

Opinion: 'Bambi' hoodwinked American environmentalists

By Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann

When "Bambi" was first released in 1942, the National Audubon Society, compared the Walt Disney cartoon film's consciousness-raising power for the environment to what "Uncle Tom's Cabin" did for the abolition of slavery.

"Bambi", about a deer, lost money then, but subsequent re-releases and video rentals brought in hundreds of millions of dollars, and made the film a rite of childhood. Over the years that "emotional groundwork," took hold in the form of "The Bambi Factor," a sentimental anthropomorphized view of wildlife, especially deer.

Seventy-four years, the Bambi Factor still animates debates over animal rights and environmentalism.

"Bambi" didn't start as an American environmental fable. Written for adults in 1928 by an Austrian with the pen name Felix Salten, "Bambi: A Forest Life", recounts the story of a fawn who grows up to be the prince of the forest alongside his royal father. But his rise to power comes only after the death of his mother and near loss of his mate Faline. While hunters are a problem for these deer, so are animals: In the forest, owls eat mice, crows eat a friendly rabbit, and a fox eats a duck. Early reviewers considered the book an anti-fascist fable and recent writers have speculated that the story was an allegory about the plight of Jews in Europe. Salter's work was banned in Nazi Germany.

But the simpler film version portrayed deer living in an idealized forest where predators and prey play together and fear only "Man," who is equipped with guns and fire. The emotional punch of Disney's "Bambi" is heightened by its

artistry, which combines gorgeous natural realism with cartoonish animals, their exceptionally large heads, small noses, and wide eyes resembling human children. Disney sent artists to sketch foliage in Maine's Baxter State Park and shipped two fawns to the studio as artist's models.

The film was controversial from the start., Outdoor Life editor Raymond J. Brown called the film "the worst insult ever offered in any form to American sportsmen," and asked Disney to correct slurs against hunters, according to Matthew Cartmill's "A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature Through History". Disney claimed sportsmen were not the targets because Salten's story was about German hunters.

One of the first people bitten by the Bambi Factor was, ironically, environmentalist Aldo Leopold. In 1943, Leopold encouraged Wisconsin to institute an antlerless deer season to allow hunters to thin the overpopulated herd. Leopold was interested in the good of all life as part of an ecosystem. But his Wisconsin proposal was shot down—the public, according to scholar Ralph H. Lutts, was outraged at the idea of culling any of Bambi's child-like creatures.

There's another environmental ideology hidden in "Bambi" that's at odds with reality. "Bambi's" underlying message is that "Man" and deer can't co-exist. A gunshot is the last we know of Bambi's mother. Other hunters go on a chilling rampage, wounding Bambi and causing a final eco-disaster when their campfire explodes into the woods and destroys the animals' home. In the film "Bambi", interactions with humans ends only in death or suffering, so the only real choice is a complete separation between the two worlds.

As academics, "Bambi's" worldview interested us: Did the "paradise" view of the forest precede the more modern idea of the ecosystem in popular culture? It didn't. A few months before "Bambi" came out, audiences went to see the Fleischer Brothers' animated feature "Mr. Bug Goes to Town" (1941).

Instead of contrasting conflicts between humans and idyllic nature, "Mr. Bug Goes to Town" demonstrates how lowland bugs and humans can live interdependently in a human couple's Manhattan garden. "Mr. Bug's" focus on interdependence connects with more realistic views about wildlife management and interconnected communities of plants, bugs, animals, and human animals. While "Mr. Bug" was modeled on sophisticated Hollywood comedies of the time, "Bambi" reflected Disney's focus on emotional yet traditional folktales for broad audiences.

Contrary to the Disney story, of course, deer are all too comfortable with "Man," "Woman," and "Cars," not to mention our delicious gardens, lawns, and infant trees. By 2015, predictably, protests against the Bambi Factor started to come from drivers and organic gardeners as the deer population grew dramatically. The National Traffic Safety Administration estimates that deer cause 1.5 million roadway accidents per year with 150 human fatalities and 10,000 personal injuries, as well as \$1 billion in property damage.

