

Opinion: Reasons to vote no on Prop. 63

By Joe Harn and Nathan Black

California voters will be faced with an unprecedented variety of issues, including several lengthy propositions, on Nov. 8. Many of the wordy and complex propositions will leave you scratching your head about what to do. There is, however, an easy answer for dealing with at least one of them, Proposition 63, and that is to vote no.

Proposition 63 has a deceptive name, the "Safety for All Act", but do not be fooled. It will add another significant bill for taxpayers at the state and local levels. The expensive new program won't give the public any benefit, according to the experts. Not a single law enforcement group supports Proposition 63, while numerous oppose it, including the California Police Chiefs Association and the California State Sheriffs Association.

Proposition 63 is not a simple gun control measure merely asking whether there should be background checks on ammunition purchasers. It is 34 pages of complex legalese that requires, among other things, the creation of new court processes and duties for local law enforcement. This means more work for district attorneys, public defenders, court staff, probation officers, and police and sheriffs, all of whom already are overworked and have stressed budgets.

The price tag for these new duties under Proposition 63, according to the non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office, is estimated to be somewhere in the tens of millions of dollars annually, year-after-year. And, Proposition 63 provides no mechanism for most of these costs to be recouped.

So who pays for all this additional work? Your county

government will shoulder a good portion, if not most, of it. The result could be budget cuts and shifting focus away from vital resources, including health services and family services, in order to pay for these costly new programs. This is because these costs would be mandatory under Proposition 63. Counties will not have the option to cut spending on its provisions. They will have to find the money from existing funds.

Proposition 63 is simply not good fiscal policy. The irony is that the California State Sheriffs Association has warned that Proposition 63's diversion of funds from critical law enforcement needs could actually make the public less safe. Prop. 63, therefore, is a dangerous bureaucratic mandate on already over-burdened local governments.

Regardless of your view on guns, listen to the many law enforcement officials and fiscally responsible Californians who are urging you to vote no on Proposition 63.

Joe Harn is a CPA and the El Dorado County auditor-controller. Nathan Black is a CPA and the Sutter County auditor-controller.

Letter: Candidate explains connection to PAC

To the community,

There is a rumor that I am running as a "slate" with another candidate. I respect each and every candidate for their

willingness to take on this difficult task. However, I am not aligned with any particular candidate. I am running independently based upon my own experience, record, and skills.



Brooke Laine

Some have suggested I am in the pocket of the “Nevada-based chamber.” I am not. Yes, I have been endorsed by the “Nevada-based chamber” as has another candidate. I did seek their endorsement because our community doesn’t end at the state line. We need to work cooperatively to bring our different interests to the conversation in search of common ground that helps us all.

There has been a heavily financed campaign linking me to another candidate and opposing a specific candidate. In no way have I been involved with either activity. I am running independent of any other candidate or entity.

An independent political action committee (PAC) is running the ads in question. I am not involved with this PAC. In fact, it would be a violation to even have any contact or coordination with this committee. I do not know who the participants or donors are. This local PAC is required to operate independent of any candidate’s campaign.

Brooke Laine, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Calif.-based chamber fires back

To the community,

Jason [Drew], this is one chamber president to another. My qualifications are 30 years as a board member, past president, accredited chamber exec ACE, past president of the 100 member Superior California Chamber Execs, graduate of the U.S. Chamber five-year institute for organization management, twice nominated for top chamber exec in the Western U.S. by the Western Association of Chamber Execs.



Duane Wallace

I point this out not for bragging, but to show that I know what I'm talking about. In 2000 the idea of chambers taking positions on ballot measures was discussed by the state leadership. The idea of endorsing candidates was strongly cautioned against.

After the merger-takeover in 2006 your chamber became very aggressive toward the California chamber and city politics. We actually received a letter promising to sue us if we didn't keep having opinions different than your chamber – see First Amendment – yet we didn't attack you. The actual number of the paid up members was 1,600. That was the number we based the

merger upon. Now the number being touted is 600. Why? It could be the arrogant aggressive style adopted.

