

A PATH FORWARD

SINGING THE PRAISES OF COUNTRY'S UNSUNG HEROES

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

In all of Wisconsin, there is just one house of worship: Lambeau Field, home of the Green Bay Packers.

Growing up in the state, the players were our heroes. We didn't miss a game. And no matter the outcome, we faithfully looked forward to the following Sunday.

My love of the Packers endures — disappointing seasons and cross-country moves aside.

So many of us idolize sports figures. We envy their talent. We regale in their accomplishments. And we pay ungodly sums to watch them play. (The average price for a Packers ticket in 2019 was \$243.)

Today, as we face a global health crisis, we have new heroes: the front-line workers who are keeping our country afloat amid the coronavirus pandemic. In "normal" times, they are overlooked and undervalued, if not disrespected. It's all different now.

The sudden shift makes me wonder: Why do we put pro athletes on a pedestal? Or movie stars, for that matter? What makes them worthy of hero status?

These days, I see heroes elsewhere. In Dallas, cafeteria worker Yolanda Fisher continues to pre-

pare meals for children and families in need. The school where Fisher works closed March 23. Since then, she and her co-workers have made and distributed more than 1 million meals. Fisher says that she considers serving people to be an honor.

Fisher appears on the cover of the latest issue of Time magazine, along with other front-line workers. It's a sacred space in American journalism that's usually reserved for the influential, like business and government leaders, or cultural icons. Edward Felsenthal, editor in chief, says that the selection was unusually simple because of the workers' courage and selflessness. He writes, "This fight is being waged in large measure by frontline responders, from the medical workers risking their lives to the delivery people and pharmacy employees who aren't able to stay in their homes to the coroners who are confronting wartime body counts."

Come to think of it, teachers deserve hero status, too. They had only a short time to prepare for the closure of their schools, likely until fall. The challenge of replicating all school functions in a virtual environment is enormous. Seemingly, so is their desire to continue the learning. Last week, I watched a few minutes of an



Food service employees Yolanda Fisher (center) and Pamela Harrington of T.W. Browne Middle School in Dallas on April 16.

online lecture that my daughter was attending and marveled. It felt as rich as a classroom experience.

The teachers, the health care workers, the delivery people: These are heroes by chance, not by choice. They didn't go looking for this fight. It came looking for them. But there they are, in the ring, throwing punches at an invisible opponent with all they've got.

But, even as we celebrate these

people, how do we square our reverence with the fact that so many of them are underpaid and under-protected?

In a recent Washington Post story, Abha Bhattarai writes about the more than 3 million grocery store employees who restock shelves and freezers, fill online orders and work the check-out lines. Bhattarai says that many of these workers are putting in longer shifts and taking on bigger workloads, despite feeling

stressed and scared as their colleagues fall ill.

Fast-food workers, too, say they are terrified of catching the coronavirus at work. Being called a hero does little to assuage fears about sickness when your employer doesn't offer paid sick leave.

Nor does the praise help you pay the rent. According to Ziprecruiter.com, the average monthly pay for a fast-food worker in San Diego is \$1,604. The average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,856.

Finally, there's one more group of unsung heroes that is worthy of mention: parents. Those of you with children are working hard at (all of) your jobs, trying to maintain a semblance of household order and optimism as the pandemic marches on — even as we all continue to worry.

My respect for parents grows each day of this crisis. At the end of the year, they'll have my vote for Time magazine's highest honor: Person of the Year.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based organization working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. NCRC is nationally recognized for its conflict management and communication strategies. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com

WATCHDOG Chief of staff on the board

FROM B1 business interests before the city.

In recent months, behested payments were made by the Seidler Co., which is run by a co-owner of the San Diego Padres, the master leaseholder of city-owned Petco Park; a family trust run by Thomas Sudberry, who relies on city permits to develop housing; and San Diego Gas & Electric, which is negotiating a franchise agreement with the city that will have major implications for the company's future operations.

One San Diego is the leading beneficiary of Faulconer's charitable solicitations, collecting more than \$1 million in contributions during his tenure as San Diego mayor.

In addition to providing food and other donations to low-income families across the community, One San Diego is dedicated to helping Faulconer himself, according to organization tax records.

"Through its work, One San Diego seeks to support the organization of the Mayor's Office," the mission statement says.

The document goes on to say the nonprofit will "engage neighborhoods through collaboration and community involvement and better connect San Diegans with local leaders to

build more resilient communities."

The charity's articles of incorporation, filed with the state Attorney General's Office in July 2014, include this stated purpose: "to relieve the city of San Diego of the costs and burden of conducting activities on behalf of the office of the mayor of San Diego."

The One San Diego governing documents also say charity assets may be spent on furniture for city offices, polling on public policy issues and search firms to assist with City Hall staffing, among other projects.

Francis Barazza, one of the mayor's deputy chiefs of staff, joined the One San Diego board of directors in 2018, tax records show. The Mayor's Office said Barazza's board service did not pose a conflict of interest.

