

Letter: Weighing in on SLT bike trails

To the community,

The South Shore area, including Meyers, has made great progress in developing bicycle access. The Sawmill Pond extensions are great examples.

In my opinion the weakest link is Highway 89, Emerald Bay Road north from the Y to the very nice actual bike paths en route to Camp Rich. This section is a high speed four lane race track for eight-tenths of a mile. The bike lanes are very narrow and non-existent in sections. There are no crosswalks for pedestrians or bikers to cross. A deadly accident waiting to happen.

With two bike shops along this strip, it is clearly a biking favored route. Eloise is the actual designated bike path. Pot holes, large cracks abound. Stop sign favor cars and ignore biking flow. Eloise is the anything but a trash dump for bikers and a disgrace to the city. The solution is very easy for Caltrans to resolve.

Roger Pratt, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Obama and economic equality

By Ron Formisano

You'd never know from this year's presidential campaign

rhetoric that anyone in Washington has been paying attention to economic inequality. Donald Trump has hijacked the Republican Party with his populist rhetoric about working class Americans no longer “winning,” and Hillary Clinton acknowledges at every turn (partly to woo and mollify Democrats who backed Bernie Sanders) that inequality needs addressing. No one seems to recognize the great strides made during the past eight years of Barack Obama’s presidency to mitigate the problem.

That’s a shame, because the Obama-era efforts hold important lessons about what’s possible in addressing inequality and how we must do better in the future.

As Obama entered office, public consciousness of inequality of income and wealth was on the rise and the Great Recession brought disastrous economic consequences for tens of millions of Americans. In the past 40 years, inequality of income rose faster in the U.S. than in any other nation and the inequality of wealth exceeded that found in any other advanced economy.

Obama tackled the problem of inequality from the beginning. The first bill he signed as president was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act—an equal pay legislation. Ledbetter had worked for Goodyear for 20 years before learning she was paid less than men for the same job. The law removed the requirement that a petition regarding discriminatory pay be filed within 180 days of the discrimination; it also made any discriminatory paycheck actionable.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the administration’s 2009 stimulus bill, has not received enough credit for assisting poor families and for preventing more people from falling into poverty. The act added \$20 billion for food stamps and food banks, support for poor neighborhoods, an increase in unemployment insurance, and \$3.5 billion for job training. With an unprecedented 45 million Americans in poverty today, one enduring criticism is that

Obama should have focused on a second stimulus rather than his health care bill.

Yet the Affordable Care and Patient Protection Act also helped reduce inequality to a degree. The law's redistributive features are not generally recognized by the public, but they help explain the unrelenting opposition from its reactionary opponents. Obamacare contains higher Medicare payroll taxes on individuals with incomes above \$200,000 and families with incomes above \$250,000 and it levies fees on the healthcare industry (which has gained millions of new customers from the ACA) and on drug and medical device manufacturers.

Obama's critics, and the president himself, have said he hasn't done enough to tell the story of this battle against inequality. But it's not for lack of trying. In December 2011, Obama confronted the unfairness of our economic system in a speech at Osawatomie, Kansas, where ex-President Theodore Roosevelt in 1910 made his historic New Nationalism speech calling for a "Square Deal" for the American people. The next month, Obama's State of the Union focused on restoring America's promise of opportunity. Always cautious during his first term, Obama waited until after his re-election to talk directly about "income inequality." Instead, he emphasized fairness and everyone "playing by the same rules." At the time, billionaire Warren Buffett pointedly disclosed that he was taxed at a lower rate than his secretary (who Obama invited to sit with first lady Michelle Obama in the House gallery for the State of the Union), and Obama called attention to the unfairness of hedge fund earnings being taxed at 15 percent; anyone earning over \$1 million, he said, should pay an effective tax rate of at least 30 percent. The Republican-controlled House predictably ignored his suggestion.

In his campaign for re-election, Obama hammered away at the same themes, while successfully painting his opponent Mitt Romney as an out-of-touch rich guy, with help from Romney's

own mistakes. Once re-elected, in his 2013 State of the Union, Obama spoke directly about income inequality, calling it “the defining challenge of our time.” He promised then, and at other times throughout the year, to devote the rest of his presidency to attacking inequality. The Congress he addressed had reached a milestone: more than half its members were millionaires and the body’s total worth was approaching \$5 billion.

