# Opinion: Media needs to storm the places pols tell the truth

**By Peter Beinart, Newsweek**

Of the many things that the now-legendary Mitt Romney Boca Raton video has revealed, perhaps the most important is this: the real presidential campaign is the one the public doesn't see. Sure, Romney and President Obama fly around the country giving speeches and doing media interviews.

And sure, they occasionally use those speeches or interviews to unveil some policy nugget that helps Americans understand what they might do in office. But for the most part, their public performances are just that: performances. They speak in calculated, glittering generalities. The throngs who crowd into their rallies never get the chance to probe deeper, and when interviewers do, the candidates artfully deflect their toughest questions, knowing full well that any interviewer who inquires too relentlessly is unlikely to get many future interviews.

The more honest discussions take place behind closed doors, in the innumerable private fundraisers that Romney and Obama do with their big givers. Honesty, in fact, is part of what those donors are paying for. No one shells out $50,000 to listen to the same platitudes that Joe and Mary Six-Pack hear at a 5,000-person rally in Akron, Ohio. In the "skybox" society (in Michael Sandel's parlance) in which we live, the super-rich don't simply stand in different lines at the airport; they experience a different presidential campaign.

It's not that the remarks candidates offer to donors bear no resemblance to their publicly stated views. They just express those views in a franker, less scripted, less sanitized way.

Publicly Romney derides big government. Privately he told Florida donors this spring that he might slash the Department of Education and eliminate Housing and Urban Development—specifics he had not shared with ordinary Americans. Publicly Romney accuses Obama of wanting to make Americans dependent on government. Privately he tells donors that half the country is composed of whiners who want to be dependent on government. Publicly Romney praises Israel and criticizes the Palestinians. Privately he says he opposes his own party platform’s stated commitment to a Palestinian state.

Similarly, Barack Obama publicly talks about the economic frustrations of working-class Americans. But in the heat of the 2008 campaign, then-candidate Obama was caught by a Huffington Post “citizen journalist” telling a group of San Francisco donors that small-town Pennsylvanians “get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy toward people who aren’t like them.” In private, in other words, Romney and Obama offer a version of what they say in public, just minus the dishonest, poll-tested fluff.

Currently the candidates’ staffs sharply restrict the media’s access to events with big donors. The Romney campaign does not allow press into fundraisers held in private homes. Obama bars journalists from the question-and-answer sessions that usually follow his remarks to donors. And the press plays along. That needs to change. What *Mother Jones*, Jimmy Carter’s grandson, and his anonymous videotaping source have shown is that a creative, audacious press corps could do far more to inform the mass of Americans about the things big donors hear behind closed doors. Journalists could seek out donors, waiters, or anyone else with access to those closed-to-the-press events and either interview them about what they heard or, better yet, ask them to tape it.

Media organizations could tell the campaigns that if they don’t allow reporters to cover the freewheeling candidate Q&A sessions that take place behind closed doors at night, those reporters won’t cover the rote stump speeches the candidates give in the afternoon.

In short, the press should do everything it possibly can, within the bounds of law and ethics, to foil the campaigns’ efforts to speak one way to the 1 percent – and another way to everyone else.

Thanks to the Supreme Court, the government is less able to regulate, or even track, the way money enters political campaigns. But the media can still influence what that money buys. By exposing the private conversations between donors and aspiring presidents, the media cannot only fulfill its duty to help average Americans make an informed choice. It can also undermine the very rationale for super-rich donors to give in the first place.

After all, if everyone in the country is going to learn what candidates say at fundraisers, funders will have less incentive to shell out $50,000 to attend. And then, perhaps, people like Romney and Obama will spend less time speaking honestly about the American people and more time speaking honestly to them.

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# Brothers make a living at removing rattlesnakes from yards, homes

**By Hudson Sangree, Sacramento Bee**

Just above the tract homes of Empire Ranch, on a Folsom hillside covered in boulders and brown grass, Bruce Ramirez plies his trade: keeping the suburbs safe from rattlesnakes.

Greenbelts and golf courses are particularly hazardous, he said. In the past week or so, he and his brother Len have pulled about 50 rattlesnakes from around Northern California homes.

