

Fellow Democrats warn Indian Creek trustee in fire department dispute

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Monroe County Democratic party leaders have jumped into the battle over fire protection in Indian Creek, threatening to remove the township trustee's precinct committee member status if she doesn't start communicating with her constituents.

In a letter to Indian Creek Township Trustee Linda Hollingsworth, the Democratic leadership said they do not view Hollingsworth's actions as representing "open government, transparency, good faith, etc."

The letter, obtained by the Herald-Times, is signed by chairwoman Lee Jones, vice-chair Rick Deitz, secretary Donna Purdom, and treasurer Hans Huffman.

Hollingsworth canceled the existing contract between her office and the Indian Creek Fire Fighters Inc. earlier this month, entering into a month-to-month agreement with Van Buren Township Fire Department for primary coverage until she can form her own fire department for the township.

The cancellation of the contract has opened up a large rift between the Trustee's office and the fire department, but now the gap seems to have widened between Hollingsworth and her own political party.

"We are writing to make you aware that although we cannot effect your term in office as Trustee, there is serious consideration on the question of whether you should be retained as a Monroe County Democratic Party Precinct Committee Member given your recent conduct as Trustee," the letter states.

It also says Hollingsworth has been "unwilling to attend public events and meetings that are not under your direct control."

Jones said Wednesday that the party has been monitoring the situation in Kirksville for awhile.

"We've become increasingly concerned that there doesn't appear to be much of anyone supporting her position," Jones said. "I've been hearing from a lot of people who don't agree with her. The fact that she's been very, very unresponsive to requests for meetings or to talk to her, because of this, it's just not our concept of how the elected officials in the Democratic Party should behave toward the people who elected them."

Hollingsworth didn't address the letter in a statement she provided to the newspaper today.

"I think it's very unfortunate that the Indian Creek volunteers who serve only private subscribers refuse to give the station back to the township, which needs it to provide fire protection to the public," Hollingsworth said. "They are no longer a fire department."

Indian Creek Fire Fighters Inc. is now offering protection to Indian Creek residents for \$1 a year. As of Wednesday, the department was still operating out of the station it built on trustee-owned land.

Jones said she hoped the letter to Hollingsworth would essentially serve as a wake-up call, stirring the trustee to listen to her constituents' complaints.

Hollingsworth is one of only two precinct committee members from Indian Creek Township.

Jones said she couldn't recall any other precinct committee member having their status revoked.

"It's been considered before," she said, "but I don't have enough of the history to know if it has ever been done before. There's just never been a situation like this before."

Jones said a precinct committee member could have their status taken away if they were found to be causing harm to their constituency.

"It's very, very clear that in Indian Creek quite a bit of harm is being caused," Jones said. "We're very concerned about that."

Party leaders are calling on Hollingsworth to sit down and negotiate with people of the opposing viewpoint.

"I think it'll be kind of a wait-and-see scenario," Jones said, "but this is a drastic enough measure to prove that we don't want to take it lightly."

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