

Remarks re: "go back to where you came from"

In general, I try to avoid giving air time to the constant stream of tweets emanating from the White House. I try to focus instead on the policies being suggested or implemented by the administration, and particularly on those that most immediately impact the residents of Multnomah County.

Last weekend's tweets telling four Congresswomen to go back to where they came from don't announce policy, but the world view they reflect is intrinsic to the policies being promulgated by the White House. And, by their very nature, coming from the President of the United States, they do have immediate impact on the residents of Multnomah County; on all of us.

I have the privilege of sitting on this dais, and of having access to this microphone. I want to use that privilege to say, clearly and publicly, those tweets were racist. They

were racist because they were directed at four women of color. They were racist because they fit within a long history of telling people who look other than white that we don't belong here. They were racist because they fit within a long history of telling us that we are not American.

It has been a while since I've been told to go back to where I came from. The last time was probably about 10 or so years ago, when I wrote an op-ed piece supporting Oregon's sanctuary law. Many of the comments to that piece included some version of "go back to where you came from."

More recently, and more frequently, I'm asked some variation of this question: "Where are you from?" And if I say "I'm from here, from Portland, Oregon", the next question is often some variation of this: "No, where are you *really* from?"

All of us, other than Native Americans, are originally -- “really” -- from somewhere else.

“Go back to where you came from”, or “where are you *really* from”, directed to black and brown people -- tells us that no matter how long we have been here; no matter whether we were born here (as three of the congresswomen were); and no matter whether we are citizens (as all of the congresswomen are) -- we cannot be from here. It tells us that we don’t belong. It tells us -- or attempts to tell us -- that we are not American.

A message like that, coming from the President of the United States, impacts all of us.

I am from India; and I am also from here. I am American.

All of us, including those whose ancestors migrated here; or were enslaved, and forced to come here; can both claim our origins, and claim our belonging to this country.

All of us can both criticize this country, and be proud to belong to it.

All of us not only have the right to speak up, to criticize; but also the responsibility. And all of us not only have the *right* to resist views that we believe are antithetical to the American values we hold dear, but the *responsibility* of insisting on an alternative vision.

We have the responsibility not only to resist hatred and division and the pitting of one group against another, but to insist on love and connectedness and community, and to show what that looks like.

And we are fortunate, here in Multnomah County, to have lots of opportunities to do that. This past weekend, I had the chance -- along with Commissioners Stegmann and Vega Pederson -- to participate in something that did present that alternative vision. The Walk with Immigrants and Refugees, organized by the city's Parks for New

Portlanders Program, brought together hundreds of people of all ages and races and ethnicities, to spend a beautiful summer morning walking and eating and dancing together.

These sorts of events may not seem significant, but they are. They remind us that we all share this space, and this place -- this country -- with people who don't look like us; and they remind us of the strength we build -- and the joy we share -- when we come together.

So, my call to action, for anyone listening or watching: if you can, join us at these community events. Whenever you can, join us to walk with immigrants and refugees; join us for Southeast Asian New Year in the Park; join us for the Annual Delta Park Pow Wow; join us at the Mercado, join us for Good in the Hood, join us for the MLK Run coming up in September.

Because here, in Multnomah County, this is who we are.  
We are ALL Americans; and we are ALL here to stay.