

*** * LCTA NEWSLETTER * ***

LITTLE COMPTON TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

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IMPORTANT VOTER INFORMATION!

In order for the voters of Little Compton to be more informed about their candidates for Town Council and School Committee, the Little Compton Taxpayers Association took the initiative, as a public service, to ask a series of spending related questions to the candidates, and to publish their answers in this newsletter. The questions were generated through two membership workshops. They are intentionally provocative and, in some case, angered the candidate. In any event, we do thank the candidates for their cooperation in responding. Since the School Committee spends approximately 62% of your tax dollars while the Town Council spends another 30%, it is in your best interest to make an informed vote on November 3, 1992. Please take the time to read this material and judge for yourself. We apologize for the small print. It was necessary in order to keep mailing costs down and to avoid the elimination of some of the questions.

If you would like to become a member of the Little Compton Taxpayers Association, we have included a tear-off application form at the end of this newsletter.

CANDIDATES FOR TOWN COUNCIL (5 Seats, 2 years)

Incumbent Candidates: Manola Chase (D), Alexandre Goulart Jr. (D), Johanna McKenzie (D), John McKinnon (D). Non-Incumbents: Jane Cabot (R), Thomas Goulart (R), John Silvia (R), Deborah Sullivan (R), J. Peter Sullivan (R).

1. There has been a generally recognized feeling that the last Town Council and the present one have not been responsive to the wishes of the townspeople on matters that they considered important, i.e. the Grange Hall, Lot 433, Goosewing Beach, Peckham Lot, and the "Drug Money" among others. These disputes have sapped the vitality of the people and the Council and have required time that we all wish could have been spent on other issues. How would you deal with the issue of "unresponsiveness"?

CABOT: The last Town Council put the Grange Hall issue on a general referendum to determine the wishes of the people. I would follow the recent Superior Court decision which requires Financial Town Meeting approval before drug forfeiture money can be spent.

CHASE: Unresponsiveness - no one has spent more time or effort than I (to preserve the Grange Hall) from my original compromise motion Dec. 6, 1988, to break the stalemate at the Special Town Meeting. I proposed the Fire and Grange Committees which spent 2 years in research, reports, work/meetings with RI Historical Preservation Commission, speakers (including Antoinette Downing). Five of us held on thru the 1st and 2nd Committees, were responsible for the referendum question on the ballot in Nov. 1990 which ended in over 900 votes in favor, compared with 400 against, preserving the Grange in its present location. I have continued to support that position and the Little Compton Community Center will be a much needed reality with the present plans going forward, even as we address the issue here. Lot 433 - I felt Lot 433 was far overpriced for the Town or State to afford, especially having been told of the consistency of the fill-dredge spoils, trash, etc. Before election '90, we were told of the

estimated cost per square foot, to repair "sink holes" after a storm surge vacuumed the area as actually happened during Hurricane "Bob". I feel fortunate we don't have that ownership to repair nor the question of filled tidal lands to repair (Hall vs Nacimiento). Old maps researched revealed the actual original land contour which does not in any way resemble Plat 9, Lot 433 as it appears today. Goosewing Beach - we firmly believe that the Town Council has the responsibility to acquire or sell land on behalf of the Town. Goosewing not only is a gift, too valuable to ignore, and too problem-filled if another agency were to acquire it, and the Town were to have no control of the very things that have been argued about for the last several years. Peckham Lot - We acted in good faith to solve 4 problems present when we took office...a substandard Fire Station, an inefficient outdated sewage treatment plant, bottled water use (\$10,000 per year), and public safety vehicles parking and traversing the Commons. We used wet land to plan an up-to-date fire station, have permission for the use of drug funds, updated the sewage treatment plant, planned a well for the drinking water problem, and will make use of Town owned land to eliminate taxes to buy it. We acquired valuable land (including Goosewing) to compensate for the loss of open space on the Peckham Lot. At least we didn't sell it to a private owner (as was done about a year after the Town bought it!) by selling the lot where the Beach & Bass was built. Drug Money - I once thought the "Drug Money" was tainted. Now I know it is in use, by civil forfeiture, with "tools" (money, cars, boats, etc.) of drug dealers' trade. They have their chance to prove otherwise. Elected in 1990, we have not ceased trying to make improvements. Much money has been thrown at opposing us. We have no private agendas. It took 20 years for things to get as they were in Nov. '90. We have made many worthwhile changes and need trust and time to continue.

