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Monadnock District: Brawls at nearly every turn *School board argues; one member resigns*

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GILSUM — In a meeting that spanned roughly four hours Tuesday night, members of the Monadnock Regional School Board flung accusations at one another, one resigned her post and education was discussed for less than half the time.

"My primary reason for resigning is I've had enough," said facilities chairman Karen A. Cota of Roxbury, who handed in her school board walking papers Tuesday — effective immediately.

In resigning, Cota read a letter she'd written saying that despite school board accomplishments in recent years, "In the last six months it has become more apparent that this board is not interested in the welfare of our students. ... I believe this board is more interested in power trips, and personal egos are at an all-time high."

The fireworks started from the get-go Tuesday when board members debated the appointment of Eric Stanley of Swanzey as a replacement for Colline M. Dreyfuss, who resigned from the board last month.

The argument had nothing to do with Stanley's qualifications, but was instead about whether the school board had to vote in favor of someone Swanzey selectmen had already appointed.

"Mr. Stanley has already been appointed, so the motion is out of order," said Richmond school board member James I. Carnie — who refused to participate in a vote he said shouldn't happen — while Chairman Eugene M. White 3rd argued that voting for new members was "tradition" and a matter of courtesy.

Sparks also flew when some board members alleged shady dealings in connection with filling a soon-to-be-vacant project manager position for the district.

A hiring committee was formed to fill the position and is composed of Unit 38 personnel and, as recommended by board Chairman White, school board member William Felton of Swanzey.

Facilities chairman Cota couldn't serve on the committee because, as she revealed Tuesday, she'd applied for the project manager position herself.

Cota had advocated twice for the position to be filled, most recently when the current project manager Brett Beliveau's contract expires this month. But she said she only decided to apply for the job later.

"You can all rest assured that there is no conspiracy here," she said. "I did not go out there to make

this position so I could apply for it.”

But Carnie questioned why the spot on the hiring committee didn't then default to facilities committee vice-chairman Robert J. Smith.

Smith also spoke about being passed over, rejecting White's and Cota's assertion that, since he introduced an acquaintance who'd asked about the job to a district staff member, it may appear he had a conflict of interest in the matter.

Carnie also railed against the fact that a request by Troy school board member Douglas Lyman to discuss the issue wasn't included on this week's meeting agenda and spoke about information he said wasn't being included in meeting minutes.

“This idea of sweeping so much information under the rug and not allowing the public to know about it is going to cease, and it's going to cease starting tonight,” Carnie said, hours before he and Superintendent Kenneth R. Dassau resorted to arguing about the placement of a period in their conflicting interpretations of school board policy.

Still, Tuesday's frays didn't end there.

During the meeting's public comment period, Cornelius F. Moriarty of Richmond accused Mount Caesar Elementary School Principal Elizabeth G. Tatro of barring him from continuing as a reading volunteer at her school because of his political beliefs.

A budget committee member and vocal member of the Monadnock School Taxpayers Association, Moriarty said Tatro had mentioned his frequent letters to The Sentinel when she told him his help wouldn't be needed.

Moriarty drew a comparison between his story and that of an African-American man being refused the chance to volunteer with an all-white fire department in the 1960s.

But, according to Tatro, with volunteers coming from several local sources — including Keene State College and Antioch University New England — she simply didn't have a spot for Moriarty at Mount Caesar.

Regardless, the school board opted to commit time at the next meeting to discuss the issue.

One action the board did take Tuesday was to support an effort by high school students to buy a new sign for the front of their building.

The \$8,750 estimated cost of the sign was reduced to \$6,225 because high school alumnus and Swanzeey business owner Steve McAnney offered to give students a nearly 50 percent discount on his labor, according to Cota.

The project would be financed by more than \$4,000 that three classes have saved in their activities accounts, Cota said, and the remainder would be raised by donations and student fundraising.

However, Carnie — who eventually voted in favor of the motion — said he was concerned the school board wasn't exploring any other options for a new sign and spoke about a student who made a sign as an Eagle Scout project in the 1980s.

“Obviously, we got a pretty nice sign out of the last situation, and it didn't cost us practically anything,” he said.

Board members also got bogged down for several minutes in the policy issues surrounding the

acceptance of McAnney's labor donation. And Fitzwilliam representative Phyllis T. Peterson said she'd like to see a plan for how the students would raise the extra money.

But Swanzey board member Kristen Goodenough said, "This is a donation, friends. ... What is the problem?"

About two-and-a-half hours into the meeting, Goodenough said she felt "beaten and abused" by the night's discussion.

"What is going on?" she asked. "We have got to work our differences out. We cannot succumb to the conspiracy theories and the bullying tactics and the finger-pointing. ... We have work to do," she said, "We cannot continue to have a dysfunctional board."

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