Opinion: Demand better tests, not fewer schools

By Michael R. Bloomberg

President Obama is in danger of squandering one of his most important legacies – better public education policies – and doing real harm to our poorest students and America's future.

Last month, the president and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called for limiting the amount of time that students spend taking tests. It's an unfortunate and tragically oversimplified response to the challenges facing our schools – challenges made plain by U.S. test results released recently, which show that students have lost ground in math for the first time since 1990.

To improve education, parents and teachers need to know how well our students – of all ethnic and racial backgrounds – are learning. That's especially true in communities where schools are the best hope for escaping poverty. Parents deserve to know how schools compare with one another so that they can demand improvements where they are needed and hold schools accountable for delivering results. The same is true for principals and elected officials, to say nothing of taxpayers. That's why accurate information on student learning is so crucial – and like it or not, high-quality testing is an essential element of that.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Lake Tahoe's death by a thousand cuts

To the community,

First of all, what is death by a thousand cuts? It's an ancient form of torture from Imperial China, where a subject was given one cut after another until over an extended period of time he bled to death: The first few hundred cuts wouldn't kill him, but the last few hundred most certainly would.

In modern usage, it's defined (by Wikipedia) as "the way a major negative change which happens slowly in many unnoticed increments is not perceived as objectionable." That's just what's happening at Tahoe right now.

First, it's the Tahoe Keys milfoil disaster (current solution – herbicide? Really?). Then TRPA's Regional Plan update – more height and density in "town centers" to fix our economy and sub-par development.

Now, the first big proposal since the Regional Plan update: urban sprawl on an undeveloped ridgeline above Lake Tahoe and Martis Valley, essentially creating a new town the size of Kings Beach in the middle of the forest.

This is the nightmare proposed by Mountainside Partners (formerly East-West Partners; the developer) and Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI; the land-owner).

I'm glad that SPI, which owns almost 2 million acres in California, and Mountainside Partners, which is planning a $1 billion expansion at the Mountainside at Northstar, have revealed their true, destructive intent for our area now rather than later.

Sierra Watch and Mountain Area Preservation entered into a

complicated agreement with East-West (now Mountainside Partners), a seasoned developer out of Colorado.

East-West is currently partnering with KSL (Squaw Valley) on a project at the bottom of Snowmass. In the opinion piece written by SW and MAP (Oct. 28, “Setting the Record Straight Regarding Martis Valley”) they argue that they only agreed to a new land-use designation on the forested ridge. However, this is semantics.

The result of that land use designation (whatever you may want to call it) is Martis Valley West and the Brockway Campground — and now we know how outrageous the consequences of a new land-use designation can be.

We agree with MAP and Sierra Watch that Truckee shouldn’t approve more sprawl, but neither should Tahoe — and why doesn’t that reasoning apply to Martis Valley West? Except for this deal, MAP and Sierra Watch have a history of great conservation work, and we’re hopeful they will continue that legacy by negotiating a conservation agreement for SPI lands without involving development on our iconic and irreplaceable ridgelines.

Stop Tahoe’s bleeding now — or watch her die slowly, one new development at a time.

Ann Nichols, North Tahoe Preservation Alliance

Opinion: Preparing for winter road conditions

By Meg Ragonese

As continuing rain and potential snow is forecast Northern Nevada, the Nevada Department of Transportation is prepared to help keep roads clear.

NDOT begins annual winter preparations in August by readying more than 80 snowplows and other pieces of snow and ice equipment for use in snow removal across northwestern Nevada. More than 32,000 thousand cubic yards of salt and sand has been stockpiled in the area, ready to be spread on winter roads for increased traction and safety. The sand is combined with salt and wetted with brine to create more dense sand that keeps roads ice-free at lower temperatures and will not as easily bounce off roadway surfaces. NDOT sand trucks calibrate the amount of salt and sand, spreading the mixture on roadways with extreme precision and efficiency.

“Drivers will also see our NDOT vehicles spraying a liquid brine on the roads prior to certain snow storms,” NDOT Assistant District Engineer for Maintenance Mike Fuess explained. “The brine is a water solution of 23 percent salt that we produce in-house at a substantial cost savings. Sprayed in certain conditions before storms, the brine helps reduce how quickly the ice forms and sticks to the road.”

