

# Opinion: No such thing as harmless gropings

By Jennifer Ferro

An open letter of apology to my daughters and all the women coming up after me:

I want to start by saying I'm sorry. I have failed you in a way that only now do I shamefully and truly understand.

I am a 48-year-old woman. A mother. A boss. But because of actions I didn't take, you're still getting sexually harassed. You're still getting belittled. You still have to wrestle away from body-hugs that no male colleague would tolerate. You still have to endure comments about your appearance that make you cringe inside. You still are fending off dinner meetings that end up feeling like first dates. You still are expected to put up with someone's version of a joke about your sexuality in front of others because you don't want to damage your standing in your career.

You see, I had to do all those things too. It starts young, when you're walking down the street at 14, with catcalls from passing cars. This is when you realize that your body is "fair game" for any man who feels like taking aim. You face dress codes at school that presume men can't be controlled if they see you in spaghetti straps or shorts.

Then there's the workplace, where anyone from the delivery guy to the mucky-mucks you're meeting with size you up. I will never forget an opportunity I had to meet one-on-one with the politically connected director of the organization where I volunteered during my ambitious early 20s. What started as a late afternoon meeting was switched to dinner at a location that I didn't realize was his penthouse. When he pushed me against the wall to be groped and kissed, I felt stupid and

naïve. I ran out with an excuse of having somewhere else to be.

A couple more from a list far too long to recount in its entirety here: As an assistant being told I had nice breasts by a well-respected person in the media I worked with. On another occasion in an entirely different setting, being asked by a board member—jokingly of course—if I'd like to stroke his gun to see if he was happy to see me.

All of those instances had the same effect. They were belittling. They made me feel self-conscious, embarrassed, ashamed. They led me to see—in that moment—that no matter how smart or capable I was, I was still to these men just a piece of ass.

This is where I failed you. I kept my mouth shut. I didn't stand up for myself. I colluded with all of this by letting it slide. I smiled, evaded the hugs, endured the humiliating comments, rolled my eyes at the sexual jokes and believed that eventually my intelligence and skills would be regarded first and foremost, not my physical appearance.

Let me be clear. I'm not blaming myself or any woman for being the victim of sexual harassment. But I am blaming myself for not finding the courage to stand up for myself. I know it's not just young women who deserve my apology. All of us, regardless of age, are vulnerable to this kind of debasement.

So even though we watched a woman make a serious run for the presidency, we see who won and what did and didn't matter in people's choice for leadership. All around us women face daily humiliations that aren't enough to make news or merit a call to the police. But, over time, the damage done by "minor" verbal offenses and by seemingly "harmless" gropings is sinister. It chips away at women's confidence. It causes us to second-guess ourselves, to keep our voices soft, our hands down, to lean back.

I have two teenage daughters and I worry for them. Not just for the comments and the insults they may face, but because I so greatly fear they will lose their voices, just as I lost mine. I want to show them how to speak up for their dignity and how to have self-respect. I want to show them that speaking up for yourself takes practice. Calling attention to yourself takes courage. Just accepting things when you've been wronged or made to feel insignificant is simply not OK.

Today, I'm taking responsibility for my role in all of this. For all the times I lied to escape boorish behavior. For all the times I nervously laughed off inappropriate comments that I am certain the perpetrator would never have uttered in front of his own wife or daughter. For the times I didn't "educate" my offender by standing up for my own dignity, and for yours.

I am sorry.

The results of this election left many women feeling like they don't matter. Today I'm making a change. Starting now, I pledge to do what I should have been doing for the past two decades. When someone says to me, "Turn around so I can get a good look at you," I'll say "No thanks. You can hear what I have to say better when you're looking at my face." And then I'll tell them what I should have been saying all along.

*Jennifer Ferro is president of Southern California public radio station KCRW and a member of the Zócalo Public Square board of directors.*

---

## **Opinion: Silicon Valley keeps**

# us stuck in the political past

By Joe Mathews

As long as Silicon Valley and its futuristic technologies dominate our politics, we're doomed to stay stuck in the past.

The big story of the poisonous 2016 elections was how new digital media tools ended up crowding out two big topics from our conversation: the present and the future.