In the foothills, where suburbia and prime snake habitat intersect, homebuilding is picking up again after a long hiatus. That’s disturbing more rattlers. And with summer temperatures lingering into fall, young snakes, whose bite can be the most dangerous, are numerous and active.

“It’s beautiful country,” Ramirez said. “People want to live here, too. I guess we have something in common with snakes.”

It’s not an easy coexistence.

The slithering of rattlers onto suburban lots — biting pets, frightening children — creates demand for snake catchers such as Ramirez Rattlesnake Removal. The brothers’ clients include homeowners, schools, high-tech companies and hospitals.

The Ramirez brothers have removed snakes tucked behind toilets, coiled in bedrooms and lurking under TVs. More times than they would like, they’ve come face to face with rattlers in the narrow spaces under houses while crawling on their bellies.

“The babies are out in high numbers right now,” Bruce Ramirez said.

In Empire Ranch, a new development in Folsom, homeowners routinely call Bruce Ramirez to rid their yards of snakes. He has traced the creatures to their hillside dens and captured dozens.

Last week, he handed his card to Elisa and Manuel Cordero in the driveway of their Folsom home and suggested some preventive measures, such as sealing garage doors and keeping landscaping clean and open.

The Corderos have lived in Folsom for six years, during which time they’ve had a number of snake encounters. Once, Elisa Cordero killed a rattler with a shovel. Another time, her husband shot one with a BB gun after their 6-year-old granddaughter heard its rattle while playing in the backyard.

One day, they said, their 9-year-old grandson pounded on the front door after school, yelling and frightened. Elisa opened the door and saw a big rattler coiled in the corner, an arm’s length from the boy.

The couple moved from Citrus Heights and were surprised by the number of snakes. They didn’t hear about the rattlers from sales agents. A prospective neighbor told them, “There’s critters,” and left it at that, they said.

Northern Pacific rattlesnakes are common in growing suburbs such as Lincoln, Folsom and Granite Bay. The upscale community of El Dorado Hills is the epicenter of snake sightings, Len Ramirez said.

“We call it ‘Snake-orado,'” he said.

Bruce Ramirez told the story of a call to a home in Serrano, a gated community in El Dorado Hills. The family dog had been bitten overnight and refused to come inside. When Ramirez got there, he realized the reason: The snake was indoors with the family, including a 3-year-old child.

“The dog knew better than to go back in the house,” he said.

As of last Wednesday, the 50 snakes recently removed by the Ramirez brothers were stored in holding tanks at Len Ramirez’s Auburn home. He planned to take them into the mountains and release them, as he does with almost all the snakes he catches.

Patrick Foy, a spokesman for the state Department of Fish and

Game, said the department has an informal agreement with Len Ramirez that allows him to distribute rattlesnakes on public wild lands.

Foy said state law gives residents “carte blanche” to do what they will with rattlesnakes — kill them, catch them — with no permit required. The snakes, native to this area, are not protected as either threatened or endangered.

Despite the law’s treatment of rattlesnakes as pests, the Ramirez brothers said they respect their quarry — in part for the vital role snakes play in controlling the state’s rodent population.

“We move onto their property, but we really need them,” Bruce Ramirez said.

Len Ramirez pulled out a bucket of small rattlers, youngsters that were born in late summer or early autumn.

They look almost harmless, and they are much harder to spot than older snakes, he said. But their bite can be the most dangerous, because they have yet to make a kill and cleanse their venom ducts.

“They can discharge more venom,” Len Ramirez said.

Children and dogs are especially in danger from the small rattlers, which they tend to approach with less caution.

“You wake up in the morning and your dog’s head is the size of a melon,” he said.

Using snake tongs, Len Ramirez pulled out a 3-foot rattlesnake he caught last week at the Twelve Bridges community in Lincoln. It coiled and rattled as he set it on the grass.

The snake was one of hundreds he has pulled from Twelve Bridges over the years. When the community’s golf course was being built, he said he removed 800 from that area alone.

