Opinion: EDC supes vote to raise taxes

By Larry Weitzman

At the Jan. 24 El Dorado County Board of Supervisors meeting, not only was there a 5-0 vote to support a $7 billion annual increase in gasoline tax and vehicle registrations fees, there was another agenda item (No. 30) also having to do with raising taxes.

Larry Weitzman

Item No. 30 on the agenda, which had no direct actual references to raising taxes or exploring such an idea, stems from the CAO's recommendation not to unwind the Missouri Flat Master Circulation and Financing Plan for road maintenance funding, which is in the 2016-17 budget.

The actual agenda item read: "Chief Administrative Office, Community Development Agency Transportation Division, and County Counsel recommending the Board: 1) Receive a presentation on the following: a) The condition of the County's road infrastructure, including a discussion of the County's Pavement Management System; b) The current road maintenance funding situation within the State and the County; c) The possibility of using Missouri Flat Master Circulation and Financing Plan (MC&FP) funding for road maintenance; 2) Receive and file the attached Staff Report on the same; and 3) Provide policy direction to staff regarding the MC&FP and

options to explore for road maintenance funding.”

The discussion went to exploring the feasibility of raising the hotel tax, the franchise fee on trash collection and a special sales tax.

Because the agenda item says “options” of funding it is not a Brown Act violation to have approved wanting to explore increasing taxes.

Two motions were made, the first by Supervisor Shiva Frentzen to limit the feasibility study to everything but the special sales tax. That motion failed for lack of a second.

Another motion was made by Supervisor Brian Veerkamp to include the feasibility of raising all the aforementioned taxes, including the sales tax. That motioned was seconded by Supervisor Sue Novasel. It was carried by a vote of 4-1, with Frentzen voting no vote.

Both motions also directed staff to pursue additional options for road maintenance revenue. There was no motion made to explore cutting General Fund spending.

Regarding the gas tax and registration fees, on average the deal will cost every resident of EDC $180 annually on a per capita basis. According to CAO Don Ashton, EDC would receive about one-third of the amount collected back for road maintenance – about $60 per person.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Letter: SLTPD’s philosophy on immigration

Publisher’s note: ***This was sent to the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Jan. 30 by the police chief and is republished with permission.***

Regarding the recent questions regarding immigration related fears, I offer the following which outlines the philosophy related to immigration matters by SLTPD:

Brian Uhler

1. Officers and staff of the SLTPD do not investigate immigration-related issues on behalf of the federal government.

2. Nothing in the president’s executive orders obligates the South Lake Tahoe Police Department to change our current practices.

3. In the event South Lake Tahoe police officers arrest people who were involved in serious criminal activity, and who also have questionable immigration status, they will be booked into El Dorado County Jail for the crime, but not charged with immigration-related crimes. In such cases, it is between El Dorado County Jail officials and immigration officials to evaluate and bring potential immigration-related charges.

4. In the event South Lake Tahoe police officers encounter

people who have warrants for their arrest, whether federal or not, whether immigration-related or not, such people will be arrested as we are obligated to comply with such warrants for arrest when these orders are signed and executed by a judge.

5. The South Lake Tahoe Police Department has a long-standing practice of not actively pursuing immigration-related matters. This philosophy is grounded in this key belief that maintaining good relations and open communication with those who may be victims of human trafficking or victims of crime should feel comfortable reporting such crimes without fear of deportation or immigration-related actions against them. In short, anyone who lives in our community, regardless of their immigration status, should feel comfortable reporting crime, being witnesses to crime, and working with the police.

I hope this information helps.

Thank you,

Brian Uhler, SLT police chief

Letter: Weather doesn’t stop Bread & Broth

To the community,

A big thank you to all of the volunteers who braved snow covered roads to help feed the vulnerable and hungry at Bread & Broth’s Monday meal on Jan. 23. Being the biggest snow fall in years, no one was really sure if the meal’s volunteers or any dinner guests would be able to travel the roads to St. Theresa’s Grace Hall. Amazingly, 65 dinner guests and most of

the scheduled volunteers attended the dinner.

