

Journalist reflects on experience with anti-Asian hate

BY ERIKA LEE



“Stupid Asian whore.” That’s what a woman called me while I drove through Boise last October. As a local news reporter still new to the area, it was something I’ll never forget.

Sadly, it wasn’t the only moment of loneliness and pain I have experienced in this city, especially since I’m the only Chinese-American reporter across all of the local news channels in Boise and the Treasure Valley — actually, I am the only one in the entire state of Idaho.

When I first decided to take the job and leave Los Angeles, I wasn’t completely oblivious to what I was getting myself into. Asians make up only 2% of Boise’s population (we make up just 1.6% of the population in the whole state), so I knew I would stick out or, perhaps, have a harder time fitting in.

Still, I wanted to make an impact in the community by increasing visibility in areas that otherwise wouldn’t have ever been exposed to people who look like me. Plus, all of my broadcast-journalism mentors told me that going to a smaller market and moving to an unfamiliar city would “build character” and be an experience I’d “look back fondly on” when I inevitably climb the news ladder and move on to bigger cities.

But, two years into my time here, it’s clear my mentors were wrong. Most of the instances of isolation haven’t been blatant — it’s the side comments, the feelings of not belonging, and overhearing your coworkers complain about immigrants, knowing that you come from a family of people who immigrated to this country — but the experience has definitely taken a toll on me.

During the summer of 2020, I was telling a friend how hard of a time I was having, which was around the time I was covering anti-mask protests, Trump rallies and Black Lives Matter protests almost every single day. It was physically, mentally and emotionally draining to constantly see and be around so much conflict and stress.

“2020 is just one of the hardest years in general,” my friend said. “If you can get through this year, you can get

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KEVIN SIERS Charlotte Observer

Why even Republicans are calling this the ‘worst session ever’ for Idaho Legislature

BY SCOTT MCINTOSH
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Editor’s note: This is the first of a two-part series looking at what many are calling the Idaho Legislature’s “worst session ever,” why it’s so bad and what it means for next year’s elections. Read Part 2 on Friday.

“Worst legislative session ever.”

That’s the refrain heard from several corners of the state this year, as Idaho legislators have drawn not just the usual ire of the left and Democrats, but frustration from lifelong Republicans and moderates who say this session is more out of control than usual.

“We’ve had some pretty bad ones (sessions) in the past, but for sure this one is the most disappointing,” former Repub-



Former Idaho Secretary of State Ben Yursa, top, and former Idaho Attorney General Jim Jones caution that Idaho legislators are trying to usurp powers delegated to others in the Idaho Constitution.

lican candidate for governor Tommy Ahlquist said in a phone interview. “Every year, I’m completely blown away that our government doesn’t have a coordinated legislative agenda that really gets after the problems that we’re facing.”

He cites such important issues as property taxes, statewide infrastructure and education



funding.

Instead, Idaho legislators have spent most of their time trying to usurp power from the governor, from the attorney general, from cities and states, school boards and districts, even from voters, and they’ve taken action on a seemingly endless string of fringe topics that have no substantive impact,

such as public art, Powerball and social justice. Legislators reconvened this week after a COVID-induced two-week recess and picked up where they left off, many of them still without masks or practicing social distancing.



Tommy Ahlquist.

Although Ahlquist wasn’t specific about particular seats or a strategy at this point, he said he would get behind efforts to oust some Republican legislators.

Ahlquist tweeted last month: “The problem is the limit on the number of nominees! It has been BAD! I believe Idahoans are fed up. It will be easier to primary Treasure Valley Republicans than others. Time for a change.”

ELECTION YEAR

Next year is an election year, and this legislative session has been so bad, it could translate to a more active election season targeting Republican legislators, who have brought a string of unpopular bills this session.

“You’re going to have to pick and choose races that are winnable and that you can invest in and help with,” Ahlquist said, without naming names. “And then I do think it needs to be organized, but there’s got to be something like that.”

