

Opinion: EDC budget boondoggle a disgrace

By Larry Weitzman

About two years ago, I told the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors that if the budget wasn't cut, they were going to run out of money, money to maintain county roads, buildings and other assets, money to build a new sheriff's HQ and another half dozen items that require about \$12.5 million a year with another \$12.5 million left wanting. But it gets worse as county departments have filed their next year's budget requests and they total \$7 million more than projected revenues, including the use reserves to prop up the revenue number.



Larry Weitzman

That means when you add in the aforementioned \$12.5 million above (\$2.2 million for new sheriff's HQ, \$3 million for road maintenance, \$5 million for deferred maintenance and a capital replacement fund, plus 2.5 million for funding retiree health) it adds up to a \$20 (12.5 + 7) million budget shortfall. The proposed budget as presented (not including the \$20 million), while in balance per government standards (using reserve money to balance it), was structurally imbalanced because annual expenditures exceeded annual revenues. Most people and business work off structurally balanced budgets.

What's even more amazing is that our CAO, Larry Combs,

obviously knew we didn't have the funding to build the new sheriff's HQ a month ago when he advised the BOS to spend \$2.6 million to buy the land upon which to build it. The loan payment would be an ongoing \$2.2 million annual expense for 40 years. Where is this money coming from in year two, year 15 or year 39? No one in our administration has a clue. And this is the guy our BOS takes advice from? Maybe the CAO and BOS need help from our Mental Health Department?

So if we want to fix and maintain the roads, build a sheriffs HQ (I am surprised that the current HQ hasn't been declared a Superfund site), pay retiree health care and another half a dozen or so county items, \$20 million in cuts will have to be made somewhere else in the current proposed budget. Here's a place to start. In the last fiscal year the CAO executed about \$10.5 million in contracts, which were under the \$64,000 requirement of BOS approval. I am sure there are millions in waste there alone. Double damaging is that the CAO only reports these contracts to the BOS once a year. Maybe that should change to a weekly reporting requirement and discussion.

Within the workshop and proposed budget were some BOS platitudes in the form of budget policies like no new positions unless funding is identified or a significant need established. How is that for an out. But the BOS wants that new salesman, (all except Shiva Frentzen) for a \$150,000 public information officer, which in the political world is known as a "spin doctor." The other policy was no growth of non-salary/benefit operating expenses.

But the biggest area on the expenditure side of the budget is salaries and benefits (\$155 million) which is about 70 percent of General Fund spending. And it is the biggest problem area. I am sure, under great pressure, this issue wasn't monetized by the CBO in the presentation, but was shown as percentages in the power point presentation which served as the basis of the four-hour discussion which considered budget items as

small as \$2,500 and several items that were in the \$10K-25K range. Only one BOS member, Frentzen, recognized the real elephant in the room of an annual revenue short fall of \$4 million to \$7 million, the difference between revenue growth and salary/benefit growth. No other BOS member said a word about it or wanted to discuss it and the county administrative staff acted oblivious. It might have been the basic algebra (solving for the unknown) that was beyond their capability (this is not meant to be an indictment of our educational system).

Here is this deficit issue as contained on pages 6, 7 and 8 in the 17-page power-point presentation as presented to the BOS called future year assumptions: property taxes and sales taxes will grow annually at 4 and 2 percent, respectively. Department revenues will grow at 1 percent (about \$1 million). We were told that 1 percent of growth on tax revenues equals \$1 million. That means that that total revenue growth will be about \$4 million in new revenues every year. Expenditures will grow only from salary and benefits at 4.5 percent a year, no new expenses shall be incurred from expenses that are not from sal/bene, and no new positions will be filled unless funded within the budget. The problem is that 4.5 percent equates to \$7 million this year and growing from CalPERS and health benefits as the contribution requirements are on a huge uptick as it was recently reported employer contributions are going up by 9 percent as their investment portfolio continues to perform poorly. This year will be a \$3 million deficit that will continue to grow every year.

