Opinion: Douglas County addressing flooding

By Jim Nichols

I would like to first offer my sympathies to those who were affected by the recent flash flooding in Douglas County. Many of you have suffered damage to your property as a result of the recent flood events. Many of you have expressed your concerns and frustrations over this situation and I can assure you we are taking every measure in our power to respond, recover and develop a long term solution with-in our means.



Jim Nichols

Over the last weeks of storms and subsequent flooding, East Fork Fire and Paramedic District, Douglas County Sheriff's Department, Douglas County Road Department including roads and utilities, GIS, public information, and the Community Development Department staffs have been working countless hours to assist residents. Our main priority has been public safety first and foremost followed by clean up. Questions have been asked of staff and so we have outlined a few common questions and answers for you below.

What is the Road Division doing to help with the clean up and how can I contact them if I have flood damage on my road or drains?

Our road division staff is in the process of removing dirt and

debris from many of the drainage infrastructure, mainly flow lines and culverts. Along with re-establishing of flow lines, we are shoring up the road sides from the excessive erosion that occurred as a result of the flooding.

We have contracted with A&A Construction and they are removing some of the several thousands yards of soil that filled the detention basins/flow lines around Johnson Lane. We expect this work to take a minimum of two weeks, with occasional road closures Monday through Saturday, 7am to 3:30pm.

We had the National Department of Forestry crews working on clearing out buried culverts and opening up the ends of the culverts, both public and private.

Why does the Johnson Lane area keep flooding?

Johnson Lane floods because very short length, but high intensity storms bring high volumes of water quickly resulting in drainage facilities becoming overwhelmed. County drainage systems are generally sized for the 25-year, 24-hour storm which is a long, gentle rainfall with an intensity of about 0.1-inches per hour. Last year's flood event was a 100-year, two-hour rain event which delivered about 0.6-inches of rain fall an hour. This month's event was a 500-year, one-hour storm which dropped 1.12-inches of rain. These events are six to 12 times more powerful than what the drainage system in Johnson Lane is equipped to handle.

What is Douglas County's long-term plan to address the flooding issues in Douglas County?

This will be discussed at the Aug. 6 board meeting. Currently no tax dollars are dedicated to storm drain improvements. The county has been 100 percent reliant on applying for and being awarded grants to fund storm water improvements. The county has been very successful in obtaining these grants, but generally these grants are awarded to improve flood issues along major transportation routes (highways 88, 395, 50) and

the county has not been as successful in the Johnson Lane area. The first step in addressing flood issues in the county is to complete an area drainage master plan for Johnson Lane. This ADMP would provide a list of projects and potential cost and allow the county to prioritize construction.

Although these issues will not be resolved overnight, I can assure you Douglas County is doing everything we can to help our residents. We will be hosting a flood outreach event on Aug. 6 at the CVIC Hall from 3:30-7pm. We hope this event will allow residents to speak with several members of our staff about their concerns around the flooding.

Jim Nichols is the county manager of Douglas County.

Letter: Food bank looking for shelter for client

To the community,

The Food Bank of El Dorado County is committed to helping with the homeless issue in El Dorado County one person at a time. We have adopted a young single mother that is homeless and have provided a job at the Food Bank.

We need help with a temporary place for her to live. We have located a donor that is willing to provide the property if we can find a trailer with a holding tank for temporary use until we can get this mother placed in her own apartment.

The Food Bank is looking for a 25-foot by-40-foot camp trailer or modular. A donation would be optimum, but we are willing to take one on loan or purchase one for a very reasonable price.

Do you have a trailer just sitting around that could be put to good use and are willing to help this young mother in need?

Contact us at the Food Bank of El Dorado County today – 530.621.9950.

Together we can make a difference in her life and her children's lives.

Rachel Galvin, Food Bank of El Dorado County

Opinion: How much is Calif. really spending?

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

It's time again for some more fun with numbers – big numbers.



Dan Walters

They're the numbers associated with the 2015-16 state budget, which the Legislature and Gov. Jerry Brown enacted last month.

There may be some public confusion over its dimensions. Some news media reported the total as $115.4 billion, others as $167.6 billion.

Both are correct as far as they go.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Break down barriers for better health

By Zocalo

Americans have more ways to be healthy than ever before. Organic vegetables line grocery store shelves. Yoga studios crowd city streets. Fitbits remind us to skip the elevator and Rocky Balboa it up the stairs.

But just because all these waist-thinning options exist doesn't mean everyone has access to them. Fresh produce, fancy gyms, and habit-tracking technology are expensive, and cost is one of many prohibitive factors that keeps millions of people from taking good care of themselves.

