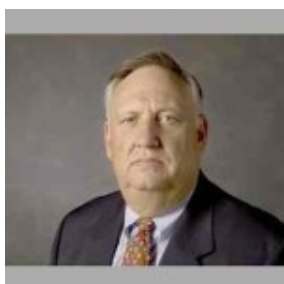


# Opinion: Sale of \$31M Tahoe estate should disturb Calif. politicians

By Dan Walters, CALMatters

The Wall Street Journal often features stories about multimillion-dollar homes and estates as they change ownership.

One recent article should disturb California politicians, particularly Gov. Jerry Brown and legislators who recently enacted a new state budget. Here's why.



Dan Walters

About 70 percent of the revenue for the \$125 billion “general fund” portion of the budget – the part that supports schools, colleges, prisons and health and welfare programs – comes from the state’s personal income taxes. And half of those income taxes are paid by the top 1 percent of taxpayers.

The bite on the wealthy has been increasing, thanks to an economic expansion that has put more money in their bank accounts, to the progressive nature of the income tax system and, finally, to sharp increases in their marginal tax rates through two voter-approved ballot measures.

There’s been much speculation over whether those highest-in-the-nation tax rates would encourage the very wealthy to flee

California and establish residences in low- or no-income-tax states such as neighboring Nevada.

There have been some anecdotal reports of such moves, which Nevada officials have indirectly encouraged by vigorously defending expatriates from California's efforts to tax their incomes. But there's been, as far as one can tell, no mass exodus.

Nevertheless, it was one thing to have high marginal tax rates imposed temporarily, as a 2012 ballot measure sponsored by Brown did. It's another thing to make those rates at least semi-permanent, as did a 2016 ballot measure backed by public-employee unions and others with stakes in the state budget.

That brings us back to that brief Wall Street Journal article about the \$31.1 million sale of a Lake Tahoe estate once owned by casino tycoon Steve Wynn to Michael and Nora Lacey. He's a pathologist and she founded a Silicon Valley bio-tech company that she sold in 2014 for \$170 million.

Just two years ago, the Laceys bought a 30,000-square-foot Tudor mansion in Los Altos Hills, named "Morgan" for a previous owner, but it will no longer be their official residence. "The Wynn estate is our permanent home and our main home and the Morgan estate is a beautiful place when we want to get away," Mrs. Lacey told the Journal.

By joining other wealthy residents of Incline Village on the Nevada side of the lake, the Laceys will be able to shield at least some of their obviously high income, particularly investment earnings, from California taxes.

Just a few days before the article appeared, the Tax Foundation, a Washington, D.C., think tank, issued a bulletin about the fat contract that quarterback Derek Carr signed with the Las Vegas-bound Oakland Raiders. The contract is "back-loaded," meaning most of the money will be paid after the team relocates, and the foundation calculated that Carr would save

\$3.2 million a year by plying his trade in Nevada.

Finally – and perhaps most ominously for California politicians – President Donald Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress are weighing whether to eliminate the federal income tax deduction for state taxes.

Without deductibility, the bite on the wealthy in California and other high-tax states – all of them true blue in their political leanings – would increase sharply.

It would create still another financial reason for them to emulate the Laceys, particularly if they also fear that state taxes will rise again to finance the universal health coverage that many Democratic politicians advocate, including the party's front-runner for governor, Gavin Newsom.

We live in interesting times.

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## **Letter: Bread & Broth appreciative of help**

**To the community,**

“The opportunity to be a helping hand to my community makes my heart smile,” wrote Valerie Soeters-Huse of S&H Holdings. “Thanks for giving us the opportunity to support others.”

Soeters-Huse, along with her son, Spencer Huse, and the Watt family of Incline Village hosted Bread & Broth's meal on July 3 through their donation of \$250 to sponsor a dinner through B&B's Adopt A Day of Nourishment program.

Valerie and Spencer were joined at their dinner by their

fellow sponsor crew members and friends, Kali Chandler and Elizabeth Tuoto. The group enjoyed helping the B&B volunteers with all of the necessary steps to provide food giveaway bags and then dish out heaping servings of taco casserole, spicy beans, sautéed zucchini and green salad on the trays of the dinner guests as they proceeded through the serving line.

