How attainable is the California Dream today?

By Matt Levin, CALMatters

California is an expensive state. The cost for housing, gas, electricity and other basics is often more than elsewhere in America. We have the nation's highest rates for poverty and income inequality. Meanwhile, government resources are stretched thin. But the news isn't all bad in the Golden State. We're safer than we used to be. And we're better educated. And much more diverse.

Here's a statistical glimpse of key trends in the state.

Housing

In 1960, average California renters saw about 20 percent of their income go to rent. That's up to nearly 37 percent now. The trend is even steeper for younger Californians, who are seeing nearly half their paychecks go to rent.

When rents are higher, it gets tougher for renters to save money for a down payment on a house. That, combined with rising single-family home prices and the end of easy mortgages, has sent California's rate of homeownership dipping.

Whose dream is this?

As recently as 1970, whites accounted for more than 70 percent of the population. That has changed dramatically. Driven by the tremendous growth of its Latino and Asian populations, California is now famously a "majority minority" state, where no ethnic group claims more than 50 percent of residents. The number of white Californians has actually dropped by about 2 million since 1990.

An increasingly diverse California, however, has not translated into an increasingly equal one. While the average Asian household has caught up to whites, both Latino and African American families make significantly less – with that gap only widening in the wake of the Great Recession of the late 2000s.

“The bulk of California’s workforce is going to be young Latinos now,” said Sonja Diaz, founding director of the UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute. “But Latinos still lag behind in a number of socioeconomic indicators, in terms of homeownership, income gains, educational attainment, access to health care, living wage jobs.”

California has always been a magnet for immigrants from around the world. While the rate has slowed in recent years, the state still has the largest concentration of foreign-born residents in the country.

But starting in the 1990s, California appears to have lost much of its lure to the rest of the U.S. Over the past two decades, California has lost 1.8 million more residents than it has gained from the rest of the country. And unlike in previous decades, that trend is persisting through good economic times.

Higher education

Clark Kerr, University of California president from 1958 to 1961, was the architect of the state’s 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education. Kerr envisioned a world-class public university system accessible to the top third of state high school students.

Partly due to Kerr’s ambitions, Californians are a lot more educated than they used to be. The percentage of Californians with a bachelor’s degree has nearly tripled since 1960, with particularly strong gains among women. Graduation rates at the University of California are some of the highest in recent

decades.

But adjusted for inflation, the cost of one year of a University of California education is seven times what it was in the mid-1960s. That's mostly because state support for the UC started dwindling in the early 2000s. At its peak, the state provided more than $26,000 per student. It now provides about half that.

Taxes

California has a reputation as a high-tax state. Has that always been the case?

Depends on how much money you make and what type of tax you're talking about.

While the state has increasingly leaned on high earners to foot the cost of government over the past few decades, the median California household has actually seen its income tax bill drop.

Effective property taxes in California have dipped below the average in most other states since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, which limits what local governments can collect as property values rise.

California now has one of the lowest effective property tax rates in the country.

But one regressive tax has increased significantly since the 1960s: the sales tax. In 1964, the state sales tax totaled 4 percent. That rose past 7 percent by the early 2000s.

The economy

The decline of manufacturing and the sharp exodus of blue-collar jobs with decent pay and good benefits are an economic narrative typically reserved for the Rust Belt. But in explaining the erosion of California's middle class, the

decline of manufacturing – particularly in the defense and aerospace industries that dominated Southern California during the Cold War – plays a central role.

“Silicon Valley does not provide those kind of big manufacturing jobs,” said Dan Mitchell, professor emeritus at the Anderson School of Management at UCLA. “There’s no equivalent of in aircraft assembly plant that you get from that. IT does provide high-paying, white-collar jobs, but certainly not as many and not in the same location.”

On the positive side, in good times California’s economy continues to outshine most of the U.S. In 13 of the past 20 years, the state’s annual economic growth has surpassed the national rate.

But California has always been a boom-and-bust state, and recessions play out worse here than elsewhere. The recession of the early 1990s, the dot-com bust at the turn of the century and the Great Recession all hit California harder than most of the rest of the country.

Identity of plane crash victim released

The pilot who died in the plane crash near the Minden airport on Feb. 19 has been identified as Stephen Filice, 64, of Minden.

Filice was flying back from Bakersfield when he had mechanical difficulty. He was unable to make it to the runway, crashing about one-half mile from the airport.