NDOT has approximately 150 permanent maintenance staff in northwestern Nevada. As storms move in, maintenance personnel closely monitor professional meteorological forecasts detailing wind, rain, snow, ice and other weather on state roads. Staff also utilize more than 30 Road Weather Information System meteorological stations located along northwestern Nevada roadways to provide detailed reports of current air and pavement temperature, as well as any moisture. The updated weather readings help pinpoint precise sections of roads needing brine, salt and sand or snow removal.

During major winter storms, crews work in 12 hour shifts, rotating personnel to provide 24 hour-a-day snow removal.

NDOT has installed automatic anti-icing systems on four bridges on Interstate 580 between Reno and Carson City to help delay and prevent ice formation on bridge surfaces. When potentially freezing conditions set in, pavement sensors on each bridge activate spray disks embedded within the concrete. Each recessed disk sprays a potassium acetate anti-icing solution to help delay formation of ice.

NDOT will also use tow plows on I-580 between south Reno and north Carson and other areas. The tow plow is a second, steerable snowplow blade towed like a trailer behind a traditional snowplow. The tow plow swings out to the lane next to the lead snowplow to clear a second lane of snow.

On average, more than 2,000 crashes occur statewide every year due to unsafe driving in snow, ice and other wet conditions, such as driving too fast for conditions, following too closely, or failing to maintain a lane and overcorrecting. In winter weather, motorists are reminded to drive slowly for conditions and leave space between their vehicle and others. Wearing a seat belt and focusing on the road are other important driving tips for any type of weather.

Driving tips:

· Remove snow and ice from all vehicle windows, mirrors and lights prior to driving

· Only travel in winter weather when absolutely necessary, and leave early to provide enough time to safely reach your destination

· Slow down on winter roads; speed limits are based on road and weather conditions

· Keep a safe distance from other vehicles

· Watch carefully for snow removal equipment

· Use extra caution on bridges and ramps, as they may be icy

Check before you go:

Tires, brakes, lights, battery, wipers, defroster, heater, and vehicle fluid levels.

Carry with you:

Tire chains, flashlight, ice scraper, snow shovel, first aid supplies, extra clothes/gloves, blanket, flares, non-perishable food/water.

Meg Ragonese is the Nevada Department of Transportation public information officer.

Letter: Community helps LTUSD students

To the community,

I wish to express my deepest thanks to following: Lake Tahoe Education Foundation and the El Dorado Ag In the Classroom, among others, who helped to fund the Tahoe Farm Day for the third- and fourth-grade classes. There were over 30 stations that students were able to experience.

LTEF was also the major funder for the Wonders of Waters Educational Experience that had K-6 students rotating through three stations at each grade level to learn about water and our environment. We are so very lucky to have such an amazing foundation supporting us.

In addition, the Tahoe Fund, along with the Rotary Club helped to fund our high school students' participation in the Tahoe Basin Watershed Education Summit. This program allows students

the opportunity to learn about the Lake Tahoe watershed while collecting data for real restoration projects and working alongside professionals in science related fields.

Our STEEC group (South Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition), which consists of over 20 local, federal and community agencies, nonprofits and businesses, provides most of the presenters for these stations. They are an amazing group of people, along with some outstanding community volunteers. We are truly blessed to live in a community that supports the education of our youth in such powerful ways.

My heartfelt thanks for the many ways you all contribute.

Beth Quandt, science outreach coordinator for Lake Tahoe Unified School District

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Opinion: SLTPD trying to curb crime spike

By Brian Uhler

The department is deeply appreciative of the support given to the family of Mark Hounsell who was killed, along with his wife, Jeanne, and her friend Laura Fisher, in a motor vehicle accident. They are survived by four children who have been the recipients of beautiful and heartfelt support from the entire community. **The fund** for the children is now approaching the goal of $130,000.

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Brian Uhler

During the latter part of September and first part of October at least five vehicles were stolen from the city. The auto theft series has subsided after our investigations and assistance from other law enforcement agencies has culminated with the arrest of several suspects. One of our newest officers (Davis Spaid) located and arrested one auto thief in the stolen vehicle while still in the city.

Amador County sheriff’s deputies located another of the stolen vehicles from South Lake Tahoe and arrested both occupants. Our detectives have linked these suspects to other auto thefts. Adam Roland now has an active arrest warrant for auto theft.