Twelve Bridges is part of a snake zone that extends across the foothills of Placer, Sacramento and El Dorado counties. Over in El Dorado Hills, John Carle has called Bruce Ramirez to his house several times to remove rattlesnakes. His house sits at the end of a cul-de-sac, adjacent to open space. He said he's seen hundreds of rattlers.

When he moved to the area 10 years ago, Carle said, new construction caused a mini-plague of snakes. Neighbors had dozens in their yards. Now the snake sightings have tapered off, and residents tend to take snakes in stride.

His Labrador retriever, Jackson, has been bitten four times, but Carle thinks he's finally learned his lesson. "If he hears a rattle," Carle said, "he'll back up."

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# Being super rich is not a requirement to give to charity

**By Claudia Buck, Sacramento Bee**

Bill Gates and Warren Buffett started it. Now a small but growing group of far-less-wealthy Californians are joining in: taking a public pledge to leave money to charity after they're gone.

And it doesn't require being one of America's billionaires. The point is not about how much you're giving, but why.

"Everyone can leave a bequest to charity of something. We want to change the idea that you have to be rich to leave money to charity," said Elfrena Foord, a certified financial planner and co-founder of the California Plan Your Giving Project.

This month the state Legislature marked the third Plan Your Giving Day, which encourages everyday residents to earmark a portion of their assets – of any amount – for charitable causes. Since it was launched two years ago, about 500 individuals and couples have signed on.

Judy McGarry, a retired Sacramento County probation and compliance officer, is among them.

Inspired by the project, she recently set up a five-figure endowment and upped the percentage she's leaving in her trust to the Sacramento Senior Safe House, a residential respite for abused or neglected seniors.

"I did some soul-searching and looked at what causes are important to me. I'm very passionate about this," said McGarry, on a recent tour of the Safe House, an immaculate six-bedroom home tucked away on a quiet residential street in northeast Sacramento. Staffed mainly by volunteers, the 24-hour facility enables abused seniors to get back on their feet emotionally and financially. Its $250,000 budget is funded entirely by donations.

McGarry, who made her financial gifts in memory of her late mother, sees it as a personal legacy that will live on long after she's gone.

Rocklin residents Michael and Lindy Dunlavey, who ran a successful graphic design business for years, also signed the California giving pledge. Now retired, they've designated bequests in their trust to a number of local charities, from the Crocker Art Museum to the Placer County SPCA.

"Sacramento has been really good to us, so it's something we feel is important to do, especially for local groups," said Michael, who's served on a number of community boards, including the Crocker, Habitat for Humanity and the Sacramento

History Foundation.

Charitable bequests certainly aren’t a new concept. Any number of museums, symphonies, nonprofits, churches and charities continually ask donors to leave something behind in their wills. And many people, especially at year-end tax time, routinely make financial donations to causes they care about.

But giving seems to be coming back in vogue. Nationally, total giving in 2011 by individuals was $218 billion – up by nearly 4 percent from 2010, according to Giving USA, the research arm of the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. Donations by individuals are 73 percent of all charitable giving, it said.

And it comes in all sizes.

Billionaires like investor Warren Buffett, along with Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and his wife, Melinda, garnered big headlines in 2010 when they launched The Giving Pledge, which asks America’s billionaires to pledge at least 50 percent of their wealth to charity in their lifetime or after.

Nearly 100 individuals and families have taken the pledge, from 28-year-old Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg to aging oil tycoon T. Boone Pickens. Just last month, another 12 signed on, including Netflix CEO Reed Hastings and Intel co-founder George Moore.

A more modest slice of the philanthropy movement are so-called “giving circles,” where like-minded people pool their money and give to causes they deem important.

One of those, the One Percent Foundation, aimed at those in their 20s and 30s, was co-founded in 2007 by Daniel Kaufman, a Sacramento native. Over conversations while at UCLA law school, he and some friends realized they rarely gave to any significant causes.

“This is a very socially conscious, very involved generation,” Kaufman said, “… but most of us felt we couldn’t afford to give, didn’t know where to give or thought our donation wouldn’t have any impact.”

