

A PATH FORWARD

TACTICAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO KEEP THE PEACE

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Democratic presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg has received a lot of attention lately because of a practice that was used by the New York City Police Department when he was the mayor: stop-and-frisk. Intended to reduce crime, stop-and-frisk had an unfortunate consequence — the profiling of people of color, particularly blacks and Latinos, who were disproportionately detained. While the use of stop-and-frisk has declined precipitously, the practice of profiling continues in cities across America.

Here in San Diego, an officer who participated in a 2015 study of San Diego Police Department traffic stop practices said, “I’m not going to lie. If I see somebody that’s totally out of place and there’s a reason, I’m going to stop them and ask them what they’re doing.” The study, conducted by San Diego State University, found racial disparities in officers’ decisions to initiate a traffic stop, issue a citation, and search a vehicle — although not in every year of the study or in every community.

One of the researchers astutely noted that analyses of racial and ethnic differences in the rates of contact with police (and the outcomes of those contacts) carry a



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A New York police officer on a motor scooter at Tilden Houses, a public housing project in Brooklyn, on June 24, 2014.

risk: the tendency to oversimplify the results. Either the police are racists who purposely target people of color or there are no differences in how they treat people, despite the reported disparities. This oversimplification inevitably overlooks what’s needed: a more nuanced approach that strengthens relationships between law enforcement officers and the community members they serve, creating a path forward.

The reality is that fewer than 1 in 5 U.S. residents has face-to-face

contact with law enforcement officers in a given year. This lack of familiarity can lead to misperceptions — often shaped by mass media — if an encounter takes place. And when an officer looks different from you, mistrust can be heightened, regardless of your race or ethnicity. Consider this tweet from a San Diego law enforcement officer: “I’m a white male cop and I’ve been called a white blue-eyed devil and a racist by citizens of color, just because of my skin color. I’m not a racist.”

The National Conflict Resolution Center brings together police and community members for dialogue in a structured environment and will soon introduce a tactical communication training program that builds officers’ cultural competency — of vital importance in a diverse community like ours.

More than 1,400 officers and community members have participated since the workshops began in 2015, in conjunction with Live Well San Diego and numerous local law enforcement agencies. Participants practice the skills of civil communication and deep listening, learning how to perceive conflict from the other person’s world view. They connect around the idea of shared needs: safety, respect, being heard.

Community members are often surprised by their first interaction with law enforcement in a positive or neutral setting. The sentiment, “Wow, they’re just like us,” is not uncommon when they hear about the officers’ lives, their reasons for joining the force, or how they deal with on-the-job trauma.

The officers also gain a fresh perspective. Away from traffic stops and crime fighting and in a safe space, they can listen and learn from their constituents. And they can speak with candor. The rich discussion yields valuable

insights and cements a belief that the officers and community members want the same things.

In the most extreme cases, a lack of understanding and respect can lead to deadly encounters. Last month, the San Diego Police Department rolled out its own training on de-escalation techniques to comply with legislation that took effect Jan. 1. It allows the use of deadly force only when an officer’s life is in imminent danger and the situation can’t be de-escalated.

It’s likely that your hope is to avoid a police encounter altogether. But if one does occur, know that each of you bears a responsibility: to treat one another with respect. Remember that it’s a person wearing that uniform — someone who may not be all that different from you. And if you feel fearful, know that law enforcement officers experience fear, too. When we acknowledge our similarities, we can achieve the understanding that’s needed to keep the peace.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC), a San Diego-based organization that is working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. NCRC is nationally recognized for its conflict management and communication strategies. To learn about NCRC’s programming, visit www.ncrconline.com.



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SCENE

Mad about Mozart!

Amadeus Gala 2020

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BY VINCENT ANDRUNAS • SPECIAL TO THE U-T

Bi-national nonprofit Mainly Mozart brings us “Music of the Masters” (Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Haydn) performances by top national musicians. Its February gala at the Hyatt Aventine was chaired (again!) by Ron McMillan — with honorary chairs Alexandra Pearson and Paul Meschler, Arlene and Richard Esigate, Ronald and Susan Heller, and Matthew and Svetlana Weil. There, 161 guests enjoyed Champagne, canapés, and music from Quartet Nouveau before a dinner featuring a surf and turf entrée.

CEO Nancy Laturno highlighted MM’s programs. Top musicians performing in its June festival will also mentor 300 Youth Orchestra members (a third of whom have learning difficulties, which music therapy has helped immensely), and MM’s “Mozart & the Mind” series focuses on music’s benefits in autism, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, dementia, PTSD, and early childhood development. Later, a renowned trio (violin, bass/vocals, and piano) performed an eclectic concert, bringing the audience to a standing ovation.

CENTERS

FROM B1 more efficient about it and better about it.”

Teachers and union leaders say they understand the district must address the shortfall, but cutting a program that serves some of the district’s most at-risk students is a bad option.

“We don’t feel that this is the right cut,” said Julie Walker, president of the Sweetwater Education Association, a teacher’s union. “If there needs to be some changes to make it more economical, then let’s make some changes, but let’s not throw the whole program out.”

Some unions are currently in negotiation with the district. Walker said presidents of the various unions and bargaining chairs were made aware of the learning center proposal Thursday during a negotiation meeting.

She said she is not confident that the district’s alternative proposal of placing students in independent study will be effective, given that the programs are structured differently.

The independent study program currently operates with students doing 20 to 30 hours of homework a week from home and meeting with a teacher once every week at one of four satellite campuses.

