indeed say ‘no’

To the editor:

In her letter to the editor, Laura Epke opposes Tiverton’s proposal to replace the Financial Town Meeting (FTM) with an all-day, private voting Financial Town Referendum (FTR) because voters cannot vote “No” to all of the budget proposals. Her letter misleads and fails to recognize an important feature of the proposed FTR.

If neither the Budget Committee’s nor any other of the published budget proposals are acceptable to a voter, then the FTR empowers that voter to put his or her own budget proposal on the ballot with just 50 signatures (less time investment than an FTM takes). A vote in favor of that budget proposal is by definition a vote against the unsatisfactory budget proposals. If no budget proposal receives a majority vote, then the two highest vote getters would be run off two weeks later, ensuring majority adoption and process finality. Contrary to Ms Epke’s spin, the proposed FTR process empowers and accommodates every Tiverton voter.

The FTR proposal has many virtues including voting at Town Hall-like an election (5-10 minutes) instead of the FTM’s Saturday morning(s). The FTR will ensure vote count accuracy, allow absentee ballots, increase informed decisions via the Financial Town Hearing two weeks prior, and the list goes on.

Furthermore, most agree that the biggest FTR improvement over the FTM is voter privacy via a secret ballot in a voting booth. It is well documented that the FTM is rife with voter intimidation and that many voters are unable or refuse to attend an FTM. Could this be what those who oppose the FTR are really afraid of — that the typical FTR voter will not support excessive tax increases year after year?

At the first week of the 2008 FTM, voters overwhelmingly said “No” to an 11% tax increase and were sent home for ‘several’ weeks so budgets could be ‘reworked.’ Then the meeting reconvened the following week and the “No” voter mandate was overturned by trickery leaving many non-attending taxpayers stunned by a 10% tax increase. Could such ‘re-voting’ be why a “No” vote is so important to pro-spend forces?

In closing, it seems that no replacement to the FTM is acceptable to some who prefer to keep what they have now, where a small group of special interests force significant tax increases on Tiverton townspeople. I urge readers to recall the past actions of those who oppose the FTR. You will find that most who oppose the FTR are those most responsible for the 27% tax increase over the past four years. This should be taken into account when hearing their claims in the upcoming months.

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Mr. Caron is a former chairman of the Financial Town Meeting Changes Advisory Committee and former chairman of the Tiverton Budget Committee.