



Moderator Ron Nirenberg and panelists, from left: Oliver Hill of the NAACP, Patricia Castillo of the P.E.A.C.E. Initiative, Phyllis Ingram of LWV,

DeAnne Cuellar of Equality Texas, Jonathan Ryan of RAICES, and Celina Moreno of MALDEF discuss ways people can come together.

Panelists discuss ‘moving forward’

By **GLEND A WOLIN**

In the wake of a divisive election, how do we come together?

That’s a question many people are wrestling with these days, one that has no easy answers. But a panel of San Antonians involved with several nonprofits – including the League of Women Voters – led by Councilman and mayoral candidate Ron Nirenberg discussed the issue recently and provided much food for thought to

an audience of almost 200 people.

At the event, called “Cultural Conversations: Moving Forward,” Nirenberg asked the panel to address the rhetoric of the campaign and how we can turn the language around in such a charged atmosphere.

“You don’t get to physical violence by starting with physical violence,” said Patricia Castillo, executive director of the P.E.A.C.E. (Putting an End to Abuse through Community Ef-

orts) Initiative. “It usually starts out with heated words, hurtful words, damaging words. That heated language is definitely a huge stepping stone to further harm that can be done.”

“Words do matter, and words have consequences,” said the LWV’s Phyllis Ingram. “We have to think about the words we are going to use, don’t just spew things out of your mouth.”

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When Oliver Hill, president of the San Antonio branch of the NAACP, reported that his office is already receiving hate calls, gasps could be heard from the audience. "This should not be happening in 2016," he said.

"When we allow our politicians to use whatever rhetoric they want, we should have a responsibility to contact someone on their staff and say enough is enough. We are all, first of all, Americans, so if you are interested in keeping and preserving America, then I would suggest that when these kinds of words come out from any kind of politician, you should be tweeting, you should be Facebooking, you should be emailing, you should be letter-writing, and you should be telephoning, and you should be telling them this is totally unacceptable."

Asked to share the anxieties and hopes people have shared with them, Celina Moreno of MALDEF perhaps surprised the audience by speaking of the hopes she sees in the community of the DREAMers, the undocumented young people brought here as children who are threatened with deportation in the incoming administration.

"Their response is 'we are here to stay, we are going to use this as an opportunity to build our movement, and we are going to continue to build our movement in a way that is inclusive – the black community, the brown community, our trans brothers and sisters, making sure that we stand to protect our Muslim brothers and sisters,' and you've really seen that energy among young people and I think that's something we all can

learn from."

Jonathan Ryan, executive director of RAICES (Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services), said what he discovered about anxiety and hope was counterintuitive.

"Some of the most educated, experienced, well-equipped people were shocked, didn't know what to do, even with all the institutional help at hand. But the most vulnerable people, victims, those who fled repressive countries, they've seen this before," he said.

"The truth is that we are exactly the ones who know what to do... We have to come together. Because we know what is going to happen. It's going to be the expansion and the exportation of what's already

"When we fight for someone more vulnerable than us, we protect ourselves. That's how communities start, that's how communities stay strong, and that's how communities survive, and I'm very hopeful to see that here in San Antonio."

Jonathan Ryan, executive director, Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services

happening here to other communities."

When asked what we should be doing to solve some of our problems, Ryan talked about what being a good citizen entails, and it's not just voting once or twice a year.

"When you look at a leader as inspirational and transformative and lofty, and you assign and give up all your agency to that person, to fix everything, then you're not being a good citizen. And if you look at some elected official as some kind of a bad man, some kind of a tyrant, and

you just equally give up all of your agency, because you can't do anything, you're also not being a good citizen. Learn about your government. It's time for us to get to work."

Ingram suggested that people sign up for newsletters from city council representatives and state legislators – and not just their own.

"I'm not in State Representative Diego Bernal's district, but I do get his newsletter. Even though I'm not in his district, the decisions he makes are going to affect me and our city.

"I would beg you to vote in the city elections in the spring. The thing that impacts your life the most is local government, and that

is the election with the least participation. So if I can start nagging you now, go to all the City Council members' websites, sign up for their newsletters, see what their positions are on important issues in the city."

She also suggested getting to know people outside their own

neighborhoods by going to other churches, synagogues and mosques and meeting the people there; and going to meetings of organizations like those on the panel.

"Organize, organize, organize," Castillo said. "We never would have been able to move our police department to create a whole victims' services unit that is staffed with 30-plus people to serve our community if the P.E.A.C.E. Initiative hadn't gotten mobilized and gotten involved and gone to visit city council members and edu-

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cated city council members about the need.”

“The best spokespeople for the LGBT community have not been activists or “politicians,” said DeAnne Cuellar of Empower Texas. She said it seems to work out best for people without the label “activist” or politician” to just sit down and have a conversation with someone who might not agree with you or understand all the issues.

“At the end of the day, if you talk to people about ending discrimination, protecting you, ending violence, extending fairness and equality, getting to know people where they are, don’t come at them thinking they understand everything about the issue, you can get really far with them when at the beginning you didn’t think they cared about the issue.”

Nirenberg recalled the words of Dr. Martin Luther King: “We remember not the words of our

enemies but the silence of our friends,” and “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter.”

Praising the people who were at the event, he asked the panel how we get people who are comfortable in their silence to care enough to be part of an inclusive dialog.

Hill repeated the often-heard “Sunday morning is the most segregated time.” He urged people to go to other churches, to synagogues, to mosques; to invite someone to your church who doesn’t look like you.

“We’re comfortable where we are, and until we get out of that comfort, we’re going to continue to have problems,” he said.

Ingram spoke highly about Texas Public Radio’s “Dare to Listen” campaign, in which people take a pledge to listen to others with an open mind. She suggested “talking to people. Ask them questions. Get them involved that way. Because

once you create a dialog, then you learn something and they learn something.”

