Winsted has reason to question costs

Editor of The Register Citizen:

For the sake of clarity in public diaglogue a response is in order to Andrea Hilt's April 18 letter referencing comments I made at the Board of Education public hearing on April 9.

In fiscal year 1990-91 Winchester taxes increased 2.34 mills. The Board of Education budget increased $647,600 or 9.5 percent. The Board of Education's final budget request for 1991-92 is $469,400 more than last year (reduced from the original request of $937,300). This represents an increase in the education budget of 4.5 percent. It is erroneous to label it a "cut," as some do simply because the board did not get the amount it originally requested.

This year spending will increase but, in recognition of the economic hardship many taxpayers face, taxes will not be raised. Efforts were made to keep spending at a minimum because every increase in spending impacts on the taxpayer. The impact is minimized this year because budget increases will be paid for, in part, by revenue generated from the increase in the town of Winchester grand list. State aid for education will cover some of the education increase in spending but do not be fooled, taxpayers also pay this bill.

No reference was made to the Board of Education's honesty. I merely asked whether the reductions in administrative salaries shown in the budget formally presented at the hearing meant that administrators had made concessions.

The Board of Education acknowledged that the approach was confusing and promised a review of its format for future presentations.

The debate will continue about whether the United States should spend more money or whether those countries that spend more outperform others in education. Harvard expert on international educational finance William Cummings indicated that nations spending the most money are not necessarily delivering the best education. He further commented that the American education system is bloated with administrative staffing, and this costs money.

The Community Lawyer/Advocate Project, supported by The Shafeek Nader Trust for the Community Interest, makes available to the citizens of Winchester a lawyer who can advocate on their behalf on issues of community wide significance. I serve in this capacity. The education budget is certainly an issue which concerns the entire community. My position is shaped, in part, by the information I receive from parents and citizens who are also taxpayers.

The conspicuous absence of parents at the Board of Education budget hearing this year is a signal of disquiet. I have spoken with many parents and other citizens who believe that the salaries of administrators and teachers are too high and that programs and essential student services are cut at the expense of the children. These citizens are sending their message: administrators and teachers must act responsibly and demonstrate that they can be responsive to the needs of the citizens in hard times.

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