Inspired, he and his friends pooled their money and sent $500 to a hunger relief organization voted on by the group. The idea caught on among their west Los Angeles friends. After graduating and scattering across the country, the group formalized itself online as the One Percent Foundation in 2009.

Like the name implies, participants donate 1 percent of their annual income. For graduate students living on loans, that might mean a few bucks a month. For a recent grad with a $35,000 job, it’s a monthly $29.17.

It’s all done online. Every quarter, the One Percenters dole out two grants in a designated category: environment, education, health, international aid or poverty. Members nominate organizations they’d like to see funded and the entire membership votes. Everyone gets one vote, no matter how much they give.

“Part of it is getting people in the mindset that they can do this. With rent, student loans, credit card payments, many (young adults) think ‘No way,'” said Kaufman, 33. “But if you change that to giving $20 a month, now it looks like a couple beers or going to the movies and buying popcorn. It totally changes how they think about (giving).”

Today, One Percent has about 500 members who’ve donated more than $200,000 in the last three years.

“It’s turned into an effort to engage an entire generation through their 30s … by building a habit of thoughtful, sustained giving,” said Kaufman, a lawyer who’s since returned to Sacramento to raise his family and launch Third Plateau, a philanthropic consulting firm.

For those concerned their kids or heirs might feel cheated out of part of their inheritance, financial experts say a family's charitable giving can accomplish just the opposite.

"It's a great way to pass on your values to your kids," said Carrie Schwab Pomerantz, president of the nonprofit Charles Schwab Foundation and a mother of three. "More than anything, it's part of bigger life skills: building character in a young person. Giving creates emotional growth."

Foord advises parents to have a conversation with their children about what causes – Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, public television, church – are important to a family and why they're being remembered.

"If someone with two kids leaves $10,000 to charity, each child inherits $5,000 less. But that child also inherits the value that 'our family shares a little of what we have to make a difference and help others,' " said Foord, who said her charitable instincts were instilled by her mother and grandfather, who left money to causes in their wills and trusts.

Planned giving doesn't have to involve attorneys and fancy fees, she noted. It can be as simple as changing the beneficiary on an IRA or annuity, or adding a charity's name as "Transfer-on-Death" (TOD) to a mutual fund or CD account.

"Everybody has something to give, even a few dollars," said Schwab's Pomerantz. "It's in our DNA, no matter what your economic background."

# S. Tahoe council candidates outline stances to voters

**By Kathryn Reed**

STATELINE — Budget and fire department staffing were two issues the South Lake Tahoe City Council candidates tackled before each answered three random individual questions.


This second forum of the political season was hosted by Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe at Harrah's Tahoe. Two positions are open, with five people vying for them. Clinton Schue did not attend the Oct. 10 event.

The first question was: *The consensus among many residents is that the city is practically broke, between what is owed bondholders through the now defunct Redevelopment Agency and the need to keep borrowing from reserves to balance the city's general fund. Some would go so far as to say the city is insolvent. What is your response to the claim of insolvency?*

Incumbents Bruce Grego and Hal Cole took issue with that assessment of the city's coffers, while challenger Austin Sass' response was about 180 degrees different from theirs, and newcomer JoAnn Conner was about 90 degrees different.

"We have a balanced budget," Grego said. "Things are not out of control. I think the problem is resolving itself."

He didn't mention that by state law the city has to approve a balanced budget each year.

"I'm really proud of our city's financial condition," Cole said. He mentioned a AA minus rating, that there is more than the required 25 percent in reserves. He also boasted how the city is paving streets.

He did not mention how the city borrowed millions of dollars to pave those streets and that taxpayers will be paying that off for the next 30 years.

“We do have a problem and we need to address it now,” Sass said. He doesn’t see how using $6.2 million in reserves in the last few years is good fiscal policy.

Conner likes that employee agreements have been revamped and said the city is doing better today than it was a year ago. She wants to increase revenue by making sure everyone is paying their transient occupancy tax – especially vacation rentals – and to levy a business tax on duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes.

**Question 2:** *Public sentiment is that with no upper management, the staffing at the fire department is in shambles. How protected is the city?*

**Cole:** He believes with three people responding to each fire and an ambulance at each station, the city is protected. He said the fire marshal duties have been contracted with Lake Valley Fire and that consolidation talks are ongoing to determine if that is the best route.