In Idaho, the rubber meets the road, in most cases, in the primary, as Democrats are typically not competitive in many districts in the general election. Whether there is enough organized coalescence around Re-

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New campaign aims to keep Boise Nice and remind us why this is such a great place to live

BY BOB KUSTRA



Even though spring was days away from officially announcing its arrival, it was a beautiful spring day in Boise on Saturday, March 15, 2003, when I first met up with our fine city. With my first of four interviews for the presidency of Boise State on Monday, St. Patrick Day’s, and with my mother’s maiden name

of Shaughnessy, I was hoping to bring the luck of the Irish to a search process that drew interest from candidates all over the country.

To this day, I can mark the spot where I left the hotel on ParkCenter Boulevard over the weekend and jumped on a rented bike to explore this Greenbelt thing that was the talk of the town and heralded in all the tourist guides. As I headed east toward Barber Park, the Boise Foothills off to my left stood guard over the valley, the Boise River and the first homes built in Harris Ranch, surrounded by an agricultural landscape since overtaken by residential devel-

opment to accommodate our record-breaking growth.

What really caught my eye that day were the cyclists, walkers and runners heading the other way. Nodded heads, smiles and brief hellos as we whizzed past each other, it was not the way I had experienced life in the Midwest and South. I often tell the story of a faculty member at Eastern Kentucky University who told me he had been in Kentucky for 30 years and was still considered an outsider. In his words, “if my granddaddy wasn’t trusted by your granddaddy, then there was little hope of ever being considered one of them.”

I remember calling Kathy on my cell when I returned and telling her I better get out of town right after the interview for fear of falling for Boise before I knew whether I had the slightest chance of surviving a rigorous search process. At this early stage of the search process, this was no time to wax sentimental over a new place to live.

Looking back on it all, Kathy and I realize how fortunate we were to have arrived at Boise State in the City of Trees at that stage of our lives and careers. So often in those early days we remarked to friends how welcoming and friendly Boise was

compared to other places we lived. Those greetings I experienced on the Greenbelt were not “one-offs” but part of what we would come to know as Boise Nice. Whether it was a stroll downtown or a walk through the neighborhood, folks were friendly and shared “hellos” and “hi’s” to perfect strangers as we were in those days.

We joked with our friends and family that the easiest way to know you are not in Kansas anymore, or Chicago in our case, was the driving experience in Boise. If you drive in Chicago and care to change lanes, the last thing you do is flip on your directional signal. That often causes the car who should be slowing a bit to let you change lanes speed up and prevent you from doing so. In Boise, we found that a directional signal

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This tax season, IRS hunts for underreported income

BY DOYLE MCMANUS
Los Angeles Times



If you've filled out your federal tax return by now, you may have noticed that Form 1040 includes a new question on top: Did you have any transactions in bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies last year?

It's there because the Internal Revenue Service believes thousands of crypto holders have, ahem, forgotten to report capital gains income from selling their electronic assets.

And some might not have forgotten at all; cryptocurrency, designed to be anonymous, is a favorite financial vehicle for drug traffickers and money launderers. But even if your income comes from criminal activity, you're still required to report it to the IRS.

The IRS' hunt for hidden bitcoin is just one small corner of a vast tax revenue problem: underreported income.

According to a recent study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, the richest 1% of households are failing to report an estimated 21% of their income to the IRS — significantly more than previously believed.

Another study by tax experts, including a former IRS commissioner, estimates that more than \$600 billion in taxes on 2020 income will go uncollected.

Cryptocurrency is only part of the problem. Unreported offshore assets are another part. So are partnerships and other "pass-through" businesses, which are difficult for the IRS to audit.

The total shortfall over the coming decade could reach \$7.5 trillion — more than enough to pay for all of President Joe Biden's ambitious spending plans.

So here's some unsolicited advice for Biden and Congress: Spend more money on the IRS.

That's right: Spend

more, to give the tax collectors a better chance to do their jobs.

For almost 25 years, Republicans, in a misguided campaign of anti-tax populism, have been slashing the IRS budget. The agency's annual spending is more than 20% smaller in real dollars than it was 10 years ago, and its budget for audits and other tax enforcement is down even more.

Its staff has been cut by more than 33,000.