Who is attacking who? Did California raise tens of thousands of dollars to influence Nevada elections? Did Californians sue Nevadans over ballot measures? Did Facebook take down our Facebook site because it violated the bullying and hate speech policy?

My hope is that you hire a new exec that understands how to work in a small town.

As for California numbers, yes you are 70 percent California, but your PAC shows 70 percent Nevada resident money.

Jason, we locals, built this town while you were in college. We supported and agreed to pay for all the redevelopment. We agreed to half a million dollars transferred in property taxes from LTUSD and STPUD customers to pay the longterm debts. We, too, blindly followed the proponents who had bankruptcies and left us with black holes. We are cautious now. Not idiots or against progress, just experienced. The reason is that we see the same Nevada names on the 44-page 460 form that made us experienced.

I hope to meet with you this year to work on sharing our thoughts. In the mean time raising Nevada funds for slates to attack California candidates will be opposed.

Duane Wallace, South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce president

Opinion: Digging deep into

Prop. 53

By Joe Mathews

One lesson of this California election is already clear: Don't dismiss apocalyptic warnings from Stockton.

If you have a television, you're encountering a barrage of ill-advised Stockton dismissals. Gov. Jerry Brown, labor unions and Sacramento infrastructure lobbies are trying to defeat a November ballot initiative—Proposition 53, which would require voter approval for state revenue bonds of \$2 billion—by marginalizing it as the flawed idea of a rich, selfish Stockton farmer.



Joe Mathews

This messaging turns out to be doubly wrong, as I learned on a recent visit to Stockton.

For one thing, “Stockton farmer” badly underestimates the man in question, Dino Cortopassi, a formidable businessman with a taste for taking on difficult fights. For another, the political message trivializes the real trauma in the city of 300,000 as it struggles through the aftermath of municipal bankruptcy.

Cortopassi grew up on Stockton's eastside and has spent his life in the area, despite amassing a multimillion-dollar fortune that would allow him to move anywhere he desired. He's also all too familiar with debt. He started as a tenant

farmer, borrowing heavily to buy equipment and to farm as much land as he could, and then plowing the profits into expansion.

“I was in debt a long part of my life,” he told me. “Debt never goes away. So when you borrow, don’t forget you have to pay it back.”

Cortopassi, 79, got ahead by specializing in “headache” crops—like tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers and onions—which require more labor and attention and carry greater risk. While he identifies himself as a farmer, much of his business was in food processing. He was an early adopter of new technologies, a talented marketer, and a savvy investor (notably in Dreyer’s ice cream). His combativeness also distinguished him: he waged big fights against larger food companies and powerful unions.

In recent years, Cortopassi watched, with fury, as his hometown fell into bankruptcy. The Stockton story is a convoluted tale of a city accumulating all sorts of debts, without recognizing the risks.

First, the housing market collapse crushed overextended Stockton homeowners and the city budget. The city had little cushion because it had borrowed aggressively to pay for public buildings, an arena, and downtown improvements. The final straw was a bond Stockton sold in 2007, just before the financial crisis, to cover employee pensions. As a result, basic services were cut, including policing in one of the country’s most violent cities.

Cortopassi says he is frustrated by how, despite the fiscal carnage, public borrowing has continued apace. So he started issuing warnings—in interviews, in a pamphlet called “Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire!”, and in newspaper ads—about “the Sacramento gang” that keeps adding to the “Debt Dragon.”

Cortopassi can be bombastic. During our half-day together, Cortopassi yelled at me when I argued with him about the numbers he uses on state debt. But, beyond the bluster, I

found him to be quite thoughtful.

Prop. 53 reflects Cortopassi's strategic impulses. It might seem like a broadside against one mode of borrowing—a requirement for voter approval for state revenue bonds that have a clear source of funds to pay them back (like tolls for a bridge). But the initiative is actually a political document full of exemptions for local governments, and with a requirement so high—only bonds of \$2 billion or more would require voter approval—that it would only prove an obstacle to two current projects: high-speed rail and the proposed Delta water tunnels. Those projects face so much opposition both may die whether Prop. 53 passes or not.

