

FORUM

EDITORIAL

Some New Year's resolutions for our political leaders and others

As we start a new and potentially momentous year, with terrorism challenges at home and security risks abroad, and with Donald J. Trump soon to take the oath of office for his second term as president and Republicans firmly in control in Ohio, our editorial board has some timely New Year's resolutions for all — including politicians, business leaders and other influential actors close to home.

Baiju Shah and the Greater Cleveland Partnership: Resolve to take the lead in assembling city and county leaders and creative minds in our nonprofit and academic centers to explore creating a district of counties as a regional taxing authority to leverage greater resources and influence to support our professional sports franchises and help address our region's pressing need for an upgraded airport and transportation hubs.

Citizens of Northeast Ohio: Recognize that only the daring succeed in the kind of bold, transformative change our region needs. Don't be naysayers. Be audacious and embrace new models of government that can lift the whole region and all of us economically.

Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb: Resolve to think regionally about the airport and sports facility finance, but also to move aggressively and deliberately with your invocation of the Art Modell Law to challenge the Haslam Sports Group's attempt to move the Browns out of downtown Cleveland.

Cleveland City Council members: Resolve to support Bibb in his efforts with the Browns while being as transparent with the public and fair-minded as possible as council numbers are set to shrink by two to 15, resulting in some radically changed ward boundaries.

Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne: Resolve to stop being the nice guy who tries to please everyone and make some hard choices on spending and public safety, while stepping up publicly to back creation of a district of counties as a new regional taxing authority.

Cuyahoga County Council: Resolve under new Council President Dale Miller, a detail guy with deep experience in budgeting, to stop being a rubber stamp for

a county administration that has a hard time saying "no," and apply your energies equally to Big Thinking about regional solutions that could be at hand to help Cleveland grow and prosper.

Mayors and county managers of Northeast Ohio: Resolve to stop regarding regionalism as a dirty word while protecting your fiefs and recognize its possibilities to expand economic horizons for this region.

Ohio and local politicians: Resolve to remember the children and always budget accordingly.

Too many Cleveland kids still suffer life-altering lead poisoning when young, stunting minds and growth, and too many remain mired in poverty that deprives them of adequate food, shelter and safety — sometimes, even their lives.

Resolve to support First Year Cleveland and the other initiatives locally and statewide aimed at ending the too-high, preventable maternal and infant mortality that disproportionately impacts women and infants of color locally and in Ohio.

Gov. Mike Dewine: Resolve to continue to be the adult in the room in Columbus, taking the high ground to look out for all the people of Ohio first and foremost, even as the Ohio Legislature continues in thrall to its publicity hounds.

And further resolve to consult with local leaders here in Cleveland first, before you even consider saying "yes" as the Haslam Sports Group lobbies you for public handouts to support their misguided domed stadium project in Brook Park.

House Speaker-elect Matt Huffman: We know you are dedicated to the proposition of school choice in Ohio, so resolve to act on the truism that real choice is only as good as the information parents have to make the best educational choices on behalf of their children.

That's why Ohio needs to require that private and parochial schools receiving large amounts of taxpayer-funded voucher dollars are subject to equivalent requirements to share educational outcomes and test scores with the same transparency and with apples-to-apples comparisons as the public schools receiving tax money.

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Vivek Ramaswamy is an Ohio-based entrepreneur whom President-elect Donald Trump has tapped for his Department of Government Efficiency. Nam Y. Huh, AP

COMMENTARY FROM THE COMMUNITY

Ramaswamy's putdown of U.S. workers to push H-1B visas is as unfair as it is untrue

Cliff Anthony

As a naturalized American, and a proud one at that, I find Vivek Ramaswamy's recent comments condescending.

In his argument for more H-1B work visas for skilled immigrants, Ramaswamy wrote on X that America "has venerated mediocrity over excellence for way too long." With a broad brush, the former Republican primary presidential candidate painted an image to the world that Americans are a bunch of beer-guzzling, burger-gobbling beach bums.

While working for several newsrooms and classrooms during my four decades in this country, I have found that mediocrity would get one fired from the job and not honored with a gold watch.

Ramaswami and billionaire Elon Musk are pushing for the issuance of more H-1B visas for skilled foreign nationals to support the burgeoning tech industry.

But the main culprit for a shortage of local talent is the low birth rate. The number of births in the United States has been declining since the 1950s. "The Census expects these trends to continue, resulting in a death rate that exceeds the birth rate by 2038. By 2100, the Census Bureau estimates there will be 1.2 million more deaths in the U.S. than births," according to a USAFacts.org post from last January.

The decline in births has a ripple effect. Prominent among them is the severe blow to enrollment in schools and colleges, forcing many educational institutions to shut their doors.

