

LCCC's Heyen Maintains Chair After Failure of Motion Calling for His Resignation

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GODFREY – In one of the most well-attended meetings of the Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC) Board of Trustees in recent history, controversial LCCC Board Chair David Heyen repudiated several calls for his resignation.

Heyen maintained his chair position for the meeting, despite a call for his resignation being one of the action items on the board's agenda. Calls for Heyen's resignation have come from across the region following posts on Heyen's personal Facebook page shared from right-wing sources, which were deemed to be Islamophobic, xenophobic and pro-Confederacy by many who saw them. The posts blamed foreigners for bringing measles, mumps and even the now-extinct-in-the-wild smallpox to American soil. The posts praised Confederate General Robert E. Lee for being against slavery, despite history showing the man owned as many as 200 human beings throughout his life. They also pondered why Confederate monuments were being destroyed instead of mosques.

LCCC administrators confirmed they were made aware of these posts on May 1, after being sent them by a reporter from Riverbender.com. The posts were also sent by that reporter to the Center for American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and fellow LCCC board trustee Julie Johnson. Johnson said she would not comment until she spoke with Heyen. Less than an hour after that email, the Facebook page was removed. Since then, it has been reinstated, but many of the posts deemed controversial or dehumanizing by many were removed.

At the meeting of the LCCC Board of Trustees, Heyen did not apologize for the posts, but did take responsibility for them, again echoing a statement he gave to St. Louis NBC affiliate KSDK. Here is that statement in its entirety:

"I am relatively new to the concept of social media. I shared some posts in order to generate conversation about various topics on my personal Facebook page. This wasn't done in my official capacity as a trustee. This is now being used as a distraction by a small faction of people who are not happy that I've asked tough questions of the trustees and sought to hold the administration accountable and provide transparency in the spending of tax dollars."

He added he wanted to help the administration make LCCC the best community college in the state, and brought up as much as \$130 million he claims the college owes in long-term debt as a need for them to be more fiscally responsible – especially with much of its money coming from taxpayers.

The first action item on the board's agenda was a motion to call for Heyen's resignation. If passed, no official action could be taken by the board, as the choice to step down would ultimately be Heyen's to make. Discussion following that item was the first chance the general public received to hear the opinions of the other board members. The newly-seated Julie Johnson, Charles Hanfelder and Kevin Rust were part of a group called "Candidates for Accountability" for whom Heyen campaigned.

Each of those three voted with Heyen against the call for his resignation. Rust said he was doing so in the interest of “due process,” stating he wanted the college to fully investigate the matter before he could make a decision to call for Heyen's resignation.

Johnson described herself as Heyen's “friend and colleague.” She said she was “saddened to see people destroy his character.” She asked her fellow board members and the general public to get to know Heyen beyond the Facebook posts. She suggested they go to his community and talk to his successful children and grandchildren. She asked folks to go to his church and talk to the people for whom he volunteers as a chaplain. She said the situation scared her and pondered who folks would try to “silence” next.

Someone interrupted her statement from the crowd by shouting “what about Muslim children?” Heyen called for security to handle it, and a guard went by the interrupter and stood.

Hanfelder described Heyen as an “above-the-board individual” stating he saw nothing wrong enough in Heyen's Facebook posts to call for his resignation. He said those trying to attack Heyen's character were “nearly criminal.”

The three board members who have been seated since before the introduction of Johnson, Hanfelder and Rust voted in favor of calling for Heyen's resignation. Dwight Werts, Brenda McCain and Bob Watson voted in favor of Heyen's resignation.

Werts said he voted in favor of it, because he was worried the Higher Learning Commission would take the college's accreditation due to the college potentially being seen as a place not welcoming to diversity. He said such accreditation is “thorough and long,” and added Heyen's Facebook shares may damage what so many people have worked many years to create. Werts said if Heyen cared about the college he would resign.

Watson asked how Heyen could have such views on his Facebook page and not bring them to his work at the college. He pondered if Heyen simply “flipped a switch” regarding what many have deemed to be hateful rhetoric. He also questioned why Heyen removed his Facebook page within an hour of being notified it was the subject of an investigation by local media. He also jabbed at him for reading the same prepared statement he gave to KSDK.

Ultimately the motion to call for Heyen's resignation – which carried no weight outside of being a symbolic statement – failed with four against and three for it. During the

public comment section of the meeting, which was moved from before action items to the very end, one man pondered why Heyen was able to vote against the motion involving him.

Other public comments were issued by Muslims in attendance. Most came from St. Louis to attend the meeting on Tuesday night. CAIR-Missouri Executive Director Faizan Syed recounted a story about the Islamic center in Joplin, Missouri being firebombed on July 4 one year. After that attack failed to destroy the mosque, the same man returned and burned it to the ground. Syed recalled smelling the smoke of that fire, and told Heyen that man was pushed to do it by similar words and sentiments to those shared by Heyen on his personal Facebook page.

Alton Main Street Board President Sasha Bassett also spoke as a private citizen living within the college's district. She accused Heyen of being anti-American and used the example of him sharing pro-Confederate memes in order to illustrate her point. She pondered why he was still allowed to hold office after sharing anti-American content seeming to praise the Confederacy, which fought for states' rights to own human beings as slaves.

Outside of multiple calls for Heyen's resignation from the board itself and public comments, the LCCC Faculty Association, which represents all 100+ full-time faculty members issued a statement calling for him to step down. The Alton Coalition of Concerned citizens sent an op-ed to Riverbender.com echoing that call for resignation. A group of Progressive Jews in St. Louis called for his resignation. CAIR-Missouri did the same.

On Tuesday, a letter sent to LCCC President Dr. Dale Chapman as well as Syed was given to Riverbender from the Heartland Chapter of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). It reads as follows:

Dear President Chapman,

I write to you in solidarity with our Muslim Brothers and Sisters from CAIR-MO in calling for the resignation of Lewis and Clark Board of Trustee President David Heyen. Mr. Heyen's Facebook posts are reprehensible. Any person who espouses Islamophobic, anti-immigrant and racist views has no place in a position of power in the community, especially one at a public educational institution.

In reference to his Facebook posts, Mr. Heyen stated: "This wasn't done in my official capacity as an LCCC Trustee." As an elected official, Mr. Heyen is accountable to a broad band of the community that not only includes students, but those who voted to bring him to leadership at LCCC in the first place. Whether it was intentionally in his

official capacity is irrelevant. His posts speak volumes about his personal beliefs. They are open to being challenged no differently than any policy positions he might take.

It is time for true leadership. Mr. Heyen needs to step down from his position on the Lewis and Clark Board of Trustees.

It should be noted Dr. Chapman has no say on Heyen's position. He is an elected official and cannot be removed by the college itself.

Other public comments followed the meeting challenging Heyen's position as well. English teacher Steve Higgins has been teaching at the college for 15 years and is the faculty advisor for LC Pride, a student group dedicated to preserving the rights of LGBT+ students. He said the views shared by Heyen, which were not directed at discriminating against gender or sexual orientation publicly, were of the same sorts as the threats and insults thrown at the students he represents. A former student, who was able to embrace his sexuality as a gay man while attending LCCC, echoed this concern for the future of the college he once looked upon with happiness.

During the time for public comment, no one spoke in favor of Heyen or his remarks out of around 20 folks who took the podium. In fact, every public comment was solidly against Heyen and the actions of the board. A few in the room did clap when the motion to call for his resignation failed.



