

OUR VIEW

Kids First?

Times are tough; perhaps tougher than they've ever been in our state. Because of flagging sales tax and gaming revenue, we are facing a \$1 billion shortfall in the next biennium and, because of this, Gov. Jim Gibbons has commissioned state agencies to make drastic budget cuts in order to trim the deficit. Belt tightening is rarely fun, but these mandated reductions are downright unpleasant. And scary.

During a special session called by Gibbons on Friday, state lawmakers approved nearly \$236 million in budget cuts — this is the equivalent of a 4.5 percent decrease for nearly every state agency. Whenever the budgetary axe man cometh, everyone scrambles to protect their necks, to justify why this or that agency or program deserves full funding. While there appears to be no sacred cows in state governance, perhaps there should at least be one area that's nearly untouchable: education.

The Gibbons cuts will siphon \$55.2 from public education and \$46.5 million from the Nevada System of Higher Education. At the local level, the cuts are forcing the Clark County School District to lay off 140 support personnel. The news is worse in higher education. The College of Southern Nevada will be forced to shear its enrollment from 40,000 to 32,000; nearly 25 percent of adjunct professors (there are 200 total) will lose their part-time teaching positions and the number of classes offered will drop by 1,400. UNLV stands to lose 100 full-time faculty members, reduce class offerings by 3,000 or 40 percent, lose 8,000 to 10,000 students and nix many of its 900 part-time instructors.

Clark County School District Superintendent Walt Ruffles tried to put a pretty face on the dire situation by saying that many of the laid-off employees might be able to find jobs elsewhere in the district. There are 120 openings available. Higher education's Chancellor Jim Rogers wasn't so kind in a memo he sent, noting "the very dire consequences of the decisions that are now-being made on our institutions of higher education, their faculty and students, and ultimately on the future of our state."

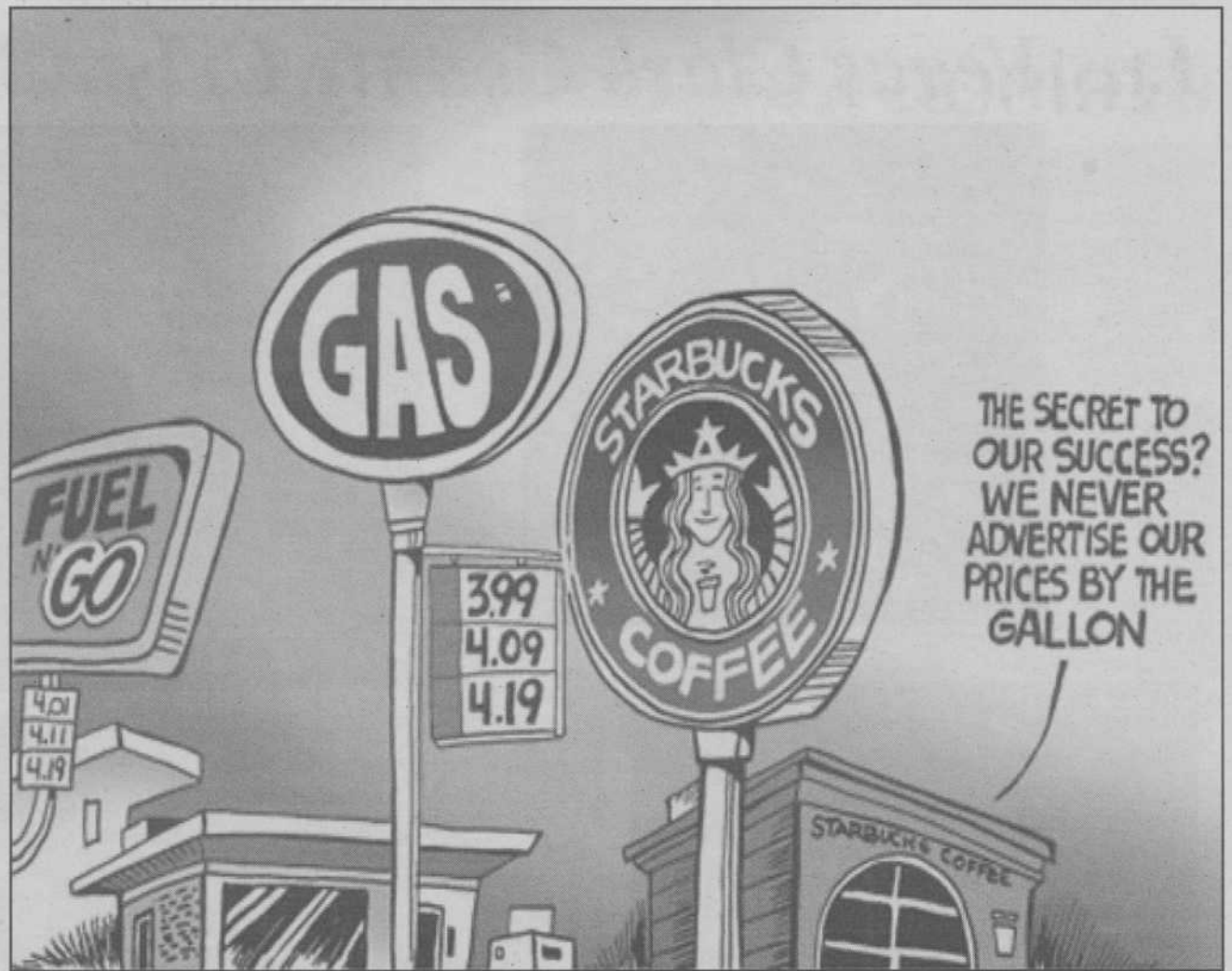
Rogers is absolutely right. The decisions made now can affect us generations from now. Gibbons shouldn't be made the heavy in all of this, though.