Joe Mathews

This phenomenon went beyond the controversy about “fake news” on Facebook; the problem wasn't just quality—but excessive quantity. California and the entire country were deluged by digital tidal waves of data and information from months, years and decades ago.

Many of these were dredged-up video clips or photos or records of the candidates and their families and associates. There were endless emails from old hacks and investigations, followed by all the historical echoes, endlessly debated and rehashed, which kept us refighting the Cold War, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, the Clinton impeachment, 1980s New York real estate and 17 waves of feminism. Donald Trump and his acolytes kept offering bogus ideas that refuse to go away—that

President Obama wasn't born here, that vaccines cause autism, that immigrants add to crime in the United States.

Because these waves never stop, those who have some interest in the truth are left to explain—over and over—easily verifiable truths and old history. All this record-correcting leaves no time or bandwidth for conversations about the present (What to do about the wars that have been wound down but aren't over? How to take advantage of rising employment and wages to invest in infrastructure and reckon with national debt?), much less the future (How is this aging country going to make itself healthier, better educated, and more economically competitive?).

With all the past crowding out any conversation about today or tomorrow, the stakes of the election were never made clear—especially about how the result might affect our role in the world.

All of this is bad—but the really bad news is that, in four years, we're likely to look back at 2016 as the good old days.

Smart people in Silicon Valley say the digital media world is growing so fast (with more people around the world going online every day), that future ill-conceived regurgitations from the past could be even more destructive to our democracy. New immersive technologies—augmented reality, virtual reality—will allow us to invent out of whole cloth whatever past serves our purposes, and make it impossible for our brains to separate fact from fiction. Anyone with a modicum of knowhow will be able to create digital experiences of candidates saying or doing things they never said or did.

This is a public health problem, as surely as an epidemic of opioid overdoses. The more political noise, the less political understanding. The more data, the less coherence. The digital age is not just the “post-fact” era; more dangerously, as Politico recently warned, it's the “post-narrative” age of

democracy. If you can't follow the story, it's because there isn't one.

There is not nearly enough thinking about how to save democracy from media. Much commentary offers the false hope that the deluge of the digital past is somehow self-correcting, that the media culture has finally hit bottom and will reform itself. The free speech folks say you can fix pernicious and inaccurate speech with more speech—but more speech actually makes the problem worse.

The more serious, but less common conversation, involves giving people more tools to stop the flow. Should we allow people to litigate and recover damages more easily for sins visited upon them on the web? Do we want to regulate social media platforms more extensively?

I find the most intriguing approaches economic. Is it possible to create financial consequences for constant past-sharing and tweets and Facebook posts that pollute our civic culture?

Sam Lessin, a former Facebook vice president writing at The Information, suggested a tax on political coverage. If CNN, for example, wants to spend 50 percent of its time on election coverage, it should give 50 percent of its revenue to the government. "That would basically say that you can't profit off the public discourse at all," wrote Lessin. "We the people own it."

Or we could create incentives for companies to change their designs to reduce the pollution around elections. Could our smartphones be designed to keep us from constantly picking them up? Could social media sites be reshaped to slow people down, and require them consider or verify posts before hitting send? One suggestion: certifications for companies that agree to certain standards that encourage more limited, healthier media usage.

Somehow, and soon, we need new ideas that raise the costs of

deluging us with the past—if the present and the future are ever again to have a fighting chance.

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

---

## **Opinion: California counties need governance reform**

**By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee**



Dan Walters

State Sen. Bob Hertzberg puts it succinctly, albeit accurately: “58 counties in California are accidents of history.”

Hertzberg, a Los Angeles Democrat, uttered his comment last month during a pithy, if sparsely attended, legislative hearing into the shortcomings of county governments.

As California’s population expanded in the late 19th century, it was divided, and redivided into 58 counties, then the state’s fundamental local governments.

**Read the whole story**

---

# Opinion: Remembering the man with the photographic memory

By Jane Ann Morrison, Las Vegas Review-Journal

If you had a photographic memory, how would you use it?

Robert Griffin could have used his relatively rare skill to count cards in Nevada casinos. Instead, he used it to identify card counters and stop cheaters.

