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January 14, 2021

To my friends in North Tulsa:

I write to you at an important moment for our nation. We are less than 140 days until the 100th anniversary of the worst race massacre in our nation's history—a two-day period when thousands of Black mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers in Tulsa were made homeless, hundreds were killed, and the most prosperous Black community in America was decimated. We are less than 140 days from when the world will look at Tulsa and ask the simple question, "How have things changed in the last 100 years?"

Thankfully, we can show areas of progress, but we also clearly have work left to do. Greenwood is rising. Black-owned businesses in North Tulsa contribute to our economy, our culture, and to what it means to be a Tulsan. We have prominent Black leaders on our City Council, the Tulsa Police Department, the State Legislature, and on many boards and commissions. But opportunity and investment gaps still remain. There is also too little cultural understanding between people of different races and backgrounds in the communities of Oklahoma, which is something I was reminded of just last week.

When I announced my support for an Electoral Commission to spend 10 days auditing the results of the 2020 Presidential Election, it was never my intention to disenfranchise any voter or state. It was my intention to resolve any outstanding questions before the inauguration on January 20. I believe Congress cannot legally ignore any state's electors or change any state's vote, but we can work to get answers to outstanding questions I want to strengthen the confidence all Americans have in their electoral system so everyone is encouraged to vote and knows their vote matters.

But my action of asking for more election information caused a firestorm of suspicion among many of my friends, particularly in Black communities around the state. I was completely blindsided, but I also found a blind spot. What I did not realize was all of the national conversation about states like Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, was seen as casting doubt on the validity of votes coming out of predominantly Black communities like Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Detroit. After decades of fighting for voting rights, many Black friends in Oklahoma saw this as a direct attack on their right to vote, for their vote to matter, and even a belief that their votes made an election in our country illegitimate.

I can assure you, my intent to give a voice to Oklahomans who had questions was never also an intent to diminish the voice of any Black American. As a United States Senator representing almost four million Oklahomans, I am committed to hearing from all Oklahomans, answering questions, and addressing our challenges to strive toward a more perfect union. In this instance, I should have recognized how what I said and what I did could be interpreted by many of you. I deeply regret my blindness to that perception, and for that I am sorry.

Many of you know that prior to my time in Congress, I served as a Baptist minister. Above all else, I am a follower of Christ and a sinner saved by grace. I believe God has called us all to be where we are today to serve Him and for His glory. I also believe God wants all people who are made in His image to work toward the goal of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5 says we all have the ministry and message of reconciliation. This is something I felt called to work toward long before I was in the Senate, something I have continued to work toward as your Senator, and something I am committed to doing in the days ahead.

That is why it was so important to me to support the people of North Tulsa as you tell your story. I was honored to work with State Senator Kevin Matthews and others to form the 1921 Race Massacre Centennial Commission in 2015, to start the conversation of how we all want the world to recognize the 100th anniversary of that horrible and deadly day.

Six years ago, I discovered that Oklahoma law required students to learn about the 1921 massacre, but there was no teaching material provided for educators to use. I started pushing for the writing of a curriculum that led to the development, for the first time, of a one-day and five-day school curriculum so students around the state will never forget what happened in North Tulsa in 1921. I am grateful that State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister and Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist joined me and the Commission in Greenwood last year to announce that this curriculum would be taught in Tulsa and around the state. It was an honor to host Sen. Matthews and the Commission in Washington, D.C., to tour the National Museum of African American History & Culture so Tulsans could see the exhibit telling their story in our nation's Capital. As your Senator, it was humbling to be able to tell Greenwood's story on the floor of the United States Senate multiple times and to be able to share that story in conversations with people all over the country. I have hosted several town hall meetings in North Tulsa, and I have spoken out on the issue of race and equality in town hall meetings across the state.

Today, I am asking my friends in North Tulsa for grace and an opportunity for us to show the state what reconciliation looks like in moments of disagreement. None of us get any compensation or reward for what we do for the Commission, but being a part of the effort to shine a light on North Tulsa is an honor and a responsibility for me. Whether I am your Senator, a Commissioner, or just a private citizen, this is my calling. It is my mission, and I will continue working to support you for many years to come.

In God We Trust,



James Lankford  
United States Senator for Oklahoma