

Editorial: Restoring Tahoe is a priority

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In a bit of bipartisan teamwork, a Senate committee last week passed a bill to help Lake Tahoe that would also have big benefits for Reno-Sparks.

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, sponsored by Nevada Republican Sen. Dean Heller, is far from a sure thing. But this was a big step. Only about 1 in 7 bills even make it out of committee.

With Nevada in the national spotlight as the caucuses approach, now is the right time to press the presidential candidates – especially those who are senators – on whether they will support this bill and help it get a hearing by the full Congress.

Read the whole story

Opinion: When political discussion brings despair

By Sam Daley-Harris

When the nation's political discussion drives one to despair it helps to find a quote that puts the craziness into perspective. This quote from a *New York Times* column by Frank Rich eight years ago does that for me:

Last weekend a new...poll found that the Democratic-controlled Congress and Mr. Bush are both roundly despised throughout the land, and that only 24 percent of Americans believe their country is on the right track. (That might mean that 76 percent believe the country is on the wrong track.)...

Wrong track is a euphemism. We are a people in clinical depression. Americans know that the ideals that once set our nation apart from the world have been vandalized...

A Real Clear Politics six poll-average from early January found the right track number virtually unchanged at 24.7 percent. So reread the quote with the updated number and insert Republican-controlled Congress and Mr. Obama and you still land at: "We are a people in clinical depression who know our ideals have been vandalized." If we change the players and still end up at the same grim place, how do we respond?

The remedy is to come off the sidelines and get involved using our voices as citizens, but that's easier said than done. Where do we start? Most nonprofit organizations don't acknowledge the toxicity into which they send their volunteer advocates. Consequently, they don't create a deep enough structure of support, one that can serve as an antidote to all the toxicity. Instead they offer mouse-click activism and other kindergarten-level actions, thin gruel for anyone hungry to make a difference. Combine the toxic environment with rampant civic illiteracy and you have a dangerous brew that results in abysmal levels of voting and a paucity of thoughtful civic engagement between elections.

I first confronted the civic illiteracy more than 35 years ago when I spoke to 7,000 high school students on ending world hunger after reading statements from a National Academy of Sciences report calling for the "political will" to end hunger. Less than 3 percent of the students could name their

member of Congress and 35 years later only 10 percent of students I polled on 15 college campuses could answer correctly.

There is great joy in being in action and knowing that your voice matters, but only a small number of organizations work to heal the break that exists between people and government. Here are some examples of groups that do.

The anti-poverty lobby RESULTS and the US Fund for UNICEF are committed to reaching the sustainable development goals agreed to by 193 nations of the U.N. in 2015, which include global goals such as: 1) eliminating preventable child deaths by 2030 (currently 16,000 children die every day from preventable malnutrition and disease), and 2) eliminating extreme poverty by 2030 (currently 700 million people live in extreme poverty).

The climate agreement in Paris sends hopeful signals but progress will require groups like Citizens' Climate Lobby whose growing team of volunteers in the U.S. and Canada have had 3,474 letters and op-eds published last year, up from 56 published in 2010, all in support of a steadily rising fee on carbon 100 percent refunded to the public.

Friends Committee on National Legislation focuses on addressing mass incarceration while the Peace Alliance supports a bill that would fund violence prevention programs throughout the U.S.

What's unique about these groups is the deep citizen empowerment each provides. An Iowa volunteer with FCNL described the fear around writing her first letter to the editor and how she hoped no one she knew would read it. "I was out of my comfort zone, but now I've had four published and it feels like a celebration." A Citizen Climate Lobby volunteer in Virginia spoke about starting with "climate trauma" but after 18 months and visits to 20 Congressional offices

described the experience as “sacred and profound.”

When the country’s political discussion is enough to bring one to despair, it helps to find a quote that puts the craziness into perspective, but it’s even more powerful to find an organization that will support you in making the difference you’ve always dreamed of making.

Sam Daley-Harris founded the anti-poverty lobby RESULTS, co-founded the Microcredit Summit Campaign, and now heads the Center for Citizen Empowerment and Transformation. He is author of “Reclaiming Our Democracy: Healing the Break between People and Government” (Camino Books, 2013).

Opinion: California’s big housing dilemma

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

It’s time once again for some fun with numbers, in this case the data on California’s serious – and worsening – housing crisis.



Dan Walters

Since 2010, the state’s population has risen by 1.8 million to 39 million human beings who live – most of them, anyway – in

14 million units of housing of all types.

That translates into an average of 2.78 persons per dwelling, implying that since 2010, we've needed about 650,000 new units to keep pace with population growth, or about 130,000 a year.

