

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

OVERCOMING CONTEMPT TO HEAL THE POLITICAL DIVIDE

Here's a bit of heartening news on this Valentine's Day: Disagreement — and even anger — aren't correlated with divorce, according to psychologists. Marital discord is normal. It says that you care.

Problems arise when disgust is mixed in, stirring feelings of contempt — and with them, a view that your partner is worthless.

I learned about this from Arthur Brooks, who joined me on Thursday for a conversation about overcoming our country's deep political divide, part of a national dialogue series sponsored by the National Conflict Resolution Center. Brooks, a social scientist, is the author of a bestselling book titled "Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America From the Culture of Contempt" and a Harvard University professor. You can watch the full interview at ncrconline.com.

Brooks talked about the work of Dr. John Gottman, an expert in the field of marital reconciliation. Gottman can watch a couple talk to each other for an hour about something they're disputing and

— knowing nothing else about them — judge with 95 percent certainty whether they will be divorced within three years. The telltale clues are eye-rolling, sarcasm and dismissive behavior.

That is quite a trick. Still, what does it have to do with overcoming our political divide? Brooks maintains that our country is engaged in the same kind of behavior that Gottman links to doomed marriages. We're like an old wedded couple, ripped apart despite a lot of history together. We don't understand each other, even though we should.

Can this relationship be saved? If so, how? Brooks believes that our country can move past conflict and end polarization, even in these unprecedented times. But rather than tasking political leaders with sole responsibility, he said, the work begins with each of us.

For change to happen, we must lower the temperature and turn off what Brooks calls the "outrage industrial complex." And we must stop the bad behavior — the eye-rolling, the sarcasm, the dissing,

etc. — if we are to break the contempt habit, once and for all.

We also need to turn off social media and news feeds from "trusted sources" that fuel our anger and preconceptions. It shouldn't be that hard.

According to Brooks, 93 percent of Americans claim to dislike conflict. The other 7 percent are profiting from the hatred that's sown.

To be sure, we live in a country defined by its divides: urban/rural, wealthy/poor, Democrat/Republican. Brooks would say that the goal is not to agree with each other, all of the time. It's neither healthy, nor realistic. Rather, we must learn to disagree better.

He offers these suggestions:
• Run toward contempt with love. Stand up to people with whom you agree on behalf of people with whom you disagree. That's moral courage, in its truest sense.
• Use persuasion, rather than coercion, and seek common ground. It's a tried and true mediation technique that's at the core

of our work at the National Conflict Resolution Center. And in the fitting words of Dale Carnegie (shared by Brooks): "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

• Learn to co-exist with disagreement. That means reprogramming a mistaken and pervasive belief: Anything less than 100 percent is equivalent to failure. If you think this way, by definition, every situation has a winner and a loser. It's untenable and it's wrong.

• Practice warm-heartedness, especially toward your enemies. Brooks learned this lesson from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, a friend and teacher of his.

When he brought up this idea, I couldn't help but ask: How do we show warm-heartedness to the insurrectionists who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, given the horrific consequences of their actions? Aren't they deserving of our contempt?

Brooks made a very clear distinction: Yes, their actions require condemnation. But that's different from saying a person is worthless.

The "outrage industrial complex" is encouraging us not to separate people from their words and deeds.

It speaks to the unevenness of our thinking. A phenomenon called motive attribution asymmetry leads us to think our side is motivated by love, while our rivals in the same conflict are motivated by hate. Of course, our perceptions are formed at the very time conflict is occurring.

But as difficult as it may be to accept — especially in these unprecedented times — Brooks is right. No other human being is worthy of our contempt. Just as no other human being should treat us with contempt. Taking that concept to heart is the first step toward healing our woefully divided country. It might even save a few marriages.

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

WORK ON STRETCH OF 78 TO BEGIN THIS MONTH

BY JOE TASH

ESCONDIDO

A long-planned, \$14.3 million project to replace the pavement along a 5-mile stretch of state Route 78 through the city of Escondido, and also make safety and technology improvements, is getting under way this month.

The project will be overseen by Caltrans, the state Department of Transportation, and funded through SB 1, an increase in the state's gasoline tax and vehicle registration fees dedicated to improvements to roads, freeways and bridges. The increased fees took effect in 2017 and 2018.

Construction on the project is expected to begin in earnest in mid-February, and continue until the expected completion date in early November, said Kareem Scarlett, project manager with Caltrans. The bulk of the work will be carried out at night, from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m., Sunday through Thursday, to minimize disruption to traffic in the area, and increase safety for workers.

