

7 March 2023 Town Hall Transcript (Summarized)

Speakers identified:

Col. Leslie Hauck, 52nd Fighter Wing commander

Dr. Anneliese Hyde, Spangdahlem High School principal

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Anthony Wiggins, 52nd Fighter Wing chaplain

Master Sgt. Lakeva Parrott, 52nd Fighter Wing Diversity and Inclusion

Dr. Hyde: Our Sentinels are not taught this and it will not be tolerated. It will be put to a stop as much as I can manage. This is not who you see on the field, in the schools, so please accept my sincerest apologies. I was made aware of this video yesterday at 0800; I understand others had it this weekend; so with that we immediately followed our chain of command, MSG, Wing command, Security Forces and German law enforcement. Actions have been taken, some are related to personnel, as you know I cannot go into specifics but what I can tell you is that the volunteer in the video is no longer associated with Spangdahlem high school.

We're here, we want to address your concerns, and give you as much information as we can. We are not hiding anything, but have to be mindful of what is happening in the background so with that being said if you have a high school student just know today they will be engaging in these conversations. As we move forward, we have listed various agencies for support so please know if at any point a student is saying there's an issue please let me know so I can take action. I'm here as your partner to work through this as we move forward..

Col. Hauck: Thank you Dr. Hyde. I want to start by saying thank you again for working through this with us, I know it's not easy - I woke up this morning feeling sadness, anger, to think that something like this exists in our community.

As this has come to light, a few things have come to light, some other comments that have been made along the line of other forms that exist within the school that we're not aware so that's why we want to make sure you have these school contacts up here to make sure we're

reporting and identifying these issues. We're about inclusion and connectedness, and part of us being connected is embracing our diversity – I truly believe we are a strength as one when we all come together.

Chief Roach and I won't stand, and none of your leadership will stand for things like this on a U.S. military base, nor anywhere else that I can control. I know you're all wondering what's going to happen to these kids, what's going to happen in the future, what's the investigation entail - I can't tell you too much about that right now because it's an open investigation and to do this right we need to let that play its course. The Germans take this as seriously as I do, and they're going to be helping us out as well.

We've made strides over the past few years as an Air Force and had tough discussions and have looked each other in the eye and tried to hear their story and understand their perspective. I don't want it to be seen that I'm sweeping this under the rug because I'm not telling you exactly what's happening with the investigation but all authorities (SFS, OSI, the German authorities, and also DODEA) are working to figure out the true facts. For those concerned over at the school I'll tell you we've put in place three security patrols that will be patrolling the area to ensure a safe environment.

This hurts. I didn't see it coming, just like a lot of the things that have happened in the world but this is another one we're going to deal with together and we're going to make sure we raise good kids. And that we've got an amazing community that supports one another and doesn't have people going home to tell their parents that these are the types of things that are happening in our community where they should be getting the best education they can within our community in the USAF.

****Opened for questions @ 11:20****

Audience member: Where can we keep track of what comes out of this? Where can we go to receive updates on the situation?

Col. Hauck: “I plan to have another town hall to keep you all informed as things develop so I can give you more data, I would expect we would post that on Facebook when we have another one but right now there’s not a need-to-know on what’s coming out with the investigation and I don’t know how long the investigation will take so unfortunately I can’t give you a specific date.

Audience member: question is mostly unintelligible, sounds like she’s saying, “We need a plan on how to move forward/prevent these things from happening, so what are we going to do?”

Col. Hauck: “This is a big enough deal that we’re addressing it in a town hall, I mean this has gone up to the U.S. Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and they take it seriously, so it’s not just me taking it seriously. I don’t mind stepping in - trust me - to solve this, and I’ve been asked if there was a way to solve this quicker and I wish there was.

****unintelligible back and forth with person who asked question and Col. Hauck****

Dr. Hyde: If your kids are at home and saying we never talk about this, please reach out, we are open to suggestions. We have all of these resources available so it’s important to funnel those opportunities and education into actions that are effective and impactful for our students. That’s what we’re here to do. The character education continues, the base partnership education continues, like I said today this afternoon we are meeting with our staff for staff semester day. These discussions and small groups will continue. We’ve added the extra support and are very visible on the regular.”

