

THE REGISTER CITIZEN

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Editorials

Selectmen to voters: get lost

Last week Winsted citizens in town meeting overwhelmingly rejected the proposed town budget. Most of the 200 voters made it clear they wanted funds restored to the education side of the budget.

But this Monday night four selectmen, a bare majority of the board, effectively rejected the voters' verdict. To make the point clear, they not only refused to restore any of the \$350,000 in school funding they had cut last month; they decided to funnel some unanticipated state funds to non-school accounts instead. The many young people who attended last week's town meeting had a chance to see democracy in action at the grass roots, as citizens stood up to be counted.

Monday's selectmen's meeting offered the students a different lesson, one calculated to feed the kind of cynicism and helplessness that now threaten American democracy.

An irony in this situation is that three of the four selectmen who rejected the town meeting's message

are men who have repeatedly appealed — often with justification — for more open and responsive local government. Walter Miller, John Gauger and Brian Sullivan have now put themselves on the opposite side of this issue. One would hope to hear a protest of their actions from Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie, whose office is dedicated to making local government more responsive. Otherwise she risks confirming Hank Ryan's fear, expressed on this page some weeks ago, that the community lawyer's office is aligning itself with one political faction in Winsted.

It is true that voters will have another chance at the budget, this time in referendum. That would also have been the case had a majority of selectmen listened to the town meeting and restored some or all of the school funding. It is still possible to get another reading on citizens' priorities. What may have been lost, however, is one more bit of citizens' respect and confidence in some those they elected.