Bambi lovers want to protect the deer even when the deer are sick. As recently as 2012, naturalist Valerie Blaine blamed the Bambi Factor for the North Rutland Deer Alliance's opposition to killing deer even to test for chronic wasting disease. According to Blaine, the group felt any herd reduction would spoil their "deer watching experience" in Chicago's Northwest suburbs.

The Bambi Factor encourages sentimentalized views of wildlife that romanticize nature without accepting its messier aspects. Instead of looking for a paradise that separates us from wild nature, we need a new vision of living together, balancing habitat preservation with wildlife management. "Bambi" is, after all, just a movie.

Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann are professors at Eastern Illinois University. They have co-authored five books

including "Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge" (2009) and "Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen" (2016).

Letter: EDC needs better CAO hiring practices

To the community,

One of the most important jobs in El Dorado County is the county administrative officer. El Dorado County is currently looking for a new qualified candidate to replace the temporary CAO Larry Combs. While this process is stated to be an open state and national search, the county's past record shows that it is anything but.

There seems to be a closed loop within several neighboring counties that hires and promotes within a very narrow circle of friends. Apparently background checks were not made, or if the revelations revealed in this newspaper are accurate, these hires should have never been made.

Because the county failed to do basic background screening, the actions of several CAOs have cost the county millions of dollars in excess hiring and raises way above what the employee union asked for. Our Board of Supervisors should have demanded accountability and proof of thorough background checks with this hiring process. They did not. They just accepted the findings of HR or the prior CAO who are part of the problem.

The County Administrative Office monitors and oversees county operations to assure that board policies are carried out. The CAO recommends an annual budget and has the responsibility to administer that budget as approved by the BOS. The CAO is to provide organizational leadership and foster collaboration and partnership among all offices and departments, both elected and appointed

You would think that the BOS and the department heads directly affected by this person would have some role in the hiring process. I believe that the BOS, if they interview at all, just believe what they are told without the needed thorough background check. The department heads have not been a part of the interview process for years.

Since the selection of a new CAO has been in the control of those who are in the circle of friends, the Board of Supervisors needs to witness just what is being circulated for the position and where they are being recruited from. They should have the pluses and minuses of each applicant, not just who the CAO or HR selects, and then be a part of the interview process along with select department heads. Maybe then we can get a capable, experienced candidate that may actually be more interested working for the county's best interests instead of feathering his or her own nest.

This is too important a position to continue with the round robin of friends that has been the case.

Paul Freeman, Cameron Park

Opinion: Invention of the modern political attack ad

By Robert Mann

On Sept. 7, 1964, a 60-second TV ad changed American politics forever. A 3-year-old girl in a simple dress counted as she plucked daisy petals in a sun-dappled field. Her words were supplanted by a mission-control countdown followed by a massive nuclear blast in a classic mushroom shape. The message was clear if only implicit: presidential candidate Barry Goldwater was a genocidal maniac who threatened the world's future. Two months later, President Lyndon Johnson won easily, and the emotional political attack ad—visceral, terrifying, and risky—was made.

Half a century later, we live in the world of negative political advertising that Daisy Girl pioneered, but there are some curious aspects to the story. First, though it is a famous ad, Daisy Girl, as the ad is known, only ran once. Secondly, it didn't even mention Goldwater's name. And finally, by the time the ad ran, Goldwater's chances against LBJ were slim, even though the ad is often falsely credited with assuring the win. And there were two dozen other ads from LBJ's camp—humorous, informative, dark, and neurotic. Daisy became the iconic spot of its era not because it was the first Johnson ran in 1964; we remember it primarily because of its brilliant, innovative approach to negative advertising.

Daisy and the other ads were made by Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB), an eclectic group of ad men at a medium-sized Madison Avenue firm with a stellar reputation for groundbreaking campaigns for Volkswagen and Avis. They didn't set out to revolutionize political advertising; what they wanted to do was to break the established rules of political ads—then dominated by stodgy 30-minute speeches mixed with shorter

policy-focused spots—by injecting creativity and emotion.

Bill Bernbach, the firm's principal founder, had long maintained advertising was an art, not a science. He favored intuition. He often reminded his employees, "Playing it safe can be the most dangerous thing in the world, because you're presenting people with an idea they've seen before, and you won't have an impact."

