

Opinion: How to improve Calif.'s golf game

By Joe Mathews

Your columnist is not an Olympic athlete. But I recently managed to play 18 holes of golf in just 45 minutes, without using a cart or lifting a golf club. And, no, this wasn't a video game.

My secret? I was playing FootGolf, which involves kicking a soccer ball into extra-large holes placed on regulation golf courses. This new sport, spreading fast in California, is one promising answer to a full-blown statewide challenge: what to do about our glut of golf courses?



Joe Mathews

In California, golf is not a matter of fun and games. For more than a century, the sport has helped define our state's landscape, tourism, real estate market, and the municipal finances of the hundreds of California cities with public courses. Today, golf is a \$13 billion California industry—10 times bigger than the legal side of another grass-oriented business, cannabis.

But golf has had a very bad decade, with the number of golfers and courses declining after 60 years of growth. This decline is jarring because California's growth has been so tied to golf. The game was a big part of the leisure culture that

Californians created as a challenge to America's Puritan ethic and as a lure for millions of people to relocate here in the 20th century.

Entire regions—from Coachella Valley to Monterey Bay — fashioned themselves around leisure and golf. And new courses were used to promote new housing developments around the state. In the 1950s, the Thunderbird Country Club in Rancho Mirage, one of the earliest such developments, allowed Ford to use its name on a new car model, which in turn inspired a classic Beach Boys song about a fun-loving girl driving her daddy's automobile. Does it get any more Californian than that?

While playing golf feels like an individual pursuit, this growth in the game was heavily subsidized, through development-friendly tax laws and by local governments that saw courses as an essential amenity. That investment in golf seemed wise in the 1990s when an Orange County kid raised on municipal courses—Tiger Woods—inspired a younger, more diverse generation to take up the game.

But in 2006, California's housing crisis crashed the global economy, and the whole world turned hard against California golf. The middle class that sustained so many golf courses no longer had the money to devote to an extravagant pastime. Golf suddenly was out of step: a face-to-face pastime in a world that prefers digital communication, a slow and courteous game in a fast and impolite society, a Republican-leaning sport at a time when the Republican Party is cracking up. Trends in fitness also work against golf, with many Californians seeking less relaxing exercise, and slimmer bodies than you find on golf courses.

With fewer customers playing fewer rounds—and higher water bills during the drought—California golf courses have struggled. Some have closed, and dozens more may follow suit. But replacing a golf course is a quandary. Some courses are

next to industrial sites or airports, and remain useful as buffers. It might make sense to turn golf courses into desperately needed housing or public parks, but regulations and politics make such conversions difficult and expensive.

In the meantime, golf course operators are seeking new uses for their courses—from concerts to film shoots to car shows. Some courses have experimented with events for young singles that combine hitting golf balls with video games and drinking.

One of the better innovations is FootGolf, now being popularized by the Palm Springs-based American FootGolf League. More than 150 golf courses nationwide added Foot Golf last year, and I tried it out one morning at an 18-hole par three golf course in Arcadia, in the San Gabriel Valley.

The course had added separate tees and small greens, with 21-inch-wide holes, off to the sides of its usual golf greens. At the pro shop, I handed over a \$15 green fee to a young course employee named Jordan Godfrey, who happens to be America's national FootGolf champion. He warned me not to damage the well-manicured regular golf greens by kicking off of them.

I had a great time. Without a bag of golf clubs to carry, I jogged around the course in 45 minutes. The three real golfers on the course greeted me warmly and let me play through. And I narrowly avoided falling into the giant holes when fishing my ball out of them.

My only mishap came on the damp fifth tee, when I fell as I kicked the ball 50 yards down the fairway, landing hard on my bottom. That's never happened to me playing regular golf. But no great California transformation is without its risks.

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

Opinion: GOP upset with Facebook for 'censoring' news

By Dan Gilmore

America's right wing is in a froth this week following allegations that Facebook has tweaked its "trending news" feed to reduce the visibility of conservative news sites. Maybe it's true, maybe not. As of now, this report from *Gizmodo*, which is owned by Gawker Media, is based on anonymous sources, making it impossible to trust.

