

Opinion: Why Calif. taxes go up and up and up

By Jon Coupal and Vince Fong, Orange County Register

Before the ink on the governor's signature has dried on the largest gas tax increase in California history, Sacramento Democrats are fully intending to break their promise to dedicate the new revenue to fixing our crumbling roads.

In the upcoming budget, there is a proposal to divert 30 percent of this gas tax increase to items and programs completely unrelated to repairing our roads and highways, such as park maintenance and job training for felons.

Regrettably, these bait-and-switch tactics are now so commonplace in Sacramento that few notice. For many years, billions in transportation dollars have been diverted from road building and maintenance to the general fund, which has created the crisis we are currently facing. Why would anyone think things will be different now with the new \$52 billion car and gas tax hikes?

Read the whole story

Opinion: EDC supes pay for mystery consultant

By Larry Weitzman

An innocuous item appeared on the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors' June 20 consent calendar, Item 20.

Item 20 was for a two-year extension of a consulting contract (a renewal) with Shannon L. Lowery, doing business as Lowery Consulting. The services performed were nebulous, calling for “continuing technical and analytical services related to business operations, procedural analysis, and project management for replacement of outdated permitting applications and systems.”



Larry Weitzman

More glaring in the item description was an increase of the prior contract’s \$70,000 ceiling (over two years) and a billing rate of \$60 an hour to a \$100 an hour billing rate and a not to exceed amount of \$190,000; an increase of 67 percent in the hourly rate and an increase in total compensation of more than 250 percent for essentially continuing to do the same services.

Board Chair Shiva Frentzen pulled the item on the basis of this huge increase in consulting costs (administrative costs) while at the same time the CAO in concert with the director of Health and Human Services, Patricia Charles-Heathers, was attempting to cut one of the best service programs in the county, senior legal. Because there was no acceptable explanation to the huge increase in compensation, Frentzen voted no, but the rest of the board voted yes.

Who is this Shannon Lowery and where did she come from? We are going to pay her about \$100,000 a year over the next two years and for what? In a nutshell, it appears to be absolutely nothing and it may have violated Government Code Section 3500

et seq. and more important the case of Rialto Police v. San Bernardino County to inform the union before such a contract was signed.

In two emails to Carla Hass, EDC's PIO, and CAO Don Ashton, I asked two questions and the following is the response (with the questions):

Q: When did you inform Local One that you were intending to contract with Lowery Consulting? Was that done in writing?

A: The scope of work Ms. Lowery was originally hired to do didn't require union review. When her scope of work was changed in June 2015, Local 1, Manager's Association and Trades and Crafts were contacted by HR in writing on June 8, 2015. and Local 1 was contacted in writing again on June 15, 2015; no response was forthcoming.

Q: How was Lowery selected by the county (EDC) originally?

A: Professional services have no competitive bid requirement. It's unclear how the county came to know about Ms. Lowery, but it's reasonable to believe that she and the then-CAO were professionally acquainted.

The county administration knew by the first answer of the requirement to notify the union, Local One. Why not for this third contract? While it can be called an extension, it is a new contract as the old contract expired as of June 22, 2017. And the new contract terms have changed significantly. By the PIO's own admission, Government Code Section 3500 has been violated by the failure to inform the union. The contract can be voided and should be. Where is our county counsel on this or our new administration dotting the I's and crossing the T's?

But the answer to question two is even more important. The county administration, including our highly paid deputy chief administrative officer (over \$150,000 in annual compensation),

Creighton Avila hasn't a clue as you can see by the answer. There was nothing on the background on Lowery in the file at the time this contract was placed on the agenda a few days before the board meeting. But it gets worse. The county obviously has no documented reason for hiring Ms. Lowery. Is this the case for other consultants hired by the county?

A simple Google search should tell us something of this consultant's professional qualifications, right? Guess what, a search turned up absolutely nothing. No professional qualifications and no references. It gets worse. A search of Lowery Consulting turned up a website or actually no website with the following appearing on my screen: "SORRY! This site is not currently available." Who are we paying \$190,000 to, an amount which probably could fund senior legal for a year? Does Lowery have a legitimate consulting practice or is she in the witness protection program?

