Editorial: Brown's lame response to drought

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the March 23, 2015, San Jose Mercury News.***

California is in a drought of historic proportions with no end in sight. Scientists and political leaders, including Gov. Jerry Brown, agree. The governor called an official state of emergency way back in January 2014 – but you wouldn't know it from his actions since.

Lame doesn't begin to describe Brown's failure to show leadership on this threat to the state's long-range future that's easily as dire as the massive budget deficit he inherited in 2011.

For example: A governor who was serious about conservation would be offering tens of millions of dollars in incentives to urban water users to replace water-wasting toilets, shower heads, dishwashers and washing machines with state-of-the-art, low-flow products.

Instead, Brown's Water Resources Control Board is requiring restaurants to fill customers' water glasses only if they ask and telling hotels to offer guests only one towel during their stay unless they request a fresh one. Oh, the pain of sacrifice.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Tomorrow’s forecast scarier than today’s weather

By Joe Mathews, Zocalo Public Square

One of the little joys of being Californian is the opportunity to taunt folks back East about their terrible winter weather. Hey, Boston, how does it feel to have been colonized by Eskimos?

But this winter, we seem to be overdoing it, sending out a blizzard of social media postings of palm trees and blue skies. It’s enough to make you wonder if all our taunting merely masks our fears about our own weather.

Horror film directors will tell you that nothing is more frightening than what you can’t see. By that logic, California has never had a scarier winter than this one. Where is all the snow that should be in the mountains? How could San Francisco possibly go all of January without any rainfall? And what happened to the February frosts on cars, lawns, and rooftops that gave Angelenos something to talk about over their morning lattes?

The paradox of the California climate is that, precisely because we seem to have so little weather, the weather is more important here than just about anywhere else. According to a new poll, 69 percent of us say the climate is their favorite thing about living in California (and we love the weather more than we love our families). Our regional economies, our lifestyles, and our culture all rely on predictably pleasant weather. And so we are profoundly sensitive to slight changes in the weather. We talk ceaselessly about the variations in microclimates within our regions, and many of us can offer instant analysis on what we consider to be the vast differences between 77, 80, and 83 degrees.

This hypersensitivity is one big reason why Californians have taken climate change more seriously than people in other states. The threat is not merely to our coastline (sea levels could rise nearly 2 feet by 2100) or our water supplies but to our very sense of ourselves. It is unsettling to see one of our shared home's most fundamental and enduring advantages in flux.

Read the whole story

Letter: Harrah's-Harveys work at Bread & Broth

To the community,

On March 16, Bread & Broth's dinner guests got a double treat at the evening's dinner. In addition to a wonderful meal sponsored by Harrah's/Harveys HEROs, they were entertained by the musically and multi-instrumentally talented Todd Green. Thanks to the Tahoe Arts Project, Green played a wide range of musical instruments, which was thoroughly enjoyed by the diners throughout the evening event.

B&B was also very fortunate to have HEROs members Darlene Winkelman, John Guastella, Patrick Frega, Randall Sumner and Jacalyn Andrews volunteering to help the evening event go smoothly. With their help, the dinner guests received a warm welcome, heaping bags of food to take home and a hot, nutritious meal.

"It fills my heart with joy to serve those struggling with hunger in our community," said Winkelman after helping on the serving line.

HEROs, a Harrah's/Harveys employee based volunteer organization, is a frequent Adopt A Day sponsor and always sends a great volunteer crew. B&B would like to thank both the Caesars Entertainment for their financial donation and the HEROs' volunteer for donating their personal time to take the opportunity to help others.

Sumner summed up his take on his B&B experience, "I feel great after volunteering at B&B helping those less fortunate than myself. Plus, a great bike ride to St. Theresa Grace Hall = win-win. No brainer"

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Editorial: Restore protections in Voting Rights Act

Publisher's Note: This editorial is from the March 9, 2015, Los Angeles Times.

In his eloquent speech at the 50th anniversary of the march in Selma, Ala., President Obama did more than salute the men and women who braved "billy clubs and the chastening rod; tear gas and the trampling hoof" to demand the right to vote. He also exhorted Congress to honor their legacy by restoring protections of the Voting Rights Act that the Supreme Court stripped away almost two years ago.

Noting that some 100 members of Congress had come to Selma to commemorate the march, Obama said: "If we want to honor this day, let that hundred go back to Washington and gather four

hundred more, and together, pledge to make it their mission to restore that law this year. That’s how we honor those on this bridge.”

