Opinion: Tahoe Fund anything but altruistic

By Jacqui Grandfield

A couple of decades ago resort developers began their invasion of the Tahoe area. They bought homes in our communities, enrolled their kids in local schools and almost immediately became active locally by joining committees and doing volunteer work. Then they started offering “donations” to our local, struggling nonprofits.

Some far-sighted people, realizing that this was a thinly veiled attempt to buy their loyalty and cooperation for future development plans, declined to take the money. Some even resigned their jobs with non-profs they helped create.

Fast forward 10 years or so. These same resort developers began offering money to our local environmental and public agencies. Fearing these donations would constitute a conflict of interests and be seen by the public as bribes from special interest groups, the agencies danced around this issue for several years, publicly denying any money exchange.

The Great Recession of 2008 made these same local agencies desperate for money as government spending was drying up. Along comes the California Tahoe Conservancy’s new executive officer, with a “great” idea. He would start a nonprofit comprised of local environmentalists and developers to cooperate and provide financing for small, local projects … another idea of his, proved disastrous for the Delta Bay ecosystem (and the Delta Bay Authority) at a cost of over $3 billion to taxpayers.

Numerous calls to the California Attorney General’s Office and a CTC board member resulted in no answer to a simple question: Is it even legal for a state public environmental agency to

start a nonprofit with such powerful special interest groups as Vail, KSL, JMA, et al?

TRPA tells us this public/private cooperation is the economic future for Tahoe.

Enter the Tahoe Fund. The picture that's been painted for the general public is that of a nonprofit group of environmentalists and developers working together to help restoration efforts by providing funding, and presumably expertise, to all sorts of natural resource projects in the basin. The stated purpose of the Tahoe Fund is "to become a major source of private funding for environmental projects around the Lake Tahoe Basin …"

Sounds good at first, right? But, what's really the difference from prior decades? Now they have communications and media experts who mislead the general public about their purpose and intent and the methods they use to achieve them.

In reality, this group is part of an "iron triangle", a result of the sub-government structure that dominates in the basin. This "cozy triangle" as it is often called, consists of federal government, state and local government and special interest groups (pressure groups), both public and private. The public group wants resource protection and education while the private groups want profit.

The problem is these two pressure groups do not have equal resources in that private groups have much, much more money and thus way more influence. The Tahoe Fund is a perfect example of private special interests controlling the average Tahoe citizen's life and environment. Add this to the fact that the majority of our local governments are run by non-elected, appointed officials. Where does this leave the less powerful public interest groups and the public in general? It leaves them virtually powerless in Tahoe's cozy triangles.

A final insult to the public, but a great deal for developers

is they can throw money or what amounts to their pocket change at small projects around Tahoe while proceeding with their mega developments. These projects, even those costing $10 million to $12 million, are great for a localized area but can in no way offset the widespread, massive environmental and cultural damage caused by huge, unnecessary developments.

What they can do is provide developers and other private investors with mitigation offsets, potential development right transfers, a nonprofit tax shelter and most egregiously, a powerful and cheap public relations tool to convince Tahoeans that developers are great people who support community, environment and economy.

Otherwise why is the Tahoe Fund board composed of ski industry CEO's such as Andy Wirth and Art Chapman, CTC's Patrick Wright, local government officials, venture capitalists and "token environmentalists" (who are also donors)? Why is the Fund's CEO a public relations and marketing specialist? And, is it possible that these "special interests" receive favors for their monetary contributions in the form of extra TAUs, rezoning conservation areas, expanded coverage, height and so on?

The Tahoe Fund is not an altruistic entity. It is part of big developers' strategy to influence public opinion in their favor.

Does anyone really trust these special entities to protect and enhance our communities and natural resources when their main goal is money? There are reasonable, effective solutions to combat the corruption and influence these types of pressure groups create. We could demand that more of our public officials are elected by the people, for the people and not appointed by questionable public agencies and special interests?

That's one idea, what's yours?

Jacqui Grandfield is a wildlife biologist and environmental policy expert who lives in Lake Tahoe.

Editorial: Calm down, Ebola won’t kill us all

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the Oct. 20, 2014, Los Angeles Times.***

Texas university refuses to accept students from Nigeria, where there were a couple dozen Ebola cases before the disease was quickly stopped. Louisiana refuses to allow incinerated trash from the treatment of Texas’ first Ebola victim, Thomas Eric Duncan, into its landfills, as though the virus would survive immolation. A passenger on a cruise ship to Mexico who may have been exposed to lab samples from Duncan, but who appears to be healthy, is given a blood screening for Ebola even though the test isn’t reliable in people without symptoms.

Schools in Ohio and Texas have been closed and their contents bleached because of the remote chance that a single student or teacher might have been exposed to someone who carried the virus. The children and teachers involved had no symptoms, which meant they could not have been contagious even if they had been infected. There is no sign so far that they were.

Parents in Mississippi kept their children out of school after the principal traveled to Africa — not to one of the afflicted countries but to Zambia, in an entirely different part of the continent.

Concern about a disease as deadly as Ebola, for which there is

no cure, is not misplaced. Any erring should be done on the side of caution. But there has been far too much frantic, irrational worry over what amounts to a handful of Ebola cases and a single death in the United States.

Read the whole story

Louisiana refuses to allow incinerated trash from the treatment of Texas' first Ebola victim, Thomas Eric Duncan, into its landfills, as though the virus would survive immolation.
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Some of the blame, of course, rests with federal authorities, especially those in charge at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who failed to get their arms around the situation. In an attempt to avoid a public panic, they instead created a worse one by making assurances that were quickly shown to be wrong.

