

Trying to understand political divide in U.S.

By Linda Fine Conaboy

Is American politics becoming clannish? Cliquish? Segregated? Disunited? Or perhaps we're headed backward and the definitive word would be tribal.

The question then is, did the 2016 election confirm the fact that we're segregating ourselves into tribes? Resoundingly, yes, said Christopher Hare in hard hitting community presentation at Sierra Nevada College last week. He has bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in political science.



Christopher Hare

"Partisans increasingly dislike and distrust each other," Hare said. "They filter out opposing viewpoints and process objective facts through a distinctly partisan lens."

When *Lake Tahoe News* asked him his definition of tribal, Hare, an assistant professor of political science at UC Davis, called it "tribal mentality, or an us versus them way of thinking. That is, a strong, almost unquestioning attachment to members of your own 'tribe' or party and a strong aversion to and a distrust of the opposing tribe, or opposite party."

A quick Internet search into tribal mentality described it as bands of those who share morals, beliefs and the survival of a group. Generally, tribes are closed to outside interference and they move as a group. Today, the Middle East is an example of tribal mentality.

And closer to home, think about American history and the tightly-knit bands of American Indians, tribes, if you will, fiercely defending their ideals and their way of life against all comers.

“Even though some evidence suggests that Americans haven’t necessarily become more ideologically extreme, it is abundantly clear that different kinds of conflicts based on policy attitudes, religious beliefs, core values, race and ethnicity, gender, region (urban vs. rural, etc.) are being absorbed into the partisan divide between Democrats and Republicans,” Hare said.

Hare said this is consequential because it means there is even less common ground between the parties, brought clearly into focus during the last election. He added the politicization of already deep religious and value divides serves to further splinter American society.

“Political differences are now organized in terms of fundamental value conflicts, with political compromise interpreted as moral surrender,” he said.

Thinking about the definition of moral—a person’s standard of behavior or beliefs concerning what is right or prudent—so says Miriam Webster. And surrender, which means giving up, resignation or submission, it’s easy to see that within the current political climate, no politician or voter for that matter, is about to give up his or her beliefs, to morally surrender those beliefs, which are considered to be right or prudent.

The result? There is little consensus about what the big

issues are. "Few Republicans say environmental protection is a pressing national concern, and few Democrats say the same about the national debt," Hare said. "The implications for policy making are that parties have ever less incentive to work together, especially on issues that require trade-offs and compromise, but are only viewed as important to one party."

It's also important to note how polarization is intertwined with other big forces in American society, Hare said. Forces such as relatively stagnant economic growth, income inequality, the concentration of family breakdown among lower-income Americans and an aging population.

When asked what kind of political system now needs to be in place to goose stagnant economic growth, Hare had this to say: "This is the \$64,000 question. One perspective is that stagnant GDP growth (gross domestic product) is inevitable in advanced, industrialized nations.

"But the U.S. has some real advantages that may allow us to buck the trend. For instance, we have the best university system in the world, bar none, and a tremendous spirit of entrepreneurialism. Another perspective is that a lot of these problems, such as family breakdown, are simply cultural and don't have political solutions."

Although Hare did not make any prognostications as to the future state of political affairs in the U.S., he did offer one more potential reason for the great divide, that being the influence of talk radio and social media.

He mentioned the "echo chamber." For those not familiar with the term, the echo chamber is analogous to an acoustic echo chamber, where sounds reverberate in a hollow space. In other words, one talking head will make a claim, which many like-minded people then repeat, overhear and repeat again, until most people assume that some extreme variation of the story is

true.

“Fragmented media and the echo chamber certainly aren’t helping polarization,” Hare said. “One other aspect of this is that our social networks are becoming more like-minded, so we’re more likely to surround ourselves with people of similar partisan, ideological persuasions.

“This is a natural byproduct of geographic sorting—Democrats are clustered in urban areas; Republicans in rural areas. The current political system has proved itself to be incapable of addressing these economic and societal stresses,” he said.

