

OUR VOICE

E. T. G. J. G.

"Earth to Gov. Jim Gibbons. Earth to Gov. Jim Gibbons." Governor, with all due respect, we, the citizens of Nevada (and the readers of the *Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice*) must ask in the most candid, direct and upfront way possible: what in the heck are you thinking? In your State of the State Address last week you announced nothing short of the complete and total diminution of Nevada. You essentially laid the groundwork for a generation or more of regression in many of the vital socio-civic areas in which our state already lags.

Your speech started off mindful of these economic perils we face. "Today, Nevada faces historic challenges. Every day, people in our communities are seeing their work hours cut, their benefits and retirement programs reduced or eliminated, their tip and commission income shrinking, or their jobs eliminated altogether. Many of our fellow citizens are losing their homes, losing their retirement savings and losing their ability to continue to work and prosper in our state."

So far, so good.

"For years, Nevada led the nation in population growth, led the nation in small business growth, and led the nation in job creation. Economic expansion brought prosperity to every sector of the economy, and our State was the envy of many. We have been that 'beacon on the hill' of hope for those who wanted to work hard and prosper. While right now our beacon may not be as easy to see, it is our responsibility to ensure that we can help bring back the bright light of success to shine across the state."

No issues there.

"For many years, people believed that our state was 'recession-proof.' Unfortunately, this economic downturn has shown that this simply is not the case. When the nation and, indeed the world, are in economic turmoil, Nevada is also shaken by the tremors. In fact, Nevada has actually fared worse in this national and worldwide economic crisis than many other states. The combination of tight credit markets, sharp declines in discretionary spending and record-low consumer confidence has caused our two major industries, construction and tourism, to suffer drastic reductions."

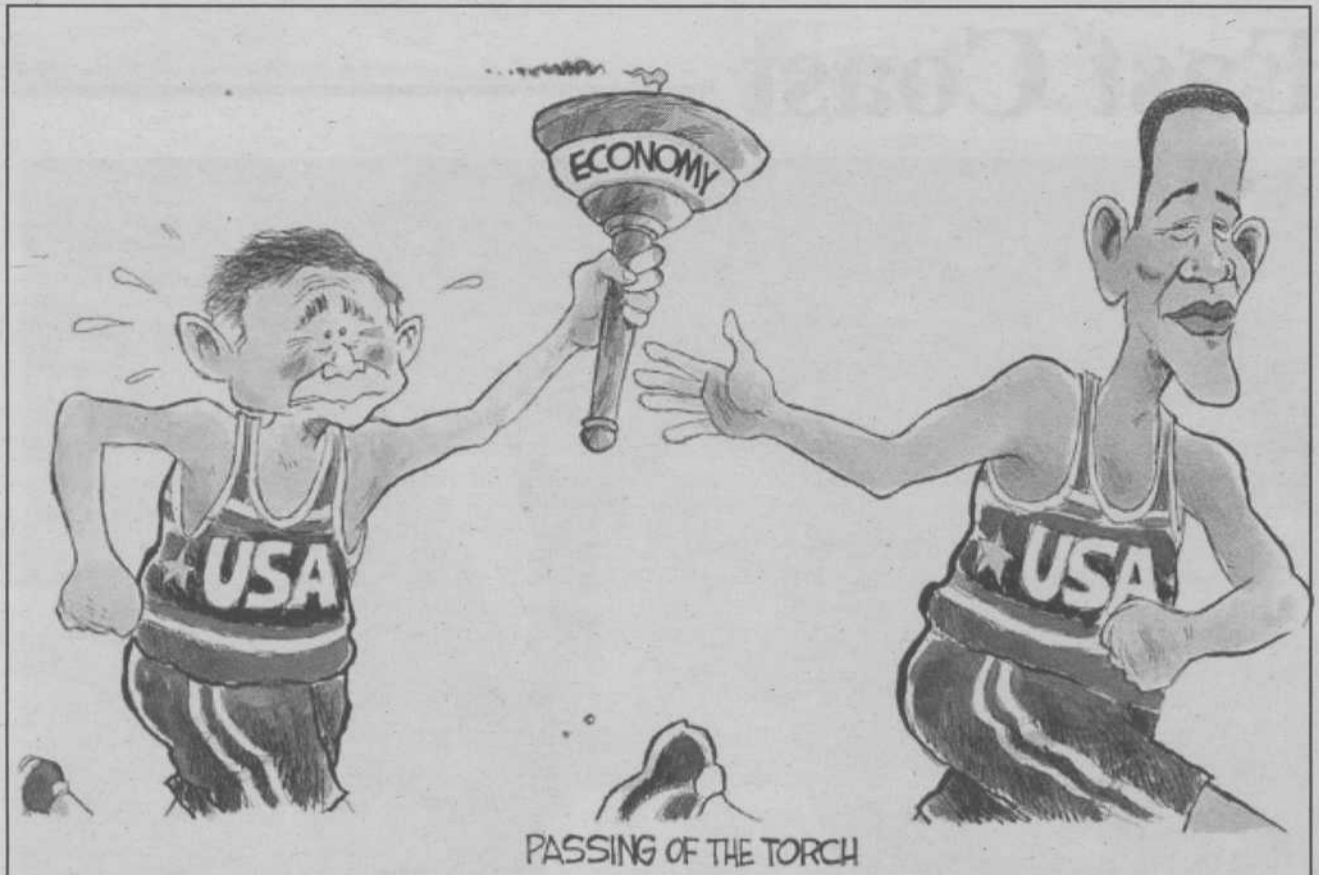
You seem to have a grasp on the problems facing us. But then.... Then... you start screwing it up.