Cortopassi has business interests in the Delta, so the no on 53 campaign has argued that he's acting to serve himself. Cortopassi acknowledges his fervent opposition to the tunnels, but says his Delta interests amount to less than 5 percent of his empire.

When pressed, Cortopassi said that Prop. 53, like any ballot initiative, can't do everything. His goal for the measure is to win a victory at the polls that forces a further reckoning with debt.

Whatever you think of Prop. 53 (and I remain skeptical), Cortopassi's larger point is inarguable: California governments have taken on too many different forms of debt without facing up to the consequences.

In his writings, Cortopassi shows how debt already cuts into vital public services. He writes about how the state's prison realignment has created financial burdens for cities; about how water bonds are often corrupt efforts to secure money for the favored projects of the measures' sponsors; about the \$60 billion-plus in deferred maintenance on state roads; and especially about the billions in unfunded pension liabilities.

"We act like we don't have to pay debt back," he says.

If you're from Stockton, you know better.

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

Letter: Unraveling loop road truths

To the community,

According to Tahoe Transportation District at the presentation to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, "While the project and its alternatives focus on directing traffic flow around the casino corridor and creating a more walkable and bikeable downtown area, the creation of affordable housing is at the heart of the project," said [Carl] Hasty, [TTD's leader].



Kenny
Curtzwiler

Mr. [Carl] Ribaud, this kind of throws your reasoning for the loop road under the bus. The only reason they are doing anything with affordable housing is because of the naysayers and opponents to the loop road bringing it up as an inclusion to the project. The opponents know a loop road is going to go through regardless of what we or you say, as Mr. Hasty has

pointed out numerous times in stating, "This is not a city project, but federal project." The opponents are the real heros [stet] in this drama as the proponents were willing to let the TTD walk in and do the project like lemmings off a cliff. We were not and, if anything, most of us are on the same sheet of music with concerns to moving the town forward. The people that are always left out of the loop of what goes on in this town, the community members who actually live here, want to get involved with what goes on in our town and we cannot always rely on our elected officials to not be those lemmings.

We all know the town needs to move forward, but the loop road as it stood in the beginning was not the answer for the community; so against all odds with the proponents and outside interests, they got involved and changed the focus of the loop road away from traffic flow solution to an affordable housing solution that benefits the community as a whole and not just a small section of town. We should be thanking them for what they did and thanking the TTD for bringing this loop road to the table that allowed us to participate in the future of our town and residents.

Kenny Curtzwiler, Meyers

Letter: Questioning chamber's influence on election

To the community,

On Oct. 30, the election committee for the Nevada-based chamber of commerce filed its official report with the city for expenditures for the upcoming City Council election. That

filing reported over \$30,000 spend on behalf of the two candidates they are supporting. \$30,000 is a lot of money and this is in addition to funds contributed directly to the two candidates.

These funds paid for several mailings and large newspaper ads run in the local newspaper. One has to wonder what they want so badly that they are willing to spend this much money to get it?

The same newspaper that has expected thousands of dollars in advertising from the chamber has refused to run any ads from the opponents of the chambers chosen two. On Nov. 28, they accepted full payment from a supporter of one of those candidates to run an ad that was intended to expose the efforts of the chamber to get their choices elected. They refused to print it.

I am not a conspiracy advocate, but the public should know that the funds came from Nevada interest, the interest supporting the person that sued the citizens of South Lake Tahoe to stop them from voting on the loop road issue.

Masha Long, South Lake Tahoe (yes, my dad is running for City Council)

Letter: Leadership qualities key in who to support

To the community,

As we collectively hold our breath to see who will lead our nation, our city, our public school system and our local

utility district, it is a great time to define leadership.

