

Tonight we'll hear a presentation regarding the Confederate monument in front of our historic courthouse. I realize this is a difficult topic for some to discuss. It's a topic that some of you may not feel is worthy of discussion. I disagree. I think anytime we come together and share our views and share our stories we are better because of it. And I hope we'll all take the opportunity to listen, to hear perspectives we haven't heard before, and to see things in ways we hadn't considered before.

We all know this presentation is about more than a monument - more than just copper and granite. This is about our history, this is about a changing Chatham County and a changing South, and yes, it's about race. And these aren't topics that we can expect to reach some conclusion, that get solved and allow us to move on. They don't go away. We won't fix it here tonight. We won't fix it in my lifetime or in my children's lifetime. And that's okay. All we can do – the best we can do – is listen to each other and learn from each other thru open, honest discussions. We are more than capable of having those discussions here in Chatham County.

I'd like to close with a plea for decorum and civility. I was going to remind us all to act like grown-ups, and ask that we all set a good example for our children. But then I received letters about the monument from a class of 5th graders and I realized I had it backwards. They spent time researching the topic, thinking about it from all sides, and then presented thoughtful, reasoned arguments about the conclusions they reached. They understood that others might reach different conclusions. Their opinions weren't clouded by their political party or their news source. They don't operate in the zero-sum game where somebody wins only if someone else loses. So I would ask that we all be a little less grown-up tonight, and that instead we follow the example of Ms. Runion's 5th graders at Perry Harrison School.

Of course that may not be why you're here tonight. You may be here to point fingers and shout and call names. And that may get you some cheers from your side, and you may even get a few seconds on the news tonight. But you won't change any minds. You won't bring anyone to a deeper understanding of your position. You won't move the discussion forward in any meaningful way. And you certainly won't represent this County well, which I know is full of good and kind people that care about and respect each other. So let's show that here tonight.