

LITTLE COMPTON TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

• • NEWSLETTER • •

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ELECTION 94

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 by the LCTA Board of Directors. We 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 8, 1994. Please take the time to read this material and judge for yourself.

TOWN COUNCIL (5 Seats, 2 Years)

Democrats: Peg Bugara, Betty Chase, Alexandre Goulart, John McKinnon

Republicans: Jane Cabot, Robert Dyer III, Tom Goulart, John Silvia, Deborah Sullivan

Independent: William Bullivant

1. WHAT IS YOUR PLAN TO CONTAIN THE GROWTH OF PENSIONS IN LITTLE COMPTON?

BUGARA: Regardless of the question asked, each question reflects what I would do in a particular situation. It must be clearly understood, that no one person can do anything to improve the conditions of Little Compton, without the support and backing of the other council members and the townspeople. The council must not be run as a dictatorship, but as an honest sharing of all concerned individuals. To answer your specific question, for all those departments that are under the Town Council auspices we should negotiate with each group to contribute to the pension fund. This was done with the Fire Department and the all democratic town council, and should be followed for future contract negotiations.

BULLIVANT: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

CABOT: I have always tried to control all municipal spending but one has to be fair to the employee and compare wages and benefits of people in similar employment. I will continue to monitor any proposed changes in the Pension Plan.

CHASE: Regarding growth of pensions in Little Compton, my suggestion would be to study the present set-up in depth with the Pension Committee, Town Council, Town Solicitor, and possibly some voters/members at large. Make it quite clear that solutions to runaway expenses must be found. Economically viable and legal proposals

should be presented. In so doing, eligibility may have to be limited. Also, joint contributions, by Town and employees, would need to be considered, as in the firemans' contract of 1992. These alternatives could then be presented to the tax paying public at the Financial Town Meeting.

DYER: The Little Compton Pension is one of the most sound in the state. This can be attributed to the very competent Pension Committees of past and present. Unlike other RI cities and towns our unfunded liability is minimal. I would hope that benefits could be maintained or increased while continuing to control or lower costs.

GOULART, A: Have all employees contribute to the pension fund.

GOULART, T: Most businesses now have a contributory pension plan. In future negotiations, all efforts must be made to require employee contribution into the Pension Plan.

McKINNON: I would like to see the Police and Fire Departments and the Municipal employees contribute to their own pensions. It was suggested at the Police and Municipal employees negotiations but it was turned down.

SILVIA: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

SULLIVAN: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

2. WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON BUDGET REFORM THROUGH THE TOWN COUNCIL IMPOSING DEPARTMENT BUDGET CAPS AND DIRECTING ITS DEPARTMENT HEADS TO SUBMIT BUDGETS NOT EXCEEDING THOSE CAPS? PLEASE EXPLAIN.

BUGARA: A directive should be sent to all department heads that there will be level funding for the fiscal year beginning July 1995. A department head who cannot meet that request would be able to petition for a specific item. If the council felt this does not meet an emergency situation the department head may go back and resubmit the

budget to come in line with the directive or have the choice of having the council cut the line items.

BULLIVANT: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

CABOT: The Town Council presently meets with the heads of all departments appointed by the Town Council and decides on a realistic budget which can not be exceeded except in an emergency.

CHASE: Reform has already been demonstrated by the Democrats in the 1991 and 1992 budgets. We worked with department heads, shaving every little bit that could be saved in their figures. This is a management item which needs the cooperation, determination, and dedication of all concerned. I am convinced that our method helps to solve many of the problems.

DYER: Department Heads currently submit their respective budgets to the Town Council for review and it is expected that they not exceed the cap. I agree with this.

GOULART, A: The council already implements the budget cap with department heads.

GOULART, T: The Council meets with all department heads to place a cap on all budget items. Special interest groups and liberal spending at Financial Town Meetings many times make it difficult to control "caps." Unusual circumstances such as snow removal and hurricanes also make it difficult to control.

McKINNON: The Council meets with each department head, examines its budget and recommends an increase or not.

SILVIA: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

SULLIVAN: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

3. WHAT IS YOUR FEELING ABOUT TAXPAYER FUNDED HEALTH INSURANCE FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS WHO SERVE ON A PART TIME BASIS (E.G., THE TOWN COUNCIL, TOWN MODERATOR, ETC.)?

BUGARA: I believe to reach potential candidates there must be incentives for them to be involved in the job of running town government. The small stipend and health benefits are the least the town 's people can offer to people who try to dedicate their time and effort to the betterment of the townspeople. If this is not favored by the town's people then increase the stipend so each person could purchase their own health care package on the outside.