Obama’s second term is often portrayed as an exercise in futility: the president proposes and the Republican Congress opposes. But that’s not the whole story. In 2013, the president’s give-and-take with Republicans on budget priorities succeeded in increasing tax rates on the highest earners.

This happened in two ways: Money in tax shelters got treated like other income and limits were imposed on the deductions high earners can claim. While the “Bush tax cuts” were extended for most Americans, the cuts for those making over \$500,000 expired. The so-called 1 percent are now taxed at pre-Ronald Reagan levels. Although most capital gains are still taxed at only 15 percent, more affluent taxpayers in the 39.6 percent income-tax bracket now face a 20 percent rate on their capital gains. The result: The 400 highest earners among American taxpayers are now paying an effective tax rate of 22.9 percent, up from 16.7 percent in 2012, but still down from 26.4 percent in the late 1990s.

Obama has also made effective use of his office and executive powers to address inequality. Unable to persuade Republicans in Congress to raise the federal minimum wage, (stuck at \$7.25 an hour, and worth far less in real terms than the minimum wage in 1968), Obama has used the “bully pulpit” to advocate higher wages and encouraged a growing movement among states and cities to raise their minimums on their own.

In 2014, the president issued an executive order raising the

minimum for workers hired by federal contractors to \$10.10 an hour. The president also required federal contractors to report wage data to the Labor Department, to prevent abuses and serve as fuel for future action.

In early 2015 Obama again resorted to an executive order to give federal workers up to six weeks of paid maternity leave, and asked Congress to extend this to private workers. The president also advocated a Healthy Families Act giving workers in the private sector up to seven days paid sick leave; some 44 million, or 40 percent of the workforce, do not have paid sick leave. Just four states and the District of Columbia, along with 18 cities, have passed laws requiring employers—usually with 15 or more employees—to give such paid leave.

Obama's Labor Department also issued guidelines to help states establish savings plans for private-sector employees whose employers don't offer them. And Obama has sought to reverse regulations that burden unions. While organized labor was disappointed that the president and Senate Democrats failed to enact legislation making it easier to unionize workplaces, Obama delivered a huge gain for low-wage service workers in his appointments to the National Labor Relations Board.

In August 2015, the board delivered a series of decisions by a 3-2 partisan vote making it easier for unions to represent workers in fast-food restaurants and retail giants like Wal-Mart.

And this May, the Department of Labor announced sweeping new overtime rules that could affect as many as 12.5 million workers. The regulatory action will make it almost impossible for employers, even smaller firms, to avoid paying overtime to workers who put in more than an eight-hour workday.

Meanwhile, even as the more progressive wing within Obama's party would have liked to see more energetic action taken

against Wall Street, there is evidence that the complicated financial reform known as the Dodd-Frank is having some effect in reining in the financial sector. Bank earnings are down, and the biggest banks are lending more while preserving healthier balance sheets under tighter regulation.

All told, the administration's higher income tax rates on the affluent, subsidies for health insurance, expanded tax breaks for poor families with children, and other measures, amount to an impressive government counterattack on advancing inequality. Nevertheless, the administration faces two problems in selling its narrative: the fact that public opinion is a lagging indicator to economic reality (things can turn better before the benefits are widely appreciated), and the more daunting reality that there are limits to what government can do in the face of structural forces (such as technological change) creating deeper income and wealth inequality in our society.

As Obama prepares to leave office, Americans are only now beginning to consider his overall legacy, and may soon come to appreciate his efforts to combat economic inequality and restore a sense of fairness and opportunity to American life. Whether his successor will try to build on Obama's effort, or be able to do so, remains to be seen.

Ron Formisano is the author of "Plutocracy in America: How Increasing Inequality Destroys the Middle Class and Exploits the Poor" (Hopkins, 2015) and professor of history emeritus at the University of Kentucky.

Letter: Candidate has issues with chamber

Publisher's note: *The following letter was sent to Lake Tahoe News by the writer.*

Dear Rabbi [Evon] Yakur:

Thank you for the opportunity to seek the [Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce's] endorsement, however, I must decline seeking of same at this time. Nor will I be providing my personal, private information to your organization for a "background check". This is information that even the county elections department does NOT ask for. Neither is it required on the many state election forms that I have filled out. Additionally, I do not believe as an Interim Exec., Mr. [Steve] Teshara is bonded in the event my information is inadvertently released. Would the chamber's own experts advise giving this information to an out of state organization headed by a temporary employee?

