

**FORMAL STATEMENT FROM THE KOOTENAI COUNTY TASK
FORCE ON HUMAN RELATIONS**

Press Conference

Tuesday, January 29, 2013

At the Human Rights Education Institute Center

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Executive Committee
KCTFHR President ~~Christie~~ Wood's Statement:

We express our appreciation to the representatives of the media and the general public for attending today's press conference. Our comments will be confined to addressing one issue that being the statement attributed to Coeur d'Alene School District Trustee Brent Regan last Saturday at a state legislators' Forum in Post Falls regarding the racial and ethnic ancestry of the President of the United States.

We cannot remain silent when a public official uses language to degrade and ridicule, whether it be made from ignorance or insensitivity, the ancestry of any person including the President. Such a display of disrespect and intolerance flies in the face of America's democratic principles of equality, fairness and respect for our cherished differences as Americans.

We suggest that public officials are in a unique position to promote, advocate, encourage and celebrate the unique fabric of all our people. It becomes impossible to fulfill that responsibility when hurtful words are used to demean any person. The damage cannot be corrected by simply stating that one is speaking as an individual. First, a public official does not have the luxury of separating his private comments from his public duties in the eyes of those who are pained by such bigotry. Second, we all

are daily responsible as human beings to search our souls for any vestiges of prejudice and to recognize how to correct those weakness to be better allies of those in society who have for centuries experienced hateful words that attack their self worth. We would ask Mr. Regan: Why would you choose to use words that many individuals and especially members of minority communities would interpret as disrespectful to their status in life?

KCTFHR Secretary Tony Stewart's Statement:

I have three points to make:

FIRST:

As an educator for 39 years, I am saddened and pained that a member of the Coeur d'Alene School Board of Trustees would use a public forum to disparage the ancestry of any individual. My first reaction was to think of all those special students in his school district that once again witness words from a person in a position of responsibility that at least is very insensitive and at worse is a statement of racial prejudice. I am sure that the outstanding teachers and counselors of the district will assure each minority student that they are celebrated and accepted for who they are.

SECOND:

The Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations has been honored to partner with the Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls school districts for the past 28 years to coordinator a week's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 5th Grade Children's Program. During those 28 years, we have witnessed 35,000 5th graders' essays, music and dance to advocate and celebrate the acceptance of all individuals regardless of their differences based on race,

ethnic origin, religion, physical differences, gender and other characteristics. Each year the kindness and unity of the children brings tears to our eyes. I suggest all adults can learn much from the voices of these precious children and our future leaders. I would hope that Mr. Regan would pause to think about these children and in the future pursue a course correction.

THIRD:

Today we are gathered in one of the most special places in all Coeur d'Alene, The Human Rights Education Institute, that symbolizes all that is good about the human condition. The HREI Board and Executive Director, Thomas Carter and his staff, each day extend a hand to all people who come through these doors seeking understanding and acceptance. For the next two years, HREI will be celebrating the American Native culture. I hope this recent incident can in some positive way be used to enhance the study of human rights and teach the many contributions made by America's first people. We all must work for inclusiveness in the 21st Century by discarding all the baggage of separation from past centuries.

Let me end with these words from a very wise woman, the late Eva Lassman, a Holocaust survivor, that I recently used in an article published in the "National Civic Review":

"When we are able to instill in people a desire to respect and be tolerant of all humanity, we may eventually have peace. If not, we will continue to experience the inhumanity of war and terrorism, and the deaths of children and other innocent victims of violence."