

Opinion: EDC supe succumbs to political pressure

By Larry Weitzman

In less than a week after the *Lake Tahoe News* published two articles that heavily rebuked the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors for voting 5-0 at their last BOS meeting on Jan. 24 to write a letter of support for new state legislation (SB1 and AB1) which would significantly increase gasoline taxes and vehicle registration fees, one BOS member has placed an item on next Tuesday's BOS agenda to rescind his action.



Larry Weitzman

Senate Bill 1, the legislation, by the legislative analyst's estimation would raise about \$7 billion annually in new tax revenue creating a per capita tax of about \$180 for every man, woman and child in California. Such an increase in taxes would cost EDC taxpayers anywhere from \$21 million to \$32 million annually. EDC would receive only \$10.1 million in additional road maintenance funding from that revenue.

Fourth District Supervisor Michael Ranalli evidently saw the errors of his ways in voting to support the tax increase and now pursuant to his request placed item No. 28 on the BOS agenda for the Feb. 7 meeting.

The item states, "Supervisor Ranalli, pursuant to County Ordinance Section 2.03.140: 1) Requests the Board reconsider

the Board's action on January 24, 2017, on File 17-0108, Agenda Item 38, authorizing the Chair to sign a letter of support to Senator Jim Beall in support of SB 1 and a letter of support to Assemblyman Jim Frazier in support of AB 1; and 2) If the Board votes to grant reconsideration of the action taken on File 17-0108, Supervisor Ranalli recommending the Board direct the Chief Administrative Office to schedule File 17-0108 as part of the February 14, 2017, Board meeting and to include information that will provide the Board and the public with a greater understanding of the projected impact of the potential tax and fee increases, as proposed within SB 1 and AB 1, on local businesses and residents."

When Ranalli's vote to raise taxes became so public he did try to explain his way out of it to a few county Republicans with what could be characterized as political double speak. Why would Ranalli do this? There is an election coming up in about a year and a half and voting to raise taxes in a county that votes 60 percent Republican and a district that is even heavier Republican could make Ranalli a one-term supervisor. There was nothing on the BOS calendar about directing the CAO to recommend meaningful spending cuts, just raising taxes and no suggestion by Ranalli to make cuts as well.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Skiing at Sierra benefits Tahoe nonprofits

Sierra-at-Tahoe is offering deeply discounted lift tickets for Snowsports Week – Feb. 13-16.

All ticket proceeds go to local nonprofits: Barton Memorial

Hospital Foundation, Lake Tahoe Community College Foundation, Lake Tahoe Education Foundation, Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, and the Sierra-at-Tahoe Education Foundation.

Snowsports Week tickets are \$50 (regular rate \$97) for a full-day lift ticket. They must be purchased in advanced at Tahoe Paradise Chevron, Lira's Market, Sunrise Ski Shop, all Powder House shops, Rainbow Mountain Sports, Rock House Discount Ski & Snowboard, George's Ski & Snowboard, Grocery Outlet, Ski Renter, South Tahoe Ski and Board, CVS at the Bijou Center and Y, Lake Tahoe Community College bookstore, Knight's Inn, Raley's at the Y and Stateline, and Sports Ltd.

They are also available **online**.

Opinion: LTCC to protect immigrant students

By Jeff DeFranco

Lake Tahoe Community College stands with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and its board of governors in strongly supporting the values and benefits of diversity and inclusion; not just on college campuses, but in towns and cities large and small across the country. The current White House administration's recent executive orders regarding immigration, the building of a border wall, and its rhetoric regarding Dream Act students has caused widespread concern among California's community college students.



Jeff DeFranco

LTCC is and always has been deeply committed to the security of all its students, and to ensuring that a safe environment is available to everyone who relies on the college to better their lives.

In alignment with the California Community Colleges board of governors, LTCC will not release any student information related to immigration status without a warrant, subpoena, or court order. The college will not cooperate with any efforts to create a student registry based on constitutionally protected categories such as religion, nationality, race, or sexual orientation. And, LTCC stands firm in its resolve to make certain that all students have a chance to receive a quality education regardless of their immigration status.

Public education is the great equalizer. As educators, it's our civic duty to make educational opportunities available to everyone. This doesn't just help individual students; it provides an avenue for growth and progress for our entire country.

