



# LITTLE COMPTON TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

## ● ● NEWSLETTER ● ●

**PO Box 455, Adamsville, RI 02801**

EEmail: Taxpayers@cox.net

Chairman: Bob Hayden  
Vice Chairman: Roy Bonner  
Secretary: George Crowell  
Treasurer: Roger Lord  
Research Analyst: Roger Lord

May 2, 2005, Vol. VIII, No. 2

**The Give-aways Must Stop:** Contract negotiations between the various unions and the town negotiators (including the School Committee and the NEA) typically result in lopsided settlements against the Town.

The benefits enjoyed by state and town employees and teachers are far in excess of those granted most working people. For example, a town employee can retire after 28 years of service, **at 50 years of age, with paid health benefits.** If they were hired at age **22**, they could be retired and sitting in the sun in Florida at age **50**, while their counterparts in private must wait until 65 for full Social Security benefits, with younger workers waiting until age 67. What's wrong with this picture?

Health care premiums are another example. The School Committee is figuring \$16,000 annual costs for a teacher's family plan health care premium for the coming school year, to which the teacher contributes \$200. Coverage like this is practically unknown in the private sector. Even the Federal government requires a 30% contribution from the employee on top of self/family deductibles.

Ineffective and unbalanced contract negotiations have allowed this situation to develop. Many taxpayers cannot afford the benefits enjoyed by policemen, firemen, and teachers. Health and pension benefits are being scrutinized on the State and local levels. The public is finally becoming aware of the need to correct the imbalance. Pressure must be put on those negotiating the contracts to insist on more equitable results in the bargaining process. Insisting on a 20% contribution to health insurance premiums, and raising the retirement age to at least 60 are examples of steps which should be taken. A return to 3-year averaging and reducing the cost of living adjustment would help reign in skyrocketing pension costs. We can't afford to have retirees collecting for 30 or 40 years.

South Kingstown, at their last Financial Town Meeting, voted to reduce the requested school increase by 20% of the cost of their school health premiums, and it passed. The people have had enough. In Little Compton, the Town Council is in negotiation with the firemen. Their union is adamantly opposed to contributing to their health coverage. The School Committee will be negotiating with the NEA. Their contract ends on August 31 of this year.

This is the time for those negotiating for the town to take a hard line to bring these benefits back into balance. We are fortunate to have some members of the Town Council, Budget Committee, and the School Committee who understand the situation and we hope that they prevail although, sad to say, they are not in the majority.

The Education Partnership is a group of people from 36 businesses, such as CVS, Amica, Johnson and Wales University, Narragansett Electric, Taco Inc., Verizon, Providence Journal, and Cox Communications, and others. They have prepared a 45-page report entitled "Teacher Contracts: Restoring The Balance". The report can be downloaded at [www.edpartnership.org](http://www.edpartnership.org). It is necessary reading for anyone who wishes to be informed regarding public education. The report arrives at three broad conclusions:

1. Teacher union contracts restrict flexibility and school autonomy.
2. Many of the clauses in the contracts drive up the cost of education without improving quality.
3. Teacher unions have used the bargaining process to entrench the role of the union in the contract, weakening management rights.

The report also makes recommendations on how to fix the situation, in many cases rewarding excellence in some teachers and giving more autonomy to local school leaders.

The Executive Board of the Taxpayers Association believe that most taxpayers want the annual double-digit budget requests restrained, and the State law requiring a 5.5% limit on the increase in taxes be respected. *Our recommendations specific to the proposed budget for the coming year will be published shortly before the Financial Town Meeting*, which this year is on May 17, 2005 at 7PM. Please mark the date and plan to attend.

**The Proposed Budget:** 10.4% - As of the March 1st deadline, that's what they're asking for at this year's Financial Town Meeting (FTM). That means that your \$3,000 tax bill goes up to \$3,312. What's the primary cause? Salary & Benefits, of course, with the School leading the pack.

It appears as those who request budgets for their respective organizations have learned nothing from the last several FTM where the people of the Town clearly expressed

themselves in what some people cannot seem to accept - the vote!

The graph on this page covers the past 7 fiscal years and has two lines on it. One line shows what has been happening with Salary & Benefits, and the other line shows the rest of the Town/School spending. It is quite apparent that the growth in Salaries & Benefits is quite steep as compared to other Town spending - 9% versus 4% on the average - all while the Consumer Price Index has been below 3%.

The root cause of this virtually unconstrained growth is the contract demands of the uncaring Unions matched by the ineptitude of the Town's negotiators who don't appear to know how to say NO. They have given away the store at the taxpayers' expense. What is even more disturbing is that there have been no significant improvements in the services associated with these costs, just growth in numbers of employees as well as their salary/benefit packages.

