

—Slug:..... COMM-0857.opin.view.fairman  
—Contributor..... Howard Fairman  
—Contributor email..... hfairman@hotmail.com  
—For section..... Voices/Viewpoint  
—Format..... Opinions  
—Dateline..... Putney  
—Article Number:..... 43318

**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Hi, Howard — I stared slack-jawed at your paragraph at line 18 and had a difficult time parsing it. I think I made it easier to comprehend and did so without altering its meaning. I also could have completely mangled it. Please let me know if I did anything stupid. I wouldn't want to do so. —All the best, Jeff

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1           Emergencies on interstate and state highways burden  
2 towns, volunteer firefighters

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3           How funding of our fire departments does, does not, and  
4 could work

####END SUBHED####

5           TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6           BILLING RECIPIENTS of fire-department services is not as  
7 simple as it seems.

8           While questioning publicly the town of Putney's  
9 proposed "new revenue stream," I learned:

10           • Twenty-seven southeastern Vermont towns that are  
11 members of the Southwestern New Hampshire District Fire  
12 Mutual Aid System are subject to its By-Laws and Mutual Aid  
13 Firefighting Assistance Agreement and to Vermont laws.

14           • Some fire departments serving these towns are Vermont  
15 nonprofit corporations and federal 501(c)(3) charitable  
16 organizations receiving appropriations from their towns plus  
17 donations.

18           • Sixty-eight New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and  
19 Vermont municipalities are members of this fire-mutual-aid  
20 system. Whether they are owners or tenants residing in these  
21 municipalities, taxpayers have paid for their fire departments that  
22 must donate their services to any member municipality and its  
23 residents, whether these services are received at home, at work,  
24 on the road, or elsewhere within this fire-mutual-aid system.

25           • Billing resident recipients of these fire-department  
26 services is double billing. To avoid it, property insurers often state  
27 that they do not cover fire department service charges if the  
28 property is located within the limits of the city, municipality, or  
29 protection district furnishing the fire department response.

30           • The only exception to donation of fire-department  
31 services is that a fire department may request replacement for  
32 foam, wet-water (including wetting agents lowering natural  
33 surface tension), and other expended materials.

34           • Illegal, unpermitted, or unattended [burning](#), [false](#)  
35 [alarms](#), and [arson](#) are violations of Vermont laws that are under  
36 the jurisdictions of town forest fire wardens (nominated by a town  
37 and appointed by the state), or law enforcement and the Vermont  
38 Judiciary. Towns are not paid any [fines, forfeitures, or penalties](#)  
39 imposed despite their taxpayers having incurred the costs that  
40 justified them.

41           \* \* \*

42           WHETHER OR NOT any laws have been violated,  
43 municipal taxpayers whose fire departments must respond to  
44 interstate and heavily-traveled state highways are unfairly

45 burdened by costs of incidents involving multiple vehicles,  
46 busses, or vans carrying many passengers or control and cleanup  
47 of spilled hazardous materials. Responsible parties may be  
48 residents of this fire-mutual-aid system, this state, this country, or  
49 other countries.

50 These municipal taxpayers also are unfairly burdened by  
51 additional costs of recovering from responsible parties and  
52 insurers costs incurred by their fire departments while responding  
53 to these incidents on interstate and heavily-traveled state  
54 highways.

55 And these municipal firefighters, especially volunteers,  
56 are unfairly burdened by having to train for and respond to these  
57 incidents on interstate and heavily-traveled state highways in  
58 addition to routine incidents where they live.

59 \* \* \*

60 THE VERMONT General Assembly and the governor  
61 therefore should decide and implement that:

62 • fines, forfeitures, and penalties imposed by the  
63 Vermont Judiciary for violation of a Vermont statute regarding  
64 illegal, unpermitted, or unattended burning, false alarms, or arson  
65 be paid to each municipality from which a fire department  
66 responded to that violation.

67 • the state recover on behalf of and pay to Vermont  
68 municipalities costs incurred by their fire departments while  
69 responding to interstate and heavily-traveled state highways for  
70 incidents involving multiple vehicles, busses, or vans carrying  
71 many passengers or control and cleanup of spilled hazardous  
72 materials.

73 • the state also pay at hourly rates respecting their  
74 training received and risks accepted members of fire departments  
75 who responded to interstate and heavily-traveled state highways  
76 for incidents involving multiple vehicles, busses, or vans carrying  
77 many passengers or control and cleanup of spilled hazardous  
78 materials.

79 This is what I learned while questioning publicly the  
80 town of Putney's proposed "new revenue stream." Whether you  
81 agree or disagree with my legislative suggestions, ask our  
82 legislators and governor to act, because there is a problem that  
83 only they can solve.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

84 **HOWARD FAIRMAN** describes himself as "a private  
85 citizen (not a lawyer)."

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

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####END LOGLINE####

