

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

CHICKEN WINGS, NACHOS AND A HELPING OF WORD SALAD

Today's Super Bowl matchup between the Philadelphia Eagles and Kansas City Chiefs is expected to draw 100 million viewers. I'll be watching too, all the while dreaming about next season's possibilities.

As readers of this column know, I'm a loyal Green Bay Packers fan.

Undoubtedly, there will be some talk today about Tom Brady, who retired from the NFL on Feb. 1. Brady, who quarterbacked two teams in 23 seasons, was a five-time Super Bowl MVP. It's just one of his "first all-time" records: wins (251), Pro Bowls (15), pass completions (7,753), pass attempts (12,050), passing yards (89,214), passing touchdowns (649). ESPN posted a list of Brady's achievements — 35 in all.

It's no hyperbole to consider Brady among the game's greatest players. And he may be one of the greatest athletes in American sports history. But is he the "GOAT"?

GOAT is an acronym for "Greatest of All Time." According to Grammarphobia.com, the word

was first used in this context in 1992. It was associated with Muhammad Ali, called "The Greatest." Ali's wife, Lonnie, incorporated G.O.A.T. Inc. to license his intellectual properties for commercial purposes.

NFL analyst and sportswriter Cian Fahey has argued that use of the term GOAT in team sports lacks nuance. He calculated that quarterbacks account for just 10 percent of the outcome of any given game, given the amount of time they are on the field (and the 21 other players on the field at the same time).

Further, Fahey noted, quarterbacks don't play many games, even over a long career. The best basketball players, by comparison, play 82 games in a single regular season and are on the court 75 percent of the time.

On Tuesday, L.A. Lakers player LeBron James broke Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's all-time scoring record, which held for 38 years. James has scored 38,390 points and is expected to play another two years, at least. Needless to say, he's getting a lot of GOAT accolades from basketball fans.

It's not just the term GOAT: I would argue that labels, in general, lack nuance. For some reason, our society has grown particularly fond of them. Yet, at the same time, we've gone out of our way to complicate our speech.

I understand why: We want to be more inclusive. And while I agree it's important to be thoughtful about our word choices and to avoid dehumanizing other people, it's created a sort of word salad.

Take the term BIPOC, for example, which stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Admittedly, I am none of these, but it feels like lazy shorthand: Are we saying there are White people and everyone else?

New York Times opinion columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote about this recently. He shared the results of a national poll that found just 18 percent of people have a favorable view of the term BIPOC — twice as many White people as non-White people. Two-thirds of respondents had never heard the term.

Kristof expressed concern that

the inclusive language campaign has gone too far, saying it seems more performative than substantive — a substitute for real action that "bewilders and alienates millions of Americans." And from a practical perspective, Kristof wrote, problems are easier to solve when we use clear, incisive language.

There may be a movement afoot to restore linguistic sanity. Last month, Stanford University President Marc Tessier-Lavigne announced the cancellation of the "Elimination of Harmful Language Initiative," an attempt by a committee of IT leaders at the school to ban 161 common words and phrases. As New York Times opinion writer Pamela Paul described it, the policy sorted words into categories of transgression including "person-first," "institutionalized racism" and "imprecise language." Among the words: webmaster, tribe, brown bag lunch.

I don't know if GOAT found its way to the Stanford list, but it was No. 1 on the Lake Superior State University 2023 Banished Words

List for being imprecise, trite and meaningless.

Following a fall event on the topic of religious intolerance, hosted by the National Conflict Resolution Center, San Diego civic leader and sage Malin Burnham told me that the word "hate" was used at least 30 times. To Burnham, it's become a crutch that's gotten in the way of real understanding.

After we talked, I sent a note to Lake Superior State suggesting the addition of "hate" to their banished words list, but never got a reply. Now I'm glad I didn't, because the word is sadly descriptive. My real complaint is that it's become all too common.

When game time rolls around this afternoon, I'll be loading a plate with chicken wings, nachos and plenty of chips. As for the word salad, I think I'll pass.

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

HOMELESS • Services include mail delivery, laundry, phone charging, item storage

FROM B1 augmented by philanthropic donations, but that hasn't been enough to keep operations going at the same level through the end of June.

"It's almost at end of fiscal year, and the good news is we've been able to fight the expense overruns," he said, explaining how the cutbacks will keep the center running through the remaining four months of their contract.

Vargas said there could be additional dollars available in a renewed contract for the next fiscal year, but it is too early to say.

"These are not discussions we've even begun to have with the Housing Commission," he said.

Until then, clients who rely on the center are preparing for the change, said Paul Sheck, program manager at Neil Good.

"Where am I going to charge my phone?" he said about the questions he's hearing. "Where am I going to use the restroom?"

A count of homeless people living outdoors in the surrounding neighborhood is conducted one night each month by the Downtown San Diego Partnership, and the latest count shows the population at almost 2,000.