A new union contract is already in negotiation. The current contract which provided a 15 percent contract is over in two months. Even a new 1 percent raise in salaries will add \$1.6 million to the growing deficit, plus the projected 4.5 percent growth as health benefits and CalPERS benefit contributions continue to rise. A half a point hike in bene costs will add another \$1 million. Those numbers will outstrip revenue growth

so the dollar gap between total revenue and salary and benefit expense will continue to widen, perhaps by \$10 million in three or four years. As it is now, EDC's budget is unsustainable.

So what did the BOS spend their time on last week? Of course not one word as to the growing built in budget deficit. The BOS is going to use reserves to balance the budget just like the failure of Pan Am Airlines. Near the end, they were losing money every year and to sustain themselves they sold off their profitable route structure to the point they had nothing left to sell. Bankruptcy grounded Pan Am as it became unsustainable. Instead of short circuiting the deficit, the BOS discussed whether they should spend \$25,000 on keeping a swimming pool open longer hours during the summer. Here the county is drowning in built-in continuing deficits of which they refuse to recognize and discuss with the county infrastructure and buildings crumbling around them, and they are worried about swimming pools. It's unbelievable. Worse yet is that Combs never mentions it during the entire meeting. Ditto for the ACAO.

There are two solutions, one of course is raising sales tax a point or two. That could bring in a few million dollars annually to the detriment of taxpayers and merchants, taking away one of their business advantages. It would encourage EDC residents to shop out of the county while sales drop for local merchants. But there is another, better solution and that is to cut expenses. This is where a real CAO comes into to play. Don Ashton or someone like him (maybe he has an identical twin?), will turn this county around. He will end favoritism, demand excellence and value from our work force (more productivity) and most important will tell the BOS the reality of the situation and give them real choices from which they can make real decisions.

Perhaps we should study the solution of the city of South Lake Tahoe when its budget got out of hand. The solution worked

well.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Letter: Suggestions for the president

Dear Mr. President,

You should compose your own jokes, then tell them straight without a printed sheet to read from.

If there are only three, that's OK. Then say something important to the American people, and sit down.

Jim Hildinger, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Rotarians give back at Bread & Broth

To the community,

"Service Above Self" is the motto for the Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe and on April 18, fellow Rotarians David Jinkens, Brian Hogan, David Kurtzman and Nic Abelow exemplified how involved and service oriented the club members are. These four Rotarians came together to volunteer their time at the Rotary

Club's Adopt A Day of Nourishment and serve those in need in the community.

By adopting the Bread & Broth's Monday evening dinner, the Rotary Club of SLT provided a hot, nutritious meal to 89 dinner guests and sent them home with food to provide meals for later in the week. As an international service organization, the local Rotary Club chapter's goal is to positively affect as many children, families and community members as possible. By selecting B&B's Adopt A Day program as their month of April service project, the club and its members were able to have the positive impact of easing hunger for those who attended their AAD dinner.

"It's an honor for the Rotary Club to have this opportunity to serve our community and assist B&B," Kurtzman said as he took a break from the dinner serving line.

Playing an active part in the local community is the ongoing focus of the group and Bread & Broth truly appreciates the support the Rotary Club and its members have so generously provided at their AAD dinner.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: 'Dark tourism' isn't all bad

By Robert Reid, National Geographic

These days it seems you can't go more than a few weeks without hearing about some unfortunate selfie faux pas on the Internet.

Tourists posting photos of themselves giving the thumbs up in Auschwitz, for example, or smiling from a rusted-out bumper car in Pripyat, the Ukrainian city that was evacuated after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear meltdown.

The offending images are seen and blasted around to social media circles. Disparaging comments are made and the shares continue, rippling out to create a full-blown meme about travelers' growing predilection for "dark tourism."

The truth is, visiting places associated with death and suffering has been popular a lot longer than the selfie stick.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Calif. needs a one-stop government shop

By Joe Mathews

I want nothing from California governments—except whatever I need right now.

