

# Opinion: UC wrong to raise tuition

By Ted Gaines

The University of California Board of Regents recently voted to raise student tuition by as much as 25 percent over the next five years. The tuition increase would vary depending on the level of state funding, but could stretch to 5 percent each year for the next five years.

Current, in-state UC students pay \$12,192 in mandatory tuition and fees. According to the UC, the first-year increase could push those mandatory expenses up by \$612. A 5 percent increase over the duration of the plan would elevate those mandatory fees to nearly \$15,600. These fees are independent of room and board, books, transportation and any other expenses students face while earning a degree.



Ted Gaines

This another gut punch to middle-class families already struggling to make ends meet in this high-cost state. Just two years ago, Californians had their taxes increased with Proposition 30, after being promised that the money would be used to freeze the skyrocketing cost of college. This year, only about two percent of those funds have been spent on universities. What an embarrassment.

The UC administrators should take a close look at this policy.

They are compensated like tech company CEOs with exorbitant salaries and lavish pensions. It's unconscionable that students are being asked to dig deeper while the expansion of the UC ruling class continues without pause.

It's political sport in California to see how much we can punish and antagonize the middle class, and this proposal is a gold-medal winner. I'm sick of it. I know that wealthy families won't be affected by this. The poorest families will be damaged, as the dream of college is dimmed by the thought of unattainable expenses, but they will qualify for more UC financial aid. But the hammer will truly fall on the families in the middle, who will get to fork over this money straight out of their checking accounts or by taking on loads of new debt that could take decades to pay off. Who is looking out for them?

Rather than raise tuition, the regents need to reduce spending, offer more online classes and limit faculty and executive pay raises. Any year there is a tuition increase, there should be an automatic freeze on administration salary increases.

I say no to the misguided and punishing tuition hikes. Our world-class universities must be open and available to everyone in the state, not just the wealthiest sliver.

*Ted Gaines, R-Rocklin, represents Lake Tahoe in the California Senate.*

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## High cost of death penalty

# could affect Nev.

**By Ana Ley, Las Vegas Sun**

Nevada's criminal justice system spends nearly twice as much handling death penalty cases compared with murder cases where capital punishment isn't sought, according to a report released Tuesday by state auditors.

The state-mandated study, which surveyed data from 27 state and local agencies, gives ammunition to death penalty opponents who have failed to defeat public support for capital punishment using moral objections. It is, by far, Nevada's most comprehensive study on the controversial practice and will serve as a law makers' guide for years to come.

"As we move into the next (legislative) session and the session after that, we would still be able to use this as basic information to frame the discussion around the death penalty for a while," Assemblywoman Maggie Carlton, D-Las Vegas, said after auditors Paul Townsend and Dan Crossman presented the study before a legislative panel in Carson City. "It's very thorough."

Auditors assembled the 105-page report by sampling data from 28 cases, calculating costs associated with legal counsel – both defense and prosecution – as well as for money spent on court proceedings and incarceration.

**Read the whole story**

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# Calif. falling short of water conservation goals



Cove East in South Lake Tahoe on Nov 25. Photo/LTN

**By Associated Press**

SAN FRANCISCO — The three-year drought gripping California has shrunk reservoirs, rivers, creeks and snowpacks while leaving Californians drawing heavily on underground aquifers to water everything from lawns to crops.

Farmers account for about 80 percent of water used in the state, but Gov. Jerry Brown has asked California households to save water as well. Here's a look at how it's going and what the problems are.

**Q: How are Californians doing when it comes to meeting the state's goal for reducing water use?**

**A:** Not as well as hoped. Brown in January declared a drought emergency, and asked Californians to cut residential water use by 20 percent. The latest figures released Tuesday by the state show that Californians managed to reduce their daily water use by only 6.7 percent in October compared to the same period last year. The closest the state's 38 million people have come to meeting the 20 percent goal was in August, when water use was down 11.6 percent year-on-year. Still, the state

Water Resources Control Board said Tuesday that Californians have saved 90 billion gallons since June – enough water for 1.2 million people for a year.