I am a former executive vice president, economic development director of the Greater Tulare Chamber of Commerce, so I am a huge supporter of chambers of commerce, but I find that a candidate seeking election in the city of South Lake Tahoe (California) who seeks endorsement from a Nevada-based organization is asking for trouble. I also have concerns with how closely the chamber's PAC is to its board of directors. There is simply not the requisite distance between those soliciting candidates and those endorsing candidates. I was involved in many conversations with WACE and the CalChamber in the early '90s, where it became very clear to those involved that a chamber of Commerce that has a PAC and endorses candidates for local (non-partisan) elections is asking for trouble. While it is OK and encouraged for chambers to take positions on ballot measures and state propositions, the

personalities involved in small town elections can be detrimental to a chamber and its future. And while it is your choice to seek this path, I must seek the path I believe to be right.

Of your 600-plus members, I am sure that many are in California. In light of this, I am happy to answer your questionnaire. But please remove me from the list of City Council candidates seeking endorsement.

I will submit the completed questionnaire in the time frame you requested and am happy to meet with your CEO Roundtable on Sept. 2. Please let me know when you require me to be at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel.

Respectfully,

Tamara Wallace

Opinion: Citizen science is more than collecting data

By Jason Lloyd

The earthquake near Washington, D.C., five years ago in August 2011—the one that damaged the Washington Monument and the National Cathedral but had little other noticeable impact—caught me by surprise. Sitting in an office on the 12th floor of a building downtown, I thought it might have been an improbably large truck on the street below, until a co-worker suggested we probably ought to leave the building. We spent the rest of that sunny afternoon milling around with other office workers before calling it a day and heading to happy

hour.

What I did not do, but really wish that I had, was enter a description of my experience into the U.S. Geological Survey's crowdsourcing initiative, Did You Feel It? The system collects data from people who have felt tremors to determine the extent and intensity of earthquakes in near-real time. The submitted data are used in the USGS ShakeMaps, which help organizations like the Federal Emergency Management Agency prepare for and respond to earthquakes.

USGS's Did You Feel It? initiative is a great example of one kind of citizen science—everyday people using their experiences or interests to participate in scientific projects. These research projects come from a startling variety of scientific disciplines. Bird lovers can participate in the Audubon Society's annual Christmas bird count. History enthusiasts can scrutinize 19th-century whaling logbooks to better understand climate change. You could also use a virtual microscope to hunt for particles of interstellar dust retrieved by the Stardust spacecraft in 2006. If neuroscience is more your thing, you can help to map the brain by playing EyeWire, an online game designed by a lab at Princeton University.

Citizen contributions to projects like these go back at least as far as Thomas Jefferson's plan to collect weather data from as many people as possible in order to produce "a reliable theory of weather and climate." It's the kind of citizen science that most everyone agrees is worthwhile—helpful to researchers and edifying for the public. In fact, a bipartisan bill making its way through Congress at the moment, the Crowdsourcing and Citizen Science Act of 2015, encourages collaboration between scientists and the public. The bill appeals to a range of political sensibilities because it encourages public engagement in science and broadens the scope of federally funded research without increasing budgets. (Citizen volunteers cost even less than postdocs it turns

out.)

But citizens can do more for science than just collect data (as important as data collection is). By educating themselves in the research and infusing urgency into the process, citizen scientists can get involved in decisions about what gets researched, how research is conducted, and how results should be used. This pushes the bounds of citizen science in new and contentious ways.

Citizen participation in science-related decision making can mean advocating for testing, as residents in Flint, Mich., did when they realized that, despite their state Department of Environmental Quality's claims, their water was contaminated with lead. It can mean loudly encouraging new research priorities, like AIDS activists did in the 1980s and some cancer patient advocates do today. Or it can mean funding the development of better air-quality samplers for use by communities near petrochemical facilities. Nonexperts can also contribute to decisions about consequential (and potentially controversial) technologies, such as gene-editing techniques and artificial intelligence, by voicing their politics, values, and concerns in emerging forms of structured deliberation.

