

UNITY - A QUESTION OF COMMITMENT

PRESENTATION TO

UNITY DAY

MEDIA, PA

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BY

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GREETINGS.

LET ME THANK THE CITIZENS-COMMUNITY TASK FORCE FOR INVITING ME TO BE HERE TODAY, AND COMMEND YOU FOR THE WISDOM, COURAGE, AND COMMITMENT IN HOLDING THIS UNITY DAY RALLY. IT IS GOOD TO SEE SO MANY PEOPLE HERE WHO ARE WILLING TO STAND TOGETHER IN SUPPORT OF UNITY AND IN OPPOSITION TO HATE AND BIGOTRY. ESPECIALLY, I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE FATHERS, FOR DECIDING TO SPEND THE DAY BEFORE FATHER'S DAY SUPPORTING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMAN FAMILY.

IF ANY OF YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE A QUARTER, YOU WILL NOTE THAT IT CONTAINS THE LATIN WORDS "E PLURIBUS UNUM," OUT OF MANY, WE ARE ONE.

THAT IS WHAT THIS DAY IS ABOUT: CELEBRATING
AND COMMITTING OURSELVES TO UNITY AND
DIVERSITY. IN OUR DEMOCRACY WE MUST REJECT
THE MESSAGES OF HATE THAT THE KKK AND OTHER
HATE GROUPS REPRESENT. WE MUST DO THIS EVERY
DAY AND AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY.

I AM NOT HERE TODAY WITH THE ANSWERS.
WHAT I PLAN TO DO, IS TO BRING YOU SOME
QUESTIONS FOR US TO ANSWER.

THE PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS
COMMISSION NOT ONLY INVESTIGATES COMPLAINTS
OF DISCRIMINATION BUT WE ALSO ARE MANDATED TO
ASSIST COMMUNITIES THAT ARE DEALING WITH CIVIL
TENSION SITUATIONS. BY THAT WE MEAN,
COMMUNITY TENSIONS CREATED BY RACIAL, ETHNIC,
AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS. AS WE RESPOND TO

TENSION SITUATIONS STATEWIDE WE SEE THAT THEY INCLUDE CRIMINAL ACTS MOTIVATED BY HATRED TOWARDS THE VICTIMS' RACE, COLOR, RELIGION, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN. THEY INCLUDE ANONYMOUS ACTS OF BIGOTRY, LIKE THE PAINTING OF RACIST GRAFFITI ON BUILDINGS OR ON A HIGHWAY OVERPASS. THESE TENSION SITUATIONS INCLUDE ACTS OF VIOLENCE OR INTOLERANCE AMONG EVERYDAY PEOPLE. THEY INCLUDE CONFLICT BETWEEN NEIGHBORS RESULTING IN ETHNIC SLURS AND VANDALISM. AND THESE COMMUNITY TENSION SITUATIONS INCREASINGLY INCLUDE THE ACTIVITIES OF ORGANIZED HATE GROUPS: THEIR DISTRIBUTION OF HATE LITERATURE, THEIR PUBLIC RALLIES AND PARADES, THEIR TELEPHONE HOT LINES, AND RECRUITMENT EFFORTS.

WE LIVE IN A DIVISIVE PERIOD IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY.

LAST FISCAL YEAR, THE PHRC ADDRESSED 203 RACIAL AND ETHNIC TENSION SITUATIONS, 60 OF WHICH INVOLVED ORGANIZED HATE GROUPS. POLICE REPORTED 232 ETHNIC INTIMIDATION CRIMES--CRIMES BASED ON RACIAL, RELIGIOUS, OR ETHNIC HATRED. MOST OFTEN THE VICTIMS WERE AFRICAN AMERICANS AND JEWS. AT LEAST 48 ORGANIZED HATE GROUPS HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN PENNSYLVANIA IN THE PAST TWO YEARS.

LAST YEAR, 67 PERCENT OF THE OFFENDERS IN HATE CRIMES WERE UNDER AGE 21, AND 21 PERCENT WERE YOUNGER THAN 16. OUR YOUTH HAVE BEEN INFECTED WITH THE VIRUS OF INTOLERANCE.

SINCE THE LATE 80'S ALL ACROSS THE STATE--
AND ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY--WE HAVE SEEN A
MARKED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ORGANIZED
HATE GROUPS, A MARKED INCREASE IN THEIR
MEMBERSHIP, AND A MARKED INCREASE IN THEIR
COMFORT WITH BEING PUBLIC. AND WE HAVE SEEN
THEIR INCREASING EMPHASIS ON YOUTH
RECRUITMENT.

