Opinion: The world needs more darkness

By Joe Mathews

Remember the good old days when Californians were scared of the dark? When Hollywood was king and we all knew there was no monster or ghost scarier than the one we couldn’t see—the one lying somewhere in the dark?

Those days are over. Today, the light is scarier than the dark ever was.



Joe Mathews

It’s not just because the sun shines so hot that California is drying up. Or because growth has brought lights into once dark and undeveloped inland valleys. Or that Californians’ days are so full of traffic and meetings that if you want to get anywhere or get anything done, you have to travel or work at night.

What’s scary is that Silicon Valley rules us now, and the lights it shines never really turn off.

They are the lights of the smartphone and the tablet and the router, keeping us up with their glow. They are the lights of digital appliances, informing their manufacturers about our consumption. And they are the lights of social media, luring us to share and read and step into the light of a community,

when we'd be better off exercising or seeing friends or making love.

And they are the lights of transparency, that new god. The best companies are transparent. We demand that our governments be transparent. We, they, all pledge to be transparent—let the light shine everywhere.

But we pledge transparency so often we've turned it into a club. Woe to anyone who won't disclose—you must be hiding something! Let's convene a grand jury or a legislative hearing. Or file a ballot initiative to force disclosure.

It's scary how much we can see now. At the same time, there is so much out in the light that we can't see it all. So we struggle to prioritize what's most important. And it's frighteningly hard to tell, in all that light, what information is correct and what's perilously wrong. There's too much dangerous stuff out there where credulous people can see it. And so they might believe that immigrants are criminals or vaccines threaten children or that having a gun in the house makes you safer.

Remember the Night Stalker? Remember when danger came with crime or violence or drugs in the night? Well, murders are less common, and drugs are on their way to being legal. Now we most fear exposure, the scary reality that all our personal information is out there for someone to grab. Identity theft is the crime of these sun-splashed times.

It's not only the bad guys who can get you in the light. It's the good people, too.

They want to give us fair warning of everything, and so our lives have endless forms to fill out, boxes to check, labels to read, means of confirming that we have acknowledged what they are disclosing.

If we miss anything, if we forget anything, if we read too

fast—well, it’s our own darn fault, isn’t it? And so we toggle between all the screens and lists and emails we’re supposed to monitor, anxious that we’ll miss some message we’re not supposed to miss.

Online communities grow like weeds—every organization and hobby has one. In my own life, with a wife and three kids and a 21st century job that’s really five different jobs, I’m supposed to be signed into and contributing to a couple dozen permanent online huddles—for preschool, elementary school, after-school, Little League and two different soccer teams, and my main work (with its different email lists) and a global democratic forum I run and the university where I teach.

The light swallows up time and everything, even Halloween. Remember when costumes were black and covered your whole body? Today—call me a prude if you like—the nurses and witches expose so much skin there’s nothing left to the imagination.

With the light revealing so much, I love the dark now. And I bet you do, too.

The dark doesn’t cause sunburn or skin cancer. The dark allows you to think, and maybe, if the weather is good, search the sky for a few stars.

My favorite moments now are when I leave the mobile phone at home and steal away for a short walk after the kids have gone to bed. At work, I treasure sneaking out to lunch for a few minutes without telling colleagues where I’m going. I love hiding in the shady corners of theaters and coffee shops where I can feel safe from the light, in dark anonymity, for just a moment.

I hope you find some dark place like that during this big and very bright Halloween weekend.

I hope I don’t you see there.

Joe Mathews is California and innovation editor for Zócalo Public Square, for which he writes the Connecting California column.

Opinion: California, where less costs more

By Joe Mathews

Pay more and get less.

That’s the bad new California deal that underpins so many daily transactions. The price of the fundamentals of life keeps going up, even as our money buys less of them.



