

Editorial: Focus on saving Sierra forests

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We Californians take for granted the great forests of the Sierra Nevada. It is where we ski and hike, and breathe fresh air, and it's the primary source of our water.

It's all at risk. Drought and bark beetle infestation are the proximate cause of death of more than 100 million trees in California since 2010. But the forests were weakened by climate change, combined with mismanagement that includes well-intentioned wildfire prevention efforts and logging in past decades of old-growth trees, which are most resistant to fire and disease.

At last, an infusion of state money for the Sierra forests, not to be taken for granted, and none too soon.

"There is an urgent need to reform policy and management to ensure that Californians continue to benefit from these forests for generations to come," a new Public Policy Institute of California report says.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Is California polarizing the rest of

America?

By Joe Mathews

America is terribly polarized.

And it's all on account of California.



Joe Mathews

The trouble is not merely that California itself is such a politically polarized place. Or that California contributes to the many causes of polarization: partisan media, cultural atomization, large-scale political fundraising, technological change, economic anxiety, and income inequality.

No, the artichoke heart of the matter is that California is simply too big, too exceptional, and too 21st-century to fit an America governed by 18th-century rules and mid-20th-century nostalgia.

The chief way in which California fuels polarized national elections is paradoxical: We divide America not because we are divisive, but because we balance out the country culturally and politically. California is a large progressive check on a conservative country, making America a 50-50 nation in matters political.

But America's political system is simply not set up to work in such a narrowly divided polity. The United States is famously a system of checks and balances, in which governance requires big majorities and broad consensus. One path to consensus is a

strong—and currently elusive—ethic of bipartisanship. The other reliable way to achieve consensus is to have one dominant political party that can make changes easily; the minority party, rather than obstructing, knows that it can't win and thus has more incentive to cooperate.

As political scientist Frances Lee shows in "Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign," the country produced more compromise from 1933 to 1981, when Democrats dominated Congress and presidential elections usually produced landslide victors. But in the late '80s and early '90s, as California transformed into a Democratic stronghold, the dynamic shifted. There hasn't been a presidential landslide (in which the winner got more than 70 percent of electoral votes) since 1988. And party control of both the House and Senate has flipped several times.

Because elections are so close, American politics has become so relentlessly competitive as to be dysfunctional. To win in this system, parties magnify their differences at the expense of governing, and exploit every tiny advantage, from election procedures to the redistricting process.

"When party control seemingly hangs in the balance," Frances Lee writes, "members and leaders of both parties invest more effort in enterprises to promote their own party's image and undercut that of the opposition. These efforts at party image making often stand in the way of cross-party cooperation on legislation."

This dynamic explains polarizing behavior by both parties—and creates two deep grievances involving the Golden State.

The first is the complaint that California is a great nullifier. Many Americans simply can't accept the power of California's huge population, wealth, culture, and technology to frustrate efforts to enshrine their old-fashioned bigotries in national policy. It makes America even madder that we're

not at all sorry about our exceptionalism. But so what? To quote the famously pithy Austro-Californian philosopher and statesman Arnold Schwarzenegger, "Everybody pities the weak. Jealousy you have to earn."

The second grievance is California's own. The rickety, old American Constitution routinely hamstringing our democratic preferences. The 2016 election made this plain: We voted in record numbers for Hillary Clinton, who won the national popular vote by nearly 3 million votes, but saw our choice nullified by the Electoral College, which makes the votes of people in a lightly populated state like Wyoming three times more valuable than our own ballots.

The House of Representatives gives outsize power to rural voters in other states, and the Senate gives California the same two senators as the 49 lesser states. My fellow Californians, the next time some American apologist defends the country's constitutional structure as anything but a conspiracy against California, look them in the eye and say: "North and South Dakota, dude?"

Since California stands at the heart of the problem, there are two ways to address American polarization. The first and better way is through democratic reform. Let's elect the president by the popular vote, and replace Congress with a 21st-century parliament, in which one state's huge size doesn't count against it.

In such a system, you could keep the checks and balances. One party, the Democrats, would dominate Congress and the presidency and be able to govern.

But if the Constitution remains inviolate, then the United States would be far more governable if California left the union. America would be far poorer but Republicans would dominate most elections and be the clear governing party.