Beverly Griffin, his former wife and his partner in Griffin Investigations, told how Bob Griffin's abilities pinpointed card counters and identified cheaters as far back as 1967, when he began his business with her, a venture she still runs.

Griffin died Oct. 9 at age 88, but his passing received scant attention. His fourth wife didn't do an obituary. But Beverly, his third wife, reached out to me, thinking he deserved attention as a trailblazer in Las Vegas' gaming reaching back to the Howard Hughes era.

Griffin Investigations' most notable investigation was helping identify a team of young and mostly Asian card counters from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that took casinos for millions in the 1980s.

**Read the whole story**

---



# Letter: Getting on board with reality of development

To the community,

Wow, what a doozy of a letter in the *Sierra Sun* from **Thomas Greg Traxler** on Nov. 3, "Unless Lake Tahoe builds a wall, redevelopment is reality."

In it, Traxler starts with the false premise that all new development is "re-development." Martis Valley West (760 units plus 6.6 acres commercial) on lands zoned conservation on our forested ridge is not redevelopment.

Traxler thinks we need to "get on board." Really? Tahoe's only choice to save our environment is to build a wall? Tahoe residents had better get on board or get out of the way because 6,000 units are either currently approved or in the Tahoe-Truckee pipeline. I guess this logic comes under the heading of: The beatings will continue until morale improves.

Traxler is entitled to his opinion. He is a Realtor selling shared ownerships, etc., at the formerly bankrupt East-West Partner's projects at Northstar and Old Greenwood. East-West has morphed into Mountainside Partners, the developer behind Martis Valley West. The project will throw another 1,900 new residents onto the already clogged Highway 267 corridor.

Traxler's specious rationalizations, if accepted by residents and government, will inevitably result in the destruction of our dark night skies, foul lake clarity, cause traffic gridlock, and make it difficult if not impossible for Basin residents to make it out in case of wildfire.

We don't have to "get on board" with overdevelopment. This isn't the lawless Old West. The public has a say through a number of channels to protect the environment and public

safety. Unfortunately in the case of Martis Valley West, all but one member of the Placer County Board of Supervisors ignored their own Planning Commission, their Environmental Report, the California attorney general, five conservation groups and hundreds of citizens.

It's a terrible loss for Lake Tahoe.

**Ann Nichols, North Tahoe Preservation Alliance**

---

## **Opinion: College rankings miss the point of university**

**By Kim A. Wilcox**

In the next several weeks, millions of high school seniors will apply to colleges and universities across the nation. If you are one of them—and if you come from a low-income family or are a minority student—I urge you not to look at higher education rankings systems that emphasize reputation, acceptance rates, and alumni giving.

Instead, keep your eye on rankings that rely upon a different set of numbers: Namely, graduation and retention rates. That's because the current trends in enrolling and graduating low-income and minority students threaten social justice in higher education.

American Council on Education statistics show that college enrollment among low-income students has fallen to 46 percent, 20 percent below the national average. While African American and Latino enrollment is rising somewhat, there are troubling gaps in outcomes for these students.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, among students enrolled in four-year institutions only 41 percent of African American students and 53 percent of Latino students ultimately attain bachelor's degrees. That's compared to at least 70 percent of Asian counterparts, and 63 percent of Caucasians.

To see these contrasts in detail, just take a look at the chart accompanying this text. It's based on data from the U.S. Department of Education, the Education Trust, and UC Riverside, where I'm chancellor.

While some institutions focus on efforts to ensure low-income and minority students en masse get their degrees and move into rewarding careers, they're probably not listed among the private colleges and universities that dominate the top 10 lists in the U.S. News & World Report, Wall Street Journal, or Forbes rankings. The nation's public higher education institutions, less frequently cited at the top of these rankings, enroll more than 70 percent of all four-year college students—including a preponderance of low-income and minority students.

So applicants and their parents should look to other higher education resources to gauge more relevant measures. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard allows you to compare tuition and living costs, graduation rates, and income after graduation.

Furthermore, there are important questions students should ask about any school they're considering:

- What is the diversity picture? Will you be 1 in 100 on your campus, or 1 in 5? Statistics show having a critical mass of diversity in the student population makes a difference. If you have a group of people like you on campus, you are more likely to succeed.

