

Tensions boil over at school board as vice-chair attacks fellow trustee

By TIM WHITNELL
Special

Robb McLeod was shocked, disappointed and somewhat disillusioned by a physical attack on him by a fellow Halton Board of Education trustee.

Now he'd just like to have the matter forgotten.

McLeod said he was sore for a day or so in the upper chest area after being on the receiving end of a two-fisted blow from board vice-chair Penny Siebert, just prior to the start of the Oct. 10 board meeting. Siebert has since sent McLeod a written apology for her actions. However, she claims she merely pushed the trustee.

The incident occurred while trustees were preparing to start the regular portion of the board meeting. It was witnessed by very few people and was sparked by something Siebert overheard McLeod say to Milton trustee Tim

Kingsbury on the subject of some trustees' alleged conflicts of interest.

"There was a very heated in-camera session," McLeod, a Burlington trustee, said in setting the scene just before the incident.

"I wanted to speak to Tim Kingsbury about something. Penny came out from behind me and heard me refer to trustees with conflicts. She turned around and brought her fists over her head and pounded me on my right shoulder. Then she broke down crying."

McLeod put the unexpected outburst by Siebert down to pressures facing the vice-chair.

"I think the impending trial on Nov. 14 is taking its toll. That's a highly-emotional situation."

Siebert is one of five Halton board trustees facing alleged conflict of interest charges in a civil court case brought forward by a member of the Taxpayers Coalition Burlington Inc.

For her part, Siebert repeatedly stated in an interview that striking

McLeod was "totally inappropriate", though she disputes the exact nature of the blow.

Also, the spectre of an impending conflict of interest suit wasn't the only factor in her loss of self-control, noted Siebert.

"It had been a very difficult (in-camera) meeting," she said. "Trustees have had to deal with a lot lately, making tough decisions and going to endless meetings," though she emphasized that it was no excuse for what she did.

Board Chair Linda Glover said she did not witness the confrontation and had little to say on the incident.

"It's not a dysfunctional board," she stated, referring to what she said was a comment made by McLeod some time after the incident.

"It's a few dysfunctional trustees" causing troubles for the board, said Glover, though she was quick to say she was not referring to either McLeod or Siebert.

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- ✓ Please do not use your water or flush your toilet between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm on the day we're working on your street.
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