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Fitch Students Hold Debate on Drug Use

BY [Chuck Potter](#) STAFF WRITER

Last Wednesday, four juniors at Robert E. Fitch High School were overheard in the school's band room talking about buying and selling bongos, water pipes, rolling papers and other drug paraphernalia that can be found in most corner stores, smoke shops and malls.

Two of the students, Matt Gentry and Ben Dinovelli, both 16, were doing their best to justify the stores' right to sell the items. They contended it would be useless for the government to disallow the sale of the items. The public could still acquire the items on the black market, or worse, obtain dangerous, makeshift substitutes.

They agreed that most of the items are sold under the pretense of being used for smoking tobacco, but are rarely, if ever, used for that purpose. Still, they contended that pretense gave store owners the right to free enterprise.

Meanwhile Nishant Sahoo, 16, and Michael Han, 17, did all they could to punch holes in the Gentry and Dinovelli's position.

"Yes, items such as water pipes are also used with tobacco," Han concurred. And then countered, "However, actually finding someone who uses these items just for legal drug use will be nearly impossible."

The attentive crowd taking in the intense discussion included a police officer, the school principal, the town's manager of recreation services, two officials from the Ledge Light Health District and several other adults who work with young people either in the school and community, including the coach of the debate team, Nick Evento.

They were all there to hear the four boys, members of the debate team, take on the challenge presented by the Groton Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention (GASP) Coalition.

The debate touched on a wide range of issues, from the money spent fighting drug use, sales and related crimes, to the ability to ingest marijuana without smoking it, to the allure of the bright colored and fascinating shapes and designs of pipes that catch young eyes, stimulate young curiosities and ultimately invite experimentation.

But most importantly, their debate coach, Nick Evento said, they took on the debate, made strong arguments and brought the issue to light.

"I'm always amazed to see what direction a debate goes in," said Evento.

Michelle Hamilton, GASP Coalition coordinator, said the group would take up the issue more extensively in the near future.

Officer Doug Hoffman offered one last bit of insight.

"In all my years of being a police officer, I have never seen one of those fancy pipes used for tobacco," he said. "This was very impressive. With more young people like you, I have more faith in our future."

c.potter@theday.com