Three years ago, the *Mountain Democrat* reported: "Assistant CAO Kim Kerr hired her friend to investigate, analyze and prepare a report on the efficiency of the county's Building and Planning departments. The woman has no experience in the specialized area she was hired...The problem is, Ms. Lowery is void of any credentials or experience in this area."

More discovery turned up the following. It appears that Shannon Lowery was from Amador County and was friends with guess who? That's right Terri Daly and Kim Kerr. You remember them. It was Daly who put the county in its current financial predicament and Kerr who spent good money after bad and created the climate of fear within the county. Kerr was also hired by Daly. Both Lowery and Kerr were "FODs" or "friends of Daly." It appears to be Daly and Kerr (then head of the CDA) who hired Lowery in 2013.

Frentzen is the only board member who seems to protect the citizens, residents and taxpayers of El Dorado County. As to the others, Mike Ranalli and Sue Novasel are coming up for re-

election if they choose to run in a year. Changes need to be made.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Editorial: What does privacy mean in digital age?

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the June 9, 2017, Sacramento Bee.*

In the 16 years since the Sept. 11 attacks, we have grown accustomed to taking off our belts and shoes, among other indignities as we follow the dictates of surly Transportation Security Administration guards for the privilege of stepping aboard cramped airplanes.

As UC Davis professor and inveterate reader Julie Sze learned, TSA agents are asking at least some air travelers to place their reading material in bins before boarding. We guess The Sacramento Bee, National Geographic and "Goodnight Moon" would pass inspection. We're not sure about "The Satanic Verses," anything written in Arabic, or something truly radical such as The Bible, or the Koran.

We understand that security experts say liquids in containers larger than 3.4 ounces in our carry-on bags constitute security threats. So we discard them, unless we don't, which happened at the Wichita airport named for President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Read the whole story

Letter: El Dorado County and its seniors

To the community,

There have been several articles regarding the method in which El Dorado County has proposed to balance the 2017-18 budget. Some people have chosen to take it upon themselves to be an activist for seniors in El Dorado County. The articles for the most part appear to have some straightforward quality information, but look as if to have “fluffed” some of the facts.

The one piece of information saying the Board of Supervisors wants to eliminate senior legal services is misleading. This entire fiasco was started from two sources, one is a memorandum to the BOS from HHS Director Patricia Charles-Heathers, and was followed by CAO Don Ashton’s recommended budget, where he quite simply says, “The CAO office is recommending the elimination of the senior legal services program.”

He touted it carries a certain “risk and liability” to the county. Can’t get much clearer than that. Unfortunately, he was unable to provide any evidence to substantiate his statement; neither did BOS legal counsel.

The CAO has presented a recommended budget for over 1,800 employees in the county, but it seems odd that he would suggest to eliminate the one service in the county which probably has the lowest percent of financial impact on the General Fund. The proposed budget for Human Services is recommended at \$73,449,969, the budget for senior legal services is roughly \$267,778, plus “... a reduction in force of

3.5 positions....” In layman’s term they are fired.

El Dorado County is going through a momentous change which will impact services for seniors for generations to come. El Dorado County is getting older, much older. El Dorado County is now at the point where half of the populace is age 50 or older, making EDC the oldest it has ever been. The 60-plus population has shown dramatic increases over the last 10 years. According to 2015 Census statistics, communities such as El Dorado Hills, Cameron Park, Placerville, Pollock Pines, Georgetown and South Lake Tahoe and many others, the population of seniors age 60-plus has doubled since 2010.

The county must start to focus on how this population change is going to impact county services. Seniors come to El Dorado County to relax, spend their retirement checks at local businesses, away from all the congestion and noise of urban living. They want affordable housing and an infrastructure giving them easy access to dining, shopping and adequate health care.

I praise Marshall Hospital for its service to the community, but they too should adjust to the bulging aging population. Perhaps the board of directors should take a more proactive position now and open a specialized geriatric unit staffed with physicians whose specialty is only geriatric medicine. Barrier free structures and ease of mobility within health care facilities is important for seniors. Of most importance is the attitude of health service providers, and the community, toward older people which is nationally recognized as ageism.

