

Town of Amherst Supervisor Brian Kulpa

June 2022 Column

Words matter. As I sat down to write this month's column, I knew I had to address the recent massacres in Buffalo and Texas. I continue to pray for the victims and their families, and as I do, I thought, what can I say that hasn't been said? And as I thought more, I found myself thinking: what has been said that should never have been said? What we say, what we mean, what we teach is important. The words we choose matter. This violence needs to end.



In the aftermath of these attacks there is a lot being said. We are hearing gun laws debated; we are hearing law enforcement explain their investigations into threat after threat; we are hearing from those who lived through the attacks and we are hearing the pain from families who lost their loved ones. The words chosen to express each of these situations have a profound impact. It often begs the question: what can I do today as a member of my community to bring change and address what influences these attacks? I think it starts by remembering that the words we choose, the opinions we express and the messages we deliver have an impact. We need to understand the gravity of our words. Too often we hear soundbites that are said to trigger reactions. However, the ambiguity of bully politics has no place in our community.

When we get sloppy, when we don't choose our words carefully, we not only desensitize our community to harmful commentary, we create pathways to harm. The shooter in the Buffalo massacre was engaged in online conversations that spewed words of hate. He heard those words and how he interrupted them mattered. In another example, with COVID-19 came hateful and violent attacks on Asian communities. Too often eloquence has long left conversation. Instead we see sloppy debates ending with name calling and extremism.

We need to create environments that allow for intelligent discourse and one that doesn't feed radicalization and stigmas. When we say things without thinking, when we talk off the cuff, we create misunderstandings, especially in our youth.

Let's all stop and think before we speak and have purpose in our message. Let's strive to always be clear in our meaning and direct in our approach. Take the time to understand the message you are conveying. Are you supporting acceptance and promoting inclusion and diversity? Or are your words divisive and harmful? If we can't openly discuss issues, and we don't want to see the opposite views, we discourage full understanding and acceptance.

Words matter, whether said in anger or frustration, said to get attention or instigate, they matter. Long after the words leave your mouth and the recipient of your message is no longer standing before you, the words still matter. Your words carry a lot further than your voice reaches. Social media plays into this greatly.

I know this won't solve the world's problems, but it will certainly strengthen our community and bring us together to work against hate and violence. I ask you to join me in spreading messages of support and acceptance.