However, the Great Recession clobbered housing construction, which fell to as low as 44,000 units in 2010 and has averaged only 70,000 a year during the decade so far, half the demand.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Highway funding needs long-term solution

By Jim Madaffer

California drivers are bearing the burden of the state's transportation funding crisis, with the average driver spending more than \$500 a year to repair the wear and tear on their vehicle caused by bad roads. Gas tax revenues currently fund most of the state's road maintenance and repairs, but gas tax revenues are declining as cars become more fuel efficient and as drivers adopt hybrids and electric vehicles. Caltrans estimates the funding gap to be about \$5.7 billion per year for the state highway system alone.

Unless we address the transportation funding shortfall immediately, the funding gap will only widen. Lawmakers are working on a short-term solution to maintain our roadways and we will have to depend on the gas tax for the immediate future. However, gas tax revenues will continue to fall behind our transportation funding needs over the longer term. We

must ultimately find a new transportation funding model that better reflects today's realities.

One potential solution is the road charge. Under a road charge system, drivers pay by the mile rather than by the gallon. Whether you drive a gas-guzzling truck or an all-electric sedan, the road charge is the same per mile. Everyone pays their fair share. Several other states are already testing the road charge concept, and we must explore it further in California to determine if it is the right solution for us.

The state has already taken steps to begin exploring a road charge system. Senate Bill 1077, signed into law last year, requires California to study the feasibility of a road charge in a statewide pilot that includes a variety of volunteers from all regions of the state. To help ensure the parameters of the pilot meet California's unique needs, SB1077 also established a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to design the pilot with the benefit of robust public input. The TAC includes experts in telecommunications, data security and privacy, as well as highway users, business and consumer advocates, elected officials and academic researchers.

In 2015 the TAC conducted a robust stakeholder outreach process to seek feedback and input on the design of the pilot. The TAC had 12 public meetings throughout California and invited residents all over the state to attend a meeting or comment through the TAC's website. Additionally, the TAC invited more than 400 stakeholder groups and 130 elected officials to participate in the process, and it consulted a Road Charge Work Group made up of representatives from local government, vehicle manufacturers, fuel distributors and highway users.

After carefully reviewing all of the feedback and input gathered, the TAC released its final recommendations for the design of the pilot in early January. Some of the highlights of those recommendations are that the pilot should:

- Give drivers multiple options to report miles driven
- Provide non-technological options for those who choose to report their miles manually
- Protect driver privacy and personal data
- Measure the impact of a road charge on rural and urban drivers
- Require no cost to participate.

The pilot is now scheduled to launch this summer and aims to recruit 5,000 participants that reflect the geographic, demographic and socioeconomic diversity of the state.

Because it has been rigorous, this endeavor gave us the opportunity to carefully examine and develop a set of recommendations that reflect the unique nature of our state. While we know the current gas tax system will not keep pace with state and national needs in the future, we also know the development and implementation of a sustainable long-term solution will take time to deliver. That is why we should all do our part by signing up for the pilot. Together, we can help the state determine if paying by the mile is the right transportation funding solution for California.

For more information, go **online**.

Jim Madaffer is chair of the Road Charge Technical Advisory Committee and California Transportation Commission member.

Editorial: Pension outlook darkens for Calif. taxpayers

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Jan. 17, 2016, Orange County Register.*

Despite fairly steady economic growth and state budget surpluses, California's unfunded public employee pension liabilities are spiking. As detailed by Stanford University research scholar David Crane on the Fox & Hounds website, year-end reports pegged the increase in unfunded pension promises for the California Public Employees Retirement System at \$15 billion and for the California State Teachers Retirement System at \$9 billion.

Total spike in unfunded liabilities for fiscal year 2014-15, which ended June 30: \$24 billion.

Before last year, total unfunded pension liabilities, as detailed in Gov. Jerry Brown's budget proposal for fiscal year 2016-17, were \$72.7 billion for CalSTRS and \$43.3 billion for CalPERS. Adding up everything, the new total unfunded liability for both giant pension funds is \$140 billion.

Read the whole story

Letter: Ski patrol assists at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to express our sincerest thanks to

all of the members of the Heavenly Ski Patrol for sponsoring an Adopt A Day of Nourishment on Jan. 18. The ski patrol has been sponsoring two Adopt a Days annually for the past several years, and sending great sponsor crews to help at their sponsorship dinners. Their continuing support is greatly appreciated and a very special thanks goes to Tom Burkart for his efforts to coordinate the Heavenly ski patrol's sponsorships.

