Opinion: EDC uses seniors to cut budget

By Larry Weitzman

"We've got major budget issues. I'd feel much better getting all those other things to a committee and make sure we get multiple minds on this and develop a plan, a prioritized plan and the 15-16 (fiscal year budget) deficit is the target. And I understand it. I have seen deficits all my career tied to the county. But we have to be very real about it and we have to start addressing it now. Not six months from now, not a month from now. Now," said Brian Veerkamp, El Dorado County District III supervisor.

That statement took place at 5:40pm at the Sept. 23, 2014, meeting of the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors during a discussion of the $100 million plus deficit facing EDC over the next five years.

Larry Weitzman

In light of that, the BOS created an ad hoc budget committee comprising Veerkamp, Supervisor Shiva Frentzen, and other county officials including Laura Schwartz, County Auditor Joe Harn and CAO Pamela Knorr, plus two members of the public and other interested parties from the public. What was supposed to be a committee to recommend actual budget cuts and methods to arrive at those cuts turned into a budget policy forum.

Paul Freeman, a retired manufacturing manager, applied for the job as a public member on the basis of the published notice which clearly described the function of the committee as follows: “This committee will provide recommendations to the BOS regarding funding sources and expenditures of funds.”

In the seven months since the committee formation not one spending cut recommendation has been made. Not even one analysis of what caused the excess spending was initiated. Meanwhile, the county spent $10 million of savings. Based on county revenue, it spent $10 million more than it took in and that $1.3 million monthly bleed continues as I write this column.

What the committee did produce in those half a dozen or more meetings was a 10-point page and a half draft memo of government speak entitled El Dorado County Draft Budget Policies. That idea occurred early on in the process and was directed by Knorr, the county CAO, who ended up missing the final meetings. And this Jan 12 ad hoc budget committee occurred six days after Knorr told the BOS at a regular meeting of the BOS, “Your real need is to stop spending.” It looks like she didn’t mean it. The county is burning through cash like a battleship of drunken sailors who haven’t set foot on land in nine months. And Knorr wants to write a memo of government speak. When any suggestion or discussion of a budget cut was attempted it was shoved aside. Even Supervisor Frentzen who so desperately wanted to analyze the last three years of county hiring was totally shut out by Veerkamp and the CAO.

Freeman was disappointed, to say the least, and has become fearful for the taxpayers of this county, especially seniors. The CAO fiddles, the BOS majority (i.e. excluding Ron Mikulaco and Frentzen), are enjoying the music while EDC bank accounts burn to the ground.

Making matters worse, at the last ad hoc committee meeting where Veerkamp served as de facto chairman, he remarked that that he felt that the committee was assembled to develop budget policies to be followed in the future and he essentially reaffirmed that during the last BOS meeting. Would that qualify Veerkamp as a flip-flopper or just a budget wimp? “I will gladly pay you tomorrow for a hamburger today.”

Why is all this important? Fast forward to the special BOS budget meeting of April 15. The purpose was to work on the budget. Fifteen minutes before the meeting Knorr dropped a 39-page budget package on the supervisors, who had no chance to read or study it. It turns out Knorr has a history of preparing documents and not giving them to a BOS until just before the meeting. Without time and study (and it would take a day to absorb these 39 pages), Knorr knows the BOS will not be up to speed and not understand what she is proposing, Supervisor Frentzen made a remark to that effect. It’s difficult to ask questions if you don’t understand the material. And nowhere in this document are there credible spending cuts to solve the budget problem which was caused by excess hiring and spending over the last three years. The 39 pages were mostly a government-speak PowerPoint.

However, in the 39 pages are significant cuts to senior programs which were characterized by Supervisor Veerkamp as “chump change” and would save EDC almost no money, in the tens of thousands of dollars instead of the necessary $10 million to $20 million. For instance, Knorr wants to save $13,200 and cancel the highly beneficial Perks Court program. Knorr wants to eliminate Senior Day Care and Knorr wants the eliminate the senior meals programs, programs that use a few thousand dollars of EDC seed money with most of the costs picked up by volunteers and in-kind donations. These programs aren’t solely about food, but keeping seniors active, healthy and participating in society. It’s those programs that will suffer under the Knorr scalpel. That should be considered ineffective elective surgery. Medical malpractice.

