Opinion: California’s high fuel taxes and bad roads

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

A cogent – and perhaps unanswerable – question punctuates the political machinations over raising billions of new dollars to repair California’s deteriorating highways.

How is it that California motorists are paying some of the nation’s highest fuel taxes, but the highways they use are among the nation’s worst?



Dan Walters

Including federal gas taxes, Californians are paying just under 61 cents a gallon, the fourth highest in the nation. That doesn’t include another dime a gallon in “cap-and-trade” carbon fees that, if added, would make California the highest-taxing state.

Meanwhile, data from the Federal Highway Administration place California’s highways as among the worst in physical condition.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Are the Olympics anti-democracy?

By Bruno Kaufmann

Can the Olympics and democracy co-exist?

It's a question being asked again this summer after Beijing won the bid to host the 2022 Winter Olympics. Beyond the fact that the International Olympic Committee put the biggest event in winter sports in a smog-ridden megalopolis without any real snow, people are concerned about China's demonstrated record of human rights violations during the last Games it hosted, the 2008 Summer Olympics.

But the International Olympic Committee didn't actually have a democratic option. The only challenger to Beijing was Almaty, capital of another Asian dictatorship: Kazhakstan. All the other potential democratic bidders – Munich, Germany; St. Moritz, Switzerland; Krakow, Poland, and Oslo, Norway – had previously pulled out, as a consequence of subjecting their candidacy to the democratic process. Each had held a popular vote on holding the Games, and it turned out the idea wasn't very popular.

It shouldn't be futile to reconcile democracy and the Games. Both have similar roots in ancient Greece, where they were born out of the idea that people are powerful and that participation – in decision-making or in athletics – should be broad. Today, the IOC is headquartered in one of the world's most open, vibrant, and democratic cities: Lausanne, in Switzerland.

But democracy is fundamentally small – about individual votes, cast locally in neighborhoods – while the Olympics have become a global behemoth, wealthy and elitist. The scale of democracy has not been able to keep up as the number of athletes and

nations has multiplied. The 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, had the kind of budget – $50 billion – that would be next to impossible to justify in a democratic place.

In fact, there may be no better example of the challenges of reconciling the Olympics and democracy than Switzerland. It's hard to imagine a nation better suited to host the Winter Olympics than a neutral, peaceful, mountainous outpost at the heart of Europe, but the last time the country was able to host the Games was in 1948. On six occasions since then, the Swiss, who pride themselves on direct democracy, have gone to the ballot to decide whether to bid on the Games. Three of those times, the citizens voted yes: in 1969, 1995, and 1997. But each time, the IOC ended up giving the Games to other cities, in part because the debates leading up to Swiss referendum votes highlighted the weak points of the Olympics and included heavy criticism of the IOC. (In 1976, Switzerland first lost the winter games to Denver, which in turn lost the Games after its citizens rejected the bid in a local referendum, forcing the moving of those games to Austria).

Swiss sports officials haven't given up. After being chosen to host the much smaller Youth Olympics in 2020, they are looking into yet another attempt.

In recent decades, the IOC itself has emerged as the main obstacle to hosting the Games in open and democratic societies. The problem: the organization does not meet democratic norms of transparency. The 2022 Winter Games bidding process offers powerful proof of this. In Oslo, the capital of oil-rich Norway, citizens voted yes to the candidacy for the Games during the city's first-ever popular referendum, and the national government even offered a hefty guarantee to cover any deficits. But the IOC sabotaged the process with impossible, prima-donnish demands of the Norwegians. In a 700-page handbook, the committee requested cocktail parties with the Norwegian royal family (where the royals were expected to pick up the bill), open bars during

the night, and official-only lanes in the city. For a country that previously had hosted the down-to-earth and highly successful Winter Games in Lillehammer in 1994, the investment of billions of tax crowns in such an elite event was too difficult a sell. Oslo had to drop the bid.

Democratic participation in a country's process of preparing and conducting the Games has now become a red flag for the IOC. It does not matter if citizens are likely to vote to approve a bid; the transparency that comes with public scrutiny is not something the IOC wants to see.

This dynamic has become even more apparent this summer. Boston, the U.S. frontrunner for the 2024 Summer Olympics, pulled out after it became obvious that a 2016 statewide referendum in Massachusetts would offer critics opportunities to scrutinize and perhaps stop the bid. Germany's national Olympic Committee chose Hamburg over Berlin because it was more likely to win a popular vote, but the vote itself still will likely dissuade the IOC. Paris, which won't have a popular vote, is considered the favorite for 2024.

