

Future of county diversity panel left in doubt

By Bethanie Gengler
OSHKOSH HERALD

Infighting among county supervisors regarding the potential dissolution of the Winnebago County Diversity Affairs Commission (DAC) continued at the most recent Board of Supervisors meeting.

District 1 Supervisor Rachael Dowling most recently chastised District 25 Supervisor Karen Powers at the board's Oct. 18 regular session for implying that members of the DAC were racist and accusing a member of being a part of QAnon, a right-wing conspiracy theory.

Powers said she didn't accuse a DAC member of being a part of QAnon but said she relayed information that she was told by a resident that a committee member was a part of QAnon.

"No one has insulted anyone and certainly have not insulted Supervisor Dowling in any way whatsoever and if she has something written or something recorded that she can prove me wrong, bring it on," Powers said.

Board chair Thomas Egan said the person of concern was warned about what could happen next time.

"Remember, we're all grownups here," he said.

The fate of the DAC has been a heated topic in recent months, with the commission adopting a resolution to dissolve itself at a meeting in August.

County Executive Jon Doemel said during the September Board of Supervisors meeting that he was considering disbanding the commission, stating he has struggled to maintain a full commission and the DAC has become political.

The DAC is overseen by the UW Education, Extension and Agriculture Committee. That committee discussed dissolving the DAC last month.

According to the resolution, the commission is ineffective and the relationship with the Agriculture Committee is dysfunctional. Some members of the Agriculture Committee disagree, expressing that they feel the push to dissolve will affirm that diversity has taken a step back in the county.

District 13 Supervisor Steven Binder said during the discussion that Doemel has done everything in his power to dismantle the DAC. He said he offered Doemel many qualified candidates to be on the commission and Doemel didn't appoint any of them. The committee voted to table the dissolution vote until November.

At the Oct. 13 DAC meeting, member Kathryn Noll-Arias questioned the motives behind dissolution.

"I personally do find it extremely curious that two new members, almost brand-new members, joined this committee, one of them volunteering to be chair, only to immediately request at

the exact same meeting that this committee be dissolved," she said, referring to the August meeting where Jared Longsine was elected as chair and Dowling as vice chair, after which Longsine motioned to dissolve the DAC, which Dowling seconded.

At the October meeting, two other people interested in becoming members attended. If the DAC is not dissolved, it will vote on the new members in November. If their membership is affirmed, the DAC would send the recommendation to Doemel for approval.

Part of the DAC's meeting was spent discussing the September Agriculture Committee meeting. Longsine addressed the comment about a DAC

member being a part of QAnon.

"There are multiple believers of QAnon, so if any of us five are members of QAnon, that's crazy talk," he said, adding that QAnon is a conspiracy group that he doesn't believe.

District 5 Supervisor Kay Horan said she feels the commission causes distress and if the DAC continues, she hopes other committees provide some oversight and direction.

Dowling and Horan are bringing the resolution to dissolve the DAC to the county board meeting Nov. 15. If the board votes against dissolution, Longsine said they will be updating the DAC's bylaws, strategic plan and future speakers.



Powers



Binder

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