

OPINION



Your Turn
Michelle Bays
Guest columnist

We should be better by now

I was hired in 1995 during a highly competitive time — hundreds of applicants for each position. Physical tests consisted of body drags, grip tests, obstacle courses, pullups, pushups, quicker runs and scaling six-foot wooden and chain link fences that are still standing today on Valley Road. It brings me back every time I drive by and recall the recruiting officer who timed me, saying, “Its OK if you don’t pass; women have a hard time with the walls.” I took off before he finished talking and mentally thanked him for annoying me just enough to run it faster than I had practiced. I was not alone because when I was hired, the percentage of women in law enforcement was about 11%. Twenty-five years later, the percentage of women is still about 11%. Why is that?

Testing has become more job-specific, which it should be. However, I recall this was done to address failure rates by all candidates, not necessarily an effort to remove barriers for women and minorities. In my opinion, it is a harmful distraction for any law enforcement executive to claim standards must be lowered to improve gender and race diversity. It is worse if they actually believe this to be a good strategy. This view fails from all angles and undermines the very concept of equality. It also doesn’t work. Our community deserves high standards for selecting law enforcement candidates and the profession cannot afford anything less.

In addition to physical testing, there is also the claim of low application rates from underrepresented groups. I have heard these excuses for decades, and for many years they made sense. Today, they fail to convince me and paint the picture with too broad a brush. The real problems deserve more analysis and a commitment to uncovering what the true barriers are. By now we should have law enforcement agencies that reflect our diversity. Women make up half our population, so the percentages should have improved as other professions have. There are no easy solutions, since these numbers are reflective of many (but not all) agencies across the United States. However, accepting the same excuses will get us nowhere. I would rather believe we can do better and that my peers want to do better.

There are some numbers that are different. Today, I am often the only female and one of the few minorities in the room when I am among other law enforcement leaders. During my early career, there were far more women in the executive ranks. In years past, I could look up to and learn from more lieutenants, captains, deputy chiefs and undersheriffs who happened to be women. That was an encouragement to me that has faded for the next generation. Why is that? From my view, there has been no shortage of bright, capable women within our agencies.

Some of the problems are rooted in culture, both inside and outside our organizations. Men are too quick to label a woman negatively for the smallest mistakes or differences in approach. Navigating rumors and inuendo can be frustrating and dealing with bias can be infuriating for even the most professionally minded of us. Women do not support and mentor each other enough. Then again, we have to be there to be mentors. I believe the attitudes of both men and women peers hold the most hope for change. Above all else, leaders hold the keys to encouraging women and minorities to apply and to succeed.

Michelle Bays is the chief investigator for the Washoe County District Attorney's Office.

Navigating rumors and inuendo can be frustrating and dealing with bias can be infuriating for even the most professionally minded of us. Women do not support and mentor each other enough.

Opportunities amid pandemic



Your Turn
Mike Kazmierski
Guest columnist

This opinion column was submitted by Mike Kazmierski, president and CEO of the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada.

As we enter the seventh month of this pandemic, we likely have concluded that this is not going to get better anytime soon. Masks and social distancing are now a way of life and could be for many more months, or even years, to come. New COVID-19 cases and deaths continue as the virus spreads throughout the state. Schools and businesses are grappling with ways to safely resume their operations, while many small businesses struggle or even fail. Local and state governments are coping with ways to meet their citizens’ growing needs, while revenues decline. It is not the best of times, but from an economic development perspective, it is not the worst of times either — we must take advantage of the significant opportunities this pandemic presents.

Job attraction just got easier. The pandemic has highlighted, and even added, more reasons for companies to relocate, especially from large, dense metro areas. The use of mass transit and elevators in high rises, along with the crowded conditions of offices, restaurants, streets and even outdoor spaces, make people uncomfortable considering the potential spread of COVID-19. Companies in high-cost environments, likely facing increasing taxes, COVID-19 operational restrictions and a reluctant workforce, are looking at Reno-Sparks as a viable option. This need to relocate is especially true for manufacturing and e-commerce companies, including those that foresee the need to onshore their operations and supply chains, particularly for areas identified by the pandemic as problem areas like medical supplies, pharmaceuticals and medical devices. Add to this the large-scale social unrest that is growing in many large metros, making smaller city living more attractive than ever.

Office life and workforce attraction may have changed

forever. As an increasing number of companies embrace remote working, our region is attracting a workforce seeking a better work-life balance and an improved quality of life. Working remotely and avoiding the high cost of living in these large cities, especially the cost and time associated with traffic and long commutes, is a real game-changer for many. Our recent national recognition as the Best Small City in America has reinforced the growing realization that our community is an excellent place to live, work and play. This work-life balance is especially important to the entrepreneurial community; both local entrepreneurs and start-ups weary of the Bay Area stress want to grow their company in a more livable environment.

Our existing workforce will have more options. Given the expected loss of many jobs resulting from the pandemic and the accelerated adoption of automation, employees are at a crossroads. Most of the jobs coming to the region pay much more than the current average wage and provide generous benefits packages. These new jobs will require some training (reskilling) for the existing workforce and an increased focus on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) skills in our education institutions. The elevated skill pool will result in higher wages with a quality of life that sets us apart from most other places. Additionally, the ability to work here in Reno-Sparks remotely, for companies in other states, provides unlimited opportunities for current and future employees.

