

School Board, Teachers Reach Contract Agreement

By Karen Gould

With the new school year less than two weeks away, a contract agreement was reached between Mackinac Island school teachers and the school board that calls for a 4% retroactive pay increase for last year and a 2.7% salary hike for the 2007-2008 school year. Teachers can expect to see a lump retroactive payment covering last year's increase

Friday, August 31.

The new three year contract was signed by the school board Thursday, August 23, 14 months after the old contract expired June 30, 2006, which coincides with the end of the school's fiscal year.

Like this year, the 2008-2009 school year also will give teachers a cost of living increase using the April national Consumer Price Index,

which measures prices paid by consumers for goods and services.

Two people were in the audience when the decision was reached, teacher Susan Bennett, who headed the teachers' negotiating team, and former board member Paul Wandrie, who led negotiations for the board. Laura Eiseler and Karen Allen also represented teachers during the contract negotiations

and Ben Mosley and Jason St. Onge joined Mr. Wandrie to represent the board.

A notable negotiated change was made in the contract that affects teachers with 10 years vested at the Island school and who also want to retire, said Mrs. Bennett. Those teachers can be compensated for up to 150 sick days at \$25 a day when they retire.

The sick day buyout is less

than half of a substitute teacher's daily pay of \$60, noted Ben Mosley, board president.

Wording changes delayed the completion of the new teacher contract as both sides updated old language.

"In almost every section," said Mr. Mosley, "there were some sort of changes."

A similar change was made in teacher education requirements for new teachers. Rather than specify requirements that could become outdated, the contract now states the school will comply with Michigan law.

The three-year contract is retroactive to June 2006.

"So we have two more years before we get to do this again," Mr. Mosley said.

In other business, the board agreed to hire Kathleen Peterson of St. Ignace as the special education teacher. She also will teach an elementary music class. The school had hired Crystal Hilborm in April on a temporary basis to complete the school year.

New playground equipment has arrived, although removing old equipment and completing new footing work will delay its installation, said Superintendent Roger Schrock. The board hopes to get volunteers to help install the equipment. Replacing equipment became necessary this summer when adults damaged equipment that was designed for children. While a final bill has not been received, Dr. Schrock estimated

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Primary Hopscotch Game Exposes Political Rifts

Two northern Michigan lawmakers who once were ballot opponents are on opposite sides of a spat on the 2008 U.S. presidential race: Will Michigan January 15 be among the first states to hold a primary?

In one corner: U.S. Representative Bart Stupak (D-Menominee), who last week wrote Governor Jennifer Granholm and Democratic State Chairman Mark Brewer in favor of the party's current caucus process, contending a state-financed primary system would be "fiscally irresponsible."

In the other corner: state Senator Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau) (who in 1998 got 40% of the vote as Stupak's GOP challenger). Her bill to set the earliest presidential primary date in state history last week passed the GOP-ruled Senate 21-17 along party lines - although a bipartisan deal on the early date remained a possibility.

Granholm, Brewer and, most notably, U.S. Senator Carl Levin have been pushing to give Michigan an earlier voice in the nominating process long dominated by New Hampshire and Iowa.

But a current rub is that organized labor, large segments of which support ex-Senator John Edwards of North Carolina for the nomination (as does Stupak), prefers the more tightly controlled caucus process where labor traditionally has clout second to none.

Democrats must get their act together if Michigan is to have a relevant primary.

In a Friday letter to Granholm, Brewer and Republican State Chairman Saul Anuzis, Levin, U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow, Democratic leaders of the state House and Senate, four down-state members of Congress, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, and assorted other Dem pooh bahs called for a primary election to provide "the most inclusive process and highest voter participation."

But Stupak, who says caucus planning is in place for the 31 counties he represents, asked Granholm and Brewer: "Why scrap those plans for an expensive primary format?"

Says Stupak: "A statewide primary would cost Michigan taxpayers \$10-12 million and would place a significant burden on county and township clerks."

Stupak said he would support a statewide primary format "only if the presidential candidates or state party organizations agree to pay for the cost of the primary, not the tax-



Michigan Politics

By George Weeks

payers." Won't happen.

Republican McManus has a commendable bill that awaits House action. Levin, Stabenow, et al, are right that "embracing an early, inclusive contest would ensure that (manufacturing) issues are raised and our Michigan viewpoints are heard. An early, inclusive primary election is the best way to ensure the issues of trade, health care, and manufacturing are in the national limelight."

The Hillary Clinton camp may grouse that Stupak worries about her popularity in polls and favors a more Edwards-friendly caucus system. But he has a popular pitch in declaring: "It is inappropriate for the State Legislature to vote to fund an unnecessary political presidential primary and then ask taxpayers to increase their taxes because the state is broke."

At a Saturday meeting in Lansing, the Republican State Committee unanimously approved a January 15 state-run primary and rules to implement it. GOP State Chairman Saul Anuzis said:

"We are united. Moving up the primary will make Michigan the first major industrial state to hold a presidential primary and will give our voters a chance to educate the next president of the United States about Michigan and its specific issues. Republicans and Democrats agree that Michigan must move up its

primary in order to be relevant in the presidential selection process."

Touting Tourism

Last week the Travel Industry Association of America named Travel Michigan's spiffy "Pure Michigan" tourism TV ad campaign the nation's best. But are we Poor Michigan when it comes to spending to promote tourism?

A new tub-thumping coalition may be stretching it in declaring that legislation introduced last week by state Senator Jason Allen (R-Traverse City) would increase tourism jobs and revenues in Michigan "almost immediately" by funding the Pure Michigan campaign at levels competitive with other tourism states.

But Tourism Improving Michigan's Economy (TIME) is right in deploring the poor funding in relation to other states, despite the \$15 million boost for the two-year period ending at the end of 2007. Consider \$48 million in Illinois; Pennsylvania's \$64 million.

TIME co-chair Dan Musser, president of Mackinac Island's Grand Hotel, says Allen's plan for a \$30 million annual tourism budget "is a smart investment that will pay for itself two or three times over in new revenues to the state and new jobs as well."

Other TIME members include those from the Michigan Hotel, Motel & Resort

Association, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, Michigan Restaurant Association, the Michigan Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus, the Traverse City Convention & Visitors Bureau, and other groups.

Over the decades, assorted groups and governors have touted tourism - but Michigan's funding has been erratic.

Hoekstra for Governor?

Over the years, eight-term U.S. Representative Pete Hoekstra (R-Holland) has flirted with running for governor or the U.S. Senate. Asked Friday on Michigan Public Television's "Off the Record" show about running for governor in 2010, he replied: "I believe that is a possibility I would seriously consider in the future."

George Weeks retired last year after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.



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