The obesity rates in America are staggering; more than a third of adults deal with the disorder, with demographics that reflect a complicated web of cultural and socio-economic influences. So how do we even the playing field? In advance of the Zócalo/The California Wellness Foundation event "Is Healthy Living Only for the Rich?" we asked medical experts and others invested the public's well-being: Given the structure and demands of everyday life in America, what can be done to make healthy living more accessible across classes?

Leonard Jack Jr.

The burden of chronic disease in the United States is substantial. Chronic diseases – such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, and cancer – are among the most common,

costly, and preventable of all health problems. More than half of all adults in the U.S. have at least one of them.

Improving the overall health of Americans will involve reducing risk factors such as physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and limited or no access to quality healthcare. In addition to these factors, environment (for example, communities, schools, workplaces, restaurants, parks, etc.) plays a large role in helping Americans achieve optimal health. The importance of creating safe places to exercise, increasing access to healthier foods and beverages, and reducing exposure to secondhand smoke in public places cannot be overlooked or minimized.

Bettering people's environments requires strong partnerships and a commitment to making healthy choices easier. The best successes are where schools, local parks, businesses, faith-based organizations, clinical settings, and restaurants work together through a combination of approaches. These approaches include establishing policies in schools that make available salad bars and healthy-foods vending machines; adopting joint-use agreements with facilities such as schools, churches, and businesses to increase access to safe places to exercise; working closely with corner grocery stores in communities to increase access to fruits and vegetables; and changing prices of healthier foods and beverages relative to the cost of less-healthy foods.

Leonard Jack Jr. is the director of the division of community health within the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Paul Simon

First, address a community's fundamental needs.

There is unfortunately no single, easy answer. We certainly need to encourage healthy eating and regular physical

activity, and discourage tobacco use and unhealthful patterns of drug and alcohol use. However, these efforts are unlikely to make a dent in the glaring health inequities we see across socioeconomic and racial and ethnic groups unless we also create environments that promote healthy living.

Sadly, in most communities, and particularly in low-income communities, the deck is stacked against healthy choices. We need to shift the balance in favor of healthy options where landscapes are largely dominated by junk food, unhealthy food and beverage marketing, tobacco shops, and liquor stores, and few if any options for recreation. Even these measures, though, are unlikely to achieve the desired results unless we address even more fundamental needs, including safe and affordable housing, high-quality education, and meaningful employment opportunities that offer a living wage.

Though these issues may seem far removed from healthy living, they are in fact among the most important factors that influence health across the lifespan. In addition, chronic stress associated with living in communities that are rife with violence, disinvestment, and degradation exact an enormous toll on one's health. We need to work with and support communities to build resilience, strengthen social networks, and create opportunity. Anything less is like putting a Band-Aid on a festering wound.

Paul Simon is the director of the division of chronic disease and injury prevention at Los Angeles County of Public Health. He is also a pediatrician, and teaches at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health.

Cherise Charleswell

Healthy living is truly a privilege in the United States, because many families are focused on survival. I will forever remember the words of a mother who spoke up at a grassroots community-organizing event I attended: She said even though

she knows it’s not nutritional, she still gives her sons honey buns in the morning, because it’s quick, cheap, and at least they will have something to eat.

Simply stating that this woman – and others like her who don’t have access to healthy living – need more health education classes is not enough. There is arrogance in that notion. Surely, this marginalized population knows that they should be eating better, getting more exercise, and having more routine physicals. However, there are barriers in the way that seem to be growing – barriers that are among the key reasons why protestors took to the streets during the Occupy campaigns. When we speak of classes, the United States is simply becoming the “have” and the “have-nots,” and public health is suffering because of this, as healthy living options become unattainable.

The problem involves macroeconomics, and should be approached from this macro-level with urgently needed social policies and legislation that will make healthy living accessible. Speaking about the poor is taboo in American politics; politicians prefer to talk about the “shrinking middle class,” without providing any context as to where they are shrinking away to. For that reason, we need to begin to speak about privilege and inequity, and consider diverse public health interventions, such as creating and maintaining community gardens, imposing higher taxes on sugar-laden foods, and extending physical education requirements in schools.

Cherise Charleswell holds a dual position as diversity officer and clinical researcher at Huntington Medical Research Institutes in Pasadena. She is the president of the Southern California Public Health Association.

Jonathan M. Samet

This is a critical question with an easy answer: Much can be done, and the imperative to do a lot is strong.