So why, in this Internet age, doesn't my state offer a one-stop shop where I can renew my driver's license, register to vote, research state records, pay my taxes, and buy passes to a state park?



Joe Mathews

Mine is not a new notion. To the contrary, the one-shop stop is one of the oldest ideas in California governance—a staple of candidate position papers and commission reports. In the last year, California worthies have suggested one-stop online shops for poor people to sign up for multiple public assistance programs at once, for businesses to handle all their permitting and licensing, and for California parents signing up for child care.

“Imagine if Californians had one personalized log-in account to manage all their business with the state, from updating address information and voter registration to paying taxes and applying for and managing benefits,” the Little Hoover Commission, the state’s independent oversight agency, suggested recently. “And they could do it all from a mobile device while taking the bus to soccer practice or at home after putting their children to bed for the night.”

These are sweet dreams, kids. But, like the Holy Grail, the effective California one-stop shop exists only in the realm of myth.

Why?

My one-stop answer: California has too many governments—literally thousands of them—and nearly every single one sees compliance with its separate standards and rules as a way to protect its very existence.

Indeed, our state governing system seems designed with the opposite of one-stop shopping as its guiding principle.

California has more permitting agencies than most other states, all sorts of regional bodies, incentives for endless litigation, and the California Environmental Quality Act, which can kill almost any worthwhile project.

Hence, a paradox: Californians need one-stop shops to deal with the government because of the very inefficiencies that make creating one-stop shops nearly impossible here.

This paradox is also why the idea of the one-stop shop is so very useful. It's an essential dodge for politicians and governments that have no real interest in doing the hard work of consolidating agencies and redesigning government to make it more efficient for taxpayers. Given the dysfunction these one-stop shops are proposed to mask, it's hardly surprising that they never make it very far off the ground. When the state does launch a one-stop shop, it's often incomplete (the California Business Portal provides good information but no single form to register your business) or makes so many mistakes that it produces new industries to help you navigate it (like the Covered California health insurance exchange).

The private sector has developed what are effectively one-stop shops—but those are rare and require a corporate dictator, like Amazon's Jeff Bezos or Uber's Travis Kalanick, crazed enough to destroy old industries. The few governments around the world able to pull off the one-stop shop don't have America's system of divided government. Check out Great Britain's miraculous GOV.UK, and dream of a California parliament.

For now, the best option available to those who want customer-friendly service in California is to hire consultants and lobbyists. The absence of a one-stop shop has been a boon to such influence peddlers, whose numbers keep growing.

Which gives me an idea. If California governments won't give us a one-stop shop for the state, the least they can do is

provide Californians with their own fixers. That's right—concierges for all. With a ballot measure, we could make concierge service a constitutional right.

California government has experimented with concierge-style service before. Veterans of Pete Wilson's administration talk about "Red Teams"—essentially, concierges for companies—they organized in the 1990s. But concierges-for-all would be much costlier, with most of the approximately 100,000 (my best estimate) concierges being private contractors rather than government employees (we couldn't afford the pensions).

These concierges wouldn't have to wear uniforms or golden-key badges like hotel concierges—unless they were into that sort of thing. But each California adult would be assigned a concierge; we'd each receive our concierge's email and cell phone, and we could put him or her on speed dial like we do with the plumber or the dentist. These concierges would have to respond to our requests in 48 hours, and state and local officials would have to respond to their requests in 24 hours. Our concierges would have the power to secure permits and licenses, make appointments for us with any government official, or even schedule visits to our relatives who might be doing time in state prisons.

Call it a dream if you like, but it's no less dreamy than a one-stop shop. Really, I want nothing from California government, except somebody whose job it is to get me whatever I need right now.

