

Paul Conley

4/08/2014

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee and the Education Committee:

Thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today. I recently talked with Education Committee and shared my personal opposition to H-883.

I am a citizen of Huntington, Vt. and a retired school superintendent with 40 years as a public schools educator. My last 14 years of work were the eleven years as Superintendent of the Chittenden East SU and one year as Interim Superintendent of the Barre SU and two years as the Interim Superintendent of the Addison Central SU in Middlebury.

I am opposed to nearly ^{every} detail in H-883. The only aspect of this bill that I can support is the goal of improving opportunities for all Vermont students. This bill eliminates our town school districts and school boards and is not the way to accomplish this goal. Our local boards are positive major assets for our schools and our students.

In this few minutes of testimony, I cannot address every serious problem in this approach. For that reason, I will simply list these topics of concern. I am submitting some brief details on each of these areas:

1. Potential costs. The rough draft, on 4/20/2014, from the Agency of Education for transition costs shows \$11,982,700. However, only \$2,000,000 of this sum is transition. The additional \$9,982,700 are permanent increases for salary parity for our teachers in these larger districts. This parity estimate is probably at least 50% too low, I believe. This rough draft does not address the increased costs for these "increased opportunities" for all Vermont students which these new districts must provide. The bill requires us to "level up our opportunities". There is no support in this bill for lowering these opportunities. My conservative estimate of these curriculum increases are in the \$5,000,000 to \$11,000,000 range. Together these potential increases will range from \$14,000,000 to \$20,000,000 each year. From a 10 year perspective this bill may lead to a \$140,000,000 to \$200,000,000 increase in our school budgets.
2. Some people believe this plan will bend the cost curve in future years. I do not. There are some planned savings in this bill from fewer audits of small districts and some central office reductions. I believe these might lead to a reduction of \$2,000,000 to \$5,000,000 per year at best.
3. Most of our SU's are doing great work for all of our students. A few small districts in some SU's need help. Eliminating all of our town school boards is not a positive approach. There is no research or data that supports this change

4. I believe that the support for this bill from the VSA needs more review. We have many great SU's with strong leadership from administrators and Board members that should not be destroyed
5. This state-wide approach requires these new PK-12 school boards to level-up the curriculum and create salary parity for our teachers. These are both very worthy efforts. At this time very large increases in our budgets are necessary for this effort. In reality this may lead to an unfunded mandate in the range of \$140,000,000 to \$200,000,000 over the next 10 years. With our present funding system, I believe this is the wrong time and wrong move.

The larger the districts become, the greater the distance between the superintendent and what is really needed and best for the kids in the classroom. The teachers who work with children daily are the best source of improvements. They know what works and what doesn't. School boards and local control are tremendous assets to the educational system, especially here in Vermont. Boards are made of the parents and communities immediately surrounding their small schools. When parents visibly support their children's school and are involved with their children's education, children flourish and schools are stronger. Meeting regularly with Boards give Superintendents a sense of the community and their priorities, goals and needs for improvements. Better and regular communication with these folks always gave me a perspective and the direction to lead more effectively.

Thanks for your time and attention and your commitment to our schools and students.



Gail B. Conley

Citizen, Huntington, Vt

This was published in the BFP as a MY TURN in the First round of RED plans by Commissioner Vilaseca.

I have been surprised and disappointed with Commissioner Amando Vilaseca's campaign to eliminate school boards across the state. I believe his proposal to reduce the number of school districts from 290 to 20 (or 13) will not achieve his goals of more efficiency with educational improvements.

Our local school boards do not increase the costs of our schools. These volunteer board members work hard to serve our communities and our students. These boards complete their work within a complex array of state and federal regulations. While local control may seem like a vanishing concept, there are still some important local decisions. The size of the local budget, the number of classroom teachers, and the determination of which teachers to hire are three of these local control decisions.

The elimination of local boards and consolidating some districts will not reduce transportation costs, for example. The students will still require bus transportation. If local near-by schools are closed, the bus routes will be longer and these costs will increase.

The belief that larger schools can purchase materials and supplies on a larger and more efficient scale is also false or misleading. Today the State of Vermont creates a state-wide bid procedure to find the best prices. All local schools are authorized to buy materials from the state bid list.

Many schools today share teachers on a part time basis when there are only a few students in a program. Time and distance for transportation requirements are a major obstacle to more sharing. These transportation problems will also face new consolidated schools. How much time should students spend on a bus?

After a detailed analysis of these efficiency plans is created and no (few) savings are found, the proposal will be based only upon the increase in educational quality, as it should be. I believe there is no research that supports the elimination of our local boards as a means to improve our schools. Nearly all of the recent research supports smaller schools (especially high schools) and active citizen/parent involvement in the curriculum.