Nonetheless, conservatives and Republicans in Congress have seized on the report as only the latest evidence of overall liberal media bias against their cause. Sen. John Thune, the Republican chairman of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, has demanded answers from Facebook and, no doubt, will invite Mark Zuckerberg and/or his minions to explain themselves.

But the deeper issue is undeniably real: Facebook is the dominant member of a small number of giant entities—corporate and governmental—that are gaining control over the flow of news, freedom of expression, and a lot more in our digital lives. Yet the conservatives who dominate the Republican Congress and big-business groups have done their best to thwart policies that would encourage the kind of competition we need to challenge that increasingly centralized control.

Almost no one wants to address the fact that Facebook is becoming a monopoly in the antitrust sense of the word. No, it doesn't control all conversation[AM1] . But Facebook is by far the most widely used venue for these conversations, and its power grows daily. Along with Google, it dominates online

advertising; Facebook especially does so on mobile devices, which are the way many people connect to the Internet. If you offer news and information online, you have almost no choice but to play on Facebook's field, because so much of your audience is there. (In some parts of the world, Facebook essentially is the Internet because mobile devices are pretty much the sole means of online access and in some cases the company has made deals with local telecommunications companies and/or governments.

Facebook has been buying everything that presents even a whiff of competition: Instagram, WhatsApp, Oculus, among others. This is smart—no one can dispute that Zuckerberg and the others on his team are brilliant technologists and strategists—but it's also a red flag. As Zuckerberg famously said several years ago, he wants Facebook to be “like electricity” in terms of ubiquity and people's needs. Well, electricity is a utility. And we regulate utilities.

Monopolies and cozy oligopolies never turn out well in the long run for anyone but the monopolists or cartel members. They end up controlling markets and do their best to thwart genuine competition. It's their nature.

Which is why capitalism, plainly the best system when it's working right, needs rules to promote competition. It's why we have antitrust laws and other processes, including regulation, designed to blunt the dominant companies' normal predations. Yes, the dominant players tend to capture the regulators, but that's a failure of function, not of pro-competition theory.

Yet Republicans in general think the government should play little to no role in promoting competition. They consider antitrust inquiry and enforcement to be counterproductive, at best—except, of course, when a powerful constituent (a corporation, usually) is in danger from predatory behavior.

That attitude accounts for the GOP's cheerleading for

corporate dominance of Internet access. Republicans in general are fine with the idea that one or two companies (say the leading cable provider and another telecom) should control access in most communities, and utterly opposed to a remedy—what we call network neutrality—to ensure that people at the edges of networks, not dominant Internet service providers, should decide what information they want and at what priority.

I don't want the government to tell Facebook what it can publish, and don't look forward to much more than posturing from Thune and his compatriots. But I do want the government to start paying extremely close attention to the way the company is becoming a monopoly, and what it means for freedom of expression when a single company has so much power over what people say online. I want government to use antitrust and other pro-competition laws to ensure that Facebook doesn't abuse its dominance in a business sense. I want government(s) to promote open technology and communications, and fierce competition at every level. Kudos to Zuckerberg for making Facebook so appealing to millions of users; that's an amazing achievement. But we can't allow Facebook to leverage that success to block the emergence of alternatives to its service, or use its market power to influence or alter the content of publications and others trying to communicate with Facebook users.

We all need to wake up to the potential threat Facebook poses to freedom of expression. Once you are in its enclosed online space, it is the corporation's terms of service, not the First Amendment that determines what you can say. If it decides to downplay speech it doesn't like, Facebook has the right to do so.

So I'm glad that conservatives are concerned, even if the allegations prove overblown. (Last Tuesday, Facebook modified its outright denial from the day before to a "we're looking into it" stance; stay tuned.) I'd be even happier if

conservatives realized that government does have a role in promoting genuine competition—and that we're in uncharted information-freedom territory under the new control freaks of Silicon Valley.

Dan Gillmor teaches digital media literacy at Arizona State University. He is the author of "Mediactive".

Letter: Bijou School says thank you

To the community,

Once again, parents, students and teachers stepped up for Bijou Community School at our eighth annual community service day last weekend.



