

# **Letter: Generosity helps transitional youth**

**To the community,**

On April 2, the Kiwanis Club of Tahoe Sierra received over 350 pieces of luggage, duffle bags, backpacks, and sleeping bags for children and youth in transition.

These youngsters include foster children and transitional aged youth who may be homeless or couch surfers. No longer do they need to carry their limited belongings in garbage bags as they move from place to place. The luggage will be distributed by Tahoe Youth & Family Services, and Sierra Child and Family Services.

Kiwanis Club of Tahoe Sierra thanks T.J. Maxx for the use of the parking lot as the staging site for the collection. We thank those generous community members who have helped youth and children bring a bit of order to their lives by providing much needed luggage.

If you have luggage to donate but missed the event, may bring your suitcases, duffle bags, and backpacks to Sierra Child and Family Services (2580 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe).

**Tom Millham, Kiwanis Club of Tahoe Sierra**

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# **Letter: Bread & Broth thanks**

# volunteer team

**To the community,**

“We love helping with the great folks at Bread & Broth,” commented Jacalyn Andrews. “It warms your heart to be involved with serving a hot meal” to those who attended B&B’s dinner Monday evening dinner on March 28.

Andrews is a game supervisor at Caesars’ Stateline casinos. She and her fellow HEROs volunteer crewmembers had a great time at the Harrah’s/Harveys HEROs Adopt A Day dinner.

Employee volunteerism is the cornerstone of Caesars’ community involvement and the employee-based community volunteers are called Caesars HEROs. The local Harrah’s/Harveys’ HEROs have been supporters of B&B’s AAD program for several years and have been sponsoring two dinners annually. Having the HEROs at the dinners is a big help because their volunteers know what to do and to a great job helping out.

Along with Andrews, the HEROs volunteer crew consisted of Darlene Winkelman, Kristel Kimball, Pat Frega and Steve Campbell. These experienced HEROs volunteers filled the giveaway bags with fruit, vegetables, dairy products, bread/pastries, and canned goods, helped serve the baked chicken dinner and closed out the evening by helping with the dinner’s cleanup.

“It truly warms my heart to serve the less fortunate of our community,” said Winkelman. B&B really appreciates the concern and involvement of the HEROs in our joint efforts to ease hunger in the Tahoe South Shore Community.

**Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth**

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# Opinion: 'Hamilton' is hardly history

By Nancy Isenberg

"Hamilton" is the hottest show on Broadway, filled with hip-hop songs, R&B rhythms, and tri-cornered hats. Its multi-racial cast portrays the pantheon of Revolutionary greats, and for many a starry-eyed critic this sing-along with the founders offers "a factually rigorous historical drama." Those are the words of Jody Rosen in the New York Times, and he is not alone. As an academic who spent years studying Aaron Burr before producing a scholarly biography, I can say emphatically that rules of historical rigor do not apply to "Hamilton".

The musical follows an old playbook that divides the founders into heroes and villains. This started after the Revolution when Charles Willson Peale began compiling portraits of "Revolutionary Patriots" and displayed them in his renowned Philadelphia Museum. In 1818, a Russian diplomat and artist, Pavel Petrovich Svinin, observed "every American considers it his sacred duty to have a likeness of Washington in his home, just as we have images of God's saints." In death, Washington figuratively became a god, when an artist attached his iconic face and head to a classic pose of Jesus sitting on a cloud and ascending into heaven. The impulse to glorify the founders is still with us. They were romanticized in the silent film era, and in innumerable, hokey Hollywood movies since. "The Patriots" awed New York theater critics during World War II, and "1776" rocked Broadway in 1969, with Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin singing and dancing their way to independence. Have we already forgotten HBO's gushing tribute, "John Adams"?

The drama of the founders has overtaken the reality. In the undergraduate seminar I teach, "America's Founding Myths," I ask my students to identify the life masks of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, produced in 1825, which is as close as we can come to capturing their likenesses. None of my students recognized them. Why? They are old. Adams is jowly and bald. There isn't an ounce of glamor in these unflattering busts. The reason that "Hamilton" is so popular is that the theatergoer is treated to vigorous youth, brazen sex appeal, macho brashness, capped by so-called genius—all wrapped up in a loving and whimsical portrait of a Hamilton who "tells it like it is" in the pounding, nonstop rhythms of hip hop. Which guy do you want to be? A shrunken Jefferson, or the dashing and daring Hamilton who, like Peter Pan, never appears to grow up?

