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VA nurse Giasson earns lifetime achievement award

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Skunk cabbage is a stinky, eye-candy sign of spring



UMass men's basketball coach Martin laments 11-20 season | B1

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REGION



STAFF PHOTO/CAROL LOLLIS

Jane Berger looks at the specifications of a car at Country Nissan in Hadley on Monday afternoon. Berger was helping her niece look for a car and was worried about the price going up because of pending tariffs.

BELCHERTOWN

Override heads to voters

\$3.3M request, if OK'd at town election, would fund schools, town, capital projects

By EMILEE KLEIN Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN — Even though they voted to put a \$3.3 million Proposition 2½ general budget override on the ballot next month, Select Board members on Monday each expressed disapproval with some element of the request.

SEE BELCHERTOWN A5

Dash to the dealership?

Tariffs on the mind: Local consumers, car sellers brace for auto tariffs to kick in Wednesday

By SAMUEL GELINAS Staff Writer

NORTHAMPTON — Car buyers who have been prolonging the need for a car suddenly have a very good reason to act — cold hard cash.

Take consumers Ela and Gene Kingsley, a Chicopee couple who arrived at Lia Toyota of Northampton on Monday morning, one of several dealerships they were visiting as they get ready to pull the trigger on a new

car purchase before prices potentially rise in the wake of new tariffs imposed by the Trump administration.

Across the Coolidge Bridge in Hadley, Jane Berger was perusing vehicles at Country Nissan in Hadley. She too was feeling the pressure to act quickly.

These consumers, like others at dealerships throughout the Valley, were shopping in anticipation of President Donald Trump's announcement on Wednesday, which he is calling "Liberation Day," to levy a 25% tariff on all foreign vehicles and auto parts imported into the United States.

"We're definitely here because of the tariffs," said Gene Kingsley. "We didn't want to have to pay a 25% increase on a price tag for something that is already overpriced. The

other dealerships are saying that they're really not sure how it's going to affect them."

Economists, business owners, and consumers are on edge about Trump's menu, which is expected to dish out hefty import taxes on a variety of goods including aluminum, steel, and foreign automotive products.

New automobiles, which are the second most expensive consumer investment of Americans, could potentially rise in price anywhere from \$3,000 to \$20,000, according to many economists nationally, including Anna Nagurny, an economist at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Similar hikes will be experienced with

SEE AUTOS A7

MASSACHUSETTS

Progressives demand legislative response to Trump

By CHRIS LISINSKI State House News Service

BOSTON — Progressive activists are growing impatient with what they view as a slow start on Beacon Hill, while the top House Democrat said lawmakers are "shooting in the dark" as they grapple with uncertainty from the federal government.

Nearly three months after the House and Senate kicked off the 2025-2026 term, more than a dozen groups wrote to legislative leaders urging them to get a joint rules agreement out of the way, then dive in immediately on legislation responding to the

SEE RESPONSE A5

AMHERST-PELHAM REGIONAL

School board reaffirms job-saving budget

With no way to cushion blow to smaller towns, proposal carries big assessment increases

By SCOTT MERZBACH Staff Writer

AMHERST — State education officials were crystal clear with the Amherst Regional School Committee on Monday night, warning members that they are not to vary from an agreement that determines how much each of the district's four

member towns must pay each year.

Taking the warning to heart, the committee opted to stick with a \$37.08 million fiscal year 2026 budget proposal that aims to preserve most current staffing.

But being bound to the Regional School District Agreement formula that considers a

community's wealth and student enrollment when calculating assessments for each member town means that huge assessment increases would be brought to the annual Town Meetings in Pelham and Leverett next month. A sizable assessment jump also will be considered at Shutesbury's annual Town Meeting, and the assessment for Amherst would remain above the 4% guidance set by the Town Council.

In a 7-2 vote Monday, the com-

mittee reaffirmed an earlier vote to present an operating budget that is \$812,126 short of the \$37.89 million needed to maintain level services, but represents a \$1.81 million increase over this year's \$35.27 million budget. The proposal ensures four middle school teachers and two high school counselors would not lose their jobs, preserves both the Prep Academy and world languages, and is rec-

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WEATHER TODAY

Clouds thicken through the day, 46 Page A2

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Amherst Regional High School.

STAFF FILE PHOTO

Board reaffirms budget

BUDGET FROM A1

ommended by Superintendent E. Xiomara Herman as having the least impact on secondary education.

Amherst representative Jennifer Shiao said the budget is the best option due to what it maintains, while understanding that school leaders aren't able to use an alternative assessment method, in which more of the burden would be put on Amherst, and guardrails would prevent any town from having more than a 6.5% year-over-year assessment increase.

