

Opinion

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



JOE HELLER/HELLERTOON.COM



Your Turn
Joe J. Wallace
Guest columnist

A question amid COVID-19: What now Coachella Valley?

Sheltering in place has dealt a hard blow to businesses and the local economy, and one would have to be oblivious not to realize it. Everyone in our region has either experienced income disruption or knows someone who has.

The Coachella Valley Economic Partnership's study on the employment impact of COVID-19 projects roughly 54,000 jobs and 5,500 businesses will be lost in the desert. Every day that our businesses remain closed, furloughs become layoffs and business owners give up. Our over-dependence on tourism has been exposed by the pandemic as nonessential and irreplaceable on short notice. This pandemic has been the perfect storm to debilitate the Coachella Valley's business community.

The only way to mitigate something like this happening again is to diversify our region's economy by adding industry clusters that are essential and relevant to the outside world. The Coachella Valley has resolved to take the necessary steps to invest in diversification before, but the missing ingredient has been perseverance.

When the economic disruptions of Y2K and 9/11 hit the nation's economy, the Coachella Valley was not spared. CVEP was expanded to diversify the economy through business attraction. After a couple of years, the Coachella fest became an international event and tourism came roaring back. The need to diversify was forgotten, and CVEP was too. In baseball vernacular that would be strike one.

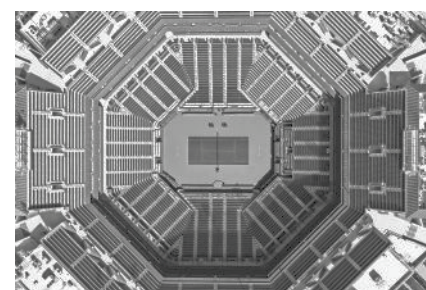
In the aftermath of the housing crisis of 2009, when home prices plummeted by upwards of 50%, I was recruited to become the founding director of the Palm Springs iHub. Entrepreneurship was identified as the best way to diversify the region's economy; California had become unfriendly to business, making business attraction nearly impossible. Growing our own was the way to go, and CVEP was once again expanded to further the diversification efforts. By 2014, some groups that had rallied to fund CVEP had forgotten the pain of the Great Recession and CVEP's funding was reduced again. Call this strike two.

Today, CVEP is on the minds of many as the only regional entity focused on diversifying the local economy. Our funding is voluntary and we have never returned to the kind of budgets enjoyed after the last two recessions. Drums are being pounded to diversify and CVEP is serving on the economic recovery efforts at the city, regional and county level. We are still only 6.5 people. With their budgets pounded by as much as 60% from TOT and sales tax shortfalls, cities are all looking for savings. They're also desperate to restart the business community so the revenue starts rolling in again. They're talking rigorously about how much a more diverse economy is needed.

As the decisions on what to cut from city budgets are made, it would be a mistake to reduce the investments in the one entity that is poised to lead a serious effort to diversify the economy. CVEP is the only local entity with a trained dedicated staff and a mission to do what is needed. To blow a third opportunity to mobilize a long-term sustainable effort to diversify and elevate the economy of Greater Palm Springs may well become strike three for the Coachella Valley.

I miss baseball and I hope the Coachella Valley makes the right choices going forward and sticks to them. A home run is also a possibility. Strike three should not be an acceptable option.

Email Joe J. Wallace, CEO and chief innovation officer of CVEP, at Joe.Wallace@cvep.com.



This Indian Wells Tennis Garden stadium is empty after the BNP Paribas Open was canceled.
JAY CALDERON/
THE DESERT SUN

It's time for year-round education in America



Ann McFeatters
Columnist

It's time for the United States to join the rest of the world. When schools reopen for in-person learning, American children should go to school year-round.

Like daylight savings time, the agrarian school year has passed its prime. As a percentage of the population, few children are needed to help on the farm for three months.

There are fewer summer jobs for teens. Flipping hamburgers increasing is a job adults fill. Resorts dependent on underpaid teens for grilling and lifeguarding don't justify insufficient education. Yes, children need a good work ethic, but building businesses on child labor is not a good look for us.

Our children need to learn more in this complicated world, and they get out of the habit of learning and lose momentum over the summer. They need a break, but not for three months. Look how many now are eager to go back to school and their friends.

American children are falling behind their counterparts who go to school on Saturdays and all summer.