Sponsoring the evening's dinner was Kirkwood Mountain Resort. Skier services crew members Jon Copeland, Anjie Goulding, Reba Mourcio and Jamie Mullens formed the volunteer sponsor crew.

"It's always a treat to come to volunteer here and support the community," said Copeland. "Bread & Broth does a fantastic job and we are happy to help and support. Our employees enjoy the experience."

Bread & Broth is very fortunate to have volunteers and sponsor groups that are committed to helping the hungry even under hazardous conditions. Walking and driving through barely plowed streets to help at B&B's Monday meal and making a difference in another person's life deserves a very special thank you. So kudos to Kirkwood Mountain Resort and their incredible Skier Services sponsor crew.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: I'm still talking about my incarceration

By Chizu Omori

I am a member of a once despised minority group, American Japanese, who spent three and a half years incarcerated in an American concentration camp during World War II. Although that ordeal ended 72 years ago, the impact of that experience on my life and its broader implications for American society resonate deeply to this day.

In 1941, at the beginning of the war, roughly 10 percent of the adult “alien” men (Japan- born persons being ineligible for citizenship) were picked up by the FBI as potentially dangerous and interned by the Justice Department, effectively robbing the community of leadership. We had been under surveillance for quite a while, and these men were singled out. My father, who was an alien, was not picked up, though many of our friends were. No one was convicted of a crime or act of sabotage, though many were held for years in captivity.

I was a citizen by birth, but the distinction meant nothing at the time. My entire family—my parents, two sisters and I—were sent to Poston in southwestern Arizona, geographically the largest of the 10 camps where American Japanese were held. At the time, I had just turned 12. By the time we were permitted to leave I was 15.

We, along with 120,000 others, spent the better part of four years in desolate areas where we were monitored, our movements restricted. We ate in mess halls, and our tar paper barracks were so flimsy I remember wind and dust storms so strong that roof tops were torn off, debris flying around like crumpled paper.

Perhaps even more of a shock to me than the prison-like conditions was the fact that for the first time in my life I was living totally surrounded by others of Japanese descent. In my early school years, most of my classmates were white, with a scattering of Mexican American kids. Although I was one of the few American Japanese in my small town, I never experienced any prejudice there. But at Poston my farm upbringing contrasted sharply with the sophistication, manners, and clothes of the American Japanese kids from Los Angeles and other cities.

Here we were, all locked up together, doing our best to be “normal” teens. My mother disapproved of the camp’s faster growing-up process, driven by the city kids. She wasn’t sure

about my going to the parties and dances that were a big part of teen life at the camp, and she did not want me to have a brassiere or wear makeup. I missed my white classmates, my home, my town, and my less-pressured life. I felt like an ugly duckling.

We had the trappings of society like schools, jobs, a camp government, a police and fire department. My father did some wood carving while my mother took sewing lessons, making our dresses. I spent a lot of time reading books from the library. But life was far from normal. The usual social hierarchy was turned upside down, with the elders stripped of power and the young freer to pursue their interests.

It was the pettiness of life in camp that got to me. Almost every aspect of everyone's life was known to all and this promoted a culture of gossip and rumor mongering, with whispers and speculations about others filling our time. The meanness, the nastiness exhibited, the way we picked on one another, was an ugliness I hadn't known before. Of course, it was a manifestation of the cramped living conditions, forced idleness, and the insecurity of our situation.

A group formerly known for hard work and pride in our accomplishments was reduced to committing little acts of rebellion aimed generally at the government and administration who were oppressing us. People "stole" wood scraps to make furniture and pilfered food from the mess halls. Many did not feel that manual work was worth doing and slacked off, held strikes, and quit their "jobs." My father "borrowed" a tractor and took a mob of kids to the Colorado River, a couple of miles from the camp.