**Q: Why are Californians falling so short?**

**A:** Water board officials said they're trying to figure out if the usage was caused by a lack of awareness about the drought; not enough enforcement of conservation guidelines; this year's hotter weather; or something else. Board members threw out ideas Tuesday ranging from asking the state Transportation Department to post stronger messages about the drought on flashing highway advisory signs, to looking at whether more penalties should be imposed on big water users.

Water board officials say some of the key problem areas are affluent communities in Southern California, where rainfall is always short but residents love their green lawns, golf courses and swimming pools. Californians in the south coast region managed to cut water consumption by only 1.4 percent in October, the weakest showing in the state.

**Q: It's raining in California now, so why still worry about saving water?**

**A:** California officials say the state would need 150 percent of its normal annual rainfall to recover from drought. As of this autumn, the state had marked its driest three years on record, the federal government's National Climactic Data Center said. Storms so far this rainy season have brought parts of the state closer to normal rainfall for this point in the year. But the most important reservoirs contain just 39 percent to 60 percent of normal water levels. The snowpack in the Sierra Nevada, one of the most critical sources for state water year-round, is also lagging. Before the Tuesday storms, the southern Sierra had gotten just 47 percent of its normal rain and snow so far, and the northern Sierra 79 percent.

**Q: How hard is the drought hitting California?**

**A:** Poorer, rural communities in the agricultural Central Valley are feeling some of the sharpest impacts. Hundreds of wells have gone dry as water tables recede, leaving families to rely on trucked-in water or even water collected for them by Girl Scouts. Some farmers say they've had to spend thousands of dollars more to dig deeper well or buy water, and some have seen almond and pistachio trees or other orchards shrivel. The drought has been hard on wildlife as well. State and federal officials last month, for example, said low water in creeks meant one kind of coho salmon in Northern California was apparently unable to breed at all this year. The officials had to move all year-old cohos in that creek to a hatchery to try to save the species.

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**Festival                      full                      of  
extraordinary trees**



Best in show for the 6th annual Festival of Trees and Lights goes to the Chanel tree. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Judges had no trouble determining the most elegant designer tree gracing the convention center of Harrah's Lake Tahoe. Unanimously they selected the Chanel tree.

It also received best in show for the sixth annual Festival of Trees and Lights. (Designer: Katie Long, Thran's Flowers.)

Every year Barton Foundation puts out a call to designers to decorate a tree and then to continue the theme in the surrounding area. A multitude of gifts come with each tree. They are then auctioned off at the annual gala.

Each year all proceeds benefit a different component of Barton Health, with this year's recipient being Barton Hospice.

The event runs through Dec. 7.

Even those who are not big into Christmas or don't even celebrate the holiday are apt to find the spectacle engaging. The Chanel tree – all done in black and white – is not traditional by any means – especially since the tree is black.

While the tree itself is exquisite, all the accouterments make it outstanding.



Sew Wonderful is an unnatural green color.

But the tree that was rewarded for thinking outside the box was Sew Wonderful. (Designer: Caryn Hughes.) It's unique and garish at the same time.

The best interpretation of the theme went to Moulin Rouge. (Designer: The Merry Widows and The Gallant Widowers.) The designer even created a mechanical swing with a showgirl on it. Best tabletop designer tree went to Out of this World. (Designer: Katie Long, Thran's Flowers.)

South Shore schools competed against each other with trees that size-wise were in between the two designer categories. Awarded the best handcrafted tree was the magnet school, Sierra House Elementary won for best of theme, and Bijou Community School won for most creative.



Judges like the  
Faith, Love and  
Hope's  
authenticity.

The best Barton tree was Faith, Love and Hope. (Designer: Community Health Center.) The Barton wreath winner is Silver and White. (Designer: ICU.)

Judges were from *Lake Tahoe News*, Lake Tahoe Television, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, Lake Tahoe Community College and Edgewood Tahoe.

For more info about the festival, go online.

