

South Dakota Democracy in Action

Women Working for a Better World

Resolution in Support of Proposed Ordinance No. 5964

Whereas, Democracy in Action's mission statement includes protection of civil liberties and racial reconciliation; and

Whereas, the restoration of subpoena powers to the Commission would allow enforcement of the city's non-discrimination policy and require a response to complaints, thus fostering a complete investigation and resolution of such: and

Whereas, the proposed ordinance would qualify Rapid City's Human Relations Commission to be designated a Fair Employment Practices Agency by the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; and

Whereas, the proposed ordinance would keep complaints at the local level where familiarity and faster resolution are possible; and

Whereas, the proposed ordinance would add little cost to the city budget as the EEOC would share labor and reimburse costs for employment related issues and expenses accrued in resolving other complaints which would be small compared to the good will and justice obtained, and

Whereas, the proposed ordinance would respect due process all the way through the available appeals process; and

Whereas, the Commission would make use of resolution by a trained mediator, thus reducing the adversarial nature of the process. Mediation offers fair hearing to all parties and focuses on the problem and not the persons involved; and

Whereas, the proposed ordinance would offer protection to the complainant from any retaliation and protection to the respondent from unfounded charges; and

Whereas, the proposed ordinance would convey a vital message to ~~the~~ all the protected classes named in the Declaration of Policy – Purpose, Section B that Rapid City has zero tolerance for discrimination;

Now therefore be it resolved, that South Dakota Democracy in Action, a local nonpartisan women's group, urges adoption by the City Council of Ordinance No. 5964 amending Chapter 2.64 of the Rapid City Municipal Code.

Submitted by:

Karen Hall, Facilitator

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Chamber's "Business As Usual" Promotes Institutional Racism

By Tom Katus*

[Institutional] Racism can be a matter of *result* rather than *intention* because many institutional structures in America that most whites do not recognize as subordinating others because of color actually **injure minority group members far more than deliberate racism.**

—*US Commission on Civil Rights, RACISM IN AMERICA, p5*

The Rapid City Chamber's opposition to providing the City's Human Relations Commission "real teeth" subpoena power to take action on discrimination complaints perpetuates racism in Rapid City. This "business as usual" approach meets the classic definition of "institutional racism".

The Chamber purports to represent the views of 1,200 members. I have been a Chamber member for the past 25 years, and was very active in the now-defunct Chamber's Cultural Diversity Committee. I have as much personal and professional experience in addressing racial issues as any member of the Chamber. I was not consulted. This is not my Chamber!.

The Chair of the Chamber indicated there was no real need for strengthening HRC, because there were so few discrimination complaints. The complaints do not reflect the status of racism in Rapid City. The vast majority of Native Americans who have been offended simply give up on HRC, because the racial issues are rarely adequately addressed.

Every Mayor, at least since Don Barnett in the early 70s, has made attempts to improve race relations. They usually follow a major clash, frequently a killing, are launched with much fanfare, then die on the vine. Mayor Art LaCroix formed his Indian-White Relations Committee and the City's Human Relations Committee was launched.

Jim Shaw launched his "Undoing Racism Committee" in 2003. When the business community failed to show up at the launching meeting, I castigated us in an *RCJ Forum*, "Business community failed" (Nov. 8, 2003, A4). This caused a constructive response, more than 150 people, largely from the Chamber, showed up at the next meeting (*RCJ Forum*, "City Wakes Up To Diversity", Dec. 13, 2003, A4).

For more than a decade, the Cultural Diversity Committee of the Chamber, teamed with the Pine Ridge Chamber to co-sponsor the Great Plains PRO-BIZ Summits. These annual Summits from 2005-2010 brought small Native and non-Indian businesses together for collaboration and opportunities for Government contracting. The Committee under the dynamic and successive leadership of Suzi Aadland, Sandy Burns, Lila Mehlauff and Eric Yellow Boy, provided positive SOULUTIONS for improved race relations. But,

do to the lack of the Chamber's continuing commitment by submerging this unique Committee under another and the drop off of Native participation and leadership, the Committee, like so many of the Mayors' efforts died.

I urge my fellow Chamber members to again become part of the SOLUTION by re-establishing an independent Cultural Diversity Committee instead of continuing to be part of the "business (racism) as usual" PROBLEM.

This Mayor's efforts to strengthen the Human Relations Commission should be applauded. To assure local control, I urge the City Council to pass the proposed HRC Ordinance, including subpoena powers.

Tom Katus was South Dakota's first Peace Corps Volunteer and was selected to be one of six members of Admiral Zumwalt's first Race Relations Training Program for the US Navy (1973). He later served on Mayor LaCroix's Indian-White Relations Committee.