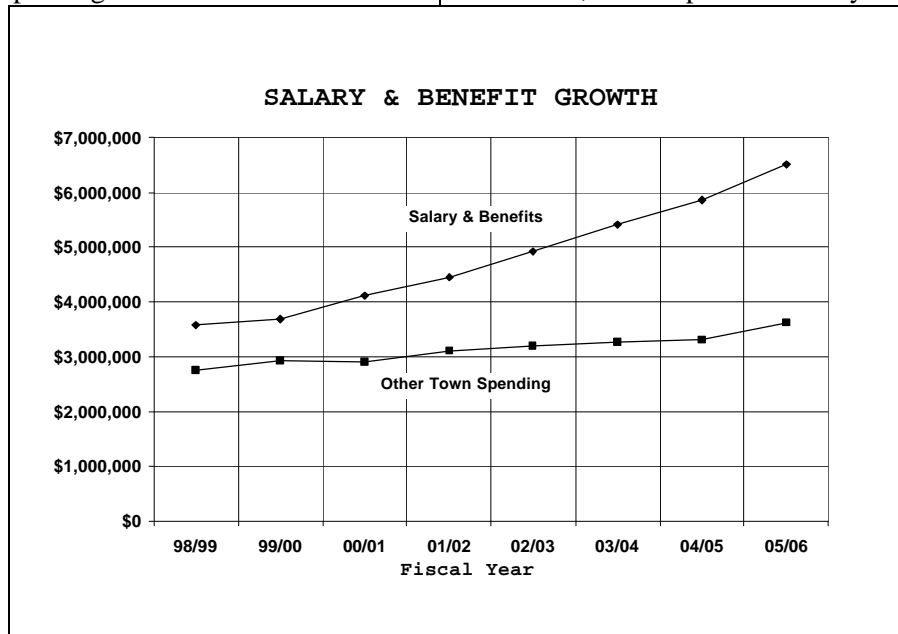
At the May 17th Financial Town Meeting, the voters will be subjected to a plethora of anecdotes, sob stories, and claims that there's no more fat to cut in the budget. While this is going on, keep a vision of the graph on this page in your mind. The ever growing Salary & Benefit package is where the increase in taxes will go - not services.

As mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, negotiations are underway for the teachers' and the firemen's contracts. Notify the Town Council and the School Committee that you want an end to these out-of-control increases in pensions and benefits. Tell them you want a better deal for the taxpayers. Tell them that you want employees to stick to their own principals and conscience rather than caving into the Union demands, even when they know it is wrong. Little Compton is a very safe and comfortable place to work. This fact represents a very desirable working condition and should be used as a negotiation point.

**The School Bus Issue:** A lot has been said regarding outsourcing the student transportation function currently performed by Town employees. Much of what has been said in the press was purely emotional and lacking basic

logic. Given the size of the School's budget, we must think more in business terms rather than emotional terms as discussed below.

There is no dispute that the drivers know what they're doing and do it well; no dispute that they know the routes like the back of their hand; no dispute that drivers are considerate and friendly toward the children and their families; no dispute that they are on time and safety minded. But if the function is out-sourced, the private bus company will be hiring the very same people to do the driving since it would be foolish to throw that expertise away. Are we then to believe that all these fine attributes disappear because the drivers switch companies? Do they suddenly become unfriendly, forget the routes, and start doing a bad job?



That is nonsense.

The dispute is with how much they and the associated transportation expenses cost the taxpayers. In a half-hearted attempt to put the question to rest, the School Committee issued a Request For Proposals (RFP) to the private sector entitled:

**"INVITATION TO BID STUDENT TRANSPORTATION FOR EXPLORATORY/FEASIBILITY PURPOSES."**

Why would any private vendor take the time to do a complete analysis of the routes, the times, the head counts, etc., when it is clear that no contract will be forthcoming? The RFP says "...FOR EXPLORATORY/ FEASIBILITY PURPOSES." This means that the School Committee really wanted a free study of the transportation function but disguised it as an RFP. You only get what you pay for.

But even with this major flaw in the RFP, Laidlaw (one of two bidders) still provided a bid that would save the taxpayers close to \$100,000 each year over a 3-year period and eliminate the need to keep buying buses. That is a substantial amount of money that would reduce the annual cost of transportation from \$937 per student (highest in the State) down to \$732 per student noting that the State average was \$389 per student in 2003-2004 (see web site [http://www.ridoe.net/ride\\_insite/default.htm](http://www.ridoe.net/ride_insite/default.htm)). It is quite possible that these costs could be further reduced if the private bus companies were given a real opportunity to bid

on a real contract. They also know what they're doing given that they provide transportation services to virtually the rest of the State at significantly reduced costs.

