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By EARL WATT • Leader & Times Tammy Sutherland-Abbott's road to the USD No. 480 school board was not a typical trek. Sutherland-Abbott shared her background Thursday with We the People, a local group dedicated to learning more about the issues facing the political landscape on the High Plains.

Being raised by parents that did not graduate from high school, Sutherland-Abbott received her high school diploma, but had no direction afterward.

"They did the best they could do, but there was no guidance on what to do next," she said.

So, Sutherland-Abbott got married, had children, and then found herself a divorced mother of two.

She moved to Liberal in 1992, and took classes at Seward County Community College and is still working on her college education.

"I've been a college senior for about 10 years now," she joked with the group. "I want to help children graduate from high school and then guide them on what's next," she said. "College isn't for everybody. We need to help them with other choices, too."

Sutherland-Abbott is married to Travis Abbott, and she works for Weatherford.

The school board is trusted by the public to oversee the largest budget and one of the largest employers in Seward County.

"I know that this is not my money to spend, it's the taxpayers' money," Sutherland-Abbott said. "We have to be conscientious."

When the community voted against a \$60 million bond issue and then voted to repeal the capital outlay mill levy, Sutherland-Abbott said she got the message loud and clear that the board does not have the trust of the community to make those types of expenditures.

"We have to gain the public's trust by watching over the budget," she said.

One example of that was a recent trip by the district's leadership to recruit teachers in California and another planned trip to Michigan.

"Will those teachers be able to speak Spanish?" Sutherland-Abbott asked.

To curtail the spending, she proposed a 600-mile recruiting limit, which would include areas like El Paso but restrict the coasts.

She did not have enough votes to get the item added to the agenda for a vote by the board at the last meeting.

"I'm just one vote," she said. "I am one of seven. It is frustrating when one or two are trying to make things happen. It takes at least four votes."

Sutherland-Abbott will have the item added to the next agenda, and the board will be able to vote on the proposal.

"We have a handful each year that went to school here and want to come back and teach," she said.

She also voted against the purchase of a \$45,000 lawn mower and a \$7,000 secondary fence around the new West Middle School football field. Both passed the board as a whole with Sutherland-Abbott and Reid Petty opposed.

Sutherland-Abbott will be on the ballot April 5. Four seats on the school board will be decided. Other candidates seeking the positions along with Sutherland-Abbott include incumbent Stacy Johnson, Tony Whisenant, Steve Helm, Delvin Kinser, Crystal Clemens and Chris Jewell.

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