Opinion: Calif. growth is just a fantasy

By Joe Mathews

California has an official state flower (poppy), state insect (the Dogface Butterfly), and state theater (the Pasadena Playhouse). But no official state sport.

Unless you count the great Californian pastime of overestimating our own population growth.



Joe Mathews

It should be enough that, at 38.7 million, we're the most populous state in the Union. But California's own collective identity is so tied up with our size that we routinely exaggerate it.

We overestimate our population in the present (politicians and pundits have long called this a "state of 40 million" even though we still haven't reached 39 million) and in the future (we've been saying for more than a generation that we'll be 50 million people by 2020). Gov. Jerry Brown invoked the 50 million figure last month in urging Californians "to find a more elegant way of relating to material things."

The trouble is that at our current pace we'll barely have 40 million people by 2020. For 20 years California has been experiencing the lowest rates of population growth in our

history, with flatter immigration and a cratering birth rate.

In the last few years, the state government has been quietly – and rapidly – ratcheting down its long-exaggerated estimate of future growth. USC demographer Dowell Myers points out the following: in 2007, the state Department of Finance projected that California would reach 50 million by 2032. By 2012, that milestone had been delayed until 2049. In the most recent revised projections based on 2014 figures, we don't hit 50 million until 2051.

Why do we keep overstating our numbers? For two big reasons – one nice, one nasty.

The nicer one is our deep attachment to the 1980s, those salad days back when people came to our state in droves. It was in 1985 that the Population Reference Bureau first made the 50-million-by-2020 prediction, and the U.S. Census Bureau was still echoing that in the mid-1990s. Such projections made sense then – given California's 20th century growth from less than 2 million people in 1900 to 33 million in 2000.

But our demographers have found it hard to shake assumptions created by that historic growth. Even after the early '90s recession changed California's trajectory, the Census thought we'd make 49.3 million by 2025. It took the Great Recession to convince demographers that we weren't going back to the '80s.

So why do false assumptions about population persist? That's the nasty reason – population growth serves the left and the right.

On the left, those warning of the environmentalist apocalypse rely on the Malthusian notion that California is being doomed by endless growth, which in their view must be stopped. That's allowed them to justify opposing the essential replacement of aging infrastructure, and the adoption of new energy sources.

On the nativist right, the narrative of endless population

growth serves the anti-immigrant cause. Lately the right has been blaming drought-related water shortages on an imagined population growth from a supposed surge in immigration that is not in fact taking place. While California has 10 million foreign immigrants, most of them have been here a lot longer than you (nearly half are citizens).

Our population overestimates are a close cousin of the assumption that, as USC's Manuel Pastor has described it, "that California is on its way to becoming 150 percent Latino." Indeed, with the slowdown of border crossings and a plunging birth rate among Latinos, our ethnic mix is no longer changing so fast. Demographers who once predicted Latinos would soon become a state majority say it's possible that Latinos will never represent a majority in California.

The irony, unappreciated by the environmental left and anti-immigrant right, is that they have already won. California's population is not growing out of ecological or demographic control.

The trouble is that so few of us recognize this reality or have responded to it. The narrative that we're being overrun by newcomers crashing our nirvana is understandably seductive. But California, with fewer children and a stagnant population, needs to do more for its children, since they will have to be more productive than previous generations. And if we want to have the economic growth to support an aging population and generous social benefits, we need to think—for the first time—about how to attract more people here from other states and other countries, and to do a better job of retaining the people we do have.

Unfortunately, there is little serious effort or investment aimed at growing our actual population. Perhaps because we're too busy coping with the population boom taking place in our collective imagination.

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

Opinion: Big corporations are good for social progress

By Andrés Martinez

Ever since the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision in 2010, it's been fashionable to deplore (with full-on *How dare they?* indignation) the power of big business in our political process. But judging from recent events, maybe we would all benefit if corporations wielded more political power, not less.

