

Letter to the Editor:

The Sudbury Board of Selectmen unanimously decided at our February 10th meeting not to place an override question on the March 30th Annual Town Election ballot. We would like to offer residents a brief statement of the reasons for our action.

The Board of Selectmen is deeply concerned about the staffing reductions which occurred at the schools and Town departments in the current year, and that the FY10 budget might result in even further job and service losses. The FY10 budget voted by the Finance Committee is predicated on assumptions that employee compensation costs will grow faster than available revenues due to steps, cost of living adjustments and increases in health insurance costs, leading to job reductions in order to balance the budget. However, as we have noted many times, Town and School leaders have a legal obligation to negotiate with our unions to make changes to these compensation items. Unlike the State or most private sector employers, the Selectmen and school committees cannot unilaterally impose them on the employee bargaining groups. With that in mind, the Board of Selectmen cannot recommend placing an override question before the voters until we know that significant change in the area of employee compensation has been successfully negotiated by each of the three cost centers through the current collective bargaining process, resulting in preservation of jobs and services in FY10.

As we have previously made clear, our aims going forward are twofold: first of course to avoid further staffing reductions in FY10. Additionally, we hope that collective bargaining will result in more than just one year savings. We will be looking for all newly-negotiated contracts to include provisions that will reduce the rate of growth in employee compensation for the future. When both of those outcomes have been achieved, the Board of Selectmen would be willing to consider supporting an override question.

We remind residents and employees that changes in employee compensation are not the only avenue we are pursuing to address the ongoing structural gap between expenses and available revenues. There are other tools in the "toolbox". We created the Budget Review Task Force to generate ideas to reduce expenses and enhance revenues from sources other than residential property taxes. Several of their ideas, including the potential consolidation of school administrations, are actively being studied. The Town and Sudbury Public Schools (SPS) are engaged in a project (known as CORE) to improve efficiencies and reduce the cost of shared "backroom" administrative tasks. We are hopeful that current efforts to regionalize the administration of several Town services will soon conclude successfully.

In closing, we would like to thank the members of the Finance Committee, who have done an outstanding job this year analyzing the structural deficit situation and making difficult decisions. We also thank the SPS and L-S School Committees and our Town and School employees. We know all are very dedicated to what is best for Sudbury. We all must work together to preserve town and school services. If we as a town are going to be successful in moving beyond recurring annual budget crises, it will require all of us to compromise our parochial interests, set aside old models, and break down barriers to change.

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