

Editorial

End fearmongering now

Let's say, for a moment, that Grant County had a sizable population of people who practiced the Muslim faith. In this imaginary world, we all live and work among these folks — they're our friends, our neighbors, they hold office and are the backbone of any number of community organizations. These folks are just like us, save for their Muslim faith, and have lived here for generations, with family roots that go back further than most.

Now let's imagine that elsewhere in the country, a group of militants who share one thing with our neighbors — their religion — disrupted a community and made headlines around the globe. Schools were closed, public meetings were canceled, and a shadow of fear about potential armed violence fell upon this rural community. It's hard to do, I know, but bear with us.

Immediately afterward, a couple of community organizations here plan an event demanding to know if the fact that there are some Muslims here means that our community will be the next to suffer a disruption — and what our plans are to deal with such an eventuality.

Somehow, the folks who last week were our friends and neighbors have become an "other" that we must fortify ourselves against. What if they invite their radical counterparts here? What if we're next? *What about the children?*

In this alternate reality, this newspaper would rightly decry that kind of fearmongering — scapegoating and stereotyping a segment of this community on the basis of something some barely-related group of people did elsewhere. We expect that most of Grant County would join us in that condemnation, because this is a tight-knit place that knows and trusts its neighbors — the kind of trust built and nurtured over generations.

We have our problems, sure, but we know how to come together and solve them when it counts.

Tonight, back in the real world, the Gila Resources Information Project and Gila/Mimbres Community Radio are holding a "community conversation" around the question "Will Silver City be the Next Burns, Oregon?"

Should Grant County be prepared for emergencies of all sorts? Absolutely — and we are.

Should we constantly work to better know our neighbors, especially those with different backgrounds and beliefs? You bet.

But what we should not do is sow seeds of mistrust and suspicion under the guise of "awareness."