**Conner:** She believes with neighboring agencies working well together the residents of South Lake Tahoe are safe. She did confuse the role of the fire marshal with battalion chiefs when she said, “The captains are doing the job of fire marshals.”

**Sass**: He, too, believes the mutual aid agreements keep city residents safe. However, he said talking to Lake Valley and Tahoe Douglas fire staff, he has learned those agencies are “concerned with onsite management of a fire.” And he said city staff is worried about equipment, especially with an engine failing during the Peter Darvas house fire last month.

**Grego**: “We are fully protected.” He said the city is looking at buying a new fire apparatus, but that it costs $500,000.

[No one mentioned that the city does not have a capital outlay fund so when any equipment reaches the end of its usefulness there is no pot of cash to replace it.]

Next up, Ann Swallow, who moderated the Wednesday event, asked each of the four three questions.

*Q: The city has tightened its purse strings by reducing expenses, some of which have included eliminating positions and/or departments. As a result, employees are potentially facing a more work and less pay scenario. How would you address the potential for decline in morale and productivity?*

**Grego:** “Morale is something we need to work on by recognition.” He also suggested hiring people outside the city to do some of the work.

*Q: The city of South Lake Tahoe currently has no position on the use of eminent domain. If the issue is raised, would you vote yes or no?*

[This was a false statement by Soroptimist. A previous council passed the policy that eminent domain will not be used. It would take four out of the five councilmembers to change that policy.]

**Sass:** “Eminent domain should be used as a last resort.” He could see using it if 95 percent of the loop road property and business owners accept to be bought out and that for the greater good the 5 percent are taken by eminent domain.

*Q: Would you vote for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency’s Regional Plan update as it is currently proposed?*

**Conner:** “Yes.” She believes how TRPA wants to change best management practices as well as allowing sensitive property to be traded to encourage development elsewhere are good things in the plan.

*Q: Beside yourself, who else will you vote for for City Council?*

**Cole:** “Elect two candidates who have a vision.” He wants someone who is like-minded.

*Q: Do you think councilmembers should be on nonprofit boards that could benefit from the councilperson’s elected position?*

**Grego:** “No. It is against the law.” He said councilmembers are not allowed to vote when there is a conflict.

*Q: What are your views about a recreation master plan and how would you pay for it?*

**Sass:** He wants to create a sports and recreation commission and assess what the facility needs are. He believes revenue will come from attracting tournaments and other athletic events to the area – especially when the facilities are in place.

*Q: Is it appropriate for the South Shore Chamber of Commerce to endorse a candidate?*

[There is the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, which Conner is president of, and the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce. It was not clear which chamber the Soroptimist meant.]

**Conner:** “We have always felt we should not endorse candidates.” She said her chamber endorses issues, not people.

*Q: Explain a vote you made during your tenure on the council that you would change today and would you change it?*

**Cole:** He wishes he had not allowed medical marijuana dispensaries because he says they ended up selling drugs in bulk to people out of state and that it has been bad for the city. He called the operators “drug dealers”.

*Q: The Tahoe Transportation District is moving the loop road forward with $810,000 in grant money. What is your position on the loop road and how would you protect city residents and business owners?*

**Grego:** “I oppose the preferred alternative. I see no benefit for the city of South Lake Tahoe to support it.”

*Q: What are your thoughts about the El Dorado County Grand Jury’s recommendation of merging the city of South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County?*

**Sass:** “I’m not sure if it’s a good or bad idea. A study would need to be done about what the city residents would gain and what they would lose.”

*Q: What steps would you take to generate revenue in the city while keeping expenses at a minimum?*

**Conner:** “Market our recreation because it’s the most viable asset we have.” She wants residents to be tapped to do some of the work, which some already are when it comes to securing grant funding. She says broadband would allow different businesses to come to town. “I would put studies on a pause.”

