



08/31/2006

Letters -- week of Aug. 31

Living Wage member says come to council meeting

To the editor:

As a member of the Lawrence Living Wage Coalition I was one of those out there (as well as many others) who helped gather signatures for the Living Wage Ordinance. Because of town council's refusal to place the question on the ballot, it is being asked of all of you who signed the petition to come out and let your voices be heard. You took the time to sign the petition because you believe people should be treated fairly when they work for billion dollar corporations, but town council feels you are breaking the law by placing a question on the ballot that aims to give working families more money to live on. Come out on Sept. 5 to the next town council meeting and let your voices be heard! They can't deny you that!

Nick Mellis

Harmony Avenue

Council disregards basics of 'democratic governance'

To the editor:

Lawrence Township Council on Aug. 15 once again demonstrated blatant disregard for basic principles of democratic governance. The council reneged on its promise to hear citizens seeking to place a certified living wage ordinance (signed by 1,048 voters) on the November 2006 ballot. This was done in a rapid, seemingly orchestrated manner following a recommendation from Lawrence Township Attorney Kevin Nerwinski to table the matter, as he was in the process of getting further information concerning the legality of the ordinance.

Mr. Nerwinski has raised legality concerns several times in the last eight months. The fact that he still needs to confirm his opinion suggests either incompetence or deliberate delay. Testimony in support of the ordinance was quashed, giving a clear message to the citizens of the township that their efforts to effect policy are not valued.

At issue is the public's right to provide policy input and to exercise basic freedom of speech. These are founding principles of our country, which have escaped the notice of our current township council. With the ordinance on the ballot there will be full airing of the pros and cons of the proposed referendum, allowing voters to make an informed choice. The fresh air of electoral democracy is far preferable to the stale odor of backroom politics.

I am dismayed with Lawrence Township Mayor Michael Powers, Councilwoman (Pam) Mount, Councilmen (Mark) Holmes, (Rick) Miller and (Greg) Puliti for their part in suppressing the rights of Lawrence Township citizens.

Edith Pike

Princeton Pike

Will council 'obstruct the will of its voters' on Sept. 5?

To the editor:

Pity the poor Lawrence Township Council, forced to spend taxpayer money to defend itself from itself.

The Large Retail Living Wage and Benefits ordinance is a carefully worded and researched document that complies with state and federal law. The authors presented the township with proof that the ordinance could be passed without running afoul of state and federal regulations, but the township refused to even consider an ordinance that would keep its residents from having to rely on public assistance for food and medical care.

Over 1,000 people signed the petition to put the Large Retail Living Wage and Benefits Ordinance on November's ballot. Indeed, the response was so overwhelmingly positive that many residents registered to vote in order to make their signatures count. The petitioners presented the ordinance once more to the Township Council, which had yet another chance to approve it or watch it be placed on the ballot. The council chose to circumvent state law by tabling the ordinance, refusing to allow public comment on it, and going to court instead.

How could the township vote "no" in the face of so much citizen support while at the same time placating the large retailers who might be contributing to their party's campaign coffers? What a dilemma! Vote in favor of the ordinance and lose contributions, or vote against it and lose the next election? So it's easy to see why the township would turn to the state Superior Court for an answer — it's the only way to save face.

Unfortunately for the Lawrence Township Council, it is too late to save face. Spending taxpayer money to sue taxpayers to keep said taxpayers from gaining financial independence is no way to charm those taxpayers.

The Lawrence Township Council will have one more chance, on Sept. 5, to do the right thing. Will the council make the only morally correct choice by considering the ordinance, or will it continue to obstruct the will of its voters?

Laura Lynch

Lumar Road

Mayor apologizes for lack of public portion

To the editor:

As an elected official, I have always encouraged residents to come to the meetings of the Township Council to voice their concerns. At the initial Planning Board screening meeting for the Wal-Mart application, I publicly invited the 200 or so people in attendance to voice their concerns over Wal-Mart's business practices at the next meeting of the Township Council. Many people at that Planning Board meeting took me up on that offer and have since then appeared regularly at the Township Council meetings to discuss Wal-Mart.

On Aug. 15, a living wage ordinance was on the Council Agenda for adoption. Although I told members of the public they would have an opportunity to discuss this ordinance, this opportunity to speak did not occur due to the ordinance being tabled by the council. In hindsight, I should have permitted public discussion before allowing the ordinance to be tabled. I made a mistake in not doing this.

I want to publicly apologize to all who were affected by my actions that night.

Michael Powers

Mayor

Lawrence Township

Editor's note: This letter was submitted Aug. 16 but was not received until this week due to an e-mail error.

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