

The Berkshire Eagle

The Berkshires



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By Alan Chartock

Lining up the selectmen of my choice

GREAT BARRINGTON

There is an interesting race on for Great Barrington selectman, or in this case, selectwoman. I recently had a chance to speak with Alana Chernila. She is young, well-spoken, open, a mother and willing to learn. I will vote for her in the upcoming election.

There are three other candidates for the two seats, one of whom is Steve Bannon, the former proprietor of Bill's Pharmacy and a man I have admired for a long time. Steve is dedicated to serving the town of Great Barrington and we are extremely lucky to have him. He is also the head of the School Committee and is concerned with the welfare of the town's school children. Bannon has checked with the state ethics committee and they have given him the green light to run even though he will have two key positions in our community. If it's good enough for the ethics people, it's good enough for me.

The combination of a young person representing the thinking of a substantial community of young parents along with Steve Bannon is the best we could hope for. Since the superb Walter "Buddy" Atwood is at the head of the Board of Selectmen, we will be very well-positioned going into a difficult and trying year.

Speaking of Steve Bannon's run for selectman and his interest in our children's education, I think it is time to step back and consider the issue of charter schools in our area. The way that charter schools work is that some of the education money from the town and state follows the student.

I am a huge charter proponent for places where the schools are so bad that the kids have no hope. There's no guesswork about this; the kids either measure up or they do not. But when you have a school system that is doing the job well, as the folks in the Southern Berkshire or Berkshire Hills districts are doing, it makes no sense to allow a few dilettantes with too much time on their hands, no matter how well-meaning they might be, to create a charter school.

If they want to start a private school, fine. Good luck to them. But it makes no sense to weaken a fine school system. I am writing this now because there are murmurs that the people who were thwarted once in their attempt to develop a local charter school are going to try again this year. I will be there, as will the parents and taxpayers who said no last time. Forewarned.

A recent front page story in this newspaper announced, "Barlow land to become park." I think that's great. The land right off Route 20 in Lee will be enjoyed by those who wish to take advantage. I love the fact that our little Lake Mansfield in Great Barrington has proven to be such a wonderful gathering place for everyone in our town. I am, however, more than a little concerned about those well-intentioned not-for-profit groups who buy up land that is not always accessible for recreational purposes.

While I know my position on this will raise the hackles of these very good people, I think that when state and even private money (with tax breaks) is raised to buy up land and it is later not available for public recreational use, their good intentions are sometimes misguided. Let the people use what their taxes are paying for.

Finally, if I haven't annoyed enough people yet this week, there is a very interesting group called WiredWest that is trying to bring high speed Internet to everyone in the Berkshires. This is very important and essential to anyone seeking an even break in commerce or in their studies.

Under the new state plan, the Internet would be brought to the center of each of our towns. Unfortunately, the outliers might never have a chance to ditch their dial-up modems in favor of high speed service. The big companies seem disinclined to do it because it is not cost-efficient for them. This plan will be brought to the various town meetings, 46 of them to be exact, that will become the governing board of the new WiredWest system. This sounds like a great idea that will bring business and learning to our area.

Not to have high speed Internet at this stage puts some folks at an incredible disadvantage. We should all support this initiative.

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