

MD Anderson has an opportunity to reset its priorities and reaffirm its mission.

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# ★ OUTLOOK

Pension plans allow Houstonians to retire with dignity while supporting our economy.

PUBLIC POLICY

The car will still be king, but let's transform the city into one that can be experienced by foot or pedal



Michael Ciaglo / Houston Chronicle

The remaking of Avenida de las Americas in downtown Houston shows we can prioritize people without banning cars.

# RETHINKING HOUSTON

By Kyle Shelton

**T**HE week before the Super Bowl, the new, pedestrian-friendly version of Avenida de las Americas in front of the George R. Brown Convention Center was packed with people. Some were there for Super Bowl festivities, while others lined the newly redesigned pedestrian space to protest the Trump Administration's executive orders on immigration.

It's significant that today, both those events could happen in the middle of a street in front of one of Houston's economic engines.

Converted from what was formerly a six-lane road, the new pedestrian zone includes wider sidewalks and a pedestrian plaza, a smaller right-of-way that encourages bikes, pedestrians, and cars to use the same space at slower speeds, public art and new street-level restaurants.

The remaking of the Avenida de las Americas into a more pedestrian friendly plaza is a statement of what is possible here, despite Houston's car-centric design. Historically, Houston's approach has given us a built environment where, at best, pedestrians and bicyclists are slightly less-than-uncomfortable as they cross the city, and, at worst, they fear for their lives. But

the Avenida de las Americas experience shows us we can pursue a different approach.

While building safer streets should be our foundational goal, there are other advantages to this approach. Higher foot traffic in a business or commercial district is good for the economy and promotes higher sales. We can build them because they make our neighborhoods more interesting and encourage us to lead more active, healthy lives.

Best of all, there isn't just one way to pursue this. The city has a number of examples of great streets that encourage pedestrian, bicycle and transit use while not removing cars. We can prioritize people without prohibiting cars.

In Houston's East End, a formerly empty median was remade into the Navigation Esplanade, a pedestrian plaza has helped to revive activity along a central commercial corridor in the neighborhood. By marginally shrinking the right-of-way of the two lanes of traffic, the project created a wide central median that was re-done by the East End Management district into an engaging public space. Today a weekly farmer's market and a variety of street festivals use the median. Pedestrians have easier, stop-light controlled access to the median and cars tend to travel more slowly in the stretch next to the populated median.

**Bold policies continues on A28**

IMMIGRATION

## Rhetoric doesn't match border reality

Fact-based reform efforts should drive good solutions

By Dennis Nixon

The issue of immigration and border security is more complex than the political debate in Washington and on cable television would lead the public to believe.

It is also easier and far less costly to solve than many of the plans introduced by leading politicians and pundits.

The current reality on the Texas-Mexico border as well as much of the border outside of Texas is that the flow of immigrants who illegally enter the United States has declined dramatically in recent decades, from 1.6 million to about 400,000. Today, the border is faced with an illegal entry problem from individuals, mostly from Central America, coming to the United States in the hope of participating in the American dream. These economic migrants are basically law-abiding people who are seeking work because their country of origin has not given them a chance to succeed.

While immigration is a national obsession, there's a much greater and more real threat to American prosperity and national security. The United States is now at around 1.9 births per female, well below replacement level. And with 10,000 baby boomers retiring every day, the demographic outlook is bleak.

Without population growth and the prospect of new workers, economic growth is just not likely. Future GDP growth above 2 percent on a sustained basis will be an enormous challenge in the face of the demographic winter that will have a huge impact on the world over the next several decades. We need an immigration policy that addresses America's need for workers — about 600,000 to 650,000 low-skilled workers every year to keep our economy growing.

In addition to fact-based immigration reform, there **Feasible continues on A28**

REFLECTION

## HATE CAN'T TAKE ROOT IF WE DON'T LET IT

Safety comes in steely resolve to stay vigilant in rejecting bias

By Dayan Gross

In the past several months, our country has seen an extraordinary number of bias-motivated and anti-Semitic incidents, and our community has not been immune. In an average year, staffers in the Anti-Defamation League's Houston office will investigate 20 to 25 reports of hate incidents across South Texas. In the past 3½ months, we've responded to nearly 50.

