

Robert J. McCarthy

Hypertension benefits

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THIS WEEK'S report in The Register Citizen about payments to former policemen has stirred much talk in the town of Winchester. The information, revealed at a meeting of the Board of Selectmen, drew critical comment from individuals who view the payments as eventually growing to a level unaffordable for a town this size.

The problem lies with the state's heart-and-hypertension laws. The law became more restrictive on July 1, 1992, but prior to that it seems the law was a one-way street to the benefit of the former policemen and expensive to the community being served. The article mentioned three individuals who now cost the town \$83,412 a year in benefits attributed to the heart-and-hypertension law. Then there is the pending \$21,000 settlement requested for scars resulting from heart bypass surgery.

The individuals, of course, are not to be blamed in this situation as they are benefiting from a state law, the consequences of which were unknown at the time of its passage. The future is also indefinite as to the limitations the new restrictions will place on individual cases. Communities now will have the benefit of challenging whether heart problems are job related.

At last week's meeting, insinuations were made that the hypertension leading to heart problems may have been the result of lifestyles of the individuals rather than job stress. In the new law that factor can now be tested.

Former Mayor Nancy Eizenlohr presented the problem perfectly with her comment that the town could be heading toward one paid working department and one that is "living off the town."

Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie urged selectmen to take a strong stand against the heart-and-hypertension laws, and send a message to the Legislature that it will not continue to support such handouts. She visualized individuals abusing their own bodies and then benefiting from that abuse.

It puzzles me that communities can be made to suffer to such an extent because of the apparent lack of backbone or ability to say "no" to pressures which resulted in the passage of the original law.

The problem is reminiscent of several years ago when the Legislature reduced the legal drinking age to 18. It didn't take long for legislators to realize that a mistake had been made and within a short period of time that mistake was rectified and the legal drinking age restored to the original 21 years of age.

I'm sure Winchester is not alone in being responsible for such generous handouts, especially when questions arise as to whether such physical problems are job related. We can only hope that in the future, when questionable legislation is placed before those people we elect to protect us and our tax dollars that better judgment can be exercised on our behalf. I wonder at times who is working for who?