

Fang plans to use her youth, 'inexperience' to her advantage if elected to county commission

Herald: Arkansas State University

September 10, 2020 Thursday

University Wire

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1

Length: 846 words

Byline: Emma Witter

Body

Fanny Fang is running for the Riley County Commission district two seat. (Dylan Connell | Collegian Media Group)

In a March meeting, Riley County Commissioner Marvin Rodriguez said the county was at a relatively low risk for COVID-19. His justification was that since the county has such a small Asian population, it would have less cases.

These comments, called racist by the Manhattan Alliance for Peace and Justice, were the catalyst for Fanny Fang's run for Rodriguez's county commission seat.

Fang, a 25-year-old Chinese-American woman, spoke out on behalf of MAPJ, calling for the commissioner's resignation. Then, she announced she would run to replace him.

"What [Rodriguez's comment] foreshadowed to me and many community members was that we have leadership that is not ready to take on this pandemic," Fang said.

In addition to those comments, Fang said a lack of transparency from the commission solidified her urge to run. MAPJ asked that city commission meetings be live streamed for greater accessibility, and the commission denied this request.

"We're talking about a government entity that has a budget of \$68 million, and they can't find a way to pay for a webcam," Fang said. "That showed me that we have outdated elected officials, and what I've come to discover on the campaign trail is that many of them just don't care about the community."

While Fang said working in community politics has always been on her mind, she never saw herself as a politician.

"Understanding the power that the county commission has and seeing the abuse of it, I felt that it was time someone like me, a 25-year-old minority woman, ran for a seat," she said.

Some community members have said Fang's ability to bring a new perspective to the county commission is what makes her a great candidate.

"Fanny's campaign is a piece of the broader picture to make this a more inclusive and equitable nation," Louis Bedford, political strategy director for the Fang campaign, said.

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Fang said she feels connected to congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's story in that they both began as community organizers.

"We both come from working class families, and we'd just had enough," Fang said. "Community organizing isn't getting enough done fast enough, and people are dying because of that."

After graduating with a degree in sports business from New York University in 2018, Fang moved back home to Manhattan to work at her family's market.

"It was the first time since I'd gone to NYU that I had time to breathe and just be present," Fang said. "What I saw through working at the Asian Market was a community ready for change, ready to embrace diversity and inclusion."

Fang said her ultimate goal as a county commissioner would be to start genuine, open conversations between local government and the public.

"As hopefully the next county commissioner, my job will be to invite people into this political process," she said. "I get how daunting that is, and my job is to break down those barriers."

The top three issues of Fang's platform are access to healthcare, affordable housing and increasing access to and representation of the people in government.

She said while it's easy for college students in Manhattan to feel like the county government doesn't affect their lives, the two are closely connected.

"Mask mandates, restrictions on businesses, all that, the final say is within the county commission," Fang said. "I understand how easy it is to get sucked into college life, but remember, there's a community around you that is making decisions for you as well."

Fang said she appreciates the wisdom that older politicians bring to the table, but it's important to have diverse ages and races in government organizations to create diversity of thought.

This is especially important in a college town, she said.

"Youth and enthusiasm are something we sorely lack in local government," Amber Starling, Riley County resident, said. "[Fang's] ideas on accessible government leadership in particular aim to engage and encourage people who have been treated as less-than, especially college students who have to abide by local laws but have not been granted a seat at the table where they are written."

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The median age in Riley County is 25.

"I don't know what the average age is of the elected officials," Fang said. "But you can look up a picture of the county commission, and I guarantee you're not going to feel represented by that board."

At 25, Fang's age has been a topic of discussion since she announced her run, and she said she sees it as an asset rather than a disadvantage.

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"When [people] talk about my age, they say, 'You're inexperienced,'" she said. "It's not that I'm inexperienced, it's that I have a different set of experiences. If we want to grow, that is exactly what we need."

More information on Fang and her run for the district two county commission seat can be found at the campaign Facebook page.

Load-Date: September 11, 2020

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