OCTOBER 27, 2026 PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

Pittsfield School District November 3 Ballot Question on School District Tax Cap/SAU Budget Limitation (HB 1300)

Board members present: Sandra Adams, Chair; Molly Goggin, Vice Chair; Becky Berk, Adam Gauthier, and Tim Robinson

Others present: Dr. Erik Anderson, PMHS Principal; Melissa Brown, PMHS Assistant Principal; Jack Dunn, Business Administrator, and Dr. Tim Herbert, Superintendent

Public Hearing Sign-in Sheet – those who spoke: Katie Bocash, Melissa Babcock, Frank Babcock, Donna Keeley, Rebecca Sims, Jim Allard, Diane Rider, Louis Houle, and William Rupp

Sandra Adams welcomed all attendees and led the Pledge of Allegiance and explained that the public hearing would be recorded. She read the following rules: All comments should be directed to me, the board chair, who will determine from the board or administration who is best equipped to respond. Additionally, in order to clarify a speaker's comments or questions, members of the board may respond or ask questions. Comments and questions on matters other than the subject will be called out of order. Speakers are encouraged not to repeat comments made by other speakers. A simple statement of agreement with past speakers will provide for a more efficient use of time. Statements that threaten violence or are derogatory or defamatory, and any conduct disruptive of the hearing, will be considered out of order and will not be tolerated. The board chair may terminate the speaker's privilege of address if the speaker does not follow these rules of order. Refusal to comply with rulings of the presiding officer or other continued disruption could result in removal from the hearing.

As we said, this hearing is designed to present facts and information on how a yes or no vote may impact the school district and the SAU administrative budgets. As the notice indicated that you have seen, it provides an opportunity for members of the public to discuss, ask questions, and offer comments relative to the ballot question. At this time, we would like to share a video that has been available on our district website. It serves as an introduction to providing information, after which we will be opening it for public discussion.

The video from our school district website was then shown by Dr. Erik Anderson, PMHS Principal. “Thanks for coming. If you have not accessed this video yet, this is the school district homepage, and it’s right here. Click here to watch the video. I already have it queued up.”

Video content: Voters in every town in the Grand State will see a question on their general election ballot: Should their local school district’s property taxes be capped? In this video, we’ll explain the law behind the tax cap question that will be on your ballot. What’s in a school budget, and how do districts across New Hampshire steward tax dollars for the benefit of all students and communities? We’ll detail the key drivers out of local school districts’ control that have contributed to property tax increases in many towns and cities in the Granite State, and will show how a tax cap law could deliver unintended consequences where it goes into effect. Earlier this year, the New Hampshire General Court passed a school district tax cap bill, which Governor Ioan signed into law in July. Here’s what the law does.

It puts a question on the general election ballot in November, asking voters if their local school district’s property taxes should be capped. Any community where 60% of its voters approve the question with a yes vote would legally limit their local school district from passing a budget that raises local taxes by more than the annual rate of inflation in our region, plus any new taxable property growth from new or expanded property. It would also require school districts to budget no more than six percent of their annual funds on general management functions like information technology, payroll, and legal services. Any school district under a tax cap would also not be able to budget additional revenue from property reassessments or from market appreciation of existing property. These limits would remain in effect for two years. Then, in November 2028, voters will be asked the same question again.

Requiring the same 60% supermajority to pass to place the same limits on their local district for another two years. While the new law puts tax caps on the November ballot, people in every community in New Hampshire have already had this power for more than 15 years. Chapter 32 of New Hampshire state statutes allows for any citizen to petition a warrant article on a tax cap at their town meeting or deliberative session for consideration by their community. Every year, our local school districts have to approve balanced budgets that provide an equitable education for every student. The overwhelming majority of this money is spent on classroom instruction, while the numbers vary from district to district. The overwhelming majority, usually about 80 cents of every dollar in the average local school district budget, is spent on professional educators, their salaries, and the contractually required benefits they bargain for.

Then include instructional materials and supports to students to get the resources they need to learn and grow, and then add all of the expenses to operate safe and secure schools, from school resource officers to staffing secure vestibules, transportation to get every student to and from school safely, facilities and utilities. Altogether, most school districts in New Hampshire have allocated well over 95 percent of their budget dollar before any discretionary choices are even considered.

New Hampshire's public school districts do this each year, even in the face of declining enrollment. This may sound like something that should save tax dollars, but declining enrollment has the opposite effect on our schools. That's because the cost to educate each student goes up when this happens, because declining enrollment doesn't reduce the size of school buildings or the costs to operate them. And while it might reduce the size of individual classes in small ways, every class, no matter its size, still requires a professional educator to teach its students in the subjects mandated by our state and federal government. Subjects where our students consistently outperform most of their peers around the nation. School districts in New Hampshire are one of the strongest examples of local control that make up our identity as Granite Staters. The costs that are driving most school district budgets upward in recent years, however, are anything but local.

