

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# THE MANY FACES OF THOSE INVOLVED IN PEACEMAKING

Last week, at the National Conflict Resolution Center's Peacemaker Awards, I was reminded of the diversity of people who are actively waging peace. And I was encouraged by it.

Like Local Peacemaker honorees Ekene and Nene Okolo, who started an Instagram account (@Black-inPUSD) inviting students and alumni of color to share their experiences in the Poway Unified School District.

The outpouring led to long-term changes at the district, which immediately adopted a districtwide racial equity and inclusion plan. Black educators were hired. School libraries added hundreds of books reflecting the diversity of our country.

At the awards ceremony, the sisters recalled the dinner table conversation that prompted them to act. They never imagined that their platform would get so big or influential. "It shows

how advocacy can go a long way — that fighting for what's right is so important," Ekene said. So, the Okolo sisters continue to amplify the voices of people who have been silenced for so long.

Then there's Chula Vista police Officer Jeffrey Pace, who spoke about his work with NCRC.

Pace understands that the essence of policing is conflict resolution — facilitating discussions that allow people to move forward in a peaceful manner (the outcome everyone seeks). With pain in his voice, the 35-year veteran of the force told us, "(Policing) is very hard right now. A lot of people don't see this uniform as a symbol of justice." As a result, those people are reluctant to come to the table for conversation, believing they won't be heard.

So, Pace perseveres to bring community members and police officers together for dialogue, in order to

achieve greater understanding.

And there's National Peacemaker Award recipient Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and chief medical adviser to President Joe Biden. Fauci noted that while science and medicine aren't typically hotbeds of conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to intense debate and division in our country.

Fauci shared three guideposts for communicating in tough times: Tell the truth, even if inconvenient; what you know and what you don't; and speak to power; communicate often, with transparency — both what you know and what you don't; and speak to foster understanding, not to impress, meeting people where they are.

So, Fauci perseveres to unite our country in an effort to defeat a common foe: the COVID-19 pathogen.

Just as peacemakers are diverse, so are the solutions for resolving conflict. At the event, UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep Khosla announced the launch of something truly extraordinary: the Applied Research Center for Civility, a joint venture between the university and the National Conflict Resolution Center. The Center for Civility will look at best practices for healing our entrenched divisions.

I first imagined a Center for Civility five years ago. We were in the thick of a presidential slugfest between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. It was a nasty and contentious time. Civil society was at its nadir.

Of course, that notorious election was just the latest chapter in what is Americans' long and dark history of being uncivil toward one another.

In our schools, a decadeslong reliance on punitive practices — like suspension and expulsion —

disproportionately affects students of color. Disconnecting from school and community often entangles these young people in the juvenile justice system, fueling the school-to-prison pipeline.

In our workplaces, sexual harassment persists, despite well-intentioned training programs. The data is stark: Up to 85 percent of women say they've been harassed on the job. But most harassment goes unreported. And while the #MeToo movement has shined a light on abuse against women, harassment pervades in other forms, too.

In our communities, intolerance and hatred are on the rise. Increasingly, these feelings manifest in violent acts. White supremacists are now our most significant terrorist threat. We regularly hear horrifying stories of Asian Americans, often elderly, who are being attacked on our streets. NCRC is working to

address all of these challenges. But with civility as we know it on life support, we still have a lot to learn.

A country that spends more than \$190 billion a year on medical research may be wise to also invest in research that will create a more just and humane future for its people.

The Applied Research Center for Civility will seek solutions to our deepening polarization. That's a different sort of threat to our public health, but also a very real one.

Like our peacemakers, we at NCRC will continue trying to make our society better. We will do so knowing that the path forward begins with a single step. I'm ready to take it.

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 NCRC's programming, visit [ncrconline.com](http://ncrconline.com)

## TIJUANA

FROM B1

Tijuana does have some nice outdoor spaces, though.

Parque Morelos, a 1,045-acre ecological reserve in the central eastern area of the city, features a zoo. On Tuesday morning, Marcela Gonzalez, 44, pushed an empty stroller as her son darted alongside the park's large lake.

"We come as often as we can to walk the park and get some exercise, and we do enjoy it very much," she said.

Claudio Ramon Alfaro, 71, said he has been coming to Parque Teniente Guerrero for decades, since it reopened after being temporarily closed in the late 1990s because of crime.

"I think they have enough space here in Tijuana. There are a lot of parks and green places if you know the city well," said Alfaro, who enjoys the musicians that come to play in the middle of the day. "I come here just to relax and take a break, and relax my eyes. It's a very safe and tranquil place, especially since the police put in the cameras."

