

## PERSPECTIVE

# It's all about scare tactics

**W**e've seen it all before. First there was "YES, For Our Kids" in 2000, which came up with the failed expensive plan to rebuild the high schools. Then

## OUR TURN

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there was last year's "Keep Newton Safe and Strong," which deceived and frightened the public into passing an unprecedented override. Now there's "It's All About Education," formed "to make sure our children receive the best education possible."

It's the same lies, the same sleazy rhetoric, the same scare tactics and the same array of characters trying to once again lead us down the same predictable path to fiscal misery. It's only the name of the group that's changed.

This latest group is justifiably neurotic that their School Committee incumbents could actually lose the municipal election, and since the organizers all have "children, grandchildren and neighbors in the schools" they want to ensure that Anne Larner, Nancy Levine and crew win reelection after a stellar job of (I'm not making this up) "managing the work at Newton North and exerting tight control on the budget."

While it's easy to poke fun at the group's leadership, realize that there are many people in this community who will buy into this absurdity. There are actually Newton North parents who might still support Anne Larner. Dori Zalesnik can say with a straight face how she voted for bus fees to ensure small class size, and people will still vote for her. My (restrained) column last week on Susan Heyman cannot dissuade her loyal Heymanites from marching her to another reign of fiscal terror. And despite Patty Kellogg's embarrassing

performance in the primary debate against Donna Cohen, she can still smile-in a lot of voters.

And now, predictably, they all have a cheerleading group called "It's All About Education," which apparently will do anything and everything to distract the public from the failures of this School Committee by attempting to demonize their challengers — about whom they know next to nothing. It reminds me of the 1993 election when, just like today, all the School Committee incumbents and insiders were opposed. And their challengers were demonized as right-wing Christian fundamentalists, even though most of them were Jewish.

The LAE, as they're called, has given us an ominous warning that the challengers are endorsed by the Newton Taxpayers Association, and so they in turn created their "new" group because they've concluded that the incumbents (including Susan Heyman) are "a group dedicated to education," which is meant to imply that the challengers are not. What's interesting here is their attempt to characterize the Newton Taxpayers Association as some evil right-wing cabal.

The NTA is what it has been since its founding in 1936 — a fiscal watchdog for the city budget, a volunteer civic group that advises city officials and the public on how their property taxes are spent. City Hall and the School Committee are constantly at odds with the NTA because of the fact that it holds them publicly accountable to the taxpayer-citizens of Newton. These city officials detest public accountability. "I'm not accountable to anyone," sneered School Superintendent Jeff Young to Channel 7 reporter (and Newton resident) Dan Hausle who dared to question his outlandish wage and benefit package.

But the NTA makes him accountable. And that's what they can't stand. It's why they'll do anything in their power to demonize the NTA, or to ostracize any

candidate with the slightest NTA ties who dares to challenge them. In the absence of any Republican opposition, the NTA is the only available target of the Newton political establishment. Because the NTA is the whipping boy of City Hall, it's difficult to find anyone willing to lead it. Brian Camenker agreed to become its president because no one else wanted it. And look what's happened to him.

So is it any wonder why some of these candidates might be reluctant to advertise any relationship with the NTA?

The Newton political establishment will demonize any candidate who dares to challenge its monopoly on City Hall. Likewise with the Democrat City Committee, which in reality has more in common with the Socialist Workers Party than the State Democratic Committee. Notice how the Democrat City Committee has thrown its full support behind Ted Hess-Mahan rather than Dave Donahue in the Ward 3 Alderman-at-Large race. But it's a no brainer — Donahue is a blue-collar Democrat, while Hess-Mahan is so far to the left he makes Alderman Ken Parker look like Newt Gingrich.

There is currently a joint effort in the works by the School Committee and Aldermanic incumbents to form a Mayor Cohen-sponsored political bloc to try to cajole a skeptical electorate. In the mass mailing that they'll send out to voters a week before the election, they'll blame others for their failures and make promises they won't keep. And they'll use front groups like "It's All About Education" to demonize the opposition.

But seriously, do you really believe they'll stop there?

Remember their override electioneering playbook.

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