



McCosh's Column

What's behind school resignations?

The recent resignation of two more school board members is only the most recent dramatization of the dissonance plaguing that body for the past several years. It wasn't too long ago that

being a member of the school board was a way of saying you were "the Establishment," like belonging to the Rotary, being a deacon in your church or serving on the board of review.

It's tough to put a finger on just when this began to change in Farmington, but it changed.

It could have been when the education association became active in local politics, with their thinly disguised support of school board candidates.

It could have been when the so-called "conservatives" launched strong campaigns mainly based on opposition to a sex-education program in the local schools.

Regardless, for at least five years now, the typical school board member has been a person who feels he or she must play an activist role.

Self-styled "liberals" have felt they must launch a variety of programs aimed at helping kids in school "relate" to the administration.

Generally, they have also taken a position. It is the role of a board member to scrutinize and sometimes initiate new educational programs — a much more activist position than board members took in the past.

The so-called "conservatives" have frequently presented their position as mainly being a group defending the public against the "liberal" onslaughts.

Anti-sex education, anti-tax increases, but mainly anti-"liberal," the conservatives were represented most strongly by Mrs. Elizabeth Brennan.

Well-known in the com-

munity and with a long record of service with the parochial schools, she was elected to the public school board mainly on a wave of anti-sex education fervor.

Shortly before the resignations, the board meetings were lasting until well after midnight, with sometimes as few as three items on the agenda coming to a vote.

With the current school board supposedly in agreement in basic philosophy, and with three of the seven members appointed by the other four, there should be no reason for further arguments.

Or is there? Underlying all the dissonance, the labels and the arguments over "educational philosophy" is a suspicion that what has been taking place on the school board is not debate, but argument.

It is possible that it is not a split between "liberals" and "conservatives," but between "us" and "them."

When one talks to board members individually, there is none not deeply concerned with the school system, children and the community.

Even the so-called "philosophic differences" are hardly ever in the field of education, but are mainly over national issues.

The incident which prompted the walkout of the last two board members was mainly the handling of a charge by Mrs. Brennan that another trustee was improperly consulting with "outsiders" before making board decisions.

The legal opinion which she sought was delivered the meeting following her resignation, which leaves it up to

speculation whether or not she was the victim of a "dictatorial" chairman.

What is clear is that the complaints of the conservatives are, almost word-for-word, the complaints the "liberals" voiced when they were in the minority.

These are, mainly, excessive board interference with the school administration; "majority rule" actions excluding the minority, and internal problems with board organization.

Sources within the administration present a different view. The attitude from the front office is a careful avoidance of politics. But some administrators admit to a "moral problem" not because the board opposes or interferes with their work, but stemming from the tedious, rambling, conduct of board business.

Most of the current school board members took a strong position in favor of open meetings during their election campaigns.

Study sessions have been opened to the public, and closed board sessions reportedly are mainly concerned with personnel matters and often with the internal board problems — including discussion on Mrs. Brennan's charges, and the new appointments.

This is cited as a main reason for the longer, talkative, board sessions by board members.

The dual resignations dramatically highlighted the problems of the school board. But there is also some indication drama was the main reason for the sudden walkout.

Mrs. Brennan was maintaining dual residency, keeping a legal address in Farmington only by virtue of renting an apartment.

Mrs. Kathryn Stirling had indicated several times she

would not run for re-election.

Looking toward the coming school board election, with three seats coming up now, instead of two, the stage is set for an emotion-laden campaign.

NOTICE

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City council defers assessments

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physical handicaps or those living on small pensions who cannot afford such added expenses.

The council passed a city ordinance allowing such persons to defer payment on special assessments until such time as their property is sold or their income improves. In the case of death, payment would be deferred until a settlement of the estate is made.

Under the guidelines of the plan, which take into account household income, Richardson said about 100 residents of the city could qualify for the deferred payment plan. Review of applications would be confidential.

The three member committee includes Commissioners Allen, William Hartsock and Mayor Ralph Yoder.

The council also appointed

Thomas Carr of Chatham Hills to the board of zoning appeals and issued commendations to Henry L. Trombley, former city postmaster, and a group of citizen volunteers who constituted a group formed to assist local citizens in filling out the necessary forms to qualify for property tax relief under the new property tax relief act.

The group assisted a total of 122 Farmington citizens in the preparation of their tax credit forms.

Finally, a public safety report on the first month of 1974 given by Capt. Burns indicated that unlike other areas of the state, Farmington traffic problems are not being alleviated by the lack of gasoline and reduced speed limits. "The energy crisis isn't hurting our acci-

dent rate any," he said. "It is on the increase."

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