

Dwane Callwood Fends Off Challenge From Ronald Russell, Gets Reelected as Chair of GERS Board

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GERS Board Chairman Dwane Callwood.

One of the agenda items on the year's first meeting of the Government Employees' Retirement System (GERS) Board of Trustees was choosing someone to chair the board's activities, however that was challenged by board member Ronald Russel who argued that sufficient notice was not given prior to the election.

Mr. Russell said that a 30-day notice period was stipulated in the bylaws, and noted that he was in contact with a number of members who did not know the election was being held. He suggested the trustees postpone the election until 30 days after the board meeting, to provide an opportunity for members' concerns to be aired.

Board member Pedro Williams confirmed that article 3.3 of the bylaws does require a 30-day election notice, adding that the election announcement was directed specifically to board members only during the last meeting.

However, Mr. Russell argued that the 16,000 members of GERS ought to have received notice of the election. “I don’t believe we should proceed with this election simply because the Board of Trustees get notice,” he said.

When asked if he was attempting to postpone or delay the election, Mr. Russell replied “yes”, and subsequently raised a motion to postpone the meeting until a 30-day notice is issued to all members. Board member Andre Dorsey seconded the motion, which ultimately did not get sufficient votes to be upheld.

Subsequent verbal nominations were opened. Board member Dwane Callwood was nominated for chair, and Nellon Bowry for the post as vice chair.

However, Mr. Russell raised another objection, this time over an alleged conflict of interest. “With all due respect Chairman Callwood, the conflict that I raised with you and the Legislature, I think inherently disqualifies you from being chair,” Mr. Russell said.

Mr. Callwood snapped back saying the matter Mr. Russell was referring to had been raised and resolved prior to Mr. Russell joining the board. However, Russell continued to suggest that Callwood decline the nomination as chair on the basis that he cannot properly represent the board while working for the Legislature. Even after having been told a second time that the matter had been resolved prior to his tenure on the board, Mr. Russell continued to ask questions about Mr. Callwood's relationship with the Legislature.

Russell eventually called for a written opinion from legal counsel on whether or not the conflict compromises Mr. Callwood’s position as chair. He also requested an explanation for Mr. Bowry's acceptance of the nomination as vice chair after [his resignation last October](#), saying he wanted to discuss that issue before any voting is done.

Mr. Russell subsequently questioned the whereabouts of Board member Vincent G. Liger, who was having technical difficulties. “I would accept a nomination from anybody because I would like to serve as chair,” Mr. Russell said, saying he thought Mr. Liger would nominate him.

Board member Andre Dorsey then nominated MR. Russell for chair, and he accepted the nomination. Mr. Dorsey also nominated Board member Leona E. Smith as vice chair; however she declined the nomination.

Mr. Russell then nominated Mr. Dorsey as vice chair.

Mr. Russell went on to say he believes anybody serving as chair should submit a resume detailing the things they have done to deserve the appointment. He questioned Mr. Callwood's credentials and community work, saying he did not see how the incumbent chair was qualified for the position.

Russell had submitted his own resume, he informed his fellow board members, and said he believed he was fully qualified for the post. He then asked Mr. Callwood for some insight into his background and why he believes he qualifies for chair, saying he doesn’t know Mr. Callwood.

After a heated discussion about how the vote should be conducted, a majority of board members decided against a proposed voice vote, and eventually settled on texting their vote to GERS Administrator Austin Nibbs with the exception of Mr. Dorsey who voted via phone call.

Four board members voted in favor of Mr. Callwood as chair, and two in favor of Mr. Russell.

Mr. Russell accepted the results, however brought up the issue of conflict of interest again. Attorney Pedro Williams promised to review the details of the first time the issue was brought up, but affirmed that the conclusion arrived at was that Mr. Callwood qualified to serve on the board.

Mr. Russell pressed on whether the conclusion at the time had taken into consideration the possibility of Mr. Callwood serving as chair.

Mr. Williams explained, “If he qualifies to sit on the board, clearly he qualifies to serve as chair because there is no additional or specific requirements for one to serve as chair, other than one being a member of the board,” before promising to do the appropriate research into the matter.

Mr. Russell, however, continued his debate, saying Mr. Callwood going before the Legislature was a challenge to loyalty. He promised to send his concerns out to the board members over this alleged conflict.

Mr. Russell also committed to providing the necessary proof that Mr. Callwood’s appointment is a conflict of interest, saying it was not a personal attack but that he wanted to ensure all was in order.

Mr. Callwood took up post as chairman of GERS in October last year, following the resignation of Mr. Bowry.

Mr. Bowry tendered his resignation as chairman of the board in protest of the other trustees' decision to increase the salary of the administrator to \$250,000 annually.