For now, however, the country is in a stalemate. The rest of

America won't surrender the excessive representation that it has. And California won't bow to an anti-democratic America that nullifies our values.

If the United States is ever going to cure its polarization, something will have to give: The American Republic. Or California.

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

Letter: Why VHRs don't belong in neighborhoods

To the community,

So you want my take on VHRs – OK. I'm going to start by asking a few questions,

Why is one type of lodging property held to different standards than the other. Why don't VHRs have to be ADA compliant? They're a business and open to the public. Why are businesses allowed to set up in residential areas? Zoning exists so I don't end up with a mechanics shop/office building/dentist next to my house. I'm in a residential area. For people who spout property rights – zoning is the agreed upon designation for the area. You want to own a business, buy in a business/commercial area.

Next let me clear something up: It has been said that the only people complaining are old people and retirees, um, no. They are the only people who can make it to the meeting because the rest of us homeowners are busy working one or two jobs to stay

afloat up here.

Let me share some of the things I have experienced living next to VHRs.

Coming home to find a family playing in my yard "because my snow was better."

Looking outside to see another set of renters playing in the neighbors' yard. When I asked them to locate to their yard they actually said, "Don't worry no one is home." Then me having to explain that the owners work graveyard and are sleeping.

Waking up to people parked in my driveway and then getting upset because I woke them up early. (Hey gotta do snow before I go to work.)

People upset with me for doing snow removal early.

People expecting to park in my driveway because theirs wasn't clear of snow.

People venting on me because the rental isn't what they expected.

Seeing people barbecue in the rental's garage.

People parked in the street and hindering snow removal.

People letting their dogs run loose and getting upset when I ask them to pick up what their dog left behind in my yard. (Sorry no. That itty bitty poop did not come from my dog.)

People asking me to not do yard work because they are on vacation.

People leaving food outside to bait bears, coyotes, other wildlife.

People with fireworks.

Having the owner not heed my warnings of a problem tree and then having that tree come down and take out our side and back fence.

New housekeepers leaving trash out after Sunday cleaning when trash day isn't until Tuesday.

I'll also mention that with all of the above instances I never once called to file a complaint. Do you see a callable situation?

Look, I know heads in beds is the game in this town, but VHRs have really become a nuisance in a lot of instances. If enforcement is the issue, and I think it is, maybe we should have a moratorium on VHRs until enforcement can catch up and get its act together.

My 2 cents.

John Spinola, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: LTUSD stood by and did nothing

To the community,

I want to thank all of the parents and students that supported our efforts to have Mark Salmon removed as the girls soccer coach from the South Tahoe High School program. This was very upsetting for all of us that attended, testified and provided or even attempted to provide information to the school district. It appears that the school district does not care about the best interests of the students, violating laws or even common decency.

I will in this letter provide to you, the people of Lake Tahoe, the facts as were provided to the school and let you make your decision. I will start with the least objectionable information provided and go to the most disturbing.

First, I would like to say that my family and I moved from Lake Tahoe due to the school's and especially the school board's lack of concern over all of these events. I had spent over 35 years in the legal community, representing families and minors in the system. I even had to represent a high school student that the school suspended for smelling of tobacco and nothing more.

My wife and I were supporters of the soccer program run by Mark Salmon. We attended all of the games, both home and away. After each away game where there was a sleep over the parents and team would go to dinner and after that we would usually congregate in coach Salmon's room. Alcohol was always consumed by the adults. We did not know this was strictly against school policy. We did not learn this until some time later when we had a meeting with Pat Harnett, the athletic director of the high school. The fact that drinking occurred was of course denied by both Salmon and specifically the assistant coach Brian Hogan. Mark even received a bottle of alcohol and shot glasses from the team at the awards ceremony attended by Harnett.

The next concern was that it became apparent that there was a tremendous amount of bullying going on within the team and it was, what we as well as many other parents perceived as those who Mark played against each other to get in his good graces. The bullying became both verbal and physical and was addressed by the parents over the span of several years. In fact some of the girls quit the team due to this practice. One set of parents filed a complaint with the school district a year prior to our complaint about Mark bullying and being abusive toward their daughter and to the best of their knowledge it was never heard, nor were they ever consulted about it despite

repeated requests. This parent also confronted both the school board and Superintendent Jim Tarwater requesting action. This parent also as will be addressed, told the school board that their child admitted to being one of several the girls that ate the controlled substances on the soccer team trip to the regional championships in Winnemucca, a fact that Coach Salmon and his staff tried to and did cover up.

