

Father of Mollie Tibbetts tells Trump administration: Stop using my daughter's death in racist attack on immigrants

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On Saturday, Rob Tibbetts, the father of Mollie Tibbetts, the young Iowa woman whose body was found in late August after a month-long search operation, published a guest column in the *Des Moines Register*. He declared that his daughter “is nobody’s pawn,” and that to use her death to peddle a racist, anti-immigrant agenda is both “heartless” and “despicable.”

The message of the column was powerful and straightforward. The grieving father asked right-wing politicians and pundits to stop distorting and corrupting Mollie’s death “to advance a cause that she vehemently opposed” and not use his family’s tragedy to push the Trump administration’s foul anti-immigrant agenda.

The immediate cause for the column seems to be an op-ed published last week in the same forum by Donald Trump Jr., the president’s oldest son. Framed loosely as a commentary on the response to Mollie’s murder, Trump Jr.’s op-ed is notable only for the fact that it relentlessly and shamelessly hammers home his father’s usual talking points: “illegal alien crime” is one of the biggest problems faced by American society; “the Left,” i.e., the Democratic Party has facilitated this “existential threat” because of an ideological commitment to open borders; and Mollie’s murder would never have happened if “we policed our southern border properly.” Not one of Trump Jr.’s claims stands up to even minimal scrutiny.

There have been numerous studies by academics and think tanks in recent years that have clearly shown that there is no correlation between immigration and crime. If anything, research seems to indicate that immigrants are less like to commit crimes than those who are American-born.

On the political front, to claim that the Democrats

have been supporters of open borders is ludicrous. Historically, the militarization of the border has been the product of a bipartisan consensus amongst the ruling class. Many of the detention camps that are being used by the Trump administration were in fact set up during the Obama administration. It was during Obama’s tenure that the US deported more immigrants than during the rest of its history, earning the president the title of “deporter-in-chief.”

In the aftermath of Mollie’s funeral, the Hispanic community in Des Moines has been the target of anti-immigrant groups that have painted racist graffiti on public roads and used recorded calls to threaten violence. The calls, traced to an out-of-state group called the “Road to power,” state that Tibbetts was killed “by an invader from Mexico” and that “America should be white only.”

“Our community members are very afraid,” Latino community leader Joe Henry told CNN affiliate KCCI. “We had young people last week who were confronted even walking in parks.” Two local festivals celebrating Latino culture in Iowa were postponed, with organizers for one the events citing security concerns.

In his op-ed, Rob Tibbetts reached out to the Hispanic community, saying, “my family stands with you and offers its heartfelt apology. That you’ve been beset by the circumstances of Mollie’s death is wrong. We treasure the contribution you bring to the American tapestry in all its color and melody.” The person accused of Mollie’s murder, her father wrote, “is no more a reflection of the Hispanic community as white supremacists are of all white people. To suggest otherwise is a lie.”

Revealing a more profound understanding of

democratic rights than the current administration, Tibbetts pointed out that the accused will receive a fair trial, and if found guilty, he would face the “consequences society has set,” and that would be the end of the matter. To focus on his ethnicity or legal status was “to knowingly foment discord among races.” Such an action, Tibbetts stated, “incites fear in innocent communities and lends legitimacy to the darkest, most hate-filled corners of the American soul. It is the opposite of leadership. It is the opposite of humanity... It is shameful.”

Given the systematic attempt by the Trump administration and its supporters to promote a fascistic ideological atmosphere targeting immigrants, the heartfelt statement by Rob Tibbetts is a powerful sign of the working class’s unwillingness to fall into this trap. Under the most tragic of circumstances, instead of falling prey to the foul rhetoric emanating from the White House, Tibbetts’ statement reveals thoughtfulness, humanity and a commitment to democratic principles.



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