

LOW TAXES ARE THE RESULT OF LOW SPENDING

The Bow Times

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EDITORIALS

SUNSHINE WEEK 2020: CELEBRATING WHISTLEBLOWERS AND PUBLIC RECORDS

by Justin Silverman and Laura Simoes

When Dr. Ed Kois left his private practice after 30 years for a position at the Manchester VA Medical Center, he expected most of his new patients' injuries to have occurred on the battlefield. Instead, he found many of them to have been caused by poor medical care.

Frustrated by the lack of improvements hospital administrators were willing to make, Dr. Kois and several colleagues in 2016 went public. They used whistleblower protections and the power of the free press to tell their story and shine a light on the deplorable conditions at the Manchester hospital. Just hours after The Boston Globe reported a story based on information provided by Dr. Kois, the federal government removed two top officials at the hospital and ordered a full review of the facility.

Dr. Kois died in 2019 and was posthumously honored by the Nackey S. Loeb School. His insistence on exposing government incompetence should be remembered as we celebrate Sunshine Week—a national celebration of transparency beginning March 15. Whether through whistleblowers like Kois or the use of state and federal freedom of information laws, knowing about our government is crucial to maintaining trust in public institutions.

If a police officer, for example, is breaking the law instead of enforcing it, we need to know that officer's name and what is being done to prevent similar misconduct in the future. If a school board refuses to produce a publicly-funded report on the wrongdoing of its educators, it should not be allowed to hide behind "personnel issues," especially when students and staff may be at risk. And as Dr. Kois demonstrated, we can only trust our hospitals if there is a public accounting and redress of their failings.

The need for trust in our public institutions is why we have whistleblower protections and the New Hampshire Right to Know Law. This law allows citizens to request certain records that can show us how our tax dollars are being spent and why public officials make the decisions they do. The law provides us, for example, payroll records of public employees, police logs, government expense reports, school construction plans and restaurant inspections. RSA 91-A provides insight into how our government is working so we can know if and how it can be improved.

Justin Silverman is executive director of the New England First Amendment Coalition.

Laura Simoes is executive director of the Nackey S. Loeb School of Communications.

CENSUS PROJECTS SHRINKING SCHOOLS... HOW ABOUT SOME INNOVATION, NH?

Don't look now, New Hampshire, but your student population is shrinking. On second thought, do look now and start planning for it.

The fact is that Americans are having fewer children. Even an increase in job-seekers coming to New Hampshire is not likely to affect that trend by much.

The drop in student numbers has been more than 10 percent in the last decade and now the N.H. Department of Education is projecting a further decline of anywhere from 26,000 to 48,000 students in the next decade.

What to do? How about having your cake and eating it too? How about being innovative, now, in improving educational opportunities and outcomes for your children without paying more and more for fewer and fewer students?

Rather than succumb to the education bureaucracy (and teacher union) arguments for more and more spending, how about parents and taxpayers demanding plans for the wiser use of existing resources?

While understandable, the idea that taxpayers might actually see a smaller student census result in reduced education costs is probably a bridge too far.

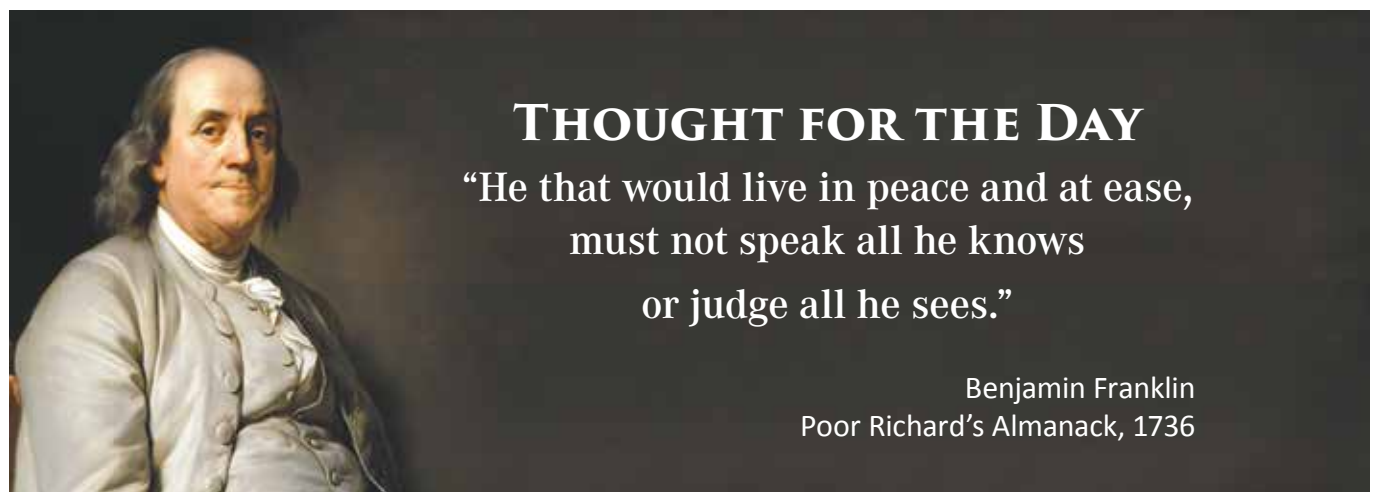
Indeed, Democratic legislators blocking \$46 million in federal funds for expansion of public charter schools claim that accepting this money would "burden" the traditional public schools that might lose students to the charters.

Writing in New Hampshire Voices, a Peterborough father made the point: "On the current trajectory our public education cost modeling is unsustainable. Looking at the new (state) report, a public charter school can educate a student effectively for less than half the amount of a traditional public school."

"It is through these innovative schools and other methods," wrote Christopher Maidment, "that New Hampshire can again start to find sustainability in education funding."

With town and school district meeting time upon us, it is important that taxpayers faced with big-spending school proposals demand that proponents justify their current plans and explain how they are downsizing in the future.

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THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"He that would live in peace and at ease,
must not speak all he knows
or judge all he sees."

Benjamin Franklin
Poor Richard's Almanack, 1736