Joe Mathews

Watch your water bill rise even as you take shorter showers and let the lawn die. Reach deeper into your pocket to pay for electricity even as you switch to energy efficient light bulbs and appliances. Borrow twice as much for tuition at a state university even as you struggle to find enough classes to graduate in four years.

More for less defines our collective spending. We raise local taxes so that the cuts in library hours or police force won’t be as bad as originally planned. The state is paying more to

house fewer criminals in its prisons. We pay more in tolls to cross the same decaying bridges.

And don't get me started on California schools. We raised state taxes in 2012 to help education, but you'd be hard-pressed to see that money in more classes or instruction time at your kid's school. Much of it went to cover yesterday's IOUs and teacher pensions and salaries. Public schools constantly demand more money from parents to compensate for budget cuts or cover costs. At this fall's back to school night at our local elementary, parents were on the business end of no fewer than half-a-dozen fundraising pitches, including a strongly suggested donation of $125 for classroom supplies.

This "more for less" ethic seems out of step with a time when so many consumer goods—and almost anything involving technology—cost less and provide more in applications or computing power. "More for less" is also a frustrating dynamic for those of us in professions—like mine, journalism—where people work more but are paid less.

"More for less" in California is the consequence of long-term trends and public policies. The gist: Generations of excessive frugality and underinvestment have created various forms of scarcity in public services. The response to that scarcity is conservation, which is expensive in two ways. For one, higher prices can force people to use less of something. For another, successful conservation can force prices up.

The drought provides the most prominent example. The state asked us to conserve water, so we buy less water from the agencies that provide it. But that means less money for water providers, who raise prices to make up the difference.

There has been too little pushback against this "more for less" reality. And our politicians have been skillful at selling both higher payment and lower service as forms of

civic virtue. Gov. Jerry Brown, who is especially good at this kind of spin, this year said at a June event on water that "you have to find a more elegant way of relating to material things. You have to use them with greater sensitivity and sophistication."

That's beautiful bunk. There is nothing sophisticated or sensitive about charging someone more for less of the same thing. And at the risk of being inelegant, I must point out that it isn't fair to be adding new minimum costs for life's basics in a state with the nation's highest poverty rate.

California is a proudly progressive place where majorities are wisely willing to pay more for social goods. But we shouldn't be played for fools. Which is why we need a clear, collective stand: When we must pay more, we must get more.

The right time to establish a firm "More for More" public ethic would be next year, as we consider several ballot measures to raise taxes.

Ask yourself as you read about each tax: Will this new levy really produce more revenues that can be tapped to pay for the schools, health and other programs we all depend on? Or will it merely take money from our pockets and siphon it to the narrow causes of the initiative sponsors?

Among the initiatives filed so far, a proposed tobacco tax—backed by doctors, health groups, and the billionaire Tom Steyer—looks like a more for less. It puts the proposed new tax dollars into the funds of politically favored programs, and even includes a new constitutional prohibition against any of the new taxes going to the general fund, which supports core state programs.

Such more-for-less schemes are not just bad policy. They inspire cynicism and undermine trust—and thus make it harder to get people to pay for the expensive new investments California will need to support its people, grow its economy,

and tackle big challenges like climate change.

“More for less” will lead us into the trap of being cheap. Let’s not go there. Instead, we need to be firmer about getting more of what we pay for.

Joe Mathews is California & Innovation editor for Zócalo Public Square, for which he writes the Connecting California column.

Opinion: The faces of homelessness in SLT

By Nicole Zaborsky

Allow us to introduce Stan and Karen. Stan is a 20-year resident of South Lake Tahoe, college educated, a chef, articulate, friendly, and Christian. Karen is a local, grew up in Tahoe, and has a college degree and a professional career.

These are two of the many faces of homelessness in South Lake Tahoe.