What can you do? Many of the cars stolen in our area were left unattended with the keys inside. Keep your car locked and do not leave keys inside. We know that many community members like to pre-warm their cars. There are remote start systems which allow the doors to remain locked and any attempt to drive the car would result in the engine stopping. Consider installing one of these systems to avoid being a victim of a car thief.

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In October we had two gang-related drive-by shootings. The first resulted in an adult male being shot in the leg by a suspect identified as David Angeles. We believe he has fled from South Lake Tahoe. We are coordinating with federal authorities to locate and arrest him.

The other drive-by shooting occurred on the evening of Oct. 28 when a suspect driving in the 800 block of Emerald Bay Road fired several rounds into a vehicle parked in front of a residence. Detectives arrested 23-year-old local resident Jahem Barton the following day in connection to this case. He was arrested on charges of being an ex-felon in possession of firearm ammunition and resisting arrest.

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department is committed to identifying and arresting violent criminals. If you are involved in gangs, don't be surprised when we commit significant resources to tracking you down and arresting you.

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Issues with winter approaching:

(1) Driving: Allow extra time to drive slowly on slippery roads. Unless you're in the car repair business, all accidents are bad.

(2) Parking: Don't forget we tow or cite cars which are parked on public roadways during snow removal times. Keeping cars off the roadways provides for faster snow removal. Also note that the snow removal period can last many hours or even days beyond the first pass. Sometimes people forget about the "widening phase" of snow removal which can be several days after a large snowfall event.

Brian Uhler is the police chief for South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Internet will not

make kids stupid

By Yalda T. Uhls

I come bearing good news: Our teens are not growing into brain-dead zombies or emotionally stunted sociopaths. After more than a decade of research by child psychologists like me, we have discovered that the kids are all right. In study after study of emotional and intelligence indicators, 21st-century children use media to connect with their friends and learn about the world, just like those of us who were children of the 20th century did.

But you don’t have to take it from me. The proof is in the past. Every time a new technology is introduced, it becomes a cultural battleground. And ultimately, we come to a truce.

Take this one example: Near the end of the 19th century, a new medium was unleashed upon the world. Children took to it like ducks to water, and this terrified adults. Young people everywhere spent hours on end immersed, while simultaneously ignoring the grown-ups in their lives. Understandably, parents were alarmed and worried that this new medium and its racy content were ruining young minds.

Change 19th to 20th, and I could be talking about the Internet. So what was this addictive content? Romantic novels.

Example two comes from Azriel L. Eisenberg, writing in the American Journal of Psychiatry:

This new invader of the privacy of the home has brought many a disturbing influence in its wake. Parents have become aware of a puzzling change in the behavior patterns of their children. They are bewildered by a host of new problems, and find themselves unprepared, frightened, resentful, helpless. They cannot lock out this intruder because it has gained an invincible hold of their children.

What was this dreaded intruder that Eisenberg wrote about in 1936? The radio.

Example three comes from an academic study on parents' reactions to a new media:

One mother reports that her children are aggressive and irritable as a result of over-stimulating experiences, which leads to sleepless nights and tired days.

Overstimulation and aggression? Her kids must be addicted to social media and violent video games. But this article was written in 1950. She's talking about TV.

In the second decade of the 21st century, with more information at our fingertips than any time in human history, you can find evidence of all of these old fears and trends and studies online. But we haven't still haven't managed to assuage our concerns about kids today, who have adopted their generation's media with ardent fervor.

In a recent Pew poll, 75 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds reported they had smartphones, 52 percent said they spent time with friends playing video games, and 24 percent said they go online "almost constantly." What are we to make of these statistics? Each time I speak to adults, parents, teachers, and anyone who cares about kids, they express their worry about the "addictive" nature of digital media and mobile phones and the dangers kids are exposed to online. Meanwhile, Silicon Valley evangelists claim their new devices and apps are going to make the world a better place. Who is right, and who is wrong? The answer is somewhere in the middle: digital media are a new environment that has both positive and negative effects on our children and our society.

While research on the Internet and the developing brain is in the nascent stages, we can learn about our brain's ability to successfully adapt to new environments from past research. Studies show that our brains are incredibly plastic, and never

more so than in early childhood and adolescence. This means our brains rapidly attune to new surroundings—whether we're moving to a new city or to a new kind of virtual environment. Moreover, we are learning that our brains adapt to new social worlds, too: As tweens and teens use the Internet and video games to connect with friends, their social brains are adapting quickly to this new environment. Remember, humans adapted and thrived in many different habitats and climates over thousands of years; as the digital natives continue to develop, so will their ability to adapt successfully to the online environment.

