



PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE

Good afternoon and happy spring break.

Spring break is a time for many people to recharge, and that looks a little different for every person. To some, spring break is a time to relax or an opportunity for adventure. For others, it is often a chance to catch up or get ahead at work or in classes. To our students, staff and faculty who remain on campus, thank you for your continued dedication to UNM. However you spend the break, I hope you have a wonderful week.

Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people (attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt).

As your acting president, one of my main concerns is to encourage conversations that help us bridge our differences and allow us to discuss ideas.

I recently came across a TED [talk](#), by a former member of the Westboro Baptist Church, who grew up as a member of that group. She accurately diagnosed the divisions we are dealing with, and provided sound advice in the latter part of her talk. She states *"We celebrate tolerance and diversity more than at any other time in memory, and still we grow more and more divided. We want good things — justice, equality, freedom, dignity, prosperity — but the path we've chosen looks so much like the one I walked away from four years ago. We've broken the world into us and them, only emerging from our bunkers long enough to lob rhetorical grenades at the other camp. We write off half the country as out-of-touch liberal elites or racist misogynist bullies. No nuance, no complexity, no humanity. Even when someone does call for empathy and understanding for the other side, the conversation nearly always devolves into a debate about who deserves more empathy. And just as I learned to do, we routinely refuse to acknowledge the flaws in our positions or the merits in our opponent's. Compromise is anathema. We even target people on our own side when they dare to question the party line. This path has brought us cruel, sniping, deepening polarization, and even outbreaks of violence."*

Her story reminded me of that of [Derek Black](#), a former KKK member who was also exposed to the ideas of "others," left the KKK and disavowed his family and old ways. I encourage you to listen to the TED talk and read the article. I hope that you will appreciate, as I have, the power of communicating across the many gulfs in our society.

Chaouki T. Abdallah

Acting President

Follow me on Twitter [@chaoukita](#)

There is so much more that happens on the UNM campus than can be conveyed in a weekly message. To find out about the latest stories and events, please visit the [UNM Newsroom](#), the central source of news and information for the UNM community.