I was too young and naïve to understand the bigger picture, but the smaller world I inhabited was beset with contradictions. In eighth grade, a white school teacher from Massachusetts ordered us to memorize a Marc Antony speech from Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar". "Friends, Romans, countrymen,

lend me your ears," it began. "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones." We labored mightily to master those lines and dozens more. But, alas, most of us had trouble doing it, and she castigated us as ignorant, lazy, know-nothings.

There were those, particularly older men, who listened to Japanese propaganda broadcasts on smuggled-in radios. Reports of Japanese victories would elicit some cheers. Clumps of men would discuss the latest "news," sneering at those who didn't believe, severely criticizing those who remained loyal to the U.S.

Our community was caught up in this international war at a particularly sensitive period. My parents' generation were still culturally old country. Some, like my mother, never learned to speak English. Their children, including me, were rapidly becoming Americanized. I joined the Girl Scouts and edited the junior high newspaper, the *Desert Daze.*

In prewar times, it was customary to send children to Japanese school because many believed that eventually they were going to return to their home country. In some places, it was a Saturday-only class, but in my case, we attended an hour of Japanese lessons each day, after American school, and our teachers were brought from Japan. I perfected my calligraphy and reading and writing, but the authoritarian style and emphasis on obedience went against what we were learning in the American school. Even though most of us spoke Japanese at home with our parents, we weren't interested in it. English was becoming our main language.

These intergenerational conflicts, typical of the American immigrant experience, intensified in the camp. In the beginning, because no Issei (immigrant generation) were allowed any leadership roles in the camps, the block managers and elected members of the camp councils were all young people

who had been born on American soil. This powerlessness of the older men was manifest in continuous grumbling about how callow and ill-prepared for leadership the young were.

A call by the Japanese American Citizens League, (composed of young men and women who acted as the liaison between the people and the government), to allow young men to serve in the American military to prove their loyalty, provoked intense conflict. I had no brothers, but I know that my parents thought that to send our youth to fight for this country, the very country which had imprisoned us, was absolutely unacceptable. I had cousins who “resisted”, refusing to comply with draft orders, and I also had an uncle who served as an officer in the army, fighting in Europe.

These divisions in the camp were reflected in my family. Several years into our incarceration, my father decided that he would apply for repatriation. He had had enough of the mistreatment, feeling that prospects would be better in Japan where the family had some property. I was astounded and angry. America was my home and I knew that I was not Japanese. I had no interest in going to Japan. I’d seen enough of the patriarchal, authoritarian style of Japanese society in my own family and others to know that I didn’t want to be a Japanese woman, subservient and under the control of men.

I fought with my parents, even writing letters to magazine editors, but nothing I did would change their minds. As the war wound down I watched as friends left, moving to eastern parts of the U.S. and then back to the West Coast. I was feeling trapped. But when Japan was defeated, my father learned that there was nothing to go back to. He changed his mind and we resettled in Oceanside.

For the rest of my father’s life, we never talked about the camp experience in a serious way. It was too painful. He started farming again, but wasn’t very successful. Two years later my mother died of bleeding ulcers. My father became more

passive and quiet.

For my part, I was relieved that the ordeal was over and determined to put it out of my mind. I went to college, married a white man, raised a family, lived mostly in white society. I protested the Vietnam War and was active in the civil rights movement. And in the course of these activities, I began to think about my own background.

The wars against Korea and Vietnam made me very aware of American attitudes toward Asians, and the topic of camp came up from time to time. I ran into a therapist at a party who questioned me about my experience and I brushed it off as not very important. But she pressed on, telling me how formative those early adolescent years were, that I should reexamine those times. This stuck with me, and when a movement for redress began to take shape, I joined in and worked at the legislative level and as a named plaintiff, in a court case that went to the Supreme Court.

I learned that the most damaging event that occurred in the camps was a so-called “loyalty questionnaire” administered in 1943, mandatory for everyone 17 and older. It was used to separate the “loyal” from the “disloyal”. It was a poorly designed instrument, resulting in divided families, friends. On the question of agreeing to serve in the American military, to say no was to automatically designate “disloyalty”. My cousins said no and were charged with being draft dodgers. A sympathetic judge fined them one penny.