For their Jan. 18 AAD sponsorship, Burkart recruited Heavenly ski patrol members Nick Aguilar, Michelle Loubet, Craig Smith and Kyle Hannah to help the B&B volunteers with the dinner. According to Dana Tucker, the evening's AAD coordinator, these four sponsor crew members were a lot of fun to work with and they pitched right in to make the evening special for the dinner guests.

"It was so great for us to come together to give back to the community that we live and work in," Loubet commented after helping to serve a meat and vegetable casserole dinner.

Through their fundraising efforts, the Heavenly ski patrol donated \$250 to Bread & Broth for the purchase of food for the full course dinner and fruits and vegetables for filling giveaway bags. As a nonprofit, all volunteer organization, B&B depends on generous donors and sponsors like Heavenly Ski Patrol to help the low-income population in our community. But then helping people is what the Heavenly ski patrol is all about.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Calif. schools want more money

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown's new budget would boost spending on K-12 schools by several billion dollars, but the California School Boards Association says that's a small fraction of what's needed to adequately prepare the state's six million students for jobs and higher education.



Dan Walters

The CSBA released a report Wednesday asserting, "California is underfunding K-12 schools by as much as \$42 billion per year."

That would be an extra \$7,000 per student on top of the \$10,591 that Brown's 2016-17 budget projects will be spent on each from state and local funds and push California's per-pupil spending to one of the nation's highest levels.

Read the whole story

Opinion: The National Park Service's importance



Half Dome is one of Yosemite's iconic features. The California treasure became a national park in 1890. Photo/LTN file

Whether it's the grandeur of Mother Nature, or history encapsulated in monuments and battlefields, or wildlife roaming free the National Park Service is there to remind us of our past and future.

It is easy to understand how the Park Service is about our past, especially when looking east toward the National Mall or south to battlefields or west to the USS Arizona.

Our future is reflected in the Park Service because how we treat these treasures says a lot about us as a citizenry. Do we sit by and let national treasures like the Ahwahnee Hotel and Curry Village in Yosemite National Park change names because of a poorly written contract or do we write our members of Congress to tell them we are disgusted by what is happening? Will our actions change the future even if they don't alter the circumstances a couple hundred miles from here?

Do we say it's OK for funding for the Park Service to continually be eroded or do we demand these treasures be preserved?

Do we support the Park Service by visiting some of the 409 areas it represents? Do we share memories to encourage others to visit these special places? Or perhaps we buy an annual pass even if we never visit a park.

This agency that turns 100 years old in August continues to evolve, grow and be part of all of our lives. The service is in every state, District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

It's not just about the 59 national parks. The agency encompasses monuments, battlefields, military parks, historical parks, historic sites, lakeshores, seashores, recreation areas, scenic rivers and trails, and the White House.

Fourteen national parks existed before the Park Service came into being. Yellowstone in 1872 became the first national park – not just in the United States, but also in the world. Twenty-one monuments also existed prior to 1916. President Woodrow Wilson signed the act creating the National Park Service, which to this day is overseen by the Interior Department.

Lake Tahoe News, starting Jan. 25, is going to take readers on a trek to a few of these wonders. Writers are embracing locales that have touched them in memorable ways. The first story is from Carolyn Wright who has visited 33 of the national parks. Hers is as much a photo essay as it is a travelogue about some of those parks.

We hope through our series of monthly stories we connect you to places that perhaps you've never been to or we trigger fond memories.

Enjoy the journey.

– Kathryn Reed, LTN publisher

Opinion: El Dorado County survey a joke

By Larry Weitzman

Money is so tight in El Dorado County that CAO Larry Combs recently decided that no general fund money will be used for roads in El Dorado County. But that didn't stop our Board of Supervisors from conducting a Citizens Engagement Survey at a reported cost of \$15,000 to "help" with determining a county strategic plan.

After several months of meetings, which included hundreds of hours of time of highly paid county officials, a 98-page detailed report of the survey results were released about three weeks ago. I happened to be on one of the committees, the Good Governance Committee, that tried to help work on the strategic plan's other aspects. At the several meetings including the initial meeting for good governance I made the point that only six words were necessary to define good governance, not the government speak that is so often seen which consists of flowery politically correct whatever. Those six words are: "Absolute Honesty, Pristine Ethics and Complete Transparency." As to strategic planning, I said probably 95 percent of the county populace wants three things: public safety, good roads and good land use planning. Those points were made directly to Laree Kiely, whose Kiely Group was hired to perform and administer this survey.



