

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

ANSWERING A PLEA FOR UNITY; CONVERSATION ON FEB. 11

President Joe Biden used the word “unity” (or a variation of it) at least 10 times in his inaugural address. Yet, our country has never been more deeply divided — except during the Civil War. Even our national response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been factious.

Unity, Biden said, is the path forward. “We must meet this moment as the United States of America,” he told the country. “If we do that, I guarantee you we will not fail. We have never, ever, ever, ever failed in America when we’ve acted together.”

It’s the right message for these perilous times. But there’s a nagging, dis-unifying issue right in front of us: what to do about the insurrectionists who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

Honestly, I’m a bit surprised by my own lack of certainty about what happens next. Don’t misunderstand: Any person who engages in violence or damages property should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. After all, a police officer lost his life at

the hands of protesters. And, like many Americans, I won’t soon forget the images of destruction. The guilty must be held accountable.

Federal officials estimate that roughly 800 people overtook the Capitol that day.

While many committed crimes deserving of punishment, some committed infractions that were fueled by misguidedness. Believing that former President Trump invited their actions, they answered the call. In fact, as incredible as it seems, many may have thought they would be held up as heroes.

Justice Department officials promise to relentlessly identify and arrest the offenders. Already, 135 individuals have been charged. Most Americans agree: To discourage such conduct in the future, a forceful message must be sent. And that can only happen if the violence and mayhem of that day are punished.

But not everyone sees the wisdom in charging people whose sole offense was unlawful entry.

Polls show a majority of Republicans still don’t believe the election was legitimate. Many are downplaying the Capitol attack.

Can we move on without accountability? Writer Anand Giridharadas recently posted on social media: “Every time we turn away from accountability, we allow the needle to move. There just has to be a reckoning. You can’t reset unless you truth-tell and demand that people are held accountable for what they have done.”

What’s not clear is how to hold people accountable for breaking norms, ethics, and values — even threatening democracy. How does this promote unity?

That’s a question I’m going to ask Arthur Brooks, the author of a bestselling book called “Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America From the Culture of Contempt.”

Brooks will share his ideas for uniting the country at a virtual conversation at 5 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 11, hosted by the National Conflict Resolution Center. (In-

formation about this free event is at ncrconline.com.)

Brooks is the perfect speaker for this moment.

He is professor of the practice of public leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School and professor of management practice at the Harvard Business School. Before joining the Harvard faculty in July 2019, Brooks served for 10 years as president of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a leading think tank based in Washington, D.C.

Brooks was raised in a politically liberal city — Seattle — by liberal parents. But as his AEI stint would attest, his politics today are conservative. Brooks gave up his career as a classical French hornist to become a social scientist, earning a Ph.D. in public policy. He’s a deep thinker and an interesting guy.

The host of “The Art of Happiness with Arthur Brooks” podcast, he considers the Dalai Lama among his friends and teachers. Brooks recently conducted his eighth interview the Dalai Lama,

who talked at length about the oneness of human beings.

The president seems to have a similar vision. Biden said, “The answer is not to turn inward, to retreat into competing factions, distrusting those who don’t look like you or worship the way you do, or don’t get their news from the same sources you do.

We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal. We can do this if we open our souls instead of hardening our hearts.”

Unity isn’t achieved by papering over disagreements for the sake of appearances. It’s about learning how to disagree better, and without contempt. That’s how we move forward.

I hope you’ll join the conversation on Feb. 11.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCR’s programming, visit ncrconline.com

NEIGHBORS

FROM B1

The improvements paid for with maintenance assessment district funding must go beyond services already provided by the city, city spokesman Tim Graham said.

“Sidewalk improvements may be eligible for MAD funding, but the community would need to confer with city staff to determine the project’s eligibility and compliance with local and state and local laws,” he said in an email Thursday.

Generally, the responsibility for building new sidewalks falls on property owners and developers, said Anthony Santacroce, another city spokesman.

Santacroce said it would be speculative to say how much building new sidewalks might cost because it depends on variables such as location, environmental review, permitting and soil condition.

Replacing and repairing a sidewalk, however, costs an average of \$18 to \$25 per

square foot, depending if there is a tree, he said.

