

Opinion: Outcome of 2017 depends on all of us

By Kathryn Reed

As the fog of ringing in a new year fades, we must collectively begin to face the reality that 2017 is going to be much different than 2016. Some of it we will have control over, some we won't. The worst part will be if people stop being engaged.

As the late U.S. Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill said, "All politics is local."

The Lake Tahoe Basin has plenty of issues that need to be addressed – housing, wages, transportation, and climate change are just a few. These are big topics with no easy answers. They are problems that should not be solved in a vacuum by only a few people. All of these issues affect everyone who lives in and visits the basin. That is why we, the residents, need to have a say in the cure that will be used to treat what ails us as a community.

Don't wait until the eleventh hour, don't wait to be asked for your opinion – just find a forum to express it in a manner that could effect change.

Housing – lack of it and the exorbitant price – is not unique to Tahoe. *Lake Tahoe News* will be exploring this topic through a series of stories beginning later this month.

One thing Tahoe will likely always face is a housing shortage. In some ways this is a good thing because it means we did not pave over paradise. The fact that there is a limit on what can be developed in the basin is a good thing. It means we will continue to live in a wooded forest instead of a concrete jungle.

Should employers provide housing for employees? Should people expect to live and work in the same town? What role should government have in housing? These are some of the bigger questions we need to address collectively to find consensus.

I wonder if people were paid a livable wage, if the housing crisis would not be as severe because they could then afford more. At the same time, it is unrealistic to expect everyone who wants to live here to be able to do so.

California's minimum wage as of today is \$10.50/hour. By 2021 it will be \$15/hour. Nevada's minimum wage is \$8.25 an hour, but drops to \$7.25 if an employer offers health insurance. The federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour was set in 2009. The average annual household income on the California side of the South Shore is \$28,565.

Vail Resorts, one of the larger employers in the greater Lake Tahoe area, in June 2015 made a big splash by announcing it would have a minimum wage of \$10/hour. For its three California resorts, it's no longer relevant.

I'm all for companies making a profit, but at some point that money needs to trickle down to the workers who are doing the heavy lifting. This is true of all sectors. The economic divide is growing dramatically between the haves and the have nots.

Climate change is real. Argue all you want as to why, but it is changing. Scientists have proven this. Look at all that rain we had in the fall. Is this going to be the new norm? The snow line is rising. This could dramatically change our economy if the winter sports season is shorter. It might also mean a longer off-season, as evidenced by the bustling fall the basin and Truckee areas experienced in 2016.

People are clearly wanting to recreate in the basin and Truckee – just look at how congested our roads are. It's great they want to enjoy our home and drop some cash while doing so.

But if their experience is miserable because of the congestion and lack of functional public transportation, how long will it be before they play elsewhere?

It is mindboggling to me that the powers that be keep approving development projects with no answers to how to mitigate the impacts the projects will have on roads and other infrastructure. Nor do these policymakers seem to care that the lack of housing for the workers at these developments means those people will be commuting, thus adding to the congestion. This then adds to air pollution and degradation of Lake Tahoe's clarity.

As for what is going on nationally – Jan. 20 brings a new president. I have had friends tell me Trump will not be their president. To date I have failed to be persuasive to argue otherwise. Bridges cannot be built with that thinking.

He will be the president of the United States. (It is alarming that a Qualtrics poll taken in December showed 29 percent of the respondents believed Trump won the popular vote. Fifty-two percent of Republicans said Trump won the popular vote. The reality is Hillary Clinton won that count by more than 2.8 million votes.)

This is part of our collective problem – people refusing to learn (accept?) the truth, the facts.

It is our choice if we want to remain the Divided States.

Finding even the smallest commonality and building on that is critical. Educating people through civil discourse, listening – these are things that need to be done. Protesting and making oneself heard has its place, too. In all of this, there must be purpose beyond anger and telling others they are wrong. That is where the education piece becomes so important. It's a critical component for all sides.

Drawing a line in the sand for equality, to thwart

discrimination, and to uphold the Constitution and Supreme Court decisions is righteous. Drawing a line in the sand because you didn't get your way and your person isn't in office is beyond unproductive.

The questions now are – How do we overcome being the Divided States of America? How do we make the greater Lake Tahoe region sustainable for future generations?