BULLIVANT: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

CABOT: The Town Council, the Town Treasurer, and the Town Clerk are the only elected officials to receive health benefits. The benefit is part of their total compensation package.

CHASE: Obviously, from a national point of view, as well as on the local level, health insurance is a delicate subject to discuss because of the pocket book and human emotions involved. It does require an innovative approach and some 'give and take' on all sides. I would suggest a serious look at giving our elected officials a standard compensation increase to cover an average amount. That way, the figure would not fluctuate as the health care provider's figures

move up or down each payment period. The individual could use that set amount toward his own private plan or use it toward taking advantage of the Town's group rates, if that person so desired to pay in. That way, it would essentially lower the cost to the L.C. taxpayer, yet not penalize those who dedicate themselves to serve. Essentially, though a position of honor and trust, being a Town Councilor does involve endless meetings, much responsibility, and sometimes, thankless stress. To take all or some such compensation away could discourage others from running in the future. Not all qualified and interested people are in a position to dedicate the energy and necessary time, without feeling that they are appreciated, evidenced by more than adulation or just verbal "thanks."

DYER: During my time on the Budget Committee this subject has been an ever increasing issue. I believe that full time elected officials should have as a benefit an Individual plan and contribute, if desired and needed towards the Family plan. Part time employees should not receive this benefit. Union employees are covered by contract.

GOULART, A: Considering the hours the councilor spends on Town matters, they are entitled to a few perks.

GOULART, T: At the present time, our Town Code allows for taxpayer funded health insurance for elected officials who serve on a part time basis. I personally am very much opposed to this and will continue to oppose this issue. We have many working families in our Town who can not afford health insurance for their families. This is most unfair that elected officials who serve part time are entitled to receive full Blue Cross and Delta Dental Family Plan.

McKINNON: I don't believe the Town Council should be put in the same category as Town Moderator, etc. For the amount of time Council members spend at meetings, I think they are deserving of health insurance.

SILVIA: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

SULLIVAN: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

4. PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNION DEMANDS FOR SALARY AND BENEFITS OUTSTRIP INCREASES IN PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY. WHAT STEPS WOULD YOU TAKE TO COUNTER THE TREND?

BUGARA: Your statement "Public employee union demands for salary and benefits outstrip increases in productivity and efficiency," is your biased observation and does not reflect my personnel observations. However, in my opinion, productivity and efficiency has a direct relationship to the leadership of the department head in charge. Department workers need to know exactly what will and won't be tolerated regarding their work ethic. All department heads and town council personnel should be very familiar with the union contracts so that practices that have become "habit" but are not grounded in contract words can be stopped. Department heads need to know they will have council support without unnecessary micro managing. If needed a department head who is having

difficulty within their department might need to be coached and counseled.

BULLIVANT: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

CABOT: I do not understand the question. How do you measure productivity and efficiency, especially in the Police and Fire Departments. All our employees are proficient in their work and serve the Town very well.

CHASE: The demands for salaries and benefits vs. productivity and efficiency can be addressed by considering work requirements and time management. Every employee and every department head should have a definite idea of what the job requires, elements and value of compensation necessary: in other words, a job description adhered to and honored. Also, to be considered, for possible cost savings, are certain contracting by advertised bids for services. Participation in town government is a privilege. Often, we take it too lightly. Millions have died striving to achieve such rights. Many scoff at it, but those who have taken an oath, to preserve and defend that constitutional right, deserve to have us give attention to such details. Don't moan and groan if you don't attend. Each detail, in its own way, strengthens our own corner of this republic.

DYER: I do not agree with your premise that "public employee union demands for salary and benefits outstrip increases in productivity and efficiency." I feel that our Town employees are hard working and deserve a decent day's pay for their efforts. However, like any business sometimes there are exceptions where some people may not do what is expected. I do believe that contract negotiations are very important and must be handled with an eye not only on the present but on the long term as well.

GOULART, A: That would come under the aegis of the department heads.

GOULART, T: I don't necessarily agree that Union demands for salary and benefits have any effect on productivity or efficiency. The Town Council, along with the Chiefs of Police and Fire, are not members of any union. Therefore, they should continue to monitor productivity and efficiency as always on an ongoing basis. Elected officials monitor their own departments.

McKINNON: I disagree that public employees are not productive and efficient.