A GOULART: I feel that I am being asked to grade my own papers. As far as the present Council not being responsive to the wishes of the people, I heartily disagree. Our only mistake was in not having a referendum in the beginning, but never did I believe the lengths and expense the opposing party would pursue. I believe the LCTA has been remiss in not backing the Peckham Lot complex project as it will definitely result in lower taxes. The school will save \$10,000 per year that is now spent on bottled water. The cost of maintaining the sewage plant will be taken over by the police-fire complex and we will not have to repair and rewire the present firestation at a savings of at least \$200,000. The two tankers will be housed in the new complex, saving another \$2,500 per year. The Maintenance Department can keep their equipment in the present fire station, saving \$750 in rent paid to garage it. The assessors office, planning board, and other groups can use the present police station instead of being cooped up in cubbyholes.

T GOULART: I would have informal open meetings so that all taxpayers may be heard. This would prevent formation of groups going in different directions which in the end divide the town and prevent coming to sound and reasonable decisions. It's not a disgrace to make a mistake, however it is a disgrace not to make a decision.

McKENZIE: I am answering this question as best I can. I believe that, in painting the present Council as "unresponsive", you are distorting the facts. I believe the unresponsive is a term that accurately characterizes the previous Council which served until 1990. With regard to the issue of responsiveness, when elected I will continue to hold the First Saturday Forums and enlist the LCTA's support to promote this as a means whereby any citizen can have an open and informal discussion with the Town Council. I encourage all town's people to avail themselves of the Saturday Forums opportunity. I am aware that many people cannot make the time in the evening to attend biweekly council meetings. Additionally, I applaud those who have devoted time and energy to serve on the Town Committees, Boards, and Commissions. This council has delegated power to many committees, has worked with them through non-voting representatives from Council, and has endorsed many of their recommendations. Examples speak louder than words. If you examine the working relationships of the Harbor Management Plan Committee you will find that fishermen, recreational boaters, and the most

affected residents worked together constructively to develop a Harbor Management Plan that should outlast any shifts in political balance. I encourage any concerned citizen to participate on the Committees, Boards, and Commissions, and through their participation I hope that more people will consider running for political office. The council offices are the best means of influencing the future direction of the Town. The partisan sniping from the sidelines that we have endured can be destructive to those upon whom the responsibility for decisions rests. If citizens are dissatisfied with the direction of the Town, the political system is at long last open enough to permit them to run for office. I cannot overemphasize the importance of the community based committees in providing solutions for the Town at minimum cost to the taxpayers. The Composting and Recycling Committee has produced real benefits at the transfer station. It is yet another example demonstrating that whenever people come together with positive energy and goal-oriented thinking there will be a greater likelihood of accomplishing their goal without government interference. On the other hand, we all suffer from the continuation of frivolous law suits and tunnel vision. Endorsing this tunnel vision will only lead to rising taxes with no apparent benefits to anybody.

McKINNON: I disagree this Town Council has been unresponsive to the wishes of the townspeople. This Council ran on a platform of open government and we have kept that promise. Open meetings were held for the public to express their opinions regarding Goosewing Beach and the Council appreciated their input. Disputes arose with a Beach Commission whose entire effort focused on refuting the acquisition of Goosewing Beach, a beach acquired for the townspeople at no cost to the town. This same Beach Commission caused dissention, suspicion and secrecy between its own members and between the lifeguards and even to the extent of the resignation of a highly qualified and well respected beach manager. And, most important, they showed little concern for the safety of the beachgoers. Who was responsive? The Peckham Lot: In 1977 the Little Compton Comprehensive Community Plan recommended a fire station be built on this lot. Additional studies have been made but no alternative site has been proposed, except a resounding defeat to demolish the Grange and replace it with a fire station. Here we are 15 years later and now in critical need of a new fire station. We have the opportunity to build a complex on a town owned lot AT NO COST TO THE TOWNSPEOPLE. Is this being unresponsive? Issues develop that create differences of opinion and this is democracy in action. However, disputes that arise from a very vocal select few who have much to gain personally is questionable. Who should the Council be responsive to, the select few, or the townspeople as a whole?

SILVIA: My general philosophy is that the annual town financial meeting is the forum in which the townspeople express their wishes for how the town will proceed during the coming year. It's my intention to bring all matters of substantive financial importance, or matters relating to the disposition or acquisition of property rights to the town meeting for voter approval.

D SULLIVAN: My belief of being unresponsive means that you are not listening to the concerns or wants of the people. When an issue arises that will affect our pocketbooks as taxpayers, or change the face of our Town, then all people should have the right to vote on the issue. We all have opinions, differing from each other, but majority rules.

