

Letter: Barton volunteers appreciated

To the community,

On behalf of the physicians and staff at Barton Health, I want to thank the Barton Auxiliary for volunteering their time and providing generous donations for our health and wellness efforts.

More than 80 community members make up the Barton Auxiliary, a compassionate and dedicated group of individuals who help support Barton Hospital, its patients, and the community. They can be found in many places, such as escorting Skilled Nursing residents on field trips, guiding visitors around the hospital, handing out comfort items to patients, or sorting donations at the Attic Thrift Store. In this past year, the Barton Auxiliary volunteered 29,092 hours.

In addition to their volunteerism, the Auxiliary members are also generous benefactors of Barton Health. In 2015, the Auxiliary raised \$280,850.99 from the Attic and gift shop sales, holiday fundraisers, and personal donations. This means the Auxiliary has raised more than \$7,456,000 dollars since its inception in 1960.

Barton Memorial Hospital, which has transformed into a regional health system, would not have existed without the Barton Auxiliary. As we celebrate National Volunteer Week April 10-16, I extend my appreciation to the Barton Auxiliary for improving the health and wellness of our community.

Molly Hucklebridge Coolidge, communications specialist Barton Health

Opinion: Calif. high speed rail is a boondoggle

By Ted Gaines

If you thought the Bay Bridge construction fiasco would reign forever as California's worst, most unsurpassable example of a government project running wildly over budget, you are in for a bitter surprise. High speed rail is on pace to be the grand champion money waster in California history and needs to be stopped before our citizens take an unprecedented fleecing.



Ted Gaines

As a reminder, the Bay Bridge was initially slated for a retrofit after its dramatic and tragic failure during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. In 1995 the cost estimate stood at \$250 million. By 1997 it was \$1.3 billion. In 2001, \$2.6 billion, and finally \$6.5 billion at completion, but even that estimate doesn't include interest costs, which could push the final cost to \$13 billion.

Now comes high speed Rail (HSR), whose initial \$33 billion total cost estimate has already ballooned to more than \$60 billion, and the story is about to get worse. With construction in its infancy, the California Rail Authority is facing potential cost overruns of \$400 million dollars on just

the first 29 miles of the 500-plus mile project. And this is on the flat and sparse Central Valley. What will the cost overruns be in the infinitely more crowded and complex Bay Area, LA and San Diego?

We shouldn't view this overrun as an anomaly, but a preview. It's further proof that every HSR number should be disregarded and that the state is really obligating itself to build a project with an open-ended cost, taxpayers be damned.

Their own, recently updated business plan shows that they've identified only \$20.7 billion in funding for their \$64.2 billion in costs (and there is zero chance that \$64.2 number doesn't explode into something drastically higher). Where will the rest of the money come from? They are hoping for some more federal funding and for continued "cap-and-trade" revenue, but those are hardly guaranteed. The cap-and-trade program is scheduled to expire in 2020.

Moving forward with such an unrealistic and unlikely financing scheme is really a leap of bad faith on the part HSR. They are playing a cynical game where they will waste \$20 billion, in hopes that the state (read: taxpayers) will have to see the fantasy project through to the end after sinking so much money into the "investment."

It should speak volumes that private investors, required under the terms of the initial HSR plan, have stayed completely on the sidelines. No investors will risk their own money on the project, but politicians gambling tens of billions of your tax dollars is just fine.

On April 4 I attended an oversight hearing on the updated HSR business plan, where legislators and bullet train representatives went back and forth on the new timelines, routes and funding proposals. One group did not have a seat at the table: The opposition. They did not get to speak. On a project this big, with a brief but conspicuous history of

wildly inaccurate cost estimates, the critics should be more than a silent ATM.

Every assumption used to justify the initial high speed rail proposal approved by the voters in 2008 proved to be overly optimistic at best, purposely misleading at worst. The ridership projections have been slashed, the train speed cut, and, predictably, the updated cost estimate looks nothing like the 2008 version.