As Darlene Cavalier, a citizen science pioneer who founded the SciStarter database, and researcher Eric Kennedy astutely point out in their new book on citizen science, the public's involvement in these scientific issues is not intended to replace or refute expertise. (Disclosure: I work for Arizona State University's Consortium for Science, Policy, & Outcomes, and we published Cavalier and Kennedy's book.) Citizens complement traditional science policymaking by contributing perspectives that researchers and decision makers would not otherwise have access to.

The educational aspect runs both ways. Participation in citizen science in its many forms improves adult scientific

literacy, an important task as scientific issues permeate public policy debates on everything from Zika research funding to genetically modified organisms. (This might also educate people on the limits of science and help diminish our habit of appealing to it to arbitrate disagreements over the nonscientific realms of policy, politics, and values.) Greater awareness of issues like lead contamination in municipal water supplies can benefit the research process, too. Under federal rules, for instance, city utilities must get volunteers to collect water samples for testing. In 2014, the Philadelphia water utility sent letters to more than 8,000 of its customers but managed to find only 134 volunteers. Demanding that our water supplies aren't poisoning us means taking some responsibility for ensuring that it's tested properly.

It's also worth remembering that a lot of research in the United States is publicly funded, as Cavalier has emphasized: "American adults fund 50 percent of the basic science [through tax dollars], and we entrust people with issues that impact our lives, but we're cut out of the conversation." The federal government will spend nearly \$150 billion dollars on research and development this year. Some measure of accountability to the people supplying that funding is necessary and appropriate.

Citizen scientists have different incentives than career scientists, which can affect the kind of research undertaken and how the results are used. Of course, scientists would presumably have chosen different career paths if they did not care a great deal about, for example, environmental quality and how it affects people. But the sample of murky water sitting on a lab bench looks a lot different than the murky water with which you're making pasta for your kids. Because they're human, the pressures of publishing, of finding funding, of making tenure, of discovering a marketable drug, or of keeping one's boss in the environmental agency happy can all exert influence on scientists—and don't always help align

their research with the interests of everyday citizens.

This gets to an important final point about public involvement in science policy: Citizen participation improves the science. Ominous clouds have been building above many parts of the scientific establishment, aided by a steady updraft of retractions, fraudulent practices, reproducibility problems, conflicts of interest, conflicting results, and simple irrelevance. One of the reasons for this is that scientists are rarely accountable to anything outside their community. A citizenry that demands tangible results—such as effective cancer therapies and safe drinking water—can help to discipline research efforts toward finding solutions to pressing, real-world problems.

When dealing with the quality of our air, water, and food; searching for treatments for diseases we suffer from; or even understanding the enormous social implications of innovations stemming from cutting-edge science and technology, citizens' voices need to be heard. This will require citizens like me to participate—rather than wandering off for a post-earthquake beer—and for scientists and policymakers to be more accepting of the public's involvement in using the power of science to improve the world.

Jason Lloyd is a program manager for the Consortium for Science, Policy, & Outcomes at Arizona State University. This article was written for Future Tense, a Zócalo partner. Future Tense is a project of Arizona State University, New America and Slate.

Opinion: Brown's housing plan stumbles

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

California has an immense shortage of housing, and every day it gets worse because we're not building enough to keep up with even a modest level of population growth.



Dan Walters

The shortage has driven housing costs through the roof, especially for working-class and poor families, and is atop the list of California's truly important issues with water and transportation.

However, as with those other deficiencies, another legislative session will end soon without decisive housing action.

Gov. Jerry Brown proposed a baby step toward alleviating the housing shortage – exempting certain projects from some of the red tape that plagues the housing development industry.

Read the whole story

Letter: 5th-grader's letter to President Obama

Publisher's note: *The following letters are from 10-year-old South Lake Tahoe resident Rosie Friedrich and her father, John, to President Obama.*

Dear President Obama,

We're excited for your visit to Lake Tahoe next week. I was one of your elected 2008 national convention delegates from California, and have been a strong supporter ever since.

During your first campaign, I made "Babies for Barack" buttons, which I gave to you and Michelle at events in Iowa, my home state. Our daughter Rosie was one year old at the time, and her future was my deepest motivation to get involved in your campaign.

