

Businesses, community groups force 30-day delay on school contract plan

by Christian Morrow

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PHOTO BY KENNETH NEELY

ALEXANDER NICHOLS, DORIS CARSON WILLIAMS

Though the turnout of Black business owners at last week's Pittsburgh school board meeting was substantial, more than attendance will be needed to stop an agreement that would give more than 90 percent of the district's contracts to union firms.

The plan would essentially eliminate minority- and women-owned firms from the district's contractor pool because most are non-union.

The scheduled June 22 vote on the proposed project labor agreement was tabled for 30 days—but only after contentious debate and two failed attempts by Alex Matthews to limit the agreement's scope and an earlier, failed motion by Randall Taylor to table the agreement indefinitely.

"We're having this rammed down our throat," said Matthews.

School Director Jean Fink said the agreement will not affect small contractors because "they should have other work anyway."

To which Matthews scoffed, "So you're telling

Black contractors they'd better have other work because they won't get any here."

NAAACP Pittsburgh Branch President M. Gayle Moss said she was shocked by what she heard during the meeting.

"It's clear—the racism is clear. This is what Pittsburgh is all about," she said. "This agreement needed to be tabled. For years they just give us crumbs and now they want to take that."

The agreement promises union firms—or those that replace 90 percent of their workers with union labor—all district contracts valued at more than \$25,000. In exchange, the building trades unions are to set aside an unspecified number of apprenticeship slots for district students.

Anti-sweatshop advocate Kenneth Miller said the building trades deal with the school district is just the first step in a larger initiative.

"This is a test case," he said. "If we don't stop it here, they will do it at the new downtown hotel and at the casino."

Though shocked by the board's apparent will-

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