*Q: Over 18 months ago the City Council met jointly with Douglas and El Dorado counties in public session. Since then no meetings have taken place. What is your opinion with regard to the City Council meeting regularly with these neighboring counties?*

[The meeting was actually Nov. 4, 2011, when the city and Douglas County met. The city and El Dorado County have not met. ]

**Cole:** “There is no state line.” He would like more meetings and is disappointed the second one with Douglas was canceled.

[The election is Nov. 6. Vote by mail ballots should arrive this week.]

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# Scary stories to be recited at Zephyr Cove library

Spooky stories will be told at the Douglas County Public Library in Zephyr Cove on Oct. 20 at 3:30pm.

Carol Nageotte (aka Tilly the Witch) will be on hand.

Dress in your Halloween costume for this special storytime. Children will receive a Halloween treat to take home.

Children ages 4 and up will to listen to stories from the books "Making Friends with Frankenstein: A Book of Monstrous Poems and Pictures" by Colin McNaughton and "The Spook Matinee: and Other Scary Poems for Kids" by George Ulrich. Other library books, special pop-up books, and a flashlight story will be featured.

Tilly the Witch will end the program with her favorite poem – "Spider on the Floor."

The Douglas County Public Library is located at 233 Warrior Way in Zephyr Cove.

For more information, call (775) 588.6411.

# Study: Nevada good for businesses, California bad

**By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau**

CARSON CITY – Nevada is one of the 10 best states for its business tax climate, while companies in states like New York, New Jersey, and California have a far less pleasant environment to deal with, according to a report by the Tax Foundation.

“Even in our global economy, a state’s strongest and most immediate competition often comes from other states,” said Tax Foundation economist Scott Drenkard. “State lawmakers need to be aware of how their states’ business climates match up to their immediate neighbors and to other states in their region.”

Nevada ranked third in the Tax Foundation report released Tuesday, unchanged from last year. Nevada scored less well in two of the five categories that make up the ranking, coming in 42nd for its sales tax index rate, which is considered high at a statewide 6.85 percent rate; and 41st for its unemployment insurance tax, which does not provide for many benefit exclusions like many states do.

The survey is a snapshot in time as of July 1, 2012, and so does not include any evaluation of a Texas-style margins tax being proposed by Nevada by the Nevada State Education Association. The association is now collecting signatures to take the measure to the Legislature in 2013, but it still faces a court challenge.

In a press briefing to announce the results of the new edition, speakers made it clear that Nevada’s high score would be substantially worse with a margins, or gross receipts, tax.

Texas scored in the top 10 in the survey in spite of the margins tax, not because of it, Drenkard said.

“We penalize states heavily for having gross receipts taxes because they are very distortionary,” he said. “It’s similar to having a very poorly structured sales tax.”

The top 10 states in the 2013 Index are Wyoming, South Dakota, Nevada, Alaska, Florida, Washington, New Hampshire, Montana, Texas, and Utah.

Many of the top ranking states do not have one or more of the major statewide taxes, such as a personal or corporate income tax or a sales tax. Wyoming, South Dakota and Nevada, for example, have no corporate or individual income tax; Alaska has no individual income or state-level sales tax; Florida has no individual income tax; and New Hampshire and Montana have no sales tax.

The 10 lowest ranked states in the 2013 Index are Maryland, Iowa, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Vermont, California, New Jersey, and New York.

The State Business Tax Climate Index, now in its ninth edition, collects data on over a hundred tax provisions for each state and synthesizes them into a single score. The states are then compared against each other, so that each state’s ranking is relative to actual policies in place in other states around the country. A state’s ranking can rise or fall significantly based not just on its own actions, but on the changes or reforms made by other states.

The index enables business leaders, government policymakers, and taxpayers to make an apples-to-apples comparison of their state’s tax system. While some similar studies focus on the total amount residents pay in taxes each year, the index focuses on whether the state’s tax code itself enhances or harms the competitiveness of its business environment.

Despite moderate corporate taxes, New York scores at the bottom this year by having the worst individual income tax, the sixth-worst unemployment insurance taxes, and the sixth-worst property taxes. The states in the bottom 10 suffer from the same afflictions: complex, non-neutral taxes with comparatively high rates.

