

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

A TALE OF TWO DIFFERENT AMERICAS, EAST AND WEST

Last I checked, our country is still called the United States of America. But from the perspective of Black Americans, it must feel like we're split in two. At least, that's my take.

On the East Coast, there is the state of Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis has taken a series of actions that, on the surface, seem antagonistic to minorities — and especially, Black Floridians. On the West Coast, California Gov. Gavin Newsom has established a reparations task force that's been traveling the state to learn about the generational effects of racist policies and actions on Black Californians.

Some have said both governors are pandering, in furtherance of their presidential ambitions: DeSantis to the most right-wing conservatives; Newsom to the most liberal left.

In his budget speech on Jan. 31, the eve of Black History Month, DeSantis announced that the state would ban its publicly funded universities and colleges from spending money on diversity, equity and inclusion

offices and programs.

The announcement came just hours before the College Board was set to unveil its new Advanced Placement African American Studies course. Eleven days earlier, on the eve of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, DeSantis rejected the course, claiming it lacks educational value and is contrary to Florida law.

The governor was referring to the Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (WOKE) Act, passed in December 2021. It builds on DeSantis' previous action banning instruction on critical race theory in Florida's schools. The idea is to prohibit teachers or employers from forcing discriminatory concepts on students as part of classroom instruction or on employees as a condition of keeping their jobs. Portions of the act have been blocked by a federal judge.

I'll admit to being surprised by the College Board's swift modifications to the AP African American Studies course, wondering if it was a move to placate DeSantis. But as I learned from one of our trainers

at the National Conflict Resolution Center — who worked in a large California public school system for more than 30 years — AP courses must be uniform across the country. The AP African American Studies course, currently in its pilot phase, can only launch nationwide if colleges and universities commit to awarding college credit and placement to students who take the course and achieve qualifying AP scores. It seems unlikely the curriculum was gerrymandered.

Here in California, the reparations task force is expected to deliver its recommendations this year. But while the Florida Legislature quickly fell in line with DeSantis, it's uncertain that the California Legislature will have the political will to make reparations a reality — as much as Newsom may want them.

The task force has already determined who should qualify: descendants of enslaved African Americans or of a free Black person living in the U.S. prior to the end of the 19th century. Nearly 2.5 million California residents iden-

tify as African American or Black; not all would be eligible.

Now comes the hard part: deciding how reparations should be distributed — both the amount to be paid and allowable use. Some favor tuition and housing grants, while others want direct cash payments. Then there's the matter of residency: Should an otherwise eligible person be compensated if they are living in New York?

Five categories of harm have been identified for compensation, according to New York Times economics correspondent Kurtis Lee — housing discrimination, mass incarceration, unjust property seizures, devaluation of Black-owned businesses and harm to health.

If California paves the way by compensating people for the economic legacy of slavery and racism, there is a hope that other states and federal legislators will follow suit to narrow the racial wealth gap. It's significant: According to the most recent Federal Reserve Board Survey of Consumer Finances, median wealth of Black households in the U.S. is \$24,100,

compared with \$188,200 for White households.

But if the 1,074 comments on Lee's article are any indication, just the idea of reparations is fury-inducing. I only read the first 10, which raised a lot of questions, practical and philosophical. Some readers wondered whether Indigenous people deserve reparations too, for the harm they have endured — or in the case of California, whether people with Mexican lineage should be compensated, since the state was previously part of Mexico's territory. One reader called the idea of reparations an affront to the American ideal of working hard to get ahead.

Black History Month — which celebrates the achievements of Black Americans and recalls their struggles — ends on Tuesday. The tale of two Americas reveals that the struggle continues.

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

PETS

FROM B1
staffing problems for years, but the pandemic supercharged the problem.

Pet adoption rates skyrocketed through the COVID-19 shutdowns. Across the nation, about 23 million households welcomed new furry family members during the pandemic, according to a 2021 estimate by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

While veterinarians' workloads grew, vets couldn't see as many pets, and many pet parents forwent wellness visits at the height of the pandemic. That — coupled with the additional appointments needed for newly adopted pets — boosted demand for vet appointments, resulting in weekslong to monthslong waits.

Even now, shorthanded veterinary hospitals and clinics are still being slammed and struggling to keep up with the demand, according to the San Diego Humane Society.

Its shelters have been hit equally hard. With nearly 1,000 animals currently in its care, the demand for medical resources is significant. But the organization's vacant medical positions are hard to fill.

