

OUR VIEW

Thanks For The Good Memories

West Las Vegas and North Las Vegas are very different places from when former state Sen. Joe Neal and former Assemblyman Wendell Williams represented them (Senate District 4 and Assembly District 6 bisect both jurisdictions).

Elected in 1972, Neal immediately set his path as an independent lawmaker, uninfluenced by mercenary or ulterior motives and unafraid to challenge the status quo. From encouraging Blacks in the 1970s to forcefully resist abusive and violent police officers to doggedly pursuing higher tariffs on gaming, Neal treaded on hallowed ground and never apologized for it. For his eloquence and insight, he was known as "the conscience" of the state legislature. His was a desire to advocate for Blacks who comprised the majority of his constituency.

In many ways, Williams grabbed the baton from Neal with his election in 1986. Serving as a teacher in the Clark County School District gave him unique insight into the machinations—and failings—of the public school system, knowledge he used as chairman of the Education Committee in the Assembly to champion equality. But Williams also made his mark in civil rights: In response to officer misconduct in the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, he teamed with Neal to create a Citizen Review Board to investigate complaints; he was also an avid supporter of the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Parade. Like Neal, Williams' constituency was predominantly Black.

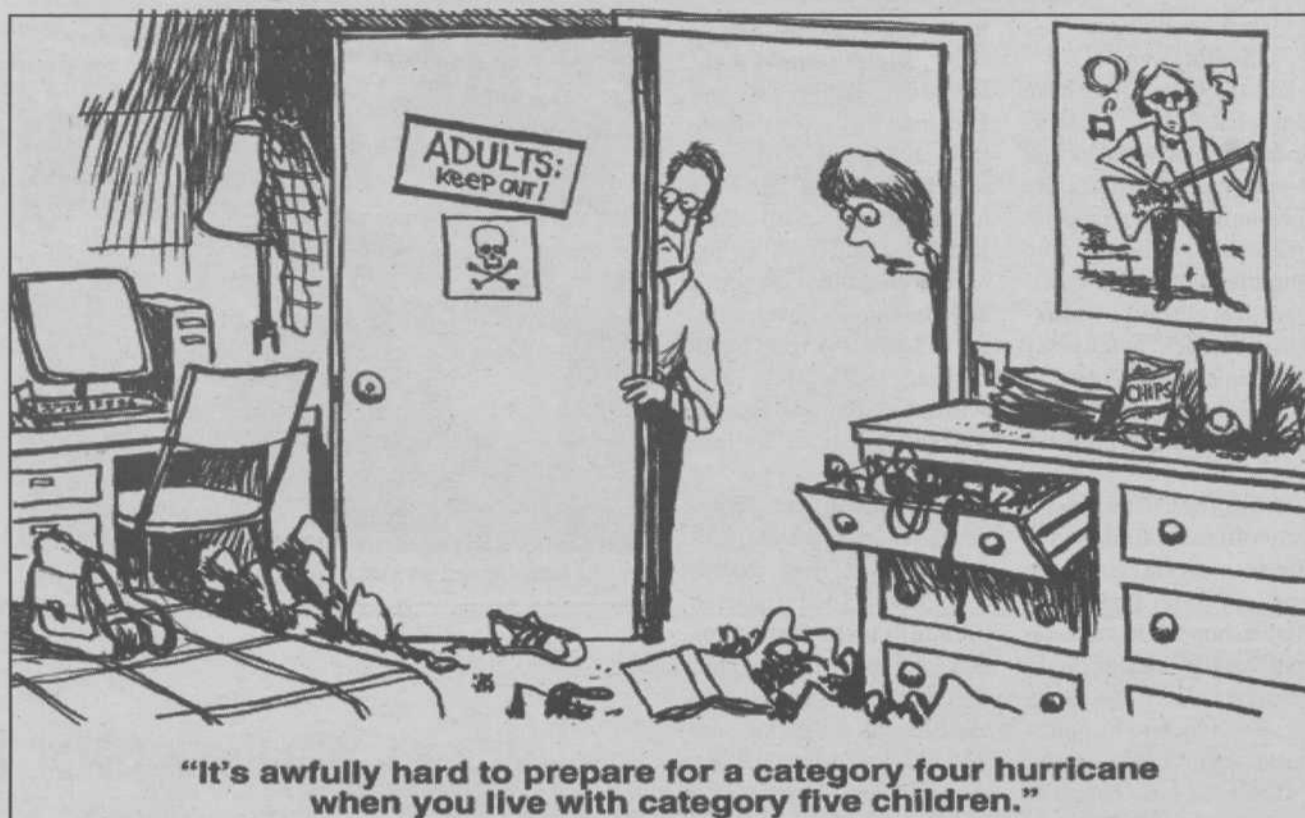
Thanks to an influx of Hispanics, White migrants and other ethnicities, the Black population has been cut in half, from 60 percent to around 30 percent of the populace, rendering the areas they represented much different than in previous years. Credit this demographic change to the fact that a White woman, Theresa Malone, threw her hat into the succeed-Joe-Neal fray.

