Opinion: EDC supervisors suspend First Amendment

By Larry Weitzman

An inconspicuous item on the Dec. 5 El Dorado County Board of Supervisors agenda removed the most important amendment of our precious Bill of Rights from public board meetings. The item number was 35 and the BOS voted 5-0 to approve the item.

While some may argue that the Second Amendment, the right to keep and bear arms, is more important as it provides the protection of all other amendments, the First Amendment (note it was the First Amendment for a reason) provides for freedom of speech, expression and the press. In reality, the founders and framers were not talking about pornography, but political speech. And speech at BOS meetings is exactly that, political speech and all of it needs protection.



Larry Weitzman

But the BOS decided with item 35 that they would limit speech at meetings from the public. Kind of like modern-day liberals, progressives, socialists and other left wingers who talk of the protection of speech as long as they agree with the speech. As has been demonstrated in recent events, it is the left that tries to prevent speech from people they don’t agree with. Both true conservatives and true liberals believe in Patrick Henry (“Give me liberty or give me death”) and the words of Elizabeth Beatrice Hall who wrote in her work titled”

Friends of Voltaire": "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death of your right to say it." Our board appears not to believe in those immortal words.

Item 35 says the BOS will limit all public comments during public forum and as to individual agenda items to three minutes or less which is not much of a change from before, except organizations will no longer get five minutes and be limited to three minutes. That is of little concern. What is the concern being that all public comment whether it be during public forum or an individual agenda item will be limited to a total of 20 minutes. While it provides the BOS the discretion of extending the time to speak, it's the BOS which gets to decide which speech they want to hear, which is not free speech, but controlled speech.

In addition, 20 minutes means six and two-thirds speakers. Who decides who gets to speak? The BOS? Who lines up first? Think of the injuries to speakers in their race to the public podium. What that means is that some individuals will have their free speech rights curtailed or suspended. That is not America and certainly not the First Amendment. This new measure borders on totalitarianism. And this is part of the good governance manual and the result of the four extremely expensive "public" meetings?

During the hearing, Supervisor Brian Veerkamp said, "The purpose (of time limits) is to provide better government, but is it perfect? No." Well if it is not perfect, then fix it. Duh! Veerkamp needs a history, reading and comprehension lesson, perhaps a re-education camp. "Under both Acts (Brown and Bagley-Keene) a body must provide an opportunity for members of the public to directly address each agenda item under consideration by the body either before or during the body's discussion. Cal. Gov't Code §§ 11125.7(a)."

Veerkamp went on to say, "Board meetings are to be held in public, but are not public meetings" meaning while the public

can watch and listen, they are not entitled to speak. Veerkamp clearly doesn't understand the California Code, the Brown Act and its various amendments. The public has an absolute right to participate at public meetings. That is why they are called public meetings and the operative word in the quote above is "must." The board has very little discretion except as to reasonable individual time limits to prevent personal filibusters.

Not one board member stood up to correct Veerkamp, including the two board members who are up for reelection, Sue Novasel and Mike Ranalli. In fact, Novasel said almost nothing during the entire discussion. Didn't she claim to have studied good governance? Maybe she can sleep with her eyes open and appear to be alert while in a meditative trance.

But Ranalli in a stroke of brilliance not to be outdone by the stupidity of Veerkamp said, "This document (and public comment limitation) clarify how we conduct business and we do have the flexibility to allow the public to speak." Thank you so much King Ranalli. When was Ranalli appointed king and the authority to determine who he will allow to comment on public business, what business they can comment on and what they can say about it? The law even says, "Under the Brown Act, the right to comment includes the right to comment on matters to be considered by the body in closed session."

Ranalli didn't stop shooting his mouth off (he must love to hear himself talk) as he went on by saying it's OK "to set limits on those days when we have other public business to discuss and the limiting depends on what the topic is."

Earth to Ranalli, when you took this job and begged us for our votes, you didn't mention time limits on the conduct of government business. Good government is not like football, with four 15-minute quarters and even the NFL eventually put in overtime rules. It's more like baseball, it's over when it's over, no matter how many innings are required. When it

comes to government, we are a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Ranalli wants government by Ranalli.

If Ranalli wants the power to govern, he must accept the responsibility of the publics' participation. If he listened more carefully, he might learn something. He certainly learns nothing while listening to himself, but the public sure learns about Ranalli.