But Jesus Aguilera, 31, who was playing chess at tables nearby, lamented the lack of parks.

"There are a lot of people who live in Tijuana and every single day more and more people are arriving," he said. "For everyone to have enough room to go to breathe in some fresh air and relax, something has to be done."

Under the state government (and Bonilla's) plan, the exclusive Tijuana Country Club — known locally as Club Campestre Tijuana — and its attached 18-hole golf course would be seized and turned into a 120-acre public park. Bonilla, of the ruling political party Morena, has proposed to convert the exclusive club into a recreational space for children,



ALEJANDRO TAMAYO U-T

Some residents said there are plenty of parks and green spaces, like the Parque Teniente Guerrero, in Tijuana if you know the city well.



WENDY FRY U-T

Marcela Gonzalez, 44, pushes her son's stroller as he walks next to her at Parque Morelos.

arguing that it is one of the few green areas in Tijuana that can be redeveloped for that purpose.

The legal battle is already under way to expropriate the property, located in a relatively affluent part of Tijuana. The club and those supporting it have filed legal complaints against the state's plan.

"There are people who have lived in Tijuana for 40 years and they don't know the [Tijuana] Country Club;

they can't even gain access to the parking lot," Bonilla said.

A spokesman for Club Campestre said the plan to seize it "stinks of political revenge between two politicians." Other legal experts have said the state is unlikely to win its case in court.

Adolfo Solis, a lawyer for members of the club, said the expropriation would set a dangerous precedent.

"Any opponent, any journalist or any official, any

group that is not aligned with the government, could simply have their property removed," said Solis.

The modern version of the sports and social club opened in 1979, and now features a spa, massage area, a salon, and a children's entertainment area for child care, according to its website. The private club has about 800 members, which includes the business and political elite of the city. (Bonilla contends those are its only members.) Membership costs about \$300 to \$500 a month, but to join, one has to pay a \$70,000 to \$90,000 initiation fee, according to Solis.

For months prior to publication of the expropriation decree in the government's official newspaper on April 13, Bonilla had threatened the action during his daily, live Facebook transmissions. He accused the organization of not paying property taxes and not paying for services such as water.

Club Campestre is a favorite haunt of former Ti-

juana mayor Arturo González Cruz, who was the former president of the club for two terms. González Cruz was involved in a major political squabble last year with the governor. Even though González Cruz and Bonilla are part of the same political party, the two became public enemies last year, partially fighting over whether or not González Cruz would be endorsed to run to succeed Bonilla as governor.

Some observers question whether the action was politically motivated because of that political beef. Business leaders have expressed concern that the expropriation decree will deter private investment and hurt the state's ability to grow its manufacturing industry.

Some residents argue the city should take better care of the public properties it already manages. In the Lomas Taurinas neighborhood of northern Tijuana, some complain they've lost access to Pasteje Park because hundreds of families are building a squatters' settle-

ment there.

Marcelo Alvarez, 34, is among hundreds of people building private residential structures — shacks made out of spare wood, sheet metal and other discarded materials — inside the Pasteje Park. Alvarez said he and his neighbors decided to build homes there because they had run out of options and did not want to live on the streets.

"Look at us, do we look like people who are sitting around waiting for the government to do something for us?" Alvarez asked, as he drove a long spade into the ground to create a foot-wide hole for drainage outside the 4-by-4-foot shack he made from discarded plywood. "Mexicans don't have the luxury of sitting around with our arms crossed waiting for the government to send us a check or rent relief. It'll never come."

Alvarez said he supports Bonilla's decision to try to seize Club Campestre.

"For hundreds of years, our government has done nothing but taken from the people," said Alvarez. "At least he's trying to give us something back."

Tijuana City Councilman Arnulfo Guerrero Leon has proposed an alternative solution to seizing private lands. His proposal to buy 100 acres in the southern portion of the city off Boulevard 2000, near Cuervo de los Venados, and construct a manmade forest is being considered by the planning commission.

"Tijuana requires a forest, a sufficiently large and open space that includes protected natural areas, green areas, wildlife, vegetation and natural landscapes for the preservation of regional ecosystems, which also contributes to the health and well-being of the city's inhabitants by preventing diseases associated with environmental pollution," he said.