It is very hard to see how this reality could change. The Games are not likely to get much smaller, and the IOC historically has been resistant to altering its approach.

If there is to be a reconciliation of democracy and the Olympics, perhaps it could come from Los Angeles, which seems poised to take over the U.S. bid for 2024 from Boston. The big city in Southern California has reinvented the Games before; after the disastrous economic and political experiences of the 1976 Games in Montreal (with huge cost overruns) and the 1980 Games in Moscow (with the boycott), the 1984 Games in LA managed to build a bridge between civic and business leaders at the local level – and ended up with a considerable surplus. And this summer, the city hosted a successful the Special Olympics, offering a showcase of participatory and inclusive competitions spread out to communities all over the region.

Los Angeles has a special place in the history of the Olympics (it also hosted the 1932 games) and in the history of democracy. It was among the first cities in the United States to adopt the local referendum, and is the largest city in a state famous for its commitment to popular democracy. These days, both the Games (discredited by corruption and cost) and local democracy (discredited by low participation rates in elections around the world) need fresh starts. And Los Angeles – with its economic muscle and multicultural inclusiveness – has long been a place to start fresh.

Bruno Kaufmann is the editor of People2Power, a Global Democracy Media Initiative hosted by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation. He wrote this for Thinking L.A., a partnership of UCLA and Zócalo Public Square.

Opinion: What your vacation says about you

By Arthur C. Brooks, New York Times

Twenty-three years ago, my wife and I were having an argument about how to celebrate our first anniversary. Money was tight, and we had to choose between taking a beach vacation or buying a couch, which we did not have. Being a Spaniard, she naturally advocated for the beach. As a thrifty American, I argued for the couch because it was permanent. In the end, we compromised – we went to the beach.

Vacations say a lot about people. For one thing, where people choose to go indicates how much they like to be around others. In new work in the Journal of Research in Personality, psychologists from the University of Virginia quizzed college

students about their geographical preferences and found that introverts prefer the mountains while extroverts prefer the ocean. The researchers found more evidence for this when they looked at who actually lives where: Residents of especially mountainous states were more introverted on average than their counterparts who live in flatter places.

This finding is fairly intuitive. In the mountains one can easily find seclusion and isolation. Meanwhile, beaches tend to be crowded places full of seminude strangers, a potentially unappealing scene for introverts but exactly the point for extroverts.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Food can be good medicine

By Amy Smith

Hippocrates, a physician and philosopher of health, said: “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

Food is often underestimated as an effective medicine. One collection of ingredients gaining attention are phytonutrients. Phytonutrients, sometimes called phytochemicals, are nutrients found in plants that contribute to its vitality. They can be found in a variety of plant-based foods and research shows when humans consume phytonutrients, they interact with the body and promote healing.



Amy Smith

Here are some examples of foods rich in phytonutrients that you can eat in your daily diet and help improve your overall health.

Cruciferous vegetables

Brussels sprouts, kale, broccoli, and cabbage are rich in a group of phytonutrients called indoles. Indoles have been found to lower the risk of breast, prostate, lung, stomach, colon, and rectal cancers. In one study, participants who consumed at least one cruciferous vegetable per day decreased their risk of breast cancer by 40 percent (Terry, 2001). In a separate study, men who ate three or more servings of cruciferous vegetables a week compared to their peers who consumed less than one serving a week reduced their risk of prostate cancer by 40 percent (Cohen, 2000).

Berries and cherries

Blueberries, cranberries, elderberries, raspberries, cherries, blackberries, and the skin of red grapes contain phytonutrients with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Research confirms a high intake of berries and cherries can slow cognitive decline and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by preventing accumulation of LDL or “bad cholesterol” (Devore, 2012; Stojanovic, 2001; Gonzalez-Gallego, 2010; Landberg, 2011; Rotelli, 2003). These phytonutrients also help prevent cancer and inhibit cancer growth (Catalgol, 2012; Zhu, 2012; Aziz, 2003).