Famously dismissive of advertising driven purely by research, Bernbach had written a revolutionary memo in 1947 that laid out the philosophy that would eventually characterize his firm's work. "Advertising is fundamentally persuasion and persuasion happens to be not a science, but an art," he brashly told his then-employer, Grey Advertising. "It's that creative spark that I'm so jealous of for our agency and that I am so desperately fearful of losing. I don't want academicians. I don't want scientists. I don't want people who do the right things. I want people who do inspiring things."

Inspired by Bernbach's philosophy of relying upon instinct as much or more than research, DDB produced an extraordinary and memorable series of spots for Johnson. The firm capitalized upon Goldwater's reckless statements by providing viewers with indelible images. DDB mocked Goldwater's vote against the nuclear test ban treaty with a spot showing nothing but a girl licking an ice cream cone as a female announcer spoke ominously about the fallout from atmospheric nuclear testing and how it might enter the food supply.

Goldwater had once bragged that the nation might be "better off if we could just saw off the Eastern Seaboard and let it float out to sea." So, DDB served up a humorous 60-second spot of a saw slicing the East Coast from a Styrofoam model of the United States. In another spot, DDB mocked Goldwater's statement about privatizing Social Security by showing a pair of hands ripping up a Social Security card.

Viewers had never seen anything like this. It's not that previous presidential campaigns had only been polite affairs. Dwight Eisenhower ran negative TV spots against his Democratic opponent Adlai Stevenson in 1952, subtly tying him to alleged corruption in Truman administration officials. Stevenson's spots attacked Eisenhower in 1956. John F. Kennedy attacked Richard Nixon's record as vice president in the 1960 campaign. Goldwater's attacks against Johnson in 1964 were unrelenting. In almost every case, however, the attacks were rational, fact-based arguments. DDB's innovation was not negative advertising, per se. It was, rather, to help make emotions (primarily, fear) a staple of political spots. By 1968, political ads—by other agencies—were also transformed.

Even the spot itself was something of a DDB innovation. Before 1964, political campaigns had used 30- and 60-second spots, but not exclusively. Instead, campaigns, including Goldwater's, pre-empted regular programming with dry, 30-minute speeches or campaign documentaries by candidates. Under DDB's direction, Johnson's campaign aired nothing but 30- or 60-second spots, with the exception of two four-minute commercials, including the "Confessions of a Republican" ad (which went viral recently) purporting to show that even Republicans found Goldwater uncomfortably extreme.

DDB broke another rule by recognizing that Goldwater was such a widely known figure that voters needed no education about him. They didn't have to remind viewers that Goldwater himself had joked about lobbing a missile into the men's room of the Kremlin. Or that he had written that the U.S. should not fear war with the Soviets. Or that he would give NATO commanders authority to use nuclear weapons without prior presidential authorization. Or that he had declared the nuclear bomb "merely another weapon." America knew he voted against the Civil Right Act and that, at the GOP convention in July 1964, Goldwater even branded himself an "extremist." So DDB never once had to mention Goldwater's name in Daisy. It only had to

find viewers' emotional trigger.

Put another way, the firm believed that viewers should not be given too much information to put their minds and emotions to work. And Daisy Girl's DNA has continued to provide instructions for today's political advertising: Ronald Reagan's famous 1984 "Bear" spot used the animal to symbolize the Soviet Union without explicitly making the association. In 2004, Bush's campaign skillfully employed the same technique with a spot that used wolves to symbolize al Qaeda.

Voting is not a purely rational act. As the late journalist Joe McGinnis observed, it's a "psychological purchase" of a candidate. It's often no less rational than buying a car or a house. DDB understood that arguing with voters would be a losing proposition. To persuade someone, especially in the political realm, a campaign must target emotions. Voters don't oppose a candidate because they dislike his or her policies; they often oppose the policies because they dislike the candidate.

Reagan's optimistic 1984 "Morning in America" spot was a good example of this kind of appeal. So was George H.W. Bush's dark, fear-inducing "Revolving Door" spot in 1988 that exploited the controversy over a prison furlough program of his Democratic opponent, Michael Dukakis. Bernie Sanders' "America" spot is a current example. They are all very different ads, but are aimed at generating a non-rational, emotional response.