This is not the “Train to Nowhere” as it’s been derided – we should be so lucky. Its last stop is in the political hall of shame. To build it is to rob Californians of the desperately needed roads, water storage, and other meaningful infrastructure projects those tax dollars could buy. To build it is to doom taxpayers to perpetual subsidies to prop up the ultimate green vanity project.

State Sen. Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

Opinion: Time to overhaul TRPA commodities

By Joanne Marchetta

When people visit Tahoe for the first time, they marvel at the extraordinary natural landscape and fresh, clean air. At the same time, some are shocked at the dilapidated condition of the built environment: rundown buildings, crumbling infrastructure, and tired-looking development. The paradox is

compelling. Despite TRPA's mandate to harmonize the natural and human-made landscapes so that they blend together, outdated development that preceded environmental standards now serves as blight in our community.



Joanne
Marchetta

How we got here and what we plan to do about it is the focus of TRPA's Governing Board and the community at large. Because of cutting-edge science we know that not only is this outdated legacy development a visual scar on Tahoe, it contributes to the loss of the lake's world-famous clarity. Polluted stormwater runoff from areas developed before environmental measures were in place is clouding the lake's transparency. And policies from the 1980s that were designed to slow and manage growth and development had the unintended consequence of locking in the status quo and freezing in time 1970s-era buildings.

We need to improve the system of development rights for housing units, hotel rooms, and commercial space to accelerate the kind of environmentally-beneficial redevelopment projects our environment and our communities so desperately need. Overhauling the development commodities system is one of TRPA's top priorities. At a strategic planning retreat this March, our 15 Governing Board members confirmed they are committed to innovating and working together to make needed change happen.

But we at TRPA need your help to envision and implement the

growth management system of tomorrow. We need the ideas, perspective, and help of all Tahoe stakeholders—residents, business owners, investors, environmental advocates, local government leaders—to create a growth management system that will work for Tahoe in the 21st century.

The 1987 Regional Plan limited the total number of homes, hotel rooms, and commercial floor area allowed in the Tahoe basin, turning them into a fixed amount of development rights. It also created mechanisms for these commodities to be transferred from one property to another and banked and sold as development rights that are needed for any project to happen.

With the new Regional Plan adopted in 2012, “bonus” development rights are available from publicly-held pools for projects that remove development from environmentally-sensitive areas, restore those areas, and transfer development into existing town centers. The goal is redevelopment that benefits our environment and revitalizes our communities.

This complicated commodities system is unique to Tahoe and has profoundly impacted our environment and economy in ways that are both good and bad. The system has successfully halted the runaway growth that once threatened our basin and limited the size of Tahoe’s urban footprint. That’s a good outcome for our natural environment and our recreation-based economy that depends on its health. But the commodities system has also made it exceedingly difficult to realize the kind of multiple-benefit redevelopment projects that will restore our environment and revitalize our communities.

Without those redevelopment projects, Lake Tahoe will continue to see harmful environmental impacts from legacy development built before TRPA’s creation in marshes, meadows, and stream zones where it would not be allowed today. The restoration of those areas is critical for the health of our watershed and wildlife. Meanwhile, communities will continue to struggle to

secure the development rights and private investment needed to revitalize their town centers.

Interviews with dozens of stakeholders this year confirmed some of our suspicions about the commodities system: It is complicated, difficult to navigate, costly, not well understood, and a major obstacle to private investment and environmental redevelopment at Tahoe. The question confronting us now is how we will work together to make the commodities system better, and make it work for our environment and communities.

We at TRPA are committed to bringing our best ideas to the table and working toward a solution for this important issue. We want you to share with us your ideas to improve the commodities system and bring about this needed change and innovation. By working together, I am confident that we can reach a bold solution that protects and restores our invaluable natural resources and helps our communities thrive as places to live, work, play, and raise families.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Opinion: Rent control not an answer for affordable housing

By Joe Mathews

Rent control won't solve California's enormous housing problems. But that's not stopping Californians from pursuing rent control policies in their hometowns.

2016 threatens to become the Year of Rent Control, with the topic white-hot in the Bay Area, home to California's most expensive housing. Rent control refers to laws that put limits on how much landlords may raise rents.