PEOPLE ARE THEREFORE TEMPTED TO ASK, "WHAT
IS WRONG WITH THOSE PEOPLE WHO JOIN HATE
GROUPS?" THAT IS NOT THE QUESTION WE NEED TO
BE ASKING. WE NEED TO ASK, "WHY HERE? WHY
NOW? WHAT IS GOING ON IN MY STATE, MY COUNTY,
MY TOWN THAT IS OPENING THE DOOR TO ORGANIZED
HATE GROUPS?" WE MAINSTREAM AMERICANS NEED
TO BE CLEAR THAT WE CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT IN

WHICH BIGOTRY CAN TAKE HOLD. WE SEPARATE OURSELVES ON THE BASIS OF RACE AND RELIGION AND NATIONAL ORIGIN AND POLITICS AND ECONOMICS AND THE LIST GOES ON AND ON. WE BECOME ANGRY AND FEARFUL WHEN THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD OR SCHOOL OR WORKPLACE START TO CHANGE. AND WE REMAIN SILENT WHEN SOMEONE ELSE IS THE VICTIM.

THE GOOD NEWS IS: THAT STRONG, EFFECTIVE CITIZEN GROUPS ARE FORMING ALL ACROSS THE STATE IN RESPONSE TO HATE GROUP ACTIVITIES. STAFF OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION TRAVEL AROUND THE STATE WORKING WITH SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES HELPING THEM TO ORGANIZE UNITY COALITIONS. AT LAST COUNT,

THERE WERE 51 SUCH UNITY COALITIONS. YOU CAN CALL ON US FOR HELP.

AT ONE TIME, IN THE COAL MINES, THE MINERS USED TO BRING A CANARY WITH THEM. IF THE AIR GOT BAD, THE CANARY WOULD DIE, PROVIDING A WARNING TO MINERS THAT THERE WAS A SERIOUS PROBLEM, AND THAT THEY NEED TO SAVE THEMSELVES.

THE NUMBERS OF HATE CRIMES, HATE GROUPS AND TENSION INCIDENTS IS OUR WARNING SYSTEM THAT SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG WITH OUR SOCIETY, AND WE NEED TO SAVE IT.

IF YOU THINK THE NEED FOR UNITY IS ONLY ABOUT HATE GROUPS, IT IS LIKE THINKING THAT THE DANGER OF MINE GASES IS ONLY ABOUT CANARIES.

YOUR PRESENCE HERE TODAY SHOWS YOUR COMMITMENT TO EQUALITY, NON-VIOLENCE AND DIVERSITY. THE NEXT ISSUE IS WHAT YOU CAN DO TO IMPLEMENT THAT COMMITMENT.

THE FIRST STEPS ARE OBVIOUS. DO NOT EXPRESS INTOLERANCE YOURSELF, AND SPEAK OUT AGAINST SUCH EXPRESSIONS BY OTHERS. DO NOT ACCEPT COMMENTS, JOKES OR OTHER EXPRESSIONS WHICH PUT PEOPLE DOWN BECAUSE OF THEIR RACE, RELIGION, ETHNICITY, SEX, AGE, DISABILITY, OR OTHER FACTORS.

YES, PEOPLE HAVE THE LEGAL RIGHT TO MAKE SUCH REMARKS. BUT YOU HAVE BOTH THE LEGAL RIGHT AND THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO CHALLENGE THEM. FREEDOM OF SPEECH CUTS BOTH WAYS. THEREFORE, WHEN WE WITNESS ACTS OR WORDS OF

BIGOTRY, WE MUST SPEAK UP AND SAY, "NOT AROUND ME. NOT IN MY SCHOOL. NOT IN MY WORKPLACE. NOT IN MY TOWN."

THE NEXT STEP IS TO LEARN ABOUT THE ISSUES AFFECTING GROUPS OTHER THAN YOUR OWN. A GALLUP SURVEY, RELEASED THIS WEEK, SHOWS THAT BLACKS AND WHITES IN OUR COUNTRY HOLD SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE REALITY OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY. WHILE 58 PERCENT OF WHITES THINK THAT LIFE FOR BLACKS IS IMPROVING, ONLY 33 PERCENT OF BLACKS AGREE. NEARLY 80 PERCENT OF WHITES BELIEVE THAT AFRICAN AMERICANS HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR JOBS, COMPARED TO 46 PERCENT OF BLACKS WHO BELIEVE THAT. AND 86 PERCENT OF WHITES SAID BLACKS HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR HOUSING,

WHEREAS ONLY 58 PERCENT OF BLACKS AGREE. WE ALL NEED TO INFORM OURSELVES TO CLOSE THIS PERCEPTION GAP.

