

Letter: Questioning cell tower in Meyers

To the community,

T-Mobile is currently working with Lake Valley Fire Protection District to develop a communication facility. T-Mobile is proposing a 100-foot tree tower to blend with the existing trees in the area. Some of us are not happy about this.

T-Mobile sent out letters in an 300-foot radius to homeowners; at the most maybe 30 homeowners.

What do you think can be done to stop this? Then AT&T will come and Verizon, then more money for the fire district. What about us homeowners and exposure coming off microwaves or micro watts. And looking out and seeing this in our backyard.

Thank you,

Rick Robinson, Meyers

Opinion: Expanding what diversity means

By Joe Mathews

In California, embracing diversity is not just about being comfortable with demographic change. It's about protection against disasters, natural and manmade.

California is a disaster-prone state, and when calamity strikes, diversity—of all kinds—keeps bad times from becoming

even worse.



Joe Mathews

The central insight into diversity as protection is biological: a diverse eco-system is more resilient because it has a much broader variety of ways to respond to stress and calamity. This insight applies not only in forests, but also in neighborhoods, governments and industries.

When an ecosystem loses its diversity, when the variety of trees and plants and other species narrows, you get disasters that are more damaging than those we've seen before. That's the story behind California's mega-wildfires—like the Soberanes Fire in the Big Sur area, now the costliest fire to fight in U.S. history. Instead of allowing smaller fires to thin and renew our lands, keeping them diverse, we've suppressed fires for decades. Now, when the calamities of climate change and drought are upon us, our lands lack protection.

Something similar can happen when disasters strike neighborhoods. The most resilient communities are ones with people of different ages, varied levels of education, and diverse sources of income. When the housing and foreclosure crisis struck California a decade ago, communities across the state got hurt. But the hardest hit were newer low and middle-income communities inland whose residents conformed to a similar socio-economic profile. Such tracts were all but wiped out by foreclosures, while neighborhoods that mixed home-owning retirees with families and young single renters were

more likely to struggle through.

At the same time the housing crisis hit, a lack of diversity was making the economic catastrophe even worse in my own profession: journalism. Economic and technological changes (especially the rise of the Internet) were going to do damage to established newspapers and TV stations no matter what. But media outlets made things worse, by employing too many of the same kinds of people.

At the papers where I spent my youth—including the L.A. Times—editors almost exclusively hired people with journalistic training, and were wary of technologists. In addition, the near absence of racial and ethnic diversity in newsrooms meant that media outlets lacked community allies willing to support them when times got rough. So these vital civic institutions didn't have the diversity of expertise and connection to protect against massive change in the business.

When you think about all the ways a lack of diversity leaves us exposed to danger, the lesson should hit home. Diversity is not something to be celebrated or embraced as a virtuous luxury. It must be sought out and developed as a core strategy for survival.

Unfortunately, California is so diverse that we've come to take our diversity for granted. The state's racial and ethnic diversity is really a legacy of our parents and grandparents who brought with them very different cultures and experiences. Today's Californians are majority homegrown, so, despite our different shades, we are more homogenous than ever before. With immigration levels to California declining dramatically from previous decades, we need to think about renewing our population, by attracting more people from around the world.

In our old-line neighborhoods, we need to stop fighting affordable housing and new developments that bring badly needed diversity. And we need to stop obsessing about income

inequality—which is really just diversity of income—and instead make sure that people with different incomes can afford to stay in California, and live and work productively together.

We must stop protecting our highly centralized system of state government, in which Sacramento makes regulatory and tax decisions for us all, and return real control to local governments so they can embrace very different destinies. And we should fight back against those who demand ideological purity in our politics and parties—and purge those who dissent from the party line. Those who create political monocultures are making it possible for dangerous people to invade and take over political institutions. (Ask your Republican friends—they'll know what I'm talking about).

Biologists will tell you that the healthiest eco-systems often have gradual borders of transition, where, for example, forests slowly become grasslands. California communities need such spaces too. If your town is divided by a big highway or railroad tracks, build big parks or restaurants or grocery stores over these divides to attract people from both sides.

In the meantime, get out there and become part of our diversity. Make new contacts not like you, move to a different neighborhood, and ignore all your like-minded friends on Facebook. You're not just turning over a new leaf. You're protecting the forest from a bigger fire.