“The B&B volunteers are awesome, especially Lenny! Laid back help and love to work in an unstressful environment!” added Valerie. “What you all do is great!”

B&B is very grateful for Valerie’s kinds words, but more importantly, B&B really appreciates the financial support and wonderful crew that showed up to help at July 3 dinner and make possible the food and the team work needed to serve the appreciative guests at their sponsorship dinner.

**Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth**

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## **Opinion: Was Wounded Knee a battle for religious freedom?**

**By Louis Warren**

The Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 appears in many history textbooks as the “end of the Indian Wars” and a signal moment in the closing of the Western frontier. The atrocity had many causes, but its immediate one was the U.S. government’s effort to ban a religion: The Ghost Dance, a new Indian faith that had swept Western reservations over the previous year.

The history of this episode—in which the U.S. Army opened fire on a mostly unarmed village of Minneconjou Lakotas, or Western

Sioux, on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota—teaches us about the moral perils of abandoning religious freedom. Although the First Amendment guarantees freedom of conscience, only in recent decades did that protection extend to American Indian ceremony and belief.

For most of U.S. history, the federal government sought to assimilate native peoples by eradicating their religious ceremonies and belief systems. These efforts increased with all-out campaigns to turn Indians into Protestant, English-speaking farmers in the closing years of the 19th century. Under government regulations that took effect in 1883, the Department of Interior banned “heathenish” (meaning virtually all) Indian dances, in an effort to force conversion to Christianity.

Thus, customary ceremonies that once brought spiritual relief to Lakotas, such as the Sun Dance, became illegal. At the same time, reservations grew dramatically poorer. Congress’ 1889 decision to reduce food rations to Lakota Sioux, bringing many to the point of starvation, and to strip Indians of most of their reservation lands, increased native peoples’ sense of desperation. On other reservations, among Arapahos and Cheyennes, for example, similar pressures also contributed to a growing feeling of crisis.

It was at this point, in the fall of 1889, that, the new teachings of what became known as the Ghost Dance religion began to energize believers among Lakotas and in other Indian communities, especially on the Great Plains. Many greeted its teachings with joy. This was no violent uprising: Armed resistance to U.S. authority had ended in 1877. For well over a decade, Lakotas had peacefully occupied reservations in South Dakota and North Dakota. Other peoples who took up the Ghost Dance, such as Arapahos and Cheyennes, had lived on reservations in Montana, Oklahoma, and elsewhere for even longer.

None of these peoples was threatening hostility. What they sought was redemption from their suffering, and the new religion promised it. Tribal members passed along rumors of an Indian messiah who would come in the spring, bringing a new earth, on which believers would find no white people, but abundant buffalo and horses. For this wondrous event to transpire, said the evangelists, believers must adopt a new ceremony: a sacred dance in which participants held hands and turned in a large circle. Among Lakotas, the circle turned at an ever faster pace until some dancers collapsed into trances. On awaking, many recounted visions of the afterworld and encounters with spirits of their departed kin and friends.

At its peak, perhaps one in three Lakotas joined the dance circle, and the exuberance of believers was spectacular, with hundreds dancing at any moment and dozens falling into visions. But to U.S. government officials responsible for administering the reservations, the excitement could only mean trouble. "The dance is indecent, demoralizing, and disgusting," wrote one. "I think," wrote another, "steps should be taken to stop it."

Why did the dancing elicit such strong condemnation? The wave of Ghost Dance enthusiasm had run headlong into the government's policy of assimilation, the ongoing effort to force Indians to look and behave like Protestant white people. While most officials recognized Ghost Dancers were peaceful, they were nonetheless perturbed by the sudden appearance of the large circles of ecstatic dancers. The rhythmic movement of bodies proved to white observers that Indians were refusing to assimilate, to abandon old religions and embrace Christianity. The Ghost Dance looked like dangerous backsliding toward "paganism."