DDB also believed that giving data and facts was less persuasive than telling a story. The best spots provide an experience. In addition to evoking emotions and not repeating what the viewer already knew, many of the DDB spots from 1964 had a narrative arc to them. A good example in 1964 was a Johnson spot reminding viewers of the many harsh attacks on Goldwater by his former GOP opponents. The gold standard for subsequent spots in this genre may be Bill Clinton's 60-

second “Journey” spot from 1992, in which he touted his small-town American values by recounting his childhood in Hope, Arkansas.

Early in his career Bernbach perceived that although research had its place in persuasion, there was something more—something completely unquantifiable: “The truth isn’t the truth until people believe you and they can’t believe you if they don’t know what you’re saying; and they can’t know what you’re saying if they don’t listen to you; and they won’t listen to you if you’re not interesting. And you won’t be interesting unless you say things freshly, originally, imaginatively.”

For better or worse, the Daisy ad made emotions a much more potent weapon in our political campaigns, employing techniques that had previously only been applied to selling cars and soap. The next innovation, already with us to some degree, is nano-targeted TV spots, which will resemble the ads we see on the web but will be on TV. Soon, working with cable providers, candidates will offer up messages specially crafted for certain viewers. Five different people watching the same program might each see a different spot from the same candidate.

Meanwhile, social media has injected campaigns’ storytelling into communication between friends. Without Daisy, would the Facebook flame wars of Trump and Bernie fans have the same raucous fervor? But as campaigning moves further into the virtual world of computers and algorithms, it must overcome a paradox: Now, as then, the best ad campaign has a soul—and that’s something a computer or a poll can’t create for any candidate.

Robert Mann is a political historian, former U.S. Senate press secretary and professor at the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. He is the author of “Daisy Petals and Mushroom Clouds: LBJ, Barry Goldwater and

the Ad that Changed American Politics” (2011).

Opinion: A school district without a teachers' union

By Joe Mathews

What would a California school district be like if it jettisoned its teachers' union?

That question, once hypothetical (conservatives saw it as fantasy, liberals as a threat to teachers to questions), is now real. With the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, the U.S. Supreme Court is now divided 4-to-4 on the validity of the funding model for teachers' and other public employees union. So if the country elects a Republican president this fall, the likely result would be a new conservative justice who would vote to weaken teachers' unions so much that some might disappear from some school districts around the country.



Joe Mathews

What would that mean for teachers, schools, and parents? It's impossible to know for sure. But California offers one fascinating example of such a future: the Clovis Unified School District.

Clovis Unified is by far the largest school district in California without a teachers' union. Centered on the city of Clovis (pop. 100,000) and swaths of Fresno, it's the 16th largest school district in California (smaller than Riverside, bigger than Stockton), with 42,000 students, 49 schools, and 5,000 employees. It also happens to be one of California's most representative districts. About half of its children are on free and reduced lunch, and there's no ethnic majority among the student body.

Parents, teachers, and administrators in Clovis are proud of their schools. But they don't brag—publicly, at least—about their lack of a teachers' union. This isn't because they want a union, I've found on visits. It's because they're skeptical that Clovis' one-of-a-kind structure could be a model for anyone else.

Clovis Unified teachers and administrators see their district as having a peculiar history that gave it an effective method of governing itself. This history starts with Floyd "Doc" Buchanan, the district superintendent from 1960 until 1991. In the 1970s, California's teachers' unions won the right to represent teachers in districts throughout the state, but Buchanan, who was deeply respected by teachers, resisted. And teachers voted against union representation.

But that wasn't the end of the story. Instead of a union, Clovis' teachers and the district formed a "faculty senate"—the goal was to have something worthy of a university—to give teachers more of a role in the governance of the district. Teachers were elected to represent each school, and in turn elected officers for the senate, which served as "advocate for teachers at all levels of policymaking, procedures and expenditures, in partnership with our administration, fellow employees, and community as a quality education team."

Clovis Unified could only be so different. In California,

state law governs most of what happens in school districts, including matters such as teacher tenure and firing.

But, as the faculty senate evolved, the teachers it represented exerted more power, by forming committees, often jointly with the district, for everything from benefits and wages to the school calendar and curriculum. "If there's a committee, we're on it," says Duane Goudy, the faculty senate president. "If there's a meeting, we are part of it."