J SULLIVAN: I am confused because the Grange Hall and Lot 433 were included in the examples of issues to which the previous council and the incumbent council have been accused of being unresponsive. Clearly, this is not the case. According to the Oxford American Dictionary, "unresponsive" means not responding warmly and favorably to an influence. As I recall these issues, the Grange Hall was placed on a referendum so that its fate would be decided by all the voters of Little Compton. The proposal to purchase Lot 433, at little or no cost to the Town with state and federal funds, was allowed to die by the incumbent council because of opposition from the Little Compton Taxpayers' Association and a Sakonnet Point resident. Clearly, the previous council responded "warmly and

favorably to an influence," a significant block of Little Compton voters. The incumbent council, however, responded "warmly and favorably" to one organization and one resident. The root cause for the polarization which has plagued Little Compton for the past two years is change - too much too fast! People don't want radical change because it changes the character of our Town. While I do not support the status quo, I think managing change and progress is responding to the needs of the community in a careful measured way. As a member of the Little Compton Town Council, I pledge to maintain a balance between tradition and progress, to listen and understand what the voters are saying, and prudently determine the direction of Little Compton for the benefit of all her residents.

2. There are Town employee contracts coming up in the next few months. Would you favor conducting contract negotiations with their unions in public in the spirit of open meetings. If not, why not? The same holds for a public hearing on the details of a tentative agreement prior to signing a contract. Do you support such a measure? If not, why not? Finally, in matters where there are disagreements, will you use arbitration as a tool rather than accede to the demands of the unions?

CABOT: The following is a quote from the negotiating ground rules agreed to by the last Town Council and the Police & Fire Unions - "Negotiating sessions will be open to the public." Negotiating meetings were open to the public and any contract agreed upon was public record and was always signed at a public Town Council meeting. Arbitration is very expensive but also has been used in the past if the Town Council thought that the Town had a good chance to win some issues.

CHASE: Open meetings, even without public participation or comment, might jeopardize negotiations and/or tentative agreements. I have no problem with arbitration when needed, but feel strongly that under the present circumstances, progress can be made to the satisfaction of all concerned. Since this is all new to me, I'm listening and learning.

A GOULART: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

T GOULART: I would favor conducting contract negotiations in public so that the taxpayers may be better informed. Hearings on details of a tentative agreement should be open to the public. In the event of a conflict I would use an arbitrator, unless the item was so minute that using arbitration would be more costly than the end result.

McKENZIE: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

McKINNON: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

SILVIA: I intend to support the Republican council candidates' intention to conduct all council meetings in open forum and at convenient (to the taxpayers) times for all issues not expressly required by law or binding agreement to be held in executive session. I support the idea of an informal hearing on contracts since those contracts are negotiated out of phase with the town meeting. I will use any means, including binding arbitration, to arrive at fair and equitable contracts with town employees.

D SULLIVAN: There should be no need for closed door policies during the next 2 years. I understand arbitration is an extremely expensive situation. I would hope that the business at hand could be handled with negotiation, but if in the final scheme of things it couldn't, I would favor arbitration.

J SULLIVAN: On September 28 and October 5, 1992 the incumbent council held early contract negotiations with the Fire Department in executive session. Past Councils held contract negotiations during open meetings or workshops, advertised according to state open meeting laws, and held at convenient hours

when working people could attend. As a member of the Little Compton Town Council I would, in most cases, conduct all meetings in public. I would like to point out some basic facts and clarify some misconceptions about arbitration. My research indicates that when faced with disagreements in the bargaining process the point of disagreement must be compared with the rest of the cities and towns in the State of Rhode Island. For instance, if a union was looking for retirement after 20 years of service, and the majority of other Rhode Island cities and towns offered that then an arbitrator would probably award the same benefit to a Little Compton union. Arbitration does not generally favor municipal government. As a member of the Little Compton Town Council I would, generally, avoid arbitration.

3. Is the town of Little Compton staffed at the correct level? What do you believe are the determining factors that should be used in deciding staffing levels?

CABOT: The voters at a Financial Town Meeting decide the staffing level of the Town. The Town Council can only make recommendations or requests. The voters have voted salaries for present employees; therefore, I believe that the Town is staffed at the correct level as voted by a majority of voters.

CHASE: No. Criteria for staffing should be the amount of coverage for public safety and affordability. We are isolated, in often solo circumstances, an aging population, with sometimes economic or mobility problems. All these things have to be taken into consideration for each individual circumstance.

A GOULART: I believe we are adequately staffed for the best protection possible in the area of crime, fire, and emergency treatment. We are better than most and second to none in our personnel and equipment.

T GOULART: Presently, I believe the Town is staffed at the correct level. Generally, the Financial Town Meeting gives the governing body the feeling that the taxpayers are comfortable with.

