

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

CELEBRATING AMERICANS' CORNUCOPIA OF CONTENTION

For the fortunate among us, Thanksgiving is a time of abundance. If there's one theme that holds true, people eat a lot on the holiday.

Accounting for appetizers and desserts, the average American consumes a little more than 3,000 calories in a typical Thanksgiving meal, according to the Calorie Control Council. That's equivalent to six Big Macs from McDonalds, or 14 iced doughnuts from Krispy Kreme.

When you factor in seconds, the calorie count increases to 4,500.

It's not coincidental that many families begin their Thanksgiving celebrations with a prayer or expression of gratitude for their bountiful meal and the hands that prepared it.

This Thanksgiving, I'm grateful for abundance of a different kind: the diversity of opinions in America. We live in a complicated country that's wrestling with complicated issues. Still, we welcome an open exchange of information and ideas that's facilitated by a free press. It makes unity seem a bit overrated.

Call it our cornucopia of contention:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn sharp divisions from the get-go. First it was mask wearing; now it's vaccine mandates. For all of the prodding, one-third of Americans remain unvaccinated. It's causing conflict in schools, workplaces, and at public meetings and gatherings across the country. It may even affect your Thanksgiving dinner plans.
- A debate is raging on the topic of critical race theory (CRT) and whether it should be taught in K-12 school classrooms. CRT states that racism is embedded in our social institutions (as a function of their underlying rules, regulations and procedures), leading to differential outcomes by race. But some Americans think CRT levels blame on them personally. Now parents are mobilizing to exercise greater control of their local school curricula.
- A record 1.7 million migrants from around the world were encountered trying to enter the United States illegally in the last 12 months — the highest number recorded since government track-

ing began in 1960. Immigration divides us collectively, but also, individually: On the one hand, we want to be compassionate. But we also worry about the economic effects, like lower wages. Add to that pandemic-related health concerns.

- While 99 percent of scientists agree that climate change is happening — and that humans are the primary cause — there is an unwillingness among some to do what it will take to avoid its most devastating impacts. The reality and urgency of climate change has been the topic of many Thanksgiving dinner table disputes; this year, it's more likely to be a side dish.

The list goes on. At a meeting the other day, I asked a few members of the National Conflict Resolution Center team to name the most contentious issues of our time. In less than a minute, they came up with a list of 20.

I celebrate our ability to talk through these difficult matters and our freedom to disagree. It's the lifeblood of democracy. With open debate, we can consider all interests and perspectives and

then find our way to consensus — or at least, find a compromise.

It's a right and privilege that none of us should take for granted, however.

Freedom House, a nonprofit organization that works to defend human rights and promote democratic change, says that efforts to suppress nonviolent expression have grown in countries around the world. Far from ensuring peace and stability, they note, suppression can lead to domestic unrest that erupts in far more dangerous forms.

The organization's "Freedom in the World 2021" report states, "As a lethal pandemic, economic and physical insecurity, and violent conflict ravaged the world in 2020, democracy's defenders sustained heavy new losses in their struggle against authoritarian foes, shifting the international balance in favor of tyranny."

Incumbent leaders increasingly used force to crush opponents and settle scores, sometimes in the name of public health, while beleaguered activists... faced heavy jail sentences, torture, or murder."

Citizens living in these countries are virtually isolated, as authoritarian leaders see access to information as a threat to their rule. The media is silenced, and restrictive laws, fear and intimidation are used to prevent the spread of information. Differences in thought are unwelcome and subverted.

In China, only a small group of people — specifically, senior members of the Communist Party — can publish criticisms of the government. Ordinary people (China's billion-plus citizens) must use online systems that are licensed, monitored and regularly scored by the government.

Yes, our challenges and divisions are many. But when I sit down for dinner on Thursday, I will take comfort in knowing that we live in a society where citizens have the freedom to express their opinions and perspectives.

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.

SCENE

Corazón de Vida Foundation

Organization raises more than \$300K to help orphaned and abandoned children

U-T STAFF

Corazón de Vida Foundation held its annual Noche de Gala event at the Hotel del Coronado on Nov. 6.

Corazón de Vida, established more than 26 years ago, provides support for orphaned and abandoned children in Baja California.

Members of the organization's San Diego chapter and host committee members worked to assemble an evening full of fun and connection.

The event started with a champagne outdoor reception followed by dinner and

a program in the hotel's Crown Room. The event included silent and live auctions and live entertainment. The special moment of the evening was the paddle-raise auction where guests were asked to support Corazón de Vida by making a donation. The response was overwhelming. The goal of raising \$300,000 was exceeded.

