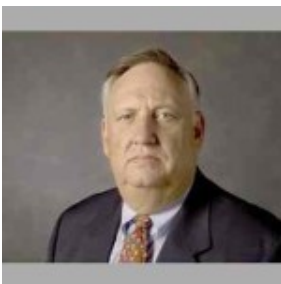


Opinion: California has pension dilemma

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

California has long prided itself on having an upwardly mobile, egalitarian gestalt, so there's much irony in its evolution into a two-tiered society.



Dan Walters

But there's also much angst as the relative few in the top tier prosper and the many in the lower tier deal with stagnating incomes and very high living costs, particularly for housing.

One aspect of California's socio-economic stratification is that more than 60 percent of California's private-sector workers lack any employer-based retirement plan, either a defined benefit pension or a 401(k) savings/investment plan.

In fact, according to a study by UC Berkeley's Center for Labor Research and Education, 84 percent of those working for employers with 25 or fewer employees lack such benefits.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Don't blame the candidates—blame yourself

By Andrés Martínez

We may finally be getting the presidential candidates we deserve.

Forget all that talk about the wisdom of voters, and the great American people. We are the problem, with our shrill, hyperbolic, extremist, intolerant, and polarized ways of engaging in politics over the past two decades.

I can recall in the late '90s being totally befuddled by how some of my friends, perfectly sensible people when the subject wasn't politics, would go apoplectic at the mere mention of Bill Clinton.

Our president, I can recall a Michigan banker friend named John telling me, was a socialist, a dishonorable man intent on destroying America. John would practically start shaking when discussing Clinton and the need for the cretin to be removed from office. I couldn't understand where all this vitriol came from. To what water cooler did he retreat to where such views were the norm? (A clue: I think it was from him that I first heard of Fox News).

Sure, Clinton had his personal weaknesses (almost clichés for a politico, though, which in other eras would not likely have led to impeachment proceedings). But as far as I could see, the president was overseeing a massive economic boom (deregulating John's banking industry along the way), taking on Democratic unions to push for free trade agreements, balancing the federal budget, and deploying U.S. forces overseas, when required, in places like Kosovo and Iraq. How did all that make Bill Clinton a crazed socialist?

I was equally perplexed by the irrational level of contempt and vitriol leftist friends and colleagues felt toward George W. Bush late in his first term, and throughout his second term. The man was a fascist, they'd say, amid wishful talk of impeachment. I, too, disagreed with much of what Bush did, and worried about that administration's competence, but the criticism among impassioned liberals, congregating online at a new crop of progressive websites and watching MSNBC and Jon Stewart, was absurdly over the top.

The facts, once again, were becoming awfully elastic and selectively parsed. Take the war in Iraq. Within a couple of years of the 2003 invasion, Democrats talked about the war as a secretive, despicable Bush plot. Never mind that plenty of Democrats supported the initial decision to go to war, and that there had been little daylight between the Clinton national security team's assessment of Saddam Hussein's behavior, capabilities, and intentions, and the assessment of the Bush team.

What was becoming clear, however, is that we Americans—specifically the more politically engaged among us—have been losing our ability to respectfully and constructively disagree with governing leaders of a different party, not to mention with each other. Instead of opposing certain policies of a president we don't see eye to eye with, we jump to questioning that president's legitimacy to even hold the office, to represent us.

Of course, this psychosis has been most pronounced during President Obama's administration, when plenty of Republicans have repeatedly questioned the president's birthplace and religion. And, once again, the extremist rhetoric portraying him as a feckless socialist seems far removed from facts, when you consider how he responded to the financial crisis by shoring up banking institutions without taking them over, embraced a moderate market-based approach to healthcare reform (instead of a single-payer approach), and ratcheted up the

drone campaigns against terrorists in countries like Yemen and Pakistan. There's plenty to disagree with Obama on, and I understand conservatives' ire at Obamacare and some of his progressive social agenda. But isn't there a way to oppose the president without ridiculing the man, questioning his patriotism, and denying his legitimacy as a twice-elected leader of the free world?

The anecdotal sense that we have become a far more polarized society was borne out last year by the largest political survey ever conducted by the Pew Research Center. The survey found that Republicans and Democrats are further apart ideologically than at any point in recent history; that the two parties no longer overlapped in any meaningful way; that, in 20 years, the share of Americans expressing consistently across-the-board conservative or liberal positions had doubled, as had the percentage of Republicans and Democrats holding "very unfavorable" views of the other party. The study also found that more and more of us are hiding out in our hardened ideological silos, increasingly segregated from fellow citizens and media that don't share our worldview. And by worldview, we no longer seem to be talking solely about one's interpretation of objective facts, but one's subjective choice of facts.