Among the many advantages of this committee system: It forces the district to come to a consensus on issues. And this method of governance provides crucial flexibility in bad times. During the Great Recession, the district avoided layoffs of full-time employees and cuts to the length of the school year because the teachers on committees agreed to impose a 2 percent pay cut and three furlough days on themselves.

For this system to succeed it requires great openness among administrators; the superintendent has an open door. This also breeds closeness to the community. For example, while it's now routine to find school campuses closed after-hours throughout California, Clovis Unified prides itself on keeping its school campuses open so that neighborhoods can use them on evenings and weekends.

Of course, there are drawbacks. Privately, teachers say committee meetings can feel endless and waste time. Clovis' method of governing itself is so different that it can be hard for administrators hired from outside the district to adapt. And even staunch believers in the faculty senate approach wonder whether a system that relies on face-to-face meetings and relationships can survive as the district continues to grow. They say it's already hard to make changes quickly because so many people have to be consulted.

But the system is likely to endure, in part because the district gets results. Clovis Unified performs above average

academically and does well in attendance. Teachers shower praise on the district in surveys.

For the rest of us, Clovis Unified suggests that school districts without teachers' unions won't be hells-or paradises. They could even be places where teachers have the power to be true partners in running school districts—with all the responsibilities and headaches that come with it.

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

Opinion: Kids need delightfully dangerous playgrounds

By Joe Mathews

California doesn't make playgrounds like it used to.

Fifteen years after the state legislated compliance with national safety standards for new and renovated public playgrounds, I can take the Three Stooges—my three sons under age 8—to parks around California confident I'll see the same reassuringly safe equipment: low swings, low slides, ubiquitous guardrails, and super-soft rubbery mats to cushion falls.



Joe Mathews

But all that safe sameness is boring. Today, the playground pieces that once captured children's attention—merry-go-rounds, custom teeter-totters, Tarzan-style ropes, high monkey bars, and flat swings—are nearly impossible to find. It turns out that safer playgrounds, while producing less litigation over injuries, carry their own risks.

Pediatric researchers warn that today's playgrounds no longer provide the fast-moving kinds of play that help children overcome fears and develop sensory and motor skills. Older kids, finding safer equipment less challenging, may be using playgrounds less.

California parents should counter these trends by seeking out those classic California playgrounds too old (before the mid-'90s) to comply fully with today's regulations. So I've been introducing the Three Stooges to dangerous old playgrounds.

On road trips, we've visited Santa Barbara's Kid's World playground, a giant wood fort with so many places to hide that you can't keep your eyes on your kids. Despite the risk of falls, we've enjoyed the playground at Tidelands Park right on Morro Bay—with its wood-and-metal pirate ship allowing kids glimpses of bay otters and a majestic view of Morro Rock.

Then there's our local San Gabriel Valley favorite, La Laguna, at Vincent Lugo Park in the city of San Gabriel. Someone should write a book about the Mexican artist Benjamin Dominguez, who created 14 somewhat scary concrete structures a half-century ago, near the end of a difficult life that also

produced the Atlantis playground in Garden Grove. The concrete structures look like dinosaurs and whales and octopi, and kids climb slippery steps to go down long, treacherous slides.

The Three Stooges love La Laguna so much I decided to take them to the mecca of old-school California playgrounds: the Dennis the Menace Playground inside El Estero Park in downtown Monterey. Last week, on the way to visit my grandmother in San Mateo, we made our pilgrimage.

Dennis the Menace has had some safety updates, but it remains much the same place designed in the 1950s by Monterey citizens, including Hank Ketcham, creator of the troublemaking comic strip character for whom the park is named. A suspension bridge hangs high and long near the playground's entrance. The place is full of extra long and twisty slides. Our only disappointment was that you can no longer play on the old rail steam engine near the entrance—a sign says the city is seeking a way to allow access that complies with state safety laws.

After an hour on the playground, I drove the family north to grandma's, muttering about playground greatness being a thing of California's past. But a few days later, I was proven wrong—when I took the Stooges to Palo Alto's Mitchell Park, where the Magical Bridge playground opened just last year.

