

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

RECONCILING ANTISEMITISM, FREE SPEECH ON CAMPUSES

Classes are under way at many colleges and universities around the country. So are acts of anti-semitism.

At my alma mater, University of Wisconsin-Madison, the fall semester is off to an inauspicious start. Administrators there are calling for “civility and kindness” after antisemitic messages were written on campus sidewalks in seven locations. The chalkings labeled Jewish student groups as “racist,” “genocidal,” and “having blood on their hands.”

The problem isn’t particular to UW-Madison. I recently learned that some Jewish parents of college-bound students screen prospective schools for their antisemitic leanings, out of concern for their children’s safety. And with good reason: According to Hillel International, an organization that supports Jewish students, the incidence of antisemitic acts on college campuses was at an all-time high during the 2019-20 school year, despite the pandemic.

It’s the Middle East at issue today — specifically, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One faction (anti-Zionists) rejects the idea of

Jewish nationhood, vilifying individuals and groups that it considers pro-Israel. The anti-Zionists, who support Palestinian freedom, believe Israel must be held accountable for its military actions in the region and that all Jews have blood on their hands (thus the chalking).

Another faction conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism: If you question the existence of Israel — or even criticize its treatment of Palestinians — then you must hate Jews.

While antisemitic actions are abhorrent and on the rise, we must have a balanced response that protects free speech. In their apology to Jewish students, UW-Madison administrators said, “Just because something isn’t prohibited doesn’t make it a good idea. Our expectation is that we engage across differences and discuss varying views and ideas with civility.”

Closer to home, when a pro-Palestinian student group at UC San Diego hosted a controversial speaker in May, Jewish organizations expressed a concern that his extreme views threatened their

safety. The day after his appearance, a sign depicting the Israeli flag was defaced.

In response, Chancellor Pradeep Khosla and Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Becky Pettit penned a letter to the UC San Diego community. In part, they wrote, “Each member of the university community is entitled to speak, to be heard, and to be engaged based on the merits of their views. This is true for speech we support, and it is true for speech we strenuously oppose.”

Khosla and Pettit continued, “It is a great disappointment that some speakers on our campus may choose to exercise their right to free speech by advancing antisemitic points of view, and while those speakers have a right to be heard, they do not have a right to be free from criticism.”

Indeed, our colleges and universities need to do everything possible to enable debate, discussion and even disagreement on their campuses. It’s a part of their reason for being, after all.

That idea first took hold in the 1960s. Students at the University

of California, Berkeley, had been banned from participating in political activities by school administrators, fearful of the spread of Communism. A group of 500 students marched in protest of the university’s order, and the Free Speech Movement was born. It gave voice to their concerns about civil rights and the Vietnam War.

It was a difficult time — not only at Berkeley, but at other public universities. But to Dr. Jeffrey Herbst, president of American Jewish University, the recent animus has taken a worrisome turn.

In a webinar hosted last year by the Yale Program for the Study of Antisemitism, Herbst said that while Israel has long been contentious, the immediacy and specificity of threats against Jewish students were inconceivable just a decade ago.

Acts of antisemitism are indefensible. While students can and should express their opinions, it must be done in a civil way. In a similar vein, those of us who condemn antisemitic acts must speak up, too.

What’s been lost in this conflict

is conversation — an opportunity to better understand the other person’s point of view and what shaped it. Even better: What if that conversation was thoughtful and nuanced? At the end, we might still disagree, but I would respect your position and your right to have it.

That’s the freest speech of all. In that spirit, I hope you’ll join the National Conflict Resolution Center on Sept. 22 for an exchange between panelists Imam Abdullah Antepfi of the Duke Divinity School and New York Times opinion writer and Pulitzer Prize winner Bret Stephens.

Our topic will be the connections and differences between antisemitism and Islamophobia. I will be moderating the talk. For information or to register, visit [NCCROnline.com](https://nccr.org).

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 NCCR’s programming, visit [nccronline.com](https://nccr.org)

HEROIC

FROM B1

Every item they have with them now was pulled from dumpsters on the way to the river bed.

