

We Must Unite Against Abuse

By Lt. Governor David Zuckerman

Public revelations of sexual assault and misconduct against women and children, such as those making headlines over the few months, are deeply disturbing. How can anyone think such actions are okay? My hope is that we are leaving behind a time of impunity for abusers, who believed their actions would never be reported or given proper consideration.

These assaults have torn the fabric of our society, robbed many of their dignity and human potential, and left members of our community broken and suffering in silence. As a society, we have accepted a slippery slope of insulting speech and behavior, especially toward women, thus encouraging and abetting sexual bullying, harassment and assault. Unless we acknowledge the depth of the problem and massive social wrongdoing, we won't move forward.

As a husband and father, I shudder at the experiences my wife has had, and those my daughter may experience. Our society can and must do better.

I honor and support the thousands of women who have bravely raised awareness about the pervasiveness of assault and abuse by coming forward publicly and/or with the #MeToo. Responsibility for these horrific acts lies squarely on the shoulders of the abusers, not the victims. The perpetrators must admit their guilt, apologize and - to the fullest extent of the law - face the consequences. The rest of us, who actively or passively turned a blind eye, can no longer remain silent or inactive. Together we must create a world where everyone is safe and free from victimization and abuse. Let's build a society where all people are treated fairly, with respect and dignity.

Women should be trusted, listened to, and respected as equals. Unfortunately, there are many areas where they are not equal in our society. In Vermont, women earn 84 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterpart and 43% of women working full-time do not make enough to cover their basic living expenses. Raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour would dramatically impact women since they tend to be more highly concentrated in lower-wage jobs. Imagine being abused at work but staying for fear of losing health benefits for yourself and your family; a universal health care system would address this by allowing employees mobility. Continued investments in quality affordable housing means more options for those who need to relocate to distance themselves from abusive relationships. Innovative and progressive legislation can go a long way in eliminating the prevalence of power dynamics that enable abuse to occur. This is yet one more reason why we must continue the fight for equal pay, universal healthcare, affordable housing and childcare, and other aspects of economic justice.

We cannot pretend Vermont is free from discrimination or abuse. We must have honest and open dialogue about these issues. As a Senator, I served on the Sexual Harassment Panel. I worked to clarify rules and procedures, to ensure any harassment allegations were address quickly and efficiently, while ensuring due process and appropriate punishment for perpetrators.

As President of the Senate I will ensure decorum and respect prevail in the Senate Chamber. I will not tolerate any inappropriate actions or remarks between Senators, from the press, lobbyists, or visitors. I will encourage lively discourse, proper consideration of different perspectives, and fact-based arguments. All elected officials serve at the will of the people and I believe we should do justice to this honor. You should be watchful and hold us to the highest standards. Our discourse and the laws emanating from our Chamber set the tone for what we want our society to be.