

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# WITH INAUGURATION, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR U.S. TO RESET

This Wednesday, Joseph R. Biden Jr. will be inaugurated as president of the United States. Sen. Kamala Harris will become vice president, breaking barriers that many of us never imagined would shatter in our lifetimes.

This Inauguration Day will look very different. Well before the recent mayhem at the Capitol, plans for a downsized and largely virtual commemoration were announced in an effort to deter Americans from traveling to Washington, D.C., during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some traditions continue. There will be a Pass in Review, a survey of military troops meant to symbolize the peaceful transfer of power. Biden will deliver an address to the nation, followed by a presidential escort from the Capitol to the White House, along Pennsylvania Avenue — minus, of course, the thousands of cheering spectators that typically line the route.

And rather than an inaugural

ball (a tradition that dates back to the presidency of George Washington), a “virtual parade” is planned across the country. It will feature the new president and vice president, along with their families, as well as musical acts, dance troupes and other entertainment.

Let’s hope this modicum of pomp and circumstance can occur without the violence and chaos that stained our country on Jan. 6, when rioters sought to disrupt the Electoral College vote count and prevent the ratification of Biden’s victory. And let’s hope, too, that law enforcement and the National Guard are better prepared to respond if an angry mob reappears.

Assessing the situation, Biden said, “The work of the moment and the work of the next four years must be the restoration of democracy, of decency, honor, respect, and the rule of law. We must step up.”

The president-elect is quite right. It is time to step up. It’s also time for a reset.

Our country has so much at stake: combatting a pandemic that has now taken more than 386,000 American lives; repairing an economy that shed more than 20 million jobs last year, many permanently; and eradicating the sort of racial injustice that was again on full display during the Capitol siege.

Michele Norris, a Black columnist who writes for The Washington Post, described the events of Jan. 6: “The United States’ yawning cultural, political and racial divides were there for all to see on Wednesday, in the composition of the crowd, in the way they were accommodated by police, and in the ideology that fueled their rage.” Norris recalled images from the Black Lives Matter protests last summer: National Guard personnel in full military gear, helmeted police on horseback, the rain of rubber bullets. She said, “The reasonable conclusion after this week is that White lives matter more.”

A reset requires us to rebuild

trust in our public institutions and in government. In his book “A Systems Analysis of Political Life,” political theorist David Easton said that trust is only possible when there is congruence between what people think is right or fair and what the government actually does. Trust is critical in times of crisis; without it, it’s impossible to solve the country’s problems.

And so, it’s encouraging to see that many Americans believe a reset is possible. A brand-new Civility Poll from the Georgetown Institute of Politics and Public Service found that 9 in 10 Americans (92 percent) want President-elect Biden and Congress to work together to tackle our current crises, and 63 percent think their efforts will be at least somewhat successful. More than half (56 percent) of Americans are at least somewhat optimistic that Biden can restore civility and unity in our politics. Now there’s a tall order — but I hope they’re right.

If the inauguration is a time for

a national reset, it’s a time for a personal reset, too. We’re often flexible in our principles, picking and choosing what is right or wrong based on our own point of view or the expediency of the moment. We don’t apply one standard. We only see the absurdity on the other side, never our own.

Let’s open up our minds and hearts to other points of view. Reach out to someone who thinks differently. Engage in respectful debate. Don’t sit on the sidelines — take a stand. Our right to protest is protected by the First Amendment of our Constitution. So, too, is our right to assemble, peacefully. Let’s keep doing these things, for the good of the country.

After all, that’s the American way.

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 NCR’s programming, visit [ncrconline.com](http://ncrconline.com)

## TABRON Buoyed by messages of support

FROM B1 Scarlett and Dylan.

Tabron hasn’t been able to return to his job in corporate sales, and he faces the possibility of losing both his health insurance and his home. To help the family, BMX athlete Chad Kagy — who was best man at the Tabrons’ wedding — launched a GoFundMe campaign that has raised nearly \$120,000 since September. More than 1,500 people nationwide have contributed to the fund, and thousands more have sent Tabron messages of love and support on social media using the hashtag #simonstrong.

Shanna said the messages her husband has received in recent months have been the best tonic for his recovery. Realizing that he may very well have died last fall, he found himself wondering what legacy he would have left behind.