"It looks really painful for Pelham, Leverett and Shutesbury, but I don't see any way around it," Shiao said.

For Pelham, the \$1.31 million assessment is 23%, or \$244,807, higher than this year's \$1.07 million assessment, while Leverett would see a 14%, \$230,356, increase from \$1.63 million to \$1.86 million.

Shutesbury's assessment would be up 7.7%, or \$126,620, from \$1.65 million to \$1.78 million. Amherst's increase, at 4.8%, or \$905,670, would bring the town's assessment to \$19.74 million, from \$18.84 million.

Committee Chairwoman Sarahbess Kenney, who is one of Pelham's two representatives, said her understanding is that Pelham officials will recommend the large increase to Town Meeting, as they have a preference for getting back to the statutory method after years of moving away from it.

Shiao and Kenney were joined in supporting the budget by Pelham representative William Sherr, Shutesbury representative Anna Heard and Amherst representatives Sarah Marshall, Deb Leonard and Bridget Hynes.

Voting against the budget were Amherst representative Irv Rhodes and Leverett representative Tilman Wolf. Rhodes said he is concerned Amherst Town Council won't support the higher town assessment, and Wolf said a slightly smaller budget would be a "tad less painful" to his town.

The three smaller towns must approve the budget at Town Meetings, along with the Amherst Town Council, for it to go into effect on July 1.

The need to take another vote on the proposed budget came after Town Council rejected an alternative way of calculating assessments at its March 24 meeting.

The committee also had to make its latest budget recommendation by Monday at 11:59 p.m., because the regional agreement requires its decision no later than March 31.

While the four towns had given approvals to revised assessment methods in recent years, with subsequent approvals from the commissioner of the Department of

Elementary and Secondary Education, Herman said the Town Council's vote ended that possibility. "This year, we're not as lucky," Herman said.

But state officials indicated that state approval may not have been forthcoming anyway, as regional school leaders are supposed to abide by the statutory method, and only use an alternate assessment method if it's outlined in the regional agreement.

Jay Sullivan, associate commissioner for District and School Finance for the state education department, said that after several years of having assessments calculated on a one-year basis, the Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools were in a bad situation because no alternative formula has ever been written into the regional agreement.

"We've let the district slide many years in a row," Sullivan said, explaining that not only is this problematic, but the requests from the administration came in well after the Dec. 31 deadline for approving any changes to the statutory method.

Michelle Griffin, a representative from the state education department's Office of Regional Governance, said the statutory method is always available, but an alternative method should only be allowed if it's embedded in the regional agreement.

Only the statutory method or one alternative method are allowed by the state, not an annual negotiation between the towns on a revised formula, said Christine Lynch, also a representative from the state education department's Office of Regional Governance.

"You hope every year," Lynch said, adding that it's been "a dangerous method to use, and has no basis in (state) law."

Herman said having this information in hand allows for an appropriate timeline to make a decision on the budget and for determining whether an alternative formula should be created next fall by the four towns that could be embedded in the regional agreement.

As shown by the Amherst Town Council rejecting the revised assessment method, that could prove difficult.

"Our current practice is a high-risk practice," Herman said.

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STAFF PHOTO/CAROL LOLLIS

Ela and Gene Kingsley talk about their concerns with being in the market for a new car and how the tariffs will impact the cost as they get ready to walk into Lia Toyota of Northampton Monday afternoon.

Local consumers, car sellers brace for tariffs

AUTOS FROM A1

foreign auto parts, which often are used in both new and used American-made vehicles, especially computerized parts in newer models. Additionally, the tariffs could lead to hikes of as much as 8% for insurance premiums if the cost to repair vehicles inflates significantly.

It has not been made official how car manufacturers expect to handle the costs: Will they absorb the price hikes? Will it mean steep prices hikes for buyers? Will it lead to mass layoffs at auto companies? These are just a few of the questions still to be answered as the auto tariffs roll out.

"We are now entering into the first inning of the first game of the season, and we don't know what Trump has planned for the ninth inning," said Bob O'Koniewski, executive vice president of the Massachusetts State Automobile Dealers Association. "We have to wait and see how this plays out."

While dealers brace for the potential tariffs to kick in, car shoppers and sellers at various local dealerships on Monday and Tuesday agreed that the impacts of such a move were unknown until Trump unveils his plan on Wednesday.

As for now, however, dealerships in the area are assuring customers that the current inventory on their lots won't be subject to an overnight 25% hike, and prices will remain stable for at least the coming weeks, before inventory on lots is swapped out.

