



September 1, 2020

## PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM SOUTHERN OREGON COALITION FOR RACIAL EQUITY LEADERSHIP TEAM

The last few days have been a whirlwind for the leaders of SOEquity. After an outpour of support that effectively drowned out the hate we witnessed in Rogue River on Saturday, August 29, 2020, we have begun to see a small but troubling pattern amongst some of our fellow community members.

As expressed in our public statement released on Friday, August 28, 2020, we had relocated our You Are Enough family-friendly barbecue to the Evans Valley Community Center. At the last minute, the EVCC Board released a public statement cancelling the You Are Enough event without contacting any member of SOEquity. This resulted in the nonviolent stand against hate we held in front of Rogue River City Hall in lieu of a family-friendly barbecue. At some point during the night after our nonviolent event, the Evans Valley Community Center was vandalized. Quickly, a rumor spread that the culprit of this act of community destruction and hate was an SOEquity member or supporter. This is entirely false.

The troubling pattern we are beginning to see is one steeped in the very root of our community's shortcomings. Members of our community who claim to support our message of nonviolence and equality believed this outlandish rumor. It is an unfortunate but common tactic for nationalists and other agents of hate to commit crimes in an attempt to discredit a group promoting racial equity. Our community distrusts each other so deeply, some members began to question the integrity of our group, who stood out in the heat for four hours passionately sharing our message of nonviolence, equality and community.

On Sunday afternoon, a member of the press emailed SOEquity asking if members of our group were still in Rogue River, stating that he received information that some of our members were "staying in Rogue River at the Best Western." He reached out to ask if we were aware of this, following up with the question "Because if members of the local group all live in the area, they wouldn't need to stay overnight in Rogue River, would they?" That is correct. We are a local group and our supporters are members of local, Southern Oregon communities. We are your neighbors. We are your friends. We are your coworkers. It is an unfortunate but common tactic for nationalists and other agents of hate to promote the idea that individuals who support racial equality are not local residents. Our community distrusts each other so deeply, a member of the press had to fact check this outlandish statement.

SOEquity is, frankly, embarrassed. We know that the residents of Rogue River are better than this. We believe that if you truly support our message of nonviolence, equality and community, you too would quickly be able to identify how truly bizarre these accusations are. We have received multiple messages accusing us of thinking all residents of Rogue River are "uneducated, redneck racists." We don't believe the members of the Rogue River community to be stupid. We have never said the members of the Rogue River community are all racist. We do believe a dialogue about race



does need to happen in every community in Southern Oregon. The events of this past weekend only further proved that to be true.

Now is a turning point for the Rogue River community and the greater Southern Oregon community as a whole. Every citizen in this beautiful and caring region has a choice: you can take a stand against racism and hate or you can stay silent and be complicit in the oppression and harm against your fellow community members. We have faith that our neighbors, our friends, our coworkers will make the right decision. Rogue River, we believe in you. We support you. We only ask for the same good faith in return.

Our experience this past weekend was disheartening to say the least. That an angry group of nationalists worked tirelessly to drown out our free speech is upsetting but expected in these unfortunate times. The more disappointing aspect was the complicit actions and inaction from Rogue River community leaders.

When nationalists reserved Palmerton Park out from under us, Rogue River City Council did nothing to support us in finding a new venue.

When threats of direct violence were spewed at our Black leaders during our nonviolent gathering, Rogue River Police Chief Whipple did nothing to address the combatants.

When the Evans Valley Community Center had the opportunity to demonstrate that a sign in their building that reads "WE WELCOME ALL RACES AND ETHNICITIES... WE STAND HERE WITH YOU YOU ARE SAFE HERE" was more than just words on a wall, they chose to side with hate and cancel our family-friendly barbecue.

And even with all of these examples of clear antagonization and suppression of free speech, some of our community members have chosen to believe blatant lies about our nonviolent organization. Do better.

Ahead of the Evans Valley Community Association Board Meeting we want to make a few, clear statements.

Members of our leadership team will be attending. We will not be there to cause problems. We will not be there to suppress free speech. We are attending to show we are serious about our desire to engage in dialogue with our communities and to attempt to get answers to questions that have been ignored up until this point.



For the Evans Valley Community Association Board, we have five expectations:

1. The EVCA Board provides an official statement explaining their facility rental policy in no uncertain terms.
2. The EVCA Board provides an official statement explaining who they believed would create “an escalating and possible dangerous environment” if the You Are Enough family-friendly barbecue had taken place at the Community Center.
3. The EVCA Board provides an official statement explaining why they believe an event to uplift the voices of children of color in their community is “not a good fit for the Rogue River/Wimer community.”
4. The EVCA Board provides an official statement explaining their decision to release a public statement cancelling the You Are Enough family-friendly barbecue without notifying members of SOEquity first.
5. The EVCA makes an official commitment to antiracism and developing antiracist policies.

If the Evans Valley Community Association Board fails to meet these five expectations, they will make it clear that they have chosen the side of hate and would rather stay complicit in the racist systems that allow for this level of race-based suppression to occur. We hope this is not the case. We believe the Evans Valley Community Association cares about all of its members and the Rogue River and Wimer community. We offer our support in helping the EVCA Board develop the antiracist policies needed to truly be a safe place for people of all races and ethnicities.

We look forward to engaging in this dialogue. And we trust that our supporters and the members of the Rogue River community will take the time to reflect on this past weekend and no longer allow for nationalists to instill fear and distrust in their hearts and the hearts of their neighbors.

Doing the right thing is not always easy. We are here to support you. Do not let hate win.