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## DAM

FROM B1

One issue that has faced city officials is the escalating cost of the project. The initial estimate for the project in 2012 was \$30 million for construction. That figure has more than doubled to \$72 million, McKinney said, which includes the realignment of a section of Oakvale Road.

The road realignment would precede dam construction, and a bid for that work could come before the City Council as soon as this month, McKinney said.

The city is looking at three outside sources of funding for the dam replacement, McKinney said. The first is a \$15 million state grant that has already been approved, but requires legislative approval for an extension of the grant's eligibility.

The city is also working to finalize a federal grant and a low-interest federal loan to cover most of the remaining costs of the project, McKinney said. Based on how much the city receives in grant funding, the amount of the loan would be adjusted to keep that source of funding as low as possible. The city also has set aside \$16 million in its capital reserve fund that is earmarked for the project.

"I'm happy to say, I feel optimistic about all three of those sources of funding eventually coming to fruition," McKinney said. "With all three (funding sources) and our cash, we'll be able to complete this project."

Last year, as it considered the escalating costs for the project, the city looked at alternatives to building a new dam, such as rehabilitating the existing dam to meet current seismic safety



Sources: Nextzen; OpenStreetMap

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standards. However, McKinney said those alternatives were too costly and unlikely to win approval from the state Division of Safety of Dams, a regulatory agency that must approve any modification or construction of new dams in California.

"Unfortunately, we did not find any alternatives preferable to constructing a new dam," McKinney said. "We refocused our efforts on replacement. It was clear that was the most viable option."

Once the new dam is built, the city can restore the

lake to its full level, which will help increase water quality, increase the lake's storage capacity, and enlarge the lake's surface area for recreational users, McKinney said.

The city also is working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to manage impacts to the lake's surrounding wetland habitat.

The agency had concerns during the environmental review of the project that wetland formed when the lake was lowered in 2007 would be inundated when the lake level is restored to its full height. In response, said McKinney, the city agreed to raise the lake level more slowly, allowing new wetlands to form as the existing habitat is submerged. This agreement significantly reduced the cost of mitigation.

Jennifer Turner, a senior

environmental scientist/supervisor with CDFW's San Diego office, said the agency was concerned about several plant and animal species that could be impacted by the dam replacement project, including Engelmann oaks, golden eagles, mountain lions and deer. CDFW also wanted to make sure that invasive, nonnative species such as red-eared slider turtles and bullfrogs were controlled.

Before the city moves forward with the project, Turner said, it will need to complete a lake and streambed alteration agreement with CDFW "to meet the needs of the project and avoid impacts to as many plants and animals as possible."

McKinney said dealings with both state regulatory agencies have proceeded smoothly.

Tash is a freelance writer.

## HOUSING

FROM B1

nue, is across the street from the Orange Line Encanto/62nd Street trolley station and a bus stop.

The property provides on-site laundry, an outdoor play area, a community garden, a computer center, a community center for residents and local groups to use, and a bicycle storage area. There also is 5,000 square feet of commercial space available to non-profit organizations and local

businesses.

There also are 50 parking spaces available to residents and charging stations for electric vehicles.

Residents have access to after-school activities, and there are classes in financial literacy, homebuying, résumé building, nutrition and English as a Second Language, provided by the Hope through Housing Foundation, an affiliate of National CORE.

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## OFFICE

FROM B1

higher air pollution than other areas of the county, she stated.

Other parts of the county also face elevated environmental risks, she said.

In Oceanside, the American Lung Association has reported that 4 out of 10 people live in neighborhoods where the air is often dangerous to breathe, Vargas said. Barrio Logan and National City rank in the highest 5 percent

of California communities in terms of diesel air pollution and have children's asthma hospitalization rates that are three times the county average.

Meanwhile south San Diego communities face high air emissions from border traffic, as well as water contamination from Tijuana River Valley waste, she said. Many of these communities also lack access to fresh food, safe housing and open space, the staff report stated.

Other supervisors endorsed the office as an im-

portant step to ensuring environmental health for San Diegans.

"I think everybody in San Diego County should have clean air, clean water and a clean environment," Supervisor Jim Desmond said.

"I'm so excited my colleague brought it forward," said Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, adding that earlier in her career she worked with a community that suffered elevated cancer rates related to environmental hazards.

The county's administra-

tive officer will recruit a full-time director and additional staff for the office and include those new positions in the 2021-2022 budget. The county also will create steering committees in North El Cajon, North Lemon Grove, Spring Valley and Sweetwater to address environmental justice issues in each community.

The new office will cost about \$1.3 million per year, according to the staff report.

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