

Perspective: A More 'Transparent' School Board

Written by By Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
Friday, 07 August 2015 04:16



Obviously stung by the criticism in editorials and articles in the Gallup Independent – the only daily newspaper in town – the Gallup McKinley County School Board of Education attempted to deflect those opinions at the meeting held Aug. 3.

The regular meeting included – almost as an afterthought – the process on how to replace a board member in District 5 who had recently resigned due to his wife's medical condition, and was also reported to take action on the evaluation of the Superintendent.

The issue quickly opened with some board members floundering to present their case for transparency, and most of the large crowd did not seem impressed with their statements, deeming them defensive in nature rather than enlightening.

Adding to the confusion was the fact that the use of the microphones provided for the board and superintendent was not consistent and the use of Navajo words, albeit in short bursts, was not designed to be understood by the majority of Anglo and Hispanic that filled the room.

The dissatisfaction began with a few timed public comments, mostly on how the board would or should find a replacement for Dr. Bruce Tempest, who is moving to Albuquerque to ensure a

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better medical quality of life for his wife. During his short speech, he encouraged the board to become even more transparent in their search and allow the voters in District 5 a chance to apply for the vacancy.

Although any mention of a possible replacement by Tempest was spoken against by board member Kevin Mitchell in an earlier statement, the well-known doctor and long-term board member nevertheless strongly recommended Marilee Petranovich be selected as his successor, but also suggested that whoever was chosen should be thoroughly discussed and explained by the board in public.

There followed a sizable list of other speakers: Ryan Hudgeons and Irene Denblyker, both candidates for the open seat; Navajo Nation Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie, encouraging cross-commissioning support for the Sheriff’s Office and the Nation; Sonlatsa Martin, a community activist and mother of a GMCS student, who spoke against a new election; Rita Capitan of the Crownpoint Chapter; and Olin Kieyoomia, the vice president of the UNM-Gallup Board.

The audience suffered through the slow moving, two-hour agenda that is the regular fare for such meetings, interrupted with questions that could easily be answered in a non-public setting. There was a brief mention of the \$578,000 needed for the on-going repairs to Gallup High School and overly-long presentations – standard stuff when dealing with a bureaucratic system – of staffing updates, the Indian Education Committee/JOM Report, and other minor details before the action necessary to replace Tempest was discussed.

It was agreed that persons interested in becoming the replacement member of the board until the next scheduled election must submit a resume and letter of interest in a sealed envelope personally to Joan Nez, secretary to the superintendent, by 5 pm on August 10. All candidates must reside in District 5 and must send an e-mail to the district notifying them that they have fulfilled the above requirements, in case the sealed envelopes are lost or misplaced. This includes those that have previously submitted these documents via e-mail.

A special session is scheduled for August 13 at 6 pm to allow candidates to speak for at least five minutes on their own behalf, after which the board will meet in executive session for further discussion on the candidates before returning to vote in public for the selected person.

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The evaluation of the Superintendent Frank Chiapetti was postponed until after the board vacancy has been filled.