When does a cyberattack mean war?

By Byard Duncan, Reveal

Sen. John McCain, who spent more than five years in Vietnamese captivity, is no stranger to traditional war. But when the Arizona Republican recently brought together officials from three intelligence agencies, his focus was on a more modern frontier: cyberspace.

Given reports of Russian interference in last year’s presidential election, McCain wanted to know how the U.S. might appropriately respond. So 20 minutes into the hearing, he posed a blunt question to Director of National Security James Clapper: Would a successful digital campaign to alter the outcome of a U.S. election equal an attack on the U.S.?

Clapper demurred.

“Whether or not that constitutes an act of war I think is a

very heavy policy call that I don't believe the intelligence community should make," he said. "But it certainly would carry, in my view, great gravity."

Clapper's response highlighted an alarming point about U.S. cyber policy, one that could prove troublesome as U.S.-Russia tensions mount and an unpredictable new administration gets its bearings: America does not have a clearly defined threshold at which digital offensives escalate into all-out war.

A history of disagreement

In 1996, the U.S. and Russia began meeting in secret to establish a set of common protocols for their respective operations in cyberspace. Since then, they've managed to agree, via the United Nations, that international law applies in the digital realm – and that countries must take responsibility for the actions of hackers operating within their borders. As recently as 2015, the two parties also agreed that no state should use digital tools to target each other's critical infrastructure during peacetime.

But the common ground essentially ends there. While Russia historically has pushed for treaties that limit the use of digital weapons, the U.S. for years has claimed that cooperation among international police is a better technique for regulating cyberspace.

Throughout this standoff, both sides have taken shots at the other's approach: U.S. critics say any treaty Russia creates would limit free speech by targeting citizens who find a way around the country's censorship infrastructure; Russia maintains that America, in refusing to come to the table, is willfully stoking a digital arms race.

The latter assessment isn't so far off, according to some experts.

"Of all countries, the U.S. has the fewest incentives to reach any binding agreements about the limitations of use of cyber weapons," said Bruce McConnell, a former deputy undersecretary for cybersecurity at the Department of Homeland Security in the Obama administration. "When you have asymmetry in the world, as we still do, there's less incentive in the most powerful superpower to put something on the table that says we won't use this capability."

Yet even as the U.S. has developed and refined its cyber arsenal, its deep reliance on information technology has made it among the world's most alluring targets for hackers, McConnell said. At the same time, its own record of cyber espionage and interference across the globe – even against allies such as Germany and Brazil – repeatedly has damaged its international credibility.

All the while, Russia has made no secret of its intention to use cyber tools as a means of gaining geopolitical leverage. In 2007, the country allegedly launched a devastating attack on Estonia's government and banks as retaliation for the country's removal of a Soviet-era statue. And in its 2010 military doctrine, Russia acknowledged its interest in waging "information warfare," which can "achieve political objectives without the utilization of military force." That approach aligns with a recent intelligence community assessment that Russian President Vladimir Putin "ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election."

"There is a kind of sparring back and forth that the United States didn't really see but the Russians believed they were engaged in," said Adam Segal, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of "The Hacked World Order."

"The U.S. clearly is not an innocent actor in cyberspace," he added. "But I do think Russian behavior crossed a new line."

Cold War II?

During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union engaged in a constant dialogue about what might constitute a “red line” and what forms of retaliation might be appropriate. Huge nuclear stockpiles in both countries provided a deterrence structure based on the concept of mutually assured destruction. But as Segal points out in his book, no such dynamic exists in cyberspace, where capabilities can be disguised and attribution is difficult.

“Washington, Moscow, and Beijing have an interest in identifying legitimate targets and thresholds,” Segal writes, adding that the three powers likely would agree that a cyberattack with “ ‘kinetic effects’ equivalent to those of a conventional armed attack” could warrant an act of boots-on-the-ground self-defense.

