“Liberty and Justice for All” are not intended to be mere words, but instead to serve as pillars of a Congressionally adopted pledge envisioned to promote governmental legitimacy and procedural justice regardless of race, color, sexual orientation, or gender identity. However, our presence today suggests that as a nation we are failing to uphold one of the most fundamental promises in the preservation of democracy. Make no mistake what has happened to George Floyd, and hundreds more persons of color at the hands of law enforcement and the criminal justice system is inexcusable. Yet, your anger should demand more than defunding police, because many more systemic failures contributed Mr. Floyd’s death than a knee to his neck.

In fact, the knee on Mr. Floyd’s neck is symbolic of the political divisiveness and lack of accountability that plague this nation inhibiting the ability of the American people to live in peace and harmony...to breathe. Elected officials who have the power to institute much-needed change are content to condemn or blame others versus accepting their collective responsibility to hold themselves and the agencies they govern to higher standards. Therefore, our jobs are not to argue, fight, loot, or commit acts of violence in protest of social injustices, but instead to hold those who have failed to do the job they were elected or appointed to do responsible.

There is no correlation between affluence, education, legacy, or longevity and competency, so why are so many tenured officials allowed to pass judgement with little or no life experience(s) associated with being a person of color, living in generational poverty, being an immigrant, or being subjected to the litany of other disparities many of you contend with daily. Why do we allow those we send to Salem and/or Washington, DC to become consumed by the albatross that turns seemingly good people into politicians? Rest assured, I applaud your unwillingness to accept the status quo, but I also challenge you to do everything within your power to affect the change you seek through peaceful dialogue and debate not just presenting problems with no thoughtful solutions.
I believe that when people deviate from what they know or should have known to be right, such decision(s) are the consequence of choice not circumstance unless survival becomes a compelling force. Sadly, the poor choices many public officials make daily across this nation have long lasting implications rooted in poor training, questionable character, prejudice, apathy, emotion, and/or indifference. ENOUGH is ENOUGH...not one more person should lose his/her life to the ignorance perpetrated by political posturing versus identifying and funding more contemporary public practice/policy. It has been 96 days since Mr. Floyd needlessly lost his life...ask yourselves what Congress and/or the Oregon Legislature has done to ensure such ridiculousness does not repeat itself. Wait, it already has...just ask Jacob Blake’s grieving family.

My point is that if our time today is going to be worthwhile, we need to educate ourselves with facts...not the unfounded drivel plaguing social media. We need to develop a deliberate quantifiable plan for change. We need to vote for those worthy of consideration...not just those who get their name(s) placed on a ballot. We need to convince ourselves that if we do not like what is happening in law enforcement, corrections, politics, mental health, addiction, and social services we can and should pursue conversation, jobs, or volunteerism intended to serve our respective communities instead of leaving such work for others. No one knows your struggles better than you, so if not you...then who is better suited to improve our current plight. Do not be content to leave meaningful change to our children or grandchildren.

If history tells us anything, it affirms that we must endure to prosper. But, what I want to know is how much longer must we endure, which is why my message is based on Martin Luther King Jr.’s statement, "The time is always right to do what is right." So, stand up, and be counted...don’t be a mere face in the crowd. Have a purpose...lead, because if no one knows your face/name, your message is more easily dismissed. Rallies, demonstrations and riotous activities are not getting the job done, so what is next?