

STATE OF WYOMING)
) ss.
COUNTY OF FREMONT)

LANDER, WYOMING
OFFICE OF THE FREMONT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
JULY 16, 2021

FULL DETAILED REPORT

The Board of Fremont County Commissioners met in a Special Session at 9:00 a.m. with the following members present: Chairman Travis Becker, Vice-Chairman Larry Allen, Jennifer McCarty and Mike Jones. Commissioner Clarence Thomas was present via speaker phone. County Clerk Julie A. Freese was present.

Chairman Becker stated the Special Meeting had been scheduled for one purpose only and that is for the selection of a Fremont County Coroner. The Republican Central Committee had their meeting July 12, 2021 and by state statute, submitted three candidates for consideration as a replacement for Mark Stratmoen's remaining term. The Commissioners had interviewed the three applicants on July 13, 2021 and subsequently rejected all three names, and agreed to ask the Chairwoman of the party to reconsider additional names due to the limited qualifications possessed by the candidates presented at that time. There were 14 people in the audience (a list is on file in the Commissioners' Office) and multiple people on Zoom. Chairman Becker stated he would allow public comment but limited each to one minute. A number of audience members addressed the commission. A list of attendees is on file in the Office of the County Commissioners.

John Brown stated he is on the GOP Central Committee and was not at the Fremont County Republican Party Central Committee meeting of July 12, 2021 where the three names were voted upon and forwarded to the County Commissioners for consideration of the appointment. He apologized to the County Commissioners, the people of Fremont County, those people in his precinct and to Ms. Ivie. He did not even consider that Ms. Ivie would not be one of the three names submitted to the Commissioners, as she is the most qualified person and it is a no-brainer. He again apologized to everybody in the room and in Fremont County, he felt it was his fault this happened and again stated how sorry he was.

Ginger Bennett, Chairman of the Fremont County Republican Party, reiterated the state statute that requires the Central Committee to submit three names of candidates for consideration by the Commission. Those three candidates were Karl Falken, Larry DeGraw and Joseph Lucero. She does not understand why she is being asked to reconsider the candidate list when the process was followed by state statute and a secret ballot was conducted and counted by a committee.

Andrea Caproni acknowledged the Commission has a duty to make a selection from one of the three names submitted by the Central Committee, but she failed to see how they are qualified for the position. One applicant admitted he had not ever seen a dead body. She felt emotions and the process is not the way to pick a replacement. Ms. Bennett has made it clear we cannot go back, which Caproni felt the entire County would like to be able to do. She felt it may be unethical that Mr. Falken is a Precinct committeeman and also a nominee. She asked the Commission not make a decision and let it go before a judge to decide.

Erin Cunningham stated the Commission has a duty today to best serve the county, not the party. One of the candidates referred to a deceased as a "crispy critter". This position requires empathy. Don't make your decisions based on politics, you have a hard decision in front of you.

Dan Ladd worked in the Riverton Police Department for 13 years and with Erin on multiple death scenes and there is nobody more qualified in the county or the state and Erin is the one you want with you in a crisis. He understands the process will not allow her to be considered today. He asked that the applicants be questioned as to their plans to keep Erin employed if appointed.

Pepper Ottman stated the people at the Central Committee meeting were people elected or appointed for their precinct party position and make up the governing body of the Fremont County Republican party, and were there to vote for three candidates to forward to the Commission, following advertisement of that position vacancy. These precinct people represent our community, they are legislators, law enforcement, hold a public office, and are credible people. For whatever reason they voted for who they believed to be the best candidate and that should carry some weight, there seems to be some confusion who made these decisions and it was the elected people on the central committee.

Lloyd Larsen made the observation the process was followed but this is not a general election where the county could elect the replacement, it was an appointment. Suggests the Commission take the opportunity to re-evaluate the names submitted to ensure citizens are served by the most qualified person available, you need to deliberate and contemplate your decision today.

Chairman Travis Becker read a written statement (on file in the Commissioners' Office) that stated in part "In all technical terms, those statutes have been met by the party of which the former Coroner was affiliated with.... It is now time, as a County Commissioner, that I must do my part as it is laid out in state statute. Those laws state that a decision must be made within five days of notification as to which of the three names submitted will take the open position as Fremont County Coroner. Should I not do my lawful duty, I can be fined and prosecuted for dereliction of duty, and rightfully so.....So I am proposing to start a committee that will look at all elected positions in Fremont County that we have authority to appoint replacements to if the position becomes vacant before a term is fulfilled. If there needs to be added qualifications, and can be done at the local level, then it can be brought forth and potentially be added in Fremont County. If it can only be fixed by the state legislature, then those ideas will be forwarded out our local State House Representatives and State Senators for their review and support."

Jennifer McCarty made a statement to the people of Fremont County and that there has been a great disservice because of either ignorance of duty or ill-advised information. A gold star candidate with impeccable credentials and endorsements has been overlooked. I will be supporting Erin 100% in her campaign for the Coroner position. By law and under protest, I will do my duty, to the best of my ability. I have trust that patience is needed and I will not allow the public to be in any danger.

Commissioner Mike Jones stated the right things needs to be done, it's not that hard, and keep going forward and not endorse any of the three candidates submitted. The candidates are all capable under state statute, but he does not feel they are qualified and the Court should be petitioned to make the decision.

Vice-Chairman Larry Allen said that after the Central Committee provided three names to the Commission, and after interviews with the three on Tuesday, the Commission asked the Central Committee to provide additional names of people with more experience. Qualifications are not in question, those are simple. The Central Committee failed to follow that request and provide us with three additional names. There has been precedence set where other counties asked their central committee to reconvene and provide additional names, but for whatever reason, that has not been forthcoming in this case. We need to put politics aside and do what is best for the citizens of Fremont County, the three names submitted are not the most qualified for the position from among those interviewed by the Party.

Commissioner Clarence Thomas reiterated his statements made on July 13th when the Commission asked the party to submit three additional names. The names submitted are qualified, but they don't have the background and experience that is available in a candidate whose name was not forwarded to the Commission. The applicant must be able to deal with a large amount of trauma. One of the applicants has law enforcement experience and understands some of the problems he will be faced with.

There being no further discussion, Clarence Thomas moved, Jennifer McCarty seconded, to select Larry DeGraw as Fremont County Coroner to complete the remainder of Mark Stratmoen's term. Voting against the motion: Larry Allen and Mike Jones. Motion carried. Vice-Chairman Allen stated his concern that Mr. DeGraw keep current staff in place. (Note: after the meeting was adjourned, Mr. DeGraw so stated nothing will change under his administration).

Chairman Becker stated Mr. DeGraw will be sworn in at 10:00 a.m. this morning by Judge Jason Conder. As stated in his earlier statement, this process needs to be fixed, and he felt the system failed the citizens and Fremont County as a whole.

There being no further business, the Special meeting adjourned at 9:25 a.m.

A full detailed report (informational only) and the official minutes are posted on Fremont County's website (www.fremontcountywy.gov). The meeting can also be accessed via You Tube (Fremont County WY Government).

/s/ TRAVIS BECKER, CHAIRMAN
FREMONT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

ATTEST:

/s/ JULIE A. FREESE, FREMONT COUNTY CLERK AND CLERK OF THE BOARD