

Like many of my fellow Missoulians, I'm damn tired of bad news, lingering controversy and gray skies.

I'm heartbroken knowing that women in my community suffer at the hands of violent men, that some have lost faith in the systems that should be protecting and defending them, that despite what we believe are our best efforts, terrible things continue to happen to fine people.

I'm sad that instead of talking with the national media about what a wonderful place Missoula is, I've been telling them what I think about being part of a federal civil rights investigation. I've been answering questions no mayor – no citizen – wants to answer about the city he or she loves.

I'm weary of having to comfort smart folks doing great things in our community by reminding them that criticism is part of leadership, that they shouldn't give up, that it's worth it.

And I am done with the rain and the clouds and the cold.

It's been a rough go for Missoula lately.

But I don't have the luxury of giving in to weariness or sorrow or frustration and I won't.

For every person who commits an act of violence in our community, thousands would stand up to protect, defend, nurture and heal the victim. Thousands more would never dream of acting violently, cruelly, maliciously.

As the U.S. Department of Justice conducts an investigation into the patterns and practices of our police department as part of a larger inquiry, I know that the 98 women and men of the Missoula Police Department who are sworn to protect and serve our families, friends and neighbors will continue to do their duty with professionalism, pride and courage. There may be victims we have failed, but the real failure lies in denying our willingness and capacity to improve, grow and change for the better. And while I have faith the investigation will prove we're pretty good at what we do, whatever the outcome, it can only make us better. And I want Missoula to be a model that the federal government can point to when a community needs to know how to do things the right way.

When I talk to the national and local press, I'll be candid and truthful about the issues, but I'll defend Missoula against allegations that are just plain wrong and I won't allow our city to be defined by a fleeting headline, a pithy sound bite or snarky tweet. I'll remind them that most mornings, most Missoulians wake up living a place they love and care about. It ain't perfect, but it's our home.

And when folks I work with read that they're not working hard enough on creating jobs, I'll remind them that they're building an organization from the ground up, the work is hard, and no one else was doing it before they showed up. I'll remind them that if you're not facing some criticism, you're probably not doing anything. And I'll remind them that some criticism can be constructive. Again, we can do better.

When I hear that local government's not working hard enough to cut spending, I'll defend local taxes as a duty and investment we share, not a burden, while reminding folks that we have tightened our belts, cut spending, reduced staff through attrition and continue to make changes to the way we serve our

citizens that save money every day. And I'll remind citizens that one taxpayer's frill is another's necessity, and that I and the Missoula City Council need to balance those interests. And I'll remind folks that I'm not just the mayor, I'm a citizen of Missoula, born, reared and never left. I live the consequences of my actions and will continue to do so long after others enjoy the privilege, responsibility and rewards of this job.

We are not defined by the actions of a few, by controversy or our failures. Rather, we are defined by how we rise to the occasion, meet adversity with our better nature, acknowledge weakness and apply strength with an equal measure of compassion.

We are Missoula, Montana, a great, not perfect, place. And we're getting better.

Bring on the sunshine.