“Was he kind enough? Did he accomplish enough? Did he live life to its fullest? I think reading all the kind messages from strangers and dear friends proved to him that he has had a good life and made good choices,” Shanna said.

Kagy, who met Tabron at the X Games in San Diego in

1998, said seeing his formerly confident friend question himself so much has been disconcerting. Although Kagy was surprised the campaign raised so much money, he was not surprised at the public outpouring of support. Tabron is known for his generosity to others, and he has been an inspiration to others by being true to himself.

“He didn’t follow the traditional path. He rode a style that was unique to him, and he always stuck to it,” Kagy said. “He was authentic to his core without following the newest trends just because there was a new trick available. He was more about challenging himself and doing what he was good at.”

Tabron was born and raised in Liverpool, England, where he started racing BMX bikes at age 8. By 17 he was a world champion. For nearly 20 years, he bounced back and forth between England and the U.S. until 12 years ago when he met and fell in love with Shanna, who worked at the time for the sports network Fuel TV. Six years ago, when Shanna was pregnant with their twins, the Tabrons moved into their hilltop home in Bonsall.

The family’s life took a dark turn in 2018, when then-3-year-old Scarlett was diagnosed with restrictive cardiomyopathy, a rare heart condition that makes the organ’s lower walls rigid. Facing death, Scarlett was put on the waiting list for a



Simon Tabron walks down a stairway lined with his BMX competition medals, accompanied by his 6-year-old twins, Dylan and Scarlett, at their home in Bonsall.

K.C. ALFRED U-T

new heart, which she received two years ago today at Rady Children’s Hospital in San Diego.

Then Tabron suffered two serious cycling injuries, first a broken leg and then a torn aorta, which happened when his bike handlebars smashed into his abdomen. Shanna has spent most of the past 2½ years as a full-time caregiver.

“It’s been extremely difficult,” she said. “We had a really hard time, first almost losing one of our kids and then Simon, who is my best friend. But I’m grateful that we’ve had so much time together as a family this past year.”

Despite his daughter’s heart disease and his recently aortic injury, Tabron said his heart attack last fall was unrelated and also unexpected. It was caused by undiagnosed clogged arter-

ies. During the half-hour Shanna and, later, first responders worked to save Tabron’s life on the porch after his heart attack, the loss of blood flow to his brain caused a stroke. The stroke left him with Wernicke’s aphasia, which has impacted his word recovery, reading and writing abilities.

Tabron said that in the early days and weeks of his recovery, he didn’t remember much of anything, including his children’s names, his cycling career, his guitar-playing ability, the names of colors or types of currency. In the hospital, he watched all the episodes of the Netflix series “The Crown” three times over to spark memories of his childhood in England, and was grateful when his native Liverpool accent returned.

Since arriving home in

mid-October, Tabron’s recovery has been slow but steady. Shanna serves as his interpreter, gently suggesting words whenever he struggles to find one. “Kind” may come out as “calm” and words like “adapt” and “window” are still a bit tricky. The children also help by carefully enunciating their words. Tabron is still learning how to type and use a computer again but said “Siri,” the voice assistant on his iPhone, has become his best friend.

“It’s very different now for Simon. He’s still learning his numbers,” Shanna said. “It’s been hard. He is really quick and smart and witty, but now he has to go slow, which is frustrating. But he has remained so positive.”

Because his job in sales for an extermination company required in-the-moment financial calculations

and fast-paced negotiating skills, he isn’t sure when he’ll be able to return to work. In the meantime, the money from the GoFundMe account is being used to pay their mortgage, household bills, medical co-pays and other expenses.

Tabron said he’s so grateful and moved by the public’s generosity that he’s often frequently moved to tears. For himself, his family and his fans, he is determined to work his way back to his old self.

“I will try every single day,” he said. “Some days, it’s so hard and so sad. But every day is a new day and I start again. I just want to try more and more.”

One thing that Tabron is certain he will return to — and hopefully soon — is cycling. His cardiologists have yet to give him the all-clear to return to ramp-riding. But he has carved out a flat dirt track on their Bonsall property and he rides bikes every day with the twins. He’s looking forward to the day he can start practicing again on the indoor vertical ramps at his good friend Tony Hawk’s private practice center in Vista.

