

Opinion: Proving the future is bright

By Ted Gaines

To watch the news is to imagine a politically-obsessed America pulling apart at the seams, with opponents mobbing up and attacking each other at every turn and the two parties and their talking head proxies endlessly screaming at each other about the real meaning of President Trump's tweets. It's a phony picture. The essence of this country isn't government at all and you might never see it on the news. It's everyday people – hardworking people of every creed and age, living their lives the best they can regardless of what the government is doing – who make this state and nation what they are. It's those people who make me believe that California's future is bright.



Ted Gaines

Recently that belief was driven home to me when I met three very different groups of people in the North State. I came away inspired by their stories.

North State ranchers have lived off this land for more than a century and have experienced every up and down imaginable, but they've persevered. Now, as the dry creek beds and barren mountains of years past have disappeared, they look forward to getting more water and getting their businesses back on their feet.

Illegal marijuana cultivation is stealing rancher water and polluting land with indiscriminate pesticide abuse, making it harder for legitimate ranchers to thrive and breaking their hearts at the same time. These men and women are the original conservationists. It's not just words with them; they depend on clean water and healthy soils for their livelihoods. It's why they have such a deep connection to the land and are such careful stewards of their property. I know that a solid ranching economy in the North State will secure these lands for generations.

Despite these new challenges, the ranchers were ready to fight for their futures in California, and just asked me to try to get government out of their way. They were eager to roll their sleeves up and get to work. They weren't looking for government handouts or help, just freedom, so they could continue the agricultural legacy their ancestors built.

In Placerville, I visited with the executive director of the privately-supported and volunteer-driven Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). CASA recruits and trains people from the community to serve as advocates for abused or severely neglected children as they seek justice in our court system.

The CASA advocates usually take one case at a time and build a relationship with the child they are representing. They bond with the child, learn about the child's special, individual circumstances, and they use that knowledge to report to the judges overseeing these cases, so they can make informed, compassionate decisions about the most helpful services and support for each of these children.

The CASA volunteers, donors, and other supporters together serve as a solid foundation for these kids' futures, helping during their crises and together forging a more successful life path. One child at a time, CASA is creating healthier, more loving communities for us all.

But my favorite visit, one that brings a smile to my face even now as I think of it, was with 11-year old Preston Sharp, the flag planter. Starting in 2015, this young man started placing small flags on the graves of local veterans in Redding to honor their service. Since then, Preston has planted an amazing 28,000 flags on gravesites from Redding to Sacramento, and he's branching out to Reno and wherever else his commitment takes him. I'm proud to know such a young patriot who shows such great empathy for veterans and their families.

I wanted to recognize Preston, and gave him an award from my office to honor his efforts. He appreciated it. But in the end, he said he was not acting to get an award from the government, but because he wanted to give veterans the respect they had earned. He is a fine young man with the right priorities.

These three stories seem unrelated but they aren't. They are all, in their way, stitching together a unified state – one child, one ranch, one flag at a time. Like a million little streams feeding into one mighty river, these Californians and others around the state are achieving on their own, with their individual accomplishments all pouring into a single California, robust and full of hope. Sacramento can't mandate these acts, only get in the way.

Politicians come and go, and parties come into and fade out of power all the time. But the California spirit and the talents and desires of the builders, the achievers, the doers, is forever.

Our future is bright.

Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.