

YOUR VOICE

How Native Americans in state beat the odds



**CalMatters
Commentary**
Dan Walters
Columnist

You can't turn on your television set or click on a YouTube video these days without being subjected to a barrage of ads for and against California ballot measures that would legalize betting on sports events.

Virtually all of those spots feature members of California's Native American tribes. Most tribes oppose Proposition 27, an on-line gambling measure sponsored mostly by FanDuel and other gaming corporations, saying it would undermine the finances of casino-owning tribes. However, a few tribes that don't have casinos are touting Proposition 27, saying its provisions would help them escape poverty.

No matter what happens to Proposition 27, or to Proposition 26, which is

sponsored by casino-owning tribes and would expand their virtual monopoly on gambling, the intense campaigns remind Californians of their state's very large Native American population.

The 2020 census revealed that the state's 762,733 self-identified Native Americans — nearly four times their number when the first white explorers reached California — are by far the largest population of any state. Moreover, California has more than 100 federally recognized tribes, ranging in size from five persons to more than 6,000, and dozens of reservations. The involvement of California's Native Americans in political clashes with multi-billion-dollar stakes is a testament to their resilience in a state that tried to enslave and/or eradicate them.

Those who survived enslavement and smallpox and other diseases brought into California by explorers and fortune-seeking migrants were often treated as vermin.

"That a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races, until the Indian race becomes extinct, must be expected," California's first elected governor, Peter Burnett, declared after taking office in 1851. "While we cannot anticipate this result but with painful regret, the inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power or wisdom of man to avert."

California offered a 25-cent bounty for Indian scalps, later increasing it to \$5, and the federal government dispatched troops to California to keep the state's native tribes under control. Ulysses S. Grant, later to command Union troops during the Civil War and be elected president, spent some of his early Army career at Fort Humboldt, protecting Trinity River gold miners from clashes with local tribes.

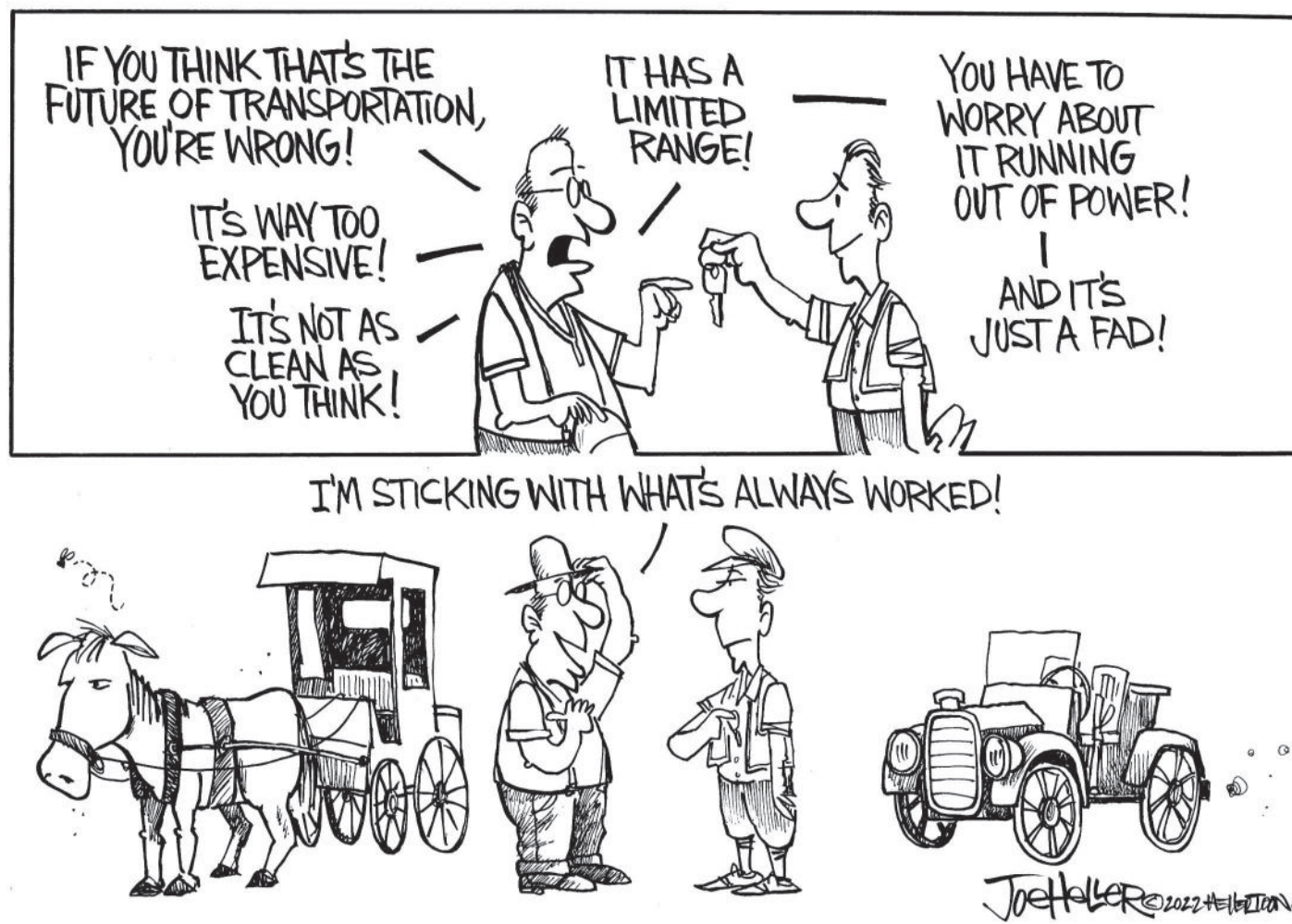
The killing finally stopped, but California's Indians were largely confined to reservations, almost all afflicted with deep poverty until the latter years of the 20th

