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**Capitol View**

**Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

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**Whatever Happened to People Who Apologize?**

Quick, somebody give the Governor a shovel, I want to see how much deeper he can dig the hole.

Weeks after he insulted a reporter who questioned the high nitrate levels on his pig farm, Governor Jim Pillen has yet to apologize for his xenophobic remarks.

The reporter, born in China, has been working in this country since 2017. She wrote about the nitrate issue for Flatwater Free Press, her employer for the past two years. On an Omaha radio call-in program, Pillen said he hadn't read the article and won't because the author is from Communist China.

That's not very diplomatic. That's not even nice. How does the Governor know the author is from China? Is it a presumption made by seeing her name?

That would be like me saying I’m not going to listen to Pillen because he's a pig farmer.

You get the picture!

Facing questions almost daily from various media outlets, state and national elected officials and a written plea from reporter Yanqi Xu’s editor to please apologize, Pillen has not apologized for nor defended the comments he made about the Nebraska reporter's nationality that have been criticized by Asian American leaders across the country.

Perhaps as troubling is the original story, which Pillen has also not addressed, nitrate levels on his farms that are far above the legal drinking water limit.

So what did he say to create all this furor? Asked about the story on his farms on a statewide radio show, the Governor said, “Number one, I didn’t read it. And I won’t. Number two; all you got to do is look at the author. The author is from communist China. What more do you need to know?”

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The governor's comments surfaced when Matt Wynn, the news outlet's executive director, wrote a column defending the reporter and calling Pillen’s comments infuriating and saddening. At his first public appearance since Wynn's column gained national attention, Pillen repeatedly sidestepped questions about his remarks on Xu, often referring to the mounting criticism against him as a "sideshow."

"I am 100% focused on being governor of all Nebraskans," he said. I wonder if that includes the reporter?

"Again, my comment — I'm not gonna talk about any reporter, I'm not gonna talk about any sideshows," he added. "I'm focused on my job."

But wait Governor. You already talked about a reporter, that’s why you have become your own sideshow.

Rep. Judy Chu, a Democrat from California who chairs the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, told NBC News Pillen’s remarks amounted to a “baseless xenophobic attack” and called on him to apologize. “Failing to do so only contributes to more hostility and suspicion of people from China and Asian Americans broadly,” she said.

The Asian American Journalists Association Board of Directors also denounced "statements that may fuel xenophobia or prejudice” in a statement in support of Xu, an award-winning investigative reporter for Flatwater.

Norman Chen, the CEO of The Asian American Foundation in San Francisco, said in a statement that Pillen’s comments were “not only appalling but also outright racist.”

Meeting with reporters in downtown Lincoln, Pillen said "I'm 100% focused on the state of Nebraska and the people of Nebraska and defending agriculture, growing agriculture, selling it all over the country," he said.

"And that's what I keep focused on. I focus on the task at hand and don't get caught up in the sideshows."

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Governor, I repeat, you ARE the sideshow and only you can stop the sideshow.

The hole is just getting deeper. The solution is simple.

Apologize.

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