

Island Opinion

• LETTERS •

Focus on teachers needed at schools

"In light of diminishing student population . . . the school department needs another administrator"?

I raise this hypothetical question in light of a difference of opinion I recently had with (Jamestown School) Superintendent Sipala.

Disclosure affords you this: I represent the interests' and educational goals of the Jamestown Teachers Association, I work for the National Education Association Rhode Island and have negotiated the last two agreements with the school department and will commence discussions for a successor accord this spring.

The dispute I referred to revolves around the recent reductions in full-time educators within the school department. Obviously, my position is that the School Committee, through collective bargaining, has agreed to maintain certain levels of staffing, including class size and mutually agreed upon educational programs.

At the culmination of the disagreement, Ms. Sipala presented two documents, which she stated had been offered to the Jamestown Town Council to substantiate the decrease in student enrollment and the correlating reduction in educators between 2001 and 2006.

It is evident that Ms. Sipala produced these documents to persuade a third party, and previously the Town Council, that a reduction in students had dictated a reduction in the educational staff.

But now I question the motivation of the superintendent to add administrators, in light of, as she states, "...rising costs due to salaries, benefits, and governmental mandates. Most professionals have experienced more duties and requirements over the last

decade, none more than the educators I represent.

Ms. Sipala realizes, as most parents are aware, the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act has added innumerable supplementary responsibilities to all educators, from the education support professionals, whom we recently had with standardized their skills or be terminated, to the classroom teacher's obligation to display their independently confirmed "highly qualified" status in their area of instruction. Both groups are further compelled to pursue ongoing education in order to remain eligible educators.

I do not question any superintendents' workload, and I have and continue to respect the opinions of Superintendent Pini, whom I had a professional connection with over the last eight years. However, I feel that Ms. Sipala's motives to increase administrators are not educationally based. It appears to me that the superintendent may be following the current fashionable fix of applying certain business principles or strategic logic to the education system.

In my opinion, the administration of a school department is to support the delivery of education to the students. To bolster the number of administrators does nothing to advance the educational mission of the schools in your town.

I would therefore ask that the School Committee focus on the retention and support of the highly successful programs and superior education that the teachers and staff have worked so hard to attain in Jamestown.

Pete Gingras,
assistant executive director,
National Education
Association Rhode Island

The president must be held accountable

Thomas J. Bembenek, in

IT'S JUST THAT WHEN YOU SAID "COME AND SEE MY PLACE ON THE ROCK," I THOUGHT YOU MEANT JAMESTOWN, THAT'S ALL.



his response to the letter by Joe Clifford ("What kind of nation do we want?"), dismisses Mr. Clifford's years of teaching high school history. At the risk of sounding impudent, I might suggest that Mr. Bembenek take a refresher course in American history.

It is disheartening that Mr. Bembenek feels that his military service compels him to defend the right of the president to do whatever he pleases, regardless of Constitutionality.

I too served in our military. And on the day that I was commissioned as a naval officer, I swore a solemn oath to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Not the president, not the Congress, nor the flag — but the Constitution. Yes, that archaic piece of parchment, written by a bunch of geezers in powdered wigs who most folks haven't thought about much since, well, high school history class.

While I no longer wear the

uniform, I am still obliged to speak up in defense of our Constitution. Today, it is most threatened not by enemies abroad, but by those within our government who would go to any lengths to consolidate and preserve their own power.

The revelation that President Bush has authorized numerous wiretaps of American citizens without obtaining a warrant has rightly outraged members of Congress of both political parties. The law requires FISA court approval for national security wiretaps. Violation of this law is a felony. If anything, the provisions of FISA already are tipped in favor of security over civil liberties. Since its inception in 1978, the FISA court has authorized over 10,000 national security warrants, and has only denied four. Why then would Bush circumvent the FISA court system? The logical conclusion is that his administration has been conducting domestic surveillance not only

on suspected terrorists, but also on political dissidents.

You might say that this is the stuff of left-wing conspiracy theorists. If so, I would counter that you are either quite naïve or too young to remember the Nixon administration. Dr. Martin Luther King, in whose memory most of us were privileged with a day off from work last week, was a victim of FBI surveillance for years. FISA was enacted to prevent the widespread abuses in domestic surveillance disclosed in the Congressional hearings in the aftermath of Watergate. And now we have a president who openly and defiantly flouts this minimal legal provision to safeguard civil liberties. Those men that we quaintly refer to as our Founding Fathers embarked on a wonderful experiment.

This notion of democracy briefly flowered in ancient Greece until it died with the conquest of Athens by the Macedonians (although it flourished in many tribal cultures, including our Native Americans.) America was at the forefront of a movement first in Europe and then throughout the world to strip power from aristocracies, monarchies, and churches and restore it to "the people." The authors of our Constitution understood the threat to democracy if any individual assumed too much political power, and wisely established a government with three branches, each holding checks and balances over the other two. But now we have a president whose philosophy of governance is rooted not in the Constitution but in the theory of the "unitary executive." Bush justifies his authority to disregard any existing law by the 2001 Congressional resolution authorizing military force — a war against terror, which, as Bush has acknowledged, may continue indefinitely. There is a word for a government where a political leader possesses unconstrained and indefinite power — it's called a dictatorship.

Mr. Bembenek's exhortation to "Let the President spy!" echoes sentiments expressed by

right-wing pundits who forget Benjamin Franklin's admonition that those who would sacrifice liberty to gain security deserve neither and will lose both. I am not building bombs in my basement either, but I do not want the government tapping my phone, reading my e-mail, or looking at my library records. A consequence of unbridled surveillance by a government on its people is the chilling effect it has on dissent and free speech — the essential lifeblood of a democracy.