The reason some neighborhoods have sidewalks and others don’t is related to when the area was originally developed, said Bruce Appleyard, an urban planning professor at San Diego State University.

“Back in the ‘50s and ‘60s, developers would argue away the need for sidewalks ... it was an added cost,” Appleyard said.

Therefore it’s not unusual to see communities with discontinuous sidewalks, he said, which creates greater dependency on cars and impacts people’s well-being. It can also affect property values, he said.

In the case of Paradise Hills, an older and urbanized community, the streets were subdivided before improvements were required as part of the development process, city officials said.

Although Paradise Hill’s approach is unique, and proponents are looking forward to bringing it to fruition, Roesler said, it’s ridiculous that residents have to tax themselves to get basic in-



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T

A section of Sea Breeze Drive in Paradise Hills has no sidewalk, making it dangerous for pedestrians.

rastructure.

“It’s the only way it seems we are going to get something for our community,” Roesler said.

Could a similar approach work in other communities?

Pedestrian-safety advocates say sidewalks are crucial for a neighborhood’s walkability and well-being, yet many areas lack that basic infrastructure.

The city of San Diego completed an inventory of

its more than 5,000 miles of sidewalks and its nonexistent sidewalks in 2015. The study found that 650 miles of streets are missing sidewalks.

About 29 percent of them are in City Council District 1, which includes the neighborhoods of La Jolla, Carmel Valley, University City and Torrey Pines. Most of the missing sidewalks are in the hilly areas of La Jolla.

That’s followed by council districts 9 and 4 which in-

clude some of the city’s most diverse and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in southeastern San Diego and Mid-City, at 18 and 14 percent respectively. Sidewalks also are missing from nearly 14 percent of streets in Council District 8 in south San Diego.

There are differences, however, in how lack of infrastructure impacts residents in those areas because there is a social-equity component to the discrepancies, Appleyard said.

The lack of sidewalks make it so communities of color are overburdened by auto dependency because it’s not safe to walk, Appleyard said, which affects the area’s social cohesion and health.

Belinda Appleyard, who is married to Bruce, advocates for pedestrian safety in their neighborhood of Mission Hills. She said it’s ridiculous that southeastern San Diego neighborhoods, which already face a lot of inequity, have to resort to a tax on residents.

“It’s so sad that to get sidewalks these folks have to

resort to making a neighborhood tax to get basic infrastructure to keep themselves safe and healthy,” she said.

Although Roesler agrees that the burden of building sidewalks shouldn’t fall on community members, if it’s worth it to residents to create a tax district, then that’s one way to address the problem.

City staff is in the process of evaluating the cost and proposed boundaries. Once that is complete, the property owners in the district will have an opportunity to vote to approve or reject the assessment.

Aside from the sidewalks, the Paradise Hills MAD would also pay for upkeep such as removing graffiti, litter and weeds, and install a neighborhood sign.

“I want neighbors to feel proud and say, ‘that’s my neighborhood,’” Moreno said.

Staff writer Lauryn Schroeder contributed to this report.

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DEPORTED

FROM B1

Vice President Kamala Harris. As a senator, Harris supported Rebolgar Gomez’s campaign to stay in the U.S.

“Now we’re waiting, God willing, for the new government to help us so that I can be with my family,” Rebolgar Gomez said.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

A White House description of Biden’s planned immigration legislation includes the possibility of allowing certain people who were deported under the Trump administration to be included in the path to green cards. The bill has not yet been officially introduced to Congress, and its full text is not yet known.

And with the Biden administration scrambling to adjust immigration policies implemented under former President Donald Trump and already facing legal challenges to its attempt at a 100-day pause on deportations, it is not clear when or whether relief might come for those affected by the Trump administration’s aggressive deportation policies.

Rebolgar Gomez had been in the United States since 1988. She was picked

up in a raid on the hotel where she worked in the mid-1990s and quickly removed from the U.S. But she came back, crossing illegally again to be with her young children. She was removed twice more in the mid 2000s, and each time, she returned again to be with her family.