As a result, only 0.45% of tax returns were audited in 2019, about half the percentage audited in 2010. For pass-through businesses, the audit rate was even lower.

Those enforcement cuts have been very visible. The

agency might as well have sent taxpayers a notice that their chances of beating an audit were better than at any time in recent memory.

IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig, a Beverly Hills, California, tax attorney who was appointed by President Donald Trump, estimates that every additional dollar in IRS spending will produce about \$6 in added revenue. Economists outside the agency have projected that the return could be as high as \$14.

Either way, that's a terrific return on investment. As a business proposition, it's a no-brainer: A company that thought it could recoup \$6 in billings for every dollar spent would be hiring bill collectors by the dozen.

Biden and his aides have seen those numbers, too.

The president announced last week that he plans to pay for part of his big-ticket wish list by increasing IRS enforcement

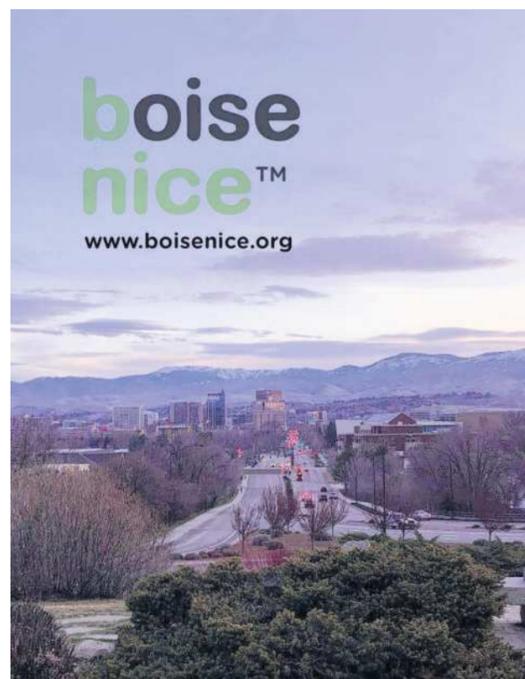
efforts directed at corporations and high-income individuals.

But the most effective remedy must also include a broader effort to persuade more people to comply with their tax obligations.

"If you have to dig it out through audits, you're never going to get there," Charles O. Rossotti, who served as IRS commissioner under Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, told me. "Enforcement is expensive and time-consuming; we want the least amount of enforcement that's needed. What we really want is compliance."

Rossotti says that when people know the IRS can see their income — as it does for anyone whose salary is reported on a W-2 form — compliance hits about 95%.

"But there's a lot of business income that comes without any regular reporting — maybe as much as 50%," he said. "That creates a kind of compliance-free zone."



Courtesy of Boise Nice

A group of Boise residents has embarked on a campaign to shine a spotlight on Boise Nice and remind Boiseans why this corner of southwestern Idaho has been such an attractive and pleasant place to live.

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actually caused the driver next to us to slow down so we could make our move to the next lane.

But let's face it. Boise's reputation as a community that respects the rights and privileges of others has been challenged lately by behavior much more serious than lane usage or unfriendly greetings on city streets. When gun-toting vigilantes show up at prayer vigils at the state Capitol, trucks waving Confederate flags parade through Boise downtown and protesters demonstrate in front of public officials' homes instead of the chambers of government, Boise Nice doesn't seem to live here anymore.

Well, it does and it's about to get a major assist from some Boise citizens who have embarked on a campaign to shine a spotlight on Boise Nice and remind Boiseans why this corner of southwestern Idaho has been such an attractive and pleasant place to live. Every community boasts its civic pride, but not every community can back it up with a culture that respects its neighbors and spreads goodwill on its streets to the nth degree. That's what Boise Nice hopes to underscore when it officially kicks off its project next week at the Boise Chamber of Commerce.

Rourke O'Brien came to Boise from Seattle three years ago and picked up on Boise Nice immediately in contrast to his experience in the much larger city by the Sound. Joined by Nancy Buffington and Julia Kertz Grant who both have a rich history of community engagement in Boise, the trio decided it was time to model and

applaud how Boiseans have treated each other over the years. They hope to share with newcomers and long-termers alike this very special tradition of civic goodwill and respect Boiseans have for each other.

