

GOP-backed candidates reference false conspiracy rhetoric

Legislative hopefuls cite QAnon as a source of info

By **CAITLIN ANDERSON**
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Several GOP-endorsed candidates running for races in the southwest metro have made references to false conspiracy rhetoric.

The candidates, most of whom are endorsed by the Republican Party of Minnesota, have used rhetoric from QAnon, which encompasses several false conspiracy theories that have entered mainstream social media.

Those candidates include Julie Dupré running for Senate District 49, Joe Thalman for House of Representatives District 49B, Gary Heyer for House District 50B and Melissa Moore for House

District 46B. The Star Tribune originally reported on the candidates.

Together, they are running to represent areas of Edina, Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Richfield, St. Louis Park and Hopkins.

Having originated on an anonymous internet message board, QAnon falsely claims that world leaders, and particularly top U.S. leaders, are Satan worshippers and pedophiles who are plotting

against President Donald Trump, while at the same time operating a worldwide sex-trafficking ring. It also alleges that COVID-19 is a hoax meant to secure a Democrat win in November.

Moore, who is running to represent areas of St. Louis Park and Hopkins, has posted and retweeted QAnon-related phrases, including the "#GreatAwakening" and "#DigitalSoldier" and "#WWG1WGA."

While reading candidate introductions for the League of Women Voters of Bloomington candidate forum, Joe Thalman, who is running to represent areas of Bloomington, Edina, Eden Prairie and Minnetonka, said "Where we go one, we go all," – the full phrase for "WWG1WGA" – after encouraging people to vote.

When asked by Sun Newspapers whether he knew the phrase was connected to QAnon, Thal-

man said he did.

"I'm aware of Q and I'm aware that there are other attributions of that phrase as well," Thalman said. "General (Michael) Flynn had made the same statement on a post that he had done a day or two before. I love the sound of it. ... I like the spirited statement."

Heyer, who is running to represent areas of

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Rhonda Bland

Address: 7000 Kerry Road

Education: B.A. in history, philosophy, political science from University of Manitoba; J.D. from William Mitchell; LL.M. (taxation) from William Mitchell

Occupation: Retired attorney

Community involvement: Two successful efforts to block unpopular city proposals in my residential neighborhood,

former Chair of Young Audiences of Minnesota, former President of Prospect Knolls Neighborhood

Contact information: rhonda4edina@gmail.com

Why are you running for City Council?

Edina has been very good to me and my family. I feel a responsibility to serve the city that has been such an important part of my life. As a trained lawyer and neighborhood steward, I believe I am uniquely qualified to help guide our city's path to the future.

I organized a successful effort to relocate a two-story, 10,000 square foot

water treatment plant – that would have replaced a neighborhood pocket park – to the Southdale district.

The only loyalty of City Council should be to the residents of Edina, not a party or ideology. Unlike most of my opponents, I reject all endorsements and financial support from party operatives, politicians, and partisan groups.

What is your vision for Edina's ongoing redevelopment as it pertains to the discussion over preserving Edina's suburban character while addressing modern needs?

I believe in thoughtful, coherent, measured development that supports and sustains our

commercial base while protecting the integrity of our community. Real estate in Edina is valuable. Each prospective development must live up to Edina's high standards. As such, the council must ensure developments honor and respect our neighborhood values and appearance, including green space. Council must assess site-specific details, environmental impacts, and developments must be in scale and located appropriately. Once a village, now a city; at its core, Edina is its neighborhoods.

How have events over the recent months — COVID-19 and protests for racial justice — affected how you might act in this

role?

COVID-19 is a direct and immediate threat to our public health and economy. Some of our favorite small businesses may close their doors for good and our neighbors' pocketbooks will suffer. As a City Council member, I would face the medical and financial realities: promoting safe and responsible behavior, assessing changes to our tax revenue, and preparing for when the federal aid runs out.

A couple weeks ago, I met with Edina Patrol Officer Darren Davis, the 2019 Officer of the Year. He has a unique perspective on the intersection between race and policing because in addition to

serving on our city's police force, he also happens to be African American. Officer Davis shared with me two valuable insights: Edina PD does a good job dealing with issues of race but we, and all cities, must do better to ensure the "bad apples" (as he called them) do not become our policemen. From a Council perspective, that means ensuring rigorous screening and ongoing training that guarantees that all citizens are treated with respect. Regarding non-police issues, the Council must actively seek out marginalized voices and value everyone's input so that all Edinans feel represented and so that their issues can be addressed.

QAnon

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Bloomington and Richfield, posted a now-deleted video last December that depicted a sign with QAnon terms such as "Q" and "Patriots Unite" with a disclaimer saying the sign was paid for by "Gary Heyer for Congress," the Star Tribune reported. In the video, Heyer detailed "inviting all of the churchgoers to partake in the great awakening."