I learned about leadership while serving on many boards over the last 40 years, starting with Tahoe Parents Nursery School, graduating to school site councils and youth sports boards, then on to community boards, at the county and local level. I have observed many great leaders and learned what leadership is and is not.



Wendy David

I have learned that leadership is not the loudest voice, or the most frequent voice. It is not harsh, unkind, self-centered or presumptuous. It does not bully or belittle others to make oneself feel superior. It is not closed minded and disrespectful of others for their differences. It is not petty and small minded.

Yet we are seeing candidates, even at highest level of government exhibit these very traits. As voters, we have not only the opportunity but, more importantly, a responsibility to vote for true leaders. Especially at the local level, we know that whom we select to put in our elected positions will make a difference.

When choosing whom to vote, please consider what leadership skills that person can bring to their position. For the school district, consider Annie Davidson. She has demonstrated to me some great leadership skills, and she also has children that will be going through our district for many years. She has a real stake in the future of public education in our community. I respect each of the candidates running, but believe we need

to have at least one board member that has children currently in the district. Annie is that person.

For City Council, please consider Brooke Laine and Jason Collin. Brooke is a tireless community advocate and has proven to be a collaborative, strong, positive leader. She leads by bringing out the best in each person she works with, honoring their input, their ideas and their abilities. I look forward to working with her on the council. Jason has demonstrated his leadership abilities through his work, his history already as a positive community leader and by being an independent risk taker for what he believes. I honor that in him.

For STPUD, I am supporting Kirk David. Besides being a terrific son, he is smart and thoughtful, he is wise and reasoned in his decision-making ability. He will bring a fresh voice and the outlook of someone who cares about the future of our community. As a small business owner, and a long-time local who has raised his family here, he cares as deeply as I do.

Leading by life example is the best quality that each of these candidates will bring for our community and each of these candidates has demonstrated these qualities through their commitment to family, jobs, volunteering in their community and always demonstrating their care for others first. Their examples of leadership will shape our city and our community for years to come.

Wendy David, South Lake Tahoe mayor

Opinion: Thankful to live in an indirect democracy

By Andrés Martínez

Suppose we ask all Americans to vote on whether anyone whose first name starts with the letter “A” should to pay an extra tax, giving everyone else a tax break. The appalling measure would probably pass.

From the perspective of us A-listers (sorry, couldn’t resist), that would amount to a classic case of the kind of “tyranny of the majority” our Founding Fathers were so eager to avoid, illustrating why certain filters, or brakes, on direct democracy are desirable. The idea was that people shouldn’t legislate themselves, but instead leave that up to their representatives.

And even if the people’s representatives get carried away, our political system has other checks and balances to insulate it from too much democracy: Congress itself is split into two bodies; unelected judges protect the Constitution from lawmakers; our nation’s monetary policy is set by an “independent” (undemocratic, that is) Federal Reserve Board. We’ve also developed a stable of technocratic agencies like the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Communications Commission to govern areas of American life at a dotted-line remove from the democratic process.

All these checks on democracy, together, constitute the genius of American democracy. We pride ourselves on our freedom to do as we damned please, but at the same time we’ve locked away all the chocolate and given the key to a friend, and warned him not to listen to us if we call to ask for it urgently late some night. Of course we then complain about how the system doesn’t work, about how we can’t binge on chocolate whenever

we want.

Such complaints are the fuel of the term “populism.” The word wasn’t current in the era of the Founders, and it remains vaguely defined in ours, but it’s precisely what our republic’s designers were intent on protecting against: The danger that over-indulging majority passions could overwhelm and subvert the system at any given moment.

This is the election year of mad-as-hell-and-not-going-to-take-it-anymore populism (to cite the Howard Beale character from the classic “Network” movie), with Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump railing against how bankers, Washington, the Federal Reserve, foreigners, and conspiring elites are holding back “the people.” Those are familiar rants, yet, there is something novel about the threat posed by today’s populism: The real threat nowadays is a potential tyranny of an agitated minority, more so than a potential tyranny of the majority.

