

# All About Georgetown

Georgetown Selectman Lonnie Brennan

How do we avoid overrides?

Have I mentioned that more than 27 times this past fall, yes, barely nine months ago, the School Committee, led by chief negotiator and Chairman George Moker, penned a new contract that grants 6-11 percent raises for up to 60 percent of our teachers?

Are you bored yet by hearing about this?

Six-to-eleven percent increases — not a bad turn of the pen. Problem, however, is that the chair, George Moker, didn't know anything about checks and balances, a.k.a. Mass. General Laws CH150, Section E (the one that governs how school committees are to conduct negotiations!).

One would have thought he might get tipped off by the reference to CH150E on page 1 of the teachers contract.

But it's a long contract, lots of pages. And one might think that he might get tipped off by the town administrator, Steve Delaney. But, despite years and years of town administration experience, Mr. Delaney said he didn't know anything about CH150E. By way of reference, Delaney also serves as the town's acting finance director.

Still, I can't help but think that on page 25, where Chairman George Moker signed his name to the contract, there would have been perhaps some chance that he would have looked up, perhaps just glanced for a minute, and seen just a few inches above his signature, another reference to "Chapter 150E." But alas, I guess not.

And so, with great regret, the contract was signed into law with no checks and balances as required by Chapter 150E. But, worse than that, no one seems to care. It's boring. The law was not followed, but so what, it doesn't matter, there's no penalty, who cares?

I care. Why? Because the contract gave very generous raises to (admittedly) very deserving teachers, but with no way to pay for those raises, except with a Proposition 2 1/2 Override, or the cannibalization of other teacher positions and school programs. Money was promised with no funding source, except Moker repeated pushes for yet another failed override. Is that responsible spending?

Imagine a world, if you will, where the School Committee negotiates a reasonable raise for its employees, our valued teachers, and that those raises are reflective of what Joe and Jane Citizen are getting in the non-taxpayer-funded world. We're talking 1.5 - 4.0 percent folks, tops.

Now, in addition to limiting raises to sustainable numbers, imagine that the schools gave a solid list of priorities that wasn't skewed to sell overrides. Imagine looking online at a list of all the computers, their locations, their usage, their age, etc. And what about a list of all the textbooks and the dates, quantities, publisher information, ISBN numbers, etc. Imagine being able to see numbers updated regularly, and be able to track the spending monthly, easily, transparently, online, and on local TV. And imagine a committee that the entire town felt good about. And a committee that had the full trust and support of the entire town.

How do we get there?

Last year, I was the hero for the pro-school crowd when I fully supported giving Chapter 70 (school) bonus money to the schools, over the objections of many on the Finance Committee. We even had to go so far as to hold a special town meeting just to ensure the schools received those funds in a timely manner. This year, I'm a bum with many because I did not support a \$1 million plus override that leads to non-responsible spending, and was termed "Christmas in July" with its lavish broad-based spending for many departments.

What is the answer? We need to help the School Committee with its budget process. We need to get the politics out of the pro-schools Finance Committee, and we need to do this now, not next year. We need to get monthly reports broadcast to the community on school spending. We need charts and data and historical information, not hysterical information.

The override failed (assuming the recount holds) because a little more than 50 percent of the voters don't believe the hand-wringing, emotional, sky-is-falling-for-the-seventeenth-time School Committee and its supporters.

I like our School Committee. I like two-thirds of the Finance Committee. But neither group has the full confidence of the community. With luck, Moker and these groups and committees will drop their past tactics which have only led to failure, and instead, listen to the other side. Just listen. Don't preach to us, don't yell at us, don't call us names, don't scorn us, don't look down on us for not blindly following your passions. We're a small town, we can work together. I hope you can take a step in our direction. We'll take several in yours.

Memorial Day

Band Director David Kaminski led the incredible 111-member Georgetown



Cub Scouts and Brownies decorate veterans' grave markers for Memorial Day

marching band (that's almost one in every four students at the high school) down Central and Main streets on Memorial Day to honor those who have served in our military, defending our nation, defending freedom.

Georgetown's finest attended the dedication ceremonies, including the Police Honor Guard, members of the Fire Dep., a Veteran's Color Guard consisting of former Selectman Paul Thompson, former Police Chief Dick Spencer, American Legion Post Commander Barry Botman, Fred Bodenrader, Peter Whitney, and Doug Dawes.

Armand Soucy again called out "fire" as he directed the gun salute to those departed. The most stirring speeches of the day came from the prayers delivered by Rev. Jim

McLaughlin, Rev. Eric Marean, and veterans' agent Terrance Hart who reminded the crowd of the difficulties of mixing politics with waging war, from George Washington's battles to our engagements today.

For me, Memorial Day is a personal day to remember many of my now deceased relatives including my dad, who served proudly in the Navy in the Pacific, enlisting as a young lad just after the Pearl Harbor attack. Bless you, dad.

Lonnie Brennan is a selectman in Georgetown. You can email him at lonnie@thechocolatecellar.com.

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