

OUR VIEW

Gamesmanship

"One ought to recognize that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end. If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark, its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself. Political language — and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists — is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time, one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase — some jackboot, Achilles' heel, hotbed, melting pot, acid test, veritable inferno or other lump of verbal refuse — into the dustbin where it belongs."

This quote comes from George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language" in *Shooting an Elephant* (1950).

So you might be thinking, why is the *Sentinel-Voice* quoting George Orwell? The answer is that Orwell's commentary on political chaos being tied to the decay of language is a good jumping-off point to discuss the race for the Las Vegas City Council's Ward 5 seat. Said decay of language can be directly tied to the utter lack of decorum that generally accompanies American politics, particularly around election time.

All's fair in love and war, the saying goes; well, the only rules in the high-stakes game of politics is that there are no rules. Friends are foes; foes, friends. Smiles conceal frowns, death glares hide behind inviting eyes. Words leap off forked tongues and handshakes aren't emblematical of fidelity, but rather gestures ensuring that the candidate isn't going down without a fight—a bloody fight.

As the June 5 general election nears, the Ward 5 race gets testier and testier. Decorum has been thrown out of the window, the gloves have come off and Ricki Barlow and Stacie Truesdell are duking it out. So far, Truesdell—or, at the least, her support network—has landed more punches. A particularly nasty website has been put up that tars and feathers Barlow as a tax cheat and carpetbagger. And those are the nice allegations.

Then a story surfaces about Barlow's arrest in 1998 on domestic violence charges against his then-wife. Though the case was dismissed (Barlow told the *Review-Journal*: "I have never touched a woman, and I never will. I respect women too much. During my divorce, there was a heated argument, and allegations were made. The judge looked at the allegations, and he dismissed the allegations."), the damage was done. This story just about coincided with a rally held at City Hall last week to castigate Barlow and paint him as unfit for office.

Now it must be said that anyone who runs for office opens himself/herself up to scrutiny. So, if you stole a candy bar as a sixth-grader, got busted for shoplifting or, perhaps, were guilty of a legal but morally reprehensible transgression, then you can expect your opponent to dredge it up. The problem is that character assassination rarely has anything to do with a candidate's ability to do the job. It's one thing to blast a person for voting this way or that or being a do-nothing figurehead, and quite another to bring up past incidents in an attempt to besmirch someone to win an office. This isn't to say that Truesdell is behind the spate of negative press on Barlow. But it is to say that mudslinging muddies the issues more than clearing it up. Politics is dirty enough as it is.

Admittedly, there's some sensitivity from the Black community as it relates to the attacks on Barlow. The Las Vegas City Council doesn't have an African-American presence (interim Ward 5 seat-holder Brenda Williams is Black but will be replaced after the election) and there's real concern that if Barlow isn't elected, West Las Vegas will be forgotten. Truesdell must be given the benefit of the doubt; she's not been tied to the attacks, and she knows the Westside has issues. Hopefully, she also knows that the personal attacks on Barlow (whether she's behind them or not) do nothing for the people she wants to serve.

ROBBERY SUSPECTS



Candidates should feel poverty

By George E. Curry
Special to *Sentinel-Voice*

As presidential candidates, both Democrats and Republicans, actively pursue middle-class voters, there is growing evidence that when it comes to the issue of supporting the poor, they may be well behind public opinion.

In this era of extensive polling, perhaps this new data will force the would-be presidents to follow the lead of their followers.

In a recent article on how Democratic candidates are speaking to the needs of the poor, *Washington Post* reporter Alec MacGillis concluded, "Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), who has upset some poverty advocates by supporting tougher welfare work rules, talks about helping the poor by raising the minimum wage, reforming immigration and promoting savings. Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) proposes expanding the earned-income tax credit and subsidizing temporary jobs but leavens this with calls for more personal responsibility, particularly among African-Americans. Edwards, on the other hand, calls poverty 'morally wrong' and a 'national shame,' and he proposes paying for his plan by immediately repealing the Bush tax cuts for the rich."

To be fair to underdog Dennis Kucinich, his anti-poverty proposals are bold,



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rivaling those of Edwards.

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, made public this month, reveal some startling findings. Chief among them: "Support for government programs to help disadvantaged Americans, as well as sympathy for the plight of the poor, have surged since 1994 and returned to the levels last seen in 1990 prior to welfare reform, with gains occurring among virtually every major social, political and demographic group."

The report found that the biggest gain occurred among political conservatives, Southern Whites and older Americans. In 1993, only 28 percent of conservatives agreed with the statement: "The government should help more needy people even when it means going deeper into debt." By this year, however, that figure had risen to 48 percent.

Concurrently, there was an increase in the number of Whites who sympathize with

the plight of the poor. In 1994, only 35 percent of Whites agreed that the poor "have it hard." Today, almost half — 49 percent — agree with that sentiment. The share of Whites who say the poor "have it easy" declined from 56 percent to 37 percent over that same period.

The softening attitudes of Whites toward the poor still trail those of African-Americans. In 1994, for example, 65 percent of Blacks said the poor have hard lives. In 2005, that figure was virtually unchanged at 64 percent.

Overall support for the poor was measured by those who agreed with three statements: The government should help the needy, even if debt increases; food and shelter should be guaranteed by the government to all people, and the government should take care of people who can't take care of themselves.

Using that measurement, the greatest gain in support from 1994 and 2007 was among those 65 and older, a jump from 16 percent to 38 percent. Those in the lowest income quartile — \$19,000 or less — improved from 29 percent to 38 percent. Support in the South increased from 29 percent to 49 percent. Support from college graduates increased from 20 percent to 36 percent. Support from Independents improved by 15 percent, from 27 percent to 42 percent; Democrats by 14 percent, from 41 percent to 55 percent; and Republicans 9 percent, from 16 percent to 25 percent.

Among the announced presidential candidates, only former Sen. John Edwards and Rep. Dennis Kucinich have produced detailed plans to fight poverty.

The two plans call for uni-
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