The wreckage of the twin engine Piper PA-34 Seneca was located in the vicinity of Hobo Hot Springs, west of Highway 395 and south of Plymouth Drive.

The incident is being investigated by the Federal Aviation Administration.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

McClintock rival stretching truth about her résumé

By Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

Managed half of America's foreign aid budget. Rewrote the U.S.-India defense strategy. Adviser to a four-star admiral.



Jessica Morse

These are some of the highlights of Jessica Morse's career that the 35-year-old Democrat likes to emphasize on the campaign trail. They are also some of the talking points that are drawing fire from critics, many of whom support a Democratic opponent in the race for California's 4th Congressional District, which is centered in Roseville. They accuse her of "taking credit for things that she did not do."

The truth is somewhere in between. A deep dive by The Sacramento Bee into Morse's background and America's foreign relations bureaucracy found that Morse, the front-runner among three Democrats bidding to unseat Republican Rep. Tom McClintock, built a serious and successful career within the military, State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

SnowGlobe chasm grows as dissenters organize

By Kathryn Reed

While a segment of the South Lake Tahoe community is rallying to silence SnowGlobe, the fact is the contract calls for another year of the three-day electronic music festival.

"Absent violations, they are holding the 2018 event," interim City Attorney Nira Doherty told *Lake Tahoe News.*

SnowGlobe is expected to be on the March 6 agenda as requested by the council. It will likely only be discussion since the contract is already in place.

At the Feb. 6 meeting a **settlement regarding the field** was approved by the council without any discussion. Promoter Chad Donnelly was at the meeting, but did not speak.

There is little gray area regarding the festival. People love it or hate.

It is an economic force. Hoteliers, restaurants and other tourism related businesses say the South Shore is no longer always busy over New Year's Eve. In years without snow, like

2017 was at that time, having an event like SnowGlobe brings people to town. About 12,000 people attend each of the three nights.

Donnelly says since the festival started in 2011 it has had a $50 million impact to the local community.

Then there are the people who are literally rattled by the bass for three days. This isn't a two- to three-hour concert like what takes place at Harveys in the summer. It's about nine hours for three days. The Stateline concerts have an earlier curfew. SnowGlobe goes to midnight or 1:30am depending on the day.

No Globe Alliance is organizing to get rid of the event or move it from the community ball field on Al Tahoe Boulevard.

This group of local residents in a position paper stated, "This event has unfairly displaced local residents, invaded our homes with noise, closed access to whole neighborhoods, exposed our forests to unnecessary and dangerous potential for fire and attracted visitors who do not reflect the family friendly Lake Tahoe we want to be."

Donnelly put together a SnowGlobe summary that he has circulated among the business community, and which city staff has been privy to. *Lake Tahoe News* sent each of the electeds a copy of the document and asked for thoughts about SnowGlobe 2018. None of the five responded.

LTN asked Donnelly if there is a point when he might say enough is enough based on the struggles he has had here. No answer. However, his summary states he still wants a long-term contract.

While the city and Donnelly have a contract that covers 2018, there are out clauses.

"Paragraph XXIV … allows either party to cancel the contract

with five days' notice by setting forth the specific violations of the special event agreement, temporary activity permit or facility use permit. The terminating party has to give the other party the chance to meet and correct violations before the termination is effective," Doherty explained.

While the town may be divided about SnowGlobe, attendees want more. Pre-sales for 2018 are sold-out.

Drone deliveries might be good for the environment

By Constantine and Joshuah Stolaroff, The Conversation

There are more than 1 million drones registered in the U.S. Most of them belong to people flying them for fun, but a growing number are used commercially. Companies including Amazon, UPS, Google and DHL are already exploring ways to deliver packages with drones instead of trucks. Our new research has measured how that shift would change how the U.S. uses energy, and the resulting environmental effects.

We found that in some cases using electric-powered drones rather than diesel-powered trucks or vans could reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. But in other cases, using trucks – especially electric-powered ones – would be more efficient and cleaner.

The U.S. electricity sector has been rapidly transitioning to generating power with fewer greenhouse gas emissions. But transportation is still largely powered by fuels made from oil and is now the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. About one-quarter of transportation emissions, the

equivalent of 415 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, comes from medium- and heavy-duty trucks, the kinds of vehicles that deliver freight to warehouses, businesses and consumers' homes.