No one watching "Hamilton" will want to be Burr, one of the most interesting figures of early American history. Leslie Odom Jr., who plays Burr, has a lovely voice, but his portrayal echoes a familiar slur: the opportunist. Or to use Hamilton's favorite insult of Burr (and others): a "cunning" man, who carries himself with aristocratic airs. In "Hamilton", Burr is a mere prop, a villainous foil, his personality an overblown caricature. He is portrayed as a man who lacks principles, unwilling to believe in, or fight for, anything that matters.

The historical Burr was no less passionate about the Revolution than Hamilton, eagerly joining the arduous 350-mile march through Maine wilderness to Canada in 1775. He was appointed aide-de-camp to Gen. Richard Montgomery, who died during the invasion and lived on as a Revolutionary martyr. For courage under fire, Burr received a commendation from Congress. Contrary to the song lyrics, he wasn't "waiting" for anything.

The men he later commanded admired him, and he believed in expanding democratic rights to uplift and empower poorer men.

He was not pompous or aloof, nor a man of mere surfaces, nor a Chesterfieldian dandy, as his slanderous enemies pretended. His New York wing of the Jeffersonian party, the "Burrites," was men of mixed class backgrounds, whereas the Schuyler-Hamilton Federalist faction was a top-down organization favoring elite interests. Falsely casting Burr as an aristocrat is a rhetorical ploy: It incorrectly shifts the blame for class prejudice onto him.

By taking sides in a mudslinging fight for power that goes back more than 200 years, "Hamilton" misses Burr's actual contributions. He was a skilled innovator of democracy, working to make elections, financial services, and even the U.S. Senate more fair and transparent. In New York, he was charged with "revolutionizing the state," because he backed progressive policies for funding internal improvements, debtor relief, and establishing a more democratic method of electing state senators. He founded the Manhattan Company, the first bank to extend financial services to ordinary merchants and mechanics outside the ruling elite. As vice president, he presided over the Senate's impeachment trial of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase in 1805. His judicious behavior, which helped to maintain the impartiality of the judiciary, won him grudging praise from many Federalists; one called him "one of the best presiding officers I ever saw." A man with sophisticated ideas, respected for his impartiality and scrupulous conduct—this Burr never appears in "Hamilton".

Reducing Burr to a villain turns the musical into a lopsided morality tale, glossing over the complexity of early America in favor of characters we can cheer for. Thus hip-hop "Hamilton" unabashedly celebrates the American Dream; the conceit that the country has always been the land of opportunity. Hamilton represents the immigrant made good, because he was born on the Caribbean island of St. Nevis. Left out of the upbeat story is that Hamilton—and the Federalist party he headed—was hostile to the idea that the

United States should ever be led by newcomers. It was the Federalists who pressed for a constitutional amendment barring naturalized foreigners from elected offices, and it was that villain Burr, in the New York Assembly at the time, who gave an eloquent speech defending the liberal promise of the young republic. "America stood with open arms and presented an asylum to the oppressed of every nation," he said. "Shall we deprive these persons of an important right derived from so sacred a source as our Constitution?"

The musical puts feminist words in the mouth of Elizabeth Hamilton, presuming she wanted to tell Jefferson to rewrite the Declaration to include women. This is absurd. In truth, Aaron Burr was far ahead of Hamilton, Jefferson, and Adams in advancing the ideas of English writer Mary Wollstonecraft, the leading Enlightenment advocate of women's rights. Burr and his wife, Theodosia, educated their daughter as they might have a son: She could read and write at the age of 3, then mastered French, Italian, Latin, Greek, mathematics, history, and geography. The idea that women were the intellectual equals of men was a radical one, and Hamilton attacked Burr for it, calling him a proponent of "Godwinism." (William Godwin was Wollstonecraft's husband.)

Finally, "Hamilton" wrongly claims that the duel with Burr was over the election of 1800, and that Burr knowingly shot Hamilton after he saw him fire a bullet in the air. Wrong again. The real cause of the duel was that Hamilton attacked Burr's character (and refused to apologize) when Burr ran for the New York governorship in 1804. Conveniently missing is the fact that Hamilton supplied the pistols, and the one he used had a secret hair trigger. This gave him an unfair advantage and violated the gentlemanly code of conduct.