Seriously. Think about the recent exhilarating triumphs for once-marginalized minorities: the U.S. Supreme Court legalizing gay marriage across the land; South Carolina hastening to lower the Confederate flag of sedition and racism; a Republican presidential candidate being ostracized for bashing Latino immigrants. One thread connecting these stories is the presence of corporate America taking a stand against the bullying and discrimination of minorities.

In the landmark marriage case, a Who's Who list of blue-chip companies from Procter & Gamble to Goldman Sachs signed onto legal briefs urging the justices to strike down all bans on gay marriage. They argued that such bans conflict with their own anti-discrimination and diversity policies, and that you can't have a country (and cohesive marketplace) where

fundamental rights vary from state to state.

Even more impressively, big business mobilized in a number of states over the past two years to defeat or roll back proposed "religious freedom" laws seen as disingenuous efforts to legitimize the discrimination of gays. No single company has been more identified with challenging such laws than Wal-Mart, which singlehandedly defeated a proposed measure in its home state of Arkansas.

Business interests also helped turned the tide against the Confederacy. The *New York Times* story on South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley's call for the removal of the Confederate flag credited "intensifying pressure from South Carolina business leaders to remove a controversial vestige of the state's past" as one factor leading to the governor's reversal of her previous position.

At the national level, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business groups have led the charge for sensible immigration reform – though this effort can't yet be checked off as a victory. If only the business lobby had as much power as we often assume it does. In the meantime, it was gratifying for Latino activists aligned with business on immigration to watch Donald Trump be fired by corporate partners like Macy's, Comcast, Univision, and Disney over his hateful comments about Mexicans. Vicious speech denigrating immigrants may be acceptable in certain political circles, but not in the corporate realm.

Some politicians eager to cater to local prejudices, and capitalize on them, are chafing at the activism of corporations. This spring, while pushing for his own religious freedom law, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal whined in a *New York Times* op-ed: "As the fight for religious liberty moves to Louisiana, I have a clear message for any corporation that contemplates bullying our state: Save your breath." Jindal's choice of the verb "bullying" is deliciously hypocritical,

because it was business rising up to oppose the bullying of people by small-minded politicians.

This is why I differ from my friends and colleagues in journalism and academia who hold to a reflexively anti-corporate worldview. They see large, distant corporations as the source of much bullying. I see the worst forms of bullying arising closer to home: at the hands of local or state governments, or dominant business interests rooted in one place.

No, there isn't anything inherently virtuous about business leaders. As cynics are quick to note, the political fights I've described here are all about business wanting what's best for business. Companies need to avoid offending customers and they need to be seen as inclusive and diverse employers to potential hires. But big business tends to be more enlightened than smaller businesses rooted in only one place, because the broader your perspective, the bigger your market, the less tolerant you can afford to be of idiosyncratic regional prejudices. It's no accident that commerce across state lines has always been one of the great motors of progress in this country, and not just economic progress.

That is also why trade agreements that seek to harmonize norms across borders are as beneficial to individuals as they are to big multinationals. The prospect of joining the European Union (and attracting investment by large foreign companies) forced governments across Eastern Europe to protect the rights of long-oppressed minorities. As much as Elizabeth Warren and her protectionist allies have attacked President Obama's proposed trade deal with Asia as a sop to big business, the agreement will help strengthen civil society and individual rights in these countries for precisely the reasons these critics attack it – by standardizing norms of behavior across jurisdictions.

Bigotry, and the disregard of people's rights and dignity that comes with it, doesn't travel well. And it's bad for business.

Andrés Martinez writes the Trade Winds column for Zócalo Public Square, where he is editorial director. He is also professor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University.

Letter: Yacht club volunteers are B&B

To the community,

Taking a break from competitive racing and cruising club activities, the members of the Lake Tahoe Windjammers Yacht Club took the opportunity to serve the community by sponsoring a Bread & Broth Adopt a Day of Nourishment on July 13. The Windjammers donated $250 to B&B to provide the evening meal to any community member that came to St. Theresa Church Grace Hall for a full course, nutritional dinner.