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

Letter: MontBleu helps at Bread & Broth

To the community,

“Helping at MontBleu’s adopt-a-day dinner was truly amazing,” said Emmy Rowe, a sponsor volunteer from MontBleu Casino Resort & Spa. “Everybody was so nice, from the Bread & Broth volunteers to those in the community that came in to dine.”

On Aug. 22, Rowe and Rachel Kallas volunteered their time to work alongside the dedicated B&B crewmembers and help serve up a hot and nutritious meal to those attending MontBleu’s AAD sponsorship dinner on Monday evening at St. Theresa Grace Hall.

Feeding 97 diners is no small task, and with Rowe and Kallas’ help, the B&B crew served the Monday evening grateful diners a spaghetti and meatball dinner. All of B&B’s Monday evening dinners are full course meals served with vegetable dishes, green and fruit salads and a wide variety of desserts paid for by the \$250 AAD sponsorship donation.

Bread & Broth would like to thank MontBleu Casino Resort & Spa and Rowe and Kallas for their help in easing hunger in our community. Over the years, MontBleu’s many sponsorships have helped feed hundreds of local folks in need. Also, thanks to their donation of over 300 cookies for B&B’s Burlap & Denim fundraiser for B&B 4 Kids, MontBleu is helping to provide weekend food to children who struggle with hunger.

For more B&B information, contact me at 530.542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Placer supes ignoring the law and public

Open letter to the Placer County Board of Supervisors,

Ongoing county actions concerning two major development proposals at Lake Tahoe (Martis Valley West and the Squaw Valley Village Plan) have disregarded several letters to the Board of Supervisors advising you of your legal shortfalls concerning compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act and your Placer County codes.

The county is on a path to cause numerous long term and irreversible impacts to North Lake Tahoe, while demonstrating an alarming disregard for the public interest. The state attorney general's comments on your environmental impact reports: "reasoning is flawed." ..."entirely inconsistent with the purposes of CEQA"... "EIR fails to include significant pending projects."... "EIR analysis is impermissible under CEQA."

We call on you to uphold your legal obligations to the public. Is not government formed by and for the people? Your approval of the Martis Valley West and Squaw Village projects are dismissive of the compelling concerns raised by the public and several agencies, as well as over 60 small businesses. Will the public have to seek remedy through the courts to force county compliance with our laws?

Auburn seems to be telling the Tahoe public to accept over 20 significant and irreversible environmental impacts from the Squaw Village project. Among other egregious consequences, the proposal would expose every person caught in a Squaw Valley emergency evacuation to a 10.7-hour traffic stall. If not incinerated in Squaw, the crawling cars and buses would then

be trapped on Highway 89 from Tahoe City to Truckee.

The Martis Valley development would substantially worsen traffic on Highway 267. The CHP testified on July 7, 2016, that the traffic on July 3 was backed-up from Kings Beach to Northstar until midnight. Traffic failures in Kings Beach are forcing police to patrol by bicycle.

Both the Squaw and Martis developments would cause traffic "Level of Service F," which stands for failure. Should the Tahoe Emergency Evacuation Plan simply say, "Good luck waiting!"

Who will be accountable for the charred families caught in those forest fires that will rage, at some point, through Tahoe? You know for a fact (the F grade) that our road infrastructure cannot accommodate these developments.

The supervisors' first and foremost responsibility is to the public's health and safety. We need you to demonstrate responsible and accountable government, comply with our laws and avoid unnecessary litigation.

Sincerely,

Daniel D. Heagerty, director Granite Chief Wilderness Protection League

Letter: Heavenly stellar at Bread & Broth

To the community,

The lift maintenance crew from Heavenly Mountain Resort sent

six outstanding volunteers to crew at Bread & Broth on Aug. 29.

Led by lift maintenance manager Kevin Higgins, Ryan Albertson, Jen Menzel, Jeff Reid, Kelli Renzi and Vinny Valdez arrived at Grace Hall at 3pm and spent the next 3½ hours helping the Bread & Broth volunteers with the Monday evening dinner.

