

Calif. schools grappling with growing pension costs

By Jessica Calefat, CALmatters

California's public schools have enjoyed a remarkable restoration of funding since the bone-deep cuts they endured during the recession, but many now face a grave financial threat as they struggle to pay the escalating costs of teachers' pensions.

Over the next three years, schools may need to use well over half of all the new money they're projected to receive to cover their pension obligations, leaving little extra for classrooms, state Department of Finance and Legislative Analyst's Office estimates show.

Some districts are predicting deficits and many are already bracing for what's to come by cutting programs, reducing staff or drawing down their reserves even though per-pupil funding is at its highest level in three decades and voters recently extended a tax hike on the rich to help pay for schools.

[Read the whole story](#)

Age not an obstacle in annual Tahoe tennis tourney



Zephyr Cove Tennis Club will be the site of the Tahoe Tennis Classic, July 26-29. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Dominic Mushines is proving almost daily that tennis is a lifetime sport.

This week the 84-year-old is going to test his abilities when he competes in the 35th annual Tahoe Tennis Classic at Zephyr Cove Tennis Club.

“Younger guys can overpower me, but I have for my age pretty good reflexes and ability,” Mushines told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I am fairly fast on my feet for my age. I’ve learned to be patient on the court and not try crazy shots. I wait for the opportunity to make my shot.”



Dominic Mushines

With age comes patience, which can be an added bonus on the tennis court, especially against younger opponents.

It's been a few years since Mushines has competed in a tournament or league. Today it's more about playing with friends on a recreational basis.

In the four-day Classic, which starts Thursday, Mushines and his partner Ross Rittiman of Zephyr Cove are guaranteed two matches – just like the other 200-plus competitors. They are competing in the 140-plus division, meaning their combined ages are at least 140.

He's happy to be playing with someone younger; hoping Rittiman does more of the running.

With the temperature supposed to be in the 80s this week, Mushines isn't worried about the heat affecting him.

“I can wear the young guys out. They aren’t used to heat,” Mushines said. “You have to look for every little advantage you can.”

While he may not have been competing regularly, that doesn’t mean Mushines hasn’t been playing.

Mushines is able to play year-round because he lives at Genoa Lakes in the summer and in Palm Springs in the winter. The attorney isn’t sure the exact number of years he’s played tennis – 60 something – but he does make sure wherever he lives that a tennis court is nearby. The sport is that important to him.

Once a friend turned him onto the sport he has been playing it ever since. For years he lived in the Tahoe Keys neighborhood of South Lake Tahoe, and would often be found on the courts there.

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Notes:

- Tahoe Tennis Classic – July 26-29
 - For more information, go **online**.
 - There is no fee to watch. This is some of the highest caliber tennis played on the South Shore.
 - This is the main fundraiser for the nonprofit Zephyr Cove Tennis Club Foundation.
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Opinion: Ownership of words becoming divisive

By Jennifer Mercieca, *The Conversation*

You might think that the culture war over race and immigration primarily transpires in dramatic events, like the woman who climbed the Statue of Liberty to protest Trump's child detention policy or the events in Charlottesville last summer.

But it also exists in the banal and everyday ways that we communicate.

It involves battles over the dominant meaning of words, and how we use those words to describe our values and construct our policies. For example, on July 19, House Speaker Paul Ryan urged conservatives to engage in a rhetorical battle over what he called the "hijacking" of traditional conservative terms like "Western civilization" by the alt-right.

Ryan asked conservatives to notice that a key term that they take for granted as universally understood had recently become contested. In a 2009 speech Ryan explained that "Western civilization" was "rooted in reason and faith;" it was a tradition that "affirms the high dignity, rights, and obligations of the individual human person." Now Ryan fears that it is being construed to mean "white identity politics," which is more like "racism" and "nationalism."

Because we're so immersed in our own culture and social networks, these rhetorical battles can be easy to miss; you have to look at them from the outside, which is a tricky thing to do.

One way to take a peek inside a culture's discourse is to examine what rhetorical scholars like me call a culture's "enthymemes," which we can think of as the ways that words,

phrases and ideas are understood in a particular community.

Enthymemes serve as common ground

In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle coined the term “enthymeme” to explain how different words and arguments resonate in one community but not in others. Technically, an enthymeme is a “rhetorical syllogism” – an argument made with a premise that’s assumed or taken for granted, and so goes unsaid.

For example, when you hear someone say, “the states,” you know they’re referring to the United States of America. They don’t need to actually say it. More confusing is when people say “the city” because depending on where you are, “the city” could be San Francisco or Chicago. The difference between how we understand “the states” and “the city” is the difference between a commonly shared enthymeme and one that’s specific to a region.