Note: the \$977 per student is calculated by adding the regular and special education transportation costs stated in the School's Annual Report voted on in last year's Financial Town Meeting (\$419,392), adding \$38,000 for approximated pensions costs, and then dividing by 488 students (from the School Committee). And if you take the \$50,000 bus out of the calculation, the cost becomes \$835 per student - still the highest.

With the Unions pushing for higher salaries and benefits with no concern for taxpayer impact, it is time for the School Committee to take decisive action where it can; otherwise, the taxpayers will become the infamous stone from which no more blood can be squeezed. The emotional issues must be put aside and more business like decisions must start being made if we are to continue to provide a good, affordable education to our children while, at the same time, maintaining a decent quality of life for ourselves. If the School is to continue on with its own bus fleet and drivers, it should show a plan on how costs can be brought more in line with the State average. If this cannot be done, then the proper business decision is to outsource. Unfortunately for the bus drivers, the Unions have placed the taxpayers in a relentless strangle hold forcing such a decision.

Much of this issue is due to the **attitude** of the administration at the School, an attitude that permeates the entire budget. There are additional opportunities for savings and they have been suggested, proposed, and seconded by members of the School Committee -- and then rejected by the School Committee as a whole. The present proposed School budget, if left unmodified, will result in a significant increase in taxes, most certainly exceed the 5.5% cap, and cause other Town functions to be drastically cut to move the budget within the law.

**Non-Resident Voting:** The Rhode Island Shoreline Coalition (RISC) sent the following article to us. This should be good news for our out-of-town residents that get taxed, but can't vote at the Financial Town Meeting.

On Monday evening, April 18, the Westerly Town Council unanimously approved a resolution to permit non-resident property owners and taxpayers to vote on financial matters. The Council directed that the resolution be forwarded to the Westerly legislative delegation (Senator Dennis Algiere, Representatives Brian Patrick Kennedy, Peter Lewiss and Matt McHugh) with the request that they take the requisite action to sponsor enabling legislation to permit non-resident voting on financial matters.

The members of the Westerly Town Council are to be commended for following through with their informal vote at the conclusion of a special meeting they convened last August 16. At that time, they indicated their approval of the matter and subsequently appointed a committee composed of Paul Lynch, Chairman, and members Ted Brown, Finn Caspersen, Frank Celico and Fred

Whittemore to study the matter and report back on how to proceed to implement the non-resident vote. All RISC members owe the committee a vote of thanks for their work.

This is the first vital step in RISC's effort to obtain the right to vote on financial matters for non-resident property owners. While we should all be heartened by the progress to date, the issue still faces the enabling act hurdle. We will continue to monitor the progress of the enabling legislation and to keep you informed.

Harry L. Staley, President

**We Need To Clear Up The Disinformation:** The PST and School Department would like you to believe that the Taxpayer's Association and the voting residents at the last two Financial Town Meetings caused the following losses:

1. Band
2. Spanish
3. Gifted /Talented Program
4. Wood Shop
5. Morning coverage of library
6. Reduced classroom supplies
7. Reduced Professional Days for teachers
8. Maintenance Personnel
9. A Kindergarten/First Grade teacher
10. ETC.

**THAT IS NONSENSE!!!** In fact, over the last two years when these program cuts were made after declared "emergencies," there were budget surpluses! Audited figures show a \$132,000 unexpended carry-over (or surplus) going into the 03/04 school year which grew to \$153,000 going into the current 04/05 school year! These amounts could have covered most, if not all of the School program cuts. The real culprits were the former Superintendent/Principal and the former School Committee. The Superintendent/Principal recommended these School programs for reduction and/or elimination, and the School Committee approved them. These surplus carry-over figures are undisputed and are supported in the official year-end Town/School Audit. **MORE RESPONSIBLE ACTIONS** should have been taken by our former Superintendent/Principal and former School Committee. It appears as though the measures they took were designed to punish the children, parents, and taxpayers.

**Interesting Web Sites:** There are a couple of Internet web sites that people should be aware of. The following two sites pertain strictly to Little Compton and represent opposing points of view. In a continuing effort to inform our readers, we believe that voters should be aware of what others are saying -- "fair and balanced" to coin a modern day phrase.

*Sakonnet by Sarge:* <http://katesguy.blogspot.com/>

*Citizens for Straight Talk:* <http://straighttalk.wbrett.com/>

Little Compton Taxpayers Association  
PO Box 455  
Adamsville, RI 02801

Bulk Rate  
US Postage  
Paid  
Little Compton  
RI  
Permit No 4

**POSTAL CUSTOMER**

**LITTLE COMPTON TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
(For couples, please provide both first names)

OFFICE PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ FAX \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

**First Home Address** →  Check if year-round address

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

**Second Home Address** → From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_ (Month/Day)

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

SUGGESTED CONTRIBUTION: \$10 (Single) \$15 (Family) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Other)

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