Representing the Windjammers at the dinner were Kurt Rasmussen, the club's rear commodore, and fellow club members Laura Rasmussen and Liz Beelik. Trading their sailing gear for B&B aprons, this sponsor volunteer crew was eager to help, and in addition to bagging 65 food giveaway bags and cleaning up after the dinner, they cheerfully served up pulled pork sandwiches, cole slaw and sweet corn on the cob to the 114 hungry and grateful dinner guests.

"From the friendly, dedicated cooks preparing the fresh food, everyone setting up for the evenings' guests, to the cheerful dishwasher, Bread & Broth is an impressive organization," wrote Laura Rasmussen. "It has been a privilege to assist the team today. The folks who enjoyed this dinner were polite, grateful and a pleasure to serve. The Windjammers Yacht Club

thanks B&B for this opportunity and looks forward to sponsoring another Adopt A Day.”

Bread & Broth is grateful to the Windjammers Yacht Club for their support and looks forward to partnering with the club in helping people in need in the future.

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

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Hit piece proves grand jury’s irrelevance

By Larry Weitzman

Supervisor Ron “Mik” Mikulaco doesn’t always vote with the majority of the Board of Supervisors. His most important vote was a dissenting no vote on the last budget (FY 2014-2015 which had a large structural deficit), which happened to be the last budget submitted by ex-CAO Terri Daly.

Someone during this last grand jury term must not like Mik as this last GJ produced a report (GJ 14-15) that looked more like a political hit piece by a potential future opponent. Mik is up for re-election next year. And one of the most frequent, if not the most frequent visitor to this GJ, is none other than Terri Daly.



Larry Weitzman

In its opening background statement the GJ had the audacity to belittle Mik's campaign style in his first election campaign commenting that he wore a "depression style" sandwich board sign on El Dorado Hills Boulevard asking for votes. Much to the chagrin of the GJ it worked. Who and in what place is the GJ to write a report on campaigning? It's not within their charge or purview. This is just another reason why the GJ should be eliminated.

Penal Code Section 933.05(e) provides that if the subject of a GJ investigation is a department head or other official then it is mandatory that the subject be interviewed by the GJ. There is no question the subject of this investigation is Mik. Mik claims he was never interviewed by the GJ with respect to anything within the report. If that fact is true, and I see no reason why it wouldn't be, not only is the report unfounded, but it is just another reason for its illegitimacy. This GJ of 2014-2015 may have been operating beyond its legal capacity.

But there is so much more. The GJ complained that Mik used his approximately $250,000 discretionary budget, which pays for assistants and office and other sundry expenses, was misused. Every supervisor gets such a discretionary budget. Mik spent about $25,000 of his budget on a second office in El Dorado Hills near Town Center. The GJ claims this wasn't proper use of his discretionary budget. What doesn't the GJ understand about the meaning of the word "discretionary"?

Perhaps the GJ needs a course in remedial English, which in the UC system is known as "dumbbell English." Since the GJ

obviously doesn't know the definition of "discretion or discretionary," let's enlighten them. According to Webster the definition of discretion is: "1. the freedom or authority to make decisions or choices." Discretionary is defined as "left to one's own discretion; regulated by one's own choice." What does the GJ not understand about the supervisor's having a $250,000 discretionary budget? Mik made the conscience choice to have an office in his district. It's solely his choice and the GJ has no right or basis to say anything. Yet they make a big deal about the use of Mik's discretionary budget. One could say the GJ's claim is an oxymoron.

Of course, the other explanation for this oxymoron is the real purpose of the GJ report. When combined with the opening paragraph it should be considered a political hatchet job. It only further cements the argument that the BOS should abolish the GJ or in the least defund it.

In a final attempt to smear the independent thinking Mik, the GJ says his behavior is odd. He "can be moody or he terrorizes many female employees." They claim this information was from testimony. Does that mean sworn testimony or from an interview? Since the GJ is allowed to conduct non-sworn interviews, such statements or answers to questions are nothing more than hearsay or gossip. According to the district attorney, much of the GJ testimony is nothing of the sort as it is not sworn and therefore not testimony or legal evidence as the GJ is a legal forum. Because grand juries are secret and considering the ridiculous and ludicrous things said in several other reports which were misleading or untrue, their claimed "evidence" has little, if any, weight. Mik denies all their allegations.

