



Celebrating Chartering @ 30 – MINNESOTA'S STORY

In the legislative process, the Conference Committee is where 'real' legislating takes place when the House and Senate have different positions on an issue, so who the members of the Conference Committee are is crucial.

Given the Senate's history of bipartisan support for chartered public schools for three consecutive years, it was not surprising that the five Senate conferees were all charter supporters: Senator Ron Dicklich (DFL- Hibbing), Senator Greg Dahl (DFL- Ham Lake), Senator Gary DeCramer (DFL- Ghent), Senator Sandy Pappas (DFL- St. Paul), and Senator Gen Olson (Republican-Mound).

On the House side, who the Conferees were would be critical as three of them would have to support including charters in the final Omnibus Education bill. The House Conferees had two DFL members that supported charters - Rep. Ken Nelson, (DFL- Minneapolis) and Rep. Becky Kelso, (DFL – Shakopee) - and two DFL opponents of chartering - Rep. Bob McEachern (DFL – Maple Lake) and Rep. Jerry Bauerly (DFL- Sauk Rapids). The deciding vote would be cast by Rep. Gary Schafer (Republican – Gibbon). Rep. Shafer was a supporter of chartering. Senator Ember Reichgott wrote in ***Zero Chance of Passage***, "*With Kelso, Schafer, and Nelson as chair, the three house votes needed to finally adopt the chartering provisions from the senate bill into the conference committee report seemed, for the first time, very real.*"

In the legislature, nothing is really "real" until the legislature adjourns sine die and with the conference committee in place, things did start to get real – but not as Senator Reichgott had expected. Once the Conference Committee was announced, the opposition to chartering mobilized for action. The MN Federation of Teachers (MFT) sent an action memo to its members stating, "*We need you to act today! Call Members of the Conference Committee and tell them to vote "No!" on the charter school bill.*"

It is said that timing is everything – While MFT was mobilizing against the charter school provisions, there was debate about the position of Al Shanker, president of the AFT, given that the Minnesota charter provisions were based on his talk at the Itasca Seminar back in the fall of 1988.**

In a 2011 interview for *Zero Chance of Passage*, Rep. Nelson stated:

"When we got into the debate about charter schools [in conference committee], the Minnesota Federation of Teachers was against it and made it clear they were against it. I would say, 'Well, Shanker supports this, you know.' McEachern would challenge that and get upset about that. So ... I went and called Shanker. I happened to get him right on the phone before he was leaving on a trip. I said, 'Hey, we've launched this charter school idea based on your idea...But...your local unions out here are beating up on us. What's going on?'" Nelson continued, "Shanker said, 'Well, the structure of the AFT is to kind of let the locals decide their own destiny.'"

The local state union led by Sandra Peterson, MFT President shared in a September 2011 interview for *Zero Chance of Passage*, "Our members were very threatened. We had votes against charter schools That's why, even though [we] might support Shanker's forward thinking, and Ember, who said, 'This is to avoid vouchers', we lobbied her a lot about not doing this."

Lobby they did – in the last two weeks of the session, the unions did an all-out press on all House members to pressure the House Conferees to reject the charter school bill completely.

Next Week: The pressure is on – and it gets personal.

Notes:

1] Senator Ember Reichgott was not on the Conference Committee as she was chair of the Property Tax Committee and therefore was on the Tax Conference Committee:

2] ** Volume 8 – October 19, 2021 Issue of Celebrating Charters @ 30 – Minnesota's Story



Copyright © 2021 Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, All rights reserved.

You were added to this list as a sample email to test out MailChimp.

Our mailing address is:

Minnesota Association of Charter Schools
161 St. Anthony Avenue, Suite 1000
St Paul, MN 55103

[Add us to your address book](#)

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