Knorr in her government-speak style says she is going to cut two positions in her office. But these are vacant positions upon which no money is spent, therefore the savings are fictitious. Yet Knorr is maintaining almost all of the humongous growth of the CAO's office which on new analysts alone we spend almost $2 million annually. None of those analysts even existed two and a half years ago when the county ran just fine with a small surplus. It was part of the massive new hiring (exacerbated by huge raises) of former CAO Terri Daly that caused this budget debacle. The only significant change in county spending is county salary and benefits that have grown by $38 million over the last two years, almost the exact amount of the growing budget deficit that started two years ago. Revenues and other county expenses have remained reasonably constant.

At the April 28 BOS meeting Supervisors Frentzen and Mikulaco appeared upset with the budget process especially when CAO Knorr tried to usurp the BOS power by reciting EDC County Charter section 304C which says the CAO is to "recommend an annual budget …." Knorr continued by saying, "I do the budget and you get to modify it." She went on to say effectively she doesn't have to listen to the ad hoc budget committee effectively pooh-poohing its importance and use. County counsel went on to back Knorr, saying that this should be the process (Knorr's interpretation) and it is in compliance with the EDC Charter and that's the governance level of the structure. They all forgot a more important Charter provision about listening to what the BOS has to say regarding following their directions and that is section 202 (a) (2) which says, "The BOS shall: (2) Appoint or remove the CAO. "

Something else was said by Veerkamp that was incorrect was when he said Mikulaco and he share some responsibility for this budget problem (as it happened last year). Absolutely incorrect. Both Supervisors Mikulaco and Frentzen voted against the current budget. It was Veerkamp, Norma Santiago and Ron Briggs who voted for it.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Letter: Time for Meyers to unite

To the community,

We do not have our elected leaders’ voice at the Board of Supervisors:

As you may have heard by now, our new (El Dorado Count)y supervisor, Sue Novasel, cannot vote on, nor participate in planning for the new Meyers Area Plan. First, we respect Sue. She’s a hard-working woman who clearly cares for her community. However, with the county’s legal opinion that she cannot participate due to a conflict of interest, our community has been left without an elected vote on the plan. Yes, a second opinion is being requested from the state, but this takes time.

This is unsettling to say the least. Worse yet, this comes after many community volunteers have spent over a year trying to slow the fast-moving TRPA and El Dorado County train down so that the Meyers community has the chance – through a transparent, inclusive, and clear process – to develop the plan for our own future that is based on the desires of area residents, not TRPA nor special land speculator’s interests. We had high hopes that our new supervisor could help ensure the kind of process our community deserves. Now, we have an appointed supervisor from another district who comes from downtown Placerville, not Meyers.

The planning process is flawed, undemocratic, and not inclusive. So what do we do now?

That's the big question. The last thing anyone wants is a repeat of the county's 2014 process, whereby TRPA and the county present a spruced-up "dog and pony" show at yet another community workshop intended to impress but lacking clear and transparent information regarding the changes TRPA wants to impose on Meyers. Nor does anyone want to see the community's input tossed out the window (again) by a Planning Commission unfamiliar with Meyers and the poor planning process we've dealt with to date.

There is a better way to plan for Meyers' future.

We believe we can still turn this around. We have an opportunity to decide our own future. In fact, our neighbors at the Y in the city of South Lake Tahoe have recently given us a reason to be optimistic – the South Lake Tahoe community stood up to TRPA, and through a well-informed process led by city staff, citizens were able to define the future they want – not what TRPA imposed on them. As a result, the draft Tahoe Valley Area Plan (the "Y" Area Plan) has been modified and scaled down from the increases imposed by TRPA's 2012 Regional Plan update. For example, the 56-foot height (four stories) prescribed by TRPA for the entire "town center" (most of the Y area) was reduced. In another example, TRPA's "one-size-fits-all" town center approach was divided into five districts to recognize the unique qualities throughout the area. Notably the 1993 Meyers Plan included four districts in "downtown Meyers" before TRPA's Plan lumped them all into one "town center." We have wondered if the SLT community can choose unique districts and height, why has there been so much resistance to the Meyers community doing the same?

