

# Opinion: Rafting companies need to pay to play

By Larry Weitzman

I want my readers to understand about county government functions. Services that provide a general benefit, like public safety (sheriff, DA, PD, probation) roads, infrastructure, zoning, business licensing and parks, to a lesser extent, provide a general benefit to all county residents and should be paid for by the general population and the general fund. I did mention licensing, but that should be self-funded, whereas fines and penalties aren't intended to fund public safety.



Larry Weitzman

As to building and safety, those are supposed to be self-funded just as the requirements we place on builders with respect to on- and off-site improvements for housing developments and charge huge traffic impact mitigation fees to provide for most of that. El Dorado County already has taxes on the tourist and recreation industry in the form of a 10 percent tax on hotels/motels and other temporary lodging called the transit occupancy tax. It raises millions of dollars and helps pay for the extra services required as a result and although it is general fund money, it's an excuse to fund things like the EDC visitors' bureau, festivals and other tourist and business draws. South Lake Tahoe makes bank

on its TOT.

El Dorado County is blessed with incredible beauty and topography making it a playground for the semi-adventurous and adrenalin junkies alike. We have one of the best recreational rivers in the country, the American. It is a magnificent show of nature, it's power and beauty. The South Fork of the American River (SOFAR) flows through the Marshall Gold Discovery Historic State Park like the financial aorta of EDC.

As a result, it has spawned a huge industry: commercial rafting. It's been ongoing for decades with some years drawing over a 100,000 people who want the thrill of running rapids like Troublemaker. It is a rush. And that's only one of several that will get your heart rate going. With the paddling required, it will add to your cardiovascular conditioning, too. For this year about 70,000 are expected to run the river with a commercial raft company. About the same number of people do the river in their own kayaks and rafts.

As a result of all this activity several problems are created. First is the public safety that has to be provided, emergency response teams, noise issues, crime issues, code enforcement, huge environmental issues and water quality concerns. Most of this falls on the EL Dorado Sheriff's Office. Just last week, they had their elite team of seven divers, all deputies, scouring the Cosumnes River looking for person a reportedly missing, spending hundreds of hours including overtime looking for this individual. On top of that, the taxpayers are spending about \$30,000 a year on a bus shuttle subsidy, purely to benefit the commercial rafting industry. An educated guess as to the total dollar amount spent on these river issues exceeds \$1 million. That could be a lot of road fixing money. Rafting is not a priority, but the roads are. But almost of this money comes from the general fund.

In looking at rate schedules from the various outfitters, the average cost for a river trip is over \$100 a person. One

outfitter listed cheapest run at \$95 for a half river run on a weekday. On the weekend that goes up by \$20 and any other trip goes up from there. Rafting the river is about the price of Disneyland, and Disneyland does it all: policing, environmental, cleanup, maintenance and shuttle buses.

What do the rafting outfitters pay the county to run their enterprises? There is a \$200 permit charge per company and a \$2 a head put into the River Trust, which is used to pay for one county employee (river recreation supervisor Noah Rucker-Triplett) who works administratively with the rafters (a complete accounting needs to be done on this potential slush fund). The outfitters take in in excess of \$7 million but pay nothing for the privilege of making this money. Taxpayers end up paying for the sheriff, environmental services, code enforcement or the continuing damages to the private citizens who live near the river who have to put with the noise pollution, commotion, huge late-night parties, vandalism, theft, trespass and more. In fact, the 6-mile stretch from about a half a mile east of Troublemaker rapids to where the river turns southwest from Highway 49 toward Folsom Lake at the Greenwood Circle day use area is designated a quiet zone. It probably is quiet compared to the take-off areas of LAX or SMF, or maybe not.

At a very recent River Management Advisory Committee meeting in the Marshall Gold Discovery Park Museum to discuss the updated County River Management Plan, the rafters want to tell the county how to run the river concessions. Isn't that the tail wagging the dog? There was no county representative present at a very one-sided meeting that bordered on mob rule. While an official county advisory committee, their actions may have been beyond the law and their authority. It's called an "ultra vires act."

The river outfitters want to play, but don't want to pay. If the outfitters want to have input, they can start by absorbing all the costs they create. There is a Planning Commission

meeting scheduled for Aug. 10 at 8:30 am at the hearing room in Building C in Placerville to discuss the update and possible approval of the River Management Plan (RMP). It shouldn't be approved. It should be modified to reflect the costs and how those costs are going to be paid because of the outfitters commercial enterprises. We need a study to determine what exactly these costs are and how and who is going to pay for them. As above, we have a TOT on lodging, why not on the rafters, too? They create bigger problems than the hotel/motels in EDC. We need a 10 percent river fee (tax) and a permit fee for private users. We should call it the rafters assessment tax.

The RMP is deficient until a cost study is done. Approval by the Planning Commission without a complete cost analysis would be derelict of their duty to the residents of EDC. Otherwise, the residents of EDC are going to pay, while the rafters play and make money at taxpayer expense. That is not a proper function of government. I doth protest and so should everyone else. Tell your supervisors enough is enough. While I wish the rafting industry continued success, the taxpayers should not be supporting and subsidizing these businesses. They need to pay their own way.

*Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.*

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## **Opinion: The impact of Sears on the American economy**

**By Vicki Howard**

The lifetime of Sears has spanned, and embodied, the rise of

modern American consumer culture. The 130-year-old mass merchandiser that was once the largest retailer in the United States is part of the fabric of American society.

