

Opinion: Betrayal by EDC Board of Supervisors

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County has two main priorities. No. 1 is public safety and No. 2 is maintaining the 1,000 or so miles of county roads. Everything else is a distant third.

For several recent years, the county would put about \$2 million a year from the General Fund to road maintenance. In fact, about 15 years ago, voters passed Measure H which allocated about \$4 million to road maintenance from a portion of one-half of vehicle registration fees. But after a few years, through legislative machinations, Sacramento took away the 60 percent voter approved Measure H. But the Board of Supervisors still continued to fund road maintenance from the General Fund as described above. All General Fund road maintenance stopped with carpetbagger CAO Larry Combs when he recommended to the Board of Supervisors that we stop doing that in order to balance the budget.



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And then it rained. It poured. And it hasn't stopped for about two months. I pictured Governor Moonbeam sailing away from the capital in an ark with a bullhorn yelling we are still in a drought. Placerville's total rainfall is already over 57 inches where the annual average is 38 inches. And now our roads are literally failing apart from lack of maintenance and

ditch and culvert cleaning.

As reported in the *Mountain Democrat* on Feb. 24, Grizzly Flats residents showed up in force to plead their case for fixing their “deplorable” roads at the Feb. 7 and Feb. 14 board meetings. The board’s response was equally deplorable.

Board Chair Shiva Frentzen said straight out during the Feb. 7 meeting, “We don’t have money for Grizzly Flat or other roads.”

At the Feb. 14 meeting Frentzen tried to mollify the Grizzly Flat residents by saying, “One million dollars is earmarked for Grizzly Flat, but we need to find a source for that funding” meaning what she said in her first statement, “We don’t have the money.”

No one asked the big one-word question, “Why?”

First EDC has the money, it’s in the annual contingency fund which has millions of dollars and in other places. This is a public emergency. People need roads for police, fire, food, emergency, ambulance and so on. It is a public safety issue. This problem should be fixed forthwith and if CDA can’t do it, hire an outside contractor who would probably do it faster and cheaper.

Second, while our roads decay, EDC is spending \$12 million or more fixing their own digs. The occupants, EDC employees – including Board of Supervisors – were complaining about the HVAC system, not enough heat or maybe a poor A/C system. Grizzly Flat may have no heat during this winter as propane trucks can’t service their areas. Why isn’t there a road repair emergency fund? And it’s not just Grizzly Flat, it’s all over EDC from El Dorado Hills to South Lake Tahoe.

The answer to the above question “Why?” You can blame it on this and prior boards starting with CAO Terri Daly who recommended the county give its miscellaneous employees a 15

percent raise, which has cost EDC over \$60 million over the last 3½ years. And then there is the pension contribution problem growing into an out of control nightmare, but it's not a dream, it's real. There has also been an expansion of the employee base. EDC is currently in negotiation for a new contract. Any raise given will only exacerbate EDC's out of control employee spending, which now accounts for 79 percent of the net county cost. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand where to cut spending. Wait a minute, there is a rocket scientist on the board.

The problem is not revenue; that has grown every year. The problem is spending. CAO Don Ashton needs to continue to make cuts, like he did in eliminating two highly paid positions in the CDA a couple of weeks ago. But that is not the board's solution. As with most governments, the allegedly conservative board wants to raise taxes, increase in the transit occupancy tax, the waste franchise fees which will raise costs to the end user and finally increase in the sales tax. Cutting spending doesn't have a chance. Board members are looking to raise our taxes because they already squandered the taxpayers' money and they know where and how to get more.

The board thought they found a pot of money on Sept. 27 when they voted to increase General Fund road maintenance by stealing money from the MC&FP. My column shortly afterward said they couldn't. The county counsel at that same September meeting said the board could get the \$2 million. County counsel was wrong, but that didn't stop the board from giving him an \$8,500 raise. It is almost funny how the board rewards incompetence and mediocrity.

Last March 2, the El Dorado County Transportation Commission (EDCTC) met to support a change to the California Constitution through Senate California Constitution Amendment 6 which would reduce the threshold from 66.7 percent to 55 percent (making passage easier) which would allow cities, counties and special districts to raise revenues for transportation projects. In

other words, the transportation commission voted to support making it easier to raise taxes just as the EDC board originally voted to support the state Legislature in raising gasoline taxes. At a recent county taxpayer's association meeting, board member Michael "I never met a tax I didn't like" Ranalli when accused of voting for five new taxes actually responded with political double talk by saying "we only voted to explore" the possibility of new taxes and we only voted to "study" the idea. He is really saying, "I am just coveting your wallet, but I haven't stolen it yet." Ranalli is up for re-election next year.

The EDCTC is comprised of four EDC Board of Supervisors, John Hidahl, Ranalli, Brian Veerkamp, and Frentzen and three Placerville City Council persons. Only Frentzen voted no, but our three other EDC board members voted to make it easier to raise taxes. Hidahl might be understandable for his vote, he's a Democrat, but Ranalli and Veerkamp tell us they are conservative Republicans. Yeah sure, our board is loaded with a majority of tax and spend liberals and RINOs. And you thought they were conservatives.

EDCTC member Hidahl, the rocket scientist, said it should be 55 percent as we are a democracy. So much for being a rocket scientist as I advised Hidahl the USA is not a democracy where majority rules but a representative republic and the two-thirds rule is part of California's Constitution wherein, our state legislature requires a two-thirds vote to increase taxes and there are many situations where supermajorities are required for certain legislation or overriding a governor or presidential veto requires a two-thirds majority. The two-thirds majority requirement is for the protection of the public, but when it comes to new taxes, the tax and spend Hidahl, Veerkamp and Ranalli it's damn the taxpayers, full speed ahead. They will have more money to waste. They have certainly done a great job of that so far.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.