

The Long Road to Justice

“These are the times that try men’s souls”, wrote the patriot Thomas Paine during the American Revolution. At the time he penned those words, Americans were struggling to establish the first steps on the long road to the perfection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Today, we face what may seem like a long, backward retreat on that road; a tragic death that has made us question whether we truly are a nation where all are equal before the law, a conflagration of passions and violence sparked by that death, and a deadly pandemic that has brought into sharp relief the competing ideas of individual liberty and social responsibility. These times are testing our strength and our commitment to justice and peace, like no other I have ever experienced. But I ask you to remain steadfast in your determination to move forward on that journey toward a better society.

Like many of you, I watched in horror the video of the violent death of George Floyd while in custody of police officers. I join that chorus of voices that demand that justice be done for him, and for all others who have suffered at the hands of those who are sworn to uphold that justice but fail egregiously in that duty. I know in my heart what I saw in that video was a grave injustice, but I also believe that justice is administered under the rule of Law and not by street violence.

I am encouraged by those who seek justice by peaceful means, and seek to make all, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity, walk with them down that long road to a more peaceful, just society. However, there is an ugliness that has always lurked in the shadows of American society, a malevolence that feeds on chaos and division, and in fact seeks to spread its influence when times seem to be at their worst. We are experiencing that spread of violence and hatred now. I am revolted by what I saw in the video of the death of George Floyd. I am also heartbroken at the scenes of destruction by those who have used the tragedy of Mr. Floyd’s death as an excuse for anarchy. Anarchy is not a means to achieve justice, it only creates more injustice, and should be rejected by those who seek a more just society.

Hovering over all this tragedy is the COVID pandemic, which has killed 100,000 Americans so far. Franklin Township has been the hardest hit community in the county. And if our town mirrors the state, our African-American community has been disproportionately devastated. Everything that I and other public officials in the township and state have asked you to do or refrain from doing, was done with the intent of saving lives, and for no other reasons. I implore you that while you take to the streets to fight for justice, that you maintain social distancing and other measures to stop the spread of this deadly virus. If while marching for justice, you feel that your health may

have been compromised, I urge you to go to the Rite-Aid on Hamilton Street to receive a Corona virus test or to the testing site we are hosting at the Hamilton Middle school on Wednesday.

I want you to know that Franklin Township, particularly our heroic first responders, have performed their duties during these times to the highest standards. I have great confidence in our new Public Safety Director and our well-trained and dedicated police force. The Township Council and I, Township officials, and all our first responders implore you to act in a safe and responsible manner, to be committed to peace and justice, and to carry on the work of countless generations of Americans before us who dedicated their lives to the perfection of this nation.

It is imperative we all continue down the road to justice. We can only make it if we go together.