Our seniors are a valuable asset and resource for their families and communities, and especially local economics. An age friendly community encourages active ageing by optimizing opportunities for the entire population and will enhance quality of life as people age.

Opinion: Employers will have to juggle generations

By Matt Stewart, Las Vegas Sun

There's a new generation in town, and it's one that employers better get ready for, because it's 23 million strong and will be flooding the workforce by the end of the decade.

Meet Generation Z, confidence-filled youths who don't want to miss a thing, have the shortest attention span of any generation and aren't quite as open as their millennial predecessors, from whom they learned that not everything needs to be shared online.

If you try to treat those in Generation Z – born in the mid-to late-'90s, mostly to Generation X parents – like you treated millennials – born in the early '80s to mid-'90s, mostly to baby boomer parents – it will backfire on you. This generation is unique.

Read the whole story

Letter: Elks take turn at

Bread & Broth

To the community,

The Tahoe Douglas Elks Lodge No. 2670, an on-going supporter of the Bread & Broth Adopt A Day of Nourishment program, hosted Bread & Broth's Monday meal on June 12.

The Elks Lodge is a service organization whose members work together on national and local levels to help the needy through community service. The Tahoe Douglas Elks Lodge exemplifies their mission through the many serve projects they perform for the South Lake Tahoe community and the Bread & Broth organization.

"Tahoe Douglas Elks are always available to help Bread & Broth," stated Steve Kurek.

Generally, this local Elk Lodge will sponsor two to three AAD sponsorships annually. As the sponsor crew members were leaving for the evening, they were requesting to sign up for another Adopt A Day this year.

Roger Barragan, chairman trustee Elk, along with Steve Lannen, joined Kurek for the evening's setup, serving and cleanup activities. These three Elk Lodge members were a big help and warmly welcomed and served the evening's dinner guests.

Thanks to our wonderful and generous AAD sponsors and donors, B&B is able to ease hunger for seniors living on fixed incomes, struggling families, the working poor, as well as those who are homeless. B&B not only brings food to those in need, but offers fellowship and dignity to those experiencing hunger and difficult life situations. B&B would like to salute the Tahoe Douglas Elk Lodge No. 2670 members for their commitment to bettering the lives of our community members.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Lahontan expedites projects post-Angora

Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News this month will be running several stories leading up to the 10th anniversary of the Angora Fire on June 24, 2007.*



Patty Kouyoumdjian and the Lahontan staff work to make forest health a priority. Photo/Provided

By Patty Kouyoumdjian

As the 10-year anniversary of the Angora Fire approaches, many of us in the government agencies charged with environmental protection are reflecting on the lessons learned from that natural disaster and what we've done since then to ensure we don't see a repeat of the tragic destruction that ravaged our community.

The devastating results of the Angora Fire touched many lives

as hundreds of residences were destroyed and families found themselves evacuated from their homes as others unfortunately lost everything and became homeless – including members of our staff. With these thoughts still with us, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Board has taken actions to help facilitate forest health, create defensible space and protect water quality.

Prior to the Angora Fire, the Lahontan Water Board's members directed staff to speed up the necessary permitting process to thin our forests, as forest health and defensible space are necessary to protect the public. This action was significant since the Lahontan Water Board's rules adopted in 1980 to protect Lake Tahoe's exceptional water clarity prohibited land disturbance in sensitive stream zones unless the Lahontan Water Board granted exemptions. Projects that related to public health and safety, or environmental protection, fall under these exemptions.

Following the Angora Fire, the Lahontan Water Board took additional steps to further simplify and expedite the permitting process for forest thinning and defensible space projects. The Water Board's regulatory tool to complete these projects is the Timber Waiver – a permit with performance expectations that ensures water quality protection while allowing tree removal and vegetation management to occur. The Timber Waiver was updated in 2009 and 2014, and with each change the Lahontan Water Board increased flexibility in the permit to expedite projects.

The Timber Waiver describes several tiers based on the threat to water quality. Vegetation clearing on private lots for construction or to create defensible space, and hand crew operations on any size project do not require notification to the Water Board. Larger projects using existing roads and meeting some conditions require the project's managers to submit applications to the Water Board, but they can begin work without immediate Water Board response.