In the United States, there are tremendous gradients in health and longevity by indicators of socioeconomic status. Underlying these gradients are patterns of harmful substance use (tobacco, excessive alcohol, and illegal drugs), availability and affordability of healthy food, psychosocial stress, and access to high-quality preventive and medical care.

What can be done on the short-term?

- Continue to drive down rates of tobacco use, while taking on the new challenge of various electronic nicotine delivery systems. In California, for instance, cigarettes are too cheap, so there's an opportunity to reduce smoking through a tax increase.
- Invest in research to find better interventions for alcoholism, as the problem of excess alcohol consumption remains deeply rooted.
- Assess, address, and monitor the availability and consumption of healthy foods. We have the tools to do so, and already know the solutions: local growing and selling, and pushing for healthier options from the food industry.
- Promote physical activity by identifying and addressing barriers to it (for instance, lack of walkable routes, lack of education on the risks of a sedentary lifestyle)
- Teach communities to advance their own health. Strategies could include engaging community leaders, providing model initiatives, and offering funding to foster innovation.

For some of the most critical factors, solutions are for the long-term and outside the domain of local communities—healthcare access and quality, and a strong base of jobs—but they should not be forgotten.

Jonathan M. Samet is the chair of the department of preventive medicine at University of Southern California's Keck School of

Medicine. He is also the director of USC's Institute for Global Health.

Siddhartha Angadi

Socioeconomic status is adversely associated with obesity and lifestyle diseases. However, it's often incorrectly assumed that access to recreational facilities is critical to maintaining a good workout routine.

Exercise is potent and virtually "free" medicine that delivers health benefits independent of education level, financial status, or body size. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., and exercise is extremely efficacious cardiovascular medicine. Current American Heart Association guidelines recommend that adults engage in 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity per week.

While these goals may sound unattainable to a time-crunched person or busy family, it is important to note that accumulating 30 minutes of exercise in short bouts is just as effective at lowering cardiovascular risk. Short exercise sessions – as little as 10 minutes at a time – have been shown to be just as effective at reducing blood pressure as a single, longer session. A short walk or bike ride to work, the park, or a store can enhance heart health without the cost of a gym membership.

The salutary effects of exercise occur independently of body weight or body fat. In a series of studies carried out at the Cooper Clinic in Texas, researchers examined the effects of fitness on the risk of death from all causes and cardiovascular mortality. The key finding was that obese and fit individuals had the same risk of adverse outcomes as normal-weight and fit individuals, and half the risk as normal-weight or obese, unfit individuals.

In short, good heart health is possible at any size with a

cheap pill called exercise.

Siddhartha Angadi is an assistant professor at Arizona State University. His research focuses on the effects of exercise and diet on cardiac and arterial function in patients with serious cardiovascular conditions. His doctoral student Jennifer Herbold assisted him in writing this response.

This article is supported by a grant from the The California Wellness Foundation.

Letter: USFS wrong to remove Camp Rich trees

To the community,

The U.S. Forest Service has begun implementing plans to "improve" the Camp Richardson area north of Highway 89. The purpose of this plan is to meet standards for water quality and universal access.

Campsites and roads are being reorganized. The campground will get a new entrance. The bike path that is now along the edge of the highway will be moved away from the road. These plans include the removal of 250 beautiful trees from the camp.

This article protests the removal of so many trees. People come to Tahoe to be closer to nature and to camp amongst the trees under a starry night sky. Tall Jeffries, Ponderosa's and firs give Tahoe an identity that is different from the populated lowlands. It seems everywhere we are losing trees for one reason or another, to widen roads, to clear lots for housing, to reduce fire hazards, to disease and bugs, or

they simply die from lack of water. The USFS should endeavor to improve the campground in a less destructive fashion by trying to accommodate as many trees as possible while achieving their goals. For instance they could make entertaining, little curvy camp roads that go around trees and also slow people down.

Deforestation is a global problem contributing to climate change happening not just in some far off place, but also at Tahoe. The USFS has already ruined many forests in the Tahoe basin with their excessive mandate of fuel reduction and reckless burning of slash. We need to protect and appreciate trees. A 100 year old tree is a marvel. No amount of money can buy it back once it is cut down. It will take 100 years to replace it. Climate change is a concern because it appears to be causing extremities in weather that makes life uncomfortable for people, such as extreme heat and drought, flooding and more severe storms. It will have a profound effect on agriculture. We need to help, preserve and plant trees.