If you want to persuade a group of people, then you need to understand what they understand, see the world the way that they do and use the words that they use to describe objects and ideas. Otherwise, you’ll just talk past them.

As Aristotle pointed out, what was persuasive in Athens might not be persuasive in Sparta. He thought that we could be most persuasive when we argue using commonly understood enthymemes and examples.

Decoding one American enthymeme: diversity

It can be difficult to see how enthymemes operate in a culture when you’re on the inside. It can help to look at how your culture is perceived by an outsider.

As part of my research for a book that I’m completing about the 2016 election, I’ve spent the past few months reading the message boards and websites of white nationalists, a group

that exists on the fringes of American culture. It's been fascinating to learn the white nationalists' enthymemes and to see how they understand discourse about race.

I perused the now-banned white nationalist website Daily Stormer and read content like neo-Nazi Andrew Anglin's article "A Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right."

I learned that white nationalists believe that racism is normal and that everyone else is a racist too. They are avowedly pro-white and believe that "diversity" is the dominant American culture's code for a systematic program of promoting what they call "white genocide." According to white nationalists, a conspiracy exists to exterminate white people "via mass immigration into white countries which was enabled by a corrosive liberal ideology of white self-hatred, and that the Jews are at the center of this agenda."

With that basic understanding in mind, let's turn to a seemingly innocuous July 4th tweet from former President Bill Clinton celebrating the nation's diversity.

Many of the responses to Clinton's tweet understood his comment as a celebration of fundamental American values. Americans might disagree about how much diversity is best, but it has been generally understood that America is a "melting pot" and that diversity has made the nation stronger.

But not everyone accepted Clinton's enthymemes.

If you believe that there is a conspiracy in the dominant culture to exterminate white people through immigration, you would read Clinton's greeting claiming that the result of "diversity" is "deeper strength" as a call to unite all non-white people in the conspiracy of white genocide. You would read Clinton's celebration of "we the people" as "us versus them."

For example, one respondent decoded Clinton's tweet from the

white nationalist perspective, noting that “diversity” is “anti-White, anti-America, anti-While [sic] male.”

Another respondent rejected Clinton’s enthymeme, arguing that calls for diversity are calls for the eradication of white people: Imagine attempting to have a productive conversation about issues of race or diversity with someone who holds completely different enthymemes from you.

When one side understands “diversity” as America’s strength and another side understands “diversity” as a conspiracy to exterminate white people, there is little common ground to discuss policies such as building a border wall, affirmative action, or whether to abolish ICE.

Without shared enthymemes, problem solving is almost impossible.

Beyond white nationalism

While white nationalist beliefs and rhetoric represent an extreme version of how different groups understand “diversity,” it’s possible to see how the meaning of the word is contested in attacks on university diversity initiatives. To one group, diversity initiatives mean allowing unqualified people to get an easy pass. To another, it fulfills an educational ideal of bringing people of different backgrounds and circumstances together. These different understandings make it that much harder to have a real debate.

One way to describe this cultural moment is that we’re in the middle of a battle to control the nation’s culturally dominant enthymemes – the ways that we communicate our understanding of our nation and its ideals.

It’s productive for cultures and subcultures to have open disagreements about facts, words and values – otherwise, dominant ways of thinking about the world may become calcified and suffocate progress. Think about where we’d be today if no

one had ever questioned the once dominant enthymeme of “citizen” that denied women or African-Americans the ability to vote.

Yet nations need to share enthymemes to function. Without a mutually shared understanding of facts, words and values, a culture cannot endure.

It’s possible that at this moment in history there is little that we all understand in the same way, with the same emotional intensity.

We see more rhetorical battles over the meanings of key terms during moments of transition and upheaval. The instability in our understanding of the meaning of “diversity” reflects the nation’s actual instability.

Jennifer Mercieca is an associate professor of communication, Texas A&M University.

Report: States should be cautious as they look to sin taxes for revenue

By Yvonne Gonzalez, Las Vegas Sun

So-called sin taxes on alcohol, tobacco and gambling are not a reliable source of state revenue, authors of a new research report warn.

Sin taxes are volatile and likely to shrink as more states look to expand sports betting under a new Supreme Court ruling and legalize recreational marijuana as a solution to budget

issues, according to a report released today by Pew Charitable Trusts.

The report, "Are Sin Taxes Healthy for State Budgets," is a joint project between Pew and the Rockefeller Institute of Government that found "taxes on vices are tempting, but unreliable sources of revenue."