GIVEN THIS GAP, HOWEVER, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT BOTH BLACKS AND WHITES FEEL THAT RACISM WILL ALWAYS BE A PROBLEM IN THIS COUNTRY. AND THE PERCENTAGES WHO BELIEVE THIS ARE RISING RAPIDLY. CAN WE WORK TO CHANGE THAT PERCEPTION? CAN WE WORK TO CHANGE THAT REALITY? CAN WE GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO REALLY GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER? CAN WE GET PAST OUR OWN FEARS AND BIASES AND SELF-INTEREST TO WORK FOR THE COMMON GOOD?

THESE ARE NOT JUST RHETORICAL QUESTIONS. OUR COMMON FUTURE AS A DIVERSE SOCIETY DEPENDS ON YOUR ANSWER, AND YOUR

COMMITMENT TO FOLLOW THROUGH. YOUR ANSWER "YES" WILL PROCLAIM YOUR COMMITMENT.

MOST OF YOU WOULD SAY YOU BELIEVE IN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY. THE CHALLENGE IS: WHAT ARE YOU PREPARED TO DO TO PROMOTE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY?

WILL YOU WORK WITH YOUR SCHOOLS TO FIND OUT IF MINORITY STUDENTS ARE ACHIEVING AT THE SAME LEVELS AS WHITE STUDENTS? IF THEY ARE NOT, WILL YOU ASK WHY, AND INSIST UPON SOLUTIONS?

WILL YOU LOOK AROUND YOUR NEIGHBORHOODS AND SEE IF EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY IS A REALITY? IF NOT, WHAT ARE YOU PREPARED TO DO ABOUT IT?

IF YOU ARE AN EMPLOYER, WHAT WILL YOU DO TO PROMOTE A WORK FORCE WHICH IS NOT ONLY

DIVERSE, BUT PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND
MAKES EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME AND VALUED? IF
YOU ARE AN EMPLOYEE, WHAT WILL YOU DO TO
ASSIST CO-WORKERS OF ANOTHER BACKGROUND TO
SUCCEED?

IF YOU ARE A CONSUMER, WILL YOU USE YOUR
PURCHASING POWER TO SUPPORT BUSINESSES WHICH
SUPPORT DIVERSITY? WILL YOU GO OUT OF YOUR
WAY TO PATRONIZE BUSINESSES WHICH ARE OWNED
BY MINORITIES OR WOMEN? OR BUSINESSES WHICH
EMPLOY PEOPLE FROM MINORITY OR DISADVANTAGED
BACKGROUNDS?

WILL YOU LET YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS KNOW
HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT POLICIES AND FUNDING
DECISIONS WHICH IMPACT ON OUR DIVERSE
COMMUNITIES? WILL YOU BACK UP YOUR POSITIONS

WITH YOUR WORK IN CAMPAIGNS, YOUR
CONTRIBUTIONS, YOUR VOTE?

WILL YOU SUPPORT STRONG CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS
AND ADEQUATE FUNDING AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR
STRONG ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS?

WILL YOU MOBILIZE OTHERS TO SHARE YOUR
COMMITMENT? WILL YOU WORK WITH
ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTING OTHER GROUPS ON
THEIR AGENDAS?

THOSE WHO HATE ARE ORGANIZED AND
CONNECTED. MANY OF THEM ARE COMMITTED TO
PUT THEIR RESOURCES AND THEIR LIVES ON THE LINE
TO SUPPORT THEIR BRAND OF HATE. WHAT ARE YOU
WILLING TO PUT ON THE LINE?

ACHIEVING UNITY IS A QUESTION OF
COMMITMENT. IF NOT US, THEN WHO? IF NOT HERE,

THEN WHERE? IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN? WE CAN
ACHIEVE THE SOCIETY WE ENVISION BY PLEDGING
OURSELVES, HERE AND NOW. WILL WE DO IT? LET ME
HEAR YOU SAY "YES."

THANK YOU.