Corazón de Vida seeks to end child abandonment by breaking the cycle of poverty. Its goal is carried out by funding local orphanages, providing quality of life improvement services, and

investing in children's futures by funding higher education.

If your organization has held a philanthropic event, you're welcome to email a high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduniontribune.com.

Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer's name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.



ROMAN DURTA

Members of the Corazón de Vida San Diego Chapter (from left): Omar Araiza, John Haugland, Sandra Slocum, Hilda Pacheco-Taylor, Amar Harrag, Paniz Al-lameh, Mariann Sanchez, Angela Aguilar, Brianna Woo, Alina Gordon and Abelardo Rodriguez.

PROTESTS

Staff plea for online meetings

FROM B1 her children.

Woolley and a man were arrested at the board's Oct. 14 meeting after being warned they were trespassing in the district lobby and then refusing to leave.

According to a timeline in the restraining order, Woolley pushed her way into the boardroom during a Sept. 9 meeting and held the door open for other protesters to

enter the closed room. Five days later, Woolley is accused of visiting multiple school sites to tear down mask signs and put up her own signs stating masks were "child abuse."

On Sept. 15, Woolley called and emailed Phelps' office with "aggressive, disturbing and threatening language," according to the document. Two days later, a student reported an uncomfortable confrontation with Woolley while with a group of friends, the document said.

The day after her arrest, Oct. 15, multiple copies of letters addressed from Woolley were delivered to the district office. Four days later, the district alleges, board members and the superintendent were visited at their homes by pro-

testers delivering the same letters in person.

"Protesters are seen trespassing onto private property at all hours during the course of the next several weeks at the superintendent's home," the timeline said.

From Nov. 8 to Nov. 16, Woolley is accused of visiting the district office, neighboring businesses and school sites to protest, write on the sidewalks with chalk and film, the district said.

Woolley said Friday in a phone interview that "the truth will prevail."

"Are men and women who disagree with the actions of the superintendent allowed to exercise their rights?" she said.

"Each man and woman

who exercises all five parts of the First Amendment is showing up in the flesh. Those who have great power as Christ shows us the way have great responsibility to honor the path of exercising our birthrights and show up as freedom-loving faith bearers," Woolley said. "One who is in fear does not exercise faith."

During public comments at Thursday's board meeting, Christine Paik, chief communication officer for the district, recalled her experience during the Sept. 9 meeting, during which 30 unmasked anti-mask protesters pushed their way into the boardroom, prompting the board to adjourn before completing its business.

"I felt it was my job stay there," Paik said. "But I started to feel unsafe as they raised their voices. They yelled profanities. They called me a 'disgusting pig' among other things."

Paik said she felt shaken by the events of that night.

"I'd never in my left felt unsafe in my own workplace. And, trust me, I was a reporter for 15 years and have witnessed extremely dangerous things," she said. "But after that, for weeks I relived those moments, traumatized and dreading the next board meeting."

Michele Manos, who works at the district, said she "watched in disbelief" as six police cars showed up at the October meeting, which also was virtual. Protesters

with signs and cameras barged into the offices. Manos told the board she didn't feel safe and asked that meetings remain online for the rest of the school year.

Thursday night's meeting continued to be remote due to safety concerns. The board cited state Assembly Bill 361, which allows governing bodies to meet virtually if there are "imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees."

Board members discussed what it would take to return to in-person meetings. Suggestions included security, mask mandates and someone at the door checking vaccination cards.

Brandt writes for the U-T Community Press.



Carlsbad police cordoned off part of Outrigger Lane in March 2019 as they investigated the stabbing death of Marjorie Gawitt.

TERI FIGUEROA U-T FILE

GUILT

FROM B1 cul-de-sac near Agua Hedonidia Lagoon. She was stabbed or slashed 142 times during a burglary. Prosecutors contended that James wielded the weapon.

Despite Gawitt's injuries she was able to call 911 and summon help. She died about an hour after the assault.

According to testimony

at a preliminary hearing in the case, other residents of the neighborhood had reported prowlers in the area. One man testified he heard a back screen door opening at his home and walked toward it to see the sliding glass door open.

He said he called out, "Hello?" then yelled, "Hey!" as the door kept opening. Whoever was there had fled, he said. He called 911 and officers arrived to take a report, but did not find a prowler.

About 45 minutes later, the man was on the phone with someone when he heard screaming from a nearby home. He called 911 again, and a few minutes later heard a car speeding away.

Just hours later Bushee and James were arrested at an encampment near the lagoon. Both were homeless at the time and on probation for a burglary in Upland the year before.

