

Editorial: A strong bill to keep public agencies public

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One of the news media's most important functions in a democracy is to constantly remind public agencies about that "public" part of their name. Too often, government officials try to conduct the public's business in private, and the results can be disastrous for taxpayers (just ask those in the city of Bell).

The California Public Records Act is a key tool in keeping public agencies public. Enacted nearly 50 years ago, the law assures all residents and the media have prompt access to most records – so we know what government is up to and can be involved in important decisions.

The act requires cities, counties, schools, water districts and others to make government documents and data available to the public within 10 days of a request in most cases.

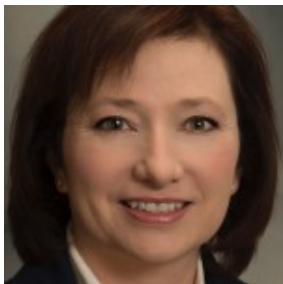
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Opinion: Importance of talking to teens about stress

By Sonia Rupp

Any parent will tell you raising teenagers is a stressful time. Are you in that stage? Talk to your teenager about it.

Your stress may be similar stress for your teen.



Sonia Rupp

An American Psychological Association (APA) online survey shows today's teenagers experience greater levels of stress. Stressors include academic pressures, feeling overscheduled, financial pressure, and social pressures – especially with social media. In addition, bad habits teens learn to deal with stress often continue into adulthood. Stress can help some short-term situations like focusing for an exam or having a burst of energy for a sporting event. However, chronic stress can affect mental and physical well-being.

Is your teen stressed? According to the APA, common signs of teenage stress include:

- Episodes of irritability or anger
- Tired or fatigued
- Nervousness or anxiousness
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Crying spells
- Skipping meals or overeating – changes in diet
- Upset stomach or nausea.

Many young adults develop unhealthy behaviors to cope with stress such as watching TV, surfing the Internet, or playing video games. Small media amounts may be a good distraction, but stress returns once the media is turned off. Also, for teens with low self-esteem, social media pressures may elevate stress. Violent video games and graphic movies increase

nightmares and negative thinking. Of greater concern, your teen may develop other negative behaviors including overeating, anorexia, excessive consumption of caffeine, self-harm, smoking, and drug or alcohol use.

Teach your teen coping habits by being a good example. Help your teen replace unhealthy behaviors with healthier and productive ways to manage stress including the following:

Exercise. Physical activity counteracts heart and blood pressure changes that occur with chronic stress. Outdoor activities help improve mood by supplying vitamin D from the sun. Team sports also help increase socialization.

Mental exercises. Reading, meditation, puzzles and non-violent games are healthy ways to distract the brain from worries and create a more peaceful mind. Think positive thoughts and avoid being cynical. Breathing exercises also relax the body and brain by increasing oxygen and teaching the mind to focus.

Establish routines. Keep regular eating and sleeping habits and avoid overscheduling to allow time to relax.

Improve diet Stress can affect digestion and immunity. Healthy eating can boost immunity and prevent an upset stomach.

Get creative. Get involved with a hobby or creative interest – draw, write, play music.

Socialize. Take time to enjoy friends and family. In stressful times, talking to a loved one can help the problem not feel so big.

Journal. Write down what causes stress. Separate stressors that can be changed or decreased. Use the strategies above to help with things that can't change.

After the best effort to manage stress and you or your teen still feel overwhelmed, don't be afraid to reach out for help

through therapy, a support group, or by talking to your doctor.

Take time to talk to your teenager and start showing healthier ways to deal with stress so they can have a happier and healthier future.

Sonia Rupp is a board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist who provides diagnostic evaluations and treatment recommendations for children and adolescents at Barton Psychiatry in Stateline.

Opinion: Calif.'s core budget problem is underspending

By Joe Mathews

We have reached the high holy days of California's budget season, as our governor and Legislature decide which programs will gain life, and which will be sacrificed. And so, per tradition, our state's ministers have begun their ritual sermons on the dangers of overspending.

They are preaching nonsense. California's real problem is underspending.



Joe Mathews

Go ahead and dismiss this as blasphemy. After so many years of budget crises and big deficits, Californians have adopted a budget theology grounded in self-flagellation, even though our recent budgets contain small surpluses. You can probably recite the catechism yourself: We're still sinners who spend too much on state services! Far more than we take in! So save us, Non-Denominational Higher Power, from our profligate selves with budget cuts or spending limits!

I am here to tell you that our overspending religion urgently needs reformation.

