



SOUTH KITSAP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Gattenby, Law hope to reverse 'lack of transparency'

Candidates vie for SKSD board's District 1 seat

By Bob Smith

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PORT ORCHARD — Eric L. Gattenby, appointed in August 2018 to fill the District 1 director's position on the South Kitsap School District's board of directors, is running for a four-year term in the general election against Safeway.com truck driver and South Kitsap parent Keith Law.

Gattenby is a 22-year Navy veteran and parent of two daughters who attend school in the district. He currently is a civil service employee at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center in Keyport. In addition to his stint on the school board here, the veteran served three years on the board of directors for the Central Kitsap Food Bank.

Law isn't a newcomer to the world of local politics, however. He has been a candidate for Port Orchard City Council and has run a number of times to become a Republican Party precinct committee member.

Gattenby said his 16 months on the school board has given him an advantage in understanding what is expected of a school board director and the responsibilities the role carries.

"I've enjoyed my time on the board and feel like I've brought a good perspective and diversity to the board," the incumbent said.

One concern he said he hopes members will address is the issue of community trust in the board of directors.

"The trust in the board is not on an upward trend," Gattenby said. "I've been fairly consistent in my approach with the board — my temperament and participation has been a positive. I hope to turn that trend around so that the public is more engaged with us and is more trusting of us and the process."

Gattenby said he believes the board "needs to be more deliberate and overt in getting more participation and be more visible in what we do."

He said the board needs to come up with a comprehensive plan to replace the district's aging school facilities that take into account the community's persistence in not approving a series of bond measures to build a second high school.

“Cedar Heights [Middle School] is very dated. And South Colby is a hodge-podge of portables and add-ons. There needs to be a comprehensive look at the needs of the entire district, not just the needs for a high school.”

Law said he had been contemplating running for his district’s school board seat for some time — and his interest was piqued by discussions with his daughter, who is a senior this year at South Kitsap.

“I have certain beliefs that are really [immersed] in me,” Law said, “and I try to put morals in my kids based on what I believe. What first got into my craw was my daughter’s teacher who kept pushing political ideas that kind of went against the morals I was trying to teach her.”

He said he hears of “the constant political issues that are being thrown at her by teachers. I feel we need to get politics out of our schools and get back to the basics.”

The deciding factor for his candidacy, though, was the news that the school district would need to lay off teachers due to budgetary restrictions. Law said the subsequent news that those teachers would still keep their jobs left him puzzled about the budgetary process. He said the school district wasn’t upfront with residents about those initial budgetary issues — and, he said, officials didn’t release that information to the community until it had disclosed it to a third-party organization he didn’t want to disclose publicly.

Law said the additional money needed to fund schools has placed a hardship on South Kitsap property owners — so much so, he said, that many are leaving the area due to affordability issues spurred by higher property taxes.

“It’s not just property owners that are suffering. People who live in apartments also see their rents go up because those increases are just passed along by the property owners through rent increases.”

District 2 – Glenny Compton

In the District 2 race, Glenny Compton is facing John R. Berg for the board seat, which doesn’t feature an incumbent. Berg’s comments were included

in an election profile in the Independent a few weeks ago, and Compton was unable to set up a time then to share her views. She did contact the newspaper this week, however, and discussed her reasons for running.

“My kids are very active in school and are involved in sports and other things,” Compton said. “I’m always at school for something.”

Her interest in running for the school board arose after dealing with the district about her son, who she said was having problems with some teachers.

“It didn’t seem like we were getting answers from the school,” she said, “and the process was taking too long.”

Compton said she was bothered by the board’s lack of transparency and only was able to get additional information after digging for them.

“So I decided, ‘You know what, we need to make a change.’ That’s when I decided to run.”