This energetic crew assembled food giveaway bags, setup and served at the dessert and drink table, ladled out a Moroccan chicken themed dinner and stayed until 6:30pm helping with the dining hall and kitchen area cleanup. Outdoing themselves, Higgins was in charge of the dishwashing and Valdez did everything from serving, drying dishes and taking out the trash. This was a five star crew.

“This was truly an eye-opening experience seeing the need for food in our community. Very eye-opening,” commented Reid. “Glad I had this experience.”

B&B truly appreciates the help and spirit of giving that Heavenly Mountain Resort and this great group of sponsor volunteers demonstrated in their efforts to help those in need.

For more B&B information, contact me at 530.542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Time to build on

Tahoe's momentum

By Joanne Marchetta

At the Lake Tahoe Summit last month, we saw the power of what we can accomplish when we work together. Progress over the last two decades was showcased when President Obama made his first visit to Tahoe and said conservation and restoration efforts like ours are more important than ever as the nation works to adapt to a changing climate and create a more resilient environment.

“When we protect our lands, it helps us protect the climate for the future. So conservation is not just critical for one particular spot, one particular park, one particular lake, it’s critical for our entire ecosystem,” Obama said. “Our healing of Lake Tahoe proves it’s within our power to pass on the incredible bounty of this country to a next generation.”



Joanne
Marchetta

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2000 and the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act are two pieces of federal legislation that have made monumental contributions to Lake Tahoe’s restoration. Together, they helped launch a model for regional collaboration and environmental restoration on the scale needed for Tahoe’s 500-square-mile watershed.

Congress passed the restoration act shortly after former President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore attended the

inaugural summit in 1997. Held over multiple days, the summit included dozens of community members, researchers, and local, state, and federal partners focused on the environmental problems then facing Lake Tahoe and how to correct them.

These two pieces of legislation authorized and appropriated several hundred million dollars in federal funding to jumpstart the Environmental Improvement Program. The unprecedented initiative united all levels of government, nonprofit groups, and the private sector in a shared mission to restore Lake Tahoe's environment and enhance the public recreation opportunities that drive our economy and help millions of people enjoy this special place each year.

Federal funding was matched by state and local agencies and the private sector. Over the last two decades, hundreds of EIP partners have invested \$2 billion into nearly 500 conservation and restoration projects, with another 120 projects ongoing.

These lake-saving EIP projects have been completed all around the Tahoe Basin and were prioritized to have the greatest benefits for our lake, forests, air quality, wildlife, and communities. Projects have restored stream channels, marshes, and wildlife habitat; built parks and new bike and pedestrian routes; protected Tahoe from aquatic invasive species; upgraded hundreds of miles of roads to stop stormwater pollution from washing into the lake; opened shoreline for public access; and cleared hazardous fuels from tens of thousands of acres of forests to improve their health and reduce wildfire risk.

This work was possible only through partnership and collaboration on a level never before seen at Lake Tahoe, and because of it, our environment is healthier than it was two decades ago.

This year's summit again put a bright national spotlight on the work we have done to restore and conserve the jewel of the

Sierra. But it also raised awareness about the challenges we continue to face at Tahoe, all of the work that is not done, and how our mission will become more difficult because of a changing climate that threatens to affect everything from the lake's world-famous water clarity to the health of our forests and ecosystems and winter recreation on our mountains.

We must continue the progress we have achieved through the EIP, completing projects that conserve and restore the environment, improve our community, and revitalize our economy, recognizing that the health of each is intertwined. Federal support is critical in this endeavor. And our region received some highly-encouraging news just two weeks after Obama's visit when the Senate passed its version of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2015.

Introduced by Sens. Dean Heller, R-Nev., Harry Reid, D-Nev., Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., the bill would reauthorize the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act and up to \$415 million in federal funding over 10 years for high-priority projects that create healthier forests and reduce wildfire risk, clean up stormwater pollution, restore the lake's water clarity, and fight the spread of aquatic invasive species.

The Senate passed its bipartisan legislation as part of the Water Resources Development Act of 2016, a two-year, \$10 billion national water infrastructure bill. Legislation to reauthorize the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act has been introduced in Congress multiple times over the last decade, but each prior bill stalled in committee. This marks the first time legislation to reauthorize the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act has cleared a chamber of Congress, showing the strong bipartisan support we see for restoring one of our greatest national treasures.

