

—Slug:.....COMM-0867.opin.openle.pelton
—Contributor.....Michael Pelton
—Contributor email.....michael.herbert.pelton@gmail.com
—For section.....Voices/Open Letter
—Format.....Opinions
—Dateline.....Windham
—Article Number:.....43654



Notes from editor (not for publication):

Hi, Michael: Powerful letter and so well-written. I did trim a little redundancy. Is your bio OK? I want to give readers the context that you're writing as a community leader, but I absolutely don't want to misrepresent your submission. Please feel free to submit a sentence or two you like better. —All the best, Jeff



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 The people have spoken. Are the schools listening?

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 The WRED and current supervisory union structure are
3 no longer serving communities effectively. The school and SU
4 boards and administration now face a choice: Continue
5 defending a system that has lost public confidence, or take
6 meaningful corrective action while trust can still be rebuilt.

####END SUBHED####

7 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

8 TO THE WRED board, WCSU board, and administration,

9 The repeated failure of the West River Education District
10 (WRED) budget is not simply a reaction to taxes or educational
11 spending. It is a direct response to years of growing frustration
12 with the structure, leadership, accountability, and cost of both the
13 Supervisory Union and the WRED.

14 The message from voters is clear, consistent, and
15 impossible to ignore.

16 Communities no longer trust that the current structure is
17 acting in the best interests of the towns it was created to serve.

18 For too long, the administration and governing structure
19 have operated without meaningful accountability to the taxpayers
20 and communities funding them. Districts are assessed costs they
21 neither fully understand nor meaningfully control. Local concerns
22 raised repeatedly by towns and board members have too often
23 been delayed, dismissed, or ignored.

24 Even the public meeting process reflects this growing
25 disconnect.

26 In many local town boards, community members are
27 allowed to participate throughout discussions in a respectful and
28 controlled manner, allowing questions to be answered, concerns
29 to be clarified, and public input to meaningfully inform
30 deliberations.

31 In contrast, WRED and WCSU meetings often limit
32 participation to a brief comment period with little opportunity for
33 follow-up discussion, response, or engagement. This leaves many
34 residents feeling unheard and reinforces the perception that
35 decisions are being made without genuine community
36 involvement or accountability.

37 Enough is enough.

38 * * *

39 THIS IS NO LONGER a question of asking communities for
40 patience while additional studies are conducted or more
41 committees are formed. The time for delay has passed. Trust has
42 eroded significantly, and immediate action is required if this

43 system intends to preserve legitimacy with the communities it
44 serves.

45 At least three towns are now openly discussing how they
46 may leave the current structure entirely because they no longer
47 believe they are being heard, respected, or fairly represented
48 within the existing system.

49 That reality should deeply concern every member of the
50 supervisory union board, the school district board, and the
51 administration.

52 Communities do not begin discussing withdrawal,
53 restructuring, or alternative governance models lightly. These
54 conversations are occurring because confidence in the current
55 system has deteriorated to a level that can no longer be ignored.

56 Whether or not those towns ultimately pursue separation,
57 the fact that these discussions are actively occurring across
58 multiple communities should serve as a clear warning that public
59 trust in the current governance model has been significantly
60 damaged.

61 The WRED and current supervisory union structure are
62 no longer serving communities effectively. Instead of creating
63 efficiency and collaboration, the system has become increasingly
64 divisive, administratively heavy, and financially unsustainable for
65 many taxpayers.

66 The question now is whether leadership is prepared to
67 listen.

68 * * *

69 SPECIFICALLY, the WCSU, WRED, and administration
70 should immediately take the following steps:

- 71 • Freeze all non-essential administrative hiring,
72 expansion, and new program spending.
- 73 • Conduct a complete line-by-line review of
74 administrative positions, contracts, consulting agreements,
75 stipends, and operational overhead.
- 76 • Present a public restructuring plan within 30 days
77 identifying:

78 —Administrative reductions
79 —Consolidation opportunities
80 —Cost-saving measures
81 —Positions that can be eliminated through attrition or
82 reorganization