Before her 2020 deportation, Rebolgar Gomez had tried applying for a special program that protects family members of U.S. military personnel. That program is discretionary, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services denied her application. Then Immigration and Customs Enforcement told Rebolgar Gomez that she would have to leave.

Her son, 1st Lt. Gibram Cruz, her oldest daughter, Karla McKissick, and her attorney accompanied her to her appointment on Jan. 2, 2020 to make a final plea for discretion. Officials sent her children and attorney to another office to talk with someone about her case and then whisked her away to Tijuana before anyone knew what had happened.

ICE told the Union-Tribune at the time that her deportation was “in accordance with federal law.”

Rebolgar Gomez hasn’t seen her son since she was deported. Cruz, 31, is an intelligence officer in the U.S. Army, and he’s not allowed

to leave the United States without the military’s permission, not even to visit his mother in Tijuana.

The military has also told him that he’s not allowed to give any more interviews about his mother’s case, according to his mother.

Cruz spent much of 2020 in Qatar. Rebolgar Gomez said, and she was unable to communicate with him for about six months.

Rebolgar Gomez had been the primary caregiver to her aging mother in their Valencia Park home. In her absence, her youngest daughter, Xitlaly Cruz Rebolgar, 25, had been working to keep up the house and pay the mortgage, and other relatives would stop by to help with the caregiving.

In late 2020, Rebolgar Gomez’s mother fell.

Karla McKissick, Rebolgar Gomez’s other daughter, drove down from her home in Orange County to help her sister figure out what to do in the wake of their grandmother’s accident.

Rebolgar Gomez’s mother ended up dying alone weeks later in the hospital.

“My mother not being able to be beside her in her last days was really, really, really heartbreaking,” McKissick said. “I guess a lot of people are going

through that right now with the whole COVID situation. It’s not until it happens to you that you realize how hard that is to have to speak to your loved ones through a camera and to possibly say a last goodbye through a camera.

“After that happened, I’ve been really adamant with my mom to take care of herself — ‘I don’t want to have to say goodbye to you over a camera,’” she added.

For Rebolgar Gomez, taking care of herself in Tijuana hasn’t been particularly easy. She’s lost more than 20 pounds, she said, because she doesn’t feel like eating.

Even before the pandemic, she was afraid to go outside. She’s already been robbed at gunpoint once.

“I’m sick with depression and stress,” Rebolgar Gomez said. “It’s as though I were in a jail of my own four walls.”

Her time alone with nothing to do is a stark contrast to her life in San Diego, where she worked multiple jobs and sometimes as much as 16 hours a day to take care of her family.

And when McKissick needed someone to watch her three young children, Rebolgar Gomez was always ready to help.

“They say, ‘Why is abuelita on the other side in a different country? Why

can’t we go see her?’” McKissick said of her children. “They miss going to her house.”

Rebolgar Gomez’s lawyer, Tessa Cabrera, said that despite seeing many deportations in her work as an immigration attorney, Rebolgar Gomez’s removal stung.

“This one has been hard to recover from,” Cabrera said. “We know that a lot of people were removed from the United States during the past four years that are desperate to come back, but we think that Rocio’s case specifically is one of particular public and humanitarian interest.”

Cabrera, too, is looking to the Biden administration and particularly to the vice president to step in and help the family.

Rebolgar Gomez hopes, too, that a new documentary by French filmmakers will help her cause. She is one of three featured deportees in “On the Line: les expulsés de l’Amérique,” a moving film about what it’s like to be separated by the border from loved ones.

The directors hope to bring the documentary to the United States and Mexico simultaneously in the near future, Rebolgar Gomez said.

Meanwhile, Rep. Salud Carbajal, D-Santa Barbara, introduced the Protect Pa-

triot Parents Act, which would allow certain parents of people who serve in the U.S. military to get green cards. A family in Carbajal’s district is in a similar situation to Rebolgar Gomez.

Frank Ochoa, a retired judge who is representing the family in Carbajal’s district, estimated that there are about 10,000 members of the military whose close family members are at risk of deportation.

Carbajal hasn’t yet found a senator to sponsor the bill but is hopeful that it might pass while Biden is in office.

