

## Mayor's Message

1.15.26

*"Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why?' I dream of things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"*

- *Robert F. Kennedy – Adapted from Playwright George Bernard Shaw*

In June of 1968, at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, Senator Ted Kennedy stood before a grieving nation to eulogize his brother Robert F. Kennedy. As he reached the end of his remarks, he chose words that captured not only Robert Kennedy's life, but his enduring challenge to all of us: "Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why?' I dream of things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"

Those words came originally from the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, but they became inseparable from Robert Kennedy because they expressed something essential about how he saw the world, and how he believed change was made. As a recent high school graduate heading off to college, I was very attuned to Robert Kennedy's message during his campaign for President, and his assassination caused many young people my age to ask the question, Why? Our country was fractured by war, racial injustice, political violence, and a sense that the great American experiment might be failing. We just didn't ask the question, why, we looked at the world around us and asked why is this happening?

Robert Kennedy did not simply use this phrase as a slogan, over the course of his public life, he lived these words, becoming an advocate for the poor, for those left behind, and for those who felt neglected. He believed that progress begins with imagination matched with moral courage and action.

It would be easy to think those words belong only to the late 1960's, but in many ways, they speak just as clearly to our own time. Look around today, and you can see how we too live with deep political divisions; political disagreement has caused mistrust, and too often we assume that those who differ from us are not just wrong, but unreachable. We see polarization and can easily say, that is just how things are today.

I don't believe Robert Kennedy would have accepted that answer, having lived through unrest and violence, he believed that imagining a different world was a necessity, not a luxury. He would encourage us to imagine something better, while understanding the reality of the world around us.

To ask "Why not" today is to challenge the idea that divisions in our society are permanent. When Ted Kennedy spoke those words at his brother's funeral, they were not meant as a memorial to what had been lost. They were a call to conscience, spoken in grief, but grounded in hope. A reminder that even in the darkest moments we still have a responsibility for the future we create.

And so today, we are left with the same choice Robert Kennedy offered back then: to accept things as they are and ask "why?" Or to imagine something better, and ask together, "why not?"