In the end, the panelists agreed that San Antonio doesn’t need to look elsewhere for solutions – San Antonio holds the solutions in its own hands. Our city is the future of America and now is our opportunity to shine and be an example, or to founder. Despite the many problems, the outlook was positive.

Ryan pointed out that more than half of his staff are DREAMers whose own immigration status leaves them vulnerable, yet they come to work every day to help others.

“When we fight for someone more vulnerable than us, we protect ourselves,” he said. “That’s how communities start, that’s how communities stay strong, and that’s how communities survive, and I’m very hopeful to see that here in San Antonio.”

The complete conversation was recorded by NOWcastSA and can be viewed at <http://nowcastsa.com/blogs/webcast-cultural-conversation-about-moving-forward> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBbTvNMpaoM>

Members sought to fill leadership positions

League members, would you like to:

- Help in registering voters and producing the respected Voters Guide, or
- Monitor City Council or Commissioners Court meetings, or
- Participate in a pro/con study of an important governmental issue, or
- Make policy decisions about the direction of the organization, and
- Work with strong, smart, in-

formed folks who care about our community?

If so, consider joining a League committee or the board of directors. We have positions open for a variety of offices and directors. Terms would start next June, and a commitment can be at any level comfortable for you. If your interested, contact Evelyn Bonavita, Chair, Nominating Committee at 210-828-1368 or ebonavita@satx.rr.com.



Pass It On

If you enjoyed this issue of The Voter, please pass it on to someone you know who you think would also enjoy it.

Vote411 usage increases nationwide, in Texas

When you say “411,” people know you’re talking about information, whether it’s older folks who remember dialing the number on their rotary phones to get the operator, or slang-slinging teens who use it to describe the latest gossip.

Perhaps the latest iteration of the number comes in the League of Women Voters’ VOTE411, the online one-stop shop for nonpartisan election information, which was begun 10 years ago and has been growing ever since.

Now that the election is over, Megan Brown, LWV’s national coordinator of elections, called VOTE411 “a huge success” in a letter to all Leagues. She said VOTE 411 had nearly 6 million sessions (number of times the website was used) from Jan. 1-Nov. 8, and over 2.7 million of those included the online Voters Guides.

“That represents an over 279 percent increase in sessions nationwide to Voters Guides on VOTE411 as compared to 2012, the last comparable election. Way to go!”

In Texas, statistics showed an increase in overall sessions of more than 206 percent, and in San Antonio of more than 157 percent.

In addition to an online version of the Voters Guide that can be tailored to the user’s specific address, VOTE411 includes both general and state-specific information on such details as absentee ballots, what measures are being decided, early voting options, ID requirements, registration deadlines and much more.

The best way to promote VOTE411 is locally, by showcasing local candidates and local information. The national League also promoted VOTE411 throughout the year and especially in the months leading up to Election Day through social media and a customized widget on the website.

Survey under way

A survey is under way to de-

termine the ways various Leagues let people know about VOTE411. Here are some ways LWVUS/ Education Fund spread the word:

◆ Posting throughout the year on the public VOTE411 Facebook page netted over 8,500 “likes,” and the VOTE411 Twitter account has more than 3,800 followers. That’s in addition to posts about VOTE411 on the LWVUS Facebook page and Twitter account.

◆ Outreach to national partners and media resulted in more than 5,100 websites linking to VOTE411.

◆ It actively managed an ongoing LWV/EF Google grant that provided VOTE411 with approximately \$250,000 in free search-term advertising on Google Search.

◆ It partnered with the Professional Association for Design and Get Out the Vote poster contest, in which hundreds of posters were created, all of which included the VOTE411 logo.

◆ It undertook traditional media outreach in the final weeks, including contacting media outlets nationwide and highlighting the information VOTE411 includes.



The League of Women Voters’ VOTE411, the online one-stop shop for nonpartisan election information, began 10 years ago.

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League welcomes new member

Jeanette Reynolds

I am currently dedicating my knowledge and skills toward enriching the arts community and presence of independent radio in South Texas as director of development at KRTU, broadcasting from Trinity University. I am responsible for fundraising over half of the nonprofit's annual operating budget by managing its individual giving program.

Before moving to San Antonio in 2014, I worked with St. Louis Earth Day from 2010 through 2014, helping to increase the organization's impact, efficiency and visibility. As programs and communication director, I helped the program grow into the second largest Earth Day celebration in the country.

I earned a BA in Communication from Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg,

Va., and a MA in Gender and International Development from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in Brighton, England. I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Fiji 2006-2008, where I helped residents of a housing project establish a successful parents' community education group. Prior to the Peace Corps, I worked with Big Brothers Big Sisters and 4-H.

I am dedicated to making positive impacts both professionally and personally, and am always interested in opportunities to engage with my community and beyond. I currently enjoy volunteering as a coach with Girls on the Run at Rogers Elementary and as a performing musician at area senior homes with the M.U.S.I.C. Project. I am an active member of the Downtown Run Group, and spend as much time outside in nature as possible.

Upcoming

Texas Legislative Session begins Jan. 10 at the Capitol in Austin.

Presidential Inauguration is Jan. 20 in Washington, D.C.

Women's March on Washington is Jan 21 in Washington, D.C. Information: <https://www.facebook.com/events/2169332969958991/>

Women's March on Austin, for Texans who cannot go to Washington, is Jan. 21, noon-3 p.m. Information: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1822494244699112/> (The League is not participating as an organization in these events.)

Lobby Days at the Capitol in Austin are Jan. 29-30.

Making Democracy Work Dinner is Jan. 29 at the Austin Club in Austin.

League's 90th Birthday is Feb. 14. A local party is being planned. Stay tuned for details.