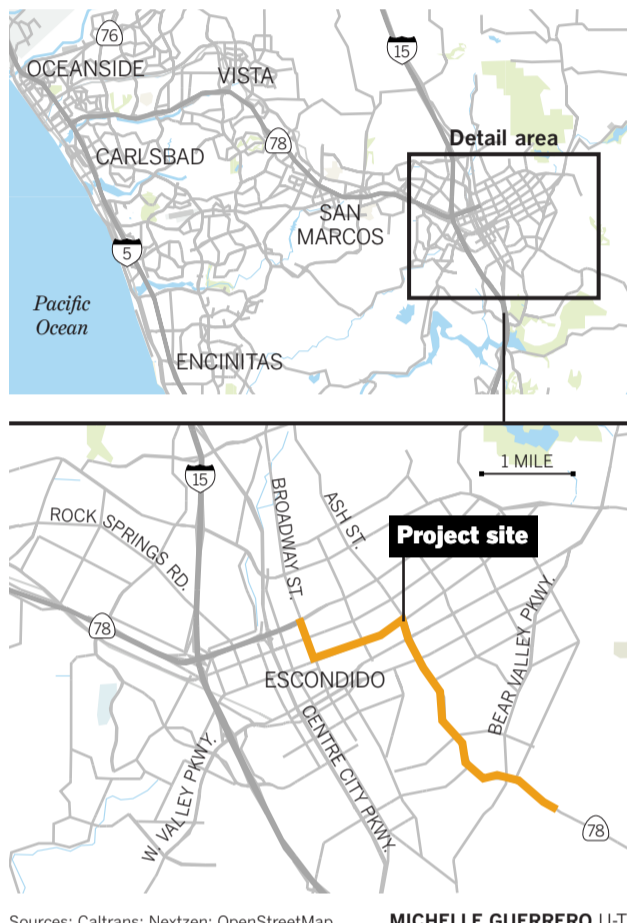
The 5-mile route of the project begins at SR-78 and Broadway, and heads south on Broadway to Washington Avenue, where it turns east. At Ash Street, the route turns south and the work will end at Flora Vista Street, a few blocks past Bear Valley Parkway.

Along with removing the existing pavement and replacing it with a longer-lasting overlay, workers will install 83 new curb ramps that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, said Stephen Welborn, a spokesman with the San Diego Caltrans office.

The project will also include new guardrails, traffic signal upgrades at 12 intersections, and the installation of fiber optic cable to enhance communication along

Route 78 paving rehabilitation project

Work on 5-mile stretch in Escondido will begin this month.



Sources: Caltrans; Nextzen; OpenStreetMap

MICHELLE GUERRERO U-T

the Caltrans roadway network. In addition, crews will install "V2I" modules, which will provide real-time traffic information to vehicles equipped with the latest telecommunications technology, Scarlett said.

Traffic lanes will be marked to let motorists know to share the lanes with bicyclists, known as "sharrows," said Welborn.

Scarlett said the original engineering estimate for the project was \$19 million, but bids came in lower than expected due to a slowdown in the construction industry related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first phase of the

project will be the replacement of curb ramps, Scarlett said, and crews will then begin removing and replacing sections of the roadway.

The Caltrans officials warned some of the work will be noisy, including backup alarms, jackhammering and saw-cutting.

"The grinding operation (to remove existing pavement) is not quiet," Scarlett said.

The project should not result in road closures, said Welborn, although there may be temporary closures of driveways during the construction work. He said Caltrans will work with the city of Escondido, through social

media and electronic message boards to provide updates about the work. Apartment complex managers will also be provided construction updates.

"We'll be reaching out to those folks and letting them know what's going on," Scarlett said.

The V2I modules that will be installed during the project will be able to relay traffic information to vehicles equipped with the technology, such as Teslas, said Scarlett. Other manufacturers will also be including the technology with newer models, he said.

The module can provide real-time traffic information, such as telling drivers the optimum speed that will allow them to hit all green lights on their route.

Welborn said the units have been installed in several places in San Diego County, such as a dedicated bus lane on I-805, a car-pool lane on I-15, and units at Taylor Street and I-8. Nine Caltrans vehicles are currently equipped with V2I technology, and they can display wrong-way and speed limit messages, among other information.