A "Great Awakening" and "The Storm" are known on QAnon message boards as the time when elected officials and other members involved in the plot would be corralled for imprisonment or execution.

Heyer did not respond

to requests for comment by Sun Newspapers.

The QAnon movement, once a fringe internet phenomenon that emerged in late 2017, now has reached the mainstream, with QAnon-linked candidates seeking elected office in many parts of the country.

But Republican leaders in the southwest metro have said that the use of these references does not necessarily mean the candidates are promoting QAnon's ideas.

'Great information source'

For GOP candidates who have expressed QAnon rhetoric, several have justified its use as a source of information instead of it being a promotion of its ideas.

Dupré said QAnon is

"a really great information source" and "one of many that I use," according to the Star Tribune. Dupré, who is running to represent areas of Edina, Bloomington, Eden Prairie and Minnetonka, did not respond to requests for comment by Sun Newspapers.

Dupré is not currently endorsed by the Republican Party of Minnesota.

Moore told Sun Newspapers in a statement, "I follow many different sources of information and groups, including Q, which I find interesting and I continue to always search more sources for more answers."

She added, "I'm not out there protesting or burning cities down. My party supports me based on my very conservative values. This is a complete

smear campaign from the left. I'm a proud patriot and want to work hard to keep this beautiful state of MN a great state to live in."

Senate District 49 Republicans, which has endorsed Thalman, wrote in a statement on its website, "(Thalman) does not believe that Satanists and pedophiles run the government. He does not seek to inspire terrorism or violence; in fact, just the opposite. He has never expressed support for QAnon online or encouraged others to join them."

"It's one of many news sources that a lot of people are going to outside of the traditional mainstream media," Thalman told Sun Newspapers. "I would suggest people always do their own re-

search and come to their own conclusions."

Randy Sutter, a spokesperson for SD 49 Republicans, said using QAnon as a way to get "unfiltered news" does not mean certain candidates are promoting its ideas.

"It doesn't mean that (Thalman's) an advocate, or a promoter, or a supporter," he said.

QAnon in politics

DFL candidates in the southwest metro have called the QAnon rhetoric "crazy" and "a distraction."

Steve Elkins, the incumbent running against Thalman in House District 49B, said he was not too familiar with QAnon, but after reading about it, he observed, "It's kind of crazy stuff."

"It's a distraction from

what we need to be focusing on, which is getting this pandemic under control and getting the economy back opened up safely," said Melisa López Franzen, the incumbent running against Dupré in Senate District 49.

Eileen McAwley, chair of Senate District 49 DFL, said, "I think it's a sad commentary on our times that these conspiracy theories are gaining traction in the political discourse."

Sutter, of SD 49 Republicans, said relaying information from QAnon without checking to confirm it is where it might be dangerous.

"That's a concern that I have," he said.

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COMMUNITY NOTES

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nificant contributions to Edina, is eligible for the Tom Oye Human Rights Award. Nominees will be evaluated based on their efforts to foster respect and dignity for others in the advancement of human rights. The term "human rights" includes freedom from discrimination because of race,

color, creed religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, disability, status with regard to public assistance, family status or national origin.

Previous Tom Oye Award recipients include Sanford Berman, Olivia Pierce, Arnie Bigbee, Saumya Mangalick, Lauren Morse-Wendt, Jessi Kingston, Tom McKenzie and Kristin Aarsvold, Alec Fischer,

Joyce Repya, Dan Johnson, Karen Hazel, Kelly Fitzgerald, Rachael Pre-am Grenier, Sandy Schley, Shata Mohtadi and Emma Weisberg, Debby McNeil, Ellen Kennedy and Mary Ellingen.

Nominations must be turned in by Nov. 9. The application can be found online at edinamn.gov/humanrights. For more information or to receive a paper copy of the application, con-

tact Human Rights and Relations Commission staff liaison Heidi Lee at hlee@edinamn.gov or 952-826-1622.

Edina Lions Club collecting eyeglasses

The Edina Lions Club, a community service organization in the city,

is continuing to collect used eyeglasses amid the pandemic.

The Lions Club International has participated in the eyeglass collection program for decades. The glasses picked up by the Edina Lions Club will go to a Lion's Club recycling center where they are sorted, measured and stored until requested by mission groups. The glasses have been shipped to over 50

different countries, including Haiti, Nicaragua and Honduras.

Collection sites in Edina include Jerry's Foods, 5125 Vernon Ave. S.; Cahill Barbers, 7023 Amundson Ave.; and Southdale Eye Clinic, 66th Street and Drew Avenue.

For more info, visit mnlrc.org