

Letter: LTCC helps at Bread & Broth

To the community,

“Lake Tahoe Community College (LTCC) is committed to serving our community and it was an honor to be able to be a part of Bread & Broth,” commented Michelle Sower, dean of instruction.

Sower was a sponsor crew member for the LTCC Advance Adult Education program at their Adopt A Day dinner on May 21. LTCC’s new Advance program is geared to provide free training for adults who are interested in improving their job skills and looking to advance in their careers, and is just an extension of the many ways the college is providing support to our local community members.

Joining Sower on the sponsor crew team were fellow LTCC members Steve Berry, director of enrollment services; Brad Deeds, dean of workforce development;

Shelly Hansen, director of human resources’ and Michelle Risdon, vice president of instruction. The LTCC crew members brought their professionalism and compassion while giving of their time to help to make the dinner a positive experience of sharing food and community.

“While it is so hard to see our neighbors in need, Bread & Broth is a wonderful resource,” said Michelle Risdon. “LTCC and Advance are proud to partner with B&B in our joint efforts to meet these needs.”

B&B is grateful to LTCC for their efforts in providing a dynamic educational environment and also for their concern for providing the basic needs to those who struggle with hunger.

Opinion: Kafka can't believe California housing

By Frank Kafka (as told to Joe Mathews)

I keep hearing you Californians calling your state's housing crisis Kafkaesque.

You are far too kind: I never imagined a nightmare this cruel, absurd, and surreal.



Joe Mathews

I don't know exactly how I got to California. But I appeared here some weeks ago, in the form of an insect, like my protagonist in "The Metamorphosis." And I'm glad I did. If I'd known weather like this in my lifetime, I might not have died of tuberculosis in Prague in 1924 at age 40.

In my prime, I was a master of conveying oppressive and intangible systems that trap humans. California, and its housing markets, do indeed fit that bill. But I couldn't have conceived of a wealthy and beautiful place of 40 million people that claims it is welcoming to the whole world, while refusing to house people.

You Californians talk a big game about how you support the environment. But by a surreal trick, the laws that supposedly protect the environment also make it so difficult to build housing—especially near your transit hubs—that housing is pushed to the periphery, where environmental costs are higher.

And while I am proud of my ability to create nightmares of labyrinthine illogic, I never managed to dream of anything so diabolical as your California Environmental Quality Act. One lawyer, Jennifer Hernandez, writes about CEQA with scary flair: “Imagine spending five years and \$5 million to defend against a lawsuit challenging a plan for where to put critically needed housing and related public services—and then to get sued again, and again, and again, and again, for trying to implement the plan ...”

That surpasses my most chilling passages!

Californians have forgotten just how fundamental housing is—not merely as shelter from life’s cruelties but as a space to think. As I once wrote, “It is not necessary that you leave the house. Remain at your table and listen ... The world will present itself to you for its unmasking, it can do no other, in ecstasy it will writhe at your feet.”

I portrayed the paradoxical isolation of an overcrowded city in “The Trial.” Your state is reminiscent of that, but at an overwhelming scale—of escalating homelessness and an estimated shortage of 2.5 million homes.

And oh, the terrible price you pay! I had some real health problems in my life—migraines, insomnia, constipation, boils, and clinical depression. But your housing crisis is making you sicker than I ever was.

Millions of you have moved far from your jobs to find affordable housing that suits your family, but now your commutes are ruining your health. I know about commuting—while

writing literature, I worked for insurance companies—but I couldn't imagine the traffic or the hyper-crowded BART cars you endure.

All these pressures can put households in, well, Kafkaesque predicaments. I know about families—my father was a tyrant. In my story "The Judgment" a father won't make any room in the world for his son, who jumps off a bridge.

But many younger Californians can't even have a child. So many of you delay marriage and child-rearing (in part because you can't afford a home) that your state's birth rate is at the lowest level ever recorded. And good luck educating kids while paying your giant mortgages. Your schools don't capture the full value of today's high housing values because you have constitutionally limited your property taxes.