Gantt Miller Jr. hangs from the new basketball hoop at Bijou. Photo/Provided

Over 50 people came out to clean up, garden, paint stencils, install a buddy bench and basketball hoop, as well as install new signage from the Take Care campaign. The Take Care campaign was created to encourage people to take care of the environment. It is a Tahoe-wide campaign developed by the Lake Tahoe Outreach Committee.

Thank you to all the volunteers and the Bijou PTA and Meeks for helping cover the costs of these projects.

Also, a special shoutout to Melissa and Ernie Bornstein who donated the new Buddy Bench. We are lucky that our children are at such a wonderful community school where the whole community steps up constantly.

Thanks,

Kathy Haven, parent

Opinion: Ding-Dongs, burgers and a diet for champion cyclists

By James Raia, Sacramento Bee

Five years ago, teammates Chris Horner and Levi Leipheimer rode together for several miles in an uphill breakaway at the Amgen Tour of California. The riders' skills, showcased high in the San Gabriel Mountains, defined cycling's beauty but with a bizarre chunk of irony.

Confident and fit, the two riders pedaled in unison. They mastered the short, steep switchbacks to the Stage 6 finish

near the 10,000-foot peak of Mount Baldy. Leipheimer, a three-time event winner, surged and won the stage. Horner finished second and the next day won the tour title.

Then, strangeness ensued. A disciple of clean living and meticulous preparation, Leipheimer called out Horner, his antithesis. Horner, the “Everyman’s Rider,” is a proud proponent of eating junk food.

Leipheimer said Horner would become a serious cyclist only after curtailing his penchant for hamburgers, soft drinks and candy bars.

A year later, Leipheimer, a Lance Armstrong accomplice, was suspended for his admission to doping throughout much of his career. He hastily retired.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Time to reassess pivotal 1990s

By Andrés Martínez

Welcome back, '90s; I've missed you.

Monica Lewinsky is on the speaking circuit. American cable networks have served up series on the O.J. Simpson trial and the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings. As we contemplate sending the Clintons back to the White House, '90s economic globalization, anti-crime efforts, welfare reform, and financial deregulation are all on trial.

The '90s were an exuberant interlude between the Cold War and

the post-Sept. 11 era. Hardly anyone disputes that. The debate is over whether you think we wasted this exuberant interlude by indulging in mindless pursuits, or whether the decade stands, as Bill Clinton asserts, as a consequential time of sound governance, impressive innovation, and expanding opportunity.

I am with Clinton in this debate, but it isn't hard to see the appeal of the counterargument that this was a decade—as “Seinfeld”, the iconic TV sitcom of the '90s referred to itself— “about nothing.” The notion is that American society, liberated from the decadeslong nuclear standoff with the Soviets, was allowed to exhale, and focus on frivolity.

As a society, we struggled in the '90s to assess risk, and this was as true in foreign policy as it was in the business world and in politics. The end of the Cold War allowed America to consolidate our capitalist model as the default for the international order. It also made policymakers far more opportunistic about weighing the costs and benefits of engaging American military power around the world. We oscillated between being enamored of our sole superpower status and being mindful of our historic reluctance to play global policeman. We were stunned at how easy it was to defeat Saddam Hussein's army in the first Gulf War, but then chastened by the loss of 18 Marines in Somalia. We tragically stood by as genocide took place in Rwanda, but later, somewhat belatedly, led NATO to destroy ethnic Serbian militarism in the Balkans, even as we allowed looming threats from terrorist actors to fester elsewhere, like Afghanistan, with fatal consequences in the 2000s.

However, the sense that we were no longer stuck in a divided, zero-sum world proved enormously beneficial for cross-border collaboration and economic expansion around the world. The Europeans transformed their common market into a full-blown union, with a shared currency. The North American Free Trade Area was born. In Asia, the world's most populous nation

became more integrated into the global economy; and a loose set of governing trading rules became the World Trade Organization.

With nationalism resurgent in 2016, and even well meaning First World elites fetishizing locally sourced everything, I miss the spirit of those days: the recognition that we are all in this together, and the ambition to raise living standards around the world.

