

CHURCH from 8

N.H. Rebellion following in the footsteps of Granny D

By **DAYMOND STEER**
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

tory. I hope the voters will not haphazardly vote to tear this down.”

Resident Norman Head suggested forming a community committee to investigate solutions of what to do about the church, from restoring it to relocating it. He agreed to lead the committee and it has had some meetings since then.

Resident Leslie Mallett said the church holds a special place in her heart.

“I was baptized in this church,” she said. “I was married in this church. My children were confirmed there and my grandmother cleaned this church. I think we’re going about this the wrong way in looking to destroy the building. Let’s see what we can do to preserve it.”

The board is scheduled to sign off on the warrant and budget when it meets next on Jan. 7. Those items would then move forward to the lone public hearing on Feb. 4. Voters will have final say at the school meeting on March 4.

CONWAY — The New Hampshire Rebellion, a 185-mile anti-corruption march, will be passing through the Mount Washington Valley in January. The march is led by a Harvard professor who was inspired by New Hampshire icon and campaign finance reform activist “Granny D.”

The late Monadnock region resident, Doris Haddock, at the age of 89, famously walked across the country in 1999 to call attention to the issue.

Today, Harvard professor Lawrence Lessig is carrying on Haddock’s legacy with a march he calls the New Hampshire Rebellion. Lessig is the Roy L. Furman Professor of Law and Leadership at Harvard Law School and director of the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard University.

“I don’t care about something called campaign finance reform,” said Lessig. “I care about something called corruption. I think talking about this as if it’s campaign finance reform is like talking about the problem of an alcoholic as if he had a liquid intake problem.”

The march will begin on Jan. 11 at the Balsams Grand Resort in Dixville Notch and is expected to end on Jan. 24 in Nashua where there will be an event to remember Haddock.

Lessig hopes to organize two more such walks between now and the 2016 presidential primary. Lessig hopes about 50 people will do the full march this January as it would be difficult to manage a larger group during a first attempt to do the walk. Lessig says they need volunteers to offer their homes for marchers to stay in and they also would appreciate anyone willing to offer coffee. Those wishing to walk a portion of the march are welcome to come.

“Anything they can do from spreading the message to joining in the march is incredibly helpful,” said Lessig.

Along the route, marchers hope to chat with as many people as possible.

As of Dec. 17, a couple thousand people signed up to march or participate in some other way.

Marchers are expected to pass through Gorham on Jan. 13, and reach Pinkham

Notch/North Conway by Jan. 15 and spend the following day between North Conway and Tamworth. By Jan. 18, the marchers are expected to reach Laconia.

The longest single stretch will be about 21 miles and the average distance to be traveled in one day is about 10 miles. Anyone wishing to participate in the entire march should be used to covering this type of distance.

“I’m most impressed by the fact that one of the people who has committed to doing the full march is a 77-year-old man from Massachusetts,” said Lessig.

According to Lessig, the U.S. government is systemically corrupted because Congress has to spend its time raising money and appeasing a tiny fraction of the wealthiest Americans rather than trying to help everyone else. The problem has gotten much worse over the past 14 years, said Lessig.

“New Hampshire is the perfect state to make our stand,” said Lessig.

Of course, New Hampshire has the first-in-the-nation presidential primary, and the right of rebellion is literally in the New Hampshire State Constitution. Eighty percent of New Hampshire residents believe campaign finance reform is the first step in improving the government.

The N.H. Rebellion is aimed at encouraging residents to press every presidential candidate on the issue of federal corruption, which Lessig stresses is a bipartisan problem. The question Lessig wants people to ask presidential candidates is, “What are you going to do about the corruption in Washington?”

Politicians refuse to speak openly about corruption unless they are forced, said Lessig. A 2012 Gallup poll indicated that the No. 2 priority of Americans was addressing corruption. Concerns about corruption came second only to the creation of high quality jobs.

“What was amazing was that even though that was number two on the top 10 list, neither Romney nor Obama mentioned the issue anywhere on their websites,” said Lessig. “It was totally invisible.”

Lessig wants candidates to specifically say what types of bills they would be willing to support. This will help the public distinguish between sincere candidates and those who are

toeing the line for the wealthy elite.

According to Lessig, there are a number of viable solutions to the corruption problem.

“We’ve created a system of funding elections where candidates for Congress spend 30 to 70 percent of their time raising money from about 150,000 Americans,” said Lessig. “That means .05 percent of Americans, it turns out, the same number of people are named ‘Lester’ in America, are the essential funders of campaigns. If you spend half your time trying to figure out what .05 percent of Americans want so that they’ll fund your campaign, you can’t help but become oblivious to what 99.95 of Americans want.”