SILVIA: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

SULLIVAN: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

5. NOVEMBER ELECTIONS BRING APPROXIMATELY 70 TO 90 PERCENT OF THE VOTERS TO THE POLLS; YET, ONLY 10 TO 15 PERCENT TYPICALLY ATTEND THE ANNUAL FINANCIAL TOWN MEETING. WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION AT THE FINANCIAL TOWN MEETING?

BUGARA: First, I would like to see the meeting moved back to a Saturday. Second I would like to list in advance all those who wish to run for offices, that are usually elected at the end of the meeting. Before the meeting voters would receive a short statement regarding each indi-

vidual, their strengths, and why they want to run for that particular office. As voters came in they would receive a ballot and could vote their choices at the beginning of the meeting. Third see if a time limit could be placed on individuals when they are speaking. I do not mean that each individual should not be heard. Fourth see if better communication between the council and budget committee could streamline the budget process. Possibly educating the public regarding the rules on how to enter an amendment to a budget item. Fifth, have a budget committee person speak to a stroke when they recommended a change, so the townspeople can understand their rationale. This information could also be given at the time the warrants are sent out to the people for their preview. This way voters would come to the meeting already with an understanding why the budget committee recommended changes to the stroke.

BULLIVANT: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

CABOT: In a Democracy there is no way to force people to attend a Town Meeting. One can only inform the voters on the issues.

CHASE: In 1992, by changing the time to mid day, was a way in which we thought to help more people feel that they could attend the Financial Town Meeting. Using a consolidated format would conserve valuable time, also. Barrington, I believe, has an excellent one. The home rule suggestion of a single comprehensive ballot form for each person to mark, as items are considered, seems like a good idea to be developed. Although the idea may seem cumbersome at first, if coded to protect identity, some of the usually absent tradepersons in town might decide to attend, also. Their input would be invaluable in many deliberations. Understandably, they fear for their livelihood being in jeopardy should they appear negative to, or in favor of, opinions expressed. Secret ballots would tend to take care of that issue.

DYER: I have attended Financial Town Meetings for years now and unless there is a controversial issue pending attendance is generally low. Although there is an argument for greater attendance I cannot see forcing people to go. Perhaps their absence is an implicit agreement that the Budget Committee's review and Report along with the Town Council's daily management is adequate.

GOULART, A: Change the format for electing the Budget and Beach Commissions; and, have the meeting of Saturday.

GOULART, T: Financial Town meetings historically have been held during the evening. Saturday has also been tried but no improvement in attendance. Our Town Moderator does an excellent job allowing all to be heard. Budget Committee recommendations have not been accepted by the voters. More emphasis must be made that matters voted on at the meeting affect their TAXES for the upcoming year.

McKINNON: The public has to be made aware of the importance of their vote at the Financial Town Meeting. It appears to be an older group in attendance and it may be

difficult for young parents to attend, I don't think many of the younger people are willing to pay a baby-sitter to attend a meeting that might last 3 to 4 hours.

SILVIA: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

SULLIVAN: ☹️ **FAILED TO RESPOND**

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**SCHOOL COMMITTEE (3 Seats, 4 Years)**

*Democrats:* Abigail Brooks, Nan Haffenreffer

*Republicans:* Darrell Harvey III, Lisa Ramsbottom

**1. LITTLE COMPTON IS CONSIDERED A "WEALTHY TOWN" BY THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE. AS A RESULT, MAJOR FUNDING CUTS HAVE OCCURRED IN OUR EDUCATIONAL STATE AID. HOW DO YOU PLAN TO CONTINUE TO RUN THE SCHOOL WITHOUT SIMPLY PASSING ALONG THE LOSS TO THE TAXPAYERS?**

**BROOKS:** As the state continues to cut funds I will continue to urge the School Committee to cut costs but not at the expense of quality programming. I believe that quality education for all is the backbone of this country's success. The School Committee has not simply been passing state cuts on to the taxpayers. It has been involved in a number of measures to decrease expenses. These include: (a) dramatically reduced salary increases for employees over the past four years; (b) a dramatic increase in the level of funding to the school through grants such as those recently received from the Champlin Foundation (efforts spearheaded and implemented by teachers); (c) negotiations with Middletown High School to keep our per pupil cost below the actual per pupil expenditure; (d) a vote to privatize the school food service in order to reduce costs and perhaps to even make a profit; (e) an exploration of privatizing some parts of bus transportation; (f) work with a private consulting firm to reduce our health benefit costs and to explore alternate insurers; (g) purchasing of classroom and maintenance supplies and heating oil through the regional school collaborative; (h) a critical review of staffing at the school on an annual basis in order to ensure that all staff are both necessary and are being fully utilized. will continue these efforts if I am re-elected.