Globalization and technology exacerbated inequality within many countries over time. But it's less often acknowledged that the single most important economic story of the past two decades is the unprecedented decline in dire poverty around the world, and the expansion of a global middle class.

On the domestic front, too, the '90s were the opposite of a wasted decade. The U.S. economy registered its longest economic expansion ever, from March 1991 to March 2001. Americans enjoyed rising wages, low inflation, and accelerating productivity, thus almost forgetting about economic cycles and the concept of risk. Government deficits gave way to healthy surpluses. The financial exuberance around the Internet's adoption proved to be irrational, but the hype around the transformative power of the new technologies was well deserved.

For Americans living in cities, the decade saw a vast improvement in our physical surroundings as well. I lived in New York in 1990, then mired in the fearful mood captured in "Bonfire of the Vanities", Tom Wolfe's 1987 novel. When I returned near the end of the decade after a stint away, I found Manhattanites as likely to be worried about the Disneyfication of their city as they were about their personal safety. Violent crime in New York declined by more than half in the 1990s, and public spaces throughout the city were reclaimed for public enjoyment. The same was true in cities across the country.

It's as reasonable to second-guess the decade's bipartisan anti-crime legislation and strategies, as it is to second-guess our embrace of globalization in those years. But the conversation should start with recognition of how much things improved. Pretending the 1990s were a wasteland of frivolity is a recipe for losing sight of that exuberant decade's bountiful, lasting legacies.

Andrés Martínez writes the Trade Winds column for Zócalo Public Square, where he is editorial director. He is also professor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University and a fellow at New America.

Opinion: Legal action could extinguish fire tax

By Jon Coupal

By now, most rural homeowners have become accustomed to receiving an annual bill of \$150—or higher—for what is euphemistically called a “fire prevention fee.” However, this familiarity does not make writing out the check to the state Board of Equalization any more palatable. Many property owners, who are receiving no additional fire protection services, recognize this as the rip-off that it is.

It is hard to believe that those in the Legislature, who created this tax in 2011 with a simple majority vote while calling it a fee, did so with a straight face. Even Gov. Jerry Brown questioned its legality while signing it into law. And we at the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association saw clearly that it was not a fee—which requires that a specific service be provided in return for the payment—but a tax, which under

Proposition 13 requires a two-thirds vote of each house of the Legislature.

Of course, the "fee" was established, not so more money could be provided to the Department of Forestry, the stated beneficiary of the new revenue, but to allow lawmakers to divert money previously spent for this purpose to pet projects. Basically it was a switcheroo, with the new money being used to backfill for the money diverted to other programs.

In response, HJTA filed a class-action lawsuit to provide relief to nearly 1 million California property owners who received bills for the illegal "fire prevention fee." The complaint was filed against the California Department of Forestry and the Board of Equalization, which is the collection agency for the "fee."

The class action complaint seeks to overturn the fire "fee," which costs property owners an extra \$150 per year charge for each habitable structure. It challenges the constitutionality of the fee on the grounds it is really a tax that needed a two-thirds vote of the Legislature, but garnered a bare majority and therefore should never have become law.

On the legal front, progress has been slow, although there has been progress.

The delay in reaching a resolution is primarily due to two reasons: First, the California courts are struggling with a backlog of cases. But the biggest problem has been a powerful opponent, the state of California, which is determined to hang on to every ill-gotten nickel.

State bureaucrats, fearing that a successful class action suit would require refunds to those taxpayers who filed a protest, used delaying tactics. State attorneys filed repeated motions to postpone trial, including motions to dismiss the case and motions challenging the "class action" status of the suit.

After HJTA responded to each of the state's challenges—nearly four years of legal work—the court ruled that the case may proceed as a class action. We have just completed the public notification process that a class action suit requires. It is our hope and intention that the legal process will now proceed rapidly.

Some will ask, “If the fire tax is illegal, should I pay it?” Although HJTA attorneys are confident of the eventual outcome, we strongly urge homeowners to pay the bill. Property owners have 30 days from the mailing of the bill to pay it. If you are late, there is a 20 percent penalty, plus interest. For every 30 days after that, another 20 percent penalty is added, plus interest. The fee is a lien on property, and failure to pay can result in foreclosure.