Maine saw the greatest improvement this year, vaulting them from 37th to 30th best overall, in part due to a repeal of their alternative minimum tax. Michigan also made a sizable leap of six places by replacing their cumbersome and distortionary gross receipts tax (the Michigan Business Tax) with a flat 6 percent corporate income tax. This improved their overall rank from 18th to 12th best, and their corporate sub-rank from 49th to seventh best.

The Tax Foundation is a nonpartisan research organization that has monitored fiscal policy at the federal, state and local levels since 1937.

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# Barton offering series of flu vaccination clinics

Flu vaccines are available for free for ages 3 to 18. Cost for ages 19 and older is $20 for flu shot and $35 for pneumonia vaccine.

**The clinics are:**

Barton Family Medicine, 1090 Third St., South Lake Tahoe, Oct.

20 9am-noon, Nov. 17 9am-noon.

Barton Urgent Care & Family Practice at Stateline Medical Center, 155 Highway 50, Nov. 3 9am-noon.

Both vaccines are reimbursable for standard Medicare patients. Medicare HMO’s and other insurances cannot be billed.

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# Plague-carrying chipmunk found on South Shore

A chipmunk found last week at Taylor Creek Visitor Center tested positive for the bacteria that causes plague.

Visitors to area picnic spots and campgrounds should take precautions to protect themselves from plague, a disease transmitted by infected fleas. This starts with not feeding rodents and never handling sick or dead rodents. Also, leave pets at home when visiting areas with elevated plague risk

Plague is a rare, yet highly infectious bacterial disease that is spread by squirrels, chipmunks and other wild rodents and their fleas.

Early symptoms of plague include high fever, chills, nausea, weakness and swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpit or groin.

Additional rodent surveillance will be done in the area this week.

To report a sick or dead rodent, contact El Dorado County Vector Control at (530) 573.3197.

# El Dorado County supervisor candidates outline goals

**By Loretta Kalb, Sacramenot Bee**

One is a small-business owner. The other is a retired fire chief.


They are the runoff candidates in the Nov. 6 general election for District 3 of the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, and both want to strengthen the community's business climate.

Candidate Brian Keith Veerkamp, the retired fire chief, finished the June 5 primary election with 33 percent of the vote in a field of six. Candidate Richard Barb, the small-business owner, placed second with 22.5 percent of the vote.

The District 3 post is being vacated by Supervisor Jack Sweeney since El Dorado County requires that its local officials leave after two full terms.

Here is what candidates say about the job and their qualifications, in order of their appearance on the ballot:

• Veerkamp describes himself as a fifth-generation resident with years of experience in public and community service.

He considers the local economy to be the biggest issue facing the community and describes his knowledge of how government works, his connections and his community affiliations as assets in tackling the job.

“We obviously have issues relative to permit fees and regulations that we need to review and to scale back where we can and to try to make it affordable to build in the county,” Veerkamp said.

“One of my goals is to work with other supervisors to build a strong governance team where we can strategically plan, set priorities and move our county forward instead of into a tailspin,” he said. “We’ve been stagnant for quite some time.”

Veerkamp prides himself on “knowing the players” and says he can step into the role without a steep learning curve.

As a supervisor, he said he expects to work cooperatively with all agencies, local, state and federal.

Veerkamp spent an early part of his career in the private sector on construction and other jobs, he said. And he spent 30 years in fire protection service, beginning as a volunteer firefighter and later becoming chief of the El Dorado Hills Fire Department.

His background includes years in public service and as a member of community organizations such as the Placerville Kiwanis Club. He served 14 years on the board of the Camino Union School District, eight of those as president.

He was a three-year board member for the El Dorado County Emergency Services Authority, a joint powers authority for which county supervisors have fiscal oversight. For two of those years he served as the authority’s board chairman.

He spent 22 years as director of the emergency medical services training program for the El Dorado County Fire Chiefs Association.

“I’ve got a lot of those connections, a lot of experience,” Veerkamp said. “I know how to work and understand the system. I can hit the ground running.”

Veerkamp said he would refuse salary and benefits for the post. “It’s not about making a career for myself,” he said. “To me it’s all about community service, and that defines me as a person.”