Joe Mathews

Last summer, Richmond became the first city in California in 30 years to pass a new control law (though the law was later suspended, and the issue likely will be decided on the ballot). And in recent months, rent control has become a top issue in the state's biggest cities.

In San Jose, multiple proposals to tighten rent controls, perhaps by tying them to inflation, are being debated in the city council, and some could go to the ballot. A ballot initiative to cap rent increases was just filed in Oakland. L.A. is considering a new registry of all apartment rents. And in San Diego, a tenants' movement wants to establish new controls.

Such attention to rent control is understandable but unhelpful. Rent control is a policy that, as libraries full of research and California's own experience demonstrates, doesn't do much to accomplish its avowed purpose: to make more affordable housing available.

As the state's nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office made clear in a 2015 report, the heart of California's housing problem is that we Californians have long failed to build anywhere close to enough new housing to accommodate the number of people who live here. The office said we'd need an

additional 100,000 units a year to mitigate the problem. The reasons for the lack of building are many and related: community resistance, environmental policies, a lack of fiscal incentives for local governments to approve housing, and the high costs of land and construction.

Given all those barriers, today's debate over rent control seems beside the point.

If rent control really lowers prices and produces stability for tenants, as its supporters claim, why are cities with rent control—among them Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, Palm Springs, San Francisco, Santa Monica, San Jose, Thousand Oaks, and West Hollywood—so expensive? On the other side of the question, opponents of rent control sound ridiculous when they warn that it discourages new construction, especially since state law exempts new construction from rent control laws. The vast majority of California cities have no rent control—and they have housing shortages, too.

The real import of the rent control debate is as a reminder of California's civic disease: our long history of embracing complicated formulas as ways to dodge the hard work of democratically solving tough problems. Rent control laws often include complicated formulas for allowing rents to be raised by different percentages or in different ways depending on different conditions (like whether a landlord made capital improvements).

It's instructive that rent control's California history is deeply intertwined with the ultimate dodgy California formula, Proposition 13. That constitutional amendment, approved by voters in 1978, provided the foundation upon which two generations of California fiscal formulas have been built.

One false promise of Proposition 13 was that saving property owners money on their taxes would lead to lower home prices and rents. So when home prices and rents soared after the

amendment passed, liberal cities began to install rent control ordinances that, like Proposition 13, didn't lower rents or housing prices either.

And, just as Proposition 13 keeps taxes lower the longer you stay in your home, rent control grants special privileges to the older and more stable among us, regardless of their actual financial need. That is the maddening tragedy of 21st-century California: A place that once cherished and defined the new is now organized around the imperative of favoring the old and the established. It is infuriating, and odd, that people who think of themselves as progressives defend, and even seek to extend, such fundamentally conservative policies.

The people who need protection in California are poor people who cycle through housing. The best approach here is not more housing incentives—decades of housing incentives both to developers and renters have produced very little housing here—but developing robust support structures (via transportation, health, child care, jobs, and cash) that follow poor people wherever they can find opportunity. And, of course, more housing.

In a state devoted to anti-tax formulas that don't keep taxes low and education funding guarantees that don't guarantee enough money for education, it's no surprise that rent control laws don't make housing affordable. But let's not pretend that rent control is anything other than just another way of pretending to address our housing problems.

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

Letter: Restaurant workers assist at B&B

To the community,

Over the years, Bread & Broth has developed many supportive partnerships with Tahoe South Shore community organizations, businesses, churches and individuals. Every one of these partnerships brings something positive and unique to help B&B ease hunger for those in need. For almost a year now, Tahoe Restaurant Group has been providing resources to support both St. Theresa's B&B's Monday evening dinner program and B&B 4 Kids program.

Tahoe Restaurant Group's Azul Latin Kitchen and Base Camp Pizza have both sponsored an Adopt a Day of nourishment, with the most recent sponsorship on April 4. At the Monday evening dinner, Azul Latin Kitchen staff members jumped right in using their food service skills to provide a great B&B dinner experience for the evening's guests.