If the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association lawsuit is successful, the court may order refunds to people who have filed a Petition for Redetermination. For instructions on how to file this form, go **online** and click on the Fire Tax Protest banner. Once there, you can also sign up for free informational bulletins on progress of the suit against the fire tax.

Rural property owners have been paying this illegal tax for years, but we remain optimistic that a court will ultimately grant relief from this unconstitutional money grab.

Jon Coupal is president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association in Sacramento. This column was originally written for the California Farm Bureau Federation.

Opinion: California optimism on the rise

By Jonathan Lansner, Orange County Register

It's apparently not just the fine weather that makes Californians smile.

California's consumers are the most optimistic among eight large U.S. states, according to the widely watched Consumer Confidence Index. My trusty spreadsheet tells me it's the first time the Golden State has been the confidence king in nine years.

An intriguing slice of the Conference Board's monthly index is a benchmark of shopper psyche for eight big states. The confidence index is compiled from ongoing consumer surveys and offers a regular peek into the financial thinking of American households.

The latest index results put California confidence at 100.7 for April, up from 99.9 in March but down from 106.4 a year ago. Any of those scores look good when you note that California confidence index has averaged 71 since 2007, when the eight-state breakout began.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Importance of bike

safety on the roads

By Fran Clader

May is National Bike Safety Month, and the California Highway Patrol is reminding motorists and bicyclists to share responsibility for roadway safety.

California's weather allows bicyclists to enjoy riding many months throughout the year.

Although bicycle safety should be practiced every day, the month of May has been set aside to draw awareness to how we can all help minimize bicycle injuries and deaths.

"As important as it is for drivers to be mindful of bicyclists, those who ride their bicycles, must exercise safe practices and ride smart," said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. "With all roadway users doing their part, we can help reduce the number of tragedies."

According to 2014 statistics from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, each year about 2 percent of collision victims are bicyclists. In a majority of the bicycle deaths, the most serious injuries are to the head, highlighting the importance of wearing a bicycle helmet. Helmet use has been estimated to reduce the odds of head injury by 50 percent. Bicyclists and motorists should be especially aware that a large portion of collisions that result in death occur in the late afternoon or evening. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that 48 percent of bicyclist deaths occurred between 4pm and midnight.

Bicyclists on the roadway have all the rights and responsibilities of a vehicle driver and are responsible for complying with the law. Riders must also obey the laws of the road, such as stopping at stop signs and stop lights, and yielding to pedestrians. Riders can increase their safety by wearing reflective clothing, wearing a helmet, watching for parked cars, staying alert at all times, looking before turning, and riding with the flow of traffic.

In recent years, California has implemented traffic safety laws to help improve conditions on the road for both bicyclists and motorists. The Three Feet for Safety Act became operative on Sept. 16, 2014, and requires motorists to allow at least three feet of clearance when passing a bicyclist. Also, effective Jan. 1, 2016, the slow-moving vehicle statute was clarified to require any vehicle, including bicyclists, proceeding upon a highway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic, to pull off the roadway if it has five or more vehicles lined up behind it.

Motorists need to be aware of bicyclists on the roadways and take certain precautions when sharing the road. Drivers should follow a few safety tips to help reduce bicycle-involved collisions, such as: slow down, be patient, share the road, look twice for bicyclists, and expect bicyclists on the roadway.

Data from the Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System shows that in 2013 there were 164 bicyclists killed in collisions statewide, which represents an 11.5 percent increase from the previous year. Since 2013, the number of bicyclists killed in collisions has dropped each year.

In 2015, there were 133 bicyclists killed in collisions statewide. This represents a 23 percent decrease from 2013.

Although the number of bicyclists killed has declined recently, there are still too many fatal collisions occurring throughout the state. There is work to be done on the part of both bicyclists and motorists.