We may finally be at a tipping point, one we have seen with every introduction of new media. New data from respected social scientists around the world continues to demonstrate that children are adapting and sometimes thriving as they embrace 21st-century media; these small and incremental changes may be building to permanent change. Perhaps now the hysteria will finally come to an end. Encouraging signs point to a leveling out of the national conversation.

For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics just published new key messages for families regarding media and technology use. While they didn't go so far as to change their recommendations on the amount of screen time that is healthy for children, they did state that the quality of the media content is more important than time spent. They also made it clear that online relationships are essential for adolescent development. Ultimately, their message was that media is just another environment—like the playground—where children will spend time, but require careful supervision to do so safely.

Childhood is still childhood. I couldn't have put it better than K.G., a first-grade teacher whose words have become an Internet meme: "Yes, kids love technology, but they also love Legos, scented markers, handstands, books and mud puddles. It's all about balance."

It’s time for adults—digital immigrants to the next generation’s natives—to adapt, step in, and be that balance. Instead of focusing our energy on being “for” or “against” technology, let’s guide children in how to use it wisely and safely. Let’s help them make the most of this new place they love, while continuing to teach them the importance of face-time, discipline, and moderation. Judging by history, when this generation grows up, they’ll be busy coping with their own fears of whatever new thing their kids are using.

Yalda T. Uhls is a child psychology researcher who studies how media affect children. Her new book is “Media Moms & Digital Dads: A Fact Not Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age”. Uhls does research at UCLA, and works with Common Sense Media, a national nonprofit.

Letter: Barbells for Boobs a success

To the community,

South Tahoe CrossFit would like to thank the following businesses and individuals for their time and donations for our successful fundraiser, Barbells for Boobs, on Oct. 24.

They are: Mo’s Place, Manish Patel; KFC, Lisa and Pat Kern; Verde Mexican Rotisserie, Domi and Katy Chavarria; Lake Tahoe Golf Course, Bobby Jaeger’ Landing Resort and Spa, Casey Lucas; Hall Creations, Angie Hall; Hestra Gloves, Justeen Ferguson; Nel’s Hardware; Deerfield Lodge at Heavenly Resort, Jessie and Spence Romine; Casto Chiropractic, Nichole and Jason Casto FatFace Skin Care, Cassie Burnside; Heaven Scent, Sarah Sullivan; Overland Meat and Seafood Co., Brian

Cohen; Thirty One Bags, Melanie Turner; Arbonne, Lisa Malone; Azul Latin Kitchen, Stephanie Feeney; Cold Water Bistro, Justin Kaplan; Kalani's, Tara Chiarpotti; Tahoe Keys Deli, Jenn and John Galea; Flight Deck Bar and Restaurant; Classic Cuts; Tahoe Vapory; McDuff's Pub; Posh Finds; Hot Cha Cha; Tahoe Blue Vodka; Fashletics; Ashley Lindner; Robyn Lindner; Karen Haslam; Robin Kroeger; Judith Strand; Jodi Messex; Kim Caringer; and Renée Gorevin, to whom we dedicate this event.

With your support, we were able to raise over $12,000 for the organization that has early detection through breast cancer screenings as its primary mission.

Thank you also to all the South Tahoe CrossFit members and the general public that came out and participated in the event.

Thank you,

Daunelle Wulstein, South Tahoe CrossFit

Opinion: Brown wrong to not sign drone bill

By Ted Gaines

Gov. Jerry Brown made a serious error vetoing my Senate Bill 168 and by doing so put emergency responders, property and the lives of Californians unnecessarily at risk.

SB168 tackled a new menace in California, unauthorized drones in emergency zones. Drones are amazing, and I want to see the industry flourish in California. I want to see hobbyists flying them and having fun, businesses using them to deliver

packages, take photos or in any other creative ways we can't even imagine. And I want to see public safety using them to help save lives and property. But they have no business flying in dangerous emergency areas and interfering with public safety.



Ted Gaines

My bill would have given civil immunity to emergency personnel who damaged a drone in the course of their duty. It would have also penalized that reckless drone use with up to six months of jail time, which is consistent with current law regarding interference, and increased the potential penalty for interfering up to $5,000.