Indeed, the Obama administration, in a 2011 document titled “International Strategy of Cyberspace,” affirmed that “when warranted, the United States will respond to hostile acts in cyberspace as we would to any other threat to our country.”

So how severe must an attack be for the U.S. to retaliate? It doesn’t always take much, according to Herbert Lin, a senior research scholar for cyber policy and security at Stanford University. Lin points to Operation El Dorado Canyon, a 1986 U.S. airstrike campaign, as an example: After Libyan forces bombed a Berlin discotheque frequented by Americans, killing two and wounding 79 others, the U.S. targeted Libyan airfields and barracks, killing at least 40 people in retaliation.

“In justifying this,” Lin said, “we invoked our right to self-defense, saying that this was an action that was intended to discourage future attacks and therefore was legal under the U.N. Charter.” The U.N. disagreed.

The event raises questions about the U.S.’ willingness to use force following a cyberattack: What happens if a country such

as Russia or Iran launches a digital assault against an American factory, accidentally killing 10 workers? Or 20?

“There is no clearly defined threshold, even outside of cyber,” Lin said. “If there’s no clearly defined threshold outside of cyber, how do you expect there to be one in cyber?”

These boundaries will matter more as countries such as Russia and the U.S. continue to test their tools on adversaries. The U.S.’ cyberattacks on Iran’s nuclear facilities, for example, were the first (and, so far, the only) to yield physical destruction; they also were criticized as an illegal act of force in a NATO-commissioned report. Meanwhile, Russia’s alleged infiltration of U.S. electoral boards might have qualified as an assault on critical infrastructure (therefore violating U.N. protocols), were it not for one fact: The Department of Homeland Security failed to designate electoral systems as critical infrastructure until Jan. 6 – two months after Donald Trump won the presidency.

Many experts agree that escalating tensions, coupled with ever-developing cyber weapons, call for a new military paradigm. Yet there’s not a fully developed picture of how that paradigm should look. This predicament was neatly summed up in a 2015 study in the Texas International Law Journal:

“Traditional kinetic (laws of armed conflict) principles simply do not fit this new wave of warfare. The limitations of applying traditional (laws of armed conflict) to cyber acts have left nation States misguided and confused.”

The rules in place

To be clear, there is a solid – albeit imperfect – legal framework that governs how the U.S. and other countries should respond to cyberattacks. The U.N. Charter draws a distinction between actions that constitute a use of force and others that amount only to meddling in another country’s sovereign matters. Although it makes no direct mention of “cyber,” the

charter also dictates what sort of responses might be appropriate in each case.

That doesn't mean it's free of vagaries, though. A 2002 analysis published by the U.S. Naval War College on whether the U.N. Charter's Article 2(4), which bans the use of force, applies in cyberspace offered an equivocal answer.

"It likely will be a long time, if ever, before the practice of States, decisions of the International Court of Justice, or other recognized sources of international law yield a clarification of how Article 2(4) applies to (computer network attacks)," it states.

According to Catherine Lotrionte, Georgetown University's CyberProject director in the School of Foreign Service, most legal experts would agree on one thing: Russia's alleged efforts to swing the presidential election don't rise to the level of an armed attack – or even a use of force. They were, however, still forbidden under a provision of international law that bans "coercive interference."

So how might the incoming Trump administration – whose affinities for Russia are well documented – respond to similar attacks if they persist?

"There won't be one standard threshold or trigger for all occasions," Lotrionte said. "It will all depend on the nuances of the facts of a specific case."

It's a theme: Few firm boundaries exist in cyberspace – mostly because any nation's military decisions will be flavored by a host of political considerations, such as an adversary's military capabilities. Yet the clearest protocols available might have come from a speech at a legal conference for government agencies in September 2012. There, a legal adviser to the U.S. State Department named Harold Koh explained how the use of cyber weapons factors into the U.S.' larger national defense goals.

