

Georgia Town Administrator

From: Heather Grimm <firemom25@comcast.net>
Sent: Monday, November 20, 2023 2:51 PM
To: Devon Thomas; Georgia Selectboard; Georgia Town Administrator
Cc: Bob Stebbins; Linda Kirker; Martha Jansen
Subject: Concern

Devon & Selectboard Members,

We are writing in response to the request from Devon to put a hold on the invite to Dr. Aaron Kindsvatter to speak with the DEI Committee.

We feel that the board has sent us mixed messages on how we are to operate as a committee. We were formed and tasked with looking into what a DEI statement would mean for our community. We were also told that as long as it could be tied to the charge that you would allow the committee to decide how to approach our research and decisions.

We knew that the board wanted the founders of the Vermont Declaration on Inclusion to come to the committee to make a presentation before the committee was even in place. We decided that we should look at all viewpoints on accepting a DEI statement and what the pros and cons would look like. This means that we would need to look at multiple viewpoints to be fair in our conclusions.

Our first attempt at finding a counter claim was an interview by John Stossell of Dr Erec Smith who was a former DEI trainer, this was turned down by the board as it was deemed to be from social media sources and would not allow a question and answer opportunity from committee members and the public. Our argument was that videos are posted to YouTube because it is a platform for videos on the internet and it is a platform that our own town uses to post their meeting videos. But we moved on and looked for another viewpoint that would allow for a question and answer period.

Countless hours have been put into researching other speakers and how we could meet the charge and find a speaker who could give some time. Dr. Aaron Kindsvatter was found and his presentation "How DEI Fails Children and Families" seemed to fit what we are working on. This presentation is well worded and very respectful. Dr. Kindsvatter is a founding member of Free Black Thought and a chapter leader for the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR) We decided to move forward and see if he would be willing to attend via zoom or if he could meet in person since he is also from Vermont. Dr Kindsvatter agreed to meet with us and we set a date of 12/4/2023 at our committee meeting. Some of us knew that as soon as a name was put out, there would be community members that would try to find a reason to have this shut down as they do not want opposing views to be seen or heard. We were shocked to hear that Devon's plans were to continue with censorship and prohibit us from going forward with this guest speaker. We were given the reasons as follows:

- "Aaron's message is more focused on a discussion of racial identity and not the municipal impact of a DEI statement."
- "I find it concerning that he has a history of using violent language and has even encouraged acts of violence against students at UVM"
- "it seems like an incendiary invitation which is the type of action the Selectboard asked the committee to avoid making in pursuing its charge"

We do not agree with these statements, and ask the board to give us more information on how you came to these conclusions. We feel that we cannot come to a clear understanding on how this would affect our community without being able to explore all viewpoints. Does the select board have any recommendations on an acceptable opposing viewpoints or is this just a tactic of smoke and mirrors? Due to the divisiveness and backlash to having an opposing view and the personal attacks online and in person to our committee members as well as community members, individuals are scared to attend and or speak up to say they don't agree. The insinuation that our committee cannot view information and make an informed decision of facts without the influence of the select board is quite offensive. Our diverse backgrounds should be respected and allowed to explore the charge as stated by the select board. If the select board wanted to lay out a predetermined plan as to how, what, where and why we were to investigate this subject, it should have been done in advance with clear guidelines and a list of appropriate resources.

At this time we feel that we cannot move forward as the select board continues to intervene and stop the forward action of the committee.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Grimm, Martha Jansen, Linda Kirker, Bob Stebbins

Sent from my iPhone