MOREHEAD - The Morehead State University board of regents voted last night to ask former President Morris Norfleet to meet with the board to try to resolve Norfleet’s increasingly heated contract dispute with the university.

After meeting behind closed doors for more than 2 1/2 hours, the regents voted 9-0 to ask Norfleet and his attorney, M. Stephen Pitt of Louisville, to meet with the board’s three-regent negotiating committee at a session tentatively scheduled for Tuesday afternoon.

Board chairman Robert M. Duncan of Inez said after the meeting last night that "if we can get all parties concerned in the same room at the same time, we can resolve the dispute."

It was not immediately known whether Norfleet or Pitt would agree to attend the Tuesday session.

The regents have been trying for several weeks to get Norfleet to agree to take pay and benefit cuts, but Norfleet and Pitt have insisted in public statements that they would hold the university to a contract that the regents approved in June. That contract called for Norfleet to receive numerous benefits and a salary of $72,000 during the first year of his new job as chancellor for corporate relations, despite the fact that Norfleet has said he will be on sabbatical.

The contract has been a subject of controversy on the campus of the northeastern Kentucky college virtually since the day Norfleet left the president's chair in early July. He had been the school's president for seven years.

Here's a summary of the various rounds of the fight so far:

In July, some regents began expressing displeasure with the four-year contract they had approved in June. Under that contract, the terms of which have since been frozen by the university, Norfleet would have taken a year's leave of absence and then worked for three years as chancellor for corporate relations.

For the first year, Norfleet would have made as much money as he received in the president's job, but the salary would have dropped to $49,500 a year for the remaining three years.
The regents, unhappy with the first contract, voted in August to renegotiate it and authorized a three-regent committee to pursue a negotiated settlement.

Norfleet then threatened to sue if the earlier contract was not enforced. However, no suit has been filed.

The regents' committee made a proposal under which Norfleet's role, salary and contract term would be substantially cut: a three-year contract for $50,000 a year and a title of special assistant to the president for research.

Pitt, Norfleet's lawyer, said this week that the regents' proposal was unacceptable. He and Norfleet offered a counterproposal to the regents, but details of the Norfleet proposal were kept confidential by both sides in the dispute.

Duncan, the regents chairman, said last night that the Norfleet proposal was neither accepted nor rejected by the board.

Neither Norfleet nor Pitt appeared at the meeting last night.

Duncan said the regents were still hopeful that the dispute could be resolved outside the courtroom.

"I hope that reasonable people are available to resolve disputes in this manner without going to litigation," Duncan said.

The resolution calling for a meeting with Norfleet said the university was "making every attempt possible to resolve this contract dispute without litigation."

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