Only projects with a high risk to water quality, such as new road construction, require the Lahontan Water Board to review a permit application before work can begin. During the last update of the Timber Waiver in 2014, the U.S. Forest Service sent its appreciation and support to the Lahontan Water Board for the changes made to simplify and expedite permitting. Since these changes in 2014, Water Board staff has seen increased levels of compliance and water quality protection from the U.S. Forest Service.

The Lahontan Water Board participates in the multi-agency Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team meetings where priorities are set, lessons learned are shared, and successes are tracked. Because of our increased level of participation and cooperation with fire districts and the U.S. Forest Service, the Water Board incorporated the results of demonstration projects and research into the Timber Waiver. The waiver allows for some earth-moving equipment in sensitive stream environment zones, and it allows pile burning in stream zones. We have made improvements while ensuring water quality is not harmed, and now more projects are being completed to reduce the risk of severe wildfire in our communities and watersheds.

Water quality impacts and the destruction of vital watershed functions from severe wildfires continue to pose a significant threat in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Fortunately, following the Angora Fire, multiple agencies, including the Lahontan Water Board staff, quickly mobilized and cooperated to ensure erosion control measures were installed. The Water Board also secured funds to support post-fire water quality monitoring and continues to support watershed restoration efforts.

Because of these quick actions water quality impacts to Lake Tahoe were considered minor. Watershed recovery and restoration is evident – streams and meadows are doing the work of enhancing water quality. The greatest impacts to Lake Tahoe came – and continue to come – from our man-made environment. We can continue to improve our water quality and

safety by maintaining defensible spaces, protecting soils from erosion and infiltrating runoff.

Patty Kouyoumdjian is executive officer of Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Opinion: Drain the swamp, not the Sierra

By John Kingsbury, Union Democrat

The president of the United States wants to “drain the swamp.” Of course he is using this saying as a metaphor for mismanagement and government waste. It seems to me that California, however, is hell bent to drain the Sierra Nevada – in the literal sense – as if this action was without consequence.

While I support “draining the swamp” of excess bureaucracy, I am opposed to California’s “draining the Sierra” or taking water from one ecological region to meet the environmental needs of another.

The Delta depends on the Sierra as the largest reservoir of banked water in all of California. Draining the Sierra will defeat the Delta Stewardship Council’s objective to coequally achieve water supply reliability and restore the Delta’s ecosystem.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Keep the internet neutral

By Terry D. Kramer

Why would someone who spent much of his career working for a multinational telecommunications company care so much about preserving “net neutrality?”

That someone would be me. I worked for Vodafone, the British telecom giant that serves Asia, Africa, Europe and Oceania, while living in London and The Hague. I went on to work with young technology companies, then at the U.S. State Department, and eventually to teach at UCLA Anderson School of Management.

At the State Department, I held a role as U.S. ambassador negotiating the 2012 telecom and internet treaty called the World Conference on International Telecommunications. Those negotiations sought to prevent nations from monitoring and censoring internet traffic, which is antithetical to U.S. political and economic beliefs.

And yes, I’m sensitive to the needs of broadband network providers. Such networks should receive sufficient revenues to ensure an adequate return on their significant capital investments.

One lesson connects all my various work and travel: A free and open internet is core to the future of our societies. Service providers have an abiding interest in this as well. After all, their networks have value because they can carry our fundamental traffic—guaranteeing individual access to the internet, voice and video communications, social networks, e-commerce, and access to crucial research—in an unfettered and

unrestricted manner. Here there is no room for financial arrangements that would allow telecom operators to make solely financial decisions over which traffic is prioritized over a network and which isn't.

"Net neutrality" is the principle under which internet service providers would enable access to all content and applications regardless of their sources, without favoring or blocking any particular traffic, products or sites. The principle to me is defining.

Future innovation and economic growth comes from the individual rights we enjoy. Net neutrality helps protect those rights on the internet, and with good reason. Technology and ubiquitous high-speed networks can have such an impact on citizens, consumers, enterprises and, more broadly, society that they must be defended.

I have seen the consequences of philosophies and policies that lead to censorship, metering of traffic and attacks on the free and open internet we enjoy today. During the WCIT treaty negotiations, nondemocratic nations sought to win legitimacy for their efforts to monitor internet traffic and block spam. While spam in the United States might represent unnecessary commercial content, in these countries spam could express political dissent.