Those penalties were already lower than what I wanted. I wanted something stronger that would send a clear message to anyone piloting a drone over a fire that their actions are contemptible and worthy of punishment. But I toned down the penalties to try to meet the governor in the middle, knowing that he is sensitive to creating new crimes in California.

Apparently, there is no halfway point with the governor on crime. While I appreciate a thoughtful discussion of our penal system, Brown's veto of this important legislation shows a reflexive, anti-punishment strain that threatens every Californian who is fighting fires and responding to life-saving emergencies. Brown, the motive force behind the prison "realignment" that has pushed thousands of criminals back out on the street, has let his ideology again trump the needs of citizens around the state.

New technologies will lead to new crimes. Laws should adapt to the existing environment to provide the public safety that should be government's highest priority. It is absurd to say the advent of the automobile, or the internet, or credit cards, or drones, will not lead to unforeseen situations that are unique and deserve unique laws to address them.

Wildfires have savaged our state this year. More than a thousand homes are now sad piles of ash and people around the state are just beginning to think about the painful task of rebuilding or relocating. But probably the most compelling image of the fire season was the terrified people on Interstate 15 running for their lives as the North Fire swept over that freeway and torched their vehicles as they fled.

Drones in the air caused the North Fire air tankers to abandon the scene and divert their flame-retardant loads away from the fire. By the time the drones exited and it was safe to resume their mission, 15 critical minutes had passed. The fire engulfed the cars. We are lucky that only vehicles were damaged, but next time, there might not be an exit route and we may be mourning a loss of life.

Despite his "no new crimes" mantra, Gov. Brown did sign one drone-related bill that expanded a penalty. The bill aimed to protect celebrities from paparazzi using drones to snap pictures of the stars. So, Brown will add new penalties to protect the Kardashians, but not firefighters or families living in wildfire areas.

To borrow from another governor, I want Brown to know that "I'll be back." I want to work with him for a solution next year when this problem will likely be far worse than it was this year, because this Christmas it's expected that 1 million new drones will be sold as gifts. The operators need to understand all air safety laws and also use common sense when it comes to operating what can be dangerous toys. But if they ignore the law and expose everyone to direct and unnecessary

risk, they should be punished. SB168 would have done just that.

Ted Gaines, R-El Dorado, represents the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin in the state Senate.

Letter: EDC State of Jefferson clarifies its opinions

To the community,

Conversations and rumors continue, alleging that the State of Jefferson (SOJ) is behind and/or supports the recall effort of all county supervisors. This is not true.

At a local meeting of the El Dorado County SOJ Committee, this issue was debated, followed by a vote, where an overwhelming majority voted no to joining or supporting this recall or any recall of county elected officials. However, an individual who may be a Jefferson supporter, is within their rights to sign a petition for recall, but they only do so as an individual, not as a representative of the SOJ.

It should also be noted, that the Board of Supervisors never had the opportunity to vote for or against signing the declaration/petition, supporting the SOJ, as our committee voted to pull the item from the agenda, feeling that the board was not comfortable in making that decision. Instead the committee chose the direction of securing signatures of support from El Dorado County citizens, which has been rewarding. In front of stores we have averaged one signature

every 80 seconds.

The committee has been successful in acquiring thousands of signatures and will continue to do so. The main objective continues, seeking representation for rural Northern California counties.

Remember, it was a Southern California lawmaker who authored the fire fee “tax”, passed by urban legislators whose constituents are not required to pay the fee. Did you know that the Board of Equalization has stated that the fee does not pay for fighting fire? Where do you think our fire tax money is going?

The Jefferson movement is spreading. Last month, the El Dorado County committee coordinated a town hall for Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne counties, who have now formed committees. Of the 23 counties, 11 have now qualified to file declarations with the state of California, again seeking more representation and/or to form the 51st state. El Dorado County and other remaining counties are nearing their goals, and we plan to introduce legislation in January 2016.

It is clear, that people are tired of California’s unbalanced, big government, with over 570 agencies, who overregulate. Did you know our state legislators pass an average of 900 new laws every year? Will paying for the bullet train or delta tunnels benefit us? Get ready, there are more taxes on the way, with the potential for five new tax laws on the 2016 ballot.

Finally, many feel that the 51st state, with its part-time legislature, offerings of more local control and two U.S. Senators, that represent rural citizens’ concerns and needs, will resolve much of what is wrong at all levels of government. It is time for appropriate representation, smaller government, less regulations and less taxes. Join us and sign a support statement. You can sign **online**.

