

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Throwing stones at a glass house

Lost in the maelstrom of the ethical firestorm of "daquirigate" as the media termed the situation surrounding the alleged transgressions by Clark County Commission Chairwoman Yvonne Atkinson Gates to use her position to get leases in casinos she regulates — are dozens of other issues: whether the case smacked of racial innuendo, media overhype, little reporting of new or consequential information, convicting in print, possible ethics violations by at least four other county commissioners, among other things.

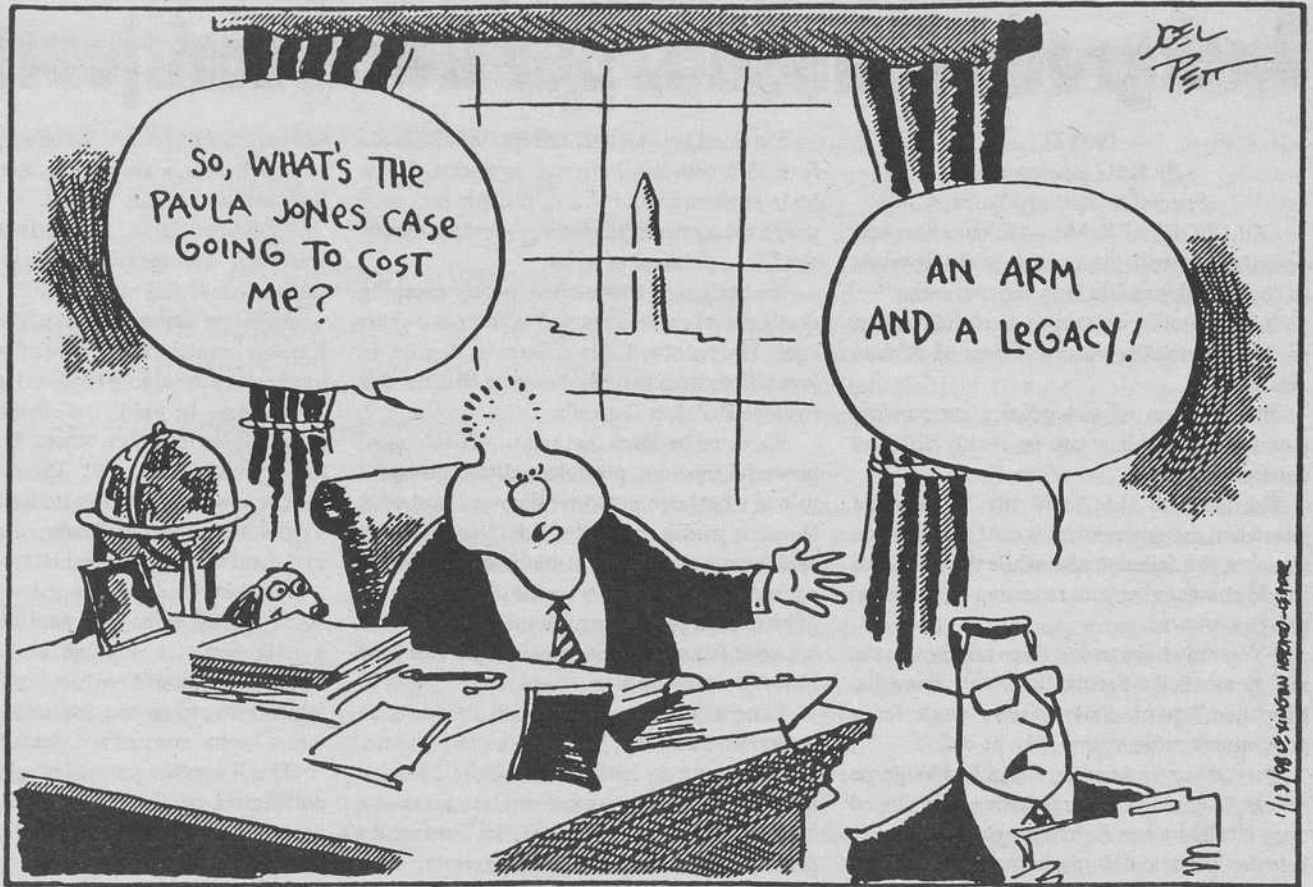
But the most perplexing issue, in our view, concerns Ethics Chairwoman Mary Eileen Boestch and her travails with Washoe County law enforcement. Boestch was arrested by a Nevada Highway Patrol officer for driving under the influence. The last time we checked, drunken driving was a crime, punishable by fine, community service, but most importantly jail time. Boestch pleaded guilty, paid the fine and summarily avoided jail time.