What makes matters worse is our county counsel, Mike Ciccozzi, said this limiting of public participation is legal and appeared to be all for it. It helps Ciccozzi keep the board under his influence while lobbying for a new $250,000 a year four-year contract. Without Ciccozzi, maybe some potholes could get filled.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Home buyers figuring out how to game GOP tax plan

By Rob Urban and Prashant Gopal, Bloomberg

Out in the Hamptons, Wall Street's favored beach resort on Long Island, brokers and buyers already have a workaround for a tax-plan provision under consideration in Congress that would take away the mortgage-interest deduction for second homes.

A client of Brown Harris Stevens broker Jessica von Hagn who works at a hedge fund decided to turn the vacation home he's buying into an investment property by setting up a limited

liability company. That will allow him to deduct the interest and earn rental income at the height of the season from the modern home on Bridgehampton’s Lumber Lane, with four bedrooms, three baths and a swimming pool on an acre of land.

For the buyer: problem solved. For the Hamptons market: more high-end vacation properties getting listed as rentals, more competition and, most likely, falling rents.

In second-home markets across the U.S., from Cape Cod in Massachusetts to Lake Tahoe, brokers are bracing for a hit.

Read the whole story

IGT adds stimulating dimension to slot machines

By Thomas Moore, Las Vegas Sun

From the very beginning, slot machines – with fast-spinning reels and the sound of coins clattering into metal buckets – were designed to excite the senses and hopefully drive players to bet more. Today, slot makers are hoping new technology will make games even more immersive.

One example is IGT’s new 4-D Sphinx slot, placed on casino floors for the first time at a Las Vegas property last week.

Of course, 3-D, in which objects appear to float and move in space, isn’t new; 3-D movies were popular in the ’50s. The technology is not even new to gaming. IGT’s 3-D Sphinx game, which does not require glasses, went live on casino floors in 2014.

Read the whole story

Tech giant revives deal for Sinatra’s old Tahoe casino

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

When it comes to splashy real estate deals, Silicon Valley icon Larry Ellison usually gets what he wants. Frank Sinatra’s old Lake Tahoe casino, the Cal Neva, is no exception.

After threatening to back out because of delays, Ellison is ready to move forward with his $35.8 million purchase of the bankrupt Cal Neva Resort & Casino on Tahoe’s north shore. Lawyers for Ellison and others connected to the Cal Neva bankruptcy filed court papers Tuesday revealing that Ellison is ready to buy the faded resort as long as he can wrap up the deal by Jan. 10.

The Cal Neva has been closed since 2013.

Read the whole story

McClintock bill would allow bikes in wilderness areas

Efforts to allow bicycles in wilderness areas are moving forward in Congress.

Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, introduced a bill to alter the Wilderness Act.

The House Natural Resources Committee on Dec. 13 voted to pass HR1349.

“Bicycles were allowed in wilderness areas from the inception of the act in 1964 until 1977, when the Forest Service reinterpreted the act to ban them,” McClintock said at the Natural Resources Committee hearing.

One of the principal objectives McClintock has set as chairman of the subcommittee on Federal Lands is to restore public access to the public lands. The bill would restore to federal land managers the option to permit non-motorized mountain bikes, adaptive cycles, strollers and game-carts in wilderness areas where their use is compatible with the environment, trail conditions and existing uses.

The bill now goes to the House floor.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

EDSO looking for man last seen in Meyers

Nearly a month after a man went missing the El Dorado County Sheriff’s Office is finally asking for the public’s help in finding him.

Eric Zentner, 38, was last seen leaving his uncle’s house in Meyers on Nov. 11. He was reported missing four days later.



Eric Zentner

Zentner’s vehicle was located at the Lake Tahoe Airport on Nov. 18. Search teams scoured the area, but to no avail.

He is described as an avid outdoorsman, pilot and diver.

Zentner is about 5-feet-10-inches, 190 pounds, short brown hair, brown eyes and has a full bead.

He has family in Ashland, Ore., and previously resided in Alaska.

Anyone with information is asked to call Detective Damian Frisby 530.573.3022.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

USFS hosting meeting about Incline land

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit will host an open house Dec. 21 to discuss the proposed management of 1,138 acres above Incline Village.

The meeting will be from 3-6pm at The Chateau, 955 Fairway Blvd., Incline.