Among the reports we've investigated in recent weeks: hate-filled fliers

left on the Rice University and Texas State University campuses and on the doorsteps of residents' homes; a Victoria mosque burned to the ground by an arsonist; Jewish students harassed by other students flashing the "Heil, Hitler" salute, showing them swastikas and sending them posts with Nazi memorabilia included; a student at a local middle school who had a racial epithet written on his notebook; a synagogue in Beaumont that had rocks thrown through its windows, twice; "Heil Hitler" left on a synagogue's voice-mail; and a bomb threat at a local Jewish institution.

Hate tends to wash over us in waves, and we have seen swells before. But no one in our Houston office, **Hate continues on A28**



Yi-Chin Lee / Houston Chronicle

A gathering at a local Anti-Defamation League office last month was called not by Jewish leaders but by Christians and Muslims who came together to denounce anti-Semitism and hate.

## OUTLOOK

# Bold policies can create a different Houston

**Bold policies from page A27**

In neighborhoods, this approach might be as simple as designing streets that require drivers to travel at lower speeds. A bill in the state Legislature would lower the prima facie speed limit from 30 to 25 mph on city streets to improve safety. But beyond regulatory changes we can physically remake neighborhood streets to calm traffic and encourage mixed-mode usage where bikes, pedestrians, and cars share space safely. The Energy Corridor has already introduced the city's first *woon-erf*, a design feature from The Netherlands that forces cars to slow and encourages pedestrians and bikes to share the road space. Other neighborhoods could follow suit or pursue their own strategies — building bulb-out curbs to narrow streets or pushing for the creation of wider pedestrian realms in future projects.

Some of our biggest commercial districts are a small step away from remaking themselves. Places like City Centre



Mayra Beltran / Houston Chronicle

**The Esplanade on Navigation in Houston's East End was transformed into an inviting public space.**

and Sugar Land Town Center could pursue parking and street-level interventions that remove cars from key commercial sections and open up foot traffic. Rice Village and the Museum District might look for ways to close or reduce traffic on small, underutilized sections of streets to encourage safer mode mixing.

Rice Village's anchor tenant Trademark Property announced the creation of a pedestrian plaza along Morningside Drive. Such strategies could even be pursued initially on a temporary basis. Experiments can extend to our streets and we don't have to be afraid to close something to traffic for a test run.

And finally, many of our major corridors could be rethought and re-engineered in bold ways to help create a different kind of Houston. Wide, car-centric boulevards like Bellaire Boulevard or Richmond Avenue are too wide in many places, especially along major commercial activity nodes with concentrated traffic of vehicles and pedestrians. Options — including shrinking road widths, remarking the pedestrian realm, and reconsidering setback requirements on businesses that put front doors instead of parking lots adjacent to sidewalks — could remake these spaces. Even simply adding additional traffic lights could create safer crossings for pedestrians.

Such projects would require that we imagine a city that isn't only experienced through a car. This shift, to work on a grand scale, would require real money — not nearly as much as a single lane of highway costs — but real money nonetheless. It would also require cooperation among the Texas Department of Transportation, the city of

Houston's Public Works and Planning departments, the Harris County Engineering Department, and citizens through the city.

Most important, these efforts don't have to happen in isolation. If we pursue a collection of such projects, the spaces could be tied together by the Bayou Greenways initiative or the in-progress bike plan to transform the way Houstonians think about and move through the city. The city recently inaugurated a walkable place committee to explore how we might pursue such an agenda.

Our streets are meant to be places of interaction, commerce and activity. Those things don't have to only happen in a car. They shouldn't only happen in a car. We only have to have the willingness to imagine ourselves experiencing that kind of street realm and then act to make that kind of street possible.

*Shelton is director of Strategic Partnerships at Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.*

## Hate must not be met with society's silence

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including one person who has worked there for over 30 years, has seen such an endless litany of bias-motivated vandalism and harassment.