– Kathryn Reed

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## Tips for not becoming a victim at holidays

Not everyone considers the holidays a time to celebrate, but rather an opportunity to commit crimes, according to the El

Dorado County Sheriff's Department. Busy parking lots and hurried shoppers are just two factors working in favor of criminals.

**Here are tips to reduce the risk of becoming a victim:**

- Do not leave wrapped presents or new purchases clearly visible in your parked car while shopping. Avoid doing all your shopping at once.
- If possible, do your shopping during the day and avoid peak shopping times.
- Only carry a small purse or wallet, instead of a large bag.
- After opening your presents, do not pile up empty gift boxes from your new computer, DVD, TV etc., on the street for trash pick up. Break boxes down or cut them up to conceal the items.
- Drop off mail at your closest post office if you are mailing money, checks, or gift cards. Pick up your mail promptly and report any suspicious activity immediately to the Sheriff Office or your local Police Department.
- Suspend your mail and paper delivery or have a neighbor pick up these items and ask them to watch your house while you are gone. If you live in the county, contact the El Dorado County Sheriff's STARS at 530.621.7545 to schedule vacation house checks any time of the year. If you live within the city of Placerville, contact Placerville Police SHIELD at 530.642.5210.
- Lock your doors and windows when you leave your house.
- Be prepared for winter weather at home and while driving.

**Online safety tips:**

- Never use your credit card online on a website that doesn't have an SSL (secure sockets layer) encryption.
- No one needs your Social Security number or birth date for a transaction.

- Check your online bank statements regularly – don't wait until the end of the month. If you see something suspicious, contact your bank immediately.
  - Never give anyone your credit card information via email and ensure your computer is up-to-date with current firewalls, updates and anti-virus software.
  - Trust your instincts. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.
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## Winter Trails Day in Truckee

The 20th annual Winter Trails Day is Jan. 10 at Tahoe Donner Cross Country Ski Area.

REI and Tahoe Donner are coordinating the free event in Truckee.

Winter Trails Day offers those new to snow sports the chance to try snowshoeing and cross country skiing for free, and discover the great fitness and social benefits with these easy-to-learn winter activities. There will be free trail passes for pre-registered participants (\$5 onsite suggested donation to the Truckee High School Nordic Team), mini snowshoe and cross country ski lessons, interpretive snowshoe hikes, education, product demos, food, and entertainment.

Bring your equipment. Vendors will have equipment to try, but must restrict time of use as supplies are limited.

The event is from 11am-3pm.

Go online to register.

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# Hospitals killing tens of thousands fewer people

**By Jason Millman, Washington Post**

Wide-ranging efforts to make hospital care safer have resulted in an estimated 50,000 fewer patients dying because of avoidable errors in the past three years, according to a report presented by government and industry officials on Tuesday.

Hospitals reported 1.3 million fewer hospital-acquired infections in all between 2011-2013 compared to the rate of mistakes that hospitals made in 2010, according to the report from the Department of Health and Human Services. That represented a 17 percent drop in hospital errors from 2010, but about 12 percent of all hospitalizations as of 2013 still experienced an adverse event during the course of care.

The reduction of these avoidable incidents – such as falls, pressure ulcers, adverse drug events and more – meant \$12 billion in savings to the health-care system between 2011 and 2013, according to HHS.

**Read the whole story**

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# Fasting an alternative to holiday glutton

By Eliza Barclay, NPR

Before this season of overindulgence freights us with unwanted pounds or a glutton's guilt complex, why not try the opposite of the holiday feast: the fast.

Fasting need not be a punishing, multiday ordeal of deprivation. Increasingly, scientists are warming to the intermittent fast, which can be as brief as one skipped meal once or twice a week.

The benefits of fasting seem to extend far beyond managing weight. A recent paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences makes a cautious but encouraging case for how regularly cutting way back on calories for a short period of time may be good for your health (and that we need to study it more).

**Read the whole story**

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## Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- A hotline (530.542.6001) has been established to record information and/or concerns regarding the Dec. 29-31 SnowGlobe music festival in South Lake Tahoe.