There are many benefits to trees. They play an important role in the global carbon cycle. A tree can absorb 48 pounds of carbon dioxide in a year. This amounts to 1 ton in 40 years. One large tree can provide a supply of oxygen for 2 people. Trees provide shade, lower evaporation and reduce air conditioning needs around buildings. They reduce storm water runoff. They provide wildlife habitat and beautify our environment.

For the first time ever, the CO2 level in the atmosphere has reached 400 ppm (parts per million). Pre-industrial concentration around 1800 has been estimated at 260-270 ppm. According to the Department of Energy, the average American produces annually 17.2 tons of CO2 from the burning of fossil fuels and cement production. Each gallon of gasoline burned produces 20 pounds of CO2. If we assume about half of human generated emissions are absorbed by the world’s oceans and

other plant life, then 344 trees are needed by every American every day to offset his personal CO2 production.

The trees at Camp Richardson are to be be prized and treated with care. The destruction of so many trees in order to "improve" the campground is terribly disappointing. Camp Richardson is visited and loved by many people. The USFS could do much better to preserve the beauty and character of this special place while achieving their goals. They are leaving a legacy we will be living with for decades to come.

Liana Zambresky, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Housing market isn't rational

By Robert J. Shiller, New York Times

Home prices have been climbing. They have risen 27 percent nationally since 2012, even more in places like San Francisco. But why worry? If you accept the efficient markets theory – and believe that real estate is an efficient market – then these prices are based on "new information," even if you don't know what that information is.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that the efficient markets theory is at best a half-truth, as a voluminous literature on market anomalies shows. What's more, even that half-truth is grounded mainly in the stock market, which attracts professional investors who sometimes do make the market behave efficiently.

The housing market is another matter. It is far less rational

than even the often irrational stock market, for a couple of important reasons. First, most investors find it difficult to understand how housing supply responds to changes in demand. Only a small minority of people think carefully about such things. Second, it is very hard for the minority of smart-money investors who do understand such matters to bet against bubble-level prices in real estate markets. In housing, the smart money has relatively little voice.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Californians suckers for superheroes

By Joe Mathews

With Superman, Spiderman, and Batman all living in New York (or its fictional doppelgangers), Californians have failed to grapple with our own superhero problem: we've become dangerously dependent on them.

This peril is most obvious in Hollywood. The film industry could collapse if the public gets tired of superheroes – two dozen such films, most with huge budgets, are scheduled over the next five years.



Joe Mathews

But California's problem goes beyond the cinematic glut. Superheroes – and our desire to await one to save the day – have taken over our culture, our industry, our politics, and our schools.

You can see the phenomenon in Silicon Valley, where the success of start-ups too often depends on the blessing of elite superhero investors, and where too much focus is devoted to searching for the next Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs. Nonprofit advocacy interests nearly all seek a superhero celebrity spokesperson and funder. And our politics are now driven more by individual superheroes than coherent political parties or associations.

We chose our last two governors on superhero logic; Arnold Schwarzenegger was supposed to transfer his cinematic superpowers to Sacramento, and Jerry Brown (himself a sequel) was sold to us as a superhero wizard (bloggers call him Gandalf, like the "Lord of the Rings" character) capable of conjuring a way through the state's thorny budget messes. Any ambitious change in California now requires expensive ballot initiatives, which creates a need for other superheroes (or supervillains, depending on your politics) like Tom Steyer, Charles Munger Jr., or the Koch brothers to provide the cash to lift very heavy things.

I may be extra sensitive to superhero-centrism, as the father of three young boys. This month, my 6-year-old's summer camp and my 4-year-old's preschool both had superhero weeks. The latter produced a brand new superhero for California's

pantheon: Super King, who shoots fire and ice, fights “bad kings,” and won’t clean up his room after his adventures.

Why do superheroes have such a hold over us? The director of my son’s preschool, in an email to parents, argued that “there is something innate in a 3- and 4-year-old that craves power” and so the preschool “will be building on this innate need to control things by tying in superheroes to experiments with science and projects to broaden their view of the world and explore various artistic ways to channel these needs.”

In California, it’s easy to se how that craving for power extends beyond the preschool set. In San Diego for a reporting trip that coincided with Comic-Con, I rode the San Diego trolley with Batman and three ninjas (I’ve never felt so safe on public transit). In San Mateo earlier this year, I happened upon Draper University of Heroes, a residential program to train entrepreneurial superheroes that was founded by venture capitalist Tim Draper, best known for his plan to divide California into six states.

The school’s theory: entrepreneurs must think of themselves as superheroes in order to take bold risks. Students at Draper University even take a Superhero Pledge that includes an Evangelism Clause (“I will help prepare the next generation of Superheroes”).

