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The national outpouring of anger and frustration triggered by the killing of George Floyd by police reveals an urgent need today: we need many more leaders who will bring people together. President Donald Trump's brutal, racist words and actions in response to the resulting protests have tried to divide people even further than they already are, American against American. I commend Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's efforts now, in welcome contrast, to begin a state-wide community conversation about new policies to improve racial justice here in New Mexico. That's how we make progress as the human race.

As the horrifying video showed, George Floyd's life was taken from his family and his community in Minneapolis suddenly and without cause. Millions across the country and around the world mourn his tragic, senseless death. We recall other high-profile victims of similar police brutality such as Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland — all of whom were Black — and the list of tragedies goes on. With countless other New Mexicans, I stand with all those who have taken to the streets to peacefully protest and raise determined voices against police brutality and racism. It is long overdue.

The systems of oppression that have existed for hundreds of years in America are still a reality in our communities. The brutalities happening every day, extend far beyond the fatal police violence. Poverty that endures, underfunded public education, inequitable access to health care, and poor environmental conditions experienced by Black communities and other communities of color, are other forms of systemic violence. While less visible in the news and the popular imagination, these daily injustices are devastating to the lives of people of color — Blacks, Hispanics and Latinos, and Indigenous people. It partly explains why George Floyd's killing evoked such a powerful response world-wide.

What better time than the present to fight against these unfair and dehumanizing barriers lived daily by so many of our fellow Americans? Many, many of us across New Mexico and the United States are committed to working together to confront systemic injustice and inequality, and to push instead for policies that uphold decency, fairness and respect for human life.

There is a broad movement of historic proportions for change at work today. It may go far beyond simply reforming police tactics, although that is needed, too. Widespread racial discrimination in our society, and the likelihood that many police officers are more likely to mistreat Black people than white people, cannot be denied. All of the officers engaged in this reprehensible behavior must be held accountable.

The federal policy of sending surplus military equipment — more suitable for a war-zones like Kabul or Aleppo — to local police departments across New Mexico and America is a total failure.

We urgently need more funding for classrooms, housing, good jobs, public health, life opportunities, and halting the march of climate Armageddon. Instead, there is always more unnecessary and ever-growing policing, high-tech surveillance of Americans, and tear gas and flash-bang bombs. People are tired of the inequity of it all, especially young people.

Let's recognize that all those protesting peacefully today actually are trying to save our country. They should be protected. The overwhelming majority of protesters is entirely peaceful, despite the media's obsession with focusing on violence and looting. I commend Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller and the APD for their restraint to date.

Gov. Lujan Grisham's initiative creating an "Advisory Council for Racial Justice" to end systemic racism in our state is the right approach for this extraordinary moment in time. All responsible people want to live in a world free of hate. Let the cynics roll their eyes, but we are serious. When the New Mexico Legislature convenes on June 18 in Santa Fe in special session, we will begin the hard and necessary work of protecting our communities of color.

By Howie Morales
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