

Letter: Vote Davidson for LTUSD board

To the community,

I'm writing this letter in support of Annie Davidson's candidacy for LTUSD school board.

First and foremost, Annie cares deeply about children. Annie's 20-year career in education began with teaching elementary school in a high-poverty, impacted school in Burlington, Vt., where all students received free or reduced lunch, and many students were in special education or were second-language learners.

Along the way, Annie earned her Ph.D. in education leadership and policy, and she has worked for or with state departments of education in over 15 states including California and Nevada. She has also collaborated with national organizations such as the American Education Research Association and state assessment consortia. Her educational involvement includes work with:

- No Child Left Behind
- Common Core State Standards
- Race to the Top
- Next Generation Science Standards
- Re-authorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act as Every Student Succeeds Act.

Annie and her husband, Matt Lucksinger, are involved in many local community service efforts such as:

- Classroom volunteer work
- Tahoe Parents Nursery School
- Lake Tahoe Community College as adjunct faculty
- Coaching soccer

- Helping with performing arts activities
- Advisory board of the Warm Room
- Tahoe Women's Community Fund

Annie currently works as an independent education consultant, and husband Matt is a real estate agent with Lake Valley Properties owned by Matt's parents Mark and Marti Lucksinger. Matt volunteers as treasurer of the SLT Rotary Club and he serves on the LTCC Measure F Bond Oversight Committee as well as the Lake Tahoe Education Foundation.

With children aged 5 and 7, Annie and Matt will have a big and long-term stake in our South Lake Tahoe schools for many years to come. I urge you to vote for Annie Davidson for LTUSD school board representing trustee Area 1.

Diane Rosner, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Rationing education in Calif. schools

By Joe Mathews

Californians think we have a system of public education. What we really have is a system for rationing public education.

I got a taste of this in the spring, when I took my 5-year-old son to our local school district offices to determine his educational future. This being California, the determination was made not by any test or assessment but by a lottery. An administrator pulled names out of a hat to fill spots in our elementary school's new Mandarin immersion program.



Joe Mathews

The beginning of the academic year is when we hear fine speeches about how our state is committed to doing the very best for every child. But when you see firsthand how educational resources are allocated, California schools leave much to chance.

We do this for two reasons: scarcity and avoidance. Educational resources here are scarce—there is simply more demand for schooling than the state’s wobbly budget system can accommodate. And so we use lotteries and formulas, so that our officials can avoid the work of deciding who deserves resources, and so that Californians can avoid reckoning with our collective failure to support public education.

By all reliable accounts, there aren’t nearly enough good, experienced teachers in our schools. The state offers only 180 days of instruction (when research suggests there should be more than 200 days). And the inadequacy of newer programs and schools offered by some districts in the name of educational choice only underscores the ongoing scarcity. There are simply not career-readiness programs, Advanced Placement classes, charters, magnets, or language immersions to meet the demand for high-quality options.

There’s little hope of trying to do more to meet those needs, since California decouples school funding from academic needs. Our state constitution’s school funding formulas, known collectively as Proposition 98, guarantee only a portion—you might say a ration—of the state budget to schools. (Tellingly, that money is supplemented by a small amount—usually \$1

billion or less than 2 percent of annual education funding—from the state lottery).

In the absence of funds to meet all our students' needs, we turn to education's version of lotteries to allot scarce resources. State law (mirroring federal guidance) directs school districts to use a lottery system for charter school admissions once the number of pupils who want to enroll exceeds the number of spaces. Districts with magnet programs do the same. Many of these lotteries have complicated rules and exclusions, often in the name of diversity, as well as with the aim of keeping kids in their neighborhood schools, or keeping siblings together.

Such lotteries are not all that fair. Research shows the lotteries favor students whose parents have the time and resources to investigate their local educational possibilities and sign their children up in the first place. (We parents gotta play to win). Then there's a bigger question: Does "random" allocation of educational resources really represent justice?

