

Tonight, we will vote on an extension to the Superintendent's contract. I expect the board vote will be 3-2 in favor of an extension through June 2027. Based on the Walker County current year election candidates, we will have two new board members in January 2025. If the vote extends the Superintendent's contract through 2027, it will tie the hands of the new board members for more than half their term in office.

This is unprecedented, as in the past, we have waited for newly elected board members to have a vote of their own. Mrs. Harden voted for the Superintendent's last contract extension within six months of coming onto the board, the same amount of time that the two new board members would have, as the superintendent's contract expires at the end of June next year.

To hide behind the reasoning that new board members need to get to know Mr. Raines is not consistent with the respect previously given to new board members, and it does not make sense given the context of the situation. Why is it so pressing to extend the contract now?

Two current board members have children who are employed as system administrative staff. Yes, there was a legal dispute about which positions are considered system administrative staff. The outcome of that dispute did not specify which employees are considered system administrative staff, but there is no doubt in my mind that the two positions in question are, and always have been, system administrative staff. The court's exclusion of evidence on technical grounds does not change the truth of the matter.

Therefore, it bothers me that two current Board members have children employed in these positions and vote on this issue at all. However, their vote in favor of this extension, given the context and the evidence we can all see regardless of the court's admission of it, appears questionable at best. The law is clear that system administrative staff should not be related to Board members to avoid the appearance of bias.

It seems the law was written to prevent the very situation we find ourselves in tonight.

Phyllis Hunter  
April 15, 2024