

To the Citizens of Chatham:

# *Has Chatham Gone Mad ?*

Friday afternoon, December 10th, I was escorting an out-of-town speaker and his colleague into the Community Center to address the 100 or so members of the Chatham Retired Men's Association.

We encountered Frank Messina, and what appeared to be other close friends of the Town Manager, who had commandeered the lobby. Messina was shouting at people entering the building, urging them to go over to the reception desk (where the Town employee usually sit) to sign petitions to throw Florence Seldin, Sean Summers and Tim Roper out of office. What public official authorized this?

It is an outrage that this group was using Town property to bully people into signing recall petitions aimed at Florence Seldin and the others. It was a huge embarrassment for the Town in front of our out-of-town guests.

Town employees like Harbormaster Stuart Smith, and spouses of Town employees like John Geiger, and close friends of the Town Manager such as Frank Messina and Andrew Siffard, all have a right to protest the decision of the Board of Selectmen not to renew the Town Manager's contract. But spreading false information, such as that the Town Manager was fired, and displaying ugly behavior such as this, reflect badly on the Town Manager and coarsen public debate.

It was also sickening to watch Chairman Len Sussman publicly insult Florence Seldin's integrity by attempting to intimidate her to change her vote on November 19th. Florence Seldin has spent many years in volunteer service to the Town of Chatham. She is intelligent, honest, diligent and works hard to get the facts straight. Though I have differed with her from time to time on various issues, Jackie and I respect her enormously for her integrity and unwavering dedication to the best interests of the town.

The Selectmen know this Town Manager. The Board's last

performance evaluation, as reported in the February 4, 2010 Cape Cod Chronicle, gave him a declining rating of just 72%. Only the Town Manager's ever-reliable Mr. Whitcomb even raised the idea of a five-year reappointment, and that was rejected 4-1. For all his demagogic public posturing and show of indignation, not even Chairman Sussman supported a new 5-year contract.

We do not doubt for a second that Florence Seldin and the other Selectmen believed they were acting in the best interests of the Town in seeking someone new in whom they can place their trust and confidence to guide the Town through the next very difficult years. After extensive discussions in executive session, the Town Manager and all five selectmen reached a satisfactory agreement with respect to his present contract ending June 30, 2011. The Town Manager and all five Selectmen signed the addendum to his contract reflecting that agreement, and all five Selectmen voted 5-0 in a public meeting to ratify their action.

Recall is a drastic measure, like impeachment at the federal level. A recall should be reserved only in cases of high crimes or improprieties. It is not a political weapon deployed to remove Selectmen for merely casting a vote that a few disagree with.

Selectmen Seldin, Summers and Roper do not deserve this shabby treatment. The recall proponents should be ashamed.

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*Mr. Meaney is a co-founder of Chatham Concerned Taxpayers and a former bond counsel of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Mrs. Meaney is a former aide in Washington to a U.S. Congressman.*