century. In the 1980s, a U.S. Supreme Court decision gave California tribes the legal right to offer some forms of gambling because California had several types of legal wagering.

The decision protected modest tribal bingo and poker parlors from police raids and some tribes pushed the legal envelope further by installing slot machines. Although legally dubious, the tribes' machines generated cash to build larger casinos and sponsor two ballot measures to lock in their casino gambling monopoly.

With that monopoly, tribes could attract investment capital and build even larger casinos, some full-fledged resorts. They also adroitly cultivated support among politicians of both parties — which explains why both have formally opposed Proposition 27.

Although the battle so far has been over Proposition 27, and Proposition 26 has been virtually ignored, its passage could expand the tribal gambling monopoly even more.



JOE HELLER

Must we have all this schadenfreude? Or can we exercise a little compassion?



Your Turn
Randy Florence
Guest columnist

There's a word for it: Schadenfreude. A German noun meaning "pleasure derived by someone from another person's misfortune."

Most people, I'm guessing, do not believe they take joy in someone else's pain. But I admit, I've chuckled when the person who almost ran me off the road is pulled over later. I've gotten pleasure in watching the fall of someone who I thought "deserved" it.

I left much of social media several years ago as I got distressed at the joy people had from "owning" others. I literally saw family members, who just a few years before were spending time with each other lovingly at family events, threaten each other online. Conservatives want to own the socialists. Liberals want to own the white supremacists. And when did our elected politicians decide Twitter cleverness was their most treasured skill?

Years ago, someone asked me if I would ever want to be in politics. My

answer was an immediate no. I want someone better than me to be running things. Someone braver, smarter, more compassionate. That's what we want from our leaders. Or at least what we used to want.

Our country no longer has to worry about an outside enemy. We're it. We have made life so much easier for our outside enemies. All they have to do is throw a couple of bots on Twitter or Facebook, and soon we are all at each other's throats. But they can do it because we feed into it.