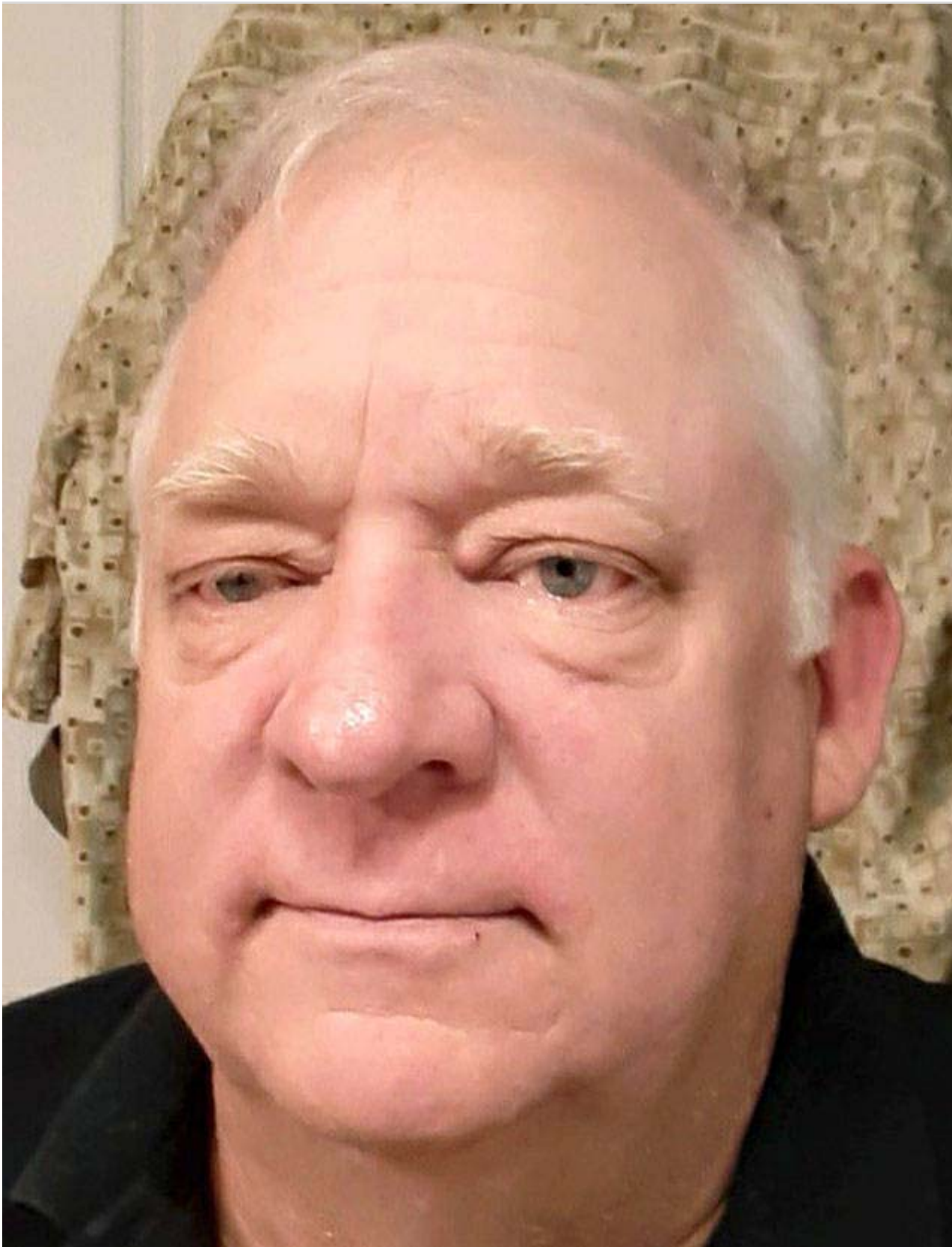
She said her top issue with the board, not surprisingly, was its lack of transparency.

Compton, who hasn’t attended any of the board’s public meetings, said trying to get information from the school district is slow and takes great effort.

“I can only imagine how it is at board meetings,” she said. “I have friends who go to the board meetings, and they said all of the decisions are made ahead of time. There’s no decision-making at the meetings.

“As a taxpayer, they need to change this. Their way of making decisions needs to change.”

