

November 26, 2014

Keith Downey
Chairman
Republican Party of Minnesota
2200 East Franklin Avenue, Suite 201
Minneapolis, MN 55404

Dear Mr. Downey,

The undersigned civil rights, faith, community and advocacy groups write to express our deep concern regarding bigoted statements made by a member of the Minnesota Republican Party, Big Stone County chairman Jack Whitley. We request that you urge the appropriate party authorities to remove Mr. Whitley from his official position immediately to send a strong message that the Republican Party of Minnesota rejects this type of vicious hate and bigotry.

As you know, on Thursday, November 20, Mr. Whitley posted on his then-public Facebook profile a “call to arms” against Muslims, calling them “terrorists” and “parasites.” This was after he suggested in a post on Wednesday, November 19 that when millions of Muslims travel to Mecca annually to perform a religious pilgrimage, someone should “frag ‘em”—a reference to detonating a fragmentation grenade. When asked about these statements, Mr. Whitley made no apology and continued to express his belief that Muslims “don’t belong in this country.”

Civic leaders have a special responsibility to uphold our nation’s founding values, including freedom, truth and fairness, and a county chairman like Mr. Whitley in particular is playing an important leadership role. Statements like Mr. Whitley’s, however, run completely afoul of that commitment. His blatantly anti-Muslim remarks send a dangerous message to the American public that it is okay to malign and, even worse, incite violence against our fellow Americans simply because of how they look or how they pray.

We appreciate your decision to publicly condemn Mr. Whitley’s remarks targeting Muslims. In response, however, Mr. Whitley has not only refused to acknowledge the reckless, inflammatory and irresponsible nature of his comments, he appears to have doubled-down, and took to Facebook again to expand upon and defend his bigotry. Therefore, we believe that more must be done.

We urge the Republican Party of Minnesota to stand up against hate and bigotry by having Mr. Whitley removed from his position.

Mr. Keith Downey
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Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Anti-Defamation League
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Muslim Advocates
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Network for Arab American Communities
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
The Interfaith Center of New York
The Sikh Coalition