

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

DEMOCRACY UNDER THREAT AS HARASSMENT ESCALATES

Harassment, intimidation and threats have become a way of life for public officials. When I read reports from around the country, I can't help but wonder: Why would anyone want to serve in public office today? Then, I can't help but worry: What happens if we don't fix this?

You may recall a particularly acrimonious meeting of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors in November 2021. Some members of the public used racist, misogynistic and threatening language to express their frustration with the county's COVID-19 response.

Following the session, the board voted to adopt the National Conflict Resolution Center's Code of Civil Discourse, which provides parameters for conducting inclusive, respectful public meetings.

There have been other displays of contempt toward our public officials here: a house set on fire, a car vandalized, incidents of stalking. We shouldn't be surprised: Roughly one-third of Americans think violence against the government is justified, according to a December

2021 survey by The Washington Post and University of Maryland.

Rachel Locke and Carl Luna have collaborated to study the scope of the problem here in San Diego County.

Locke is the director of the Violence, Inequality and Power Lab at Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at University of San Diego.

Luna is the director of the Institute for Civil Civic Engagement, a partnership between the University of San Diego and San Diego Community College District. The research was funded by a grant from USD.

The pair surveyed 328 elected officials here, including school and community college representatives, city council members, mayors and the board of supervisors.

They also conducted interviews and reviewed literature, traditional media, and social media — including more than 400,000 posts on Twitter, analyzed by Locke's team.

While the report won't be finalized until mid-summer, Locke and Luna have shared some of their findings:

- Seventy-five percent of San Diego County's elected officials reported being threatened or harassed — 82 percent of women and 66 percent of men.

- Sixty-six percent said threats and harassment have increased since they started public service — and nearly half said it's a monthly occurrence.

- Fifty-two percent of those threatened have considered leaving public service as a result — 61 percent of women and 32 percent of men.

To Luna, the threat environment in San Diego is no different from the rest of the country. It's the national issues — like COVID-related mandates and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives — that have become a rallying cry for instigators making a determined effort to target public officials.

"There are repeated reports of organized harassment," Luna said, adding, "Anger is a marketable business in America."

It's part of a larger strategy by the fringes in society to subvert the will of the people. As anger is fomented, trust in public institutions erodes. As intimidation

spreads, fewer will want to serve in public office.

The consequences are chilling. In her book "How Civil Wars Start," Barbara F. Walter wrote, "If you cannot topple the central government, then you can use violence to goad the population directly into submission." Walter, who has studied the rise and fall of democracies around the world, was NCRC's National Peacemaker honoree last year.

It answers my earlier question about what happens if we don't fix the harassment, intimidation and threats that have become a way of life for public officials.

Democracy means rule by the people — and in America today, that means all of us. If targeted attacks are successful, valuable voices will likely be silenced.

To explore possible solutions, Locke and Luna recently organized a series of community conversations, in partnership with the League of Women Voters.

The easy fix, it would seem, is to change meeting protocol in a way that curbs hate speech and shields public officials from harassment and intimidation.

But the right to comment "on any subject relating to the business of the governmental body" — even to heckle — is protected by the 1953 Brown Act, which provides guidelines for public participation in meetings of local legislative bodies. (If the behavior is considered disruptive, however, a person can be removed.)

The bigger challenge is finding a way to defuse the anger that is fueling the threats and acts of violence. I know what doesn't work: trying to persuade people to change by convincing them our point of view is right (and thinking we can).

Instead, we should listen, and let them know they are being heard. Isn't that what we all want?

(A Path Forward will be taking a summer hiatus in July. It will return on Aug. 6.)

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

PUPPY FOUND WEDGED BETWEEN TWO BOULDERS

Dog is available for adoption today after being rescued

BY TERI FIGUEROA

VALLEY CENTER

The whimpering caught a worker's ear. He followed the sound and found the source: a puppy wedged between two large boulders.

He's free and safe now, and ready for adoption, San Diego County Animal Services said in a news release last week. But not before he had a bit of an ordeal.

It's a mystery how the months-old Australian cattle dog wound up trapped June 17. But there he was, at a Valley Center work site on Viking Grove Lane.

The construction worker who had heard the dog tried to free him, but his hips were stuck. And the worker had to head out. Before he left, he called the county's Depart-



SAN DIEGO COUNTY

The whimpers of this months-old Australian cattle dog led to his discovery on June 17 in Valley Center.

ment of Animal Services, sent photos of the poor pooch to the officer assigned to the rescue case, and hefted a tire atop the boulder to mark its location.

Animal Services Officer Alyssa Moreno saw the pictures and quickly asked for an assist from Valley Center firefighters.

