

OUR VOICE

Big Cop Out

We've heard it from politicians from city halls and state houses across the country, as well as the halls of Congress and the White House: we're all going to have to share in the nation's financial pain in order for the economy to recover. For many people, that will mean paying higher taxes. That is almost certain to be the case in Nevada, which is facing a nearly \$2 billion budget deficit. It's neither practical nor prudent to expect lawmakers to find enough waste in the state government to make up for that gap. As a result, tax increases are a near certainty.

On Tuesday, local police chiefs added their two cents to the equation by asking state lawmakers to re-up and pass a quarter-cent sales tax hike to hire more police. The chiefs claim that the new officers hired after the passage of a similar tax in 2005—some 800 in all—have helped reduce crime across Southern Nevada and allowed departments to become proactive, rather than reactive, when it comes to fighting crime. Clark County Sheriff Doug Gillespie, Henderson Police Chief Jutta Chambers and North Las Vegas Police Chief Joseph Forti told lawmakers in Carson City that crime data speaks to the power of increased policing: Gillespie said crime in Metro's jurisdiction fell 27 percent since 2004; Jutta said Henderson has experienced a 17 percent drop from 2006 to 2008; Forti claims property crime dropped 10 percent and violent crime by 8 percent between 2007 and 2008.

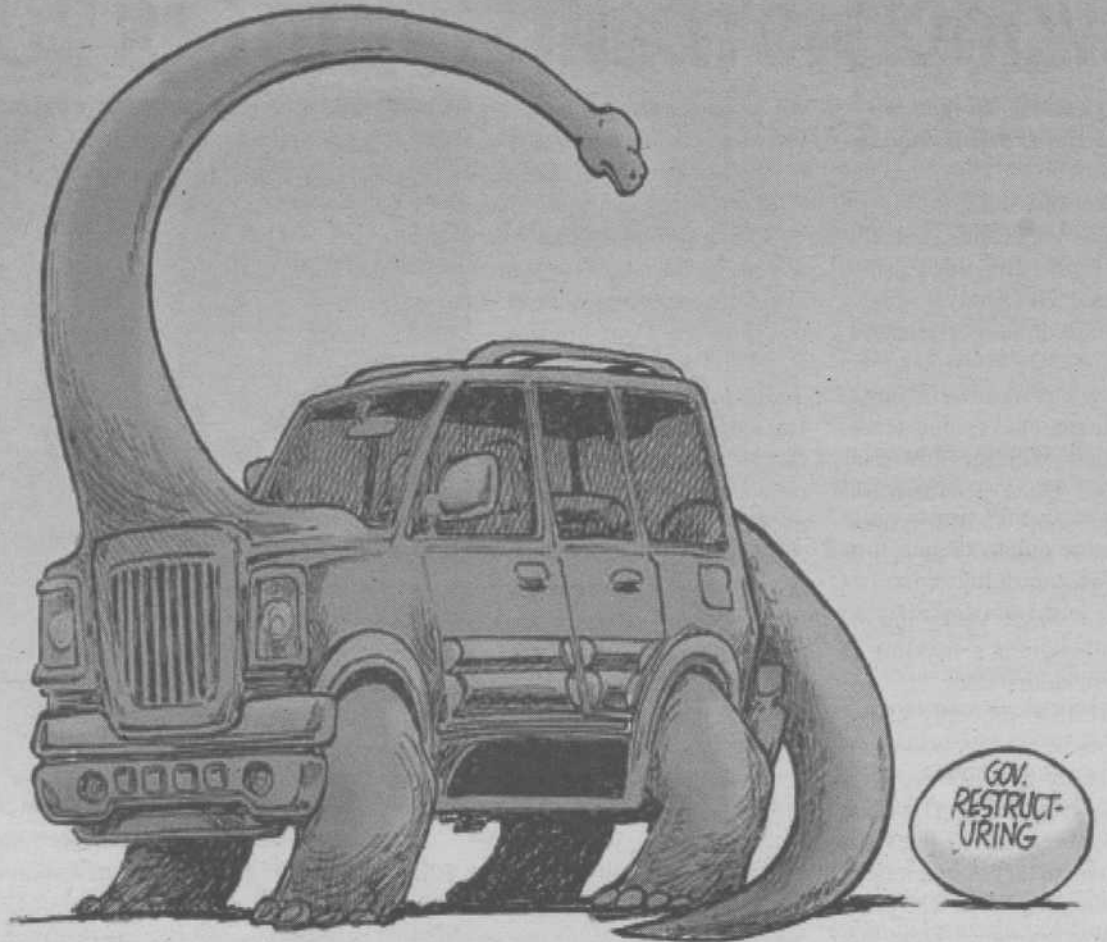
Let's give these police chiefs the benefit of the doubt. Let's assume there's a concrete correlation between more boots on the ground and lower crime rates. Under that theory, it seems that we could simply arrest our way to safety; that we could add more and more cops, theoretically allowing departments to be infinitely more proactive. Police could prevent crimes before they happen. Crime stats would plummet. There'd be fewer deaths, few illegal guns and illicit drugs on the streets. Neighborhoods would be safer. Life would be better all around.

