

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Judge's ruling should send message to all government officials

Clark County Commissioner Yvonne Atkinson Gates received great news over the weekend when District Judge Jerome Polaha ruled that she did not illegally help friends win lucrative concession contracts at McCarran International Airport.

The visiting Washoe County judge ruled that the ethics law — which prohibits a public official from providing assistance to family members or persons with whom there is a business relationship — was vague in many respects and confounded lawmakers. The judge said the Ethics Commission improperly expanded the scope of the people public officials are prohibited from assisting and concluded that the Legislature stopped short of expanding that list to include friends.

"While the Legislature may have intended to include friendships and other relationships (in the ethics laws), it has failed to do so in the 22 years since the law was passed," Polaha wrote in his decision.

In his ruling, Polaha stated, "It must be understood that this court is in no manner endorsing the actions of Gates. These actions disrupted and bypassed a system for choosing concessionaires that was put in place specifically to eliminate behavior like that of Gates. These actions also brought the entire Clark County Commission, and public employees in general, into disrepute with the public."

The judge pointed out that Atkinson Gates bore some of the blame for the 2-year legal battle. Recommending friends for airport concessions did "not rise to a level of ethical purity the public would like to see," the judge wrote, adding that there are ethical limits to favoritism.

The fiasco surrounding Airportgate tarred the reputation of the commissioner. It also resulted in a slew of 4-0, 3-0 votes on important issues, as public officials were in limbo as to whether they should abstain from voting on a particular issue or disclose their ties to participants in a particular issue. (Since the Ethics Commission ruled Atkinson Gates' action weren't willful, she was not fined or sanctioned).

As expected, Atkinson Gates welcomes the ruling, as should all public officials who want to remove the ambiguity regarding abstaining and disclosure. While Judge Polaha's ruling allows Atkinson Gates to regain lost support, it should send a message to public officials that ethics reform is needed and vital if they want to restore public confidence in their government leaders.

City and county legal staff need to be involved in revamping ethic codes in order to ensure compliance. Public officials rely on staff counsel, and too often that's been a crutch to excuse what could be illegal behavior. The governments should then meet with state lawmakers to clarify the list of people public officials are prohibited from assisting.

The ruling was a victory for Atkinson Gates. Whether it's a victory for constituents depends on public officials.

GEORGE W... SON... WHAT WILL YOU SAY 25 YEARS FROM NOW WHEN FOLKS ASK ABOUT THE VISION THING?



Demand for black actors misses picture

Blacks must demand quality African-American programming

Dr. Rainier Spencer
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The NAACP has made headlines recently through complaints that network television does not contain enough Afro-American actors. In other words, network television is too "white."

Apparently, at least some television executive have taken notice of these complaints and of the organization's threat to target a network for boycotting this fall. As a result, it seems that some shows are darkening-up via the addition of a black face here and there throughout the fall line-ups. But is this really progress?

Surely, mere tokenism is not what the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People hoped to accomplish; but realistically that is all that is likely to happen: a few more darker faces spliced onto shows that didn't even consider Afro-American characters until a few weeks ago.

The real problem is not the lack of black characters, but the lack of good television at all. Indeed, perhaps we should be grateful that so many of these awful programs have no black characters.

Of course everyone agrees that too much television is very bad these days. But the argument is made that we still have to have black actors even

on the bad shows, so that there are black role models for young Afro-American viewers. This argument may sound good, but it really doesn't hold any water.

Psychologists today will try to convince you that unless black children see black role models on television they won't be motivated to achieve their full potential. But if this is true, how did black professionals and the black middle-class of today even come into existence?

Except for the fields of sports and music, my friends and I never had ANY black role models growing up. Most of the shows we watched had no black characters at all; and with the notable exception of "I Spy" the few that did have some blacks never featured them in major roles.

Yet, we watched "Dr. Kildare" and "Ben Casey" and wanted to become doctors—not white doctors, but doctors. We watched "Dragnet" and "Adam-12" and wanted to become police officers—not white police officers, but police officers.

An entire generation of high-achieving Afro-Americans established themselves without the benefit of racial role models, and they did a fine job of it. Today's psychologists are just plain wrong. In fact, if a particular black child isn't going to be motivated to achieve his full potential if a

white character is playing a role on television, then that same child won't be motivated by a black character either.

All of this is not to say that it doesn't matter that there are so few black characters on television. Of course, it matters, but not for reasons of racial role-modeling.

It matters because the current state of affairs says some significant things about upper-level management in the television industry. This is why the NAACP's campaign will accomplish no more than slightly enlarging the number of token Afro-American characters on network television. This is why the campaign misses the point. Instead of black characters on bad white shows, a better goal to strive for would be excellent black shows.

Some shows just have that special something that sets them apart from the rest and

gives them a place in television history. "The Cosby Show" had it. "Seinfeld" had it. So did "Barney Miller" and "I Spy." The critical ingredients were good writing, intelligence, wit, and an attitude that challenged rather than played down to the audience. There are Afro-American writers and producers who can put shows like this on the air, but they can't get them on the network line-ups.

This is what the NAACP should be pushing, rather than enhanced tokenism. If it put its considerable muscle behind producing a truly outstanding Afro-American program, the networks soon would come begging to put it on commercial television.

It's all about demanding excellence and accepting nothing less. The bottom line is this: as long as we are satisfied with "Martin," it's Martin that we will get. We can do better than that.

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