Tumeric and piperine

Tumeric, a spice in the ginger family, contains the phytonutrient curcumin. Curcumin is an antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anti-cancer agent. It reduces the risk of Alzheimer's, and multiple studies support the use of curcumin for joint inflammation, tendinitis, and inflammatory bowel disease (Blaylock, 2012; Hanai, 2009; Mindura-Kiela, 2012). Increase daily turmeric intake of with supplements or by adding the spice to soups, teas, and smoothies. For the best phytonutrient absorption from turmeric, pair it with piperine, an ingredient in black pepper.

The whole rainbow

Try to eat a rainbow of fruits and vegetables daily. Lycopene is a carotenoid phytonutrient found in watermelons, pink grapefruits, guavas, apricots and tomatoes. It is best absorbed from processed or cooked tomato products such as tomato sauce, paste, and soup. It is a potent antioxidant and has been suggested to prevent cancer and cardiovascular disease (Agarwal, 2000; Pool-Zobel, 1997). Lycopene is one of six types of carotenoids. Other colorful fruits and vegetables that contain carotenoids include carrots, tangerines, sweet potatoes, spinach, kale and cantaloupe.

These are just a few phytonutrients that studies show have positive health benefits. Consume regularly, and aim for eating at least five servings a fruits and vegetables a day.

Amy Smith, family nurse practitioner, is a University of Arizona Medicine Fellow under doctor Andrew Weil.

Opinion: EPA goes halfway on methane emissions

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from BloombergNews on Aug. 19, 2015.***

The Environmental Protection Agency's proposed new restrictions on methane emissions are a reasonable imposition on the oil and gas industry. Whether they're adequate to help fight climate change is another question, and the answer depends on what the government does next.

Under the proposed rules, new or modified oil and gas wells would have to use pumps and compressors that better capture methane, and companies would have to work harder to find and fix leaks – cutting the sector's methane emissions by 20 to 30 percent. That would be about halfway toward the Obama administration's goal of pushing methane emissions from the oil and gas industry down 40 to 45 percent below their 2012 levels by 2025.

Read the whole story

Letter: Yacht club assists at Bread & Broth

To the community,

On Aug. 10, South Lake Tahoe Yacht Club (SLTYC) member Tina Miranda was volunteering for the first time a Bread & Broth dinner and she was very moved by her experience.

“Everyone was so appreciative, grateful and very thankful,” she said. “The dinner guests make it very easy to want to serve them.”

Joining Miranda, were fellow SLTYC members Barbara Marsden, Ann Ezekiel Jones, Catherine Kornegay and Kevin Kornegay.

The SLTYC is an active group that enjoys many social activities on and off the waters of Lake Tahoe and supports the community by sponsoring summer bi-weekly beach cleanups and annual B&B Adopt a Day of Nourishment dinners. Their $250 sponsorship donation and all of the helpful support throughout B&B’s dinner on Aug. 10 demonstrates their spirit of service to the community.

“This is a fabulous experience,” commented Catherine Kornegay. “It is amazing how quickly large nutritious meals can be served. The dinner guests are very appreciative of this service. My impression is that this is a brief respite and a moment to visit with others in a safe and friendly environment.” T

Thanks to the SLTYC, Bread & Broth provided another great meal and food to take home for those struggling with hunger.

For more B&B information, go **online** or find us on Facebook.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Protect Lake Tahoe for future generations

By Dean Heller and Dianne Feinstein

It was 142 years ago that John Muir, the famous naturalist and conservationist, first laid eyes on Lake Tahoe.

Muir wrote in a letter to a friend that he “sauntered through the piney woods, pausing countless times to absorb the blue glimpses of the lake, all so heavenly clean, so terrestrial yet so openly spiritual.”

He continued: “Tahoe is surely not one but many. As I curve around its heads and bays and look far out on its level sky fairly tinted and fading in pensive air, I am reminded of all the mountain lakes I ever knew, as if this were a kind of water heaven to which they all had come.”

Each of us who has fallen in love with Lake Tahoe has a similar story, that jaw-dropping first encounter.

Mark Twain wrote, “As it lay there with the shadows of the mountains brilliantly photographed upon its still surface I thought it must surely be the fairest picture the whole earth affords.”

There’s a reason that Lake Tahoe attracts such notables and such fawning reviews. It’s a world treasure with an unmistakable spirit.

That’s why John Muir pushed for it to be a National Park. It’s why California and Nevada leaders came together in the 1960s to establish formal means to protect it. It’s why the federal government for nearly 20 years has devoted funds to Keep Tahoe Blue. And it’s why last month we introduced legislation to continue that fight.