Housing makes most of you prisoners in your own homes. Yes, I once described an apartment as a prison in my unfinished novel "Amerika." But by not building enough housing you've created such a run-up in prices that most of you couldn't afford the place where you're currently living if it came on the market.

Even worse, the ideas that your state officials propose (Mandatory solar! Affordable housing requirements! Rent control!) would only make housing more costly. When listening to your legislators, I thought of an old line of mine: "It's only because of their stupidity that they're able to be so sure of themselves."

If you don't address the crisis more forcefully, I fear you Californians will lose your taste for your sweet land, just as the salesman-turned-insect in "The Metamorphosis" loses his taste for his favorite foods: bread and milk.

I'd suggest that Californians read my posthumously published novel "The Castle," in which the protagonist K arrives in a village but can't get the permission to live there.

I never wrote the ending, but I planned to have the village grant him the right to have a home only when he was on his death bed.

California, do you really want an ending as Kafkaesque as that?

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

Letter: Not a fan of Curtzwiler's

To the community,

I'm glad that you are opposed publicly to Mr. [Kenny] Curtzwiler's attempt at supervisor. As I recall back to late October, or perhaps early November, he made a proposal that I contend was absurd. Curtzwiler said that to raise money to repair our city streets, we should assess an added tax against Heavenly Valley lift tickets. I was floored.

First, that wasn't going to solve the problem that was the City Council misdirecting money away from street repairs and into other areas. Second, Heavenly Valley, run by Vail Resorts, would surely sue the city and prevail. Mr. Curtzwiler is a reckless bum, that has no place in any public leadership role.

Right now we need people to step up and run for our City Council. Is there anybody out there ready to take on a leadership role to run our city? These people presently on our City Council are not willing to make the tough decisions and

lead our city. I know Mr. Curtzwiler is running for a countysupervisor seat. But I am most worried about the city of South Lake Tahoe right now.

Daniel Harvey, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Stop harassing VHR renters

Publisher's note: *This letter was originally sent to South Lake Tahoe enforcement, chief of police, City Council, and city manager, and then to Lake Tahoe News.*

Dear VHR Enforcement Team,

We are in receipt of a fourth "Advisory – Vacation Home Rental Complaint" since the city's wonderful and effective ordinance which brought South Lake Tahoe national publicity. All four of these complaints were unverified.



Jim Morris

We appreciate any efforts that the city performs in trying to minimize the potential fining of our tenants, but if they cannot verify the complaints of the Nazi-neighbors, we prefer that you have no contact with our clients as the city has done enough damage to our industry that we have been building up

for over 35 years. If there is no substantiation of the complaint, please remove yourselves from the area and do not disturb our guests.

If you want to be effective, go knock on the door of the complainant and warn them that filing a false complaint may subject them to a city fine as well as litigation by yours truly. You need to tell the complainant that the enforcement team does not appreciate unverified complaints.

We are the owners of 426 Emerald Drive and contributors to city TOT revenue of \$187,000 over a 17-year period without a VHR violation. Not to speak of the over 5,100 guests to our city spending money in grocery stores, restaurants, ski resorts, marinas, gas stations, retail stores, etc.

We are the owners of Lake Tahoe Accommodations and we don't want any of our guests disturbed in any of our vacation rentals in the city. What is more important, to satisfy the overly sensitive neighbor, or to bring 5,100 guests, families and children, to one of the most beautiful places in the world?

Jim and Melinda Morris

P.S. Does the City Council and the city management understand what you are doing to one of the most productive industries in the South Shore?

Opinion: A California-Texas summit

By Joe Mathews

To: Governor Jerry Brown of California; Governor Greg Abbott of Texas

From: Joe Mathews

If North and South Korea can have a peace summit, why can't California and Texas do the same?



Joe Mathews

The United States desperately needs its two biggest states to figure out how to keep the country together.

Sure, you are different places. Texas is the cheap, lightly-regulated, freedom-loving counterpoint to California's progressive, cultural, and technological powerhouse.

But you have one big thing in common: You're both nation-sized places (California has 40 million people and the world's fifth largest economy; Texas has 28 million and the world's 10th largest economy) stuck in a giant country whose leaders are intent on dividing it.