My list of causes for this would include the end of the Cold War (the daily threat of nuclear extinction didn't allow for self-destructive partisanship); the balkanization of media, aided by the advent of the Internet; the takeover of politics by the fundraising-industrial complex (it's much easier to raise money if you're screaming that you're fighting a danger to the republic rather than a well-meaning, if misguided, friend from the other side of the aisle); and the poisoning of the idea that Washington is a permanent home where our representatives should live, mingle, and learn to get along.

Choose your favorite polarizing culprits from that list, or add others to it, but there is no denying that we've landed at

an ugly moment on the eve of the 2016 vote. Recent primaries have featured early “silly seasons” when voters have flirted with absurd candidacies before sobering up. But now the silly season is threatening to spill over into the actual voting process.

Let’s stipulate the obvious: Donald Trump, Ben Carson, Ted Cruz, and Bernie Sanders are beyond the pale. In a more serious time, they never would have been considered credible candidates in a national election. Only in silos of same-thinking dogmatism is this not obvious. Trump, in particular, has masterfully capitalized on the cultural moment, turning into a fascist demagogue before our eyes, exhorting people to channel their anger with the status quo and “Make America Great Again” by bullying foreigners and minorities, those “others” who are to blame for all our woes. His candidacy embodies and fulfills the hysterical tenor of our political discourse. He is our political Frankenstein. If we elect Donald Trump president, half the country’s cries that our president is a fascist unfit for office will—for once—be no exaggeration.

The Republicans don’t have a monopoly on a lack of seriousness. Sanders is not leading in the polls, but the fact that so many Democrats treat him as a legitimate choice is alarming. When the self-avowed Socialist (again, real life is catching up with our once exaggerated epithets) was asked in a recent debate how high he’d like to raise income tax rates if elected, he vaguely joked that they wouldn’t go higher than 90 percent. Hillary Clinton is in a different league, credibility-wise, but our debased political culture is forcing her into some intellectually dishonest contortions. So, for instance, she had to come out against President Obama’s Asian trade pact (which she championed and negotiated as secretary of State) because the “base” these days won’t tolerate any deviance from its dogma or overlap between the parties. It all boils down to “us” versus “them.”

There is that old aphorism (often attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville, but of uncertain origins) that, in a democracy, the people get the government they deserve. We must have a reckoning with ourselves, as voters and citizens. It's great fun to sit back and mock, or demonize, these presidential candidates, but they aren't the underlying problem. We are.

Andrés Martínez writes the Trade Winds column for Zócalo Public Square, where he is editorial director. He is also professor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University and a fellow at New America.

Opinion: Raw realities of 'Spotlight'

By Kristin Gilger

If your son is a priest and your daughter a journalist, "Spotlight" is a jarring movie.

There are journalists and lawyers aplenty in this recently released movie about the Boston Globe's investigation of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, but hardly any priests.

I went to see "Spotlight" to cheer for the journalists. I'm a long-time journalist and journalism professor who raised a daughter who is an investigative reporter. But I'm also the mother of a Catholic priest. And that made "Spotlight" very difficult to watch indeed.

My son, Patrick, joined the Jesuit order of Catholic priests nearly 12 years ago, a decision that startled us then and still has the power to unsettle us now.

Both my husband and I were raised Catholic. We were married in the church and had our three children baptized Catholic, but when Patrick was 7, we left, unable to reconcile our personal beliefs with church teachings on everything from birth control to women.

That might have been the end of it but for the Jesuits. When Patrick started his studies at Jesuit-run Creighton University in Omaha, he didn't know what to think of the Jesuits. Who were these men who seemed so worldly and so otherworldly at the same time? They could probe philosophy one minute and dissect basketball scores the next. And they were rebels and reformers: They wanted to change the world.

The risk, the radicalism of it all, appealed to Patrick. These were not men who settled for comfortable lives in suburbia. It made Patrick think of the Paul Simon song "Obvious Child" about a man who chooses a conventional life of fun, money and even love, but finds no meaning in it.

"Who wants to be like everyone else?" he asked.