The two dangers are easy to confuse because agitated minorities can look very much like a majority now that they can mobilize via once unimaginable communications technology and dominate wall-to-wall cable TV news coverage. Who knows how far William Jennings Bryan or Eugene V. Debs would have gotten with a Twitter following, a YouTube channel, and the ability to call into CNN?

Let’s tweak our imagined tax referendum to illustrate what a tyranny of the minority looks like. Suppose that instead of asking Americans whether people whose first name starts with an A should pay more taxes, we ask them to vote on whether A-listers should be exempted from ever again having to pay any taxes.

This measure, if uncoupled from any other balloting in a low-turnout vote, might conceivably pass. Why? Because we A-listers would turn out to vote in droves, and most everyone else would have little incentive to vote, or to speak out

against the measure.

It's an extreme hypothetical, but too much of American political life has become vulnerable to hijacking by intensely motivated and agitated minorities. It's why teachers unions can control school board elections, why the gun lobby can punch above its weight in Washington, and why we haven't fixed our broken immigration system.

The danger of not appreciating the threat posed by an extremely motivated minority, as opposed to an untrammelled majority, is that our society is enabling the former threat with its overzealous vigilance against the latter. So, for instance, while a bicameral Congress and the separation of powers that allots the executive a veto and the courts judicial review are good brakes on majority rule, the Senate's filibuster rules and the so-called "Hastert Rule" observed by House Republicans go too far in empowering agitating minorities.

The Senate's longtime filibuster rules were infamous in delaying the adoption of needed civil rights in the 20th century, long after a majority of Americans were ready to go along. This was a case of an aggrieved minority—white Southern Democrats—subverting the will of the majority to protect said minority.

The Hastert Rule in the House is a more recent, and less formalized, tradition in the House of Representatives that has similarly served to block immigration reform favored by a majority of Americans, and by a majority of their representatives in Congress. The policy, enunciated by Dennis Hastert when he was the Republican Speaker of the House (long before he was revealed to be a child molester), and loosely followed by some predecessors and successors, is that proposed legislation should not be brought for a vote on the floor of the House unless it is supported by a majority of the party's own caucus.

As speaker in recent years, John Boehner set aside the rule at key times to allow for bipartisan votes to keep the government open when some far-right Republicans were threatening to close it down, and that's one reason Boehner is no longer in office. But he did not allow the House to vote on a sensible immigration reform bill passed by the Senate in 2013, which would have legalized the status of the millions of undocumented workers in this country. The bill could have passed in the House with the support of Democrats and more moderate Republicans (as it did in the Senate), but the Hastert Rule stood in the way.

The Founding Fathers intended for both chambers of the Congress, as well as the president and the judiciary, to all wrestle with thorny issues like immigration—balancing the will of the people with the Constitution. It's a perversion of their design for one faction within the House to hijack the process, and allow for an agitated minority of anti-immigration nativists to become the arbiters of what constitutes a proposal worth voting on.

Immigration and international trade feature prominently in this election cycle's populist discourse, but it's inaccurate to portray these issues, as the media often does, as pitting elites against "the people." Opinion polls consistently show that a majority of Americans view trade in a positive light and favor immigration reform along the lines of what the Senate passed three years ago (as opposed to mass deportations and a wall). It's easy to lose track of that reality, though, given the asymmetry of passion and interest between supporters and opponents of immigration and free trade.

Richard Nixon's odes to the concept of a "silent majority," whose support he cherished, were often mocked by pundits in his day but it's a concept worth revisiting. Today there is a silent majority that thinks it'd be insane to deport millions of hard-working, law-abiding immigrant workers. But, like many other insane ideas out there, this one isn't going to keep

most people from going about their daily business. It's the supporters of the insanity who likely consider immigration the issue of our times, and can be found screaming at rallies and pestering their members of Congress, threatening to have them "primaried" if they work with Democrats on the issue.