We met Stan recently and had a chat about his particular situation. After the economic down-turn, Stan was laid off which led to him becoming homeless. Last year Stan secured a job at a local motel as a maintenance worker. A job that despite the low pay came with free housing and an opportunity to rebuild his life. Sadly the winter of 2014-15 did not produce heavy snowfall and the local motel did not possess the means to keep Stan on staff resulting in him becoming homeless once again. Stan inspired us with his determination as he continues to be motivated to find work and is utilizing

employment leads and contacts to find a job.

Karen’s story is all too common within the homeless community. A medical catastrophe blindsided her. Following her health issue she lost her job and then her home. She currently lives in her car, and her health continues to decline. She told us that she is constantly on alert for her safety, which makes sleeping and rest a challenge.

Each homeless person has a unique story and includes people with college degrees, long-time locals, death of a primary income earner, and those with catastrophic medical conditions. Homelessness does not discriminate. Some formerly homeless locals include a lawyer, engineer, small business owner, religious leader, and a high school student.

How do people become homeless? According to the Housing Assistance Council, homelessness is primarily the result of poverty and a lack of affordable housing. Ending homelessness in a community like South Lake Tahoe requires jobs that pay a living wage, adequate income supports for those who cannot work, affordable housing, access to healthcare, and reliable transportation.

The California median monthly rent is $1,300. In order to afford this, an employee needs to make at least $25 per hour, or $52,000 per year (assuming they will spend no more than 30 percent of their income on rent). A worker who earns the minimum wage in California, $9/hour, will have to work 111 hours per week to have an income high enough to afford this rent.

Homelessness is often considered an urban problem, but homelessness and its underlying causes are challenges that communities of every size face. Due to the fact that South Lake Tahoe has no homeless shelters our homeless live in their cars or campers, with relatives in overcrowded or substandard housing, and are employed.

The Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless will run a “warm room” for our homeless community throughout the 2015-16 assistance season and are accepting donations to fund its operation. Checks may be made payable to Live Violence Free (our fiscal sponsor), note “Warm Room” in the memo line, and mail donations to P.O. Box 13514, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.

We are also inviting volunteers for warm room setup and overnight staffing this season. Trainings will be Nov. 10th from 6-8:30pm and Nov. 18 from 10am-12:30pm. Email TahoeWarmRoom@gmail.com to register.

Nicole Zaborsky is a member of the Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless.

Opinion: McDonald’s should serve fries for breakfast

By Aisha Harris, Slate

Most good things must come with a price, as longtime fighters in the crusade for an all-day McDonald’s breakfast menu can attest. The fast-food chain has bent to the will of their vocal customer base, nixing the 10:30am service cut-off for such beloved items as the egg McMuffin, sausage burrito, and hotcakes.

But as Buzzfeed reports, not all items on the menu will be available at every location,depending upon the region—and the item people are most upset about not having all-day, every day, is the hash brown.

“Depending on the setup of their kitchens, about 10 percent of

restaurants will not be offering the golden, crispy delight, meaning customers may end up pairing their Egg McMuffin with fries. Fries!”

The author, Venessa Wong, writes this as if it’s a travesty, an unconscionably huge step backward immediately following a giant leap forward in the movement for equal breakfast for all. And as a lover of nearly all forms of spud, I get it. McDonald’s hash browns are fine. But there’s a more important war to be won, and that is over the McDonald’s French fry. Forget your all-day hash browns: Give us your all-day fries.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Bullying needs to be abolished

By Nancy Kerry

Recent articles and studies across America provide evidence that bullies are costly to our society. Bullies in the schoolyard have resulted in a substantial increase of *suicide* among *children*. After the 1999 Columbine massacre, the federal government passed anti-bullying legislation that swiftly swept across the nation with similar legislation adopted by all states.

However, most of those laws apply specifically to schools.



Nancy Kerry

It is thought that by the time we become adults and enter the workforce, we would have matured enough to treat each other with respect, professionalism, and communicate effectively. Unfortunately, that isn't always the case as evidenced by the need for anti-harassment laws.