In Vermont and throughout the nation there are many many programs for instruction on the internet, especially for small schools. These programs can be very cost effective. The flexibility and change in the instructional delivery system that Commissioner Vilaseca and the State Board are encouraging can be effectively accomplished within our present school board structure. In reality, smaller schools with smaller faculties and supportive communities are much quicker to accept change and move forward.

In conclusion, I believe Commissioner Vilaseca and Commissioner Cate have missed the basic reason we have so many small schools and small districts. Vermont has many small districts because we have all of these great small towns. I believe our citizens like our small Vermont towns and they do not want to give up their near-by schools! We do not want large county districts like Florida or Maryland with remote boards. Please revise your proposal!

Sincerely, Gail Conley

MERGER

On the June 7, 2011 vote for a Regional Education District for the Chittenden East Supervisory Union, I plan to vote NO. After careful consideration of the proposal, there are many reasons that I believe we should all vote NO. These concerns include:

1-- The potential financial savings are completely unrealistic. One savings claim is based upon closing/moving the CESU central office to a school. There would be large expenses for such a move and no school has been identified with space for the office and/or space for the office traffic. A second unrealistic savings involves the elimination of a special education administrator. This position was added several years ago to reduce the cost of special education by helping the staff and parents in making efficient decisions on services. This change could bring even more costs. All of these potential savings seem like smoke and mirrors in an effort to pass the proposal. If any of these ideas are good financial decisions, the present boards would have adopted them.

2-- This proposal is also aimed at the improvement of the educational program. There are no specifics in the plan. The Commissioner on several occasions has stated that this will not eliminate programs such as enrichment or pre-school. He has stated that there will be no "leveling down" only "leveling up" of opportunities for students. Therefore some of our schools will need to add programs (such as enrichment, pre-school, languages) to make all of our schools have "equal" opportunities for students. This will add substantial costs to the budget of the Regional Board. School choice is also added as an incentive to the proposal. Elementary students could choose another school (and add another two hours to their daily bus ride). Without special funding for transportation for these students, this is a completely unfair and unbalanced idea. If this new funding is available it will cost more (and still waste hours of bus time).

3-- This proposal transfers all of our town school buildings to this new Regional Board. The citizens of each town will no longer own or control their own community school buildings. After the four-year limitation, the Regional Board can close any building without the approval of the citizens of the town.

4-- There will be no future annual town school meetings. The town school districts have been eliminated.

5-- The Chittenden East Supervisory Union has created educational and financial efficiencies for decades. We have one teachers' contract for all of our districts and one support staff contract. We centralize all special education staff. We have staff assigned to multiple districts for many programs- music, physical education, languages. One business manager supervises all the budgets, building projects and contracts. Any efficiency the state Commissioner or anyone can describe can be implemented with our current board arrangement--if it is a sound and effective idea that our boards can support. Our multiple board organization is not archaic or "Byzantine" as some have alleged.

6-- Decisions about the children of our community should be made by the parents and citizens of our community, I believe. When and if we need to close our school or expand our school , the citizens of Huntington (and each town) can make that decision. We do not need a Regional Board to tell us what we should be doing.

Please review this proposal and VOTE.

Gail B Conley, Huntington, VT

Gail B. Conley

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PERSONAL: Date of Birth: July 21, 1942, Canton, Illinois

Married: Joanne Keifer, June 1965

Family: Two sons, Timothy (11/26/68) and
Michael (6/2/71)
One daughter, Amber (10/8/75)

EDUCATION:

1976 Ed.D., Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, Illinois

1965 M.A.T., Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia

1964 A.B., Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois

EDUCATIONAL EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

2013-2014 Retired

2011-2013 Interim Supt. Addison Central Su, Middlebury

2008 - 2011 Retired

2007 - 2008 Interim Supt. Barre SU

2005 - 2007 Retired

1994 – 2005 Superintendent, Chittenden East Supervisory Union #12,
Richmond, Vermont

1987 – 1994 Superintendent, Rantoul Township High School, District 193,
Rantoul, Illinois

1980 – 1987 Principal, Macomb High School, Macomb, Illinois

1975 – 1980 Principal, York High School, York, Nebraska

- 1974 – 1975 Graduate Assistant, Educational Administration Center,
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois
- 1971 – 1974 Teacher and Coordinator, Experimental Educational Program,
Oak Park and River Forest High School, Oak Park, Illinois
- 1967 – 1971 Mathematics Teacher, Oak Park and River Forest High School,
Oak Park, Illinois

By Ted Tedford

Special to the Mountain Gazette

Jericho Elementary School principal Florence Hurteau has left her job here to become principal of Georgia Elementary School, in her hometown.

