

Point of personal privilege:

Our legislative family is currently going through an intense period of self-evaluation on the topic of how we treat each other, where we have been failing to do things right, and how we need to do things better.

My own involvement in all of this has been greatly magnified as a result of a complaint that was filed against me for reasons that I believe were largely unrelated to the complaint itself.

But that complaint was followed by a number of additional complaints, the majority of which were sincere and which exposed me to the knowledge that my actions were not always received as intended, and that worse still, they caused genuine discomfort or pain.

At first, my response was largely defensive, borne of frustration at a few complaints that were not true or were made for a personal or political vendetta.

But it would be a mistake to I treat each and every complaint the same, if I failed to learn from legitimate complaints, and if I failed to recognize and apologize for those actions that caused damage or hurt.

We, as a larger Capitol family, cannot begin to heal until those of us who have made mistakes begin the process ourselves. For me, that means learning and changing, so I stand today because it is my desire that we now begin to heal.

The healing won't start in earnest, at least with respect to the people whom I have hurt, without me recognizing that comments I have made in jest, over the past seven years, were not received in the spirit in which they were intended. Quite the contrary. Some were jarring, insensitive, and demeaning.

I don't need to wait for an investigative report to know that.

In the past, when I've told a joke that landed badly and realized it, I have always apologized. My purpose is always to entertain and to get people smiling and laughing, and that has been my style as a farmer and a legislator. But when someone reacts badly or tells me I've hurt their feelings I feel terrible and try to immediately remedy it.

It has been hard to sit on my hands during this political and legal process and not acknowledge that I care. I WANT to get it right and I want to make it right.

I was beyond embarrassed to hear that what I thought were welcomed and well-intentioned hugs were perceived as creepy and lecherous. I didn't know. As soon as I did know, I have been - and am, so sorry.

I will confess that there were times that, when hearing that I had offended someone with a boorish comment or that- what I intended as a simple hug turned into someone believing that I had crossed some line, I was sorry but, I also reacted defensively and thought to myself that some people are just too sensitive.

It has taken me time to understand, that ---- I ---- have been

INsensitive, and it is unfair to expect everyone to react to

things the way I might react. If I'm going to be a comedian, I

have to understand and be sensitive to my audience, not blame

them when my jokes fall flat.

I now know that comments intended to be hospitable,

harmlessly flirtatious or outrageous -and above all intended to

be humorous, weren't at all humorous **and caused others to**

believe I did not value who they are as individuals. I've taken

all of this very hard because those who know me well, know that

under all of the clowning - the schtick I put on- I care a great

deal.

Nor was this reaction limited to how *women* reacted to my behavior. During this investigative process, I learned that I not only offended women; one complaint was even from a man!

I learned that a crass and offensive comment I made in jest at an after-hours event to a legislative candidate-- in response to a political prediction-- was perceived as sexual harassment which I never would have imagined. Repeating my response now, during the day, in front of my colleagues, including women, is evidence enough that I should have never said it. It's a little rough. But, my sarcastic response related to buggery. This candidate interpreted my remarks as serious, not sarcastic or in jest, for which I am embarrassed and deeply regretful. I look forward to apologizing personally.

It is important that you all know that while my actions have unintentionally offended some, I have never attempted to kiss anyone, made obscene gestures at a woman, nor sought a tryst or sexual relationship. It may seem inconsistent with my attempts at humor, but I have lived my life as someone who absolutely reveres and respects women. I have been blessed to be married for 41 years to an incredible woman, to whom I have remained devoted.

I was brought up to be a gentleman who will hold the door, pull out the chair, stand when a woman leaves the table or lend her my jacket when she is cold.

However, I now am acutely aware that not everyone understood my attempts at humor and resented that I did not show the

respect and value each individual deserves. That is one of the things that bothers me the most.

I am sorry for the distraction and strain that this matter and the subsequent investigation have caused all of you. That was not my intent when I asked for the investigation. I did not want to go one more day without apologizing and honoring all of you by not only saying sorry, but by doing better. This has been a painful process for all. Hopefully to those I hurt, you feel empowered for speaking up. Your courage has already had a profound impact on the way I relate to others. I am sorry.

I also want to tell all of you that I am still your friend and I still want to hear from you. I especially want to hear if I'm doing something wrong. I wish that the people who came forward

months or years later had said something immediately at the time so that I could have apologized and made improvements right away. But, I certainly understand why they didn't. I hope that while I strive to be better, you all help me along the way if you see things I can improve. It is time to repair and begin to heal. I want to get this right.

It can be tough to teach old dogs new tricks, but this old dog can and will do better. I look forward to personally listening and expressing my remorse once the investigation is over - to the extent those I have offended are interested. I am sorry.

Thank you.