At LTCC, in-state enrollment fees and state financial aid, including fee waivers, Cal Grants and privately funded institutional scholarships, are available to undocumented students known as Dreamers. These benefits are protected by California law in the form of the Dream Act, which allows students who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents to apply for and receive non-state funded scholarships and state-funded financial aid for college. More information about these benefits can be found **online**.

It is uncertain what direction the White House will take regarding Dream Act students located around the country. But LTCC's firm commitment to its own Dreamers is clear: Our doors are open for all LTCC students, and we stand with our Dreamers and international students.

The college is currently drafting a board of trustees' resolution formalizing the positions stated above. Campuswide events with community organization involvement where legal information and advice will be shared are also in the works. More information about these efforts will be coming.

Jeff DeFranco is president of Lake Tahoe Community College.

Opinion: EDC residents should hide their wallets

By Larry Weitzman

The "Day of Reckoning" is coming and it's not going to be playing at your local movie theater. But it is going to liberate your wallet by far more than a \$10 movie ticket.

It has become apparent in a nine-page memo sent to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors from our honest CAO, Don Ashton. What happened? Just a year ago, our then carpetbagger CAO Larry Combs told the BOS that EDC was in "good financial shape ... and structurally balanced." Of course, one of the first things on Combs' agenda was to strip road maintenance from the General Fund budget.



Larry Weitzman

So what does Combs do? He hires his former ACAO at Sutter to be our ACAO and he hires her at the highest salary level, step five or about \$182,000 a year. It follows the spoils principle of "hire your friends." Combs even said in the recruitment posting for the new CAO, EDC was in a strong financial position.

But now it appears from the nine-page single spaced Ashton memo to the BOS, things aren't so rosy. Perhaps blood red is a better description as EDC is hemorrhaging and it's going to get worse. The point of this document was money for road maintenance.

On Nov. 7, 2000, EDC voters by a margin of 61 percent to 39 percent passed Measure H. In other words, overwhelmingly voted to allocate at least one half of the "vehicle in-lieu tax" which amounted to at least \$3.6 million (one-half of the tax collected in fiscal year 1998-99) to "be expended only upon public roads, way and highways for maintenance, repair, circulation, general road safety and fire access." It was a mandate to the BOS. These funds were part of the General fund at the time.

Unfortunately, about eight years later the state through some tax machinations took away the vehicle in-lieu tax (it was sort of replaced with something else) but it made Measure H ineffective and the BOS was no longer required to spend about \$3.5 million of General Fund money annually on road maintenance.

At the most recent budget hearings, there wasn't any General Fund money allocated for the maintenance and repair of our badly decaying 1,080 miles of "centerline" roads. But someone had the bright idea of grabbing \$2 million out of the Missouri Flat MC & FP (master circulation and finance plan). Our county counsel said he would get the legal questions solved and the money was put into the 2016-17 budget.

But now according to our new astute CAO, that might be a problem, a very big problem. According to his memo (which is nothing more than an "I told you so" from a previous column), it is possible to get the money, but only if EDC locks away \$24,968,000 to pay for the completion of all phase one improvements required under the plan which includes \$22.2 million to build the Diamond Springs four-lane parkway.

Of course, the BOS doesn't have \$25 million to lock away to free up \$2 million. Secondly, it would be beyond stupid to do so. County counsel who told the BOS it could be done was talking out of his hat, never reading the Missouri Flat MC&FP formation documents as I did. And we pay this guy a quarter of a million dollars a year for bad advice and this is only the tip of the iceberg. About the only person who did read it, dozens of typos and all, was former BOS member Jack Sweeney who has said the BOS can't get to the money either.

So where does that leave us? It means a lack of road maintenance, more potholes and an eventual cost to the county of hundreds of millions of dollars. And as above, this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Pension costs are going up significantly, we are going to have the annual \$2.3 million expense for 40 years to pay for the new sheriff's facility and we have accumulated millions of dollars in deferred maintenance. But the BOS allocated a new expense of a \$150,000 for a public information officer, a spin doctor for when it all hits the fan. BOS will work the mantra "blame someone else." Maybe they should also try the late Flip

Wilson excuse, "The devil made me do it."