The dangers posed by agitated minorities are not merely an American phenomenon. They are wreaking greater havoc in other western democracies, like Colombia and Britain, that have ill-advisedly put big questions to a public vote in 2016. Elites in London and Bogotá were seeking additional legitimacy for their decisions to stay in the European Union and reach a final peace settlement with a vanquished narco-insurgency by engaging their silent majorities in the process. In the end, sizable impassioned minorities prevailed.

Trump's populist campaign narrative of elites pitted against "the people" is off. Today's politics is pitting elites and a silent (or quieter) majority against a loud, angry, mobilized faction of people susceptible to a populist pitch. The question on Nov. 8 is whether the silent majority makes itself heard, or whether it will cede the electoral battleground to the more clamorous minority.

Andrés Martínez is the executive editor of Zócalo Public Square.

Letter: Vogelgesang deserves another term

To the community,

I am endorsing Randy Vogelgesang for re-election to the STPUD

board. Randy is a long time local, having lived in the South Lake Tahoe community for 30 years raising a family with his wife, Cathy, and running a successful engineering firm as a small business owner.

During the 20 years that I have known Randy and his family, I appreciate the honesty and integrity he has always displayed both personally and professionally. Randy is truly invested in the community in which he lives, and brings not only his professional engineering experience to the board, but also the respect he has for his fellow community members and neighbors.

I admire the balanced approach he brings to decision making, and the fact that he was always mindful of the impact to ratepayers the board's decisions would have during his first term with STPUD. The fact that he successfully collaborates with other board members with differing opinions speaks to his strength as a team player, and his measured, fiscally conservative ideals are key to his responsible approach to rates and spending.

I hope you will join me in re-electing Randy Vogelgesang to the STPUD board on Nov. 8.

Sincerely,

Linda Mueller, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Divisiveness doesn't help our community

To the community,

An open letter to Mr. Bruce Grego:

Your **Nov. 2, 2016, letter** published by *Lake Tahoe News* was filled with misinformation and a clear attempt to mislead the community about the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber (Tahoe Chamber) and the current local political cycle. As chair of the board of directors, I am writing to call out your continued divisive tactics and clarify the facts.

First and foremost, there is no "Nevada-based" chamber in our community. You know this because we have repeatedly informed you and your cohorts that fully 70 percent of our more than 650 chamber members are California-based businesses. Our organization has offices in both California and Nevada and many of our events and programs, including the very successful Sample the Sierra, are held in California. Your continued use of the term "Nevada-based" chamber only seeks to divide our community rather than build our economy and support our local businesses.

Second, you know that the Tahoe Chamber has adopted a Tahoe Future 2020 Vision. This foundational document represents our members' vision for the South Shore. It sets forth our organization's commitment to economic vitality, quality of life, sustainability, infrastructure, and intellectual capital. Yet you consistently assail our motives for supporting these important community values and attack candidates who align with this vision.

Third, the Tahoe Chamber has a transparent endorsement process open to any interested candidates. Separately, Tahoe Chamber has a political action committee called the Tahoe Chamber Independent Expenditure Committee (IEC). This is a separate, lawfully registered organization created to support business friendly candidates who align with the Tahoe Future 2020 Vision. Despite these facts, you work overtime to characterize our process and motives as subversive. The reality is that Tahoe Chamber is proud to identify and endorse candidates with platforms that align with the Tahoe Future 2020 Vision. The Tahoe Chamber IEC is proud to support these candidates

through independent expenditures.

Mr. Grego, you present yourself as a community leader, but true leaders do not seek to divide a community. Your constant chorus of "Nevada vs. California" creates unnecessary animosity. It does not contribute to supporting our local businesses, the South Shore's quality of life, the betterment of our community, or the improvement of our political governance. I encourage you to take a more positive approach to community leadership. In an attempt to assist you in this transformation, I invite you to meet with our executive committee or our full board of directors so we can collectively engage in a more fact-based approach to supporting our local businesses and creating a robust South Shore economy.

Jason Drew, chair Tahoe Chamber board of directors