Drivers should notice a much smoother ride on the section of SR-78 after the pavement is replaced. Scarlett said the crews will use a "super strong" type of asphalt, similar to material used on airport runways. The new roadway surface will last longer than the material currently in place.

"A way better ride will come out of this project," Scarlett said.

The community has long been asking for improvements on this particular stretch of SR-78. Scarlett recalled giving a presentation 18 months ago to the Escondido Rotary Club, and audience members brought up the poor state of the road and asked when it would be fixed.

Tash is a freelance writer.

FALCK

FROM B1

The key point of dispute is how much Falck will be able to charge patients with health coverage through Scripps, Sharp, Kaiser and other local health care providers.

AMR has made "capitated" deals with many local providers that decrease what AMR charges for 911 ambulance trips, in exchange for the health care companies agreeing to use AMR for other ambulance trips and services.

AP Triton based its projections, which are lower than Falck's, on assumptions that Falck will make similar deals that would lower its revenues from 911 ambulance transports.

That assumption, coupled with AP Triton's data on payment trends for ambulance service, prompted the consultant to call Falck's annual revenue estimate of \$75 million too high.

"This is not to imply that Falck is not capable of meeting this projection," said AP Triton, acknowledging that Falck uses sophisticated modeling. "However, using standard payment history we believe this will be a significant challenge."

Falck's chief commercial officer, Troy Hagen, said AP Triton is off the mark.

"The AP Triton report incorrectly assumes Falck will be subject to existing agreements that AMR currently holds with insurance companies and hospitals," Hagen said. "This assumption artificially lowered revenue projections."

Hagen said the company is confident in its projections and the tentative deal it reached with the city in December.

"The bottom line is we stand behind the contract we signed," he said. "We've done financial modeling for many different systems, each with their own financial nuances, and we're confident in our projections for San Diego."

Falck chief executive Matt Gallagher said part of the problem is that AMR was not required to provide the details of its deals with local hospitals and insurers, so both Falck and AP Triton made their assumptions with incomplete information.

"This is the business we're in, making assumptions, which does carry some risk, but it's risk we accept," Gallagher said. "We looked at the demographics of San

Diego, and we made educated assumptions on the payer-mix make-up."

Regarding Falck's track record with workers and labor unions, several Falck emergency medical technicians from Alameda County criticized the company during last week's public hearing in San Diego.

They said Falck tried to cut pay after taking over service in Alameda County two years ago. They also said employees have been shorted pay and that service reductions have been necessary in some cases.

"Morale is the worst it has been in the five years I have worked here," said Dominic Curcuruto. "Our benefits and paychecks are constantly inaccurate or deactivated."

Katelyn Hailey, an official with the United Domestic Workers of America, said such reports from elsewhere should matter.

"Falck's brief history in California is fraught with poor treatment of its workforce," she said. "It's vital that the city doesn't turn its back on these poor labor practices in other jurisdictions."

Gallagher said the company has made five separate offers to Alameda ambulance workers during more than a year of negotiations, asserting that each offer included increases in the company's costs for wages and benefits.

"It's misinformation that there would be a take-away," Gallagher said of employee claims that Falck initially sought pay cuts.

While Hailey was joined by several other local labor officials in criticizing Falck, Councilman Raul Campillo noted one key exception: the leader of the labor organization that represents San Diego's ambulance workers.

Anthony Sorci, president of the San Diego Association of Pre Hospital Professionals, said his group is neutral about the city's decision between Falck and AMR.

"We hope the City Council's final decision will not be influenced by outside entities," Sorci said last week.

Campillo said that stance "carries a lot of weight" with him.

The city's independent budget analyst's report on Falck's financial projections and its labor track record is scheduled to take a month, so the council's decision on whether to replace AMR with Falck would come mid-March at the earliest.

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SMOLENS

FROM B1

pandemic has upended the city's revenue stream. Local governments everywhere are in similar straits. But Gloria contends Faulconer made matters worse.

"The pandemic has exacerbated long-standing city budget problems the last administration did too little to address," Gloria said in his State of the City speech on Jan. 13. "Behind the ribbon-cuttings and news conferences, the city faced structural budget deficits."

A structural deficit basically results when a government spends more than it takes in over the long term.

What role, if any, Gloria might play in an anti-recall campaign — and whether he would bring that kind of fire to it — is uncertain. For one thing, a recall election has not yet qualified for the ballot, though proponents and independent analysts believe it will. Through a spokesman, Gloria declined to talk about Faulconer and the recall.