It's worse. Ashton said in his memo and here it comes, the BOS should consider the feasibility of three new taxes. First, an increase in the transient occupancy tax. Second, an increase in the solid waste franchise fee and third, an increase in the county sales tax. The last two will affect all residents directly, while the former will affect our tourist business, which will have an indirect effect on all residents. I told you to hang on to your wallets.

So, what will the county do? Probably keep paying dues to the California State Association of Counties of about \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year. Why? Because they are the main lobbying arm for California's 58 counties. And what will they lobby for? New gasoline taxes using the excuse that gas taxes haven't gone up in over 20 years even though California has placed all kinds of new taxes on gasoline like what is effectively an oil severance tax to combat the boogey man "global warming." The idea was with higher gas prices, people will use less of it. California's mileage standards also mean drivers use less gas as well. Another unthought of unintended consequence.

In our state Legislature, the voters have given the Democrats a blank check for new taxes because of super majorities so the counties will get more tax money that way and everyone will blame the state, but the real blame comes from our BOS for not managing the taxpayers' money. The bottom line, our allegedly conservative Republican BOS is going to hide behind the skirts of CSAC and the liberal super majority democrats of the state Legislature, even spending our taxpayer money to support a liberal democrat cause, raising taxes.

I seem to remember the words "operational efficiencies" at the last budget hearings. The real solution is to cut spending for the lesser and least efficient priorities and deadwood, but not for the number one and two priorities, public safety and road maintenance, excepting the deadwood. Speaking of

operational efficiencies, I remember the BOS spending hundreds of thousands of dollars for a survey about a year ago, which not only said the same thing, but the BOS knew that before they spent the money. Perhaps they were hoping for a different result. That reminds me of Einstein's definition of insanity. But here is one operational efficiency, get a new county counsel. We are spending a lot of money for bad advice.

News flash: At the Jan. 24 BOS meeting, the EDC BOS voted without any discussion, debate or public input to support Senate Bill 1 which will raise gasoline, diesel and vehicle registration fees; \$7 billion annually which amounts to \$180 a person or about \$21 million a year for all of EDC. The average two-car family will see their taxes go up by over \$300 a year. Why? Because our BOS cannot make meaningful spending cuts. Any non-government business person could and would cut our general fund budget in a New York heartbeat. I told you so. Didn't Larry Combs tell the BOS just 15 months ago at the final 2015-16 budget hearings that EDC was in sound financial condition?

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: Endless benefits to VHRs in SLT

To the community,

My name is Jerry Williams. I am a 36-year local resident, husband, father, grandfather, Realtor and property manager in South Lake Tahoe. I wanted to take a moment to address the prevailing, negative, and detrimental sentiments that currently surround vacation home rentals (VHRs) in our

community.

We, who live here, reside among homes that are VHRs, and that has been a reality long before the city officially incorporated some 51 years ago.

In the recent past, vacation home rentals have become the most polarizing issue in our community. My goal in writing this letter is to request and encourage that City Council and staff share with the public the many benefits VHRs provide to this community.

The No. 1 industry in South Lake Tahoe today is tourism. VHRs provide accommodations for visitors. The popularity and demand for VHRs and home sharing is being fueled by consumers looking for a vacation experience they can't get at a hotel.

Revenue

According to the city, VHRs bring in one-third of the total TOT (transient occupancy tax) and TID (Tourist Improvement District) income. In 2015-16, total TOT was reported as \$2.5 million to \$2.9 million. TID revenue was \$470,000 for the same timeframe.

With roughly 1,150 VHRs (outside of tourist corridors), VHR permit fees have generated \$500,000-\$575,000 in revenue.

Add in application and inspection fees at \$545 and \$133 and/or \$80 per application, that's another \$718,750-\$779,700 deposited into city coffers for fiscal year 2015-16.

Where does all of this money go? Most of it is funneled into the city's General Fund, which provides for our city's infrastructure – vital services such as:

- Police and fire protection
- Street maintenance ... including snow removal!
- Parks and recreation
- General administration

The city multiplier suggests that all of those TOT dollars translate to \$20 million (again approximately one-third) going into the local economy, once ancillary businesses are paid (management, maintenance, cleaning, etc); they pay their employees' wages, employees spend money on groceries and gas – and it goes on and on.