Since joining the Jesuits after college, my son has been stretched in just about every way imaginable. For three years, he lived and worked on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, one of the poorest communities in the U.S. He has been sent into one of the nation's worst public housing projects, to a remote parish on the edge of a jungle in India, and to a women's prison in San Francisco. In such places, he has tested the limits of what he can—and cannot—do.

I'm proud of my son and his work, but I'm cautious about telling people he's a priest. I'm afraid of the question I see in their eyes. "No, he's not a child molester," I want to tell them.

Still, I can't really blame them for wondering. It is estimated that there were more than 10,000 victims of sexual abuse at the hands of Catholic priests around the world from

1950 to 2002.

When I point out to Patrick the all-too-obvious flaws in the church, he agrees with me. The church is sinful, he says. It's a human institution—so how could it not be?

Patrick believes the Catholic Church, with all its failings, still offers the best option: a moral code built on emulating the way Jesus lived and seeking meaning beyond comfort and self-affirmation. And Pope Francis, the first Jesuit to lead the church, has made it somewhat easier for us tenuous Catholics to realign ourselves with the church.

But not even Pope Francis can alter the past, something I kept thinking as “Spotlight” came to a close. There's an awful moment when the names of hundreds of cities scroll across the screen, every one of them places where priests were found to have abused children. My husband and I sat slumped in our seats long after that stark and damning list had faded away.

Later, in the car, my husband and I agreed that “Spotlight” is a great movie. It doesn't glamorize journalism and doesn't exploit the stories of those who have been abused. That makes it, even more devastating, especially for Catholics and those like me who have been feeling more hopeful about the church.

My son just called to talk about plans for Christmas vacation. He'll be home for a week, and wants to see a movie or two. I told him we should go see “Spotlight” together, but now I'm hoping he has forgotten the suggestion. If it was hard for my husband and me to watch the movie, how much more so would it be for him?

I think we'll go to “Star Wars” instead.

Kristin Gilger is the associate dean of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. She has written a memoir about the Catholic Church and her son's vocation, which is **excerpted here**. She wrote

this for Zocalo Public Square.

Opinion: Too much high school football

By Joe Mathews

How many state champions does California need?

There's a new answer to this question: 13. That's how many state football champions California will crown this weekend during five state bowl games at Sacramento State's Hornet Stadium and eight other games around the state. That's a big increase from the five state champions we had in 2014—and 13 more than we had before the state bowl games were launched a decade ago.



Joe Mathews

Even in the largest football-crazy state of this football-crazy country, that's an awful lot of football. Indeed, California's ever-expanding high school football season now starts the last week of August and extends into the winter holiday break. And some teams seeking state titles this weekend will be playing their 16th games—the same number the pros in the National Football League play each year.

You may be surprised to read this, especially if you've listened to recent news stories and medical studies about the need to protect young bodies and brains from concussions and other injuries. Last year, the California enacted a law that imposed new limits on physical contact for school football teams; they can't have full-contact practices during the off-season, and can hold only two full contact, 90-minute practices a week during the season.

But those rules didn't cover games. And so California's high school football industry—with its coaches and players and even cable TV sports networks—continues to grow more rapidly than the state's pension obligations.

To be fair, it isn't merely the will to win driving this expansion. It's also about the well-intentioned desire to include everyone. This latest expansion was fueled by complaints that the state bowl games included only a fraction of the state's 50 sectional champions. So this year, the CIF voted to include all 50 champs in bowl games. Those state playoffs culminate this weekend with 13 games between the top teams from north and south in 13 different competitive levels.

For football fans, that may sound like an exciting weekend full of possibilities. But California high school football is highly predictable. Most of the same high schools dominate year after year, in part because thousands of students routinely use liberal transfer rules to move to the schools with the best sports programs.

In this way, high school football has been decoupled from local communities, with elite teams dominated by ringers from other places. Private schools often have a big advantage in this high school free agent market, and many of them are national powers that play games against teams from out of state. These days, it is big news when a public high school led by players from its own community ends up competing for a championship.

Tellingly, this weekend's signature game—the Open Division bowl game between the De La Salle High School Spartans, a Catholic school in Concord and the Centennial High Huskies of Corona—is a rematch of last year's title game. Indeed, De La Salle may be America's greatest football factory, having won five of the last six Open Division championships.