Magical Bridge is annoying in the way of so many Silicon Valley enterprises; it's not content to be smart, it has to tell you how smart it is. Playground signs cite research on how its equipment improves your children's vestibular development, and offer links to a website boasting that Magical Bridge is "the nation's most innovative and inclusive playground." There's a donor wall honoring the worthies who covered the \$3.8 million cost, a "Kindness Corner" with anti-bullying messages, and "a patent-pending safe slide landing."

In spite of its preciousness, the place is great.

Magical Bridge is the brainchild of a local mother who wanted

a playground to serve children with all manner of developmental and physical disabilities, including her own daughter. The place achieves a magical combination: It's at once more inclusive and more challenging than the standard California playground.

Large disc and bucket swings accommodate kids with disabilities and create speedy movement to satisfy risk takers. There are multiple bridges, a two-story playhouse, and a theater—all fully accessible. A 24-string laser harp allows children of all abilities to make music with movement.

The slides are tall, and there are two 21st-century versions of the merry-go-round. One connects a spinning circular platform with a cone of ropes that allows kids to climb as they spin.

At the top of the merry-go-rope structure, the Stooges enjoyed a 360-degree view of this new and classic California playground. They also loved the dangerous and novel feeling of being so high that they were out of the reach of their parents.

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

Opinion: Checking on bullying at the doctor's office

By Jessica W. Tsai, New York Times

I let out a huge sigh as I picked up the next chart in clinic. "Chief complaint: Behavioral concerns" was typed out on the

top of a thick packet of papers. My young patient was sitting on the exam table comfortably. His parents sat stoically with furrowed brows in the chairs next to him. They were nervous, rigid, clearly concerned.

“What’s been going on?” I asked. Apparently he had been acting out at his elementary school. I sifted through the papers, chock full of documentation from teachers, detailing his behavior. He was on the verge of expulsion. His parents expressed understandable frustration to me given his remarkably normal behavior at home.

I gathered my history per usual, directing my questions toward him as he swung his legs back and forth on the exam table. I did not seem to be getting anywhere when I happened to ask, “Is anyone at school making fun of you?” Yes.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Get rid of caucuses in Nevada

Publisher’s note: *This editorial is from the April 10, 2016, Las Vegas Sun.*

In a society gorging on technology and consumed by new interactive ways to share information and promote points of view, it is befuddling that political scrums known as caucuses, with roots dating to the 1700s, are still conducted in Nevada and 13 other states to boost candidates for the presidency.

Let’s take all the time we need to reflect on all the good

things we've experienced or heard about the caucuses this campaign season.

Anyone?

OK, then let's move on to the opposing question: Is there enough time to cite all that is wrong about caucuses?

Everyone who participated in a Democratic or Republican caucus has a favorite story – a gripe, actually – about the experience.

Read the whole story

Letter: Heavenly store managers at B&B

To the community,

A very energetic and outgoing volunteer team from Vail Resorts' Retail Group joined the Bread & Broth volunteers to donate their time to serve the April 11 evening dinner at St. Theresa Grace Hall.

With funds provided by the Vail EpicPromise Grant program, Heavenly Mountain Resort sponsored the Monday meal and had Retail Group store managers Ryan Olm, Heather Searcy, Amy Grannick, Josh Bastille and Marcie Canale team up and participate in the dinner event.

"It was a wonderful night seeing the community come together to serve food and share a smile," said Ryan Olm. "Our VRR Team had a good time with the regular volunteers and enjoyed being a part of such a thoughtful operation."

The VRR team was really helpful serving the dinner and making sure that all of the dinner attendee's had milk, butter and eggs to take home with them along with bags filled with fruits, vegetables and bread/pastries.

Thanks to the efforts and donations made by our many supporters, the volunteers at Bread & Broth have been able to provide nutritious meals and take home food to those in the our community who struggle with hunger and just try to make end meet. Kudos to Heavenly Mountain Resort and its outstanding team members for the ongoing commitment to B&B's goal of easing hunger.

For more B&B information, go online or find us on Facebook.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Cave Rock project should be stopped

To the community,

NDOT is in the process of "selling" the Tahoe community on its plans for an extension of the Cave Rock tunnel. Their proffered justification is that our community needs such a tunnel extension to prevent future accidents that might be caused by rocks falling from the Cave formation.

