Ex-Rochester Council Member to Succeed Gardner as Regent

Catherine Collins
ALBANY — A former Rochester City Council member was tapped Tuesday to succeed a Buffalo lawyer who is retiring from the Board of Regents, the state’s powerful education policy-setting panel.

Wade Norwood was selected after state legislators from the Buffalo area found themselves split over who should succeed Arnold B. Gardner, who announced two weeks ago he would not seek a new five-year term.

One state legislator, speaking privately, said the split delegation did not help the effort to keep someone from the Buffalo area in the seat.

Backed by Assemblyman David F. Gantt, a Rochester Democrat, Norwood, who also is a member of the Buffalo Fiscal Stability Authority, was approved, 152-1, by a joint session of the Assembly and State Senate in the Capitol.

Three candidates from the Buffalo area were in the running: Stacey Watson, the executive director of the South Buffalo Education Center, who was backed by Assemblymen Sam Hoyt and Mark J. F. Schroeder, both Buffalo Democrats; Dr. Jane Griffin, principal research scientist for Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute, who was backed by Assemblyman Robin Schimminger, a Kenmore Democrat; and Catherine Collins, a Buffalo School Board member whose supporters included Assemblywoman Crystal D. Peoples, a Buffalo Democrat.

Gardner had served as a regent for 10 years. The seat previously had been filled by someone from the
Rochester area. Unlike most regent positions, which are allocated by judicial districts, the seat is an at-large position.

"I absolutely was a Stacey Watson partisan. She was my first choice, and she would have made an exceptional regent to shake things up at a time when things needed to be shaken up," Hoyt said. But he called Norwood "an impressive guy."

Norwood, who works for the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency, a not-for-profit community health planning agency, ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Rochester. He also once worked for Gantt in the Assembly. A University at Rochester graduate, he was appointed to the Buffalo control board in 2006 by then-State Comptroller Alan G. Hevesi.

Robert Bennett of the Town of Tonawanda announced last week he is stepping down as regents chancellor but would remain on the board. He represents the Eighth Judicial District, which consists of Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans and Wyoming counties.

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