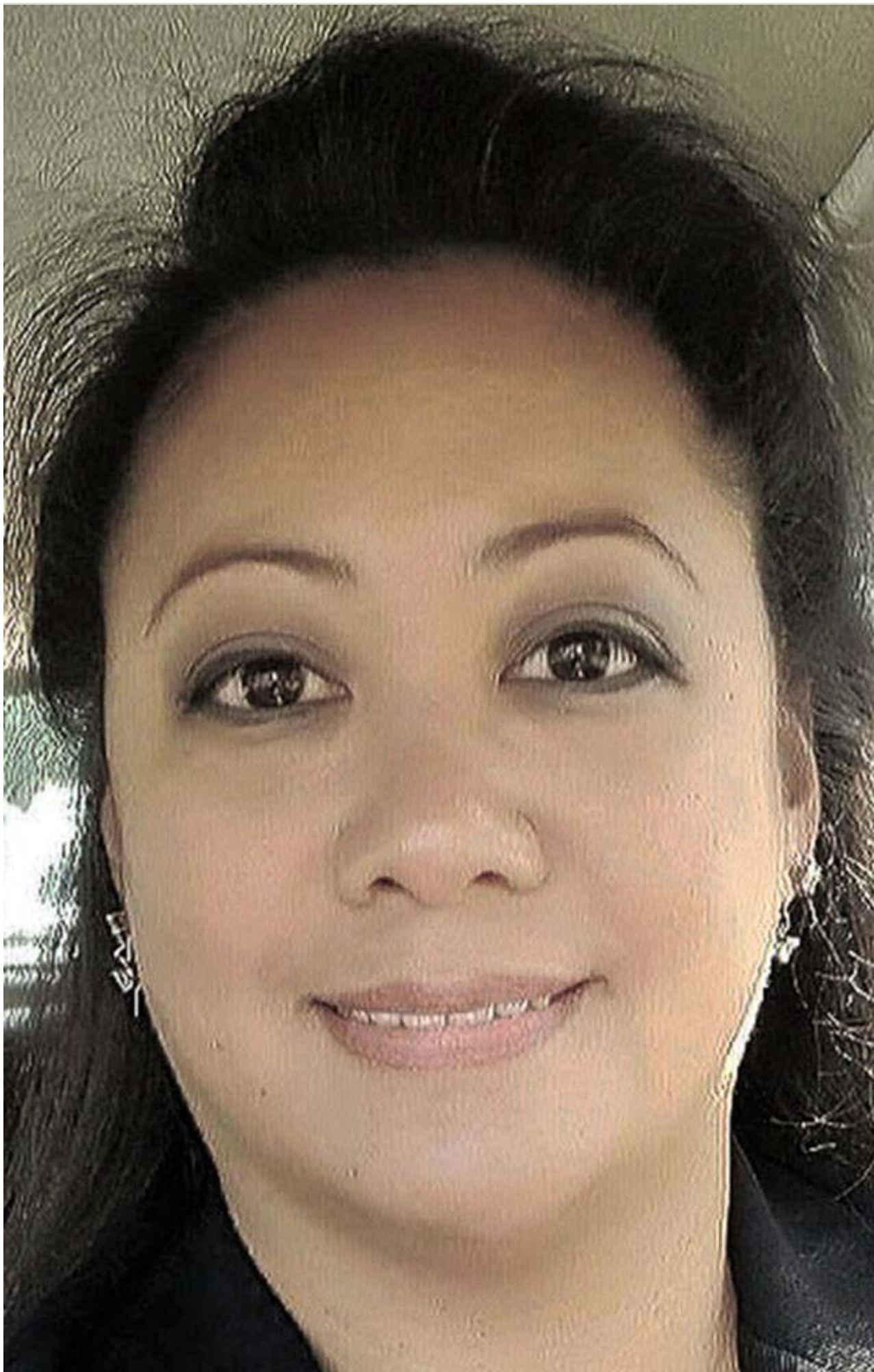
Compton is an instruction and classroom technician for the medical assisting program at Olympic College.



Keith Law



Eric Gattenby



Glenn Compton



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