

# Grego: 'Government needs to control its own costs better'

*Publisher's note: Lake Tahoe News asked the seven South Lake Tahoe City Council candidates a series of questions. All are the same except for one that is specific to each candidate. The responses are being run in the order LTN received them.*



**Name:** Bruce Grego

**Profession/work experience:** Attorney/self-employed law practice.

**Age:** 61

**What organizations, committees or groups are you or have you been involved with?:** Most recently, I volunteered with Tahoe4Tahoe to remove parking meters from our streets and beach parking lots. I am a board member of the California-based chamber (South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce), been on the City Council 2008- 2012 and on the Planning Commission eight years.

**Why are you running for City Council?:** I want to assure we have transparent/honest government responsive to those who live here.

**Why should people vote for you over the other candidates?:** I am independent and free from special interest pressures.

(i.e.: I recently did not accept an invitation from the Nevada based chamber to be considered for endorsement.) I already have city government experience and understand how those pressures can work. As a 46-year resident and South Tahoe High graduate who came back after college, I care deeply about our town, and as an attorney I have legal training to offer.

**What do you think is the most pressing issue facing South Lake Tahoe and how will you deal with it?:** All too often we make decisions based upon superficial facts, unproven theories, and we fail to have an in-depth understanding of the issues before acting. We try to substitute our lack of understanding with polls and studies or staff interpretations. In November 2012, I voted against the paid parking program that was eventually overturned by the voters with the passage of Measure P. The city has made other errors. We have sustained significant losses concerning the operation of the parking garage. While "The Hole" has now seen some development, we have lost tax income for over seven years, not to mention the injury we caused all the business that were removed at the property. So what is the most important issue? Transparency and thoughtful decision-making. We need to stop making substantial financial errors that affect the future of our community.

**If the city cannot reach an agreement with its bargaining units, are you willing to go to impasse? Why or why not? How would you resolve the CalPERS and health care issues in the city?:** I have combined these next two questions because they are so closely related. I do not have access to the negotiations presently between the city and its labor units and the details of the issues surrounding the contract. It would be speculation on my part to try to give an answer to these questions as they are written. I would not hesitate to declare an impasse if there is good cause to do so, and after considering all options. But the bottom line is that without having knowledge of the issues surrounding the negotiations, any more substantive response would be worthless.

**What is your opinion about term limits for the council?:** It sounds like a good idea because it limits those elected from holding office for an extended period of time. But is it? The California Legislature has term limits and can anyone say our state government is better now than before term limits? In many respects, holding public office is no different than any job in the public sector in that you must fully understand how an organization works before you can be an effective policymaker. No one would suggest that we limit the term of a doctor or carpenter. Governing is more than just taking input from the public, it is the ability to understand the relationship between elected officials and staff, applicable law, and understanding what is possible at your level of government. It requires an understanding on what role staff has in decision making. There is more to consider than a simple equation of term limits in trying to achieve better government.

**If the city has positive cash flow, where should the money be spent?:** It should go toward our stated goals, our debt, and for road reconstruction. I am proud of reconstruction of our roads, such as Glenwood, built in our community when I was on the council, which was discontinued after I left.

**What are your ideas for increasing the city's revenues?:** New tax revenue should come from assessing businesses that do not currently contribute. Look at Heavenly Ski Resort, just outside our city limits. Past councils have exempted them from a tax of their ski tickets sold within the city. Our city also supports Heavenly Village to the tune of about \$150,000 a year for an indefinite period. There is no expiration in the City's commitment to provide tax dollars to support this private complex. I say no "sweet heart" deals for big corporations, developers or anyone else.

Additionally, the city of SLT had significant surpluses prior to 2006 and the sources of that revenue have not changed; so I think we need to wait for our economy to continue to recover

from the recession instead of just adding more taxes to persons and businesses that already pay their fair share, and are still facing their own economic challenges.

