



A response to Fox News' coverage of the Race and Social Justice Initiative

On February 28, 2011 Fox News commentator Megyn Kelly spoke about the City of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative. In a lengthy monologue that was picked up by the national blogosphere, Kelly made a number of untrue assertions. For example:

In Seattle,

White people go to jail; people of color go free!

Jobs that require college degrees are racist!

Seattle doesn't prosecute laws when people of color break them!

Outrageous claims – if they were true.

Of course, they're completely false.

Seattle City Attorney Peter Holmes went on Kelly's show on March 1 to provide accurate information about the City of Seattle's work for racial equity. [You can view that exchange here.](#)

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights also wants to address Kelly's inaccurate information.

Kelly: *"The city's web site in Seattle claims that jobs that require college degrees ... are racist! Because more white people go to college."*

The Race and Social Justice initiative is looking at City of Seattle job requirements that put undue emphasis on college degrees over work experience. The key words are "undue emphasis." Many jobs require college degrees at the expense of hands-on work experience. The fact is, access to higher education is simply not equitable. Many people of color don't have a fair shot at going to college – for that matter, neither do a lot of white people. What's wrong with taking a look at job requirements in city government so folks with good work experience can qualify for a good job?

Kelly: *"They are also openly admitting to requesting less jail time for illegal immigrants who are arrested for crimes because they want to prevent the feds from deporting them."*

The City's policy of requesting 364-day sentences is universal and applies without regard to citizenship or residency status. We do not take immigration status into account when requesting sentences. In addition to equalizing treatment of citizens and noncitizens, the purpose of our 364-day sentencing policy is to prevent **legal** immigrants from being deported for certain misdemeanor convictions. Also, the Washington State Senate has followed our lead to approve a bill making 364-day sentences the routine for misdemeanors.

Kelly: *"One of the things that tipped off this cop who wrote the letter that started it off was they are not prosecuting certain small crimes, certain traffic offenses, in particular, and alcohol offenses because they believe that more minorities are being picked up."*

The City of Seattle has not changed our prosecution of alcohol offenses based on race or racial disparities.

Kelly: *"You've got a third degree traffic offense. You pull over the driver. He is a minority. Don't give him a citation, and don't arrest him. But if it's a white guy, take him down to jail."*

Neither police nor prosecutors are permitted to treat drivers or other defendants differently based on race. Furthermore, anytime a driver may be subject to a Driving with License Suspended 3 (DWLS 3) charge, the officers are instructed to fill out a police report and send it to the City Attorney's office so they can determine whether or not to file charges. They make this determination based on defined, race-neutral criteria.

Kelly: *"City prosecutors have also stopped enforcing certain traffic and drug laws because they feel that they're too harsh on minorities."*

Here's the reality: our criminal justice system unfairly impacts people of color at every step of the process. That's true nationally; it's also true in Seattle. The City of Seattle has reduced prosecutions of charges of DWLS 3 due to both budgetary concerns and concerns that it's a very low-level crime that disproportionately impacts people of color. **Seattle has not stopped prosecuting DWLS 3**, and **no** individual charging decisions take race into account. Seattle has not stopped enforcing any other type of law.

The City of Seattle is proud of our work to achieve racial equity. This long-term effort has the strong support of every elected official in City government. We welcome open, frank discussion of our efforts. That's why we're taking this unusual step to refute Fox News' inflammatory rhetoric.

To learn more about the Race and Social Justice Initiative, please visit www.seattle.gov/rsji.