

In the 30 years of my international communications career, this is the first and only time I have ever spoken such angry words in a professional setting. Never far from my heart is knowing the devastation that COVID-19 has brought to this community. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders especially have suffered and died disproportionately since this pandemic began. COVID is not a hoax easily treated with livestock dewormer. Proper education could have prevented much of the suffering these affected families will endure for years.

It is difficult to understand the sense of entitlement displayed by some of the more privileged residents who now live here. Many move to Hawai'i with little understanding or respect for the values left to us by those who built this community with sacrifice, hard labor and care for one another. Island people know our collective survival depends upon fulfilling the needs of the group before the satisfying the desires of individuals.

Perhaps these activists don't fully appreciate the impact their ideological rhetoric has had on those with less education, wealth and societal privilege than they have. Truthful education about vaccines could have prevented many of our most vulnerable neighbors from the devastation of COVID-19.

I cannot and won't try to justify the things I said to Mr. DeBeer in anger. It was both unprofessional and unacceptable. But I am not a bot and my honest emotional response was made human-to-human. I did not speak to him as a "public servant" or as a representative of anyone else except me as an individual.

Those who confuse aloha with weakness or stupidity will ultimately lose. Hawaiians have been here for at least 1,500 years; it's been a state for 62. Our ways are tested and proven by time.