

It's time again for civil discourse

We have struggled to find the right words for this page since we watched on television as hundreds of people stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6. Some had severe hatred in their hearts, chanting, “Hang Pence! Hang Pence! Hang Pence!” Officer Brian D. Sicknick was killed by the insurrectionists, a Trump supporter was shot and killed by officers while trying to access the House of Representatives chamber and three others died due to medical emergencies.

Not everyone in Washington, D.C., that day had malice in mind. Not everyone in Washington, D.C., that day went through blockades on to the Capitol steps and then further into the building. Not everyone in Washington, D.C., that day beat police officers with flag poles or fire extinguishers and not everyone threatened the journalists who were just doing their jobs.

We have to admit there is a deep and disturbing divide in our country. We'd bet, however, that if we all took the time to talk to one another—and listen—we would probably see we aren't as different as some think. We all want our families to be healthy and happy, we want to be gainfully employed and we want a safe place to lay our heads at night. We might not always agree on policies, and that is OK. But we'd bet there is more that unites us than divides us.

Recognizing the need, President Joe Biden's inauguration speech mentioned “unity” nine times.

“We have learned again that democracy is precious. Democracy is fragile. And at this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed. So now, on this hallowed ground where just days ago violence sought to shake this Capitol's very foundation, we come together as one nation, under God, indivisible, to carry out the peaceful transfer of power as we have for more than two centuries,” President Biden said on Jan. 20.

He said until there is unity, we will not overcome the challenges we face as a nation.

“Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this: bringing America together; uniting our people; and uniting our nation. I ask every American to join me in this cause,” President Biden said last week.

He noted other great challenges our country faced, including the Civil War, the Great Depression, World War I and World War II and 9/11. He said “our better angels always prevailed. In each of these moments, enough of us came together to carry all of us forward.”

We see this even more at local levels—we are neighbors and we always come together in times of great need in Greene County. When hungry people visit Feeding Greene to help feed their families, volunteers are not asking for their allegiance to a political belief; they are just hoping they're helping them be able to go to bed without hunger. When terrible storms blow through—whether blizzards, flooding or even tornadoes—people in Greene County rally to help each other. We've seen this over and over and over.

Biden called for people to show respect to one another, saying that every disagreement doesn't have to result in war. While it might be too much to ask in this time of social media, we'd like to ask that people remember to show grace and mercy to their neighbors—whether they're from Greene County or Nome, Alaska, it doesn't matter. We're all Americans and we need to find a way back to that. We've called for that civility before, but never has it been more necessary than today.

Compassion has a place in football

The rivalry between William Monroe and Madison County high schools seems to always have just been. Where did it start? Who cast the first stone? If that story has been archived somewhere, we have not found it. However, long ago, we were one.

Madison and Greene counties were both once part of Orange County and before that Spotsylvania County. Madison broke off from Culpeper County in 1792 and many years later Greene County broke from Orange in 1838. Madison and Greene counties have a lot of similarities—the western most sections of both counties touch the Blue Ridge Mountains and what is now the Shenandoah National Park. Residents from both counties were forcibly removed from their homes in the mountains to create the park. Both counties have a downtown area that serves as the county seat—the Town of Madison and the Town of Stanardsville. Both counties have been mostly rural for nearly all their histories with farms that have been in families for generations. Both rely on agritourism dollars for income. And each county has one high school.

Madison County's population has not grown at the steady rate that Greene County's has and the high school's student population has kept it a Class 2 high school by the Virginia High School League, while William Monroe has grown to Class 3. But when the two schools play one another, there's a buzz in the air—the rivalry remains even as the two schools are not even in the same district. There has always been good-natured ribbing between the students and fans for both schools and we have always celebrated the others' successes and supported each other through the tough times—until this weekend.