Sheila tells Pulido that her wallet was in her backpack and, with it, her EBT card, which helped cover the cost of food.

“On Monday I’m going to pick you up and take you down to the EBT office,” Pulido tells her. “I’ll come check here and if you’re not here, I’ll look around for you in this area.”

Pulido says he’s been working with Sheila and Juan for a couple months, trying to get them into housing.

“It’s frustrating,” he says, “but it’s just a matter of waiting for it to happen.”

“I’m not going to lose track of you,” he tells Sheila before leaving to check on another camp.

Stronger network

The city’s current outreach efforts differ significantly from past efforts, says Ketra Carter, program manager with the city’s Homelessness Strategies and Solutions department.

“Outreach in years past didn’t have a clear definition or clear structure,” Carter says. “Many of the outreach efforts were so sporadic and thin, people didn’t know who was doing what when.”

Service providers were doing their own tracking, Carter says. Now everyone is linked into the regional Homeless Management Information System, or HMIS. Each outreach worker carries a cellphone, iPad or laptop that allows them to enter information about their clients into the database to find out, in real time, if anyone else is working with the person.

And when a housing unit becomes available, outreach is immediately notified.

“We need that information at the point of connection and at the point of conversation with the person standing in front of us,” Carter says.

“We’d go looking for people for six months with a unit available.”

One of Pulido’s clients was a woman whose four children had been placed into foster care. One hour

before she was to appear in court to try to get her children back, Pulido received notification that she had been matched to housing.

“I was able to call her up and say, ‘You’ve been matched to a program, let the judge know that you’re on PATH.’ She’ll probably have her kids back in a month,” he says.

The mayor describes outreach workers as “the first step” in the city’s larger effort to address homelessness.

“They’re the entry point,” he says. “A lot of people drive by encampments or see an individual and want something done about it. These are the people that do something about it.”

Gaining trust

Miles away from the river bed’s rough terrain, outreach teams from City Net, a homeless services nonprofit, work the areas alongside state highways, where encampments started springing up during the pandemic.

In October 2021, Gloria announced a partnership between the city and Caltrans to have City Net provide outreach to people camped on Caltrans rights-of-way.

Under the agreement, City Net teams have two to three weeks to make a connection before Caltrans sends in workers to clean up an area.

Karyn Garner, a field program supervisor with City Net, said her teams can ask for more time if they feel they’re making progress and don’t want to lose track of someone.

“We have such a great relationship with Caltrans, that if we wanted to ask them to maybe pause and give us another week to really facilitate some services with the client, they will,” she said.

Roughly 100 people a week are placed into shelter, according to data provided by the city. It can take several engagements to earn the trust of someone who’s been living on the street, outreach workers say.

“When you take someone who’s only known street life, who’s struggling with mental health, substance abuse, and you’re trying to get them housing focused, it can be a



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T
Alejandro Pulido talks with Sheila and her husband, Juan, near the riverbed.

journey,” Garner says. “But it’s doable. And when you get to see them get housed, it’s really amazing.”

On the morning The San Diego Union-Tribune accompanied a City Net team, Garner kept an eye out for a client who wasn’t answering her cellphone. When Garner and her team spotted the woman’s tent, they found someone else was occupying it.

Garner finally found Alicia (who asked to be identified by a pseudonym) about a half-mile south of where she usually camped. The woman in her old tent had kicked her out and taken her cellphone. Alicia had bruises on her face from the ensuing scuffle.

Despite what had happened, Alicia is hesitant about moving into a shelter. She needs a bottom bunk so she could bring along her dog, but bottom bunks are difficult to come by. And there are other valid reasons people like Alicia are hesitant to accept a shelter bed. They may have had a bad experience in a shelter; a chaotic communal living environment could overwhelm someone who struggles with mental illness.

Garner recently spent 45 minutes talking to Alicia about her past. She told Garner she recently kicked a meth habit and was struggling to stay sober.

“She shared a lot with me about her hardships and her traumas and what she’s been through,” Garner says. “Being sober, that’s really hard to do, especially given what she’s just been through (with her tent and phone being stolen). It could have very easily triggered a cop-

ing mechanism. It’s very easy to go back to using when you’re living on the streets.