From its start as a 19th-century mail-order firm, to its heyday on Main Street and in suburban malls, and from its late 20th-century reorientation toward credit and financial products to its attempted return to its original retail identity, Sears has mirrored the ups and downs of the American economy. It was a distribution arm of industrial America. It drove the suburbanizing wedge of postwar shopping malls. It helped atomize the industrial economy through manufacturer outsourcing in the 1970s and 1980s. It played a key role in the diffusion of mass consumer culture and commercial values. For better and for worse, Sears is a symbol of American capitalism.

By the early 20th century, Sears already was a household name across the United States, one that represented rural thrift and industry as well as material abundance and consumer pleasures. The company was founded as a modest mail-order retailer of watches in the 1880s by Richard W. Sears and Alvah C. Roebuck. Julius Rosenwald, a Chicago clothing merchant who became a partner in the firm in 1895, directed its rapid growth, expanding into new products and ever-broader territory. Mail-order firms like Sears were able to penetrate underserved rural areas by leaning on new infrastructure, such as the railroads that linked far-flung regions of the country. Government regulation also aided the company's growth, with the Rural Free Delivery Act of 1896 underwriting its distribution chain by expanding mail routes in rural areas.

In an era when print media reigned supreme, Sears dominated the rural retail market through its huge catalog, an amazing work of product advertising, consumer education, and corporate branding. Titled the Book of Bargains and later, The Great Price Maker, the famous Sears catalog expanded in the 1890s

from featuring watches and jewelry to including everything from buggies and bicycles to sporting goods and sewing machines. It educated millions of shoppers about mail-order procedures, such as shipping, cash payment, substitutions and returns. It used simple and informal language and a warm, welcoming tone. "We solicit honest criticism more than orders," the 1908 catalog stated, emphasizing customer satisfaction above all else. Sears taught Americans how to shop.

Sears also demonstrated how to run a business. Cutting costs and tightly controlling distribution fuelled its rise to power. The company built a massive Chicago distribution complex in 1906, which occupied three million square feet of floor space. A full-page illustration of the plant, in all its bright redbrick glory, graced the back of the Sears catalog. Any customer could see how his merchandise was received and held, how his orders were filled and shipped out, and where the catalog itself was published. The distribution center was its own best advertisement; among the largest in the world, it was a symbol of the mail-order company's dominance.

The company innovated in other ways, too. Bricks-and-mortar retailers today have to contend with new consumer habits brought about by e-commerce. Similarly, mail-order firms like Sears faced potential loss of their markets as the nation urbanized 100 years ago and entered the automobile age. Sears navigated the challenge brilliantly when it opened its first department store in Chicago in 1925. Under the managerial leadership of Gen. Robert E. Wood, who had formerly worked with mail-order competitor Montgomery Ward, Sears initiated a rapid expansion outside of urban centers. By 1929, on the eve of the Great Depression, it operated more than 300 department stores.

Growth continued even during the economic downturn, because Sears wisely championed an aesthetic of thrift. The chain made

its name selling dependable staples such as socks and underwear and sheets and towels, rather than fashion items like those found in traditional department stores such as Marshall Field's in Chicago or John Wanamaker's in Philadelphia or New York. Sears outlets were spare, catering to customers who were interested in finding good value, to meet practical needs. By the end of the Depression decade, the number of stores had almost doubled.

After World War II, still under Wood's leadership, Sears continued to open new stores across North America, in the bustling new shopping centers populating the expanding suburban landscape. In the United States, the number of Sears stores passed 700 by the mid-1950s. The firm also expanded across the borders north and south, opening its first Mexico City store in 1947 and moving into Canada in 1952 (incorporating with a Canadian mail-order firm to become Simpson-Sears). Sears benefited from being a pioneer chain in a landscape of largely independent department stores. Along with J.C. Penney, it became a standard shopping mall anchor. Together, the two chains, along with Montgomery Ward, captured 43 percent of all department store sales by 1975.

Sears wouldn't really lose any footing until the 1970s, when new challenges emerged. Skyrocketing inflation meant low-price retailers such as Target, Kmart and Walmart, all founded in 1962, lured new customers. The market became bifurcated as prosperous upper-middle class shoppers turned to more luxurious traditional department stores, while bargain seekers found lower prices at the discounters than at Sears.

In 1991, Walmart overtook Sears as the nation's largest retailer. As big box stores began to dominate the country, the department store industry responded through mergers, reorganization and experimentation with the department store category itself. Sears was no exception. The company took many different tacks under a series of problematic leaders, losing sight in the process of its traditional niche, which it

ceded to discounters. Sears moved into insurance and financial services. Its credit card business, for example, accounted for 60 percent of its profits at the turn of the 21st century. In 2003, however, it tried returning to its retail core, selling its credit and financial business to Citigroup for \$32 billion.

There is a tendency to look at Sears's decline, and the potential loss of a grand icon of American business, with fond nostalgia. This would be a mistake. Sears embodied many of the uglier aspects of American capitalism, too. Many times, the firm's management pushed back against forces that benefited workers. Sears tried to undermine organized labor, successfully resisting it even though several other traditional flagship department stores had unionized by the 1940s and 1950s. Company leaders resisted 20th-century progressive social movements that sought economic equality for African Americans and women. Like other department stores, Sears contributed both to structural and daily acts of racism, against customers and workers. African-American boycotts against Sears in the 1930s, for example, exposed racist hiring practices; in the late 1960s, welfare-rights activists revealed the firm's discriminatory credit policies. Gender inequality was deeply entrenched in its work structure—and challenged, prominently and unsuccessfully, in the famous 1986 "Sears case," which emerged from an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint concerning discrimination against women, who had been passed over for lucrative commissioned sales jobs in traditionally-male departments.