He began by posing – and answering – a series of questions: Do international laws apply in cyberspace? (Yes.) Do cyber activities ever constitute a use of force? (Yes.) May a state ever respond to a computer network attack by exercising a right of national self-defense? (Yes.)

But he also acknowledged that many pressing cyberdefense issues, such as how to properly attribute attacks to a nation or group, do not yet have clear legal answers. And they might not come anytime soon.

“Answering ... tough questions within the framework of existing law, consistent with our values and accounting for the legitimate needs of national security, will require a constant dialogue between lawyers, operators and policymakers,” he said.

Given Trump’s clashes with the intelligence community, most recently over his associates’ potential ties to Russia, it’s unclear how robust this dialogue will be. Even experts such as Segal, the “Hacked World Order” author, aren’t sure what to expect.

“We don’t really understand necessarily how it’s going to play itself out, what the outcomes are going to be,” he said.

Californians keep their lawmakers’ phones ringing

By Sarah D. Wire, Los Angeles Times

The phone in Rep. Tom McClintock’s office rang seven times in 10 minutes Tuesday afternoon.

“This is Congressman McClintock’s office, how may I help you?” the receptionist said again and again, scribbling down each caller’s name, address and comment. “This call means a lot to us. I’ll express that to the congressman.”

Members of Congress have been inundated with phone calls and emails in the scant weeks since President Trump took office, with staff answering two to three times as many calls and emails as normal.

Read the whole story

College credit for Nev. high school students may be easier

By Meghin Delaney, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Revisions to two state laws aim to make it easier for Nevada high school students to earn college credits or participate in internships while in high school.

The Senate education committee, the primary sponsor on both bills, heard proposed revisions to the dual-credit and internship programs Thursday.

“These two bills compliment each other. They can be viewed as a package,” said Matt Morris, the legislative director for Gov. Brian Sandoval.

Read the whole story

Tahoe-Truckee trying to understand new pot laws

By Sage Sauerbrey and Alexandra Spychalsky, Moonshine Ink

The phrase of the year is “gray area” regarding the Golden and Silver states’ new green issues. Confused? So is everyone else. When California – the first U.S. state to outlaw marijuana, as well as the first state to approve its medicinal use – legalized recreational cannabis alongside Nevada last November, it commenced an unprecedented effort to define what that will mean on a legal, regulatory, and even cultural level.

Legally, California and Nevada share a few hard and fast laws as of Jan. 1, 2017. Both allow the recreational possession and use of up to one ounce of unconcentrated cannabis or 8 grams of concentrated cannabis for users 21 and older, as well as the cultivation of up to six plants, but the sale of recreational cannabis is still prohibited. This paradox will exist until the relevant regulatory agencies begin issuing licenses on the anticipated date of Jan. 1, 2018.

According to Alison Bermant, a lawyer who specializes in marijuana law in the Truckee-Tahoe area, there are “thousands of people growing marijuana in this community.” In spite of these numbers, Bermant says that she hasn’t had a cultivation case come across her desk in more than five years; all of her marijuana related clients are non-locals who were nabbed by one particular CHP agent for transporting illegal amounts of marijuana with the intent to sell. Bermant calls Interstate 80 one of the largest drug trafficking highways in the country, and Truckee is a convenient stopover town on the route to non-legalized states. Bermant says that many of the growers in this community are operating lawfully under Proposition 215, which permitted medicinal marijuana in California in 1996, but

their legal protection has an expiration date.

Read the whole story

Hwy. 50 in Calif. may open Sunday night



At least some people have kept their sense of humor through these storms. Photo/LTN

Updated 3:10pm:

Caltrans is projecting a 6pm Feb. 12 opening of Highway 50 between Meyers and Placerville. Traffic is expected to have one-way controls.

Interstate 80 is open in both directions.

Highway 395 in Nevada is open in both directions.



Elks Club has such horrendous pot holes that El Dorado County closed the Tahoe street. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Highway 50 remains closed Saturday morning from 8.4 miles east of Pollock Pines at Ice House Road.

