

Special Committee on Ethics, Elections, and Local Government

Testimony for HB2345 – Greg Tice

November 20, 2015

Senator Holmes and Special Committee Members;

Thank you for the invitation to come and testify on HB 2345. I appreciate the consideration and willingness on your part to hear how this bill affects my situation and that of Renwick USD 267.

I currently serve as School Board President for USD 267 Renwick, which includes the Andale and Garden Plain High School, as well as K-8 Schools in Colwich, St. Marks, Andale and Garden Plain. This bill would affect me personally because my wife is a middle school math teacher in our district. Our School Board also has four other members which would be affected by this bill. I am currently serving my second term on our school board and am in my fifth year on the board.

During my first term I intentionally did not serve on the Negotiations Committee because I did not want there to be any perception of a conflict of interest with my wife's position as a teacher. I have also been wary of other situations that may have been perceived as presenting a conflict of interest. As I have been on the board I have realized that there was really no reason to be concerned about this. First, as a Board member I am one of seven representatives of our district. I cannot individually make any decisions that are going to benefit my wife which would create a conflict of interest. Even if I were to be able to sway the other members of the School Board, I would not be acting as an individual. I would have to gain their consensus which should mean it is in the best interest of our school district, not just for my wife. Second, as a School Board we are in charge of the School District, but we are also advised and directed by the School's Administration. There is a measure of oversight that occurs as a result of this. We set policy but the School Administration is responsible for the implementation of the policy. Finally, specifically as it pertains to the Negotiations Committee, I represent the School Board along with the Superintendent, a Principal, and three members of the Teacher's representation. Anything that we negotiate is still brought back to the School Board and I am representing the position of the School Board. I am not in any position which would allow me to make an individual decision that would benefit my wife.

Additionally, I realized that there was really not that much that I was negotiating. During negotiations, we have discussed salary increases, calendar days, due process, and a few ancillary issues. In the past few years, if we have given raises, they have been in the range of 2%-3%. On a salary of \$45,000, this represents a difference of \$450. Can there really be a conflict of interest when we are talking about a difference of \$450 over a one year period (\$37 per month)? Our health insurance increases have gone up more than that. Also, this would be given to all staff in the district, not just my wife, so there is really no individual gain that could be possible. This would also apply to the other issues that are negotiated. It could be possible that I would be accused of being "teacher friendly", which is probably true because as

a business owner I realize the importance of good morale, attracting quality staff, and maintaining a good work environment. However, I do not think it is possible that I could be accused of a conflict of interest where I acted to benefit my wife or personal situation.

We also have four other Board members who would be affected by this bill. One is a teacher in a different school district. She was recently elected to a position on our Board so she does not have a lot of experience as a Board member, but I would hate to see that she would not be allowed to serve. She has already contributed quite a bit to our Board in regards to being able to share her expertise and experiences with negotiation situations and curriculum selection. I am not sure how her position could be seen as a conflict of interest because there is nothing she can do in our district which would benefit her situation. The other School Board members have either a spouse that is a substitute teacher, a spouse that works in one of our kitchens or a sibling that is a teacher. I can say that in my time on the School Board I have never seen a situation where there has been a conflict of interest because of any of these relations.

Also, professionally I am an architect and I have worked with several school districts over my twenty two years in the profession. I made the decision to run for the School Board position knowing that I could not pursue any large contracts with the school district during my time on the Board. I have helped with a few projects pro bono as a service to the school district. Could this be a conflict of interest? This has probably been the toughest area for me. I think I would have a problem more ethically if I did not think the school district was getting the better part of the deal. If I did have a conflict of interest professionally, we do have the ability as School Board members to recuse ourselves, but I think if we are able to provide professional expertise and provide a value to the School District, that is part of our service to the School District and what makes it so valuable to have different people serve on a School Board. We have had people who have expertise in finance, IT, architecture, contracting, teaching, and I have seen other School Districts that have other professional experience as well. All of this comes together as a community to bring value to our service.

One thing I would like to point out is that I think one of the foundations of our society is representative government. It wasn't until our United States of America adopted our form of elected leaders that this form of government existed. The beauty of this is that it extends all the way down to the local level. We allow elected leaders to represent each other in areas where we sometimes only get 100-200 votes, sometimes even less. It is inherent that when you get to a level of representation at that level that you will have people who are related, do business together, or are otherwise connected. I think the importance of allowing individuals to represent their communities needs to be recognized and upheld, not infringed upon.

In closing, I would say that it is good to have checks and balances and make sure everything is as it should be. However, in regards to HB2345, I don't think you will find evidence to support that this bill is necessary.