- Does the institution offer first-year programs such as learning communities, which help create small cohorts of

freshmen studying particular courses? Experience has shown that these programs help students keep up with studies and get off to a good start toward graduation. At larger institutions, learning communities can help keep the collegiate experience from being overwhelming for freshmen. Thanks to learning communities, we've been able to recently increase our freshmen retention rates at UC Riverside by more than 6 percent, with particular success among women, Hispanic, Asian-American, first-generation, and low-income students.

· Low-income and minority students should always ask about these types of programs and support systems: When it comes to enrolling, retaining, and graduating students, these are the efforts that make the difference.

Investment in a college degree transforms society, and improves an individual's chances of getting ahead. University of California research shows that, within five years of graduation, UC students who qualified for federal Pell Grant aid have an annual income of approximately \$50,000—more than double the combined salaries of their parents.

So start your college search not with a default to high-profile rankings systems, but with an earnest look at the measures that will guarantee your success in college and beyond.

**Kim A. Wilcox is chancellor of UC Riverside.**

---

**Letter: TDFPD board members**

# say thanks

To the community,

We would like to thank the entire community for the trust you've placed in us to help guide the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District. Our new chief, Scott Baker, and his entire team are phenomenal community assets and it's our honor to support them.

Our district is fiscally sound, our staff is well trained and equipped, and the members of this organization serve our residents and guests competently and with pride daily. There are some difficult challenges in front of us, however, including addressing areas of our community which have no firefighting water supply and assessing and managing the impacts of the redevelopment area on future funding.

We always welcome your suggestions, questions, and attendance at our board meetings. Again, thank you for your support – especially if we missed you while we were giving out Ann's fresh-baked cookies as a thank you on Friday. We are committed to representing you well.

**Ann Grant, Larry Schussel and Greg Felton, TDFPD board**

---

**Opinion: Ski industry leaders support climate change deniers**

By Porter Fox, Powder

The future of skiing can be summed up like this: The planet is warming; snow melts when it is warm. And state and federal climate change legislation—that keeps billions of tons of carbon in the ground instead of up in the air—is the best, perhaps only, way to save snow.

So it is surprising that in 2016, ski resorts, trade groups, and industry leaders—who work in one of the most susceptible regions to warming in the world—are actively supporting Congressional candidates responsible for blocking climate change legislation.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, “Vail Resorts PAC” sent thousands of dollars to the campaigns of stalwart climate change deniers Reps. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., Chris Stewart, R-Utah,, Rob Bishop, R-Utah, Scott Tipton, R-Colo., and Tom McClintock (R-Calif.). Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz donated \$10,000 to the PAC in 2015 and 2016. Former CEO John Redmond, Executive Vice President David T. Shapiro, and several other high level executives donated as well. Vail Resorts owns Whistler-Blackcomb, Breckenridge, Keystone, Heavenly, Northstar, Kirkwood, and Park City, among many other properties around the globe.

**[Read the whole story](#)**

---

## **Opinion: What atheists and monks have in common**

**By Jeffrey Guhin**

It's hard for me to think of a philosopher more important for my work than Charles Taylor. I'm a sociologist, and while most people don't think of sociology as an especially philosophical discipline, if you dig a little beneath the surface, philosophy is actually all you'll find. That's not just true for sociologists either: It's true for anyone who makes arguments about people, which is to say, everyone who's ever been able to talk.

For example: Let's say someone thinks her boss is a suck-up to her supervisor and not especially helpful to those she supervises. The employee describes the boss as a "kiss up, kick down" kind of manager. This statement is full of implicit philosophy: Assumptions about how we ought to relate to those above and below us in status, expectations about workplace behavior, as well as models of what a good person is and how this particular manager doesn't live up to it. Social life contains philosophical assumptions about what it means to be a good person and what the good life entails, and we are always tapping into those deep connections even when we don't realize it. Charles Taylor calls these underlying assumptions our "social imaginaries." This concept is key to my work.

I study religion and schools. My first book, which is forthcoming, is an analysis of the year and a half I spent observing four high schools in the New York City area: Two Sunni Muslim and two Evangelical Christian. My second book project looks at how school reform and old-fashioned American individualism shape how public schools think about "success." I spent time observing six public high schools across the country, two each in San Diego, New York City, and Charlotte, N.C.