Audience member: “Why wasn’t it addressed sooner?”

Dr. Hyde: “The volunteer that was associated with the team was addressed immediately, but for the students, it’s currently under investigation and we can’t talk about it.”

Col. Hauck: “We have gone through with our team across the board to see who’s involved, who are these people, what type of investigations need to occur, where did it happen - there’s a thousand things to consider, like was this on school land, was this during a school sanctioned event? There’s a lot of things that go into it so we have to sort through to figure these things out. Right now we have the appropriate counselors involved with the school.”

Audience member: “I understand that you said there’s a lot of moving parts to it, but when that video surfaced at 0800, were those kids still in the class? Because my concern is if you have kids that are saying they want to kill people, and they’re still sitting amongst the other kids, 1; they need to be protected because they could have gotten jumped yesterday, and 2; our kids need to be protected because it could have been the kids or a volunteer who brought a weapon into the school, a gun in the school, and that is a major issue. So were the kids still allowed to be in school all day - and this can be directed to Dr. Hyde - and if so, why?”

Col. Hauck: “They were in school yesterday, I can’t say where they are today due to the investigation. We have security patrols there to ensure the children are in a good place as well as their parents so they don’t get into a worse situation. I’m holding the assistant coach accountable as an adult and that person is no longer serving as an assistant coach and we will see where it goes from here.

Audience member: “DODEA policy 4.2 – Dr. Hyde question for you - with that policy, it states there are other repercussions or things you can do to remove the child not from the school, but to have alternate means of education immediately if there are any people being discriminated against. Why has that not been done?”

Dr. Hyde: “As we work with our community partners, I’m answering as a mom and as a principal of that school, we’re following directions, we’re working with our community and our local partners so I can do what I can do, when I can do it, and we’ve already taken action today with the students, so I did what I could do immediately as I was given the right to.”

[23:40 unintelligible]

Audience member: “Is there anything set in DODEA policies for hate crimes for discrimination for zero tolerance for any of this?”

Col. Hauck: “If something happens during the school day we don’t always hear about it because if a student gets suspended we’re not going to broadcast it; in this case, it was on a Sunday, on the baseball field, not DODEA’s baseball field, with a volunteer coach and students on their own

weekend time. So that involved some authorities to sift through and I've also got the German folks from Trier to work through the process with – if it did happen on school, she's got options to work with but we will have to see what happens with the investigation.

Audience member: As a parent and a prior teacher, it's not something that you can overlook and say, we're not holding those individuals accountable. We're in charge of our dependents, and we take accountability for them. So how are you making it so that these parents are also held accountable? It's not only the children, and I feel as if we're sugarcoating it by calling it, "Oh, this is bad news." -- *It's a hate crime*. You can't sugarcoat it. You can't say it's not. It is. I have a black son. I'm not going to sit here and say, "Oh, it's being actively uncomfortable for my son going to school and there being children who are speaking like this. We can't say it's not the parents.

Col. Hauck: What I can do is let the investigation play out a little bit more. At this point, the parents didn't do anything that we have any legal authority to take any action on. You might want to. You might want to take legal action upon them, but there's nothing – the parent didn't do anything.

Audience member: Sir, Staff Sgt Yates, 52nd LRS. Um, just to address what she stated down there. I don't think it does us any justice to make assumptions on what influence would lead those folks to make such an ugly video like that. The reason I say that is because I was adopted when I was 17 years old. My mom is white; my dad is white all five of my siblings are white. One of my siblings did disclose to me about 6 or 7 years ago that before I came to the household, he did not like black people, which was hard to believe because my mom, my dad, my sisters, my other brothers, they are not racist. We're talking about teenagers here. We're talking about teenagers. We don't know what's influencing them outside of the home.