Larry Weitzman

The survey is replete with its own issues ranging from poorly designed questions to biased sampling. For such a survey, the sample of participants must be chosen randomly. During a university statistics course the one thing I remembered was for a survey to be valid it should be taken randomly and consist of a sampling of at least 1,256 participants. And that is where the problems begin.

El Dorado County has a population of 183,087. Survey takers totaled 2,228, with 2,119 living in EDC. Forty-nine are here part time and 53 claimed to be non-residents. That's about a 1 percent participation rate. Of that sample 62 percent of the respondents were female. Almost 70 percent were older than 50.

At least two emails from an EDC official were sent to all other EDC county employees encouraging them to participate with a direct link to the survey. The result was that 20 percent of the survey respondents said they worked for the government, giving them a biased self-interest. On top of that, 187 of the respondents said they were educators – more government. That means these people were over represented by 250 percent based on population and people in private industry were under represented by about 65 percent.

El Dorado Hills, with a population of 42,000, had a total of just 300 respondents, where Placerville with a population of 10,000 had 393 respondents, weighting the Placerville respondents' answers by more 500 percent over that of El Dorado Hills respondents. One of the other more important facts skewing the results is that you could take the survey

more than once. I did. So did several other people.

Of the 98 pages, there were more than 50 pages of comments from respondents that also showed even more bias. A lot of the comments were from limited and no "growthers." Another conundrum was the desire for higher paying jobs, yet the growth industries wanted from a preponderance of the comments were recreation, ag, tourism, telecommuting and "responsible" retail, or mostly low paying jobs.

Many respondents wanted a rural environment, some with no cars or at best electric cars, but this highlighted pull quote from page 15 perhaps sums up the dozens of similar comments: "Please work with the small county farmers in creating easier ways to have home based agricultural businesses such as raising chickens, selling eggs, organic animal raising, selling and consumption of those meats, as well as growing produce and selling that produce and products at small local markets." Can you say Walden Pond? More high paying jobs? All of the above demonstrates why the data from the survey is basically bogus. But there is a surprise.

While the most important question of ranking county functions in order of importance was poorly written – 12 choices were given, but you were not allowed to give any or all of them a zero, which skewed the results. The question should have had the 12 choices individually ranked from 0-10, so you could rank them if you wanted three 10s and nine zeros). Notwithstanding, the top three in order of importance were public safety, roads and land use. Perhaps they should have paid me for my advice. Unfortunately, most people look at free advice worth exactly that, nothing.

The respondents also commented extensively that government needs to be honest and transparent.

Comments also demonstrated that the county should be their mother and father and provide all kinds of free service,

health care, cheap housing, lots of public transportation, more bicycles (great with all our hilly terrain), cheap, healthy (organic) food and other items, none of which even should be a county issue. One interesting incongruity was when asked: "What county services most impact the quality of your life?" The top answer was the library and by a large margin, yet it ranked eight out of 12 in importance of county services.

So what was the real purpose of the survey? It looks like an attempt to justify the expansion of government. It could also be an attempt to create a diversion from how bad a job the BOS and its administration are doing. The survey has little, if any, scientific value. But notwithstanding, the survey as "unbalanced" as the respondents were, validated that the No. 2 job of the county is take care of the roads to which the CAO, Larry Combs, (which the BOS approved) said that's one item for which no general fund dollars will be used. What's the purpose of the survey then, biased or not? But making matters worse is our expanding county government employees making more money than ever in salary and benefit. To hell with the roads.

News flash: Confirmed by Combs, he advised his staff a few days ago that he was going to hire his loyal friend for the position of assistant CAO. Shawne Corley, who is currently ACOA of Sutter County, is where Combs spent about 25 years. This is exactly what I said in my last column in the last paragraph, Combs will hire his friends and play the game of government musical chairs, the game where government employees never lose. Sounds just like Terry Daly hiring Kim Kerr and our continuing feckless BOS. How history doth repeat itself.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: Corporate grab behind Yosemite trademark clash

By Michael Hiltzik, Los Angeles Times

If you're a lover of U.S. national parks in general and Yosemite National Park in particular, you've probably been moved to outrage over reports that a New York corporation has claimed the trademark rights to several names associated with the park.

These include the historic Ahwahnee Hotel, Curry Village, and conceivably Yosemite National Park itself. As a response to a pending lawsuit over the issue, the National Park Service will erase some of the disputed names as of March 1; the Ahwahnee will become the Majestic Yosemite Hotel and Curry Village will be known as Half Dome Village. The park's name will stay the same...for now.

The dispute over the names is part of a broader legal fight, though not one that necessarily makes either the company or the government look good.

Read the whole story