Can we expect a more accurate musical someday? Probably not. Interestingly, in times of political turmoil, the pop-culture pendulum often swings in a critical direction. In the 1930s, the iconoclastic painter Grant Wood (best known for his

American Gothic) mockingly reworked the Parson Weems tale of George Washington, as the cherry tree slayer who would not lie. The same artist turned Paul Revere's ride into a surreal jaunt through a fairytale town, with Revere astride a miniature rocking horse. Wood's point was simple: In the midst of the Great Depression, bedtime stories about the founders were suitable for children but not adults. It was time for Americans to grow up and embrace their real history, a darker one. Gore Vidal did the same in 1973, when the breakdown of Nixon's Watergate was in full sway, publishing "Burr", a fictional history, in which Jefferson is savagely shown as a Janus-faced, dilettantish, ruthlessly power-hungry politician. In times of trouble, a little skepticism (and sarcasm) goes a long way.

"Hamilton" may be a delight to watch, but let's not convince ourselves that it honors the discipline of history. When he interviewed Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Late Show" host Stephen Colbert joked: "I didn't have to read the Bible, because I saw 'Jesus Christ Superstar'." That pretty much says it all. The musical "Hamilton" is to the historical Hamilton what Charlton Heston's Moses is to . . . well, you get the picture.

*Nancy Isenberg, T. Harry Williams professor of American history at Louisiana State University, is the author of "Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr", and the forthcoming "White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America". She is also the coauthor with Andrew Burstein of "Madison and Jefferson".*

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# Opinion: Fantasy sports is the same as gambling

By Timothy Fong

I not only play fantasy sports; I study them. Fantasy sports are online games in which people assemble virtual teams of real-life players and compete against other virtual teams based on statistical performances.

While money is often involved, these games are not seen as gambling by the federal and most state governments. But for me, an addiction psychiatrist who co-directs UCLA's Gambling Studies Program, it has become harder to tell the difference.

Last year, I was one of 50 million people who played fantasy sports; I spent Thanksgiving playing daily fantasy football. My son and I opened an account on one of two major companies that organize daily fantasy—a fast-paced and hugely popular version of fantasy sports that squeezes online competition into a single day as opposed to an entire season. An entry fee of \$50 allowed me to assemble a team of NFL players and pit them against the roster of another anonymous user. The website compared our players' stats side-by-side in real-time, and awarded \$90 (\$50 from him, \$50 from me, and \$10 to the website) to the team that had the most points at the end of the day's games.

My desire to win surprised me. Every time one of my players did well, I felt a rush of excitement. Every time one of my opponent's players did well, I felt a pang of frustration. As the games wound down and it became clear I would lose \$50, I felt unsatisfied—not at the idea of losing money, but at the idea of losing to someone I didn't know.

This daily version of fantasy sports rapidly emerged in American popular culture last year, in part through a \$250

million advertising push. The companies, which include DraftKings and FanDuel, aren't regulated like traditional forms of gambling, and the companies argue that they shouldn't be, on the grounds that they're games of skill. But in recent months, some states have moved to classify daily fantasy sports as gambling, arguing that they're actually games of chance.

The week after Thanksgiving, I played a second round of games because I had money left over in my account. I played against another faceless avatar, and lost. My opponent and I coincidentally had chosen almost the exact same roster (had I been able to see his roster ahead of time, I would have picked other players). He won because his tight end caught a touchdown, and mine did not. He lucked into picking the right guy on the right day.

The season-long version of fantasy sports never feels this random. Those games are measured, nuanced, and definitive, and the winner earns victory by outmaneuvering the rest of the league. I've played season-long fantasy sports for more than 20 years. There are nine people in my baseball league, and it's always the same three who fight for the top and the same three who finish at the bottom.

In daily fantasy sports, players wager money on an event of uncertain outcome in the hopes of winning more money. That feels like gambling, because that's the essence of the gambling experience. The layouts of daily fantasy sports websites look exactly like online poker and Internet sports gambling websites, with slick graphics and tantalizing promises of big wins.