The Forest Service is seeking comments on the proposed Incline Management Plan, which proposes project-specific activities to establish National Forest System standards for streams and habitat, recreation, road and trail management under the LTBMU Land Management Plan. The planning effort also proposes a Forest Plan amendment to modify a portion of the project area from a general conservation management area to a backcountry management area.

For more information on the project and how to comment, contact Ashley Sibr at 530.543.2615 or asibr@fs.fed.us.

EDC supes approve Meyers Area Plan

By Susan Wood

The recreational hamlet west of South Lake Tahoe took another step toward flexing its individual muscle and identity Tuesday, when the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors approved the recreation-oriented concept of the new Meyers Area Plan.

It was approved 4-0, with Tahoe Supervisor Sue Novasel recusing herself. She later told Lake Tahoe News she was pleased with the stepping-stone outcome.

The proposed plan will head over to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency as one of four more meetings before it returns to the county board for final adoption early next year.

Following a marathon of community meetings, environmental improvement reports and agency hearings, county planner

Brendan Ferry took his show on the road to Placerville to tout the concept that initially began with turmoil years ago and continues with massive nods of approval.

The EIR comment period ended in early October, resulting in only five comments. The plan, which was debated at length, once packed meeting rooms with a multitude of expressed opinions ranging from the types of businesses zoned to the height of structures.

Dec. 12 was no exception with respect to recent heightened agreement. The only commenter was Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Steve Teshara, who commended the revamp proposal of the village as “enhancing the definition” of Meyers.

“I think balance has been achieved,” Teshara said, adding chamber members in the community support the plan.



Meyers Area Plan had not been updated since 1993. Photo/LTN

As it stands, the proposal consolidates three existing commercial and community services zoning districts along Highway 50. It loosely covers a 669-acre area between Pioneer Trail and Highway 89.

Ferry explained to the supervisors the plan retained “the

values” of Meyers, including recreation being its “key priority.” This means many bike and pedestrian trails are due to go in, with landscaping, benches and planter boxes enhancing the aesthetics. Another value focuses on Meyers as a historic gateway to the Lake Tahoe Basin. Its roots are deeply planted in keeping it a walkable community with a north-to-south, east-to-west view of “world class amenities.”

Of course, there are bugs to work out such as relocating the U.S. Agricultural Station. There are also considerations to be made like beefing up broadband in the area, which can be spotty at best.

Another key priority is elevating the level of safety for pedestrians. That’s why the community is up for a complete street format designed to slow down traffic so walkers may safely cross busy Highway 50.

Take Apache Avenue. “We’d like to improve that intersection,” Ferry said.

Also keeping Meyers’ unique profile, the county planner told the board the proposal calls for a building-height threshold of 42 feet, even though TRPA would allow 56 feet. Currently, no structure stands over 36 feet. When coming up with this number, the planners offered a rendering of a 45-foot building that didn’t impede visibility.

“I feel we’ve landed in a middle ground as we met with the stakeholders a number of times,” Ferry said.

A middle ground can be an ideal place to be – especially in an area debating the finer and not-so-fine points of vacation home rentals. Supervisor John Hidahl asked Ferry if the home-sharing phenomenon was considered in the concept. Currently, Meyers has no hotel, with other aspects up in the air such as Tahoe Paradise Golf Course being for sale.

Ferry replied in no uncertain terms that all life in Meyers

was covered.

So with that, the county formally adopted the Meyers Area Plan, approved the California Environmental Quality Act and TRPA environmental documentation, amended the General Plan, revised county zoning and directed staff to analyze costs.

Nev. board gives up control of wild horses

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Nevada Board of Agriculture voted 8-1 to hand over control of as many as 3,000 wild horses in the Virginia Range to a yet-to-be-determined nonprofit group.

The board’s vote in favor of the plan came despite widespread opposition from wild horse enthusiasts who say it puts the horses at risk of slaughter and business interests who say horses on the range are integral to the state’s frontier image and business recruitment.

“This is a dangerous move, it is an illegal move and it is totally against the will of the public,” said Suzanne Roy, executive director of the American Wild Horse Campaign.

Read the whole story

Artists party in South Lake Tahoe

Tahoe Activist Artists is hosting an appreciation party, artists talk and silent auction on Dec. 21.

The adults-only event is designed to be an intimate evening of art, ideas and inspiration.

Each artist will make a short presentation about their work in the exhibition. Admission is free, and sparkly beverages will be served.

It will be at High Vibe Society Artisan Collective on Third Street in South Lake Tahoe from 6-8pm.