This hunger for superheroes in business reflects concern about the slowing pace of innovation. Why are our companies giving us more texting apps instead of big new technologies?

Perhaps that’s why we’re drawn to Elon Musk, the Space X founder and Tesla CEO, who is seeking superheroic advances in space flight, electric cars, and batteries. Musk, although often mentioned as an inspiration for Robert Downey Jr.’s portrayal of Iron Man, is no superhero, as Ashlee Vance’s bestselling new biography makes clear. Musk is merely a gifted leader of teams of engineers determined to make new things. In

Vance's account, Musk's companies get into trouble (and lose key employees) because of resentments bred by Musk's unreasonable demands for superhero-level devotion to work, and his need to be portrayed in the media as a superhero deserving all credit.

Our devotion to superheroes is understandable, given our collective sense of powerlessness in an age of political gridlock and economic inequality. But superhero devotion is a form of delay, a way of avoiding the inconvenient truth that progress, in any realm, requires bringing many different people together behind a common goal.

And superhero dependency feels like desperation. It's instructive that "Superhero" – the hit from L.A. rock band Jane's Addiction that became the theme song of TV's "Entourage" – is really an expression of desperate, unrequited love.

Be a superhero if you want. But do it someplace else.

Joe Mathews is California and innovation editor for Zócalo Public Square, for which he writes the Connecting California column. He wrote this for Thinking L.A., a partnership of UCLA and Zócalo Public Square.

Opinion: We deserve to know what's in our food

By Andrew Kimbrell, Wall Street Journal

One of the biggest arguments in the food world these days involves products that have been genetically modified.

Consumer advocates have been pushing for rules requiring companies to label foods that contain ingredients that have been modified for any number of purposes, such as making them resistant to herbicides. Recently, voters in Oregon and Colorado voted down measures to require labeling. Other states, though, have approved labeling, and the Food and Drug Administration's website says it has received petitions to mandate labeling nationwide but hasn't made a call on the idea.

The argument for labeling comes down to the right to know: Consumers, the advocates say, should be well informed of what's in their food. Further, they argue, genetically modifying food carries risks while providing few nutritional benefits.

Opponents say that the fears about GMO foods are overblown, and that in fact the foods are safe and bring benefits. So, labeling foods would give the wrong impression that there's something dangerous about GMOs, when there isn't, opponents say.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Gun control tactic hard to shoot down

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the July 20, 2015, Las Vegas Sun.***

Aside from picking office holders, Nevada voters next year will have the opportunity to help keep guns out of the wrong hands.

Granted, we can’t always identify “the wrong hands” because many crimes are committed in the passion of the moment by first-time gun-wielders who might not fit the profile of a gunman-in-waiting.

But as a society, we at least can try to weed out those people who, on the face of it, shouldn’t be allowed to carry a weapon. It’s an obvious group: felons, domestic abusers and the mentally ill who have been identified by the state as having been committed involuntarily to a mental health institution or deemed a danger to themselves or others.

Read the whole story

Letter: Say ‘no’ to electronic digital signs

To the community,

Several people have said to me that they do not want to see electronic digital signs in our beautiful county. So why are digital signs included in the proposed new sign ordinance? Does the majority of the public even know that digital signs are being proposed in the new sign ordinance? The county confirmed that it did not perform any surveys or polls to see if residents want the digital signs.

El Dorado County residents must speak up and voice their concerns to the Board of Supervisors if they do not want to see electronic digital signs in El Dorado County. People visit and live in El Dorado County to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city, not to be bombarded with digital signage. It would be in our best interest to find less invasive and

more aesthetically pleasing ways to promote local businesses and events.

The Board of Supervisors will hold a hearing on the proposed new sign ordinance on July 28 at 2pm. Make your concerns heard by either emailing the supervisors or attending the meeting.

Email the Board of Supervisors:
1. Ron Mikulaco, Supervisor District I, 530.621.5650, bosone@edcgov.us
2. Shiva Frentzen, Supervisor District II, 530.621.5651, bostwo@edcgov.us
3. Brian Veerkamp, Supervisor District III, 530.621.5652, bosthree@edcgov.us
4. Michael Ranalli, Supervisor District IV, 530.621.6513, bosfour@edcgov.us
5. Sue Novasel, Supervisor District V, 530.621.6577, bosfive@edcgov.us.

The agenda for the July 28 meeting will be posted here when available.

A photo example of the digital signs is available here.

This is our chance to stand up and defend our beautiful county. Please join me.

Jeannette Maynard, Shingle Springs