**HAFFENREFFER:** I feel that the School Committee has done a good job over the past few years in controlling costs, in spite of drastic state cutbacks over which we have no control. Our budget this past year represented an increase of less than 1% from the previous year. I realize the town's taxpayers (of which I am one) have had to pick up more of the overall burden, but we on the School Committee have tried to keep this burden to a minimum. I will continue to strive for fiscal responsibility without compromising the education of our children.

**HARVEY:** It is not reasonable to answer this specifically until one actually reviews and justifies the costs submitted during the budget process. There are non-repetitive items,

the lack of a beginning balance, reduced State aid, and contract obligations to be considered before one can determine where savings can be implemented. All areas, however, need to be acutely focused upon so that any increases are of a lesser percent than they have recently experienced. It would not be my intent to pass along the full loss to the taxpayer.

**RAMSBOTTOM:** I strongly encourage parents, friends, and family to participate and contribute time, supplies, ideas, and anything they can offer to the school and our classrooms. I also urge teachers and employees of the school system to control spending; perhaps we could implement an incentive plan to that effect.

**2. NATIONAL ATTENTION HAS BEEN PLACED ON THE RELATIVELY SMALL AMOUNT OF TIME AMERICAN SCHOOLS DEVOTE TO CORE SUBJECTS (I.E., THE THREE R'S) AS COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES. DO YOU FEEL THAT OUR STUDENTS WOULD BENEFIT FROM MORE EMPHASIS ON BASIC EDUCATION (THREE R'S)? WHAT STEPS WOULD YOU TAKE TO ENSURE IT?**

**BROOKS:** I do believe it is easy to lose touch with focus on basic skills in our increasingly complex, quickly changing and challenging world. We are a nation gifted with creativity and the largest number of Nobel Prize winners. We do have to balance our creativity and imagination with sound skills as represented in the three "Rs." Currently, the School Committee and staff are undertaking a thorough curriculum review that includes setting goals for achievement and measurements for weighing how well we have accomplished teaching our students the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic across all subject areas. This is an effort that currently involves staff but is ultimately intended to include parents and interested community members. Where this country has failed our students is both complicated and of grave concern to those of us in education. I do believe that basic skills are the building blocks of a sound education and I will continue to push for their inclusion in all aspects of our school's curriculum.

**HAFFENREFFER:** I assume that by the "three R's" you mean reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. I feel strongly that, in addition to these essential subjects, we must continue to support such subjects as social studies, science and the arts. In looking over my son's grade six schedule, I find that there is a good balance, with the "core" subjects being taught every day. The school schedule has been modified over the past few years so that some of the "extras," such as band, chorus and the school enrichment program, do not conflict with the students' regular classes. Such activities are held after lunch during study hall time. In the 93-94 school year the teachers have worked on a new school-wide math curriculum. They are now in the process of reviewing the science curriculum. I feel the school is heading in the right direction by designating a core subject yearly for overall school review.

**HARVEY:** Yes! In my mind, it is more important today than ever to have students well founded in the basics whether their futures are professional, the crafts, the trades, business, etc. Perhaps each grade should have pre-determined objectives to be accomplished during the school year. Also, teachers in a non-English discipline could pay more attention to correcting English errors to reinforce using proper English.

**RAMSBOTTOM:** I agree that reading, writing, and arithmetic are extremely important; however, a varied and well-rounded curriculum is the most important advantage we can provide our students. Exposure to the "three R's", in addition to Arts, Sciences, History, and Athletics are all important as a foundation for our children.

**3. SEVERAL COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES HAVE INSTITUTED A PRIVATIZED SCHOOL SYSTEM. THOSE COMMUNITIES CLAIM THAT COSTS WENT DOWN AND THAT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT WENT UP. WOULD YOU CONSIDER SUCH A SYSTEM? PLEASE EXPLAIN.**

**BROOKS:** I would consider privatization of schools if I thought or was shown that it could work in Little Compton. I am following the issue with interest as it is explored around the country, but my read on it so far is that no one has yet proved that it is successful. The jury is very much out on its effectiveness. Where it has been most successful as a cost-saving measure has been in school systems with large administrative staffing. We have exactly one and one-half administrative positions in our school--the Superintendent/Principal and the Head Teacher. Also testing measures in privatized schools have ranged all over the lot from success to failure. I am open to the idea but I have not been convinced by any means that it is the right thing for Little Compton.

