

Livingston County Democratic Executive Committee

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For Immediate Release

Dems Announce Plan to Fix Veterans Services Scandal

Livingston County needs a complete overhaul of its Veterans Services Committee in order to restore trust with taxpayers and deliver the services our county's veterans deserve and were promised.

“Livingston County taxpayers approved a tax increase to take care of our veterans’ needs and now we find out that new programs are not coming on line, that a committee member did not turn over a donation from the public, and that another committee member is receiving payments approved by the committee he sits on. This good-old-boy network needs to be busted up and replaced with accountability,” said Steve Savela of Hartland Township

The candidates – Jennifer Garcia of Hartland Township, Steve Savela of Hartland Township, Maureen Martin of Unadilla Township, Alex Hansen of Howell Township, Kasey Helton of Marion Township, and Kristina Drake of Hamburg Township – released a multi—point plan to stop the abuses in the system including:

--A forensic audit covering the entire period that Hansel Keene and Kevin Nagle have been on the board, looking for cases of conflicts of interest or misappropriation of donations, followed by regular audits of that fund that go into more detail than the county's annual audit.

--A conflict of interest policy barring committee members from receiving payments from the Veterans Relief Fund for services provided to veterans.

--Increased oversight by the county commission, including appointing county commissioners to attend Veterans Services committee meetings on a rotating basis to provide oversight and a regular commission review of all committee spending

--Replacement of all five committee members and an expansion of the board to seven members with new members appointed after public advertising for applications with an emphasis on attracting younger and women veterans and increasing the diversity of the committee.

--Protection for the Veterans Services staff from retaliation by committee members. Committee staff should be considered county employees rather than be subject to the whims of a volunteer committee. Unfortunately, state law does not allow this to apply to the director, who is appointed by the committee.

--Expanded training for committee members on accountability regarding public funds and soliciting and handling donations.

--A strategic planning process that maps out services that veterans need and a timeline for implementing them along with adoption of a set of bylaws that spell out the duties and obligations of the committee.

“This has been going on right under the nose of our current county commission. This is dereliction of duty and our county commissioners deserve to be fired,” said Drake.

“My opponent prides himself on being a fiscal conservative, but it’s not fiscally conservative to fail to notice that the accounting doesn’t add up.” said Hansen.

Martin said that the one-party system of Livingston County has contributed to the good-old-boy network that has let this system flourish. “Unless we put new faces on the board, county commissioners will continue to look the other way at corruption and misuse of public funds,” she said.

Garcia said she would like to see more transparency around committee spending, with all committee spending listed on its webpage.

Helton said a larger board would prevent cliques from forming that allow conflicts of interest in approval of expenditures. "I attended the most recent board meeting and was bewildered to discover this wasn't even a discussion item on the agenda. If an active police investigation isn't going to rouse them -- what will? The public is demanding answers, and either this board is neglecting its duty or just wants to wait it out until the election is over in hope that more attention won't be drawn to this issue," she said.

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