Neal abandoned his Senate seat of 32 years to run for the County Commission, easily the most powerful government entity in Southern Nevada and arguably the most powerful one in the state (considering that it regulates the Strip, the state's center of profit and power). In doing so, Neal went head-to-head with three-term commissioner Yvonne Atkinson Gates, who's enjoyed an iron grip on Commission District C. Williams sought a return to service in District 6 and faced not only retired teacher Harvey Munford but a string of stinging controversies—double dipping, allegations of lobbying and hiring chicanery, driving on a suspended license and rehashing of his child support issues.

In Neal's case, Gates proved too strong an incumbent, collecting 64 percent of the vote to his 21-percent tally. In Williams', baggage proved too powerful to overcome. As easily as he thwarted Munford in 2000, commandeering two-thirds of the vote, Munford returned the favor, collecting 57 percent of the vote over his 43 percent.

So now that two veteran political stalwarts are out of the game for now—Neal indicated he's done with politics—is it time for them to ride off in the sunset? Not by a long shot. It's often been said that lobbyists and those who work behind the scenes are the real source of political power (think about how President Bush is clueless without Karl Rove). Given their knowledge of district issues and the political process, Neal and Williams could be as effective at guiding, influencing and implementing policy out of elective office as they could in office. Each has a list of accomplishments worthy of praise, so why not add to the list? If, indeed, their loyalty is to the community and not politics, neither should balk at continuing to fight for the rights of the downtrodden, discarded and distressed. Steven Horsford, the new projected representative of Senate District 4, could use Neal's political acumen. Munford could benefit from some seasoning by Williams. Each new guy will have their mettle tested. Neal and Williams should work to make sure they continue their good works.

POINT OF VIEW



"It's awfully hard to prepare for a category four hurricane when you live with category five children."

Numbers as dollars and sense

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

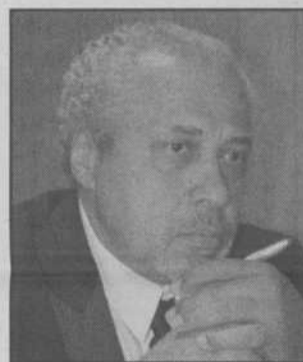
Numbers recently released by U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) seem to pay homage to Nevada's reputation as being known as the "Mississippi of the West."

The EEOC maintains records on discrimination charges in the categories of race, retaliation, sex, national origin, and disability.

In Nevada, for each of the last three years the number of charges filed with the EEOC that are race related have gone up: 451 (2001), 583 (2002), and 628 (2003). When the total number of race discrimination charges filed in Nevada is compared, on a per capita basis, to the rest of the United States persons in Nevada who feel they have been discriminated against is three times that of the national average.

For Nevada to have a race discrimination number that is triple the rest of the United States makes no dollars and sense. I am willing to go on record stating that here in Nevada, "I have observed situations where an 'unqualified person of a given faith has been hired over a qualified Black person.'" I have made this observation on a number of occasions.

In response to employment discrimination here in Las Vegas, I have suggested, with much trepidation, that Black newcomers seeking jobs in Las Vegas should "dumb down" their resumes and seek entry level jobs rather than to be passed over



LOUIE OVERSTREET

for senior positions for which they are qualified.

In far too many instances, this is why the cost of providing government services is so high. Persons empowered to make hiring decisions are repeatedly hiring their dumb friends. Thus, persons of color have no choice but to seek redress by filing race discrimination charges at a rate three times that of the national average.

If you think this is bad enough, wait to read about the screwing you have coming from the Clark County School District which is responsible for producing a lot of the unqualified persons who are filling public sector jobs based on longstanding relationships and not merit.

What screwing, you ask? The screwing you have coming will be in the form of the increased amount of taxes you will have to pay, based on a foolish vote by the public back in 1998 to directly tie-in a portion of funding for education to the assessed value of your home.

Recent news stories document the fact that the value of homes in Las Vegas increased by an all time national high

of 52.4 percent in one year. The previous one-year record was a 38.7% increase posted in Fort Meyers, Florida in 2001.

Presently, the Clark County School District receives 24% of its budget from local property taxes. Last year this equated to \$335,000,000. As recently reported elsewhere, over the past decade, the district's revenue from property taxes has gone up at an annual rate of 12%. This growth in the tax base is twice the growth rate of the student population which has averaged between 5-6% annually.

District officials could hardly contain their glee, when asked what it would mean to the district having property values go up over 52% in one year. The superintendent was quoted as saying, "Everybody I talk to is so excited their home is worth so much more than they paid for it. So if it's worth so much more, maybe we should be paying more in taxes."

Talking about an appointed public official being so greedy that the first thing that comes out of his mouth is not a statement about how to better manage available resources to improve the quality of education, instead he utters a statement about let's increase the taxes on the personal assets of citizens.

Presently the property tax rate in Las Vegas is 3.3 percent. The tax basis is 33 percent of the assessed value. For a home valued at \$200,000 the tax would be \$2,200. The same home, increased by the 52.4 percent (\$200,00 x 1.524) would be \$304,000 and the tax now \$3,343 — a \$1,143 tax increase in a single year without a tax cap.

Unless you are willing to throw good money after bad in funding a poor performing school district, you may want to demand that your elected officials learn the meaning of the phrase "tax cap." A tax cap number only makes good dollars and sense.

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