The House of Representatives is anticipated to consider its version of the Water Resources Development Act this fall. We

are optimistic versions of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act introduced by Representatives Tom McClintock, R-Calif., Mark Amodei, R-Nev., and John Garamendi, D-Calif., can be included and passed as part of that legislation.

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act and Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act have driven some of Tahoe's biggest achievements over the last two decades and helped make the Tahoe region a healthier place and a national model for collaboration and partnership. The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2015 is critical to continuing progress and addressing the challenges that lie ahead. The Senate's passage of this legislation is an important milestone and we look forward to continued support in the House to keep our momentum at Tahoe growing.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Letter: Ag in the Classroom a success

To the community,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people, organizations and businesses that helped to make our fourth annual Farm Day an amazing success on Sept. 20.

AG in the Classroom did an excellent job of coordinating and providing an outstanding program for over 450 students from Lake Tahoe Unified School District. I would like to give

special thanks to Camp Richardson for the generous donation of their site, the AG in the Classroom sponsors and Lake Tahoe Education Foundation for funding of this incredible event, LTUSD maintenance staff for helping with set-up and take down, Chimayo Street Grill for providing the delicious lunches and the over 85 incredible presenters and volunteers from both STEEC, South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado.

This year we were also lucky enough to have many Future Farmers of America students from both Douglas County and El Dorado County help us. The students got to rotate through 28 hands-on, interactive stations on such topics as forestry, nutrition, water, bees, composting and animals. We had a large number of animals this year that the students were able to learn about and touch, including a calf, horses, chickens, rabbits, goats, sheep, and a turkey.

It was a great experience for so many students and I am extremely grateful for all of the wonderful people who make this possible. We couldn't do it without you.

Beth Quandt, LTUSD science outreach coordinator

Opinion: Squeaky wheel gets the grease at nursing homes

By Paul Harasim, Las Vegas Review-Journal

What Tracy Rodgers saw – or rather didn't see – as a young nurse treating patients in a nursing home haunts her to this day.



Paul Harasim

She still finds it difficult to believe.

“There were so many people who had no one visiting,” Rodgers said, shaking her head as she sat on the couch in her Henderson home. “Not even on Christmas or other holidays. It’s hard for me to fathom what it’s like when no one comes to visit you. I know everyone has their own lives, with families and jobs. But it’s so easy for patients to fall into a depression when they have zero contact with loved ones or people from outside.”

Out of sight. Out of mind.

That mindset held by many Americans – research done by Dr. Joyce Varner of the University of South Alabama found 60 percent of nursing home patients don’t receive visitors – can have effects far beyond the psychological.

Read the whole story

Opinion: More red ink in EL

Dorado County

By Larry Weitzman

It has been a tough two months for the new CAO, Don Ashton, as he attempts to turn a lemon budget created by the inept Larry Combs into lemonade. While he wasn't given a direct order from the Board of Supervisors to cut \$10 million out of the Combs budget, he has achieved about \$6 million reduction.

But out of control salaries and benefits have become blight upon the county, especially considering the need for a new sheriff's facility. Budget hearings started on Sept. 12. And while our new CAO has tried to structurally balance the El Dorado County budget, the problem will remain without a significant change in direction of county policy. Helping reduce the deficit was a onetime nearly \$2 million "gift" (money due) from the Red Hawk casino for a payment that was thought to be due in December 2017 that will actually be received in December 2016.



Larry Weitzman

And another piece of "good" news was a potential reduction in the interest rate to 2.375 percent currently, if the county could lock in this rate, for the proposed \$61 million sheriff's facility. This would save the county about \$400,000 annually over the 40-year life of the loan (\$16 million total). Understand that this improvement should be voted on and approved by the citizens of EDC pursuant to a reasonable interpretation of Measure A. It should have been on the

November ballot.

But that gets to the issue of the loan requirement that the county have a structurally balanced budget for the next five years. When that question was asked by the fiscally savvy Second District Supervisor Shiva Frentzen to the CAO at the end of the Sept. 12 meeting, the answer was a yes. However, the county auditor, who was also asked the same question, said while it was balanced per state law, it wasn't structurally balanced and the CAO eventually agreed with the auditor when he qualified his answer saying with the add-on budgeted items presented at this meeting, then the budget is not structurally balanced meaning that revenues will be exceeded by ongoing operating expenses.

