Editorial: Paris attacks – What is the sensible response to this horrific act?

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Nov. 14, 2015, Los Angeles Times.***

After the terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January, it was clear that France wasn't immune to acts of violence motivated by a warped interpretation of Islam. It was also foreseeable that that risk would increase with France's participation in the launching of airstrikes against Islamic State in Syria as well as Iraq. Still, Friday's orchestrated carnage in Paris – for which Islamic State has claimed responsibility – came as a shock.

As with 9/11 and other acts of terrorism, the multiple attacks that killed more than 120 people in the French capital will (and should) lead to an inquest into whether internal security and intelligence collection were adequate. In his comments, French President Francois Hollande went frrther, describing the attacks as an "act of war" and promising that France would use "all means anywhere, inside or outside the country" to defeat Islamic State.

For Americans, those words were reminiscent of President George W. Bush's declaration after 9/11 that the U.S. would act if the Taliban government in Afghanistan didn't end its support for Al Qaeda and other terrorists. Soon afterward, with support from Congress, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, and American troops remain in that country to this day, albeit not in a combat role.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Feckless EDC Board of Supes

By Larry Weitzman

As El Dorado County salaries and benefits continue growing at an alarming rate, our Board of Supervisors just continues to go along for the EDC ride to ruination.

Salaries and benefits last fiscal year ending on June 30 even exceeded my estimates by $3 million at $145 million, when just two years' prior salaries were at about $118 million, a level that was maintained for four prior years. Saleries and benefits for this fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, will exceed $150 million (due to a hiring binge especially in the CAO's office where more than a dozen new analysts occupy space and eat up about $2 million annually and a 15 percent raise), an increase of more than 25 percent in just three years and with no end to the increases as a new contract will have to be negotiated as the current employment/union contract ends in June.



Larry Weitzman

Even more alarming new hiring continues. On the BOS agenda for Nov. 10 was an item to hire another building inspector. With only about 400 new building permits issued last year, why does

the county need another building inspector? Revenue growth is not even close to keeping pace. Something has got to give.

In case you didn't notice, it already has. In a budget letter dated Sept. 9 to the BOS for the final budget hearing before the adoption of the EDC budget CAO Larry Combs wrote, "I would like the board to consider a policy for the FY 2016-2017 budget and moving forward, whereas all road related projects are funded out of the Road Fund without any additional General Fund support."

The three things that over 95 percent of county residents want from EDC in this order of priority are public safety, roads and road maintenance, and good land use planning. That was validated in 2000 as 60.8 percent of EDC voters passed Proposition H, a measure "requiring the expenditure of at least half of the 'vehicle in-lieu tax' revenues received by the county of El Dorado annually on roads, ways, highways…" The voters mandated this expenditure of General Fund money on roads, an amount of approximately $2 million annually.

Those expenditures continued for about six years until the state took back those fees in an effort to balance the state budget. Even when that money was usurped by the state the BOS continued to follow the voters' obvious wants and continued funding road maintenance at an average of more than $1 million a year with the last reported year of FY 2014 spending over $2.1 million from the General Fund on road maintenance.

But now at the recommendation Combs and the agreement of the feckless BOS our roads are going to crumble. I am sure you have already figured out why? We can't spend General Fund money when salaries and jobs have ballooned to unsustainable amounts. If you love potholes, you gotta love Larry Combs.

But Combs isn't hurting for money. He has a pension from Sutter County for life of over $185,000 annually and one from Merced County of about $14,000 a year. On top of that we (EDC)

pay him over $92,000 a year for half time work, i.e., 20 hours a week with about half of that time being spent in weekly BOS meetings (his income totals nearly $300,000/year plus health care). So Combs has a solution for spending time in BOS meetings as well, have fewer BOS meetings.

If you haven't noticed, there was no BOS meeting the first week of November. It was announced in last week's meeting there would be no meeting Nov. 24. In the future you will see more of the same. We certainly don't want to overwork the interim CAO who's now in his fifth month without a search and recruitment for a real CAO even being started. And now with fewer BOS meetings expect even more delays.

Perhaps the worst part of having fewer BOS meetings is less time facing the public answering questions as to why are we spending more money than ever on salaries and less on maintaining the county, and it's just not the roads. County buildings are falling apart. Last year about $6 million was scheduled to be spent on county buildings. It didn't happen. Maybe it would have caused a budget deficit. But salaries and benefit rose by over $14 million for last year, about an 11 percent increase.

While our CAO may be detrimental to EDC, the buck stops with the feckless BOS who voted 5-0 to stop General Fund road maintenance and continues to accept the excuses of high ranking staff as to why important issues are not getting solved or corrected without consequence as in the salary and benefit resolution not being corrected going on five months, a job that could be finished in less than two hours. Maybe the EDC's $200,000 plus HR director and former interim CAO Pam Knorr who was assigned that job in June isn't spending enough time at the office? Then again, the buck stops with the BOS.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: Social media makes politics impossible to predict

By Helen Margetts

It’s the vital question of our era, the question undergirding the success of everyone from Donald Trump to Black Lives Matter: What makes some online campaigns go viral and others flop?