David Belliveau, general manager at Northampton Volkswagen on King Street, said it may take four to six weeks to feel the impact of the tariffs. He added that inevitably, "from our perspective, prices are definitely going up." So much so, he said, he fears the increases will impact affordability.

However, General Manager Chris Peltier of Toyota of Northampton thinks that is too short a window to see impacts.

"As of right now, I am not really playing into the fear factoredness of it," said Peltier, who said that he stresses to customers that the impacts remain "unknown."

Trump has said he's moving ahead with tariffs to regain American manufacturing jobs that have gone overseas in past decades and thereby reinvigorate the U.S. manufacturing workforce. The president on Saturday said he "couldn't care less" if some car prices go up due to tariffs so long as the auto industry returns to America.

"I hope they raise their prices, because if they do, people are going to buy American-made cars," he said about foreign car manufacturers in an NBC News interview. "I couldn't care less because if

the prices on foreign cars go up, they're going to buy American cars."

Tariffs 101

Katherine Schmeiser Lande, the chair of Mount Holyoke College's economics department, gave an economics 101 explanation as to why tariffs won't work to bring down costs — though they may have 30 years ago.

At that time, the United States hadn't signed onto NAFTA, which created a free trade zone between the United States, Canada and Mexico. This is what led many companies to relocate to Mexico to access cheaper labor there, and hence make their products available at cheaper prices.

The benefit to consumers? They got to pay less for those products. Now the upside may bring a few jobs back to the U.S., but consumers will be paying more after the tariffs are implemented, said Lande.

But both Belliveau and Peltier say the potential fix is for foreign car companies to bring manufacturing to the U.S.

"Right now, we only have a few vehicles that are manufactured in the U.S.," said Northampton Volkswagen's Belliveau. "Vehicles like the Jetta, a big seller, is not made here. So we're hoping that that gets moved over to the U.S. very quickly," he said, stressing that the tariffs may shatter the affordability of their vehicles.

Peltier expressed that he has been briefed by the president of both Toyota and Lexus, which both build some models in the U.S. The messages received, he said, have been, "vague at this point, but overall basically a positive message."

That positivity, he explained, is being driven by the fact that Toyota has invested so much in America over the past decade.

"Toyota is probably the best equipped to handle a situation like this. They've got a pretty strong foothold in the United States already, and they've invested tens of billions of dollars into the United States already, over the past decade or so," he said.

Customers on edge

Despite the positive state of mind Toyota seems to be in, Peltier commented that his customers have been more on edge about the potential price hikes.

"I've heard the word tariffs more in the past week than I have in my entire life. Whether it's a phone conversation or someone walking in or an email — it's on people's minds. I think it's maybe not so much of a motivator for people who are not in the market."

He added, "I think it's more a motiva-

tor for people who are maybe in the market but maybe weren't planning on buying until the summer or the fall. They just kind of move their timeline up. Like 'this pushed me over the edge because I don't want to be stuck paying 25% extra.' That's the mindset."

This observation was consistent with what many shoppers in showrooms were saying this week. Most said their primary reason for shopping for a car is, to no one's surprise, because they need one. However, most said the pending tariffs did play a factor in deciding to hustle up and buy.

The Kingleys are among those hurrying, and said the process has introduced them to the level of confusion that is being felt by the entire auto industry.

"Some are saying that the dealerships will eat the cost of the tariff increase at least temporarily. Other are saying it doesn't impact them, because their cars are manufactured here ... so it's kind of all over the map," said Gene Kingsley.

At Country Nissan in Hadley, Berger was buying a car for her niece. Similarly, she said that although she needs the car, she is also feeling the pressure to have it done as soon as possible before the threat of having to pay a quarter more than the car is worth, she said.

"We are trying to keep it in a certain range and are worried the tariffs will severely impact the affordability," Berger said.

But even Peltier, who has not been fretting over the situation, said that parts will certainly be impacted by the tariffs.

"If you take a car, you know, it's not just built in Japan. It's not just built in Mexico or Canada or the United States. There's so much that goes into it," he said. "There's between 30 and 50 computers in new models. And of those computers, who's making a knob for this one, making the button for this one, or who's making the clip for that one."

His assessment is in line with a comment made by Nagurny, who said that, "Every single car has foreign-made parts," adding that the United States "can't build new plants overnight."

To add to the disruption, Nagurny is concerned about the implications for the global economy, especially what it will mean for U.S. foreign relations.

Most countries see the tariffs as destructive, including Canada, France, and even Japan and South Korea, with many countries already announcing their own retaliatory tariffs.

"This is not good. We need to keep our friends," said Nagurny.

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