

Over the course of the last four months the members of the Westfield Education Association have been the center of Councilor David Flaherty's attention. After enduring months of Councilor Flaherty's misleading charges on various forums we are taking an opportunity to address his latest attacks on the people who educate the children of Westfield.

In his latest statements Councilor Flaherty alleges that the city council was "hosed, snookered, lied to and deceived by the union" because every teacher in Westfield received a raise. Let's be clear, there were no increases to the base salary scale in the teachers' contract, there was no cost of living increase afforded to any contracted union person in the school department. The mayor was very clear with the city council and the people of Westfield when he said repeatedly and emphatically that "the salary schedules of every union have to be funded, the teachers were no exception."

The increase that Mr. Flaherty seems to take objection to in the ONE YEAR CONTRACT, is that the longevity table was expanded. For this one year, our longevity scale went from 15-20 years to 14-20 years. Anyone who reached 14 years longevity received a stipend of \$900 for the year or \$17 a week. Any teacher who has achieved 15 years or more of longevity received a \$500 increase to their stipend or \$9.62 a week. Even though the expansion of the longevity table did afford some people with a meager increase in salary, there are also 112 people who are experiencing a 0% increase in any manner; factor in the furlough day and they have taken a pay cut. Mr. Flaherty's statement "that EVERY teacher got a raise" is incorrect.

. While Mr. Flaherty "doesn't think that the union website should be the source of information of this nature," this is exactly where he located the information that he found so objectionable; albeit only last week. However, on July 19<sup>th</sup> when the negotiations team reached consensus on the tentative agreement, the agreement in its entirety was posted on our website. We posted accurate information that our members needed so they were prepared for the ratification vote. On July 27<sup>th</sup> after Unit A voted and ratified the agreement those results were posted online as well. This was all done well in advance of the city council meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> where the emergency vote took place to restore the \$744,000 cut from the School Department budget. There was nothing duplicitous or underhanded about what we did, how we acted, or what we negotiated. If anything, we are ridiculously transparent and everyone has access to our information.

Another bone of contention that Mr. Flaherty is still chewing on is the furlough day buyback. Since the mayor brought up the idea of the furlough and future buyback, Mr. Flaherty has objected to it. The 5 million dollar cost that he says is going to be incurred by the city because of this buyback program would only happen if six thousand teachers retired at the same time. If 15 teachers retire at the end of this year they would receive a \$671.80 buy back a piece and it would cost the city \$10,077. Let's fast forward 10 years...assuming 2% raises over the next 10 years, at retirement a teacher will receive a buyback sum of \$818.92. If 15 teachers retire at that rate it will cost the city \$12,283. It would appear that the 5 million dollar debt is a conveniently inflated figure and Mr. Flaherty is using it as a scare tactic to pit the citizens of Westfield against the people who educate the children of Westfield.

The following is a post that CCFlaherty made on masslive on July 22<sup>nd</sup> in regards to the tentative agreement between the School Department and the WEA. "My thanks go out to city and the union. I think we have a workable deal. Details coming shortly. Press

release in the works. Deal should save \$400,000+ over its one-year term. I'm hopeful it will be ratified early next week.” It would appear that Mr. Flaherty’s comments of not having information are contradictory to what he actually knew. He knew that this contract was for one year. He knew that it would save approximately \$400,000 for this year. While he didn’t have the details he knew they were coming. If he wanted to he could have called members of the School Committee who were on the negotiations team, members of the WEA negotiations team, or Helen Bowler to find out what the details were. Mr. Flaherty never picked up the phone to make that call to get that information; his professed ignorance is nobody’s fault but his own. His allegation that the School Department, School Committee and WEA “spun information to mislead the public” is a blatant attempt by Mr. Flaherty to cover up his lack of preparedness.

The fact that Mr. Flaherty has never mentioned in any of his emails, letters, forum posts or communications of any kind is that EVERY UNIT IN THE WEA has made concessions during negotiations and outside of negotiations for the last ten years; however we are repeatedly attacked and made the object of scorn and ridicule by incorrect and misleading posts with erroneous information designed to promote no one’s cause but his own.

There are several things that can’t be taken back, the bullet once it’s fired, the punch once it’s landed, and the word once it’s said or written. On more than one occasion Mr. Flaherty has made damaging and maligning allegations about the WEA leadership. With no facts to substantiate his statement he posted online that the WEA had hired a lobbyist to create a pro-union website, and hoped that members in the WEA knew where their dues money was going to. Later, when he was given the correct information, he recanted that statement; unfortunately, it was too little too late. That seems to be the trend with Mr. Flaherty, present erroneous inflammatory information that suits his need, be contrary and incendiary with people who could help him gain the correct information, and go out of his way to create adversarial relationships with other elected officials and bodies, rather than alliances.

Mr. Flaherty’s latest attempt to scuttle the recovering rapport among the School Department, WEA, and the City Council is to ask the council to rescind the \$700,000 it restored in July to the School Department. The basis for this action is his lack of information regarding the ONE YEAR CONTRACT that the teachers agreed to. Councilor Flaherty wanted to put this item on the last council agenda as an emergency item and the WEA would like to acknowledge and thank Councilors Sullivan, Miller and Onofrey for speaking against it, we would like to thank Councilors Crean, Bean, Andras, and Keefe for voting against the motion as well. We hope that if this item is placed on the City Council agenda in the future the same action will be taken and that the council will uphold the decision they so wisely made in July.