

Editorial

Dissension continues in Winsted

Winsted has had its share of issues which makes the news week after week and the issue of the police captain who was awarded retirement benefits in 1991 continues to resurface. Perhaps it is something about the air in Winsted but issues seem never to get settled in a reasonable time and to most people's satisfaction.

Back in the spring of 1991 then police Captain Francis J. O'Neill offered to retire with benefits to save the job of the last officer hired when a position in the department was written out of the budget. Of the \$40,000 Mr. O'Neill received, \$10,000 was a supplemental benefit voted on by the Board of Selectmen. Objection to the additional benefit resulted in a petition filed the day before the retirement funds were to be paid. The petition with 360 signatures requested a referendum on the extra benefit.

Town Clerk William T. Riiska was supposed to certify the signatures on the petition but said Town Attorney Stephen Allaire told him the petition was invalid and so he set it aside. Later a suit was filed by Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie on behalf of a citizen, Patricia Mills, asking that the 1991 petition be honored. Another

portion of the suit, seeking a court order restricting selectmen from making any non-contracted payments to municipal employees was dismissed in 1992 by the presiding judge. Six weeks ago the request to honor the petition was also denied because it had never been certified.

Last week Mr. Riiska's role in rejecting the petition resurfaced in a letter from Ms. LaVoie; she questioned the procedure which led to that decision and asked that Riiska certify the petition. Selectmen Monday denied the request because of the amount of time that had passed but they agreed the town clerk, in the future, should certify petitioning signatures and send such documents to selectmen to determine legality.

One would hope this is the end of the matter, but Ms. LaVoie, who said the town clerk's action disenfranchised citizens, left the issue open to further legal action. If Mr. Riiska didn't know the procedure in the past, the selectmen's action Monday was a slap on the wrist and he does now. Ms. LaVoie is correct about citizen disenfranchisement, but if the citizens could vote on the issue now, would Mr. O'Neill be expected to return the money if they voted against paying him that benefit?