Local businesses benefit with more visitors spending money at:

- Restaurants and bars
- Rental companies – boats, Wave Runners, kayaks, paddl boards, skis, boots, poles, bicycles and more
- Retail stores and shops – large and small,
- Grocery stores, supplies, etc.

Employment

There are jobs, jobs, and more jobs – directly and indirectly to VHRs and the visitors they bring:

Direct employment:

- Housekeeping
- Laundry and linen services
- Maintenance and handy people
- Snow removal services
- Reservations
- Office administrative staff
- IT people and marketing specialist
- Licensed contractors
- Plumbing and heating
- Electricians
- Landscapers
- Paving and excavators

Indirect impact on jobs and local employers:

These employees and business owners are directly impacted by the money spent by VHR guests:

- Restaurants and bars – managers, servers, bartenders, dishwashers
- Rental companies – sales people, attendants for boats, Wave Runners, kayaks, paddleboards, skis/boards, boots, poles, bicycles and more
- Retail stores and shops, large and small
- Grocery stores – management, checkers, stockers, customer service.

These local employees then spend money at virtually every business in town; such as hardware stores, auto parts stores, grocery stores, local shops, mini marts, gas stations, bars and restaurants, and that list goes on and on. These local residents – whether they own or rent their home – pay taxes, they have children in our schools, they visit doctors, dentists and emergency clinics, etc. Now we could list all of the people that work in those places.

In February 2016, the council adopted a new Recreation Master Plan. Bravo to the council for something that is much anticipated and will be an absolutely fantastic addition to our community.

In November 2016, Measure P was passed. This was a 2 percent increase in TOT that is to be utilized specifically for this new recreation complex. This is potentially millions each year that will go toward building and maintaining the complex. More jobs and more revenue. And VHRs, contributing one-third of the total TOT, are a huge contributor to this wonderful benefit for residents and visitors alike.

VHRs are not without their own set of concerns and issues, to be sure. I fully support efforts to address problems, increase enforcement, and continue to work toward finding solutions so that the city is empowered and able to effectively resolve our local residents' issues and concerns. However, concerns seem to be really the only component of VHRs that is ever highlighted or discussed.

In conclusion, this is a request to council, and staff, when VHRs are a topic of discussion – on the agenda, when staff reports are compiled, posted on websites and presented at council meetings – the beneficial, positive, vital, impact and role that VHRs play in our community should be highlighted and emphasized, so that we all get a more balanced view.

Jerry Williams, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Trump may hurt Tahoe real estate market

By Theresa Souers

The California Association of Realtors has issued a statement in response to the announcement by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that the Federal Housing Administration will indefinitely suspend a recently announced cut in its annual mortgage insurance premium.

“We hope HUD and the Trump administration will make it a priority to quickly review the reduction in the FHA mortgage insurance premium,” said CAR President Geoff McIntosh. “Homebuyers in California, who would have saved an average of \$860 per year, will be negatively impacted more than any other state by the decision to not reduce the FHA premium. FHA’s single-family home portfolio is as financially sound as it has ever been, and we hope that once the new administration has thoroughly reviewed the merits of the premium reduction the suspension will immediately be lifted.”

The united belief is that this move by the Trump administration hurts the very people that Trump promised to

help during his campaign.

The administration doesn't plan to stop with the FHA premium cut. According to National Association of Realtors President Bill Brown, the Trump administration is also reconsidering the elimination of mortgage interest and property taxes as federal tax deductions. Also under attack are the current 1031 exchange programs. Such moves send a signal to the public that the government doesn't support homeownership for the working class, the group that will be most impacted by these moves.

For example, \$860 per year, or \$72 per month, may not seem like a lot of money over a year's time. However, South Lake Tahoe's median home price is \$420,000. If you are fortunate enough to be able to save \$84,000 (20 percent) for a down payment, and were able to secure a low interest rate, for example 4.25 percent, you would be averaging an estimated monthly payment of \$2,200, when including taxes and insurance. If you are lucky enough to have a good paying job in Tahoe, it's still a stretch to make it work. Now add in the additional \$72, plus no deductions from your taxes – homeownership is pushed that much further out of reach for most local residents.