Even more telling is the GJ's own admission that the other four supervisors "do not recognize Mikulaco's aberrant behavior …." Maybe it doesn't exist so the GJ goes on to claim that the other supes "turn a blind eye to his antics …." What kind of self-assuming GJ is this? That's the kind of thinking

that happens in Third World kangaroo courts like Iran, Venezuela and Cuba.

But wait there is more. One of the GJ members for the year 2014-2015 was Kenneth Steers. According to a recent examination (July 7) of political contributions Form 460 for recently announced District I supervisorial candidate Beth Gaines, Steers contributed twice to her campaign coffers, an amount totaling $5,900. Gaines is running for the seat now held by Mikulaco who is the subject of this hit piece by the GJ of which Steers was a member. You can draw your own conclusion. Perhaps that tells the entire story of this civil grand jury.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of rescue.

Opinion: Calling for an end to cairns

By Robyn Martin, High Country News

Stones: We've built pyramids and castles with them and painstakingly cleared them out of farm fields, using them to build low walls for fencing. We marvel at the rocks in the Grand Canyon, Arches and Grand Teton national parks. Yet a perplexing practice has been gaining ground in our wild spaces: People have begun stacking rocks on top of one another, balancing them carefully and doing this for unknown reasons, though probably as some kind of personal or "spiritual" statement.

These piles aren't true cairns, the official term for deliberately stacked rocks. From middle Gaelic, the word means

“mound of stones built as a memorial or landmark.” There are plenty of those in Celtic territories, that’s for sure, as well as in other cultures; indigenous peoples in the United States often used cairns to cover and bury their dead. Those of us who like to hike through wilderness areas are glad to see the occasional cairn, as long as it’s indicating the right way to go at critical junctions in the backcountry.

Stone piles have their uses, but the many rock stacks that I’m seeing on our public lands are increasingly problematic. First, if they’re set in a random place, they can lead an unsuspecting hiker into trouble, away from the trail and into a potentially dangerous place. Second, we go to wilderness to remove ourselves from the human saturation of our lives, not to see mementoes from other people’s lives.

Read the whole story

Letter: Wells Fargo helps with affordable housing

To the community,

Saint Joseph Community Land Trust wants to express its gratitude to Wells Fargo Bank for their recent $3,000 grant to our Affordable Housing Fund.

This generous donation kicks-off our latest fund drive effort, which includes a goal of raising $300,000 for our next affordable housing project. This project is ambitious, but we are confident we will be able to raise the funds needed to purchase a home, refurbish it (if needed), and sell or rent it to a local household at an affordable price under our shared

equity homeownership program.

Thank you Wells Fargo Bank for partnering with us to help meet the affordable housing needs of this community.

Frances Alling, Saint Joseph Community Land Trust

Opinion: Tahoe – a glass half-empty

By Garry Bowen

Back around May Day, I wrote an article “A Glass Half-Full”, as a commentary on South Lake Tahoe celebrating a 50th anniversary of its incorporation while at the same time having several workshops on the question of what SLT wants to be when it grows up, highlighted by looking at each of those workshops, from the original standpoint of until we know and find shared agreement as to who we are, we won’t know why we’re caring for a future for the next 50 years.

Let’s take another look, under the promised title, “A Glass Half-Empty”. A bit darker of a full mirrored reflection, as Tahoe’s proposed and purported successful future may depend on it.



Garry Bowen

As an observation in that earlier May Day piece (not by accident was that simile used), some have sensed that these workshops “barely touched upon how to turn the ideas into reality”, so I’ve been pondering the actual directions seen since that time, given the coming and going of Memorial Day, several soft opening months trial run of the fulfillment of our fourth casino being back in operation, and the just-completed 4th of July.