Even after considerable research, it’s surprisingly hard to say. We have more data on failures, since most mobilizations based on social media go nowhere. Almost all (99.9 percent) petitions to the White House’s “We the People” petition platform fail to get the 100,000 signatures required for an official response, and 99 percent of petitions fail to get even 500 signatures.

The one thing we can say about successful initiatives is that once they start, they get going really quickly. All those hash tags used in campaigns against policing rise exponentially directly after the incident, and again if there is failure to indict. Successful political video clips are watched millions of times in a matter of hours. If a petition sits around with only a few signatures for more than 10 hours, it is digital dust—forgotten almost as quickly as it is posted.

Research shows that if we know something is popular, we like it more—and that applies to political initiatives, too. So petitions or campaigns or mobilizations that are popular become more popular, at the expense of the less popular. And that causes instability in political “markets,” just as it

does in cultural markets – where popular songs and videos are liked by millions even as most disappear without trace – or in financial markets, where a run on one stock can cause a stock market bubble. This instability makes it very difficult to work out which initiatives will succeed and which will fail.

None of the normal drivers of political behavior explain what is going on in these settings. The way we used to predict political mobilization was through demographics—age, ethnic group, and socio-economic status, for example. The conventional wisdom was that older people were more likely to participate in politics than young people, whites were more likely to participate than blacks, and the rich were more likely to participate than the poor.

Yet today, when the costs of participation are so small, your income or other resources are less likely to shape whether you join in. Young people, the most avid users of social media, seem to be participating more, after years of commentators bemoaning their disinterest in politics. This participation can take many forms, from expressions of support for a cause on social media to circulating petitions, sharing photos of political events, taking part in elections, and even joining insurrections (as in the Arab Spring).

Participation means more than just voting, but even by that measure alone, things are changing. The presidential elections in 2004, 2008, and 2012 showed that a high voter turnout of around 50 percent is becoming the norm for the millennial generation, in contrast to the 1990s, when youth turnout was regularly less than 40 percent. Obama also brought young black people into the political process—in 2008, turnout among the black population matched that of the white population for the first time ever, and increased in 2012.

This trend of young people getting involved in the political process is growing wherever social media use is. In the U.K., Jeremy Corbyn, a left-wing backbencher, was elected Labor

party leader to the amazement—and horror—of the many. How? Thanks largely to young people previously outside politics who mobilized around the hash tag #Jezwecan.

But what happens after these rapid-fire mobilizations succeed? Sustainability is a problem. Many recent mobilizations have exposed the chasm between new forms of citizens' engagement and the standard functioning of traditional institutions, particularly political parties. The challenge is how to become better at harnessing these mobilizations to sustain political change.

As exciting as they can be, digital campaigns, protests, and movements are also unstable and unpredictable. If they fail to achieve their aims, they will sink back into transient invisibility, as with the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong, but they could burst forth again at any point. We already know that there is no safe bet in American politics in the coming year: Look at Donald Trump, master of Twitter, and Bernie Sanders, who has gotten over 1 million online donations. The only thing we know for sure is that more unpredictability lies ahead.

Helen Margetts is professor of society and the Internet and director of the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford. She is also co-author, with Peter John, Scott Hale, and Taha Yasseri of "Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action".

Opinion: Fantasy sports

raises serious questions

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Nov. 6, 2015, Deseret News.***

Federal and local prosecutors in states such as New York, Florida, Massachusetts and Nevada are busy investigating the daily fantasy-sports industry to see whether it qualifies as gambling or violates various laws. The subject even led to a somewhat memorable political debate moment recently as New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie launched a verbal assault against a moderator, claiming a question about fantasy sports was irrelevant, given the many problems facing the nation.

But there is mounting evidence that the daily fantasy-sports movement, which has begun an aggressive marketing campaign during sports broadcasts and now has the sponsorship of some major sports leagues, is indeed a threat worthy of discussion.

And arguments that the game involves the skill of its participants, not chance, are looking feeble, indeed.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Power plants threaten Utah's ski industry

By Angel Collinson, Outside

My younger brother John and I grew up in Snowbird Ski Resort's employee housing, high in Utah's Little Cottonwood Canyon, 30 minutes drive from downtown Salt Lake City and home to Snowbird and Alta, two of Utah's premier ski resorts. My dad

was a ski patroller at Snowbird. We were lucky: Our childhood was filled with fresh air and, in winter, fresh snow. But that’s been changing for the worse.

From kindergarten through high school, my mom homeschooled us, along with four other canyon kids. We rarely left the canyon in winter, we just skied.

It was a child’s utopia, except for the fact that, most days, the border between our life in the canyon heights and the Salt Lake Valley below was clearly demarcated by a thick layer of brown-gray haze.