On average, positions are open for 50 days, which in turn impacts



Dr. Julia Hyatt (left) spays a cat at the San Diego Humane Society on Wednesday. There is a shortage of veterinarians in San Diego and a new bill seeks to alleviate that problem.

the shelter's ability to perform medical procedures essential to making animals in their care adoptable. This lack of access to basic care means animals are staying in shelters longer.

The San Diego Humane Society

isn't only struggling to provide veterinary care for its shelters' animals. It's also struggling to help other San Diegans access care.

Just a few months ago, the shelter launched a new community veterinary program aimed at making

veterinary services more accessible in some of San Diego's underserved communities, where essential care is lacking or hard to access.

At its San Diego campus on Thursdays and Fridays and a trav-

eling clinic that visits under-resourced neighborhoods on Wednesdays and Saturdays, staffs provide pet exams, vaccinations, flea medications and other basic sick care for conditions ranging from ear infections to dermatitis.

In its first four months, the clinic had about 1,400 appointments. With appointments consistently at capacity, staff says they are witnessing firsthand the demand for affordable veterinary care.

A recent study by Mars Veterinary Health, a network of pet care companies, estimated that the nation will be 15,000 veterinarians short of demand by 2030 if pet ownership continues to grow at its current rate and vet schools aren't able to pump out enough graduates to meet growing demand.

"With veterinary school debt averaging nearly \$200,000, it's no wonder we have a vet shortage," said Petrie-Norris. "It's cruel to allow pets to suffer prolonged illnesses — by alleviating the stress of education debt, we can increase veterinary care access for the nearly 350,000 California shelter animals who are waiting for lifesaving treatment."

AB 1237 will go through the committee process before heading to the Assembly floor for a vote.

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SMOLENS

FROM B1
tration's maneuvering for the city to take over the 101 Ash St. office building is well known. Rather than buy the building outright, the city agreed to a more costly lease-purchase agreement. The deal was structured in a way that — whatever the motivation — effectively distanced one of the building's former owners from the transaction, developer Doug Manchester.

The real estate magnate, once the owner of The San Diego Union-Tribune, was one of Faulconer's biggest financial supporters and gained \$5 million through the 101 Ash St. deal.

The general public may never have become aware of that detail and many more involved in the transaction had an asbestos problem not surfaced and rendered the building useless. That resulted in even greater public costs and a full-blown scandal.

The city now owns the empty structure and wants to incorporate the property

in a hoped-for redevelopment around the Civic Center.

Meanwhile, controversy continues to grow about the Gloria administration's selection of a developer to redevelop the city-owned Pechanga Arena and surrounding municipal property in the Midway District for thousands of homes, commercial areas and a new arena.

The choice of the Midway Rising team, which was approved by the City Council, already had drawn criticism for a number of reasons. The main one was team leader Brad Termini and his wife had contributed \$100,000 to a committee that helped elect Gloria mayor.

Questions also arose about whether the team was qualified — it had never done a project like this — and there were concerns over past treatment of workers. Further, the vetting process of the competing bidders was thin and rushed.

In a recent development, news reports zeroed in on a payment by Midway Rising



K.C. ALFRED U-T FILE
Kevin Faulconer (left) and Todd Gloria, in 2014. City land transactions have sparked controversy for both.

to a political strategist for organized labor that may have created a conflict of interest.

La Prensa and the Voice of San Diego reported that political consultant Dan Rottenstreich was paid more than \$200,000 to promote the Midway Rising proposal. Rottenstreich is married to Brigitte Browning, head of the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council, a coalition of 136

labor unions representing more than 200,000 workers in two counties.

Browning advocated for the Midway Rising proposal at a City Council committee meeting. Browning did not publicly reveal her husband was being paid by the developer.

"I would really like to acknowledge that all of the projects have signed agreements with organized labor," Browning told the

council's Land Use Committee and Housing Committee, according to La Prensa, "and they're all good projects, but we believe that because Midway Rising has the highest number of affordable housing units and it will create the most number of permanent union jobs, it is absolutely the best project to go forward."

The Midway Rising partnership did not file the requisite disclosure forms about the lobbying expenditures until just after the council voted — long after they were due.

The city Ethics Commission eventually reached a settlement with Midway Rising and the development team was fined \$5,000 for the late filing. The Voice of San Diego noted that none of the other companies bidding to redevelop the sports arena area had submitted lobbying expenditure reports.