Gambling is meant to be recreation. And for most people who do it, it's a diversion, an escape. I remember the first bet I ever made, a losing \$20 wager that the Chicago Cubs would win the 1993 World Series. I lost, but it imprinted in me the experience of a wager—the anticipation, the excitement, the

optimism, the denial, and ultimately the acceptance of defeat. Gambling disorder, meanwhile, is a psychiatric condition that affects 2 percent of the population. It's characterized by addiction: continued gambling despite harmful consequences, even after defeat.

Daily fantasy sports websites are anonymous, easy to access, and even easier to hide. Anyone could place thousands of dollars at risk with a click of the mouse, and no one close to them would know. This is where the risk to develop addiction is highest. There is no maximum amount of money to be lost, and there are no consumer protections.

Today, my daily fantasy sports account sits at \$49, with enticements like "deposit more" and "get back in the game." Every once in a while, I'll log on to see what games are being offered. But the draw for me to play is low. I know I won't enjoy the experience. Besides, the NFL season is over and I need to get my fantasy baseball team in order.

*Timothy Fong is an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he co-directs the UCLA Gambling Studies Program. He is a lifelong Chicago Cubs fan.*

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## **Editorial: California's most pressing need – water**

**Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the April 1, 2016, Sacramento Bee.***

As if we needed more proof, the Sierra snow survey last week made clear that Californians must continue to conserve water

while working to build a more reliable water system.

The snowpack is roughly normal in Northern California. But the situation is worse in Southern California, where El Niño was a bust, delivering half of normal rainfall.

Yet more evidence arrived Friday in the form of a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announcement that while many customers will receive adequate water from the Central Valley Project, farmers on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley will receive a mere 5 percent of their contracted allocation.

California's existing plumbing is in need of help. The state must protect the environment, but also ensure a reliable water delivery system.

**Read the whole story**

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## **Letter: EDC electeds lobby for next CAO**

***Publisher's note: The following letter was sent to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on April 5, 2016. The signers are all elected officials.***

Dear Supervisor [Ron] Mikulaco:

We, the undersigned elected officials for El Dorado County, hereby submit our unanimous recommendation of and support for Don Ashton as the next El Dorado County chief administrative officer.

As you are no doubt aware, over the last few years El Dorado County has experienced a series of transitions in key county

management positions. The many transitions in such critical positions as chief administrative officer, assistant chief administrative officer, human resources director, and county counsel create an atmosphere of uncertainty and discontinuity. The citizens of El Dorado County have been promised the highest quality service delivered by an efficient, cost effective county work force. The employees tasked with delivering on that promise deserve stable, competent administrative leadership.

The seven elected department heads are unanimous in supporting Don Ashton as the person to provide this stable administrative leadership. Don has a proven record of fiscal prudence and no nonsense leadership. He was a respected executive officer in Los Angeles County with increasing responsibility over more than 10 years. Since moving to El Dorado County, he has served admirably for six years; first as the sheriff's CFO, then as a principle analyst in the Chief Administrative Office, and most recently as the director of Health and Human Services, the county's largest department. As the HHSA director, Mr. Ashton managed the department through a chaotic and tumultuous consolidation, a solid example of his leadership ability. Significantly, Mr. Ashton came to live in El Dorado County not seeking to climb the ladder, he did that quite successfully in Los Angeles, he came here to live and make this the home for his family.

Simply stated, we are confident your board will have many well qualified candidates for CAO from which to choose; however, none will possess the depth of quality in character, competence and community as Don Ashton.

Respectfully submitted,

**Vern Pierson, district attorney**

**John D'Agostini, sheriff**

**Karl Weiland, assessor**

**Cherie Raffety, treasure-tax collector**

**Joe Harn, auditor**

**William Schultz, recorder-clerk**

**Rich Briner, surveyor**

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# **Opinion: Time to Keep Squaw True**

**By Tom Mooers**

Even in the face of increasing opposition, massive development for Tahoe's Squaw Valley took another step forward last week when Placer County released a final version of the proposed plan.

Would-be developer KSL Capital Partners is asking Placer County for permission to build a series of high rises – including a 10-story tall indoor water park – in iconic Squaw Valley. According to Sierra conservationists, it would be development of a size, scale, and scope North Tahoe has never seen.

The latest version of proposed development in Squaw Valley is a matter of 'meet the new plan; same as the old plan'. It's

still a blueprint for disaster that threatens everything we love about the Tahoe Sierra.

The fight over the future of Squaw Valley is shaping up as a pivotal moment in the long struggle between conservation and development in the Sierra Nevada.