Speaking at the CAR business meetings in Indian Wells last month, Brown reported that homeownership in California is already down to 54 percent. He stated that a thriving middle class of homeowners is needed to support the nation's economy. In order to achieve improving levels of home ownership, good public housing policies are needed. As NAR's voice to the working government, Brown promised, "Everything involving home ownership and home ownership rights will be aggressively fought for."

Theresa Souers is with the South Tahoe Association of Realtors.

Letter: SnowGlobe remnants are an eyesore

To the community,

If you're a visitor to this site, you know that I have a strong opinion about SnowGlobe. Again, I will state that I am not against it, I am against were and when it is held. I'm all for well run events that bring people to the area.

Now that being said, I just want to ask: When is SnowGlobe going to clean up its mess? Its been a month and there are still office trailers, cargo containers, port a potties, signage, tables, and fencing that needs to be cleaned up. Not to mention all the trash that is now covered by snow and won't be seen until spring.

You can't use snow as an excuse. You know it snows here and snow is in your event name. Snow is a part of your promotion. The promoter and vendors at SnowGlobe made theirs and we are left looking at the mess. Again, this is another example of a poorly run event.

John Spinola, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Pay attention to

overhanging snow

To the community,

After heavy snows this January, Tahoe is experiencing a deep snowpack that has created dangerous overhanging snow on many buildings around the area. If you see large wind lips or cornices hanging off buildings, please stay clear from underneath as they pose a serious danger to life and property.

A collapse of this snow can be very destructive and life threatening. Snow can move and change over time so please keep an eye out and evaluate conditions around you.

Look up! Practice spatial awareness to identify these threats and avoid exposing yourself to risk by traveling around areas of danger.

If you see a dangerous situation, inform your family, friends and community to help keep them safe. If you have concerns about your property, please call a snow removal company and hire a professional to remove the cornice properly.

We live in a winter environment and specific dangers do exist. Be aware of your surroundings and take steps to minimize your exposure to danger by limiting access to fall zones or removing the hazard.

Don Triplat, executive director Sierra Avalanche Center

Letter: UNR embraces

diversity

To the community,

As stated in our institutional mission, this university recognizes and embraces the critical importance of diversity in preparing students for global citizenship and is committed to a culture of excellence, inclusion and accessibility.

The Jan. 27 executive order regarding border security and immigration enforcement has raised concern among members of our university community. Accordingly, the university is committed to offering support, resources and information to help our students, faculty, visiting scholars and staff fully understand the executive order's implications and take the most appropriate action. We recommend that students and scholars from any of the countries listed in the order stay in the United States for at least the next 120 days.

The staff of our Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) will be closely monitoring the situation and can advise and answer questions as information becomes available. Individuals affected by this executive order are advised to stay in regular contact with the Office via their **website**, email oiss@unr.edu, or phone 775.784.6874.

The Association of International Educators, formerly NAFSA, is providing information helpful in understanding the language and application thus far of the executive order on their **website**.

The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities is also tracking this information closely and will be providing updates at their **website**.

We value the contributions made by our international faculty, staff and students to our learning environment, which in turn greatly enhances our ability to serve the needs of Nevada, the

nation and the world. At the University of Nevada, Reno, we encourage diversity of experience and perspectives and must continue to embrace this important aspect of our mission while providing a safe and welcoming environment for all students and employees.

Marc Johnson, UNR president

Letter: Chemicals not the answer for TK weeds

To the community,

There are several non-chemical methods available today, that used in combination for killing, removing and decaying the invasive weeds and their food source, will eliminate the weeds not just one time, but permanently.

There is no need to use chemicals that combined with the algae will create bacteria that has been proven to cause neurotoxins that cause Parkinson's, Lou Gehrig's disease, etc. The chemicals that are put in breakdown into other chemicals that never leave the lake, but worse, is the bacteria that is created in the water that we drink, swim and bathe in.

Cyanobacteria has also now been proven to go airborne. Our water supply systems do not clean for the chemicals that remain after the herbicide has broken down.

Support the use of a non-chemical methods that used in a systematic combination will be a model to the country and world on how to clean lakes without chemicals.

Elise Fett, Crystal Bay