Hurteau began her new job July 1. The Georgia school houses kindergarten through eighth-grade. She is principal of the K-4 part of the school.

Hurteau is the fourth principal in the Chittenden East Supervisory Union (CESU) to leave their positions this year. Robert Goudreau has retired as principal of Camel's Hump Middle School. His replacement is Ralph Garbart II, former principal of the Northfield Junior-Senior High School.

Principal Robert Stevens has left Mount Mansfield Union High School to take a job with the State Education Department. He has been replaced by Jennifer Botzjoorns as interim principal. John Alberghini, principal at Bolton's Smilie Memorial Elementary School, has been named CESU as-

sistant superintendent. Michael Woods, former assistant principal for the Crossett Brook Middle School in Duxbury, replaced him at Smilie.

And Dr. Gail Conley, superintendent of the nine-school district, retired June 30. Nearly 200 friends and colleagues attended a going-away party for Conley at Camel's Hump Middle School recently.

In an interview as she was cleaning out her office in Jericho last week, Hurteau said she could not pass up the opportunity to apply for the Georgia job. "The school is only three miles from home," she said. She lives in Georgia and has commuted to Jericho every school day for the past seven years. She had told the Board she was applying for the job and announced her decision at the end of the school year in late June.

The CESU central office is putting together a search committee, according to Lori Uerz, chair

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Bridge closures in Bolton, Westford

Bridges 51 north and 51 south on U.S. Rt. 2 in Bolton will have periodic daytime lane closures through November, to allow work on bridges over Interstate 89.

The Woods Hollow Road bridge in Westford will be closed through November.

Cambridge Fire Company and Cambridge Rescue aid injured hiker

On Saturday, June 11 the Cambridge Fire Company and Cambridge Rescue were among the responding groups that cooperated in the rescue of a hiker who had fallen 20-50' in Smugglers' Notch.

The 19-year-old New Jersey man fell at about 1:30 PM while hiking, off-trail, with a Winooski resident who hiked out to call for help. Cambridge Rescue, Cambridge Fire Company, the Stowe hazardous terrain team, a technical rescue team from Colchester, and Waterbury's Back Country Team together sent about 35 rescue personnel to the scene.

It took more than three hours of work, beginning at about 2:30 PM, to retrieve the victim who suffered serious head injuries, and transport him to a helicopter. The injured man was transported to Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington.

Hummels are planning move to Massachusetts

By Ted Tedford

Special to the Mountain Gazette



Manfred and Margaret Hummel are planning to move to Massachusetts to be near their son and his family.

The Hummels, Underhill residents for nearly 40 years, with lengthy service to the town, have put their Poker Hill Road house up for sale.

Manfred Hummel has served for many years on the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Margaret Hummel served eight years in the legislature from the district covering Jericho, Underhill, and Bolton. While she was in the legislature, she served six years as a legislative represen-

tative on the University of Vermont Board of Trustees.

She also served nine years, from 1992 to 2001, on the Underhill Select Board and as its chairwoman. She was a member of the Planning Commission and the Solid Waste Committee, the latter post during the period when the town closed its landfill.

"We hate the idea of leaving Vermont," Margaret Hummel said, "but an opportunity came out of the blue." That opportunity was an apartment vacancy two doors down from their son and daughter-in-law's house in Newton Highlands, MA. The Hummels said they want to be near their son, his wife, and their grandchild. Their daughter-in-law is expecting a second child.

"We will miss our friends here - and our gardens that we love so much," Margaret Hummel said.

Conley retires from Chittenden East post; his legacy will live on under new leadership

By Ted Tedford

Special to the Mountain Gazette

Dr. Gail Conley retired as school superintendent in the Chittenden East Supervisory Union June 30, but the results of his stewardship will long remain.

For the past 11 years, Conley, who retired June 30, has shepherded the nine-school union through school funding crises, educational mandates from Montpelier and Washington, and some major upgrades to many of the district's schools.

He has also spent countless evening hours attending school board meetings and providing the right answers to unnumbered questions. If ever there was a man on top of his job, it was Conley.

"I think he has been a wonderful superintendent," said Lori Uerz, chairwoman of the Jericho School Board. "It's been amazing to me that at every School Board meeting, whether he is talking about budgets or there is a historical question, he has the answers."

From her more than three years on the Jericho School Board, Uerz said she grew to understand that Conley has the ability to think through situations. "He did not just react."