KSL Capital Partners, a private equity firm based in Denver, purchased Squaw Valley in 2010, citing the property's "great growth potential". They filed an initial application for development entitlements in 2011 and followed up with a series of proposals, resulting in the final version of the "Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan" last week.

The plan is available **online**.

Proposed development would remake Squaw Valley with a series of high rise condo projects with 1,500 new bedrooms – as many as in three of the biggest casinos at Tahoe's Stateline combined, time share mansions in the mouth of Shirley Canyon, and a massive indoor amusement park with waterslides, fake rivers, arcades, and simulated sky-diving.

All told, the project would be so big it would take 25 years to construct.

Local residents, second homeowners, and conservationists have struck back with a grassroots campaign to Keep Squaw True.

Even though KSL's proposed nightmare just took another step towards becoming Tahoe's reality, we're committed to stopping the project and ensuring a sane future for Squaw.

More than 300 private citizens, regulatory agencies, neighboring jurisdictions, and conservation organizations wrote letters to Placer County during last summer's public comment period. And nearly all – 97 percent – of those letters expressed opposition to project approval or questioned the county's environmental analysis. Over the past several months

an additional 80 individuals have written the Placer County Board of Supervisors urging them to reject the proposal.

Opponents point to a range of unacceptable impacts the project would have on North Tahoe, from the economic viability of local businesses to the brightness of stars in the night sky. The strategy of KSL seems to be to stay full steam ahead with their project – in spite of increasing opposition.

In last week's revised version, the total number of bedrooms (1,547) remains the same, the maximum building height (108 feet) is unchanged, and the proposed indoor water park would still have waterslides, fake rivers, and arcades.

Placer County's ongoing environmental review of the project has raised a number of potential problems.

Of particular concern: traffic. Tahoe is increasingly infamous for gridlock. Earlier this winter, the California Highway Patrol turned back cars trying to exit Highway 89 toward Squaw Valley; there was simply no room for more cars.

Yet the proposed development would add an estimated 8,410 new daily car trips to Tahoe traffic when traffic is already at its worst.

The horrific traffic projections raise a basic question. Do you want to spend your time in Tahoe enjoying the great outdoors – or stuck inside your car?

Reliability of the local water supply has also emerged as an important issue. Even during a winter of abundant snow, Squaw Valley is acutely aware of persistent drought and its limited watershed.

For years, the primary water provider in the valley has warned that their supplies are inadequate and that they need to build a pipe to import water from Martis Valley. Yet KSL claims there is plenty of water for their new development.

“It makes no sense to consider massive development in a place that is already worried about insecure water supplies,” says Isaac Silverman, staff attorney for Sierra Watch.

Some of the project’s demand for water would come from its proposed indoor water park. At 90,000 square feet, it would be as wide as a Walmart and more than twice as tall. KSL says they need it as a “wet amenity to compete with the lake” (as in Tahoe). Local residents feel otherwise.

Squaw Valley should be the kind of place where we introduce our kids to the wild wonders of the great outdoors, not funnel them inside for the artificial amusements of a big box water park.

Most important to many opponents of the project is its potential impact on Tahoe and its famously blue water. The bi-state Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) weighed in with a comment letter, pointing out that impacts from the development would “reach and extend into the Tahoe Region.”

Of particular concern to TRPA is the amount of traffic Squaw Valley development would pump into the Tahoe basin. That traffic – and the pollution it would generate – would lead directly to loss in lake clarity.

Their concerns are shared by regional conservation groups and, also, local businesses. More than 50 signed on to a joint letter to Placer County, urging officials “to reject KSL’s proposed development and, instead, encourage landowners and the community to work together to create a blueprint that makes sense for Squaw, Tahoe, and beyond.”

But, in spite of the clear consensus of opposition to the plan, the latest revision included no substantive changes – and continues to move through the planning process.

Next, Placer County will release the final environmental impact report for the project – the final written assessment

of what proposed development would mean to Squaw Valley, to Tahoe, and beyond. The public will have 30 days to digest that document. Then the county will hold public hearings – with a vote on the project coming as early as this summer.

Conservationists plan on rallying more support for their campaign to Keep Squaw True.

This isn't the first time Tahoe has been threatened by wild development schemes. Fifty years ago, our parents and grandparents worked together to protect the lake from a plan to ring the lake with freeways and urbanization. Now it's our turn.