Read the whole story

SLTFD looking for community input

South Lake Tahoe Fire Rescue is hosting a meeting July 24 to share the community's risk assessment.

It will be from 7-9pm at the Fire Training Center located at 1195 Rufus Allen Blvd.

The department is seeking input on the fire department's operations, which will be included in the Standards of Cover document.

There will be question and answer period, as well as a presentation by Fire Chief Jeff Meston.

Did short-term rentals kill

the mountain town?

By Tom Vanderbilt, *Outside*

Brian Barker was living in Portland with a well-paying union job as a spokesperson for the fire department. But despite having “a job you don’t leave”—he had an itch. “I wanted to go live in the mountains,” he says. “I didn’t want to sit in traffic all the time. I was tired of living in the city.”

So he began searching. Missoula, Boise, Truckee—“anywhere within 30 minutes of a ski area.” In 2014, he relocated to Crested Butte, a 1,500-person-strong former coal-mining town nestled in Colorado’s Upper Gunnison River Valley. It’s often referred to as the last great American ski town, a distinction that locals, despite acknowledging it with a hint of self-deprecating smirk, do not really go out of their way to dispute. Phenomenal skiing aside, it is the sort of place where doors go unlocked (except, occasionally, to keep bears out); where locals on the Crested Butte Bitch and Moan Facebook page gripe about tourists (typically Texans) exceeding the 15-mile-per-hour speed limit downtown; where powder days mean closed stores and canceled meetings; where even the gas pumps at the local Shell station seem to take things just a bit more slowly.

“This is a great place to raise kids,” Barker, a divorced father of two young children, tells me one evening, wearing a baseball cap, a vest, and a hint of stubble. We’re seated at the Brick Oven, a locals’ hangout on Elk Avenue, the town’s main spine, where tidy wood-frame buildings in a rainbow palette glow beneath the snow-capped mass of the eponymous mountain.

This postcard existence comes at a price, though. The cliché about remote adventure-town idylls is that people either have a second home or a second job. Barker has three jobs.

Not long ago, Barker stopped by the property-management company that oversees his rental to talk about a water heater on the fritz. “The manager said, ‘I know you have kids, but the owners are thinking about turning your place into a VRBO. You should probably start looking.’”

Read the whole story

Nev. sets bar lower for 11th-graders taking ACT

By Meghin Delaney, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada high school students taking the required ACT exam will be considered proficient starting this fall if they reach a threshold that’s lower than the national standard set by the test creators.

The State Board of Education signed off on the “cut scores” that will be used to determine whether students have demonstrated sufficient mastery of math and English on the test at a meeting Thursday in Las Vegas. The board decided to divide student test scores into four different categories, with the highest two – Levels 3 and 4 – being considered proficient or passing grades.

ACT doesn’t set cut scores the same way, instead using what its creators call benchmarks.

Read the whole story

Road Beat: Honda Clarity plug-in hybrid impresses



The 2018 Honda Clarity plug-in hybrid, is an almost perfect EV. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Clarity was originally a name reserved for Honda's venture into fuel cells, which still exists in the Clarity Fuel Cell. But at a price approaching \$60,000, its sales are very small at about 500 units for 2017. However, the new Clarity Plug-in Hybrid is having robust sales in comparison and for many a good reason.

This new mid-size Clarity looks like a Civic, but it is

actually a half inch longer than the all new Accord at 193 inches. But it uses its own smaller wheelbase of just 108 inches. Width is a bit beamy at 74 inches. Its sleek window line gives it that new Civic look, and I would normally say it's a good-looking ride, which overall it is. But probably in the interests of low wind resistance, it has ugly wheel wells with the rears looking like something out of the 1950s resembling a hearse. Maybe the new buyers think "till death do us part."

But this ride is about fuel economy and the type of fuel, in this case gasoline and electrons. Both sources of energy powers the Clarity, singularly or in combination and in combination in two ways. Either the gas engine is connected directly into the front wheels (via a CVT) in concert with the electric motor or with the engine powering a generator providing electricity for the electric motor only. For electrons, Clarity has a 17 kWh L-I battery which can power the Clarity for over 50 miles without the gas intervention. Honda says 47 miles, but I routinely got over 50 miles solely on the battery and it should as the rule of thumb is 3-4 miles of range per kWh and the Clarity as said before has 17 of them at full charge which takes about 10-12 hours on 110v, 15-amp receptacle. Perhaps the lesser range reported by Honda is due to the computer always retainer 2 kWh for operating in hybrid mode, leaving 15 kWh for EV mode.