Interestingly there was little said about "operating efficiencies" which was such a large topic of recent BOS meetings. But it was discussed with respect to one item brought to the attention of the BOS by the county auditor. The county is underbilling for county development services charged by the Community Development Agency both in the hours charged and the hourly rate to developers. CDA head, Steve Pedretti, brought the hourly rate issue to the BOS about six months ago and got a rate increase from \$100/hour to \$119/hour for planners in the Development Services Division. These are charges billed to developers for county services necessary for their projects.

However, there are still issues of whether this and other billing rates are sufficient as well as billing for appropriate amounts of time that are charged back to developers. The county auditor was concerned that we are still under billing and "that long range planning staff is not charging all the hours that it should to specific billable projects." The recovery of this money from developers could amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars annually "and reduce the need for General Fund support to the CDA." Hopefully, CDA will within a few weeks recommend a series of

improved billing practices to recapture this significant "found money."

The elephant in the room is still the cost of salary and benefits. For four years ending with the fiscal year of June 30, 2013, the county salary and benefits were virtually identical for each of those years at \$118 million. Since then salary and benefits have grown like star thistle to \$132 million the next year, continuing to \$152 million for the year ended on June 30, 2016. The last budget projection for FY 15-16 produced in May 2016 estimated salary-benefits at \$156 million, so it came in about \$4 million less primarily from unfilled vacant positions. Our new CAO has held the line on new positions or employee additions for FY 16/17 effectively at zero new General Fund employees. That is good, but even still the new salary-benefits budget projection is \$168 million. The real total should be at year's end more like \$160 million or maybe slightly less based on vacant positions, which are budgeted along with actual filled positions. That will mean that the growth in salary-benefits in just four years will be \$42 million.

Our chief financial officer projects the salary-benefits growth at 4.5 percent annually. Currently there are ongoing negotiations for a new contract as the prior 15 percent raise contract ended on June 30, 2016. In that contract most EDC employees received raises they were not asking for in that they were looking for 9 percent. Instead of a raise with respect to this new contract, maybe there should be a 3 percent give back, 1 percent a year. That would go a long way to reach fiscal sanity in EDC and stop the enormous salary growth.

Additionally, the other growing bubble is pension benefits. CalPERS has had two bad years relative to their investments and that may give rise to rapidly increasing pension cost contributions. County contribution requirements are three-times higher than the federal Social Security requirements for

private employers (about 18.7 percent versus 6.2 percent). And that number is rising. And for public safety employees the rate is almost six time higher (about 36 percent versus 6.2 percent). This is a serious problem which needs a thorough examination. The final component of the salary-benefits issue is health care. South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerrey is a noted expert on reducing these costs. Maybe someone should ask for a meeting. Maybe there are some savings available there.

But while our new CAO attempts to work his extensive knowledge and magic to control the budget, the EDC BOS could give him some general direction on cutting the budget and then let him do his job. As an aside, the BOS has authorized at least \$2 million from the Missouri Flat Master Circulation & Funding Plan for road maintenance. That is a great idea if it's legal to do so. County counsel is to prepare a legal opinion regarding the legality of such a transfer. I am not so sure.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Editorial: Age of limits for California's water wars

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Sept. 16, 2016, Sacramento Bee.*

It has been 110 years since the San Francisco fire led to the damming of the Tuolumne River, cornering dibs on some of the world's most pristine water for that lucky city by the bay.

Hetch Hetchy water: It's the California luxury that the Bay Area has, for generations, taken for granted. And given how

delicious it is, clear and sparkling, straight from Yosemite National Park, another coup that never stops being amazing, we're not surprised at how last week's dispatch from state water regulators is being viewed by its users – namely, as a water grab and a gathering emergency.

But the State Water Resources Control Board is overdue in its call to leave more water in the Tuolumne, Stanislaus and Merced rivers, not to mention the river they feed, the San Joaquin, which is one of the most heavily tapped in the state.

Read the whole story