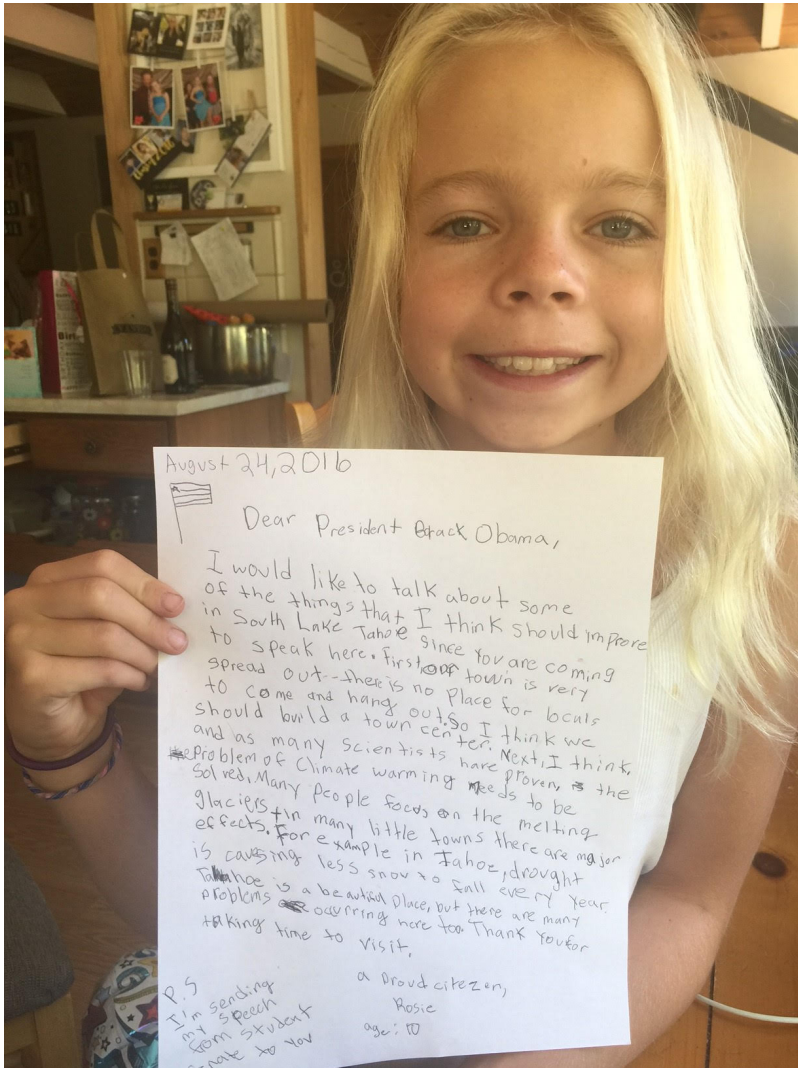
Flash forward, and Rosie, now 10, will be in her first week of 5th grade when you visit. She'll be attending the Lake Tahoe Summit to hear you speak.

Thinking about your visit, Rosie decided to write a letter to you. She also wanted to share the speech she wrote when running for the 4th grade student senate last year about getting solar panels for her elementary school.

She wrote her letter to you by hand, but I'm typing it for her. Thanks for reading, and we'll see you next Wednesday!

Sincerely,

John Friedrich, South Lake Tahoe



August 24, 2016

Dear President Barack Obama:

I would like to talk about some of the things that I think should improve in South Lake Tahoe since you are coming to speak here.

First, our town is very spread out – there is no place for locals to come and hang out. So I think we should build a town center.

Next, I think, and as many scientists have proven, the problem of climate warming needs to be solved. Many people focus on the melting glaciers, but in many little towns there are major effects. For example in Tahoe, drought is causing less snow to fall every year.

Tahoe is a beautiful place, but there are many problems

occurring here too. Thank you for taking time to visit.

A proud citizen,

Rosie, age 10

Opinion: Political jargon means little without action

By Larry Weitzman

Ordinary people and politicians use buzzwords to not only highlight a problem, but also as solutions to a problem. In El Dorado County, new buzz words may have been created at the June 13, Board of Supervisors meeting – “operational efficiencies.”

The term is not new, but it is used to describe the solution to El Dorado County’s continuing budget deficit problems created by a massive hiring campaign starting in about 2013 where EDC’s government and administration has grown from about 1,700 to about 1,900 employees with some growth in every year since 2013 right up until the present. So much for the soft hiring freeze allegedly instituted about two years ago. Since that “freeze” new hiring obviously has continued, just not as rapidly. I am surprised that no one has yet to blame global warming for the failure of the freeze.



