



State of the County Speech July 19, 2016

My Father-in-Law, Carlon E. Dreier, Bud as he was known by all, was a WWII veteran—a metalworker who repaired aircraft in the U.S. Army Air Corps. This is Bud's funeral flag. He passed in 2012.



My husband, Tom, and I just returned from a World War II History Tour to France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany. Coincidentally, a couple on our tour had been in the Oklahoma City Bombing on April 19, 1995, and had shared their firsthand accounts of the bombing in which 168 people were killed and 680 were injured. These experiences, combined with news of recent and repeated horrific events in our Nation and across our World, have given Bud's flag new meaning for me.

It was not long into our trip to Normandy—beaches, cemeteries where thousands were laid to rest, sites of war crimes and unparalleled bravery and heroism—that I realized that our World War II History Tour was not a tour to highlight war—it was a tour to highlight the driving forces of peace.



Peace happened and stability returned to Europe in the 1940's because American leaders made decisions. And their decisions were joined with decisions of other nations and leaders so that together,

each could act in as much concert with the other as possible given the myriad differences and challenges of the times.

What if they had waited longer or hadn't made a decision at all? What if they had focused their energies on looking back or second guessing decisions that had already been made instead of gathering information to prepare for the next set of decisions?

Now I realize that the state of Portage County today is very different from the State of the World in the 1940's, but I think there is a valuable perspective for us to consider here and now in our very own community.

Portage County is at a crossroads. Some important decisions need to be made so that we can clarify directions: For the future of our nursing home services. For courthouse and jail security. For our human resources in County government. More than one answer is "right" at every decision point. The only wrong decision is "No Decision" because it prevents everyone from knowing where we are headed and puts our resources more at risk. We must position ourselves to manage by design—which requires us to keep the bigger picture in mind at all times and not get mired in details too soon.

To see United States Flags lining streets and flown at homes in a foreign country was a new experience for me in Normandy even though I had

lived in Europe during my husband's military service in Germany for about six years in the 1980's and 90's.



"Welcome to our liberator" was painted on store windows. Peace flags created from miniature American, British, Canadian and French flags were strung in rows stretched from window to door at French homes and across restaurants. Doves of peace appeared in windows and were hung outside homes—and they inspired me over and over again.



How much do we keep the dove of peace in our hearts through the work we do in Portage County—even when tough decisions must be made and passionate positions must be made clear? I hold up the mirror and accept a higher calling for myself. Hope you might, too, starting anew tonight.

Peace across America starts right here in Portage County by leaving the ugliness of national and state politics at the doorstep before entering our local meetings. Please: No more meetings when anyone is allowed to put down someone else. Please: Stick to the issues and topics. Agree to disagree and be ready to move on. I went home from

one meeting last week and literally threw up in disgust that it was allowed to be so uncivil. At another recent meeting, I was appalled by the poor display of leadership which had prevented anything worthwhile from occurring.

The stress from meetings spills over into the work days of many employees, and I would venture to say that in turn, it spills over into their homes. We have fantastic employees working for us at all levels of this organization: Doing the heavy lifting, working weekends, working nights, giving up family time—all because duty calls under the same flag as that which is flown on the streets of Normandy and across our nation. They have a significant role in peace-making across our community. Through their jobs and professions, they help keep the wheels of government turning so that our community is stable and therefore safer.

Whether they are ensuring that business as usual can go on in our community on a snowy day, intervening in a conflict to protect a child or elder, seeing justice through, or providing quality of life-related supports and services, our County employees at all levels of this organization are on our front line of peace-making. And when it comes to the driving forces of peace, our Sheriff's Office staff and law enforcement officers (in tandem with other responders from area agencies) are there, giving their all, laying it all on the line under this flag to serve us and ensure public safety. Never knowing how the day will go, they answer each call. Trusting their instincts (as they must), they

put themselves at risk over and over again. This includes our corrections officers. They work in a difficult place every day—the Portage County Jail. A jail that we know is obsolete and lacks modern features that improve health and safety and reduce liabilities for those who work there and are housed there. A jail that is not connected to a modern courthouse which has modern features that improve health and safety and reduce liabilities for those who work there and use the facility.

And yet, after years of study, we seem to be paralyzed in fear of making a wrong decision, when the only wrong decision is no timely decision to protect those who protect us, to provide stability to those who provide stable services to our community. The changing times require us to change, too. The unrest must be put to rest with decisions that give our County direction so that we can plan for 2017 and beyond. There is no way to please everyone, but we can keep peace close at heart. The only way we are going to make it through the uncharted and choppy waters is by rowing in the same direction together...so that we all can go on serving our flag in the honorable tradition of so many others who have given their “everything” for peace.

Thank you.