

Cabrillo board rejects pay plan

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By EMILIO ALVARADO
STAFF WRITER

Cabrillo College governing board last night rejected a proposal to consider giving board members a monthly stipend and medical benefits.

By a 3-2 vote, the board killed a move by trustee Danny Spencer to have the board explore the idea of giving board members a \$240-a-month stipend and a medical-benefits package. (Trustees David Weiss and Nancy Matlock were absent from the meeting.)

"I wish the board had done this years ago," said Spencer, who was elected to the board in November. He represents the Scotts Valley area, a seat previously held by Jack Boone.

Spencer said most school districts and community college districts in California compensate board members.

It is estimated that the cost of stipends and medical benefits would have cost the district about \$60,000 a year.

Trustees Rebecca Garcia, Marla Henry and George Couch voted against the measure, with trustee Spencer and Mike Kostyal voting in favor. Garcia, Henry, Spencer and Kostyal have all been on the board since November. Couch has been on the board for several years.

Since the college opened in 1959, trustees have served on the board without receiving a stipend or medical benefits.

From a "historical perspective," Couch said, serving on the Cabrillo board has been considered a "public service."

"Personally, I'm not interested in what other districts do," Couch said.

Kostyal said the idea of giving trustees a stipend is "fraught with perceptions." He voted for the proposal because it would give the board members an opportunity to explore the idea, and they could decide to vote for it or not if it were placed on next month's agenda.

But that won't happen. The board did unanimously approve a motion that would give trustees an opportunity to buy into the Cabrillo's medical benefits package. That item will be on next month's agenda for board action.

Former board members Boone

and Helen Palmer attended last night's meeting to speak against giving board members stipends.

A member of the audience who identified herself as a taxpayer angrily berated the board for considering paying themselves. The woman said the stipend issue was never brought up during the November campaign.

"I feel betrayed and deceived," she said and promptly left after her comments.

In an interview before the meeting, Spencer said he was under the impression when he was running for the seat that Cabrillo board members were paid. He said he was told the board met only once a month and the meetings were usually very short.

"I was not out looking for money, but it was brought to my attention that money was available (for trustees)," he said.

Under state law, trustees are entitled to a stipend. That stipend is based on the schools' enrollment. At Cabrillo that stipend would figure to be about \$240 a month.

Since taking office, Spencer has discovered that being a board member takes up about 60 to 70 hours a month of his time. Going to meetings takes him away from his family, and there are costs incurred in attending meetings, he said.

Spencer concedes it is "very difficult" to justify paying trustees, particularly now when Cabrillo is experiencing funding constraints. Cabrillo has asked each department to cut about 3 percent from their budgets. Opponents of the stipend said Spencer's proposal comes at a "bad time" for the college. But Spencer counters, "It's never a good time. When is a good time?"

Spencer was thinking of the future when he decided to make his proposal. "It's not a case for Danny Spencer," he said.

The proposal, Spencer said, was taking into consideration elections "down the road." A stipend and a medical-benefits package, he said, would not only compensate trustees for their work but the money and benefits would also serve as an enticement that could draw "top-grade" candidates into future board elections.

The voters would then have a larger field of candidates from which to choose and a "higher caliber of people" would enter the races, he said.

Spencer mentioned the congressional race to fill Leon Panetta's seat. Panetta resigned his seat to serve as President Bill Clinton's budget chief. There now more than two dozen candidates vying for his seat.

"One of the reasons people are running for that seat is that it pays good," Spencer said.