At the end of apartheid in South Africa, an organization was formed called The Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was determined the only way to heal was to have real conversations among all people associated with the horrors of apartheid. There was to be no healing until agreement could be reached on common ground.

It seems a very important time for us to be having similar conversations. Locally. Here among our neighbors. The national discourse is the sum of all local discourse. And we can impact that. A discussion about what we all want and how we can admit our differences and work toward the common goal. Couldn't we be better than this? We

all want the same thing. Safety. Security. Some level of peace. The ability to walk down the street without being labeled or accosted due to the way we look or whether or not we are wearing a mask. We are much closer to the end of the experiment of democracy than we are to the beginning. And outside influences recognize that Americans have the complete ability to tear themselves apart. To quote a good friend of mine: "Words matter."

We can be more accepting. We can explore our hearts and figure out what is right and wrong. We don't need to be told. And we certainly don't need to be told by those whose only goal is ratings or to further separate us so that we're more easily controlled.

Let's let our leaders know, locally and nationally, that we expect better. We expect them to represent all of us. Getting re-elected should not be the first priority. And as citizens, let's model the behavior we want our leaders to follow.

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Karlen

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valley's expanse, one absorbs the intrinsic value of untrammelled land. The Wilderness Act's concept and wording are more important than ever for Coachella Valley's residents 58 years later.

Our elected officials and unelected bureaucrats are approving projects that cause the loss of pristine open desert and endanger natural resources: behemoth building projects that will significantly increase traffic and carbon emissions; inequitable redistribution of valley water during historic drought conditions; and destruction of fragile open desert land, plant and animal habitats.

Several projects serve as examples: Disney/Cotino's 1,700-unit housing and 24-acre lagoon project in Rancho Mirage; the 383-acre La Quinta Coral Mountain surf resort, with a 16.6-acre, 18-million-gallon wave basin; the 18-acre DSRT surf in Palm Desert; the 200-acre SilverRock Resort in La Quinta, and a 3 million square foot, multi-story Amazon warehouse in Desert Hot Springs, projected to employ 1,800 full-time employees. These plans should never have left the drafting table, water being the critical and obvious red flag.

For instance, the SilverRock Resort and La Quinta surf park will use Colorado River water from the Coachella Canal. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced Colorado River management will operate at a Tier 2 shortage level for the first time. Arizona's allotment will be reduced by 21%; Nevada's by 8% and Mexico's by 7%. California will follow when the river reaches Tier 2b stage. To illustrate, were California's 4.4 million acre-feet of water reduced by 21%, like Arizona, the reduction would equal 924,000 acre-feet annually, likely reducing the canal's river water distribution to the valley.

It's time to shine the spotlight on the valley's nine-city elected officials regarding water usage and open desert loss, critical issues for residents. They are approving these projects and the public will is ignored. Colorado River water should not be used for surf parks and resorts, nor should aquifer water be a fallback part of the matrix because of poor water distribution decisions. And, communities do not want to lose their beautiful open desert.

Officials pride themselves on community input; yet, if you've attended a public comment session, you will have noted officials shuffling papers, not listening, and staring blankly at the speaker. Elected officials must listen to their constituents since project decisions are frequently based on individual, often personal, agendas.

As public policy scholar Deborah Stone maintains, "Politics and policy can happen only in communities...communities must be the starting point."

The valley needs leaders who are committed to their constituents, who appreciate the value of untrammelled open desert, and who are brave enough to say "no" to projects posing existential threats to natural resources. As Robin Silver, co-founder of the Center for Biological Diversity succinctly said: "This is the desert. It's time to grow up."

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• Letters should be fewer than 200 words

• Letters may be edited for length, clarity and taste

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• Cartoons can be one panel or multiple.

• We print the author's photo, city of residence and contact info (typically an

email address) with a column; and name and city of residence with a cartoon.

• Anonymous columns or cartoons are never published.

• Stick to a single topic in columns and avoid personal attacks.

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