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

Opinion: An officer and a friend



Donna Kingman, second from right, retires today after spending her entire career with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department. Photo/Bill Kingman

By Kathryn Reed

In retrospect, having your roommate clean her service revolver when your date is coming over for the first time might not be the best idea. It did, however, keep what's his name in line. I just don't remember a second date.

Today is South Lake Tahoe police Officer Donna Kingman's last day on the job. She is retiring after having started with the department in December 1987.

Hers is a storied career in many ways. When she was 8-years-old with her family on vacation in Southern California there was some police incident that she recalls being the coolest thing – she just doesn't remember exactly what it was. That led her to want to be an officer. She begged and begged her

dad to buy her a pair of handcuffs. He finally did.

Through her youth her desire to be an officer never wavered. Kingman went to CSU Sacramento where she majored in criminal justice. The South Lake Tahoe native knew she wanted to work for her hometown department. While she tested with others, she was one of five who was hired that December. About 600 had applied.

In her tenure she has worked for six full-time chiefs and two interims. She's been part of some of the biggest cases – like the murder at Campground by the Lake in 2001. Kingman was working in detectives at the time. (In 2003, Lisa Platz was found guilty of the murder of her 9-year-old daughter, Rebecca Aramburo. The child was found with her throat slashed inside a tent at the campground. Platz was sentenced to life in prison. Her boyfriend James Csucsai hanged himself in jail.)

I met Kingman in September 1988 when I first moved here. She lived in the apartment below me on 13th Street. Being the same age and single it led to many nights out at the Cantina, which we could walk to, and to Lily's to dance. It was inside High Sierra, which is now the Hard Rock. It seemed like a weekend ritual with us.

Unfortunately, Kingman remembers the night she dragged me out of there and all I could say was something about my shoe.

"I don't know whatever happened to that shoe," she laughed. I don't either. "You had to hang your head out of my car because it was new." I don't remember enough to argue with her memory. We both agree I didn't get sick.

Kingman had a Camaro and as two women in our early 20s we thought we were pretty cool cruising around in it. The heater would be on and the sunroof open. They were fun, carefree days – and nights, and really early mornings.

I was covering cops for the *Tribune* at the time. My boss

thought this would provide with me intel. *Wrong*. Her boss was worried. *No need to be*. To this day Kingman has always been loyal to the department. I've also never asked for anything that would compromise our friendship.

During that stint at the *Trib* I thought it would make a great story to try out for the department, but not let the higher ups know. This was when SLTPD had an obstacle course. That was first test; the written, psych evaluation and other stuff came later.

I ran into a 6-foot wall. Literally. More than once. Kingman was in charge of that particular obstacle. She told me to place my foot on the wall, jump, grab the top and haul myself over. This was a slick, wood wall. I thought her instructions were stupid until they worked.

"I remember at the end of that you were like 'oh, my god'. I think about two hours later you were on the couch and you didn't want to move," Kingman said. My selective memory has no recollection other than I completed the course and gained a tremendous amount of respect for those carrying a badge.

By then we were roommates; renting a house on South Shore Drive. Eventually another officer, Lori Scott, joined us. This was before she married her current husband.

Oh, the fun we had.

I left Tahoe for bigger papers, but Kingman and I stayed in touch. I came back for her wedding that was in town, with the reception at the Ridge. Then our calls and letters dwindled, before becoming non-existent. (This was pre-texting and emails.)

When I came back in 2002 I learned she was still at the department. By then she had a son – who is now 19. Our lives were different. I was managing editor at the *Trib* then. We were friends, but not. We didn't – and still don't –

socialize. We've never been to each other's house. And, yet, I still consider her a friend. We wave when we see each other. She picked me up in her patrol car when I was on foot because my car was in the shop. (I figure she can't get in trouble for that now.) Ironically, it's her dad, Bill Kingman, who does the "Then and now" articles for *Lake Tahoe News* who I am better friends with.

Oh, the laughs Donna and I have had in the last few weeks reminiscing about life in our 20s. Now we're both 50.