McKENZIE: Considering the needs of the Town, its location with respect to full medical services, and the demands of Americans for quality service, the public safety departments of the Town are staffed at adequate levels. The maintenance department, however, could use additional help on a seasonal basis. (This Council, through the liaison of the Police Chief with local social service agencies has been able to provide the additional summer manpower without increasing the tax burden of the Little Compton citizenry). The building inspector will in the next few years probably need to become a full time appointment because of the demands of citizens to control development in Little Compton, as expressed by the Comprehensive Community Plan, and an increasing sensitivity to preserving the environment. The controlling factors that should be used in determining staffing levels should be: (a) Public health and safety; (b) the costs of increased staffing and the associated impact on the Town's pension liability; (c) the ability to obtain professionally qualified personnel at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer; (d) the desires of taxpayers as expressed at the Town Financial Meeting and the ballot box. I feel sure that any increases in staffing levels by this Council, especially the hiring of two new EMT's, followed these criteria. In the last two years we have increased the patrol mileage of the police force, lowered the crimes against property, and installed two new EMT's, giving Little Compton one of the best qualified and most responsive rescue services in the state. Those EMT positions had been approved at the Town Financial Meeting in 1988 but had not been hired due to lack of responsiveness of the previous council.

McKINNON: At the present time the town of Little Compton is adequately staffed except in clerical needs of the Town Council and Building Official, i.e., handling mail, answering phones, taking messages, etc. You get the message I'm sure.

SILVIA: In the context of what services were voted at the town meeting and the restrictions of current labor contracts, it appears to me that the town is

staffed at an appropriate level this year. These two issues, plus the staffing required to meet State and Federal guidelines are the issues that determine an appropriate staffing level.

D SULLIVAN: At the present time, I would have to say it's a difficult question to answer. I have the personnel numbers written before me. "X" number of police, fire, part-timers, maintenance, etc. But to answer without pouring over the amount of calls that are answered everyday or projected to be answered isn't right. These call figures should be gone over with Dept. heads and the Town Council to determine hiring practices.

J SULLIVAN: The litmus test that I would apply concerning appropriate staffing levels is threefold: (1) is the required work or service being completed in a professional and timely manner; (2) is the work or service necessary; and, (3) can the Town afford the work or service in question. There may be departments within the Town that are over staffed. They are, however, controlled by union contracts and elected officials other than the Town Council. Ultimately, the voters who attend Financial Town Meetings have control over spending whether it's for manpower or maintenance.

4. Salary Increases and benefits are sure to be an issue in the coming negotiations. Will you hold the line on this issue so that we remain within the mandated cap on spending?

CABOT: I am committed to doing all that is possible to remain within the State mandated cap on Town spending.

CHASE: The present Town Council has proved in the past that "the cap" is important to them as Councillors and as private taxpayers.

A GOULART: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

T GOULART: I will work diligently to hold the line on salaries and benefits so that we remain within the mandated cap for spending.

McKENZIE: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

McKINNON: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

SILVIA: The use that the current council has made of the "cap" as a measure of appropriate salary and benefit increases is, to me, totally out of sync with the current economic realities. I believe in a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, no more and no less. A fair day's pay includes fringe benefits associated with the job.

D SULLIVAN: I will do my best to hold the line so that we can remain within the mandated cap.

J SULLIVAN: I support compensation packages that are fair, equitable, and justified to both the employee and the employer, the Town of Little Compton. Cost containment of health insurance will be a high priority for me as a member of the next Town Council.

5. Recent changes in the pension benefit for Town employees have resulted in significant increases in the requirements for funding the pension trust fund. The potential is there to require an increase in the Town's contribution from the traditional \$38,000 to \$250,000 for the coming fiscal year 1993/1994. At that level it becomes one of the top funding requirements in the entire budget! What is your plan to contain, reduce, or eliminate this extraordinary growth in this benefit?

CABOT: I am not familiar with the 250,000 dollar figure in the above question. When I left the Pension Committee, the Pension Plan was fully funded. The added benefits for Police/Fire voted by a majority of the Pension Committee and all

the previous Council members would have been an additional cost per year of under \$30,000 (Actuary's letter dated 4/4/90 on file in the Town Clerk's Office). I would never commit to an additional expenditure of \$250,000 of taxpayers' money for pension benefits.

CHASE: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

A GOULART: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

T GOULART: This item has been up and down like a "yo yo." I cannot see myself committing the taxpayers to a \$250,000 contribution. We need more information at open meetings.

McKENZIE: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

McKINNON: [DUE TO FIREMEN UNION NEGOTIATIONS, THE SOLICITOR HAS ADVISED AGAINST ANSWERING THE QUESTION - Ed.]

SILVIA: We have a rather extraordinary pension and fringe benefit plan in Little Compton. In particular, a pension plan that bankrupts itself serves neither the town nor the retirees. I would seek a fringe benefit plan that is both equitable and sustainable into the future.

D SULLIVAN: If in fact those are correct figures, I would feel that contracts should be renegotiated.