Under the new tax cap law, a community could limit a school district's new tax levy to the rate of inflation. But many key expenses are dramatically outpacing inflation, which averaged 4.1 percent in the 12 months before the tax cap question was signed into law. These are things like fuel costs. Gas is up in our area more than 30 percent over the last year. Heating oil about 38 percent, and diesel, which many buses run on, more than 40 percent. Health insurance costs, which many families and businesses in New Hampshire can relate to. Dozens of school districts in New Hampshire were assessed surprise fees in the past year. Many districts faced increases four or five times higher than the rate of inflation. Out of district placements to serve the most vulnerable students, school districts pay in the form of tuition for students to receive accommodations not available in their communities. But school districts have no say or bargaining power to determine these costs.

State caps increases to this tuition at five percent a year, which means these costs too pace inflation nearly every year. A decline in federal funding. School districts not only have to approve their budgets before they know how much money is coming from Washington, but the federal education department has not funded its own special education law, contributing twelve to fifteen percent of costs to serve students with disabilities when it promised. This transfers tens of millions of dollars in obligations onto local school districts to make up the difference to comply with federal law. A similar thing has happened with state funding in recent years. State adequacy aid from Concord to local school districts that ensures every local school district is keeping to state standards has not kept pace with inflation. When you compound the annual inflation rates over the past 11 years, the actual cost of living in New Hampshire has increased by about 37 and a half percent.

But state adequacy aid increased in that same time period by less than 22 percent. That's additional millions of dollars in expenses schools have faced with comparatively less support from Concord. When you combine these obligations, our local school districts have to provide an equitable education to every student, with cost pressures and unfunded mandates they have no control over. Many local communities have raised property taxes to meet their contractual obligations. Comply with state and federal law and preserve the services and resources they provide every student. When a community's local control to fund their schools is limited by a tax cap, the only remaining option a

school district has is to reduce expenses. And as we've shown, the overwhelming majority of school district expenses are classroom instruction, mostly in the form of people. Reducing funding for classroom instruction not only increases class sizes.

It can lead to unintended follow-on consequences, including the competitiveness of our students and their pathways to higher education and careers, the attractiveness of communities for employers to expand into, all of which can impact property values, which not only directly impacts homeowners, but can precipitate a revenue spiral, where declining tax rolls can place more, not less, tax burdens on existing property owners. We believe strong and supported schools result in strong and thriving communities. And with the support of state and federal lawmakers, New Hampshire's school districts can deliver a high-quality education that helps every student reach their individual potential.

End of Video

At this point in time, if there's anyone who has put their name on the list and would like to speak, now's the time we invite you. Welcome. Questions, comments.

Katie Bocash. I think I was looking for a little bit more from you guys about how this directly affects Pittsfield. For instance, does this put the administrative cap at six percent? What is Pittsfield's current percentage of the budget for administrative? I'm hoping to hear from you guys, not just about the budget.

As you might know, this past year, Pittsfield is now contracting for SAU administrative services through Concord SAU 8. Our percentage of administrative cost is about three percent. So we are well below the six percent.

Did you want to mention anything or say anything to that, Jack? Jack Dunn is our business administrator in Concord. Welcome, Jack.

I think for us, as we look at this bill, if I'm not mistaken, it includes all funds, not just the general fund. If we were to take just the general fund, which is 12.2 million dollars, you take six percent of that. That's 732 thousand dollars. Our contract for this year is 260 thousand. And then we have to add in whether it's questionable or not the IT piece of it because they don't have an IT director here. They have a tech person, and they contract out for the cybersecurity and some network support. So even if I add another hundred thousand, you're at three sixty. Add some supplies because you do all your checks and postage, and then we build that out. So say you're at four hundred. Six percent of the general fund is seven thirty two.

So you're still well below that overall amount, and I think that was the good stewardship the board did in the last administration's passing of all. I think that's good. I don't know enough yet about the four percent portion and how that's going to affect the overall budget yet, as we're learning how this is all working.

I hope that helps. Yes

Thank you. Thank you, Jack.

Yes. My name's Bruce Berk. I live at 1 Range Road. Talk to me about the quandary that this passes. What kind of problems does it create for our budgeting going forward?

There's mandatory fixed increases. There's health insurance, and there's the special ed, and there's transportation, utilities. You saw all those things listed. None of those things, like the dental and the support staff, software subscriptions, things like that, are mandatory. So we would have to be looking at things that, when we look, are the least impactful to instruction if we needed to make any type of cuts.

But we have a sense of. I know this is a I don't know if we have an answer to this, but if this passes, how much time do we have?

Play with the budget. Understand how the budget is going to be shaped for next year. I guess that's my question.

As I read it, Bruce, it looked to me, and correct me if I'm wrong, that a 2026 adoption would first affect the FY 2028 budget cycle for a two-year period. So we would have some time to do some preparation and see if we need to cut co-curriculars, or some field trips, or just what it would be to meet the demands of keeping a budget that's responsible.

I would just add that the other piece, and actually maybe either Tim or Molly wants to speak to this. The other piece that is still out there is there's a committee working to come back to the full school board with some recommendations about the high school. This is a study committee that was put together for that. One of the pieces that I just want you to keep in mind is that, depending on where the committee comes out with its recommendation, depending on where the school board decides to move with this.

