

THE FOOD

The owner of Roots restaurant and The Bakery in Rutland, Billings is now roughly a month away from opening his latest

chos," he said. "But I'm not gonna do your standard nachos. They'll be with pulled chicken. And they won't be covered with

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OVUU board debates merits of equity policy

By LEE J. KAHR

BRANDON — The Otter Valley Unified Union School District board's spirited debate or a proposed equity policy that kicked off after the policy's first reading on April 7 will likely continue when the full Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union Board meets April 21 at 5 p.m.

One OVUU board member in particular took issue with the policy, which he called "deeply problematic."

"Equality," means treating everyone equally regardless of race, class, gender or any other marginalizing aspect for the sake of fairness and justice. "Equity" means not only treating people equally regardless of their race, sex, sexual orientation, etc., but going further and recognizing the gifts and talents someone brings to the fore and improving their lives.

The latter is the goal of the Otter Valley Unified Union School District, save for one particular

"[The policy's] emphasis on 'culturally and historically marginalized' groups is uselessly vague and historically blind. Worse, it is highly likely to be divisive"

— School board member
Kevin Thornton

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board member.

At issue is an equity policy that school officials hope will create a school climate more sensitive to racism and prejudice. If the policy is adopted, there will be expected behavior standards among students and staff alike, and school officials will scan the current curriculum to weed out insensitive policy and education practices when it comes to the most marginalized populations in local schools. The goal is to institute sociocultural change within the school system to teach kids tolerance and to combat systemic racism and prejudice.

Kevin Thornton is a freshman board member and local historian. He completely disagrees with the goals of the equity policy and how it would be implemented. His take comes roughly six months after he criticized the credentials and merit of independent consultant Paul Gorski, who was hired by the

supervisory union to do a Sept. 23 presentation for board members on racism and sensitivity to the Black community. Gorski also audited RNEsU's school environment and curriculum. Thornton took issue with Gorski's description of himself

Harvard Department of Sociology.

Wilson is a past president of the American Sociological Association. His 45 honorary degrees include doctorates from Yale, Princeton, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania,

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School Board member Barbara Ebling

as the "most distinguished sociologist in America," and the sociologist's negative opinion of famed sociologist William Julius Wilson's work as "debunked" and "marginal." Wilson is an endowed chair and professor at Harvard's Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, and the

scientific honor in the United States, in 1998.

Gorski asserted in his presentation to the OVUU Board that Wilson is wrong in his theory that race is declining as a factor in American social life, including among African-Americans, and has been for some time.

Thornton vehemently disagrees, citing increased Black college enrollment and that "millions of African-Americans

Northwestern, Johns Hopkins, NYU and Dartmouth. He was a MacArthur Fellow in 1987 and was awarded the National Medal of Science,

the highest honor in the United States, in 1998. Gorski asserted in his presentation to the OVUU Board that Wilson is wrong in his theory that race is declining as a factor in American social life, including among African-Americans, and has been for some time.

have entered the middle class" since the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. He added that in the last 20 years, the U.S. has elected a Black president and approved a Black National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, not to mention the appointment 30 years ago of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

"In other words, there is ample reason to believe that Prof. Wilson is correct about the long-term declining significance of race in the United States, as well as about the economic causes of the problems of the group he has termed 'the truly disadvantaged,' that is, poor, urban African-Americans," Thornton said. "Critical race theorists such as Dr. Gorski would prefer that you believe racism is a permanent, unchanging blight on American culture; that white Americans alone can be racist (and no other race or ethnic group can be); that it is not enough for white Americans to treat people fairly and equally but that whites must sign on to become actively 'anti-racist'; and, most importantly, that to be anti-racist we must do what people like Dr. Gorski tell us to do — that is, we must leave it to them to decide when we are sufficiently 'anti-racist' and (See OVUU, Page 12)

Correction

An article in the April 14 issue of The Reporter about the proposed noise ordinance mistakenly attributed comments made by Karen Rhodes to Karleen Werner. We regret the error.

Also, although the board discussed putting the noise ordinance question to a public vote at Town Meeting 2022 and will likely do so, the motion that passed at the April 12 meeting was to keep the status quo and continue to enforce the state noise statute locally.

**Independent Bookstore Day is
Saturday, April 24!**



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therefore good people."

Thornton characterized the proposed Equity Policy as "deeply problematic" and said it should not be approved.

"Its emphasis on 'culturally and historically marginalized' groups is uselessly vague and historically blind," he said. "Worse, it is highly likely to be divisive."

Thornton contends that, "most of our supervisory union's minority children are either native Vermonters or moved here when they were very young. Culturally, they differ from their peers very little if at all. If we, by policy, presume that these children are deeply culturally different, solely because of racial and ethnic appearance, we will be doing them grave harm. Ask yourself if the adoption of this policy will make our still-small number of minority children feel more or less comfortable in school? More or less self-conscious? More or less singled out?"

He also argued that there is no one in the school district qualified to institute the curricular changes the policy implies.

"Who in this district is qualified to talk about the lives of poor people in Mexico? Who is qualified to teach about the history of China?" he asked.

Thornton went on to argue that class inequity is a far more pressing social problem in the school district than racism.

"Let's face it: in effect this policy would institute a program where one set of white people lecture another set of white people about their moral deficiencies," Thornton said. "We would create the spectacle of college-educated adults instructing the working-class and poor children of this district about their 'privilege' when they have never been privileged a day in their lives. The self-regard and condescension inherent in this are breathtaking. The result would be more (and well-earned) hostility toward the schools and less participation from the people in our district whose kids can benefit the most from public education.

"Surely, we should teach our children about the greatness of the United States as well as its problems. This policy unknowingly echoes a distorted, wrong-headed and divisive ideology rooted in the idea that the essential basis of our society is racism. The board should therefore permanently table this proposed policy."

Board member Barbara Ebling argued that there is plenty of evidence to support the belief that race relations are not improving in America.

"White supremacists are intending to interpose in the highest law of the land," she said. "We see ways where legislatures are trying to disenfranchise Black and brown people. We would be tone deaf to not approve the equity policy. Now is not the time to not see color and is the time to engage in discussion of inequity and equip our students with a better understanding. The children can learn this so much better than adults."

Parent Courtney Satz said that as a parent of small children, she is in favor of any policy that teaches equity, but questioned how the policy will be enacted.

"Equity also includes LGBTQ-IA, youth with disabilities, women and girls, immigrants, etc.," Satz said. She agreed with Brandon resident Michael Shank's assertion in his comments to the board that "if we don't teach children during their youth, then we've lost them."

"As a community, it is our duty to create an environment of acceptance in 2021," Satz said. "There are too many instances where I hear comments from children in school with my sons that I honestly cannot believe are real. Racism and inequity are real in this town, even in second grade."

The policy will be discussed further at the RNeSU School Board meeting April 21 at 5 p.m. To access the virtual meeting by phone of via Zoom, visit rnesu.org/district_information/calendars for instructions.

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Courtney Satz, parent