- Two hundred children were treated to a holiday shopping

spree Dec. 2 during the 12th annual Shop with the Sheriff at the Damonte Walmart Superstore in Reno. Thanks to an annual donation from the Washoe County Honorary Deputy Sheriff's Association, each child had a chance to do some holiday shopping for themselves and their family.

- The Tahoe Rim Trail Association is offering guided educational and historical winter treks this winter. For more info, go online.

- Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe has joined with SLATE Art Consulting to feature a rotating exhibition of Northern California artists' work throughout the hotel's lobby and public areas now through 2015.

- Lake of the Sky Outfitters will be showing the award winning film "Chasing Ice" Dec. 4 at 7pm for free at Unity of the Lake, 1195 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

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## **Road beat: Miata keeps its quality for 25 years**



Miata retains its appeal 25 years after its introduction.  
Photos/Larry Weitzman

### **By Larry Weitzman**

When the first Miata hit our shores in 1990, dealers were commanding price premiums of thousands of dollars. The rumor was they were only going to make 3,000. Yeah, sure. That was then and Miata production is now in its 25-year life with more than 900,000 built, the most produced two-seat sports car ever.

It is also the most raced brand ever. More Mazdas are raced every weekend than any other brand in the world, and the Miata is probably No. 1. One of the best Miata racers and preparer of Miata race cars, Mark Hoover, lives right here in El Dorado County. His shop European Performance is based in Cameron Park. They are amazing cars that just don't die; offering perhaps the most bang for the buck than any other roadster.

Lately Miatas have been going a bit upscale coming with more

bells and whistles and even a power retractable hardtop. My 2015 Miata was a Grand Touring edition, six-speed manual, with that very cool power retractable hardtop. It's a great addition while only adding about 82 pounds. With the manual, its avoirdupois is still only 2,593 pounds.



### **Specifications**

Price \$24,515 to about \$33,000

### **Engine**

2.0L DOHC, 16 valve inline four 167 hp at 7,000 rpm

140 lbs.-ft. of torque at 5,000 rpm

Redline 7,200 rpm

### **Transmission**

Five speed manual

Six speed close ratio manual

Six speed automatic

### **Configuration**

Longitudinal mounted front engine/rear wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 91.7 inches

Length 157.3 inches

Width 67.7 inches

Height 49.4 inches

Ground clearance 4.6 inches

Track (f/r) 58.7/58.9 inches

Weight 2,511/2,593 (PRHT)  
pounds  
Weight distribution (f/r)  
51/49 percent  
Fuel Capacity 12.7 gallons  
Trunk Capacity 5.3 cubic  
feet  
Turning Circle 30.8 feet,  
curb to curb  
Steering lock to lock 2.7  
turns  
Wheels (std/opt) 16X6.5/17X7  
inch alloys  
Tires (std//opt)  
205/50X16//205/45X17  
Co-efficient of drag 0.32

### **Performance**

0-60 6.53 seconds  
50-70 3.72 seconds  
50-70 uphill 5.48 seconds  
Top Speed Electronically  
limited to a speed with  
which if the Miata had wings  
it would fly  
Fuel Economy EPA 21/28 mpg  
city/highway. Expect 27-28  
mpg in rural mix driving,  
better than 34 mpg on the  
highway at legal speeds.

Styling has changed little. The original shape from 1990 is retained, but some of the slightly swoopy lines are gone from the later generations, but overall it still has a British feel and that is good. Coefficient of drag is decent at 0.32.

Miata also retains its miniscule size. Its wheelbase is only 92 inches with an overall length of just 157 inches. But it is

relatively wide at almost 68 inches; meaning the track is also wide at 59 inches while standing only 49-inches tall.

Under the low hood, which has the Mazda symbol created in the metal, is an oversquare 2.0L inline four-cylinder powerhouse knocking down a 167 hp at 7,000 rpm (redline is a high 7,200 rpm) and 140 pounds of twist at a 5,000 rpm. But don't think that because it makes its power at higher rpms that this is a peaky engine, it's not. If anything, it has a flexible power curve allowing rpms to drop to 2,000 in sixth gear and still accelerate away without shifting the six-speeder snick-snick manual down a gear or three. In lower gears with 2,000 rpm on the clock acceleration is rather smart.