And that requires genuine revelation. Our state's tendency to produce big deficits is not caused by big spending. We have had big deficits because our state budget is based on volatile formulas that expand deficits in unpredictable ways. In fact, California has long been on par with other states in expenditures per capita and in spending as a percentage of state GDP. Nevertheless, we cling to our religious fear of overspending and take the cheaper path—which often costs the state more money in the long run.

The problems of underspending are most obvious when it comes to pension obligations. California governments and employees have long spent too little money on contributions to pension funds. So, to catch up to our pension obligations, California taxpayers are having to make much bigger contributions now, which takes money away from critical services like schools and health care.

The costliness of underspending is also the story behind rising public higher education costs in California. Over generations, the state has cut back its relative contribution to the University of California and California State University systems. This underspending has been made up for in part with ever-higher tuition fees for students.

While overspending may be the stated enemy, underspending gets

you into more trouble. The UC is under siege now for underspending—an audit found \$100 million-plus in secret reserves. The state parks department had a similar secret reserve scandal in 2012. Underspending in California's overcrowded prisons was so bad the federal courts forced the state to spend more and reduce the prison population.

Underspending also explains problems with our basic services. Studies have found that the state spends tens of billions less on schools than would be necessary to provide all Californians with an adequate education. And that underspending has real costs: California is not producing enough college graduates and skilled workers.

The state has made bold promises on child care and early-childhood education that it hasn't adequately funded, leaving citizens to pay for the rest. Child care costs more than college tuition here. And housing costs more than just about anything, in part because we've spent so little on housing that we have a massive shortage that has pushed up home prices to more than twice the national average.

That the state has failed for generations to spend enough to build and maintain infrastructure is obvious in the degraded condition of roads, bridges, and waterways. Most recently, the state's failure to spend adequately to create strong-enough spillways at Oroville Dam is forcing California to make hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of repairs and upgrades before the next rainy season.

Our state's leaders understand the problem with underspending, but they haven't been successful at explaining the problem, credibly, to the public. It also hasn't helped that when state officials do need to spend big, they haven't been very good at it. Examples include the new Bay Bridge, with its delays, cost overruns, and questions about the integrity of its steel rods, and the high-speed rail project, where spending and construction have been so slow that many people think the

project will die.

In recent budgets, Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature have sought to counter the state's tendency to underspend now and pay later. They've made a great show of efforts to pay down debt. And Brown's current budget proposal would make a large advance contribution to pensions now, in order to reduce liabilities later. But that payment, unfortunately, is achieved by borrowing billions from a state special fund.

Brown has grown popular as a proselytizer of the credo that California can be managed on the cheap. That's appealing dogma for a state whose people struggle with a very high cost of living.

But the realities of our state should remind us that successfully running California on the cheap is a fantasy. And a very expensive one at that.

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

Opinion: California's courts are failing us

By Joe Mathews

Dig deep enough into California's biggest problems, and you'll hit upon a common villain: our court system.

California's housing shortage, its poverty, its poor business climate, and its failing infrastructure all are explained in part by the failure of our underfunded, delay-prone courts. But in public narratives of what's wrong with the state, we

have mostly let the courts dodge responsibility for their many crimes against California's future.



Joe Mathews

Why? Our courts have been broken for so long that we've stopped expecting them to work. And so we've become too accustomed to blaming others –regulators, politicians, unions, businesses or even President Trump – for our failure to build a state that meets its population's needs.

But the biggest reason why we've allowed the courts to skate responsibility involves a public underestimation of their importance. While the courts account for a small fraction of the state workforce and budget, they have a huge impact, serving as a faulty foundation for our state's economy and government.

Too often, Californians blame laws–like CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act–for costly delays in building housing or infrastructure, when more of the blame should go to the courts, argued Emile Haddad, the chairman and CEO of FivePoint, the largest developer of mixed-use communities in coastal California, at a recent Chapman University conference.

"I'm one of those probably odd developers who say they love CEQA," he said, because it protects open space and adds to the quality of life. The real problem, he said, is "the entire legal system." He recounted a project that got local government approval in 2003 and permits a decade ago, but still hasn't happened, as his company is now litigating its 30th lawsuit.

Such legal delays bear a heavy responsibility for our historic housing shortage and add to housing costs that are more than twice the national average. In turn, expensive housing is a huge factor in California's highest-in-the-nation poverty rate and its persistent homelessness. Poverty is now highest in coastal areas with the most development restrictions, which produce more litigation and costlier housing.

The same court-related delays and resulting costs also plague transportation and water projects, and new businesses. The state courts so utterly failed to resolve California's prison problems that the U.S. Supreme Court had to step in. And while Californians love to mock our years-behind-schedule high-speed rail project, most of the project's delays involve the courts.