With such a growing swell of hate, it would be human nature to seek safety. For us, safety comes in our steely resolve to stay vigilant. The tentacles of hate have reached into our organization, too. Our New York headquarters and our offices in Boston, San Francisco and Atlanta have received bomb threats. We know how chilling it is when hate comes home. But we cannot shrink away. Neither I nor my staff will be discouraged or disheartened by this surging scourge. If anything, our focus is sharper and we are more determined to carry out our mission: "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people, and secure justice and fair treatment to all."

We are encouraged by the expressions of solidarity and support that recent events have engendered. I was honored to participate in a news conference at ADL's Southwest Regional Office in reaction to a spate of anti-Semitic incidents — a gathering called not by the Jewish community, but by Christians and Muslims who came together to denounce anti-Semitism and hate.

Bishop James Dixon of Kingdom Builders Global Fellowship, one of the religious leaders who initiated the news conference, said, "When the world is dangerous for any of us, then the world is dangerous for all of us." And more than two dozen Muslim leaders wrote in a letter to the Jewish community, "We will not allow the seeds of hate to sprout in our city without fierce resistance. Know this day, and know

this always, an attack on a person of Jewish faith is an attack on all of us."

How can we be discouraged when we hear statements like that? Our Christian and Muslim friends get it. It's vital to reject hatred and speak out against it. Hate starts with words, and if not addressed, it grows. Three weeks ago two Indian engineers employed by Garmin were killed by a gunman who opened fire in a bar in Olathe, Kan. Bar patrons report hearing the gunman exclaim "Get out of my country!" before the shooting began.

Our U.S. senators are not silent. All 100 of them have urged the administration to take comprehensive action to investigate, prosecute and prevent the more than 140 threats against Jewish institutions, and desecrations of Jewish cemeteries. We are extremely grateful they took this important step. We've also asked President Trump and his administration to follow our senators' example and call out anti-Semitism and bigotry at every opportunity.

You can do it too, and by doing it, you can stop hate in its tracks. Whenever you see or hear a stereotype, bias-tinged joke or insult, whenever you witness someone being discriminated against, when you witness exclusion and prejudice, don't ignore it. Speak up and reject bias in no uncertain terms. Organizations like the ADL, our senators, the president and his Cabinet cannot do it alone. We all have to work together to eradicate hate, and it just makes sense to do that, because every hate incident is not just an attack against its target. It's an attack against all of us.

*Gross is Southwest Regional director for the Anti-Defamation League.*

## Feasible, productive solutions can improve border security



Guillermo Arias / AFP / Getty Images

**Sculptures mark the international boundary at Amistad Reservoir on the U.S.-Mexico border near Ciudad Acuña, across from Del Rio.**

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are two things the U.S. Border Patrol seeks along the Texas-Mexico border: visibility of the river and access to the river.

Both can be easily achieved simply by cleaning up the riverbank along the Rio Grande. The salt cedar and Carrizo cane are invasive plants that are not native to Texas. Their density becomes a hiding place for immigrants and criminals who illegally enter the United States.

Once these invasive plants have been eradicated, an all-weather river road should be built to provide U.S. Border Patrol agents access to patrol the riverbank. Encouraging Mexico to eradicate the plants on their side as well would create a large buffer zone that discourages immigrants and criminals from crossing.

Coupled with modern technology such as motion detectors and infrared sensors, this enhanced natural buffer zone is a far more effective barrier to entry than any man-made barrier and also represents a good-neighbor solution. This approach is a faster, cheaper and more effective way to patrol and control the river and allow

Border Patrol Agents to do what they do best — protect the border.

Yes, more can be done to smartly and cost-effectively improve border security. However, the reward for enhancing apprehension is only as good as the legal process supporting it; otherwise the process only becomes a catch-and-release program. Today, with the rapid decline in illegal immigration, the problem squarely rests on an inadequate judicial system. Simply said, we need more immigration courts.

Through October 2016, more than a half-million cases were awaiting adjudication in U.S. immigration courts. Border Patrol executives put the wait time at 1,000 days.