Caltrans has crews on the scene working to clear a major mudslide that crossed all lanes of the highway on Feb. 10.

The road has been open on and off much of this year because of ongoing avalanche control, slides and spinouts.

Interstate 80 is open to eastbound traffic, but expect delays. Westbound has been stopped since Friday because of a mudslide. Crews are also on scene there working to open the road.

Boulders in the road and an unstable hillside continue to have the Logan Creek Road area on the South Shore blocked, preventing South Shore travelers from getting to Carson City via Spooner Summit.

Highway 89 around Emerald Bay is also closed.

There are local roads in the basin that are also closed because of standing water or massive pot holes.

The good news is the sun should be out for the next few days. The potentially bad news is the temps are going to be warm, which will cause what snow is left at lake level to continue to melt. This in turn will add water to the already swollen creeks, streams and rivers.

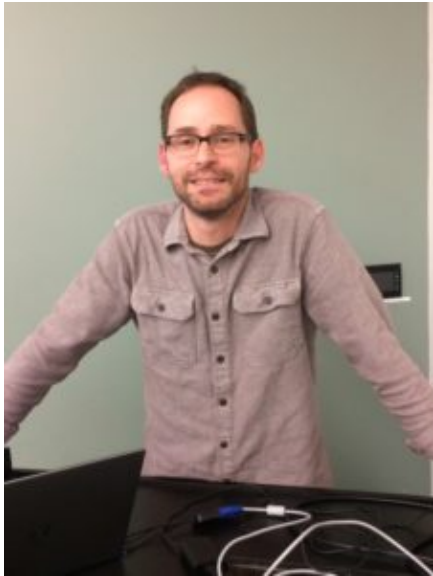
– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Sierra lakes hold answers to climate change

By Carole Jablon-Bernardi

INCLINE VILLAGE – The Sierra Nevada snow drifts are at a drought busting 173 percent of average, with the most snow recorded since 1995, so said California water managers as of Feb. 2. That was before another 2 feet of snow fell overnight Thursday on the North Shore.

On a snowy Feb. 9 evening it was appropriate the topic at Tahoe Environmental Research Center on the campus of Sierra Nevada College was climate change.



Steve Sadro talks climate change on Feb. 9. Photo/Carole Jablon-Bernardi

Steve Sadro, who is with Department of Environmental Science and Policy at UC Davis, titled his lecture “Climate Change and Lake Temperature in the Sierra Nevada.”

Water temperature regulates a broad range of fundamental ecosystem processes in lakes. While climate can be an important factor controlling lake temperatures, in many lakes, water temperatures are responding differently than air temperatures. Through multiple decades of climate and water temperature data from a high-elevation catchment in the Southern Sierra Nevada scientists now hope to be able to illustrate the magnitude of warming taking place and demonstrate the role of winter snowpack in regulating those lake temperatures.

Sadro’s study is Emerald Lake, a glacial cirque lake located in the Tokopah Valley of Sequoia National Park. The Tokopah Valley forms the headwaters of the Marble Fork of the Kaweah River in the Southern Sierra Nevada. The lake, situated at 8,200 feet, runs 30 feet deep and 400 yards across. It is one of approximately 14,000 lakes in the Sierra.

This area has been the focus of sustained limnological and watershed research since 1983. Ultimately, the knowledge gained through Sadro's research could help with understanding how these thousands of lakes and watersheds are responding to global change.

Lakes have long been studied by environmental scientists and the insights from their investigations have led to advances in the natural sciences. Mountain lakes, in particular, are recognized as excellent indicators of regional environment conditions and are increasingly being used by regulatory agencies.

What Sadro pointed out is the importance of mountain snowpack to freshwater supplies mandates that attention be paid to the bio-geo-chemistry, hydrology and ecology of these systems.