A long strap and a flat

wooden board helped firefighters support the puppy's body, and a neighbor supplied soapy water to lubricate the rocks. It took more than an hour, but the rescue operation succeeded.

Once they pried him free, rescuers warmed the dehydrated dog in a towel and gave him water before Moreno whisked him to a vet.

"I was not planning on leaving there until we got him out," Moreno said. "I was happy with the ending. We were able to get him out, get him warmed up and give him some water and food."

Snack — as the shelter staffers call him — will be available for adoption today at the County Department of Animal Services shelter at 2481 Palomar Airport Road in Carlsbad.

Walk-in hours are from 1 to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

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SCHOOLS

FROM B1 according to the district; the panel included labor representatives, school and central office staff members, and parent leaders from district advisory committees.

After the selection, only two area superintendents kept their roles: Mitzi Moreno and Richison.

Most of the new hires are current principals in the district, including Henry High School Principal Michelle Irwin, who sparked controversy last year after she quietly eliminated several advanced courses without gathering campus-wide input.

Irwin has been married to Scott Irwin, principal of Dana Middle, who is also being promoted to central office as the executive director of student services.

The new area superintendents are one of many leadership changes that have happened at San Diego Unified since former Superintendent Cindy Marten left the district two years ago.

The district last year brought in Fabiola Bagula, head of equity at the San Diego County Office of Education, as deputy superintendent.

Former chief operations officer Drew Rowlands took over as chief of finance, and former government relations director Enrique Ruacho became chief of staff.

Here are all the area superintendents announced this week and their previous positions:

- Michel Cazary, principal of Spreckels Elementary (University City)
- Steven Dorsey, executive equity coach at San Diego County Office of Education, board president of on-line charter Method Schools
- Maria Gomez, district instructional coordinator, former principal at Penn Elementary (Bay Terraces) and Ericson Elementary

(Mira Mesa)

- Michelle Irwin, principal of Henry High (San Carlos), former principal on special assignment at Logan Memorial Educational Campus (Logan Heights)

- Mitzi Moreno, area superintendent of La Jolla, San Diego and Madison high school clusters

- Gabriel Núñez-Soria, director of trauma-resilient educational communities at Learn4Life charter schools, former principal of Learn4Life's Innovation High School

Richison, who was the area superintendent of high schools and alternative and atypical schools, will keep that role with a new title of executive director of the office of graduation. Michelle Irwin will become the middle school area superintendent and will work with Richison with the intention of better integrating middle school grades while addressing secondary school matters.

The other five area superintendents will be assigned elementary school areas sometime this month, Jackson said.

The area superintendents will start their jobs by July 17.

Jackson also announced new executive directors for the following areas:

- Student services: Scott Irwin, principal of Dana Middle (Point Loma)
- Human resources: Kristine Morshhead, employee and labor relations consultant for University of Minnesota, former HR director for Minneapolis Public Schools, former HR officer at San Diego Unified
- Special education: Angella "Niecy" Watkins, principal of Jerabek Elementary (Scripps Ranch), university supervisor for San Diego State's teaching credential program, former special education program manager.

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MURDER

FROM B1

Foster, 32, was an aviation electronics mate stationed at Naval Air Station North Island.

A father of four, he was moonlighting as an Amazon driver, and was delivering packages when his car was taken, according to his family. Foster's mother said her son relied on the extra work to make ends meet.

"He felt that car was the only means to support his family and keep them financially stable," Diana Medlen

said. "He needed to make sure they had food in their stomach."

According to Deputy District Attorney Makenzie Harvey, Vazquez Gongora decided to steal a car after he and a teenage girl "found themselves stranded in Coronado."

Harvey said the defendant came upon Foster's car, which was running and unlocked while he was delivering a package.

After the teens got into his car, Foster jumped on the hood and held on for at least 2 miles as Vazquez Gongora allegedly swerved

the car back and forth in attempt to toss Foster from the hood, the prosecutor said.

Harvey said the victim called 911 while atop the car. He told a dispatcher to track him and that "he was going to be killed," Harvey said.

Foster was gravely injured when the car crashed at an entrance to the San Diego-Coronado Bridge. He was taken off life support a few days later. His mother said his organs were to be donated.

The driver and passenger ran from the crash. Co-

ronado police found Vazquez Gongora and a teen girl on a bridge access road. He was arrested and remains in custody without bail.

The newly added murder charge includes a special-circumstance allegation that the death occurred during a carjacking. Murder carries a potential sentence of 25 to life. The special-circumstances allegation increases the potential penalty to life in prison without parole.

Staff writer Teri Figueroa contributed to this report.

SMOLENS

FROM B1

clear the way for expediting construction of transmission lines on a large scale.

