

STEVEN P. DINKIN: A Path Forward

A TALE OF TWO COVIDS: THE SELFLESS AND THE SELFISH

In the third year of a global pandemic, our focus is decidedly local. That's understandable: Things like mask mandates and worker shortages affect our everyday lives.

Even still, a story from northern Brazil recently caught my eye.

Actually, it was a photo: an indigenous man carrying his father on his back after getting their COVID-19 vaccination, deep in the Brazilian Amazon. The photo, taken by Dr. Erik Jennings Simões, shows 24-year-old Tawy holding Wahu, 67; the pair had walked six or seven hours through the forest to reach the vaccination site.

Tawy and Wahu belong to the Zo'é, a small indigenous community that lives in relative isolation. When vaccination against COVID-19 began in Brazil, indigenous people were considered a priority group because of their greater vulnerability to infection. But a challenge emerged: It would be unfeasible for health workers to travel to every remote village.

Instead, they set up huts in the

forest, communicating by radio with each community. "We've adopted practices that respect and take into account the culture and knowledge of the Zo'é people," Dr. Simões said. He took the picture of Tawy and Wahu in January 2021 but only recently posted it on Instagram.

According to a BBC report, Wahu died in September for reasons that remain unclear. Tawy remains with his family and is fully vaccinated.

If ever there was a time to think globally, it's now. More than 5.5 million people have died from COVID-19 around the world; there are currently 340 million confirmed cases in 222 countries and territories. Nearly every one of us has been touched, somehow — and so, the need to unite in this fight couldn't be more urgent.

The world's top male tennis player, Novak Djokovic, didn't get the message. Djokovic was deported from Australia on Monday over his refusal to get the COVID-19 vaccine. He was in the country to compete for his 10th

Australian Open title. Djokovic's return to his native Serbia followed weeks of lobbying back and forth with Australian government officials and Open organizers. His behavior was especially egregious in a country that has taken the pandemic seriously, imposing austere restrictions in an effort to keep hospitalizations and death rates low.

The saga began when Djokovic landed in Australia. He was denied entry after immigration officers decided his request for a medical exemption didn't fly. The officers revoked Djokovic's visa and confiscated his passport. Then, after a short stay at a detention hotel, a judge reversed the action. Within hours of the ruling, he was on a tennis court, to the delight of his fans.

But tournament play wasn't meant to be. It turns out, Djokovic brought a lot of baggage to Australia — and not just his tennis gear. Jemele Hill, who is a contributing writer at The Atlantic, described Djokovic's offenses —

beyond the vocal skepticism about vaccines and his own refusal to get jabbed.

First, Djokovic admitted in an Instagram post that he'd visited multiple countries in the two weeks prior to arriving in Australia — information that was omitted from his travel paperwork. Djokovic blamed his agent for incorrectly filling it out.

Second, he hosted a charity tennis tournament in Serbia last June that turned into a COVID superspreader event. Instead of masking — or at least social distancing — players were seen dancing together in a nightclub, shirtless, and embracing each other over the net. Djokovic and his wife tested positive, as did several other international tennis professionals who attended.

And Djokovic hypocritically criticized fellow tennis star Naomi Osaka for withdrawing from the French Open last year. When Osaka didn't want to participate in mandatory press conferences, citing mental health concerns, Djokovic joined the "rules are

rules" chorus, saying press conferences are part of life on the tour.

In a litany of sins, Djokovic's selfishness is supreme. As Hill said, "That an athlete of his fame is using his platform in such a destructive fashion is bad enough; even more despicable is that Djokovic seems so comfortable exploiting his immense privilege to endanger the health and safety of others." It was confounding that some of his fans were seen shedding tears as he left Australia.

The contrast couldn't be more stark: Djokovic, a man who has it all, flouting COVID protocols and telling the rest of us that our well-being doesn't matter. And Tawy, a man who appears to have little, other than a bond with his father, whose life he hoped to save.

I know who's the richer of the two.

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.

SANCTUARY

FROM B1 park's oldest and longest residents was heartbreaking.

"It's super hard whenever you lose these animals, but they don't live as long as we do," she said. "Tabu was a 20-year-old tiger, and they only live 13 or 14 years in the wild. And Bakari was an older male with a degenerative disc disease. He was in a lot of pain. He was a big guy, 610 pounds. You couldn't visit the sanctuary without hearing him."

Over the past two decades, the Brinks have built Lions, Tigers & Bears into one of just six big cat and bear animal sanctuaries that are nationally accredited by both the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and the American Sanctuary Association. The sanctuary is a no-kill, no-breeding and no-contact facility that's now home to 63 animals of 17 species, including four lions, four tigers, five bobcats and nine bears.

It costs about \$4,000 a day to feed the animals at Lions, Tigers & Bears, and the pandemic has been hard on fundraising. But Brink said that for the first time in three years, they'll be hosting their annual Wild in the Country gala on May 21, which in pre-pandemic years raised enough money to cover three to four months of operating costs.