This is not a good idea. Indeed, it is a terrible waste of money that will increase the risk of accidents, cause extended traffic delays, destroy one of the most scenic entrances to the Lake, and expend money that could be better used for other projects.

The following points should be emphasized:

1. Accident Risk: There have been no accidents precipitated by falling rocks. NDOT tells us, though, that such an accident might happen in the future. We have had, however, several accidents involving bikes hit by cars and trucks in the very short tunnels that now exist. Extending the westbound tunnel by 60 feet will greatly increase the risk of accidents for bicyclists. NDOT is increasing the risk for known dangers while ostensibly reducing the risk for unknown dangers.

Why does NDOT focus only on the northern end of the westbound tunnel? Do they expect that rocks will only fall on that one segment of road? Why not the other three entrances/exits? Do they plan to extend the tunnel at all four openings?

The community should also note that a tree fell across Highway 50 by the Zephyr Cove firehouse just a while back. Would NDOT want to construct a canopy or tunnel to guard against future tree falls? What distinction merits a tunnel for falling rocks?

Finally, NDOT views the steel nets that protect motorists from falling rocks as "temporary". What is the basis for that designation? Why not keep the steel nets in place and forego the tunnel?

2. Aesthetic Destruction: The northern entrance to the westbound tunnel offers motorists the first lake-level view of the lake. It is a stunning view. The proposed tunnel will obliterate that view entirely. For TRPA to endorse the destruction of that view is the ultimate bureaucratic hypocrisy.

3. Traffic Delays: NDOT itself projects interminable delays that will cripple traffic this summer and well into the end of the year (if not further). With the lake economy just now recovering, it is a terrible time to make the journey to the lake more difficult for visitors, especially those who fly

into Reno.

4. Cost-Benefit Analysis: NDOT hasn't provided any meaningful cost data and absolutely no information that would facilitate a careful benefit-cost calculation. Given the tiny probability of a future rock/vehicle accident (especially with steel nets in place) and the high costs of construction, environmental destruction, and traffic delays, it seems impossible that this project could withstand an objective cost-benefit analysis.

In view of the foregoing points, the Tahoe community should vigorously oppose NDOT's proposed tunnel extension. To do so, the community should petition our congressman, our governor, and interested agencies to put a halt to this project .

Brad Schiller, Cave Rock

Opinion: EDC has good CAO candidate in-house

By Larry Weitzman

Who will be the next chief administrative officer for El Dorado County?

In another recent failure of the CAO's office, EDC's Economic Development Policy J-7 allowing the county to give tax incentives for businesses to locate in EDC lapsed during some potential negotiations to locate a small to medium business enterprise in El Dorado County. In February 2015, the policy was extended to Nov. 10, 2015.



Larry Weitzman

No one in the CAO's office calendared Policy J-7 for renewal, clearly the fault of CAO Larry Combs. He has made so many mistakes I am losing count; never mind his recommending no General Fund funding for road maintenance or his own potentially illegal employment contract that I discussed recently. His record as a CAO here and other places is below dismal, yet he continues ruining our county, never mind recommending raising taxes and reducing road maintenance. He even told the BOS more than once he doesn't even have a handle on the budget. This is also the fault of the board for not demanding intensive background checks for high ranking employees, including Combs, which they haven't done in six years, maybe eight.

There is a solution to hiring competent administrative people, especially in light of employing a new CAO. It's called rigorous and responsible background checks, something that hasn't been done in the last three CAOs appointments, HR director and other department heads. As long as Larry Combs is in charge, it is doubtful it will happen. Maybe it's laziness or incompetence, but with Combs in charge, he will not recommend the best applicant, but will recommend a friend of Combs who he already hired as ACAO, Shawne Corley, less than two months ago. Sounds like Combs is trying to cover (up) his own tracks as CAO, including his illegal employment contract.

Corley, the ACAO for Sutter County already had a chance to be an Interim CAO in Sutter County, a county one-third the size of El Dorado, a general fund budget one-quarter the size of EDC and a county population (about 20,000) that is one-seventh

our size. Reports indicate that she failed in that job in a matter of months (see June 2015 Sutter County Grand Jury Report).