He's had the unfortunate luck of being governor when a perfect storm of economic calamities have befallen our state. The foreclosure crisis; the slump in gaming revenues; lower-than-expected sales on taxable goods; lending institutions hesitant to fork over money; historically high gas prices. By all means, a financial disaster. And yes, something had to be done. Something drastic, too, because we've got to find ways to fund our basic needs.

There's no more basic a need than providing this state's young people with the educational resources they need to compete in today's fast-paced world. Reducing funding is no way to do that; \$18 million here (due to the Legislature's elimination of grants and earmarked funding sources), \$130 million there (representing a 14-percent reduction in funding for the 2009-2010 academic year). Where does it stop? And when does it stop? The no-taxes crowd says tariffs is no way to usurp a depressed economy. Neither is budget cutting. Sheared budgets impact our ability to provide services, such as education, that government entities are constitutionally bound to provide.

Gibbons and lawmakers aren't the only ones who need to make tough decisions these days. As an alternative to cutting cost-of-living increases, they proposed reducing textbook funding by \$45 million. This is scary. Our students need books. Our teachers also deserve raises; they're underpaid given the work they do. Perhaps there's a compromise in there somewhere — teachers accepting a marginal cut in raises so that we can ensure our students have learning materials. It's a shame it has even come to this.

We should be unabashed supporters of education, to the point that we're willing to pressure lawmakers into keeping their hands off of it, no matter what. Everything ties back to education. The better educated our youth, the less likely they are to get involved in behaviors that will require social services.



We must live by our resources

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Can you imagine someone becoming a judge, a journalist, a businessman, and a physician, all in one lifetime? Certainly in today's economic climate, all of us should be so blessed to have two or more career paths just to pay for gasoline and food. But seldom do we hear of a person with such varied credentials as those mentioned above, much less someone who is educated in more than one area. In light of the fact that we are, indeed, in a knowledge-based economy, as Peter Drucker pointed out in his book, "Post-Capitalist Society," it is important that we know how to do more than one thing; we must become generalists rather than specialists.

Martin Delany was such a man. Born in 1812, Delany moved through several careers, including a stint as a U.S. Army Officer.

This intelligent, conscious, nationalistic Black man accomplished more in his 73 years on this earth than a dozen of us accomplish collectively. He, along with many other Black people during his time, such as William Wells-Brown, Frederick Douglass, and Maria Stewart, understood and acted upon the reality that if Black people were going to be successful in this country it would be by the work of their own hands. They knew



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full-well, despite the horrendous treatment they received since arriving on America's shores and deserving reparations for their labor, that Black folks were on their own.

Our ancestors did what they had to do to take care of themselves, their families, and one another because they knew help was not on the way from those who ruled this country. Delany was a positive example of a man who acted upon the reality of life in America for people of African descent.

Despite being born a free man, Delany still understood his obligation to his people, free and enslaved. He did not consider himself so privileged that he turned his back on his less fortunate brothers and sisters.

Having attended Harvard Medical School, he did not look down his nose at Black folks who were not educated. He rallied his personal resources, both intellectual and financial, to help his people, which became his life's

work. He founded a Black newspaper, *The Mystery*, and later partnered with Frederick Douglass and his newspaper, *The North Star*, prior to studying medicine.

Delany promoted self-determination for African-Americans and advocated for a separate nation for Blacks outside the United States. His seminal work, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* is to this day a lesson in self-determination and self-reliance among Black people.

Delany's life pursuits and accomplishments were not unique. During the 1800s and early 1900s there were many other Black people whose knowledge and acumen spanned from construction to business to medicine to writing to agriculture. Why? They understood that only by the work of their own hands would they succeed.

What are the lessons for us today? What lessons in Delany's life can we share with our children, not only during Black History Month but all year long? Independence, self-reliance, nationalist-thinking, and understanding that to whom much is given much is required, are good places to start. We should also teach our youth that no matter their station in life, no matter their resources, no matter the barriers they face, they can make it. And last but not least, we should teach them about the legacy left by their ancestors, and instill in them the fact that they are standing on the shoulders of strong, determined, Black people; therefore, they have an obligation that rises far above self-aggrandizement and self-absorption.

As I have said many times, all the lessons we

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Telephone (702) 380-8100
Email: lvsentinelvoice@yahoo.com

Contributing Writers:
Shirley Savage
Lés Pierres Streater
Kanika Vann

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

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