Learn more about "Boise Nice: It's Who We Are" by visiting its new website, (<https://www.boisenice.org/news/>). It sets out its goals and even offers up some questions that serve as models of what it means to be Boise Nice. You can learn more about special places and unique events that bring Boiseans together to celebrate its history and culture. You can also find a growing network of engaged businesses that support the cause.

What kind of city does Boise choose to be? The Boise that makes national news when swastikas are placed on the Anne Frank Memorial last December or the Boise that reacted to the occasion thanks to the Boise Downtown Association and the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights raising 60 banners of "Love Everywhere" for all to see? Boise cannot allow the vicious and unlawful behavior of a very few define a city known for extending its welcoming arms to refugees over recent years.

The new Boise Nice campaign will add another strong voice to the overwhelming majority of Boiseans who are proud of Boise Nice. After all, it's who we are.

Bob Kustra served as president of Boise State University from 2003 to 2018. He is host of Reader's Corner on Boise State Public Radio and he writes a biweekly column for the Idaho Statesman. He served two terms as Illinois lieutenant governor and 10 years as a state legislator.

GOP must take infrastructure bill seriously

BY JENNIFER RUBIN
Washington Post

President Joe Biden, in his infrastructure speech on Wednesday, pointed out that a lot of Republicans who "badly criticized" his American Rescue Plan later had to acknowledge that "people in my state really like it." He then invited Republicans to avoid the same outcome on his infrastructure plan, stressing that he's open to "good faith negotiations."

That apparently did not sit well with the 10 Republican senators who had presented a puny \$650 billion counteroffer to his rescue plan in February. They insisted their plan was presented in "good faith" and "designed to open bipartisan negotiations." Instead, they complained, "The Administration roundly dismissed our effort as

wholly inadequate in order to justify its go-it-alone strategy."

These Republicans are either being disingenuous or have atrocious negotiating skills. If you are operating in good faith, you do not respond to a \$2.2 trillion offer with a \$650 billion offer that is missing entire categories of spending (e.g., state and local funding). They could avoid a similar outcome this time around if they really are interested in making the American Jobs Act bipartisan. Here are some suggestions.

First, do not omit the caregiving benefits. One of the leaders in the group, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, introduced a bill this week with Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., that would "authorize grants to public and nonprofit organizations to expand training and support services that improve caregiver health

and delay long-term care facility admissions by keeping loved ones with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias in their homes longer." Expand that to the elderly in general, and there is probably some common ground to be found.

Second, do not adopt the laughably narrow definition of infrastructure that many Republicans hold. Last June, for instance, a bipartisan group of lawmakers "introduced a bill to provide more than \$22.8 billion in aid for semiconductor manufacturers, aiming to spur the construction of chip factories in America amid a strategic technology rivalry with China." There is agreement on the need to bring chip production to the United States, so Republicans should include that as well.

Third, if they want a lower corporate tax rate than Biden has proposed or no corporate tax hike at all, they must spell out how they want to pay for the bill or make clear that they really no longer care about deficits. Republicans previously have introduced carbon tax bills. With rebates for lower- and middle-income Americans, that may be a feasible way to

raise revenue.

There is a range of reasonable responses that Republicans could come up with. But putting forth an unserious, lowball bill with no funding mechanism and without the items Republicans have endorsed in one form or another (e.g., upgrading the electric grids, expanded broadband internet) will signal that they either cannot produce votes for anything meaningful or that they have not figured out how to be for infrastructure, against deficits and against taxes. (Hint: You cannot be.)

And instead of relying on the right-wing talking point that passing the infrastructure package through reconciliation means that Democrats want to stiff the other party, Republicans could also come forward with an alternative that has even minimal support from their party. While reconciliation would still be needed, they could bring along a handful of Republicans who would have a role in shaping the outcome.

We will know how serious Republicans are when we see a meaningful counteroffer. Until then, there is no negotiating partner for the White House.

FROM PAGE 6C

LEE

through anything."

