

Blong Yang (1976-)

Hmong-American Attorney and Candidate for Hennepin County Commissioner in District 2

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Blong Yang is a candidate for Hennepin County Commissioner in District 2. Yang is 36 years old and is of Hmong descent. He is a DFLer. (1) If elected, he will be the first commissioner of color in Hennepin County's history.

Yang was born in a Thai refugee camp. He is the oldest of six children. At the age of three Yang and his family immigrated to the United States. According to his website, Yang grew up "watching his parents struggle to keep food on the table and the children out of trouble." (2) Yang credits his parent's struggle for teaching him and his siblings that "the American Dream is achievable through hard work and education." (2)

Yang has a BA in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and a JD from the University of Minnesota Law School. (3)

After receiving his JD, Yang worked at the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis as an Equal Justice Works Fellow / staff attorney. After his fellowship, Yang opened a small private practice in Minneapolis. The practice focused on family law and estate planning. During this time, Yang also served on the Commitment Defense Panel of the Hennepin County Bar Association where he defended people from being civilly committed for mental illness and/or chemical dependency. (4)

Yang served on the boards for the Jordan Area Community Council, the Hmong American Institute for Learning and Westside Community Health Services.

Yang publicly announced that he was running for Hennepin County Commissioner in April 2012. (1) He was one of 10 candidates running for the position.

At the time of Yang's announcement, he was an investigator for the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights (MDCR). He was forced to resign from the post due to his employer's denial of his request for an unpaid leave of absence to run for elected office, which was allowed by the Labor Agreement. (5)

In an interview published by *The Hmong Times*, Yang expressed his frustration with the matter:

"I enjoyed working as an investigator and I would have wanted to return if my run for office was not successful. However, the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights (MDCR) refused to grant my request, even though the labor agreement allowed for it. The MDCR's reason for the denial was that there was just too much work. This is curious for three reasons: (1) My unit eliminated the MDCR's chronic backlog of cases that had been sitting around for years. (2) The MDCR had hired a contractor as an investigator and so there was more staff that work available. (3) The MDCR was about to engage in an outreach effort to get more cases because there was a shortage of cases. I find it ironic and extremely

disappointing that a civil rights investigator would be denied one of the most basic opportunities in a democracy: the ability to run for public office by the MDCR. I owe a debt to my union, AFSCME Council 5, for supporting me through this.”(4)

Since the controversy, Yang placed second in the primary on August 14, 2012 (5), and will continue running against Linda Higgins, who is also a DFLer. (1)

Blong Yang resides in the Jordan Neighborhood of North Minneapolis and is married to local writer Mai Neng Moua. (2) Mai Neng Moua is the editor of “Bamboo Among the Oaks,” an anthology of Hmong creative writing. She was dubbed the “Midwife of the Hmong Literary Arts Movement” by the New York Times. (6) Mai Neng Moua and Blong Yang have two children.

Works Cited:

1

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