If we decide to tuition out, for instance, if we decide to approach other school districts to tuition our high school students out, and we have a budget cap in place, it actually hamstrings us a little bit in terms of our overall negotiations for high school kids with other districts. Just another piece of it.

I can't try not to give my personal opinions as a board member. A couple things. One is we are looking at keeping kids here or sending them out. So this is a time we need a little bit of flexibility, not to be hamstrung with something. Because I'll say it as a personal opinion, you may end up with a situation where you may end up with a physical plant for a period of time before it can be sold or repurposed. That you still have expenses on, which are essentially included in the tuition for where the students are going if each site is wishing them out. So in a short period, I'm not sure it's the wisest idea. The other is, to be frank, the state adequacy money was it hacked 670,000 less this year?

The SAU cost 250,000.

So if we're not getting level funded or increased funding from the state, that has to be made up on the town side to keep the services at the same level. I mean,

some of this is the legislature having you vote on a tax cap, but they're also decreasing funding to local schools at the same time.

To that point, I think this is a bad time. We can see that from the slides. It's a bad time economically in terms of inflation, and the way that affects our schools are in those costs that we must provide. We must provide certain pieces of our education. We must have a heated building. We must provide the contractual obligations towards teachers that they have negotiated. We must provide transportation for certain children to a certain age. So these things can't be avoided. We have to pay those costs, and I think what the video does a good job of is show that we are one very budgeted to a shoestring around here, to the place that we've cut every possible program extra. We run a very tight budget as a community because we recognize how difficult it is to run this. And how what that looks like for taxpayers, but we also, like Tim suggested and Becky suggested, we're at a great time of change and I don't want to say uncertainty to make people nervous, but those decisions haven't been made yet, and we can't make them with the town and the school and the community and the taxpayers in mind if we don't have the ability to fund them, and that doesn't mean that you still can't vote.

You still have a voice through deliberative session, you still have a voice on any budget that comes forward, any ballot measure. It feels as though this provides an initial stop on a lot of forward momentum that we potentially need to make, and it takes the decisions out of the local community and makes it more of a broad swath of decision making.

I think the other thing many of you were in the room several years ago when we had to change the budget because of a change in students that came into town on the special ed side. So there, we don't control those costs as students that are high needs services as they come in. That just happens, and so you could stay in line with inflation with all your fuel costs, salary costs, all those costs could stay in line. Inflation, but this tax cap doesn't account for a situation, at least that I understand it to be, where if you had something, two students move in and it moves the budget by four hundred thousand dollars. That could be, that's going to come out of a program somewhere, rather than if it hits the cap. So just understand that some of the change in the budget structure isn't just on inflation.

Based on state adequacy money and also what the cost of special education is by your student population, that's a bigger driver than it seems, a significant driver in comparison to inflation.

It has been for us. Any other thoughts or questions?

Concerns? I think just to add on briefly. To what Molly and Tim were saying. Every year, when the school district budget comes around, the full community has the opportunity to come to a deliberative session to understand from the budget committee's perspective what.

What seem like reasonable expenses or justifiable expenses or not, and I think that we saw just in the past year that the community already does have significant control over expenses, just in the teachers' contract. That piece did not pass, and so I'm sad to say it didn't pass.

I won't go there, but I think from a factual standpoint, the community already does have these opportunities to learn about the school district budget, about programming, about expenses that are increasing or decreasing and why, along with the budget committee.

As far as the three-fifths majority, I was doing a little bit of reading on that, so I could understand a little bit better. The three-fifths majority that it would take to pass, whether it be the three-fifths yes or the three-fifths no, requires all of the voters voting in the election to approve a tax cap or a SEU budget cap. In other words, all those who vote in the election. But those who do not vote on the question will count against the majority needed to adopt the law. I'm thinking, what did that really mean? Regardless of whether they vote on that option, it's not two thirds of, it's not three fifths of the voting on the question. It's very important to get to that three fifths if we want a three fifths no or a three fifths yes, because all the voters that vote are counted. Does that make sense?

It sounded a little confusing to me. I had to read it over several times.

Let me look at some of the other notes that I have, Bruce, for just a minute, because that seemed to kind of confuse me the way I read it.

It's not a warrant article. It's a question from the legislature.

This is the way I read this: the ballot question provides that adoption of the ballot question requires a three-fifths majority vote. That statute provides that the local tax cap will be adopted if a three-fifths majority of the voters voting in the municipalities and wards served by the school district approve the question. The ballot question will only be adopted if three-fifths of the voters approve the question. Approval requires three-fifths of the voters who voted yes or no on the question, and does not count any voter who cast an overvoted ballot, marking both yes and no, or who cast an undervoted ballot, marking neither yes nor no. In other words, the total number of yes and no votes added together.

