

# **Rallying for Resignation: Muslim Solidarity Event Calls for Heyen to Step Down from LCCC Board**

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**GODFREY** – A Muslim solidarity rally will precede the meeting of the Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC) Board of Trustees Tuesday night.

The rally is being hosted by Umama Khenissi, who describes herself as a “progressive Muslim organizer” from St. Louis City. The rally is being hosted to protest screenshots taken from recently-elected LCCC Board of Trustees chair David Heyen's personal

Facebook page. The posts were shared from right-wing sources and were found by many to be anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and pro-Confederacy. In one shared by Heyen, it was asked why people are tearing down Confederate monuments but not mosques despite Confederate General Robert E. Lee being against slavery (he had owned an estimated 200 people through his life) and Muhammed owning slaves.

These posts were shared with LCCC administration and the Center for American Islamic Relations – Missouri (CAIR – Missouri) by Riverbender.com in an effort to attain comment. LCCC administrators commented they were investigating the issue and CAIR – Missouri called for Heyen's resignation.

“Anyone who shares such anti-Muslim, racist and anti-immigrant views has no business serving in a leadership position for any educational institution,” CAIR-Missouri Executive Director Faizan Syed said in a statement last week. “We urge Lewis and Clark Community College to thoroughly investigate this matter and ensure that the college remains a welcoming place for all of its students.”

Another call for Heyen's resignation came from the LCCC Faculty Association Head Mike Lemons. That group represents the more than 100 full-time faculty currently working at LCCC.

“The views expressed by Lewis and Clark Board Chair David Heyen are abhorrent to the Lewis and Clark Faculty Association,” Lemons penned in a release. “Ours is a culture of respect and inclusivity, and we reject completely, and without reservation, any rhetoric which would make any of our students feel unwelcome. We serve a diverse community and population. We have a student body that is dynamic and insightful. We want all of them, as well as their families to know, publicly, that we will welcome each and every one of them.

“As such, we believe Mr. Heyen is incapable of functioning as an effective leader of our college. While he has every right to his opinions, such views are in direct conflict with our values as a faculty. We repudiate them entirely. Mr. Heyen made a statement to the media admitting that he shared these posts on his Facebook page 'to generate conversation about important topics,' yet the comments were not only hateful, but patently false. This incident has been a distraction from our mission of educating students. We all want to put it behind us. Therefore, we urge Mr. Heyen to resign, not only as chairman, but also from the board of trustees itself.”

In fact, a call for Heyen's resignation is the first action item at the board meeting, set to take place at 7 p.m. at the Trimpe commons area. Heyen was elected chair by recently-elected board members Julie Johnson, Kevin Rust, and Charles Hanfelder. Heyen campaigned for these candidates in the early April elections, which had an overall

turnout of less than 12 percent of the overall voter base, Madison County Clerk Debra Ming-Mendoza said following the election. They ran on the promise to slash taxpayer waste, especially from the administration of LCCC.

The Coalition for Concerned Citizens of Alton and a group of Progressive Jews from St. Louis have also joined these organizations in calling for the immediate resignation of Heyen from the LCCC Board of Trustees. The former did so in a Letter to the Editor sent to local media, and the latter did so in a letter to the college itself. It should be noted, however, as Heyen is an elected official, he cannot be terminated by the college or any other entity.

In a statement to St. Louis NBC affiliate KSDK, Heyen stood by his posts and blamed a lack of social media know-how, despite his Facebook page being in operation since at least 2012. Heyen would not respond to multiple emails, Facebook messages and even a call to a number registered to a farm he runs sent by Riverbender.com. The statement from Heyen is used with permission from KSDK.

“I am relatively new to the concept of social media,” Heyen told KSDK. “I did share some posts in order to generate conversation about various topics on my personal Facebook page.

“This wasn't done in my official capacity as an LCCC Trustee. This is now being used as a distraction by a small faction of people who are not happy that I have asked the tough questions as a trustee and sought to hold the administration accountable and provide more transparency in the spending of our tax dollars.

“Despite these attempts by this small faction to distract the public, our board will continue in our efforts to bring an unprecedented level of fiscal transparency to LCCC and support the efforts of the administration to make LCCC the best community college in the state, providing top-notch education and job training to our students while being fiscally responsible to the taxpayers of the district.”

LCCC President Dr. Dale Chapman, whose salary and colleagues have been the subject of Heyen's call for taxpayer transparency and ending waste, said the college did not subscribe to the views held by Heyen, adding it will always work to be a welcoming place for people of all cultures and backgrounds.

When asked about the college's future accreditation, Chapman expressed some concern. He said oversight on higher education has a firm stance on the college's ability to provide a safe place for diversity and multiculturalism. Because of that, he wanted to ensure the views expressed on Heyen's personal Facebook page were not shared by the institution in general.

Chapman was quick to say he did not lend tonight's event support. He simply told them they were allowed to host such an event on the college campus. In fact, the college is legally obligated to give space for such an event if one is to be held.

In the description on the event page on Facebook, which Khenissi said was her statement to the media, she calls for accountability as well as forgiveness for Heyen's posts.

“To show students and employees of Muslim Faith they do not stand alone, I will be organizing a solidarity rally in collaboration with CAIR-Missouri, Alderman John Collins-Muhammed of the 21<sup>st</sup> Ward of St. Louis City and Umar Lee, community activist, immediately prior to the next Board of Trustees meeting. We will ask David Heyen to kindly resign, but we will also offer him forgiveness. Most importantly, we will spend time with each other in solidarity. Together, we are strong. We hope all people who support the Muslim community will join us.”

The rally is going to take place outside Trimpe, starting at 5:30 p.m. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. Many of those in attendance are hoping for time for public comment. Each organization will be allowed one speaker to speak for as long as three minutes without interruption. The public comment section of the meeting has been moved to the end instead of the beginning as it is usually placed. The meeting location has been moved from its usual slot in Erickson to Trimpe to accommodate what is expected to be a large crowd.