It's a terrible thing that happened, you know, watching youths, you know, do such an ugly thing. I want to say thank you, first of all, for holding that coach accountable because he did neglect his duties as a public servant. You know - a servant not to just in uniform, but as a servant to those to those teenagers. All right, so ... I'm not trying to take away from the

seriousness of this offense, but we should not we should not assume that that the parents are at fault here.

My question for you all is what kind of rehabilitative steps are going to be taken reshape these young boys' minds? How are we reaching out to them so that they understand the weight of their words and how they affect not just the people in this room, but how they affect everybody on this installation.

Col. Hauck: How do you continue not have to have this 17-year-old, 16-year-old all of a sudden become a degenerate for life and this be the one thing that's going to take him there? You know, you want them to be able to recover and learn from this and be a stronger person together. We're not there yet. It'll depend on the investigation and what comes out on that one and if there's any repercussions from that. So I'll leave that to the German review first, and then we'll see what we do at the base. But I'll tell you what we're not doing or I'm not doing yet until the situation dictates a change, which I don't foresee that with these kids. But I am not banning them from base yet, I'm not removing their command sponsorships and let the investigation play out. If you do that, then there are going to be stuck off base in Germany with nowhere to go. And if they go back to the United States, who knows what will happen. So the first step is let's figure out the investigation.

Audience member: I think one of the things that needs to be addressed is racism is a progressive thing. It's born out of ignorance and it progresses to hatred and eventually progressive environment. So how do we prevent it earlier on? So how do we go on about preventing that in the future if we continue in that early step?

Col. Hauck: Parenting 101, right? I don't know, man. Someone said maybe offer more services focused on racism. I still think it's the training and maybe some of our where we determine to go forward with this with the base is having those like emphasis items too. It's not just that this is what should happen in the workplace. This is what we expect in the workplace.

Audience member: What is the game plan to address this going forward within the community?

Col. Hauck: Yeah. So we have our lines of effort that we continually go through. We sit down once a quarter to see what we've got planned out for everybody. That team over there is super smart and we have various lines of effort, and that captain over there does a lot of that planning – Capt Schimmoeller. But I think as we go into our next meeting, which is next week on our lines of effort across the days, and then also it's our long range calendar meeting.

I don't want to be reactionary. We had two suicides in my first year I was here. And from there we started we're doing all the connection events – we were getting to our Airmen in the dorms and making sure they know each other, and it's more proactive stance. We've been trying to do Diversity Days and things like that.

Audience member: [Unintelligible] I do think it would be beneficial to have a set stand-down day within the school. Sitting here listening to what everybody is saying. Yeah, this happened with a teen. It's hard to have influence over them 24-7. How do we set diversity talks when we already have that. [unintelligible]. ... they've got schoolwork to do. But this is important. I do think going forward.

That's something that needs to be looked at and maybe, I don't know, once a quarter or once a month, whatever the case may be having it within the schools. Not necessarily with the parents, because most of us are parents, you know, like the kids aren't going to say everything in front of you. So having something with the school, with their peers ahead of time before something like this happens.

Dr. Hyde: We ask that you come into our schools, we want you. I understand there was a time there that you could be in our schools, but we're asking when we see volunteers, please come in, hang out with our kids. We have lunch. They have open campus lunch. If you have an idea for an activity, come in and lead a small group. If you want to do an incentive day we can do that.

The message from today is zero tolerance. We will not continue this. So it will stop if the parents know, I'm not going to go there on everyday parenting or not, but I can say what DODEA's stance is it will not be tolerated. It will not happen in our schools. So if having more people in our schools, having eyes on our kids, listen to what they're saying, what's going on. They don't want to talk to me. Maybe they'll talk to you. Maybe they'll talk to the volunteer coach. Thank you for that, by the way.

So please, again, if you have ideas, we have a school advisory council tonight. Hit me up anytime; my door is open.

MSgt Parrott: So I stand here as a representative, as a right. I also have a 15-year-old son, so I've been having a very difficult time with this situation. We want to get ahead of this as soon as possible. Because this is gonna go up quickly.