Larry Weitzman

In addition to new hiring within the county, a 15 percent raise was given to most county employees over a three-year period for the period from July 1, 2013, to June 30, 2016. With a new contract currently under negotiation, the 15 percent raise will only be exacerbated.

What has made this problem most important is the approval by the BOS to take on a \$61 million obligation, albeit at a low interest rate of about 3 percent, over 40 years that will create a \$2.6 million annual General Fund obligation for the county. The purpose will be a new badly needed sheriff's facility which will replace the existing facility and consolidate the sheriff's department under one roof instead of everything being scattered over the entire county. The net will be about \$2.3 million as the county will save about \$300,000 a year in current leasing costs.

It should be pointed out that the growth in county employees over the last several years has not been in public safety, which has remained relatively static. The sheriff, district attorney, public defender and probation departments have had almost no employee growth. In fact, a couple of departments have shrunk an employee or two.

Employee salary and benefits have grown to the point that even without a new raise under a new contract being negotiated currently (perhaps EDC should ask for a give back of a percent or two in salary over three years), salary growth is now outstripping total General Fund revenue growth, not in percentages but in actual dollars, by about \$4 million

annually and growing. And with the poor CalPERS pension performance that number of \$4 million will grow considerably. In other words, even without a new salary increase, the county deficit will continue to grow. The only saving grace is a county surplus of funds, which after the 2012-13 fiscal year had a cash balance of \$54 million and no debt. That surplus is dwindling and it being used to balance the budget every year.

Since salaries and benefits are about 70 percent of the General Fund budget, the rest of the budget has grown little and would be difficult to cut to make a significant difference or inroad on the budget issue. However, last year the chief administrative officer spent \$10.5 million in contracts (consultants, lawyers, etc.) that didn't require BOS approval. That could be a huge area where our staff hires less consultants and performs much more of that work in house. That could be an "operational efficiency."

Our new CAO brought us the term operational efficiencies at the June budget meeting when he proposed that the county could save significant funds by implementing comprehensive "operational efficiencies." At that same meeting he restated the three priorities of county government as being public safety, roads and infrastructure, in that order. The sheriff's new facility fits into two of those priorities.

Besides cutting outside contracting which could provide a budget boon for EDC, what or how are "operational efficiencies" going to cut salary and benefit spending which are about 70 percent of general fund expenses? EDC Chief Financial Officer Don Ashton said in July that budgets will be balanced for the next five years.

Understand that the employees of the county don't produce anything in the way of goods or significantly billable services except for some fee and permit charges which is a drop in the bucket when considered part of overall revenue. In a normal business improving efficiencies would mean more

production of salable goods and services by its employees. EDC can't do that. So what kind of efficiencies will save money without the "L" word (layoffs)? With layoffs, the balance of employees will become more efficient in doing more work by picking up the "slack" created by layoffs.

But according to what was said at the July 26, BOS meeting when staff was being asked by Supervisor Ron Mikulaco, "If expenses will exceed revenues, how do we achieve a balanced budget for the next five years?" the reply by the CFO was, "We'll constrain salaries." Mikulaco responded, "Do we lay people off or cut senior programs?"

To that the CAO responded "No, please don't say layoffs. Instead we we'll use efficiencies with no cuts to service. It's time to start getting some efficiencies." As a side note, cutting senior services is another drop in the bucket as many of those programs survive very inexpensively because of substantial volunteerism within the community with regard to these programs.

While the CAO said there will be "no new positions," Supervisor Brian Veerkamp said, "I'll guarantee we'll add positions (within the next five years) ...we don't know when or who but I guarantee we will have to add positions." The BOS has already done that with a new public information officer (spin doctor or PR person) at about \$150K annually.

To make serious cuts in government, there is only one way and that's the "L" word. One painless way to consider is what is the county attrition rate (not replacing retirees)? In the federal government it is about 5 percent a year. But we have to study history. In fiscal year 2012-13, EDC had 1,700 employees and there were little if any service issues and salaries and benefits totaled about \$118 million. Last year salaries and benefits with 200 more employees and the 15 percent raise totaled about \$160 million.

Adding to the negative mix is the issue of road maintenance of which the BOS voted unanimously to change policy last year that no general fund money shall be used for such. If the sheriff's new facility is approved, does that mean 40 more years of no General Fund road maintenance?