Sheck said the population is much higher when counted over time. In the last fiscal year that ended June 30, 2022, the center saw 5,932 unduplicated visits, meaning each visit was from a different person, he said. There were 830 meetings with case workers, 2,517 computer sessions, 3,069 laundry uses and 32,527 mail sessions in that time.

"If people don't get their mail here, they're not going to get it delivered to a tent," Sheck said. "This



Information Referral Specialist Anyssa Amaro hands mail Thursday to a man at a window at the Neil Good Day Center in San Diego where clients, who are mostly homeless, can receive services.

is a vital service that we do here for people to stay in touch."

The first six months of the new contract year already has seen 5,027 unduplicated visits, he said. During the chilly last couple of months, he said the center had given out at least 350 sleeping bags and 400 blankets.

The center also is a place to go for people interested in finding a shelter bed. Clients line up at 8 a.m. to meet with someone who assesses their needs and then passes

their name on to the San Diego Housing Commission. The shelters fill up fast, however, and Sheck said people are turned away every day.

They do find other help, however. Sheck said he will personally walk someone trying to overcome addiction to the medical clinic at Father Joe's Villages a few blocks away.

"Case management here is unlike case management anywhere else," he said. "It's kind of like a tri-

age."

Sheck said a woman lived outside the shelter for 22 years and a man who sought help at the center was on the street 19 years. Both found housing after case managers worked with them over time.

"Even I walk around and see people and say, 'What will it take to get you off the street?'" he said. "How can we help you? What can we do?"

The cutbacks will mean an end to the 56-bin storage room at the

center, which was used by 649 people in the previous fiscal year. Sheck said people sometimes stored blankets and other items during the day and take them out to use at night, and he did not want those to be locked away where people couldn't get them during the weekends. There are other storage areas for homeless people in the area, but Sheck said one that is nearby also is closed on Sundays.

Brynda Howard, 52, lives in a shelter run by the Alpha Project and said she uses the center every other day to check her mail and store things. Not being able to come on weekends will be inconvenient, she said.

Another client who gave his name just as Rico A, 64, has been homeless for three years and likes to come to the center to do laundry and relax.

"This is a safe place," he said. "I watch TV here sometimes, and it keeps cops from always hassling you. In here, it's peaceful."

He's disappointed that the storage area will no longer be available because he would use it to store things if he had an appointment, such as ones he has had lately while trying to get housing.

"They need more hours, and they're taking hours away," he said.

Reuben Degato, 63, lives on 17th Street and said he and other people are upset about the cutbacks, particularly because the restrooms will be unavailable on weekends.

"It makes no sense," he said. "I'm not going to walk way to the way down to the Civic Center to use the bathroom. I'm too old for that."

gary.warth@sduiniontribune.com

SMOLENS Supervisor re-election a no-doubter

FROM B1 to victory, essentially uncontested, for the open 39th State Senate seat, which stretches from Imperial Beach north to Escondido and from La Jolla east almost to El Cajon.

Incumbent Toni Atkins, the Senate president pro tempore, is termed out of office in two years and has created a committee to explore a bid for lieutenant governor in 2026. But the Senate leader acknowledged being "open to exploring all opportunities that may arise in the future."

As he was gearing up to run for the Senate, Fletcher campaigned for a re-election that was never in doubt.

The efforts dovetailed nicely, as did taxpayer-financed promotion of his accomplishments at the county, including a string of short videos under the umbrella slogan "We Changed SD County."

To be clear, there was nothing illegal in that and other elected officials do similar things — Fletcher just may have done it better and more frequently.

His announcing for another office right after winning re-election rankled some of his political adversaries. This means he will vacate the supervisor seat halfway through his four-year term if he wins. Like it or not, that's not entirely uncommon, either.

Of the many things Fletcher will emphasize in the 2024 campaign, one of the most prominent will be his background as a Marine intelligence specialist on combat tours in Afghanistan, Iraq and the



Supervisor Nathan Fletcher with Sheriff Kelly Martinez and Assistant Sheriff Brian Nevis.

Horn of Africa.

In his announcement video, Fletcher focuses on a leadership lesson he learned in Marine training.

His release announcing his candidacy uses the word "Marine" five times, including in a comment by former state Sen. Christine Kehoe, a San Diego Democrat who lauded him for opposing the military's controversial "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy barring people who were openly gay from serving in the military.

That was in 2010, when then-Assemblymember Fletcher made his stand public on the Assembly floor. He received widespread attention largely because he was a Republican at the time.

Critics point to Fletcher's later exit from the GOP — first to become an independent and then a Democrat — as an example of him being a political opportunist. Fletcher said he left the party because it had changed, though he made his move shortly after he sought and failed to gain the local Republican Party endorsement for San Diego mayor in 2012.