Will serve as the denominator when determining whether or not the three-fifths approval has been achieved. And to go on, it sounds like you get it even better than my jibber jabber earlier. But for example, consider a situation where 110 ballots are cast, and the results are determined to be 61 votes in the affirmative, 39 votes in the negative, and 10 undervotes. For the purpose of calculating the three-fifths, the ten undervotes would not be counted toward the calculation. The numerator would be 61 votes for yes, and the denominator would be 100, the combined number of yes and no votes. In this scenario, the affirmative vote would exceed the three-fifths threshold, and the measure would be approved. So it's very important.

So it's the people that actually cast a vote on the question that is the denominator.

What other kinds of thoughts do we have? Questions, concerns, things that we can clear up or that we can better understand too. Diane, did you sign your name? No. Please speak.

Diane Rider. I'm just curious if the board or the study committee has conducted an enrollment projection at all.

It's a fairly rudimentary one based on high school enrollment at PES. There will likely be some attrition in that. We have looked at a couple of different factors, but we haven't gone past looking at birth rates and things like that. So that is essentially a five year enrollment projection.

Is that on the website?

I'll be in the report when we're we just did it in the last couple.

And your deadline for the report you have?

December first.

Lots of things are going on. There are a lot of burners.

Yes. Given the funds that we are, the name. Thank you, Don.

Is that going to lead people to believe that it's upgradable?

Yes. So I think the challenge, and I think all of us experience this as an administrator is looking at HB thirteen hundred. It's really poorly written. Just as a side note, it's very difficult to understand. The language is convoluted. There's two questions within it. So you could very much feel we should cap administrative costs. That's important. And quite frankly, in our district, we do. We're very cognizant of that, and have made very important steps to make that less impactful on our budget because we just can't afford it. But that doesn't stand alone. It's linked directly to the inability to increase. And the other part too. And again, I don't want to speak out on this without knowing the facts. Please don't take this as a personal comment, but our taxes are not only determined by.

Our school, so for people to read a tax cap is disingenuous because it can't fully cap that. You know that's not the school does not hold all the control over that. So it's another issue with the way it's worded and how it's promoted. It suggests it's going to cap your property tax entirely, and that's also not true. So I think that's a big problem, and I think it's purposely worded that way because I think part of it many people have a resounding yes to, and the other part feels like well it must go along with that, and that isn't necessarily they don't always go hand in hand.

See, the unfortunate thing is I'm with you Molly. The unfortunate piece is those two questions within question two are incongruous. You want to go with it; the other, you don't. If they had been separated, perhaps you might vote one way on one of them and one on another. But they lumped them together, through no accident, I'm sure, making it even more confusing. You're saying one thing and you're really saying two different things because you've got two different questions there, and it's very, very difficult to vote the right way with your mind. And once again, it was done in front of the bill that you read out loud.

I have it. Let's see here. I need a few more pieces of paper. I apologize. Shall Pittsfield limit property tax growth for the S A U fifty one Pittsfield School District under R S A thirty two five I, if adopted for a two year period? The local property tax levy may not grow beyond the prior year's amount, adjusted for inflation at new construction. SAU central office spending may not exceed six percent of

total school district appropriations, and bonded capital costs are excluded from both limits. These caps apply only to administrative offices of the SAU central office and do not affect classroom instruction, school-based services, or other municipal expenditures.

These limits may be overridden as provided in RSA 325. Adoption requires a three-fifths majority vote. On one hand, you're talking about the property tax levy, and on the other hand, the six percent with the SAU, and they don't marry up very well.

It's also speaking to the fact that it won't impact other services, which is not correct. Absolutely, it can impact other services if the six percent is met. If there's no way around that, then something else has to give. So that's our understanding. Written misleading and incorrect. That's our understanding. I don't want to say it's a lie, but it's not correct. It's not true. The services could be impacted.

Of course. And that's why we said earlier, you try to use the least impactful instruction if you're going to try to make cuts, and whether it's field trips or it's co-curricular, it's sports, which is big in this field. Whether it's transportation for the high school students and knocking that off so that you can afford to do the other things that are required by law, and no thank you state for chopping down and not supporting your mandates. It's interesting.

Louis: And we're really glad that you all came tonight because we did want to get word out because I do feel like the way it's written. It is layered enough that it suggests if you vote this, superintendentcy costs will go down, which many people are in support of, and it won't impact student learning. And that's not true. We don't know that. We can't know that. We don't have a crystal ball to tell us what the state will or won't give us, or what we'll get finally for special ed funding through federal grant, or what will occur with inflation and other.

Mandatory costs, and so once all that's carved away, there's just a finite amount we have. We have a finite amount of money to use, and when it's gone, it does impact teachers and classrooms and students and what we offer and how we can offer.

I think we definitely are conservative in our budgeting. We've been in the past, and we're very mindful. We don't just make this wish list and say, 'Ha, okay, everybody in favor of all of these special things for our kids? We just try to meet what our kids need. Oh, yes, Katie.

Katie Bocash - two questions. I'll just ask one, and then nobody has one. I'll ask the second. Listening to you read that bill, it states that you know the tax levy cap, but allowing for inflation and new building. That seems silly. New construction. So it's similar to a default budget, but the only thing that's not mentioned there that is included in the default budget is contractual obligations. Would this not allow for that? If this passes, would we not be able to cover increases in contractual obligations?