J SULLIVAN: At a minimum, the Fire Department will be asking for an increase in benefits and a reduction in the normal retirement date of the pension plan and an increase in salary. All of these components increase the cost of the pension plan and concomitantly our taxes. Part of the increase in our pension expense can be directly attributable to the recent addition of two full time EMT's. In order to reduce our pension costs, which the Town's actuaries currently peg at \$103,630, I propose the following changes to the Town Pension Plan: (1) that the normal retirement for all Town employees be their 62nd birthday; (2) that "Average Compensation" for all Town employees shall mean compensation averaged over the 5 consecutive years out of the last 10 years producing the highest average prior to termination of employment; and, (3) that the "Plan" be changed to contributory status. Simply put, this means all Town employees would pay a percentage of their retirement plan. Initially, I propose a contribution of 4% of salary. It is reported that Little Compton is the only town in Rhode Island that does not require its employees to contribute to their pension plan. If the above changes take place I then recommend that the Town of Little Compton change its employees savings and investment plan so that, for every dollar the employee contributes, the Town contributes twenty-five cents. This would cost very little and further encourage our Town employees to save. Taken together, the above proposals would significantly reduce the Town's pension expense, while at the same time put Little Compton in line with other Rhode Island cities and towns, and help our Town employees to save for their retirement. It makes me wonder why the incumbent Council, which includes a member of the fire department who is not seeking re-election, is negotiating, in executive session with the Fire Department a contract that expires nine months from now.

CANDIDATES FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Incumbent Candidate: Carole Buffman (D)...Non-Incumbents: Herbert Case Jr. (R), Addison "Thad" Closson (Independent), Bernard Shapiro (D), Donald Wordell (R). [2 seats to fill for 4 years. The remaining 3 seats come up in 1994]

Mr. Bernard Shapiro wrote the following cover letter to his responses.

"Although your questions are negatively skewed, and the attitude of your association is one of intimidation, aggression, and confrontational with a "holier than thou" inference, I will answer them only because some of your

questions are relevant. Your association can be a very positive and constructive force in this community, it is unfortunate that your group chose the low road to meet your goals".

1. Teacher contracts are negotiated between the School Committee, representing the Town, and the National Education Association (NEA), representing the Teachers. It is well known that the NEA utilizes previous agreements with other Towns to bolster its positions taken at the bargaining table. That being the case, Rhode Island Teachers who sit on Little Compton's School Committee and negotiate with their own Union stand to benefit in the long run by giving in to NEA demands. This is a clear conflict of interest. Do you believe that such School Committee members should abstain from participating in contract negotiations? Please explain your answer and say whether or not you are a Rhode Island teacher.

BUFFMAN: The Little Compton Taxpayers' Association has already been in contact with the Ethics Commission concerning what they describe as a clear conflict of interest regarding teachers serving on the School Committee and participating in negotiation of contracts. The Ethics Commission did not agree with their contention. Beyond this, I feel each voter should evaluate each candidate's qualifications and vote for the candidate(s) that they feel will best do the job. I am not a teacher.

CASE: The Ethics Commission has previously written an opinion on teachers who are school committee members and participate in the negotiation process and found no clear conflict of interest. Any person serving on a school committee, teacher or not, is expected to deal with many different needs and desires. The voters have entrusted this person to deal with any and all issues openly, honestly, objectively, and above reproach. I am not a teacher, but if I were I would make it absolutely clear that the negotiation process was not tainted.

CLOSSON: It would be a conflict of interest if a school committee/NEA member were to negotiate and vote on a labor contract, and they should abstain from the negotiation process. I am not, nor ever have been a member of a teachers union.

SHAPIRO: Yes, I am a Rhode Island teacher and I'm proud to be one. I happen to belong to the AFT (American Federation of Teachers) but that's not even the issue. I look at being a teacher as a positive and not a negative asset. Who else would know about educational programs, school budgets, school supplies, text book selections, curriculum and literally hundreds of other decisions a School Committee must make? My first priority as a teacher, an educator, a parent or a taxpayer is the children. No, I don't see a conflict of interest. I see an interest in education.

WORDELL: A member of the School Committee should not be able to vote on or negotiate the contract only if they are a teacher of the town of Little Compton.

2. The current School Committee allowed the NEA to obtain a no-layoff agreement in the latest Teacher contract. The reason given by members of the School Committee is that they wanted to make sure that Teachers would be affected by budget cuts "only as a last resort"; but, this agreement eliminates that option! What is your opinion of this agreement and what will your position be at the bargaining table should this come up again?