She always seemed to be in the thick of things. A pursuit she was on not long after being hired remains the longest in the department's history. She followed the suspect from here to Sacramento – making it there in 32 minutes. The dude wasn't happy a woman caught him.

At times there were three women patrol officers on one shift, plus the sergeant. Suspects thought a guy should be called. Even if there were one to call, one wasn't needed.

"Most people who did wrong know they did wrong. I try to treat people decently so I am not adding to their issues," Kingman said.

But she is also guarded about her personal life. Retribution is a real part of being a cop – even in South Lake Tahoe. Someone once broke into her home and killed her dog. That's not the only incident.

She's had to pull her gun many times, but never fired it. However, she has been there when her colleagues pulled the trigger. Taser – that was more her instrument of choice.

Some cases have stuck with her more than others. The near fatal slashing of **Susie Rizk Laney** is one of those. It was a case that necessitated the department to bring in a psychologist for officers to talk to.

There's the **Adam Rose** case. He was on his bike when a drunken driver hit him. From there the two formed a bond.

"Adam Rose is up and walking around and doing his thing," Kingman said with a softness that speaks to their friendship that formed after the incident.

Then there was the juvenile rape victim whose case she handled while in detectives.

"We had a connection and have a friendship as a result of that to this day," Kingman said. "When she comes in to see me she is so successful today. It is so awesome to see through the darkest time there is this shining star living her life."

Like anyone, there are things she would do differently, what with hindsight being 20-20. But she would not choose a different career or another town.

Thanks for the memories, my friend. Good luck in retirement. Go see the redwoods, the cherry blossoms, sleep in and please give me the exclusive when you find Bigfoot.

Editorial: New law silences Nevada voters

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the April 24, 2016, Reno Gazette-Journal.*

The voices of thousands of Nevada voters will not be heard because of a law passed by the Legislature last year.

Senate Bill 499 was approved unanimously by the Senate and two-thirds of the Assembly before being signed by Gov. Brian

Sandoval. Despite this overwhelming support, the law should be revoked in the next session so all Nevada voters can have a say in who represents them.

The situation also exposes how the major political parties – Republican and Democrat – too often fail to serve the public by putting their strategic plans ahead of democracy.

Read the whole story

Letter: Warm room a success because of community

To the community,

Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless would like to thank the many community members and volunteers who helped in the cleanup and closing of the South Lake Tahoe Warm Room in early April. The Warm Room was open from Dec. 18 through April 1, and provided the first overnight homeless services in the Tahoe region.

We received help from the South Lake Tahoe Challenge Program through the Juvenile Treatment Center. South Tahoe Middle School supported our cleanup efforts as well. We appreciate students and staff from Whittell High School and South Tahoe High School Interact Clubs. We also are grateful for the efforts of the many Tahoe Douglas Rotarians who participated.

The South Lake Tahoe Warm Room closed on April 1 for the season. The Warm Room served 107 unduplicated individuals during this cold and snowy winter and provided 1,820 shelter bed nights. We appreciate our volunteers who dedicated over

1600 hours to this project this winter.

Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless is looking for businesses to run supply drives in the fall of 2016 and for volunteers for the 2016-17 winter season. We can be contacted at tahoewarmroom@gmail.com or 775.573.0822. Please visit our **website**.

Donations are welcomed to aid in funding the Warm Room 2016-17 season. Checks can be made payable to Live Violence Free (our fiscal sponsor), note "Warm Room" in the memo line and mail to P.O. Box 13514, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151 or make donations **online** and note "Warm Room" in the additional information box. We will be accepting supplies again in the fall 2016.

Sincerely,

Marissa R. Muscat, executive director

Letter: Live Violence Free thankful for donation

To the community,

Live Violence Free would like to thank Heavenly ski patrol for its incredible generosity and continued contribution to our programs and services. On April 15, Heavenly ski patrol surprised our agency with a donation of \$2,500.

We are so grateful to Heavenly ski patrol for its positive impact in our community and for all they do to support our vital programs here at Live Violence Free.