“With the monthlong promotion of bicycle safety awareness throughout the state, we hope to see the number of incidents involving bicyclists continue to decline,” added Farrow. “Through education, mutual respect, and observance of traffic laws we can help make the roadways a safer place for all.”

The mission of the CHP is to provide the highest level of Safety, Service, and Security to the people of California.

Fran Clader works for the California Highway Patrol.

Opinion: EDC CAO great at misrepresenting the truth

By Larry Weitzman

On May 3 the El Dorado County CAO's office, directed by CAO Larry Combs, published an article in *Lake Tahoe News* defending the EDC's road maintenance policy claiming that our roads are better maintained and that any problems are due to less funding because the state gasoline tax is down due to lower

oil prices and more fuel efficient cars.



Larry Weitzman

The Comb's directed piece quoted a recent *Los Angeles Times* article saying, "The last month, the California Transportation Commission said the state would cut transportation funding by \$754 million – a 38 percent decrease. Why? Because revenue from the state's levies on gasoline sales, which provide much of that funding, plummeted as gas prices dropped and more fuel-efficient vehicles proliferated. Those falling prices cut the state's gas excise tax revenue from 18 cents a gallon two years ago to 12 cents last year, and revenue is expected to sink to 10 cents in July."

The above statements are absolutely incorrect, and by large numbers. The tracker and collector of gasoline data and sales tax revenue is the state Board of Equalization (BOE). If the California Transportation Commission said they were cutting funding \$754 million, it would mean the prior budget was about \$2 billion.

But first let's go through the facts on the issue and CAO Combs' misrepresentation of the truth. While the California Transportation Commission is cutting funding, it has nothing to do with road maintenance; those funds are for transportation improvements only and not for maintenance. Perhaps a new or improved bus system or new bike paths, but it's not for fixing roads. The CAO's office should have done better research and fact checking, but one must assume that words are intentional and designed to mislead. But it is much

worse.

What the CAO's office didn't tell in an attempt to magnify the problem is that the \$754 million isn't for one year, but the cut will be made over five years. This is an example of an unforgiveable half-truth and this money is divided between all 58 counties, so EDC's portion would be miniscule anyway.

The column then claims that funding has dropped due to plummeting gas prices and less fuel usage. Again, mostly untrue. Lower priced gas does lower the sales tax revenue on gasoline sales. But sales taxes have changed since 2010, when it was 7.5 percent. But effective starting with F/Y 2010, sales tax dropped to 2.25 percent of which only 1.25 percent is for local use. But that same year gasoline excise tax doubled from 18 cents/gallon to 35.3 cents/gallon and over the next five years it gradually has been adjusted upward to reach a peak of 39.5 cents/gallon until this year when it dropped to 36 cents/gallon. Next year it will drop to 27.8 cents/gallon. But the numbers quoted by Combs' office are wrong. He quoted those numbers (18 cents, 12 cents and 10 cents) to make the gas tax cuts from 2014-2015 to look much more dramatic.

A few phone calls to the state Board of Equalization and the California Traffic Commission rendered accurate info and website documents all pointing to the errors of the CAO's office writings to have been done intentionally in the worse-case and gross negligent in the best. Whoever wrote this in Comb's office must have been under extreme pressure from the CAO to create this propaganda and perhaps become the fall guy.

The claim of falling gasoline sales is also a lie. Consumption is climbing steadily with the last year (2014-15) reporting the most gallons of fuel consumed ever with 14.9 billion gallons reported by the BOE. It had been climbing for three years. And this year will exceed that number, according to the BOE.

As to total gasoline excise taxes collected, the numbers speak for themselves. Starting in FY2010, excise taxes collected were \$2.67 billion, but the excise tax was the old fix rate of 18 cents a gallon with a 7.5 percent sales tax. In the next year (10-11) (with just a 2.25 percent sales tax and an excise tax of 35.3 cents/gallon) total revenues from excise tax alone doubled to \$5.20 billion. The following year the tax was adjusted to 35.7 cents/gallon and excise tax revenues went to \$5.22 billion In FY12-13 at 36 cents/gallon, excise tax revenue fell ever so slightly to \$5.21 billion. The next year (FY13-14) the rate was set at 39.5 cents/gallon and excise tax revenues went beyond projections to \$5.76 billion and last year (14-15) with even higher gasoline sales and a reduced rate of 36 cents/gallon revenues only fell to \$5.37 billion. This year (15-16) the rate is 30 cents/gallon and next year (16-17) projections put the excise at 27.8 cents/gallon.

