

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS

"I am really proud to call this my home society. I will be supporting TMS meetings in the future and will commit to doing my part to create a more welcoming environment in all activities I participate in."

—TMS Member Raymundo Arroyave

The above is an excerpt from a LinkedIn posting made by Dr. Arroyave in response to a public statement issued by TMS President Brad Boyce and myself in late May 2023. The focus of our statement? The efficacy of holding conferences in the state of Florida. Why was it necessary to issue a statement about holding meetings in Florida? It has been a frequent and successful venue for the Society. What changed? The answer is in our statement's first paragraph: "We are distressed to see the recent actions by the Florida state government that effectively unwinds decades of the state's progress in areas associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion. . . . The affronts to Black, Hispanic and Latino/Latina, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups are well documented by U.S. news organizations."

Florida has been adding laws since 2022 that do not track with Goal 1 of the TMS Aspires Strategic Plan: "TMS aspires to be a highly inclusive society where all materials students and professionals feel welcome, and diversity is celebrated." Some TMS members ask about TMS2024 in Orlando, will I be welcome and safe or discriminated against and harassed? Trepidations are also expressed by those not worried for themselves but who have concerns for the well-being of others.

What can TMS do beyond offering expressions of empathy? We begin by acknowledging what we cannot do. TMS does not have the resources, voice, or standing to sway Florida's government. Even mighty Disney—a corporate colossus with a strong DEI agenda, staggering influence, and an enormous economic footprint in Florida—finds itself in a grinding legal conflict with the state because it gave voice to concerns about the new DEI restrictions. Disney World is Florida's largest employer and comprises a physical infrastructure the size of San Francisco. There is no putting that oversize load on the back of a tractor trailer and moving it to Virginia. Similarly, TMS has binding contracts with hotels in Orlando for three annual meetings in the 2020s. Exiting those contracts would bankrupt TMS. Was that careless planning? No. We are always cautious with the endless considerations that go into selecting meeting sites, but it is exceptionally difficult to know, seven or more years in advance when contracts are negotiated, which sites will be safe harbors and which will devolve into treacherous shoals.

Knowing our disadvantages, what are our advantages? Beyond TMS2024 delivering the materials event experience to which we have all become accustomed, there are many aspects of the venue that work in our favor. While Orlando is in Florida, the culture of the city is not the same as that of the state. Built on the business of hospitality, Orlando scores 100 out of 100 on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index. The city's visitors' bureau, VisitOrlando, says that the city "strives to be the nation's most inclusive travel destination, welcoming people from all over the planet to enjoy everything we have to offer regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or life stage."

Similarly, our TMS2024 host headquarters hotel/conference facility—the Hyatt Regency Orlando—has a like commitment from the corporate side: "Our purpose to care for people so they can be their best every day only has meaning because we care for everyone with no exceptions. Guests. Colleagues. Suppliers. Owners. And all others." The entirety of TMS2024 will be housed and conducted within this single venue located on the aptly named International Drive.

Our Society, our host city, and our host hotel are aligned to deliver a safe, comfortable, convenient, inclusive, and welcoming TMS2024 while enabling us to continue advancing the minerals, metals, and materials community. TMS exists to bring people together, and we will continue working hard to do that very thing.

Volume 75
Number 8
August 2023



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