The D.C. business model for elections depends on ever-greater polarization of the American electorate. So national politicians now run the government as a spoils system for their donors and politically favored demographics.

As a result, California and Texas, despite their differences, share a common enemy: federal power.

For a century, whichever party controls the White House has seized more authority for the U.S. government. Recent

presidents of all stripes have ruled increasingly by executive order. Often this dictatorial federal power has been aimed at your two states.

By now, the drill is familiar. A Democratic administration imposes policies that run contrary to Texas's conservative preferences. And so Texas fights and sues constantly. Now that Republicans are in power, it's California's turn to be targeted for its progressive policies—and to tie up the federal government in dozens of lawsuits. The *New York Times* recently called this a legal civil war.

All this fighting takes time and resources away from your states' efforts to improve the lives of your citizens. And the resentments create internal divisions. Both of your states have movements seeking secession from the United States.

The good news: together, the two of you can break the cycle.

Start with a peace summit. The goals of the talks should be twofold. First, for both states to reaffirm their American-ness and commit to peaceful coexistence.

Second, for both states to work together to reduce federal power, and enhance the independence of states and their local communities.

This must go beyond reaffirming the U.S. Constitution's 10th Amendment, which reserves for the states the powers not given to the federal government. California and Texas are now so big that they need more explicit autonomy—in taxation, regulation, environment, health care, and immigration—so that they can choose their own destinies without interference.

The D.C. Mandarins will call this a revolution. So be it. California and Texas must declare that this is not the United States of 1789, with 13 states and 3 million people. Our country of more than 320 million is simply too big to be governed from Washington. Indeed, the best argument for

greater state autonomy is a democratic one. Our states are far more democratic than the federal government, which has a presidency sometimes won by the loser of the popular vote, a U.S. Senate that defies equal representation, and bureaucracies that resist accountability.

A concerted effort to demand greater autonomy for both states—pursued jointly through politics, lawsuits, and even constitutional amendment—would be healthy. Your states wouldn't be able to blame the federal government for your own follies. Instead, California might have to confront how its oppressive environmental regulation makes building sufficient housing impossible. And Texas might have to face how its lack of planning puts its people in flood plains in the path of hurricanes.

To get the talks started, California should immediately revoke its counterproductive ban on government-funded travel to Texas. Yes, the Lone Star State has discriminatory laws on adoption by LGBTQ families, but how do you change minds if you can't meet with people?

Each state offers places where a visitor from the other would be comfortable. Why not start the talks in Austin, a California chunk in the heart of Texas, where Apple employs more than 6,000 people? In California, Gov. Brown could take Gov. Abbott to oil-rich Bakersfield for a meal at Wool Growers, which serves the cuisine of the Basques—a people famous for fighting for sovereignty.

I'm not expecting you to produce the political equivalent of "Pancho and Lefty," the joint album from California's Merle Haggard and Texas's Willie Nelson. (Though bringing Willie to the summit is not a bad idea.) But regular California-Texas summits would remind us that, while we will never be the most cohesive country, our collection of states requires some unity.

And that, in a country as diverse as ours, there may be no peace treaty more powerful than an agreement to disagree.

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

Opinion: Shroud of secrecy envelopes S. Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Public Records Act requests sent to the city of South Lake Tahoe seem to disappear into a dark hole that never see the light of day.

It is the city clerk, Suzie Alessi, who is responsible for responding to them. She is an elected official who is only answerable to the residents. Her seat will be on the November ballot. In the past she has said this would be her last term. Let's hope she keeps her word since she doesn't do her job well.

According to the city's website, "The city clerk oversees, promotes and encourages open and participatory government."

It's what the position is supposed to do. It's the opposite of what is going on today.

Alessi doesn't actually have to show up for a regular 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday workweek. And she doesn't. She comes and goes as she likes. No one knows when she might show up. She takes extended leaves. If she shows up in some inappropriate state, there is no one to tell her to go home, no one to discipline her.