This is a high-performance car as it knocked off 0-60 mph with a full battery in sport mode in an average of 7.56 seconds and it really doesn't get rolling until about 20 mph. With a depleted battery the number drops to a still good 8.74 second average. How does it do it? Clarity PHEV has one engine and one motor, with the engine being an Atkinson cycle 1.5L DOHC, 16 valve VTEC unit pumping out 103 hp at 5,500 rpm with 99 pounds of twist at 5,000 rpm combining with powerful 181 hp electron sucker (at 5,000-6,000 rpm) and a substantial 232 pounds of twist from 0-2,000 rpm with a maximum total combined

212 hp meaning you don't get all 181 hp from the electric motor with the gas engine running. But that's some substantial moxie.



Specifications

Price \$36,600 plus \$890 destination and delivery

Engine

1.5L DOHC 16 valve VTEC inline four 103 hp @ 5,500 rpm

99 lb.-ft. of torque @ 5,000 rpm

Electric power

AC Permanent magnet synchronous motor 181 hp @ 5,000-6,000 rpm

232 lb.-ft. of torque @ 0-2,000 rpm

Combined hp 212 hp

Battery

17 kWh Lithium-ion

Transmission

Fixed single speed

Ratio 2.454-0.805 CVT

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 108.3 inches

Length 192.7 inches

Width 73.9 inches

Height 58.2 inches

Track (f/r) 62.2/62.5 inches

Weight 4,059 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)
57/43 percent

Passenger volume 101.5 cubic
feet

Cargo volume 15.5 cubic feet

Fuel capacity 7.0 gallons

Turning circle 38.4 feet

Steering lock to lock 2.41
turns

Wheels 18-inch alloys

Tires 235/45X18

Performance

0-60 mph with some battery
range and charge 7.56
seconds

0-60 mph hybrid only (EV
range of 0 miles) 8.74
seconds

50-70 mph with some battery
4.04 seconds

50-70 mph hybrid only 4.40
seconds

50-70 uphill with some
battery 5.62 seconds

50-70 uphill hybrid only
8.15 seconds

Top speed well into triple
digits

Fuel economy EPA rated
(hybrid) 44/40/42 mpg

city/highway/combined, EPA Electric only mpg equivalent 110 mpg. Expect 60 mpg in overall driving. In hybrid only driving expect 40-46 mpg.

Passing times are excellent when you have all 212 ponies with 50-70 mph coming up in 4.04 seconds and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade only slowing a second and a half to 5.62 seconds. However, with a depleted battery those times slow to 4.40 and 8.15 seconds respectively. So, if you are entering any traffic light grand prix or looking to overtake a big semi on a grade, having that battery with more than a minimum charge is a good thing. The tranny is a super smooth CVT unit.

The other half of the Clarity equation is fuel economy. Filling up the electron box takes at least 17 kWh of electrical energy and here in El Dorado County that is normally not inexpensive at 28 cents a kWh or about \$4.76 cents meaning that the cost per mile for energy is about 10 cents a mile. Gasoline is about \$3 a gallon and at 42 mpg which is Clarity's EPA combined fuel economy rating, it works out to 7 cents a mile. When no subsidies are involved the true cost of operation is less with gasoline.

As a hybrid the Clarity is rated at 44/40/42 mpg city/highway/combined. MPGe is rated at 110 mpg. On the highway at 70 mph in a two-way run it actually returned 45.9 mpg. Overall hybrid use averaged about 40 mpg. However, with nightly charging, and daily use it rarely used the gas engine and the trip computer consistently showed 199.9 mpg as the engine rarely fired. It operated as a pure EV. It's a good thing the engine doesn't fire as fuel capacity is a measly seven gallons. There are motorcycles that carry more fuel. Overall in 518 miles of driving including a round trip to Carson City, the Clarity averaged 61.6 mpg. In that round trip

to Carson City of 216 miles starting with a full charge the average was 63.4 mpg, the highest ever recorded by the Road Beat. Awesome.

In level driving expect an EV range of 50-52 mpg. However, in my climb up the Sierra on Highway 50 starting at Missouri Flat Road, the battery was all done in about 33 miles. I picked up a few miles coming into Tahoe from Echo Summit and about 6 miles going down Spooner Grade (about 8 miles of downhill) into Carson City.

Handling for this 2 ton (curb weight is 4,059 pounds) mid-size ride is actually quite good. It certainly has the creds. Listen to this: State of the art four-wheel independent suspension, a quick electric power steering rack that is 2.41 turns lock to lock, big 18-inch (if not to pretty) alloys shod with serious 235/45 rubber and a 62-inch track. It has cornering power and plenty of it, but it's too easy, numb steering and weight keep it from being perfect. But for 99 percent of you and me and 100 percent of Clarity buyers, they will think they are ready for Le Mans.