I think the problem is, Katie. We have to cover those.

What remains? So we have to take it from somewhere else, as opposed to the default budget. If the default budget goes through, we can put in the increases for contractual obligations. But this would not allow us to do that.

We have to take it from somewhere. Jack, do you know if the new construction meeting means new tax revenue because there are new buildings built in town?

We're covering a bond in Concord.

Which again is ironic because that's a huge expense, all the things you run into.

Working out over multiple taxpayers, interpreting that, you want to encourage debt. That's one. To some of the other points that we made here, we started the question, you talk about contractual obligations. What about state mandates? One of the state mandates that you have is no guaranteed retirement. Many of you remember they cut from 35 down to 25 percent contribution to zero back in 2011-2012. So when that rate changes, does that part of the cap? When we did our presentation, we said, 'Here's what it would be if you subtract that out. Here it is if you include it, but the law is silent.' So are we going to pay that? For every dollar of a person that's eligible to go to New Hampshire retirement.

And that is a teacher with 30 plus hours. You're required to pay in 35 hours for a non-teacher. You're required to pay in. Next year, that rate is a little over 18 percent of every dollar the district has to pay into New Hampshire retirement. If you're a non-teacher, it's a little under 12 percent of every dollar it's paid in New Hampshire retirement. It is mandated, not optional. So if that's not exempt, that all has to fit within that cap. To your point, it's a contractual obligation. We got to cut in order to make those required things.

Ms. Rebecca Sims, Concord Hill Road. One of the things that really concerns me about this is I had taught in a district in Laconia that had a tax cap, and I saw all the promises that were made with the tax cap and the reality of what really happened, and we were constantly losing. And I think a lot of the discussion the district has had about the schools and closing a school and whatnot has also had a massive impact on our enrollment. That we've seen a lot of people leaving the school district because of the uncertainty about what's going on. The reality is that as a state, we are obligated to provide public schools. The problem is that we look at our averages for Pittsfield against averages of, say, Bedford, and the percentage of special needs students. We are really at a disadvantage, already being at a disadvantaged property for town. If we accept this tax cap, we are going to see more reduction, which you've already stated is going to have a deeper impact on our earnings for maintaining the schools, and we have to look at a different way to turn that around. But capping it is not going to be an answer. It is only going to take more and more away from what is already at a minimal budget.

Based on what you've already shared with us, my question for you is: I notice other school districts and school boards have stated their position on the article. Have you agreed to or decided not to state your opinion on the article?

Becky: So we just recently received some additional guidance from the Secretary of State and Attorney General that school boards and school board

members can take a position. So we can do a roll call if you want. I am unequivocally opposed to the cap, and I think this is similar to what I had written in an article earlier. I think a large part of the trouble that

Certainly, Pittsfield, but many other school districts across the state are encountering the fact that the state, despite three Supreme Court rulings, has never addressed the core issue. The core issue is that it's unconstitutional and unfair to fund public education the way we do with local property taxes, because it introduces a huge disparity and it overpenalizes property poor communities that are already struggling to adequately educate their kids. I'm personally unequivocally opposed to it.

Sandra: Anybody else wants to? When you see that it's not a tax cut, it's a tax cap, and it's not tax relief, and we are going to be cutting students' services and cutting educational services. I think that, as an individual and not necessarily a board member, I am opposed.

Molly: I will vote no. Both as an individual and a board member, I'm opposed. Again, we didn't put a position forward. There was a lot. There's been a lot of scare tactic around this about whether or not boards can say what we can say, what educators can say, when they can say it, which is ironic. It's an issue that affects all of us, and not just school board members or teachers. It affects everybody in every community, so it feels like we should all have a voice in it. I'm very much opposed to it. I, like I said at the beginning, voters are welcome to have that voice at deliberative session and at the ballot. That's where we vote for or against our budgets. That's where we go to budget committee meetings. We weigh in. We attend local.

Hearings we participate in. That's what New Hampshire's about. It's about having a local voice. I think this takes that away. I think it will be crippling to our school district specifically, but I think it could be potentially crippling to public education generally in our state. Which, as a public educator for twenty-five years, terrifies me very much.

Tim: Very much a no. Already made my opinion known earlier today on Facebook. I'm against it currently. I can see a future where it might actually be something I would be in favor of. But we need a little bit more flexibility right now. We're looking to potentially tuition students out. Potentially have a building that's not filled and have costs that you won't have for a long term. The other is, as I think about this, you get another chance to vote for this in 2028. It was time to see what the impacts are on similar communities.

Tim: Let them vote in the tax cap and see what happens to them, and allow them to experiment with it and see what happens, and then vote 2028 with more informed knowledge on what you know similar examples have. That's my opinion, and that's personal opinion. I wouldn't state it as a board member, but I think when you look at it with the variable costs that are outside of inflation, between special education and what the state's going to pay in adequacy funding, with the potential change in how we're going to educate high school students, and it just doesn't make sense right now. And it will give you time to look at if a similar sized community with similar budget, if they impose a tax cap,

what happened to their programming? Did it actually affect student programming, or did it cut fat that existed that nobody?