And yet, to many Indians and even a few white defenders, the Ghost Dance religion also looked a lot like Christianity. Some white observers compared the dance to evangelical camp meetings, and one urged officials to let Ghost Dancers

“worship God as they please.” The religion, after all, promised the coming of a messiah, who some adherents called “Christ,” and some of its teachings were not that different from those of Christianity.

The prophet of the Ghost Dance was a Northern Paiute named Wovoka, or Jack Wilson, who hailed from Nevada. By 1889, Northern Paiutes had long since entered the Nevada workforce as teamsters, road graders, builders, domestic servants, and general rural laborers. Wovoka himself was a well-regarded ranch hand. According to multiple accounts from the period, he instructed his followers not only to dance, but to love one another, keep the peace, and tell the truth. He also told Ghost Dancers to take up wage labor, or as he put it, “work for white men.” They should send children to school, attend Christian churches (“all these churches are mine,” Wovoka counseled), and become farmers. Such teachings were transmitted to distant followers on the Plains. Lakota evangelists, too, instructed their followers, “Send your children to school and get farms to live on.”

The Ghost Dance religion was no militant rejection of American authority, but an effort to graft Indian culture on to new ways of living, and to the new economy of wage work, farming, and education that the reservation era demanded. But to government officials, the dancing was a sign of religious dissent, and had to be stopped.

When Ghost Dancing continued throughout 1890, President Benjamin Harrison sent in the Army. On Dec. 28, about 500 heavily-armed cavalry accepted the surrender of a village of 300 elderly Minneconjous, women, children, and some lightly-armed men. The next morning, as troops were carrying out orders to disarm their prisoners, a gun fired, probably by accident. Nobody was hurt, but an impulsive commanding officer ordered his troops to open fire. By the time the shooting stopped, about 200 Lakotas lay dead and dying. In the aftermath, a brief shooting war finally erupted, with

skirmishes taking the lives of dozens of Indians and a handful of soldiers before Lakotas once more surrendered their arms.

To this day, the pain of Wounded Knee is still deeply felt within the Pine Ridge community and by descendants of the victims. The stain of the Wounded Knee Massacre remains on the Army and the U.S. government.

But efforts to suppress the Ghost Dance religion had the opposite effect. Army violence convinced many believers that its prophecies must be true, and that the government was trying to stop them from being fulfilled. Why would the government want to stop prayers to the Messiah, unless white people knew the Messiah was real? Clearly, said believers, the government knew the Messiah was coming.

After a brief period, secret Ghost Dances returned to South Dakota. Elsewhere, dances among Southern Arapahos and Southern Cheyennes took on renewed energy. Among some peoples, Ghost Dances were held regularly through the 1920s. Across many different Indian reservations, the ceremony and its teachings endure to this day.

Only in the late 20th century would Indian people begin to secure limited rights to observe their own religions. As they have done so, our memories of assimilation campaigns and their tragic consequences have faded. But as Americans still debate the merits of religious freedom, the Ghost Dancers of Wounded Knee remind us of the terrible price of suppressing belief.

*Louis S. Warren is W. Turrentine Jackson professor of Western U.S. History at UC Davis, and the author most recently of "God's Red Son: The Ghost Dance Religion and the Making of Modern America" (Basic, 2017).*

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# Opinion: The need to bridge the high desert

By Joe Mathews

What's the fastest way to change California?

Unless you have the power to set off a major earthquake, your best bet would be to connect Palmdale and Victorville.



Joe Mathews

These two working-class desert cities aren't often associated with economic or political power. But building world-class infrastructure to bridge the 50 miles between them might be the most powerful current idea in California. Strong Palmdale-Victorville connections could transform Southern California's traffic and economy, boost the West's energy markets, and reconfigure the path of American trade with Asia and the rest of North America. It might even save the California high-speed rail project.

