http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/george-floyd-protest-eau-claire-s5.jpg



We still have a lot of work ahead of us to address systemic racism and injustice, and it will take a collective effort to achieve equality.

MADISON - This Friday, on June 19th, our country celebrates Juneteenth, an important holiday commemorating the emancipation of slaves dating back to 1865. In the 155 years since the Emancipation Proclamation was read to freed slaves, many Americans have believed our country simply fixed its biased attitudes and racist behavior.

However, this assumption is far from the truth. The legacy of racism within our country wasn't resolved because of the Emancipation Proclamation or the civil rights demonstrations in the mid-20th century. The fight for racial and social equity is nowhere near close to being finished.

Today, because we've never actually addressed racism and injustice through systemic societal change, we are experiencing a reaction that should not surprise anyone. Like a volcano that erupts after we've ignored it when it's only boiling within its boundaries, racism hasn't gone away because we chose to look away.

Racism is weaved into the social fabric blanketing our country. The everyday reality of racism may not be visible to many Americans, but it is very much there and will continue to exist unless we do more to reveal racial prejudice and expose institutional racism within our society.

The terrible murders of unarmed Black persons have continued to expose racial discrimination within America and have set off a powerful reaction across this country. Ahmaud Arbery was a young man out jogging when he was chased down by white supremacist vigilantes and killed. Breonna Taylor, an EMT in Louisville, was murdered in her own home by police. George Floyd was killed after an officer knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds.



These recent deaths have shed light on the horrific violence invoked by racial prejudice, but appallingly there's a much longer history of suffering and brutality, at the hands of white vigilantes and police, against the Black community.

Activists throughout the country are raising awareness of racial injustice, while challenging all Americans to not only condemn racism, but actively work to be anti-racist. This movement and the call to action from young people, especially, allow me to feel optimistic. This eruption of social activism may be the push our country needs to think critically about changing the landscape and creating a more equitable society.

Last week, members of the Wisconsin Legislative Black Caucus sent a letter to Governor Tony Evers requesting a special session to take up legislation to reform the justice system at the state level. Their letter cites the emergent need for a special session while laying out the existing support from civilians and law enforcement alike. I'm proud to stand behind my colleagues within the Legislative Black Caucus in supporting a call to reform the justice system.

Achieving equality will take hard work and persistence. It isn't enough for people to want justice and peace – we have to make it happen. Don't walk away when the going gets tough. Be sure to hold your elected officials accountable. Don't let your elected officials ignore this movement and move on, like so many already do.



Too many legislators know that if they just hide from the issue it'll be forgotten and they'll never have to answer the tough questions or take the tough vote. This movement will take endurance from all citizens who are demanding justice right now.

The change we need won't happen tomorrow or next fall just because there are elections. It won't even happen next year until laws are debated and votes are taken.

Just like any lesson we learn from history, we cannot ignore the work that must be done to truly achieve the promise of the Declaration of Independence for all Americans to obtain, "certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

A more just, equitable society will take more than changes in the law; it will take a change in attitude and willingness to learn and grow. I'm optimistic that our collective efforts will make a difference.