After the government turned the camp at Tule Lake into a segregation center for all “disloyals” and troublemakers, I watched friends loaded on to trucks to be taken there. By the flimsy logic of the day, our family should have been sent there as well—I never learned why we were not. Perhaps a fortunate oversight kept us out.

The government seemed hell-bent on tarnishing all of us as

aliens—and enemy aliens at that. How could we remain “loyal” to a country that had held us captive for years, impoverishing us in so many ways? How were we to respond to these humiliations and victimization? We were expected to disallow our Japanese heritage and submit to the demands of our captors. And we did. But it left us with a badly damaged community, an ever-present split between the “loyals” and “disloyals”, and a deep understanding about how vulnerable we were.

Ironically, we were very good at adapting and melting into the American middle class, earning the label of “model minority.” In my own case, I lost my primal language, distanced myself from the American Japanese community and for many years didn’t look back. We paid a heavy emotional price, and the issue of identity has always dogged us: can we truly be American?

It’s been a long time since World War II and one would think that Poston would be a fading memory, but it is not. I have made pilgrimages to Tule Lake, seeking a better understanding of our history. Though I have spent my years in white society and my children are half white, I am certain that given particular circumstances, I could be targeted again for my

political views, ethnic background, for my religion or being a member of a group identified as other.

I am not bitter, but I remain quite angry. I am a liberal, a believer in equality, but I am also a cynic. I don’t think that our founding fathers really meant to extend equality to everybody, but the words and sentiments remain part of our Constitution. The struggle for our ideals continues and it is necessary to remind us about what happened to me and 120,000 other Americans because without that memory, it could easily happen again.

Chizu Omori is a freelance journalist and co-producer of the documentary “Rabbit in the Moon” with her sister Emiko Omori,

chronicling the WWII internment of Japanese Americans.

Opinion: TTUSD alters calendar because of snow

To the community,

We appreciate you taking the time to share your input regarding proposed changes to our current school calendar. We received over 600 survey responses, and 88 percent of the respondents were in favor of the district adding three make-up days of classes to address lost instructional time because of the high number of snow days.

The board of education met Jan. 25 to review and discuss the survey results, hear input from parents in attendance, and take action on the proposal.

On Jan. 25, the board of education approved a new calendar for the 2016-17 school year that includes the following:

- Waiving five instructional days based on a waiver approved by the board of education on Jan. 18.
- Eliminating the Feb. 1, March 8, and May 10 districtwide minimum days to regain instructional time. Note: This does not recover additional school days, but it does allow for more uninterrupted instruction time.
- Adding three days of school on Feb. 22, 23, and 24, during Ski and Skate Week. These are indicated as “make-up” days on the calendar where students have two options for completing assigned work by their regular classroom teacher(s) during these days.

a) Parents sign an independent study contract and complete

work independently outside of school and turn in for credit by a date to be determined in early March, after Ski Skate Week.

b) Students attend scheduled “make-up” classes on those days at school sites in both parts of the district and complete work assigned by their classroom teachers (in addition to other activities planned by the teacher in charge on these days).

The revised 2016-17 school calendar is posted.

Our district leadership team is currently working on the details of how we will implement this make-up program, and more details will be coming soon.

Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time. We all want what’s best for our students, and we are working diligently to ensure students continue to have a high-quality education in a safe environment.

Sincerely,

Robert Leri, superintendent Tahoe Truckee Unified School District

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Opinion: You always have to be cutting back

By Joe Mathews

She left us only recently, and already San Mateo has gotten way too leafy.

As I drove through that Bay Area city on the way to my

grandmother’s memorial service this month, the bushes off Hillsdale Boulevard were growing far bushier than they used to dare. The trees along Alameda de las Pulgas flaunted branches that hung much too low. Flowers breathed too easily.