**HAFFENREFFER:** In considering any of these "studies," one must look at the practical reality of the Little Compton school system. We are a small one-school system (not counting the high school children). The few public school systems that have recently been privatized have generally been large, urban systems in a condition of financial and educational crisis. The jury is out on whether these experiments will succeed. Our Little Compton school is a solid one. The burden of proof belongs to those who advocate "privatization".

**HARVEY:** I would consider such a system. There would need to be in-depth studies to assess administration, program content, and issues of control and economics before advising and consenting.

**RAMSBOTTOM:** I believe the management of the school system can make it operate efficiently and effectively if incentives and programs are put in place accordingly. Student achievement is often a factor of parent participation, teachers' attention, and the student's own drive. Excellent schools are seen in both the public and private sectors,

particularly where lots of different opportunities are offered in a well-rounded curriculum.

**4. SMALLER CLASS SIZES ARE ADMITTEDLY A NECESSITY FOR SMALLER CHILDREN. AS THEY GET OLDER AND ADVANCE THROUGH THE GRADES, LARGER CLASS SIZES CAN BE TOLERATED. CAN YOU THINK OF A WAY TO UTILIZE THIS CONCEPT TO REDUCE STAFF AND, THEREFORE, REDUCE THE COST OF RUNNING WILBUR SCHOOL?**

**BROOKS:** I do believe that class size should be smaller in the lower grades. We do know, however, that at all grade levels a small student-teacher ratio is the best for a majority of students. Many private schools pride themselves on this fact and their cost reflects their commitment to low student-teacher ratios. We have compromised at a maximum of 27 students per teacher.

**HAFFENREFFER:** You say larger class size can be "tolerated." But is mere "toleration" the standard we want to set for the Wilbur School? The average size class at Wilbur is about 20 children. The teacher contract calls for no more than 27; I hope class size never reaches that number in grades K-8. To reduce staff would mean that a typical class would be 40 children (combining, say, both fifth-grade classes) -- much too large and impractical. We do not even have a classroom to accommodate such a large number. Your unidentified studies may suggest that larger classes do not hurt academic performance. But do they say larger classes improve academic performance? I doubt it. Ask parents who send their children to private schools why they do so. I'm sure small class size is at the top of the list.

**HARVEY:** I do not have any formalized thoughts on this dilemma at the present time.

**RAMSBOTTOM:** As mentioned already, I encourage participation from parents and other community members. In the classroom this is a help to students and teachers alike. At home, parents help build their children's esteem when they discuss school, which helps the children to perform more independently and confidently in school.

**5. WOULD YOU SUPPORT PRIVATIZING SCHOOL SERVICES (E.G., TRANSPORTATION, MAINTENANCE, ETC.) IF ECONOMICALLY WARRANTED? PLEASE EXPLAIN.**

**BROOKS:** I am open to privatization wherever possible and warranted. I do not see privatization as the "be all and end all" however. The School Committee has been looking closely at privatization in a number of areas and will continue to do so. But careful research is essential to maintaining and improving quality while exploring alternative management from the private sector. I will continue to monitor this issue with an open mind.

**HAFFENREFFER:** Over the past four years we have looked into privatizing some aspects of the school, and we

will continue to do so. At present the school lunch program has been taken over by a private company. We continue to look into privatization of some or all of transportation. Wilbur School is part of a regional school collaborative (East Bay Collaborative). As part of this group the schools have stronger purchasing power, resulting in lower costs for such things as fuel oil; janitorial, teaching and office supplies; and health care benefits. One must consider all aspects of "service" at the school, not just the fiscal one. The two you mention, transportation and maintenance, involve more than just driving school children around and keeping the school clean. The sewage treatment plant, boiler and well are some of the other areas for which the maintenance staff is responsible. We have many dedicated peo-

ple working for the school, who know the children and the town very well. You may feel that privatization will "get rid of the union"; but in the long run it may not be cheaper. We have looked into some areas of privatization for managing the school efficiently, and I'm always open to new ideas. But such a change might not necessarily result in better services or reduced costs.

**HARVEY:** As in question #3, I would consider such a process if economically feasible and if it offered the prescribed quality of services expected over the longer term.

**RAMSBOTTOM:** Privatization of services is a consideration, and business plans, pros and cons would all have to be evaluated carefully.

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## LITTLE COMPTON TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

CITY/TOWN \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

HOME PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ OFFICE PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

DONATION: \$5 (Single)      \$10 (Family)      \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Other)

Mail this form and your contribution to: Little Compton Taxpayers Association  
PO Box 455  
Adamsville, RI 02801

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