There are many threats facing Lake Tahoe, and unless we take action, the pristine beauty Muir described will soon be only a memory.

We joined our colleagues, Sens. Harry Reid and Barbara Boxer, to introduce the bipartisan Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of

2015, a bill to protect Lake Tahoe and the Tahoe Basin for generations to come.

The push started in earnest in 1997 when President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore hosted a presidential forum on Lake Tahoe. In 2000, we were able to pass legislation to begin a 10-year, $900-million restoration and conservation effort.

It’s been hugely successful. We’ve been able to restore more than 16,000 acres of wildlife habitat, implement innovative transportation solutions, significantly reduce erosion that clouds the lake, improve water clarity and mitigate the risk of wildfires.

Since 1997, the federal government, California, Nevada, local municipalities and the private sector have provided a combined total of $1.8 billion.

Unfortunately, the resources that Washington chipped in have largely dried up. Our bill recommits the federal government to continue the vital projects that are saving Tahoe every day.

The bill includes fuel reduction projects to protect against the threat of wildfires. It prioritizes environmental restoration projects. And in order to strengthen the ecosystem, we allocate funds for an extensive invasive species control program.

These resources really can have an impact. We’ve seen progress from decades ago usher in a new era, and we need to maintain that drumbeat.

Without additional support for Tahoe, we fear the beauty that Muir, Twain and countless others have enjoyed may be short-lived.

The vistas and natural wonders deserve to be timeless.

Let us all recommit ourselves to protecting Lake Tahoe’s

special qualities. As we preserve the water and the land, we'll also be preserving the lake's singular spirit.

Dean Heller is a Republican senator from Nevada and Dianne Feinstein a Democrat senator from California.

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Note: Sens. Heller and Feinstein will join other key stakeholders at the 19th annual Lake Tahoe Summit at Round Hill Pines in South Lake Tahoe at 10am Aug. 24. The event is open to the public. This year's theme is Connecting Lake Tahoe's Environment and Economy through Innovation and Transportation.

Opinion: Feds have obligation to protect Tahoe

By Steve Teshara and Darcie Goodman Collins

Decisions made in Congress over the next few months may well determine the extent to which Lake Tahoe remains blue and clear, with healthy forests, resilient watersheds, and its ecology protected from the threat of new aquatic invasive species.

For two decades, the Lake Tahoe environmental improvement program (EIP) has provided guidance for the shared investments made by our federal, state and local governments, homeowners, and businesses to restore and protect Tahoe's unique environmental qualities and enhance its diverse public recreation opportunities.

As the 2015 Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit nears, two bills

are pending in Congress to continue the federal government's investments at the lake. One of them, Senate Bill 1724, continues the comprehensive and collaborative approach needed to address the traditional as well as new challenges that face our national treasure. The other bill is HR3382 in the House of Representatives. We are concerned that, if passed as written, HR3382 would mark a major retreat for the federal government's long history of leadership and investments at Tahoe.

Starting in 2000, the first Lake Tahoe Restoration Act authorized the federal share of funding for many of Tahoe's highest priority projects identified by the EIP. Even before that legislation expired in 2010, Tahoe stakeholders and EIP advocates began working to secure reauthorization. SB1724 reflects years of input from a diverse array of stakeholders. It is the comprehensive approach essential to build on the foundation of prior Tahoe investments by all EIP partners. We strongly encourage everyone who cares about Lake Tahoe to actively support the federal leadership and investments detailed in SB1724.

The Senate bill is bipartisan legislation introduced July 9 by Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev. It is co-sponsored by Sens. Harry Reid, D-Nev., Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.) and Barbara Boxer, D-Calif. HR3382 was drafted and introduced by Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Garden Valley, on July 29.

The Senate bill authorizes up to $415 million over 10 years to improve forest health, reduce the risk of wildfire, combat harmful aquatic invasive species, and restore Tahoe's famed water clarity, including efforts directed at threats to the Lake's nearshore water quality. HR3382 authorizes less than half the programs in SB1724 and at a much lower amount, totaling $60 million over 10 years. That is far less than the 10-year commitments of Nevada and California, and far less than the $216 million invested by private property owners and businesses during the first 10 years of the EIP from

1997-2006. As written, the scope of HR3382 is not well matched with the fact that the federal government owns and manages over 78 percent of the land within the Tahoe basin and has responsibilities commensurate with its large and significant ownership.