All of it, good and bad, reflects our nation's struggle to adapt to larger economic, political, and cultural forces. For historians like myself, who see business as a social institution through which to view and critique the past, the end of Sears will mean more than just one less place to buy my socks.

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# Opinion: Granddaddy's version of racism in America

By Myah Genung

I lived most of my childhood convinced that my grandfather, Calvin Muldrow, was Superman. On summer evenings, I'd perch atop his knee as we sat on the creaky back porch of his red brick house in North Little Rock. He'd weave elaborate tall tales about his magical excursions gliding over the jungle canopies of Sierra Leone, or wrestling boa constrictors, or floating aloft past my bedroom window at night to check up on me.

Granddaddy had a way of blending the fact and fiction of his past into a magic realism that left me curious and amazed. Among many things, he taught me that Superman's powers could open stubborn pickle jars, that you could pick a decent watermelon by thumping it, that golf was a dumb but fascinating sport, how to solve crossword puzzles, how to drive a car, and that it would suffice in life to have all of what you need and most of what you want.

On one topic, however, he could frustrate me to no end. As a child, I had a defiant desire to live my life optimistically colorblind. Granddaddy, however, seemed determined to judge the world based on black and white. I didn't see it then, but

I've begun to think that maybe we both were right.

When you're a black person born and raised in the American South, navigating whiteness is an acquired life skill. In school you might watch movies about the assassination of Medgar Evers at the hands of a white supremacist, read chapters in your books about white mobs throwing Molotov cocktails into buses filled with Freedom Riders, or hear about the carnage on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. But even before this formal education begins, you can feel the weight of the South's Jim Crow past. It envelops you like a hot wet blanket on a humid Arkansas summer night.

I was 4 years old when I first felt the urge to gasp for air under that heavy load. The initial burn came from a preschool classmate, a little white boy who called me a "nigger" for taking too long to go down the slide at recess. The second came from three little white girls in the same class who wouldn't let me join their pretend game of "Let's Be Kittens" because they didn't want "any black cats in the sandbox."

I felt ashamed, those nights, when my mother asked if I made any friends at school. I only reluctantly recounted my experiences. She would tell me that the girls and boys treated me this way because their parents taught them to. White hostility toward blackness was a symptom of a hereditary disease, passed down through generations. My mother wasn't angry with the world, but rather sorry to see her daughter experience the only slightly faded shadows of the same darkness she grew up with.

In the '60s my mother had been one of a few black students to integrate an all-white middle school in Arkansas. She was 12 years old and determined to make a good impression. She would defy the preconceived notions harbored by racist whites that black kids from the "other side of the tracks" were unlearned, uncouth, and unworthy of friendship. Still, her lunches were spent at a table alone. When she wasn't entirely ignored, she

was met with cruel pranks and sneering looks.

I can only imagine that watching his daughter endure this treatment colored my grandfather's approach to raising me. Granddaddy was born in North Little Rock, Ark., in 1924 in a house near the train tracks. His skin was the color of coffee with no cream, and he had three sisters of the same hue. In his old age my sister Faith and I were the apple of his eye—and over the course of 88 years his eyes saw a lot.

At 19, granddaddy was drafted into the segregated U.S. Army and shipped overseas to serve in Wales, France, and Germany. His all-black regiment's shoes and socks were secondhand. When their train passed through town, French locals jeered at the soldiers and called them "monkeys." Eventually, granddaddy said, he and his friends would just lower the train-car window curtains. Out of sight, out of mind. After three years abroad in service he returned home to more of the same. He had to pick up prescriptions at the local pharmacy's back door. He had to sit at the rear of the bus.

Thanks to the GI Bill, granddaddy enrolled at Philander Smith College, a historically black school in the area, where he met my grandmother. They married in 1949 and moved to Glenview, one of the few subdivisions of North Little Rock where blacks could purchase property. My grandfather taught English and became the principal of the elementary school I later attended. He and grammy never left their little red brick house on Glenview Boulevard.

My family and I followed a different path. When I was 8 years old we moved to Los Angeles, and I saw colors beyond black and white for the first time. There I met kids with last names like Mohamed and Cheng, who worshipped on prayer mats or not at all. My fourth-grade classroom resembled an ad for United Colors of Benetton. I felt at home in a Technicolor world where my skin didn't determine who could be my friend.

So when we moved back to Arkansas two years later, I had a renewed sense of the world that didn't quite jibe with my grandfather's views. Arkansas boosters used to call their state the Land of Opportunity.

"The opportunity to get your hat and run," granddaddy liked to add, with a chuckle.

I scoffed at his sense of resignation to the way things had always been. One night during the first week of sixth grade I came home from school excited to tell him about my new friends. "Are they black or white?" he asked. My heart sank. I was angry, and told him that he was stuck in the past. My white friends didn't see color, and neither did I. "You'll learn," he'd say. "Most white people in life think you're beneath them because it's all they've known. There are only a few good exceptions."

It didn't occur to me, back then, that this was a coping mechanism he'd crystallized over time: Assume you will be greeted with prejudice and the inevitable outcome will sting less. It also didn't occur to me that he was not entirely wrong. Decades of legal discrimination and indoctrinated prejudice manifest in myriad forms and to varying degrees, and they don't disappear overnight.

When I was 6 years old, I represented my class during a live press conference with President Bill Clinton, the Arkansas native after whom my school, William Jefferson Clinton Elementary, had been named. I wasn't called on during the press conference but had prepared a question just in case. I'd taken to painting and wanted to ask him if he knew the primary colors—red, blue, and yellow.

