

OUR VOICE

Common Sense

All those conservative wingnuts spewing rancorous hot air about some allegedly nefarious plan by President Obama to neuter the Second Amendment need to zip their lips and take in a deep whiff of reality. No one in the White House or on the left side of the political aisle want to strip Americans of their rights to bear arms. The call is simply for more aggressive policing, pardon the pun, of illicit weapons trade, which has flooded this nation with enough guns to give every citizen at least one. It's also to crack down on the sale of assault weapons which, in general, have no other use than to kill lots and lots of people.

What say you, wingnuts, about this latest rash of horrible gun violence? We tend to forget that 30,000 Americans—yes, 30,000—die from gun-related violence every year. If that doesn't qualify as an epidemic, what does. But it's only when tragedy strikes that we engage in serious self-reflection on the tremendous toll our rights to bear arms takes on us.

On April 3, in Binghamton, New York, a gunman killed 13 people before turning the weapon on himself. On March 30, six people died in an apparent murder-suicide in Santa Clara, Calif. On March 29, a gunman killed eight people, most of them elderly and sick, in a North Carolina nursing home. On March 12, a 28-year-old gunman killed 10 people, including his mother and a toddler, in a shooting spree in Coffee and Geneva counties in Alabama. Also in March, a gunman killed three police officers in Oakland.

Common sense would tell any rational person that guns are indeed a problem; that perhaps we need to revisit enforcement issues, strengthen the background check process, create more stringent guidelines for obtaining weaponry; that we may indeed need some sort of federal intervention to stop the bloodshed.

It doesn't help when conservative blowhards foment wingnuttery by painting Obama as out to steal the weapons you need to defend yourselves from criminals. Nor does it aid the situation when you've got a culture of distrust and disrespect exacerbated by law enforcers who abuse their power over people.

The stories are legion; Cops pull gun on a 7-year-old. Cops arrest an 8-year-old. Cops break into the home of an elderly couple, holding the innocents hostage. Cops get overly aggressive with minority motorists who commit traffic infractions—ordering them to lie face down, cuffing them, drawing their weapons. It's as if there's no room for common sense in police training. As if cops are trained to assess the nature of the threat and act accordingly. What we're left with is over-aggressive, possibly fearful cops and a citizenry that's equally fearful and, in some cases, goaded into fearlessness, having been targeted and abused so often that they're willing to shoot or kill an officer.

What's missing in the debate over gun rights, gun access and gun responsibility is common sense. Until and unless it's injected into our discourse, the killing will, tragically and sadly, continue unabated.

Can they finish it?

Congratulations are in order for Marsha Kimble-Simms and North Las Vegas City Councilman William Robinson. Kimble-Simms advanced to the June 2 General Election where she will face Sean Hoeffgen for the judgeship of Municipal Court, Department 2. Like other areas of local governance, the judiciary has generally lacked the diversity representative of this multi-ethnic valley.

Kimble-Simms appears to possess all the qualities needed to not only be an effective African-American female judge, but an effective judge irrespective of her race and gender. Robinson also has more than a fighting chance to make history as the first African-American mayor of a large Nevada city. He finished 35 votes behind his colleague on the North Las Vegas City Council, Shari Buck, in the primary for the mayoralty of North Las Vegas. Buck garnered 2,737 votes to Robinson's 2,702 votes. Robinson is a stalwart in North Las Vegas politics, having served on the council since 1983. As such, he's the longest-tenured, currently-serving elected official in Southern Nevada. That gives him a political gravitas that's hard to come by.



No slam dunk in the classroom

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

If the basketball championship games had been based on how athletes performed in the classroom instead of on the basketball court, Monday night's championship game in Detroit would have been between Duke and Villanova instead of North Carolina and Michigan State in the men's division and top-ranked Connecticut would have faced either Ohio State, Stanford or Vanderbilt instead of Louisville in the women's championship game Tuesday night in St. Louis.

The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, based at the University of Central Florida, listed academic rankings for both men and women basketball programs. Using the NCAA's Graduation Success Rates, Duke and Villanova were tied in the men's bracket with 89 percent, followed closely by North Carolina at 86 percent, Xavier (82 percent), Purdue (77 percent) and Pittsburgh (69 percent). Michigan State was ranked 9th, with a 60 percent rate.

In the women's competition, Connecticut, Ohio State, Stanford and Vanderbilt were all tied at 100 percent. Iowa State and Pittsburgh tied at 93 percent,



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followed by Arizona State with 90 percent. Louisville came in 11th, with an 80 percent success rate.

The rankings were contained in a report titled, "Keeping Score When It Counts: Graduation Rates and Academic Progress Rates for 2009 NCAA Division 1 Basketball Tournament Teams."

Richard Lapchick, director of the sports institute and principal author of the study, said that while there has been some overall progress in the teams that made the NCAA tournament this year compared to last year, there were some notable shortcomings.

"...The continuing significant disparity between the academic success between African-American and White men's basketball student-athletes is deeply troubling," Lapchick said in the report. "One of higher education's greatest failures is the persis-

tent gap between African-American and White basketball student-athletes in particular and students in general. The good news is that the gaps are narrowing slightly and that the actual graduation rates of African-American basketball student-athletes are increasing."

According to the report, 58 percent (33 teams) of the men's basketball tournament graduated 70 percent or more of their White men players, while only 32 percent (20 teams) graduated 70 percent or more of the Black male players, a gap of 26 percent (down from last year's 31 percent margin). In perhaps the most telling analysis, 88 percent of the schools (50 teams), graduated at least

half of their White basketball players but only 50 percent (31 teams) graduated 50 percent or more of their African-American basketball players, creating a 38 percent gap, up from last year's margin of 26 percent.

"It is important to understand the fact that African-American players graduate at a higher rate than African-American males who are not student-athletes," Lapchick observed. "The graduation rate for African-American male students as a whole is only 38 percent, versus the overall rate of 61 percent for White male students, which is a scandalous 23 percentage point gap. Too many of our predominantly White

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