

September 13, 2013

OPEN LETTER (from human rights activist Tony Stewart):

Dear Mayor Bloem and Councilmen Edinger, Gookin, Goodlander, Kennedy and McEvers

I hope all is well with you. I want to share with you what I found deeply troubling regarding the positions of mayoral candidates Mary Souza and Joe Kunka in the "Coeur d'Alene Press" interview on September 12 when addressing the anti-discrimination ordinance passed by the City of Coeur d'Alene on June 4.

As one who has spent a lifetime studying and teaching constitutional law and a human rights activist, I find these candidates' position historically both foreign to and antagonistic toward the democratic principles of freedom and equality for all Americans including all the residents of Coeur d'Alene. We in the human rights community will once again be energized to take a firm stand against discrimination directed toward any of our citizens.

I personally oppose the stands of Mr. Kunka and Ms. Souza based upon the following points:

1. When candidates or political office holders declare that they will support the will of the majority even if that requires policies that permit discrimination against some of their constituents, they have forsaken their moral compass on that particular issue in favor of political expediency or the desire to win an election.
2. As I grew up in the South in the 1950's, I observed many politicians in support of discrimination, and especially racial segregation, to placate a majority of the electorate so they could win yet another election. These Southern politicians lost their moral compass and history has condemned their actions.
3. It is a grievous affront to those law abiding and tax paying citizens in our city for a candidate to suggest that we should conduct workshops to discuss, negotiate and decide if some of our neighbors should be afforded equal rights under the law. The natural law guarantee of freedom and equality for all Americans should never be open to negotiation.
4. It is well established in both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution that all Americans have certain inalienable rights that are not subject to repeal by a majority vote. The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees no person shall be denied "Equal Protection of the Laws". I contend this means all people.
5. I find political stands based on discrimination contrary to the world's great religions whose tenants have historically been based on love, compassion and acceptance for all humanity.
6. If the views of these mayoral candidates prevail in Coeur d'Alene, our beautiful city will forfeit its legacy as a city that embraces human rights and is a welcoming city with a Heart. We no longer would deserve the status and recognition of the 1990 "All American City Award" or the recipient of the 1987 "Raoul Wallenberg Civic Award". Our image would unfortunately become more like those Southern cities of the 1960's who proudly promoted discrimination toward many of their citizens.

7. The repeal of the anti-discrimination ordinance would send a message across America that we embrace discrimination toward some members of our community. It would take years to erase this stain on our city.
8. The city would be erecting a sign stating: "We welcome discrimination toward some Americans".
9. ~~The repeal of the anti-discrimination ordinance would have a detrimental impact on our economy both as to visitors and the recruitment of future companies that oppose discrimination directed at some of their employees.~~

After more than 40 years as a resident of this beautiful city, I am confident that a great majority of our residents will reject any attempt to endorse a policy of discrimination that would once again permit some of our neighbors and friends to be treated as second class citizens with regard to housing, employment or public accommodations in our restaurants, hotels or other establishments.

At the end of life, each of us will be judged based on how we have treated our fellow human beings and if we had the courage to stand with those who faced such adversity as discrimination.

Discrimination that denies equality and freedom for some of our citizens is not the Idaho way.

Mayor Bloem and City Councilmen Edinger, Goodlander, Gookin, Kennedy, and McEvers, your place in history will be an honorable one and you will be remembered for your moral courage.

May you always be showered with respect and admiration by your fellow Coeur d'Alene neighbors and friends.

Sincerely,

Tony Stewart
Political Scientist and
Human Rights Activist