I have a vivid memory of walking alone through the double doors of my elementary school that day, hoisting my backpack onto a conveyor belt and watching it glide through the silver screening machine. The Secret Service waved the scanning wand

across my red pleated dress and down to my brand-new black-patent Mary Janes. Meeting the president is a daunting occasion for any American, let alone a kindergartner. But in our family little girls who meet the president had to look the part—and my mother made sure I did.

Today I see this as an extension of the lessons that my grandparents taught my mother when she was set to integrate that hostile all-white school. Speak well. Dress well. Ask intelligent questions. Prove them wrong. It didn't matter so much that it was 1994 and segregation was a thing of the past. The tension lingered on.

It's kind of funny that President Clinton, who's clearly white, was honored as the "first black president" at a dinner for the Congressional Black Caucus in 2008. Clinton took kindly to it. It was a recognition of a mutual affinity he seemed to develop with the black community. He, too, had grown up in the South and had struggled to make ends meet. He had befriended Vernon Jordan, played the saxophone, and loved Southern barbecue. He enlisted Maya Angelou to recite her poem, "On the Pulse of Morning," before he was sworn in on the National Mall. He was a powerful white man who seemed at ease with black America.

History has rightfully trained a more critical eye on Bill Clinton's policies and their effects on black society. But back then older Southern blacks, like my grandfather, accepted him as openly as he embraced them. He was "The Man from Hope," one of the "few exceptions" granddaddy had told me about. Bill Clinton wasn't a black President, but in my grandfather's eyes, he was likely the closest we'd get.

At age 18 I left Arkansas still defiantly optimistic that more was possible. This was around the time a young senator from Illinois named Barack Obama was challenging Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination to be president. Granddaddy didn't expect Obama to win even the nomination, much less the

presidency.

On Election Night 2008 I called granddaddy from a jubilant and chaotic Times Square in New York City. By this time, I was a sophomore at New York University. Barack Obama had just been elected. With tears in my eyes and tightness in my throat, I shouted into my flip phone, “Granddaddy, can you believe he won?” I couldn’t make out all of his words but from the sound of his voice I knew he was smiling and that his deep set eyes, made blue with age, were beaming. America had elected its first actual black president, against all the perceived odds.

Granddaddy died in 2012. I’ll never forget something my great-aunt Rio told me after his funeral: “You know he loved you, fiercely and with all of his heart.” I did know this—and it explains the lengths he went to prepare me for the world’s bitter surprises, even when it meant we butted heads on politics and race. I also have the comforting memory that, for one fleeting moment, I felt my grandfather see the world through my defiantly optimistic eyes.

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## **Opinion: The brainiest train in California**

**By Joe Mathews**

My train line is smarter than your train line.

I ride The Brain Train, officially the L.A. Metro system's Gold Line, running from the San Gabriel Valley into downtown L.A. and back out again to East L.A. Along the way, it connects enough smart institutions to explode stereotypes about public transportation and Southern California itself.



Joe Mathews

Yes, other parts of California may claim brainier trains: The Caltrain commuter rail connects San Francisco to Stanford; San Diego is extending its trolley to UCSD; and Sonoma and Marin counties are about to inaugurate the SMART train (although that's an acronym, not an intelligence claim).

But for L.A. County—where we're known for our good looks but not for our brains or public transportation—the Gold Line is a revelation, linking a startling diversity of intellectual institutions.

The Brain Train's eastern terminus on Atlantic Avenue is within walking distance of East Los Angeles College. From there, take the line downtown, where you pass the Japanese American National Museum, and SCI-Arc, one of the world's leading architectural schools. North of downtown, one stop drops you at the Southwest Museum, a vital archive of Native American history, and another, Highland Park, is a bike ride away from Occidental College, one of President Barack Obama's alma maters.

When the train enters Pasadena, it goes right through the south campus of ArtCenter College of Design, a globally distinguished school, and later stops at Memorial Park, a

block from Parsons, the leading engineering firm. Then the Gold Line turns east, with stops that are a walk to Pasadena City College (among the best in the state at transferring students to four-year institutions) and a short bike ride to Caltech, where planets are discovered and Nobels are won. Further east, one of the nation's top cancer centers, City of Hope, has its own stop on the Brain Train in Duarte.

For now, the Gold Line ends at two higher education institutions: Citrus College, which the Brookings Institution has called one of America's best community colleges, and Azusa Pacific, a top Christian university. But plans are already underway to take the Gold Line further east, eventually serving the University of LaVerne and the Claremont Colleges, the seven-school consortium.

The Brain Train's educational resume runs beyond universities. The line runs right through two of the state's top school districts—Arcadia and South Pasadena. The Gold Line also offers thought-provoking views of the majestic San Gabriel Mountains and of Mt. Wilson Observatory, once essential to the study of astronomy.

Do all these local nerds ride the train? No, but many cost-conscious ones do. The 31-mile-long Brain Train costs just \$1.75 per boarding, and transfers to other lines are free. With public transportation ridership flat, the Brain Train is a bright spot, registering an all-time high for weekday boardings (more than 53,000) in June.

On board, I'm often struck by the nerdiness of my fellow passengers. The Brain Train offers a smooth, quiet and comfortable ride, making it a rare public space where you'll see people reading actual books. On recent rides, I encountered people reading Benjamin Madley's "An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe 1846-1873," volumes of Richard Feynman's lectures on physics, Siddhartha Mukherjee's Pulitzer-winning "The



Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer,” and Salvador Dali’s cookbook, “Les diners de Gala.”