Gloria had received considerable campaign support from the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council and numerous individual unions in 2020. The mayor likely

would count on that again if he runs for re-election next year as expected. Union power also looms large over City Council members, all of whom are Democrats.

The Midway Rising proposal may well have been the best one submitted. After all, the city's top priority for redeveloping the area is to build a lot of affordable housing.

But money and influence cast a pall over the deal, not unlike the 101 Ash St. fiasco.

Politically, San Diego has undergone a changing of the guard that was decades in the making. In a previous era when Democrats and labor weren't in power, they criticized Republicans and their business allies for this same kind of stuff.

Meet the new boss...

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Stevens Company Ltd. (@KneeDeepMedia) amid last week's wild, windy weather.

"I'm holding out for a small craft advisory in San Marcos."

michael.smolens@sduiniontribune.com

SCENE

Boys & Girls Club of Vista

Organization honors Jr. Youth of Year and other club members

BY U-T STAFF

The Boys & Girls Club of Vista held a celebration last month at the Vista Civic Center to recognize its Jr. Youth of the Year. Families, local officials and donors attended. The event also recognized a child from the club's various programs.

The evening was hosted by Judge Michael D. Washington, and each of the 11 club members receiving an award was introduced by nominating club staff. Families also heard encouraging words from Vista Unified Superintendent Matt Doyle and Vista Mayor John Franklin. County Supervisor Jim Desmond's office provided a certificate to each club member. Panda Express provided dinner; Raising Cane's the drinks; and Little Cakes Cupcake Kitchen the desserts.

The Jr. Youth of the Year was fourth-grader Olive



BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF VISTA

Jr. Youth of the Year Olive Beebe is a fourth-grader at Casita Elementary, and a leader.

Beebe from Casita Elementary. Olive was recognized for being an inclusive leader. "The club is like a safe haven to me," Olive said. "When I first came to the club, some other club members gave

me a tour, and they were very friendly and nice. The club teaches kids how to be welcoming to new kids and that made me feel really welcomed even though I was kind of scared at first."

The Boys & Girls Club of Vista serves more 1,200 youths ages 5 to 18 annually. It provides programs that emphasize academic success, character, leadership, and healthy lifestyles.

If your organization has held a philanthropic or gala-type event, you're welcome to email a high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduiniontribune.com. Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer's name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.

LAWYERS

FROM B1

San Diego Union-Tribune and other media outlets won a court order to unseal the warrants and supporting documents.

Attorney Dan Gilleon represents the young woman, who was a high school senior when she says she was led into a room and assaulted by several men at a house party near the campus early Oct. 17, 2021. Gilleon's client is referred to in court documents as "Jane Doe."

"The truth favors Jane Doe's case," he said in a statement to the Union-Tribune.

His client's civil suit names former punter Matt Araiza, and former red-shirt freshman Nowlin "Pa'a" Ewaliko and Xavier Leonard as alleged assailants.

The defense attorney who represented Araiza during the criminal investigation said Friday that reading the unsealed documents left him "even more firmly convinced" of the innocence of his client and all others ac-

cused in the case.

"Her story is just riddled with inconsistencies, inaccuracies and even outright lies," attorney Kerry Armstrong said.

Gilleon said the judge who signed the warrants did so after finding "finding there was probable cause that crimes had been committed."

"The fact the DA didn't file charges changes nothing about the Court's decision," he said.

Dick Semerjian, who represents Araiza in the civil case, said the warrants "again confirm the innocence of Matt Araiza and the fact he should never have been named in this civil lawsuit."

"Jane Doe's inconsistent narrative is highlighted by the eyewitnesses and her own friends who accompanied her the night of the party," he said.

"We again urge Jane Doe to dismiss her unsupported lawsuit against Matt Araiza so both can move on with their lives."

Attorney Thomas Buckley, who is representing Ewaliko in the civil suit, said Friday that they are glad the warrants were released, that he is assessing them, and that his client "strongly maintains his innocence."

"We are 100 percent confident that the evidence is going to support the defense verdict we expect to get at the time of trial," Buckley said.

He does not represent Ewaliko in a separate criminal case that arose during the investigation into the rape allegations. In that case, Ewaliko, 20, is accused of possession of child pornography. He has not been arraigned. The attorney who represents Ewaliko in the criminal case declined comment.

The defense attorney who represented Leonard in the criminal case did not immediately respond to requests for comment. It is unclear if Leonard is represented by an attorney in the civil case.

The civil case is scheduled to start in October in San Diego Superior Court.

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