Why would such a connection be so valuable? To bridge Palmdale and Victorville is to connect the Antelope and Victor valleys, two fast-growing exurban regions that each include a piece of a major North American highway corridor. Palmdale's home region, the Antelope Valley, in L.A. County, now has more than 500,000 people; its highways make it part of the Interstate 5 corridor, from Tijuana to British Columbia. Fifty miles east, the Victor Valley, where Victorville is the anchor town, has

about 400,000 people, and sits right on Interstate 15, which moves Southern Californians to Las Vegas every weekend while transporting goods from San Diego to Alberta, Canada.

Current connections between interstates 5 and 15 are primitive. Truckers either have to navigate the awful traffic of the L.A. basin, or must find a way across the High Desert. The latter requires driving surface streets, or the traffic-clogged 138, known unofficially as Blood Alley, since it's one of America's most dangerous roads.

Good news: This infrastructure gap creates an enormous opportunity.

Which brings me to the High Desert Corridor, a decade-old proposal that is one of the most underrated ideas in California. Backed by a joint powers authority of Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties, the High Desert Corridor is a public-private partnership to build not one connection between Palmdale and Victorville, but four.

First would come a 56-mile freeway connecting the two cities. Second, the High Desert Corridor would establish a high-speed rail right of way, with the goal of connecting the California High-Speed Rail's proposed station at Palmdale with the planned and private Xpress West high-speed rail project between Las Vegas and Victorville.

The third piece of the connection involves energy: Underneath the freeway and rail would run electric transmission lines, and above ground, there would be charging and alternative fuel stations for cars and trucks. Finally, the High Desert Corridor would have a 40-mile bikeway between Palmdale and U.S. 395.

If such a corridor were ever to become a reality, the impact would go beyond the convenience of connecting the 5 and the 15. The high-speed rail piece of the High Desert Corridor would connect San Francisco and Los Angeles to Las Vegas,

inspiring more high-speed rail and economic integration in the West (Phoenix and Salt Lake City should be next).

Today, international trade is slowed in the L.A. basin by dense traffic in the seaports and on the streets. Advocates of the corridor say it could become a new "inland international port," if land for logistics is closely connected to rail and airports in the corridor, allowing cargo to be moved between transportation modes. Such a port would support

trade, spawn more businesses, and allow the logistics industry to expand beyond the basin to the Inland Empire, bringing more jobs to the desert for local residents, shortening their commutes.

At the same time, the project could take pressure off of Los Angeles' roads, while providing infrastructure to encourage more green technology and transportation. Supporters are also betting that manufacturers will flock to the High Desert Corridor, since it is outside the basin and its strict air regulation.

Be skeptical if you wish. The history of the California desert is filled with grand plans that went nowhere. But the High Desert Corridor isn't grand—it's a tightly focused connection. The environmental reviews are complete; the next steps are figuring out the exact route, and the costs of acquiring the right of ways.

Current estimates of the project's overall cost are \$8 billion. That's a lot—but high-speed rail is projected to cost at least nine times that. Supporters had hoped to fund much of the expense with federal earmarks, but Congress has eliminated them. So the project will require a mix of private and public money, and be built in phases (rail first). Los Angeles County's transportation tax, Measure M, will provide some dough.

But the state should step up. California politics is dominated by the coasts, and especially the Bay Area, which is why big funds were lavished on the new Bay Bridge. It's now time to look south and inland, and build the next great California bridge in the High Desert.

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

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## **Opinion: More bike trails are good for Tahoe**

**By Ty Polastri**

Bike paths can transform a community to be safer, healthier, and contribute to its economic and environmental sustainability. A bike path, or more accurately called a shared-use trail, is a “completely separated right-of-way for the exclusive use of bicyclists and pedestrians with cross-flow from vehicles minimized.”



Ty Polastri

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency reports that the Lake Tahoe Basin has 49.85 miles of shared-use paths with Dollar Creek (2.2 miles), Sand Harbor to Incline Village (3 miles), Ski Run Boulevard to El Dorado Beach (just under 1 mile), and Incline Way in Washoe County (0.3ish miles) currently under

construction. Looking ahead, the regional plan calls for another 25.71 miles over the next five years.