While this new facility will be done via the subterfuge of a "certificate of participation" it is \$61 million of new obligations or borrowing. Pursuant to Measure A passed in 1990, does this borrowing require approval of the voters? And what about the California Constitution Article 16, Section 1 also providing for voter approval of such borrowing. Apparently the BOS has hired a consultant and bond counsel (more taxpayer money) for the very purpose of circumventing Measure A and the California Constitution requiring voter approval.

At the July 11, BOS meeting Supervisor Shiva Frentzen made a motion that was passed 5-0 directing the CAO and staff "to report back to the board on possible operational efficiencies during the September 2016 budget hearings." Let's hope for the best and plan for the worst.

PS: With respect to what corporations do when budget problems arise, they lay people off. Cisco Systems just announced they are going to layoff 7 percent (5,500 employees) of their 78,000 total employee workforce to improve their financial situation. That's how it's done. They will achieve improved "operational efficiencies."

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Letter: P0 boxes seem to subsidize home delivery

To the community,

Like many of you, I recently received my bill for my post office box this month. I was surprised at the amount, \$34 for six months or \$68 for 12 months. But why?

Let's think about this for a minute. I have the option to get my mail delivered to my home. For this I pay nothing, in fact the person sending the mail has covered the cost. The Postal Service has to pay an employee to sort the mail in the post office, load the mail into a vehicle and drive to my neighborhood to deliver a letter or package to my door or curbside. Either the post office or the contract employee has to cover the cost to purchase the vehicle and then maintain it and have proper insurance. All of this, along with the many, many other costs associated with getting a letter or package from one place to another is paid for with a 47 cents stamp. Again, I pay nothing for home delivery.

The second option is to "rent" a post office box at the post office. The postal employee sorts the mail in the post office, loads the mail into some kind of cart and proceeds to deliver the mail to the individual mailboxes, all without ever leaving the building. There is no cost of a vehicle or its associated costs. Therefore, it is much less expensive to deliver mail to a box in the post office building than to any address outside the same building. So why are we forced to pay extra for the less expensive option?

The Postal Service was granted a temporary rate increase of 3 cents in 2014 to 49 cents and that was taken back by 2 cents in 2016 to the current 47 cents for a stamp for a 1 ounce first class letter. These rate fluctuations along with the

requirement that the Postal Service pre-fund all future pension obligations have lead to massive operating losses, in the billions of dollars, at the post office.

Could it be that the Postal Service is jacking up the fees for a post office box to help make up some of its operating losses? In essence, the lower cost post office box users are being forced to subsidize the higher cost home delivery user.

Perhaps now is the right time to look at the proposal put forth by Bernie Sanders, and others, to allow the Postal Service to offer limited banking and financial services. This is a very common practice in Europe.

Thank you,

Jonathan Moore, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Calif.'s next big shift in climate change

By Joe Mathews

She calls him Eduardo. He calls her Mrs. Pavley.

She is Fran Pavley, 67, a San Fernando Valley state senator in the final months of a legislative career that established her as the mother of California climate change policy. He is Eduardo Garcia, 39, a first-term assemblyman from a working class Coachella family, who is known for focusing on the needs of his inland California constituents.



Joe Mathews

Their fledgling alliance – over the last year they have been co-authoring each other’s legislation– embodies two tricky transitions in the world-renowned California movement to fight climate change. One involves a shift in personnel, as older champions are replaced by younger counterparts. The other involves a shift in focus: from reducing greenhouse gases to making sure poor communities get their fair share of climate-related investments.

It’s been a decade since Pavley authored AB32, the nation’s first cap on greenhouse gas pollution, and 15 years since she authored AB1493, which became the model for national vehicle emissions standards. And the coalition she helped build for those landmarks—a coalition that went beyond environmentalists to include scientists, water agencies, local governments, labor unions, religious institutions and Hollywood celebrities—requires updating to better represent the California of 2016—more working-class, more Latino and more inland.

But the state’s sprawl and diversity, in combination with the success of climate change legislation in sparking new businesses in California, have made coalition building harder. There are more constituents for climate change legislation, and thus higher expectations. Representatives of the state’s poorer, inland places—among them Garcia, who represents a massive district bordering on Mexico and Arizona—are demanding that regulations and programs improve public health and create job opportunities in their communities.