"We all had such a positive experience helping those in our community," said Rachel Ervin, who is a bartender at Azul Latin Kitchen. Also volunteering were fellow workmates Josh Setzer, Emerson Fuentes, Lauren Sullivan, Philip Peacock and Natashia Nielson.

In addition to hosting Adopt A Days, the restaurants have helped tremendously by sending crews of two to three volunteers almost every Monday evening to work the dinner's cleanup detail. Since the inception of the B&B 4 Kids program, the Tahoe Restaurant Group has also been donating the funds collected at Base Camp Pizza's mic night to provide weekend food to the community's food insecure K-8 grade students.

B&B would like to extend our sincerest thanks to the Tahoe Restaurant Group and its team member for their partnership

with our program and all that it has done to improve the service we provide to the needy members of our community.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Trump offers a lesson in rhetoric

By William Simon

For thousands of years, rhetoric, the art of persuasion, was a core area of study in our schools. Over the last century or so, that changed, and rhetoric and public speaking have all but disappeared from curricula. Why? My best explanation is that the academy became skeptical of rhetoric as speaking became associated with media salesmanship.

The costs of this decline of rhetoric education are now apparent, as the country reckons with a very strange presidential campaign. The rise of Donald Trump is much easier to understand if you have been schooled in rhetoric and advocacy.

I've had three educations in rhetoric. I first learned persuasive techniques as a courtroom litigator in the 1980s. Then, in 2001 and 2002, I had a re-education in rhetoric as the Republican nominee for governor of California. Today, I blend lessons from those experiences with classic texts—from Aristotle to a 1988 book by Roger Ailes and Jon Kraushar called "You Are the Message"—to teach the Art and Science of Rhetoric and Advocacy class at UCLA's law school.

At first, I had a lawyerly conviction that the content of my

trial presentations and court appearances was the most important aspect of public speaking. But when I ran for office, I learned I had been wrong.

It turns out that between 80 and 85 percent of delivering a message is non-verbal. Body language, I learned, is incredibly important. Ben Elliott, who was President Ronald Reagan's chief speechwriter, told me that Reagan would give a speech "with his eyes."

The Ailes book, and Aristotle, offered remarkably similar lessons. Make your point in one sentence. Find a way to be comfortable—and you'll make your audience comfortable. And be memorable—or "leave footprints," in the words of Ailes, now famous as the Fox News chief. One way to do that is to use *chiasmus*, (that's the Latin) or what we think of as contrast. As in President John F. Kennedy's formulation: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

After politics, I returned to my work in business, but I also wanted to share some of what I learned. Dan Schnur, a political consultant who now runs a USC institute, asked me what I would do next, and I replied, half-kiddingly, that I wanted to dress up like Julius Caesar, walk into a classroom, and declare, "*Veni vidi vici*." That conversation got me teaching classes first at USC, then at UCLA.

I didn't teach rhetoric at first. I taught economics, but I made a point of emphasizing speaking. I required students to make a five-minute presentation instead of writing papers. Some students told me they got a lot out of the assignment, and suggested offering a whole course on this topic.

In my rhetoric class at UCLA law, I have my students study classical texts (including the Romans Cicero and Quintillian) and great, historically important speeches. This year, the presidential campaign, and Trump, have come up repeatedly.

successful science expo

To the community,

On March 30, 31 and April 1, we were fortunate to have the first annual South Lake Science Expo at the Lake Tahoe Community College campus. This event is an exciting opportunity for our third- through fifth-grade students to explore the many wonders of physical science.

This amazing event would not have been possible without the help of so many. First, I would like to thank the incredible crew from the Tahoe Environmental Research Center/UC Davis in Incline (Heather, Amy, Evan, Emily and Bree – you are amazing).

TERC has been hosting this event for the last 11 years in Incline and the TERC team graciously agreed to bring it down to South Shore this year.

The Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe is responsible for gifting us with a generous grant that covered the financial needs of this project. Our deep and sincere thanks for this and all that you do for our community. You make this a better place to live every day.

The Science Expo committee (the TERC group and Greta, Rebecca and Bonnie) made this happen in a very short period of time. Thank you so much for all your help. You are an awesome team to work with.

