



Empty seats

Conversation around the Thanksgiving table may be dicey this year as families debate the demeanor of exemplary public servants versus congress members who act like immature middle schoolers. Is our democracy in peril or is it all just a witch hunt? Should we impeach or indulge the madman in the White House? Families may struggle to set aside polarizing politics, the chaos created by an increasingly unstable Trump, and the looming 2020 election long enough to enjoy the turkey and each other's company. But, surely, we can all agree to spend a few moments remembering and celebrating those we've lost this year.

Nevada's political world was dealt a hard blow with the sudden death of Assemblymember Tyrone Thompson in the last month of the 2019 legislative session. He was gentle and kind and advocated strongly for those without homes or hope, mentoring countless young people toward a better future.

Former Assemblymember Bob Price died after a long illness, maintaining his

unique and quirky personality throughout his later life. He cared deeply about the injustice of overtaxing the poor and helped eliminate taxes on groceries. He loved UFOs and the paranormal, successfully passing a bill to rename State Route 375 as the "Extraterrestrial Highway" to attract more tourists who could enjoy Nevada as thoroughly as he did.

Two stellar legislative reporters passed this year, leaving newsrooms with huge gaps in knowledge about Nevada's political history—the good, the bad and especially the ugly. Ande Engleman devoted her life to making sure the public knew the truth about political decisions, advocating strongly for Nevada's Open Meeting laws as the director of the Nevada Press Association. Dennis Myers, the news editor of our own Reno News & Review, was both the conscience of Nevada and a walking encyclopedia of Nevada politics. We miss him every day.

In every community, there are people doing the hard work of creating positive

change who aren't in the headlines. Reno lost Doug Smith this year, a former Marine who received a Purple Heart in Korea. Doug's passion and determination along with his organizing skills led to the formation of "Scenic Nevada," a group still working hard to reduce the blight of billboards along our roads. Marissa Morningstaur, an activist with the volunteer organization Indivisible, worked tirelessly on social justice issues and mentored many a young person in the political world. Dorie Guy, a former Chair of Washoe's Democratic Party, was a tireless organizer, inspiring countless others to get off the couch and join her.

Reno's art world mourned the passing of Paul Herman, a local potter who specialized in functional ceramics that today adorn tables and cupboards throughout the city. His semi-annual firings in his wood-fired kiln attracted potters from all over the West.

Betty Bates was a special education teacher and guidance counselor as well

as a talented painter who volunteered for many arts organizations and her beloved Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

Rob Calderone was a funny and generous Brooklynite who never completely lost his accent, startling people at times who wondered how he came to serve Nevada as our Chief of Parole and Probation and later as Washoe County's Director of Juvenile Services. Even when dealing with the misery of defendants, victims of crime, and families caught up in terrible circumstances, he retained his humanity and was not afraid to try new approaches to rehabilitation.

Finally, let's take a moment at our Thanksgiving tables to mourn our community's young people who lost their lives in 2019 to a drug overdose or suicide. Each one created a huge hole in the hearts of their family members and friends who no doubt are missing them terribly today. Each one represents a lifetime of lost potential. We have to do more to prevent these heartbreaking losses in 2020. □

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