

COMMENTARY

Diversity: Right, wrong moves

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Thus far, the year 2001 has come to represent a two-step dance. It seems like every time a government agency, business entity or community organization takes a step in the right direction, invariably another agency, business or organization will take a step in the wrong direction.

Put your dancing shoes on, in order that you may follow along with twelve alternating steps in the right and wrong directions, thus placing you in the same position as when you started. Grab your partner and here we go!

Our national political leaders have done a good job building the case for national unity during a time when there exists a clear and present danger to our country. A step in the right direction!

Locally, our county commissioners, city council members and selected members of the board of directors of community-based organizations, continue to engage in influence peddling and collusion in the appointment of persons to executive level positions and the award of publicly funded contracts. A step in the wrong direction!

Governor Kenny Guinn undertook a fundamental review of how the state is governed, as well as how it generates revenue through its tax policy. A step in the right direction!

The police department refused to record the names of officers as part of study to



LOUIE OVERSTREET

determine which officers engage in racial profiling in when they make traffic stops. A step in the wrong direction!

Black and Brown community organizations pledging to work together for political, educational and community empowerment issues—a step in the right direction!

The national president of the NAACP suspending the charter of the Las Vegas Branch, NAACP, in violation of the due process provisions of its own by-laws—for an organization whose agenda is based on begging the system to be fair to persons of color, this is definitely a step in the wrong direction.

The Urban Chamber establishing a Blue Ribbon Committee on Race, as well as receiving the support of Mayor Goodman to develop a set of recommendations to improve race relations in Greater Las Vegas is a welcome occurrence. A step in the right direction!

The Clark County School District Board of Trustees failing to provide equity in educational opportunities for students living in low-income neighborhoods, as evidenced by the disparity in programs and facilities available to these students. A step in the wrong direction!

A number of businesses are now promoting programs of diversity as a valuable and needed accommodation to the changing nature of the workforce in America. A step in the right direction!

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War against terrorism, battle against drugs share fates

By Emory Curtis

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The U. S. War on Terrorism joins the War on Drugs as ventures with similar international goals—wiping out international terrorists and drug-traffickers. For the old War on Drugs, reaching that goal has been as difficult as reaching a mirage in the desert. The same problem faces the new War on Terrorism.

The War on Terrorism's goal is to stop disgruntled groups from ganging up and committing lethal acts against us here and abroad; the War on Drugs has the goal of stopping the use of illegal drugs in this country by stopping the drugs before they can get here. Interestingly, the home grown elements expand the problems for both wars.

From the looks of the data in the "2001 Annual Report of the Office of National Drug Control Policy," the War on Drugs has a long way to go before the desert mirage of an oasis they now see as a goal turns out to be an actual oasis on the desert horizon.

In 1992, the government reported that about 14.8 mil-

lion residents 12 years old or older used some illegal drug during the past month; in 1992, the number was 12 million. That data on drug use was derived from the regular extensive National Household Survey on Drug Abuse conducted by the government. The results from that survey shows that drug use has remained relatively constant for the past nine years.

That data looks high but actually, it is probably low. It depends on survey respondents honestly reporting on their own use of illegal drugs to a stranger with a clipboard who is being paid by the government. Under those circumstances, if the respondent admits to using illegal drugs, the tendency will be to admit to a reduced frequency or amount than the respondent actually uses.

During that same time period the number of drug-induced deaths rose from 11,703 to 16,926. Also, the number of drug-related emergency department calls about doubled to 554,932. From those numbers, the number of drug users increased faster than the household survey

indicated.

If there is an increase in the number of OD's showing up for emergency treatment, a logical inference is that there were more taking drugs. The same is true for the increase in drug-induced deaths.

Those numbers are not faked. Showing up at the emergency department for treatment is not done for fun—the problem is real. Also, the dead don't control the doctors who make out the death certificate.

While the user numbers, from surveys or medical reports, increased, government spending to fight the War on Drugs increased at a faster rate. In Fiscal Year 1992 the U. S. budgeted \$11.9 billion for the War on Drugs. The budget for fy2000 increased to \$6.9 billion over the 1992 figure. That's a 58 percent increase.