Lake Tahoe Community College hosted this event at their site and were such gracious hosts, helping us in so many ways!

There were over 40 hands-on stations for the students to explore. We had over 725 students from five schools and more than 290 people at the public event. Quite a success for the first year.

I also need to thank the community for stepping up and volunteering their time to help man the stations. We could not have done this without all of you. There were over 125 volunteers who gave up mornings, afternoons and evening time to make this possible. What an amazing place to live and work. Thanks also go to Starbucks, Jamba Juice and Raley's for providing nourishment and other necessities. My deep and sincere thanks for everyone involved in making this such a success!

Beth Quandt, LTUSD science outreach coordinator

Letter: Action of South Tahoe council questioned

To the community,

At the April 5 [South Lake Tahoe City] council meeting, Mayor Wendy David declared that comments by the citizens during the non-agenda portion of the council meeting will no longer be televised. It has been suggested that this was done to "prevent staff and others from begin slandered".



Bruce Grego

Except for Councilmember [JoAnn] Conner's request that this

matter be placed on the agenda, the rest of the council was silent. No motion, no vote, no agenda item, just a bare statement by the mayor that the policy was changed.

I understand that the city is surveying other cities as to their policy. When I was on the council, I voted to support Councilmember [Angela] Swanson's motion to have this portion of the council meeting televised. Transparency should be the objective of government at all levels. I was surprised that the remaining council was silent when the mayor declared the change of policy; they should have been outraged. Who told the mayor to change the policy? Does the council need to take a survey before they know what to do?

I demand that Mayor Wendy David explain her actions. We have council that can't resolve their petty differences, fail to understand democratic principles, and seek to reduce transparency. Are these "leaders" of our community competent to vote on the merits of major issues, such as the loop road? Or are their votes going to be based upon personal animosities, hidden agendas, and surveys? We should be worried.

Bruce Grego, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: SLT warm room advocates thankful

To the community,

On behalf of the Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless (TCH), I would like to thank our community for a successful inaugural season of the South Lake Tahoe Warm Room and the first

overnight homeless services in the Tahoe Region.

Our agency appreciates vital funding provided this winter by the El Dorado Community Foundation, Tahoe Magic, and Reliapro Painters, along with many other community partners.

Each week we received food, clothing, toiletry, and supply donations from caring and compassionate community partners such as the Junior S Club of South Lake Tahoe Middle School, Girl Scouts, South Tahoe High School, and Tahoe Beach and Ski Club. Harrah's and Harveys Employee's Reaching Out and Barton Health both hosted large supply drives as well, providing most of our needed items. Other supportive groups included the Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe, Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe, Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra and the Tahoe Douglas Rotary.

Special thanks to Amanda Burroughs and staff at Imagine Salon who provided our guests with fresh haircuts in March.

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 1,600 hours to this project this winter.

Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless can be contacted at tahoewarmroom@gmail.com or 775.573.0822. Please visit our **website**.

Marissa Muscat, Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless

PS: Donations are welcomed to aid in funding the Warm Room 2016-17 season. Checks may 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. Online donations are possible; note "Warm Room" in the additional information box.

Opinion: Campaign to save India's tigers ignores human cost of conservation

By Lisa Margonelli

Tigers are a hypothetical necessity.

Hypothetical in the sense that very few of us spend any time around tigers outside of zoos, though we interact with tiger images daily, depending on what type of cereal we eat, or sports team we root for.

Necessities in the sense that the existence of tigers is a certification that wildness still exists and that conservation works.

Tigers in India are a conservation success story, a bright orange stripe in a century of heavy extinction. A hundred years ago, India had tens of thousands of tigers, but by the early 1970s they had dwindled down to a mere 1,200. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi started Project Tiger in 1973, relocating 200,000 people away from designated tiger zones, and creating buffer zones between tigery jungles and developed areas. In 1975, tigers were listed as an endangered species. In January 2015, there were 2,261 tigers in India—70 percent of the world's wild tigers. (There were about 13,000 non-wild tigers in 2010.)

