

High Voter Turnout Was Good News For Winsted's Citizens

By Charlene LaVole

The remarkable power of the vote is demonstrated, as John Kennedy said in 1960, the torch is passed to a new generation of Americans by the record breaking voter turnout in the 1992 election.

In the most interesting campaign and election in recent history a third party candidate repeatedly reminded citizens that elected officials are public servants elected to do the people's bidding, not their own.

The 1992 election also reminds Winsted citizens of events which occurred last year at election time. Events many citizens do not view as proud moments in the democracy of our community. The election concerned another period of disregard for citizen opinion, disrespect to elected officials and violation of the public trust.

Last fall, the incumbent selectman sought voter support based upon a record of real accomplishment. For November 1991, at that time member of the Board of Selectmen was re-elected. This reflected voter satisfaction with

the Board and the administration and the acknowledgment of a job well done during the 1989-1991 term. Yet, despite receiving a mandate to continue, the 5-2 Democratic majority elected a Republican mayor and one week after the election the new mayor, without discussion with the Board, asked the town manager to resign.

On November 18, 1991, the Board of Selectmen voted 4-3 to fire the town manager even though he received an excellent performance evaluation and a pay raise in July 1991. Citizen outrage was triggered by the surprise firing, the baseless conclusions rather than reasons, the lack of fairness and the less than candid responses of the four officials.

By the actions of just four elected officials, consistency and competency in the management of the town government eroded into disruption, deceit, promotion of personal agendas, disregard of citizen opinion and violation of the public trust.

Eventually it surfaced that one selectman's political

maneuver for running for office was to oust the town manager due to a grudge he held against the manager. Another selectman adopted a paternalistic attitude and refused to accommodate overwhelming public opinion on the subject stating that his action was "in the best interest of the town."

The questionable choice for mayor resulted in a lack of leadership which led to poor choices based on personal agendas and created a deep schism which has nearly paralyzed the elected body. Effective leadership is still absent while citizen cynicism increases and violation of the public trust and disregard of citizen opinion continues.

To maintain the democracy, citizens must strive to hold elected officials accountable and responsive to their direction. The good news, as we are all reminded by this election year, is that the public officials are not appointed to a life-term and citizens are watching; another election year is coming.

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