

[http://www.townonline.com/northandover/news/opinion/nac\\_edinaharryco04302004.htm](http://www.townonline.com/northandover/news/opinion/nac_edinaharryco04302004.htm)

## Super stand on free speech

Friday, April 30, 2004

For the past 10 months, School Superintendent Harry Harutunian has proven he is a first-rate educator who can work with a tight budget and push the North Andover school system forward with stronger and more cohesive academic programs.

This week, Harutunian proved he was something else -- a genuine community leader.

When complaints were made about the Wheels of Justice peace tour visiting North Andover High, Harutunian could have side-stepped the problem and cancelled the visit. The country is at war, opinions are divided and Wheels of Justice has a message that some feel is inappropriate and even harmful. There's little doubt that the tour will offend the sensibilities of many in town.

Harutunian could have avoided the headache, said no thanks to the visit and returned to his work of boosting test scores.

But he didn't.

Instead, Harutunian worked with other administrators, teachers and groups in the community to come up with a presentation that includes opposing views and gives students a full picture of the war in Iraq and the conflict in Israel.

Rather than limit speech, Harutunian chose to enhance it by providing balance to the program for students. And he did it by getting opposing groups on board for the benefit of students who will now be able to ask questions and draw their own conclusions.

But Harutunian did more than score a win for free speech and intellectual freedom.

He spared North Andover the black eye of being a community that silences views that may bump up against the majority opinion. The town did not need the tag of being a close-minded community, frightened of discussion and ideas.

Harutunian also did something else not often seen on a public stage. He took complete responsibility for the decision to allow the Wheels of Justice tour to visit the high school. It was a move that reflected a strong

commitment to a full education where students are taught not what to think, but instead given the chance to discover how to think.

The students at North Andover High are part of the generation who will probably feel the greatest impact of the war in Iraq and the current conflicts in the Middle East. They are the ones who will step up and assume the responsibilities of policies now being formed. The risks of terrorism, the obligations of justice and the work of rebuilding a safe and peaceful world will soon fall to them

They and their peers will be the ones who will be asked to sacrifice, to struggle and possibly to fight and to die for the decisions and choices being made today. In a heartbeat's time, it will be their world, and to allow them to hear all points of view, all ideas and all opinions about the problems they may face is the only way to prepare them for what's ahead.

Harutunian made the call to give students as much information and as many ideas as possible, and he did it by building bridges among groups in town. It may have been a long week for the new superintendent, but it was one of his best weeks yet in North Andover.

[http://www.townonline.com/northandover/news/opinion/nac\\_edinaharryco04302004.htm](http://www.townonline.com/northandover/news/opinion/nac_edinaharryco04302004.htm)

---



Copyright by TownOnline.com and Herald Interactive Advertising Systems, Inc. No portion of TownOnline.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)