This year's state playoff expansion comes at an interesting time. A new film on football concussions, starring Will Smith, whose son Trey was recently a star player at an elite football high school in Southern California, hits theaters on Christmas. The film dramatizes the story of doctor Bennet Omalu, who made discoveries about the impact of contact sports on the brain.

Omalu, now the chief medical examiner of San Joaquin County and a professor at UC Davis, recently questioned whether kids should play at all, given the evidence that football and other contact sports cause brain damage. In the *New York Times*, he also suggested that the law establish an age of consent for playing football: "We have a legal age for drinking alcohol, for joining the military, for voting, for smoking, for driving, and for consenting to have sex. We must have the same when it comes to protecting the organ that defines who we are as a human being."

In the context of that sober warning, 13 state championship bowl games sounds like an unlucky number. The 50 schools in the state playoffs are already champions, of their sections. Is it really necessary to expose them to more risk in the name of more championships?

Would California really be diminished if it had no state football champions? Yes, there are schedules in place to hold this huge round of state bowl games through 2017. But if Californians let these unnecessary games go on for even another year, we all ought to have our heads examined.

Joe Mathews is California and innovation editor for Zócalo Public Square, for which he writes the Connecting California column.

Opinion: Monitoring drought, El Niño's affect on Tahoe

Publisher's note: *This originally was published in the TERC newsletter and is reprinted with permission.*

By Geoff Schladow

It seems that every conversation about Lake Tahoe this year made reference initially to the ongoing drought, and more recently to El Niño. What is certain is that we are in a long and historical drought. What is also certain is that there exists a band of very warm water across the equatorial Pacific Ocean – the condition known as El Niño. Whether the El Niño conditions will have a significant impact on the drought, particularly in the northern Sierra, is largely unknown.



Geoff Schladow

Historical precedents are relatively few in number, and the data are divided between El Niño years when the northern

Sierra received above average precipitation and years of below average precipitation. More certain is the likelihood that temperatures will be above average, increasing the chances of rain at the expense of snow, whatever the total precipitation may be.

What does all this mean for the lake? This year the lake fell to more than 18 inches below its natural rim. While that does not seem very much, the very low slopes in some parts of the lake meant that the water's edge receded many hundreds of yards exposing brown mud and rocks, and shrubs started growing and flowering in previously submerged areas. With the lack of nutrients and erosion products washing into the lake, it has also been far clearer and bluer during the drought.

Will the lake refill this year? With an average precipitation year, the lake will rise slightly above the natural rim next spring, and the Truckee River will flow once more. With summer evaporation, however, the lake level will fall and the flow will cease. It will take more than one wet year to overcome the consequences of the drought.

Extreme events such as droughts can teach us a lot about our efforts to restore Lake Tahoe. During this period we have seen how many feet of clarity improvement are achievable in a single year; that the lake's blueness is reflected in our ability to control nutrients; and that the attached algae on rocks has fallen to relatively low levels. While scientific measurements are recording these changes, it is the detailed research that we undertake that provides the understanding of what is driving change, and that understanding allows us to construct predictive tools that can guide future restoration. That understanding does not always come quickly or easily, but through the efforts of many we are moving forward.

To all who have contributed to our accomplishments this year, I am truly grateful. This includes our incredibly hard-working staff, our volunteer docents, the many students and interns

that work at TERC, our partners in other research institutes and our colleagues in the various Tahoe agencies, those who visit our education centers, and those of you who have helped fund our research and education programs and partnered with us in unique ways.

I wish you all a safe and peaceful holiday season, and look forward to hearing how the lake refilled far quicker than I predicted.

Geoff Schladow is director of the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center.

Letter: B&B appreciative of real estate agents

To the community,

On Dec. 7, Robert Stiles hosted a Bread & Broth Adopt A Day of Nourishment dinner. He brought Cindy Richter, Paul Windt and Janessa Howard to serve with him on his sponsor crew.

Stiles and his three crewmembers are all local real estate agents serving Northern Nevada and the South Lake Tahoe area.

Stiles has been sponsoring an annual Adopt A Days for the last three years and he views his sponsorship as “always a great experience contributing to the community.”

As the Dec. 7AAD host, Stiles and his crew saw the nutritious and well-balanced meal that was funded by the \$250 AAD donation, and more important, experienced the really positive impact the meal has on the hungry, at risk people who attend as dinner guests for the evening.

B&B would like to thank Stiles and his crew for the outstanding job they did helping the B&B volunteers with all the many tasks that needed to be done to feed up to 100 meals.