I did not serve in the defense of my nation's Constitution only to see the civil liberties it confers upon us so callously frittered away. The Constitution must be safeguarded, and those who threaten it — even the president — must be held accountable.

Michael Larkin
Jamestown

Trading liberty for security

Dialogue is a great thing, and I was delighted to see a response to my letter, "What kind of a nation do we want?" There is no point debating the writer's criticisms because I suspect he is pretty inflexible in his views, and it would not be constructive. I would, however, offer some observations and opinions.

Rest assured, a student taking a course on the Constitution who states "There are no unreasonable searches and seizures" is in dire need of summer school.

But consider the following statements:

- "Let the president spy!"
- "Suspected terrorists should be detained until evidence proves otherwise."
- "There are factors that justify the U.S. refusal to participate in the International Court for War Crimes."
- "Constitutional rights should not take precedent over threats to national security."

Frankly, a student who expressed these sentiments

Letters continue
on page 8

The news of 10 and 15 years ago is from the Jamestown Press. The news of 25, 50, 75, and 100 years ago from the Newport Daily News comes from the collection of the Newport Historical Society.

100 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, January 24, 1906:

Large quantities of clams are being dug along the shore of the island with each low tide.

The Ferry Company is disposing of the coal in its bins as fast as possible, preparatory to having them torn down.

From the Newport Daily News, January 27, 1906:

Not for several years has there been so little work during the winter as at the present time. Practically no building is being done and work on the fortifications was discontinued last fall for lack of an appropriation. Even the ice crop, which usually gives the unemployed two weeks' work, has failed thus far this winter. Most of the men are working out of town, either at South Ferry or at Newport.

From the Newport Journal, January 27, 1906:

For several years past spasmodic efforts have been put forth to induce one of the lines of New York steamers to make a landing at Jamestown. . . . The directors of the Jamestown & Newport Ferry Company held a special meeting . . . to consider an agreement with the Enterprise line. . . . The Enterprise line agrees to lease certain rights and privileges on the wharf of the ferry company. . . . It is thought by the advocates of the New line, that with direct communication with New York and Boston, Jamestown will take on a new life.

75 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, January 26, 1931:

The Jamestown Post, American Legion dance, which was held in the Holy Ghost hall Saturday evening was a social success with about 75 couples attending. "Bill" Bailey's orchestra of Newport furnishing music.

From the Newport Daily News January 28, 1931:

(At the Town Council meeting) the town clerk was directed to advertise for sealed bids from local contractors for the con-



struction of proposed new bath houses at Mackerel Cove beach, said bids to be received at a town council meeting to be held on the second day of February.

From the Newport Daily News, January 29, 1931:

A group of men representing the American Legion met with the school committee to discuss plans for building a gymnasium or hall for the use of the townspeople.

50 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, January 28, 1956:

A \$600,000 deficit was reported today by the Jamestown Ferry Authority for its operations during 1955. The authority asked that the General Assembly take prompt action to appropriate funds to cover the deficit. The understanding is that funds will be made available to maintain ferry service between Jamestown and Newport in the non-profit months ahead until tourist traffic resumes in March.

From the Newport Daily News, January 30, 1956:

The Mother's March on Polio on Jamestown yesterday added \$372.23 to Jamestown funds. Twenty-nine mothers under the chairmanship of Mrs. Edwin Evans took part in the drive and every street on the island was canvassed.

25 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, January 27, 1981:

A work session to review property revaluation on Jamestown will be held March 16, the Town Council decided Monday night. . . . Tax Assessor Gerald V. Woodbine said all cities and towns in the state are required to revalue property every 10 years.

Jamestown last revalued its property in 1972, he said.

From the Newport Daily News, January 28, 1981:

The city's (Newport) population last year was 29,266 compared with 34,562 in 1970. Jamestown's population increased from 2,911 to 4,028. . . . Housing units in Jamestown increased from 1,554 to 2,039. . . . As of April 1 of last year, the state's population was 945,835 — a decrease of 3,888 since 1970.

Town officials fear Jamestown will be nearly bone dry next summer unless 36 inches of rain falls and refills North Pond.

15 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, January 24, 1991:

The Town Council last Saturday began reviewing the town budget for the 1991-92 fiscal year. Town Administrator Robert Sutton has proposed a \$3.24 million annual operating budget, up 4.5 percent from last year.

The Town Council Monday night agreed to formally ask the state Department of Transportation to conduct an educational presentation of the proposed cross-island connector road design early next week.

10 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, January 25, 1996:

Town and state officials were set yesterday to discuss the receipt of a \$864,000 federal grant that would fund the construction of two controversial waterfront projects at East Ferry. A 140-foot T-pier for use as a ferryboat landing and a deep-water boat-launching ramp are both key elements in a proposed \$2.2 million plan to renovate East Ferry that met with harsh criticism when it was presented to an audience of some 300 residents last May.

It sounds too good to be true — but it looks like island taxpayers will see a decrease in their tax bills this year. The Town Council voted Monday to approve a total budget — town and school spending plans combined — of \$10.3 million. That figure is up almost 7.3 percent over this year's \$9.6 million budget, and it will go up once again once contract negotiations with three labor unions representing town employees are finished and salaries are figured into the spending package.

The Jamestown Under-12 B girls' team won the State Indoor Soccer Championship Saturday night in a sudden-death overtime.