A bully in the workplace can do substantial damage to an organization. Bullying is harassment and is just as costly in the workplace as the schoolyard, if not more so. Bullying is most often demonstrated in abuse of authority by those in leadership positions; it results in high turnover, lost productivity, emotional damage to those victimized, stress claims against employers and millions in settlements paid by employers who failed to take action.

The Declaration of Independence was adopted 239 years ago, setting forth the foundation of principles guiding our government as to how we should respect one another. Although the United States is much more complicated today, the tenets remain the same: *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable* ***Rights*** *that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."*

What does the **right** to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" mean in the workplace? It includes the right to pursue one's civil liberties; it means employees have the right to enjoy a workplace free from harassment, bullying and discrimination. Following the 1883 Pendleton Act, it also means the right for government employees to retain employment

based on competency instead of political connections and influence.

The evidence of bullying is found by listening to the receiver's point of view, not the bully. A bully will likely have many friends and family members who don't agree with a victim's perspective of the conduct because they may not have experienced the same behavior. Bullies often deflect the concerns of those who have the courage to confront them and typically characterize their victims as complainers.

An employee who finds themselves bullied at work often has little recourse. It's very difficult to *prove your perspective;* after-all it is the victim's opinion of the conduct that is at issue. Multiple people witnessing the same conduct will have multiple perspectives. When the bully is a supervisor or leader in an organization, the perceived risk by the employee for reporting is increased. When it is from the highest level in the organization, the risk is real. As a result, employees are reluctant to speak up about the abuse they have suffered.

Workplace bullying is more prevalent than most employers realize. A 2014 study by the Workplace Bullying Institute found that nearly one-third of all employees experienced abusive conduct at work; "72 percent of employers deny, discount, rationalize or defend the conduct and in the absence of legal prohibitions against it, employers are failing to take responsibility for its prevention and correction." Sometimes, a bully is *not aware of the impact* of their behavior, which is why it's important for employers to address the issues early on to provide opportunity for change. If the behavior doesn't improve, corrective actions will likely intensify. A person who fails to acknowledge how their behavior impacts and causes harm others may either be a bully or become one if left uncorrected.

A bully may defend their behavior as just being "their style"

of communicating. Outside of an employment situation, their style may only be a societal harm. However, in the workplace, it's not acceptable and can result in litigation for an employer. Being rude is not the same as being a bully; a bully is abusive. Abusive bullying behavior is typically persistent, aggressive, denigrating, hostile and intimidating. A bully seeks to shift a real or perceived imbalance of power through the misuse of their authority creating a climate of fear among employees. A bully will often strive to dominate with tactics to humiliate and belittle others using both subtle and blatant threats to restrain efforts to stand against such treatment.

When the behavior is a persistent pattern of conduct, it interferes with the employee's ability to perform their jobs to the best of their ability. When it's pervasive, it affects the organization's legitimate business interests and undermines confidence. When it's left unaddressed, the bullying may increase and victims can experience a variety of illnesses including anxiety, depression, migraines, stomach ailments and worse.

Whether bullying is illegal or not, it is the employer's moral and leadership responsibility to protect their employees from all forms of harassment. Occasionally, all it takes is a conversation so everyone is aware of the problem and changes can be made. If that doesn't work, putting an end to bullying in the workplace should be a high priority for every employer.

Nancy Kerry is the city manager of South Lake Tahoe.

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Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News* has chosen not to allow comments on this article because of all the bullies who troll this site. If anyone wants to respond, there is always the option to write your own letter/column with your full name attached to it. Send it to info@LakeTahoeNews.net for consideration.

Opinion: Nutritional information often ignored

By Jane E. Brody, Washington Post

In the more than half a century that I've been writing about nutrition and health, I've witnessed many attempts to inform and improve the American diet, all the while watching young and old alike ignore sound nutritional advice and grow fatter and fatter.

