

OPINION

Letters to the Editor

Birther Movement comes to Alameda

Editor:

In the San Francisco Bay Area, we sometimes feel that we live in a bubble — a bubble of progressive, forward-thinking values that include justice, equity, opportunity and inclusion. Those leading the recall effort against our talented and inspirational Vice Mayor Malia Vella are trying to burst that bubble and replace it with hate and bigotry.

Earlier this week, taking a page out of the playbook of Donald J. Trump, a supporter of, signatory to, and main point of contact for the recall petition, Stephen Slauson, took on the mantle of the birther movement, arguing that somehow I am not a U.S. citizen, and demanded that I produce proof of my citizenship.

In another page out of the Trump playbook, those at a "citizens" meeting recently launched disgusting, misogynistic and sexist attacks against Vice Mayor Vella. Despite the fact that she was elected to the City Council, Vella is continually asked to provide independent verification that she lives in Alameda. One speaker at a Council meeting said about the Vice Mayor, before she was even sworn in, "we don't know what rock she crawled out from under," and, in true locker-room Trump form, "I'm hoping that she does hard time." While on the dais, Vice Mayor Vella was forced to hear a property owner label some tenants in town "wannabe Alamedans."

One signer of the petition upon seeing a number of our African American neighbors dining at a restaurant in Alameda said something to the effect of "must be the first of the month when welfare checks come out." Offensive. Racist. Disgusting.

Vice Mayor Vella won her seat on the City Council with the most votes of any candidate, making her the Vice Mayor. Thousands of Alamedans cast their ballots for her to represent us. Now, apparently because it's too much to bear that a woman of color could be so effectively leading in "their" city, this minority wants to unwind your vote.

So let's be clear. If you sign any recall petition, you're supporting this hate, bigotry and intolerance. If you think Alameda should aspire to becoming a racist backwater, sign it.

But if you know that Alameda is better than this and support our beautiful diversity and our shared values of inclusion and community, then reject the recall petition. Let the petition gatherers know how you feel (civily, calmly and clearly) when they approach you.

Those seeking signatures on the

recall petition are peddling hate and you shouldn't be a part of it.

We're in a critical moment in our nation and our state. Those seeking to divide and destroy are becoming more emboldened. So it's incumbent upon us — the super-majority who know that we're all in this together, that we'll succeed together or not at all, and that we should lift each other up and support one another, not tear each other down — to fight for our values.

We can take a stand for the values we hold dear, the community we love and know we are, and the future we want to share together.

Let's start right here in Alameda.

— Rob Bonta

Responding to Rabbi

Editor:

In his recent letter, ("Jewish Heritage Month response," June 21) Rabbi Steven Chester notes disapprovingly that the author of a commentary ("All things Israel," May 31) is a supporter of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (BDS). He then complains that the commentary focused only on what Alameda's "Jewish Heritage Proclamation" had to say about Israel, "without considering any of the notable achievements of the American-Jewish community."

But the point of the commentary was precisely that the proclamation pays scant attention to such achievements, and instead devotes most of its text to show Alameda's support for Israel and to conflate Israel with Judaism itself. Because she did not include "positive points about Jews and their contribution to society," Chester "questions how the writer feels about the Jewish community as a whole."

I'm a member of Jewish Voice for Peace, which works for equality and dignity for both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis and supports BDS. I am troubled that the Rabbi speculates that antipathy to the Jewish community is what motivates support for Palestinian rights. As recent polls show, Jews increasingly sympathize with the Palestinian people, especially among the younger generation Jewish students, for example, are disproportionately represented among campus groups that call on universities to divest from companies profiting from Israel's policies of annexation and dispossession.

Chester is correct that the American Jewish community has made notable contributions to our society, not the least of which is its tradition of social justice. Jews active in the struggle for Palestinian rights are in fact often motivated by that tradition. They are turning

away from Jewish institutions that place support for Israel above the prophetic command: "Justice, justice shall you pursue."

— Carol Sanders

Hoping cooler heads prevail on housing

Editor:

I was grateful to read Jeff Cambra's recent letter ("Help end turmoil," May 10) giving louder voice to Alameda's Rent Review Advisory Committee (RRAC). While big concerns remain about the "Wall Street crowd" and the ability of RRAC to effectively protect tenants caught in the crossfire of international developers, amplifying a message of assurance to renters and property owners alike was overdue and much needed. Thank you, Jeff.

Yet there remains a storm brewing on the horizon. A war chest of millions is being amassed to be used in a firestorm of negative political ads. These will be geared to convincing Alamedans that extreme action, in the form of a City Charter amendment, is needed to manage the rental market in Alameda.

With RRAC coming into its own, I would request you, Jeff, meet with Alamedans-in-Charge (Realtors) and local mom-and-pop landlords to assure them that a solution "carved-in-stone" by Charter amendment is not necessary; that doing so will instead carve in stone a chapter of Alameda's history we may not wish to memorialize: when our lesser angels left the city polarized over the simple human need for shelter.

