

For Immediate Release

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It is a difficult time in America. Millions of people across the globe have watched the images of George Floyd as he cried out for help while a policeman's knee pressed down on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, taking his life.

We all watched as peaceful protests swelled across the country and throughout the world; they marched for George Floyd, they marched for Breonna Taylor, they marched for Ahmaud Arbery, and for so many more. And now the marchers will carry signs for Rayshard Brooks, who died on Friday after being shot in the back by Atlanta police. Prior to this month, the last time NYC had a curfew was in 1943, when a white police officer shot a black soldier. History continues to repeat itself.

We watched as looting and violence increased, and as some police departments relied on aggressive tactics to quell the unrest. We also saw officers taking a knee and protestors breaking into song.

The line between freedom of expression and destruction of property is not always clear. The use of riot gear, rubber bullets and tear gas may protect our police, but it further incites protestors. Violence against police and property is wrong and it jeopardizes the ability of protestors to have their voices heard.

On June 1, the President of the United States called for active duty troops and our National Guard to dominate the streets. Governor Parson quickly responded to the call by sending Missouri National Guard troops to the nation's capitol. We watched as violent measures were used to clear the block in front of the White House so the President could get a photo shoot in front of a church with a Bible in his hands.

In 1967 Martin Luther King Jr. said, "A riot is the language of the unheard." It is time for us to listen.

America was founded on the ideal that all of us are created equal. It took us more than 100 years to write equality into the Constitution, and we are still not a land where there is justice for all. Our rights to freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom to peaceably assemble are included in the first amendment. We have urgent, important work to do to finally ensure these values apply to ALL Americans.

If our nation is to move forward, specific, visible action is required. We must alter how we think and talk about race, how we govern, and how we work together for peace and prosperity. Change is difficult, but now is the time. Without justice for all there is no peace.

Deb Lavender