Reducing the need for trucking by delivering some packages with electric drones could save fuel, and potentially carbon emissions. We modeled how much energy drone delivery would use, and how it would be different from the ways packages are delivered now.

Finding a drone's energy use

First, our team – led from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and including researchers from Carnegie Mellon University, SRI International and the University of Colorado–Boulder – measured the energy use of quadcopter and octocopter-style drones carrying different payloads. The amount of energy a drone uses depends on how heavy the drone itself is, its batteries and whatever packages it's carrying – as well as other factors, including how fast it's moving and wind conditions.

For the purposes of making an overall estimate, we settled on a quadcopter drone capable of delivering a 1.1 pound package and an octocopter drone capable of delivering a 17.6 pound package, each with a range of about 2.5 miles. We considered a range of battery technologies and fuels, but focused on lithium-based batteries for our base case, because that's what powers most current electric drones.

Comparing emissions

Even though it's fighting gravity to stay aloft, an electric drone uses much less energy per mile than a heavy steel delivery truck burning diesel fuel. But a delivery truck or van can carry many packages at once, so the energy needs and environmental effects need to be allocated per package.

Different delivery vehicles can run on diesel, natural gas, electricity or gasoline, each with various energy and emissions characteristics. We also included the environmental effects of making these fuels and of making electric vehicle batteries. The energy needed to turn crude oil into diesel fuel can add another 20 percent or more of greenhouse gases to the amount generated when the fuel is burned. And while battery manufacturing is improving, making batteries still generates carbon dioxide.

Then we calculated the amount of greenhouse gases emitted. Burning a gallon of diesel fuel emits about 10 kg of carbon dioxide, but emissions from electricity vary by region, depending on how it's generated. Some areas burn more coal and natural gas to generate power, while others have fewer fossil fuels and rely more on nuclear, hydropower, wind and solar power.

In general, electric power generation in the U.S. is getting cleaner over time. To show the range of energy needs and environmental effects, we paid particular attention to California, which has a low-carbon grid, and Missouri, which is in a carbon-intensive region.

Extra warehouses?

In addition, to serve drones with limited range, companies would have to change how their delivery systems use energy. Drones could transport items in multiple legs, almost like the Pony Express or stagecoaches did with horses in the early days of the American West. Or, as Amazon is testing, smaller local warehouses could serve key delivery destinations within the drones' range.

We calculated that serving the city of San Francisco would require about four urban warehouses with drone bases. To cover the greater Bay Area would require dozens of new warehouses, each needing electricity and potentially natural gas to

operate, just like other warehouses. We included this extra energy use in our estimates.

Small drone delivery can save emissions

Combining all the factors, we found that package delivery with small drones can be better for the environment than delivery with trucks. On average in the U.S., truck delivery of a package results in about 1 kg of greenhouse gas emissions. In California, drone delivery of a small package would result in about 0.42 kg of greenhouse gas emissions. That’s a savings of 54 percent from the 0.92 kg of greenhouse gases associated with a package delivered by truck in that state. In carbon-intensive Missouri the improvement would be smaller – just a 23 percent reduction – but still better.

Small drones were better than any truck or van, whether powered by diesel fuel, gasoline, natural gas or even electricity.

Our findings about larger drones were less clear-cut. They were 9 percent better than than diesel trucks when in California, but a lot worse when charged in Missouri. Because large drones need more kilowatt-hours to fly a mile, the carbon intensity of electricity really matters for large drones. Even in places where energy is typically generated from clean sources, it’s probably better to deliver larger packages with electric vans or electric trucks rather than large drones, because of the extra warehouse energy needed for drones.

But if you forgot that essential ingredient for tonight’s dinner, our findings suggest it’s much better to have the grocery store send it to you by drone rather than to take your car to the store and back.

Next steps for sustainability

Like any energy model, our estimates can change depending on

the assumptions used. The amount of space needed to store packages for drones, and how much energy drones use, are important factors, as is the carbon footprint of the electricity used. In our paper, we explore how the results change under different assumptions.

For ground delivery vehicles, the best ways to improve efficiency involve increasing the number of packages delivered per mile or switching to electric delivery trucks or vans.

As more companies start using drones, package delivery will be one of their tasks. To maximize the potential environmental benefits, companies should focus on using smaller drones charged with low-carbon electricity to deliver light packages, and on limiting how much warehouse space is dedicated to serving delivery drones. Heavier packages are likely best suited for efficient, often electric, ground delivery vehicles. The biggest gains will come from improving warehouses' energy efficiency and, crucially, reducing the amount of electricity generated from carbon-intensive fuels. Now we just have to do something about the noise of all those propellers overhead.