Here are some projects that are in the planning process without specific start dates:

- Highways 89/50 in Meyers. Roundabout implementation start 2018, completion 2021. This includes adding to the path network. Not sure on miles of path.
  - Sierra Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe may be in construction, not positive though. I know it's their plan, but these things get moved out; 0.6 miles of path.
  - Tahoe Valley Greenbelt in CSLT. Same as above. Supposed to start next year. Roughly 1.6 miles of path.
- Al Tahoe Safety and Mobility Enhancement Project. May start next year, but most likely 2019 start date. 1.9 miles.
- Meeks Bay to Sugar Pine Point (may start this year, but most likely next year). Just under 1 mile.

Numerous reports and studies have carefully documented bike path benefits to include a community's livability to the local economy. Bike paths can be associated with higher property value when a trail provides easy access to schools, shopping districts and recreational resources from neighborhoods. When a trail offers convenient neighborhood opportunities for physical activity and safe alternatives to using an automobile, property value increases because of the added lifestyle value, and local governments receive more property tax revenue.

Retail businesses also benefit from increased sales. A recent site visit to Long Beach and Davis saw auto parking spaces converted into "bike corrals" – a dedicated parking space for bikes only. A bike corral of just one converted auto parking space can accommodate 12 bicycles as opposed to one vehicle. Retailers with bike corrals in front of their businesses experienced an increase in business and a cultural shift of

the type of customer – a customer who spent more time and dollars at their business.

Environmental benefits are also present when bicycling is an alternative transportation mode. Bike path use contributes to air quality improvements with the reduction of nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, hydrocarbons, and greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles. Lake Tahoe water quality suffers from automobile use. Gas emissions fall from the sky and enter the Lake stimulating algae growth. Air borne particulates released into the atmosphere, from vehicles pulverizing road debris, also fall into the lake increasing cloudiness and water temperature – stimulating more algae growth.

According to the Center for Disease Control, 36.5 percent of the U.S. adults and 17 percent of youth are obese. Obesity is a chronic health problem and one of the biggest factors for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer – many that are otherwise preventable. Neighborhood bike paths can provide a convenient way to help develop a fit active lifestyle and reduce obese associated health costs, over \$150 billion annually, on society and the employers.

In the United States 50 percent of all auto trips taken are three miles or less and yet most Americans drive to even the closes destinations. Only 3 percent of commuting trips in the U.S. are by bicycle, compared to up to 60 percent in The Netherlands.

Here in Tahoe most bike paths either pass through or are adjacent to high concentrations of residential areas, commercial lodging properties, schools and shopping areas. It is just 5 miles from Stateline to the Y, with nearly flat terrain the entire distance. It is also true in Tahoe City and Incline Village, making biking to work, school or for play from home or lodging highly feasible and beneficial to the “triple bottom line” (environment, economy and community).

Helping mitigate some of these health and environmental impacts is a campaign lead by Bike Tahoe in collaboration with the Nevada Commission on Tourism. It is a campaign encouraging more bicycle use among residents, businesses and visitors. One of the campaign's key elements is a series of bicycling videos freely available for use by any business, agency, and organization or public. The **most recent video** available for downloading and sharing. It highlights some of the most popular bike paths traveling through the residential and commercial corridors of South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City, and Genoa.

*Ty Polastri is president of Bike Tahoe.*

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## **Letter: International soccer game for Tahoe girls**



**To the community,**

German team vs. Tahoe Madrid: tied 1-1.

What an amazing game. Great sportsmanship. No shoving or

pushing. Just straight fun.

This was a once in a lifetime opportunity for both teams. The German team came all the way from Germany to play against our girls. Both teams played very well and a very evenly matched game.

Ava Campbell had a few opportunities to score, but the ball just didn't make it into the goal. We also had a few guest players, a touching speech from Robert Sanchez , a tearful hug from the girls to Coach Robert that the season is over and a tribute to Addy Burrow.

Love this team, group of parents and coaches are the best.