We will not reduce all residents of Madison and all residents of Greene to a lowest common denominator—that demeans us all. We've heard the rumors of trash talking between the teams relating to Joshua Johnson, who passed away in June at the age of 16. The former football player's family still lives in our community and supports the Dragons on the gridiron. You never get over losing a child. It's not the natural order of life and we imagine it has been difficult to read what has been posted in relation to their beloved son. This is not OK and cannot be condoned, if true. Of course in the age of social media people are guilty until proven innocent. We have every belief the coaches and administrators at Madison County High School will do the right thing and we hope it can be a lesson to all other youth players; it takes one dumb decision to change the course of your life. Be better than that, as we know you are.

We also heard that Dragon players said the Mountaineers just cannot perform against them (in cruder words). A winning streak does not make you a better human than those on the other team. You do not need to demean your opponent to come out on top. Trash talking is part of sports, but there has to be line you will not allow yourself to sink below.

High school rivalry games can be great memories for you to look back on. Studies show when we're competing with our "rivals" we really do perform at a different level. Rivalries in and of themselves are not the problem; it's when we lack compassion for each other as human beings that it gets out of control. It's not uncommon for families to have a player from each county on the field at the same time. Parents: do not think your child would not participate—talk to your children about what they've said and what they've heard and teach them right from wrong. Teenagers need that direction, probably even more than they did when they were in kindergarten. Now is the time to talk to them and we hope to see us all talk to one another to find a way to keep this incident from defining our rivalry because that's not who the Mountaineers or the Dragons are—of that we are sure.

Charlottesville is not a political prop

Last Friday, we witnessed in horror as—yet again—Charlottesville was used as a chess piece in a political conversation.

As Republican Glenn Youngkin's campaign bus stopped in the city of Charlottesville for a meet and greet, five individuals stood in front of the bus wearing khakis and button-down shirts while carrying tiki torches—reminiscent of the hundreds who visited the university on Aug. 11, 2017, chanting “Jews will not replace us.”

It turns out Friday's event was all a political stunt by The Lincoln Project, an organization that notes on its website its objectives were to defeat then-President Donald Trump at the ballot box and ensure “Trumpism” failed with him.

Some people online have stated the individuals that participated on Friday allegedly have ties with those in the Democratic Party of Virginia. The Lincoln Project last week said the goal of the stunt was to highlight how Youngkin, the Republican candidate for governor of Virginia, had not denounced Mr. Trump's statement that there were fine people on “both sides” after the car attack and murder in Charlottesville after the Unite the Right rally on Aug. 12, 2017.

We. Do. Not. Care. Why.

Maybe you believe the local newspaper in Greene County doesn't get to have opinion on this; we disagree. Heather Heyer, 32, who was killed by James Alex Fields when he drove his car into a crowd on 4th Street on Aug. 12, 2017, grew up in Greene County and she graduated from William Monroe High School. Her mother was a longtime teacher in Greene and worked with Greene County 4-H, as well. In fact, her mother still lives here in Greene County.

What we believe makes this latest stunt even more revolting is the civil trial taking place right now in Charlottesville against the organizers of the Unite the Right rally by the victims from both of the August 2017 days. The victims are having to relive the worst days of their lives on the stand and in public, facing those they believe are responsible for the violence against them, and yet an outside organization thought it was a great idea to grab some torches and head to that city to make a political point.

Of course, this isn't the first time Charlottesville has been used to make a political point for someone. While running for president against Mr. Trump, Joe Biden invoked the “C” word in speeches when he had never even visited the city.

Charlottesville is not a prop. It's more than a hashtag. There are more than 40,000 residents in the city and more than a 100,000 in surrounding Albemarle County. Many of the residents who live in Greene work in Charlottesville. All of these people are humans with real lives who all suffered from the trauma of that weekend in 2017 and every time it's used in a debate, a political advertisement on television, online to make a point or a stunt like we witnessed last week, we all again hurt.

Please stop using the violence that happened in Charlottesville in 2017 as some political stump box, even if the event stoked a fire within someone to stand up and run for office. We all deserve politicians who can stand on more than one traumatic act; who do not invoke the violence experienced here as some badge of honor for themselves. Be more; as voters we deserve it. As residents in Central Virginia, we demand it.

The Lincoln Project said in its press release Friday it will return to Charlottesville again with its torches. Do not. You are not welcome here.