

## Undecided after decision

### Town unsure about health insurance

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**MIDDLEBURY** — Town employees warned First Selectman Thomas P. Gormley that they would file a grievance with the state when the town switched health plans last year.

They also told officials they would win if their complaint was sent to arbitration, and they did.

So now what?

That's the question town officials are asking after the Department of Labor's State Board of Mediation and Arbitration finalized its ruling against the town earlier this week without providing a clear solution.

The decision finds the town did violate its agreement with town employees when it changed to health savings accounts instead of point-of-service health care plans, but doesn't specifically state whether the town needs to switch back.

"I'm sitting here scratching my head and wondering what do we do now?" Gormley said. "They haven't given us any directive."

Unless they do, Gormley said Thursday, the town might take its slap on the wrist and continue using the health savings accounts. To be certain the town avoids further legal trouble, Town Attorney Stephen Savarese and labor attorney Robert W. Smith have been asked to determine how to proceed.

CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 spokesman Matt O'Connor said the town must reinstate the point-of-service plan, but the union, which represents police and town employees, is willing to negotiate. O'Connor noted that the health care switch has been a sticking point in negotiations with police, who have been working without a contract since July, and said if the town can come up with a new proposal, that contract could be finalized soon.

O'Connor said other towns have negotiated for health savings accounts in the past, but the town switched without even consulting the bargaining unit.

"Obviously we are expecting a quick resolution," O'Connor said Thursday. "We're not going to let nothing happen since they were found in violation. We understand this has been a rough month for town officials, but our members are anxious to get this behind them."

Town officials had said the switch in plans was necessary to save \$234,000. The health savings accounts require participants to spend a certain amount on their deductibles before insurance covers the remaining costs.

The town fully funded the accounts for each person this year, which included \$1,500 for individual enrollment, and \$3,000 for two or more people.

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