Tahoe Madrid: Meagan Kiesow, Destiny Olivas, Kendall Rangel, Melanie Sanchez, Marissa Orizaba, Karina Novoa-Diaz, Brianna Johns, Ava Campbell, Brittney Medina, Sandra Rohr, Alize Hernandez, Shaylynn Walters, Ashley Trejo-Osorio. Local guest players: Allyjah Clot, Kaelin Conant, Fiona Richie, Brenda Warden, and Katie Woolensack. Referees: Ed Johns, Mike and Daniel Rohr. Coach: Robert Sanchez.

**Jeanna Rangel, parent**

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## **Editorial: Important to know how not to start a fire**

**Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the July 7, 2017, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

Wildfires have already claimed homes in the Reno-Sparks area. Tens of thousands of acres have burned. And it's only July.



We can all play a role in minimizing fires going forward. Think about where you can make a difference.

It may seem obvious – don't start a wildfire – but that's the thing. We often don't realize what we should have done differently until it's too late. Ninety percent of wildfires are caused by humans, the National Park Service reports. If you use a gun, pull a trailer, drive off-road, smoke cigarettes, go camping or live in a rural area, there are actions you can take to minimize fire danger.

**Read the whole story**

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## **Letter: Heavenly returns to Bread & Broth**

**To the community,**

To help address the needs of the hungry of our community, Bread & Broth, a nonprofit, all volunteer organization, has been serving free, nutritious meals for all who come to our Monday dinner at St. Theresa Grace Hall.

To fund these meals, B&B invites individuals, families, businesses and service clubs/organizations to sponsor an Adopt A Day of Nourishment. By donating a tax-deductible gift of \$250, up to 110 people will be fed and up to five folks from the sponsor group can participate alongside the B&B volunteers at their sponsorship dinner.

Thanks to Vail's EpicPromise grant, Heavenly and Kirkwood mountain resorts each sponsor six AADs annually and on June 26 the AAD sponsor crew from Heavenly Mountain Resort's product,

sales and services team hosted the dinner. The B&B volunteers always look forward to having a Vail Resorts crew because frequently the team members are repeat volunteers who know the dinner's routine and are always fun loving and outstanding workers.

The Heavenly PSS team was no exception. Led by Megan Madrid, senior manager, her team included Jared Autio, assistant manager; Chris Barbar, scanning manager; Devon Kornak, team lead; and Mary Taylor-Cooper, supervisor. Speaking for her team, Madrid wrote, "It feels really good to work with the Bread & Broth organization who is so involved in giving back to the community."

Bread & Broth feels very fortunate and is very grateful to partner with Vail Resorts and their wonderful team members who feel it is so important to help those in need in our community.

**Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth**

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# **Opinion: San Diego and the Trump-California War**

**By Joe Mathews**

If you wish to inspect the frontlines of the conflict between Donald Trump and California, head for San Diego.

Yes, so far the Golden State's fight against the president has so far taken place in the courts and in cyberspace. And, sure, challenging The Donald's legitimacy is not a mere local pastime but an all-consuming statewide prizefight. But as a

matter of geography, culture and economy, the California-Trump War feels more intimate and higher-stakes in greater San Diego.



Joe Mathews

What makes Trump's wild swings land as punches in San Diego? Because the city is more deeply tied to the United States than California's other big regions. Los Angeles and the Bay Area define themselves as global mega-regions that deviate from national norms. But San Diego is unapologetically American—"America's Finest City" being its most durable slogan. And since San Diego is the nation's biggest border city and home to one of the world's heaviest concentrations of military power, many San Diegans represent America not just as civic commitment but as professional duty.

But San Diego practices an open-hearted brand of Americanness that doesn't mesh well with Trumpian isolationism. The population of active military and veterans leavens its patriotism with hard-won wisdom about the world. And San Diego institutions have built ever-closer ties to Mexico, encouraging cross-border commutes, contemplating a cross-border Olympic bid and constructing an airport terminal that spans the border with Tijuana's airport.

And so Trump's obsession with border security is a threat to San Diego's daily routine. The president's increased deportations have inspired fear among immigrants here, and his blasts against cities that don't use police to enforce immigration laws (San Diego among them) have inspired a

poisonous backlash against federal law enforcement.

