

OUR VIEW Flighty Plans

We're sure the 200-plus folks who attended Tuesday's Federal Aviation Administration forum on its proposed new flight routes felt their indignation was righteous. The first affront, according to a published report, was that the meeting was held at Centennial High School, whose campus is on the outskirts of the northwest part of town. It's a defensible gripe, considering that the campus is way the heck out there and that driving in this town is often a pulling-teeth experience. Las Vegas City Councilman Steve Wolfson whined to the *Review-Journal*: "The first thought I had when I stepped out of the car was, this is ridiculous. Why hold a community meeting 15 to 20 miles away?" But when weighed against other affronts—the scant number of polling stations in predominantly Black communities throughout the nation during the 2004 presidential election comes to mind—this gripe becomes nothing more than hyperventilated pooh-pooing.

Which brings us to the next affront—and the meat of the matter: Affluent folks don't want planes disturbing their piece of suburbia. The FAA would like to reroute as many as 33 percent of its departing flights—about 200 daily—west to the Las Vegas Beltway. According to the plan, aircraft leaving McCarran International Airport would fly in a U-shaped pattern, going north, circling and then continuing east. Planes would soar over the ultra ritzy Spanish Trails, The Lakes, Peccole Ranch, parts of Summerlin, the northwest as well as North Las Vegas. As expected, the plan raised the hackles of Summerlin residents, who react like feral beasts whenever they feel their quality of life is threatened. (Witness the clamor over Station Casinos plan years ago to build 300-foot towers at Red Rock Station. Residents hammered out a compromise of 198 feet—they could still see the Red Rock Mountains and Stations got its high-rise buildings).

A desire to protect property values and/or the environment is certainly noble. Your home is the biggest investment a person will make. The purchase process must be taken seriously and you should know everything possible about the locale: Is it in a gaming overlay district? Is it in flood control zone? How far is the closest school? Nearest library? Closest church? Seems that the opposition expressed Tuesday night stemmed mostly from incredulity, their argument going something like this: "The FAA can't change routes so planes could fly over my neighborhood. Don't these guys know how much I paid for my house?"

Let's face facts: Las Vegas isn't likely to lose appeal anytime soon. With McCarran expected to reach its 53 million-passenger annual capacity by 2010, the Clark County Aviation Department pushing to open the 25 million-passenger capacity Ivanpah Airport by 2017. Since people aren't going to stop going or coming, we'll need as many flight paths as we can get. That might mean you have planes soaring over your house in the near future. Call it the price of living in the world's playground.

Building Plans

Two projects do not a renaissance make. However, when those two developments include a sorely needed grocery store and a possible condominium complex, both in ritually dissed West Las Vegas, then you must take progress where you find it. Predominantly Black West Las Vegas has been without a grocery store since Vons closed in August 2004. As a result, many residents have been forced to travel miles away from home to shop for groceries or have resorted to paying exorbitant prices for regular goods at nearby convenience stores.

City Councilman Lawrence Weekly's job certainly isn't enviable. Ward 5 is perhaps the most racially stratified and economically diverse mini-jurisdiction in government. Weekly has to balance the needs of poor constituents and rich ones, which makes Monday's news more remarkable. The grocery store fills a need, particularly for the lower socioeconomic classes, while the condos (tentatively priced at \$200,000 and above) add a luxury product to a part of town that's been the antithesis of luxury. A renaissance this isn't, but progress, yes it is.



The execution of Tookie

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

Over the past couple of months, the nation has been gripped with the pending and ultimate execution of Stanley Tookie Williams, one of the world's best known, condemned prisoners. Three issues were at the core of the debates: crime, punishment and redemption.

For those of you who don't know (I can't see how anyone in America has missed this story), Williams, co-founder of the notorious Crips gang, was convicted for the murder of four people and sentenced to the death penalty. Prior to his execution on Tuesday at 12:35 a.m., Williams spent 24 years on death row.

As the execution deadline approached, at the core of the final debate on whether Williams should be granted clemency or not, was the same set of issues: crime, punishment and redemption. In deciding whether a death-row inmate should be granted clemency or not, the decision maker should look not to the crime. If the death penalty is designed to protect society, then the issue of redemption and/or change of heart (they are different, and Williams is proof of that) should only be examined carefully and assessed in light of the true issue to wit: Is the value to society of a continued incarceration with the promise of a potential return to society (even if remote) of a greater amount than the cost of put-



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

ting that potential to an end through execution?

In Williams' case, I think that the proof of value was in his writings, his work with gang members and potential gang members, as well as other things he could have realistically and potentially accomplished. Measuring his obvious accomplishments, which had already been demonstrated in America and reported from elsewhere, it seems to outweigh the value of the small increase in safety some perceive society will gain with his execution.

Whether we, as a society, should ever kill a member is an issue I leave for another discussion. The right of the death penalty, at least for the purposes of this commentary, is assumed; hence, the issue is what was right in Tookie Williams's case.

The issue was not the four dead people, though they truly matter, and I do sympathize with their families. The issue was not Tookie as a gang leader. The issue was not four dead innocent people plus a few good books equaling forgiveness. The issue was not whether or not Tookie Williams' heart had changed because he had in turn done so many good deeds. The issue was not

about any potential closure that may come with his execution.

The issue was about the greater good of society and its gain or loss.

If we remember that the criminal justice system is not a mechanism for personal vendetta settling but, instead, an organism meant to better society, the issues of the death penalty will become far clearer. If we remember that the criminal justice system is a fallible system wrought with racial inequities, then the debate surrounding the death penalty become moot, because it would be denounced by us, as Americans.

Let me say right here that I had very mixed emotions regarding this case. There were four people killed, four

families left with lives shattered forever, and I can see both sides of this issue very clearly. One side was that the families and some of the American public wanted him executed for crimes for which he was convicted and even if, as he alleged, he didn't commit those crimes. Williams stated, "That my present state (being on death row) was germane to my wretched past, and I'm here by virtue of karma, not because of killing someone, because I didn't do that, but because of other bad things I have done and gotten away with in the past."

Some of those bad things caused hundreds of African-Americans and others to be murdered. Now should he be held responsible for every murder the Crips gang has committed? Absolutely not. But in many folks' minds, he is responsible. When he started the gang at age 18, did he have any idea that it would grow to be the menace to so-

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900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
Telephone (702) 380-8100
Email: lvsentinelvoice@earthlink.net

Contributing Writers:
Chelsi Cheatom
Tanya Flanagan
Tasha Pope
Lés Pierres Streater
Photographer:
Isaac Sawyer

Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief
Parker Philpot, Copy Editor
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

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