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Re: Call for Unity

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The last few weeks have not been easy for our nation, our state, or our communities. Deeply entrenched beliefs fueled by bigotry and prejudice have been elevated to the national stage. This undeserved attention has come at the expense of human beings (along with their families and loved ones) who were killed or injured.

However, this national spotlight has also illuminated values and characteristics, which reflect what America is truly about; the calls for unity have vastly outnumbered the calls for division. That is why the Palm Beach County League of Cities, on behalf of the 39 municipalities in Palm Beach County, felt it was important to declare its collective abhorrence of racial and religious prejudice and bigotry, and call for unity throughout all of our cities, towns and villages. Our Board of Directors are encouraged by the fact that so many are recognizing that America is stronger when our commonalities are celebrated rather than our differences.

Hatred and bigotry are not new issues, and they cannot be magically erased overnight. These sins have plagued our communities for generations. While in recent days we have been focused on the aftermath in one city in Virginia, the uncomfortable, but undeniable, fact is that racial and religious bigotry touches all of our communities -- including our own here in Palm Beach County.

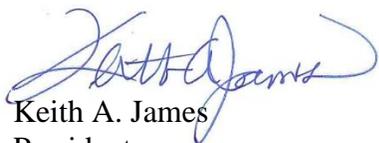


We view the events that transpired over the last few weeks as nothing less than a clear and resounding call for us to engage actively in the fight against hatred and bigotry. We cannot allow time to pass merely by uttering heavy words, and not taking any action. As community leaders and citizens of Palm Beach County, we must look inward and ask what we can do to move our communities closer to the place where we demonstrably love and embrace ALL of our neighbors, as we love our families and ourselves.

As city leaders, we are on the front lines of our communities. Let us use our positions to build bridges among our neighbors and close the perceptions that divide us. We know that combatting hatred and division must begin at the local level. While it may be difficult to engage in open and honest dialogue about our history of racial and religious bigotry, let us not shy away from that task. But let us not get stuck there either. Let us focus on where we are now, and continue working to build better communities throughout Palm Beach County for future generations -- together.

Racial hatred and religious bigotry know no borders. This intolerance is the same regardless of where you find it. Therefore, the Palm Beach County League of Cities encourages municipal elected officials throughout the county to identify the programs and initiatives in each of their communities that are successfully combatting hatred and bigotry. As the elected public servants in our communities, we must support and strengthen such programs and initiatives. We should also take the opportunity to speak publicly about unity and healing from the dais, pass resolutions or post statements on our respective websites. This is an exercise that we can all embrace, and a vision we can all share.

Our history is not so different than most. As municipal leaders in Palm Beach County, we choose not to focus on the messages of hate and bigotry, but work to create our own messages of hope, unity and healing. The time is now; let us take advantage of the opportunity that is before us. The Palm Beach County League of Cities challenges all citizens of the County to answer the call, to make that decision to stand up for hope and unity, and to fight against hate and bigotry. Together we can bridge the divides and build the foundation for a better tomorrow.



Keith A. James
President
Palm Beach County League of Cities