Of course, individuals are not entirely to blame. The food and restaurant industries have done more than their share to lure people into bad eating and drinking habits. Stoking near-to-worthless breakfast cereals with added nutrients. Serving portions large enough to satisfy a racehorse. Selling snack foods and drinks in supersize containers, sometimes offered with free refills.

Purveyors of wholesome fruits and vegetables, beans and whole grains – even of meats, fish and poultry – can't compete with the promotional billions spent by processed food giants that sell products of little or no nutritional value.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Collaboration keeps

plant from being endangered

By Joanne Marchetta

Lake Tahoe has been recognized for another important conservation success. Our region's proactive, collaborative strategy to protect Tahoe yellow cress, begun almost 15 years ago, is working so well that the plant does not need additional protections under the federal Endangered Species Act.

This conservation success story is yet another example of epic collaboration – how unparalleled partnership and collaboration are getting things done at Lake Tahoe. In this case, protecting a unique wildflower species that once teetered on the brink of extinction has avoided the need for additional federal protections that would have regulated many private homeowners as well as many public recreation areas.



Joanne Marchetta

Tahoe yellow cress is a flowering perennial plant that grows only along Tahoe's beautiful, and popular, sandy beaches. Patches of the wildflower must spread and shift with the ever-changing water levels of our lake. The flower is found nowhere else in the world.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this month announced its decision not to list Tahoe yellow cress as a federally endangered or threatened species after an extensive review

found previously identified habitat threats no longer pose significant risk to the health and well-being of the species.

Over the last 10-plus years, those habitat threats to Tahoe yellow cress have been managed and successfully reduced by the broad group of federal, state, local, and private sector partners on the Tahoe Yellow Cress Adaptive Management Working Group. This group has protected the plant and its habitat with a comprehensive conservation strategy that was first put into action in 2002 to keep this unique and rare Lake Tahoe wildflower from disappearing forever.

That conservation strategy has been successfully implemented. So much so that in announcing its decision, the Fish and Wildlife Service, said, “The efforts of the Lake Tahoe area working group and its technical team and the partnership they’ve built over the past decade to protect this unique plant have truly exemplified the most basic function of the Endangered Species Act – to protect and conserve ecosystems and the species that depend upon them. They have continued to raise the standards for the next generation of conservation and convinced us that Tahoe yellow cress has a bright future on the beautiful shores of Lake Tahoe.”

That success has not come easily, and it has involved the dedicated and coordinated work of many partners at Lake Tahoe, including regulatory and land management agencies, private property owners, and the public.

Members of the Tahoe Yellow Cress Adaptive Management Working Group include California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Lands Commission, California State Parks, California Tahoe Conservancy, League to Save Lake Tahoe, Nevada Division of Forestry, Nevada Division of State Lands, Nevada Division of State Parks, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, Tahoe Lakefront Owners’ Association, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Protecting Tahoe yellow cress and its habitat is one of the goals of the environmental improvement program, the collaborative capital improvement program that TRPA manages to restore Lake Tahoe's environment and improve recreational opportunities. More than 50 public and private partners work together to prioritize and implement projects through the EIP, including projects to protect Tahoe yellow cress.

This broad group of stakeholders saw the problems facing Tahoe yellow cress and formed a collaborative working group to take on the challenge of protecting this imperiled wildflower species in its one-of-a-kind home here at Lake Tahoe. By partnering and working together we have protected Tahoe yellow cress and its habitat, collected and germinated seeds to plant new populations of the wildflower to increase its range, and educated people about this plant and the importance of protecting it while enjoying Tahoe's beaches and natural areas.

This decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows that our partnership and collaboration are working and that our conservation strategy is sound. Members of the Tahoe Yellow Cress Adaptive Management Working Group recently updated that conservation strategy and have agreed to continue to implement it.

