**For Release Wednesday, June 17, 2020**

**Capitol View  
Commentary by J.L. Schmidt  
Statehouse Correspondent  
The Nebraska Press Association**

**Protesting, Rioting and Listening to find Solutions to Problems**

The tragic death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis Police Officer has taught Nebraskans the difference between protestors and rioters and the importance of listening and offering solutions to problems.

A Friday night calm in the Capital City was broken by a large crowd of mostly protestors marching down O Street in Lincoln, blocking a major intersection or two and ultimately devolving into name-calling, rock-throwing, window-breaking and looting before police dispersed them early into a Saturday morning.

As they did through subsequent nights of demonstrations, mostly centered on Lincoln Mall, the four blocks between the Capitol and the County City Building, protestors carried professionally printed Black Lives Matter signs. The fringe, which one can assume included some rioters, carried hand-lettered signs with messages such as the incendiary “ACAB,” translated as all cops are bad.

Saturday night’s peace on the mall was marred by a window-breaking spree by – one assumes – the rioters. Many were captured on video. Police managed to shepherd the crowd between the County-City Building and the Capitol. Sunday night was more of the same, and more costly.

Authorities estimated more than $10 million in damage to buildings including the headquarters of the Nebraska Association of County Officials, which is actually a block south of the mall. Rioters also torched the Universal-Inland Insurance Company, a 63-year-old building on the mall which the

**For Release Wednesday, June 17, 2020 – Page 2**

landlord says may be a total loss. More than 20 people were arrested blocks away as they threw rocks at an already boarded-up Target store.

The mayor spent a fair amount of her time speaking and listening to protestors. On Monday, the governor spoke and allegedly misspoke to a group in Omaha. Omaha’s mayor and city council tried to listen. The Saturday night death of a young Black man in Omaha at the hands of an Old Market business owner complicated things there.

Meanwhile, Lincoln’s police chief gathered with Black leaders for a listening session as the group forged a bond to work on solutions. The Lincoln mayor opted to lift a nightly curfew and protestors finally outnumbered rioters as police watched from a distance as the demonstrations remained peaceful.

The Legislature’s Judiciary Committee convened two public listening sessions, one in Lincoln and one in Omaha. Each session featured familiar rhetoric from protestors. Likewise, the Lincoln City Council held an open mic session with pretty much the same results.

New to the scene this go-round is a demand that police departments be defunded or disbanded. The Minneapolis City Council has said it will disband its police department. Some have tried to make it a partisan issue with Democrats allegedly favoring extreme to sweeping reform while Republicans cling to the status quo. It’s NOT about politics, it’s about humanity.

Since this isn’t my first rodeo and I am a life-long journalist and observer, I’ve heard these arguments before. But in this time of a global pandemic and an upcoming presidential election, the outcomes could either be healing or furtherly divisive. That’s why it is so important to listen, and then act.

I am a veteran observer and participant in the coverage of demonstrations dating back to anti-Vietnam War and American Indian

**For Release Wednesday, June 17, 2020 – Page 3**

Movement activities in the 70s, a Ku Klux Klan rally in Illinois in the 80s and massive worker strikes in the coalfields, the assembly lines of Caterpillar Tractor Company and the meat packing industry in western Iowa into the 90s.

One thing I learned is that when all is said and done, more is usually said than done.

My hope and prayer is that this time there will be positive action for the benefit of all involved with equality and fairness. The process has started. Let’s hope those involved keep it on the right path.

--30--

*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for 20 years.*