

Our City

Have I told you lately how smart and in tune my students are? Some of you won't like the ramifications; I suppose that can't be helped. But, I am getting ahead of myself. Sorry.

In September of 2018 I was named 2019 Idaho State Teacher of the Year (TOY). For those of you who don't know I teach in a school where 70% of the students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 40% actually live in poverty, 50% are Hispanic and about 10% are Native American. Little did I know what an impact the TOY recognition could have on my students and their families. In February of 2019 when the 57 (All 50 States, Territories and Military) TOYs came together for the first time we were asked to develop a passion project or work. In April of last year the TOY cohorts met in Washington D.C. for the National Teacher of the Year recognition. And, as I have written previously I spoke with Senators Risch, Crapo and Representative Simpson almost exclusively about immigration reform. I have also recently applauded Simpson's co-sponsoring of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act which would provide a stable work force for Idaho's and our Country's agricultural industry and a pathway to citizenship for thousands. As a teacher / mayor in Idaho I have no real way to impact immigration reform so I chose a different route to help Power County's and Idaho's farmers and processors through my passion work. I approached Senator Jim Guthrie and other legislators to do the one thing we could to help not only Idaho's and Power County's number one industry but the people who make that industry at all possible.

Last summer I requested a meeting between Senator Guthrie, two other legislators who are welcome to name themselves if they read this, several of our local potato producers and processors and those associated with the dairy industry to discuss the possibility of passing legislation to provide for driving privilege permits (not licenses or legal identification) for undocumented residents or other residents who would prefer not to disclose certain information in order to have the privilege of driving legally in this country. Senator Guthrie agreed. Since that time he and I along with multiple representatives from the agricultural community and others more diversely associated with the proposed legislation have met repeatedly to determine its viability.

Yesterday, January 7th, an article was published in the Idaho State Journal about the proposed legislation. Perhaps not surprisingly, my FFA Ag Issues team chose this piece of legislation as their 2020 issues to present in public forums throughout Power County and to anyone else wanting to learn more. The Ag Issues team reflects the high school's demographics and as they wrote their parts after some extensive research it is amazing to me how closely their opposing "made up" sentiments actually reflected all the negative comments on the Journal website and of course Facebook about the legislation and Senator Guthrie. My kids were a bit shocked; as they thought their opposing arguments were "over-the-top." "Nobody would really say that would they Mr. Beitia," they would ask as they wrote their parts. And, while my students didn't really think things like that would be said by real people their parts truly reflect the opposition's beliefs.

As to the comments made specifically about Senator Guthrie, to him I apologize and at the same time admire for attempting to do what in my opinion as Mayor of American Falls and a teacher of its students is very definitely the right thing. I wrote before Christmas in this

column, “Why as a country are we so divided, so hateful and full of resentment for our fellow man whose views may be different than our own? WE mock and disparage that which is different, that to which we don’t ascribe and that which makes us uncomfortable. Where is God or our greater purpose in that?” That question stands today.

Why the hate? Why the divisiveness? Someone revered once said, “Let thee without sin cast the first stone.” People come to this country because they have a dream, the American dream. People come to this country because it is the greatest country ever known to man. People come to this country because they wish to work and make a better life for their family. How or why is that such a bad thing? Because they are brown or don’t speak your language? Really? As Mayor of American Falls I am glad they choose to come here, they make our community stronger and more prosperous. They are a part of what makes American Fall the best place to live. They are a key part of what makes Idaho’s number one industry possible. Maybe, just maybe, if we eat it, wear it or live in it we could just say, “Thank you.”

I have the smartest and best students in my classes. Sadly, some are not citizens, they and their parents cannot drive legally because they lack “status” yet they show up to work or school every day and do what they can to make a better life for their family. Who among any of us has the right to oppose that?

Until next week...