“In my mind, I’m the same as I was before, so it’s been strange to stop riding,” he said. “I want to ride again. This has been my life. It’s one of the best things I’ve ever done.”

To visit the Tabron family fundraising page, visit [gofundme.com/help-simons-heart-2020](http://gofundme.com/help-simons-heart-2020).

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## PENSION

FROM B1

years force the city to pay off pension system losses more quickly. While such moves are characterized as a more responsible way to handle the debt, they make it harder for the city to make its annual pension payment and continue paying for cherished amenities like libraries and parks.

“We did this to ourselves because we’re conservative,” George Kenney, a member of the pension board, said last week.

Thanasi Preovolos, another board member, said the goal of forcing the city to accelerate paying off pension debt was taking a more realistic approach.

“We were trying to make sure our policies matched reality,” he said. “It wasn’t that we were shooting to be conservative, or liberal for that matter, it was trying to be as accurate as possible.”

Kenney asked whether

the recent increase in debt should prompt even more dramatic action by the board.

Kalwarski said San Diego’s pension system policies compare favorably with other pension systems across the state and nation.

When compared to 188 pension systems across the nation, San Diego has the most conservative expectations of investment returns, he said. And the city’s 70.2 percent funding rate for its debt ranks among the top half of 33 state pension plans used for comparison.

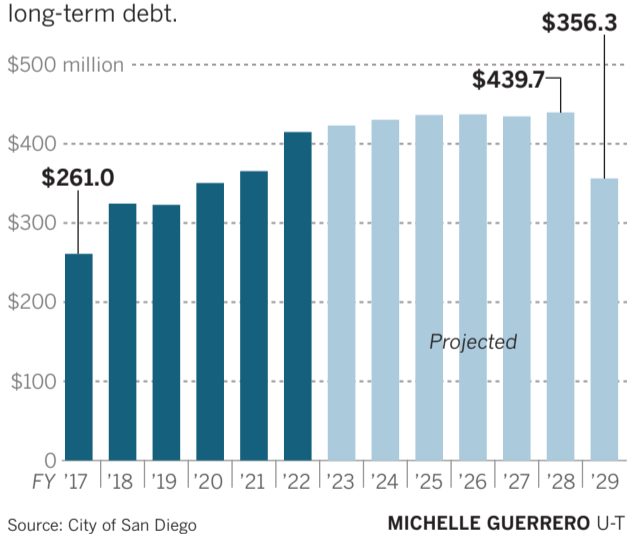
Gregg Rademacher, the pension system’s chief executive, said he is confident the system is in a sound position.

“I believe we have a solid long-term funding plan,” he told the board last week, noting that San Diego officials have told him they plan to make the higher pension payment required this year.

But that number is projected to continue climbing in coming years, to \$423.1

## Rise in pension payments

The City of San Diego’s annual pension payment is increasing because of the pension system’s greater long-term debt.



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million in fiscal year 2023, \$430.4 million in fiscal 2024 and \$436.4 million in fiscal 2025.

Those higher payments are projected to reduce the city’s pension debt to nearly zero by 2041.

Kalwarski said one reason for optimism is San Diego’s new mayor, Todd Gloria, who served on the City Council from 2008 to 2016 before spending four years in the state Assembly.

“Todd Gloria was one of

the most astute council members when it came to pension matters,” Kalwarski said.

The primary factor in this year’s debt increase was the new study showing city workers will live longer than previously expected. That increased the pension debt more than \$290 million.

Board members questioned why there was such a large impact when the city already incurred more pension debt after a similar mortality study in 2016.

Kalwarski said the 2016 study accounted for people living longer, but not for the significantly greater number of people living past age 80.

“It isn’t so much that people are living longer at the end of life, it’s that more and more people are making their way into their 80s and 90s than ever before,” he said.

Another factor was employee salaries rising 7.5 percent last year, more than double the 3.3 percent annu-

al increases the pension system had projected. The average city salary rose from \$84,204 to \$90,552, increasing the pension debt \$67 million.

The pension system also may soon have to cope with thousands of new members: city employees hired after the 2012 Proposition B ballot measure that eliminated pensions for all new hires except police officers.

