

Albeiro "Al" Florez
We're All in This Together.

By Daniel Montoya

Originally from El Salvador, Albeiro Florez spent eleven years in the Armed Forces. Feeling welcome in the city, he and his family decided to make Fayetteville their home in 2014.

"I've always enjoyed working in the community, helping others," he says from his Cumberland County office, where he works as an Applications Development Manager. "I like to leave the place where I live better than when I found it. With three children and a wife, the community is my priority. I want this to be a place that my children are proud of."

That attachment to the collective is evident in the list of boards and committees in which Albeiro has participated. Among them: Armed Forces YMCA, Latinos Unidos para el Progreso, WorkForce Development, Arts Council of Fayetteville and Cumberland, and the Governor's Advisory Committee on Latino Affairs.

"All these boards are very different, he says, but most are local, based on that principle of helping the community."

Discussing the pandemic, Albeiro states that many areas need improvement. Quoting Dr. Jennifer Green, Director of the Cumberland Department of Health, she mentions health disparities, lack of equitably distributed resources. "The pandemic affects us Latinos more, but there are no resources for the people." According to NCHHS data, 40% of cases include Hispanics in NC.

"Currently, there is a lot of pressure from the media and a lot of discussions, but if you have to wear a mask, it is for the common good," insists Albeiro.

"We must understand: all laws are born from a time where they were necessary—for example, the use of a seat belt. Today nobody complains about having to wear a belt, and it is something more restrictive than a mask, but people do it because they know the consequences."

Albeiro hopes that people will take the pandemic more seriously. "This is a general problem that affects us all."

You will remember Albeiro as the one who stood in the North Carolina House of Representatives elections representing District 45. He lost in the November 6, 2018, general election to John Szoka.

Albeiro laughs when I ask him about his experience as a candidate. He remembers that everything was tough. From the beginning, there were threats, late-night calls to the house,

foul play. He doesn't complain about all the work associated with that choice, "because everything important requires work," he says. You have to focus on why and by whom you do it; know what your principles are."

Today, however, Albeiro says he is satisfied with the results. "It was my first time participating in politics. No one had run against Szoka, and I got 42% of the vote." On a personal level, it feels like an unparalleled success.

"People must understand that they have influence in hand and vote. Latinos have power, but people don't vote, out of fear or lack of information ". In this way, they give politicians a free pass to ignore the Latino vote.

One of the issues that touch him closely, as a parent, is education. "There is a lot of outrage against the School Council, he indicates, since face-to-face classes are still suspended." Parents find themselves at the crossroads of guiding their children through schoolwork while, at the same time, taking care of their work obligations.

"The problem, says Albeiro, is that we don't understand the nature of the epidemic, which is contagion. Lack of resources does not help to start classes healthily. I want my children to go to school, but to go safely. I don't just want them to go back to school because they got bored of being home. "

Asked about the future, Albeiro indicates: "I intend to go back to my roots, begin to get involved in the community, more as an activist, not so much as a politician. Many things affect us, which comes from extreme partisanship, which uses people's principles as a lever to produce positive change. "

Albeiro repeats that it is necessary to make the young generations understand the importance of voting. "It is important not to preach the ideology of a party, but to understand what its civil rights are. People must realize that one vote for president and a cabinet will accompany him, not forgetting governors and senators. Local elections are the ones that affect us the most. But only 10% of the electorate vote."

Albeiro knows that, as humans, we can adapt. "God gave us this ability that other creatures don't have. We must understand that we are in this together, as citizens, parents, or students."