Meanwhile, according to the War on Drugs own numbers, the average wholesale and retail price for cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine (locally produced) all were reduced over that same period. According

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Rep. Barbara Lee deserves kudos for her anti-war vote

By Ronald Walters

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It is well known by now that Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., was the only person to vote against Joint Resolution 23, passed in the House and Senate unanimously, which authorized George Bush to use force in pursuit those who attacked the United States on Sept. 11. In her statement explaining her vote, she said she had grave and serious reservations about giving the President unlimited authority to use force without further consent of the Congress. Moreover, in later statements in her district, she also expressed misgivings about the extent to which a policy of force could provide the security that Americans needed and which the government ostensibly was seeking on their behalf.

Lee is no "Johnny-come-lately" to such issues, since she was an aide to Ronald Dellums when he served in Congress representing the same district. Dellums was a stalwart ally in the peace movement and similarly a bulwark against the war policy of the Vietnam era and afterward. When he served as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Lee was one of his key staff assistants and strategists. So as Dellums opposed the militarization of vital international conflicts, Lee has adopted that same mantle.

The resolution Lee opposed was based on the 1973 War Powers Act. It prohibits the President from waging war for more than 60 days without seeking explicit Congressional approval. Passed in the Vietnam era, it ex-

pressed the determination of the Congress not to grant any other President the license to involve the country in another unlimited military action without the approval of the people. The Congress spoke again on the issue in 1982, when it passed the Boland Amendment, limiting the actions of the chief executive when the Reagan administration began to support the Contras in Nicaragua who were attempting to overthrow the government. President Reagan's determination not to be stopped by Congress from supporting the Contras resulted in the secret war run by CIA operative Col. Oliver North, financed with illegal funds.

Reagan's war against the Sandinistas who controlled Nicaragua is an example of the combination of an anti-communist ideology and a security agency run amuck. This is similarly a great danger today. Barbara Lee's action has called attention to the potential downside of the rabid ideology of anti-terrorism. It is busy poisoning the body politic by forcing a one-sided view of patriotism upon many people, stifling debate about policy on the grounds that to hesitate to approve of a military strategy as the only response is "unpatriotic."

Strangely similar to the security mania that drove the anti-communists during the Reagan era, SJ Res. 23 has unleashed the Bush administration to do whatever damage it can in the name of anti-terrorism. An example is the misnamed "Patriot Act" now under consideration by the House and Senate that, in an attempt to give broader surveil-

lance powers over terrorists to the Justice Department, would compromise the rights of American citizens.

This bill would expand the powers of the Justice Department, for example, to direct wire taps to a person and whatever phone is utilized, rather than to a specific phone number.

This means that many numbers of innocent citizens would likely be exposed, as would e-mail messages if the department gets the right to obtain the addresses used by those suspected of terrorism or associated with them. It also would confer upon the attorney general the power to detain suspected immigrants for an unlimited period.

Lee's Congressional Black Caucus colleagues held the annual set of forums, amid demands the event be cancelled. Neverthe-

less, it was fortunate that it was held because Black people needed the opportunity to deconstruct what had happened and to develop some common themes of response. Lee's theme of caution was echoed in a special town hall meeting, organized by Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.), featured former Assistant Attorney General Eric Holder, former Ambassador Andrew Young, retired Gen. Julius Becton, psychiatrist Carlotta Miles and others. They sounded the theme that Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) found in his district: shock, outrage and also caution. I believe this warranted because ultimately caution will yield to reason and reason to the truth.

Dr. Ronald Walters, a political science professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, is the co-author of "African-American Leadership."

Prize

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Each affiliate offers technology training and on-line courses so that residents in these areas, too, can join in the information superhighway and have a fighting chance to build a viable future.

Microsoft's new grant, coupled with its previous support, means that 73 affiliates will now have Digital Campuses sponsored by the company (An additional 25 affiliates have technology centers that are funded by other sources.) that offer training in the latest MS software titles for adults and teens.

Now, more of our affiliates will be able to train unemployed and under-employed individuals in such areas as computer literacy, MS software titles, A+ certification, and web site design.

Now, more Urban League affiliates can mount preschool, child development and after-school programs that utilize the MS titles to engage children and teens in computer related activities that help them learn how to use the latest software available.

The broader goal these pursuits embody — that of joining the American mainstream — is always worth fighting for.