Here it's always been for me a value proposition. Are we getting the best for our dollar we can? It's not a lot of having been on the board now, coming at the end of a three-year term. There's not a lot extra there to take out of the budget. It's pretty much at its bare bones. So I think it would be prudent to wait and see what happens in other communities, and also allow us to get through what we're going to do with the high school options like that. That's my opinion.

Adam: I'm against it as a board member and as a resident who pays taxes. We all do. We all feel it. We're trying to stay, keep the programs we have now struggling. We're trying to keep the level of budget. If we have this tax cap, programs and things are going to start disappearing. We're in this situation due to lawmakers in Congress voicing the question on our ballot. The same lawmakers who are approving a 10% administration cost to the EFA nonprofit organization from out of state. That's not right.

Rebecca: First, I want to thank you all for stating that. And just another point, well, two points. One is in Laconia, we did lose multiple co-curricular activities, and they probably still are. Secondly, if we continue in this direction, and our tuition is being paid to other districts, we have no say on what their tuition is going to be. That's going to increase our costs. At least here we have control, and I think you said it admirably: we do have a local voice, and it's up to us to maintain that. If we do this, we lose our voice. And as you mentioned, we've had 52 laws against public schools that have cut our budgets consistently in legislature.

Thank you. William, I believe you had your hand up here.

William, up Norris Road. My question may be for control, so I'll ask you. But I may be asking the gentleman over here. The school budget is the administrative portion that is potentially going to be affected by this question. Is it well defined within the budget? Do we know exactly what constitutes administrative expenses?

Jack: We're interpreting the law because it's not clear. We look at our contract for two hundred sixty thousand. Food services are out. Transportation is out. It doesn't count. Special ed is questionable, but we're not counting it. Believe it or not, even though there's a director, it's all relations to. The only other piece would be the IT portion, whether the contracts for that, which is between the person and the contracts, probably about one hundred and fifty thousand. Does that get added on?

I don't think if it passes the six percent, we'll affect that portion. But does it also look at organizations to say six percent is an acceptable

It should be raised. Have we asked the question to clarify what constitutes industry?

Depends on who you ask.

No. Have we formally asked whoever is presenting this in Concord to define what specific expectations mean? So we're making decisions based on actual expectations rather than just intuition.

We have been advised that SLE will count. Have you come back and told us what the answer is? They are working under the assumptions that they have. So part of the problem is I do think it's a moving target. Districts are asking attorneys, attorneys are asking lawmakers, lawmakers are giving information. Attorneys are questioning it because there's no precedent set. So there's

We vote next week.

Exactly. We met with our school district attorney, and she's incredibly competent and very well versed in law. She's defined the definition, I think.

So based on our interpretation, how far in advance, how many years in advance do we project our expenses, spend plan, budget, etc.? Military seven years. I don't know what we do for a local school. Couple years in advance.

Usually about a year or two. What we have done coming here, I don't know what that.

Those trends and projections. Do they keep us below the concern level for this?

Cap? Would be six percent for us.

Plus inflation, plus six percent. So you have nothing to expect that this is going to affect our administrative expenses.

This is only known for Pittsfield. It's a three-year contract. After that, it's whether there is a new one and that adjusts.

So as of right now, there's no, and we're well below the six percent concern. It's looking like it's not even going to affect us, based on what we can project. The six percent. The four percent, I can pay. I think we still do have local control. Because we can vote to override any bit of this, as the town. We've heard a couple times. We can't pick apart the bill out there, but we can vote. It's not constitutional. We can vote to override the restriction as a town if we decide we need to do so for our own purposes.

I think the only ability to override is again at the federal election in November, not at the local level. It's my understanding. Correct me if I'm wrong. It's my understanding that if this cap passes next week for Pittsfield, then the only time it can be overridden is at the federal election in November.

I'm reading what this says. Override the local tax cap. May be overridden by a three-fifths majority vote on a budget question. Only votes in the affirmative or negative are included in the calculation of the three-fifths majority. To exceed the tax cap, voting on a question must be by ballot in a traditional meeting and will be by official ballot in a Senate Bill Two meeting, which is our SB2. In communities without an annual meeting, meaning us, the legislative body will adopt the school district budget.

And it may not exceed the tax cap unless the legislative body overrides a cap by a supermajority vote as determined by a charter. There's all kinds of ifs ands

clauses to go with that. But because two of the factors used to calculate the tax levy—the inflation factor and the net new tax growth—may not be known at the first session in SB2 in February, when the appropriations to vote in March are finalized. They still may be unknown when voters vote on the district proposed appropriations in March by ballot, in an SB two district or at a traditional district meeting. So much is up in the air as far as being unknown. Once a year, we can override. Correct. Having. Yes. Thank you, William.

Louis. This is pretty simple. This is such an unnecessary. What? This whole article is unnecessary. We have always had the ability to put a cap on our budget. We have always had that. We've always used good sense in budgeting that we didn't need to. I guess I don't understand why. The only reason this is happening is to control the towns and it's not just us.

