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Educators Decry Racial Violence in Charlottesville, Offer Assistance

VEA/NEA Statement on Racial Violence in Charlottesville, Virginia

Jim Livingston, president of the 50,000 member Virginia Education Association

Lily Eskelsen, president of the 3.2-million-member National Education Association

Sixty years ago, they burned crosses in Charlottesville in a black neighborhood and at the home of a white civil rights activist.

This past weekend, hate-filled bigots again descended on Charlottesville in a contemptible attempt to evoke fear and terror. In their wake, three were dead, many more injured, and the community left traumatized. The weapons they used to incite—torches, hateful slurs, threats—were despicable enough. Late in the day, one of their own used a car as a battering ram and killed 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injured 19 others. And two other heroes with the Virginia State Police providing safety services, Lt. H. Jay Cullen and Trooper-Pilot Berke M.M. Bates, were killed when their helicopter crashed.

As teachers in the Virginia Education Association and National Education Association, we know our history. Words lead to action. Too many leaders in positions to know and do better have failed to counter white nationalist rhetoric; their reluctance to directly confront and call out racism at every turn contributed to what unfolded Saturday. Heyer, standing up for diversity and against intolerance, and Cullen and Bates, endeavoring to keep all safe, paid the ultimate price for a sickness that we must expose, confront, and overcome.

The VEA and the NEA stand with members of the Charlottesville community, and we offer our deepest condolences to the families of those who lost their lives on Saturday. Educators bear the wounds collectively. Heather Heyer's mother, Susan Bro, formerly taught in the public schools and was a member of the Greene County Education Association. Karen Cullen, wife of Lt. Jay Cullen, is an elementary teacher and member of the Chesterfield Education Association. We mourn with them, and their families.

We know that children of all ages follow events such as those that occurred Saturday and have questions; some may feel traumatized. Members of the VEA and NEA have resources to assist teachers and community members, and we stand ready to offer any educational or crisis management assistance. For more information on resources, go to www.nea.org/Charlottesville.

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