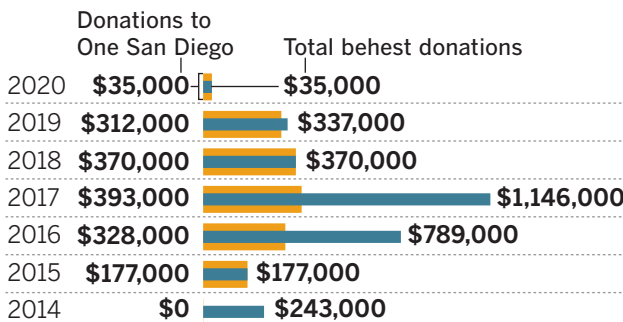
"She joined the board to support the mayor's charitable fundraising efforts," Chadwick wrote.

One San Diego website does not list Barazza as a current board member. Former San Diego police chief Shelley Zimmerman is listed as a current member of the board.

Lani Lutar, a registered lobbyist who regularly meets with the mayor's senior aides on behalf of her clients, has served as the One San Diego board chair for several years. Her clients include Rancho Guejito, which has an interest in the city groundwater program, and Sempra Services Corp., the Sempra Energy subsidiary challenging the city's Climate Action Plan.

The mayor's behest

History of behested payments — donations to a charity at the behest of a public official — reported by Kevin Faulconer since he was elected San Diego mayor. The main beneficiary has been One San Diego, a nonprofit Faulconer set up in 2014 whose mission, in part, is to support the Mayor's Office. Other contributions benefitted other charitable organizations and the mayor's 2014 inauguration events.



Source: California Forms 803 filed by Faulconer since 2014

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Neither the Mayor's Office nor the charity responded to questions about the appropriateness of having a professional lobbyist serve as chairwoman of the mayor's nonprofit. They instead issued nearly identical statements.

"There is not a conflict of interest with her serving on the board," the One San Diego statement said.

According to the most recent One San Diego federal tax filing, submitted in September for the tax year ending Dec. 31, 2018, the charity raised \$440,000 and spent \$322,000. Its year-end net assets nearly doubled to \$255,000.

During the same period, One San Diego spent \$40,000 on fundraising and \$72,500

on an executive's salary.

The largest budget line by far is for "events and programs" — \$183,000 in spending that is not reported in detail. The budget line item for "events and programs" in 2017 was \$103,000.

All told, the mayor's nonprofit has collected almost \$2 million over the past six years, according to federal tax filings and behested payment disclosures.

In 2014, One San Diego's first year in business, the charity reported \$112,000 in total income. The annual revenue climbed to \$260,000 in 2015, to \$370,000 in 2016 and to just over \$450,000 in 2017, tax filings show.

The organization's 2019 tax filing will not be available for public inspection until

later this year, but Faulconer has reported just over \$347,000 in donations to the charity at his behest since the start of 2019.

Meanwhile, grants awarded by One San Diego declined to \$12,500 in 2018, tax records show, a significant decline from the \$135,000 spent on grants the prior two years.

Executive Director Dena DiSarro said the drop was due to a specific strategy adopted by the board of directors.

"While the amount of grants to other organizations was not as high as years prior, the number of programs that directly correlated to needs throughout the most underserved communities did increase, which supports the increase in spending," she said by email.

Specifically, DiSarro said, One San Diego implemented its first event with the Alpha Project to help homeless people living in shelters or transitioning to temporary housing.

She also said One San Diego increased its backpack program, helping 3,000 students from five schools. It further distributed more than 1,000 turkeys at Thanksgiving and helped San Diego police promote two community events, DiSarro said.

"Mayor Faulconer launched One San Diego as a nonprofit to help bring resources and opportunities to all San Diegans regardless of where they live," the executive director said.

Carl Luna, who teaches political science at Mesa

College and the University of San Diego, said that donations to political leaders' charities are another way for well-heeled residents to gain favor with those leaders.

"Powerful business groups and organizations like to keep people in power happy by contributing to their causes," he said. "There's a whole nonprofit and non-governmental organization ecosystem that depends on the kindness of wealthy donors."

Behested payments do not typically result in direct quid pro quos — the taking of one thing in exchange for another — Luna said.

"What it creates is a web of interests that get access to the levers of power, more so than the average person," he said. "It's simply the way the system works. If you want to change that, change the way you finance elections and everything else."

Faulconer reported that all of the \$35,000 in behested payments raised so far this year went to One San Diego.

The latest donations pushed Faulconer's total solicitations as mayor past \$3 million, although the pace of contribution has declined in recent years.

In 2019, he disclosed \$337,500 in behested payments, almost all of it to One San Diego. That was down from 2018, when he reported \$369,799 in solicited donations.

The mayor's biggest year was 2017, when he disclosed more than \$1.1 million in charitable solicitations.

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UNFAMILIAR Somalis face obstacles

FROM B1 tions, online schooling, transportation and information about the novel coronavirus.

The nonprofit also launched a GoFundMe campaign in March to establish an emergency fund for families directly affected by job loss. As of Friday, the organization has raised \$420 of its

\$100,000 goal.

"Our priority right now is to assist the families and make sure that they don't fall into the background," said Ahmed Sahid, president and CEO of Somali Family Services.

