

My name is Jackie Skillings. I am a paraprofessional working at RHAM High School and am a member of CSEA Local 2001. I am also a member of the contract negotiating team. I live in Hebron and pay taxes to support the RHAM District. I am also a registered voter.

My fellow taxpayers in Hebron, Andover and Marlborough have every reason to be angry over the breakdown in contract negotiations between the non-certified staff represented by Connecticut State Employees Association Local 2001 and the RHAM Board of Education. That anger needs to be justly recognized and applied.

Contract negotiations began in June 2008 when the previous three-year contract between the two parties expired. At the first meeting, the teams for both sides met to establish rules and set dates for negotiations. Dates were difficult to set because of summer schedules. A Board member stated that their negotiations had not yet begun with the teachers' union and that left the non-certified employees with the better choice of dates. The Board subsequently met and settled, through arbitration, with the teachers in February 2009. The non-certified staff entered their second year without a contract in July 2009.

Both sides of the contract dispute entered mediation sessions after a breakdown in talks. These mediation sessions ended without a settlement, leaving the decision on the contract to an independent arbitrator. RHAM Superintendent, Robert Siminski, approached the union's rep, Charles Fabian, with the request to meet to attempt a settlement before arbitration. The negotiating team from the union authorized this meeting. **LET THERE BE NO MISTAKE ABOUT THIS --** the Superintendent approached the Union. The offer that came about as a result of this meeting was the 4-year contract voted upon by the union on September 21. The union negotiating team made the decision to take the Board's contract offer to the members at large for a vote. After allowing the union to vote and after being notified of the vote to accept, the BOE voted to rescind their offer. This is **NOT** bargaining in good faith. At no time was the union negotiating team told that this offer was not backed by the RHAM Board. If the Board did not like the offer, it was the Board's obligation to remove it before it was allowed to go to a vote.

Andover's BOE member Ken Lee (one of the members of the negotiating team) has publicly directed his anger at the staff's greed in wanting a fourth year added to the contract with a 4.1% raise in that year. The Union did **NOT** ask for the fourth year nor did it ask for the 4.1%. The 4th year was added **BY THE BOARD** at the last mediation session and the raise was included in the offer from the Board that was voted on by the Union.

In an article published in The Rivereast on October 2, Marlborough's BOE member, Joseph Farrell (also a member of the Board's negotiating team), states "earlier in the year the board authorized (Siminski) to make an attempt at negotiating a contract. What we voted on at the last meeting wasn't anything I had agreed to. I hadn't seen the terms of the contract until recently". My question to Mr. Farrell is why didn't you know? You were elected to know, weren't you? Why did you and your negotiating team allow the members of the union to believe you and the Board were bargaining in good faith? If you authorized Dr. Siminski to negotiate a contract why did you reject his effort?

None of the non-certified staff employed at RHAM High and Middle Schools are operating under any illusions of grandeur as to where we stand on the grand scale at RHAM. All **certified** RHAM employees – District Administration, High School and Middle School Administration, High School and Middle School teachers and guidance counselors – have received **substantial** raises from this Board. Why do you choose to deny raises to your lowest wage earners after generously compensating everyone else?

We recognize and thank the Board members who support us – Ms. Griffiths, Mr. Cherry, Mr. Zimmer and Ms. Leichter.

Mr. Tremont, Mr. Holtsclaw, Mr. Farrell, Mr. Morelli-Wolfe, Mr. Lee and Mr. Turner -- reconsider your decision to rescind your contract offer before we end up in another costly arbitration procedure. It's time to put this behind us and get back to what we have in common – making RHAM a good place to educate our students.