Joe Mathews

Frances Mathews, who passed away a few months short of her 100th birthday, was generous and unthreatening—in almost every respect. She was a loving wife, beloved mother, popular schoolteacher, proud UCLA alum, leader of parenting classes, churchgoer, wearer of the color purple, and such a klutz that her grandchildren called her Grandma Oops.

But, now that she is in a better place outside the reach of California authorities, I can speak frankly: there was a Hyde to this kindly Jekyll.

Grandma Oops was a harsh pruner, unrepentant about cutting back plants to the nub. If a bushy bush were to appear in her line of vision, she would not let it go untrimmed. It never mattered if the plants were hers, or whether she had any legal sanction to prune. As a boy, I was brought along on pruning raids on Laurel Elementary and Abbott Middle schools, various church gardens, a few street trees, and countless private homes.

The only other Bay Area figure who ever came close to matching her vigilante’s passion for mowing down living things was Harold Francis Callahan, the fictional San Francisco cop played by Clint Eastwood in the movies. Grandma Oops and Dirty Harry shared a philosophy: Give an inch to overgrowth or

punks, and civilization will teeter.

At my grandmother's memorial service, her friend, the Rev. Kibbie Ruth, observed that pruning was spiritual for my grandmother, a way to get to the core of life. Because, as Grandma Oops wrote in one birthday note to me, "if you don't prune, you can never really grow like you should."

And she erred on the side of pruning more rather than less. Relatives from Los Gatos to Long Beach cried that she had reduced beloved plants to their stubs. She was unapologetic—and for a reason that should resonate statewide.

Cutting back, whether your target is a plant or a government program, is so extremely difficult that one must be a pruning extremist—if you're ever going to overcome the human instinct for hewing to the status quo. California could sure use more of that extremism. Hollywood, in the era of Netflix, is overgrown with too many TV shows we never have time to watch. Silicon Valley is a jungle jammed with pointless startups. Old warehouses across our state have been repurposed as storage facilities, for all the things we Californians won't throw away.

In Sacramento, our state Legislature adds hundreds of new laws a year, and rarely eliminates old ones. Our tax code and budget are incomprehensible thickets of formulas and exemptions. Our state Constitution, with all its guarantees and mandates, makes thoughtful pruning essentially unconstitutional. One of this year's most important decisions affecting the future of California could be an anticipated state Supreme Court ruling on a challenge to the so-called "California rule," which guarantees that public employees' pensions can never be reduced in any way.

Lack of pruning can have huge costs, and not just in dollars and cents. At the heart of our mounting shortage of housing is thick regulatory overgrowth that makes construction overly

time-consuming and expensive.

And it may get even harder to prune properly as our state righteously fights the Trump Administration on multiple fronts. We're so geared up to protect our people and programs that we may have little time or space to jettison those pieces of government we no longer need.

If Grandma Oops is reincarnated, I think she might come back as one of those consultants that rich people now hire to help them figure out how to get rid of their stuff. As she approached the end, I marveled at how she meticulously disposed of almost everything in her small house, leaving only basic furniture and a few photo albums. I wish I had her pruning discipline. Maybe I could figure out how to work less, or to simplify our home life—currently a mad scramble of children's classes, sports, and other commitments.

In her later years, Grandma Oops expressed frustration about one living thing that she couldn't uproot—herself. She had lived too long, she often said, and was using too many of the earth's resources as she hung on past her prime.

I respected her opinion, but I couldn't agree. Sometimes in a family tree, you get one branch so special and enduring that you can hardly bear to see her go.

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

Opinion: Why Groundhog Day

elevates science over superstition

By Dan Blumstein

I am a scientist who loves Groundhog Day, that least scientific of holidays. Every February, as Punxsutawney Phil shakes the dust off his coat, emerges from his burrow, glances at his shadow (or not) and allegedly prognosticates winter's end, I gather a group of professors, graduate students and other assorted science geeks at my UCLA lab to nibble, drink, schmooze and revel in ground-hoggery in all its magnificent splendor.

