

Hello abisbikos,

Monica C Swyden

I am writing to express severe dismay at the actions of Jason LaChapelle and Tim Vaillancourt on November 20, 2021 on the social media platform, Facebook. A Colchester teacher made an honest mistake on when commenting on a national news event. After a short while, approximately two hours, once her mistake was realized, she removed her post, expressed regret and embarrassment, and corrected herself.

Jason LaChapelle took it upon himself to write in his capacity as “a duly elected representative on the Board of Selectmen” to the Superintendent and the Board of Education asking them to take action regarding her employment. Clearly, he has no understanding of his role as an elected official on the BOS to make policy for the town. He says that the teacher had “destroyed public confidence” in her and accuses her of “sowing divide in the classroom.” He urges Mr. Burt and the BOE to “hold the teacher accountable for her unethical and unteacherly behavior.” He said that he also asked the Board of Selectman to include his letter in your next meeting packet, probably as a form of public embarrassment. He then posted this horrible letter all over multiple public media sites. When it was suggested that Jason apologize, he wrote, “I will not apologize for making public an action I took as a member of the Board of Selectman.”

Tim Vallaincourt does not understand his position as a Board of Finance member either. He wrote, “as a citizen, a taxpayer and a duly elected member of the BOF, I am not surprised...this teacher is poisoning children’s minds...Mr. Burt act now, act swiftly. Or I will call on the BOE to do your duty.”

Screenshots of all of these posts are available upon request.

Please add this correspondence to your packet for your Dec. 2, 2021 meeting.

Both of these men used their newly elected positions of authority as town leaders to threaten, harass, and intimidate an employee of the town, who is protected by the First Amendment. This behavior is toxic and a clear overstepping of boundaries. It should be noted, and is not surprising that, the teacher who was harassed is an active member of the Democratic party. These men had the clear intention of using the power of their offices to silence her through fear.

Sadly, when I reviewed the Colchester Code of Ethics, I saw nothing about elected officials using their office to intimidate and bully anyone, let alone a town employee. This should clearly be a violation of ethics as it is immoral and cannot be justified. It is completely unacceptable and as much of a legal liability to the town as the actions already mentioned in the Code of Ethics.

Therefore, in addition to asking you to censure both Jason LaChapelle and Tim Vallaincourt, I am asking that you review the Code of Ethics and consider a revision to include a clause that disallows elected officials from using their office to harass, bully, intimidate any citizen or town employee. Elected official need to keep their roles and responsibilities as described in the Charter, not use authoritarian tactics to scare people who might disagree with them into silence.