Project Tiger and other initiatives in the Sunderbans, the giant mangrove swamp on the border of India and Bangladesh, seem to offer a successful model for that: Careful stewardship can preserve whole biological zones, complete with beautiful

wild predators. But on closer inspection, Project Tiger is also a cautionary tale about what happens when tigers (and conservation) are a bigger priority than the humans who live nearby.

Some people have paid a very high price for the world's few tigers. People who live in the buffer areas around the Sunderbans have suffered from so many deadly tiger attacks that there are about 3,000 so-called tiger widows in India and 10,000 in Bangladesh. A few weeks ago, I happened across a journal article, by Arabinda Chowdhury and three colleagues, with the title, "Ecopsychosocial Aspects of Human-Tiger Conflict: An Ethnographic Study of Tiger Widows of Sundarban Delta, India," published in *Environmental Health Insights* earlier this year.

Chowdhury, a psychiatrist who spends part of his time working for the National Health Service in the U.K., is particularly concerned about the psychological cost of human-tiger conflict. From 2001-06, he and his team surveyed more than 3,000 households in the Gosaba area, which is right at the edge of the tiger reserve, then did psychiatric evaluations of 49 tiger widows, spending as long as three days with each woman.

Before they ever came face-to-face with a tiger, these women's families were very poor. Entering the tiger zone to get wood, hunt for honey, or catch tiger prawn seed have become the main local sources of income, but they require paying the government for a permit. Men from poor families haven't been able to afford the permits so many sneak in at night. In the Indian area of the Sunderbans, about 40 people—mostly those sneaking around without permits—are attacked by tigers every year.

After they lose their husbands to tigers, widows become much poorer. The widows had few skills: Of 65 tiger widows in one survey, only three could read.

The widows' poverty was amplified by another factor. Tigers are "not just an animal, they're a god-like concept," as Dr. Chowdhury put it, and tiger deaths are seen as signs of the wrath of the forest goddess Bonobibi. Families and communities shun tiger widows.

The plight of the tiger widows is just the top layer of a much larger problem: a lack of electricity, clean water, transportation, health care, or industry surrounding the conserved areas, where the World Bank estimates that 1,700 children under 5 died in 2008 alone from dirty water and poor sanitation. The charismatic tiger brings our attention to the tiger widows, of course, but the toll of filthy water is many times higher. Conservation needs a moral compass that considers human costs.

India has been debating how to better balance conservation and development for decades, and in 2006 the country passed legislation on the rights of forest people, but that was not extended to the Sunderbans. Since the study, Chowdhury says, some things have improved in the buffer zone, and a Bangladeshi group called LEDARS has helped many tiger widows on the other side of the border. In central India, a nonprofit called Satpuda works with more than 80 villages near tiger reserves to provide jobs, medical care, and education—in addition to doing tiger conservation. Chowdhury has a dream of training people in villages to do basic psychological counseling as part of a medical team, while encouraging highly skilled psychiatric professionals to visit during their vacations. But it will require a lot of political will to address the deep problems in the area: poverty, population growth, changing climate, and the human-tiger conflicts.

The Western environmental movement of the 1970s aimed to protect wild animals from humans, but the next environmental movement can't succeed morally or practically unless it also protects and enhances the lives of the poorest humans. When we finally get down to combatting global warming, we also need to

tackle development aggressively. This will mean facing up to the real-life tensions between the ideal of living “naturally” in nature and letting nature live.

Ironically, the best approach for humans may be to simply leave nature to the tigers. Indian academics estimate that if sea levels continue rising in the Sunderbans and strong tropical storms keep hitting the area, it’s going to be too dangerous for human beings to continue living there and as many as 13 million climate refugees from the mangroves in India and Bangladesh could flee. There’s a growing discussion that the better solution in the long run may be to move the humans to urban areas with electricity, clean water, jobs, and access to education.

Then, like us, these Sunderbans exiles may live in dense cities, work in high rises, chat long- distance, and eat strange manufactured foods. And the tigers can continue to roam wild. Somewhere out there.

Lisa Margonelli writes the Small Science column for Zócalo Public Square, where she is the science and humanities editor.