

## **Ithaca Rotary Club – Thought For The Day – July 22, 2020**

By Harlin McEwen, longtime member and former Ithaca Police Chief

In these challenging times I believe as a former Ithaca Police Chief I should share my thoughts with all of you.

First, in the strongest of terms I denounce the criminal actions of the officers in Minneapolis who murdered George Floyd. I share the outrage of these despicable acts, and hope that all the officers involved are brought to justice.

I am also deeply troubled by acts of misconduct we have seen committed by some police officers in other areas of the country.

After having spent more than 50 years as a law enforcement officer and administrator I can assure you that most police officers are good people and they are as troubled by these acts as you are.

As calls for police reform swell across America, officers feel caught in the middle: vilified by the left as violent racists, fatally ambushed by extremists on the right seeking to sow discord and scapegoated by lawmakers who share responsibility for the state of the criminal justice system.

I promise you I will always vigorously fight racism, but I do not agree that there is systemic racism within the police of America. When we do become aware of a problem officer who exhibits racism, we must take immediate steps to separate that officer from the police service. But it is just not right to condemn all officers and agencies and to call for them to lose funding. We need the police and the police have always been called on to address problems no one else will handle. As an example, the police face on a daily basis the most important societal problems – crime, mental illness, addiction, and poverty. The police handle mental health and drug abuse emergencies every day because our mental health services and addiction services have long been seriously underfunded. That is a societal problem that we must address. The answer is to provide more funding for mental health and drug counseling services, not cut funding for the police.

I have always respected and supported the rights of people of all races and sexual orientation. Unfortunately, the current national leadership of Black Lives Matter, as well as some local BLM leaders, have exhibited hateful, nasty, and vulgar speech against the police and that is despicable.

I believe that ALL BLACK LIVES MATTER, not just the lives of those few who die as the result of police misconduct. Dozens of black people are being killed in criminal acts every week throughout this country and we all need to take action to stop that. Peaceful protests must be protected but we should loudly condemn those who hijack these protests with criminal acts of violence, looting, burning, and destruction.

I am so proud of being a member of Rotary and knowing all of you, a place where people of any background can come together to discuss issues, show love, and build better communities locally and throughout the world.

Thanks.