

Board president urged to resign after ad

By JOSH FUNK
Senior staff writer

Election '98

Three state education organizations called for the resignation of the president of the State Board of Education Tuesday.

The demand stems from Board President Kathleen McCallister's appearance in a campaign ad supporting Initiative 413, the proposed tax lid, which the board voted to oppose 5-3.

The Nebraska State Education Association, the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators said the ad was misleading because McCallister identified herself as board president in the ads, which could imply she was speaking on behalf of the board.

Though McCallister does not say she is speaking on behalf of the board in the ad, she does not say she is speaking individually, either.

McCallister called the demand laughable and said she has no intention of resigning or apologizing.

"I have a right to take a position on any issue I want to," she said.

The ad makes it appear McCallister is speaking for the state board in favor of the proposal, said Duane Obermier,

president of the Nebraska State Education Association, the state's main teachers' union.

"Kathleen McCallister has misled the voters," Obermier said.

State Board Vice President Katherine Endacott said board members have a policy not to speak out in an official capacity against board decisions, and she wants the ads to be retracted.

"This feels like a betrayal," Endacott said. "We just want to set the record straight."

Brian Hale, spokesman for the Nebraska Association of School Boards, said new school board members are trained how to express their individual opinions without misrepresenting the board.

"We tell them they don't lose their right to expression, but they can't walk around town with their position on their sleeve contradicting the board," Hale said.

But McCallister said her title is part of who she is.

"I was elected to represent the people, and I'm doing that," she said.

McCallister is in the final months of

her term on the State Board and is running for the Douglas County Board. She joined the state board in 1994 and has served as president since 1997.

Obermier raised the question of whether the advertisement was a trade-off for campaign donations she received from backers of the proposal.

McCallister said that accusation is offensive.

"Those people who contributed to my race are people who have given to me in the past," she said.

According to campaign statements filed with the state, McCallister received \$3,775 out of \$20,470 from individuals or businesses who support Initiative 413.

The contributions included \$1,000 from Kiewit Construction Co. of Omaha, \$250 from ConAgra of Omaha, \$1,050 from Omaha businessman David Sokol, \$1,000 from Kenneth Stinson, Kiewit chairman and \$500 from Kiewit Construction Group Inc.

"It leaves a question in your mind when you've got a person running for another office in Douglas County and is able to get so much air time," said John Bonaiuto, executive director of the school board association.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



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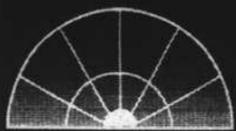
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