

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Patience needed on school reform

In October, higher education officials proffered a plan to lift the academic profile of the state's two universities: increase freshman admissions standards from a 2.5 grade point average to a 3.0 grade-point by 2005.

In the months hence, opponents of the policy change have soundly criticized it as elitist and misguided. They say it unfairly penalizes minority students, who already suffer from educational inequities, especially in the Clark County School District.

Two public forums on the issue have yielded generous debate on the topic. Although the student government at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas overwhelmingly supports the proposal—anything that adds value to their degrees it worthwhile, senators say—an undercurrent of opposition has arisen, with many students cautioning that increasing standards too quickly could spark an exodus of student to other states with more lenient eligibility criteria.

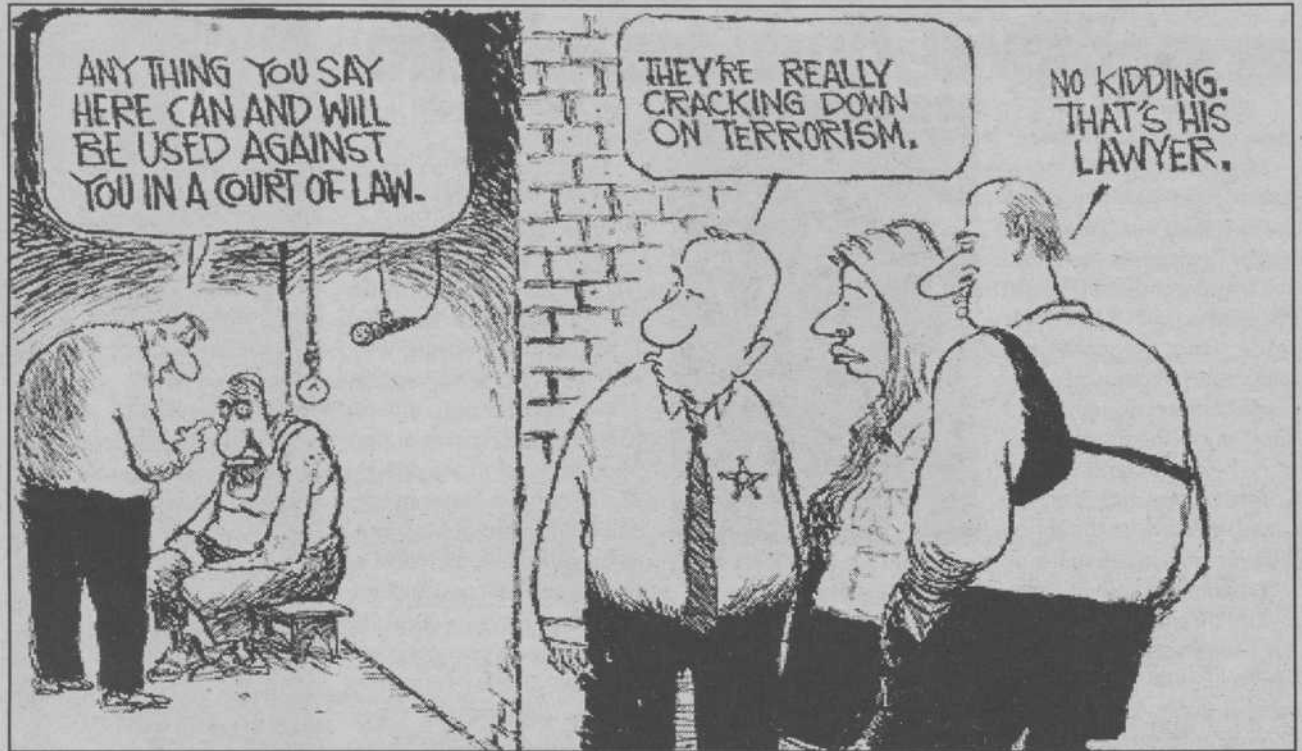
The Sentinel-Voice supports the efforts to bolster the education offered at Nevada universities; such a move only helps the state, as more of the collegians produced would likely remain in Nevada, thereby giving the state an increasingly educated populace. But it's the timeline that's troublesome.

Under the plan, the GPA requirement would increase to 2.75 by 2003 and to 3.0 by 2005. Moving so quickly could spell trouble. Look no further than to Nevada's current state of educational affairs for proof. The state has chronically underspent on educational resources for its students—Nevada's per-pupil spending is roughly \$1,000 below the national average. And there are a slew of other factors to consider: nearly 50 percent of the state's students are minorities; a growing segment of the student population is comprised of English-as-a-second-language learners; educational inequities still exist—especially in schools with large minority student populations; there remains those proficiency tests, which many educators and activists claim are biased. Taken together, these issues can't be resolved in one year—just about the time the initial GPA hike will be phased in. And three years doesn't appear to be enough time for teachers, administrators, school districts and the state's public education system to prepare students to meet the 3.0 threshold.

