Citizens can decide on teachers' contract

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Do you know that if you are dissatisfied with the contract that the Winchester Board of Education has made with the teachers, by state law the people can call for a referendum whether to accept that contract? You have 30 days after the contract is filed to petition for a referendum. Charlene Lavoie, Winsted's community lawyer, is very helpful in setting the proper wording for the petition. You will need at least 200 signatures of voters. The petition must be given to the town clerk for certification and he should pass it to the selectmen who will set a date for a referendum.

The citizens will have the opportunity to decide whether they want to accept this contract. If the people turn down the contract, it will go before a state arbitrator who will decide what is fair. Legal and arbitrator fees can cost $20,000 plus arbitrators seemed to have leaned toward either cutting back on salaries or medical benefits, not both. This is a gamble!

As I see it, the benefits of this contract are that the teachers will receive no raises for the 1994-1995 year. An old early retirement clause, given in plush economic times, will be changed to $35,000 rather than the present $50,000. After 1996 the whole retirement clause will be eliminated. In addition the teachers will pay more of the cost of their medical insurance benefit.

The following year teachers will get their usual step raises and a wage increase that will add up to 3.31 percent. What the economy will be in 1995 and the capacity of the town to pay this increase we don't know.

Why is a member of the Board of Education presenting this information? I believe that people must be given the facts to make wise judgements.

Judith D. Pavlak
Member, Winchester
Board of Education
Winchester