

## Ed board says no to cafeteria plan

By **DAVID HINCHEY**  
Chronicle Staff Writer

WILLIMANTIC — The board of education Tuesday voted to reject a proposal to privatize cafeteria services for Windham Public Schools and, possibly, save tax dollars.

The vote was 6-0 against privatization, with board of education chairman Kenneth Folan and board member Mark Doyle abstaining, while Bruce Clements was absent.

The vote was taken following a contentious public forum on the issue.

Folan said this morning the board voted the way it did because that's what the community wanted.

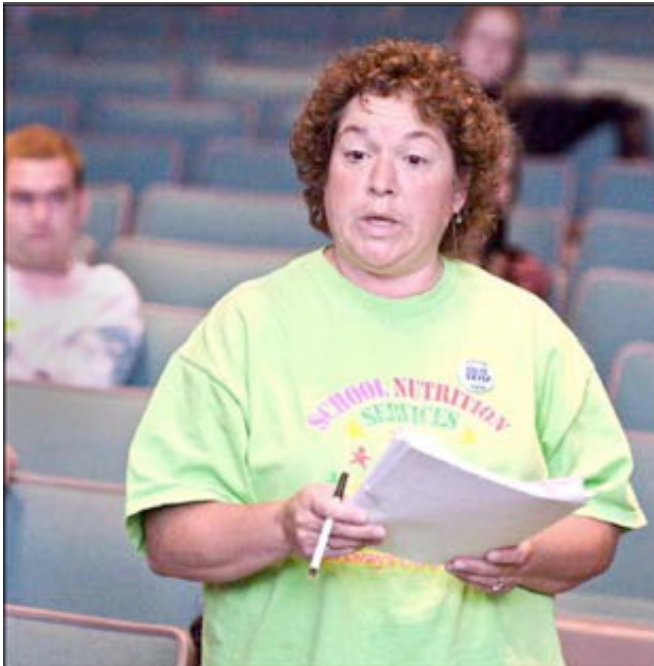
"It's as simple as that," he said, adding the meeting was attended by more people than any other meeting in recent times.

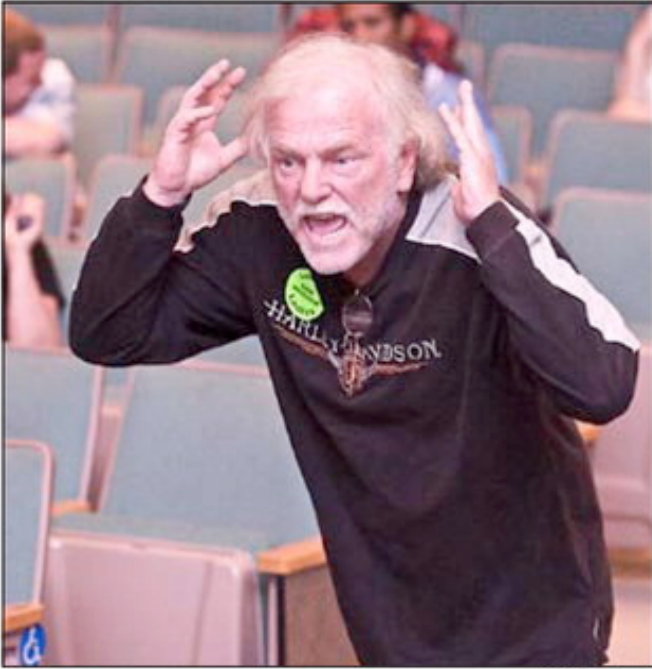
Folan said the "ball is in the hands" of the cafeteria employees. Folan said he would invite the employees to share ideas on how to increase the efficiency of the cafeteria food service.

"We cannot continue to do business the same way," Folan said, adding at the next board of education meeting, he would look to appoint an ad-hoc committee to develop ways to save money or make the food service program better.

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*Al Malpa photos*

*LEFT: Deborah Dubord, assistant manager of food services at Windham Middle School, speaks during a public forum on privatizing the school cafeteria services in the middle school auditorium on Tuesday. RIGHT: Don Haggerty, a local resident and union supporter, conveys his opposition to the plan.*

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"I have a deep respect for this group," he said of the cafeteria workers.

However, Folan did not share the same sentiments of the union leaders. The union is the Connecticut State Employees Association Service Employees International Union Local 2001.

He said union leaders did a lot of "damage" to the board of education and to him by filing an ethics complaint against him.

The complaint — which touched on an alleged conflict of interest related to Folan's job in sales with a food services company — is in the process of being dropped, a union spokesman said today.

"That's a shame," Folan said.

Folan said Tuesday that in discussions with Sodexo, school officials were looking to protect the employees. Sodexo, a Maryland-based food services company, was the likely candidate to take the food service private.

"We want to make sure it's apples to apples, not apples close to apples."

Folan said he abstained from Tuesday's vote because of the allegations. He said he had never abstained from a vote previously. "It will not have a cloud over it, not by me," Folan said.

The proposal was to contract out food services to a private company. Sodexo was named a finalist.