If she doesn't do her job, there are no consequences. The media or another entity could sue to get the public records. The city would then be liable for those attorney fees if it were to lose.

Lake Tahoe News has asked for a variety of records. In early April *LTN* sought text messages. The last correspondence from Alessi was on May 3 when she wrote, "Estimated date of completion is middle to end of next week."

Still no records.

Then *LTN* started investigating the theft of Councilmember Austin Sass's iPhone 7 and iPad Air 2. He told police they were stolen from his vehicle on the morning of April 6. The car was parked in front of St. Theresa Church, where his wife works. The vehicle was not locked.

Sass called the police chief, who then let dispatch know. Sass left the church even though the officer arrived seven minutes after being notified. The councilman was tracked down at the gym where he works out.

The city's IT department tried to track the devices, but they were turned off. Why carry them, if you can't be reached? Why not just have them on silent if you don't want to be disturbed?

There is no proof they were actually taken from the vehicle. With the devices deliberately turned off, it meant they could never be traced. iPhones when turned on can be found even from another phone.

The devices went missing just as Sass was asked to turn them in because of multiple PRAs. The timing is suspicious.

According to the city's Information Security Policy, "All messages created, sent, or retrieved over the internet are property of the city of South Lake Tahoe."

Police Chief Uhler was asked why on the police report it says the case is closed. Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*, "A lack of investigative leads routinely leads to closing cases. Attempts to 'ping' or use device locating didn't pan-out in terms of finding the devices. Lastly, just because it is closed at this moment in time, doesn't mean we cannot open the case in the event we receive investigatory information or catch some thief with the device in his/her possession."

The city has a phone and IT policy of which at least staff is to follow.

Tom Stuart, human resources director, was brought into the conversation by Uhler.

On May 3, *LTN* asked Stuart these questions:

- *The cell phone policy says employee cell phone bills will be monitored by department heads. Does anyone monitor the calls of City Council members?*

- *Do any other elected officials have city issued cell phones?*

- *How many employees have city issued phones; and may I please get those numbers by department? Same for tablets and laptops?*

- *What is the cost to the city on an annual basis for electronic devices in terms of hardware, and then service plans?*

- *Will Austin Sass have to pay for his devices to be replaced or will the city? If the city, what is the cost?*

- *Do council members ever get copies of both of the (IT policy) documents? Do they have to sign anything that says they read it and agreed with it?*

- *It says email messages will be deleted after 45 days.*

*Are they backed up on a server for a longer period of time?
How long?*

· What is the threat of confidential information that would have been on Sass's devices from being accessed? Is the city concerned about what was on the devices?

· Is there a way to have the manufacturer prevent the devices from being accessible? Are these Apple or some other brand?

· And what kind of data was on the phone that could be accessed by whoever has the devices? Email? City documents? Anything confidential?

· Are the devices insured?

On May 8, Stuart said, "I have forwarded your questions to Susan Alessi for response."

The questions had also been sent to acting City Manager Jeff Meston.

Naturally, Alessi has not responded. Legally, she has 10 days to respond. There are exceptions, but the person requesting the records is supposed to be notified why the 10-day limit will be exceeded. That didn't happen in this case.

Most of these questions are pretty straight forward and have no business falling under the category of a Public Records Act request.

The delay by Alessi is suspicious as well. How is anyone to know if she deletes documents that would be less than flattering to her?

This city is so incredibly screwed up. It's time to clean house. It's time to elect responsible people to all the positions. It's also time to think about no longer having an elected city clerk, after all, most cities don't.

Opinion: Wildfire knows no season

By Lisa Herron

What began as a very dry winter in the Lake Tahoe Basin ended with Sierra snowpack approximately 85 percent of normal, thanks to heavy precipitation received during the month of March. However, both the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) and the Reno National Weather Service (NWS) expect a warming trend to develop that will lead to drier than normal conditions by late spring.

As a result, the below average snowpack is expected to melt faster, grasses and other vegetation are expected to dry out earlier and wildland fire activity is likely to increase to above average by mid-summer.

