

Community lawyer urges taxpayers to get involved

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By TONY PAVONE
Republican-American

WINSTED — For 20 years, citizens have been blamed for being apathetic about government, but Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie buys none of that.

"On the contrary, citizens feel pushed out of the political process. They feel alienated," she told about 50 members of the Winchester Taxpayers Association on Sunday.

And democracy means that people should be involved. "People in countries all over the world are eager and yearning to have a democracy like ours," she said.

For two years, she has been the community lawyer, which she describes as the only office of its kind in the nation. The job was created in 1969 with funding from a trust created by the late Shuteck Nader, a long-

time community activist and brother of consumer advocate Ralph Nader.

Along with the rights that come in a democracy are certain duties and responsibilities, she said. "We not only have the right to vote, but we have the responsibility to vote. In the same way, we not only have the privilege to exercise our right of free speech, but it's our duty."

Ms. LaVoie said a major problem in government is a lack of discourse. "We haven't given up our right to rule ourselves, and the problem is, that's not going on these days, either at the state, federal or local levels."

Ms. LaVoie attends selectmen's meeting and usually expresses her opinions there. She represents neither private clients nor public officials.

Many people have applauded her efforts to give them the legal tools

needed to get involved in government. Others charge her with being too negative toward government and more of a political activist than community advocate.

She defended herself Sunday, saying, "You need not be involved in party politics to be very much involved in the political process. The distinction is of paramount importance."

She said she has no more power than any other citizen except possibly for "the power of persuasion."

But it's her job "to demystify the political process so people know when to stand up at meetings, or when to say something or how to say it. The idea is to get people to realize they have the power to say, 'we know best.'"

Community lawyer to address taxpayers

2/28/72 By JUNE PETERSON
Register Citizen Staff

WINSTED — Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie will be the guest speaker at Sunday's gathering of the Winchester Taxpayers Association.

The group will meet at 2 p.m. in the Eagles Club on Elm Street. The meeting will begin with a potluck dinner followed by an introduction of the new officers and a brief business meeting.

LaVoie will then speak on the

function of the community lawyer.

Any residents interested in joining the group or hearing LaVoie speak may attend the meeting, association president Walter D. Miller said.

"We're looking for people to come and those who aren't members can bring a little butter or bread (for the dinner)," Miller said.

Miller, who was elected presi-

dent last month, is trying to stir public interest in the group. Miller, a selectman, said he has been talking to residents to encourage them to join. He wants to have monthly speakers, he said.

"I think the group has done a really good job," Miller said. The group has sponsored political forums for town elections, as well as leading the charge to defeat the town budget on several occasions.