

Fighting DougCo commissioners talk civility



Douglas County Commissioner Lora Thomas points at fellow Commissioner Abe Laydon to make a point during a Monday work session. Screenshot courtesy of Douglas County



By Mike McKibbin / NewsBreak Denver / March 22, 2023

[DOUGLAS COUNTY, COLO.] — Civil and professional governing by the Douglas County Commissioners may still be a ways off, but two of the Republican officials took up the idea with some outside help.

The past few years have seen commissioners Abe Laydon and George Teal publicly attacking and ridiculing Lora Thomas over several issues and actions during weekly work sessions and a few regular meetings.

Teal was absent from Monday's work session where the subject was discussed.

"We face some real challenges related to board dynamics," Laydon said in introducing the topic. "I think the only way forward is for this board to rise above the challenges. We need to govern with civility and professionalism."

It didn't take long before Thomas and Laydon accused each other of harmful actions or words.

"I couldn't believe at last Tuesday's business meeting when you called me a jerk," Thomas told Laydon.

"I didn't call you a jerk," Laydon responded. "I said I know what jerks look like, and we don't need our staff or citizens to see any of us act that way."

Laydon asked Thomas what she wanted to accomplish in her remaining year and a half in office.

"I want to come in on Mondays and Tuesdays and not be scared thinking, 'what are they gonna launch at me today,'" she said. "Am I gonna be able to speak, or, like last Tuesday when you kept cutting me off, interrupting me and wouldn't let me speak."

Thomas said things changed between the three commissioners after Teal was elected in 2020, and Laydon aligned himself with the then-newcomer. She added when Teal starts talking, Laydon is always very deferential.



Douglas County Commissioner Abe Laydon, right, makes a point to fellow Commissioner Lora Thomas during a Monday work session. Screenshot courtesy of Douglas County

Past actions affect present relationships

Thomas and Laydon repeated several past arguments over issues such as a STEM School Highlands Ranch pilot security project the commissioners funded and Thomas opposed.

Others included Thomas' recent [removal from several outside boards and committees](#) she had served on for years, two investigations of Thomas approved by Laydon and Teal that [did not find she committed any offenses](#), and Thomas' removal as board chair in each of the past two years by her colleagues.

"I'd be thrilled to reappoint you to the committees you served on," Laydon said. "I think you are a phenomenal leader, and I'd love to see you thrive as a commissioner. We do a ton of good work, but we fight a lot, which detracts from that good work."

Thomas told Laydon that actions speak louder than words and stated she had always been civil and professional toward he and Teal, even when she was being attacked.

"There's lots of video of you and George yelling at me; I challenge you to find any of me yelling at you two," Thomas added.

"I am deeply sorry for the way my actions have affected you," Laydon told Thomas at one point.

When Laydon said a civil relationship begins with looking each other in the eye, Thomas responded, "It's really hard for me to look you in the eye because every agreement I've made with you since I endorsed you in 2018 you have reneged on. So I'm very reticent because your words do not match your actions."

"You and I have very different perspectives over the last couple of years," Laydon responded. "When you endorsed me, I probably gained more enemies than followers. Maybe it's kind of near even."

At one point, Laydon gave his "personal commitment" to Thomas to not tolerate any further personal attacks toward her.

Not rocket science

Aldis Sides of Highlands Ranch said she has a degree in organizational psychology and advised the commissioners to avoid further infighting. She said emphasizing the county's strengths and each other will lead to more positive actions.

"A little praise goes a long way," Sides stated. "Not everything has to be a big deal. This really isn't rocket science."

She said each commissioner should ask themselves how much they use the past to build the present and to use policy guidelines to help avoid future battles.

Laydon and Thomas were also advised to refrain from personal opinions about county business and issues in their [respective email newsletters](#).

Sides said the commissioners should strive to "fight like cats and dogs behind the scenes, in hallways, corridors, and offices."

"Close those doors and really talk turkey," she advised.

Sides also recommended the commissioners reinstate Thomas to some of the boards and committees she had served on to "test the waters" toward more civil and professional behavior.

Both commissioners voiced a desire to have Teal present for the discussion, and Laydon said the issue would be a weekly work session topic going forward.