



Life's good when you feed at the public trough

Eagle-Tribune

Fortunate are those who have the privilege of continuing to feed at the public trough regardless of how much their actions have already cost the taxpayers.

Take Harry Harutunian, the former superintendent of schools in North Andover. He resigned his post last April following revelations that he'd had an extramarital affair with a member of his office staff - to whom he'd awarded a very generous raise along with a part-time job for her son.

It cost the North Andover School Committee \$187,000 to buy out the remaining years on Harutunian's contract. But despite the scandal, and an Ethics Commission ruling that Harutunian violated state ethics laws by providing "his girlfriend's son with a special deal not available to other students," and then attempting to cover it up, Harutunian had no trouble finding a new position as a full-time substitute teacher at Lynn Classical High School for which he will receive more than \$61,000 a year.

Now that might seem like a significant comedown from his former position, but no doubt it's worth it in order to maximize the retirement benefits for which Harutunian will be eligible in a few years.

How did he get the job? Well, he happens to be very good friends with the superintendent in Lynn, Nick Kostan, whose wife, Kathleen, Harutunian hired to serve as principal of a North Andover elementary school in 2004. She retired after working there for two years, and having increased her salary from the \$76,000 she was earning as a principal in Peabody, to \$91,670. Such an increase can do wonders for an educator's pension which is based on his or her three highest-paying years.

So this fall, when he could have hired a novice teacher for half the cost to serve as a long-term substitute at the high school, Kostan chose to take care of his pal.

The Lynn superintendent told an Eagle-Tribune reporter that he was untroubled by the ethics charge against Harutunian. But taxpayers in Lynn, North Andover and the rest of the state ought to be both troubled and outraged.

Like Lawrence, the bulk of Lynn's school finances come from state coffers. So poor North Andover taxpayers will have suffered a triply whammy - having had to buy Harutunian out of his superintendent's contract, now helping subsidize his salary in Lynn and eventually kicking in for a portion of what will no doubt be a very comfortable pension.

Life's good in Massachusetts for those who know how to work the system.

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