In a “Glass Half-Full”, included within was a cryptic comment: “examples of other strategic missteps lie in wait”; unfortunately, a “half-empty” approach turns out to be prescient for purposes of follow-through, as an in years past perspective was used in the first instance to share partially what a Tahoe experience was like then, as so many transitory lives do not have that perspective, nor apparently do they do now.

Today’s perspective has not gotten any better, as the word “abysmal” has come into play several times.

But adjustments can be made to shift to higher quality, if the now-seen gap can be creatively fulfilled.

The following comments will refer to basically two errant directions, both related to Tahoe South’s implied direction of Tahoe’s viable and vital experiences for our visitor-based economy. The first would be the current revival of the idea that we are to become “America’s All-year Playground”, the slogan that accompanied the time-span of SLT’s incorporation period in 1965, which ongoing earnest efforts of many young local staffs now suggest is going to happen – the new trail extensions, the new bicycle facilities, the continued mapping of our extensive trail network, even Vail’s corporate entry into summer activities complementary to “iffy” winter prospects, are all suggestive of fulfillment of that professed desire.

Problem is, most of the current visitor-based emphasis is on hanging around the largest provided venue for them, Heavenly Village, as a majority never venture very far away, like outbound for other activities in the area, relying once again on mostly a day-tripper crowd, a lot of whom are never seen downtown at all, and vice-versa. Marriott has some 4,000 locations around the world, Tahoe being but one of those that might be chosen to visit, so I believe it is Tahoe's earlier known cachet that is the attraction, but it may not end up to be too fruitful in building a newer clientele unless new marketing strategies are deployed to fill the gaps.

It would appear that most visitors there want to be associated with Tahoe, but are not really experiencing it in its fuller versions or glory, in spite of what outgoing surveys might indicate.

After all, it is all of us that are here that are to know the difference, and by all accounts we do not.

That would lead to item No. 2, the current situations associated with our casino corridor, still thought to be our "core" of economic activity, at the very least in their opinion – two of the most prominent, closest to the California-Nevada state line, with entrepreneurial pedigrees unique to Lake Tahoe, and the other two, with a more variegated background, in spite of their long-standing traditional family connection.

Noting that Nevada proper has a very slight improvement in gaming revenues throughout the state, Stateline's were nevertheless down over 6 percent, which suggests that either the addition of a fourth entity did nothing to stimulate an increase in market share to cover another third (33 percent) addition to the real estate, or that, in spite of a promotional "splash", any new clientele were not satisfied or impressed.

That latter comment is worthy of a fuller look, as interactions I have had suggest that unless the service accompanies the new digs, the outlook for much repeat business is not too good, as “satisfaction will not bring them back,” as the 9-lives scenario hopes.

Combine that, for now, with the previous category idea of underutilized recreational facilities that local folks will most certainly enjoy, but which won’t do much to increase the tax base or revenue streams, then the significance of a marketing void becomes all the more apparent. The “need to grow up” includes knowing what steps to take that may overcome what “adolescent” tendencies need to be changed.

As my schedule is very flexible, yet includes a significant background here, I meet people from all over the world, as we all can and do, but I ask them of their experiences, from a perspective of knowing what questions to ask, which quite often require more than an “I’m fine” response to “How are you ?”

The most recent one was a young professional woman from Tasmania, whose friends in Reno and she decided that after conducting her business in Colorado, then to Nevada, that they wanted something different, exciting, and fun, so they chose coming up from Reno to stay at our newest venture, which promised the adjectives above – but when she can report that they were sorry they did that – that from the valet parking, to the front desk, to the bellman, to the wait for the entrée, when they wanted to go have the fun promised, it became quickly apparent that it was not to be delivered.

That prompted from a young, sophisticated global traveler a conclusion that the experience was “abysmal”, a descriptive word used in the English-speaking world, but not in any way as PR spin.