Since 1997, all partners in the EIP, including the federal government, have made tangible, measurable progress with investments that together maximize the value of each. Properly funded, the EIP will continue to support environmental restoration, recreational enhancements, and our region's nearly $5 billion annual economy. But new threats loom and much work remains to be done. Collectively, we must build on the investments and progress we have made, rather than scale back now.

We commend the members of our Senate delegation for their understanding, leadership, and commitment to reflect input from constituents. We respectfully encourage House members to take this same approach. This could be done through amendments to HR3382. One example would be adding the authorization for a continued federal share of funding for water quality projects consistent with federal and state law.

Our hope is that a single, comprehensive, and properly funded bill will emerge from the legislative process. The federal government is our largest landowner. It needs to remain a leader and full partner in protecting and valuing Lake Tahoe for this and many future generations.

Steve Teshara is principal of Sustainable Community Advocates. Darcie Goodman Collins is executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe.

Letter: Campground is a folly on the ridge

To the community,

What does it take to snap you out of your apathy? Paul Revere galloping along Highway 28 shouting “the developers are coming, the developers are coming.”

The Tahoe Rim Trail offers many things: physical challenge, endless beauty and the quietness of nature at high elevations. Do hikers and bikers really want to run into a swimming pool and restaurant? Do we really need one person telling all of us how many camp sites we need on our end of the lake?

This **proposed campsite** scar on our hillside is a precursor to more of the same: more cars, more people, more congestion, more noise and more possibilities of wildfires. I know I’m full of questions. You should be too. Remember the movie “Network” where Peter Finch yells – “I’m mad as hell and I won’t take this any more.”

Two government agencies are in a position to block this disaster. One, Placer County, will soon issue a draft environmental impact report and you reading and responding to it will be your first opportunity to thwart this project.

I hope you will stand tall and shout.

Thanks,

Steve Pearsall, Crystal Bay

Opinion: Making school less stressful

By Tracy Protell

Most kids and parents have a mixture of excitement and nervousness about starting a new school year. This is normal. However, parents can help ease the transition from summer vacation to the school routine. Here are some tips to prepare you and your student for the upcoming academic year.

Bring a little school into summer. Adjust to a school schedule before school starts. A few days before the first day, have your child go to bed early and get up early. For younger kids, “play school” by doing fun structured academic games and activities. For older kids, encourage reading more before school starts.



Tracy Protell

Avoid overscheduling the first few weeks. After school starts, keep some fun outdoor activities going. Spend an afternoon at the pool or beach, or ride bikes around the neighborhood. If you are a busy family, schedule some “outdoor free time.”

Reduce the worry. To handle anxieties about returning to school or a new school situation, parents should calm their own fears or anxieties. Research demonstrates the more anxious parents are, the more anxiety their children show and experience.

Talk about it. Ease your children’s fears by talking about their concerns and validating their feelings. Avoid saying “don’t worry” or “everything will be fine.” Instead, explain how you understand their feelings and that most kids are nervous or worried about the first day. Listen to specific concerns your child has and help make a plan to tackle the worry or perceived problem. For example, if your child says “I won’t know anyone in my class,” remind your child about making friends last year or identify a neighbor who will be in the same class and arrange a family social gathering. When offered help and encouragement, kids often come up with their own amazing solutions to their problems.
Familiarize with new surroundings. If starting a new school, I encourage families to visit the school and get familiar with the campus. This makes it less intimidating on the first day. If possible, introduce your child to the teacher(s) or the school counselor.

Help your kids with school anxiety. If your child shows school-related anxiety or refuses to attend school, try to keep your child attending daily. Complaints of stomach aches or “I just don’t feel good” are often rooted in anxiety and avoidance can increase anxiety. What starts as an occasional request, “I don’t feel good; can I stay home today?” can balloon into frequent school avoidance. Instead, rule out serious illness, such as a fever, vomiting, or diarrhea, and then ask your child about school fears or concerns. If it is a serious problem, such as bullying, address immediately with a school administrator.

Keep a positive attitude. If you, as a parent, present the start of school as an exciting time and are enthusiastic about learning, your child is likely to feel the same. Even teenagers listen and emulate their parents’ attitudes (though they often try to seem like they aren’t). School is a very important aspect of your child’s development and future success.

I wish you all a safe and healthy school year.

Tracy Protell is a board-certified pediatrician and child psychiatrist at Barton Health.