This year, the California Supreme Court, in a 4-3 vote, declined to hear challenges that said California doesn't provide enough school funding or qualified teachers to meet the state's constitutional guarantees of education for all. In declining, the court endorsed the argument that, while there might be problems with funding and teachers, these weren't constitutional problems—because the impact of bad policies was arbitrary, and not felt by any particular group of students.

Mariano-Florentino "Tino" Cuellar, an associate justice of the Supreme Court, dissented powerfully from that logic. Curtailing access to educational opportunity, the justice argued, doesn't become justifiable simply because it's done arbitrarily.

"Arbitrary selection has at times been considered a means of

rendering a governmental decision legitimate,” he wrote. “But where an appreciable burden results—thereby infringing a fundamental right [like the right to an education]—arbitrariness seems a poor foundation on which to buttress the argument that the resulting situation is one that should not substantially concern us.”

The brilliantly cynical filmmaker Orson Welles once said, “Nobody gets justice. People only get good luck or bad luck.” He wasn’t wrong—our parents, where and when we were born, the people we happen to meet, all influence the direction our lives take, through no fault or deed of our own.

My own son was lucky. His name was pulled 16th out of the hat, winning him the place he now enjoys in that Mandarin immersion kindergarten. His own luck will transfer to his younger brother, who is automatically eligible to join the program when he reaches kindergarten age.

But California is not as fortunate in leaning its educational system so heavily on luck. Our schools are supposed to be equalizers, helping counter the lottery of life. Instead, they are emulating it.

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

Opinion: Calculating Calif.’s unfunded pension debts

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

The “unfunded liabilities” of state and local pension funds

are California's biggest unresolved political issue – at least in financial terms.



Dan Walters

We know, with fair accuracy, how much money flows into and out of those trust funds now and into the reasonably predictable future, as well as the current value of their investment portfolios.

What we don't know is what those investments in stocks, bonds, real estate and hedge funds will earn in the future. And while there's no way to precisely predict those earnings, the assumption of how investments will fare determines the size of the pension debt.

For many years, the California Public Employees' Retirement System and other state and local pension systems have assumed earnings, technically called the "discount rate," in the 7.5 percent to 8 percent range, and they seemed to be generally on target.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Embrace immigrants

to preserve small towns

By Diana Gordon

Once upon a time the pulse of America beat in its small towns. They were where you took your crops to market, met the trains that brought visits from Aunt Tilly, and danced with your sweetheart on Saturday nights. They served surrounding rural areas with schools and doctors and blacksmiths. Blending individualism and solidarity, their leaders took pride in hard work and valued religious faith.

But that was when the U.S. was still largely an agrarian society, and by the early 20th century urban opportunity was sucking the energy out of such places. After World War II agribusiness replaced family farms, big box stores killed local enterprises, and manufacturing jobs all but disappeared. Today, only about 9 percent of the population lives in places with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. And the most notable features of many of those places are shuttered businesses and dilapidated houses.

So I was surprised and delighted to notice that early in the 21st century the hardscrabble Long Island village I passed through to get to my summer retreat had taken on a new look.

The tiny downtown of Greenport, N.Y., is now graced by a grassy expanse leading down to Peconic Bay, a carousel attracting young families from “up-island” and New York City, and restaurants that attest to its status as a foodie destination. The village has undergone a transformation of the kind that most small American towns gave up on decades ago.

Its success is visible everywhere: lovely old houses have been restored, yachts preen at the marina, and summer events include bowdlerized Shakespeare on the lawn and Monday evening dances en plein air. The annual Maritime Festival brings together old-time Greenporters—some are descendants of

families who settled the area in the 1640s—and denizens of the new tourist economy. For the first time since 1950, the census of 2010 recorded an increase in population, to 2,190 full-time residents, with another 500 or so part-timers.

This revitalization has two principal sources. In the 1990s a vigorous and imaginative mayor found public and private support for a park that would anchor his vision of a revived downtown. And as his dream became reality, a new working class arrived to staff it—immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

They found work in and around Greenport—landscaping, housekeeping, construction—and housing. Often these immigrants enjoyed the company of family members or friends from home who had preceded them. By 2010 they constituted one-third of village residents. “They’ve saved this town,” says former Mayor Dave Kapell, who sparked the renewal.