Many of my family members, close friends and mentors said the same thing. So, I told myself, "All I have to do is get through the year. Next year will be better." I remember counting down to 2021 thinking it would solve all my problems, that the second the clock struck midnight, all of our country's issues would just disappear.

Of course, I was wrong. 2021 started off just as bad, if not worse than the previous year. I couldn't believe the things I was watching and reading on the news. I felt like I was living in an alternate reality — unemployment rates were still at an all-time high, our Capitol was stormed and Donald Trump was facing a historic second impeachment. On top of that, hate crimes against Asian-Americans continued to rise.

ANTI-ASIAN HATE CRIMES CONTINUE

My heart broke when an 84-year-old Thai-American man died in a targeted murder while out on his morning walk in San Francisco. And when a 91-year-old man was violently attacked while walking down a sidewalk in Oakland. And when a 65-year-old Asian woman was brutally attacked in New York. Every day, I saw on social media elderly Asian men and women being attacked: Slashed.

Beaten unconscious. Shot. Pushed. Called racial slurs.

According to research from Stop AAPI Hate — which grew out of a collaboration by the Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council, Chinese for Affirmative Action and the Asian-American Studies Department of San Francisco State University to track racially motivated attacks against the AAPI community — more than 3,800 anti-Asian incidents were reported to the organization in 2020. These are in addition to the attacks that have been reported to law enforcement, though it can be hard to quantify those exact numbers.

If there was anything positive that came out of this moment, it's that I've never seen such unity from our community.

Then the Atlanta spa shootings happened. I found out about it by scrolling Twitter, and I almost couldn't believe we had another mass shooting. My reporter friends and fellow AAPI community expressed hurt, outrage and sadness for the victims.

I had to go live in the studio a few minutes after I learned of the news. I heard our anchor reading what happened out loud on air. I watched countless news reports and read countless articles that refused to call the shootings — which took the lives of eight people, most of whom were Asian women — a hate crime; they refused to say it was a targeted incident. And then I heard Cherokee

County Sheriff's Office Captain Jay Baker claim the alleged shooter just "had a bad day." I cried myself to sleep that night.

The next day, I woke up to an e-mail from a local news viewer to my work e-mail address.

"That stereotype is self-inflicted," he wrote about the massage-parlor shootings. "Have you ever been to a massage parlor disguised as a prostitution ring? They're always Asian. I've never seen one of any other race." The man added that he had an Asian wife, so I should trust that he wasn't "trying to offend me."

After that, others proceeded to gaslight me not only through my work e-mail but also through social media by arguing the two non-Asian victims killed in the shootings were not being given as much attention as the six Asian-Americans.

I felt so hurt and frustrated and confused.

Luckily, I have a great boss who checked in on me and asked me how he could best support me at this time. I am also glad to have a great community of fellow AAPI journalists who work in other markets across the country who support one another online.

I spent the next few days after the Atlanta shootings crying. It sucks when you want to take a break from the news, but you can't because you are the news.

I talked and vented with fellow members of the Asian American Journalists Association and felt understood, seen

and heard. We held a panel where we raised \$30,000 in a day for AAPI people who could not afford therapy and needed to be supported at this time. That amount is now over \$60,000. Xiao Zhen Xie, a 76-year-old woman who fought off her attacker after being assaulted, donated more than \$900,000 back to the AAPI community, even though the money was initially raised to help her. Seeing us all rally together made me feel more hopeful.

If there was anything positive that came out of this moment, it's that I've never seen such unity from our community. In the past, Koreans, Chinese and other Asians struggled to find solidarity with one another. I've seen people who haven't spoken up about social issues in the past suddenly post about the rise in hate crimes against AAPI people. It's the first time I've seen so many people in our community be so passionate. If anything, these incidents are sparking awareness and conversations about how to get involved, advocate for vulnerable populations, and take care of one another. Sometimes, I wonder if this newfound solidarity is worth the cost. But, at the end of the day, we are resilient. We are strong. And we will recover.

Erika Vichi Lee is a journalist and freelance writer in Boise. You can follow her on twitter at @erikaleetv. This essay originally was published at Shondaland.com