I study the behavior, ecology and evolution of groundhogs and the 14 other species of marmots—large, charismatic ground squirrels that live throughout the Northern Hemisphere. I realize that these rodents can't tell us when seasons will change. I know that the whole idea of celebrating a mid-winter festival in Los Angeles's usually balmy clime also makes little or no sense. I know that hanging out with a taxidermied animal I stuffed myself might seem a bit quirky for a tenured professor.

But Groundhog Day—and its inherent absurdity—also serves as a reminder to me and my colleagues of why we do what we do. The United States has prospered in no small part because of our commitment to supporting science and technological innovation. With each new advance—from the automobile to the polio vaccine to computers to space travel—we have reinvented ourselves and the world around us. Scientific discovery is at the core of America's success. Conversely, an Internet meme a few years ago wondered, "Why is that only in America do we accept weather prognostication from a rodent but deny climate change from a scientist?" But for my colleagues and me, groundhogs are symbols of science, not superstition.

At my annual lab celebration, posters of groundhogs and plush stuffed groundhogs—not to mention a glittering Swarovski crystal specimen, given to me by UCLA's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology as thanks for years of service as department chair—add to the ambiance. Groundhog-themed comics festoon the lab walls. "Two Buck Chuck", our stuffed adolescent groundhog, presides over the festivities perched in one corner. One fall long ago, when I was doing my postdoctoral research, I found him dead on the side of the road and threw him into the freezer. My wife Janice and I had to wait to stuff him until Christmas break, when the smell associated with thawing and skinning him would be less offensive to our lab mates.

We've been holding our Groundhog Day fête since 2001. America has been at it far longer than that. Groundhog Day was originally a reimagining of Candlemas Day, a Catholic mid-winter festival which itself had roots in a pagan celebration. Europeans observing Candlemas tracked hibernating hedgehogs to predict when winter would end. When the Pennsylvania Dutch came to our shores, they too looked for a hibernating mammal that might help them monitor the weather.

Woodchucks, also known as groundhogs, were native and seemed to fit the bill: males popped up out of their burrows each February, probably checking things out and deciding when they should start waking up females to mate. The new Americans took notice, and Groundhog Day was born.

Since 2001, I have run a long-term study, initiated 55 years ago by my mentor Ken Armitage, now an emeritus professor at the University of Kansas. Armitage is the world authority on marmots, and is credited with emphasizing the importance of their annual cycle, which varies by location, in explaining why marmot sociality varies. It was Armitage, actually, who first came up with the idea of celebrating Groundhog Day. He used to host the members of his lab at his house, serve "ground hog" (a.k.a. sausage), and recite marmot poetry.

The study follows individually-marked yellow-bellied marmots at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory in Gothic, Colo. The value of the work is rooted in its longevity—it's one of the longest-running studies of its kind and an important tool for studying evolution in action. The animals are now emerging about a month earlier in the spring than they did 30 or 40 years ago.

Understanding how individuals respond to environmental change is essential if we want to predict how animals will react to global warming and other human-driven habitat shifts.

Science is what I do. I'm thrilled and inspired by being able to spend my days uncovering the secrets that hide in plain sight around us, and to use my marmot studies to train students to think critically and objectively. Our grand American experiment has prospered when it has the best possible information—and I know that the scientific method is a very efficient process for revealing nature's truths. This is the spirit in which I commemorate Groundhog Day—celebrating America's devotion to science, not just superstition.

Dan Blumstein is a professor at the UCLA Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and the UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability. His seventh book, "Ecotourism's Promise and Peril: A Biological Evaluation," will be published by Springer in 2018. This was written for Zócalo Public Square.

Letter: Warm room

appreciative of Barton

To the community,

On behalf of the Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless, I would like to thank Barton Health employees and physicians for their incredible generosity.

In December, Barton Health departments participated in a fundraising drive for the South Lake Tahoe Warm Room. Employees and physicians donated $600 in gift cards and funds to support operations of the warm room and to allow Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless to purchase food and much-needed supplies to operate this winter. Barton Health's contributions will help homeless individuals stay warm, prevent cold-related illnesses, and address some of the hurdles of overcoming homelessness.

The Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless is working together to end homelessness on the South Shore with community partners, including Barton Health. Our mission is to meet the needs of our neighbors experiencing homelessness by providing warm beds and promoting community awareness. We aim to give short-term assistance to our friends and neighbors who find themselves without housing this winter, and to provide resource referrals to help break the cycle of homelessness.

The community is invited to see the Warm Room at our open house honoring City Council member Wendy David on Feb. 22 from 4 to 6pm at 2179 Lake Tahoe Blvd. Together we can all make a difference in helping members of our community who need our support.

Marissa Muscat, executive director Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless

Opinion: Sanctuary is an integral part of human nature

By Linda Rabben

Since Donald Trump's election, I've had to change the focus of the talks I give at churches, community events, universities, schools, and bookshops about sanctuary and asylum.

I used to take audiences on a 125,000-year tour of these two venerable institutions. I'd tell them about bonobos, chimps and baboons giving sanctuary to members of enemy primate communities; about the ancient custom of seeking sanctuary by touching the garment or body of a powerful priest or ruler; about 1,000 years of church sanctuary in England and other countries; about the Underground Railroad, Holocaust rescuers, and the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s.

But recently, at a high school in suburban Maryland, the students' first question was, "What can we do to help refugees and asylum seekers right now?" They also wanted to know how I, as an activist, keep going in the face of politicians' racist and xenophobic attacks on people fleeing persecution, torture and murder.

"First of all," I said, "I'm a very stubborn person, prone to indignation about injustice." I explained that I try to undertake modest efforts to help migrants in my local community, so I can see short-term, positive results. And I said that those who defend and protect refugees and asylum seekers are part of something much bigger than themselves, something that's been going on for thousands of years.

Giving refuge to the stranger is in our DNA. We're a highly

social species, as likely to welcome outsiders as to drive them away. Hospitality, protection, welcome, and refuge are ingrained in our customs and behavior. In many societies studied by anthropologists and historians, hospitality may be extended to members of hostile communities. Offering refuge to strangers diversifies the gene pool, encourages innovation, and enriches cultural practices. It institutionalizes empathy, mercy, sociability, and openness.

Shelter for those accused of wrongdoing or fleeing from persecution or slavery has existed in every major religious tradition and in numerous societies since time immemorial. Its recorded history goes back at least 5,000 years. Sanctuaries have included altars, churches, temples, cities, and sacred groves. Asylum comes from the Greek word asylos, “inviolable,” which referred to sacred spaces in ancient Greece to which slaves could flee from cruel masters.

Even the ancient Romans, who were not renowned for their compassion, built temples where slaves and miscreants could flee. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church borrowed sanctuary from other traditions. Church sanctuary lasted for more than a thousand years in Europe, until governments abolished it in the 17th century, because it interfered with their control of the legal system. The Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years’ War in 1648 and laid the foundations of modern international law, proclaimed provision of asylum as a sovereign right of nation states. Thus asylum, a secular institution under state control, replaced religious sanctuary in the law.

Over the past 500 years, government asylum and religious sanctuary have sometimes run along parallel lines, sometimes conflicted and sometimes diverged. During the 20th century, governments started passing laws to restrict access to asylum, especially before, during, and after wars, when massive numbers of desperate, persecuted people sought refuge.

In response to the flight of refugees from Germany and other European countries in the 1930s, the principle of nonrefoulement came into international law. It stipulates that no asylum seeker may be returned to a country where he or she will be persecuted, tortured, or killed. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, proclaims, “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” But despite signing many international agreements and passing national laws that mandate these principles, governments have often violated them for political and economic reasons.

So sanctuary usually operates outside or against the law. The Underground Railroad was an illegal, secret movement, some of whose leaders were prosecuted, fined, or imprisoned. Holocaust rescuers risked death, and some were killed, for hiding thousands of Jews. The U.S. government prosecuted leaders of the 1980s Sanctuary Movement for harboring or smuggling migrants.