Jenna Poell, Live Violence Free

Opinion: Trump is America's problem, not California's

By Joe Mathews

Sorry, America, but we Californians are not going to stop Donald Trump for you.

To believe otherwise is to misunderstand California.



Joe Mathews

I can see how you got your hopes up. Polls show at least three out of every four of us don't like him. California Republican strategists have launched a campaign to deny him a victory in June's presidential primary, and thus prevent him from getting the delegates he needs to secure the Republican nomination. And many California voices want to go further. An immigrant group declared him "persona non grata" in the state; cities have discussed denying him permits for rallies, given his propensity to incite crowds.

He deserves every bit of our scorn. Trump stands against almost everything that our state now represents. Our culture and economy are built on diversity and integration; he divides and race-baits. Mexico is our top export market; he slanders Mexicans and wants to build a wall across a border. We're

devoted to science; he spews discredited nonsense about vaccines. Our industries—technology, entertainment, logistics—are built around trade; he wants to start a trade war.

So why aren't we up in arms? Because Californians simply have no time to be up in arms about anything. And that's especially true when the subject is American politics, which takes place in a country, if not a planet, different than our own. It's also pretty rich of Americans—who hold the most important presidential contests in states smaller than some California counties and limit us to just U.S. two senators—to expect Californians to save them from their own democratic decisions.

In other words: Trump is your problem, America, not ours.

This attitude was perfectly expressed in a joke Gov. Jerry Brown told recently: "If Trump were ever elected, we'd have to build a wall around California to defend ourselves from the rest of this country."

Fortunately, President Trump is still a long shot. And Californians are loath to waste any of the precious time we don't spend in traffic. More than 70 percent of us can't do anything to stop Trump in this election; the only people who can vote in the GOP primary here are a dying subspecies of *homo Californiens* called Republicans. And, no matter how those Californians vote in June, will Trump really go away? Isn't he one of those chronic conditions—like diabetes—that we just have to manage?

In other contexts, like public health, California does know how to stop things—and even ban them. And we love to pick on small targets. We'll ban foie gras or shark fin soup in the blink of an eye.

But Trump is too unwieldy to fit our infrastructure of prohibition. I suppose that could change. Maybe he'll set himself on fire, and we could throw our anti-smoking laws at

him. If he takes a swim in one of our rivers, state biologists could go after him as an invasive species. But even though his campaign rhetoric is a threat to our civic environment, the California Environmental Quality Act—a favorite California tool for delaying new projects of any kind—can't be used to stall his campaign past the primary date.

The idea of stopping Trump also bumps up against one strong California cultural tendency: tolerance for bad celebrity behavior and over-the-top hucksterism. He'll sell crummy casinos and bogus "university" classes just as Hollywood sells formulaic sequels as must-see events. Our sales excesses compromise us when we get moralistic. I'd love to see Santa Barbara's Katy Perry or Long Beach's Snoop Dogg issue an anti-Trump anthem, but how exactly would stars like those call him out on his outrageous antics?

If we were serious about stopping Trump, we'd have already rallied Silicon Valley to the cause. These days, most difficult California problems—from taxation to cancer immunotherapy—are addressed by asking Sean Parker, the former Facebook president, to figure something out. And if Twitter's rules against "behavior that harasses intimidates or uses fear to silence another user's voice" were seriously enforced, Trump's account would have been suspended long ago.

Heck, if our fervently anti-Trump Legislature really wanted to make life difficult, it could pass a law declaring that California businesses don't have to serve hate mongers and their campaigns. Such a move would offer a rejoinder to laws in other states that permit discrimination against gays. Call it a reverse North Carolina.

But California isn't serious about stopping Trump. That may be just as well. He would use such opposition to portray himself as a victim. Which is why, as California enters the spotlight of the presidential campaign, the best strategy may be to stay true to ourselves, and to ignore Trump as best we can.

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