After the bullying got so extreme, I notified the school district as well as Salmon. Our daughter was dreading going to school and was becoming physically ill due to this abuse. While on the teams internet site, she was playing a game with another soccer player, Mark sent her a GIF file saying, "Go shoot yourself in the head with a large caliber bullet, cheers."

We were appalled that with all of the issues being raised over bullying and improper use of the internet that this conduct would be accepted by Dr. Tarwater and the school board. Coach Salmon might have had an excuse for that one but how did he get around the message that was sent to others "F- you f- all of you Coach Mark." These were printed out and provided to the school district as well as their investigator Bob Grant. There were also texts and information that was provided where Coach Salmon, in response to girls saying they wanted to quit his club team, that his response in writing was, "You will never play soccer in this town again." This was the tip oft he iceberg.

After complaining to the school board in an open meeting about the bullying, his daughter posted a very long article about myself and our family. It accuses me of suing everyone and our daughter of doing drugs in large bold print. I immediately had evidence to show that not only was this not true but it was presented to the school board and Dr. Tarwater. That evening I received a telephone call from Bob Grant stating he spoke to the Salmons and they stood by what their daughter posted. When this was brought to the school

board's attention they said we could not discuss it in an open board meeting because the information was about their employee, yet it's clearly OK for him and his family to post false information about his ex-player. This was not the first or last time he has made false representations about drug use by players who quit his team. Other parents have made this same complaint against Coach Salmon to the district.

After the regional games in Winnemucca I learned that four or five of the girls ate marijuana brownies on the bus ride and Mark was aware of this. He held a team meeting that night where the girls admitted to the team they made a mistake and the team was sworn to secrecy. The punishment under Nevada Interstate Athletic Association rules is a six-week suspension from team sports.

They were allowed to play the very next game. They did miss the first game but other than that no consequences. The fifth girl that ate the brownies suffered no consequences as she snitched off the other four. After I learned of this I went to meet with Justin Zunino, the assistant principal and assistant athletic director. He seemed appalled and told me he would investigate it and get back to me. I waited about a month and never heard from him. It wasn't until our daughter was asked by another teammate to join her in filing a complaint against Salmon for bullying that I approached Harnett. We met for over an hour with myself, my wife and daughter. He said he had never heard of the allegations of the drug cover up or abuse.

I even suggested that the team be given a drug test, but this was declined.

After that we went to the school board and filed a formal complaint, knowing the cover up was in place. We met with Bob Grant the investigator. We were one of several parents and students that met with him. He never met with many of the complaining parents, even the one whose daughter admitted eating the marijuana brownies and had filed a previous

complaint for bullying. He just flat out failed to do his job. He said he was informed by an adult that that student just wanted to get it behind her so he never spoke to her. Her parents never told Grant any such information and wanted to speak to him.

Many parents went to speak to him, signed in and never received a call or interview. We met with Dr. Tarwater and gave him the video clips, text messages and names of the girls that ate the brownies. He did absolutely nothing.

At the last of three school board meetings we attended, I volunteered to provide my daughter's test results, offered to pay for Salmon and his family as well as other soccer girls to be drug tested. They refused the offer. Wonder why? Do they know what the results would be? Maybe they don't care. My offer still stands. Under NIAA the team is subject to drug and alcohol testing as well as not to consume tobacco. At that board meeting, Coach Hogan said since I was a criminal attorney I twist the truth; it was not marijuana brownies it was edibles , marijuana gummies. Guess that makes it OK. The other coach told the board that the coaches made some mistakes and could have handled things better; even this fell on deaf ears.

I know this is a long letter, but it's just a brief summary of the lack of concern on behalf of the district. So let's raise our glasses and toast the school board, Dr. Tarwater, Bob Grant, Coach Salmon and Hogan for the wonderful cover up and experience they provide in teaching the next generation how to act.

Well, one thing I do know is that this school board and district should be embarrassed and ashamed of the way they accept this conduct by one of their employees. They send a clear message, bullying, drugs and alcohol are all OK if you are a student athlete.