Meetings all across the state tonight for this same purpose. It is someone's trying to infringe on our rights. We have the right to put a cap on. We always have. We have the right at the deliberative session to cut that budget to the bone if you want. We have that right. Why are we doing this? This is silly. I don't understand. Only one reason. To control from the state, not local.

Thank you. Anyone, Katie? Is there somebody else who hasn't spoken yet? I'm sorry. Was there someone else who hasn't?

I was looking around to see if there's somebody that hasn't spoken yet that's raised their hand, but you've already spoken, and Katie.

Katie Bocash, I'm going to thank you in my comment here for your firsthand experience. I think that's invaluable. And thank you guys too. After tonight, I've made my decision, and I support you guys. I'm thoroughly opposed to this. But one point that we haven't talked about yet, and I heard it in the video, and I haven't read it anywhere else either. This information isn't getting out to people. They talked about not being able to accept new revenues from property reassessment.

Another one too. I don't remember which one it was. We're not due for another property assessment until four more years. But still, that's huge. If we can't accept your revenues, you're going to cap us, but then we can't accept these new revenues, even if they may be small. I don't know if there's more information on what those revenues might be.

I don't know. To me, that's important information, and if people knew that, I think that would sway them more towards a no vote. It did for me, and I didn't hear about that until today.

So noted. I'm not up on that part of it personally, and I'm brushing up just like all the rest of us here, trying to figure it all out.

We're not the same vote, but I mean just that one little piece. I was voting no revenue.

Yes. I was just gonna. What Louis had said, Rebecca said, there really isn't a necessity for Washington to accept it because we do have the local voice option line by line on the budgets when they come to us. What the bigger picture is, as I see it, is a way of dismantling public education. There are so many new

policies from the state coming down to us that don't require certified teachers in private schools, charter schools, but do require almost master degrees, primarily in public schools. And so when you look at the funding of these things, it's going to be cheaper in those other schools. But when they don't meet the criteria that mandates to test in a public school, and they are not mandated to test in a private or charter school. Where is the equal balance in it? We're trying to prove we're meeting all these obstacles, but you're never going to get a quarter of our population who are special ed to meet the guidelines on a standardized test, which are privately designed. They're not designed by educators. So I think you have to look at a holistic view of this, and not as just a yes/no. What is really being done here, and what's being done is destruction of public schools, and it's going to hurt us.

Bruce: just a question. The feeling in the room, which is sparse, is pretty one-sided. So I'm wondering what the since the board has made their position known. What avenues board, we're going to try to explore by next Tuesday, to allow the voters to know that they think this is a bad idea. And I'm not asking you to answer that now, but I mean we've made very clear how you feel, so I think that's important for the voters to know.

Thank you. We're nearing seven o'clock, Melissa.

I apologize, Melissa, Ingalls Road. I apologize if I've missed this in communication from the school, but I didn't know about that video that's on the website. I utilize the website when I need to go look for something. I don't just look at it over my morning coffee. But if there's a way to put that link out there so that people know it's there, people go looking for it if you don't know it's there. So I don't know if putting it on social media. I know that the school has ways to communicate out to the masses as well. Maybe that is a way to do that. I also know that there's a thing that I've signed up through the town hall that I get information, and maybe talking to town hall that's something that they can share as well, so that can go out to the people that have also signed up for those updates. But I do feel like the clock is ticking, and hearing less cap your taxes.

Geez, that does sound great. But nobody ever thinks of that trickle-down effect, and maybe by taking the eight minutes it takes to watch that, it would help people.

Listen, I think the school has to be very careful with promoting or not promoting. But if they were to give that to someone here in the audience, and that person spreads it all over Facebook for the next four or five days, it'll go somewhere. And they can't do that, but if we get the link, we could do that.

But until we had heard back, Becky had heard back from the state level. We genuinely didn't know if we could even hold a public hearing. Can we speak? What do we say? Are we allowed to speak? Do we just provide materials? How do we provide materials? Where can we provide materials? How can the materials get to the public? I think this is a compounding factor. What we found, and this has not been, we haven't had a lot of time to digest, process, understand either. So it's very much our intention and hope that hosting would start getting word out. But we recognize that the time is ticking, and we haven't

had. And I guess I'm just assuming to counter what you're saying, if it is okay for the school district to have it on their website, I don't understand why it wouldn't be acceptable to share at this point. And that was given. Through another company, it's not a video that was made by any means. I know you missed that part at the beginning, but that's all.

Was the board told that?

You could share the video? We got that legal advice then.

Media or just at this meeting? We could use it. Anywhere. Basically, the guidance that we received is that as elected officials.

We can share our positions. The superintendent can share his or her position. Where they draw the line is that no taxpayer money can be used in that dissemination. In this case, the video was produced not by anybody here, so sharing that would not be an issue. The other thing that we have to be very careful about is that we can't use the school population to take a position. So we would not be allowed to send anything home through students to parents, for instance, because that's advocacy and it's using official channels.