Yet sanctuary thrives as a powerful expression of resistance to unjust laws. It is often a deliberate act of civil disobedience. Giving sanctuary may mean accepting the risk of prosecution to obey what its practitioners consider a higher law. Sanctuary has life-saving meaning to those who seek it and is a moral imperative for those who provide it. That is where its power lies.

At the peak of the 1980s Sanctuary Movement, some 400 churches and dozens of cities gave shelter to thousands of Central Americans denied asylum in the United States. The churches’ and cities’ efforts, along with widespread opposition to U.S. backing of murderous regimes in Central America, helped change U.S. foreign and immigration policies. After 1988, the U.S. government lessened support for repressive governments in that region and allowed more Central Americans to stay in the United States.

The New Sanctuary Movement started about 10 years ago, to aid Mexican and other migrants living in the shadows. Over the past two years, dozens of churches around the country have given sanctuary to undocumented people, for months at a time. The migrants waited in the safety of churches and synagogues while their lawyers negotiated with the government for suspension of deportation orders. Then the migrants returned to their U.S. families to await the outcome of their cases. These are a few among many examples of successful sanctuary, in highly publicized instances where local communities know and support migrants and their families.

For decades U.S. enforcement agents have refrained from raiding schools, hospitals, and houses of worship. The government seems to have recognized that invading traditional safe havens would arouse public outcry. However, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, could cancel this "sensitive-locations policy" at any moment, leaving sanctuary-giving institutions vulnerable to government intrusion.

Even during the Obama administration, agents raided private homes without warrants, sometimes under false pretenses. They arrested undocumented high school students on their way to school, parishioners in church parking lots, and patients outside hospitals. More than 2 million undocumented people were deported from the U.S. between 2009 and 2016. ICE increased the number of detained migrants in 2016 from 34,000 to more than 40,000 per day, in hundreds of facilities. Like the Reagan administration during the 1980s, the Obama administration refused to recognize most Central American asylum claims. The government detained thousands of migrant mothers and children, even after federal courts ordered their release.

The Trump administration already has shown that it will show no more mercy toward undocumented people or would-be asylum seekers slated for detention and deportation. In response, increasing numbers of people are likely to offer sanctuary in

houses of worship, educational institutions and their own homes. As millions of desperate people flee persecution, war, and environmental disaster, and governments refuse to shelter them, asylum is under threat all over the world. But history teaches that sanctuary is an integral part of human nature. It will last as long as people of good will are ready to risk welcoming the stranger.

Linda Rabben is an associate research professor of anthropology at University of Maryland and the author of "Sanctuary and Asylum: A Social and Political History" (University of Washington Press, 2016) and other books on human rights.

Letter: Successful Festival of Trees & Lights

To the community,

What a lively and jubilant occasion at Barton Health's eighth annual Festival of Trees & Lights. It is always a treat to see the delight in children's eyes as they admire handcrafted trees and seek "treatment" for their injured teddy bears at the Teddy Bear Hospital.

This year, we achieved several festival records. More than 4,300 people attended the event and, thanks to private donations, 100 families-in-need received free admission and photos with Santa. The event topped the fundraising charts and community members raised $90,000 to support the expansion of Barton Health's Cancer Wellness Program. These funds will give all cancer patients and their families from the South Tahoe region access to complimentary services that enhance their

physical, social, and emotional well-being.

This four-day extravaganza would not be possible without the support and generosity of our community. More than 300 volunteers helped set up, design trees, run activities, dress up as holiday characters, and ensure the four-day event went smoothly. Extra kudos to Marsha Ticas, Michelle Gomez, Joanne Donmoyer, Gary Colton, and Calee Allen who put in a combined 200-plus hours of their time.

I would also like to express gratitude to our festival sponsors, donors, and local entertainers. It truly takes a village to put on this extravaganza. On behalf of the Barton Foundation staff, board of trustees, and festival committee, thank you to our “village” for making this festival a record-breaking success.

Kindle Craig, executive director Barton Foundation