Quantifying the Miata's performance shows that maximum performance 0-60 mph run stop the chronodex in 6.53 seconds, almost exactly the numbers of most magazines and that's with two shifts. Using only third gear in 50-70 mph runs, the Miata on level ground will require 3.72 seconds and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade only slows that time to 5.48 seconds. In town it is easy to use fifth gear in traffic below 40 mph. It is a beautiful engine, smooth, powerful and flexible. If you don't like shifting, there is a six-speed automatic that is hooked up to the same engine with a revised power curve that makes 158 hp at 6,700, but it should give you very similar performance with a little less effort and fun.

EPA ratings show the Mazda may use some gas at 21/28/24 mpg in city/highway/combined driving. However Road Beat testing says otherwise. Highway testing reflected a 34.9 mpg average in a two way 70 mph run and overall in 300 plus miles the average fluctuated between 27.5 and 28.4 mpg. The worst fuel economy recorded was 22-24 mpg which was during the extensively performance testing. Maybe the EPA did its test during a racetrack evaluation? Driven reasonably, it should do better than the EPA numbers. The secret is to short shift below 4,000 rpm and get into sixth gear at 45 mph when not driving aggressively.

Most drivers who buy a Miata do so because it is fun to drive as it has incredible handling. That was confirmed during testing. Instead of MacPherson struts up front, Miata gets a more expensive and sophisticated double wishbone set up as used in most race cars. Out back is a multilink system and Bilstein twin tube shocks are in all four corners. Even the steering is a hydraulic rack for added feel and feedback. Weight distribution is a perfect 51/49 percent front and rear. My tester had the \$800 upgraded suspension package which was set up a bit firmer, had those Bilsteins and a limited slip diff. Buy it if you can.

All of the above adds up to one of the best handling cars in production. It goes around corners as good or better than any car I ever driven with feedback that lets you know when you approach its limits, which are hard to reach. Pushed hard you can actually feel the Mazda rotate under complete control with perfect turn-in and feedback. It doesn't get much better. Even though the Miata has added some weight over the years, it hasn't disturbed its perfect handling.

Ride quality is firm. On smooth roads with mild undulations it is wonderful, but harsher bumps, dips and potholes are not nearly as forgiving. You won't break any teeth, but you will locate a road's gross imperfections better than a GPS which my tester didn't have. Even with the power solid hardtop and windows up, there is some road noise. Asphalt is quieter than concrete. The engine, which spins a rather quick 3,200 at 70 mph, is pretty quiet, although it has a nice bark from the duals when you are on the gas.



A two-seater with limited trunk space.

Braking is nearly instantaneous from the four wheel discs halting forward progress from 40 mph in about 37 feet. Miata comes with all the braking and safety acronyms (ABS, EBD, TCS DSC, TPMS) and more. Being a power hardtop there are only four airbags (front and side) and may you never use them.

Inside is a very attractive interior. In my tester it was dark mocha heated leather and the seats were on the firm side, but supportive and comfortable. The instrument panel was wonderful, all business, everything you need nothing you don't (meaning big tach and speedo) and it even had a trip computer. Also wonderful was the vertical stack with easy to use controls for the HVAC and sound system. That is appreciated by real drivers. While the trunk is only 5.3 cubic feet, it is well shaped.

Pricing for an MX-5 Sport starts at \$23,720, a car that with a few mods you could track on Sunday and drive to work on Monday. My tester, the Grand Touring with a power hardtop, stickered for \$29,450, plus the boat from Japan (\$795). It also had besides the aforementioned suspension package, the premium package that added keyless entry, xenon headlights, bluetooth, theft and more (\$1,300). With a couple of other items the total sticker shock was \$32,935. The base Sport model looks mighty inviting, but if you want things like cruise, power locks and some other upgrades opt for the Club at about \$3K more than the Sport.

*Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.*