"He is a critical thinker, very astute," said Bernie Fitzgerald, principal of the Underhill Central School. "I've enjoyed working with him immensely." Fitzgerald said Conley knows how to work the political landscape "with confidence." He also said he was grateful that the former superintendent left his principals to manage their

own schools. "He let us know when we did and when we didn't," Fitzgerald said.

Conley had a wide perspective of the needs of the six elementary schools, the two middle schools, and the high school, Fitzgerald added.

Conley was more self-effacing during an interview a week before he retired.

"I think I helped maintain the quality we had before I became superintendent," he said. He said his predecessor, Dr. Harold Boyden, had an ongoing program of upgrading the curriculum to comply with basic state standards. Since then, the district began testing in grades 3 and 9 and then later began testing in grades 4 and 8. The supervisory union's schools also have complied with the federal No-Child-Left-Behind act. Conley credited his successor, Jim Massingham, for many of the curriculum advances while he was assistant superintendent.

While the schools in the union all adapted to Act 60, the equal education law passed several years ago, and its successor Act 68, Conley said a major problem still exists in property appraisals around Vermont. In part, the two legislative acts rely on statewide property appraisals. Conley said there are vast differences from town to town in property values, as determined by what is known as common level of appraisal, because many towns have not reappraised their properties for years. That results in some towns bearing a greater burden in statewide taxes than others. He is considering writing an essay on that subject and he

was urged to send it to the *Mountain Gazette*.

During Conley's tenure, the Camel's Hump and Browns River Middle Schools have been expanded and wood heat installed. Most of the elementary schools have undergone some remodeling. This summer, all or part of the roofs of five school buildings will be replaced. Those are Mount Mansfield Union High (partial), the two middle schools, the I.D. School in Jericho, and Brewster Pierce School in Huntington. The latter two schools will also be re-sided.

"It's been a dynamic 11 years, and the next 11 will be dynamic, too," Conley said. The "baby boomers" among the teachers and the school staffs will be retiring, and school funding will also be "dynamic," Conley said.

While there are many who will miss Conley and his wisdom and abilities, Fitzgerald said he is confident the union is in good hands with Massingham as superintendent. "He has historical grounding (in the union). He knows what works and what doesn't work and how we got to where we are."



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Negotiators remain far apart after second round of teacher salary talks

By Ted Tedford
Special to the Mountain Gazette

Negotiators for the Chittenden East Supervisory Union (CESU) School Boards (the Board) and the Green Mountain NEA (teachers' union) remained far apart in salary positions at their latest contract talks.

The negotiators for the teachers' union dropped their salary demand from a total of 19.08 percent over three years to 16.01 percent. The Board's negotiators have not budged from their offer of 7.5 percent for the same period. The teacher contracts span three years.

The Board negotiators put a proposal on the table at their last negotiating session that would have the teachers pay a portion of their dental insurance, now paid entirely by the supervisory union. The teachers now pay 10 percent of their health insurance premium, but the Board wants them to pay a total of 20 percent over three years. The Board originally wanted the teachers to pay 25 percent of their health care insurance during that period.

The dental plan proposal calls for single teachers to pay 10 percent of their premium next year. That would increase 2 percent a year to 16 percent in 2008-2009 and beyond; a couple would pay 12 percent the first year, then gradually increase to 18 percent by 2008-2009 and beyond; a family plan calls for teachers to pay 14 percent the first year, then increase to 20 percent by 2008-2009 and beyond.

The teachers' union originally wanted a pay hike

of each teacher's salary into a pension fund. The Board negotiators have offered a pay increase of 2.5 percent for each of three years. The Board has not yet responded to the pension fund request.

Although both sides are at odds on salaries, Jon Harris, chief negotiator for the teachers, wants the new contract to get all teachers on a single schedule. In the 1970s, teachers at Mount Mansfield Union High School were making more money than teachers in the other schools. When teachers in all the supervisory union's schools agreed to give up school-by-school negotiations that resulted in one contract for all teachers, including salary and benefits, the high school teachers were off the schedule because of their higher salaries. Harris wants them all on one schedule to simplify matters. But the union's position calls for a change in the base rate that would result in a slight increase.

Under the contract that expired July 1 this year, teachers got a 4 percent raise on their base salary every year, or about \$1200. The union wants teachers to get 5 percent of about \$1500 a year.

Before the negotiators began talking, Robert Scudero of Underhill said he was happy to discover that the negotiations were open to the public. Until the last negotiations three years ago, the two sides negotiated behind closed doors.

Scudero urged the Board to allow voters in the Chittenden East Union towns to vote on the contract, "as the members of the NEA do." The Board negotiators did not respond to the suggestion.



The Cambridge American Legion color guard leading off the 4th of July parade in Jeffersonville.