Windt enjoyed the dinner experience so much that he “would like to help again.”

B&B would like to express our appreciation for the support of Stiles over the last several years as he continues to participate in B&B’s Adopt a Day of Nourishment program. Bread & Broth’s repeating AAD sponsors are very special because they are our on-going partners in easing hunger in South Lake Tahoe.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Taxpayer Association upset with EDC expenditure

Publisher’s note: This letter was sent to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. The item in question is not included in the county’s budget and would go to the county’s wealthiest fire district. The letter is in reference to item 40 on the Dec. 15 agenda.

The Taxpayer Association requests that this matter be continued. And if not continued, we state that we oppose the granting of \$513,000 of EDC taxpayer money to the El Dorado Hills County Water District (EDH Fire) for the following reasons:

1. While it appears to be a mistake by county administrative staff and the prior BOS, the matter at that

time wasn't properly vetted both by staff and the BOS. Financial records demonstrate that EDH Fire is a wealthy district, while every other county fire district suffers from lack of money. EDC Fire Protection District recently had to close the Lotus Fire Station.

2. EDH Fire already has the best salary and benefits package of any fire district.

3. EDH Fire receives a larger proportional share of property revenues of all fire districts.

4. The Latrobe tax revenues have been already spent by EDC which means taxpayers from all over the county are paying for this gift to EDH Fire.

5. We request that this matter should be continued until a proper financial study is done so the taxpayers and the BOS are aware of the impact of this grant on every fire district and every taxpayer.

6. If a vote is to take place, Brian Veerkamp has a conflict of interest and should recuse himself from any vote as he has a pecuniary interest in that vote since he receives substantial benefits directly from EDH Fire and continues to do so.

7. While we support public safety, this grant should not be made until this it is determined that this is the best place for taxpayer's money.

Al Hamilton, president El Dorado County Taxpayer Association

Opinion: EDC practicing closed government

By Larry Weitzman

Sixty-two years ago Ralph M. Brown, a legislator from Modesto and later Fifth District Court of Appeals Judge, wrote the Brown Act and now called the Open Government Act. Brown in the preamble said, "The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know."

El Dorado County government acts as a closed system whose main purpose is to help themselves to more power, more salaries and pensions and less of everything else for the taxpayer. When the voters of EDC wake up, most of the administration will be long gone, leaving their destruction in their wake either retired with a big fat pension or moving on to some other county only to suck on the teat of some other unsuspecting county's taxpayer-funded general account. Sort of like musical chairs with an extra chair always in the game.



Larry Weitzman

Remember Terri Daly? She is now pulling down a nice six-figure income from the Yuba County Water Agency after receiving a severance package of over \$150,000 from EDC. This was after as CA0 of Amador County spending \$20 million on an unnecessary lease which they will pay on until 2028 and as El Dorado County CA0 destroying its financial stability with unbridled

hiring and raises. Never mind her hiring of failed city of Ione's city manager, Kim Kerr, as ACAO at over a \$150K per. Kerr's reward as a menacing ACAO was a high ranking position with one of EDC's insurance vendors who Kerr worked closely with during her tenure of havoc at EDC.

Robyn Drivon was one of Daly's hires. Unfortunately, we are still saddled with Drivon as EDC's county counsel. Drivon is part of the problem as she gives bad and incorrect legal advice to the BOS, a bona fide legal illiterate. As to her part in closed government, it was always policy ever since Lou Green that after a closed session to report out a summary of the closed session. Ditto for Ed Knapp. That procedure of informing the public has ended as after every closed session with Drivon, her standard remark "there is nothing to report." Maybe Edison's most famous invention has yet to be discovered in EDC. Some open government?

At the most recent EDC board meeting item No. 7 further reduced the taxpayers' access to the BOS by reducing the number of regular meeting from about 42 to 27. Instead of basically a weekly schedule, for 2016 it will be twice a month. Now you will have to look them up because the schedule is a bit irregular.

Board meetings are already too long, but to double up the calendar means a lot of deliberation and discussion will be left on the table. Longer agendas will mean more items on the consent calendar, a favorite way for the county dictator, Larry Combs, to slip through items that need scrutiny by the BOS. It happened with respect to two items last week, one being limiting BOS board meetings. With longer agendas there will be less time to speak and more time for members of the public to sit and wait for items. However, the BOS members are there earning about \$1,500 a week, meeting or no meeting. With meetings already lasting into the night, longer agendas will mean even longer meetings and that equates to a hurry-up in discussions, less vetting and deliberations and a tired BOS.