Unfortunately for Tahoe in this seemingly isolated and

particular case, this has been too often mirrored these days regardless of the specific location, which of course has nothing to do with the creation of the original Tahoe cachet still reflected in the four, five, and six-color brochures touting the exciting and beautiful happenings to be had here.

The honest and sincere attempts at identifying ourselves from the recent past will not be fully realized, nor will our planned success in redeveloping our economic infrastructure, if all these efforts are not combined with the realization that our visitors are not just responsible for the jobs we have, but also serve as opportunities to improve our own attitudes about the experiences they expect and deserve while they're here, and that staff's management organize themselves in such a way to allow the staff to bring that experience to fruition.

Bottom-line issues simply cannot intrude into understaffing and undertraining – that only contributes to what is known in the human resource field as "survival-hiring" – having too many slots to fill with the closest warm-body, as the time is not devoted to training them adequately and appropriately for the tasks they were chosen to do. With that, the term "turnstile" comes to mind.

After all, the reminder is that "service" is the only product we have, as we have no factories to produce it, just our presence in their experience of visiting here.

Nothing contributes to a "buzz kill" quicker than to encounter someone not happy or content in their position – that resonates far beyond the actual time spent in the encounter, by either side – and now, the farthest reaches of the globe don't have a spokesperson for Lake Tahoe, including Mauritius, another resort community in the middle of the Indian Ocean … the conversation previous to the one mentioned above, as the word used then was "dismal", another word not often chosen by professionals.

Of course, we won’t see those words in any brochure – while the experience itself gains steam all over.

Tahoe need not be part of a “picture-postcard mentality”, unless we want to end up thinking of ourselves as just another “pretty face”, as, trust me, there are plenty of them around the entire globe.

Until that realization hits home, the glass doesn’t just remain half-full, but will stay half-empty.

Garry Bowen has more than a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health. He may be reached at tahoefutureforum@gmail.com.

Opinion: United approach benefits Lake Tahoe

By Casey Beyer

History shows time and time again our greatest accomplishments at Lake Tahoe are achieved when people work together. In the past, Tahoe was known as a place where unproductive interactions between stakeholders led to a stunning decay in our environment and our economic vitality, creating a region that seemed frozen in time.

We face major environmental challenges at Tahoe, including the uncertainties of climate change. And as Albert Einstein said, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”



Casey Beyer

Fortunately, today, we have a strong and broad coalition of people who are working to meet those challenges head on. We must remember the lessons from our past and focus on working together and finding innovative solutions to achieve our next greatest accomplishments.

One recent example of people working together is the volunteer beach cleanups organized to pick up more than 2 tons of trash left behind by July 4 crowds.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe organized more than 300 volunteers who took time out of their own holiday weekends to pick up 1,800 pounds of trash carelessly left on our beaches. Similar efforts were undertaken by K&K Services, Clean Tahoe, and no doubt by many others. These volunteers deserve our thanks for stepping up to keep our environment and communities free of litter.

But keeping people from littering in the first place is another way to address this problem. Tahoe Fund, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, and dozens of other agencies, nonprofit groups, and businesses teamed up to create the innovative Take Care campaign. We have created an outreach campaign that aims to improve environmental awareness and stewardship among our visitors and residents and prevent such messes.

Take Care messages and graphics are available for free online. TRPA encourages people to use them every way possible. The colorful and creative messages are a subtle way to remind

people that we all have a role to take better care of Tahoe by doing simple things such as properly disposing of our trash, preventing wildfires, stopping the spread of invasive species, and cleaning up after our pets.

At the state level, California and Nevada leaders are more committed than ever to finding solutions to vexing issues by working hand-in-hand. As Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., said, “If Nevadans and Californians can all agree upon one issue, it is the protection of Lake Tahoe.”

In a renewed spirit of cooperation, both states approved significant budget enhancements this year to provide sustainable funding for Tahoe’s boat inspection program. TRPA, in collaboration with 40 partner agencies and nonprofits, manages the inspection program. It has successfully prevented the introduction of any new aquatic invasive species and has become a national model for other parts of the country looking for ways to stop invasive species.

