

Keep food services in the community

By DEBORAH DUBORD

In the interest of keeping costs down, I have determined it would be cheaper to establish an Internet blog for local news.

If cost were my only concern, I would drop my subscription to *the Chronicle*. I would certainly be more likely to do so if my job was contracted-out, a move *the Chronicle* supported in a recent editorial (Threads and Needles, March 23).

I know that *the Chronicle* provides a valuable service by keeping citizens informed, and over the years the newspaper has made a strong commitment to our community.

However, the editors have sent a conflicting message that service and community commitment are less important than striking a bargain when it comes to safe, healthy meals in our schools.

Extending *the Chronicle's* logic, it's actually cheaper to get my news from China. I found a blog based there that offers free silk sweaters if I give them my credit card number, which apparently doesn't obligate me to continue using their services.

Most of us wouldn't give such an offer a second thought. But based on their position, it seems to me that's just what *the Chronicle's*

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editors would advise me to do.

As the president of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 that represents the Windham Public Schools' food service workers,

I am offended by this misguided logic that puts cutting corners ahead of delivering reliable services. We work in the schools because we are proud to contribute to a quality education for our community's children.

Our members are among the lowest paid employees in the system.

Wages and medical insurance standards will be lowered if the services we provide are outsourced to for-profit private contractors. The result would be saving a few bucks on the backs of those that can least afford it.

Private contractors will bid on our schools' food services for profit. The last time I checked the list of companies in the industry, none were located in *the Chronicle's* readership area.

Their profits would support another community's tax base, which would do little to help rebuild our local economy.

The editorial claims that the contracting-out

scheme is the superintendent's "fiscal obligation." We want to help find a fair and just solution to the economic problems we face. We are willing to work with the school board through the negotiations process, and have been trying to schedule a meeting on a new contract since the beginning of March.

Contracting out our jobs and ultimately hurting the quality of our children's education is not a fiscal obligation. It is a lack of leadership.

I hope that community residents who share our belief in quality public education will let Windham's superintendent and school board know that contracting-out food services is a bad idea and should go no further.

I also hope that they don't actually cancel their newspaper subscription just because *the Chronicle* got it wrong in an editorial.

Dubord is the manager of food services at Windham Middle School and president of the Windham Schools Cafeteria Workers, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001.

(Editor's note: the Chronicle did not support outsourcing the food service. It supported a study to see if outsourcing is a viable alternative. Until the study results are in, there is no alternative to evaluate.)