When asked for examples of corruption, Lessig asked a reporter what was Congress’ top priority in the first quarter of 2011. Despite two wars and a troubled economy, Congress was consumed with the “bank swipe fee controversy.”

That fight was about how much debit card companies should be able to charge in fees. Not surprisingly, the credit card companies wanted to be able to charge high percentage fees while retailers wanted those fees to be small. The two sides battled each other with campaign contributions and lobbyists. Lessig says no member of Congress was elected by the people to solve that particular problem.

“Every time a congressman danced one way or the other, thousands of dollars would rain down upon them from the credit card industry, the banks or the retail industry,” said Lessig adding Congress is focused on what will get them contributions rather than what’s beneficial to the public.

The corruption shows itself in terms of lack of regulation on financial instruments, like derivatives, and the excesses of the military industrial complex.

The bottom line, according to Lessig, is there needs to be a way to spread out the funder influence. There are a few plans that would help accomplish that end. One is the Grassroots Democracy Act, which is pushed by Congressman John Sarbanes (D-Maryland).

Lessig would like to see taxpayers get a rebate on some of their federal taxes that

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would be returned in the form of a voucher that can be given to candidates who commit to getting their money from small donors only.

When asked about the strategy of launching the campaign in January, Lessig admits it will be tough. Lessig began talking about having such a march in September. He floated the idea again at an event in October and the response was positive. One person told Lessig that doing the march over the summer in New Hampshire would be impossible because of black flies.

"Look, it's going to be difficult," said Lessig of the march. "I wouldn't say it's Valley Forge because George Washington didn't have Gore-Tex and we'll have Gore-Tex and lots of layers of synthetic materials to keep us warm. Let's get one-tenth of George Washington out on the streets and I think that will be enough to inspire America."

New Hampshire is one of seven states that recognizes the right of revolution in its constitution and one of only a few states that have constitutions that say it would be "absurd" to deny the right of the people to throw off their government.

"If the government fails to do its job we have an obligation to do something about it," said Lessig. "That's the obligation we're trying to give form to."

Lessig was originally inspired to pursue campaign finance reform by the late Aaron Swartz, a computer programmer who helped develop the RSS news feed system and create the popular website, Reddit. Swartz was a fellow at the Safra Center.

Swartz killed himself at the age of 26 after federal authorities accused him of illegally trying to download millions of academic journals.

Lessig didn't support Swartz's alleged actions. But Lessig said it's not obvious that he was guilty of a criminal act and that the charges Swartz faced were not stealing in the ordinary sense. Lessig said Swartz can be thought of as an inspirational figure who stood up for what he thought was right. The march

begins on the anniversary of Swartz's death and ends on Granny D's birthday.

"Aaron Swartz's only motivation was to try to give the third world access to scientific knowledge," said Lessig.

Lessig has a bit of a following in Conway already. An outgrowth of that was the passage of Article 33 on last April's warrant. Article 33 instructed selectmen to tell state and federal lawmakers to support a Constitutional amendment to clarify that the U.S. Constitution is for people and that the people through their elected officials have the right to regulate but not ban campaign contributions by any entity. In other words, constitutional protections would extend to natural people and not corporations, unions, nonprofits or any other type of "artificial person." According to Bagshaw, as things stand now, the U.S. Supreme Court interprets the U.S. Constitution as if corporations are people.

Article 33 passed in Conway by a vote of 704 to 520.

"I would certainly hope those who voted for or against Article 33 did so with an understanding of the issue," said Bagshaw.

Prior to the vote, Maynard Thomson, the former chair of the Carroll County Republican Committee, said he opposes Article 33. In a letter to the editor, Thomson called the proposal "grotesquely over-broad."


Bagshaw said the idea for Article 33 sprung from a local book study group that was focused on one of Lessig's works, "Republic Lost."

"We wanted to do something other than writing and signing petitions," said Bagshaw. "You can sign petitions all day long but frankly, the people with money don't care and the people who give the money aren't listening to you."

Conway resident Dick Pollock organized the book group. Pollock plans to participate in the march and says that it's helpful that Lessig will be doing the walk but Pollock says he's more interested in the cause.

When asked what he thought about Lessig's upcoming march, Bagshaw said it's a "fine idea."

For more information about the march visit nhrebellion.org.



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