That may not seem very relevant today, given so many Republicans have left the party since the rise of Donald Trump. But while Fletcher has shown broad

support in two Assembly and two supervisorial elections, his switch, in part, fueled what has become a visceral dislike of him by some Republicans and scattered Democrats.

Some of those folks have a similar attitude toward Gonzalez Fletcher. Both Fletcher and Gonzalez Fletcher have been aggressive in pursuit of policy and political goals, and often don't hesitate to steamroll those who get in the way. Of the two, Gonzalez Fletcher has more of an edge in her public persona and her statewide profile made her a bigger lightning rod.

Fletcher and Gonzalez Fletcher are all over social media with political and personal posts, a constant presence that irritates their naysayers.

The critics might want to hear what Supervisor Joel Anderson has to say. A Republican with solid conservative credentials representing East County, Anderson has worked with both in the Legislature and with Fletcher on the county Board of Supervisors.

"Nobody gets beat up who's a backbencher," he said.

Anderson disagrees with Fletcher and Gonzalez Fletcher on many things, but has teamed up with each of them on legislation.

"Look, there's plenty of times I just want to scream at Nathan," Anderson said. "But I appreciate that his approach is reasonable."

He said Fletcher is open to making adjustments to find common ground on county policies. Anderson is one of two Republicans on the five-member board and had to play ball with Fletcher to get things done. Fletcher was board chair for the past two years. But Anderson said people tend to overstate the impact of partisanship.

He called Fletcher "a great partner to me and for my constituents," noting that they worked together on issues such as illegal cannabis shops, wildfire protection and homelessness.

Anderson was particularly taken with Fletcher's collaboration on a program to combat opioid abuse.

"He could have done it without me, but he knew I was working on it. People in my district are suffering the greatest," he said. "He could have taken all the credit, and some people would have."

There's admiration, but then there's politics.

Would he endorse Fletcher?

"He hasn't asked," Anderson said with a knowing chuckle.

A Joel Anderson endorsement wouldn't exactly be helpful to Fletcher in a deep blue district, any more than Fletcher's backing would be in Anderson's solid red territory.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to historian Michael Beschloss (@BeschlossDC) before President Joe Biden's State of the Union address Tuesday.

"At this point in his Presidency, Reagan had 35% Gallup Poll approval rating. The next year, he won reelection by carrying 49 states."

[@michael.smolens](https://twitter.com/michael.smolens)

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, Feb. 12, the 43rd day of 2023. There are 322 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history

On Feb. 12, 1809, Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, was born in a log cabin in Hardin (now LaRue) County, Ky.

On this date

In 1554, Lady Jane Grey, who had claimed the throne of England for nine days, and her husband, Guildford Dudley, were beheaded after being condemned for high treason.

In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded.

In 1912, Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, abdicated, marking the end of the Qing Dynasty.

In 1914, groundbreaking took place for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. (A year later on this date, the cornerstone was laid.)

In 1973, Operation Homecoming began as the first release of American prisoners of war from the Vietnam conflict took place.

In 1983, composer-pianist Eubie Blake, who wrote such songs as "I'm Just Wild About Harry" and "Memories of You," died in Brooklyn, N.Y., five days after turning 100.

In 1999, the Senate voted to acquit President Bill Clinton of perjury and obstruction of justice.

In 2000, Charles M. Schulz, creator of the "Peanuts" comic strip, died in Santa Rosa at age 77.

In 2002, former Yugoslav

President Slobodan Milosevic went on trial in The Hague, accused of war crimes. (He died in 2006 before the trial could conclude.)

In 2006, figure skater Michelle Kwan effectively retired from competition as she withdrew from the Turin Olympics due to injury. (She was replaced on the U.S. team by Emily Hughes.) Snowboarder Shaun White beat American teammate Danny Kass to win the Olympic gold medal.

In 2019, Mexico's most notorious drug lord, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, was convicted in New York of running an industrial-scale smuggling operation; a jury, whose members' identities were kept secret as a security measure, had deliberated for six days. (Guzman is serving a life sentence at the federal super-max prison facility in Florence, Colo.)

Ten years ago: The manhunt for a rogue ex-Los Angeles police officer Christopher Dorner, who was seeking revenge for his firing, came to an end with his apparent suicide in a Big Bear cabin following a gunbattle with law enforcement; authorities blamed him for killing four people, including two officers.

Today's birthdays

Director Costa-Gavras is 90. Actor Joe Don Baker is 87. Author Judy Blume is 85. Actor Maud Adams is 78. Actor Cliff DeYoung is 77. Actor Michael Ironside is 73. Singer Michael McDonald is 71. Actor Joanna Kerns is 70. Actor Zach Grenier is 69. Actor-talk show host Arsenio Hall is 67. Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh is 58. Actor Josh Brolin is 55. Actor Christina Ricci is 43.

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