In this question, Mrs. Buffman states that the School Committee never said they wanted to make sure the Teachers would be affected by budget cuts only as a last resort. During the Financial Town Meeting of May 16, 1992, Abigail Brooks, representing the School Committee, stated the following on this point as tape recorded by Mr. Bruce Gavin on behalf of the town:

"I just wanted to mention, too, I think that there's some sentiment that people are sorry that we can't lay-off teachers this year and that we had a no lay-off

clause in the contract. As educators and people who are professionals about education, we felt that all education indicators at this point tell us that, fundamental to a quality education, is the student-teacher ratio. We decided that, against all odds, what we would do this year is have a no-lay-off clause so that that would be OUR LAST RESORT." [Emphasis added] The tapes are available for anyone to listen to.

BUFFMAN: Firstly, the School Committee never said "they wanted to make sure the Teachers would be affected by budget cuts only as a last resort." What the School Committee did say was (1) at the time the contract was signed the 91/92 school year was already in session, hence layoffs were a moot issue; (2) teachers are only "protected" by a no lay-off provision in the 92/93 school year and lay-offs could only have been achieved by cutting out programs which the School Committee was not in favor of doing; and (3) the no lay-off provision is not a clause in the contract which has to be "negotiated out" during the next contract negotiations. Should a proposal for a no lay-off provision be turned down if it meant agreement to no wage increases, agreement to discussion of concessions regarding health benefits, retirement benefits, etc.? My position at the next contract negotiations is to bargain in good faith as I am required to do by the laws of the State of Rhode Island.

CASE: The memorandum of agreement in the contract only applies to the 1991 to 1993 school years. The years of 1991 and 1992 were already set when the agreement was signed and the school committee elected not to have lay offs for the 1992 and 1993 school year. The school committee has little latitude in this area because of minimum staffing levels. If the issue of no-layoffs were to come up again, it would have to be evaluated on its own merits. However, it is probably inappropriate for the long term.

CLOSSON: I believe that the "no lay-off option" in the current contract should not have been part of the exhisting agreement, nor should it be part of future agreements. This clause severely limits the School Committee's options when down sizing must occur due to budget limits, or preformance concerns are at issue.

SHAPIRO: Although I did attend the School Committee budget workshops, unlike anybody from the taxpayers association, I was not privy to all the specific line items. I will agree that the no layoff clause is an extreme one. However one has to look at "the whole picture" to see everything that's involved with this particular negotiation. I probably would not have allowed that language in the contract.

WORDELL: It should not have been done in the first place. No way should it come up again.

3. In 1974, there were 500 students and 49 staff members in the Wilbur School. Today, after two building additions, there are approximately 325 students and 69 staff members. What is your position on this point and what specifically will you do about it as a member of the School Committee?

BUFFMAN: To address the issue of staffing, there are currently only 60 staff members at the Wilbur School whose salaries are paid for by local tax dollars not 69. The staff is comprised of superintendent/principal (1), certified teachers (25 full time & 10 part-time), office staff (2), aides (5), janitors (4), bus drivers (7), & bus monitors (6). Since 1974, there have been changes in the laws governing schools which required us to add staff members to meet these requirements (i.e., bus monitors & guidance counselor). In addition, under provisions of the literacy set-aside provision we were mandated to develop additional literacy set-aside programs to supplement existing programs and a half-time teacher was hired to accomplish this. We now offer a foreign language to our students in grade 7 & 8 (not uncommon in middle school). And yes, we now have a Pre-One Class which attends to the needs of those students who are not developmentally ready to go on to first grade but who need more than a kindergarten program offers. To address the issue of building additions, both additions/renovations were bought before the town for approval. In the case of

the last addition/renovation, the school was state and federally mandated to provide handicapped accessibility to all areas of the school. Rather than address this issue alone, a building committee was formed to evaluate the long term needs of the school system. This committee was made up of a cross section of local residents who met over a year. They presented their findings to the School Committee who then brought the plan before the town. 4 different meetings were held for the specific purpose of answering any questions and concerns the community might have on the project. The bond issue was then presented to the voters at the annual town meeting - not one person questioned the need for this construction and the bond was approved. It is my belief that the building can now not only meet the current needs of the school but also the future needs as well and no additions will be necessary in the foreseeable future.

CASE: The staff of the school includes many part-timers and positions that are state mandated such as bus monitors, guidance councillors, and literacy programs that were not required in 1974. Any newly elected school committee member would have to understand and examine each staff position and make sure that it makes sense and is cost effective. The building additions were decided upon by a needs committee with the help of professionals, presented to the school committee, and finally approved at a town meeting. In both cases, the needs were clearly presented and, in most cases, mandated by the state and Federal governments. Serving as a chairperson of the most recent building needs committee, we found rooms and situations existing that you would not let occur in your own home, let alone in a school. The building was designed to serve the needs of the school into the 21st century.