It's considered electioneering. And in fact, until we got the attorney generals and the office you mentioned a week and a half ago, it was like you're going to be charged a thousand dollars because it's a misdemeanor if you are going to tell the public what you would vote, and so we've been so nervous about even saying, oh geez, I can't even say if I'm going to vote yes or no because I'm going to get charged with a misdemeanor. Thank you very much, family. That being said, yes.

Frank. Frank Babcock, Ingalls Road. I was curious about Bruce. What do you think of this? When we have votes on the ballot for budgets, we can put right on the ballot whether or not the select board supports it, or whether or not the budget committee and what amount of them. Are we not able to do that for this? Even though it's basically affecting the city.

The actual language of the question is mandated in state law. It's the same question. It appears the same way, and there's no room whatsoever on the question itself on the ballot to say anything else.

And it's too late, obviously. Below it would say school board supports this measure five zero.

Right. Just like on our budgets when we vote, it says recommended by them.

This is like a national ballot now because we're going to be voting on the question 2.

There's been so much confusion about this question when it was first passed. We had our district attorney come in to help us walk through it and all the implications and consequences of it. It's a one paragraph question. Her guidance to us was seven pages.

So that costs us money.

It costs every district. Legal, and for our security. But good point, Frank. It would be nice if we could just say the budget committee approved of this. How many people here and how many in the community approve of this, and then you go from there and then you vote.

But the basic reason is because it's not the town's question.

Correct. It's the whole state, every town.

It was the town's question.

This question is a house bill, so it comes from the state. We have no say in it. We had no voice in it. We have no voice towards it when it comes to voting, except our own individual votes. And it's mandated to be on all of our November third election ballots.

Throughout the state. Bruce, help clarify something for us.

I apologize. I have terrific handwriting. I could make a banner and hold it up on election day that says the school board opposes Article Number Two by five to zero.

That's electioneering. We just express your opinion. I'm just asking. We can't do that though.

That's okay. I can hold. Don't say the school board. That's electioneering. We can't have that.

It has to be our opinion. And the sad thing is the people that vote for this. Their taxes could go up because of voting for it. We don't know the impact of it in the long run. So this is like a horrible thing, a horror story that we're walking into. And you see people online saying, "I'm voting yes," and they have no clue they're voting. No clue, and it's sad.

They have a clue because it was written that they're going to have a property tax cap.

Our government. But they don't understand the impact of that cap..

We get four kids that move in at a hundred thousand dollars a piece. Where do we get the money? Can we borrow from the town? Where does it go? Does it go to the taxpayers then? On our tax? It's a scary thing that people aren't talking about, and I'm not sure they even thought about it because they don't have to deal with it like we do. But it's scary as to what could happen, not just to the school, the town. Will the town be on the hook for some of that money if we have to pay for kids? Because the thing is, if they were smart, they would have dismantled some of these unnecessary laws. Not add 52 new ones. If they had dismantled some of the silly requirements that are made on our school, then we wouldn't have to be so high per student. Doesn't take a genius to look at all the silly laws.

Louis Houle: That are there. If we wanted to fix something, I wouldn't just go pile more on and say, "Oh, can't do this." I would go in and start saying, "Well, maybe we can take this off, and we can get rid of this, and we can get rid of that." Why aren't we doing that? Instead, we do something stupid to freeze it,

and I'm sorry, it's stupid, and we're all going to pay for that in the long run. It's going to cost us big money, and some people just can't see the forest for the trees. All they see is a cap. They don't see what's underneath that cap.

The other interesting piece, speaking about mandates, is that in this question, in question two, there are some parameters about what is considered a SAU administrative expense. It's not.

Becky: It still takes a lot of interpretation, but there are some parameters behind it. There's another law that was also passed this year that requires every SAU, no matter how big or small or how many school districts they cover, not to create their own separate budget, so that voters understand what is a school district budget and what is the administrative budget. Part of the dilemma with that is that the way that law defines administrative expenses under the SAU is different from the way they're defined in question two. I was going to bring that up. More mud.

There are two different definitions with different things included or excluded. In the actual definitions of what is part of an SAU, part of SAU administrative expenses, so the very administrators, and for us again, we're already well below the cap in terms of the SAU cost. But the irony here is that you're putting so much more work on the very administrators right now to comply with all these mandates, including developing one budget over here for this purpose, and then taking some stuff out and putting some other stuff in for this budget over here.

And there's no consideration for the money it's going to take to develop that budget, have somebody review that budget and study that budget. So now that is already increasing the cost of the SAU.

Sandra: I want to recognize Dr. Anderson, the principal here, and Melissa Brown, the assistant principal, and I want to recognize Business Administrator Jack Dunn, who has helped us this evening, and our Superintendent, Dr. Timothy Herbert. Thank you for coming. These are SAU people here, so I wanted to recognize them and thank you so much for being here all these hours. Anyone else have anything to add? We're at seven ten. Anything else? It's important, so thank you all very much for coming.

Minutes prepared from recording

Sandra Adams, Board Chair

October 31, 2026