We agree with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that Tahoe yellow cress has a bright future at Lake Tahoe. But this conservation success story also shows there is a bright future for partnership and collaboration at Tahoe. And partnership and collaboration have proven time and time again to be what is most needed to find common solutions and solve many more of our environmental challenges at Tahoe.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Letter: Adventure firm helps at B&B

To the community,

“Bread & Broth provides a great service to the local community and we’re happy to be a part of serving the South Lake Tahoe community,” said Linda Mueller.

Mueller and husband, Jim, are the owners of Adventure Mountain Resort Lake Tahoe. They have been sponsoring a B&B’s Adopt A Day of Nourishment for the last three years. Hosting a Monday evening meal has been a family and business affair where over the years their sons and Adventure Mountain Resort team members have volunteered at their sponsorship dinners.

At their Oct. 5 AAD dinner, the Muellers and their son, Max, brought their great work and fun attitudes to help provide a healthy and filling dinner experience for the 96 guests that showed up at St. Theresa Church Grace Hall. They were a great help to the B&B volunteer crew and a very special thank you to Max for his help drying the various pots, pans and dinner trays.

Due to the great donors and AAD sponsors like Adventure Mountain Resort, B&B also provides the Second Serving meal on Fridays at the Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church and, beginning this month has added the St. Theresa B&B 4 Kids program. B&B 4 Kids provides meals for weekends for 103 Lake Tahoe Unified School District K-8 students during the school year.

B&B is so grateful to our community for their generosity to those who need a helping hand and Kudos to Adventure Mountain

Resort Lake Tahoe for giving back to their community.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Should apartment buildings be smoke-free?

By Esther Schiller

A former Marine I know has been living in a six-unit apartment building in Van Nuys, in L.A.’s San Fernando Valley, for about four years. The rent is reasonable, the neighborhood is diverse, and the landlord is helpful. But this man has a problem, which is why he just called me. His next-door neighbor smokes.

The neighbor smokes everywhere: in his own unit, in the driveway, in front of both the former Marine’s and his own doors. The smoke is getting into my acquaintance’s unit. This is not good. He has asthma and a heart condition. When the former Marine was a child, he lived with his grandmother, whose heavy smoking turned her apartment walls brownish-yellow and made him especially vulnerable to tobacco smoke. But he can’t afford to move.

To make things more complicated, the building my acquaintance lives in is regulated by a rent-control law. This law, designed to protect tenants from egregious rent increases and potential eviction, does not permit the landlord to change the conditions of tenancy except for minimal rent increases each year. Even if the landlord wanted to do something, he couldn’t require the former Marine’s neighbor to stop smoking on the property.

At Smokefree Air For Everyone, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit I direct, we get calls from people dealing with similar problems at least once a day. S.A.F.E. has been funded for 15 years by the California Department of Public Health's Tobacco Control Program to disseminate information about the problem of drifting tobacco smoke in residential buildings, and we've surveyed thousands of people who live in apartments and condos. Although the percentage of California adults who smoke is now less than 12 percent, our surveys have found that more than one in three nonsmokers who rent in L.A. County are still exposed to secondhand tobacco smoke.

This is a local problem and a national issue. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 80 million (one in four) Americans live in multi-unit housing, and more than one in three renters—the same percentage as we found in our L.A. County surveys—are exposed to secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke kills more than 400 infants and 41,000 adult non-smokers every year. Infants exposed to secondhand smoke have a higher risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and children are more susceptible to respiratory infections, ear infections, and asthma attacks. In adults, secondhand smoke can cause heart disease, stroke, and all kinds of cancers.

An air quality study in Los Angeles County in 2011 showed that tobacco smoke particles move from unit to unit through cracks in fixtures, electrical outlets, pipes, vents, and baseboards, as well as through shared ventilation systems and windows. Environmental scientist Neil Klepeis, who conducted the study, believes as much as 30 to 50 percent of the air in a residential building may come from other units, regardless of whether the buildings are new or old. "Tobacco smoke particles in units of non-smokers can reach significant levels equal to and exceeding those of a smoky bar or casino," he says.

