

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Scores demand more GPA talks

If opponents of a controversial proposal to toughen admission standards at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and the University of Nevada, Reno needed near-irrefutable data to bolster their assertion that quick implementation of stricter requirements could devastate higher education in Nevada, it was presented on Friday.

According to the state Board of Education, 52 percent of the 16,000 Nevada juniors who took the high school proficiency exam failed the math portion; 83 percent passed the reading section. Approved in 1997 via a comprehensive education reform bill and implemented in 1998, the test was the toughest incarnation of the exam all Nevada high schoolers must take to earn a diploma.

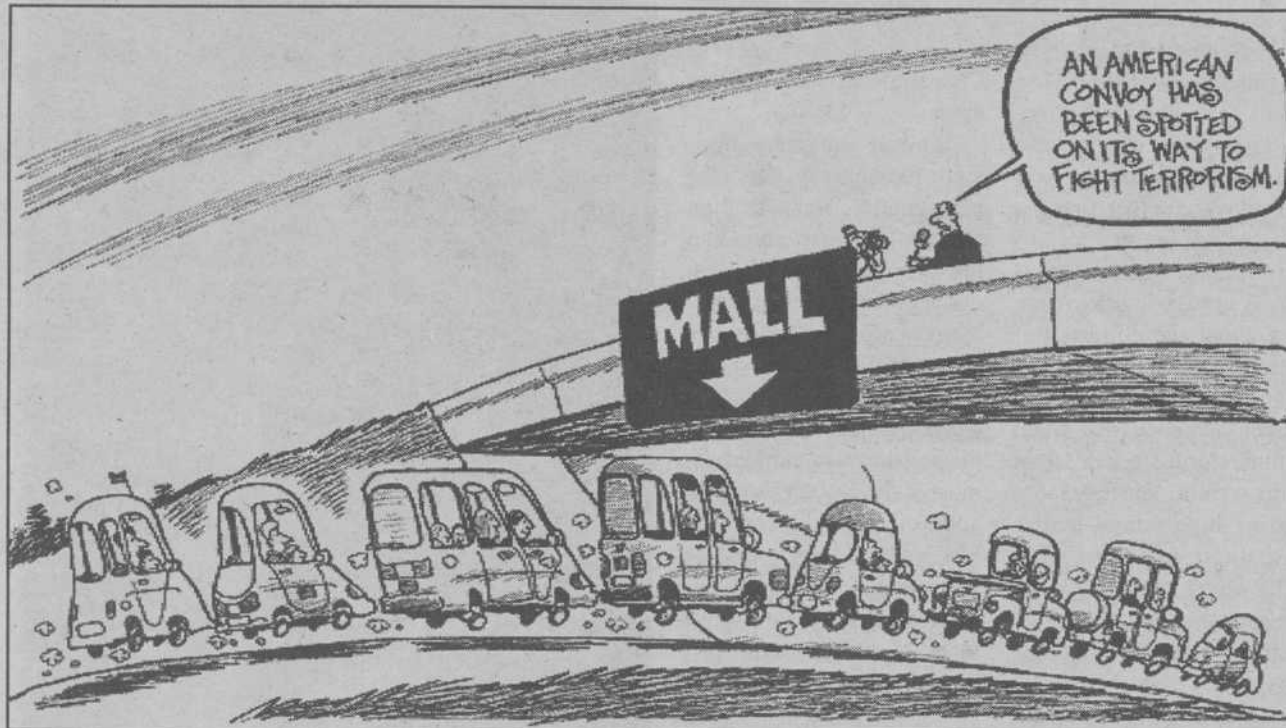
At the time, it's backers argued that it was unfair to lowball the academic prowess of Nevada students and that they would rise to meet the new test standard. They were wrong. And now their words could haunt proponents of more selective university admissions, as the issue raise grade-point requirements takes center stage during Board of Regents meetings Thursday and Friday in Las Vegas.

Backers of the plan to strengthen admissions policies have argued in public forums that Nevada students can meet the standards. In general, detractors, the *Sentinel-Voice* among them, agree. Where the sides parted was on the timeline: Backers wanted fast-track implementation; opponents favored phased-in implementation, with studies to be done at various intervals to gauge the impact. Without this caveat, it's a sure-fire bet that more students would be denied a university education because school districts and the public education system weren't allowed to prepare students to meet the higher standards. And that's simply wrong.