"Many of Nevada's families and businesses are being stretched to their breaking point and making remarkable sacrifices in the face of the most difficult economic downturn of our lifetimes. Ladies and gentlemen, I will not ask these businesses and individuals to pay more when they have less. Make no mistake about it: higher taxes will cost more Nevadans their jobs."

So, if you're not considering higher tariffs or reexamining our tax system which, you said, has "brought us record job growth and prosperity for decades," then what are you doing to do? Before we let your speech answer that question, it's helpful to note that while tourism and gambling have long been this state's main economic engines, the multibillion-dollar mining industry, along with banking, mortgage and other industries have been able to escape paying more taxes.

Then you go on to say that "we have an obligation to preserve needed services for our children, our families, our seniors, and our veterans." But you conveniently forget to mention how, in cutting \$2.2 billion from the 2009-11 budget, you do just the opposite. To wit: you've proposed nearly 35 percent cuts across the board for essential services; this number rises to nearly 50 percent when considering previously ordered cuts.

Gov. Gibbons, what are you trying to do, turn Nevada into a giant Detroit? Or Cleveland? Or any other single-industry-driven large place whose failure to diversify economically and raise taxes to stave off financial ruin has harmed its quality of life? Gov. Gibbons, pursuing a course of cost-cutting without even considering tax increases or forcing non-gaming industries to pony up is not only foolish, but it could have a marked impact on quality of life. They say that Nevada is at the top of every bad list and the bottom of every good list. If Gov. Gibbons gets his way, expect more of the same. What is he thinking?



Journey to equality ongoing

By Ben Jealous

Special to *Sentinel-Voice*

The election of President Barack Obama reflects a seminal transformation within the American psyche. Overcoming the limitations of our history fraught with the wrenching divisions of race, a majority of voters embraced our country's promise crossing racial, cultural and generational boundaries to set a remarkable example for the world.

The inauguration today is the culmination of a long march for justice. One hundred years ago in 1909 the NAACP was born, launching a three-decade long struggle to finally end the lynch mobs that killed thousands of African-Americans. In 1932, the organization took up the mantle to reverse Jim Crow and two decades later, segregation was made illegal. In 1960, a sustained effort for political inclusion was initiated that triumphed this year in the election of an African-American president and the Black elected officials since reconstruction.

Yet there is a dichotomy between the symbol of hope and racial progress of President Obama's election and the entrenched realities of our painful racial legacy. While the country has allowed individuals to permeate the barriers of discrimination, entire groups of people are still locked out of the American dream because of race.

An unknown Barack dressed in jeans and a T-shirt might find it difficult to get a cab. As a Black man, he



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would be much more likely to be subjected to threats or use of force than a White man were he stopped by police according to Bureau of Justice Statistics. African-Americans are still unfairly profiled and subjected to a justice system that uses mass incarceration to address too many of our nation's social problems.

We have the second highest incarceration rate in the world with more than two million adults in prison. With an estimated one in nine African-American men and one in 35 African-American women likely to be incarcerated, the nation's racial disparities in the criminal justice system are indisputable. African-Americans, who represent 13.4 percent of the U.S. population, are 30.5 percent of all people arrested.

Our corporate board rooms are quietly segregated. A report released last week by the Civil Rights Project at the University of California at Los Angeles reveals that Black and Hispanics are more isolated from White students than at any time since the Civil Rights Movement and many of the schools they attend are of dis-

mal quality. The report attributed the trends to a "systematic neglect of civil rights policies." The crushing burden of poverty still reigns over far too many communities of color robbing children of opportunity. The African-American middle class is stagnant at best.

Studies reveal the entrenched realities of discrimination. In one study in Milwaukee, Wis. pairs of Black and White college students, using similar resumes, applied for 350 low-skill jobs advertised in a local newspaper. Some of the participants were assigned false prison records. The study concluded that employers preferred Whites with criminal records to African-Americans with no criminal background. Overall, employers were three times more likely to hire Whites.

This is the unfinished business of our journey. The bold dream of an America where opportunity exists for all and where every American is given a chance to reach their potential remains elu-

sive.

This year we need to see a bailout of backstreet not just Main Street and the wealthy elite of Wall Street. We need to move quickly to the day when all children go to a good school. We need to stop using prisons to solve social problems that can be better addressed through strategies like drug rehabilitation and treatment for mental illness.

The centennial of the NAACP reflects a turning point in our nation from lynch mobs to electing our first Black president. We know there are many challenges ahead yet we have proven time and time again that together, in unity, marching forward we can create a better world. The remarkable election of President Barack Obama inspired millions and it is in that collective and impassioned longing for change, we shall find the political will to complete the journey and realize our country's noble promise.

Ben Jealous is president of the NAACP.

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