

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

IT’S PERSONAL: TIME TO END THE CLIMATE CHANGE DEBATE

Summer is a season of rituals: walks on the beach, picnics in the park, camping under the stars. My summer ritual is a family pilgrimage to the beautiful Minnesota Northwoods.

I treasure the time away, which follows my busiest time of year at the National Conflict Resolution Center.

But this year — in response to the inevitable “how was the weather” question — I found myself grousing a bit. You see, it was too chilly in northern Minnesota to wear shorts.

My daughter, who lives in Walla Walla, Wash., couldn’t relate. In fact, she was flatly annoyed with me. The day we spoke, the temperature in Walla Walla was 106 degrees. It’s a place where the average summer temperature is typically 25 degrees cooler. Air conditioning is uncommon.

But when it comes to climate, our notions of normal have been upended. Just as the Pacific Northwest has experienced record heat, so has much of the rest of the country — and much of the planet, really. Europe, Africa and Asia have broken temperature barriers

that once seemed unimaginable. The heat and lack of rain have left a trail of wildfires.

Las Vegas, N.M., has only a two-month supply of water, due to contamination caused by thousands of tons of wildfire ash and debris. Flames in the area gave way to floods, causing burnt soil to encroach the Gallinas River watershed.

And recent flooding in eastern Kentucky has claimed 37 lives, a toll that is expected to rise. Hundreds of people are missing in areas left isolated by impassable roads and washed-out bridges. Rain continues to fall.

But really, there is nothing new about the extreme weather phenomenon or its cause: a warming planet. According to history.com, global temperatures increased sharply in the early 1980s. By 1988, scientists were sounding an alarm — and both the media and public began to pay closer attention. That summer was the hottest on record (although many since then have been hotter), with widespread drought and wildfires.

Since then, the issue of global warming has been a political hot

potato. In 1997, President Bill Clinton signed the Kyoto Protocol, which introduced targets for reducing the emission of six greenhouse gases. In 2001, President George W. Bush halted implementation, declaring that the protocol was “fatally flawed.”

Similarly, President Barack Obama in 2015 signed onto the Paris Climate Agreement, which allowed participating countries to set their own emission reduction goals. President Donald Trump reversed course two years later, saying that the accord would cripple growth and intrude on American sovereignty.

Along the way, we’ve given the global warming phenomenon a new name — climate change — because extreme weather isn’t always hot. Last year, southeast Texas endured a week of snow, sleet and freezing temperatures. The power grid failed.

But we’ve otherwise squandered decades of time because of our inability to separate a very real issue — with life-altering consequences — from the debate around it.

Like every contentious topic,

we can only move the climate agenda forward by finding common ground. That starts with depoliticizing climate change and talking differently about it: less about the effects on polar bears (a global worry) and more about the effects on our everyday lives. For Californians, that’s wildfires and water shortages — real concerns for all of us.

That relatability is key: While surveys show that most people in the U.S. believe climate change is real, they don’t think it will harm them personally.

Katherine Hayhoe is an atmospheric scientist and professor at Texas Tech University, where she is director of the Climate Science Center. Hayhoe is also chief scientist at the Nature Conservancy. She says the best way to address the climate crisis is for each of us to talk about why it matters with people we know.

But, Hayhoe adds, we can’t convey a feeling of hopelessness. Instead, we should talk about the small, but meaningful steps (like reducing food waste) that each of us can take. When people feel empowered, they will push for

more change. Individual conversations will lead to community-level action — and in turn, drive the systemic changes necessary to mitigate the potential damage we are facing.

Just maybe the message is getting through. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said recently that he will support the Inflation Reduction Act, which earmarks \$369 billion to confront the climate crisis over the next 10 years. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., has signaled her approval, too. If passed, it would be the largest such investment in our country’s history.

Our action (or inaction) will determine the type of planet my daughter and future generations will inherit.

I’m not willing to sit back and see what happens. And I pledge to never again grouse about the Minnesota summertime chill.

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 nccronline.com

MIRA MESA

Traffic an issue in the area

FROM B1

Neighborhood leaders have criticized the plan for allowing significant growth without the necessary companion infrastructure, particularly more parks and some new roads.

