

Opinion: Rafters, not taxpayers need to foot the bill

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County has a competent deputy chief administrative officer and former chief budget officer working in our administration, Laura Schwartz. She understands cash flow, spending and overall, she is pretty smart.

I understand she has a master's degree in accounting. Darn good credentials. In fact, about the only thing I remember from my psychology 1A class was a chart listing the highest IQ of all professions and accountants were ranked No. 1. Of course, you can probably now guess my major in undergraduate school.



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But—and don't you love "buts" because here it comes—at the Aug. 10 Planning Commission meeting when discussing item No. 5 regarding the new updated River Management Plan (RMP), I thought Schwartz had morphed into Nancy Pelosi, when she said, "We need to pass the RMP before we do a financial analysis of its impact." Pelosi said an almost identical statement when she said, "We need to pass Obamacare to see what's in it."

Are you kidding me? What was the name of that turnip truck I

just fell off? Of course, in spite of the objections of certain members of the public who even presented information as to the preliminary sheriff's costs relative to the river totaling about \$1 million, there was no analysis or method within the plan of how to recover these taxpayers' costs. Yet, the entire Planning Commission approved the RMP recommending that the Board of Supervisors approve the RMP "as is."

I don't want to waste "the ink" telling you who the commissioners are who serve at the pleasure of the board. Understand that RMP appears to have been crafted by mostly the commercial rafting industry here in EDC as there are no provisions for cost recovery to the county for costs their industry creates. Sounds like the tail may be wagging the dog.

In fact, one of the ringleaders, Nate Rangel, **in his column** and in his appeal to the Planning Commission at the hearing to pass this updated RMP, attempted to counter facts that with respect to their approximately \$30,000 grant for shuttle buses, the money doesn't come from EDC, but comes from some state or local government environmental grant. Hello! Can anybody tell me where any government money comes from? How about grants, paychecks, pensions, police cars, road repairs, Delta tunnels, and high-speed rail? It comes from one place and one place only—the taxpayers. All Rangel is saying in his obfuscation of the facts is that the shuttle buses are essentially being paid for by different taxpayers, but paying just the same.

What the Planning Commission has done is similar to going to the board of directors at a bank with a business model but with no financial data. Here is our new plan to build a widget factory. It will be the best widget factory ever. Trust us. Just look at the drawings, equipment and factory buildings. But the board will ask the big question before showing them the door. You want our money to finance this monstrosity, right? Well how much is it going to cost? How are you going to pay for it? And how will you pay us back for the money you

want?

That's exactly what's going on here. If the Planning Commission were a bank, the depositors would lose everything as it would go broke in a nanosecond. But we are dealing with government here, they don't care about money because it is always "other people's money" – your money and my money – never their own money. But the Planning Commission can't think that deep.

The first things anyone with any brains asks of a new proposition is how much is it going to cost, and how are we going to pay for it? What happens to people when they get into government? Do they all lose their common "cents?" That's just not in EDC, it's problematic in all governments.

Not only did the Planning Commission fail to ask these most important questions, they failed to even ascertain one iota of information relative to costs. I did ask some questions and received incredibly quick answers from someone in the know. While they admittedly were good guesstimates, some of the numbers was quite accurate; however, further studies need to be done from the law enforcement, emergency response and public safety perspective. I was advised that information will be forthcoming as soon as EDC's new computer system gets up and running. We also have no idea about code enforcement, another huge (cost) issue along the river, and that includes continuing violations of many concessionaire's special use permits. Inquiring minds want to know, but unfortunately none of these minds reside in the EDC administration and/or the Planning Commission members.

You may hear things like "We have a river trust fund." Well give the taxpayers and other concerned individuals an accounting. It isn't called a trust fund for nothing. And they may claim they already pay fees for this and that. Well tell us how much the total is? And they claim they bring ancillary business to the county. Well let's cut through the chase on

that one. All businesses do that especially hotels and motels who already pay a 10 percent transit occupancy tax. The argument of the rafters that they make money for the county just doesn't hold water.

When is this incompetence going to end? Or the free ride of the commercial rafters and the businesses who operate on special use permits going to end? They need to be paying for the costs of their river use, not the taxpayers.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.