Building Our Community Based on Trust

When there are grave acts of violence like the recent incidents in Louisiana, Minnesota and then the shooting in Dallas, my first thoughts are "why" and how we can prevent something similar in Renton. I strongly believe a successful city is built on trust, respect and understanding. I'm proud to say we've taken significant steps in Renton to develop and maintain such a dialogue between the community and City Hall.

One of our first steps was to establish connections between our police department and the African-American community. We have created a partnership between the Renton African-American Pastors and the police department, called RAAP. I've asked this group to engage in open and honest conversations and work together to provide what we call "real solutions to real issues." Under the leadership of Police Chief Kevin Milosevich and pastors in our African-American community, RAAP has held several community forums to have open and honest dialogues with the community, build trust, and work together to address community concerns. In the coming months we will hold more workshops and continue the dialogue.

Thanks to our partnership with RAAP we've made great progress. Let me share an example. On the morning after the shootings in Dallas, Chief Milosevich received an email from Dr. Linda Smith, Executive Director & Pastor at SKY Urban Empowerment Center in Renton, and co-chair of RAAP.

In her email Dr. Smith stated that members of the community stand in solidarity with the chief and Renton police, wishing for their safety and well-being. She emphasized that "Violence of any kind is never the path to peace. Our hearts break as we witness the painful death of those officers in Dallas. When one is hurt we all hurt!"

In response to her thoughtful message, Chief Milosevich replied: "Thanks for the email and the kind thoughts. The easy road is for people to take sides and develop a bunker mentality. The right reaction is for groups to come together to find solutions based on equity, fairness, patience, and understanding. I will share your thoughts with the Department."

In other words, of all the responses I have found answering to all our problems. But I do know we cannot find them living in a vacuum; we need to find them working together. What we are doing is very important and not easy. It takes time, commitment and all of us working together to change the status quo. We still have a long way to go but with the right leadership we can make a difference. We still have a long way to go but with the right leadership we can make a difference.

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