Even so, most apartment renters don't complain about their exposure to tobacco smoke. Some don't want to start a war with their neighbors; some believe, erroneously, that there is a

legal right to smoke; and some simply believe that complaining won't help, which is frequently true. Many landlords and property management companies, even in cities without rent control, believe there is nothing they can do about a tenant who smokes. They may not understand the public health implications of their residents being forced to breathe their neighbors' toxic tobacco fumes. Or they don't want to be bothered with enforcing a no-smoking rule or spending money to evict a tenant for smoking. In the worst cases, we've seen landlords threaten to evict tenants who complain about a neighbor's tobacco smoke in lieu of addressing the problem.

But even landlords who take legal action against tenants whose smoking is seriously affecting other tenants, on the grounds that they are creating a nuisance, may find themselves dealing with judges who are not knowledgeable about the hazards of exposure.

Condominium owners are not exempt from the problem, either. They are more likely to complain than renters, but condo boards rarely take action to help. S.A.F.E. advises people not to purchase a condo unless there is some kind of law or regulation in place that protects the residents of the building from all kinds of smoke, including smoke from cigars, hookahs, electronic cigarettes, and marijuana.

Fortunately, public housing authorities, national and state institutions, and some housing corporations around the country have begun to look at the problem. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the CDC recently released position papers stating that all multi-unit housing should be smoke-free.

Although they remain in the minority, some landlords, apartment corporations, and condominium boards are beginning to recognize the financial benefits of no-smoking policies. It is a lot less expensive to prepare a unit for the next resident if the previous resident didn't smoke in it. There is

less danger of fire. We hear from realtors that prospective buyers or renters don't even want to look at units in buildings with lobbies and halls that smell of smoke. In addition, in California and some western states, an insurance group will provide a 10-percent discount for insurance for multi-unit residential buildings that have established no-smoking policies.

Approximately 40 California cities and counties have passed ordinances regulating secondhand smoke in apartments and even in condominiums. Some of the ordinances include banning the use of electronic cigarettes, and some include the smoking of marijuana. On September 15, the city of Manhattan Beach held a first reading of a housing ordinance that will require no smoking in all apartments and condos by May 2017; they used an ordinance recently adopted by Culver City as a model. Santa Monica, a city with rent control, recently passed an ordinance requiring new vacancies in apartments and condos to become non-smoking, and requiring landlords and condo boards to inform prospective residents about units that are still being smoked in. However, there are no laws regulating smoking in multi-unit residential buildings in the city of Los Angeles.

At the state level, change is happening as well. The California EPA's Office of Environmental Health Hazards Assessment has designated marijuana smoke as a human carcinogen. 1-800-NO-BUTTS provides help in several languages over the phone for people trying to quit smoking. The more laws and restrictions that have been put in place to limit where people can smoke, the more the rate of smoking has dropped.

The CDC is providing funding for organizations throughout the country to spread the word about the financial and public health benefits of smoke-free multi-unit housing. In Los Angeles, the CDC has funded UCLA's Center for Health Policy Research to work with apartment associations, community leaders, and policy makers to help people to live without

worry of smoke exposure.

Perhaps the ex-Marine who has been suffering from secondhand smoke may eventually be able to breathe clean air.

Esther Schiller is the executive director of Smokefree Air For Everyone (S.A.F.E.). Their project, the Smokefree Apartment House Registry, lists the vacancies of apartment owners who have made their properties non-smoking.

Opinion: EDC survey is more government waste

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County executives are at it again. After the Board of Supervisors and CAO spent about $200,000 last year on a witch hunt and other diversionary tactics to cover for the many failings of the then CAO Terri Daly, such as the budget deficit, failure to follow BOS directives and the huge cost of the employee raises, Daly recommended an anonymous survey of past and present county employees by Vandermyden Maddux.