Mike Thomas, Placerville

Opinion: A place that restores my spirit

By Torie Osborn

Escape. I have come to realize that only regular and solitary immersion in a gorgeous, inspiring place keeps me sane and energized for my life's work. I need to be gobsmacked by beauty, the kind found only in nature or art: That "thing outside ourselves that brings us to ourselves," as poet Adrienne Rich put it. For me, it must be a place that leaves me so filled with awe, or what some call God, that I can't even talk right for an hour.

I first discovered this hunger for wonder and beauty at Barnard College, in the heady spring of 1970. After agonizing through endless meetings on whether and how to shut down the entire university in the wake of the Kent State shootings, I was walking on Amsterdam Avenue in Morningside Heights, not too far from campus, and passed the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. I was a recovering Catholic, yet I found myself drawn inside, almost magnetically. After sitting fully still for a candle-lit hour, I felt my faith in the human capacity to change the world restored, and I felt fully charged to continue with the battles I was fighting. Over the coming months, I would return to St. John the Divine whenever I felt overflowing with frustrations or questions raised by an unsure young woman navigating a men's world of too-sure activism.

I've been fortunate to lead and to work in social movements and grassroots activism for over 50 years, from fighting the Vietnam War and leading HIV and LGBT organizations to pursuing anti-poverty work.

At 65, I've developed a number of spiritual practices that help balance my life, such as meditation and occasional quiet retreats, but I still need a regular go-to place that restores my spirit in a deeper way, in an efficient hour or two. Every few years, I feel the need to change venues; it's not a rational thing, but, rather, I just feel pulled to return over and over again to someplace different.

For a long time, I hiked the Backbone Trail in the Santa Monica Mountains, at the Tapia turnoff on Malibu Canyon road every month. A 50-or-so-minute steep initial incline discourages most hikers, so mostly it would be just me and the dipping hawks once I got up to the top, the misted ocean filling the western horizon, green canyon upon green canyon on the east. Profound silence leading out to infinity. Give me an hour at the top of the world, and I'm ready to return to the crazy work below trying to make it better.

After visiting the then-new Getty Museum in the late 1990s, my pilgrimage route began to bring me there. For me, it doesn't matter what the exhibits are: It's the sense of place that calls to me. Whether sunny or clouded over, after that winding drive and tram ride, usually crowded, I love just wandering the gardens and the white stone and marble plaza for a weekend morning hour or so. Although much more crowded than the Santa Monica Mountains, that glorious place is the closest I've felt in this country to the magnificence of Athens' Acropolis: a restorative place of beauty and learning soaring high above daily life.

Last year, after a lifetime of social-change activism on the outside of government, I became "The Man": top policy deputy for LA County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl. It's a career-capper for me, and it's unexpectedly thrilling to tackle from this perch what I consider the big issues of the day: economic inequality, environmental sanity, civic engagement, racial justice, criminal justice reform.

Still, I need my regular escape, and it had been some time since my last venue change. But a couple of Fridays ago, I found my new place. The Broad Museum is a profusion of beauty, if you like contemporary art as I do. I love that little-known artists are featured along with those who have become household names. From the outside, the building itself is strange to one not sophisticated in architectural review – that lone stone eye peering out from a ruffled bunker seems solemn and off-putting. But enter the bunker, and climb the stairs or escalator, and suddenly the innards of the edifice open up to reveal views of the storage rooms filled with art on the middle floors – an unexpected glimpse inside that fascinates. And the top floor destination with most of the art is light and bright like the Musée D'Orsay in Paris. You get lost wandering its huge expanse, roaming a room full of Ellsworth Kelly and then Andy Warhol and on and on and on. Usually one sees a collection of mixed modern art: a Rauschenberg next to a Keith Herring, maybe next to a Cindy Sherman. But, here, each artist gets a whole room, or much of one: The sheer magnitude of the collection astonishes. LA has received a great, great gift in this collection, free to the public.

But I found that pure magic restored my very being in a room created by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, an immersive work titled "The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away." For 45 seconds, you stand alone in infinity-mirrored darkness, black water below and myriad lights all around – or stars, or souls. I emerged dazzled and speechless, and somehow filled with wonder and hope for the world.

Torie Osborn is senior policy deputy for Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl.