

OUR VIEW

Alter System

Cautious kudos go out to the Metropolitan Police Department and the Police Protective Association for working with community organizations on reforming the coroner's inquest process. In a closed-door meeting, the groups hammered out three tentative recommendations for the system which investigates officer-involved fatalities. The first recommendation is to replace Clark County District Attorney's office officials with lawyers from the state Attorney General's office; county DA's currently question witnesses during the inquests. The second recommendation would replace hearing masters, who preside over the hearings, with randomly chosen justices of the peace. And the last recommendation would allow family members of shooting victims to ask questions; at present, they must submit their queries in writing.

When weighed against the head-scratchingly long time it takes to make changes in law enforcement—years to get a civilian review board; a dogfight to a racial profiling study; four years to approve taxes to hire new cops—this is welcome news. Welcome, but not totally satisfactory. The changes don't provide enough of a tweak to an inquest system that itself needs an inquest.

As it's structured, the inquest favors officers. The process isn't designed to be adversarial. Nor should it be. But neither should it be a rubber stamp for law enforcement, which it has been. In more than 150 cases dating back 30-plus years, only one cop has been ruled criminally negligent — and he was later absolved by a Clark County jury. So, that means police are batting 1,000 in use-of-force cases. This also means that the cops have never made a mistake in these situations, never overreacted. And that they weren't criminally negligent but justified in shooting a handcuffed Swuave Lopez in the back and fatally shooting Tarance Hall while he was in his car on the Strip. These types of incidents undermine public confidence in law enforcement.

This is in no way an attack on cops or the difficult jobs they do day in and day out. There are trials in civilian murder cases. There should be a trial-like atmosphere at inquests. More stringent cross examination of officers; legal counsel for involved families—family members aren't lawyers and can't raise the complex legal issues hired counsel can. The recommendations are good first steps, but there's still a long row to hoe because everyone involved deserves justice, including the deceased.

Down and Dirty

Whoever said "all's fair in love and war" forgot to mention politics. In the last decade, Clark County has been smitten with some of the most vicious political mudslinging of any jurisdiction in the nation. Among the more pernicious: Lieutenant governor candidate Brian Krolicki accused Barbara Lee Woollen's company of producing pornographic films; sheriff's candidate Jerry Airola on the receiving end of attacks over inconsistencies in his educational and law enforcement backgrounds; and two years ago, then-Las Vegas City Councilwoman Lynette Boggs McDonald and Assemblyman David Goldwater waged a nasty-on-all-fronts battle for the County Commission. Boggs brought up Goldwater's bar brawl. Goldwater painted Boggs McDonald as a corporate shill and noted the lawsuits against her.

Boggs McDonald won and now, as she runs for reelection to commission District against former school board trustee Susan Brager, finds herself targeted by the Police Protective Association and Culinary Local 226. The union filed a lawsuit to disqualify her because she lives in District C, not F, and they say a videotape proves it.

It's likely that a court will determine the veracity of the unions' claims. More worrisome is the precedent this is setting. If the surveillance yielded nothing questionable, then what tactic would the unions have resorted to? Fighter that she is, you can bet she's not going to go down easily. And since the unions have opened the door—and, so far, Brager's been silent on the union—they'd better dispose of their skeletons pretty quick. Remember: All's fair in love, war and politics.



Target 'economic terrorists'

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

For good reasons, the editorial and business sides of news operations are kept separate. They call it the separation between Church and State. Readers must know that the integrity of what they're reading has not been compromised by the purchase of an ad or other economic considerations. That's the basic hallmark of good journalism.

Therefore, listening to a Congressional Black Caucus panel discussion on advertising last week was unfamiliar territory for me. Even so, it quickly became obvious that the issue of economic reciprocity — companies and ad agencies take billions of dollars from us each year, yet doggedly refuse to advertise with media outlets that have the most credibility with African-Americans — is part of a larger issue.

Whether it's the refusal of some companies to advertise in Black newspapers, employ Black ad agencies or adopt a we-know-it-all attitude, African-Americans are getting shafted. And it affects African-Americans in so many ways.

Carol H. Williams, creative director and chairman of the Carol H. Williams Advertising Agency, spoke of the personal indignities.

"I look at the papers and see the things that are writ-



GEORGE E. CURRY

ten about a lot of counterparts and CEOs and presidents of agencies that I hired — I hired them," she recounted. "There are four presidents and two CEOs now in mass marketing that I hired when I was in mass marketing. They get more press than I do."

Clearly pained, she continued, "These people have put nothing on the air or their commercials are from [advertising] campaigns that I created. Yet, they sit on top. And I have to walk into meetings and listen to them dictate to me about the stuff they don't even know and will never understand."

Eugene Morris, founder of multimillion-dollar E Morris Communications, also knows about personal affronts.

"A client came to us and suggested that they were having some budget problems — they didn't have enough money to share the production," he recalls. "So they wanted a general market agency to produce the Afri-

can-American commercial but they wanted us to consult with them to make sure it was culturally relevant. I did not say what I wanted to say."

According to Morris, he said enough to make his point: "I was like, 'Hell, no. You gotta be crazy. Why would we do that?'"

Adonis Hoffman, senior vice president for the American Association of Advertising Agencies, said it is a fact that some advertisers can reach Blacks without going through Black media. While that is technically correct, it ignores some important considerations. First, numerous surveys show that African-Americans give more credibility to ads that appear in Black publications. Second, a company that advertises in a White-owned publication could be speaking to anyone. However, when they advertise in Black outlets, they are demonstrating that they

value Black consumers and are making a specific appeal to them.

Even though they are more trusted by African-American readers, Black newspapers are relegated to the back of the advertising bus. And some publishers are fighting back.

In Florida, a coalition of Black-owned newspapers and TV and radio stations has decried politicians — both Democrats and Republicans — ignoring them. Blacks make up 11 percent of the Florida electorate, according to the Media Audit, a Houston research company. However, according to the Washington-based Center for Responsible Politics, of \$11 million spent in 2004 on Florida congressional races, only \$22,000 went to the Black Press.

So far this year, less than 1 percent of money spent on

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