Whether the independent study program operates differently as a result of this change is still being worked out, Rubio said.

“I want to make it really clear ... that our intention is not to not serve those students,” Rubio said. “Our proposal is to move them to already existing alternative education programs.”

Dan Woodard, a Learning Center teacher at Mar Vista High School in Imperial Beach, said he hopes the board keeps the centers open.

“Our district model has been to put kids first. I’m hoping this time they do it,” Woodard said.

Woodard, who has taught at the learning center for 19 years, said the students enrolled at the center have unique challenges and situations. Some are there for disciplinary reasons, and others are there because they find it easier to focus in a more independent setting as opposed

to a lecture, he said. Woodard wonders if students will leave the school if the centers close, possibly to attend charter schools. He also worries for his future and other colleagues.

“I’m good at reaching these kids that other people can’t reach,” Woodard said. “My strength is working with these kids.”

Verenice Hernandez-Herrera, bargaining chair for the Sweetwater Counseling and Guidance Association, said in a statement Friday that it is heartbreaking that the district is more interested in dismantling a program that is a lifeline for thousands of students. She said the union has made proposals to save the district money but those have been rejected.

“It is difficult to trust a district who says one thing and does another,” Hernandez-Herrera said.

The board will discuss the proposal at its meeting Monday, at 6 p.m., at the Chula Vista Middle School Multipurpose Room, 415 Fifth Ave. The Sweetwater Education Association is organizing a rally before the meeting.

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SMOLENS Will Hunter get pardon?

FROM B1 interview with the editorial board of The San Diego Union-Tribune, Issa asked what would be gained by locking up Hunter, as well as his wife, Margaret, who also pleaded guilty to one charge of misusing campaign funds.

“Are we better off spending \$60,000 a year to put (Duncan Hunter) behind bars or are we better off with his doing community service and going on with his life, with the likelihood of his committing a crime being pretty low?” he said in the interview published last month.

State Sen. Brian Jones, another major Republican in the race, essentially agreed with Issa’s basic positions on the president’s actions last week.

“The president is well within his authority to make these commutations and pardons,” he said. “I think he is using his authority responsibly.”

He also said he didn’t think it was appropriate to talk about a Hunter pardon or commutation.

“It’s too early to opine on Hunter. He hasn’t even been sentenced yet,” Jones said.

Ammar Campa-Najjar, the lone Democrat in the race, opposed the president’s moves and said Hunter should not receive clemency.

“These particular par-

dons admittedly impede the Attorney General’s ability to do his job due to their political and personal nature,” he said.

Further, Campa-Najjar said the former congressman “himself said he should ‘take the hit’ and had taken responsibility.”

“Pardoning Congressman Hunter not only sets a dangerous precedent for other members of Congress,” he continued, “it’s unfair to the likes of (former Reps.) Duke Cunningham and Jesse Jackson Jr.,” both of whom served prison time after being convicted in corruption cases.

In other 50th news: It’s Darrell Issa, R-Bonsall

Issa, long identified as a Vista Republican, is now a Bonsall Republican, at least for the time being. He registered to vote at a home he owns in the North County town in November.

The former congressman’s Vista residence, as well as DeMao’s Rancho Bernardo home, are outside the 50th Congressional District. Both have noted that those properties are close to the district line. That gave Jones and Campa-Najjar bragging rights of actually being residents of the 50th. You do not have to live in a congressional district to run in it.

Issa, who served 18 years in Congress, frequently mentions that an earlier iteration of his former district included about a third of what is now the 50th, including Bonsall. So he claimed the right to being a homer as much as anybody else,

maybe even more so. But now he has made it official. There is a twist: His mother lives at the house where he is registered to vote.

“I am staying there most of the time,” he said, joking that he mostly lives at his office and in his car these days.

Issa may not have broadcast the change, but he wasn’t hiding it. He has publicly mentioned his new voting residence at least a couple of times, including at a debate on Feb. 14.

“I’ve already voted for myself in this district from my home in Bonsall,” he said.

Issa said he has been assured by legal counsel that he “complied with every part of the rules.”

“I thought it was a good, symbolic thing to do,” he said, adding that he thought it was absurd others “tried to make some big point over (living) a few thousand feet from those lines.”

It would be more than symbolic if he happens to advance out of the March 3 primary by one vote.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Jim VandeHei (@JimVandeHei), CEO and co-founder of the Axios news organization. “Billionaire Michael Bloomberg is duking it out with Billionaire Donald Trump, often on Billionaire Jack Dorsey’s Twitter and in ads on Billionaire Mark Zuckerberg’s Facebook, all chronicled in Billionaire Jeff Bezos’ Washington Post.”

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TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, Feb. 23, the 54th day of 2020. There are 312 days left in the year.

Today’s highlight

On Feb. 23, 1945, Marines on Iwo Jima captured Mount Suribachi, where they raised two American flags. (The second flag-raising was captured in the iconic AP photo.)

On this date

In 1836, the siege of the Alamo began in San Antonio, Texas.

In 1954, the first mass inoculation of schoolchildren against polio using the Salk vaccine began in Pittsburgh as some 5,000 students were vaccinated.

Today’s birthdays

Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Fred Biletnikoff is 77. Rock musician Brad Whitford (Aerosmith) is 68. Singer Howard Jones is 65. TV personality-businessman Daymond John (“Shark Tank”) is 51. Actor Josh Gad is 39. Actress Emily Blunt is 37. Actor Aziz Ansari is 37. Actress Dakota Fanning is 26.

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