I also saw nations in emerging markets that, in lieu of creating competitive broadband providers with private investment, sought to impose fees for any internet traffic that ended on their networks. This model only promised a limitation of internet traffic flows, as many organizations wouldn't want to pay the fee to have their traffic transported, including small entrepreneurial or nonprofit organizations. All of this would cripple economic growth and internet access to vital content and commerce in nations that need it most.

Of all my different jobs, my role at the State Department, heading the U.S. Delegation for the WCIT, allowed me to meet with the broadest array of international industry and government officials. Despite the many fundamental political and economic differences I encountered, I was struck by the number of my counterparts who asked me about the special success of the United States: its overall level of prosperity, adoption of technology, individual rights and vibrant entrepreneurial spirit. What, they would ask, enabled this success?

My answer was our immense privilege. Americans have been privileged to live in a system where entrepreneurship is encouraged and rewarded, where failures and successes are valued, and where individual rights and varying perspectives are not just tolerated, but encouraged in the quest for getting the “right answer” and stimulating engagement, whether in the community, new ventures, or society at large.

That system explains why we’ve led in technological advances—most recently in areas such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, which promise to yield amazing conveniences as well as new insights and solutions. Our system is why we have made progress in understanding the causes, predispositions and effective treatments of life-altering diseases. And it’s why we’re quick to adopt autonomous vehicles that can reduce the number of traffic injuries and fatalities, lessen the impact on climate change, and create a major “gift of time” in congested cities, freeing up individuals to connect, be entertained, transact or do whatever they please.

But none of these advances is possible without a free and open internet, where the flow of traffic—be it university research, social media, connecting people, on-demand entertainment, and knowledge—is protected.

In 2015, the United States had a breakthrough in adopting net

neutrality as an official policy. It's been concerning to see efforts by the current FCC, which seek to undermine that seminal 2015 decision.

Those opposing net neutrality often cite the need to protect future pricing models and revenue streams for telecom networks. But such protection is not worth the worrisome precedent and unintended consequences that would be triggered by the abolition of net neutrality. I fear those consequences would fall on telecom itself.

In the absence of net neutrality, internet traffic could be easily throttled or blocked. We could live in a world where only those organizations with the greatest resources could afford to have their traffic sent in a seamless manner. And in a broadband environment with limited resources, what would happen to nonprofit organizations and universities that seek to send their content free and unfettered?

I fear we would be creating an environment similar to the costly mobile phone one. In that economic ecosphere, it's expensive to call a mobile user overseas, where callers often encounter costly "termination fees." Such rules have restricted the flow of mobile phone calls internationally and encouraged "over-the top" calling solutions, which undermine telecom revenues.

The end of net neutrality would likely stifle the flow of information globally. It's hard to see how stifling information flows would be good for anyone, much less the telecommunication companies for which I used to work. A free and open internet is a rare development that benefits citizens, consumers, enterprises and societies. Very few other offerings can make such a claim.

Telecom operators have and should exploit numerous growth opportunities to meet consumers' insatiable demand for mobility, tapping new bundling prospects with video and

content. Pursuing new revenue sources by invalidating net neutrality would lead to a potentially dangerous scenario for everyone, where free and open access to the internet is curtailed, traffic is limited and everyone is hurt.

Terry Kramer is a former Vodafone executive who now teaches at the UCLA Anderson School of Management.

Opinion: The expense of not fighting climate change

By Dante Disparte, Harvard Business Review

With the Trump Administration's surprising U-turn on the COP21 Paris Agreement, the U.S. finds itself with some strange bedfellows, joining Nicaragua and Syria in abstaining from this important treaty. The White House's argument for leaving the treaty is based on economic nationalism: President Trump, in his speech announcing the decision, cited primarily the "lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production" that he thought meeting the agreement's voluntary targets would cause.

This echoes a common political talking point: that fighting climate change is bad for the economy.

I'd like to point out the flip side: that climate change itself is bad for the economy and investing in climate resilience is not only a national security priority, but an enormous economic opportunity.

Read the whole story