*Tom Mooers is executive director of Sierra Watch, the conservation nonprofit spearheading a campaign to Keep Squaw True.*

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## **Opinion: EDC wants spin doctor to tell its 'truth'**

**By Larry Weitzman**

County government is not on sale like a gallon of milk at the local grocery, although many residents think if you have enough money, then maybe it is. In the past few years' things haven't been going well in El Dorado County government.

Our county has had many problems, especially in the hiring of some high level management people, the failure to do serious background checks, the public's distaste for the recent 15 percent raise, unnecessary additional hiring, and the failure

of the county administration to do its job in a timely manner, such as the utter and complete failure to transfer property tax revenues during fire department annexations and its most blatant failure, the inability to timely file Mitigation Fee Act five-year Nexus studies thereby jeopardizing more than \$30 million of EDC money. A lawsuit is currently in progress regarding the MFA failures. These are only a few county failures.



Larry Weitzman

Larry Combs, the interim CAO, has a solution. He wants to hire a “spin doctor,” otherwise known as a public information officer. A PIO becomes a buffer between the public inquiries and direct communications between county officials and the public, like a lawyer protecting his client from direct communications, or a press secretary protecting a politician. Ex-CAO Terry Daly tried this once before about two years ago when she hired a public relations firm to protect her and the BOS when Daly had the BOS issue a public relations statement prepared by the PR firm. The 900-word press release tried to tell the public how great a job the CAO and BOS were doing in a series of half-truths. That was a complete waste of a \$25,000 contract. Daly soon become an embarrassment and was let go a few months later.

Now with the roads of our county failing apart, the BOS last month on a 3-2 vote stopped general fund road maintenance with Brian Veerkamp, Sue Novasel and Mike Ranalli voting no against a Shiva Frentzen motion to reinstate such general fund road funding (for a second time). The same gang of three

supervisors also voted down (again for the second time) the policy of requiring of the CAO to prepare five-year budget projections.

But that gang of three (minus one) Supervisors (Veerkamp, Novasel and Ron Mikulaco) in a more recent vote on March 22 voted 3-2 to raise county fees (taxes) by about a million dollars annually (Frentzen and Ranalli voted no). However, after the vote, Mikulaco claims he voted "no" on the fees and the resolution and minutes have yet to be signed by the chairman of the BOS who happens to be Mikulaco. The clerk of the BOS says he watched the video over and over again and says it sure looks like it was a 3-2 vote for increasing the fees. I agree as I watched the video several times. There will be more to come on this.

While salaries and benefits have increased by a total of at least \$77 million in the last three years because of 15 percent salary raises, increasing benefits costs and new hiring, the excuse you will hear from EDC officials is that we haven't raised county fees in six years. But the real reason is the EDC BOS has created a situation of continuous deficits in that with longevity raises and the skyrocketing expense of benefits, revenues will never catch up. It's in the mid-year budget report. CAO Combs says we have no general fund money for road maintenance, EDC's No. 2 priority.

Something has gotta' give and that's your wallets. But that's not all. Residents are complaining about road maintenance and one of the responses demonstrates why EDC needs a spokesperson after I excerpt the email of EDC's director of transportation in response to an inquiry on why our road maintenance is not getting done (think of the tax hike above). "Road maintenance is accomplished using road fund which is funded through gasoline taxes and while the cost of gasoline being low is good for the consumer, the amounting of funding for road maintenance within the county has fallen substantially."

Doesn't this high level guy know that state gasoline taxes are a fixed amount per gallon (about 41 cents)? Gasoline use is down slightly because of more economical cars, but gas prices have almost nothing to do with gasoline taxes, but it could have an effect on sales taxes, which are not gasoline taxes. The fed charges a flat 18.4 cents per gallon as well.

Then he goes on to say, "One alternative that you may consider is having your neighbors ban together and create a special assessment district to maintain the neighborhood's roadway infrastructure." In other words, he is telling the concerned taxpayer he can raise his own and his neighbors' taxes to do something the county is already obligated to do. While the director didn't know his subject very well (understandable as he was hired by another incompetent, Kim Kerr, with no significant background checks), a PIO would have never told the truth that you should raise your own taxes (because the county is using all its money to pay for me and the rest of the county employees. If you don't believe how well we are paid, just check it out on [transparentcalifornia.com](http://transparentcalifornia.com)). This is the same department that messed up the purchase of two \$430K snowplows two years ago and now wants to raise the taxes of the residents in Lake Tahoe.