“Although we received a great deal of precipitation during the month of March, we are on track for an above average potential for significant wildfire activity this summer,” said U.S. Forest Service fire management officer Steve Burns. “It’s important to keep in mind that in the U.S., year-round fire seasons have become the new normal, which means for people living in fire-prone areas like the Tahoe basin, wildfire preparedness is essential.”

Across the U.S., nearly nine out of 10 wildfires are human-caused with illegal and unattended campfires being the biggest source of human-caused wildfires. In 2007, an illegal, abandoned campfire was the cause of the Angora Fire, which burned more than 250 homes, 231 acres of private property and 3,072 acres of National Forest land near South Lake Tahoe. The public can help the Forest Service and other fire agencies

prevent these human-caused ignitions by learning where and when campfires are allowed and making sure campfires are completely extinguished using the Soak, Stir and Feel method before leaving. On National Forest land in the Tahoe Basin, campfires are only allowed in designated campgrounds and never on the beach, in Desolation Wilderness or in the general forest. For more information about campfire safety, go **online** and/or **go here**.

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT), which consists of the Forest Service and other state and local partners, has thinned and removed excess vegetation on more than 70,000 acres of National Forest and other lands around communities in the Tahoe basin to reduce the threat of severe wildfire. Forest thinning projects, also known as fuels reduction projects, are a top priority for the Forest Service and the TFFT and will continue to be implemented each year in the Tahoe basin. In order to complement Forest Service and TFFT fuels reduction projects, there are important steps residents and communities must take to improve defensible space and community wildfire preparedness at Lake Tahoe.

Springtime in the Sierra is the perfect time to complete defensible space clean up around homes, review evacuation plans, sign-up for reverse 911 with cities and/or counties, contact local fire districts to schedule free defensible space evaluations, learn about free chipping services and talk to neighbors about the importance of wildfire preparedness.

The time to prepare for the next wildland fire is now. Permanent residents, second-home owners and vacation home owners/renters should familiarize themselves with and follow advice **found here** and **here** on how to prepare their homes and neighborhoods for the next wildfire. Remember it's not a matter of "if" the next wildfire will occur, it's a matter of "when."

Another step toward wildfire preparedness is to sign-up for

the Tahoe Network of Fire Adapted Communities (TNFAC) newsletter. TNFAC provides community members with education, communication and advice; facilitates collaboration between communities and stakeholders; helps communities organize events and neighborhood-level vegetation removal projects and tracks community accomplishments.

Lisa Herron works for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Opinion: You too can be Austin Beutner

By Joe Mathews

No Californian is more inspiring than Austin Beutner.

The Los Angeles investment banker has gone straight to the top of four major institutions in the last decade—without paying his dues at any of them.



Joe Mathews

It started in 2009 when Beutner, having decided to devote himself to public service after a bicycle accident, convinced Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to appoint him as first deputy mayor of the city of L.A., despite his lack of prior experience in local government. During that stint, he was

named interim general manager of L.A.'s Department of Water and Power—without experience in the field.

Then, Beutner, without experience in journalism, took over as publisher of the Los Angeles Times, and later publisher of the San Diego Union-Tribune. But all those were a mere appetizer for his latest job. Beutner this week became superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District. With 600,000 students, it's the largest school district in California and the second largest in the nation. And yes, he had no previous experience in school districts.

Of course cynics might look at Beutner's conquest of L.A.—the fastest takeover of a global city since the Visigoths sacked Rome—and suggest that Southern California's institutions must be awfully weak to keep seeking the services of the same finance guy. They might question why he keeps getting jobs while only staying in previous ones for a short time (typically a year or so) and without producing sustained success.

To such critics, I say, you are prisoners of your small minds. Austin Beutner is a model for all Californians.

His inspiring lesson is that you can be anything you want to be, with one caveat. You have to want to lead the big, complicated institutions that Californians suspect are destined to fail.

Beutner's No. 1 qualification is that understanding that most Californians have given up on governance. This state's public institutions are so complex and dysfunctional, that we feel utterly powerless to fix them.