Many of the community’s roads, particularly Mira Mesa Boulevard, are notorious for traffic congestion. Neighborhood leaders are asking how the community can be expected to absorb more than 60,000 new residents and more than 30,000 new jobs without more roads.

The plan aims to alleviate congestion by increasing the ratio of commuters who choose methods other than private vehicles — primarily public transit, walking and biking — from 10 percent to 29 percent.

The creation of urban villages featuring jobs and housing would also increase the number of people who both live and work in Mira Mesa from just under 8,000 to nearly 30,000. In addition, the number of people who commute into the area would drop from 81,000 to 66,000.

A key factor mitigating future traffic congestion is a planned extension of the San Diego Trolley through North Park, Kearny Mesa and the western edge of Mira Mesa,

with a station planned for Sorrento Mesa when the new purple line is completed in 2045.

Mira Mesa’s proposed new growth blueprint also includes an aerial skyway that would connect the trolley’s new UC San Diego extension to Sorrento Valley and then to Mira Mesa’s community core at Camino Ruiz.

City officials said a skyway made more sense than proposing light rail within Mira Mesa because of the community’s steep terrain, canyons and valleys.

Jeff Stevens, chairman of the Mira Mesa Community Planning Group, said the proposed skyway is one of the most appealing parts of the proposal.

“I love the idea,” Stevens said. “There’s a lot of magical thinking in this plan, but that’s one I really like if it actually happens.”

Stevens said he’s particularly frustrated by the proposal’s lack of new roadways, with the notable exception of a Carroll Canyon Road extension that has been planned since long before this proposal was created.

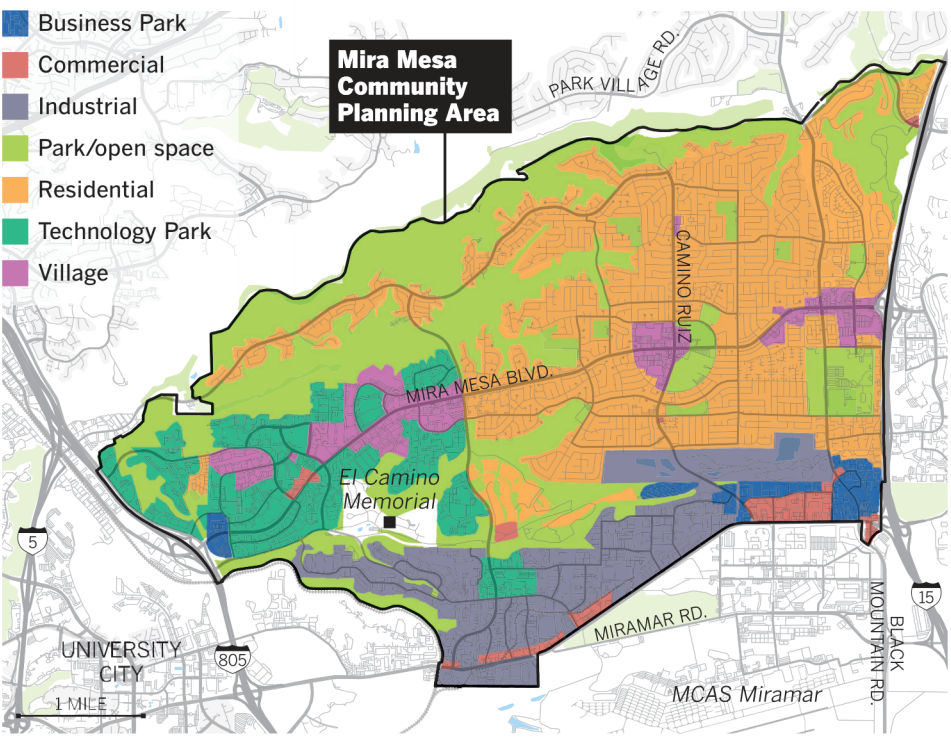
But he said the plan to transform many existing car lanes into lanes for buses or bicycles threatens to make congestion even worse. The proposal would create such “flexible lanes” on Camino Ruiz, Westview Parkway, Mira Mesa Boulevard, Miramar Road, Black Mountain Road and Camino Santa Fe.

“Some of their solutions are worse than the disease,” Stevens said.

City officials acknowledge complaints from community leaders that the plans should include more new parks, but they say there is a scarcity of land available.