Budget reductions resulting from the 2011 budget sequestration are the main culprit, as well as the lack of "will" to solve the problem. As immigration enforcement budgets have more than quadrupled over the past five years, funding and staffing for the immigration courts have lagged far behind. There are currently 242 immigration judges; 253 judges were on the bench in 2010.

The July 2014 prioritization

of cases of children and families from Central America seeking asylum has led to the escalation of wait times for the many immigration court cases that have not been prioritized. Some judges have been removed from their typical caseload to hear only cases of recently arrived children and families, leading to further delays.

In order to clear the backlog of these half-million cases by 2023, Congress would need to double the number of immigration judges. Alternatively, failure to increase the number of judges could result in a backlog of as many as 1 million cases in only five years.

To solve the border security problem, we must look to reasonable and productive solutions that benefit the United States and Mexico. As Texas' largest trading partner and our neighbor, we must support a border security plan with Mexico that continues to foster economic development and our good neighbor policies that have been in place for generations.

*Nixon is CEO and chairman of the board of International Bancshares Corp. and International Bank of Commerce.*

# Resentment alone does not make an identity



**Leonard Pitts Jr.** says the residue of forced change is old, deep and festering — and it has been exploited to be a political gold mine.

So this driver is stopped at an intersection. A pedestrian is dawdling in the crosswalk. Driver leans out the window and yells, "Get out of the street, you damned liberal!"

It's been years since I read that in a magazine. I can't remember if it was a true story, though I think it was. But even if only apocryphal, the picture it paints of American acrimony in the post-millennial years is true beyond mere facts.

As such, it leaves me questioning the likely impact of two recent well-intentioned pleas for ideological outreach. Joan

Blades, co-founder of the liberal activist group Moveon.org, wrote an essay for The Christian Science Monitor, asking progressives to stretch beyond their left-wing comfort zones and "love thy neighbor." And New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof warned the left against a tendency to "otherize" Donald Trump voters.

I've got no real argument with Kristof or Blades. It's a noble gesture they're making. It occurs to me, though, that none of this addresses a question that has come to seem obvious:

What if the problem is

simply that we just don't like each other?

As I've said often, our acrimony is not political. It's not about tax rates, government regulation or even abortion rights. No, this is elemental. This is about the city versus the country, higher education versus a mistrust thereof, Christian fundamentalism versus secular humanism. And it is about social change versus status quo.

Consider for a moment how often in history that change has been forcefully imposed on conservatives. It has been done by statute, by court decision, by executive order and, once, by war.

This is not an apology for that. In every instance, force was necessitated by the intransigence of those who defended that status quo because they were not ready for change. If change must wait until all parties are "ready" for it, then change will never come.

So no, the foregoing is just an observation: Resentment is the residue of forced change. And this particular resentment is old, deep and festering. Worse, it is useful. Republicans have found the maintenance and exploitation of that resentment to be a political gold mine. For instance, it helped elect Donald Trump.

But resentment is not identity. Or at least, it never was before. These days, people seem to wear their resentments — and more to the point,

the ideological labels that give them voice — the way they wear gender or ethnicity, i.e., as an immutable marker of self. Suddenly, "conservative" is not about what you believe, but what you are. Small wonder the feud between ideologies comes to seem as mindless — and about as amenable to amicable resolution — as the one between the Hatfields and the McCoy's.

Then you see a George W. Bush cozy up to his friend Michelle Obama and it stirs some vague, vestigial hope, some reminder that none of this is destiny, some realization that we must resolve this hate — it is not too strong a word — if we want to continue as one nation, indivisible. You see them buddied up across their vast ideological divide and you wonder why we can't

all be like that.

Still, with due respect to Kristof and Blades, I don't know that progressive outreach alone can get us there. I find it noteworthy that I've seen no prominent conservative columnist or activist issue a similar call to the political right. Maybe I missed it. If so, I look forward to the correction. It would be a hopeful thing.

Because it's a fallacy to believe progressives can fix America's acrimony by changing their attitudes. I am all for reaching out.

But it helps to have someone else reaching back.

*Pitts, winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, is a columnist for the Miami Herald. Readers may write to him via email at lpitts@miamiberald.com.*