There will be a hurry to end the meeting so the decisions will be rushed. And that means more mistakes will be made. It's the same reason we don't allow pilots to fly for more than a limited number of hours or limit a truck driver's time behind the wheel. We can't afford decisions to be made under duress or fatigue. Bye-bye open government.

Item No. 5, also on the consent calendar, was an attempt to correct a BOS mistake from 2013 and repeated in 2014 which incorrectly added longevity pay to department heads for out of county service. The mistake was discovered at least six months ago and the BOS asked it to be fixed by a certain date in June or July. Of course, Pamela Knorr – HR director and ex-temporary CA) – didn't do the two-page fix and neither did Combs until pressured by a BOS member. Instead of a new two-page document that shouldn't have taken more than half an hour to prepare, the BOS was presented the old resolution with cross outs. They were unintelligible. But the BOS still accepted a cross-out document that may come back to haunt another BOS in the future. At the salaries the administration earns, this kind of product is unacceptable.

But it was the last item of the day, item 31 that looks to be the coup d'grace of the BOS and its administration. It was an item to request that the BOS authorize litigation against the auditor for not paying from a mitigation fee act account \$169,859. The auditor rightly claims because a proper five-year Nexus finding wasn't filed by the Diamond Springs-El Dorado Fire District, it was in violation of the Mitigation Fee Act that says if such a report is not timely filed, the county shall refund the unexpended funds in the account to the property owners of record within the district. That is the law in California by statute and the appellate court case of Walker v. City of San Clemente. As the California Supreme Court refused to hear the case, it is the absolute law in California, although our county counsel continues to tell the BOS otherwise.

Your BOS as a result has authorized the spending of (tens of) thousands of dollars in outside legal fees against the auditor in a case they can't win. Meanwhile, we have potholes that aren't being filled and Drivon continues to collect her \$200,000 plus a year in salary and benefits. Thanks again Terri Daly.

News flash, Placerville: On the BOS agenda for Dec. 15 is a closed session item (No. 50) for hiring a new county counsel. It looks like Drivon is playing the game of musical chairs before everything hits the fan here. But with Combs and Knorr running the process of recruitment, the likelihood of hiring a lawyer who will be independent of the HR director and the CAO and will bring leadership to the County Counsel Office still remains slim and none.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: Welcome to California (Not!)

By Joe Mathews

When you cross from Oregon into California on Interstate 5, you will not be greeted by any welcoming party or grand gate.

The first sign of California civilization is the giant All Star Liquors store, in tiny Hilt. And if you enter California from Oregon along Highway 101, you'll get the same greeting: All Star Liquors' other outlet, in Smith River.



Joe Mathews

The store's slogan? "The Party Starts Here." Except, at California's borders, the party starts slowly.

Over the past year, I've made a point of exploring California's four land borders—with Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, and Mexico. What I've seen, again and again, would deflate the pride of the proudest Californian. Along these divides, ours is consistently the shabbier side of the border.

The juxtaposition is most jarring along our southern border with Mexico. Tijuana, one of the great urban success stories of North America, is dynamic and fast-paced, while, on the California side, the San Ysidro section of San Diego is shabby, with a particularly dismal McDonald's. Farther east, Calexico, population 39,000, is dwarfed by the cross-border cosmopolitan sophistication of 700,000-strong Mexicali, with its restaurants, theater, and university.

California's neighboring states also offer more welcoming border regions than ours.

Along the Arizona border, Lake Havasu City, with the London Bridge, outshines the settlements on the California side of the Colorado River. Farther south, Yuma, Ariz., population 91,000, sits across from not very much at all.

Along the far northern coast, Brookings, Ore., is a more prosperous place than beautiful, but poor, Crescent City. Inland, Ashland, Ore., home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, is far lovelier than Siskiyou County, which shows up in California newspapers mostly as the unofficial headquarters

for a secession movement. Along Interstate 15, the lights of Vegas outshine anything in the California border desert. Up in Tahoe, the streets on the California side of the lake are noticeably rougher than the Nevada thoroughfares. No place on the lake gleams like Nevada's Incline Village, a haven for Californians avoiding Golden State taxes.