As I got to know (and interview) a number of the newcomers I discovered that settling in Greenport offered them more than material benefits. On several levels they appreciated the peacefulness of their surroundings. For the family from El Salvador that ran a pupuseria the North Fork of Long Island was a political haven; a Guatemalan gardener was grateful to be living among fields and vineyards. Familiarity was part of the appeal. And it seemed safe. Upon arrival in the country, many people had spent time in Brooklyn or Queens—before choosing rural life because it seemed crime-free, even if, for some, the threat of deportation loomed.

Curious about small-town immigration beyond Greenport, I started to make a list of communities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants and large numbers of foreign-born residents. I quickly concluded that, at least where immigrants have settled, rumors of the death of the small town have been greatly exaggerated. All over the country immigrants, whether legally present or undocumented, have brought new life to

towns abandoned by agriculture and manufacturing sectors.

A number of those towns are in the Midwest, especially Iowa, which is 87 percent non-Hispanic white. In Denison, with 8,390 residents in 2013, it is no longer true, as one commentator noted in the early days of the new century, that you could “nap undisturbed” on a sidewalk in the business district. Renovation of that part of town now reflects the 14 percent population increase since 2000; nearly half of the residents are Hispanic, and half of those are foreign-born. West Liberty, with 3,733 residents, up 12 percent since 2000, has the distinction of being Iowa’s first majority Hispanic community, with about one-quarter foreign-born; according to its mayor, in 2011, “If you didn’t have the Hispanic population here in town, there would be a lot more storefronts that are empty.”

While the majority of immigrants in small towns come from Mexico, with a growing presence from Central American countries, other continents are represented, too. In Dalton, Ga., almost 60 percent of the student body in the public schools is Hispanic (most American-born children of immigrants), but there are also students from dozens of countries who speak 22 languages, according to school district officials. In Huron, S.D., almost 7 percent of the population of 13,163 is Asian, from Thailand and Burma.

Immigrants from India, Japan, and China have contributed to the economic recovery of Columbus, Ind., the hometown of the 2016 Republican vice-presidential candidate Mike Pence. New tastes and cultural practices come from refugee communities, too. Ten miles from Burlington, Vt., farmers from Rwanda and Bhutan are responding to the demand for goat meat among their fellow refugees from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe.

Adapting to the needs of immigrants in small towns presents some challenges. English as second language teachers are expensive additions to the budgets of small school districts.

Native-born citizens (including police officers) of small towns usually have little exposure to the languages and customs urban residents encounter in daily congress. Complaints about immigrants butchering animals in the backyards of Dalton or drying fish on the clotheslines of Huron are typical of neighborhood tensions. And residential crowding—families doubling up to save money and find companionship—is a general concern, as it is in cities.

But the process of adjustment to the new demographic reality in many small towns is proceeding much as it did in more traditional urban environments during the last immigrant wave a century ago—with the acquisition of English, the discovery of economic opportunity, and the rising of the next generation of Americans.

It is, of course, too much to think that an influx of immigrants can reverse the decline of the American small town or that small towns are the answer to the manifold challenges of immigrant integration. But some communities are no longer places to leave—just ask those who have recently arrived.

Diana Gordon is professor emerita of political science and criminal justice at the City University of New York. Her book "Village of Immigrants: Latinos in an Emerging America: was published in 2015.

Opinion: The importance of vitamin D

By Kelly Vial

With the cool fall weather approaching, it's important to

think about an important vitamin we can absorb from the sun: vitamin D. According to city data, South Lake Tahoe boasts an average of 249 days of sunshine per year, so we should all be quite abundant in our vitamin D stores.

However, many of us spend hours indoors and nutrition research shows about 40 percent of adults are lacking this vitamin.



Kelly Vial

Below are some common questions about vitamin D and how to get the most from this important nutrient.