- 83 • Require every administrative department to justify its
84 existence, staffing levels, and costs through a true zero-based
85 budgeting process.
- 86 • Publish full transparency reports detailing:
 - 87 —Administrative costs
 - 88 —Salary and benefits growth
 - 89 —Staffing ratios
 - 90 —Historical growth of SU overhead compared to
91 enrollment trends
- 92 • Establish measurable performance standards for
93 administrators tied directly to:
 - 94 —Financial stewardship
 - 95 —Responsiveness to communities
 - 96 —Operational efficiency
- 97 • Return meaningful authority and decision-making
98 power to the towns and local communities funding the system.
- 99 • Conduct immediate public discussions regarding
100 structural reform options that restore greater local control,
101 educational flexibility, and community authority while
102 maintaining cooperative educational relationships where
103 appropriate.
- 104 • Reform the budget approval process so that the
105 Supervisory Union budget itself is voted on directly by the towns,
106 not solely by the board. Such a change would provide
107 substantially greater transparency, accountability, and public
108 ownership over the costs being imposed on local communities.

109 * * *

110 MANY RESIDENTS would support remaining within a
111 shared Supervisory Union structure if local towns once again had

112 meaningful authority over their students' education, budgets,
113 priorities, and governance.

114 The current model has concentrated too much power too
115 far away from the communities paying for it. Students have been
116 separated, communities divided, and confidence lost. Towns
117 deserve the ability to pursue educational models that best serve
118 their students efficiently, appropriately, and sustainably while
119 preserving long-term educational opportunities.

120 I am asking the administration and boards to seriously
121 consider a full range of structural options during this period of
122 sustained fiscal pressure and declining public confidence,
123 including options that require fundamental rethinking of how our
124 schools are organized.

125 This should include formal evaluation of restructuring
126 Leland & Gray, including the possibility of repurposing the
127 facility for consolidated PK–6 education while transitioning
128 grades 7–12 into a tuition-based model supported by
129 transportation access and inter-SU agreements.

130 I am not advocating a predetermined outcome. I am
131 calling for a willingness to evaluate structural change at this level
132 of seriousness and urgency. That includes considering tuitioning
133 arrangements, transportation-supported tuition models, and
134 potential realignment or consolidation with neighboring
135 supervisory unions where appropriate.

136 These discussions can no longer be delayed through
137 extended study cycles that fail to produce actionable outcomes.
138 While careful analysis is appropriate, the timeline must now be
139 measured in weeks, not months or years. Yes, boards and
140 administrators will have to have many, many special meetings,
141 and they will have to work with local Selectboards to accomplish
142 this mission.

143 * * *

144 THESE CONCERNS ARE not theoretical. They are a direct
145 response to repeated budget failures, rising administrative costs,
146 declining enrollment, increasing per-pupil spending, troublingly

147 low student performance, and sustained concerns from multiple
148 communities regarding governance responsiveness and fiscal
149 sustainability.

150 Maintaining existing structures without serious
151 reconsideration is no longer a viable strategy.

152 The purpose of public education is to deliver accessible,
153 effective, and sustainable schooling for the communities that fund
154 it. That mission is not served by maintaining systems that no
155 longer align with enrollment realities, financial constraints, or
156 public trust.

157 The public is no longer willing to accept continued
158 administrative growth while taxpayers struggle and communities
159 feel increasingly disconnected from decision-making.

160 This is not hostility toward education, teachers, or
161 students.

162 This is a demand for responsible governance, fiscal
163 accountability, transparency, and respect for the communities that
164 make public education possible.

165 This budget failure should be viewed not only as a
166 warning, but as an opportunity, an opportunity to reflect, reform,
167 and reimagine how our Supervisory Union can better serve
168 students, families, and taxpayers alike.

169 This is also an opportunity for our Supervisory Union to
170 demonstrate the type of leadership and structural innovation that
171 state policymakers have failed to deliver. We should seize this
172 moment to thoughtfully reimagine how educational governance
173 can better serve our towns, students, and taxpayers moving
174 forward.

175 * * *

176 THE BOARDS now face a choice: Continue defending a
177 system that has lost public confidence, or take meaningful
178 corrective action while trust can still be rebuilt.

179 Trust can still be restored, but only through visible
180 action, structural reform, transparency, and a genuine willingness

181 to listen to the communities that have been sounding these
182 alarms for years.

183 The voters have spoken.

184 Now the leadership of the Supervisory Union and WRED
185 must decide whether it is prepared to finally listen and take
186 action.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

187 **MICHAEL PELTON** is a farm owner and operator and
188 engaged community member. He chairs the Windham
189 Selectboard, though he did not sign this letter in that capacity.

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

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

190 0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

191

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

192

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

193

###END LOGLINE###