• Barb, a 17-year county resident, is a small-business owner who describes himself as dedicated to public service.

And he said he is eager to eliminate county policies and rules that impede business.

“We’re going to review where we are,” he said. “El Dorado County is one of the least friendly counties in the state for business.

“We’re going to reform, to revise those ordinances and policies that have contributed to the unfriendly business climate.

“When we’ve figured out those issues — and I have a good handle on some of them because of my construction business — we’re going to reduce fees, the regulatory burden and some of the bureaucracies that have kept us from being business friendly.”

An example of the burden on business, he said, is the lack of clear requirements and costs when a permit is issued to a business or for a project.

“The permit is issued,” he said. “The project moves forward. Then the county decides to change the rules because the policy or code has changed.

“That has brought a profoundly uncertain working environment. And it has cost many people their life savings.”

Barb said he has long been committed to community service and spent the last 17 years as a leader in 4-H. He also spent 14 years volunteering weekly at a local senior care facility.

For the last six years, he served on the senior staff of the U.S. Air Force Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol, Squadron 85, a civilian group that provides leadership training programs for young people.

Barb said he has spent his career in small business in the private sector. As an independent contractor, he provides custom shutters and draperies for the interior decorating industry.

Among his strengths, he said, is the ability to organize and define work project requirements, manage and place staff, and eliminate inefficiencies.

A county supervisor should not be political, he said. And he or she should be easy to approach.

"It's truly about meeting the needs of the community," Barb said. "It's not just asking the community what they want, it's knowing it from the inside out and being accessible."

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# USFS runs out of money to fight fires

**By Darryl Fears, Washington Post**

In the worst wildfire season on record, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service ran out of money to pay for firefighters, fire trucks and aircraft that dump retardant on monstrous flames.

So officials did about the only thing they could: take money from other forest management programs. But many of the programs were aimed at preventing giant fires in the first place, and raiding their budgets meant putting off the removal of dried brush and dead wood over vast stretches of land — the things that fuel eye-popping blazes, threatening property and lives.

Recently, Congress stepped in and reimbursed the Forest Service and the Interior Department, which plays a far lesser role in fighting fires, with $400 million from the 2013 Continuing Resolution, allowing fire prevention work to continue. Forestry experts at state agencies and environmental groups greeted it as good news.

But they also faulted Congress for providing at the start of the fiscal year only about half of the $1 billion it actually cost to fight this year’s fires. They argued that the traditional method that members of an appropriations conference committee use to fund wildfire suppression — averaging the cost of fighting wildfires over the previous 10 years — is inadequate at a time when climate change is causing longer periods of dryness and drought, giving fires more fuel to burn and resulting in longer wildfire seasons.

Once running from June to September, the season has expanded over the past 10 years to include May and October. It was once rare to see 5 million cumulative acres burn, agriculture officials said. But some recent seasons have recorded millions more than that.

This year’s wildfire burn was nearly 8 million acres at the end of August, about the time that the budget allocated to fight them ran dry.

“They knew they were running out of money early on, in May,” said Chris Topik, director of North American Forest Restoration for the Nature Conservancy. “They were telling people in May, ‘Be careful, don’t spend too much [on prevention].’ ”

Over seven years starting in 2002, $2.2 billion was transferred from other accounts for fire suppression when the budget came up short, according to records provided by the Forest Service. Congress at times reimbursed a fraction of those funds.

“We did have to transfer the money,” said Jim Hubbard, deputy chief of state and private forestry for the Forest Service. “It disrupts work during the field season. It was not a major impact this season, but would have been if Congress didn’t restore it.”

A spokeswoman for the House Appropriations Committee said its chairman, Rep. Harold Rogers, R-Ky., and members “believe that providing adequate funding for wildfire suppression is of the utmost importance. This is why they fought for hundreds of millions in funding in recent … legislation,” as well as in appropriations bills.

Staff members on the committee acknowledged that using the 10-year average cost of wildfire suppression to determine the budget is not ideal. The spokeswoman, Jennifer Hing, said the committee will continue to operate as it has.

**Read the whole story**