

September 5, 2017

Re: An Open Letter from Mayor Albert B. Kelly, Bridgeton; President, New Jersey League of Municipalities.

Dear Mayor,

This letter from League President Albert Kelly was originally published as an invitation to a vigil held September 3. His invitation to elected officials at all levels remains timely and urgent.

Michael J. Darcy, CAE
Executive Director

Standing Together

We, as a community, are a part of a nation founded upon the principles of life, liberty and equality for all. Our nation remains great because of our willingness to stand up for these principles wherever and whenever they are threatened. We have fought two world wars when the forces of hate have threatened to engulf our way of life. We, as a nation, stood in opposition to this attempt at dominance.

In light of what has happened in places like Charlottesville and in other communities around the country, it is time for us to once again stand for what is right and bear witness to our American creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness...”.

Though the founding fathers did not originally include all racial and ethnic groups for any number of reasons, the die had been cast in the direction of equality and our subsequent civil rights were won by those willing to risk, and in some cases, lose their lives to ensure that this was so- to make them real and lasting

Though we hold, and often champion different ideologies, perspectives, and faiths; we must remember that we each have the right do this precisely because we are Americans bound together not by race or ethnicity, but by our equality and our abiding belief in our American creed.

We should not feel threatened in standing up for our respective beliefs, unless of course those beliefs have hatred and discrimination as their foundation- seeking to infringe upon our rights and undermine the idea of equality simply because of skin color, nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

The events taking place around the country over the last several weeks have forced us, as a nation, to take a hard look at ourselves against the backdrop of these violent acts of extremism and bigotry that have, at various turns shocked, revolted, and troubled us.

With these thoughts in mind, I asked myself what I might do as an elected official to reaffirm our core belief in equality and justice within our community during these turbulent and chaotic times.

Now more than ever, we cannot stand silent and allow the dark forces of hatred, whether through bigotry, discrimination, or violence; to perpetuate itself or otherwise go unanswered and unchallenged within our neighborhoods, homes, and communities.

While we cannot simply wish this all away, we also cannot allow it to fester like an open sore or a viral infection that leaves us nothing but a legacy of hopelessness that we in turn leave for the next generation to deal with and perhaps answer for.

Far too often we've kicked this can down the road and believe that somehow it will all go away or resolve itself at some future time. But the time for action is now and as elected officials, we must stand united in upholding the principles for which we took oaths, pledging to represent our constituents and ensuring tolerance and respect for all of our citizens.

Let no one doubt that I stand against racism and hatred in all its forms That's why I support tearing down certain monuments of a bygone era which symbolize and celebrate those who espoused racial conquest and subjugation. At the same time, I stand ready to engage others on how we, as a community, can celebrate our individuality and equality.

I believe that we, meaning elected officials, civic leaders, and faith-based leadership; must come together and stand shoulder to shoulder as a display of trust and solidarity. We need to challenge racially motivated biases that masquerade as policy or culture or governance that tear the fabric of our community.

Someone once asked; "if not you, who, if not now, when?" I say now is the time for those who believe in the American ideals of justice and equality to stand together and bear witness to the better angels of our American nature.

With that in mind, I am inviting every elected official, both city and county, to join me and others in honoring the memory of Heather Heyer who was killed in Charlottesville standing against hate. As she once stood, so let us now stand together against those same forces of darkness that took her life.

Mayor Albert B. Kelly, Bridgeton;
President, New Jersey League of Municipalities