Read the whole story

Letter: Mt. Tallac High says thank you

To the community,

Mt. Tallac High School would like to thank Maureen and Steve Froyum, John Marchini, and Jose Reza from South Tahoe Refuse for carrying 40-pound plus backpacks with food to Cathedral Lake on Oct. 27 to prepare a hot good lunch for the students of Mt. Tallac High School. After our amazing lunch they hiked with us to the top of Mt. Tallac.

Thank you,

Esmeralda Yanez and Veronica Roque, Mt. Tallac High School

Opinion: Affirmative action in college admissions threatened

By Ben Backes, Brookings Brief

In the coming months, the Supreme Court will consider—again—whether UT Austin's use of racial preferences in undergraduate admissions decisions violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals had failed to apply strict scrutiny in affirming UT Austin's admissions policy, thus vacating the Fifth Circuit's original decision and sending the case back down. In the following year, the Fifth Circuit re-affirmed the university's admissions practices, which was again appealed, and in June of 2015 the Supreme Court announced that they would once agains hear Abigail Fisher's challenge in Fisher v University of Texas Austin, which is now scheduled for the coming December.

As with the original hearing, there is the possibility that the pending decision will make it more difficult for universities to justify using race as a factor in admissions.

Read the whole story

Letter: Heavenly dishes up

food at B&B

To the community,

Six times a year Heavenly Mountain Resort partners with Bread & Broth to host an Adopt A Day of Nourishment thanks to Vail's Epic Promise Grant program. On Oct. 19, Heavenly hosted the evening dinner and sent a great crew from the product, sales and services team.

"We are always honored to help the community," said Jared Autio, PSS assistant manager. "Do good is a core value here at Heavenly."

Feeding dinner guests a nutritious meal, providing second servings and distributing giving away bags filled with food to use during the week certainly constitutes "good", especially to those 118 folks who attended the dinner. Helping B&B volunteers to provide all these services were fellow PSS team members Chris Barbar, scanning assistant manager; Kelly Carmichael, manager; Paul Hopkins, director; and Jolena Hearn, guest services assistant manager.

Hearn has been a frequent Heavenly sponsor crewmember and she "loves joining the community here for good food and friendship."

Bread & Broth volunteers always look forward to evenings hosted by Vail Resort employees. They always bring a great sense of community spirit and joy to the evening and are a tremendous help in all the activities needed to put the dinner event together. B&B is very grateful for the partnership they share with Vail Resorts and their team members. Thank you Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: U.S. needs to redefine poverty

By Francis Secada, Al Jazeera America

The recent campaigns to push for an increase in minimum wage rates across the United States have attracted much media coverage. The state of New York is making moves to approve a $15 per hour price floor, joining Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. There is growing support for ensuring minimal income levels to promote equitable living standards. Less attention has been paid, however, to the capricious relationship minimum wage policy has with inflation. The U.S. is unique among developed nations in maintaining an inadequately low federal poverty rate and failing to accommodate increases in the cost of living.

The federal minimum wage rate has historically been intended to provide the minimal salary working Americans need to earn a meaningful living. Though the minimum wage has been increasing consistently since its enactment in 1938, at 25 cents per hour, its value in any given year has to be understood in terms of real dollars. Factoring in the Consumer Price Index, the jump in the minimum wage from $5.15 in 2006 to $7.25 in 2009, for instance, was minimally significant in terms of providing financial relief.

The real purchasing power of a minimum wage fluctuates greatly, peaking and dropping at intervals. Moreover, each increase in the minimum wage is reactive, providing some relief to low-skill workers, but then dropping in subsequent years, until federal action is required yet again. In other words, with each passing year, wages remain stagnant while the

purchasing power of the dollar becomes progressively weaker.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Ex-SLT city manager on the outs in Wash.

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Nov. 6, 2015, Yakima Herald-Republic. Tony O'Rourke was city manager of South Lake Tahoe before leaving in 2012 for the Yakima job.***

Tony O'Rourke wants out of Yakima. The city manager has put in for at least two out-of-state positions. His house is on the market. He even said so – at a City Council executive session that violated state law, the legal point having been acknowledged by the city attorney.



Tony O'Rourke

But then, in a huff of hubris that careened into denial, O'Rourke rescinded his resignation, a move that sparked unprecedented exasperation and anger at Tuesday night's City Council meeting. The emotion-fraught verbal fracas fittingly corresponded with the flow of Election Night ballots for a new City Council that, apparently, will have to sort through a mess of the current council's and city manager's making.

We do know that the next City Council will have four new members among its crew of seven; what we don’t know is whether O’Rourke will be the city manager who reports to them.

He shouldn’t be. When Jan. 1 comes, Tony O’Rourke should be gone. If he isn’t – and the current council shows few signs of being up to the task – the new council should perform this dirty yet dutiful task.

Read the whole story