We have also heard positive comments from numerous members of the public regarding the city's public outreach; rather than spouting off numbers and presenting charts, staff brought pictures to workshops and asked the public to voice opinions; thus giving people the chance to express what they wanted without having to first take an LTCC class in land use planning.

The entire Meyers Community, not outside special interests, must decide what is contained in any new Meyers Plan.

Meyers can still take charge of planning for our own future. But, the community volunteers need your help. The County has scheduled another public workshop for the Meyers Area Plan update for May 6 from 5:30-7:30pm at the magnet school in Meyers, 1095 East San Bernardino Ave.

We need you to attend and speak up. Demand a clear and transparent process and one that includes the entire Meyers community. Tell the agencies what you want to see for Meyer’s future. Make a fuss and don’t put up with another “dog and pony show.” If our community does not rally to this effort, we will be pushed aside by TRPA, county representatives from outside the basin, and NV-side development interests (e.g. Stateline’s Tahoe Chamber) and left with TRPA’s plan for the future of Meyers. From what we’ve heard from the community so far, their vision for the future of Meyers is a far cry from the interests of those of us who have made the Meyers area our home. TRPA does not represent Meyers, and the only board member that has lived and worked in Meyers had to recuse herself from the Meyers Plan update.

Meyers community members can make a difference if you get involved.

Some food for thought: Lack of involvement and complacency allowed TRPA to push their plans on us over two years ago without most of us knowing it. If we don’t get involved now, we will remain vulnerable to TRPA’s plan for Meyers. So, we can sit back and be upset about the inability of our elected representative to participate in our plan update, or we can take action and demand that the new plan represents what we want to see for Meyers. Let the other El Dorado County Board members know that we don’t want TRPA’s plan for Meyers — we want our own. Please join us on May 6 and be ready to be heard.

Sincerely,

Joe Cardinale, Angie Olson, Jennifer Quashnick, Moya Sanders, Rebecca Schwartz and Diane Verwoest

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Letter: Chamber mixer a success

To the community,

South Shore community members felt the need for speed networking on April 30 at Lucky Beaver Bar & Burger. Attendees participated in speed networking rounds resulting in new business connections during Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce’s Need for Speed Networking Business After Hours Mixer. The speed networking rounds enabled attendees to easily meet new people and learn more about their partner’s local business.

Thank you to Lucky Beaver Bar & Burger for hosting and to all of the community members that helped to make this event such a success. The next BAHM is May 28 at Round Hill Pines Resort in Zephyr Cove.

Shannon Earley, chamber communications coordinator

Letter: USFS helps serve food

To the community,

The employees of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit were the evening’s Adopt A Day of Nourishment sponsors for the meal served by Bread & Broth on April 27.

Through their Wellness, Recreation and Morale committee, the local U.S. Forest Service employees donated the funds during events held last December to cover the $250 donation needed to host an Adopt A Day.

As an all volunteer, nonprofit organization Bread & Bread truly appreciates that the our local Forest Service employees have donated so generously due to their concerns about those who struggle with hunger in our Lake Tahoe South Shore community. With the funds raised by the Forest Service employees, B&B was able to provide all of the food, supplies and utilities needed to serve over 120 meals and “to go” containers.

Helping the B&B volunteers at the dinner were Forest Service employees Karen Kuentz, Jordan Burge, Melraine Johnson, Tom Fuller and Katie Kuchenbecker. With input from his fellow sponsor crew members, Fuller wrote, “The Wellness, Recreation and Morale Committee of the LTBMU were happy to support B&B with both our time and funds raised by our fellow employees. We enjoyed the opportunity to help serve our community.”