Ride quality is good and on smooth roads it is very quiet with no tire noise. But when the road is coarse the Michelin Energy Saver tires make some noise. There is no wind and engine noise. It is very smooth riding and compliant. In EV mode it is unbelievably smooth and quiet.

All the safety inventions come with Clarity, including auto emergency braking and lane departure assist. Headlights are very good.

Leather bathes the interior and the seats are comfortable. Rear seating is copious and comfortable as well. Instrumentation is reasonably complete except there is no tach which would be useless in this vehicle since the engine sometimes acts as a generator controlled by a computer or doesn't run at all in EV mode. It has an excellent trip

computer.

The hatchback trunk is large.

Admission to this select vehicle will cost you (Touring model, imagine a Touring model with a 7-gallon gas tank) will set you back \$36,600 plus \$890 for the boat from Sayama, Saitama, Japan. Everything talked about is standard. If we in California paid the national average for electricity which is about 14 cents a kWh, Clarity makes lots of dollars and sense, but at PG&E rates, gasoline is a much cheaper energy source, making straight hybrids more economically sensible. However, there is a performance price to pay with a straight hybrid.

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.

Music on the Beach benefits TAP

Tahoe Arts Projects' annual Music on the Beach will be Aug. 16 7-9pm at Lakeshore Lodge and Spa in South Lake Tahoe.

It will feature musicians Trey Stone, Niall McGuinness and George Tavoularis.

Bring blankets, low back chairs and food. Doors open at 6pm.

Cost is \$10.

Treating Tahoe's West Shore trees

By Christina Restaino

Last winter marked one of the most severe flu seasons in recent memory. Thousands of people were hospitalized and many died. People with compromised immune systems such as the elderly or young children were hit particularly hard with the flu.

Lake Tahoe's forests are no different.

Just as humans are susceptible to the flu when our immune systems are delicate, forests are more susceptible to pest infestations and other plights when trees' immune systems are weakened by drought. Tahoe forests were clear-cut during the 1800s Comstock mining era. As a result, fire suppression and lack of management allowed these forests to become overly dense, making them even more vulnerable to fire, insects, and disease.

Lake Tahoe agencies have been working to combat this challenge for 15 years.

Since the Angora wildfire of 2007, agencies have treated more than 50,000 acres for hazardous fuels reduction. The largest project covered approximately 10,000 acres to reduce the fire risk in the wildland urban interface where the forest connects to neighborhoods. But there is more work to do, and resource managers at Tahoe are committed to restoring the health of forests throughout the basin.

After five years of extreme drought, the West Shore is at

particularly high risk of a high-intensity wildfire. A new approach has emerged to tackle this challenge and to target treatment of 60,000 acres from the lakeshore to the upper forest.

The Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership is working to improve the health of our forests in an area at high risk for wildfire. Multiple agencies and stakeholder partners are collaborating on how to boost the immune system of our forests. It started with an overall assessment of general forest health and resilience. The group is studying what optimal health looks like—how dense the forest should be, what healthy wildlife habitats look like, and what tree species are best suited for our forest.

Next, the group identified how far the West Shore forest is from optimal health. Out of this process emerged the Landscape Resilience Assessment—a comprehensive look at the values and services we derive from our forests and how far afield these are from desired conditions.

The Landscape Resilience Assessment found that a majority of the West Shore forest is at risk of high-intensity wildfire or beetle mortality, which usually follows drought. The assessment identified where the least-healthy, least-resilient areas are for forest density, wildlife, and fire risk. The partnership can now use this information to help target areas for improved resource management.

The Lake Tahoe West group is also working on a Landscape Restoration Strategy to outline and communicate the why and how of forest restoration goals and activities. Strategy development is occurring alongside a detailed, science-based modeling initiative to understand how different forest treatments affect attributes like fire risk, wildlife habitat, air quality, and water quality. This modeling work is considering landscape-level dynamics and will help the group sketch out solutions that match the scale of the problem.

Partners will complete the Landscape Restoration Strategy in the fall of 2018 and project-scale planning will begin.

Lake Tahoe West has involved stakeholders and helped land management agencies partner with communities to find solutions to our most pressing problems. This collaboration will help forest managers create more resilient forests while improving recreation, wildlife habitat, and scenic quality. For more information, go **online**.

*Christina Restaino is the forest ecosystem health program manager for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and leads the Interagency Design Team for Lake Tahoe West. This article was first published in the 2018 summer issue of **Tahoe In Depth**.*