"In the next 50 years, we have an opportunity to alter the course of climate change on a global scale. Despite the political turmoil and/or setbacks, I feel we can all take heart," Sadro said. "Irregular funding might create gaps, but the impact to humanity remains."

Mark Twain was once said, "Climate is what we expect, weather is what we get." One could say that Sadro's exact words in comparison reflect the same observation: "Climate reflects long-term trends and weather is the noise."

Climate trends include factors such as air temperature, sea levels, snow cover, solar input, CO₂ and glacial mass. To be even more specific, Sadro broke it down to an acute focus on Sierra lakes:

- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Carbon and nutrient cycling
- Lake productivity
- Community ecology

- Bioenergetics
- Water equality
- Physical dynamics.

He went a step further to break it down to three primary areas of cause and effect:

- Warming air temperatures: high elevation in certain Sierra sites are warming at well above regional rates.
- Drought: the frequency and severity of droughts have increased in recent decades (and in lake research drought is about “supply and demand”; evaporative drought).
- Lake temperature governed by snow, water, equivalent: a large snowpack buffers lakes from warming.

Snow-water-equivalent is what’s commonly known as snowpack measurement. It is the amount of water contained within the snowpack. It can be thought of as the depth of water that would result if the entire snowpack melted instantaneously. For example, a swimming pool that is filled with 36 inches of powdery snow at 10 percent water density. Melt all the snow and there would be 3.6 inches of water in the pool.

Although Sadro’s research and analysis was strictly based on Emerald Lake, the majority of locals who attended the lecture were obviously also interested in the body of water just down the road – Lake Tahoe.

In the **2015 “State of the Lake”** document TERC Director Geoff Schladow warned about Tahoe’s ever increasing average temperature. It is getting warmer at a faster rate than the historical average.

Even more disturbing to scientists is how all this warming has affected lakes’ abilities to mix its own waters, a natural process that Sadro described as a predictor of “anoxia”, which

is the absence of oxygen supplied to an organ or tissue. This can deprive fish and other life forms from thriving in their normal habitat.

Nev. fast tracks regulating recreational marijuana

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – State officials plan to move quickly with a task force for regulating recreational marijuana, the Nevada Senate Judiciary Committee heard Wednesday.

The first steps will be putting temporary regulations in place by July to allow medical marijuana establishments to sell recreational marijuana. By the end of the year, permanent regulations are to be in place.

In the world of state government, that is a fast-tracked process for completing regulations. It can take a year or so for that to happen.

Read the whole story

DCSO rescues 10 from flood

waters in valley

By Associated Press

Emergency crews in Douglas County have rescued 10 people stranded by high waters near the Carson River south of Carson City.

Douglas County sheriff's Sgt. Bernadette Smith says they used an armored vehicle assigned to the SWAT team shortly before noon Friday to pick up the group that included several children.

She says a family called the dispatch center because they didn't want to cross a large stretch of moving water near Highway 395 north of Minden.

The highway has been closed in both directions due to flooding.

An emergency shelter was set up at a community center in Gardnerville after voluntary evacuations at two local mobile home parks at about 3am Friday.

Smith says a half-dozen people showed up, but only two spent the night. They left Friday morning but the center remains open in case there's more flooding.

Man drowns along American River off Hwy. 50

A man apparently drowned in the American River at the Randall Tract Bridge near Whitehall.

A driver on Highway 50 saw what was believed to be a body off to the side of the road, called authorities about 2:20pm Feb. 10, and when paramedics arrived they found the deceased man. Other than being an adult, no age was given. No name has been released pending notification of next of kin.

“He was hung up in some brush on the bank, but still in the water,” El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Matt Underhill told *Lake Tahoe News*.

There is no evidence that he was trying to kayak the river or use some other vessel to navigate the rushing American River.

The victim was wearing jeans, leather lace up boots and no shirt.

“People should not approach waterways right now because of the freezing cold temperature, rapidly rising waters are dangerous and the banks unstable,” Underhill said.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*