As such, extending the timeline would seem to be a win-win situation. Indeed, even opponents of the plan agree that K-12 education needs to be drastically improved and that the entire state would benefit better universities—another theory is that many of the nation's brightest students, attracted by the universities rigorous curriculum, would anchor permanently in Nevada after matriculation.

Thus, the state should be given until 2004 to do a top-to-bottom revamp of public education. Once done, then implement the 2.75 GPA hike and evaluate its effects to 2006. Based on those results, phase in the 3.0 in 2008 and conduct a similar analysis. This seems a more fair way to enact change. It's also a method backed by higher education groups like the American Council on Education in Washington, D.C.

Hopefully, the Board of Regents will consider this when it meets next Thursday and Friday in Las Vegas to vote on the plan. If implemented too quickly, the plan could indeed have a detrimental effect in the near term on unprepared students who, contrary to the views of some of the plan's backers, deserve a chance at college.



Just say no to racial profiling

Special to Sentinel-Voice

It's only natural that after the devastating attacks of September 11 on two of the most prominent modern-day symbols of America and the deaths of thousands of innocents people, the American people would demand not only retribution against the guilty but that steps be taken to prevent such horrific crimes from ever happening again.

This response is, to repeat, understandable, and justifiable, and necessary. It's necessary for the safety of America's people, and for the safety of the entire global community. The terrorism that showed itself in the attacks against the world trade center and the pentagon is an extreme form of lawlessness that must be defeated.

As Tom Segev, an Israeli newspaper columnist discussing the Israeli experience in dealing with terrorism, recently wrote in the *Washington Post*, terrorism "is the main enemy of democratic values and civil liberties."

But the unavoidable curtailing of some of the conveniences, openness, and even civil liberties we Americans have known until now taken for granted are tasks that must be done with the greatest care.

These are tasks that all Americans should rightly regard with the most questioning scrutiny as well, for as Segev went on to warn, "curbs on civil liberties rarely turn out to be temporary, even if intended to be: they are all too easily introduced but very difficult to get rid of."

That reality is one reason some Americans have ques-

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
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tioned and opposed outright certain policies the Bush Administration has proposed that would alter longstanding civil liberties. And it is one reason we at National Urban League continue to oppose any resort to racial profiling in the effort to determine whether more terrorists of Arabic extraction exists among us.

We have written numerous times before that racial or ethnic or religious profiling is patently unfair in its blunt assertion that the criminal actions of some individuals are all that's necessary to cast the stigma of suspicion over an entire group.

It is wrong for law enforcement officers and agencies to use racial profiling to unlawfully stop African Americans and Latino Americans who've done nothing to indicate they have committed or are about to commit a crime.

And it's wrong for the federal government to now use the fact of some individuals' Arabic descent to engage in what one critic called a "fishing expedition" among men of Arabic descent, in this country.

Attorney General John Ashcroft earlier this month said federal officials wanted to question 5,000 men of

middle eastern descent who had arrived in America within the last two years to determine if they have any information useful to the government's pursuit of terrorists. Mr. Ashcroft said the questioning would be "voluntary," but that this idea is deeply problematic quickly became apparent.

As the New York Times reported recently, not only civil libertarians but a number of police chiefs around the country-local police departments would play a major role in identifying men of Arabic descent in their areas-have said the plan raises concerns about racial profiling and civil liberties.

Ken Yarbrough, police chief in Richardson, Texas, a Dallas suburb, said that state law requires officers to have

reasonable suspicion to question individuals. Without it, such interviews must be voluntary. "There is going to be some heartburn on the part of police chiefs to take on this role because this is not how we usually do business," he went on, and wondered what was to happen when those being questioned stopped giving their "consent."

Andrew Kirkland, the acting chief of the Portland, Oregon police department, said they could not participate because immigrants simply because they are immigrants violates Oregon Law. "If the F.B.I. has something specific about a crime they are investigating, or a potential crime that these people might commit, then we would reconsider."

Charles Wilson, chief of the police department in Detroit, whose metropolitan area has a large Arab- American community that is decades old, was the most blunt in the Constitution and the state constitution and our municipal law," he said, and added that he did not want his officers to "go out and treat people like criminals."

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