

OUR VIEW

State Schools Falling Behind

Thanks to quarterly Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) reports, periodic conference calls with investors and analysts, the *Wall Street Journal* and local business publications, it's no secret that the Southern Nevada gaming industry is experiencing booming boom times. Nearly every major gaming industry player, be it public or private, is reaping the bounty from Las Vegas' current hot streak as one of the world's most exciting cities. This year has already produced the highest-grossing monthly gaming win in state history (gaming win is computed before taxes and business expenses) — more than \$1 billion generated in March — as well as a record for fiscal year performance, a record \$11 billion in the fiscal year that ended June 30.

And the gaming industry isn't the only one prospering. Homebuilders are doing well, as are banks, as are restaurants and other industries. Southern Nevada remains a hotspot for entrepreneurship, as evidenced by recent state figures showing that minorities comprise a significant portion of the valley's new business owners. Even state and local governments are faring well financially, so well in fact that the governor is rebating \$300 million to car-owning taxpayers (the merits of this are debateable), lawmakers OK'd a \$100 million-plus mental health hospital (the merits of this aren't; Nevada's mental health infrastructure is poor) and, for the first time, allotted monies to deal with problem gambling. Nevada is in the money.

Not that you could tell by looking at the state's 17 school districts, especially its largest, the Clark County School District, comprised of more than 300 schools and 280,000 students. The CCSD remains underfunded. Education is only \$150 million of the historic \$833 million tax increased passed in the 2003 legislative session. The money merely helped the CCSD, the nation's fastest growing school district, maintain the status quo.

That status quo has meant low salaries (\$28,000) for beginning teachers. Fiscal conservatives are only too happy to point to studies showing that, nationally, Nevada teachers are middle-of-the-pack in terms of pay. However, the stats fails to take into account that many teachers spend nearly \$1,000 to stock their classrooms with necessary supplies, that the low salaries prices many of them out of homeownership, that Nevada remains thousands of dollars behind in per-pupil education spending. This is indefensible. The epitome of repugnance. If Nevada was judged by how it treats it's students, the state certainly deserves the electric chair.

Rather than giving even more — no one disputes that the school district receives corporate philanthropy — the business industry, by and large, prefers to behave like protectionist mafiosi, threatening to behead any idea involving siphoning some of their profits to help students. Even more lethal is that some lawmakers have sided with Big Business. Folks like Republican Assemblyman Bob Beers who's legislative career is marked more by glib responses than actual, tangible political accomplishment.

While Big Business as a whole needs to step up appreciably, everything eventually returns to gaming — and the gaming industry biting the bullet and doing more.

There's no shortage of money — Harrah's Entertainment bought Caesars Entertainment for \$9.4 billion; MGM Mirage snagged Mandalay Resort Group for \$7.9 billion; the large-casino operations and locals gaming giants such as Station Casinos and Coast Casinos have experienced record quarters of late. Flush with cash from Wall Street's spigots, gaming companies are even getting into nongaming projects, such as condominiums (MGM Mirage, Hard Rock, The Palms, Station Casinos), even creating mini-cities (MGM Mirage's \$4 billion Project City Center). So hot is this city that the king of high-priced real estate, Donald Trump, has gotten in on the action, with his \$300 million Trump International.

Money, money everywhere, but little for the Clark County School District. This must change. If it doesn't, we're doing ourselves and our students a disservice.



EOB contemplates selling KCEP

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County Community Action Partnership that owns and operates KCEP 88.1 FM, Nevada's only Black community radio station, is in the process of entertaining discussions related to the possible sale of the station. The focus of the discussions centers on two key issues. Primarily, whether the ownership of a radio station meets EOB's mission of eliminating poverty by providing programs, resources, services, and advocacy for self-sufficiency and economic empowerment; the other is programming — what it achieves and who it reaches.

The first issue is centered on whether or not a radio station, in and of itself, meets the mission of EOB, which, in a nutshell, is the elimination of poverty.

For 32 years, KCEP has been known as the "Voice of the Black Community" — a community that has had no other radio station in the Las Vegas Valley to ever target or gear a programming format specifically for its needs.

The adage that states, "Knowledge is power," is appropriate: KCEP has been the knowledge base and venue for disseminating and receiving information vital to the war on poverty for more than three decades. Whenever EOB needed to raise funds and to get information out to the community about



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

new programs to, for example, benefit children, provide treatment for substance abusers, offer day care services for the elderly, make transitional housing available for the homeless, give transportation to the ill, explain available Child and Family services or announce legislation pertinent to the Black community, KCEP was the medium by which the information was disseminated. There has not been another radio station in this valley that has taken on this task or risen to the challenge of being the voice of poor people.

KCEP has been the salvation for EOB on numerous occasions, and eliminating that voice would be a travesty — not only for the residents who reside in West Las Vegas, but for African-Americans all over this valley — and as a former Chairman of the Board of EOB, I vehemently oppose the idea of selling KCEP.

Understandably, Interim Executive Director Jean Childs has a fiduciary responsibility to the organization to present to the Board every option available that could help to eliminate the organization's debt. Therefore, it's quite interesting that the mainstream media, and

certain individuals who are speaking or complaining with their own agenda, only focused on the sale of the radio station, even though the organization has other assets that can be sold to eliminate the organization's debt load.

The second issue regarding the programming, as well as what it achieves and who it reaches, was raised by Fernando Romero, president of Hispanics in Politics, and is the most insidious rhetoric of all. He was quoted in a *Las Vegas Sun* article last Thursday stating that KCEP "virtually ignores" the Las Vegas Valley's growing Hispanic community. First of all, for him, being Hispanic, to try to use this old divide-and-conquer theory, which is one that the White man has used

on minorities for centuries, is bull crap.

Everyone knows that Blacks are the most diplomatic people in the world. While Whites, Asians, Hispanics and other groups of people hire their own and provide advantages to their own every single day and think nothing of it, as Blacks, we're always concerned — perhaps overly so — about how it looks if we hire African-Americans; we often wonder how it is going to look if we hire or give a Black person, even one who is equally or better qualified, an advantage over someone non-Black.

We have been brainwashed to think that way. The fact of the matter is, Hispanics have moved into the historically Black community, pushed our people aside, said, "Here I am," and the Black community has not complained.

How dare Fernando to try to force KCEP to meet the (See LaGrande, Page 11)



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