Vote for Those Who Support a Budget Referendum

Don't be fooled again. Elect those who really support a budget referendum. Confusion or deliberate mischaracterization continues about the budget referendum. Several candidates for selectmen continue to assert that a budget referendum will replace the town budget meeting.

This is incorrect. Those who support an automatic referendum know that both the town meeting and the referendum are necessary components of the budget process and make the process accessible to more citizens.

The charter proposal defeated in 1998 said much lack to voters who cannot get to the annual town meeting. It disenfranchised the elderly, working citizens, out of town taxpayers, the disabled and those who vote by absentee ballot. The defeated proposal was not based on any grand notion that the town meeting is a genuine exercise of democracy. Rather it was based upon the cynical premise that fewer participants means better control of the process and outcome.

Other communities have both a town meeting and an automatic referendum, and so can Winsted. The Winsted charter already permits citizens at the town meeting to amend the budget. It can be expanded to include adjourning the town meeting to referendum after the amendment process. This would enable citizens to attend the town meeting to propose and discuss amendments and vote on any amendments prior to adjournment to referendum.

This solution is the best of both worlds. It permits and encourages citizens with a heightened interest in the budget process to attend the town meeting and it provides the opportunity for more citizens to vote on the final budget by referendum or by absentee ballot.

Citizens understood the potential discord and inconsistency that would have resulted from the proposed 1998 charter change and defeated it. Their collective experience and insight into the importance of the town meeting and the democratic principle of the right to vote should send the signal that the charter needs to broaden participation rather than restrict it.

Many incumbent candidates who opposed the budget referendum in the past have jumped on the bandwagon by promising to change the charter to include a budget referendum. But actions speak louder than words. Elect candidates who have truly supported the budget referendum process and they will appoint a charter revision commission to make the changes necessary to enable everyone to vote on the budget. Let's have more democracy, not less.

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