While Garcia's story – he's a graduate of Coachella Valley with UC Riverside and USC degrees—fits the new narrative, their partnership is also based on what they have in common. Garcia and Pavley took similar paths to politics, albeit a quarter-century apart: both worked as teachers (Pavley jokes that her transition from middle school to the Capitol was seamless), and both rose through local government. Pavley was elected mayor of Agoura Hills at age 32, in 1982. Garcia became mayor of Coachella at age 29, in 2006.

“Eduardo and Fran are the perfect transition,” says Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, who suggested Pavley work with Garcia. The speaker describes visiting Garcia twice in the desert and being driven around the district, as the assemblyman offered detailed descriptions of the history and needs of even the smallest parks.

Rendon recalls the partnership coming together at the Paris climate talks in December, when Garcia was added to a California delegation that included Gov. Jerry Brown, legislative leaders and Pavley. Garcia brought his wife and very young daughter and impressed the older delegates by eschewing sightseeing for intensive work. Garcia later said he was impressed by how other countries, particularly in Europe, are focusing climate change investments on poorer communities; he returned determined to shift California policy in a similar direction.

On a recent Friday, I shuttled between the two halves of the alliance. At her district office in Calabasas, Pavley walked me through the evolution of the climate movement in the state. She is termed out of the Legislature at the end of the year, and made clear that she sees Garcia as a promising successor on climate change.

“We work very well together,” she says. “And we're looking for the next generation to carry this work forward.”

I met Garcia—the rumpled, stocky picture of the multi-tasking Gen X professional/father—in a restaurant near Burbank airport. He was traveling without aides, and mixed a casual bearing with an intense intelligence. We shifted between looking at smartphone video of his son shooting basketballs and his detailed description of the solar potential of Blythe and how brine from the Salton Sea can be turned into lithium for electric vehicle batteries.

“I don’t consider myself a climate change activist,” he says. “I do consider myself someone who is interested in building consensus on policies that are focused on people, especially the people in my district.”

In these closing days of the legislative session, Pavley and Garcia say they are focused on keeping lines of communication open within their broader coalition—and between members of the Assembly and Senate, whose leaders, Rendon and the Senate pro tem Kevin De Leon, both are considered leaders on the issue. They are pushing hard for SB32, which extends the greenhouse gas reduction targets to 2030, and AB197, which creates oversight of state climate programs to make sure their benefits help the economies and public health of poorer and more polluted communities.

If these bills become law, give credit not just to the governor and legislative leaders, but also to Eduardo and Mrs. Pavley.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Opinion: EDC trying to curb DUI problem

By Vern Pierson

Although El Dorado County is relatively small, at 181,737 people according to the latest census number, we have a very large number of people that come to our county as visitors and tourists. During summer, and quite drastically in the winter, we have an influx of tourists to South Lake Tahoe for the ski resorts, New Year's Eve events, and multiple casinos just over the state line.



Vern Pierson

Our county also has seasonal visitors to the El Dorado County wine country, gold country historic sites, and to the Apple Hill region. And, daily, we have many out of county residents who come from out of the area to work, play, and to go to the popular Red Hawk Casino.

Sadly, El Dorado County ranks fifth worst in the state for lethal drunken driving incidents involving drivers between the ages of 21 and 34. Even more shocking, El Dorado County ranks third worst in the state for drunken driving incidents involving drivers under the age of 21.

In 2012, the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office applied for and received funding from the Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) to help pay for a vertically assigned deputy

district attorney and district attorney investigator. This OTS grant allows these two positions to be involved in a more integrated way with the street level enforcement and investigation side of DUI investigations. This ensures more efficient investigations and stronger cases for prosecution.

The goal of this unit, and of the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, is to hold DUI violators responsible for their actions with aggressive investigations and prosecutions, while also protecting victims' rights and keeping our community a safe place to live, work and visit. This specialized unit is dedicated to the investigation and prosecution of felony DUI cases, including cases involving vehicular manslaughter and DUI homicides.

Having the same prosecutors and investigators working on these cases from the investigative stages through the court process to jury trial is the best way to ensure the swift and thorough pursuit of justice.

Prevention of drunken driving requires a two pronged call to action – effective law enforcement investigation and prosecution and public involvement and awareness of the problem. Remember, if you see something, say something.

Vern Pierson is district attorney in El Dorado County.