The organization normally serves at least 3,000 families a year, Sahid said, but last week alone it served at least 1,000 people. The nonprofit expects that number to grow.

Ruqiya Abdi recently turned to the nonprofit for help applying for food stamps. She and her hus-



Salaad Omar, 24, volunteers with Somali Family Services, helping drive people to the grocery store.

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band live in Paradise Hills with their eight children. The youngest is 7 and the oldest is 23.

Abdi's husband is not working, and she went from working 70 hours a week as an independent caregiver to 20 hours. She said she worries about paying rent.

Salaad Omar, a refugee from Somalia, said people in the community struggle with navigating applications for available resources. Omar, 24, has visited Somali Family Services in the past for assistance but this time, he is the one helping others.

Omar works as a Lyft driver and because business is slow, he spends his time driving Somali community members to the grocery store. He recently applied for unemployment but worries about being able to pay rent and other bills.

"It's a really sad moment," Omar said. "You learn that whatever money you make you have to save it next time to be ready. We never expect this kind of thing in this country."

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SMOLENS Some push against advice

FROM B1 fine. So it should be easy to continue as things open up, or so it seems. But with any semblance of normalcy comes the potential for people to act as they did before the pandemic hit.

In the future, as it was at the outset of the coronavirus outbreak, that can be unwitting behavior by some, but willful negligence by others.

In recent weeks, more media attention has been paid to cultural divides over the advisability and necessity of social distancing and mask wearing. The split has sometimes occurred along ethnic and generational lines. But like just about everything else these days, it has become partisan.

The latter was manifest on Thursday in Lansing, Mich., the state's capital, as critics of Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's stay-at-home and social-distanc-

ing orders protested outside her office. The protest was organized by the Michigan Conservative Coalition, a group affiliated with President Donald Trump, and Michigan Freedom Fund.

Some protesters carried Trump campaign signs and shouted "lock her up," the familiar refrain at Trump rallies when he talked about Hillary Clinton. Many demanded that businesses be allowed to reopen.

While personal views can play into this, there's been plenty of mixed messages to create uncertainty about the severity of the outbreak and the tactics to stop it.

For example, many health officials early on didn't advocate that everybody wear a mask in public, with some suggesting it wouldn't do much good. Now most are insisting upon it.

Trump, meanwhile, has been all over the map, from downplaying the crisis to ramping up a federal response to saying it's basically up to the states. Recently, he took to Twitter to implore states to do more testing — even though his administration has not

established a cohesive, nationwide testing plan or enough equipment with which to carry one out.

Then, in separate tweets he called for supporters to "liberate" the states of Michigan, Minnesota and Virginia.

He has continually pushed to try to kick the economy into high gear sooner than some of his health experts and even some of the nation's business leaders think is prudent without solid testing, tracing and isolation programs in place.

Many businesses and people out of work are understandably frustrated with the situation and don't necessarily fall into any philosophical camp. They just want to resume work in as safe an environment as possible.

The Lincoln Club, a Republican-leaning San Diego business and political group, on Monday called for the creation of a local task force to recommend how best to reopen businesses. On Friday, Mayor Kevin Faulconer and county Board of Supervisors Chair-

man Greg Cox announced the formation of such a panel in conjunction with the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce and the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation.

But if more businesses open in the very near future, how many people will come?

A Gallup poll released last week showed large majorities of Americans were not ready for an immediate return to normal activities, but wanted to wait longer and see how things unfold. That view was consistent among all age groups, between men and women, across political party lines, and in cities, suburbs and rural areas.

Continued social-distancing rules will mean businesses such as restaurants and theaters won't be able to handle as many customers as they did back in the good old days, possibly for a long while. Unfortunately, that will mean fewer employees or fewer hours for workers and lower revenues, but at least they'll get going again — if they

survive the shutdown.

Customers who patronize those establishments will have to abide by house rules, whether it's "no mask, no gloves, no service" or something else.

The bigger concern may be whether San Diegans will consistently live by the safety guidelines when parks, beaches, trails and other now-closed public places reopen.

Coastal towns near Jacksonville, Fla., have agreed to a partial reopening of their beaches, according to The Florida Times-Union. The beaches will be accessible for activities such as walking, running, fishing, swimming and surfing during specific morning and early-evening hours, but they will remain closed during midday. No beach chairs, blankets, grills or coolers will be allowed.

"It's not a sunbathing opportunity," said Jacksonville Beach Mayor Charlie Latham.

On Friday, San Diego City Councilwoman Barbara Bry, a candidate for mayor, called on the city to work with county health

officials and the local scientific community to come up with a plan to open beaches and parks by the first week in May.

In San Diego, government can lay down the rules, but it's going to take a concerted effort by individuals to follow them and not backslide to pre-virus habits that are no longer considered safe or acceptable.

Hopefully, some views from regular people will be sought as new guidelines are developed. Then, it's up to us.

Having tasted a bit of the freedoms we took for granted, it will be hard to take if we have to go back home because we couldn't handle the responsibility.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to 7News Boston WHDH (@7News) about a warning from the Taneytown (Md.) Police Department.

"Police reminding residents to put pants on before leaving house to check for mail."

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