"We're hanging in there right now. We're doing what we can to fundraise," she said.

Tops on Brink's wish list would be a new laser machine to help treat animals with arthritic joints and a digital X-ray machine for the property's on-site medical clinic. She'd also like to build a shed or gazebo to display the photos and cremation urns of Tabu, Bakari and all

of the other animals who have lived out their final days on the property.

While the public can visit Lions, Tigers & Bears for behind-the-scenes tours and special events, it's nothing like a zoo, animal show or circus. In fact, Brink has spent much of her time over the past 25-plus years working to rescue big cats and bears from deplorable conditions in roadside zoos, exotic animal breeding facilities and tent circuses. Over the years she has coordinated the rescue of more than 600 big cats, bears and wolves and has assisted in the relocation of hundreds more.

In October, she was honored for her animal advocacy work at the San Diego East County Chamber of Commerce's 19th annual Women in Leadership event. Event emcee Kristine Costa said Brink "has been working with and advocating for captive big cats, bears, and other exotic animals since the early '90s, after witnessing firsthand the abuses and neglect inflicted on captive animals victimized by the exotic animal trade."

Brink, who serves as founder and director of Lions, Tigers & Bears, said the biggest challenge these wild animals face is from well-meaning people who buy them as docile cubs, mistakenly believing the animals will make good pets or can be used as a tourist attraction to make money.

"These animals don't make good pets. They have triggers. They might seem like a giant puppy, but something like bright lights or loud sounds can trigger them to be the wild animals that they are," she said.

Brink said she works with a network of agencies to arrange rescues, including sheriff's departments, state fish and wildlife officials, animal parks and individual owners who are surrender-

ing their exotic pets. She's often demoralized at the condition of the animals when she arrives.

"A lot of them are filthy," she said. "I've gotten them out of peoples' basements, tied to a post in the backyards, garages, dining rooms and horse trailers. People might have good intentions but have no idea how expensive it is and what it takes to care for them."

Brink said there are also many unaccredited exotic animal parks in the U.S. that are breeding a surplus of animals that have nowhere to go, so many just disappear. One of the most notorious such facilities, Oklahoma's Tiger King Park featured in the 2020 Netflix documentary "Tiger King," was closed by federal authorities last May for violating the Endangered Species Act. Brink was on-site during the park's shutdown last year and brought in three large trucks to transport some of the big cats to new sanctuaries around the country.

Despite the deaths of Tabu and Bakari, Brink said that didn't open up any new space to rescue more tigers or lions. Tabu shared a habitat with Hank, a senior white tiger rescued from an Ohio breeding center in 2015. And Bakari lived with his sisters, Jillian and Suri, who arrived with him as cubs 15 years ago. Brink said these cats are now too old to attempt any new introductions with other animals.

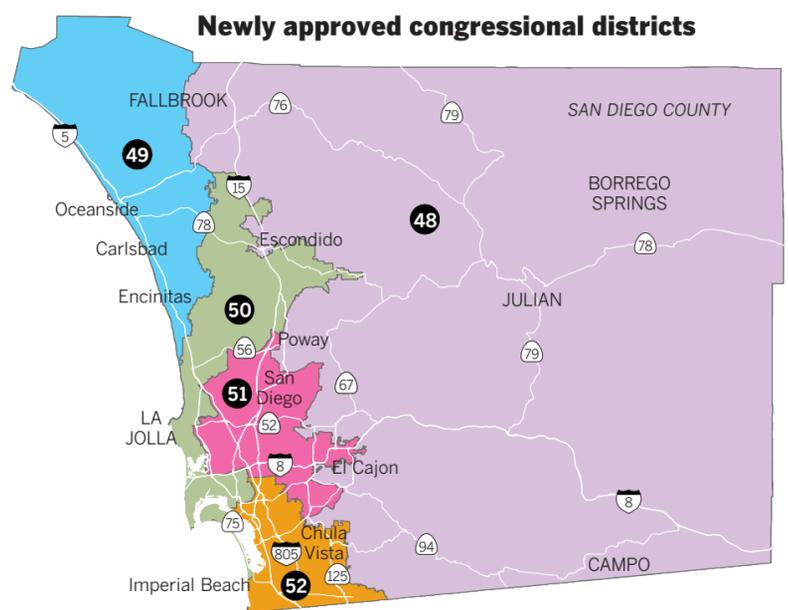
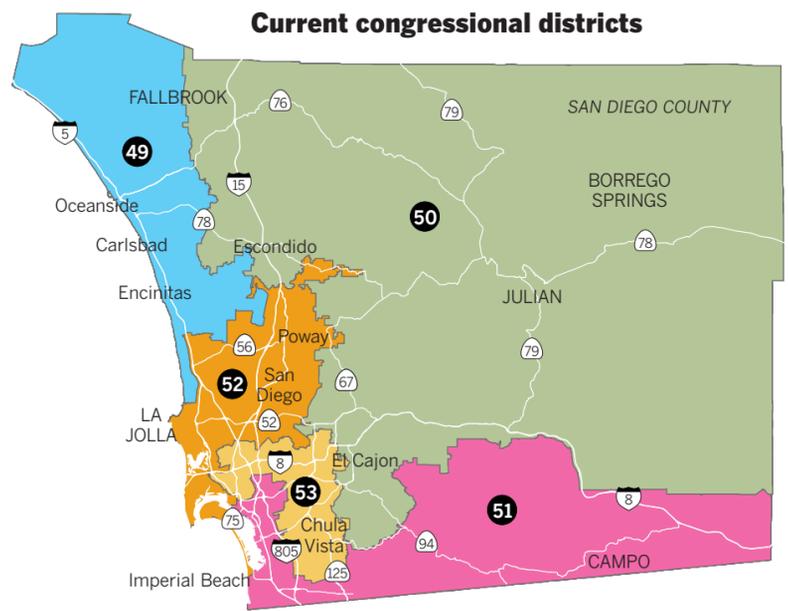
"Building habitats is a big expense," Brink said. "We've been successful at building one or two new habitats a year. If we can properly house these animals for life we'll keep them, but we have a responsibility to provide for that animal for life."