Opinion: How we risked losing the West

By Jon Christensen, High Country News

Longtime readers of *High Country News* are familiar with the long debate over grasslands and public-lands grazing in the West.

Former Publisher Ed Marston came to see these controversies as key to the heart and health of our changing rural communities and landscapes. He guided many of us through tense stories about the sometimes-violent eruptions of the Sagebrush Rebellion in the 1980s and '90s, along with surprising accounts of the unexpected alliances forming between ranchers and environmentalists. At the same time, he gave us an intimate look at the lives of ranching families anxious about their uncertain future.

All of these stories were ultimately concerned with theories of how the land works and how knowledge of the land is gained. So many questions seem to come down to who knows what, on what authority do they rely, and exactly what does that knowledge and authority empower them to do.

Read the whole story

Letter: Sunbeam Blinds helps at B&B

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to thank Kurt and Laura Rasmussen, owners of Sunbeam Blind Company, for their Monday Meal sponsorship on Sept. 18.

Laura Rasmussen shared her concern for those who experience hunger and hardship: "Food insecurity is a big problem for some people. We are always happy to help with Bread & Broth."

True to her word, the couple has been sponsoring Adopt A Day of Nourishments for several years and serving on sponsor crews when the Lake Tahoe Windjammers Yacht Club is hosting an AAD dinner. These two very active members of the Lake Tahoe South Shore community are representative of the concern shown by the many AAD sponsors and crew members who come on Monday evenings to assist the B&B volunteers in serving up to 120 meals weekly to folks struggling to make ends meet.

Joining the Rasmussens were their good friends Debbie Strahm and John Borsi. These four enthusiastic volunteers arrived at 3pm at Grace Hall ready to help and make the dinner guests feel welcomed and cared for.

"This wonderful organization makes a positive difference for so many grateful folks who come to St. Theresa's for a nutritious meal," said Rasmussen. "We'll be back again! Thanks for this opportunity to share with our community."

B&B always looks forward to seeing a Sunbeam Blind Company team hosting an AAD dinner

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: EPA cuts would put Nev. water quality at risk

By Chris Giunchigliani, Las Vegas Sun

We turn our lawns into xeriscapes, and our famed fountains on the Strip spout reclaimed and recycled water. We worry about the level of Lake Tahoe, and we build bigger water supply pipelines deep below the shrinking surface of Lake Mead.

In a state where less than 1 percent of the surface area is covered by water, water is precious – like silver and gold.

Yet even as Nevadans focus on the quantity of water in our state, the quality of our water is threatened. We need all the clean water we can get for drinking, fishing, farming and ranching, even swimming and diving.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Would Nevadans pay higher taxes to cover Medicaid expansion?

By Victor Joecks, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada's Medicaid expansion has been getting a lot of love from Gov. Brian Sandoval, Sen. Dean Heller and others who want

Washington to continue paying the bulk of the program's tab.

But if Nevada taxpayers had to pay the full cost of the expansion, it'd have less support than Harry Reid running for president of a Republican women's club.

Under Obamacare, the federal government paid the full cost of that expansion from 2014 to 2016. Nevada pays 5 percent of the costs in 2017 and by 2020 will pay 10 percent of the bill.

Read the whole story

Letter: Who is getting Kings Beach events center?

To the community,

Unbelievably, the NTPUD board voted 3 to 2 to lease the North Tahoe Event Center for 70 years to an LLC whose members were unknown as of the signing. Wow!

No concern about protecting the public interest there. At least, Sue Daniels and Tim Ferrell recognized the potential problems with this weird agreement. They stood up to the desperate atmosphere that pervaded the final discussions.

The rest of the board seemed to be saying that the entire future of Kings Beach rested with this wild Hail Mary, and that anyone not joining in on the lease was digging the grave for Kings Beach.

My advice, given that the board has gone into this long-term marriage not knowing whom they're marrying, nor what their marital partner has in mind following the signing ceremony,

nor their partner's financial strength is: watch for the first hiccup which seems to run contrary to the lease or oral representations leading up to the signing.

I hope I'm wrong and that this lease proves the three pro-signing directors right even though the ill-conceived deal has not gotten off on an equal footing so far. Time will tell.

