

Warrant Article #7

To the editor,

Conway voters have an important decision before them on April 11th. The budget committee has recommended against the teachers' contract, Warrant Article #7, but I urge you to support it. I have been the Director of the Conway School District Mentoring Program for new teachers for the last six years. Every year we interview teachers we want to hire; every year our salary scale comes up short next to offers from competing school districts. We lose good teachers every spring in Conway. They put in a few years here and then move south to make more money.

New teachers struggle on \$26,900 a year in this valley because most carry heavy debt from college. Our starting salary is in the bottom 30% for compensation in the state of New Hampshire. We rank 112th out of 159 school districts. Our average teacher salaries are not much better. Experienced Conway teachers make 9% less than the state average. There is a national teacher shortage, and in the state of New Hampshire a *critical* shortage of qualified teachers in math, science, foreign language, special education, and reading. We must compete hard to attract teachers to the valley under these conditions. If Conway voters do not support warrant article #7, it will tell teachers that we're going backwards in a salary race that Conway is already losing. I believe this is the most important issue on the ballot on Tuesday.

Warrant Article #7 asks for \$399,686 for the CEA contract. This is a one-year contract and represents an increase of 3.54% over last year's negotiated contract. Five years ago we made a move away from a contract that rewards teachers for years of service alone and towards a performance-based system. Teachers in Conway earn a raise based on their performance against 66 rubrics that define teaching effectiveness in planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. We are one of only a few school districts in the nation to have this in place. Teachers in Conway have to work hard to receive a proficient rating and a pay raise each year. In fact, if a teacher is rated basic for two years in a row, the teacher loses his/her job. This system has raised the standards for teaching in Conway. If voters defeat this article and remove the pay increases tied to performances, we will have nothing in place to reward our best teachers. Why would they stay?

When you go to the ballot box, you'll notice that the budget committee failed to support this by a vote of 5-7-1. The reason given at the deliberative session was to "send a message about health insurance." Not one penny in this article is for health insurance. Conway teachers already pay 20% of health insurance premiums, while most teachers in the state of NH pay 10%. Conway teachers have moved to an HMO and a prescription drug plan with a higher co-pay, saving the district hundreds of thousands of dollars over the last few years. There is a national crisis in health care costs. However, we can't afford to punish our teachers for it.

I realize that taxes are a considerable burden in this town. You may stand at the ballot box and be forced to make tough decisions this year. I implore you to vote for the teachers' contract. The best teachers inspire and challenge; they make difficult concepts clear. We have many in Conway. We need to keep them. Please vote YES on Warrant Article #7. This vote will likely have an impact on our schools' success for years to come.

Penny Kittle
Kearsarge