

12-3-2020

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By Preston Love Jr. Community Columnist Dec 3, 2020

For the 2020 general election campaign, I had a special opportunity to observe my Nebraska communities from a unique viewpoint.

As an African American Democrat in a predominately Republican state and as an emergency U.S. Senate candidate for a brief 50 days, raising less than \$5,000 and lacking adequate time to create a campaign structure, my candidacy was unusual, to say the least. But in that time, I witnessed the complexity, the frailties and yet potential of our time, in this very splintered world. I was able to see our Nebraska communities in all of our rawness.

My campaign theme was simple and intended to have a charm by the use of my name: "There Needs to be Love in the Senate." But a takeaway of my campaign is that adding love to our policy is a profound and serious need.

A real world lies beneath a campaign. Whether it be the campaign for Senate or any other office, the realities are sitting there waiting for attention. Campaigns focusing on attack ads, wonderful television advertising of make believe, raising and spending vast amounts of money, overlook the deep, real-world needs of many.

During my journey, I interacted and spoke with people enduring horrible stress, mental health challenges and pain in communities all over Nebraska because of COVID, poverty, lack of jobs, lack of food, health disparities, incarceration and lack of knowledge about available resources. It all contributes to the growth of hopelessness. A bitter lesson.

In meeting Nebraskans over the past two months, I noted:

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, driving a significant desire of voters not to go to the polls, or even focus on the rigors, dangers and responsibility of voting.
- The impact of the leader of our executive branch of government. No matter what your party affiliation, pro or con to Trump, I would guess that we all can agree that the injection of misinformation and personal-tics instead of poli-tics made this a most unusual election.
- Racial division, captured in the concept of Black Lives Matter, death of Blacks at police hands and manifested in the heightened demand for justice, change and reform, and fueled by the rise of White supremacists and anarchists, who would love to see the races not only divide, but go to war and tear this country to shreds.
- Worry about the re-emergence nationally of what could be called “the New Jim Crow of Voter Suppression,” which in some states includes targeted purging of voter rolls, threats to the Postal Service’s delivery of voter mail, increased voter intimidation, undermining confidence in the voting process and saying the election would be “fixed,” reduction in polling places and drop boxes in some states — all creating a threat to democracy.

To be a candidate for the U.S. Senate in the midst of all these historic factors was a strange destiny. The clarity that arose for me was that, simply, there is a great human need for hope, healing, reconciliation of our differences, and yes, love.

The clear lesson of my journey is the need to change. It was entirely unpredictable that my humble, moneyless write- campaign would receive a Nebraska record 62,000 write-in votes. It is remarkable, but clear, that my votes represented a peephole into the hearts and minds of many, who used my campaign as a way to cry out. A cry to campaigns, “You don’t need to waste money and waste the voters’ time attacking and spending.” That in spite of the all the efforts to retard voting, we voted in record

numbers as a sign, a cry for help. If we as communities do not address the cries now, sexism, injustice, racism, hate and poverty will reign supreme.

A call to action: We need public, private and grassroots leadership. We must stop dancing around solutions to the raw needs so easily seen in our communities. Together we can close the gaps of jobs, justice, divisiveness, disparities, opportunity, equity and inclusion. Come together, committed but knowing there is struggle in change. Reach out to credible and trusted sources. I suggest we take a mental inventory of how far we have come and how little progress we've actually made since the last breath of George Floyd. I will also say this in closing, that in words of James Weldon Johnson, creator of the anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," we should "*Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,*" and "*Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.*" Let's make history.