Not only is this unrealistic, there's considerable debate over whether more cops on the beat actually lowers crime. Take 1994, the year legislation was enacted to put 100,000 more police on the streets of America. The bill was in response to spiking crime; the national murder rate peaked in 1991. The National Institute of Justice released a study showing that the bill produced between 69,000 and 82,000 cops.

In 2007, University of Texas at Dallas researchers John Worrall and Tomislav Kovandzic noted in a study published in the journal *Criminology* that "COPS grants had no discernible effect on serious crime." According to an article in *Reason* magazine, a 2005 report by the Government Accountability Office disagreed described the impact of more cops as minimal, attributing the declining crime rate in the 1990's to other variables.

Can we really expect that adding more cops will reduce crime in the most troubled areas of the Valley? Crime may be down overall, but the toughest neighborhoods haven't seen dramatic decreases in shootings, robberies and auto theft. These areas have been troubled for decades—when there were fewer cops and when there were more cops. Which begs the question: Where should we, as a county, be putting our resources?

Why not into education? Think about it. We could dramatically improve education in the Clark County School District with, say, 1,700 new, qualified teachers. Or pouring the money for additional cops into extra resources for struggling schools. Or using those funds to increase teacher salaries or starting pay, provide subsidies so teachers don't have to spend between \$800 to \$1,000 supplying their own classrooms, enhance training, direct additional resources to before-school and after-school programs, invest in more tutors and learning specialists, offer performance-based incentives for faculty and academic perks for children who achieve or show dramatic improvement. Instead of gearing up, lock more people up—it costs nearly four times as much to house an inmate than to educate a child—we should be investing in our future. The better prepared our children are, the less likely they'll become tomorrow's criminals. Kids are something we can all believe in and invest in. Right, Mr. Police Chiefs? Right?



Digital divide can, will be closed

Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

African-Americans still significantly lag behind our White counterparts when it comes to utilizing the features and benefits of the Internet and to gain fast and efficient access to services and information.

This makes us slow on the learning curve and definitely puts us at a handicap medically, culturally and economically. We suffer because of it. In urban areas where broadband (cable for high speed internet access) is saturated, African-Americans still use it at a rate less than 50 percent. In rural areas where access is limited, our usage is less than 23 percent. It is absolutely shocking.

The Stimulus Bill offers American communities a great opportunity to deploy broadband in unserved and underserved communities. Between the U.S. Department of Commerce (National Telecommunications and Information Agency — NTIA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (Rural Utilities Services — RUS) there will be over \$7.2 billion dollars in grants given out to entities to lay the lines, supply computer hardware, etc. Just how they do it is up for discussion and will be determined within the next few weeks. The grants will go out in three phases: this Spring and Fall and Spring of 2010. Right now there are a series



HARRY C. ALFORD

of public meetings going around the nation for comment.

I have participated in one of them. Special interests and groups specializing in telecommunications are having their say and providing their input. I see a big void in Black participation for the most part and that is a problem. We need to get the word out and compete for our share of these grants.

The most critical place for us is in the Southeastern United States with its huge Black population spread out in small, rural communities. This part of our population lags behind the rest of the nation and it hurts. Imagine Georgia with over 200 counties and only 15 of those counties have cardiologists. What happens to those with heart problems? They will probably die prematurely.

If there was broadband access where patients could discuss their plight with a doctor and get prescriptions and a plan for recovery, the whole problem would be greatly lessened. Healthcare

is just one critical area where the lack of broadband access puts people at risk.

These small towns with populations less than 30,000 are threatened with extinction. They can't lure new business into town nor inspire residents to start a new business. The talented youth are leaving as soon as they can for the need of going to a larger community that can offer growth and opportunity.

If there were access to broadband, they could encourage businesses looking for expansion to locate there and provide jobs for local residents. The youth will note the new opportunity and, perhaps, decide to stay and participate in the growth. The towns' tax base would grow and their budgets could offer far more services to the residents than now. The Stimulus Bill is offering that and it is so critical that these towns

are able to compete for the \$7.2 billion in grants.

We recently polled a group of Black mayors representing these communities and it appeared that none of them were ready for this opportunity. They didn't understand it nor had any ability to apply for the grants if they did understand them.

Many were more or less at the mercy of their governor or federal officials to receive funding for projects. In this Stimulus Bill, neither their governor nor the federal officials are going to be there for the mayors. They are going to have to help themselves or receive technical assistance from other sources. The time to act is now and they need to get a plan as soon as possible.

The National Black Chamber of Commerce is going to do as much as we
(See Alford, Page 9)



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

Contributing Writers:
Parker Philpot
Martine Ramos
Lés Pierres Streater
Sheila Thompson

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

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