Hartford Courant

Naders empower Winsted residents

Lawyer fights town manager's removal

By RAY ROUTHIER
Courant Staff Writer

WINSTED — The people of Ralph Nader's hometown have launched a legal battle challenging the power of elected officials, using a tool given them by the family of the consumer advocate.

It began three weeks ago when angry residents protested the firing of a town manager. A citizens' group formed; petitions were gathered.

Now residents are in court asserting that they — not the selectmen — have the final say on whether the town's chief administrator should stay or go.

This aggressive challenge to the town's power structure has politicians worried, and critical of the challenge.

"If the judge upholds this, you might as well take our charter and throw it in the 'Mad River,'" said Nancy Peters Habbal, a Democratic selectwoman who voted to fire Wayne Dove. "Then disband the selectmen, get rid of the town manager, and let the people go to referendum every week."

Throughout weeks of political controversy, there has been a common thread running through all the citizen efforts: the office of Winsted's community lawyer. That office is a tool for community action created by a trust in memory of Nader's older brother and put in the hands of the people.

Please see Nader, Page A7