So most Californians look at leadership positions in such institutions and ask ourselves, why would anyone bother? Beutner has discovered there's opportunity in California's governing hopelessness. What, after all, is there to lose if you fail as school superintendent? Especially when a modest

effort can beat our low expectations?

Of course, this method is not available to everyone. In the 21st century, to be able to pick your own gig, you need a background in high finance, and connections to rich people. Beutner fits the bill: He worked at the Blackstone Group, and then, after a stint at the U.S. State Department, co-founded investment banking firm Evercore Partners.

To get the jobs, he portrays himself as the rare Angeleno who hasn't given up on these institutions. He studies up on an entity, participates in a reform task force, and tells the rich people who matter in L.A. that he thinks there might be a way to fix it. And those rich people call the elected officials whose campaigns they fund, and pretty soon Beutner is running said institution.

Then Beutner works hard, and advances intriguing ideas. But nothing ever takes hold permanently because, before very long Beutner is off to the next hornet's nest.

And that can't be blamed on Beutner. By definition these are short-term, no-hope gigs. At DWP, Beutner was the ninth general manager in 10 years. At the L.A. Times, he was one of several publishers fired by out-of-town ownership.

Who are we to complain about Beutner's short tenures, since we don't bother to assist these institutions ourselves? Beutner is sacrificing so we don't have to. And building a resume so that one day he might be U.S. senator or president, a job for which he is already overqualified.

It's high time we stopped whining about Beutner and other plutocrats running our institutions—and started emulating them.

I, for one, resolve to follow Beutner's example.

Instead of writing this column that appears in various

California papers, I should be their publisher. (Would I be any worse at running legacy media businesses than their current operators?) Just as Beutner wrote reports on institutions before taking them over, I've reported on water policy (I could chair the state water board), and the arts (I could straighten out MOCA in downtown L.A.). Heck, I wrote a book about Arnold Schwarzenegger, so I could probably be governor or run a studio.

Beutner never sells himself short. Neither should we.

Yes, his L.A. Unified stay should be short—one of the four members of the board majority that gave him the job is under federal indictment. But don't worry—the opera needs leadership, LAX is a mess, and the Dodger manager is in his contract's last year.

Beutner embodies the zeitgeist. We all know now that knowledge is power, and that power corrupts—so knowledge itself is corrupting. Yes, it's a fallen world. Why not rise in it?

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

Opinion: Pruitt making air dirtier, Americans less healthy

By Robert Percival, The Conversation

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt's ethical lapses and extravagant spending habits have distracted the public from what he is doing to roll back important

environmental protections.

Pruitt helped persuade President Trump to withdraw from the Paris climate accord, making the United States the only country in the world to reject the pact. At Trump's urging, Pruitt has moved to repeal the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan and EPA rules clarifying federal jurisdiction to protect wetlands.

He also plans to scrap national fuel economy standards the auto industry once embraced. And he sought to suspend regulation of methane leaks from new oil and gas wells, but was overruled by a federal court.

And Pruitt's agenda extends far beyond simply rolling back Obama administration initiatives. In a memo to EPA staff on May 9, 2018, Pruitt ordered significant changes in the process for setting air quality standards under the Clean Air Act, in the name of "cooperative federalism and the rule of law."

These standards are the heart of what has been the most successful environmental law in history. According to the EPA's own estimates, the Clean Air Act saves thousands of lives every year and generates net benefits to society that are vastly larger than the costs of complying with it.

But the law is now under attack from the very agency charged with implementing it. Pruitt seeks to undermine the scientific basis for the EPA's national air quality standards by changing who advises the EPA, restricting the data they can use, and requiring them to shift their focus away from protecting public health.

Science-based regulation

The Clean Air Act has reduced air pollution so effectively that even Pruitt acknowledges its success. U.S. air quality standards are the reason why our air is not like China's, where air pollution kills an estimated 1.6 million people each

year.

The Clean Air Act has succeeded because it requires air quality standards to be based solely on what science shows is necessary to protect public health. The law directs the EPA administrator to consult with “an independent scientific review committee” known as the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC). This committee summarizes what science shows about the impact of various levels of air pollution on public health and welfare.