Taylor's work helps me make the case that my two books are not as different as they appear. Both public schools and religious schools talk about what it means to be a good person, what it means to be a success, and what it means to be responsible to someone other than yourself. While secular and religious

visions of the good person might vary, Taylor's way of analyzing them based on their underlying philosophical assumptions (social imaginaries) helps me to explore how they're ultimately united by the kinds of questions they ask. Everyone wants to know what it means to be a good person, and most people have a pretty good sense of who such a person might be, rooting their answer in a narrative about a community of people. That community could be the global network of Muslims, or North American conservative Christians, or liberal secularists committed to the necessity of reason. The content changes, but the form's the same.

Part of the reason I study schools and religion is because comparing religious and secular organizations can help us get a better sense of how moral life works. Why are certain issues extremely important to communities while others are ignored? How do morals work at both an individual and community level? I'm also interested in the similarities between religious and secular communities, which are greater than you might expect.

As part of a longer definition of the "social imaginary" in his book "A Secular Age", Taylor explains: "The social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and widely shared sense of legitimacy."

"Understanding" in this sense doesn't have to be conscious. If I say that someone is a "man" to you, you'll probably imagine him in shoes, a shirt, and pants. At another time in history you'd have imagined a hat or a beard. These are "understandings" that are rarely articulated and usually aren't even conscious, and they relate to "practices" (wearing a hat, wearing shoes) that are not actually necessary in any sort of biological or physical sense.

Yet these social imaginaries can relate to much more than just what we wear. In "A Secular Age", Taylor relates how it became possible to imagine (or conceive of) a world without God, and for such an imagining to coexist alongside those who continue



to imagine a God-filled world.

Taylor is a devout Catholic, so when he talks about religions imaginaries, he is certainly not claiming that God is "imaginary" in the sense of not real. He is shifting the focus of the question from "Does God exist?" to "How do people think about (that is, imagine) God?" That shift allows him to show how certain ways of imagining allow for certain ways of acting and relating to each other. What makes Taylor's work exciting is that he has shown how changing the way we imagine can change the way we live.

I use the idea of a social imaginary to challenge the commonly perceived chasm between religious and secular thought. In fact, they have a lot in common. Taylor has written about the historical relationships between things we now think of as utterly separate: Science and religion, church and state, the religious and the secular. Believing in the scientific method is obviously not the same thing as believing in God, but insisting on the primacy of a social thing called "science" is as much a product of a social imaginary as insisting on the primacy of a social thing called "church." Of course, a rock will still fall whether or not there is a human to describe it. However, in that world without humans, the force pulling a rock to earth will not be called gravity; neither will it interact with social imaginaries called physics, measurement, and the scientific method. All that stuff exists because humans imagined it. More important, humans imagined a moral impetus behind science and from that we got certainties: Truth is better than falsehood, scientific curiosity is good for everyone, and innovation trumps tradition.

And this is where Taylor's argument helps me unpack modern secularism. Secularist scientists like Richard Dawkins present the new atheist as courageous, committed to truth, and eager to liberate others from error. Taylor shows that the secular social world is just as "imagined" as any religious person's: There is a vision of a good person and a good life that is by

no means self-evidently true, and both are maintained by their communities. A new atheist's dogged pursuit of truth is just as much a "social imaginary" as a celibate monk's quiet pursuit of holiness. Taylor describes the new atheist attack on religion as a "subtraction story"—the assumption that if you just take away all the religious superstition, you'll somehow get down to the really real human existence. But, Taylor shows, all human existence is imagined. If you subtract imagination, all we are is bones.

But Taylor doesn't just challenge secularists, he also challenges the faithful, who, he says, are almost certainly secular in the West. By secular, he doesn't mean not-believing: He just means that they recognize how it's possible another might not believe. That possibility comes from centuries of changes in how Europeans thought about themselves and their relation to the universe, gradually making it easier to believe it's the individual in this world, rather than the God in another, who's at the center of it all.