It became known as the “climate of fear.” As a result the BOS on the CAO’s recommendation hired a consultant, the Municipal Resource Group. Now the BOS has hired another consultant, Laree Kiely, founder of the Kiely group. The contract must have been signed under the authority of the CAO, as I haven’t seen anything on the BOS agenda. The good news is that the contract must be less than $64,000 which is the signing authority for a CAO. The bad news is that it is another extravagant waste of money, never mind the time cost of county employees which will substantially add to the cost.



Larry Weitzman

The “climate of fear” didn’t accomplish what the then CAO wanted, which was to destroy any opposition to her unbridled spending and power mongering. Instead it backfired as the survey clearly showed the problems all resided in her office where fear was rampant and employees were cowering. Instead it help destroy her and her cohorts as the survey showed they were the “bullies.” There are still many of Daly’s henchmen left that must be removed from EDC government.

That said, the purpose of this new Kiely study is to develop a strategic plan for EDC. Even though the county has a detailed General Plan going out decades, is the Kiely study a duplicate with underlying political motivations or perhaps a delay to solving EDC’s budget deficit?

On Oct. 2 on ***Lake Tahoe News*** there was information announcing the development of a three-year strategic plan asking for citizen engagement by taking a survey online. It is a wish list of what you, the citizen, want from the county and what you think are its most vital functions. The bias of the survey becomes clear when one of the more important questions asks the survey taker to rate 12 county functions in order of importance, 1-12 with the most important function getting a 12 and the least important getting a 1, the second least important a 2 and so on. It’s biased and slanted in that about half the functions (in my opinion) had zero importance and having to give preference of one over the other will create misleading results. The results would have been more precise and concise if each of the 12 functions were rated separately on importance on a 0-10 scale.

Other areas of the survey were like having a wish list (as asking for “free” stuff from the government). Therefore, I asked for a new county loan program for $100,000 loans with zero interest with no payments for 30 years and then a 50-year repayment schedule after the first 30 years. Heck, why not $500,000? My point being is that 95 percent of EDC residents want the county to provide three basic services: public safety, land use planning, and roads and road maintenance, otherwise they never have contact with the county except for paying their property taxes (ouch) or voting. Property taxes, sales taxes, hidden development fees and even DMV car registration fees should be a reminder to everyone of the expensive cost of government and paying for services that you never use.

Before this survey was developed there were also several meetings of high ranking public officials, mostly county department heads, the Kiely people and some members of the public to create a written matrix of what constitutes good governance, public safety, infrastructure, community health and economic development and other topics. I was on the good governance committee. At the first meeting Kiely gave a Skype presentation and took questions from those present. I made this comment that to have good government there were six words that if adhered to would solve most of the problems of governance without the necessity of matrixes, meetings or the rest of the highfalutin government speak that will be created by the good governance and the other committees. These words are: Absolute Honesty, Pristine Ethics, Complete Transparency. Just those six words if followed to the full extent of their meaning, government will operate at amazing efficiency and effectiveness and without bias. Government will become selfless as it should be and only about EDC residents.

Government and some of its (higher level) employees forget that they are a fiduciary to the people, like a bank acting as a trustee to a family trust. We don’t have that in EDC. We

have people in the administration, building a power base, always wanting a higher salary (and pensions), hiring their friends, covering up mistakes and to make matters worse our Board of Supervisors are absolutely derelict and feckless. (I am not speaking of the rank and file employees who generally do a great job serving the public).

The good governance committee basically copied what other jurisdictions claim to be the model in government speak language: “Achieving the best possible process for making & implementing decisions; characterized by honesty, integrity, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equitability, inclusion, effectiveness, efficiency and following the rule of law.” Notice how the words honesty and transparency are buried and make it feel good. There are levels of honesty and transparency and that’s why when you take an oath you are sworn to: “tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” That is why we must demand “absolute honesty, pristine ethics and complete transparency.” Everything else in government that the public expects will fall into place. We certainly don’t have it now.