The delays are likely to get worse, as courts are being asked to do more with less. New state policies on sentencing and marijuana have created new questions and petitions that boost court workloads. And the courts still haven't recovered from Great Recession cuts that shuttered more than 50 courthouses and 200 courtrooms. Court officers in 49 of 58 counties warned in a February letter to Gov. Jerry Brown that without more money in this year's budget, they'll need to cut existing levels of service.

The pressure on the courts would be even worse if the total number of court filings hadn't declined by 25 percent over the last decade. But that may be bad news. Almost all the decline has been in small claims, challenges to infractions, and minor civil cases. Regular Californians have simply given up on seeking justice in our courts.

"Inadequate funding and chronic underfunding of the courts is just one way a justice system can become unjust," warned California Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye in a recent speech, noting that since 2011 the state has added 6,408 laws while the judiciary budget has stagnated.

I recently walked three blocks from my office to the Stanley Mosk Courthouse in downtown Los Angeles. Amid the glitter of new urban development, the court building is an eyesore, with visible scars on its walls and roof. Inside, nothing—from bathrooms to WiFi—works particularly well. Lawyers receive trial dates more than two years in the future, court reporters are scarce, and overworked clerks scramble to keep things from breaking down. A lawyer acquaintance who took me around quoted Charles Dickens' "Bleak House," a 19th-century novel about the delays and injustice of England's Court of Chancery.

Broken courts, Dickens wrote, promote a crippling fatalism in society, "a loose belief that if the world go wrong, it was, in some off-hand manner, never meant to go right."

It's way past time for California to pull itself out of this Dickensian muck. Yes, fixing our court system—making it the fastest and most efficient in the country—would be challenging politically. But it also would be relatively cheap, just a couple billion more dollars a year in a state with a \$150 billion budget and a \$2.5 trillion economy.

This budget season, let's return timely justice to the courts, and stop this crime against California's future.

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

Letter: Adventure Mountain spends time at B&B

To the community,

Adventure Mountain owners Jim and Linda Mueller are longtime and enthusiastic supporters of Bread & Broth's Monday meal.

"Bread & Broth is a great organization serving delicious meals to the South Lake Tahoe community," commented Jim Mueller. "Adventure Mountain and our family always enjoys helping out such a great organization and getting to spend time with our community members."

It was a family/business affair with sons Max and Luke and longtime friend and Adventure Mountain retail supervisor Cathy Vogelgesang completing the Adopt A Day sponsorship crew.

As an Adopt a Day sponsor, Adventure Mountain hosted the May 1 meal by donating \$250 to cover the costs associated with providing the full course meal to those attending the dinner. Having the Adventure Mountain sponsor team was an extra bonus thanks to their cheerful and helpful family business attitude as they worked with the B&B volunteers throughout the evening.

Thanks to the generous support of donors like the Muellers, B&B is able to not only provide meals every Monday, but serves a soup and simple entree meal at the Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church every Friday. Additionally, for the past two school years, the B&B 4 Kids program is providing weekend food to students in need throughout the school year. Kudos to Adventure Mountain for donating time and funds to help feed those in need.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Paying the rent is getting tougher

By Foon Rhee, Sacramento Bee

Since the year 2000, rents have risen and so has the number of people needing affordable housing.

That double whammy means that even while building more housing, many places are failing to keep pace, according to a new study by the Urban Institute.

In its color-coded map, there's only a smattering of counties across America with enough affordable housing for the extremely poor. In the U.S. as a whole, there were 47 affordable units available for every 100 extremely low-income families in 2000.

[Read the whole story](#)

Opinion: Suckering Americans is a hot growth industry

By Edward Balleisen

American capitalism has always provided openings for hucksters and outright swindlers.

For centuries, this society has been especially receptive to economic innovation and the strategies of wealth-seeking that so often accompany it. Openness to new technologies and new ways of doing business exacerbates information gaps between

sellers and buyers. Those gaps, along with the enthusiasm that comes with new products and investment vehicles, create opportunities for fraudulent promoters and the bait-and-switch brigade.

As the journalist Edward Smith noted in the 1920s: "Every social change, every new invention brings to life a fresh manner of separating the sucker and his money. It may be and usually is only a disguised evolution of an older swindle, but it is new to the victim and therefore effective."

That said, the last few decades—the period since 1980—have seen a dramatic increase in the scale and breadth of American business fraud. Of course, Americans in earlier eras encountered fraudulent investment scandals, like the market manipulations at the Re brokerage firm (which came to light in the early 1960s), or the misrepresentations made by the National Student Marketing Corporation (in the early 1970s). There also were egregious consumer frauds, such as the abusive mode of selling home heating systems by the Holland Furnace Company. But the worst of these episodes took place within medium-sized corporations, or on the fringes of the economy.

