OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

MORE THAN A MASK IS NEEDED TO COVER THE RACISM OF TOM ECKERLE

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DETROIT – 160,000 Americans have died, with over 1,000 losing their lives every day. At least five million more are sick from the disease of COVID-19. Yet, some elected officials refuse to take the basic steps necessary to prevent more deaths and more sickness by simply wearing a face mask. Leelanau County Road Commissioner Tom Eckerle wants to blame African Americans in Detroit, participating in the Black Lives Matter Movement, for exacerbating the effects from COVID-19. Republican Road Commissioner Tom Eckerle, after refusing to wear a mask for his safety as well as that of others, went on a racial uproar by accusing African Americans in Detroit of creating this unnecessary inconvenience. Mr. Eckerle did not describe this situation in quite such polite terms. As a matter of fact, he said, “well this whole thing is because of them n...s in Detroit. I can say anything that I want. Black Lives Matter has everything to do with taking the country away from us.” It is reported that Chairman of the Road Commission Bob Joyce heard Mr. Eckerle use the racial slur and called for his resignation. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said “nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity." The use of this term and the accusations made against Blacks in Detroit reflect a sincere ignorance on the part of this elected official. It must also be conscientious stupidity because when asked if he regretted having made these remarks, he told Interlochen Public Radio, “a n...r is a n...r is a n...r. That’s not a person whatsoever.”

Tom Eckerle said he would not resign from the Road Commission. Several officials in the state have called for Mr. Eckerle’s resignation. They include Governor Gretchen Whitmer who said he should resign immediately and “his comments are atrocious.” The Leelanau County Road Commission issued a letter calling for Mr. Eckerle to resign. Unfortunately, we have not heard from the Senator representing his district. Wayne Schmidt of Grand Traverse. Senator Schmidt does not appear to have responded to any calls concerning this incident. While Senator Schmidt is holding coffee hours with his constituents which began Friday, August 7 at the Thirsty Sturgeon in Wolverine and continues Tuesday, August 11 at McDonalds, 11 a.m. -12 p.m. in Newberry; and the Front Porch Café in Ellsworth, August 14 from 10-11 a.m. His road commissioner is driving off the road blinded by the dense fog of racism. Let us hope Senator Schmidt answers the question of whether or not he supports the calls for the resignation of Commissioner Eckerle. The commissioner has demonstrated his inability to remain on the open road towards respect and dignity of all people.

In this era, while suffering from the global pandemic of COVID-19, the last thing we need is for a racial pandemic to remain on the scene. Mr. Eckerle makes it abundantly clear why Governor Whitmer recently identified racism as a public health issue. Many of us have held this view for decades. Eckerle affirms the fact that our public health and well-being is at risk by elected officials such as himself. He not only has admitted that he said these words, he also believes them to be true. If this is the true nature of one given the responsibility of the public’s trust, he must resign immediately. The road he is traveling is not on the straight and narrow. Now is not the time for our communities to be divided. Now is really the time for our people to be united.

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