For information on Lions, Tigers & Bears, visit lionstigersandbears.org.

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New congressional district boundaries

San Diego area representatives face challenges from the left and right in new congressional voting districts. Candidates must file election papers by March 11 for the June 7 primary election.



Boundaries of the current 49th, 50th and 51st Congressional Districts and the newly approved 48th and 49th Congressional Districts extend beyond county lines. California lost one of its House seats after the 2020 U.S. Census, leaving the state with 52.

Sources: California Citizens Redistricting Commission; San Diego County; Mapzen; OpenStreetMap
MICHELLE GILCHRIST U-T

SMOLENS

FROM B1

I receive plenty of emailed news releases, requests to join something and contribution come-ons from all sorts of political groups — Democratic, Republican and others. But they almost always come to my work email. These are addressed to my personal email. There's no sign in the emails that the committees know what I do for a living.

This firsthand look at Trump's relentless fundraising tactics raises the question, even concern, of how a less-detached person might react to being inundated with so many emails for so long. The pressure on an actual Trump supporter to contribute would seem great.

For a contribution of any size, the emails promise all sorts of benefits: first dibs on new Trump paraphernalia, exclusive memberships, a Trump Card and more.

Perhaps most of all, they offer a sense of being special by officially joining Team Trump.

Meanwhile, the emails insinuate that Trump knows if you haven't ponied up.

It's unclear how much Trump has raised to date because his committees only need to report their financial status to the Federal Elections Commission twice a year. But his reputation as a prolific fundraiser seems secure. At the end of July, his various operations had \$100 million on hand, according to news reports.

The Washington Post in October said he had been

consistently raising more than \$1 million per week — sometimes nearly \$2 million. This was done through emails, text messages, events and advertisements. Because these aren't technically campaign committees, they face looser restrictions.

The year-end report should become public at end of this month and it will be no surprise if the totals are eye-popping. What Trump has and will be spending the money on also is unclear, though there's obvious potential to use it to be a factor in this year's midterm elections and to assist a presidential run in 2024.

There was a fair amount of commentary and criticism last year noting that Trump didn't use his political funds to help finance the various election audits, ballot reviews and recounts that he encouraged of his 2020 election loss to Joe Biden. He still maintains, with zero proof, the election was stolen from him.

Election fraud is a regular theme in the emails I've received. There are others:

- Biden "complete and total disaster."
- "President Trump shuts down Fake News."
- "It's America First vs. America Last."
- "Twitter is a danger to America."
- "The Left's Voting Rights Bill."

But such matters are secondary to raising money.

On Dec. 20, an email landed with the subject line "Trump Christmas store."

"For a short time, when you make a contribution of \$75, we'll send you one of our ICONIC Trump Save

America Christmas Ornaments **FOR FREE**," it said. *For free.*

In a similar vein, I was told in a Jan. 18 email that Trump is "proud to let you know that you've been identified as a **Trump MVP**."

"All you have to do is make a contribution of ANY AMOUNT and you'll automatically reach MVP status and become an **Official 2022 Trump MVP**."

The emails attempt to flatter, cajole and intimidate. ("I've been told you haven't stepped up." "We have an opportunity you can't refuse.")

The big prize is a meeting with the man himself (and a photo) at Mar-a-Lago on Feb. 11. That offer carried some fine print familiar to so many sweepstakes.

"NO PURCHASE, PAYMENT, CONTRIBUTION, OR TEXT MESSAGE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN.** Contributing or sending a text message will not improve your chances of winning."

Several emails urged me to act now because time is running out. Stated deadlines have come and gone, repeatedly. There have been multiple "last opportunity" and "last chance" offers.

In December, Trump warned me three times: "This is my last email."

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Scott Lewis (@vosdscott), editor in chief at Voice of San Diego.

"Plexiglass dividers? Very 2020 @SDCityCouncil. Don't sit in your pooled aerosols. Let them go!"

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