CLOSSON: The school system and educational philosophies in 1974 are significantly different from the existing system at the school, and is like comparing apples with oranges. I believe evaluations of personel, programs and educational goals are all part of the budgetary system, and should be publically discussed annually, prior to the Town Financial Meeting and teacher negotiations.

SHAPIRO: What's your point? Is it that we finally recognized that there should be a lower student-to-teacher ratio? Research has indicated, time after time, that a lower class size leads to a better learning environment for the students. Is it also your point that we should have not modernized our out of date, out of code educational structure? Your question is pointless.

WORDELL: Times have changed a lot in the School Department and the staff has gotten bigger. It would be hard to cut the staff, but I think it is time to make sure it doesn't get bigger at all.

4. The School spends approximately 60% of the Town's tax revenue. The School Committee is charged with the responsibility of managing those expenditures. This gives the School Committee a dual function: managing an education program and running a business. The two sometimes conflict often times resulting in major tax increases levied on the townspeople. How do you plan to manage education and "the business" if elected?

BUFFMAN: Approximately 60% of the budget in each and every community in the state of Rhode Island is spent supporting public education. In addition, if the taxpayers of Little Compton had to support the town services other communities provide that we don't (trash pick up, town lights, etc.), the percentage of our tax dollar spent on education would be less than those other communities. The School Committee is charged with the responsibility of running the "business of education." All aspects of this "business" are mutually dependent on one another, not two separate concerns. In the past two years that I have been on the School Committee, overall budget requests have increased by 1.7% in 1991 & .4% in 1992. The increased request of local tax dollars for this same period was 4.7% and 24.7% respectively. The "major" increase is a result of drastically reduced state aid and not major increases in spending.

CASE: The business of running the school and educating our children, in my opinion, are not conflicting roles and cannot be separated. They are "joined at the hip", and one must not be sacrificed for the other. There must be clear goals, objectives stated, and communicated to the public at large. They must be measured and reported. The people most responsible for making things happen, namely the teachers, administrators, and parents, must be empowered to do so. The greatest gift any town can give to its children is a good education and the school committee has the ownership of doing it in a fiscally responsible manner.

CLOSSON: The administration and management of the school system has traditionally been the responsibility of the superintendent. I believe the school committee should concern itself primarily with school policy and budgetary matters. If elected, I would urge for the development of a comprehensive and effective policies/procedure book, as well as adopting more effective business practices which would increase efficiency "better education for less", and explore and cultivate outside funding sources.

SHAPIRO: I have always felt that the job of Superintendent/Principal/Business Manager has and is an impossible situation. One of my goals, if elected, would be to change the administrative structure of our school system. Options vary - a full or part-time Superintendent; a separate principal or assistant principal; a full-time head teacher, etc. Clearly there's a need to investigate, study and hopefully implement.

WORDELL: I think we should not meet the same night for both education programs and business. We should meet one night for the education program and one night for the business end of it. If you do them both the same night, you are doing too much at one time. You will not do your job right.

5. When Governor Sundlun announced that Little Compton's share of State education aid would be cut to nearly nothing, the School Committee members made heavy cuts in books, supplies, computers, equipment, and sports while, at the same time, they allowed increases in salaries and benefits. As it turned out, the State provided much more funding than was expected and the problem was averted; but, indications are that this problem will occur again. What will you do to the budget such that State reductions will not result in cuts to critical programs anymore?

BUFFMAN: At the time the contract was negotiated, there was no way to predict that Gov. Sundlun would reduce Little Compton's state aide to education by 89.9% instead of the 17% decrease that we were told to expect six months earlier. Town workers were given raises of 5 1/2% and federal workers received raises of 4 1/2% in this same period that the School Committee negotiated a 3 1/2% increase for teachers. As always, future budget preparation will require close scrutiny and evaluation of educational needs versus the ability of the community to fund these needs.

CASE: The answer to this question is relatively clear. Programs do not exist without teachers, and as stated before, minimum staffing levels must be met. The school committee was forced to make hard choices when there was little or no warning about cuts and how much. This situation will continue to exist because of the current direction of education funding. The school committee must re-examine the needs of the school, seek alternate funding, both public and private, as well as looking to the community as a whole for volunteer help.

CLOSSON: To meet the challenge of budget cuts from the state, I believe an annual evaluation process involving all school personnel, programs, equipment ect. so that all assets of the school will be valued on it's merits, before budget cuts are made. This process will hopefully stimulate a "better education for less" attitude within the school community, and win the support and respect of the Town community.

SHAPIRO: As long as State aid to education is tied to our property taxes, I'm not sure what any School Committee can do to prevent (or react) to any major

cut. What complicates the Little Compton scenario is the fact that our School budget is approved before we know what State aid is coming from the legislature. I would work to delay our Financial Town Meeting to a date closer to July 1.