For the cost of a \$150,000 plus PIO, we could hire two road maintenance workers, put them in one of our many maintenance trucks, and send them out every day to fill potholes. But those guys wouldn't be able to cover up EDC incompetence, which is the purpose of a PIO.

We talk of accountability and transparency, which needs to be complete. A PIO is nothing more than a shield whose sole purpose is to hide the truth or spins it for public consumption and more important adds a layer of opaque glass between county officials and the public. The county is full of corruption and misdeeds and that's why they need a PIO, it's to protect themselves, not help county residents. If the county were doing a good job, which many of the rank and file

employees try to do every day, they wouldn't need a spin doctor to tell us how things are wonderful and rosy. Next thing you know is that they will hire an ad agency. Our county needs a PIO like we need another Larry Combs, Terri Daly and Kim Kerr and/or the gang of three. And this list could go on.

*Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.*

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## **Opinion: Education standards failing students**

**By Rachel Burstein**

Why can't history classes show students why history matters?

That's what I thought as I read through a new framework for teaching K-12 history in the U.S.—California's History-Social Science Framework.

This is supposed to be the new, 21st century approach. It spans hundreds of pages of minute detail. But this document doesn't seem to recognize the value of history.

Consider the framework for fifth grade. In 164 pages, it defines the theme for the year ("making a new nation") and provides a jumble of guiding questions (e.g., how proximity to water affected the lives of North American Indians) teaching resources, and classroom activities (e.g., team analysis of paintings depicting the American Revolutionary War).

Absent, though, is any concise statement of why all this content, and the skills needed to thoroughly analyze that content, are important. In other words, why should anyone

care?

There are good answers to that question. I have a doctorate in history and used to teach college history courses; now I'm a social studies curriculum designer at an education technology company. I know that history can be more than engrossing. It teaches students about the messiness of the world and invites them to argue and speak truth to power. It shows them that they, too, are historical actors. In a word, it is empowering.

But it's hard to sense that when reading through the various state frameworks for social studies. Unlike math and language arts, social studies has no set of standards approved by multiple states, so the documents are idiosyncratic and sometimes conflicting. California's is far from the worst: It doesn't have the whiff of politicization in Texas' elementary school standards, which ask teachers to communicate the "benefits of the free enterprise system," or the local bias of Tennessee's—which asks second-graders to identify 11 "major" American cities, four of which are in Tennessee.

In many ways, California's framework is a model. It trusts teachers to find different ways to communicate ideas. And it draws on new research about teaching effectiveness, inclusion of underserved groups of students, and fostering 21st-century skills.

But nowhere does it say why history matters.

I can guess why the standards don't answer this question. In most schools across the country, it's math and language arts, and the testing tied to them, that drive instruction. So educators are forced to present social studies as serving the other subjects. Students use their graph-reading skills in history class to reinforce math lessons. Reading primary sources lets students exercise critical thinking skills learned in language arts classes.

The problem is that learning history isn't merely useful for

learning other things. History is illuminating and transformative on its own.

When I taught survey courses on global and American history, I asked students to become teachers. Each student was to draft a short lecture that identified and explained themes we had covered over the course of the semester. The lecture assignment was an opportunity for students to think not just about facts and figures—the Chinese dynastic periods, the transatlantic slave trade—but to make connections between them.

Students had different reactions to the assignment. For some, the assignment seemed like a betrayal of the unspoken rules for most survey classes; it required more than simply doing the reading and memorizing names and dates. On the other hand, students who naturally thought beyond the limits of the textbook were energized. These were the ones who forgot to do the reading on the Cold War and Soviet politics because they were so excited to get a head start on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. These were the students who could identify the big ideas of social discord and globalization, the students who wanted to debate with me even though I was the authority figure. These students might not earn A's, but they were using history to make sense of the world around them.

These are the students state officials should be thinking about when they design history standards.

Any guide to teaching history should open with a few clear paragraphs laying out the vision. Forget about the usefulness of history for a moment and concentrate on what history education can do for students. It teaches them how to make sense of the world around them—so that they might make history of their own.