Growth proposed for Mira Mesa

Proposed blueprint for next 30 years would increase neighborhood’s population from 76,000 to 130,000, add 30,000 new housing units and 30,000 jobs.



Business Park includes Business Park Residential. Village includes Community, Neighborhood, Urban and Urban Employment Village.

Sources: City of San Diego; OpenStreetMap

The plan includes several new pocket parks, linear parks and pedestrian paseos that would be included in the eight urban villages envisioned by the plan.

The plan would create urban villages by transforming existing industrial and commercial plazas into more “human-scaled and pedestrian-oriented” areas with dining, shopping, entertainment and lively public spaces for festivals and farmer’s markets.

The transformation would require retrofitting these areas by breaking up mega-blocks with a network

of interconnected streets, private street connections and pedestrian and bicycle pathways, the plan says.

The eight urban villages would be the Mira Mesa Town Center, Mira Mesa Gateway, Plaza Sorrento, Plaza Ruiz, Barnes Canyon Road in Sorrento Mesa, Pacific Heights Boulevard in Sorrento Mesa, Sorrento Mesa Rim and Miramar Gateway.

Stevens said Mira Mesa is also being hurt by a shift in how the city calculates the amount of park land required to support new projects. Under the city’s old

formula, Mira Mesa would get 161 acres of park land to accommodate the new population growth envisioned by the plan.

Stevens praised the plan for upgrading several hiking trails in the area. The plan would also boost Mira Mesa’s tree canopy to fight climate change and add a new fire station on Camino Santa Fe.

The community is also slated to get new public parks when construction is finished on two large developments, the 1,800-unit 3 Roots project and the 4,500-unit Stone Creek project.

MICHELLE GUERRERO U-T

CAMP

FROM B1

form,” he said. “Their whole life is about learning how to live in our world. Here, they get to live in their world.”

With doctor’s appointments, therapy, after-school programs and more, often the kids’ schedules during the school year are jam-packed, so camp is their chance to let loose and not have to feel different, Jason Williams explained. “They get to do things here that they usually don’t get to,” he said.

For 11-year-old Andrés Drake, camp has let him do just that. “It’s just really fun,” he said. “There’s a lot of fun activities.”

Although there is a

schedule, kids have the freedom to choose other activities, which keeps camp counselors like Kirstin Curtis on their toes, chasing after the energetic campers. “They never stop,” Curtis said, laughing.

This aspect is something Andrea Richardson said has worked well for her son Tre Braden, who has attended camp for three summers now.

“They’re really good with giving them time to make their own choices, but also they really encourage him to try new activities or something that he might not normally want to do,” she said. “He might say ‘no’ at first, but they let him sit back, watch everyone else, make sure he’s comfortable. Then, when he does try it, they give

him encouragement and positive feedback, which is really great.

“He feels safe, so I feel safe — which makes it so much easier as a parent to let your kid go off to camp,” Richardson added.

At the camp, there’s a high ratio of staff members, who are specially trained to work with kids with special needs, to campers, ensuring each child gets the hands-on attention they need.

Camp counselor Raneisha Wright said she never expected it to be so much fun.

“Every week when we get new kids, it’s always a blast, because every single kid has a different personality, and throughout the week, we create a bond with them,” Wright said. “We’re learning

a lot from them.”

The Autism Society and YMCA offer financial aid to make the camp more affordable for families. But the need for additional staff means there’s also limited space.

Each year, the camp is in high demand with a long waitlist. That has meant kids can attend for only one week each summer, while funding constraints have limited each week’s camp to 10 kids this year.

Working to fill the need

When Wil Camerino’s now 22-year-old son, Julian, aged out of Camp I CAN, he joined Teens in Motion, a YMCA program designed for older kids and young adults up to age 22 with a wider range of developmen-

tal disabilities funded through the nonprofit San Diego Regional Center.

The year-round program runs after school during the school year and as full-day camps during school breaks, focusing on socialization, independence and life skills. “It’s a very diverse group,” said Tess Williams, who is also the Y’s program director for Teens in Motion, “but that’s what makes it more unique and special and welcoming to everyone.”

During the Teens in Motion summer camp, participants spend three days at the Toby Wells YMCA doing on-site activities and two days out in the community on field trips.