When I'm talking about my work with my secular friends, they sometimes ask me why many Evangelicals deny macro-evolution, or why certain Muslims separate genders and wear the hijab. Taylor's analysis has helped to give me a philosophical language to articulate how Evangelical and Muslim moral imaginaries are not all that different from those of secular people.

Imagine an atheist with an impressive commitment to physical fitness who comes from a community of fitness freaks (perhaps in Southern California). This person feels that physical fitness matters in a profound way. But that's not more obviously true than the idea that a woman has to cover her hair because it matters in showing her religious devotion. The same logic is in play when some Evangelicals deny evolution. Rather than thinking of scientific denial as a specifically religious problem, it's a much more human story of what scholars call motivated reasoning, which can affect secular

people as easily as religious ones. That realization makes bigger problems with scientific denial—things like climate change and vaccines—much easier to deal with. Despite new atheist claims, science is not an all-or-nothing deal. If it's a human problem and not a religious one, then if you can show creationists why it doesn't go against their religion to accept climate change, it's entirely possible to convince them to accept one part of science without convincing them to accept all of it.

And that's really what speaks to me in Taylor's work: He helps me to show that my work on religious people is much more about people than it is about religion. And that's something both the religious and the not-religious ought to hear.

---

## **Letter: Thanks and clarification from candidate**

**To the community,**

With the election over, I am writing to congratulate the new LTUSD board members, to respond to some of the claims Derek Allister made public in the final days of the election, and to reaffirm my commitment to volunteer my time and talents to this school district into the future.



Annie Davidson

First, congratulations to my opponent and neighbor, Larry Reilly. Matt and I know from experience how much time and devotion he and his wife, Michelle, have given school districts on both sides of the state line. I congratulate Bonnie Turnbull and Troy Matthews as new members, honor Mike Doyle and Larry Green for their many years of committed service, and fully support the new board and district leadership going forward.

Second, to Derek Allister, I respond for the record.

· The issue of a conflict of interest is not personal, as you have suggested; it is a legal one. Since Larry's spouse, Michelle, earns a paycheck from the school district, Larry is required by law to recuse himself from any board discussions that affect salaries and benefits if their household income could be impacted. It remains to be seen how much this conflict will affect board activities. However, with approximately 80 percent of the school district budget going to salaries and benefits annually, this is a serious consideration. Having been raised in a family of teachers and being former classroom teacher and association member, this issue gets my attention with regard to representing teachers' interests.

· You suggested that because I have children in one school in the district, I would not be fair in my decision making, favoring one school over another. Does this argument hold for the many other past and current board members with children in schools, too? Because my nephew is in the middle school, does your argument hold? If you are questioning my character or fair mindedness, I hope you would check with those who know me around town and my references. I will let my record and reputation demonstrate that I am committed to all children in our community (and state and nation, for that matter).

. I am proud to bring my professional experiences to benefit this district, including what I have learned about standardized testing. I was a classroom teacher in elementary school in 2001, deeply troubled when No Child Left Behind brought on the heavy requirement of standardized testing. I began studying the issues, went graduate school to study statistics and education policy to empower myself in the face of federal laws. I then worked for McGraw-Hill's CTB where I learned how tests are made, managed, and reported. However, because I wanted to be in public service, I left CTB (which has since shut down because this industry is in such shambles) to take a job at the Department of Education in Nevada to make a difference for schools, teachers, and students while troubling teacher accountability pressure was coming on strong with Race to the Top. Child bearing and making a living have affected my career, but in all my experiences, I have argued for fairness and equity, healthy systems, and support to teachers and students. I believe our federal education laws are flawed, that there is way too much testing, and that we need to work for change in the next rewrite of ESEA.

Finally, to the LTUSD board, district leadership and staff, parents and students:

I promise my continued support for all programs and efforts in our schools. I gladly volunteer any of my time or talent that could benefit our children going forward, whether coaching or classroom volunteering, explaining how tests work or what the data mean (or don't mean), helping to evaluate assessments or curriculum, serving on committees or boards – or tying a child's shoes.

Thank you to the hundreds of people who voted for me, for the hundreds more who supported my campaign who could not vote for me, and for the opportunity to share who I am this election season. I am grateful to be part of this engaged community and look forward to other ways to serve it.

Respectfully,

**Annie Davidson, South Lake Tahoe**