The curse of this pandemic may turn out to be an economic development blessing. The COVID-19 crisis has changed our world in so many ways. We may never go back to “the way it was.” Fortunately, the pandemic has highlighted the many live-work-play advantages of our region to companies and employees alike, as evidenced by increased prospect activity and more remote workers moving here. As we embrace the opportunities this crisis provides, we should also consider what we need to do to facilitate this change, such as the growing demand for affordable housing, workforce development (reskilling), and STEAM education at every level of our education system. Unlike most communities, we will come out of this tragedy much stronger and postured for economic success for decades to come.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stead airport barracks could be solution

Re: “Homeless lawsuit: Lawyer accuses city of ‘conducting government in the dark,’” Aug. 12:

Several months ago there was a soft proposal to house the homeless at the military barracks at the Stead airport. The \$3 to 10 million that is available not only would go a long way to revitalizing the housing units, but might also be helpful to bring a workable solution to the problem. There would be funds left to provide daily transportation to and from downtown to assist in job searches; there are other buildings on the property to do training, and even to hire some of the residents able to help fix and maintain the place. Homeless people found on the streets would have a safe place to stay. Instead of constantly encroaching on others rights by placing homeless shelters near residences or businesses, let’s make a place that is out of the mainstream to give the homeless a chance to get on their feet without creating more hostility. it was good enough for the military; there should be no complains.

Tom Zemanek, Reno

Rename McCarran Boulevard

Re: “Honor Newlands’ deeds, don’t change park’s name,” Aug. 12:

I was happy to read Ron Blakemore’s column and his naming of the local example of the cancel culture. I live in the Newlands neighborhood and am strongly against this renaming. I like this historic reference.

However, I am not at all against renaming McCarran Boulevard. That man has few redeeming qualities. Being a crony of Joseph McCarthy, together they ruined many lives with their communist witch hunts and anti immigration views. McCarran is a target worth going after. Those counterculture people could also work on renaming the airport in Las Vegas! I would feel much better about getting rid of that name.

Polly Peacock, Reno

Nevada delegation must support refugees

“Asylum” is a legal and moral protection enshrined in U.S. and international law. It exists to restore safety to people in other countries fleeing violence and persecution. Because the Trump administration has attacked asylum seekers and opposes welcoming immigrants, it has taken action after action to destroy this lifesaving protection. The COVID-19 pandemic is just the latest excuse.

A new rule by the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice (currently under review) would further gut the asylum system to the point that no one, no matter what horrors they fled, would be allowed to build a new life in the United States. Of its many measures meant to silence and expel asylum seekers is the allowance that an immigration judge can deny an application without allowing an asylum seeker to testify about why they fled. On top of the incredibly inhumane Migration Protection Protocols (aka Remain in Mexico), this continues a pattern of xenophobia masquerading as fair policy.

As members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Nevada and its Borderlands Justice Team, we are appalled that our country is rejecting people who are literally running for their lives.

This cruelty goes against every value we believe in, both morally and as part of our faith. We recently participated in Zoom conference calls with staffers of Rep. Mark Amodei and Sen. Jacky Rosen about this.

We again urge Amodei and Rosen, and call on Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, to block the Trump administration’s assault on asylum by passing legislation that restores this humanitarian protection. They must pass the Refugee Protection Act and refuse to fund this administration’s ugly attacks. We also call on our neighbors to use their voices and their votes to enact asylum policy that validates the inherent worth and dignity of all people.

Jennifer Cullison, Jackie Reily and Bob Alto, Reno

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yond control with the elevation of the greatest hater of all, Donald Trump.

For context, Trump’s latest tirade about undesirables invading suburbs is aimed at Nevada’s largely white bedroom communities. Trump didn’t create this reality, but he is the Pied Piper of haters, and they heeded his call Saturday, armed, screaming and craving violence.

I’ve begun to reconsider Trump’s centrality in the hate epi-

demic. I invited my friend Edward Colman, first chair of the Nevada Dems and an African American originally from Arkansas, to talk about what happened in a podcast I co-host. After expressing my shock over Douglas County, he reacted with what I would consider a rhetorical shrug. “This is the face of America I have always experienced,” he told me. His reaction was a slap in the face of my own complacency.

We can do better as a community and a nation. I can do better. We all have a part to play changing the script on race. We can’t ignore the concerns of Black Lives Matter, and it should be unacceptable to show up to protest armed like an invading army. If anything comes from the racial strife and anger tearing apart our communities, I hope that a hard look at our own actions is finally a catalyst for change.

Hickey

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a greater return on our most important investment — children and students — we must be willing to risk more as parents and teachers. Certainly bigger risks during this horrible pandemic have been undertaken by thousands of frontline health care professionals. They did so to save lives. There are plenty of other essential workers in Nevada who go to work every day without carrying placards in protest. Every bit as essential, teachers and school staff have the opportunity to act just as courageously on behalf of the country’s future.

By insisting that schools shouldn’t reopen for in-person learning, teachers’ unions may be overplaying their hand. What happens when union leadership pressures lawmakers to

drop liability coverage for schools and urges teachers to refuse to return to the classroom?

Parents and teachers may discover they can do a better job by creating small groups of so-called learning pods or micro-schools. By unions supporting their members to collect full paychecks while delivering less-than-expected services, it may result in a whole new education paradigm, one with the potential of propelling school choice to a whole new level in Nevada.

McNeill acted bravely in standing up to her friends in favor of starting the school year in the classroom. We could all use a similar shot of courage in responding to the invisible menace that’s plaguing us.

What harms the body need not stifle the soul. That’s why students should always be first. Teachers unions and their strong-arm tactics can wait their place in line.

RGJ columnist Pat Hickey is a former member of the Nevada State Board of Education.