

▶ Eagle-Tribune

▶ Gloucester Daily Times

▶ Daily News of Newburyport

▶ Salem News

▶ Weekly pap



Sunday, April 09, 2006

dögpile.com

All the best search engines piled into one.



Go Fetch!

**Plus Edition**[Sign In](#) | [Info](#)[Home](#)[News](#)[- NH](#)[- Haverhill](#)[Sports](#)[Opinion](#)[Business](#)[Lifestyle](#)[Celebrations](#)[Obituaries](#)[Special Reports](#)[Classifieds](#)[Homes North](#)[Help Wanted](#)[Legal Notices](#)[Lottery-MA](#)[Lottery-NH](#)[Maps](#)[Movies](#)[Phonebook](#)[Stocks](#)[TV](#)[Weather](#)[Our Sponsors](#)**News**

## Problems could not have been foreseen

**By Davin Wilfrid***Staff writer*

NORTH ANDOVER — When Harry K. Harutunian was hired to be the new superintendent of schools in February 2003, school and community heads praised his leadership, effective budgeting skills and preparedness.

Three years later, the embattled superintendent is on paid vacation as the School Committee investigates an affair Harutunian had with a special education secretary, and whether the 29 percent raise he gave her was tied to that relationship. The committee expects to make a final decision on his future at a meeting Tuesday.

As Harutunian's job hangs in the balance, many concerned residents are looking back and wondering if Harutunian's behavior could have been foreseen. Everything from the process that brought Harutunian to North Andover from his superintendent job in Reading to his four-year self-renewing contract are coming under scrutiny.

"My concern is that for a position that's that important to the town, you would think you would have done a great deal of due diligence," said parent Joseph D. Cinsoruli. "You think you would have done your homework. What I've heard is all second-hand from other people, but it seems to me when he left Reading there were some stigmas and the search committee didn't do its job in checking out his past history."

But those involved say there was no way to predict Harutunian's recent actions.

"They say hindsight is 20/20, but even so I don't think we would have discovered any of these patterns of behavior," said Bruce E. Baker, a former School Committee member who helped hire Harutunian. "I don't think there's anything we would have found

**Headlines**

- ▶ Breaking matzo: Christians embrace Jewish roots with Se
- ▶ New memorial brings innov: technology
- ▶ Problems could not have been foreseen
- ▶ Car crash claims life of a No Andover High junior
- ▶ Competition for college slots record high

[More headlines be](#)**More Headlines**

- ▶ Toyota, Kia expand American manufacturing
- ▶ AG's office files suit against Boston Baby
- ▶ Hope in spite of poverty
- ▶ 'Born Into Brothels'
- ▶ Bush blasts Senate Democratic leader
- ▶ New twist in CIA leak probe
- ▶ Community Calendar
- ▶ Former FEMA chiefs see tough road for agency's new director
- ▶ U.S. suspends aid to Palestinian Cabinet
- ▶ Hog heaven in Beijing: Harley-Davidson opens first s

that would have been predictive of the events in North Andover recently."

In March the School Committee began investigating Harutunian's relationship with special education secretary and gymnastics coach Brenda A. Shea. In July 2005 Harutunian asked the School Committee to remove Shea from the secretarial union. After the committee complied, Shea was given a \$10,000 raise.

Harutunian later admitted to having an affair with Shea, but through his lawyer said the relationship started after she received her job change and raise.

Baker defended the committee's decision to refrain from a committee-wide site visit to the Reading school system, saying they had hired consultant Lyle Kirtman of Beverly-based Future Management Systems to check out each candidate.

"Did we do a background search? Yes," said former committee member Daniel J. Murphy. "Did we hire a consultant to look into the candidates' backgrounds? Yes. Was it predictable that we'd have this kind of behavior from a candidate who had been recommended by a respected consultant? No."

Attempts to contact Kirtman at work and on his cell phone were unsuccessful.

Jack Watkins, a Finance Committee member who led the search committee, said the committee was asked only to review resumes and supporting materials and to conduct brief interviews with more than a dozen of the top candidates. Criticisms of Harutunian from Reading residents, including those found on the Web site of the group Informed Residents of Reading, were never addressed during the process.

"We operated understanding that any of the candidates in front of us had their backgrounds checked by our search firm," Watkins said. "We relied on Lyle to have scrubbed the candidates. In retrospect that was not sufficient."

Current School Committee Chairman Alfred M. Perry said he did not see the IROR Web site until several months after Harutunian began his job. When he asked Harutunian about it, Harutunian responded that any superintendent who works in a community long enough makes enemies, Perry said.

More important to the search committee were resumes and interviews, Watkins said.

"Dr. Harutunian was extraordinarily well-prepared," he recalled. "Not only did he know the names of everyone sitting in the room that night, but he knew details of North Andover's financial problems. He really demonstrated the capabilities of good financial expertise."

School officials also defended the contract they signed with

in China

- ▶ [Europe's imams hunt for new 'theology of integration'](#)
- ▶ [Car bomb kills 6 near Iraqi S shrine; official says country in 'undeclared civil war'](#)
- ▶ [Methuen man teaches Korea English](#)
- ▶ [Lawrence news in brief](#)
- ▶ [Lawrence Calendar](#)
- ▶ [Lottery](#)
- ▶ [For some, mandatory health payments create worries](#)
- ▶ [Methuen news in brief](#)
- ▶ [Methuen calendar](#)
- ▶ [Nepali forces fire on protest killing 1 as anti-monarchy](#)
- ▶ [Guest lineup for today's TV shows](#)
- ▶ [Under post-Katrina pressure Cross undertakes daunting ov](#)
- ▶ [Where are all the Republicar](#)
- ▶ [Mother of soldier missing tw years still sure he'll be back](#)
- ▶ [Survivors pick up the pieces Tennessee storms kill 12](#)
- ▶ [U.S., Venezuela disagree aft ambassador's car pelted, chas Chavez supporters](#)
- ▶ [Clarification](#)

Harutunian in July 2004. The original contract was set to expire in 2008, but contains a self-renewing clause that adds additional years every year. Harutunian's current \$163,000-a-year contract is valid through 2010, meaning he could argue for a full payout worth more than \$600,000 if he is fired over his recent actions.

"The contract was pretty standard," Baker said. "It was a good contract that attracted what we believed at the time was a very strong candidate. We believed we were paying good dollars to get a good candidate."

Tom Scott, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Superintendents, said such contracts are very common and have been for years. He said self-renewing clauses are necessary to protect superintendents from the changing tides of politics.

"What you have to remember is that they are often caught up in a very political environment but they're not politicians," he said. "On any particular day even the finest of superintendents can find themselves embroiled in political issues and they become a target. If they don't have any security at all, who would want to do it?"

Scott said that of the 277 superintendent jobs in the state, 130 of them had changed hands in the past three years. Already there are 45 openings for superintendents for next year, and Scott estimates that number will eventually reach 60.

Perry insists the hiring process that brought Harutunian to North Andover was conducted with the best interests of the public in mind. And while he said the committee could not have foreseen the scandal that erupted last month, he acknowledged that it will "absolutely" take a political toll.

"There will be people asking how could this happen, and we're asking ourselves the same thing," he said. "But not one of us second-guessed this hiring.

"We had zero people come to us and say, 'You've got a problem with this guy. Watch out,'" Perry said.

Perry said if has to do another superintendent search while he is chairman of the board, he will take an extra step.

"If we do it again, I'll hire a private investigator to do a background check," he said. "I did not realize the directions these people can go."

**Until they're 4'9",  
use a booster seat in the car.**