Leaders at the federal level also remain key partners at Tahoe. This month, our bi-state delegation in the Senate introduced the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2015. Introduced by Sens. Dean Heller, Harry Reid, D-Nev., Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., this bipartisan legislation is a comprehensive approach to continued environmental restoration at Tahoe, authorizing up to $415 million over 10 years.

Colleagues in the House of Representatives also are working on a version of the bill. Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, this week had a committee hearing on draft legislation he is preparing.

The legislation introduced in the Senate would continue the federal government’s investment in critical projects at Tahoe to improve forest health, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, combat aquatic invasive species, reduce storm water

pollution, improve water quality, restore mid-lake clarity, and continue reintroduction of the native Lahontan cutthroat trout.

This federal funding would give a substantial boost to our Lake Tahoe environmental improvement program, providing funding to leverage with local government, state, and private sector funding to complete our region's highest-priority environmental restoration projects. More than 50 government, nonprofit, and private sector partners have made significant progress working together through the EIP, which is recognized as one of our country's most ambitious and successful environmental restoration programs.

Almost 445 projects completed through the EIP have halted Tahoe's long-running decline in water clarity, improved storm water collection and treatment on 674 miles of roads, cleared hazardous fuels from 55,690 acres of forest, restored nearly 16,000 acres of wildlife habitat, opened 2,579 feet of additional shoreline for public access, and built 137 miles of new bike and pedestrian routes. That is progress we can all be proud of, and progress we need to continue.

We are fortunate to have such an amazing array of individuals and groups who care deeply about Tahoe's future and are committed to working together to preserve and restore our environment and revitalize our communities. Strengthening and building upon that culture of partnership and collaboration is a top priority for TRPA, and it is how we will best meet the challenges that lay ahead. Please join us in that effort by being active and engaged, and by sharing your energy and creativity to help us all work together toward common solutions.

Casey Beyer is chair of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board.

Opinion: Most U.S. immigrants from China

By Erika Lee

Once singled out for exclusion by law from the United States, Chinese immigrants now make up the largest single group of arrivals a year into this country. The Census Bureau says China replaced Mexico as the top country of origin for immigrants to the U.S. in 2013.

Given the history, this growth – and the fact that Chinese immigrants are considered part of the Asian American "model minority" – seems improbable. But the story of Chinese immigration, past and present reminds how fickle our attitudes about immigrants can prove.

Although many of today's Chinese immigrants are students and investors, earlier Chinese immigrants were considered the lowest of the low skilled. Chinese sailors were among the crew on a ship that arrived in Baltimore in 1784. Chinese immigrants were living in New York City in the 1830s. And Chinese were among the thousands of gold seekers who rushed into California during the Gold Rush in the mid-19th century. By 1870, there were 64,000 Chinese in the United States, most of them in California, and almost all of them from the Pearl River Delta outside Guangzhou in southern China.

These Chinese immigrants faced a tremendous hostility, despite amounting to only a small fraction of the total foreign-born population in the United States in the late 19th century. They were charged with taking away jobs, corrupting white women, and threatening American civilization. In 1882, the U.S. passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred Chinese

laborers, prohibited all Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens, and allowed only select classes of Chinese to apply for admission.

While the act was in effect – from 1882 to 1943 – Chinese immigrants became America's first "illegal" immigrants. Chinese immigration drastically dropped, though it never totally stopped. Many of those who came resorted to false papers (like my grandfather). Those who arrived in San Francisco faced harsh interrogations, humiliating medical examinations, and long detentions in the unsanitary barracks on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay.

In the past 50 years, Chinese immigration has undergone a dramatic transformation. The 1965 Immigration Act ended national origins quotas favoring immigration from Europe over other parts of the world; it also established preferences for professional and skilled workers. At the same time, China's subsequent economic modernization and global outlook revived and diversified the flow of immigration from China.