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin. This means it is stored in your body's fat, not your blood stream, and must travel through the digestive system for absorption. Vitamin D helps the body absorb important nutrients we get from food, including calcium, magnesium, phosphate, iron and zinc. Vitamin D can enter the body through the skin or diet, is processed by the liver, and activated by the kidneys.

Why is vitamin D important?

Vitamin D is a key component to maintaining healthy bones. Vitamin D deficiency can lead to osteoporosis, which can increase the risk of falls and fractures in older adults. Though less common in the U.S., a deficiency also leads to other bone diseases such rickets in children and softening of the bones (osteomalacia) in children and adults. New research shows vitamin D may help regulate many other cellular

functions throughout the body.

Do all people need the same amount?

Some people may require higher vitamin D intake due to certain risk factors. For example, sunscreen and other skin barriers can prevent the absorption of vitamin D. Other barriers include darker skin tone, obesity, and certain diseases. You can also consume too much vitamin D, so be sure to consult with your primary care provider prior to taking a dose higher than the daily recommended intake.

How do I get more vitamin D?

Sources of vitamin D including the following:

- Sunlight. Sun exposure can increase your risk for skin cancer, so be cautious.
- Fortified vitamin D. Look for milk, orange juice, bread, cereal, and other products that add vitamin D.
- Fatty and oily fish. Tuna, sardines, and cod liver all have high vitamin D levels.
- Mushrooms. The kind you buy in the store.
- Vitamin supplements. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends infants who are solely breastfeeding need 400 international units (IU) daily. The IOM suggests 600 IU daily from age 1 to 70 and adults over the age of 70 should take 800 IU daily.

To learn more about vitamin D and its effects on your health, talk to your care provider and see if you are getting an adequate amount of vitamin D.

Kelly Vial is a family nurse practitioner at Barton Family Medicine in South Lake Tahoe.

Letter: Is TTD spinning its wheels?

To the community,

At one time, we were told by the Tahoe Transportation District that the EIR for the loop road project (aka, US/50 South Shore Revitalization Project) would be completed in April of this year and submitted for public comment this summer along with the TTD's preferred alternative.

More recently, however, TTD has said that the EIR would be published in August, with selection of a preferred alternative and public discussion to follow. If I'm not mistaken, August has come and gone and still there is no sign of an EIR. One begins to wonder if wiser heads have prevailed and TTD has decided to shelve the loop road project much as it appears to have done with its "All Season Crosslake Passenger Ferry". That project, fortunately, continues to gather electronic dust on TTD's website.

Jerome Evans, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Calif.'s growing education gap

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

The opening lyrics of a popular song during the 1940s advised listeners, "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative (and) don't mess

with Mister In-Between.”



Dan Walters

It may be state schools Superintendent Tom Torlakson’s favorite ditty, because he certainly adopted its upbeat credo last week in announcing results of the state’s latest series of academic achievement tests.

Torlakson trumpeted “significant progress” in the scores of the 3.2 million California students in grades three to eight and 11 who were tested on how well they are performing vis-à-vis the state’s new Common Core standards.

Read the whole story

Letter: Things are brighter

To the community,

Because so many people only write letters and become vocal to complain I am going to write something to thank two people who have helped me out recently.

After calls, letters and some frustration I finally got the

right people involved to fix the street light that was out on our street.

First I want to thank Jim Marino at the city of South Lake Tahoe for seeing my letters and taking action to get the issue fixed. I will say it was a bit comforting to see Jim get the same run around that I got. While he didn't get me any information I already didn't have it was nice to see a consistent story.

Second I want to thank Kathryn Reed for printing my letters and helping get the attention I needed to get things done. Kae allowed me to use her platform to help not only myself but also my neighbors.

Thanks to both of you for your time and effort.

John Spinola, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Time for casino industry to shatter glass ceiling

By Jan Jones, Las Vegas Sun

Two. That's the number of women who are among 34 highest-paid executives in Nevada's casino industry.

And it's not just about the money. If you look at the 10 most prominent gaming companies, there are only three women among the 50 most-senior executives.