What the proficiency exam results show is that not all students can learn at the same rate and, thus, not everyone will be able to meet standards even if they were put in place three years ago. Sobering news to say the least.

How this news will affect the Regents' vote is unknown. If it sways the them to consider an alternate proposal, which would raise the grade-point average requirement from 2.5 to 2.75 by 2006 as opposed to a 3.0 by 2005 as the original plan suggested, that's a good thing. The new proposal would also double the amount of students let in using a mix of eligibility criteria. Though not an academic panacea, it's more prudent and fair, especially considering that it will take several years to address academic remediation for poor-performing students.

Not to mention that the time frame would give university officials an extended period to evaluate educational curriculum at their schools and devise ways to assist the school districts in better preparing students. So it is the *Sentinel-Voice's* hope that Regents ignore the rhetoric employed and vote for what's best for Nevada students. Taking into consideration all the data—the proficiency exam scores, that nearly 40 percent of students with 3.0 grade points and higher take remedial classes, high school grade inflation is rampant—the new proposal is better than the old plan.



Sept. 11 attacks add hardships

Special to *Sentinel-Voice*

'Tis the season to be jolly ... goes the line of the much-beloved Christmas carol.

This year for many of us the joy and the meaning of the holiday season, however we normally celebrate it, will be both tempered and intensified by the shocking blow America suffered and the loss of life it sustained on September 11.

Although the latest news indicates that fewer than 4,000 people, not the 6,000 and more originally thought, lost their lives in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that day, the diminishing official tally does nothing to lessen the pain decent people, wherever they are, continue to feel.

New York's daily newspapers have rightly continued to provide brief portraits of the dead. All of them seem to have been people whose personal qualities — their humanity, not their occupation or income — made them worth knowing.

Beyond the changed circumstances the attacks have brought to our present and future, the profound sadness brought by the knowledge of so many lives cut short will continue to be that day's most profound impact.

But there is another dimension to the tragedy that grows more intense with each passing day. That is the dimension caused by what *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert called "the employment downdraft" that followed after September 11. Although the economy had entered a recession before the attacks (officially, in March),

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League



they shocked the system to hemorrhage jobs and reduce the working hours of many who weren't laid off.

The result is that more and more Americans are in economic peril.

The 7.7 million people who are now jobless — a five-year high; the ex-welfare recipients who flocked to the low-wage sector of the workplace during the economy's boom years, proving that they well understood the value of a job; the undocumented immigrants who are almost completely off the official public "radar screen" all constitute a national crisis.

It's a crisis in hard economic terms, and it's a crisis in human terms. People are suffering, and the pain is spreading.

Mark Levitan, a senior policy analyst at the Community Service Society of New York, recently referred to "a whole new level of hardship that's not being captured by the unemployment numbers." He meant the large number of workers whose income has fallen sharply because their work hours have been reduced.

Nationally, the exact size of this group isn't known, but its dimensions are becoming

clearer in New York.

For one thing, officials know that 80,000 workers in the city lost their jobs in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks — and that another 75,000 have suffered a serious drop in income because they're working fewer hours, or, like cab drivers and waiters, serving fewer customers and receiving fewer and lower tips.

For another, all indications are that food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters in New York and other cities are being inundated with people who have jobs but aren't making enough to make it on their own.

"The safety net we have isn't designed for this gray area," Levitan said. "We have this new twilight zone of

people who are formally employed. They work too many hours for unemployment insurance and their incomes are too high for public assistance or food stamps, yet their incomes have been hurt severely."

It's up to those of us who are better off — individuals, private companies, and the government — to act quickly.

I keep thinking more and more these days — 'tis the season — of the lesson of Charles Dickens' renowned *A Christmas Carol*.

It is most famous for the indelible physical and moral portrait Dickens paints of Scrooge when we first meet him — "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint from which no steel has ever struck generous fire, secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster."

With such a figure, it's easy to pay less attention to the implied emotional richness of the two characters some see as the true heroes of the tale, Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit, and his wife, Belle, or to think about the meaning (See *Hardship*, Page 15)

NEVADA'S ONLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER
LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice
GRIOT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.
900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
Telephone (702) 380-8100 • Fax (702) 380-8102

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Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association
and West Coast Black Publishers Association