

## OUR VIEW

# A+ for effort

Tuesday's town hall on the state of public education sought to do a lot of good but, in the end, may not have lived up to its goal. This is not meant as a slight to State Senator Steven Horsford, who organized the meeting at Matt Kelly Elementary. For his part, Horsford recruited significant players in public education, such as Keith Rheault, Nevada's superintendent of public instruction, as well as lawmakers like Assemblyman Harvey Munford, who will help decide how much funding education will get in the 2009 legislative session.

Befitting his stellar career in public service, Horsford came prepared with a well-thought-out program and an ambitious agenda. Maybe too ambitious. Topics included school safety/violence on or near campuses, student academics, hiring, promotion and retention of school system personnel, school facilities in West Las Vegas and, finally, parental and community involvement. Truth be told, you could have a town hall meeting on each of these issues alone. Trying to effectively tackle all of them in slightly less than two hours—and by effectively tackle, we mean gameplanning viable solutions that can be implemented without political mandate or the cutting of a check—probably wasn't the best approach.

Take the issue of school violence. Of the eight proposed solutions listed in a handout, only four (increased parent and community involvement, consistent and sustained prevention, more activities for young people and more community resources including drug, alcohol and mental health services) represent proactive approaches that could possibly prevent a student from starting a fight or picking up a gun and shooting a peer. But even those options require expenditures in order to obtain said resources. With the state economy teetering on the verge of recession and lawmakers considering another round of budget cuts, we probably shouldn't bank on extra money to fund anti-violence initiatives. Change the conditions that cause violence—poverty, lack of opportunity, access to weapons—and you'll probably see violence drop. The problem is that change takes time.

Ditto on academics. Address the issues that lead to educational inequity and you have a good chance of denting the higher rates of dropout, behavioral discipline, expulsions and special education placements among minority students and increasing the number enrolled in honor, advanced placement and college preparatory classes. If a kid comes to school hungry, he/she might not be focused on learning. If a kid has to worry where he/she is going to sleep at night, then he/she might not be able to study for a test or quiz. If a kid has to work to help pay the bills, he/she might have the energy to do homework.

A good teacher is worth more than gold. A bad teacher can do irreparable damage. So the question become how to ensure we're getting good teachers and equip struggling schools with the kind of top-notch instructors that will help students achieve. Some teachers simply don't want to be in struggling schools. They serve their time, then leave. With a perennial teacher shortage, it's not like schools can pick from a pool of highly qualified, culturally sensitive teachers. Until that happens, we will probably have many sub-par, culturally myopic teachers who may not know how to relate to minority students.

Schools in West Las Vegas have been given short shrift for too long. Last to get needed resources, perennially tagged as among the worst performing. Thankfully, many individuals and community groups and businesses are stepping to assist. But when will resources come from lawmakers? Booker Elementary's new building took too long. Where are the innovative programs? What's being done to improve retention and morale? Is anyone looking to make sure behavioral issues aren't being misconstrued as learning disabilities?

In one respect, the town hall was on the money. Without parental involvement and community support, education will continue to have a tough row to hoe. What's needed now are town halls on the specific issues, mechanisms to inform lawmakers and tools to hold everyone—parents, students, teachers, administrators and faculty—accountable. Without this, our efforts are for naught.



## End of Zimbabwean era likely

By Nicole C. Lee  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Zimbabwe, the former "breadbasket of southern Africa," is a country in economic ruin.

The national currency is worthless. The average laborer makes 500 million Zimbabwean dollars (ZWD) a month, while two pounds of meat costs 150 million ZWD and public transport costs 60 million.

A decent cab ride from one part of Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city, to another might cost as much as 1 billion ZWD. In this economic reality, any politics beyond the politics of securing one's next meal might seem irrelevant, but for the 40 percent of Zimbabweans who participated in last week's elections politics is front and center.

Zimbabwe's elections were the biggest in the country's history and likely the most important elections in Southern Africa this year. For the first time since independence, Zimbabwe held presidential, parliamentary, senatorial and council elections on the same day. March 29 signaled the end of a Zimbabwean Era, regardless of the elections' outcome.

This Zimbabwean era has been marked by a sharp economic decline as a result of the legacy of imperialism, 28 years of disastrous neo-liberal economic programs prescribed by the World Bank Group, and the failure of leadership from Zimbabwe's



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ruling elite. But the story of Zimbabwe and of Robert Mugabe did not begin this way. Soon after independence, Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front, the ZANU-PF, gave priority to human resource investment; from 1980 to 1990, infant mortality decreased by 50 percent, child malnutrition fell 10 percent, and life expectancy increased from 56 to 64.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Mugabe and the ZANU-PF were seen by many in the U.S. and across the Pan-African world as a beacon of hope in the fight for African Independence. Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's president for the last 28 years, rose to prominence as an acolyte of Kwame Nkrumah, and Zimbabwe provided material and diplomatic assistance, as well as sanctuary to its still colonized neighbors and their revolutionary leaders. Unfortunately, this is only part of the legacy of Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF.

Between 1982 and 1985, the Zimbabwean military

crushed armed resistance from Ndebele groups in the provinces of Matabeleland and the Midlands, killing more than 20,000 Ndebele civilians during the Gukurahundi massacres. In 1991, the government of Zimbabwe, short on hard currency and under international pressure, embarked on the austerity program which initiated Zimbabwe's decline.

In 2005, the Zimbabwean government's "Operation Murambatsvina" (or "Operation Drive Out the Rubbish") demolished the homes and businesses of poor, urban "illegal shelters" who were suspected of supporting the Movement for Democratic Change, an opposition political party. This resulted in the loss of home or livelihood for more than 700,000 Zimbabweans and negatively affected 2.4 million more.

On March 29, as the people of Zimbabwe cast their votes and the world watched, and as they wait for

the results of a deeply flawed elections process, people around the world who support Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwean people are clear in their role: to support the right of the Zimbabwean people to self-determination.

Zimbabweans are seeking a government, regardless of political party, that will invest in health services, education and public welfare. They are calling for the development of a new constitution, which will allow citizens to fully engage in the political processes of their government. They are calling for transparent and accountable economic policies that foster the transformation of the national economy, a national audit of debt, the repatriation of Zimbabwe's stolen wealth, and equitable and sustainable land redistribution.

The true test of solidarity with Zimbabwe should not be where one stands, such as relative to the position of

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