

Our City

To the students and parents of Aberdeen High School and the City of Aberdeen I sincerely apologize for the incident that came at the conclusion of last Tuesday night's girls' basketball game. Last week I concluded my column with, "I also hope that the rhetoric that filled the last two years does not manifest itself throughout our society. We are a nation and society born of immigrants; each culture contributing to what makes us so uniquely great as a country." One week to the day after the election of President-elect Donald Trump a small group of American Falls students led by one of their duly-elected student body officers chanted after our girls lost the game, "That's all right, that's okay, you're going to building our wall some day!" Someone else in my position may just overlook the incident and I honestly debated whether I should address it as Mayor. I have chosen to because I am sickened, saddened, and ashamed. As a school, community and society we have to be better than that. Our students and children are a reflection of us all; and I will not tolerate that image if I have any ability to change it.

Last winter I sat at a boys' basketball game and was joined by a local farmer part way through the event. We talked about several things but eventually the conversation got around to the Republican primary and comments that were then being made by candidate Trump. The farmer said he likened the comments to those of Hitler before and during World War II and the internment of Japanese American citizens during that same war and certainly didn't agree with what Mr. Trump was saying. I thought about those remarks throughout the entirety of the campaign season. Power County and Idaho voted three to one to elect Donald Trump as president; yet like the farmer I talked to last winter, I can't believe we did so based on his rhetoric about Hispanic immigrants. I know as a community we are better than that!

On October 3 of this year I wrote: On Monday I received a visit from Juan Saldana the Community Development Specialist from Governor Otter's Commission on Hispanic Affairs. According to Mr. Saldana if you are Hispanic there is no better community in Idaho to live in than American Falls. "It is very evident after talking to business owners, school officials, representatives of the County and law enforcement that Hispanics are well integrated and accepted throughout the community. It is unlike any other place we have visited," stated Mr. Saldana as we chatted.

In my heart I so badly want Mr. Saldana's words to be true but beyond that confined personal space of my heart I know bigotry exists throughout our society and it seldom stays hidden for long. I know the arguments that folks use to justify their opinions; to me they are both unfounded and untrue. Hispanic workers aren't taking "our jobs." No, they are taking the jobs I worked 40 years ago growing up and putting myself through school; jobs not many kids or Caucasian adults will do anymore, because it is damn hard work, and yet it remains the life blood of this community and country. To all those, white, brown or any color who choose to do the hard work, you have my utmost appreciation and gratitude.

"Hispanics are taking over our communities." Yes they are to a degree. And, thank goodness that's the case in American Falls as they continue to buy homes they can afford and pour their hard earned money into fixing them up; paying taxes and fees as they go, while making each neighborhood better in the process.

“They don’t speak our language,” is a great one too. I am pretty sure no one’s ancestors spoke the Native American languages and dialects when they arrived in America either, nor did most try to learn them. One of my most promising students is a young lady named Adrianna; who on an English speaking scale from 1-5, is a 1 or less. Yet, she is one of my very best students; she excelled in my Introduction to Ag Mechanics class, as the only female in the class outperforming all but a few of the white and Hispanic males. Adrianna also excelled in the communications class that I teach, again out performing many native English speakers. Adrianna embodies what I believe we should each strive for everyday regardless of nationality or country of origin; we need to make our best better whether it’s ourselves or our situation and we can’t do that as students, adults or elected leaders by demeaning and disparaging others.

I don’t tolerate racism or bigotry in my classroom; I have much less control of it beyond those confines, but I ask you openly what purpose does it serve. It makes none of us better, it only make us more isolated and bitter. Again to our neighbors and friends in Aberdeen I apologize on behalf of the City of American Falls for last Tuesday night’s incident. The words chanted were not our words nor did they reflect our sentiments. We will do better and I am thankful for that.

I am thankful too to live in a community where differences are accepted. A community where one is not judged by the color of their skin but by the “content of their character” and their ability to work and/or provide a service. You are correct, as a country America has not always been that way, and in some places perhaps it still is not; but here in American Falls and Aberdeen I believe it is true despite an occasional unfortunate incident.

As I look to the coming week and think of Thanksgiving, there is much that I have to be appreciative of. I would hope that each of you can find reasons to be thankful as well; that you are able to express the thanks you feel to the ones that need it most and in return you find satisfaction and gratitude in all that you do. Happy Thanksgiving one and all.

Until next week...