As a fellow Democrat, director of RRAC with professional expertise mediating conflict and a landlord as well, you, Jeff, are in a unique position to carry the olive branch, calm the Island's fever, broker a truce and head off the carnage now taking aim at the heart of this community as we move towards November's election.

Local history has elevated you to the role of Peacemaker. Never was one more needed.

— Gabrielle "Gaby" Dolphin
Co-President, Democratic Club

No exceptions in housing shortage

Editor:

I really have not spent a lot of time and research on this issue of housing that all of us are faced with here on the Island where we live. I usually get my information from the letters to the editor as well as articles written that appear in the *Alameda Sun*. In Helen Sause's, recent letter ("Marina will address housing shortage," June 21) she states "Last year the state legislature passed 15 laws to ensure cities, like Alameda, address its dire housing shortage."

Is there no clause or stipulation for exceptions in these laws that cover extenuating circumstances, like in the case of an island city? The main part of this island city is approximately just six miles long and a mile and a half wide. And one of the most important issues is it has just two tunnels and four bridges connect it to the mainland!

Therein lies one of our biggest problems. Getting on and off the Island. All of us know this when we are waiting in traffic to leave the Island, especially during rush hour!

It is our fault that our city officials of the past, and now, our current ones, are not doing all they can to cut back on all development, not end it, but cut it back. Our current officials must let Sacramento know that the number of units that are mandated in the "15 laws" are not practical for our Island City. We are not a typical "city." Let's face it, we are an "island."

Getting to and from an island is a concern that only islanders would understand.

I just thought of something. They might be more interested in what the developers want!

— Ward Simpson

Location major factor in new McKay center

Editor:

A recent article ("McKay Avenue Project Helps At-Risk Senior Community," June 21) says any notion the McKay Avenue property is being transferred to Alameda Point Collaborative (APC) to



Joe Heller

Missing the Boat on Sea Level Rise Plan

Irene Dieter

Current policy decisions are shaping our shoreline's future, and Alameda is missing the boat.

On May 30, the Planning Board unanimously approved a plan for the Alameda Marina that provides protection for three feet of sea level rise, even though the State of California says we should anticipate six feet. The project calls for increasing the sea wall's height in the future "should it be necessary." No one from the board bothered to address this concern or ask who will pay for the adaptive measures should a three-foot wall prove inadequate.

Days later, on June 5, Mayor Trish Spencer, Vice Mayor Malia Vella and Councilmember Jim Oddie decided not to pursue putting an infrastructure bond measure on the ballot that included climate-adaptation revenue. The bond, to be paid back in 36 years through property taxes, would have provided funds to specifically upgrade storm drains and pump stations to prevent flooding and keep pollution from the Bay. It would also have provided specific funds for repair-

ing sidewalks, streets, potholes and city buildings.

The Council instead decided to pursue a sales tax ballot measure for this November's election that would indefinitely increase our local sales tax by a half-cent to pay for city services, such as public safety and social programs.

Meanwhile on that same night, 80 percent of voters in Foster City approved a \$90 million bond measure to raise their existing levees to reduce flood risk. The move avoids residents having to pay annually for flood insurance as required by FEMA. Residents' property taxes will repay the bond.

It's time for Alameda leaders to get on board and become as proactive as Foster City. It would be less expensive to prepare for high water and storm surges now rather than having to respond later.

A new citywide climate-adaptation policy is expected to be released a year from now, in June 2019. This will highlight costly infrastructure needs.

Having infrastructure bond money already lined up would allow us to both implement the

I on Alameda

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climate adaptation recommendations and get started tackling the \$200 million worth of repairs and upgrades currently identified by the Public Works Department.

We could also be doing something immediately at the City Council level. The Alameda Marina project goes before the council for final approval on Tuesday, July 10. Hopefully, the Council will adjust the height requirement for the new sea wall (which will be owned by the city, but constructed by the developer) so that it is in line with the state's current sea-level-rise projections.

See more of Irene Dieter's writing at ionalameda.com.

Concerns about misuse of McKay property

Editor:

In 2008 East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) put Measure WW on the ballot. It included \$6.5 million for Project 18 "to add the federal buildings on McKay Avenue" — one 7.5-acre parcel at the time to Crab Cove and Crown Beach as the buildings became available. We pay for WW each year on our property taxes. We cannot get that money back from EBRPD.

When the city and federal government ignored the vote in 2012, trying to sell some of the land for residences, the voters filed an initiative and rezoned the land open space. Now the voters have filed an initiative to open space instead of changing the zoning to allow the construction of a \$40 million homeless facility on McKay. This will be up to the voters to decide.

Nearly 10 years ago, Alameda

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Letters are subject to editing for length, clarification and legal considerations. Please try to limit letters to 250 words.

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