

# DESERET Morning News

## Power struggles: Office of Education spars with lawmakers

By **Jennifer Toomer-Cook**

Deseret Morning News

*Published: February 28, 2008*

Simmering mistrust between some lawmakers and the State Office of Education — apparently stirred by word that a state education official might run against the House education committee chairman in November — bubbled up Wednesday after a debate over extra pay for math and science teachers.

Rep. Greg Hughes, R-Draper, unsuccessfully sought to substitute Sen. Howard Stephenson's SB35 with his HB471 in the House Education Committee. The proposal would have the state human resources department distribute \$5,000 raises, essentially as a bonus, to current and future highly qualified math and science teachers, instead of the State Office of Education, which traditionally pays teachers.

But the committee narrowly voted down Hughes' proposal, then adjourned, sending Stephenson's bill back to rules.

Stephenson's bill is a budget priority for House Republicans, so there are good chances it will be debated in the full House. But Hughes mentioned that the \$5 million price tag might be enough for just a \$3,500 raise for the targeted teachers.

"What we need is a beginning," Stephenson, R-Draper, said after the committee meeting. "I would support any amount as a beginning, and we could come back in future years and adjust that."

But Hughes' attempted substitute bill ruffled feathers at the State Office of Education. Initially miffed that the committee did not have time for public comment, the dispute intensified when deputy state superintendent Larry Shumway and Hughes discussed the event.

Shumway said the board supports additional pay for high-demand teachers, money hoped to make teaching an attractive career choice for math and science majors. But he doesn't like Hughes wanting to pay \$300,000-plus to the state human resources department to do the work the education office would do with no extra charge.

But for Hughes, the issue is about trust.

His heated discussion with Shumway and other state school bosses after the committee adjourned included a history of incidents, including the miscount leading to a shortfall on this year's promised \$2,500 raise for schoolteachers, after which several school districts preferred to wait to give teachers the full amount until lawmakers filled in the budgetary gap. While Shumway said his office gave districts the money in monthly

installments as always, Hughes said that district action "said to legislators, we don't trust you to do what you said you would do."

Other mistrust matters for Hughes include misinterpretations over how technology funding was to be spent last year and a state office lawyer's legal advice coming across as advocacy, an accusation reminiscent of the legal fight over vouchers last spring, and one that, in the past few days, led to a clearing-of-the-air meeting between Hughes and the State Board of Education.

And now, there's word Margaret Bird, the State Office of Education's school trust land specialist, is considering running against Hughes in November as Hughes sees it, a state education leader is setting out to get him fired.

"It certainly sends a message," Hughes said of Bird's potential candidacy.

Bird told the Deseret Morning News she has not decided whether to challenge Hughes nor tested the waters on Capitol Hill.

"I thought that I lived in America, and I thought anyone could run for anything, and it does not mean there is not trust," she said. "It means one person has one set of values and philosophies and another person has a different set. ... A lack of trust would be if I did something dishonest or behind someone's back. I haven't made a decision yet. When I make a decision, I will let him know."

The candidates' filing deadline is in mid-March.

Shumway said they can't tell an employee "she can't be engaged in the American political process."

He and Hughes both said they are trying to build a relationship of trust with one another Hughes several times complimented Shumway for his efforts.

Shumway promised that if Stephenson's bill passes, the State Office of Education would run the differentiated pay program smoothly and as legislators intend.

"We're going to make this happen," reiterated state associate superintendent Brenda Hales, inviting Hughes to keep in contact with her office during implementation.

Hughes said he still will try to run HB471.

---

*E-mail: [jtcook@desnews.com](mailto:jtcook@desnews.com)*