“I tried so hard last time to pitch shelter to her, I really did because it’s not good to be out here on the streets,” she adds.

Garner has a motto: “Today’s no can be tomorrow’s yes.”

“It’s a cheesy motto, but I ultimately stand by it,” she says. You never know when someone’s going to change their mind about housing or a shelter bed.

Persistence is key

City Net has had success with largescale outreach efforts. In 2017, the city of Anaheim hired the nonprofit to outreach to more than 700 people who had set up camps along the Santa Ana River, near Angel Stadium.

Matt Bates, City Net’s vice president, recalled coming across “some of the most sophisticated encampments” he’d seen, which included solar panels, electrical generators and multi-room structures.

“People said, ‘Look, you know, I’m sort of living the dream here — look at my living room, look at my bedroom and look at my solar panels, and I’ve got a TV here and I’ve got everything that I need,’” he said.

But the dream had limits and, over time, people started asking City Net caseworkers about housing.

“We saw the real grind,” Bates said. “You’re hauling water every day. And you’re peeing and pooping in a bucket and having to haul that away. There’s no privacy and everything’s dirty

all the time.”

Bates says his teams are persistent at trying to offer help.

“Experience has taught us that if we can develop that trust and kind of get to the real underlying story, people want to be housed,” he said.

Celebrating successes

A homelessness outreach worker in San Diego earns \$48,000 a year, on average. Pulido, who lives with his in-laws, said he has colleagues who, like the people they help, are on a waiting list for subsidized housing.

“Most outreach workers live with roommates or have a shared living space,” he says.

Then there are the job’s inherent challenges. In many ways, outreach workers are like first responders. Their clients might be suffering from an untreated illness or injury. Individuals they approach might be dealing with mental illness or myriad traumas.

“As outreach workers, we might have one kind of specialization, but we end up being just everything,” says Nate Dressel, an outreach program manager with PATH.

The weight of the job can wear people down.

That’s why it’s important to celebrate wins to stave off burnout.

“Last week I had two housing matches. This week, I had two housing matches,” Pulido says. “So, those things, we have to really take time to appreciate, because it keeps us going.”

“We don’t get a whole lot of wins every day,” Carter says. At weekly meetings with outreach workers, she sets aside 20 minutes to celebrate successes.

Bates says that prior to the pandemic, City Net encouraged its staff to eat lunch together, meet for brainstorming sessions and be a source of mutual support. But the pandemic has made building camaraderie a little more difficult.

“These people do heroic work,” Gloria says. “It’s unheralded and often overlooked. It’s not extremely well-compensated. That’s a problem, generally, but it’s exacerbated during these times we find ourselves in.”

Gloria said the city is try-

ing to make outreach workers’ jobs easier by providing more housing opportunities, though affordable housing projects often face significant community resistance.

“I continue to encourage people to understand that you can’t simultaneously complain about homelessness and then oppose new construction or siting of new facilities,” Gloria said.

“Our whole goal is that when someone raises their hand, we want to have an option for them right then and there,” he said.

But despite the low pay, people are drawn to careers in outreach.

In October 2020, San Diego City College and the San Diego Housing Commission launched the Homelessness Program for Engaged Educational Resources class, or PEER. Students learn about the history of homelessness; the role of homeless-services providers; federal, state and local policies affecting homelessness; and what it takes to be an outreach worker, housing coordinator or case manager.

Kirin Macapugay, a City College professor of human services and social work who helped create the PEER program, said the initial goal was to attract 15 students. As of the end of July, more than 200 students have taken the class or are currently enrolled. Some are working toward an associate degree; others have higher degrees and want to switch careers.

“So many of our students have experienced homelessness themselves,” Macapugay says. “Not that lived experience is necessary in social services, but those who have, we see greater longevity with them in the field.”

When people ask her what makes a good outreach worker, Macapugay tell them a person needs to have “unconditional positive regard” — the ability to remain empathetic and demonstrate compassion no matter how often the people you are trying to help might resist that help.

