

Opinion: Election season Lake Tahoe style

By Garry Bowen

As I watched from the sidelines the proceedings of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce's council candidate forum last week, several thoughts occurred in its aftermath, the first being that we are indeed fortunate to be able to witness in a civilized form the thought processes of our citizens in trying to make a difference, whatever that difference happens to be, in running for office at a local level.

For that, we can indeed be thankful.



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As President Obama said right here in our own town – I know, I know: Harvey's is in Nevada – but his inspiring talk of conservation recognized that political boundaries, like some others, are not recognized in or by the nature that surrounds us, so, as the president said, the positive changes we'll "continue to make are going to be in all of our hands, as citizens. I always say that the most important office is the office of citizen. Change happens because of you. Don't forget that."

In "not forgetting that," listening to sincere efforts at what might constitute reasons to be elected, there were of course

some recurring themes, the most prominent of which is the growing issue of affordable housing, which by its emotional nature vitally needs to be reframed as a policy of "housing affordability," as unless it's designated as a very particular platform, it will, in too many minds, end up as it has many times before, heated conversation about "rusted cars, trash all-around" by those who care a bit too much about any reduction of their property value, instead of the very real issue of our municipal servants (police, fire, nurses, teachers, along with many other citizens) not being able to live in their own chosen place of work.

This issue has been and continues to be in the forefront, particularly in resort-mountain environments that thrive only because of a visitor-based economy, inevitably leading to the second issue, that of diversifying the economy, usually associated with higher income jobs, and recruiting interested companies to move here, presumably bringing those better jobs with them.

As these identified answers have been touted before in many places, for me the third (and intrusive) thought, came about – as a shadow of once-famous Erhard Seminar Training (EST), whose founder Werner Erhard used to relate: "You can never get enough of what you don't need."

EST focused on transforming "one's ability to experience living so that the situations one had been trying to change or had been putting up with, clear up just in the process of life itself."

To be clear, rearranging the musical chairs of SLT's municipal government is not necessarily sufficient, unless new substance "brings to the forefront and realizes the ideas of transformation, personal responsibility, accountability, and possibility", something within the purview of trust and transparency, to assure a dialogue with the whole community, not just colleagues on the council.

Initial EST sessions were “painfully enlightening, as it became obvious that much of human misery is a function of broken agreements – not keeping your word, or someone else not keeping theirs.”

The changes alluded to above will never come about, absent solid new ideas to pursue that lead to successes that can be replicated, as it is trust and transparency that establish the creds to lead, and, as Michael Bloomberg, the eminent former mayor of NYC recently said: “transparency is itself an economic engine”, which has not always been the case with South Shore politics, leading to a conclusion that one of the drivers of any SLT candidacy always carries trust in its background, the lack of which ends up clouding motivations for change, and in losing the ability to learn what the best change is.

If we are to recognize the wisdom of making a policy issue of housing affordability, it will be with the trust and transparency of informed knowledge of how important it is to the ongoing stability of a place that cherishes its outdoors, to strengthen and fortify its ability to make sure its citizens are cared for, not as mere vote-getting devices, but as neighbors that are part of a whole – integral needed parts of a holistically-competent community, one that supports itself as/with a superior business model, not as one that barely functions as “what can we get away with”... one candidate touted his participation in the Citizens Academy, as if finding out how things are done was apt inspiration to do better than what was shown and taught, after sensing better ways than what was observed.

Nationally, internationally, and indeed globally, change is now occurring in ways that we would not have thought about just a decade ago, so the final thought is that we need to be in more control of how our choices come about, as it is also coming true that we are in danger of “getting more than enough of what we no longer need”, while not reaching out well enough

for what we do in fact need -comfort zones can themselves become endangered species.

Revisit what it means to be a citizen, or others will decide for you ... and perhaps not to your liking.

Garry Bowen has more than a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health.