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SKPS director responds to recent turmoil

By **SATYA CHANDRAGIRI**

I believe despite what they say publicly or privately, every board director was aware of why they voted in a certain way regarding the performance review of the superintendent.

As a board chair I have tried to be inclusive, thoughtful, and done my due diligence in completing the superintendent evaluation. The evaluation process was thorough, constructive and went above and beyond the standard that I am told was the case by those who have served longer than me.

We also followed the necessary policies and had two executive sessions where board directors had ample opportunity to share their input, disagreement, suggestions, and the reasons for their input. The superintendent's input was sought as required by the policy and her preference of the process was considered within the extent of the policies and necessary statutes. In my opinion no opportunity was omitted in completing this process. It was fair, respectful and an opportunity to be constructive.

Director Sheronne Blasi voted "no" to the summary of the superintendent evaluation despite what she states publicly or in the media, sent the impression that the board lost its confidence in our superintendent. We now have a major task of helping our district staff and students regain their trust and confidence in our public schools.

As a first-generation immigrant and first person of color to be the chair of Salem-Keizer school board, I am accustomed to attacks like this. I am prepared to face any such indignation so that our children or generations to come do not have to go through any such ordeal. I am not surprised. Sadly, the microphone was on.

I was shocked when I learned that the summary of superintendent evaluation which expressed confidence in our superintendent failed by a 4-3 vote and I did not in the moment notice that she uttered the expletive directed towards the chair and when pointed out appeared to justify and expressed regret that the mic was on and it was heard.

I went back and reviewed the tape to make sure and frankly it has been very hurtful, felt betrayed and wondering why her feelings directed towards me should end up humiliating our superintendent in the process who has dedicated her entire career towards our children. It appears duplicitous action to say the praise and yet vote against our superintendent.

I never said that dismantling structural racism is not a messy business. It is like performing a surgery where we must cut through layers of policies, prejudices, power differentials, implicit biases, politics, entrenched processes. We need courage, high ethical standards, and mindfulness in what we say or how we communicate. We can not walk away when we encounter such reactions and learn to practice true inclusivity and accept the observations made in the evaluations even when it comes from a person of color or someone who has different perspectives or lived experiences.

I am sure there are different perspectives and ways to express disagreement but in the end we have to stay focused on all our children, students and our community. Together let's keep our focus on addressing very important long neglected equity issues- overcoming digital divide, ensuring our students are safe and feel a sense of belonging especially with recent decisions made by Superintendent Perry, close the academic achievement gaps, ensure we use objective data and accountability measures, transparency in our system and bring our students back to school. Our community has suffered enough.

As the chair I ask for the forgiveness of our community that our children and students had to witness one of our directors utter an expletive in the school board meeting when we all had agreed to our recent policy on civility and not to use racially derogatory, sexually obscene public comments. Let us use this opportunity to reflect and learn what led to this culture where we fail to recognize the diverse strengths each one of us bring to our community and stop dehumanizing each other. (Satya Chandragiri is the president of the SKPS board of directors.

Keizer's celebrated volunteers

The recipients of the 2020 Chamber of Commerce First Citizen and other awards is a demonstration that Keizer is home to generous, unselfish personalities. Each year the Chamber bestows honors on those in the community who have shown a bottomless well of good works and caring for their city.

This year's list of honorees is a deserving addition to past winners, stretching back to 1959.

Keizer's 2020 First Citizen is Kim Freeman. Freeman served two terms on the Keizer City Council for two terms. Her demeanor and work there would have been sufficient to win an award, but it is her volunteer work throughout the community that is the heart of Freeman's impact.

From The Big Toy project at Keizer Rapids Park to on-the-ground volunteering at Gubser's Miracle of Lights food collection station to the Keizer Network of Women's (KNOW) Christmas Giving Basket program, Freeman has been front and center when Keizerites were in need.

Freeman's compassion for those who need a helping hand has been evident in every aspect of her volunteering and her career as homeowner section manager with the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department.

Many Keizer citizens know Freeman as a city councilor. The lucky ones know her as a woman who will help whomever and wherever there is need.

Also honored with the Keizer Chamber's 2020 awards were Jonathan Thompson as Merchant of the Year. Thompson, chief financial officer for Northwest Dental Arts, is serving as past president of the board of the Chamber.

Thompson's unwavering boosterism of Keizer business is deservedly recognized.

Editorial

His work with the Chamber's Government Affairs Committee has led him to speak before the state legislature and other government bodies. Thompson's work on Keizer's economic development alone should garner accolades.

In a world turned upside down by COVID, especially in our schools, McNary High School choir teacher Josh Rist did not let a pandemic throw him a curve when it came to staying connected with students and keeping his program robust without in-person teaching.

Rist was honored with the Service to Education Award.

The Zoom production of his students—at home—filming their version of Smile brought tears to cheeks all around town. It was beautiful moment at a time when Keizer needed it.

Each year the head of the Chamber's board presents the President's Award to a person who has exhibited stellar service to the Keizer Chamber of Commerce.

Jason Lewis of Lewis Media Group was presented the award for his contributions to the media needs of, not only the Chamber, but the community, too.

An expert in the field of media production, Lewis helped the Chamber navigate its communications during a time of little in-person interactions.

We congratulate all the deserving honorees and hold them as role models for other volunteers.

—LAZ



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