A month ago, Gloria joined other California Democrats in a virtual news conference contemplating the recall was an attempted "coup" driven by extremists like those who rioted at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

"We have to take a stand against those complicit in the Republican Party — the recall supporters, the Proud Boys, the financial allies of this effort — and we are

asking the public to join us in taking a stand against this recall, against this California coup," said Gloria, who made no mention of Faulconer.

A swift backlash ensued, though not specifically against Gloria. Republicans and some Democrats said it was wrong to compare the recall, which is a legal process to remove someone from office, with a coup, which is not.

However, the Los Angeles Times later revealed extremists — including QAnon followers, anti-vaxxers and the Proud Boys — were supporting and assisting the recall, even though mainstream Republicans are largely organizing the effort.

Nathan Fletcher, chair of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, also attended the news conference and made even stronger statements about the involvement of extremists. Last week, he also took a none-too-subtle shot at Faulconer during Newsom's visit to the Petco Park COVID-19 vaccination station.

"It's truly wonderful to now have a mayor committed to doing difficult work," Fletcher said to Gloria at the event.

Gloria and Faulconer do not have a history of animosity. By most appearances, they largely got along when Faulconer was mayor and Gloria was the City Council president. They not only seemed amiable with one another, but had some fun together.

The two made a grand entrance to a news conference promoting Comic-Con in July 2014 descending to the podium via zipline. Later that year, they joined former mayor and current San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Jerry Sanders in a video spoofing the movie "Top Gun" for the San Diego County Taxpayers Association's Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards.

They also had their disagreements, however, and not just over policy. Late in 2014, Faulconer maneuvered to end Gloria's tenure as council president. The move was widely viewed as the mayor's attempt to undercut the standing of a potential rival to his re-election in 2016.

Gloria ran for, and won, an Assembly seat instead.

Nevertheless, Faulconer tacitly, though not publicly, backed Gloria's bid for mayor or last year against then-council member Barbara Bry, who had been feuding with the former mayor during much of her four-year term.

While Gloria has been critical of Faulconer's mayoral stewardship since replacing him, he has pointed out some infrastructure improvements that, though he didn't mention it, occurred under his predecessor's watch — such as a new bridge in Mission Bay and a reduction in water main breaks.

At the same time, the Gloria administration notes that despite Faulconer's

focus on such improvements, the infrastructure funding gap grew during his tenure.

Even if Gloria becomes something of a political character witness against Faulconer for the anti-recall campaign, it won't be the main event.

Republican forces allied with former President Donald Trump — including the national GOP — are heavily involved in the recall campaign (along with Republicans who are not).

Faulconer is seeking to cast himself as an independent, moderate Republican, yet he acknowledged voting for Trump last year after saying in 2016 that he would never do that.

Newsom supporters say they will try to make the recall effort about Trump. It's worth noting that President Joe Biden, who defeated Trump by more than 5 million votes in California, last week came out against the recall.

If there's a marquee proxy bout over Newsom's future, it will more likely be along the lines of Biden vs. Trump than Gloria vs. Faulconer.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Michael Beschloss (@BeschlossDC), historian and political commentator.

"I don't know if we're under oath here" — just the kind of defense lawyer you want."

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TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, Feb. 14, the 45th day of 2021. This is Valentine's Day.

Today's highlight

On Feb. 14, 2018, a gunman identified as a former student opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., killing 17 people in the nation's deadliest school shooting since the attack in Newtown, Conn., more than five years earlier.

On this date

In 1778, the American ship Ranger carried the recently adopted Stars and Stripes to a foreign port for the first time as it arrived in France.

In 1920, the League of Women Voters was founded in Chicago; its first president was Maud Wood Park.

In 1929, the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre" took place in a Chicago garage as seven rivals of Al Capone's gang were gunned down.

In 1967, Aretha Franklin recorded her cover of Otis Redding's "Respect" at Atlantic Records in New York.

In 1989, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini called on Muslims to kill Salman Rushdie, author of "The Satanic Verses."

Today's birthdays

Actor Andrew Prine is 85. Former N.Y. City Mayor Michael Bloomberg is 79. Journalist Carl Bernstein is 77. Magician Teller (Penn and Teller) is 73. Actor Meg Tilly is 61. Actor Simon Pegg is 51. Singer Rob Thomas (Matchbox Twenty) is 49. Actor Danai Gurira is 43.

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