American children now rank 38th out of 71 top industrialized countries in scores on tests in mathematics and 24th in

Twenty years ago American high school and college students were number one in the world in both subjects.

Only 34% of U.S.-born American citizens have a four-year college degree. With millions of Americans encumbered with huge debt for those degrees and with millions of parents out of work, it seems likely that percentage will decline except for engineering and science majors.

The only formal education millions of Americans will get is what they learn in grade and high school and maybe trade school. We have a duty to make education as comprehensive as we can.

With education in complete turmoil because of COVID-19, now is the best time to discuss what is wrong with our education system and decide to fix it. Now, with millions of students struggling with inadequate online courses, with others not even able to do that

and with most of them unable to continue school until the end of summer, if then, now is when we should plan what comes next. Who knows how virulent the second wave of the coronavirus will be.

Millions of parents would be ecstatic with year-round schools. They would no longer have to scramble during the summer to find affordable activities or day care.

Vacations could be staggered. Camps would have to adjust to different schedules. Perhaps schools and camps could work in tandem. Few families take three-month vacations.

Teacher union opposition could be overcome with planning, if teachers were paid fairly. Professional development shouldn't take three months.

Many schools in hot summer climates would have to be air conditioned. Low-income children whose only get fed at school could eat well for 12 months, not just nine.

While we are at it, high school students should not have to start at 7:30 a.m. They are too tired. Starting later and ending later in the afternoon would mean fewer car accidents, fewer students getting in trouble during long, unsupervised afternoons. Sports would just have to adjust. Elementary school children should start earlier than 9 a.m. Most of them are up and ready to go long before then and their parents need to get to work.

Because of the virus, many educators and policy makers are making plans to extend the school year next year. Some Michigan schools have been experimenting with six-week vacations, down from 10. A school in Virginia hopes to go year-round. And about 5,500 out of 133,000 schools nationwide already are almost year-round.

But states would have to act to make year-round schooling happen and, not surprisingly, lobbyists for special interests would fight it tooth and nail. We have a lot of child exploitation in this country. And educating our children better would cost money, a daunting factor when COVID-19 has massacred state and local budgets.

In America we always say, "Our children are our future." Do we really believe that?

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ANOTHER VIEW

There's two ways Donald Trump could lead by example

The Editorial Board
USA TODAY

President Donald Trump's leadership has never been under such scrutiny as during this pandemic. And never has the adoration for No. 45 among a lasting minority of Americans held such an opportunity for Trump to exercise leadership.

He certainly relishes his popularity, forever boasting about rally crowds (before coronavirus shut them down) or tweeting that his task force briefings are a "ratings hit." While Trump's overall approval may never exceed 50%, that's still tens of millions who believe in him and what he says — leverage to do tremendous good. Or not. Two cases in point:

Embracing unproven therapies. After Trump inexplicably started pushing the public ("What the hell do you have to lose?") in March to embrace two anti-malarial drugs as coronavirus therapies, prescriptions for chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine soared na-

tionwide. While early anecdotal evidence and two small, flawed studies suggested coronavirus-fighting benefits from the drugs, mounting research since then has pointed to the opposite conclusion — the drugs are no help and could, in fact, be harmful.

The Food and Drug Administration warned in late April against using either drug in nonhospital settings because of a risk of heart rhythm problems. A Veterans Affairs study showed high death rates among coronavirus patients using hydroxychloroquine. And a New York study showed no benefits from hydroxychloroquine.

Trump's response? He announced Monday that he has been taking hydroxychloroquine for two weeks to guard against coronavirus. Knowing how controversial the drugs are, Trump could have kept his personal decision private. But he didn't.

Refusing to wear a face mask. The president has employed a similar wink-and-nod approach with his disciplined practice of never wearing a face mask in

public, not even Thursday when he toured a Ford Motor Co. plant in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where a rule required masks and the state attorney had told the president ahead of time he had a "legal responsibility" to put one on. His explanation has something to do with his belief that wearing face covering is unflattering or shows weakness, even if everyone around him is now required to wear them.

And they're a wise precaution. In April, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began urging masks be worn because coronavirus is so contagious, it can spread merely by people talking. In Hong Kong, which has nearly the population of New York City, face masks were worn almost universally from the moment the coronavirus outbreak occurred.

By embracing face masks as a means of curtailing the spread of a deadly disease, or by urging caution with potentially harmful therapies, Trump could lead by example in a way that might save one life or, perhaps, many more.