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Descendant of Robert E. Lee encourages Tyler ISD board to take strong action, supports athlete refusing to wear Lee jersey

By Zak Wellerman zwellerman@tylerpaper.com

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The Rev. Rob W. Lee IV, who is the fourth great-nephew of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, speaks during a Zoom conference meeting hosted by the Transform Network on Wednesday.

As the Tyler ISD board of trustees is set to vote on the name of John Tyler and Robert E. Lee high schools Thursday, a descendant of the Confederate general encouraged board members to take strong action regarding the name of the East Texas high school with his ancestor's name.

The Rev. Rob W. Lee IV, who is the fourth great-nephew of Confederate general Robert E. Lee, said during a Zoom conference Wednesday hosted by the Transform Network that he's tired of his ancestor's name being on schools, streets and squares.

"I'm personally tired because it's a symbol of white supremacy that my ancestor perpetrated," he said. "I want to speak clearly to the people of Tyler, Texas, especially the school board who will take up the vote. Now is not a time to shrink back. Now is not a time to say well, this isn't my issue."

Lee said the activism movement of removing Confederate monuments and speaking out against racism seems to be happening fast, but it's come together through the work of others for many years.

"We have to abandon the lost cause," Lee said. "And I say this especially for a place like Tyler, Texas. Do we want to teach our children a pseudo historical reality that said Robert E. Lee was kind to his slaves and fought for states' rights and southern rights, which we never continue that sentence because it was to enslave people."

Lee also commended Lee High School athlete Trude Lamb, who has refused to wear Robert E. Lee or Lee on her jersey. He said he is sorry that Lamb has to wear that name.

"She has been for me a reminder of God's grace. She has the full backing of myself," Lee said. "She is one of true activists leading and spurring change. I just want to say I'm thankful for her witness."

The Tyler ISD board meeting will take place at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Jim Plyler Instructional Complex, 807 W. Glenwood Blvd.

Lee was joined on the call by local Tyler activists Rev. Kilton McCracken, DG Montalvo and Ambra Phillips as well as activist Rev. Anthony Smith from Salisbury, North Carolina.

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I came to the Tyler Morning Telegraph in September 2019. I report on crime, courts, breaking news and various events in Tyler and East Texas.