

RDA Interim President gives update on presidential search



AMANDA DAVIS/GAZETTE

By AMANDA DAVIS
amanda@emporia.com

The Regional Development Association (RDA) Board heard an update on the search for a permanent RDA President during its monthly meeting Friday morning. According to Lyle Butler, Interim RDA President, a new President could be tapped by early August.

Butler said that Jorgenson Pace, the search firm leading the job hunt, has compiled a list of over 90 candidates that fit the criteria to take on the role of RDA President. The job posting is on LinkedIn, the International Economic Development Council website, the Mid-America Economic Development Council, and is the subject of targeted media and email campaigns.

Butler expressed satisfaction in the ongoing selection process.

“My specific question to the consulting firm yesterday was, ‘How do you feel the applications are coming in?’ Butler said. “They said ‘very good’ and

that they were pleased. That should give me and this community confidence that in the end, we'll get some very good applicants for this position.”

The search firm is in the process of contacting applicants, and the RDA Presidential Search Committee will conduct interviews through Zoom. The final two to three candidates selected will visit Emporia on July 24 and 25. Butler said that the Board could have a new President hired as early as August and as late as early September.

The RDA Presidential Search Committee will prioritize finding a candidate with an experienced track record in economic development, Butler said.

“That's important for a community that has a lot of assets that would attract companies, but it would also help existing businesses grow in this community too,” Butler said. “You want to bring someone in that's got the experience and knowledge and know-how to make that happen.”

In other news, Dr. Caron

Daugherty, President of Flint Hills Technical College (FHTC), shared the college's strategic growth plan for 2025-2030, as well as job placement and economic development statistics.

According to a study conducted in 2022, FHTC saw overall 98% of former students employed or continuing education one year after graduation. An economic impact analysis reported that in FHTC's seven county service area, the community experienced an \$11.4 million impact.

Daugherty emphasized advancing student success as the driving force behind the strategic plan. Four goals were identified - maintaining high-quality programs, supporting employees, enhancing facilities, and pouring into strong partnerships.

Varney and Associates reported a financial review of RDA's expenses last year, and found no financial misstatement that would need to be corrected for the financial statement to be deemed fair.

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Now What?

Well, the NO KINGS protest is over. Millions of people throughout the U. S. gathered to peacefully remind the President he is not a king. During all the protests, including our own gathering here in Emporia, people celebrated we the people, the Constitution of the United States, lifted up the military, veterans, thanked law enforcement, leveled our grievances. The protests made sure the message that the United States is a government of the people, by the people and for the people rang loud and clear, echoing the chant “No Kings.”

Now what?

Now that the NO KINGS protest is over, what do we do here in Emporia to make life better? Protestors still need to hold elected officials accountable to their jobs by sending emails, letters and phone messages. Republican legislators all over Kansas shouldn't hide like Marshall, and they should be aware of your power. Now that you've shown up once, show up at every town hall and make your voices heard.

We have to put more pressure on state legislators in regards to fully supporting Public Education, including Special Education. Republicans still want to slip in funding for private education.

I'm not a big fan of what occurred at ESU over the past few years, but I am an alumnus who realizes ESU is still a vital part of Emporia's economy. How do we help increase enrollment? I'm not concerned about attendance at sporting events. I'm concerned about students in class and the education they are receiving.

We need to put pressure on the legislature to support our Veterans and the VA. Period - Full Stop.

We need to help them understand healthcare for all, including children and food security, is necessary for a healthy workforce. A healthy workforce will make all their millionaire and billionaire friends happy. Rural hospitals are in dire need.

Locally, we need to quit badmouthing Newman Regional Health. I know Stormont Vail may be making its way down here in 6 years, but what about until then? And you know what, even when Stormont Vail arrives to “save the day” (read with a heavy dose of sarcasm) we are still going to need Newman Regional Health.

Finally, here's my big idea for all of Emporia that hopefully begins ASAP and sustains Emporia into the future, a hundred years from now.

Emporia's future is going to need energy. So why doesn't Emporia build its own solar energy plant? It could provide energy to the community initially and then expand to surrounding areas. It could sell energy to places like Americus, Olpe, Lebo, and individuals. It could be a money maker for Emporia. It's a capitalistic adventure, because the people of Emporia will own this energy plant. So it's not socialism. The RDA can have the idea and develop it, but they can't own it. The people own it.

Why can't Emporia build an energy plant to make Emporia money? Why can't all community members become shareholders, if they choose? Why can't Emporia build an energy storage plant for the future? Could solar power help ESU and all businesses save money?

The Flint Hills Technical College can train solar engineers and even train people to build solar panels. Could future housing codes/additions be encouraged/required to include solar panels as part of building specifications? A lot of communities are doing this, why don't we join the parade?

Could all the flat roof tops in Emporia be retrofitted with solar panels? I talked to Casey Wood down at Main Street almost 4 years ago about this. He suggested there might be a developer in town who might jump at the idea if there was an installer. Be thinking of other places where solar panels could be installed without diminishing the skyline or view. Because this is an idea that is long overdue.

Eldridge Cleaver said, “You're either part of the solution, or you're part of the problem.” This may not be the path Emporia will take, I can accept that. But it is a sincere effort to focus Emporia's attention on a long term solution to its economic and energy needs.

Now that this weekend's protests are over, we need to find some more good trouble to get into.

The PITA Guy
a.k.a. Rev. Mic McGuire, Retired United Methodist Church Elder

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