

Commissioner Comments

July 8th 2026

Out of respect for the process, I have refrained from making any comments about the actions taken against all three Port of Benton commissioners.

In the wake of the State's Supreme Court disappointing ruling last week, I do have some brief remarks.

It's important for me to review the facts, as opposed to pure political spin which has been predominately reported on, over the past few months.

We must be reminded of those actual FACTS, and some of the evidence that supports them:

On Jan 3rd of this year, all three commissioners were informed by the Port's attorney that employee complaints had been submitted to him. These complaints were against Executive Director Diahann Howard. On the Jan 4th Special Commission Meeting, this commission reviewed and discussed in executive session, and took reasonable action in public session to respond to these complaints.

ACTIONS TAKEN:

- 1. We began the process of conducting an investigation into the complaints against the Executive Director.**
- 2. The decision to suspend the Executive Director with pay, was discussed in executive session, as is allowed by law, and in public session, ultimately approved by a motion to do so based on the following facts:**

- In 2019 there were a group of POB employees that filed complaints against, then, interim Executive Director Diahann Howard and Commissioner Roy Keck. The independent investigation concluded that both Commissioner Keck and Interim Executive Director Howard actions were retaliatory against Port Staff.
- Shortly after Diahann Howard was promoted to permanent Executive Director, an employee with 27 years at the Port, resigned. That employee explained (Quote), “The current work environment has been and is becoming increasingly hostile and negative and I find this is no longer a safe place for me to work” and (Quote)“the continued negativity and hostility from staff and management has resulted in the current work environment that has compromised my health”
- During my campaign last year, several current and former Port employees reached out to me with concerns of executive leadership failures and what they viewed as abuses of power by the Executive Director, causing many employees to seek employment elsewhere.

- **Based on these employee concerns, a list was generated of all the people that have left the Ports employment totaling nearly 20 employees in the past 6 years. It is unclear of the exact reasons why each employee left the Port, but the sheer number of departures is significant. Comparing that to the 20 year period prior to Executive Director Howard taking over, there were a few employees that retired but no one quit. In contrast, during the 6 year period of Executive Director Howard's control, nearly 20 employees have moved on. That's approximately 20 out of 24 Port staff members.**
- **In our view, this Commission has a duty to oversee the health and safety of the Port, including management and staff. This Commission also has a duty to comply with the law.**
- **This Commission was advised, that, Executive Director Howard's employment contract has a specific clause to address this exact situation and what action the Port Commission may take.**
(Quote)
"The Port may suspend the employee, with pay, during any period in which the Port is investigating or determining whether cause for termination exists"

This Commission's actions taken on Jan 4th were solely based on these facts and nothing more. There were no other considerations discussed nor included in our deliberations.

We need you all to know that we put the health and safety of the entire POB staff and the Port's ability to carry out its commitments to this community, ahead of everything else, we will not allow political pressure to bend our will, or compromise that.

That is why the process of investigating the complaints against Executive Director Diahann Howard will now continue. We will ensure a thorough investigation is undertaken.

We cannot ignore the reports by employees or the findings of Human Resource Expert Eileen Griffin-Ray, where concerns regarding organizational and leadership failures were uncovered.

We also learned from our new Finance Director Stuart Dezember, who has in a very short time, uncovered several budget failures resulting in a budget shortfall of over a million dollars.

We do not know whether the current actions against us are motivated by the fear of what we may uncover next, but we are determined to stay the course and remain dedicated to cleaning up the mistakes of the past, in a transparent and open manner. Allowing us to move forward in partnership with our Staff, our customers, and the Community, to whom we serve.

Message to the Staff:

Please stay focused, as you have been, on the business of the Port. We have been so impressed by your professionalism and grateful for the work you all have performed. We see it and many members of our community have seen it. They have reached out to me and echoed the same appreciation for all of us, working so hard on their behalf, despite the distractions.

Final Thoughts:

- I want to Thank the Port Community for this chance to share these facts.
- We are confident in those facts and the evidence that supports them.
- We invite you to do your own review and assessment, all the documents referred to today are available to the public. Just go to the POB website and fill out a public records request.
- Going forward, we will continue to be guided by facts and law, continuing the Port's mission to pursue economic opportunities for all in our community. Please continue to join us in that mission