As to this bogus downturn claimed by the CAO's office being responsible you can see for yourself it is wrong, especially when you cite bogus data from the wrong agency (CTC). The slight downturn was because too much tax was collected the year before, but it was essentially insignificant. The column was also referring to an allocation from the California Transportation Commission that has nothing to do with maintenance. It is for traffic and mass transit improvements. The CTC's most recent allocation was for about \$5.5 million (2014) to do the Highway 50 Placerville, Ray Lawyer Drive onramp and absolutely no road maintenance.

A company, Global Insight, is hired by the BOE to recommend the excise tax year to year and stay within a formula set by the state to attempt to keep revenues constant and not to "overcharge" motorists. That's why revenues went down slightly, by about 6 percent because of the previous year's overcharge (13-14).

All the facts relative to the CAO's office claims about road maintenance were absolutely false and misleading. The county

has known for years that General Fund money was required to supplement road fund money to properly maintain the roads (the No. 2 priority of county residents), and now the CAO has recommended and the BOS agreed to stop using General Fund money for road maintenance. The state of our roads are and will continue going downhill. The claims made by the CAO's office that our roads are better with ratings that are a point above average are untrue. Comparing EDC to other counties is a comparison in mediocrity. Our ratings should be 70 not 62 or 63, and I even question those numbers as to what they mean. On top of that, EDC has over a thousand miles of improved roads not counting Highway 50 and 49 which are not county maintained. The few miles of EDC roads the county claimed to have recently maintained or repaired is a drop in the bucket.

Anyone who drives in EDC knows the conditions of the roads. They are undermaintained and after all the errors of the article, Combs has no credibility. His letter is full of misrepresentation, half-truths and outright misstatements. The BOS should investigate why. Every director, Veerkamp, Mikulaco, Novasel, Frentzen and one term Ranalli should call for a hearing of CAO Combs regarding this column and why. We shall see if there is accountability in EDC. This is exactly what EDC will get from a PIO or spin-doctor. Is that what you want to spend \$150,000 on while our roads decay and our sheriff's department is stripped of \$4 million?

Combs won't even return the sheriff's calls about this new issue. He must be too busy with lobbying for a spin doctor PIO. In another important story about flip-flopping, one-term Ranalli, (as I predicted) on the revote on raising county fees (taxes) about \$1 million annually, changed his vote from no to yes to carry the matter by a 3-2 vote, Mik and Frentzen voting no. One-term Ranalli also voted against road maintenance.

On May 6, supervisor of District 2, Shiva Frentzen, sent an open letter to all BOS members and the CAO and ACAO and others that in order not to violate the Brown Act the BOS needed an

additional item placed on the agenda for a discussion of the options of the CAO's not timely filing with the USDA the loan application the BOS authorized to lock in a 2.875 percent loan rate for the new sheriff's facility. Now that rate is lost it may cause a rate increase to 3.5 percent and will cost EDC about \$10 million over the life of the loan. Will there be accountability? Will the CAO's office even put it on the agenda and try to keep it from the public? Will the CAO hire even a one-time PIO to shield themselves from their egregious mistakes?

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: California highways leading nowhere

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

Driving north from Bakersfield on Highway 99, a motorist soon encounters an offramp onto Highway 65, which runs up the east side of the Central Valley – but not very far.



Dan Walters

The pavement ends about 70 miles north of Bakersfield, near the farming town of Exeter.

However, 200-plus miles farther to the north, another 35-mile stretch of Highway 65 connects Marysville, north of Sacramento, with Roseville through a region that has seen explosive residential, commercial and industrial growth in the last few decades.

These two widely disconnected pieces of Highway 65 hint at what was once seen as a major north-south route – a twin, so to speak, of Interstate 5, which carries traffic along the Central Valley's west side.

Read the whole story