

Racism allegation enters District 4 NM Senate race

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 27 May 2016 02:43



Adams, Muñoz spar over ‘racist’ comment

A seemingly innocent invitation related to a recent political-candidate forum turned ugly when Sen. George Muñoz and Felisha Adams sparred over what Adams perceived to be racist comments.

The incident took place after Adams, a political newcomer and one of two challengers to Muñoz for the New Mexico District 4 Senate seat, sent out an invitation via email to a wide net of people for the May 19 event in Thoreau.

“I will not be able to personally attend, but I will send my Navajo representative to speak for me,” Muñoz wrote Adams in a May 19 email on the matter. “I keep hearing that this (event) is not for non-Natives.”

Adams said she couldn’t believe what she was reading when she received the email from Muñoz. She said she was astounded on two fronts: District 4 is predominantly Native American. And, Adams said, the way the remark came off just didn’t seem to be something that should

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come from the mouth of a sitting state legislator.

“Let me be frank,” Adams wrote in a response to the comment by Muñoz. “The content of your email directly denotes racism. Let me assure you that no event that I have been a part of, nor will one ever be, on the terms that you mentioned.”

Muñoz, first elected to the state legislature in 2009, and the son of former Gallup Mayor Ed Muñoz, said he doesn’t think there was anything racial in the comment. He said he was told at another area candidate forum that the Thoreau event was for Native peoples only.

He also said he’s not exactly sure why Adams became so bent out of shape over the remark, particularly when he attended an Iyanbito forum last month that specifically targeted Native American candidates, an event that Adams also attended. Iyanbito is east of Gallup and on the Navajo Nation.

Adams is half black and half Navajo, and is a local business owner as is Muñoz. Adams is from Iyanbito and is the granddaughter of former NM State Representative Albert Shirley.

“Am I missing something here?” Muñoz asked. “I’ve been called a lot of things, but I’ve never been called a racist. I think this is a classic case of something that is being blown out of proportion.”

The alleged racist comment is not the first time during the 2016 political campaign that Adams and Muñoz, 49, have tussled over issues. Last month also, Muñoz initiated an investigation of Adams about several “questionable” signatures on a petition form that candidates must file with the Secretary of State’s Office. The district attorneys in McKinley and San Juan Counties have yet to make a conclusion on the matter.

Meanwhile, Adams, 29, concluded in the initial email response to Muñoz: “If you are uncomfortable attending events sponsored by me based on my ethnic background, then you are more than welcomed to suggest and coordinate events – my team would be delighted to assist.”

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Besides Adams, Muñoz faces Jordon Johnson of Vanderwagen in the District 4 primary. Each of the three is a Democrat. Johnson has a doctoral degree in American Studies from the University of New Mexico and works as a coordinator for McKinley Community PLACE MATTERS.

District 4 includes McKinley and San Juan counties. New Mexico legislators earn a per diem salary of \$164.

***By Bernie Dotson
Sun Correspondent***