For instance, in 2023, 14 nonprofit four-year colleges announced closures and a handful of others announced mergers or acquisitions because of low enrollment, per a December 2023 InsideHigherEd.com report. Close to home, in 2024, Notre Dame College in South Euclid called it a day for the same reason.

What's lacking are educational opportunities and resources for native-born Americans.

In my 18-year teaching career in four- and two-year colleges, I have noticed stu-

dents hustle to be self-reliant and pay for their education. Some students took up two jobs in grocery stores, fast-food chains, hotels, gas stations and restaurants. One student particularly stands out. He donned the same pair of sweatpants every day for two semesters, relied on government assistance, worked overtime in a fast-food restaurant, shared a room with another student, graduated, and found a career of his passion. There are many such success stories.

If only Ramaswamy and his ilk had removed their tinted lens, stepped out of their chartered planes and trod in these students' shoes, they would have realized that native-born Americans don't lack motivation, skills or dedication.

Granted, there are slackers, and they are the exceptions.

Native-born Americans toil unsung long hours in their offices and factories more than their European counterparts. The European Union "has a mandated four-week paid vacation period across all EU countries, whereas the same is not true in the U.S.," according to the Berkely Economic Review. "... In addition to the mandatory four weeks of paid vacation in the EU, many European countries, such as France, the U.K., and Denmark, have mandatory paid vacations that are five weeks or longer, with the U.K. requiring 28 days of paid vacation and France requiring 30 days."

In America's private sector, a Forbes survey found that, on average, a full-time employee is eligible for 10 days of paid time off during the first three years and 15 days of PTO after completing 15 years of service. During these days off, American private company employees usually don't enjoy sun and sand. Instead, more than half of them end up working when they are not supposed to work, according to the Forbes study.

Like many immigrants, I came to America because it is a land of immense opportunities, not because it is a land of mediocrity.

Anthony, a Highland Heights resident, is the author of an upmarket fiction titled "Tears in God's Own Country." He is a native of the South Indian state of Kerala.

COMMENTARY FROM THE COMMUNITY

Remembering a fellow long-term HIV survivor, activist and friend

Robert Toth

You butt-dialed me the afternoon of Friday, Dec. 27; you died sometime on Sunday, the 29th.

I'm glad I immediately returned that accidental call. Our conversation was intense and very wide-ranging; little did I know that while you were talking to me, you were in the process of transition. Such was the importance for someone to hear your last wishes.

You were adamant, like you've been known to be, that we — long-term survivors of HIV/AIDS — are not forgotten. You were adamant that we be remembered locally. You also wanted a place where LGBTQ+ individuals who'd been recognized for their community service could be honored as heroes, role models for the younger LGBTQ+ population. An LGBTQ+ "Hall of Fame" of sorts.

I promised you I'd try. You died 48 hours after that promise.

Here I am, Bryan C. Jones, trying my best to make good on that promise to you.

When I was a member of the Ryan White Planning Council, I was given a resolution from the then-Cuyahoga County Commissioners that June 5 would be "recognized as the 20th anniversary of the first documented cases of PCP (pneumocystis carinii pneumonia), the semi-official beginning of the AIDS epidemic in America.

Thirteen years later, June 5 was officially recognized as HIV Long-term Survivors Awareness Day.

You hoped that Greater Cleveland leadership would officially recognize that day locally. You were going to send me a letter to be included in my correspondence. You were fraternity brothers, Alpha Phi Alpha, with Mayor Justin Bibb. You thought that might be a good ice-breaker.

As of this writing, the Mayor's office has responded. I'm awaiting details.

You were tireless getting the U=U message out: "Undetectable equals Untransmittable," indicating that if a person with HIV is on HIV meds (antiretroviral therapy, or ART) with a consistently undetectable HIV viral load, the virus cannot be transmitted to a sex partner. As a prevention strategy, this is often referred to as Treatment as Prevention, or TasP.

You were also adamant about PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) and the role Lenacapivir plays in preventing new infections and as an alternative drug therapy for those of us who are heavily pretreated, with few options.

As an openly gay HIV-positive African American man, you were a rarity. Both of us were angry that 40-plus years later, HIV infection still disproportionately impacts the African American & Communities of Color

populations; that real/perceived stigma around HIV has been an especially powerful barrier to getting tested and into treatment.

Tip o' the hat: You were also snappy with your attire.

It is my hope for us in 2025 that the region actively promotes June 5 as HIV Long-term Survivors Awareness Day while also promoting the U equals U message and the importance of getting tested. I honor you, my friend. Your last few hours on Earth were concerned with legacy and education.

Rest in power, Bryan C. Jones.

Toth of Lakewood is a volunteer chair of the Community Advisory Board at Case Western Reserve University/University Hospitals who has been recognized for Outstanding Commitment by the United Way of Greater Cleveland and with the Voices Against The Silence award from the AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland.

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