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MEMBER

Latest in string of conflicts

FROM B1 announced visits to the offices of city staff, she is no longer allowed to speak with city employees unless accompanied by the city manager or assistant city manager.

In her complaint, LeBaron alleges that Romero and Steinke have falsely accused her of bullying and intimidating city staff. She said answers to questions posed to Romero about the city's expenditures, "a problematic commercial property" and other matters have not been forthcoming, or have been "superficial."

The filing of the complaint comes as LeBaron is facing potential legal action by the city. An investigation was initiated several months ago by the City Council alleging interference by LeBaron with a third-party vendor, according to a follow-up closed session report from Steinke in August. Matters surrounding the third-party vendor investigation are being heard in closed session.

In response to that action by the city, LeBaron in August filed paperwork with the state to create the "Liana LeBaron Legal Defense Fund," which states that the purpose is "to defend against administrative investigation initiated by Lemon Grove City Council on Aug. 17, 2021."

LeBaron says in her complaint that she ran for office to provide her constituents more transparency and accountability. "Since taking

office, I have done my best to get answers. At every turn, however, I have been thwarted by the city manager and city attorney," she wrote.

She says she has been denied access to receipts for expenses and copies of the legal bills from the city attorney's firm. When she was told by the city attorney not to take notes during closed sessions because they put the city at risk of legal exposure, she says she wasn't given a proper explanation as to how that could happen.

Romero has told the City Council that she has received close to 1,000 emails from LeBaron in 10 months' time asking for answers to different city matters.

"Based on the email volume alone, there is a clear and quantifiable pattern of disruption of city operations by Councilmember LeBaron," City Councilmember Jerry Jones said.

The city does not have a policy of how much staff time can be devoted to individual council members' requests. But Jones said that past "best practice" has been that City Council members are allowed three hours of staff time per week.

LeBaron copied some of her emails to Romero requesting code enforcement needs or to initiate meetings with different groups to as many as 100 people.

LeBaron said in the complaint that some of the 100 people included in the email chain took it upon themselves to write to Romero and copied LeBaron with their emails when they didn't get responses to their inquiries from the city manager.

In an email reply directly to LeBaron, Romero told her to stop bullying her. The city attorney followed up with an email advising LeBaron to

cease.

LeBaron said in her complaint that the city attorney admonished her for sitting in on a Zoom deposition by an employee against the city. The city attorney said her presence could be perceived as intimidation. But depositions are not public matters. Jones said she could not have received the link to the Zoom meeting from the city, so he wondered how she got it.

Earlier this month, LeBaron popped into a Zoom meeting of the Planning Commission, during which an appeal was being heard. While her presence there is not illegal, Jones said it's not accepted practice and that it could present legal exposure to the city, if the City Council was to hear the item on appeal.

Jones said that with the complaint, LeBaron has limited the council's ability to work with Romero and Steinke on the issues she raised.

"I don't believe it's legitimate because she's an employer, she's not an employee, and that is something we'll need legal advice on," Jones said. "We will have to hire an outside attorney to help us figure that out. (Assistant City Manager) Mike James is going to have to be the staffed on this. The council will have to meet to hire the attorney to give the council direction on how to handle this."

James said he is "evaluating the merits of the complaint and what steps the city should take moving forward."

The City Council will hold a special meeting next week to discuss the matter.

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TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, Nov. 21, the 325th day of 2021. There are 40 days left in the year.

Today's highlight

On Nov. 21, 1995, Balkan leaders meeting in Dayton, Ohio, initiated a peace plan to end 3 1/2 years of ethnic fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

On this date

In 1789, North Carolina became the 12th state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1920, the Irish Republican

Army killed 12 British intelligence officers and two auxiliary policemen in the Dublin area; British forces responded by raiding a soccer match, killing 14 civilians.

In 1942, the Alaska Highway, also known as the Alcan Highway, was formally opened at Soldier's Summit in the Yukon Territory.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon's attorney, J. Fred Buzhardt, revealed the existence of an 18 1/2-minute gap in one of the White House tape recordings related to Watergate.

In 1979, a mob attacked the U-S Embassy in Islamabad,

Pakistan, killing two Americans.

In 1980, 87 people died in a fire at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas.

Today's birthdays

Actor Laurence Luckinbill is 87. Actor Marlo Thomas is 84. Actor Juliet Mills is 80. Actor Goldie Hawn is 76. Actor-singer Lorna Luft is 69. Actor Nicolette Sheridan is 58. Football Hall of Famer Troy Aikman is 55. Baseball Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr. is 52. Football player-TV personality Michael Strahan is 50. Singer Carly Rae Jepsen is 36.

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