I haven't had to speak to the principal or to leadership yet. But I did want to also talk to address this situation. The reality of our situation. And it's 2023 and we're on a military installation, and this kind of stuff happens. It is not acceptable, right? And so, what I would like to convey to all is that we have representation and a way forward and to please understand that it is being handled.

And I will personally make sure that it goes as hard as it needs to go. So make sure you understand, and respect the process. I understand we're in the military, so we know that there are certain things that have to be done on both the DODEA front as well as the military front, and our leadership has our back. There's not a lot of things that can be said up here, but know that something is being done, and you have someone who also has a son that is in the same situation as other kids. So please note that this is being taken care of and I am as invested in this as you are, and it is not acceptable. I've been having a hard time of it, just as I'm sure a lot of y'all have. I'll talk to my son. This is the part I want to say.

So as soon as I talked to my son yesterday when he got home from school, “What's the word on the street? Like, what are you guys doing?” Oh, you know, he's telling me stuff that I could never see.

I would encourage you guys to make sure your kids stay away from all of this. Because regardless of what happens, if they choose to take matters into their own hands, they're going to be held accountable. I'm not going to say that's fair or not, but just know that there's talk. So please talk to your kids.

If you need somebody to talk to, I'm here, and just know that we're here. Encourage them to let the judicial system play out as it plays out and know that we're taking this seriously. ‘Kill’ is a strong word, 100%. And we know how it goes. She knows DODEA hopefully knows that we are we're taking it seriously as well. And that's really all I have to ask. If you guys want to talk to me, I'll also be at the school just providing additional education as well. But as you know that you have somebody on the wing team that also has a child within the schools, and that is as invested as you are.

Ch. Wiggins: Thanks for having us, and thanks for all in attendance. Back in January, I spoke at the MLK Remembrance Day, I had the opportunity to share a little bit about my upbringing and growing up in Alabama. And here are some of the things that I saw with some of the things that I experienced. So for me to hear about the video, to see it, I am disappointed. And yet, I'm not surprised. And so that kind of speaks to several things. Some of the questions that have been raised as far as what can be done, what is being done. I think one aspect is that we do have a community. We do have people; we do have students that recognized that this was happening. They took the video and they began to take it forward so that those individuals can be held accountable. And there will always be some things that we fail to do from whatever side, and that's what we can learn from and be better at it. So, some of the questions could some things have been done faster, better? I would say yes. In those situations, we could always say yes. A hopefully we are learning from those situations.

As I look around, we see a diverse crowd here, and we need each other to be able to bring about real change, specifically in a situation like this. I've seen it throughout my life. I've experienced it, been exposed to it. And my mom has also shared some things with me that changed my life as people were talking about the parenting and the household. That is an important piece. But something happened to me and the way my mom responded, it changed the perspective of me looking at me, loving me, working with me, supporting people in general. And I think each of you have that within you to be able to help to move this forward. And so we have to look to our left, to our right, those who work with when we see those things, we have to address them. And to me, that's the only and the best thing that's going to be done, because if we as a community begin to move against those things, that's the one of the – all the programming. There's tons of programs, tons of things that are out there, information, education, but we can't address the heart issue solely through program. And what we're dealing with here is a heart issue. I've seen it, I've lived it. I've also been able to overcome it and then find myself working with some of the greatest men and women in the United States. But we have to come together to be able to address this. So what can you do in your circle of influence to make a difference and to make things better? And so that's what I'm saying.

Col. Hauck: We will need to move forward as a community. It's not going to happen overnight, but we must do this as a community. It will take time to progress as a community.

We're on the same page. I appreciate that. And let's all think that way. But we're at our hour point. As I mentioned all of our counselors are walking over there, and I saw all of our MFLAC counselors sitting in the front row over here to my right. And then there's other resources throughout this room. So. If you all want, I'm going to hang out for a little bit longer, if you've got more things for me. We're going to be over at the school in about a half hour, so I won't have too long. But I thank you all for coming out. It shows that we care. It shows that we want to get better. It shows that we're concerned. It shows that we know that we're a community.