

OUR VIEW

Separate, Unequal

Perhaps lost amid the great tax debate of 2003 is the fact that Republicans and Democrats took partisan pot shots at each other. Assembly members and senate officials took turns demonizing each other. The state's 17 school superintendents harangued all sides to come to the table and at least agree on public education funding.

Here, in Clark County, the school district has more problems than what's been widely reported. Poor performance returned on standardized test scores, below-average per-pupil funding and mediocre starting teacher salaries. Half-empty libraries exist at some schools and Spartan facilities at others.

The school district has a race problem; it's had one for years. Constant cajoling by civil-rights activists to improve in areas of managerial diversity and minority business procurement and to address the disproportionate number of minority, in particular African-American children, in special education classes has gotten nowhere.

Problems have instead increased. There's a growing disparity, the Chamber alleges, between spending on schools in economically challenged areas and their suburban cousins and those in the "exburbs."

Chamber officials also report receiving numerous calls from blacks overlooked for promotions, denied the chance to apply for open positions and from parents who feel the Clark County School Board gives a cold shoulder to minority student issues. Drastic measures are required.

Enter the Urban Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber will file a complaint against the district with the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education. President Hannah Brown told the Sentinel-Voice: "We are past accepting the fact that African-Americans, regardless of their level of experience, are not qualified. Historically, there has been a disparity in predominately black areas vs. children in white areas. Also, it is public knowledge that dollars are available for upgrades and refurbishing schools. However, it has been like pulling teeth to get these dollars spent in areas that service African-American children. We want to improve the environment in which children learn."

Supporting the Chamber's complaint are the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams, chairman of the state's Education committee and a North Las Vegas Democrat, and School Board Trustee Shirley Barber, whose district houses many schools termed "low income" and "at risk."

Part of the complaint calls for a top-to-bottom investigation into the Chamber's allegations. Such an investigation is long overdue. After civil-rights groups clamored about the casino industry's spotty record on diversity, several gaming companies, and chief among them being MGM Mirage, responded vigorously and incorporated diversity into their corporate structure. That's private industry working toward the public good.

Since the school district is taxpayer funded, such an investigation is, essentially, an edict, or at least it should be. The state constitution grants legal guarantees to an equal education. By and large, however, inequality abounds.

Schools in minority neighborhoods generally lack the technological accoutrements of those in Summerlin or Green Valley. Politically connected parents at suburban schools scoring the lion's share of funding and business partnerships compound disparity. This often leaves the have-nots out of the loop. Nor is it fair that minorities must choose which schools in their areas can be refurbished because politicians who normally toss around pork like a pig farmer say that the state just can't afford to give all students aesthetically pleasing learning environments. Drastic measures are needed, indeed.

The real shame in this is that, 40 years after Martin Luther King Jr. told the world of his dream and 48 years after inequity in schools supposedly died with the Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka, Kan. ruling, the Clark County School District, indeed the American public education system, is as racially stratified as ever.



Face it—nuclear waste in our future

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

While politicians, over the past three years, were providing Las Vegans with false assurances, our Federal Government's effort to designate Yucca Mountain as the permanent repository for spent nuclear fuel would not succeed. Your boy wrote otherwise.

When I first "pulled your coat" to the fact there was going to be nuclear waste in your future not only were politicians campaigning against this happening, the public sentiment as well was against cutting a deal with the Feds. In fact, only about 30 percent of persons living in Greater Las Vegas thought that our politicians should make a deal in exchange for dropping their opposition to Yucca Mountain serving as the nation's site for the storage of nuclear waste.

I seem to remember a lyric from a song stating something about "time brings about a change."

The results of a public opinion poll released last month documented that today 76 percent of the public thinks the state should cut a deal. Welcome aboard the train "I told you so." This train was leaving the station back in 2000. You will, however, have to take a seat in the back of the train because the party car is filled with my fellow psychics.

In fact, if you were wondering what ever happened to Ms. Cleo of television fame, she is the leader of the "talking in tongues" class,



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which is in the club car.

If our political leaders were blessed with just a little foresight, our state would not have to increase taxes on its citizens by over 30 percent this year. Certainly federal monies could have helped out in the areas of transportation, health care and education.

Here are the seven things I humbly (well, y'all know this ain't me) suggested should be in the deal:

- The state, county, and city should require without exception that spent nuclear fuel brought in for storage be shipped by rail and not over the interstate highway system.

- Nevada's congressional delegation, the governor, county commissioners and city council should designate persons to serve on a national taskforce to plan the development and operation of the repository.

- Nellis Air Force Base should be expanded to become our nation's preeminent military installation for homeland defense.

- The Federal Government should fully fund the planning, design, construction and operation of a high-speed, light-rail system between Las

Vegas and Los Angeles.

- Guarantee to the maximum extent possible use of in-state majority and minority businesses in the development of the repository at Yucca Mountain.

- Indemnify Clark County and Las Vegas against any documented negative impact on the tourism and gaming industries

- Fund the Nevada University System and county hospitals at levels that will make these institutions world class facilities in nuclear research and alternative uses for spent nuclear fuel.

In all honesty, at the time I made the case for our politicians needing to bite the bullet on the issue of storing nuclear waste in Nevada it was based on a sense of patriotism. You know the argument about everyone needing to make sacrifices during times of national crises.

Do you recall my earlier reference about time bringing about a change? Well, this time my case is presented as an economic one.

Ask politicians what do they think is going to cause

greater harm to our economy.

Will it be increasing the tax burden to citizens by 30 percent or the jobs created and federal money to be spent completing the construction of a multi-billion dollar repository a hundred miles from Las Vegas on federal land?

If they choose not to answer this question, then ask them to explain to you the logic behind never opposing all the nuclear testing that has taken place in the state over the last 60 years. Now our state is spending millions of dollars fighting the Federal Government in federal court over the storage of spent nuclear fuel on federal land. What gives?

Since it is my guess politicians are not going to answer this question either, let me answer it for you. During much of the last half-century, the federal test site was a national defense and local economic necessity. During this time Las Vegas was a harmless small city of sin located in the desert. Today, Las Vegas is a metropolitan area of 1.6-million people and the

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