Constantine Samaras is an assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering at Carnegie Mellon University and Joshuah Stolaroff is an environmental scientist with the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Leader wants more gains for Nev. college students

By Natalie Bruzda, Las Vegas Review-Journal

At a time when the state's colleges are inwardly focused on their own strategic growth, they're also being asked to look beyond Nevada's borders for ways to make gains in student success.

Under the direction of Chancellor Thom Reilly, all seven Nevada System of Higher Education schools selected two to three institutions outside the state with which to compare and contrast progress on metrics including graduation rates, retention rates and enrollment diversity.

"If we're just looking at ourselves in a vacuum, then we don't really have an opportunity to explore," said Margo Martin, acting president of the College of Southern Nevada.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County employees flush with cash

By Kathryn Reed

It pays to work for El Dorado County. In 2017, the salary and benefits for three employees topped $300,000, while another 46 people surpassed $200,000.

Six people's compensation package was more than the chief administrative officer's and he's the top official in the county.

"The list highlights some problems with the county's compensation policies. For instance, the cost of the undersheriff's total compensation is higher than that of his boss, the sheriff," Joe Harn, the county's auditor-controller,

said in a statement. “The cost of each employee’s CalPERS benefit is included on the list, but the reported retirement cost should be reviewed with some skepticism. CalPERS has intentionally understated the actual cost of its retirement programs statewide. Undoubtedly, higher costs for the county’s retirement program and retirees’ health stipend will need to be paid in the future.”

Harn released the numbers last week. Here is that top 100 list.

“Posting the list to the county’s website is part of the ongoing effort to increase transparency in our County government,” Harn said. “The best government transparency involves placing all financial information online in a readily understandable manner. Government transparency allows taxpayers to see how our county is spending tax money, and gives El Dorado County citizens the ability to hold us accountable. The internet is a great place to enhance transparency.”

On top of the list is the mental health director with a base pay of $239,132, and a total package worth $364,056.

Forty of the top 100 work in the sheriff’s department. While most make more than $100,000 a year, it’s the overtime that adds up.

The lowest compensation package was $180,663 for an attorney in child support services.

1 person dies in plane crash near Minden

A plane crashed Monday about one-half mile from the Minden airport, killing the pilot.

Douglas County sheriff's Capt. Dan Coverley said the twin engine Piper PA-34 Seneca took off from Bakersfield and was headed for Minden, where the pilot's son lives.

"We have two pretty good witnesses who say something happened in the air. They saw an explosion and then he crashed," Coverley told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The plane landed in a hayfield owned by the Washoe tribe, in the Hobo Hot Springs area.

The crash occurred about 11:30am Feb. 19.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Icy roads a problem for drivers in Tahoe-Truckee

Law enforcement officials in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin have been working multiple car wreaks.

A collision Monday morning on Pioneer Trail and Glenwood Avenue in South Lake Tahoe resulted in one person being taken to the hospital. A fire hydrant was sheared off, which made the roads even more icy.

Truckee officers said on Sunday night they responded to

numerous reports of vehicles that slid off roadways, with several overturned.

“This was due to unsafe speeds in snowy and icy conditions. Also many drivers failed to chain their vehicles and were unprepared for driving in severe winter weather,” officials said in a statement.

The overnight snow was good for the ski resorts. Powder days have been few and far between this season.

The National Weather Service in Reno says, “Very cold temperatures will take hold of the region for the next few days. Daytime high temperatures near will only reach near freezing and overnight lows will drop into the very low teens with some places dropping into the sub-zero range.”

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

EDC fundraiser raffles off AR-15 after Fla. shooting

By Ellen Garrison, Tony Bizjak And Molly Sullivan, Sacramento Bee

A raffle item at a Cameron Park Fire Department crab feed Saturday night made some attendees so uncomfortable that they left the event.

Firefighters were auctioning off an AR-15 rifle, the type of weapon allegedly used Wednesday by Nikolas Cruz in the school shooting in Parkland, Fla., that left 17 dead.

El Dorado Hills resident Allison Merrill and her friends left

the crab feed after expressing their concerns about the gun raffle to the organizers, she said.

Read the whole story