The Brain Train is likely to get brainier, particularly if the transit connection inspires more collaboration between Gold Line-adjacent institutions. At a public event last year, a Citrus College administrator argued that the Gold Line is making it easier for students to reach the campus and complete their degrees, and the CEO of the Claremont Colleges said it would encourage field research by students and faculty.

There also are efforts by educational institutions to enhance the Gold Line corridor. Most notably, ArtCenter, in Pasadena, is preparing a 15-year master plan that would launch a new bikeway near the Gold Line and build new student housing with green public spaces, or quads, that would be directly over the rail line, linking buildings on either side.

The Gold Line is “our extended classroom,” said Art Center’s Associate Vice President Rollin Homer at the 2016 public event. “We’re embracing it—we’re going to live and create alongside it.”

The Brain Train is still an urban rail line with typical problems. (I encountered a pile of human excrement on a seat one morning, and recently assisted a half-dozen fellow passengers in subduing an intoxicated rider.) But as someone who grew up in Pasadena before the line arrived in 2003, and now lives four blocks from a stop, I love the way the Gold Line connects me to familiar places in new ways.

The Brain Train, in other words, can really make you think.

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

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# Opinion: Is Calif. an incubator or a bubble?

By Joe Mathews

California, are you an incubator for great ideas—or a bubble that shuts them out?

That's the question Californians must ask as we confront big challenges, from climate change to our housing shortage to the threats from the Trump administration. The bubble-or-incubator question is also the best way to understand the fights being waged in the legislature this summer.



Joe Mathews

The debate over the recent extension of California's cap-and-trade system is a classic incubator-or-bubble question. Can our system for controlling greenhouse gases be adopted around the world? Or is California pursuing a foolish one-state war on climate change that will land us in a bubble of economy-destroying regulations?

The state's debate over its housing crisis offers a different spin on the question. Can California devise ways to incubate new and more affordable housing? Or will it allow local governments to keep housing out of their bubble-like cities?

The controversy over legislation to make ours a “sanctuary state” by limiting cooperation between California governments and federal immigration authorities poses another bubble-or-incubator quandary.

Lawmakers understandably want to make sanctuary protections as strong as possible, given the importance of the undocumented to California and its communities, and Trump’s ugly attempts at mass deportation. But the determination to extend protections even to undocumented criminals has alienated law enforcement officials even in progressive cities. Is an uncompromising sanctuary policy likely to isolate California politically? Or would legislation that preserves law enforcement flexibility be more likely to be adopted as a model in other states, thereby offering more protection to more immigrants nationwide?

Policy change is never easy here. In other contexts, the state, by failing to update itself, has become an anachronistic bubble. Take higher education. Once a model, the state’s master plan for three distinct university systems—UC, Cal State, and community colleges—has become a straitjacket that prevents the universities from building partnerships and online programs to produce the greater numbers of college graduates California needs. Free speech on campus is another bubble-or-incubator question. Should universities be insular safe spaces that protect students, or incubators that encourage collisions between people and ideas, even those that offend?

Incubation can be overdone. In the Bay Area, there are so many incubators (or, if you prefer, combinators or accelerators) that they comprise their own sector. Nearly every startup, nonprofit or regional agency in California has some convoluted explanation of why it’s a “model” of something-or-other. But there’s more to being a good disseminator of ideas than simply claiming they’re “new” to generate buzz and investment.

The state's obsession with incubating new models has made it common for protectors of bubbles to pass themselves off as incubators. Consider the new "California model" that the state school board touts to track the progress of schools. Sounds new, but it's really a fiendishly complicated system that makes it harder for parents and communities to hold campuses, teachers and their unions accountable.

In health care, the controversial Senate Bill 562 is similarly fraudulent. Its backers pitched it as a single-payer system that would incubate change across the nation; in fact, the bill failed to include the basics of such a system—like controls on spending or utilization of medical care, or ways to cover its \$400 billion costs.

At its worst, California is a bubble of distinctive and convoluted regulations and laws, which are hard to unwind, especially in a state with so many lawyers. Right now, it's not helping matters that the new attorney general, Xavier Becerra, is a veritable bubble machine. Some of that's good: He's filing lawsuits to protect our state's policy priorities from the Trump administration.

But he's also responsible for the most foolish bubble-expanding policy of the year: expanding enforcement of a new California law that bans paid travel by state employees to states that have discriminatory laws on the books. Becerra has now listed eight states (Texas was among the recent adds) under this travel ban. Opposing discrimination is the state's goal, but this ban is counterproductive. How are Californians to spread our more inclusive cultural values—and all the great ideas we're hatching—to such places if our government representatives can't visit them?

It's hard work being an incubator. You have to engage with people you don't like. You have to address not only your own problems, but also other people's. But what is the point of a place as rich and lucky as California if it's only going to be

for itself? Incubators birth new things. And bubbles tend to pop.

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

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# Opinion: The overlooked weather trackers

By Roger Turner

You've probably never heard of the Air Resources Laboratory. I hadn't until two years ago, when I was hired to preserve a trove of oral histories recorded in the early 1990s. Those audio cassettes held a history of hidden science, full of amazing stories about nuclear explosions, air pollution, and volcanoes. I encountered scientists whose research had strengthened national security, improved emergency response, and protected human health for almost 70 years—with barely any credit or acclaim.

And with the lab now under threat of budget cuts, it's all the more important to understand its little-known history.