Further inflaming tensions, the Trump administration has made San Diego the host of the contest to design the president's promised border walls. Sometime this month, contestant firms are expected to build samples of their border wall designs in the Otay Mesa neighborhood, which could touch off massive protests.

Trump's bigoted smear of refugees as security threats doesn't go down well in the region, long a California leader in welcoming refugees. San Diego county has taken in roughly half of all the Syrian refugees who have settled in California.

Trump's anti-trade policies are a challenge for the border region's economy and his attempts to restrict travel are seen as a danger to the massive tourism industry, which attracts more than 34 million visitors a year. His campaign against environmental regulation and proposed cuts to health and science funding threaten San Diego's many top research institutes (studying everything from climate change to Alzheimer's) and its life science companies.

The litigious Trump should stay out of San Diego courts. He made few friends in the region's legal community last year with his racist attacks on District Court Judge Gonzalo Curiel, a San Diegan who is a highly-respected member of the legal community there, for decisions in litigation against Trump University. Curiel is now assigned to a potentially precedent-setting case challenging the Trump administration's deportation of a 23-year-old man who appeared to be legally in the U.S.

For all Trump's provocations, opposing a president doesn't come all that naturally to San Diego, a military town accustomed to saluting the flag and superior officers. Trump also has nodded in San Diego's direction by proposing big increases in defense spending that could be a boon to the

military and the area's many defense-related businesses.

And San Diego's middle-of-the-road politics—the county's voters are closely split between Democrats and Republicans—makes dealing with Trump trickier than it is in California's other, monolithically Democratic coastal cities.

So Trump poses a quandary for San Diego's popular mayor, Kevin Faulconer, a Republican considered a possible contender for governor next year. Faulconer is not a Trump supporter, in word or deed—he backs comprehensive immigration reform, speaks Spanish, promotes cross-border trade, and touts his city's Climate Action Plan. But his ambitions will require him to win the support of the small but powerful Republican base of voters who still mostly support Trump. Faulconer and other local Republicans, especially Rep. Darrell Issa, have had to walk a fine line between respecting a president of their party and criticizing Trump's many affronts to decency and common sense.

The California-Trump war is still young. It's possible that the president and his self-destructive tendencies will make it easier for San Diego to unite and oppose him with full force. But if the president hangs in and gains traction on his border, immigration, trade and budget policies, while delivering more money to the region's defense industry, then steel yourself, San Diego, for very bitter fights in your very beautiful city.

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

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# Opinion: When will EDC learn it needs to do background checks?

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County recently hired Shannon Lowery, an outside consultant, for \$190,000 without not only a background check, but not even checking references. It happens when you have a government policy that goes by the motto: "Share the wealth, hire your friends."

It appears that was the situation with Lowery. Even former CAO Larry Combs wasn't properly vetted by the Board of Supervisors and look what he hath wrought. That policy gave us the likes of the inept ACAO Kim Kerr and put Kelly Webb in charge of the IT Department for which she wasn't qualified.



Larry Weitzman

That policy goes for appointments to county commissions and committees. There has been a reformation of the Charter Review Committee, a county body with the charge to review the county Charter (our constitution so to speak) for "necessary" changes (usually quite political). It had its first meeting on June 26. The new five-member committee has three new members and two holdovers from the last committee from 2014. I doubt any background checks were performed with respect to the new members and that goes for all the prior charter review

committees as the members are appointed by their respective district supervisor. But perhaps that should be a requirement as this position can recommend changes to our county governing documents and many appointees to the committee have political agendas.

My research demonstrates why background checks are necessary. A person who calls himself Christopher (Chris) Alarcon was appointed to the Charter Review Committee back in 2010 and became chair of that committee. He was later hired as an election inspector for the November 2011 elections. But what would a background check have revealed about Alarcon? First, we are unsure of his real name as in high school according to official witness reports his name was Christopher Price.

But there is a lot more to this story about Alarcon/Price. It seems A/P doesn't like to pay for vehicle registrations and has been cited three times since March 2009 for driving without his vehicles being properly registered in California. In all three citations issued to A/P in 2009, 2011 and 2012, the vehicles of which he was the driver were out of registration for several years. In fact, according to police reports, Alarcon doesn't even have a valid California driver's license and has not had one since 1999, although the police reports say he lives basically full time in California. He uses an Arizona license.