After Combs was let go as CAO by Merced County, in late 2012 the Sutter BOS hired Combs for about \$5,000 to recruit a new CAO for Sutter. I have written this story and the mess this new CAO, Jim Arkens, made for Sutter. It was so bad, the Sutter BOS advised Arkens they were not going to renew his three-year contract about two and a half years into it. While Arkens got paid for the next four or five months, he stopped showing up for work.

Arkens biggest failure was binding the county to a \$10 million contract with a \$9 million, 3.7 percent loan for a solar farm, illegally keeping an illegal separate bank account for it, kept it secret from the auditor (violations of the County Charter) until sometime after signing it and as of a couple of months ago and almost two years after signing, the project is not even finished. This is the guy who Combs recommended. Of course if the EDC BOS had done a background check, they would have known all this information. It was all over the media and even in the Sutter County Grand Jury report for 2015.

And now our Board of Supervisors is trusting Combs to select our new CAO as he has been assigned to do by our BOS. That idea is not only outrageous, but an abdication of one of the most important duties of the BOS, to choose the best candidate. Combs is incompetent not only as a CAO, but in selecting a new CAO not only because of his hiring friends, but his failure to perform background checks. It is something never to be overlooked.

An April 1 letter to the BOS and signed by all seven elected department heads forcefully recommended that Don Ashton be EDC's next CAO. Ashton is the current head of the largest department in the county, Health and Human Services. He did receive a rigorous and comprehensive background check, not

from HR, but from the county sheriff about six years ago who performed the same background check as hiring a new deputy. EDC sheriff's detectives did much of the legwork not only investigating everything on his resume, but interviewing prior employers, prior work associates, work history, and interviewing and checking on his education, neighbors, friends and other references.

Ashton was hired to be the sheriff's chief financial officer, where he put in place new money saving procedures and processes that saved the department tens of thousands of dollars. Ashton has a B.S. in environmental health and a master's in public administration (both from Cal State Northridge) and has worked in the public sector for most of his adult life. His last position before EDC was deputy executive officer of Administration and Finance for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, a county of 10 million people and over 4,000 square miles. He is not only eminently qualified, he went through the most thorough of background checks.

When the position of ACAO came open a few months ago, Ashton applied. He didn't get the job as it was given to a friend of CAO Larry Combs, Shawne Corley who at one time served as ACAO to Combs in Sutter County. She hired in at a base salary of about \$162,000 (not counting benefits) annually. I doubt any background scrutiny was done by HR. Comb and/or Knorr recently also hired another Sutter County alumnus into the job of EDC risk manager at a salary of over \$120,000, plus benefits. The new risk manager being from Sutter might just be a coincidence.

I asked Supervisor Brian Veerkamp whether a background check was done on Combs by Pam Knorr, our current HR director, and he said yes. If anyone had done a simple Google search as I have, Combs questionable background would have been obvious. Combs is here because he was a friend of Knorr who begged the BOS privately to hire this guy. Any interview with past and

current public officials from Sutter or Merced counties would have sunk Combs. And then there is the lack of a background check on HR Director Pam Knorr. Knorr was a good friend of Terri Daly who recommended Knorr to the BOS. No interviews were conducted with members of the Alpine County BOS or other public officials where she was CAO of an 800 square mile county with a total population of 1,150 where many of the county employees live in Nevada.

Combs has been here about 10 months and admits he doesn't know much about the county due to his two days a week schedule. Our seven electeds who wrote the recommendation letter praising Don Ashton's work history and qualifications have worked for the county longer than any BOS member, many for over two decades and have known Ashton for his entire EDC career (six years). ACAO Corley has been employed in EDC a month and a half. And Ashton, in less than four years working in EDC, was appointed department head of the county's largest agency. If anyone knows the quality and thoroughness of Ashton, it is Sheriff John D'Agostini, who was one of the seven electeds who signed the recommendation letter.

Ashton will take EDC forward in the tradition of government that is honest and completely transparent, back to the tradition of "government of the people, by the people and for the people." He will demand excellence and thereby get our fiscal house in order. Is the BOS afraid of that possibility? Failing to appoint Ashton would be the biggest failure of this board in the last six years. Failure of the BOS to do the right thing for our county would then warrant a serious recall effort.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.