WORDELL: Right now, it is hard to cut out anything because of the contract. So you have to cut out books, supplies, equipment, and sports. We must do something about the contract next time. We must get the authority to cut the staff if the state cuts the budget again.

6. Would you favor conducting contract negotiations with the National Education Association (NEA) in public in the spirit of open meetings. If not, why not? The same holds for a public hearing on the details of a tentative agreement with the NEA on a Teacher contract prior to signing. Do you support such a measure? If not, why not?

BUFFMAN: As long as holding negotiations is not in violation of any local, state, or federal laws, I do not have any problems or reservations about holding these sessions in public. Regarding a public hearing on any tentative agreement that is reached out of negotiating sessions, both the Little Compton Teachers' Association and the School Committee are required to bargain in good faith and reach a settlement based on that bargaining. As long as a public hearing does not legally violate those conditions, I do not have any problem with public hearings.

CASE: I would favor conducting negotiations and hearings in a public setting. However, both sides have to agree to do this, and the NEA usually reserves the right to conduct closed sessions.

CLOSSON: I strongly believe that open meetings during labor negotiations are vital to a democracy, especially for a small town school system. The community should be involved in order to better understand and gain confidence for the system. An open system promotes "honesty", and is a measure I would support.

SHAPIRO: No, I would not favor negotiations to be held as an open meeting. Contract negotiations, as it is, is a very sensitive, complicated event. To open it up to a public forum would cause too many distractions and would prevent both sides from concentrating on the issues. I would also not agree to a public hearing on any tentative agreement with the union and School Committee. You elect School Committee members to represent you in any and all School matters. That's their obligation and responsibility. We as citizens, cannot step in and demand a hearing or vote on every decision our elected official agrees upon. It would cause a great amount of delays and animosity.

WORDELL: Yes, it should be open to the townspeople and, yes, the people should have the right to a public hearing.

7. Rhode Island Literacy Program officials consider a "Pre-1" class to be unnecessary from an educational standpoint, psychologically harmful to the children involved, and a major cause of a child dropping out of high school. The Little Compton Taxpayers Association agrees and also looks at "Pre-1" as another teacher position and the cost of an additional school year for each child involved. What is your position on this?

Information concerning the Rhode Island Literacy Program and its stand on "Pre-1" was obtained by the Little Compton Taxpayers Association from Ms. Charlotte Diffendale, Early Childhood Specialist with the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. She can be reached at (401) 277-6890 and is quite willing to share information.

BUFFMAN: You have stated that the RI Literacy Program officials consider Pre-One to be "unnecessary from an educational standpoint, psychologically harmful to children involved, and a major cause of a child dropping out of high school," I invite all those who agree with this position to evaluate our Pre-One program specifically not Pre-One programs in general. I invite them to talk with the parents of those children involved in the program and see if any of them has

been "psychologically damaged" by this program. I invite the critics of our Pre-One program to come up with a better way to address the developmental needs of those children who are either academically or socially not ready to progress to grade one but who are too advanced to stay in kindergarten. I invite you to explain the rationale that recognizes that all children do not develop gross and fine motor skills at the same time yet expects that all children who are 6 years of age by 12/31 to be "ready" to enter first grade. We are tied by state mandates to begin educating children earlier than a majority of other states in the country. Until this is rectified we are going to continue to find a wide range of skills and maturity in our kindergarten classes. Pre-One is our deeply considered, carefully monitored and highly successful response to this diversity. We have found this has made first grade a highly successful experience not only for the child who may need some time to catch up to others at their grade level but also for the other children in the class whose teacher does not have to spend valuable instructional time dealing with children not quite ready for the demands of first grade.

CASE: After talking with parents of children who have been through the "Pre-1" program, I feel that it has been a success but should be looked at on a year-to-year basis. We can assume that children will "catch up", but do so quicker when "Pre-1" is in place and presented in a positive manner.

CLOSSON: The Pre-One program has considerable value and merit, but has unfortunately been badly reported and poorly promoted. The program has had four graduating classes, and has greatly advanced all those who have been assisted by it. Will we save money if we eliminated it? I believe not. Without Pre-One, many young children would either end up repeating a grade later suffering great psychological distress, or would require additional special educational services which can be quite costly to the school system. In this situation, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

SHAPIRO: Wow! I would love to see the research that shows that being in "Pre-1" causes high school dropout. Considering that the program in Rhode Island is only about 5 years old, it's hard to imagine how it already effects the drop out rate! In speaking to alot of administrators in the Providence Literacy Program, I get just the opposite point of view. I think it's premature to pass judgment on this program. I know it has worked in specific cases. Whether a School system buys into the program is strictly a judgment call now.

WORDELL: If I had a child in Pre-1, I know he would get a great deal out of it. So I think it should be in the School Department.