“All we can do is try to impact the proceedings and processes that exist to us in Congress in terms of schedule and try to move it forward,” Carbajal said.

For Rebolgar Gomez’s youngest daughter, the prospect of legislation or help from the Biden administration is welcome, but she worries that because of her mother’s immigration history, she will not be allowed back to the United States even if there are changes that help some undocumented immigrants.

“I’m hopeful, but I’m also trying not to be,” Cruz Rebolgar said.

She’s afraid of being let down once again by her government.

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SAN DIEGO

FROM B1

ing gap, which more than doubled in four years from \$1.27 billion to \$3.02 billion.

A report unveiled last week shows the gap includes \$1.28 billion in unfunded stormwater projects, \$281 million in road work, \$232 million in streetlights, \$198 million in parks, \$116 million for stoplights and \$107 million for sidewalks.

The gap doesn’t include infrastructure needs that go beyond the next five years, and it doesn’t cover expenses the city might face because of sea-level rise.

This year’s analysis is the first time stormwater has been the city’s largest unfunded infrastructure gap.

City officials have attributed the spike to San Diego’s stormwater responsibilities increasing over time because of more aggressive water-quality regulations and other factors.

Those factors include climate change, which is mak-

ing storms more violent, and more urbanization of the city, which increases the amount of pavement that can pollute stormwater.

But city officials say the main driver is aging water and flood-prevention infrastructure, much of which dates back several decades.

The need for emergency repairs has been steadily increasing along with the number of failures of the system, which often lead to costly lawsuits for the city.

Based on the projected stormwater funding deficit, the city is not expected to meet 80 percent of its upcoming compliance deadlines through 2025, which could lead to steep fines from the regional water quality control board.

Money from the proposed ballot measure would help San Diego upgrade and maintain its stormwater system, which includes 8 miles of levees, 69 miles of flood channels, 1,148 miles of pipes and 46,000 storm drains.

While the ballot measure



HAYNE PALMOUR IV U-T FILE

A San Diego City Council committee moved forward on a 2022 ballot measure to upgrade infrastructure.

may include a new tax, city officials said they may focus on San Diego’s 95-cent monthly storm drain fee charged to all single-family homes.

The fee is among the lowest in the state among comparable cities, a recent survey showed.

Councilwoman Marni von Wilpert said the ballot measure could simultaneously solve stormwater problems, mitigate the impacts of climate change and boost environmental justice

by paying for upgrades in lower-income areas.

“This is a perfect opportunity to achieve all of those goals,” she said.

Councilman Joe LaCava said money from the possible ballot measure should be part of a multi-pronged approach, which would include seeking more grants for stormwater projects and finding innovative solutions that rely on nature.

LaCava said he hopes the city can avoid a “regressive”

tax that wouldn’t “burden people who are already struggling to make ends meet.”

Regressive taxes are those that apply to all people, such as sales taxes and user fees. In contrast, progressive taxes, such as property taxes, are intended to apply only to people with wealth or high earnings.

Cate, the council’s lone Republican, said he opposes exploration of such a ballot measure because whatever tax or fee increase it proposes would certainly affect lower-income residents, at least indirectly.

“I cannot in good conscience say I’m prepared to support us asking for this billion-dollar investment from our residents,” he said.

Councilman Sean Elo-Rivera said San Diego needs to solve challenges that are real, not “theoretical,” explaining that many residents can point to areas in their neighborhood that flood during every storm.

“This is not a ‘nice to have,’ this is a ‘must,’” he

said.

Tom Lemmon, business manager of the San Diego County Building and Construction Trades Council, said a new funding source for storm water is crucial to the city’s future.

“We should not be at the very bottom of the barrel when it comes to funding storm water when we’re the seventh largest city in the United States,” he said.

Laura Minna-Choe, a volunteer with the San Diego chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, said local residents have a right to clean and safe water.

“The city must invest in storm water management that protects the public from pollution, flooding and property damage,” she said.

Andrea Devlin, the city’s independent budget analyst, is scheduled to release a detailed analysis in early February of the city’s storm water funding challenges and how a ballot measure could help pay for them.

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