

Turn-off the Lights and Close the Door on Your Way Out

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The second Hampton School Board forum was held Thursday night. I couldn't be more sympathetic for the City of Hampton and how stupid the incumbents count on Hampton citizens being. Unfortunately, citizens may be uninformed but they are definitely not stupid. If the incumbents – Martha Mugler, Phyllis Henry – and former employee – Ann Stephens-Cherry – make it back to Hampton City Schools, it will be our children who will continue to suffer.

Mugler, Henry and Stephens-Cherry read from their résumés at both campaign forums to date. Failures were plugged as accomplishments and significant contributions...to hear them tell it.

“Jane Doe”, from Fox Hill, wouldn't have any reason to disbelieve that school board policies are being expertly kept-up by Mugler. What Ms. Doe most likely doesn't know is that, Hampton School Board currently has policies out of compliance with state law. Yes, Martha Mugler's boast of her policy expertise isn't what it's cracked-up-to-be. As evident in the school board minutes – minutes which must contain a summary of the discussion on matters proposed – in 2015, no policy discussion was noted with Mugler's participation.

With the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) dictating policy, I'm curious why the school board has a lawyer. Outside counsel is often hired and policies are provided by VSBA. Hampton could save \$250,000 – by firing their lawyer – and have a board member serve collateral duty as policies watchdog. Instead of having a board member appointed to the **Federal Relations** committee, a board member could be appointed to ensure policies are compliant with state and federal laws. Perform a duty required of their elected position. A quarter million dollars saved. This offers a real savings, unlike the reported savings in utilities Mugler spews. Last year, utilities spending actually went up. This doesn't include the 5.54% pay raises that the energy specialist received this year. Or the failure to implement money saving recommendations discovered during the efficiency review of 2009...though Hampton reports otherwise. Mugler knows that Ms. Doe doesn't have a clue on how to begin to fact check her malarkey on this one. Just saying the words “efficiency review” sounds productive...doesn't it? It's disturbing to think that board members do this because they can get away with it.

“John Smith”, from Wythe, shouldn't doubt that our old schools have been revitalized through renovations as Henry tells us. After all, she retired from Hampton City Schools and has been a board member for 12 years. In Henry's words, the schools are “more attractive, more homey, and more pleasant for the students” in part because of “new lights and ceilings” have been installed. Except in the cafeterias ([http://www.hamptonfacts.com/uploads/FY16 Hampton City Schools Health Department Inspections - updated.pdf](http://www.hamptonfacts.com/uploads/FY16_Hampton_City_Schools_Health_Department_Inspections_-_updated.pdf)), I guess? But kids will have the academies created through the Ford Next Generation Learning (Ford NGL) initiative to propel students into adulthood. Except, like Armstrong School for the Arts, the number of students permitted to participate will be limited. A gated community – like Fort Monroe will become – if you will. There will be prerequisites to allow students to access a waiting list for Ford NGL programs that will require parents to provide transportation to out of school zones. As previous school board candidate Joanne Morse suggested four years ago, Hampton should provide a transfer location for buses to get students to programs that will keep them engaged. But it's interesting to know that Henry would have no qualms in sending her grandchildren to the two schools denied accreditation, “Andrews” and “Bassette”. She would drive them there if needed. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to move your children around the district like that too? Maybe to a fully accredited school. Hampton could allow that option for parents but refuses. Does being a board member allows you the luxury of getting your children or grandchildren to the school or program of your choice?

More importantly, when Mugler and Henry were asked who's accountable for **ONLY** 12 schools being fully accredited, Henry hopped to her feet and was quick to chime in..."**SUPERINTENDENT**" down to "**TEACHERS**". In the Navy, when a ship runs aground or into another ship, it's not the navigational officer (superintendent of schools), but the commanding officer who bears the brunt of the blame. In other words, the school board. But Henry removed that option as a possible reason and Mugler didn't feel the need to correct Henry because according to Mugler – "Mrs. Henry described it perfectly." The message came across crystal clear.

Henry also blamed one student for a school failing to achieve accreditation. One student. Not the other 100 students who also failed their SOL tests, but that one lone student who pushed the school over the edge. That's one student is in the bull's-eye for extra assistance...not the other 100 students. They aren't to **BLAME**.

Finally, does working the dedication of the Coliseum umpteen years ago equates to skills needed to push for policies and accountability to fix our broken schools? Is the ability to spin a tale and hand-out plaques while failing to provide information in a Freedom of Information Act request an example of having the right stuff? Wouldn't we all agree that a former employee who remained employed at HCS for 17 years – during which she did her job – is a significant accomplishment worthy of a school board seat? Stephens-Cherry would like us to think so. Except Stephens-Cherry claims to have observed rubber stamping, lack of transparency, and inequalities to which she remained silent.