It's very likely that America is about to elect a female

president (and based on current polling, she'll have the support of a majority of Nevada voters). There's a good chance that Nevada is about to elect a female U.S. senator. Two out of the last three mayors of Las Vegas were female (including yours truly). And the state ranks sixth in the country when it comes to the percentage of elected leaders who are female. Clearly, a majority of Nevadans believe that women are as capable as men of holding top leadership and executive positions.

So what's going on in the gaming industry, which is far and away the largest employer in the state?

Read the whole story

Opinion: Time to deny Martis Valley West

By Ellie Waller

The Martis Valley West Parcel Operating Agreement (MVOA) has become a pawn, not the final puzzle piece to protect and connect 6,000-plus acres of conservation land to the Mount Rose Wilderness. Below is a quick chronology:

2013: CREW LLC (East West Partners), Sierra Pacific Industries, Sierra Watch and Mountain Area Preservation enter an agreement (MVOA) to protect 6,000-plus acres. The MVOA did not contemplate a TRPA area plan; it was only supposed to be within the Martis Valley Community Plan boundary.

2014: A 112-unit gated luxury development is proposed as part of the Martis Valley West Parcel Specific Plan (MVWPSP).

Placer County prepared this area plan for the 112.8-acre portion of the Martis Valley West Parcel (MVWP) Specific Plan located entirely within the Tahoe basin and subject to the jurisdiction of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. As mentioned, this was not envisioned as part of the MVOA. There was so much public outcry, the proposed area plan was suspended by the applicants and removed from the MVWPSP.

2015: A replacement proposal for the 112-unit gated luxury development is proposed by Mountainside Partners (formerly East West Partners: same development team of MVWPSP) – the Brockway Campground, a 550-unit glamping experience with just as much public outcry.

This proposal is reckless piece-meal planning disguised as a separate project. The egregious campground proposal illustrates these guys are not concerned with conservation; they just want to be paid for the east side incentives, swap designations and make money on the west side through lot sales for luxury home development, so how is this a public benefit?

“Placer County Board of Supervisors ... you must vote to deny the Martis Valley West Parcel Specific Plan as proposed.”

2016: Martis Valley West Parcel Specific Plan final environmental documentation is released in May. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Tahoe Area Sierra Club, League to Save Lake Tahoe, Mountain Area Preservation, Sierra Watch, hundreds of members of the public, Caltrans, CalFire, Northstar Community Service District/Fire District, North Tahoe Fire District, North Tahoe PUD, Placer County Air Pollution District, town of Truckee, and Tahoe-Truckee Airport among many others comment on final environmental impact report.

Decision makers: We have no confidence in Mountainside Partners. They have unfinished projects at Old Greenwood, Grays Crossing, Northstar and Highlands. These projects are

not just planned to be phased; they are incomplete, so why do we need another development by these applicants when they cannot finish their existing projects or file bankruptcy?

June 9, 2016: Placer Planning Commission hearing. The public comes out in force, with over 200 people in attendance, with only two people in support of the project. The hearing is continued to July 7, 2016, and again over 200 community members express their disdain for an ill-conceived project with little to no support. The Planning Commission decision is 5-2 with a recommendation to deny the project.

The conservation easement is being held hostage: From the MVOA: East Parcel Purchase, Sale and Option Agreement Term Sheet page 2: "Exhibit C 3. East Parcel Scenarios: If the West Parcel does not receive initial approval. No deal on East Parcel acquisition and/or conservation easement."

Remedies, Page 4 of MVOA: "5d. If the Conservation Group or Land Trust Partners litigate the Initial Approval at any point in the process of approval or within 120 days thereafter, the entire Agreement is automatically terminated."

I repeat: The Martis Valley West Parcel Operating Agreement has become a pawn, not the final puzzle piece, to protect and connect 6,000-plus acres of conservation land to the Mount Rose Wilderness.

Placer County Board of Supervisors, you have/will receive written comments and hear public testimony on the inadequacy, flaws, and lack of adequate and accurate analysis of the environmental documentation on September 13 that is so compelling you must vote to deny the Martis Valley West Parcel Specific Plan as proposed.

Ellie Waller is a Tahoe Vista resident.