

EDITORIAL



Football

If there was ever any doubt the Select Committee for Legal Review was nothing more than a political football, there isn't anymore. The stand-off between First Selectman Woody Bliss and Selectman Gayle Weinstein last week regarding the selection of members for this ill-conceived committee came down to political gamesmanship — exactly the reason why the committee is such a bad idea in the first place.

The town has retained Town Attorney Ken Bernhard of the law firm Cohen and Wolf, since 2000. When it came time to re-appoint town counsel immediately following last fall's municipal election, there were those who asked if Mr. Bernhard was the best choice for the town. Instead of agreeing to do an in-house performance review and perhaps even a cost analysis of the work done by the attorney, the Board of Selectmen, at the urging of Mr. Bliss, chose instead to appoint a select committee to do the job. In the meantime, Mr. Bernhard was re-appointed as town counsel.

Last Thursday's bargaining, maneuvering, and the entire decision-making process was so politically motivated it bordered on embarrassing.

For example, Mr. Bliss objected to the inclusion of Carl Bernstein on the committee because he is chairman of the Democratic Town Committee. He had no problem, however, with Tom Aquila, former chairman and current active member of the Republican Town Committee, being named to the committee.

Meanwhile, Ms. Weinstein insisted that Steve Ezzes — her running mate in the November election — be made chairman of the committee, saying she felt so strongly, she would "give" Mr. Bliss two of his choices in return. Mr. Bliss in turn insisted David Fleming be named chairman, even though he couldn't offer any reasons why he feels Mr. Fleming is qualified.

Selectman Glenn Major has recused himself from the process (as an attorney, he has had clients who have had dealings with the town attorney), and so it came down to a battle of wills between Mr. Bliss and Ms. Weinstein — and neither won. Instead of coming up with a compromise or seeking alternate solutions — like leaders are supposed to do — the two played "chicken" briefly, but then both ultimately swerved; they gave up and decided to come back to the table at a later date. It is unclear what is supposed to change in the interim that would make either selectman change his or her mind.

The problem, however, is not who should be chairman or even who should sit on the committee. The problem is that the committee itself is being used as a political tool. And the problem with that is even if the individual members of the committee have no political agenda, public perception of the validity and usefulness of the committee as a whole is tainted because the selectmen obviously do.

The selectmen should cut their losses, scrap the idea of adding another doomed "select committee" to the town's roster, spend a few hours reviewing town counsel's decisions and billing practices themselves, and just make a decision and be done with it.

Leave the football — political and otherwise — to the Giants and the Patriots.