School officials were guaranteed \$141,000 in profit for the first year from Sodexo. School officials previously disclosed the food service lost \$210,000 from 2006-08 and another \$32,000 to \$40,000 this year.

Phil Bornstein, director of business development, along with other members from Sodexo, were on hand to make a presentation about the benefits to switching to Sodexo.

Bornstein said Sodexo serves 14 school districts in the state and it would have kept employees "whole" with pay and benefits.

"We have 14 districts and we are growing," Bornstein said, adding Sodexo would have provided training and career growth opportunities.

"We will not cut quality on food products to lower cost," he said, adding Sodexo would make money by increasing the number of students buying lunch and lowering food costs by using the company's purchasing power.

"In no way, no one on that board wanted to put their jobs in jeopardy," said board of education member Susan Collins. "I think we made the right decision."

Collins said she took offense at the accusatory tone taken by some members of the public who spoke and reiterated the board had no intentions of putting the cafeteria workers' jobs at risk.

"Never (had) any intentions of doing that," Collins said, adding she voted the way she did because of the workers.

Collins added she wished people were as passionate about the cutting of teaching positions and paraprofessionals as they were about cafeteria services.

Windham Superintendent Doreen Fuller said Tuesday her job was to present options to the board of education and her job is to look at all expenses in the district.

"We'll work with what their vote is," Fuller said, adding she would look to have the cafeteria food service program get closer to breaking even.

## Union supporters show their anger

By **DAVID HINCHEY**  
**Chronicle Staff Writer**

WILLIMANTIC — Windham school cafeteria workers and their supporters were not shy about expressing outrage toward a controversial proposal to privatize cafeteria services.

Their anger created several tense moments, with angry union workers making their stand clear.

It appears their cries worked, with the school board ultimately voting to call off plans to outsource food services.

Don Haggerty, a union employee at E.O. Smith High School in Storrs, said it would be too costly to regain what the school district had if they privatized. A town resident, he was speaking in support of the union.

“We need to keep these jobs in Windham,” an enraged Haggerty said in a loud voice, hitting the table where the board of education sat with his hand and hitting the backs of a chair in the auditorium.

Haggerty said Sodexo — the Maryland-based food services company the board nearly hired — refers to **(Union supporters, Page 4)**

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*Mary Gallucci reads her extensive research of Sodexo, the company recommended by the board of education subcommittee.*

## Union supporters show their anger at meeting

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Windham Public Schools as “an account.”

“I refer to us as a community,” he yelled.

Haggerty said the school system needed to keep the food service jobs in Windham and keep the people in the community.

Another outburst came when the public forum was closed.

“The public forum has been closed,” Folan said, which prompted loud yells from the audience of “Give us a chance” and “Give us another year.”

The well-attended forum — which had more than 50 in attendance — took place in the Windham Middle School auditorium.

The process started in March with a request for proposals sent out and Sodexo being named the finalist.

Members of the cafeteria union — the Connecticut State Employees Association/ Service Employees International Union — were actively involved in the process, protesting at March and July board of education meetings.

They even filed an ethics complaint against board of education chairman Kenneth Folan regarding alleged conflicts of interest. Folan works in sales for another food services firm.

At Tuesday’s forum, tension reigned.

Brian Anderson, who handles political/legislative affairs for the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees AFL- CIO, asked Sodexo officials to turn off their PowerPoint presentation, which was flashing around on the screen in the front of the auditorium.

Sodexo did shut down the computer and the hearing continued.

Anderson then spoke out against the proposal.

“This sort of move is bad on so many levels,” he said. “It is morally and ethically wrong. It is fiscally unsound.”

Anderson said he had never seen privatization actually save the public money in the long run and the savings are only initial.

After a while, he said, the “privateer” raises rates because the “privateer” is motivated by profit.

“Privatization is the sort of idea that a \$135,000-a-year superintendent comes up with to save money off of the back of a \$22,000-a-year, blue-collar worker,” he said. “It is amazing, you never see a privatization where someone low paid isn’t the victim.”

Maureen Hulse, a Ridgefield food service worker who lives in New Milford, cautioned the board against privatizing food services.

She said in Ridgefield, the board of education privatized food services and has, since, switched to a number of different companies and has never been able to regain what was lost when the board first voted to outsource.

“We have become pawns in a bad chess game,” Hulse said, adding private contractors cut corners and, ultimately, the students and food service employees are the ones who “suffer.”

The ethics complaint, submitted by Kevin Mercik of Windham, alleged there was a possible conflict of interest involving Folan.

Mercik wrote he feared Folan might be abusing his position by participating in a vote that could benefit himself or his employer. “I ask that you please investigate this matter fully, and encourage Mr. Folan to recuse himself from the outsourcing vote,” wrote Mercik to the town’s ethics commission.

Since Folan, ultimately, abstained from the vote, union spokesman Matt O’Connor said the union dropped the complaint this morning.

On Monday, Folan denied any wrongdoing.

“There is no connection,” Folan said, adding he told union staff representative George Gould and the local union president about his position and they both know there is no conflict of interest.

Folan said the union was “shooting blanks into a dark sky” and the complaint was “yet another union tactic.”

“This is my personal life,” Folan said, adding the union had “crossed the line.”