“We use public transportation, because they’re at that age where they are

getting around to jobs or other programs or just wanting to go to the movies or the mall — so independence is a big part of our program,” Tess Williams said. “It’s camp, but it’s also catered to the (skills) they are working on in their own lives.”

Camerino says he doesn’t know of any other local camps geared specifically toward kids with developmental disabilities — and Jason Williams agrees.

“These programs have really been a blessing,” Camerino said. And now that Julian is aging out, his father says losing that support will be difficult. “There’s definitely a need for more opportunities like this.”

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SMOLENS

FROM B1

could be scuttled.

While not a tax issue, San Diego’s Proposition B approved by voters in 2012 to scrap municipal worker pensions was overturned in large part because courts ruled the initiative had the city’s official imprimatur and, thus, required consultations with employee groups, which didn’t happen.

The simple-majority citizen tax initiatives for government taxes require a careful dance between outside groups and government officials. There were suspicions that both the SANDAG tax — let’s call it what it would have been — and the proposed San Diego hotel tax increase in 2020 involved inappropriate coordination. No real accusations, or proof, surfaced.

Still, the process has a

bit of sleight-of-hand feel to it. It’s as if we’re to believe the two allied parties know through some kind of osmosis what the other wants or is doing. Some SANDAG staffers said they learned much about the “Let’s Go! San Diego” transportation tax proposal from the group’s website.

If the tax made the ballot and was approved, there’s the question of what would happen if SANDAG’s grand plan changes, as might be expected in a transportation system that unfolds over a matter of decades, and tax proponents don’t like it or the initiative isn’t flexible enough to accommodate it.

This is theoretical at this point because the San Diego County Registrar of Voters Office determined in June that the signatures for the tax proposal fell well short. Yet, supporters said they’ll be back. This proposal was the first of a few

tax increases needed for the SANDAG plan. The lower vote threshold is certain to trigger more citizens’ initiatives to raise taxes for other government agencies.

Coronado Mayor Richard Bailey sits on the SANDAG board and is a critic of both the transportation plan and the method of funding.

“It’s a terrible way to govern,” he said. “It makes policy so difficult.”

Bailey and others of a like mind said SANDAG should have put its own tax measure on the ballot, but that proposal never came to the full board. Such a measure would have required a two-thirds vote, a potential roadblock for the transportation plan.

“One of two things is true,” he said. “Either SANDAG was greatly negligent in failing to put their own measure on the ballot for a mission-critical transportation plan, or they were

trying to circumvent election law, which is illegal.”

There’s another way to look at it.

Unless people crossed that fuzzy line — and no one says they actually did — the courts have stated what was attempted is allowed. That is the election law today.

Despite my earlier caveats, the SANDAG board majority and staff could have been seen as wisely backing off and letting the outside groups carry the tax ball, giving the transportation plan a better shot at needed funding.

Whether there was coordination between them is a matter of speculation, but mostly among political insiders.

Some of that suspicion arose during the effort to draft, qualify and pass Measure C, the 2020 hotel tax initiative to fund expansion of the downtown convention center, homeless programs and road repairs

— all government spending projects.

A coalition of the tourism industry, labor unions, housing advocates and others drove the initiative. That was done, in part, with hopes that a majority-approval threshold would be valid if they didn’t achieve a two-thirds vote. The measure fell a hair short of the latter — 65.24 percent of the voters supported it — and the city is litigating whether the measure should be deemed approved.

Some San Diego city officials, especially then-Mayor Kevin Faulconer, clearly were kept in the loop on the development of the ballot proposal and their views were known to the drafters. That didn’t seem to matter to the public, as Faulconer was long identified with the proposal.

Taking a step back, there’s a disconnect that’s rarely discussed: The Legis-

lature and governor can win voter tax approval with a simple majority, but local governments can’t.

Bailey is right about this being no way to govern. It’s a convoluted process, and the laws probably should be changed. The solution is simple, though it may not have broad support: Get rid of the two-thirds threshold entirely.

Vital issues of government financing shouldn’t be determined by a third of the voters plus one, regardless of who’s making the proposal. Raising taxes should be like most other measures on the ballot: The side with the most votes wins.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Schooley (@Rschooley), “average against the machine.”

“Is Alito going to mock Kansas now?”

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