

## Statement made by Dr. Charles Ormsby in opposition to the proposed teachers contract

I'd like to summarize my objections to the proposed teachers' contract:

This contract:

- Will undermine the fiscal health of North Andover
- Substantially detract from our ability to service our children's educational needs, AND
- It is an affront to the citizens and taxpayers of North Andover who are not enjoying similar raises, who do not have guaranteed employment, do not have 85% of their health care premiums paid, do not have defined benefit retirement plans with health coverage, AND who are living through a tumultuous financial meltdown (Dow at 7500 today!) that is eroding their life's savings and making property taxes an impossible burden.

Three years ago we were at a similar crossroads when the school committee voted 4-2 to approve a three year "4%-3%-3%" teachers' contract that actually cost the town over 5% annually. Because of this decision, the town went through torment as the school committee cut services, increased fees, threatened the town library, attempted to impose trash fees, and ultimately passed a \$1.7 million tax override. And that was during a period of economic growth and prosperity!

This must be Déjà vu! Here we are again with two opposing votes (myself and the BOS) and the town and its children at the mercy of the remaining 4 school committee members.

Let's review the proposed agreement:

It is simple: ADD 1.9% on TOP of the existing baked-in increases called STEPS & COLUMNS. The steps and columns happen even if we do nothing ... even if we have a 0% agreement. They amount to over \$367,000 or a 2.4% increase. Add the 1.9% additional increase, and the total increase for returning teachers is over 4.3%.

The cited savings from turnover and retirements are nice, BUT THEY ARE IRRELEVANT. The increases for returning staff must be justified on their own merits ... not just accepted because some unrelated savings help to pay for them. That would be like saying "Since I saved some money on groceries this week, I should overpay for gasoline."

The 4.4% increase is just plain unjustified ... especially in these economic times and in the absence of concessions on health insurance and pay-for-performance.

Let's discuss "AFFORDABILITY."

For years ... during my tenure and for years before that ... this school committee has been bemoaning the cuts in services to our students. Loss of librarians, out of date or missing textbooks, elimination of electives, curtailed music/arts/band/shop, loss of foreign languages/Latin, sports fees, loss of accreditation, and on and on.

These cuts have not come because the citizens of North Andover are cheap, or don't like children, or don't value education. They have come because school committees for decades have been coerced, cajoled and threatened to continually give raises and benefits and institute lax work rules with no accountability to the unions that would never be accepted in the dreaded private sector.

Over time these increases and concessions have mounted up and they are having two effects:

- They have pushed tax rates to unaffordable levels that are seriously undermining the lives of many of our citizens
- They are forcing us to cut the services we want to provide to our children.

**BOTH** of these groups have a legitimate complaint. It is not older citizens against the children!! Or the children against older citizens. It is our town wilting under the unrelenting pressure of increased labor costs ...

**Only 1.9% ? .... NO it is the granting of 4.4% raises (on average ... some 0% ... some 12% ... but averaging 4.4%) to returning staff.**

**We make this mistake contract after contract. It was advertised as 4%-3%-3% three years ago ... BUT really it amounted to over 5% each year. Now, we're doing it again!**

**There will be an impact. Either higher taxes and fees OR the loss of services OR both.**

**After paying the added \$367,000 for steps and columns, this contract says "Pay another \$345,000 for an additional salary boost!"**

**What could we do with that \$345,000?**

**Restore Librarians?**

**Cut sports fees?**

**Add reading tutors?**

**Add math tutors?**

**Add a Latin teacher in our HS?**

**Avoid class sizes in the high 20s or low 30s?**

**Reduce bus fees?**

**Add more music programs?**

**Absorb a cut in state funding ... when the alternative is more cuts!**

**Replace old textbooks?**

**Improve curriculum?**

**Don't kid yourself ... It is our students who will pay the price ...**

**And it will be this school committee that will come to town meeting asking that money be taken from other town priorities OR obtained through increased taxes ... to avoid further dilution of educational services.**

**It is not the children's fault. In fact, I don't blame the unions ... What do you expect them to do? Lobby for less?**

**The blame must be placed squarely on the shoulders of elected officials who can't or won't refuse these unaffordable increases.**

**We're in the midst of a meltdown. No one else is getting 4.4% increases in guaranteed jobs with lush benefits and retirement plans.**

**We must say NO to this contract**

**OR**

**Be prepared to tell the children why we are squandering the resources the town can BARELY afford for their education.**

**I look forward to one of two futures:**

- 1. Where we save this money and use it to restore services, OR**
- 2. One in which my colleagues are prepared to explain to the children and their parents why they spent these resources on salaries while class sizes are increasing and curriculum offerings are being cut.**

**I PREFER OPTION #1. I ask the other school committee members to join me and the BOS in voting NO!**