

Detroit Democrats censure rep who credited Trump - Detroit News, The (MI) - April 27, 2020 - page B2

April 27, 2020 | Detroit News, The (MI) | Sarah Rahal and Beth LeBlanc | Page B2

Detroit – Detroit Democrats unanimously passed a resolution Saturday to censure a Democratic lawmaker who credited President Donald Trump with advocating for the drug that she said cured her of COVID-19.

State Rep. **Karen Whitsett**, D-Detroit, broke protocol by meeting with President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence during an April 14 meeting of COVID-19 survivors, where she credited hydroxychloroquine for saving her life, a Democratic district leader said.

"Thank you for everything that you have done," **Whitsett** told Trump at the meeting. "I did not know that saying thank you had a political line. ... I'm telling my story and my truth, and this how I feel and these are my words."

Whitsett's comments landed her in hot water with the 13th Congressional District Democratic Party organization, which unanimously passed the 15-delegate vote via Zoom on Saturday ousting the first-term lawmaker representing the 9th Michigan House District.

"We have the ability to be the referee when we see our leaders out there attacking and not being willing to have a discussion to find common ground," said Jonathan Kinloch, chairman of the organization. "Based on her actions and recent statements, she's chosen to be a stand-alone Democrat with the goals of a Republican."

The resolution states **Whitsett** has "misrepresented the needs and priorities" of Democratic leadership to the president and public.

The resolution also notes she's participated in events with the Republican Women's Federation of Michigan to express gratitude to the president.

Whitsett, the resolution said, "has repeatedly and publicly praised the president's delayed and misguided COVID-19 response efforts in contradiction with the scientifically based and action-oriented response" from Michigan's Democratic leadership, "endangering the health, safety and welfare of her constituents, the city of Detroit and the state of Michigan."

The admonition means she will not get the group's endorsement for this year nor will she be able to engage in the group's activities for the next two election cycles.

Trump appeared to offer his support for the state representative late Thursday, tweeting, "Disgraceful. (**Whitsett**) Should join the Republican Party!"

The president also tweeted Friday morning about the controversy: "The Fake and totally corrupt

News is after her as a means of getting to me. She's smart and strong, knows the truth. Already a heroine to many!"

Until March, Kinloch was Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's community liaison to southeast Michigan.

"This is done with unless she appeals," he said. "We will begin screening someone else to support that district."

The developments quickly drew the ire of Donald Trump Jr., who tweeted Thursday: "What a joke. Remember folks, the narrative can only be against Trump and if you break those rules the left will turn on their own."

On Sunday, George Stephanopoulos on ABC's "This Week" asked Whitmer whether it was appropriate for Metro Detroit Democrats to censure one of their own.

Whitmer was not involved in the censure and declined to say whether it was the right thing to do, saying, "I'm not getting involved in those maneuverings of what's happening there."

"I can just say this. That it's really important to get this right. We need to listen to experts and to doctors," Whitmer said. "I know this state rep credits hydroxychloroquine with her success with COVID-19, but I do also know that the medical professionals are saying, you know that that's not the case. we should not make that assumption."

'This is pettiness'

Whitsett, meanwhile, said after the vote Saturday that she would not engage in the "pettiness politics" of the Democratic organization because she is busy working for her district.

Whitsett said she has raised \$450,000 in four days for resources in her district and is working to deliver food and cleaning products to those in need during the pandemic.

"I was asked to speak about my COVID experience," **Whitsett** said. "The board has various issues and I don't understand what this censure is supposed to do."

"We are in the middle of a pandemic if anyone has forgotten, which is what Jonathan and the governor should be concerned about," she said, adding she didn't have any involvement with the Republican Women's Federation of Michigan.

Whitsett and her husband, Jason, tested positive for the coronavirus. The pair took to Twitter on Saturday morning to thank supporters.

"I have over 93,000 people that I'm responsible for, so we're trying to still get resources out, finding resources and Home Depot, Lowe's just did a delivery for us and I'm so excited about that," she said.

Past problems

Kinloch said the party's problems with **Whitsett** date back to comments she made about House Democratic leadership and the Democratic legislative caucus at large.

In February, **Whitsett** told WWJ-AM (950) that House Democratic Leader Christine Greig of Farmington Hills was a racist because she wouldn't consider an urban agenda for the caucus. Greig also pulled **Whitsett's** communications staff because of an unfavorable vote on an early rendition of the no-fault auto reform bill, **Whitsett** said.

A later version of the no-fault auto reform legislation received overwhelming support in the state House and was signed into law by Whitmer.

Several lawmakers in Detroit or elsewhere have been censured in some way by their parties over the years because of "serious trouble with the law," but the idea of zinging a lawmaker for meeting with the president is "unheard of," said Bill Ballenger, a longtime political analyst, a Republican former state lawmaker and head of the online Ballenger Report.

"They obviously feel this is something that cannot be tolerated," he said.

Michigan State Medical Society president Dr. Mohammed Arsiwala prescribed hydroxychloroquine and an antibiotic for **Whitsett** after she visited one of his Michigan Urgent Care clinics in Wyandotte. She had symptoms of COVID-19 and an underlying condition, he told The Detroit News.

The Trump administration has issued about 28 million doses of hydroxychloroquine from the federal government's Strategic National Stockpile. While hydroxychloroquine is effective at treating lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, the drug can be dangerous for people with certain heart conditions.

On Sunday, after **Whitsett** continued to make negative comments about the party and Whitmer, the 13th Congressional Democratic group asked her to come in for a "screening" of candidates for her house district. **Whitsett** refused, Kinloch said.

"Don't play with us," Kinloch said. "This is very serious when we ask to have a conversation with you and you choose not to. We're not going to accept that. How they handle you in Lansing as far as the Democratic caucus, that's on them. But how we handle you back at home, that's on us."

Whitsett said she didn't have time for the screening.

"I don't have time for politics," **Whitsett** said. "That's ridiculous, during a pandemic, that they think I have time for a screening. ... I have people that need me."