Yet, thanks largely to opposition from Republicans, prospects are poor for legislation that would restore a role for the federal government in combating racial discrimination in voting.

Read the whole story

Letter: Public should have input into dredging

To the community,

It has come to my attention that the homeowners in the Tahoe Keys area are planning to have their manmade lagoons dredged as early as this week because the drought is causing the water level to inhibit boat access. This isn’t right. The Keys have been an environmental nightmare since their beginnings – the beautiful marsh land was raped by developers and the unnatural keys cause silt to spread into Tahoe every time they are dredged.



Leona Allen

In addition, everything that is spilled onto the land in the Keys washes into the lake – fertilizer, car and boat oil, detergents, paint, and chemicals of every kind. So now, at a time when Tahoe becomes more sensitive with the drought, the homeowners want to dredge. This is an action that will be a detriment to the entire lake, and will only benefit a few of the boat-owning Tahoe Keys residents.

If you disagree with this, please make yourself heard. Permitting agencies include TRPA, Lahontan, and possibly the city of South Lake Tahoe. Which brings up another point – has the public had the opportunity to comment on this? I certainly would have been the first in line had I known of open meetings.

Tahoe native,

Leona Allen, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Nev. considers anti-LGBT legislation

By Stephen Peters

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBT civil rights organization, sounded the alarm on anti-LGBT legislation in Nevada – SB272 in the Senate and AB277 in the Assembly – that threatens jobs, the state economy, and undermines the state's civil rights laws. The legislation would allow people to use their religion to challenge or opt out of various laws, including state and local laws, that protect LGBT people and other minorities from discrimination.

“This legislation undermines the enforcement of state non-discrimination protections and will expose Nevada business owners to a wave of lawsuits,” said HRC National Field Director Marty Rouse. “It has the potential to cause serious harm to the business climate in the state, putting jobs at risk, and making major corporations think twice about investing in the state. To put it simply, this legislation threatens Nevada’s strong pro-business reputation.”

The legislation will bring harmful and unintended consequences to those who call Nevada home, inviting costly legal challenges and making the Silver State unwelcoming to both residents and visitors. Nearly 500,000 jobs and 29 percent of the state’s employment is a direct result of tourism to Nevada. Jeopardizing the state’s standing as one of the greatest places for people to live and visit, the harm this bill may cause doesn’t end with the LGBT community: an evangelical police officer could feel empowered to refuse to patrol a Jewish street festival; a city clerk could shirk the law and refuse a marriage license to an interracial couple, a divorcee seeking to remarry, or a lesbian couple; an EMT could claim the law is on his side after refusing service to a dying transgender person in the street; and the enforcement of other key sections of state civil rights law could be dramatically undermined.

Major corporations have spoken out strongly against similar bills in other states. In response to one such anti-LGBT bill threatening economic growth and business in Arkansas, both Apple and Wal-Mart spoke out in opposition to precisely this kind of legislation. And Wal-Mart and Apple are not alone. Last year, major multinational corporations including American Airlines, Marriott, PetSmart and many other companies came out against a similar bill in Arizona, concerned about how it would hurt their business and risk millions in economic activity if it became law.

The bill puts all state non-discrimination laws at risk of

being undermined. It threatens not just the LGBT community, but women, members of minority faiths and other minority classes.

Stephen Peters works for the Human Rights Campaign.

Letter: Ex-hotel employee documents tree removal



A tree in July 2014 is illegally removed from the Landing Resort. Photo/Isaac Walker

Publisher's note: ***This letter with photos and video (Landing Tree cutting July 2, 2014) was sent to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Lake Tahoe News on March 23 in regards to illegal tree removal at the Landing Resort.***

Video was shot from my cell phone, while I was the banquet manager (of the Landing Resort in South Lake Tahoe).

None of the management on site knew what was happening with

this particular tree. The day before the tree cutting the lift showed up. On the afternoon of July 2, 2014, Brent Truax, regional manager and second to Jim Demetriades, showed up and said we would need to close the patio that night. Just after 5pm, private contractors showed up and removed the tree, which was in front of the restaurant patio, and Jim's favorite room. This was in preparation for the Fourth, they were hoping for a better view of the fireworks!

I would love to see the trees go back in this spot.

Please let me know if you need any more information.

Thank you for your concern in this matter,

Isaac Walker

Opinion: EDC supes not balancing budget

By Larry Weitzman

Public Safety is the primary function of county governments. Before the expansion of governments 60 to 70 years ago, the sheriff's department was the majority of county spending. Currently in El Dorado County, the sheriff's department is about 20 percent of general fund spending. Other departments directly related to public safety are District Attorney, Public Defender and Probation, which is perhaps the least heralded but the most important public safety department.

It is a probation officer (with at least a bachelor's degree) who makes the sentencing recommendations of people convicted of crimes, which judges usually follow. A big responsibility.

Their combined (DA, PD and Probation) general fund budgets are about 10 percent of the general fund budget.



Larry Weitzman

With our current general fund budget out pacing revenues by about $20 million a year and growing, one would think the Board of Supervisors would look to find the cause and cure the problem by ridding EDC of these deficits which for the past two years are approaching $40 million combined. That would require a budget analysis to determine the cause. The county has burned through about $40 million of surpluses in the last two years. If spending were to continue at that rate, EDC would be out of money before the end of this calendar year. In the years before the deficits the county was running surpluses and had no debt.

What changed in general fund spending? It’s pretty simple. For four continuous years ending June 30, 2013, general fund salaries and benefits remained at a constant of approximately $118 million annually. In the following two years, salaries and benefits ballooned by $38 million. Do you see any correlation between overspending and salaries? One other area of over spending appears to be excessive consulting contracts amounting to millions of dollars a year. If the county has such productive and knowledgeable employees, why the need for so many consultants? Especially the use of consultants to shield the county employees from direct questions from the public in outreach events.

Not only did the prior CAO, Terri Daly, hire dozens of people

to fill new or long vacated general fund employee positions (possibly a 100 or more) in the last couple of years prior to her departure in November, it was admitted by the administration that county service levels remain about the same. In addition to the hiring, Daly recommended and the BOS agreed to a 15 percent raise, 10 percent which is currently in effect and 5 percent more to come shortly. It was confirmed recently that the union was asking for less, some sources say 40 percent less. The budget is out of balance almost exclusively because of the hiring and raises given and/or recommended by Daly that the county couldn't afford.

It is interesting to note that of all the new hires since June 30, 2013, Probation has grown zero, the Sheriff's by two, the PD by five and the DA by minus two, while the CAO office grew by 10 and perhaps a bit more. Daly did a county reorganization adding a total of 57 employees under the CAO umbrella, while the CDA lost a net of 30 employees although from the data after 33 employees were put under the CAO's umbrella from the CDA, the CDA appears to have still grown by four employees. While this is a bit confusing, the point is that the vast majority of the county employee growth is in administration, not in public safety.

Instead of solving the problem by reducing county staffing levels with an appropriate analysis of the recent county hiring, the BOS has taken the easy way out, cut each department by 6.25 percent. At the Feb. 24 BOS meeting that lasted until well past 9pm, Supervisor Shiva Frentzen wanted an analysis by the CAO's office of the recent hiring. Although Supervisors Sue Novasel and Doug Veerkamp paid some lip service to the Frentzen proposal, the Frentzen motion didn't get a second and no vote was taken by the BOS for such a proposal. It never saw the light of day. The result was that the BOS voted for an across the board 6.25 percent budget reduction which appeared to the BOS as the most palatable proposal brought to the BOS by the CAO.

Perhaps partial responsibility rests with the CAO in that she didn't even suggest such a targeted, priority based budget proposal even though she was advised well before the BOS meeting of such an idea. Her ideas were a series of across the board cuts ranging from 13.5 percent, 10 percent and 6.25 percent. About five months ago EDC formed an ad hoc budget committee to analyze and make recommendations to the BOS on how to deal with the projected $100 million plus five-year budget deficit that would actually be about $150 million when you add in the spending of $50 million in savings.

While at these meetings I kept hammering the idea that the cause of the deficit was the prior CAO's excessive recent hires and the first, smartest and fairest place to cut should be an elimination of some of the new hiring. The committee decided to spend most of its time in the half a dozen or so meetings on priority budgeting. Our Current CAO along with Supervisors Veerkamp and Frentzen led the meetings.

CAO Pam Knorr wrote on a chalkboard a list of priorities and there was no question in the room that public safety was No. 1. I even took a photograph of the chalkboard. What a waste of time as the result of the hours and hours of study, discussion and agreement meant nothing as the eventual CAO recommendations to the BOS was an across the board, blanket percentage cut. So much for priority budgeting. A fifth-grader learning fractions and percentages could have done this across the board cut. It is the least effective and worst possible solution to solve the budget problem, as the disease has not been excised. A second priority of cutting suggested at the ad hoc meetings was the elimination of EDC deadwood, or those employees who spend time at the county to accomplish as little as possible but for taking home a paycheck. No one cared.

The public should know that the vote to accept the county budget back in September was 3-2 with Ron Mikulaco and Frentzen voting no and Ron Briggs, Norma Santiago and Veerkamp voting yes. As to the across the board cut direction given to

the CAO, while Frentzen wanted an analysis of new hires that the BOS paid lip service to, they did reject it, with an across the board direction to the CAO of a 6.25 percent cut with only one board member voting no, Mikulaco. Without a change in leadership as reflected here, the problems within the county are likely to continue.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Editorial: Time to talk about low snowfall future

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the March 22, 2015, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

They are dropping like flies: Ski resorts closing early because of high temperatures and lack of snow.

This could be just another wild swing in the Sierra Nevada's historically fluctuating weather. Or it could be a sign of things to come.

For the past four years, something has caused high-pressure weather systems to sit off the coast of California and then be pushed north, away from northwestern Nevada.

It is too soon to tell if global climate change is responsible for this pattern, but some scientists think climate models show such winters will become more frequent.

This would be significant for Northern Nevada. It would be so significant, in fact, that it is difficult to know where to

start. But start we must.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Important to reel in teen stress

By Sonia Rupp

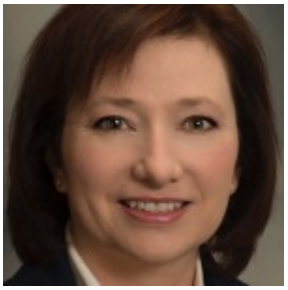
Any parent will tell you raising teenagers is a stressful time. Are you in that stage? Talk to your teenager about it. Your stress may be similar stress for your teen.

A recent American Psychological Association online survey shows today's teenagers experience greater levels of stress. Stressors include academic pressures, feeling overscheduled, financial pressure, and social pressures – especially with social media. In addition, bad habits teens learn to deal with stress often continue into adulthood. Stress can help some short-term situations like focusing for an exam or having a burst of energy for a sporting event. However, chronic stress can affect mental and physical well-being.

Is your teen stressed? According to the APA, common signs of teenage stress include:

- Episodes of irritability or anger
- Tired or fatigued
- Nervous or anxious
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Crying spells
- Skipping meals or overeating – changes in diet

- Upset stomach or nausea.



Sonia Rupp

Many young adults develop unhealthy behaviors to cope with stress; such as watching TV, surfing the Internet, or playing video games. Small media amounts may be a good distraction, but stress returns once the media is turned off. Also, for teens with low self-esteem, social media pressures may elevate stress. Violent video games and graphic movies increase nightmares and negative thinking. Of greater concern, your teen may develop other negative behaviors including overeating, anorexia, excessive consumption of caffeine, self-harm, smoking, and drug or alcohol use.

Teach your teen coping habits by being a good example. Help your teen replace unhealthy behaviors with healthier and productive ways to manage stress.

Exercise. Physical activity counteracts heart and blood pressure changes that occur with chronic stress. Outdoor activities help improve mood by supplying Vitamin D from the sun. Team sports also help increase socialization.

Mental exercises. Reading, meditation, puzzles and non-violent games are healthy ways to distract the brain from worries and create a more peaceful mind. Think positive thoughts and avoid being cynical. Breathing exercises also relax the body and brain by increasing oxygen and teaching the mind to focus.

Establish routines. Keep regular eating and sleeping habits and avoid overscheduling to allow time to relax.

Improve diet. Stress can affect digestion and immunity. Healthy eating can boost immunity and prevent an upset stomach.

Get creative. Get involved with a hobby or creative interest – draw, write, play music.

Socialize. Take time to enjoy friends and family. In stressful times, talking to a loved one can help the problem not feel so big.

Journal. Write down what causes stress. Separate stressors that can be changed or decreased. Use the strategies above to help with things that can't change.

Seek support. After the best effort to manage stress and you or your teen still feel overwhelmed, don't be afraid to reach out for help through therapy, a support group, or talk to your doctor.

Take time to talk to your teenager and start showing healthier ways to deal with stress so they can have a happier and healthier future.

Sonia Rupp is a board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist who provides diagnostic evaluations and treatment recommendations for children and adolescents at Stateline Medical Center. Rupp will speak about Stress: Its Effects on Body and Mind" on April 2 at 6pm at Lake Tahoe Community College.