The state Supreme Court ruled in 2018 that the city skipped key legal steps when placing the measure on the ballot, and a Superior Court judge ruled this month that the measure’s pension cuts must be removed from the city charter.

If that ruling isn’t appealed, city and labor union officials will begin negotiating a solution that may include awarding pensions to some of those workers, who instead received 401(k)-style retirement plans.

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## SMOLENS

FROM B1

Trump,” Faulconer said on the night of June 7, 2016, after he was re-elected. “His divisive rhetoric is unacceptable and I just could never support him.”

Later, Faulconer largely deflected questions about the president’s policies and inflammatory rhetoric, particularly about undocumented immigrants and the need to build an extended border wall. Faulconer instead emphasized cross-border business relations, positive social and cultural interaction between San Diego and Tijuana, and his support for legal immigration.

His mantra, shared by other local boosters, was San Diego is “building bridges not walls” — more than a mere nod to the new foot bridge in Otay Mesa that crosses the border to Tijuana’s Rodriguez International

Airport.

Then a curious thing happened. During a June 2019 visit to Washington, Faulconer had a brief meeting with the president in the Oval Office. At the time, the mayor said he was surprised by the invitation.

As Faulconer increasingly positioned himself to run for governor in recent months, he did more than ramp up criticism of Newsom on social media. He made a surprising declaration.

“I voted for the president,” Faulconer told Los Angeles Times columnist George Skelton in early December. “I thought he was going to be the best for the economy.”

Since the Capitol siege, Faulconer would not grant an interview for this column, nor for an analysis by Mark Z. Barabak of the Los Angeles Times.

The path for Faulconer or any Republican to win a replacement election — if

Newsom is recalled — or a general election almost certainly requires votes from Trump supporters. Trump may have lost to Joe Biden in a landslide in California, but he did receive more than 6 million votes.

And it’s clear a lot of Trump supporters are just as fervent — maybe even more so — about the president in the wake of the Capitol riot and his impeachment.

A replacement election can be won with a plurality — there is no runoff — which makes it more plausible for Trump voters to have an outsized role in boosting a Republican into office than in a general election.

What kind of political shape Newsom is in will be the determining factor in all of this. He has had a bad stretch, with widespread criticism of COVID-19 closures and for allowing unemployment benefits to go to prison inmates.

His infamous attendance

at a birthday party at a high-end restaurant in Napa Valley — in violation of his own statewide coronavirus restrictions — has served as a flashpoint for the recall effort.

But it’s hard to imagine at least the coronavirus situation won’t be better — even vastly improved — months down the line when a recall election would be held.

The vaccine rollout has not gone well so far. But by the time any recall election can happen, most Californians likely will have been inoculated and more businesses and schools will be opening up.

Newsom also has surging state revenues to spend on both the health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

Faulconer had gained a lot of notice not just because he was the nation’s only big-city Republican mayor, but, in part, because he charted a course away from the Republican Party. He

urged Republicans in the state to focus on California-centric issues such as water, environmental protection, housing costs, quality of life and cost of living — and to stay away from the divisive partisan issues of the day.

In a statewide election, he could be vulnerable on the right. He supports gun control and abortion rights and has espoused the need for ethnic diversity. As mayor, he regularly spoke a few lines in Spanish during his speeches.

Faulconer has been called a fiscal conservative, though that’s a tough argument to make. He sought to raise taxes in San Diego on hotel visitors, increased municipal spending and left the city with a yawning budget shortfall.

His tilt toward Trump seems inconsistent with much of his political profile, but such a move apparently was deemed a political advantage, perhaps a necessity, to run for governor.

He’ll have competition. Rancho Santa Fe businessman John Cox, long an outspoken Trump supporter, is also organizing a second bid for governor. Others also are certain to run. In 2018, Cox lost in a landslide to Newsom, gaining 38 percent of the vote.

Trump may end up being a political albatross for Faulconer, but there’s no telling what his impact will be months down the line or next year.

Still, it seems like Faulconer is trying to thread an ever-shrinking eye of the needle.

### Tweet of the week

Goes to Jo Munson (munson\_jo), mother, teacher.

“Pelosi said her young staffers knew to barricade the door, turn out the lights, and be silent, because they learned it in school.”

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