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Letter to the editor: Tenino deserves better leadership

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I've reached my breaking point.

After eight years serving on the Tenino City Council, I've seen our community through challenges and triumphs but never have I witnessed such dysfunction, lack of transparency, poor process, disrespect and lack of leadership as we're seeing today under Mayor Dave Watterson.

Our city is adrift.

We are mere weeks from the end of 2025, and Tenino still hasn't begun the months-long process required to adopt a budget. The mayor is nowhere to be found when it comes to doing the hard work of governance. Yet, somehow, he always finds time to post online, often to mock, attack or belittle others who have differing views than him. When you govern, you govern for all and not just those who agree with you.

Recently, Mayor Watterson crossed a line no public official should ever cross. He posted online making fun of the widow of a man who was recently killed, an act that was not only cruel but deeply shameful.

Charlie Kirk's death was tragic. His widow, Erika, is enduring unimaginable grief. Instead of showing compassion or respect, the mayor has chosen to ridicule her publicly. This comes after his earlier refusal to lower the city flag in honor of Mr. Kirk's passing.

That's not leadership. It's cruelty.

Our mayor's behavior reflects everything that is wrong with our politics today: people twisting small details into hateful narratives, attacking those they don't understand and mistaking cruelty for courage. You don't have to know someone personally to show empathy. You don't have to agree with someone to treat them with dignity.

Tenino deserves better. Our residents deserve leaders who focus on fixing problems, not stirring up drama. They deserve leaders who lead with integrity, not cynicism.

Mayor Watterson, you've embarrassed this city long enough. You've disrespected the people you were elected to serve, and you've undermined the very decency that holds our small community together.

If you care at all about Tenino, or about basic human compassion, then do the right thing and resign. Step aside and let this city heal.

Tenino is better than this. It's time our leadership reflected that.

Jason Lawton

Tenino city councilor