Today, fraud has become big business. In the last four decades, fraud cases running into the billions of dollars have become commonplace. So have allegations of marketing duplicity or false accounting against many of the largest corporations operating in the United States. Massive government contracting frauds roiled the defense industry in the 1980s and the healthcare industry the following decade. Consumer frauds have steadily targeted older Americans, first through telemarketing and now via the web.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, accounting scandals rocked a series of major corporations, including Enron, WorldCom, and Sunbeam. Over the past decade, pyramid schemes such as those run by Bernard Madoff and Allen Stanford have bilked tens of thousands of investors. And in the run-up to

the global financial crisis of 2008, the provision of marketing information throughout the entire chain of the American mortgage system became shot through with duplicity, with falsehoods embraced by appraisers, mortgage brokers, third-party loan assessors, underwriters, and distributors of derivatives.

This era of gargantuan fraud scandals is still with us. Even after the reality check of the most recent financial crisis, major fraud scandals keep happening: LIBOR rate-fixing; creation of myriad unauthorized accounts at a major nationwide bank, Wells Fargo; and another alleged billion-dollar pyramid scheme, Platinum Partners.

What accounts for this dramatic growth in the magnitude of corporate deception? The post-1980 preference for deregulation has played a big role. Cuts to enforcement budgets have been a common theme in explanations of fraud episodes. So has the disinclination among policy-makers to impose regulatory constraints on newly emerging markets such as financial derivatives.

A key premise among supporters of deregulation is that the reputational incentives created by markets will serve to check the rankest frauds. Corporations won't go down the path of duplicity, this way of thinking presumes, because the long-term consequences of lost business can be so devastating. Unfortunately, the behavior of scores of corporations over the past few decades belies this comforting narrative. Companies have so decisively bought into the use of short-term incentives to structure compensation for employees and executives that it's often hard for them to think much past the next quarter's financial results.

After the 2008 financial crisis, American policy-makers placed a premium on containing marketplace duplicity. Most important, Congress created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), with major duties: improving the flow of financial

information to consumers, monitoring the operation of consumer credit markets, and bringing enforcement actions against businesses that engaged in unfair, deceptive, or abusive tactics. The CFPB has worked hard to simplify financial disclosures to consumers, and has clawed back almost \$12 billion through a series of settlements with financial firms accused of wrongdoing. But in this same period, Congress also loosened disclosure requirements for many start-ups, a deregulatory move that has raised concerns about new opportunities for fraudulent promotion of new companies.

We now have an administration in Washington that trashes regulation of all sorts and appoints vehement opponents of regulation to run federal agencies. It's not hard to imagine that enforcement budgets for consumer and investor protection will once again take a big hit, and that federal regulators will adopt a more forgiving posture toward dodgy marketing tactics.

Such policies are their own kind of sucker's bet. If the Trump administration implements them, the long history of American business fraud suggests that we can look forward to more headlines about major corporations that have cooked their books or cheated their customers. When scandals of this sort accumulate, they have consequences beyond short-term economic losses. Indeed, they undermine the social trust that underpins our country, and healthy capitalism itself.

Edward Balleisen, the author of the recent book "Fraud: An American History from Barnum to Madoff," is vice provost for Interdisciplinary Studies and Associate Professor of History and Public Policy at Duke University.

Opinion: Great deal could go wrong with Brown's pension plan

By Daniel Borenstein, Bay Area News Group

Gov. Jerry Brown and state Treasurer John Chiang have a plan to help cover the state's soaring pension payments: Borrow money at low interest rates and invest it to make a profit. What could go wrong?

Lots.

Unfortunately, as they try to sell this scheme to the public and the Legislature, the governor and the treasurer fail to mention the risks, or their aggressive assumptions.

Read the whole story

Letter: Tell NDOT not to reduce lanes on Hwy. 50

To the community,

Tahoe locals: There is a very important meeting on May 31 at Zephyr Cove Elementary School from 4-6pm that we really need people to attend. NDOT will be presenting their concept for shrinking down Highway 50 to just one lane in each direction from Glenbrook to Round Hill. They claim it will make 50 more productive and safer, but there are many reasons why it is not a good idea.

1. Just as the 580 extension is being completed that will allow quick and direct access to Tahoe from Reno, this would bottleneck the traffic.

2. Reno, Sparks and surrounding areas are growing and expanding like crazy, create more visits to Tahoe. This change will make that much more difficult.

3. Imagine yourself in the winter behind someone who doesn't know how to drive in the snow and now there are no passing lanes. They claim there will be turnout sections, be we all see how well they are (NOT) utilized on Kingsbury grade.