California's unwelcoming Mexican border can be blamed on the U.S. government, which is held hostage by the political obsession with border security. Walking from California into Mexico takes less than five minutes. But I routinely encounter three-hour waits to cross back, because of federal border enforcement. Facing long delays crossing back from Tijuana, I recently paid \$6 to ride in a van seven miles east to the less crowded Otay Mesa crossing. There it took 40 minutes to cross, and I then was picked up by the same van at a California-side sandwich shop and driven to San Ysidro so I could get the trolley back to downtown San Diego.

California has a reputation for regulation and big government, but at our borders, we're the side that seems ungoverned. Needles, Calif., which borders Arizona (and is near Nevada), is one of the bleakest places I've encountered in the state. Trains rumble through at all hours, and trash litters the streets. The first business I encountered on crossing into town from Arizona was a medical marijuana dispensary.

That's typical. On the borders, California businesses often profit from our permissiveness. That's why liquor stores greet people who come across our Oregon border.

The Golden State has long been distinguished by some of the nation's lowest taxes on beer, wine, and distilled spirits—a legacy of the liquor lobby's might that dates back to the famous powerbroker Artie Samish, the self-proclaimed "Secret Boss of California" in the early 20th century. Voters tell pollsters they'd be happy to raise liquor taxes, but the alcohol industry's spending and the state's two-thirds

requirement for revenue increases have frustrated those efforts.

The locations of All Star Liquors on the California side of the border capitalize on these facts. Online, the store boasts “savings of up to 70 percent or more over Oregon, Washington, and Idaho pricing.” The stores also have what customers assured me (I’m a teetotaler) is an incredibly large selection, and excellent customer service. When I dropped by, All Star Liquors staffers were loading up two customers’ vehicles, neither of which had California license plates, as part of the store’s “Road Trip Service” that allows people to order online and have the entire order ready for pickup.

The store’s website promises: “You don’t need to drive any further into California to find the best prices, best selection, and the friendliest staff this side of the Mississippi!”

That’s not exactly an endorsement of the Golden State. But it’s hardly surprising. Californians treat our borders like backwaters, even though millions of people enter California this way. We could do better by our border communities, and by our state, if we thought of them as front doors.

Joe Mathews is California and innovation editor for Zócalo Public Square, for which he writes the Connecting California column.

Opinion: Police duties change

with time

By Brian Uhler

As you might expect, once the city was incorporated in 1965, it took some time to create a police department. On July 1, 1967, the police department began providing police services to the city.

In 2017, we'll plan a small public 50th celebration at the police department. Our initial plans include hosting and honoring some of the department's original members. Over the years there have been many changes.



Brian Uhler

Some points of interest include:

- A police building was christened in 1973 and Chief Crow was quoted as saying the building would serve our needs for between five and seven years. There were plans for expansion which were never realized. We are still in the same building.
- Police officer staffing levels grew from an initial compliment of 30 officers to a high of 55 in about 1988. We currently have 36 police officers.

Police personnel have certainly stepped-up enforcement for those who are illegally operating vacation home rentals (VHRs) in our community. With some of the latest efforts to manage VHRs in our neighborhoods, the police department was able to

focus more attention on those who are operating without permits (and probably not paying transient occupancy tax–TOT).

While most people who own or operate VHRs are doing so properly, there are still those who are not obtaining permits and probably not paying taxes which help pay for important core city services for our entire community. For those who are operating a VHR “under the radar” or thinking of doing so in the future, get your permits and pay your taxes.

Penalties for operating without a VHR permit include:

- \$5,000 fine
- pay back taxes or get a lien on your property
- risk your ability to get a VHR permit in the future.

We have found 21 VHR violators in just the last month.

We hope that nobody would violate this law. Our efforts to make sure everyone knows the permit requirements included mailing a notice to every residential property owner in the entire city. Further, there have been numerous discussions at City Council meetings and a variety of news articles on the topic. Bottom line: excuses for not having a permit will probably not get you any leniencies. Game playing with flimsy excuses will also be easily debunked.

It is worth noting that it is not too terribly difficult to find those who are breaking the rules. Consider that VHRs normally advertise—we know where and we’re checking. Further, neighbors who are fed up with the impacts of a VHR could report the existence of illegal operators. Once reported, our VHR enforcement officer will visit on a holiday or weekend and confirm a property is being used as a VHR. This will kick the sanctions into motion—simple message: you’d be far better off just getting your permit and paying your proper taxes. It’s just the right thing to do.

Brian Uhler is police chief of South Lake Tahoe.