

3PM 18 Jan 2021 A statement from Mark Shull

Good afternoon to the members of the Muslim community, to the Imams here today, to leaders of other faiths, to the press, and to all the citizens of the area, Clackamas County, the State and the Nation who hear these comments.

Thank you to Dr Wajdi Said, President of the Muslim Educational Trust for extending a kind welcome to me to be here to help build understanding, establish dialogue, foster peace and harmony, and for the opportunity to request forgiveness and understanding from the Muslim community for my words that caused hurt.

In order for you to consider your decision, you will need to know who I am.

Much of my adult life involved military service that required me to be focused on security threats to the United States. During my service I was able to experience some of the most beautiful and deeply meaningful human interactions as well as see some of the worst pain and suffering imaginable. At times part of my job was to work closely and constructively with innocent people in areas of conflict, many of them Muslim, after horrific tragedy in their lives, caused by both ethnic as well as military conflict. After my service ended, I continued to focus on the agents of conflict and saw a growing civil unrest in our country. It is clear to me that my energies should have shifted a decade ago to becoming more involved with domestic peacemaking, social understanding and fostering community.

Since I was commissioned in the United States Marine Corps 43 years ago, I have had countless discussions with military associates and other Americans that were frank and uncensored. My frame of mind was national defense. At the time of those discussions, some of which were on social media, I never expected these conversations to extend past the people in those discussions, the context of that conversation, or the time in which they were made. I certainly didn't imagine that some of these would be presented to countless people, causing real fear, anxiety and pain.

Last Monday morning an email came to my Clackamas County Commissioner office that contained screen shots of comments, many taken completely out of context of the discussion, that were attributed to me. After looking through them, I recognized

a couple comments and realized that the email was most likely intended to cause a public media storm with the intent to cause my resignation. But much more importantly I realized that the email would cause sincere concern to the public and hurt to the Muslim community. I felt both concern and responsibility to act. That morning, I sat down and wrote an apology letter directed to our Muslim citizens with the intent of reducing potential hurt.

During this same time last Monday the email that started this media storm was being sent to every newspaper and TV station in the region and beyond. Before this the originators of the email never came to me and asked me to explain these comments, nor did they take the comments to the Muslim leadership with a recommendation that they contact me to discuss them.

During the last week I was asked by many politicians for my resignation. I have received hate mail and death threats. Not one person who denounced me took the time to discuss the facts. Not one person who wanted to assassinate my character took the time to assess the life of Mark Shull. Politicians took action to distance themselves from me. Political rivals, some of who may have been involved with the Monday morning email, took advantage of the situation to further secure their political goals.

Out of the clamor came a lone kind voice extending a desire for dialogue. That voice was Dr Wajid Said. Last Thursday I met with him, the Imams and other members of the Muslim community and a Latino Catholic leader. I listened to their stories of the challenges faced by Muslim immigrants as well as those of the Latinos. I saw eyes were tears had been. I heard voices longing for acceptance and friendship as Americans who love this land. In every story the love in their hearts became evident. These were real Americans who respected the Constitution, while peacefully following their faith. These were Americans who love this land as I do. I went home that afternoon with a new enlightenment.

I accept full responsibility for every word that ever came out of my mouth, regardless of the situation in which those words were spoken or to whom the words were directed.

Today, with humility and sincerity, I ask for the good people of the Muslim community to consider my request for forgiveness for causing them fear, for adding pain, and for failing to have greater consideration for my responsibility to them as Americans, as people who want only to be included in this society, as people who have dreams for tomorrow, as people who want to hear words of inclusion, respect and love. It is my hope that when I leave this room today, that I have received your forgiveness and maybe even your friendship.

Regarding my interactions with Muslims, I have traveled through the lands of Islam in Central and North Africa, South East Asia and the Middle East. During those travels and military assignments I have met thousands of Muslims. Those interactions were positive and respectful. Even while deployed to Iraq I was able to concentrate on peaceful interaction, often requiring increased exposure of my own life to danger. These facts were not of the least importance to those who released Monday's destructive email.

So now the damage is done. What now?

We are living in a moment in time that is highly charged with social friction. Our nation and this region are severely fractured in political polarity. We have seen this polarity acted out in anarchy in the streets of Portland this past year, as well as across the entire country.

We must open our eyes to the potential for increased conflict. We must learn from the human conflicts of the past. We cannot repeat them. This is the time for understanding and communication.

I have been made aware and clearly understand the need to shift my focus from outside agents of conflict to addressing internal agents of conflict. I must work to defuse the situation and build unity and peace, and maybe even promote a few smiles, some laughter and a feeling of joy to our situation.

I ask my military friends, regardless of your current status and all citizens to also increase your focus on the need for positive interaction. We are all Americans and deserve to enjoy American inclusion, respect and fellowship.

Today we must listen to the voices of wisdom of the past who taught us about love and tolerance. We must listen to the opinions of others with respect even when we do not agree with them.

If we are to move toward living in harmony with each other we must learn tolerance and love. If we are to continue with this life and this society and this great nation we must encourage each other in the pursuit of our dreams and seize the opportunity to move toward achieving those dreams.

We see how short life is. What are we going to do with the time we have? What am I going to do? The cavalry is not coming. The Marine Corps cannot land to solve this. We must do it by ourselves in the time we have.

My hopes today are these;

That my apology will be considered and accepted.

That we don't let this conversation end.

That we carry it forward and use this as a learning experience to build better understanding and unity in our community.

That we pray for the wisdom to differentiate the true agents of conflict from the true agents of peace in this bewildering social and media environment.

That this time we have spent together today and the discussion of pain that we have dealt with in the last week will result in positive action on the part of each of us, and improve life for all.

I thank Dr Wajdi Said, the respected Imams here today, and the other leaders and members of the Muslim community for your hospitality and kindness.

I appreciate your time and attention today.

May GOD bless every one of us.

Thank you