



*Maine State Legislature
Augusta, Maine 04333-0002*

March 10, 2015

Honorable Michael Thibodeau
President of the Senate
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear President Thibodeau:

Just days ago, Americans of all colors--of all religions--stood hand in hand to march down the streets of Selma, Alabama--recognizing Bloody Sunday: a violent time, a divisive time in our history where black and white Americans sat in different places, drank from different water fountains, and were held to a different set of laws. They honored those Americans who stood up to this inequality, who voiced their opposition to the status quo, and who fought for a nation that could be inclusive, free from hate-speech, and fear-mongering.

In the wake of our country's recent tribute to the brave Americans who stood up to injustice, we find ourselves in the position of being unable to look the other way and ignore the unacceptable and less than statesman-like comments made by one of our own.

Recent media accounts show a long-standing, prolific, online history of bigoted and racist remarks by a member of this body. He has posted more than a dozen comments making racial slurs against President Obama, incorrectly claiming that he's a Muslim associated with various terrorist groups.

This goes beyond a difference in political party or priorities. This member's social media comments are racist and un-American. We find it repugnant that he is perpetuating stereotypes and fear-mongering. As elected officials, we are--and should be--held to a higher standard. And to that end, we should hold each other accountable.

It was not long ago, in the 124th Legislature, that every lawmaker signed on to a Joint Resolution to collectively reject "any and all efforts that suggest, whether by a tasteless joke or with a violent purpose, the promotion of violence to any person, including the President of the United States." You may remember, this Joint Resolution was the result of a deplorable threat driven by racism in Standish, Maine. We, as a legislative body, could have done nothing. Instead, we united and unequivocally denounced "words of hate."

This incident, just like then, should transcend party lines. Like a Senate Republican Leader said in his floor remarks adopting the Joint Resolution, "...this transcends politics. It transcends this institution. It really transcends mankind."

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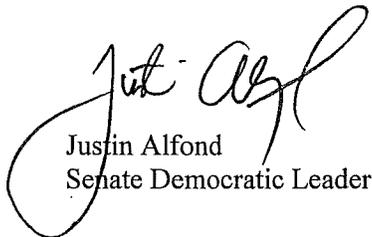
We believe the people of Maine are ready to denounce any act of hate or violence whether it is intentional or unintentional. In fact, our state has a proud history of rejecting racism. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote her novel Uncle Tom's Cabin in Maine. Joshua Chamberlin is said to have sat in on Harriet Beecher Stowe's lectures about the abolitionist movement. Many believe these lectures strongly influenced Joshua Chamberlin. Chamberlin is well known for his valiant efforts at Gettysburg during the Civil War and later became Maine's Governor.

As Americans, we ask today that as a legislative body, we unite and not look the other way or tolerate words of hate and racism. To do so, is to condone it, to agree with it, and to be complicit in the violence for which it perpetuates.

This body is one that adheres to decorum. In fact, we recently received an updated policy manual on decorum in the Senate Chamber. Let us not forget that decorum and a code of conduct extends beyond the doors of this chamber. As is referenced in the Legislative Code of Ethics, we are entrusted to act with high moral and ethical standards.

Our Senate Rules create a Standing Committee on Conduct and Ethics to ensure that our members are held to this higher standard. While it is of our opinion that this committee should be a last resort, we instead look to you, Mr. President to condemn these actions and restore the integrity of this institution on behalf of all members of the Maine Senate. It is our job to make a very strong statement, but we need to do more. We need our actions to ripple out beyond our chamber. We are at a crossroads in terms of how we respect each other. We would ask you to move beyond politics today and accept your leadership role in trying to turn this around and engage in a new civility. It needs to begin here in this chamber.

Sincerely,



Justin Alfond
Senate Democratic Leader



Dawn Hill
Assistant Democratic Leader