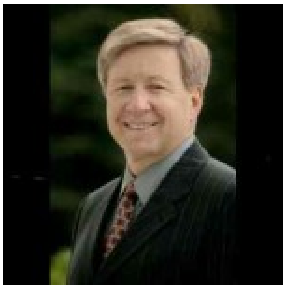
Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: The fire fee shell game

By George Runner

Democrats in the California Legislature seem to be facing the reality that the fire tax they passed with the governor's help in 2011 is unfair. Californians who live in rural areas rely on a range of public services from multiple levels of government to combat fires. These residents already pay taxes to fund essential fire services.

The original fire fee was a scheme Gov. Jerry Brown came up with after diverting about $90 million a year in fire prevention funds to help "balance" the state budget. Residents have gained nothing since this shell game passed. Not a dime of fire fee revenues can be used for actual fire suppression – trucks, planes or hoses. The funds can only be used for "prevention" efforts, which seem to be few and far between.



George Runner

However, instead of simply repealing this onerous fire prevention fee, Democrats now want to replace a really bad policy with an even worse one.

AB1203, authored by Assemblyman Reggie Jones-Sawyer, is currently awaiting consideration by the Legislature. The bill would repeal the fire fee but replace it with a 3 to 5 percent insurance surcharge on all commercial and residential property statewide. The money collected from this fee would then be used to create a disaster response fund in the state treasury.

Right now, this proposal is nothing more than a massive tax increase designed to further fund government bureaucracy. The current fire tax brings in about $80 million a year in revenue to the state coffers. If AB 1203 were to pass, that number could skyrocket to $500 million or more a year. That’s a colossal difference.

At a time when California is collecting record revenues, does Sacramento really need more of your money? For the month of March alone, revenues have come in $547 million higher than anticipated by the governor’s budget.

Based on a $1,000 premium, a small-business owner could end up paying tens of thousands of dollars more for insurance. And if you’re a residential property owner, you’d get hit with an insurance surcharge as well.

Why should Californians have to purchase additional insurance for something their tax dollars should already guarantee? Imagine having to purchase a crime insurance policy to ensure that local and state police respond to your 911 calls – that wouldn’t be effective or fair public policy, and neither is AB1203.

Protecting Californians shouldn’t require new taxes or fees; public safety should be first, not last, in line for spending existing public dollars. If the state’s emergency readiness lacks adequate funding, California needs to do a better job prioritizing the more than $100 billion in taxes that taxpayers are currently sending to Sacramento each year.

Jones-Sawyer’s legislation requires a two-thirds vote. I hope Democrats and Republicans will oppose this new tax proposal. It’s hard to imagine why the Legislature would replace a bad policy with an even worse one. Sadly, though, stranger things have happened in Sacramento.

The Legislature should repeal California’s illegal fire tax not replace it with a massive insurance scheme that will make life even more costly for Californians.

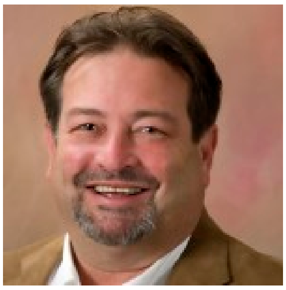
George Runner represents more than 9 million Californians as a taxpayer advocate and elected member of the State Board of Equalization where he serves as vice chair.

Letter: SLT needs to rethink motel ordinance

Publisher’s note: ***This letter was sent to the South Lake Tahoe City Council and is reprinted upon request.***

Honorable City Manager and City Council,

I am writing to you out of concern about the possible new ordinance regarding motel housing. In the past six years I have been involved with working for and advising various properties. The seven different properties opened my eyes to a separate part of our community that goes mostly unnoticed.



Duane Wallace

This part of the permanent housing fills a need for very low cost housing. The renters can be single moms who for a variety of reasons are barely getting by. They can be elderly people who are on a small fixed income or who have health issues that take a large portion of their income. Unfortunately, some of the people who occupy these rooms are mired in drugs and alcohol habits that eat up their money. But many of these have children who need clothing, shoes and a decent meal. In any case these units are all these people can afford as they bounce in and out of homelessness.

I can see why there is concern for the condition of the properties. There ought to be a minimum health and safety condition. There are human beings occupying these properties. As I have managed these properties or advised the owners, I have actually seen little communities form as the occupants babysit each other’s children or share cars. They often help each other ending up working for the same businesses. It is not the type of housing they want or the type of housing we would live in but it is what they can afford. It is all they can afford. As a substitute teacher and a former Boys & Girls Club executive director I have seen how many children are housed in these month to month motels. If it weren’t for the Kiwanis, Christmas Cheer and other groups they wouldn’t even have suitable coats for winter or shoes.

My concern is that in the zeal to drastically raise the minimum standards that element of the housing mix will either be greatly reduced or completely eliminated. The residents are not an empowered group who will show up at a Council meeting to complain about the poor conditions. They may also not speak up as you possibly take away their only available place to live. They will simply become homeless.

There certainly are motel owners who don’t fix up their properties. And they certainly have health and safety issues. There is a feeling that they should be punished. However, as the various agencies in our County add ordinance after ordinance the residents are getting punished rather than the owners. Jobs are bleeding away to other places. On a macro level, states like Texas are reducing fees and laws while we do the opposite. As an elected person myself, I am pushing for reduced connection fees even as our utility is being forced by state mandates to do things that financially hurt businesses and residents. As a result of TRPA and strict building ordinances and high costs from the city and county who have followed suit, the motels here have become a literal museum of the 1960s. The only customer they are suitable for is for month to month housing. These agencies are dealing with market forces that it appears they do not understand. Until job creation and business advocacy becomes the primary objective there will be a need for the housing type that the old motels provide. Eliminating the motels won't eliminate the need for housing. Only increased opportunities for work will do that. A comprehensive economic development plan should be implemented first. Maybe it is time for an economic summit that includes every aspect of our town. That of course includes tourism that is often reactive and creates secondary jobs but also retail, government and education as we jointly come up with a plan that creates primary jobs. We cannot legislate prosperity but if we are not careful we can legislate poverty.

My request as a citizen is for the council to set reasonable standards but to also create graduated improvement schedules that do not hurt the very families you would like to protect. By making draconian regulations the motels will either become mini black holes or be fixed up to a level that leaves these lower income community members with no place to live.

Sincerely,

Duane Wallace, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Locals Taking Action – Connecting the drops

By Rebecca Bryson

I don't know if you've felt it lately, but there is a lot of positive energy in Tahoe lately. Locals are saying "we want this" and then taking the steps to make it happen. It's coming from the leadership, but even more important, it's coming from the people who live here.

We have achieved much, from the proposed Bijou bike park, greenhouses, domes, gardens, and nutrition programs in our elementary schools, and the largely volunteer built, world-class Corral mountain bike trail project. These projects are important to the people of Tahoe and to our future as a strong, vibrant community.

This column – Locals Taking Action – will highlight examples of locals taking positive action in our community and offer steps – large and small – that all of us can also take to contribute to this transformation. Locals Taking Action allows us to tip our hats and learn from those in the basin who are actively making a difference in our community.

Our first set of articles will focus on water and energy saving initiatives. Why? Because water and energy work together. If you've been reading the news, you know that South Tahoe Public Utility District – which ultimately means us, as the community – will be required to cut its water use by the percentage identified in the state Water Resources Control Board conservation standard, currently listed at 28 percent.

Fortunately, STPUD already has some programs in place that we can take advantage of in short order. STPUD is once again offering the Turf Buy Back Program to eligible applicants. Do you have to eliminate all of your beautiful grass? No. The rebate just requires that a minimum of 400 square feet of lawn be replaced. With our dry winter, some of your grass has probably already died. Now is the time to eliminate or downsize your lawn – t o not only save water, but also make your life easier, as native plants or nonliving groundcover require much less maintenance and water. Funds are limited, so contact STPUD as soon as possible to get on the program waiting list.

STPUD also offers rebates to upgrade residential and commercial appliances, including toilets, clothes washers, and water efficient fixtures. You can receive a rebate of up to $100 for the installation of a high efficiency toilet, and $200 for the installation of a new high efficiency clothes washer, significantly reducing the replacement cost. Isn’t it time you opted for a new toilet or washer that is easier on the environment? Contact Donielle Morse at dmorse@stpud.dst.ca.us or 530.543.6268 to sign up for a rebate and/or a free Water Wise House Call assessment. There will be a Turf Buy Back workshop on May 6 at 6pm at STPUD’s board room, 1275 Meadow Crest Drive in South Lake Tahoe.

In this time of drought, we need to be mindful of not only our water consumption, but our energy consumption as well. Using water also affects the amount of energy we burn. In Tahoe, we expend 15 million kilowatt-hours per year to transport our wastewater up over mountain passes and out of the basin. This costs almost $1.5 million per year. Any water savings you can achieve also saves our community from excess energy costs.

Since water and energy are linked together, use of one affects the other. Massive amounts of water are used to cool the power plants that generate our electricity. So every time you turn on your computer, television or lights, water is being used. According to research, one light bulb left on 12 hours a day for a year uses 3,000 to 6,000 gallons of water at the power plant. Based on these calculations, replacing one frequently used incandescent light bulb with a CFL bulb can save not only 60 to 70 percent in energy costs, but also between 2,000 to 4,000 gallons of water a year. LEDs can save even more.

Think about how many places in businesses, schools, and even in your own house where lights are being left on all day – even in these long days of sunlight. Turn off all lights and equipment when you are not using them. And sign up for one of Liberty Utilities free home energy audits. As part of the audit, they provide free LED and CFL lights as well as water conserving showerheads. Contact Liberty Utilities at 800.782.2506 Monday-Friday, 8am to 5pm.

Rebecca Bryson wrote this in collaboration with members of the Energy Water and Waste Workgroup of the Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative. The Collaborative is a group of more than 100 community members, business owners, agency representatives and nonprofit employees committed to supporting and accelerating the changes necessary to create a thriving, vibrant future for Lake Tahoe.

Next article: Illuminating changes at Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School.

Opinion: USFS still in search

of a mission

By Jim Furnish, High Country News

Perhaps Ken Burns had the right idea when he named his public-television series "The National Parks: America's Best Idea". Even though I worked for the Forest Service for 34 years, I'm inclined to agree with him about the importance of our nation's parks. But the national forests are surely our second-best idea, a priceless asset despite the call from some Westerners to sell off our forests and privatize them.

It is sad to admit that the battles over logging, grazing, mining and recreation fees have never stopped. Forests go up in smoke or fall prey to insect epidemics while critics complain about how ineffective and wayward the Forest Service has become. In some ways, it is the agency's own fault.

The Forest Service enjoyed broad support as a "can do" agency in the post-WWII logging era, but its glacial response to the environmental movement dried up a reservoir of legitimacy and trust and created huge problems, perhaps best exemplified by the spotted owl crisis in the Pacific Northwest. I recall vividly when a federal judge determined that agency officials had willfully broken endangered species laws in their determination to protect logging interests. As Orville Daniels, the former supervisor of the Lola National Forest, put it, the Forest Service had gone over to the "dark side."

The agency has found it difficult to right itself since then, and it still struggles to create a clear purpose and mission for the 21st century – one that resonates with the public it serves.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Immigration law's unrelenting heartbreak

By Rebekah Rodriguez-Lynn

On Nov. 20, 2014, President Obama gave a historic speech on immigration. Despite how profoundly personal this issue is to me, I didn't watch. For the past decade, I have avoided any mention of immigration reform — hearing or reading about it causes my stomach to churn.

The topic brings me back to a window in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, in 2004. The five minutes I spent there damaged my life irrevocably. With the swipe of a pen, a blank-faced clerk denied my husband's application for a marriage visa and shattered our family.