The Air Resources Laboratory (ARL) researches atmospheric transport, dispersion, and diffusion—how dangerous things move around in the air. It is part of NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), the government agency that monitors the oceans and atmosphere to help individuals, businesses, and the government make informed decisions.

The ARL began in 1948, as a handful of security-cleared Weather Bureau meteorologists whom other government agencies

could rent to answer questions about nuclear fallout. The lab met its first challenge a year later, when an Air Force "bugcatcher" trapped radioactive dust during a flight between Alaska and Japan in 1949. ARL scientists tracked the air mass backward to deduce potential sites of the first Soviet atomic bomb test.

The Atomic Energy Commission became the ARL's primary client as open-air nuclear testing intensified through the 1950s. ARL scientists worked in Nevada to delay blasts when nuclear debris was likely to blow over urban areas. The Atomic Energy Commission originally assured citizens that radioactive debris would remain safely suspended high in the stratosphere. But ARL research challenged that claim. The ARL showed that debris would fall out of the atmosphere before most of the radioactivity decayed, and that dangerous fallout would concentrate in the middle latitudes of the Northern hemisphere. This discovery set the stage for the Limited Test Ban Treaty negotiations in 1962; ARL expertise informed sections on monitoring compliance.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, ARL meteorologists prepared daily forecasts for dozens of cities, predicting how fallout would travel in case of an atomic attack. Throughout the Cold War, ARL staff practiced deploying to the doomsday bunker buried beneath Mount Weather in Maryland, where they would track fallout and advise the surviving leaders of the U.S. government during a nuclear war.

Nuclear bombs aren't the only things that shoot dangerous dust into the stratosphere. In December 1989, a 747 flying above Alaska lost all four engines when it flew through a cloud of invisible volcanic ash. The Federal Aviation Administration sponsored ARL scientists to develop a computer simulation that allows airlines to find the most efficient ways to safely avoid ash plumes. Similar models continue to direct global air travel, including during the 2010 eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland.

As nuclear testing declined and the environmental movement grew, new agencies began to request the ARL's expertise. The Public Health Service and later the Environmental Protection Agency sought to understand the movement of air pollutants. The lab conducted field experiments to verify its computational models. One smog experiment tracked radar-reflective pyramid-shaped balloons, called tetrons, across the Los Angeles basin. An experiment related to acid rain measured the dispersion of distinctive chemical "tracers" over continental distances. Today, one of the lab's jobs is to study mercury deposition, a potentially serious pollution problem caused largely by burning coal.

Understanding atmospheric transport is essential to many kinds of emergency response. The lab's research guided government responses to the nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima. The lab's HYSPLIT computer model helps the National Weather Service protect first responders during chemical spills. First deployed in the 1980s and iteratively improved since, the model integrates current weather observations with information about a chemical release to predict where toxic substances will go and in what concentrations. In the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, the ARL's Field Research Division conducted tracer experiments in Manhattan and other urban areas to explore how chemical or biological weapons might disperse at ground level. This work can aid emergency personnel in case of a dirty bomb or bioweapon attack.

Listening to the scientists tell these stories, I was struck by the absence of self-promotion common in oral histories of Nobel Prize winners or scientist-entrepreneurs. The ARL staff were modest people content to have made a modest contribution to the problems of their time.

But this modesty is dangerous in an era when government and science are often denigrated. The government rarely gets credit because the benefits of its scientific services are

designed to be invisible, like plane crashes that don't happen, chemical burns that don't kill and maim, and people who aren't poisoned. And the ARL costs less than 2 cents per American per year—NOAA has been famously frugal since the 1930s, when its predecessor, the Weather Bureau, instructed weathermen to write on both sides of every sheet of paper.

While the work of the ARL is worth knowing on its own terms, it can also stand in for a swath of hidden science. We think a lot about the kinds of science that are culturally influential, but much less about the science that is practically important. There are many organizations across the federal government like the Air Resources Lab, modest groups of researchers whose quiet expertise makes us safer. We forget about their service at our peril.

*Roger Turner is a historian of science and Research Fellow at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia. He writes about surprising images and atmospheric science at [PicturingMeteorology.com](http://PicturingMeteorology.com). He wrote this for Zócalo Public Square.*

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## **Letter: Boys & Girls Club says thanks**

**To the community,**

Tahoe's first ever Brewfest last month was such a huge success that it ran out of beer and raised over \$20,000 for the Boys & Girls Club of Lake Tahoe.

The brain child of Cold Water's Deb Brown, the Tahoe Brewfest was made a reality on June 10. With all proceeds benefiting



the Boys & Girls Club of Lake Tahoe, the success of the event skyrocketed with supporters from all over the Tahoe Basin and beyond with over 80 percent of attendees from out of town.

The Boys & Girls Club of Lake Tahoe would like to give a shoutout to the wonderful supporters of the event who kick started what is sure to become a major south shore event each summer.

- Cold Water Brewery
- Gabbart & Woods Structural Engineering
- Sustainable Community Advocates
- Tahoe Party Rentals
- Tahoe Beach Retreat & Lodge
- South Tahoe Lodging Association
- Blue Riders
- ABC Fire
- Sysco
- South Tahoe Refuse and Recycling
- Tahoe Production House
- Tahoe Brew Tours
- SMG Consulting.

FNCTN assisted with social media exposure, marketing, and live music, and the event could not have happened without all our local breweries coming together to give their time, beer and expertise to raise money for a great cause in the community.

The Boys & Girls Club of Lake Tahoe, with FNCTN and Cold Water, are already planning for 2018 and are looking into

larger venues, more attendees, and more beer for future Tahoe Brewfests.