4. If there is an emergency evacuation, god forbid, this will impede our ability to get out quickly.

5. Nevada side people, consider how difficult it is now to turn left off of Warrior Way. When all the traffic is funneled into one lane, things will be even more difficult.

This impacts people on both sides of our state line. Please consider attending no matter where you live in the South Shore.

The list can go on and on. If you have a business in South Tahoe, you need to consider the impact to your business when it is even more difficult to get here.

We need to show up at this meeting and tell NDOT that this is a bad idea. You need to have your opinion on record. Please come, learn, share your opinion and keep our four-lane highway.

Stacy Noyes, Zephyr Cove

Opinion: Wildfire awareness critical in Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

This June is wildfire awareness month at Lake Tahoe. It also marks the 10th anniversary of the Angora Fire, the most destructive wildland fire in memory at Tahoe.

An illegal and abandoned campfire started the Angora Fire on June 24, 2007. The fire quickly spread toward Meyers, stoked by strong winds and forests overgrown with hazardous fuels. In a few days, the fire burned 3,100 acres and destroyed 254 homes.



Joanne
Marchetta

The fire plunged the South Shore into emergency response as smoke billowed into the sky, embers rained down, and flames spread into neighborhoods. Firefighters rushed into action to fight the blaze. Thousands of people were forced to evacuate. Some returned to find nothing left of their homes and belongings except ashes.

As I evacuated, watching other homes on my street catch fire, I experienced terrorizing emotions unlike anything I have felt before.

Fortunately, no human lives were lost in the Angora Fire,

thanks to the heroic work of firefighters and law enforcement. But the fire changed people's lives. It proved the strength and resilience of Meyers and the greater South Shore community during the fire and in the weeks, months, and years after as people regrouped, rebuilt, and helped one another.

Ten years later, we see fully how much there was to learn from Angora. It showed us the threat of catastrophic wildfire is real at Tahoe. That any afternoon has the potential to turn into a disaster during fire season, and that we must work together to reduce that risk.

Lots of anger was directed toward TRPA after Angora. TRPA had been working to help address the wildfire threat, but many saw our actions as too little, too late, and years of frustration were leveled at the agency during and after the Angora tragedy.

TRPA heeded the call for reform and I'm proud of the positive changes we have made over the last decade. TRPA has partnered with many other organizations, and together we have taken important steps to improve the health of Tahoe's forests and prepare our communities and public lands for wildfire.

We are still working to address the harmful impacts of logging done a century ago during the Comstock era. That logging clear cut most of the basin and changed the composition of its forests. Trees grew back in much greater densities and in uniform-aged stands that pose a greater risk for high-intensity wildfires.

Agencies were working to thin Tahoe's forests and reduce hazardous fuels before Angora. The fire proved the importance of that work, burning much less severely in areas treated prior to the start of the fire.

Today, agencies around the lake are working as a unified group, the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, to reduce hazardous fuels in Tahoe's forests. Formed after the Angora Fire, the

team has made exceptional strides, treating more than 69,000 acres of the 117,000 acres of wildland urban interface where Tahoe's forests and communities meet. This remains a top priority as we work to return Tahoe's forests to a healthier, more natural condition less prone to catastrophic fires.

As we enter another fire season, we must all remember the importance of creating defensible space. Properly managing flammable vegetation around our homes and businesses significantly reduces the danger of wildfire. Please contact your local fire district to get a defensible space inspection done this spring if you have not already.

Consider getting involved with the Tahoe Network of Fire Adapted Communities. Spearheaded by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District, this program is building and strengthening partnerships between homeowners and fire protection districts so important steps to create fire-adapted communities can be tackled at the neighborhood level.

Please be mindful of the importance of wildfire prevention. Ninety percent of fires that ignite each year at Tahoe are human caused. Angora showed the damage one illegal campfire can do. While enjoying Tahoe this summer, take every precaution to avoid starting a fire.

The Meyers community has made an inspiring recovery from the Angora Fire. That recovery has not been easy, and burnt trees still standing and visible for miles on Angora Ridge are a stark reminder of the danger wildfire poses.

That danger persists as our region grapples with the impacts of drought and a warming climate. Wildfire is a natural and important part of the ecosystem in the forests around our homes, but each fire does not need to be a disaster. The time to prevent and prepare for Tahoe's next wildfire is now, before it is burning.

With public agencies, homeowners, residents, and visitors all

aware of this danger and working together to prevent and prepare for wildfires, we can continue to take the important steps needed to protect our communities and improve the health and resiliency of the forests and natural resources we all treasure at Tahoe.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.