We had met four years earlier, working at a Mexican restaurant in a small town in Southern California. We fell in love, spending hours talking after the restaurant closed. He told me about how his mother had died when he was young, and his father descended into alcoholism. He and his nine brothers and sisters had to fend for themselves. He arrived in the U.S. at 17, finished high school, and got three jobs to support his younger siblings in Mexico. And because he had entered the country illegally, he did all this without documents.

We got married in 2002, then moved to Cambridge, Mass., so I could earn a master's degree at Harvard University. We had a beautiful baby boy. On the weekends, we'd go to the park and I would watch my husband do cartwheels for our giggling baby. At night, we would pile into the cheap black futon in our one-bedroom apartment. We were happy.

But we knew we couldn’t build a stable life for our son without regularizing my husband’s immigration status. So we applied for a marriage visa and, one year later, got an appointment at the American Consulate in Ciudad Juarez on April 17, 2004. At the time, anyone applying for a visa needed legal standing to receive an appointment inside the U.S.

So we flew to California, left our son with family, and hopped a bus to Ciudad Juarez. The morning of our appointment we found the waiting room of the American Consulate filled with couples like us.

The clerk called us to the window. My husband raised his right hand and promised to tell the truth. She only asked one question: Have you ever crossed illegally besides your initial entrance? Yes, he answered. He had returned to visit his ailing grandmother. The clerk informed us that my husband was barred from entering the United States for life. Can we appeal? No. She called the next couple.

I couldn’t care for a toddler alone while studying and working two jobs, so I left my son in Mexico, too. I returned home to an empty crib and an empty bed. I felt as though my limbs had been torn from my body. My family was gone. I found a top immigration lawyer who agreed to see me pro bono. He told me there was absolutely nothing he could do.

My husband had not broken any criminal laws. By visiting his grandmother, he had violated immigration regulations. For that, he was given a life sentence with no parole. My marriage seemed worthless in the eyes of the law – a law that left my innocent son with parents broken apart against their will.

Our justice system is weighted toward keeping families together. Children are often sent back to abusive homes on the principle of the sanctity of family. But this was not the case with my family. In my son’s eyes, his father is a superhero. Yet for over a decade now, my government has thrown up roadblock after roadblock to keep them apart.

Months later, I finally read Obama’s speech on immigration. His executive order prevents people from being deported if they have American children. It’s designed to protect kids like my son until Congress passes something more permanent. But a federal judge in Texas has put the executive order on hold; an appeals court heard oral arguments on April 17 and will rule soon, but the case may eventually go to the Supreme Court. In the meantime, I pray for a ruling that will keep other families from suffering as we have.

Rebekah Rodriguez-Lynn studied politics at UCLA and public policy at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. She lives in Southern California with her son and her Chihuahua. She wrote this for Thinking L.A., a partnership of UCLA and Zócalo Public Square.

Letter: Wyndham returns to B&B

To the community,

Wyndham Vacation Ownership hosted the mini Thanksgiving dinner served on April 20 by Bread & Broth. The diners enjoyed hot turkey sandwiches, mashed potatoes, stuffing, gravy and cranberry sauce.

The hearty meal was served by the spirited Wyndham team members Jacob Garcia, Matthew Rigdon, John Hutto and Ruby Garcia. B&B would like to thank Wyndham Vacation Ownership for sponsoring its second Adopt A Day of Nourishment in four weeks and sending another great team of volunteers.

“This overall is a wonderful experience,” said John Hutton. “Very fulfilling to the soul.”

As with all of the sponsor volunteer crews, working the serving line, hearing the genuine “thank yous” and experiencing the gratitude of those they are serving is a touching experience and fulfills a sense of community.

“The people of the community have so much need, and it is truly a pleasure to help fill that void (albeit small) that we can provide,” added Hutton. “Thank you so much for the opportunity. We would love to do this again soon.”

B&B appreciates all of the help and support that it receives from Wyndham Vacation Ownership and their very community minded employees. To help B&B as a donor or sponsor, contact me at 530.542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth