

Panel considers Duran's impeachment

Written by By Matthew Reichbach NM Political Report
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Santa Fe—The leader of the House of Representatives named 10 members to a panel that will look into the possible impeachment of Secretary of State Dianna Duran.

Speaker of the House Don Tripp, R-Socorro, named five Democrats and five Republicans to the panel tasked with examining evidence against Duran with serious consequences.

Duran is facing possible impeachment, which in turn could lead to removal from office, for allegations that she moved campaign funds into personal accounts. The 64 charges from Attorney General Hector Balderas were filed in late August. The leader of the House of Representatives named ten members to a panel that will look into the possible impeachment of Secretary of State Dianna Duran.

Speaker of the House Don Tripp, R-Socorro, named five Democrats and five Republicans to the panel tasked with examining evidence against Duran and examine possible impeachment.

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The 10 names on the committee are:

Sarah Maestas Barnes, R-Albuquerque

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Gail Chasey, D-Albuquerque

Zach Cook, R-Ruidoso

Jim Dines, R-Albuquerque

Kelly Fajardo, R-Belen

Javier Martínez, D-Albuquerque

Bill Rehm, R-Albuquerque

Patricio Ruiloba, D-Albuquerque

Tomás Salazar, D-Las Vegas

Jeff Steinborn, D-Las Cruces

Chasey and Cook will be the co-chairs of the panel. Cook was also the co-chair of the last committee to look at impeachment in 2011, for then-Public Regulation Commissioner Jerome Block Jr. In 2011, Cook was co-chair along with Las Cruces Democrat Joseph Cervantes, who has since become a member of the Senate.

Cook and Chasey are also the only two on the new committee who sat on the previous

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impeachment subcommittee. Tripp himself was on the Block impeachment subcommittee.

Speaker Tripp made the announcement in a press release.

“One of the heaviest burdens the House of Representatives carries is determining whether to overturn the results of an election,” Tripp said. “As we begin to conduct an independent analysis of the evidence against Secretary of State Duran, it is critical that the special committee I have appointed approaches this difficult task with the solemnity it deserves.”

Tripp said that he expects the panel “will put partisan politics aside as they follow a process that is fair and unbiased.”

Tripp announced last week that he would put the panel together after calls from Democratic leadership in the House, as it's not a regular occurrence.

New Mexico Political Report previously looked at what a possible impeachment would look like. The ten member panel will likely hire a counsel to investigate the charges and report back on the details.

An impeachment is not a criminal conviction, but closer to an indictment in criminal proceedings. If the House votes to impeach Duran, then she would stand trial with the Senate as the jury and the House, or a counsel hired by the House, as the prosecutor.

No statewide official has ever been impeached by the House, let alone removed from office by the Senate. In fact, there is no evidence that the House has ever impeached any elected official.

The closest was likely former State Treasurer Robert Vigil. The Democrat resigned before the impeachment could go to the full House. Vigil later served more than two years in prison for corruption charges.

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When she won election in 2010, Duran became the first Republican elected as New Mexico Secretary of State since before World War II. She took over after two other scandal-plagued Secretaries of State and campaigned on cleaning up the office.

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