In the third citation issued on Feb. 12, 2012, according to the district attorney investigator, A/P had his California driver's license "suspended or revoked as of 1985 and 1997 with a notation of fraud." But that is just the tip of this massive iceberg with respect to Alarcon's criminal activities regarding the vehicle code. In fact, the arrest report reflects that A/P's offenses were so serious the officer arrested A/P for violating Vehicle Code Section 4463, a felony, which is falsification of a vehicle registration among several other charges. At the time of this report, the officer knew of two priors where the registrations were falsified and

the Arizona driver's license was used to "avoid" being in violation of driving without a license.

But let's go back to the first run-in with the law brought on by a bad license and/or tag. Alarcon was driving a green 1990 Saab which had a 2009 registration tag. The patrolling sheriff's deputy ran the plate and found that it was expired since 2005. The officer made a stop because of the discrepancy. You should know that officers on patrol routinely spend some of their day running plates at random. A/P told the deputy "there were several years it (the Saab) was not paid, but that he just mailed the stuff in to register it." The officer asked both A/P and his wife, Sherilyn Lumalarcon, a passenger in the car, why the Saab had a 2009 registration tab. Both said they didn't know how that could be. Remember A/P admitted it wasn't registered but now didn't know how the current 2009 tag appeared on the license plate. He was cited for several violations of the Vehicle Code, including displaying a fraudulent license tag, lack of proof of insurance and expired registration. The deputy removed the expired tag for evidence.

But having registration tags on your vehicles that belonged to other vehicles seemed to be a pattern for A/P. On Jan. 4th, 2011, A/P was stopped driving a Mercury Grand Marquis by the CHP and issued a citation of violating CVC 4000 (a) for not having a valid registration.

We have a pattern developing here as A/P was again stopped driving the same Grand Marquis on Feb. 6, 2012. A sheriff's deputy noticed that the registration sticker was not attached as it normally would be. After running the rear plate, the officer found that it belonged to a 1990 green Saab. A traffic stop was made and then things got real unusual. The officer found that the front plate belonged to the Grand Marquis, but the rear plate showed a current registration sticker not from the Saab which registration had expired in 2009, but to another car owned by a woman who lived at Eskaton Elderly



Living.

Turns out that sticker and plate were stolen from the elderly woman's car according to a theft report on Nov. 25, 2011, about two months before this stop of A/P. When interviewed, the woman said the theft caused her extensive hardship getting the matter straightened out (another reason for the county senior legal program) and requested that the perpetrator be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. A/P was arrested for violating CVC 4463, a felony among several other charges.

The plates and registration from the first stop when A/P was driving the green Saab, were taken from a Toyota on or about Dec. 19, 2008, as the owner went to the DMV and was issued new plates on that date. The Toyota belonged to a person who was related to A/P's wife and lived for several years on the property which A/P lived with his wife. But the owner of the Toyota never gave permission to A/P to use the plates and registration. There is only one plausible way those registrations migrated from the Toyota to the Saab.

There is only one way the plates and registration tag made it from the older woman's automobile to A/P's car. According to several witness statements, A/P doesn't live in Arizona but has an Arizona driver's license. A/P in one of the reports told the officer that he did live in Arizona. Perhaps he thinks it's a game to acquire other people's license tags so he doesn't have to pay California license fees. For cars that old, it isn't very expensive, probably much less than \$100 per vehicle per year.

How did this guy (A/P) get to be chairman of the Charter review committee with this kind of activity and pursuant to his claims in the various police reports, he isn't even a California resident, never mind a resident of El Dorado County? California residency would be a requirement for such activities. I wonder if he votes in California and if he has, has that activity broken any laws? Is that evidence of lying

to a police officer considering what A/P said in the police report?

Anybody who serves in any official capacity in El Dorado County needs to have a background check or it will be more of the same. This is certainly not good governance which the county claims they are striving to reach.

*Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.*