**Kili Ongoy, Boys & Girls Club development manager and event coordinator**

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# Opinion: Pull the plug on EV subsidies

By Larry Weitzman

California is a great place to live. Hundreds of miles of grand, majestic mountains and picturesque beaches sandwich a central valley that has proven to be the fruit and vegetable basket of the United States. When you couple that with about the best, most temperate and diverse climate in the world (it brought us Hollywood), it's no wonder we are the most populous state in the union.



Larry Weitzman

But California has become known as the left coast, full of do-gooders thinking they know what's best for you and me. Our leftist Legislature recently passed a huge gasoline tax and extended the ridiculous cap and trade system (more taxes) until 2030 all to the detriment of everyone in the state as

gasoline prices which were already the highest in the lower 48 states will even go higher. Right now, they are averaging about half a dollar higher than most other states and in some cases prices are a dollar a gallon more.

California will amass billions of dollars from these new tax revenues. Assemblyman Phil Ting, a 48-year-old Democrat who represents the 19th Assembly District which encompasses the western part of San Francisco and parts of San Mateo County and is a UC Berkeley, Harvard School of (big) Government alumni, has an idea how to give away at least \$3 billion of these new taxes. Need I say more. His idea has already passed the California Assembly and is now in the state Senate.

Section 1 of the bill makes several declarations, most of which are false including paragraph (m) which states, "Battery technology is improving faster than expected and electric vehicles are expected to reach cost parity with conventional alternatives in the mid-2020s." Battery technology or chemistry is basically the same as it was 10 years ago. Costs may have come down, but it remains to be seen how much further they will fall and recent studies have shown that the cost of batteries would have to fall by about 75 percent from today's prices to reach that goal of cost parity and that's not considering the other issues with batteries of range and refueling. Other battery prices have actually gone up whether they are conventional car batteries or Duracells.

But here is what the crux of the bill does. Federal EV subsidies of a \$7,500 tax credit expire after 200,000 units of a model are produced by a phase out program cutting the tax credit in half for six months, to a quarter for an additional six months and then nothing. Tesla has claimed that the new Model 3, which has started production, has over 380,000 orders, so many buyers will not get federal subsidies. Even its Model S is closing in on the phase out of subsidies.

Ting proposes in his bill to not only continue with those

subsidies in the form of rebates which are direct payments to the EV purchaser (instead of a tax credit), but to increase the rebate to the extent to equalize the cost of an EV when compared to a similar conventional model. That could amount to rebates to each EV customer in the tens of thousands of dollars. For example, if a Tesla Model 3 costs \$50,000 with equipment and an equivalent Mazda 3 costs \$25,000, the purchaser of the Model 3 would get a check from the state in the amount of \$25,000. Considering that the average price of a Model S is about \$110,000 and an equivalent comparable luxury car is \$30,000 less than the state would pay to the Tesla buyer \$30,000. Tesla buyers currently have an average annual income according to a research firm of \$320,000. Talk about a transfer of wealth from the working poor to the rich, this takes the cake.

In another unintended consequence not thought of by the brilliant Mr. Ting of the Harvard School of (big) Government is that EV prices will go up. If the state is going to make up the difference, the manufacturers would be crazy not to increase its prices. Tesla is losing \$16,000 per car currently. Why not at least make up the difference so they can stay in business? GM sells its Chevy Bolt EV from anywhere from about \$35,000 to \$41,000 and they are losing money on every car. Now they can raise their price and stop the bleeding.

The bill also says that these incentives will help the state achieve the sales of 1.5 million EVs in California alone by 2025. At current sales rates, they might be lucky to achieve a third of that number. And GM recently reported some distressing news about Chevy Bolt sales. They are not. GM recently shut down the Bolt plant because inventories are now at 111 days. And the Bolt is a real EV with a range of over 200 miles and performance that will send it to 60 mph from a standstill in under 8 seconds (Tesla Model 3 claims the same level of performance). And this is a car you can already buy

for \$35,000 and get \$10,000 in federal and state tax credits right now. It remains to be seen just how many Tesla Model 3 customers there really are. The deposits are supposedly refundable.

A study done by UC Berkeley about 15 years ago said that for automobile drivers to give up their conventional car in place of an EV, it would take a payment to the customer of \$28,000 and be given the EV for free. That study might still be true as almost all Tesla buyers have another conventional motor vehicle.

Tesla stock has taken some hits recently. It loses money on every car it sells. AB1184 looks more like an attempted bailout of Tesla, than a bill to save the planet which it won't. The planet doesn't need saving; however, humans do from their stupidity and attempts to meddle in markets, economics and human nature.

*Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.*

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# **Opinion: Probation has important role to play**

**By Brian Richardt**

By proclamation of the Board of Supervisors, El Dorado County celebrated probation services July 17-21.

As the chief probation officer in El Dorado County, I would like to take the opportunity to reflect on the critical work probation does in our criminal justice system and say thank you to all the men and women of my department who work

tirelessly to protect our communities, reduce recidivism, restore victims, promote healthy families, and live the vision of our department: Safe communities through changed lives.



Brian Richardt

Even though probation has for years been the most frequently used sanction in the criminal justice system, the reliance on probation services in California has increased significantly in the past few years. For some, probation can have a singular connotation that does not accurately represent the multifaceted mission and work of probation departments across California. The work of a probation officer is a highly technical and ever evolving profession focused on behavior change in individuals, leading to positive impacts in all the people they touch.