It’s not easy, Macapugay says, but it’s a quality that we could all work on.

“We would be such a better society, right?”

Davis is a freelance writer.

SMOLENS

FROM B1

2018. Now, it remains to be seen how smoothly the public-private development will work out and whether this will truly be a “transit-oriented” development as promised.

The biggest news on the development front came this past week when the San Diego City Council approved Mayor Todd Gloria’s recommendation to select the Midway Rising team to redevelop the sports arena land.

That action was preceded by numerous reports raising questions about the process and the central member of the winning team, Brad Termini.

Weeks ago, Gloria’s administration wanted the five bidders on the project narrowed to three. A council committee disagreed and recommended continuing the evaluation of all five. Gloria persuaded the full council to move ahead on three.

That was significant because the developer eventually selected would be expected to provide most of the financing for the

campaign this fall to approve Measure C, which would remove a 50-year-old 30-foot height limit from the Midway District. The five-bidder track meant the ultimate choice wouldn’t happen in time for a developer to be in position to do that.

Then opponents of Measure C filed a lawsuit challenging a supplemental environmental report for the redevelopment. The group Save Our Access successfully sued two years ago on similar grounds, resulting in a judge overturning a 2020 election that would have lifted the height limit. The new lawsuit says the environmental report falls short in assessing, among other things, the project’s impact on transportation, water quality and biological resources.

After Gloria recommended Termini’s group, news reports raised further questions about the mayor’s relationship with the developer and the builder’s qualifications. The publication La Prensa and then The San Diego Union-Tribune reported that Termini and his wife, Stephanie, each made \$50,000 contributions to an independent expenditure



JOHN GASTALDO U-T FILE
The Naval Information Warfare Systems’ current facility across Interstate 5 from Old Town.

campaign supporting Gloria’s candidacy for mayor in 2020. They also gave a combined \$4,500 directly to Gloria’s mayoral campaign.

The mayor’s office said that support did not play into the selection to develop the city’s 48 acres in the Midway District.

The news reports also pointed out that Termini and his company, Zephyr Partners LLC, had never developed a project of this magnitude and that Zephyr was the subject of several lawsuits.

The council nevertheless voted 7-1 for Termini’s team. Councilmember Raul

Campillo was the lone “no” and voiced concerns about Zephyr’s qualifications and the vetting process.

None of the other emerging projects has traveled such a rocky road, though they are much earlier in the process (with the exception of SDSU). They haven’t been without controversy, however.

The Navy this fall plans to take formal steps to start the real estate competition for 70.5 acres at the NAVWAR site, according to Jennifer Van Grove of the Union-Tribune. In May 2021, the Navy released a draft plan of alternatives, includ-

ing the favored project that would have up to 19.6 million square feet of development spread across 109 buildings, some as tall as 350 feet, looming over Old Town.

The bulk of the plan startled and angered many residents. The Navy talked about being good neighbors, collected public feedback and made clear this was not the final plan. But the federal land is not subject to most local land-use regulations, including height limits. While a detailed proposal is a long way from being shaped, whatever eventually is built there almost certainly will be big — really big.

The city’s six blocks of land around the Civic Center, which includes City Hall, may be the blankest slate. Last week, Gloria announced the creation of a committee that would hold public sessions beginning Monday to explore potential redevelopment for the site. Building affordable housing will be a priority, as required by state law when local agencies dispose of surplus land. The affordable housing component of the Midway Rising proposal was a key to winning the sports arena bid, according to the

city.

The city gained control over all the Civic Center-area property by spending \$132 million to buy two office buildings it was leasing — a move that followed disputed deals for both under Mayor Kevin Faulconer.

The city’s lease for the Civic Center Plaza building came into question after it became public that a consultant assisting the city was being paid by the owner of the property. It also had become clear that the city overpaid in its lease-purchase agreement for 101 Ash St. — even if the building had been safe and useable. The building has remained vacant since early 2020 because of asbestos and other problems.

It will be a long time before we know whether that lemon can be turned into lemonade.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to many who put this out there:

“Pelosi: There are those in the (Republican) party who think life begins at the candlelight dinner the night before.”

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