Government also needs to control its own costs better than it has.

Furthermore, I am concerned about a multitude of fees promoted by the city. No matter what you call it, fees are taxes. When I paid my business license tax [this year] for example, there was a fee added to process the tax. These kinds of fees are like going to a restaurant ordering and paying for a meal, then being charged a fee for the use of the fork and knife. I hate to be nickel and dimed by the city after we support government with all the taxes we pay. We should not increase revenues this way.

**What is your vision for the 56-acre project?:** We need to upgrade and expand the recreation center and the campground.

**What would you do to improve relations with El Dorado County?:** Talk with them. I also support Kenny Curtzweiler [stet] for supervisor. I believe Kenny will make the other four supervisors more sensitive to our needs and goals.

**Is the city on the right course with restructuring debt and focusing on recreation? Why or why not?:** Yes, I have advocated the restructuring of debt while I was on the council and continue to support such direction. Why would we not seek low interest and lower monthly payments? Yes on recreation because it is obvious.

**Name one vote the City Council made in the last four years you are proud of and one you are disappointed in – and why?:** I am disappointed in the City Council's vote on Ordinance 1054 to have paid parking on some of our streets and beaches; I was on the council in November 2012 and I voted against this ordinance. My disappointment is based on the facts that they refused repeatedly to hear what the voters said. Many

community meetings were held where the majority of attendees loudly voiced their opposition. The City Council went ahead anyway. When 1,400 signatures were collected in three weeks opposing the ordinance, the City Council further declined to put it on the agenda for discussion. When those signatures were turned into the county elections board to put on the ballot, the City Council only then put it on the ballot themselves then proceeded to spend untold taxpayers dollars to oppose it. Sixty-seven percent of the people voted to get rid of the parking meters and some council members are still not listening. That is disappointing.

**What is working in the city and what isn't; and how would you go about changing what isn't working?:** As I stated above, in response to what I think is the most pressing issue facing South Lake Tahoe, the manner in which we are making decisions isn't working. We need to change the manner in which decisions are made by the council. All too often we make decisions based upon superficial facts, unproven theories, and we fail to have an in depth understanding of issues before acting. We have to actually use a correct model to change the faulty model to a better one.

**Being on the council requires working with four others. Give readers an example of how you work well others in difficult situations with differing opinions:** I have always treated my colleagues and city staff with respect. I welcome, even encourage, lively debate about difficult issues. Smart and truthful research aids difficult decisions. I am willing to do thorough research and I am willing to change my position if shown a better way.

**What is your opinion about the following topics:**

- **Ferry service on Lake Tahoe?:** I believe we should explore different transportation alternatives to facilitate the movement of locals and tourists in our area.

• **Loop road?:** I continue to oppose the Loop Road. It is unnecessary and I strongly believe that the special interest groups are seeking its construction for their private benefit. You cannot relocate the major traffic corridor in the Stateline area without adversely affecting the level of business activities on the California side. I oppose the removal of existing homes and businesses and the use of inverse condemnation to the objectives of this project.

• **Future of Lake Tahoe Airport?:** It is not economically feasible and I see no change in the future.

• **Increasing the transient occupancy tax?:** Please see my response to the question "What is your ideas for increasing the city revenues."

• **Changing the vacation rental ordinance to reduce the number of such units in neighborhoods?:** I need some more figures, however our city should not tolerate abusive vacation rental activities. We need to continue to promote enforcement recognizing that there is a balance between the use of private property and the public good.

**What will you do differently on the council compared to when you served before?:** I will be more directly involved in labor contracts. I will be more thorough in research before approving goals and objectives for the council. I also will be more stringent before approving budgets.

**Tell the voters something about yourself that they may not know:** I voted against the application by Randy Lane and Lake Tahoe Development Company for the loan of public funds from the city for \$25 million to "save" the Hole. I voted against paid parking back in November 2012. I graduated from South Tahoe High School.