That was the goal of the BIG WIRES Act, which had been part of the debt-deal discussions, but was left out at the end. The legislation was authored by Peters and Sen. John Hickenlooper, D-Colo.

"Our work to reform the outdated way in which we approve and build energy projects has only just begun," Peters said in a statement after the agreement was reached without his bill. "This debate has shown a spotlight on our climate reality: we cannot hit our climate and clean energy goals without comprehensive permitting reform."

Newsom has his own permitting overhaul proposal for California, but has expressed frustration at opposition from dozens of environmental groups. Many are normally his allies, but criticize his plan to speed up the approval process under the California Environmental Quality Act.

"This is ridiculous," Newsom told The New York Times. "These guys write reports and they protest. But we need to build. You can't be serious about climate and the environment without reforming permitting and procurement in this state ..."

"I did the climate bills last year, and these same groups were celebrating that. But that means nothing unless we can deliver. That was the what; this is the how."

Without such changes, Newsom said, California could lose out in competing with other states for hun-



SUSAN WALSH AP

President Joe Biden talks with Gov. Gavin Newsom on Monday as they visit the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive Center and Preserve in Palo Alto.

dreds of billions of dollars in federal funds for clean-energy programs.

Despite years of talk, efforts to substantially change CEQA have gone nowhere. Even some who support goals of the state's bedrock environmental law say it drags out the approval process and has been misused to stymie development, gain leverage in contract negotiations and block competitors' projects.

But CEQA has also been used to stop plenty of harmful projects.

While advocates of the streamlining proposals say they include adequate environmental protections, critics aren't buying it.

Biden's broad permitting push irked some environmentalists, but they were outraged that the debt agreement allows for expedited processing of the Mountain Valley Pipeline, a gas-carrying pipeline

pushed by Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va.

Nor were climate activists happy about the earlier approval in March of ConocoPhillips' Willow oil project in Alaska.

Nevertheless, the week before his California trip, Biden received early re-election endorsements from four of the nation's largest environmental groups — the League of Conservation Voters, the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council and NextGen America.

"They have done more than any administration in history by far to address the climate crisis and advance clean energy solutions and environmental justice," Tiernan Sittenfeld, the senior vice president of government affairs for the League of Conservation Voters, told CNN.

Biden has enacted sweeping climate legisla-

tion, pouring at least \$370 billion into clean energy and electric vehicles, the Times noted. His administration has also proposed strict regulations on pollution from automobiles, trucks and power plants that are designed to slash the nation's emissions to their lowest levels in decades.

That apparently made it easier for environmental leaders to swallow the fossil fuel trade-offs.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Carla Marinucci (@carlamarinucci) former political writer for Politico and the San Francisco Chronicle.

"(Justice) Kagan worried about ethics of free bagels as (Justice) Thomas accepted lavish trips from billionaire: report | Salon.com. (May 11)"

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TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, June 25, the 176th day of 2023. There are 189 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history

On June 25, 1876, Lt. Col. George A. Custer and his 7th Cavalry were wiped out by Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana.

On this date

In 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was enacted.

In 1942, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was designated Commanding General of the European Theater of Operations during World War II. Some 1,000 British Royal Air Force bombers raided Bremen, Germany.

In 1947, "The Diary of a Young Girl," the personal journal of Anne Frank, a German-born Jewish girl hiding with her family from the Nazis in Amsterdam during World War II, was first published.

In 1950, war broke out in Korea as forces from the communist North invaded the South.

In 1973, former White House Counsel John W. Dean began testifying before the Senate Watergate Committee, implicating top administration officials, including President

Richard Nixon as well as himself, in the Watergate scandal and cover-up.

In 1993, Kim Campbell was sworn in as Canada's 19th prime minister, the first woman to hold the post.

In 1996, a truck bomb killed 19 Americans and injured hundreds at a U.S. military housing complex in Saudi Arabia.

In 2009, Michael Jackson, the "King of Pop," died in Los Angeles at age 50; and actor Farrah Fawcett died in Santa Monica at age 62.

In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld nationwide tax subsidies under President Barack Obama's health care overhaul in a 6-3 ruling that preserved health insurance for millions of Americans.

In 2016, Pope Francis visited Armenia, where he recognized the Ottoman-era slaughter of Armenians as a genocide, prompting a harsh rebuttal from Turkey.

Today's birthdays

Actor June Lockhart is 98. Civil rights activist James Meredith is 90. Singer Eddie Floyd is 86. Actor Barbara Montgomery is 84. Singer Carly Simon is 78. Actor Jimmie Walker is 76. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor is 69. Actor Ricky Gervais is 62. Basketball Hall of Famer Dikembe Mutombo is 57. Actor Angela Kinsey is 52. Actor Busy Philipps is 44.

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