

## **Rooting For His Schools**

By Michael J. Atwood

I don't normally give political endorsements. That said, on April 7th, I think you should vote for Neal Gouck for School Committee.

Now the School Committee has not exactly been on my "good" side this year mostly due to their dealing with the *Afghans*. I totally blame them for shipping out the valuable piece of donated art to Sotheby's and their current desire to defy an order from the Attorney General of Massachusetts by selling it. We won't even get into the slighting of the Thompson family. Furthermore, I take issue with some of the events that have gone on concerning the treatment of North Attleborough teachers, potential layoffs, decisions made with funding, and the school budget. We need some new blood on the School Committee.

Neal Gouck, who started his own campaign blog (see link below), says that if he were a member of the School Committee, he'd have taken a different approach with the *Afghans* controversy. He's a military guy, who attended West Point, and is now an ROTC Assistant Professor at Providence College, where he is pursuing his MBA. But he's also a hometown kid – a 1992 North Attleborough High School graduate, a National Honor Society member, and a former star athlete in football and wrestling. He's won awards – the coveted Balfour trophy – but now he gives awards.

"The School Committee looked at *Afghans* and saw a million dollars," says Gouck. "As an ROTC scholarship and enrollment officer, I deal with \$6 million dollars in

award money to ROTC candidates per year. The value of *Afghans* did not faze me in the least.”

As a School Committee member, Gouck feels he can make a difference. He points to his military training and leadership experience as well as his athletic background. It seems that his whole life he has been a member of teams.

“You need to win over your peers and make them see your point,” says Gouck. “I’ve been on teams for years. We have to work together to do what’s best for North Attleborough.”

Gouck’s attitude is that he wants to “give back” to North Attleborough. He says he has no political agenda.

“I’m not running because I want to build a new sports complex or a performing arts theater,” says Gouck. “My sister-in-laws were and are teachers and I love this town but I have no agenda.”

As for the budget cuts in town and the thirty teaching positions that have been threatened, Gouck feels that it’s an unfortunate time.

“It’s not a nice situation but we still have to consider how we go about it. You don’t pull out a list of names,” remarks Gouck. “I like how Dr. Rice has been laying out a strategic plan, administering surveys, and doing things systematically. We need to take a hard look at our school system’s values and mission. Are we promulgating the correct values? How does the strategic plan, the future of our school system play into these cuts?”

Gouck feels that if cuts are made, the town needs to look at infrastructure and other programs in place.

“When I saw the superintendent was looking at these things, I realized they were in my paradigm coming from a military and business background. Are the right systems in place? How are we approaching No Child Left Behind and MCAS? When there are cuts you have to be sure to be fair to people as well as programs.”

He feels that the budget will always be an issue, even in stable financial times, and although the cuts taking place this year are tough, certain fees being put in place may not be a solution.

“These proposed fees seem like a band aid – not a remedy,” says Gouck.

Gouck has looked to the new Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, for advice on education.

“I think our district needs to be less married to the scores and more concerned with the outcomes as Duncan said in his interview recently with Charlie Rose,” says Gouck.

How invested is Gouck in North Attleborough? His son attends the Early Learning Center as a model student. His brother is a fire department dispatcher. His relatives teach in the district. He grew up on Broad Street and even after going away for his military career, he ended up right back in his hometown.

“I think they’ll have to carry us out of North Attleborough on a stretcher,” says Gouck. “I’m invested in this town; we’re here to stay.”

In fact, he had an epiphany moment when he dropped off his son on his first day of school at the Early Learning Center.

“When I walked in I realized, this was the very classroom that I began my education in as a kindergarten student at School Street School,” says Gouck.

As far as interaction with the North Attleborough Teachers Union, Gouck says he's already reached out.

"I come from a family of teachers. I want to know what they need. It's about the impact they make in the classroom. It's all about people in my opinion."

He also recalls his own education in North Attleborough fondly and points to the impact it had on his as a student. Gouck credits many educators in the district as helping him form ideas about his future.

"Many people might recall me as an athlete but I was also a student – secretary of the National Honor Society," says Gouck. "Going to school in North Attleborough was like a page out Americana."

He says he plans on having a very unrestrained view of things and plans to think creatively.

"I've been outside of North Attleborough and now I'm back," says Gouck. "But I have new ideas and I'm prepared to say what I think is best for our school system and the town."

For more on Neal Gouck check out: <http://nealgouck.choseit.com/>