Probation is committed to a research-based approach to public safety that promotes positive behavior change. In other words, research has proven that communities are safer when we give offenders the tools to succeed, during and after incarceration, all the while holding them accountable for their actions. These tools can be anything from appropriate counseling, to addiction recovery or job skill training with a focus on changing “criminal thinking” patterns. This is a proven way to lower recidivism and thereby preventing the next victim.

Our multi-dimensional approach to community safety includes holding people accountable through community supervision. Investment in services and evidence based rehabilitation is

critical to lowering recidivism, but equally important is ensuring those we supervise are accountable for their choices and behavior.

A critical part of rehabilitation is educating clients on how their choices impact their lives and those around them, including and especially victims. We do this by providing the tools to change criminal thinking. Thinking for a change and moral reconnection therapy are two of the many evidence-based programs that are integrated, cognitive behavioral change (how thinking effects actions) programs delivered through our probation department to assist individuals in better understanding the process of their decision making and how to change decision-making norms that have led to past criminal justice involvement.

This approach and the work probation does helps restore victims and prevent future victimization. The best thing we can do as law enforcement officers is prevent a future crime from being committed and prevent future victims. Research and evidence shows us that these strategies and practices do just that.

Consistent with probation's role as an evidence based and data driven decision maker, we also have a lesser known but critical function in providing detention services for youth. Probation is responsible for the operation of two county juvenile detention facilities as well as a long-term commitment program operated in our South Lake Tahoe facility. The staff in our facilities are intensely trained and steeped in the latest scientific research about what works to change behavior. Our staff work tirelessly to safely supervise these youth, to prevent them from hurting themselves or each other, and to provide comfort and resources for them when the youth are confronted with the realities of the trauma many have experienced. Probation prepares these youths for transition back into their communities as they either return home or are placed in foster care in the community for a limited period of

time, continuing to supervise and rehabilitate the youth during their term on probation, all while holding them accountable for actions leading to their detention.

We are a law enforcement agency that touches almost all aspects of the criminal justice system and we have a unique, innovative, and multidimensional approach to community safety. When we are successful, the payoff is immeasurable. From the prevention of future victims to the value of saving a life and helping regenerate a contributing member of our community. Beyond the personal and public safety impact probation makes, there are enormous and obvious cost savings for the entire criminal justice system when we succeed in our mission. In a recent report from the Public Policy Institute of California it was shown that of the average annual cost of the four corrections options in California, probation was by far the least expensive option to taxpayers. The annual cost of probation services statewide per offender was \$4,400 as compared to parole services (\$10,000), jail (\$38,600), and prison (\$60,000). Probation services are simply put, a bargain for taxpayers and an effective means of reducing recidivism.

This is why probation is so critical to our county and state and will continue to be the linchpin of the criminal justice system. Myself and all probation officers in El Dorado County take great pride in the work we do and appreciate the community support we receive. The continued investment in probation will be critical to the future of California and the societal approach to public safety Californians want to see.

*Brian Richardt is the chief probation officer for El Dorado County.*

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# Opinion: North Tahoe Event Center giveaway

By Ann Nichols

For the past 14 months the North Tahoe Public Utility District executive staff and board have been negotiating with the developer Laulima on a long-term lease of the North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach.

Laulima originally asked for a 99-year term; really a sale. Although the NTPUD claims it has had many public meetings on the issue, the terms of the deal have been kept secret from the public with the justification that it would impede negotiations. The result has been behind-closed-doors meetings held in a vacuum with zero transparency and zero public input.

Area residents served by the NTPUD are the actual owners of this important free and clear lakefront venue. As a 45-year real estate broker, I estimate its value at approximately \$4 million. The event center is the resident and non-resident affordable "go to" for weddings, Quinceanera celebrations, yoga, funerals, group/business meetings and public meetings to name just a few.

The NTPUD within its recreation and parks department manages the property. The recreation and parks department includes the North Tahoe Regional Park, the Tahoe Vista Recreation Area Boat Launch and the event center. The entire NTPUD Recreation and Parks Department spends approximately \$1.8 million per year with little revenue except for around \$600K in tax money paid by residents.

The event center, which in the past has generated as much as \$970K, now is at approximately \$400K per year. As the only venue that generates significant money an event center, \$90K

yearly loss is minimal in relation to the larger Parks and Recreation budget. The Tahoe Vista boat launch alone lost \$75K last year. Community centers rarely make money.

Unbelievably, the event center has no marquee alerting the public to events and until just now no staffing on weekends. The NTPUD is not the best event operator, but does that mean we need to give it away to a developer and lose control. Couldn't the NTPUD allow an established local event operator such as Granlibakken to step in. Granlibakken and the Biltmore Casino made a proposal to the NTPUD, but they didn't make the outlandish promises Laulima did.

Laulima's PowerPoint promised a rebuild and a \$7M infusion. Somehow this investment would be justified by an expensive wedding operation. Laulima did purchase the Ferrari/Crown motel property for approximately \$12.5 million. They propose condos on the lake and a hotel across the street. Vetting Laulima revealed a series of evaporated projects, including an equestrian project in Cloverdale and the Monterey Downs racetrack/residential project.

In defense of the NTPUD, how could you turn down millions, especially when Laulima promised to retain the same or better public access? Well, it's easy, actually: once you go down the road of losing control to a third party, it's over. NTPUD must say no thanks. The public deserves to retain the event center. The Kings Beach redevelopment mess is over and business is booming. Look at last winter's crush of visitors and occupancy rates. NTPUD: hire a competent operator and be transparent about the real financial narrative.

*Ann Nichols is with the North Tahoe Preservation Alliance.*