Ann Nichols, North Tahoe Preservation Alliance

Opinion: Small Calif. city a rare success story

By Joe Mathews

California's small, rural towns are supposedly desperate and doomed, as state policy favors our coastal mega-regions.

So how do you explain Gonzales?



Joe Mathews

Despite its location in the high-poverty Salinas Valley, the city of just 9,000 has a success story to share: relatively low crime, 96 percent high school graduation rates, new health facilities, sustainable infrastructure, and a string of economic development victories.

Most intriguingly, Gonzales has made its small size an advantage. Building on stable leadership—the city manager, Rene Mendez, is in his 13th year—Gonzales has kept city government streamlined so that it can move faster in planning and project approval—a very valuable trait in slow and bureaucratic California. An example: A large vegetable processing plant for Taylor Farms was proposed for Gonzales in July 2013—and completed in April 2014.

Speed works. In the past three fiscal years, Gonzales's tax base has grown by 17 percent, 19 percent, and 20 percent, respectively, as it has added industrial and commercial development. Those gains represent more than 1,200 new jobs.

The city is now home to companies oriented toward technology, agriculture and the environment. Among these are HealthySoil, which manufactures products that improve crop production; Ramsay Highlander, which designs and manufactures advanced harvesting equipment; and Constellation Brands, an international producer and marketer of beer, wine and spirits. Soon, Gonzales will be home to a 130,000-square foot Mann Packing facility.

Gonzales's approach is unconventional among California small towns. The typical formula is to beautify the town center and develop a signature entertainment venue that attracts visitors, while chasing major retailers like Costco to produce high levels of sales tax for municipal coffers.

Mendez, who grew up in the San Joaquin Valley and came to Gonzales from Inyo County, knew that Gonzales, small and somewhat isolated, was not a natural fit for tourism and malls. Instead of chasing visitors and big retailers, he wanted the city to build itself to serve its own residents. So the city has enhanced its industrial footprint and took advantage of its proximity to agriculture. Gonzales doesn't have a Costco, but produces the vegetable trays you buy there.

Mendez says that since his small city lacks bureaucracy, he and other officials must build relationships themselves with businesses and other stakeholders. In environment-obsessed Monterey County, Gonzales has learned that it must invest in sustainability. Gonzales built a wind turbine, its tallest structure and most distinguishing landmark, to accommodate Taylor Farms, which does extensive recycling of water and waste and relies on solar power and onsite cogeneration in its Gonzales facility.

Many of Gonzales's partnerships are designed to serve its youthful population: 60 percent of residents are below age 35, and more than one-third are 18 or younger. In 2013, the city and school district jointly created a youth council to tackle community improvement projects, and shape policy, recently on medical marijuana and underage drinking. Two youth council members have non-voting seats on the City Council.

But the best example of the Gonzales way may involve health care.

Five years ago, the city had just one full-time doctor, who was overwhelmed by patients needing her services. So the city convinced Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System to open a facility in Gonzales. A fundraising campaign, led by a million-dollar donation from Taylor Farms, helped get that clinic built. That might have been enough in some places, but simultaneously, the city was negotiating with non-profit Clinica de Salud to set up a second clinic. Gonzales now has six doctors and four dentists.

Gonzales's record is less impressive on other issues, especially housing. The city is badly overcrowded, with 4.1 persons per household. Mendez notes that Gonzales hasn't managed to build even one single-family home since 2005, though that's not for lack of effort. The city is working on three new developments that could produce more than 6,000 housing units, as well as new schools and a library. But none

has been built, as developers and the city struggle with familiar California issues of ownership, financing, and regulation.

In California, small, freewheeling cities have been viewed with suspicion because of scandals like the one in Bell, where the city manager plundered \$5.5 million, via inflated salaries. But Mendez, whose \$190,000 annual pay is about average for a city manager, says that Gonzales shows that smaller cities can use their freedom for progress if they make smart partnerships, including with each other. "Our types of communities have to do a better job of working together to pursue jobs and advocate for each other," he says.

Gonzales has more to do. Community development director Thomas Truskowski took me around the city, talking about infrastructural improvements for industry. Gonzales also could use a hotel, he said—to accommodate the visiting executives and employees of its growing businesses.

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