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*are her own and do not necessarily represent the views of IXL Learning.*

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# **Opinion: Closing the racial wealth gap**

**By Beadsie Woo**

Like many economists who care about American families struggling to make ends meet, I spend a good amount of time thinking about how parents can earn more income to give their children better opportunities and reduce stress in their daily lives. But my real mission is one you hear less about in the debate over income inequality. For families to make their way to a better life, it's not enough to earn more. They've got to keep and grow their earnings, too.

Savings and assets—homes, cars, retirement funds—are launching pads to something better, even as they cushion against today's inevitable emergencies. But for generations, policies to help families build the savings and assets they need to give their children a better life have created a persistent and widening gap in net worth between white families and African-American and Latino families.

As a country, we don't like to talk about race. Our inequality conversations are often framed more generally, as the difference between the 1 percent and the rest of us. But when nearly 70 percent of children living below the federal poverty line are non-whites—a rate much higher than the representation of nonwhite children in the overall U.S. population—it's time to look honestly at the role race and ethnicity continue to play in the prospects of future generations.

A long and shameful pattern of discriminatory policies—from redlining by federal housing authorities to disparate access to the benefits of the GI Bill—have disadvantaged African-American and Latino families, among others, in developing savings and assets for generations. While those overtly discriminatory policies have been taken off the books, a legacy of different fates remains.

Between 2010 and 2013, for example, as the U.S. economy was climbing out of the Great Recession, the net worth of white families increased by 2 percent while black and Latino families saw their assets plummet by 34 percent and 15 percent, respectively. The gaps show African-American and Latino families face steep odds when it comes to building any kind of financial cushion, while white families are more likely to inherit a house or savings. A median white family is likely to have a month's income in savings on hand for emergencies, while a median Latino family has only 12 days' worth, and a median African-American family only five days' worth.

Saving money isn't easy—nearly half of Americans don't have enough put away to handle even a \$400 emergency. And the more a family depends on its income for daily subsistence, the less there is to put away. An unexpected bill or health crisis can be financially crippling to families operating on a thin margin. Poor families might not qualify for conventional loans and resort to payday lenders whose ready access comes at a high price. Predatory lending practices cost families \$8.7 billion a year in interest and fees, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, where I use my background as an economist to analyze and communicate data, recently released a brief with four practical policy recommendations to help all families build the savings and assets they need for their children to succeed. The Institute on Assets and Social Policy at Brandeis University analyzed two of these policies at our

request and found that both could reduce the racial wealth gap—one of them quite substantially.

One of these vehicles, the federal My Retirement Account program (known as myRA), was established in 2014 to allow workers who lacked vehicles for retirement savings through their employers to save up to \$15,000 in a no-fee, government-backed starter retirement account. If participation were expanded and everyone eligible were to save the maximum, myRA could reduce the black-white wealth gap by 5 percent and the Latino-white gap by 7 percent, the analysis indicates. And because myRAs are funded with after-tax dollars, contributions can be available for emergencies without incurring tax penalties.

The other policy analyzed—a more ambitious, broad investment in children's savings accounts—showed potential for the greatest social dividends. The recommendation was that federal funds seed accounts for every child born in the U.S., with larger deposits for infants in low-income families with minimal savings. At age 18, a young person could use the money for tuition or training, a business or a home. Countries from Singapore to the United Kingdom have already offered accounts like this.

Research suggests that children in the United States with savings accounts in their own names are substantially more likely to go to college than those who don't. And the Institute on Assets and Social Policy analysis found that, depending on how much is invested in each account, the racial wealth gap could be narrowed by 20 to 80 percent or even more.

The models show the United States can begin to narrow its racial wealth gap with modest public investment, and get more impact the more we invest. Are there other ways to spend our money? Of course. But ensuring all children have opportunities to succeed would strengthen our economy and help realize our American ideals of fairness and equity.

Retirement accounts and children's savings accounts would make the biggest impact in combination with other policies, such as raising the amount of savings and assets families are allowed to keep while still qualifying for public benefits and expanding access to programs that promote saving for homeownership.

Children from families without savings and assets are more likely to struggle at school and have low self-esteem. While Americans rush to keep pace with our global competitors in innovation and technology, we can't afford to leave so many of our citizens permanently behind. Instead, let's help them grow what they have worked so hard to earn.

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