Based on this scientific information, the EPA is required to set national air quality standards for six key air pollutants that will protect public health with an “adequate margin of safety.” These standards are required to be updated every five years to reflect the latest scientific information.

The EPA is scheduled to complete reviews of standards for ozone and particulate matter by the end of 2020. According to the American Lung Association, more than 4 in 10 Americans still live in areas with unhealthy levels of ozone or particle pollution.

Pruitt’s memo expands CASAC’s charge to include advice on any adverse “economic” or “energy effects” of emission control measures – even though the law does not allow such factors to be considered during the standard-setting process. In *Whitman v. American Trucking Associations Inc.* in 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously declared that the text of the Clean Air Act “unambiguously bars cost considerations from the [standard]-setting process.”

In that case, industry litigants sought to persuade the court that air quality standards should be based on cost-benefit analyses. But the court, in an opinion by the late Justice Antonin Scalia, unanimously rejected that argument, stating: “[C]ost of implementation ... is both so indirectly related to public health and so full of potential for canceling the

conclusions drawn from direct health effects that it would surely have been expressly mentioned in [the law] if Congress meant it to be considered.”

The court declared that if it could be proved “that the EPA is secretly considering the costs of attainment without telling anyone,” this would be grounds for striking down the standards “because the Administrator had not followed the law.”

Weakening existing standards

Pruitt’s memo pays lip service to the notion that compliance costs are not relevant to standard-setting, while requesting “robust feedback” on adverse effects of implementing air quality standards. He also wants CASAC to emphasize scientific uncertainty and research on naturally occurring air pollution, harkening back to President Reagan’s famous claim that “trees cause more pollution than automobiles.”

Even if Pruitt follows the law, his memo’s emphasis on compliance costs, uncertainty and “background” levels of air pollution suggests that he is laying the groundwork for undermining existing air quality standards.

Toward this end, Pruitt wants to make significant changes to the EPA’s sources of scientific advice. His memo emphasizes that new members of CASAC review panels must be selected in accordance with his Oct. 31, 2017, directive, disqualifying experts who receive research funding from EPA – but not experts employed or funded by industry groups.

Pruitt’s action responds to an April 12, 2018, memorandum from President Trump directing EPA to speed up permitting of air pollution sources, and to grant states more flexibility in meeting air quality standards. But if the administration truly was serious about speeding up implementation of the act, it would not be proposing to slash the EPA’s FY 2019 budget from \$8 billion to \$6.1 billion and shrink the agency’s work force from 15,400 to 12,250.

When Congress last amended the Clean Air Act in 1990, it did so by overwhelming bipartisan majorities of 89-11 in the Senate and a voice vote without objection in the House. These amendments strengthened air pollution control measures while creating an innovative market-based emissions trading program that experts widely view as a success.

President Trump has abandoned his campaign promise to abolish the EPA, but his EPA administrator is on a slash and burn expedition to roll back crucial environmental protections. This effort reflects profound distrust of the science that underpins U.S. environmental policies and profound disregard for millions of Americans who still live in areas with unhealthy air.

Robert Percival is a professor of environmental law at University of Maryland.

Opinion: Succeed by saying 'no' to your boss

By Morten T. Hansen, San Francisco Chronicle

“Find a way to say YES to things” was the title of the commencement address that Eric Schmidt gave in 2012 at UC Berkeley. The former executive chairman of Google encouraged the graduates to say “yes” to trying new things. Then he told them: “‘Yes’ lets you stand out in a crowd. ... Be the one everyone comes to for help, for advice, or just for fun.”

While you may say graduates have such a choice of employers in this job market, of course they can say no – but they still will approach their new job with a “yes” attitude.

Conventional thinking promotes saying “yes” as the way to impress your boss and peers: Say “yes” to all of the assignments that will come your way, to meetings and customer visits as well as all the mundane tasks that fall under your job description. Your goal is to become that go-to person, the “good soldier” who is always ready to jump in. While it sounds like a logical path to success, it’s actually the opposite.

My research found that top performers say “no” – including to their bosses.

Read the whole story