In 1960, there were just less than 100,000 Chinese-born immigrants in the United States. In 2010, the Census reported over 3.3 million adult Chinese-Americans. As of that year, Chinese Americans had higher median annual personal earnings than the general U.S. population.

While Chinese immigrants may not be scrutinized in the same way that undocumented low-skilled Mexican immigrants are, it would be wrong to assume that America has fully embraced Chinese and other Asian immigrants. Some Americans resent having to go to a doctor who has a foreign accent, for example, or having their kids compete with talented foreign-born (and second generation Asian-American) students for college admissions or jobs.

There could be even more resentment if China's national wealth and strength becomes more pronounced, and more explicitly

opposed to American interests. This country has often treated immigrants unfairly based on the actions of their countries of origin. In 1999, Chinese-American scientist Wen Ho Lee was unfairly accused of spying for the People's Republic of China. Could there be more episodes like this in the near future?

As Chinese immigrants have gone from being the most excluded immigrants to the most numerous, we should recognize what has changed and what has not. Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Americans are growing in number. They are often held up as America's "good" immigrants. But they and other Asian Americans remain vulnerable to anxieties, economic shifts and political struggles. How far have Chinese Americans really risen? And during a time of increasing xenophobia and concern about a newly powerful China worldwide, how easily might they fall?

Erika Lee is a historian and writer and director of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. Her most recent book, "The Making of Asian America: A History" will be published in September. She wrote this for What It Means to Be American a national conversation hosted by the Smithsonian and Zocalo Public Square.

Letter: Spike in SLT sign permit fee a mistake

Publisher's note: ***This letter was sent to the South Lake Tahoe City Council and is reprinted with permission.***

To the community,

Landscaping and signs are to a community what icing is to a

cake. It’s the pretty stuff on top, the colorful thing that makes it inviting. You can have the most delicious chocolate cake, but if you frost it with ugly, nobody’s gonna want to eat it.

I just learned that a sign permit went from $235 to $878 – darn near a 400 percent increase. This degree of increase should require a little notice, maybe a warning or grace period, don’t you think? Seriously, there are only four sign shops in town, you could have sent a note.

Whether you know it or not, I, along with our other local sign professionals, spend a tremendous amount of time explaining the ins and outs of your sign ordinance. I patiently and repeatedly let business and property owners know the importance of maintaining the beauty and consistency of signs – because signs are the icing on our cake. I back you guys up every single day. I don’t really enjoy it or get paid for it, but treat it as though it is part of my job, however, I will not steal for you.

The $878 for a sign permit is wrong, really wrong, so is waiting six to eight weeks for a permit that should be stamped, initialed and completed over the counter, on the same day. No one is going to get permits for their signs now, not when, for example, a $200 sign will end up costing over a thousand dollars.

Increasing this permit fee by 400 percent simply makes it impossible to get people to comply with the ordinance, not to mention they will start throwing up ugly signs again. This is a “get rich quick” consultant idea, one that would never have come from a qualified business person, and it will backfire, just like it did years ago.

Perhaps you don’t remember? We were selling signs, getting our permits, the city was making money from permit fees, businesses were cooperating and you guys had photos and

records of all signs, thereby enforcing your own sign ordinance. Then, just like now, the city brings in an outside consultant, increases the cost of sign permits to $600, nobody got permits, the city got plastered with illegal signs, our town looked awful and the city could not control the sign clutter.

It’s taken years to correct this problem and now you’re doing it again. Need I remind this council that the city had to reduce the sign permit fee back to its original cost in order to get control again?

Mass quantities of ugly signs make a community look cheap and blighted. Drive through any impoverished area and it will be smothered with signs. Paper “$15 Rooms” signs, reader boards, A-frames and tattered old banners everywhere, all things that are prohibited under our current sign ordinance. Right now, this town, this City Council, has spent gazillions of hours and dollars on beautifying the scenic corridor, organizing and funding lots of wonderful projects, only to turn around and throw away the power to protect what you’ve invested in.

Please reconsider this permit fee. It is out of line and ultimately not good for the community.

Angela Olson, Angie’s Signs