What about Boestch's ethics? Boestch, who ruled on for the majority in finding Atkinson Gates guilty of using her power to broker deals for her daquiri business in casinos she regulates, had more than the legal .10 blood alcohol limit, according to a copy of a Justice Court of Reno Township report. She committed a crime; there is nothing ethical about that.

Debate to your heart's content that Atkinson Gates, whose alleged sins fall in the ethical, not judicial realm, knows better than to wield her influence to muscle in on business perks, but it still does not dismiss the fact that Boestch committed a far worse grievance.

Boestch roundly denounced Atkinson Gates in the media and vehemently pressed her and her partner Ed Nigro about the case, giving the appearance she stood on some moral high ground. We're not saying Boestch is not qualified or does not deserve to be on the commission, but that the same boo birds who wailed for Atkinson Gates to resign given possible ethical lapses, then they should have circled the wagons and brought out the heavy artillery to ask Boestch to step down.

In response to coverage of the affair — and to R-J Editor Thomas Mitchell — Blacks don't necessarily ascribe to a conspiracy theory when we think something is wrong, but given history, can you blame us? Also, it is incomprehensible to us that much of what was reported offered little new information. The word news contains the root new. If there is nothing new to report, don't.



Bunking children with adult offenders is wrong

Special to Sentinel-Voice

If one wants to reduce the incidence of juvenile crime, does it make sense to put young people convicted of — or merely charged with — wrongdoing in jails and prisons with adult offenders?

Children in adult jails are five times more likely to be sexually assaulted than those in juvenile facilities. Children in adult jails are two times more likely to be assaulted by staff, and are one-and-a-half times more likely to be attacked with a weapon than children in juvenile facilities. Children in adult jails are eight times more likely to commit suicide.

And we can add that children in adult jails are far more likely to get from adult jailmates the kind of "schooling" and "counseling" that will produce more, not less crime.

Yet, some in Congress want to increase this pernicious practice. They are supporting a bill in the Senate — S.10, The Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act — that would expand the number of children put in jails and prisons with adults with little or no protection from the adult population. The measure has already passed the House of Representatives, so the danger it presents is real and looming.

Two stalwart advocates for children, Marian Wright Edelman, the founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, and Barbara Kelley-Sease, director of the Black Community Crusade for Children, are leading an effort to defeat this ominous measure.

They set Tuesday aside for a concentrated, visible lobbying effort on Capitol Hill against the bill.

The danger the bill presents

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League



is most starkly apparent in the stunning racial disparities of who goes to jail in America — disparities within the nation's 1.7-million inmate population which this bill would inexorably increase.

According to federal data, the number of white inmates in jails more than doubled between 1978 and 1994, rising from more than 89,000 to nearly 184,000.

But even that worrisome increase was far outstripped in percentage terms by the increases in the jails' Hispanic and black populations: the number of Hispanics shot up from about 16,000 to more than 75,000, and the number of blacks skyrocketed from just over 65,000 to more than 206,000.

These increases have been largely driven, first, by the draconian drug laws of the '70s and '80s — which many criminal justice experts contend have merely filled up the jails and prisons without denting the trafficking and use of illegal drugs.

And secondly, by the racial bias throughout the criminal justice system which results in blacks and Hispanics getting jail time for the same offenses for which whites are given probation or lesser sentences.

The racial disparity in incarceration of adults is

present in the juvenile system, too. African-American and Hispanic-American children are far more likely than white children to be arrested, convicted and turned over to the adult criminal system.

Although black children constitute about 14 percent of all American children, they make up 50 percent of all children arrested for violent crime, more than 50 percent of those transferred to adult court and 40 percent of children in custody. As a group, minority children make up 68 percent of the children in public custody facilities, where they outnumber white children 2 to 1. Thus, African-Americans have a special incentive to protest this bill.

But, in fact, all of society will suffer from it. America

cannot afford — spiritually, socially, and economically — to pretend the crime problem will just go away if it locks up millions of its citizens.

We know that the tough-talk posturing of politicians afraid of seeming "soft" on crime won't solve the revolving-door crime problem. Nor will the self-interested exhortations of the prison lobby to build more and more prisons.

By contrast, we know that schools that engage the intellects of their students do help reduce juvenile crime. So, too, do after-school programs that put youngsters in touch with caring adults who can help them discover their positive interests and talents.

We know that intensive, multi-faceted public agency-private agency efforts, such as the one Boston's civic leaders fashioned several years ago, have worked to dramatic effect.

All of these efforts have one central message: they say that we will make every effort to do our best by every child. No children will be left behind in harm's way.

That is why Senate bill S.10 must be defeated. For America's sake, we must leave no child behind.

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