Letter: Prop. 46 deserves a 'no' vote

To the community,

California Proposition 46 is costly and deceiving to voters. It would increase costs for patients, deter doctors from practicing in California, and threaten patient privacy. The consequences are also higher for rural communities like South Lake Tahoe. I have been a physician in South Lake Tahoe for over 34 years and I'm asking our voters and patients to take a closer look; Prop. 46 just doesn't add up.

Prop. 46 will escalate insurance rates and, ultimately,

increase healthcare costs for patients. The non-partisan California Legislative Analyst's Office estimates that Prop. 46 would cost patients an additional $9.9 billion annually, that's $1,000 a year for a family of four.

The second part of Prop. 46, also considered the "sweetener" to woo voters, would require random drug testing on physicians. While this may seem like a valuable safety measure, data shows that a minuscule percentage of harm is done by impaired physicians and Prop. 46 would exclude testing physicians who practice in private offices. Medical facilities, including Barton Memorial Hospital, already have proven and effective safety measures in place to protect patients from harm.

Lastly, Prop. 46 would require doctors use a state-controlled database before prescribing certain controlled substances and to discourage patients who "doctor hop" for pain medication. But the Prop. 46 solution to this real problem is inadequate: the database is unreliable, understaffed, and lacks security measures. This will only burden medical providers to operate an additional program that is not ready or secure for statewide use.

I encourage voters to take a closer look at this proposition. Please join Barton Health and over 500 other organizations across party lines and vote "no" on Prop. 46 in the upcoming election.

Paul Rork, physician and board of director Barton Health

Opinion: Working together for wildfire protection

By Cheva Gabor

September brought the reality of wildfires to the forefront in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The King Fire came within eight air miles of the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit boundary, and as we all anxiously awaited its containment, the Cascade Fire broke out in the Desolation Wilderness.

Rain and snow quickly brought an end to both fires, but not before we were all sharply reminded of the risk we take by choosing to live surrounded by forest. Perhaps, as you anxiously monitored firefighters' progress against the wildfires, you asked the question, "What are Lake Tahoe agencies doing to reduce the risk of a wildfire that could affect my home and family?"



Cheva Gabor

The answer should come as a pleasant surprise. Since 2007, Lake Tahoe Basin agencies have worked closely together to prioritize and implement projects to reduce local wildfire risks, under the guidance of the Tahoe Fire & Fuels Team, using the Lake Tahoe Basin Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy. Participating agencies include the U.S. Forest Service, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the land managers and fire services of California and

Nevada and local fire protection districts.

In August 2014, the 15 agencies released an updated strategy that assesses the work done to date and sets forth a plan for the future.

At this year's Lake Tahoe Summit, elected officials from both parties recognized the significance of this collaborative approach, signing a proclamation supporting the strategy and its benefits to forest health and the protection of life, property, and Lake Tahoe's precious environmental resources.

The origins of the fuels reduction strategy date to 2006, when Congress passed the White Pine Amendment to the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA). The bill required Lake Tahoe Basin partners to develop priorities for fuels reduction in order to compete for SNPLMA funding to implement these projects.

Led by the U.S. Forest Service, the agencies rallied and began to build upon existing research, planning and treatment to prioritize future work. Then, in June of 2007, the Angora Fire burned 3,100 acres and 254 homes, pointing up the urgent need to treat wildland areas near communities as outlined in the strategy. Since it was finalized in December 2007, the document has fulfilled its goal of guiding wildfire risk reduction efforts.

The original strategy identified 68,000 acres as treatment priorities. Since 2008, nonfederal partners have treated 12,000 acres in the highest priority areas identified by the community wildfire protection plans, nearly doubling the average annual number of acres previously treated. The U.S. Forest Service has treated approximately 26,000 acres.

In 2013, the Forest Service convened the partners to update the strategy to address new issues and challenges that have arisen since 2007. The update responds to climate change, ensures coordination with national wildland fire policy, and

addresses the loss of markets for biomass and other wood products that result from forest thinning.

Treating fuels in the critical area where our communities meet the wildland is projected to cost between $144 million and $156 million, with an additional $25 million to $35 million needed for work to ensure the continued effectiveness of previously treated areas. These amounts far exceed our agencies' normal budgets. Our strategic approach will help us better compete for the funding we need to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

While not mentioned by name, there's one last partner we need to successfully implement the strategy – you. The updated strategy recognizes the essential role that you as a property owner play in reducing wildfire risk when you complete your defensible space or retrofit your home so it's more resistant to ignition by wildfire. To learn more about what you can do, go online.

The updated strategy facilitates the decisions that must be made by land management, fire and regulatory agencies to reduce the probability of another catastrophic wildfire in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The full commitment by partner agencies to support and implement the strategy will help protect our communities, our beautiful environment and the tourism-based economy that relies on it.

To read the Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy, go online.

Cheva Gabor, LTBMU public affairs officer

Letter: Pierini is best man to be sheriff

To the community,

I started this letter three weeks ago, but then decided not to get involved for two reasons. One, Sheriff (Ron) Pierini didn't need my help, and two, the people of Douglas County are smart enough to see through (Dave) Brady's negative campaigning. Then, a few days ago, I read a letter to the editor titled, "Ranchos not that safe," and I felt it necessary to share my knowledge of Sheriff Ron Pierini.

I have spent over 40 years in Nevada law enforcement, and have lived in Minden since 1994 when my wife and I moved here from Carson City. I served with Carson City Sheriff's Office for eight years, Nevada Division of Investigation 20 years (Tri-Net Narcotics Task Force 2½ years), and with Nevada Legislative Police 14 years.

I had the privilege of working with Sheriff Pierini when he started his law enforcement career with CCSO, and many times since then, and it is no coincidence that I chose to make my home in Douglas County. While with NDI, I was assigned to the major crimes unit. This assignment took me to every county in Nevada, and many other states as well, and I have seen firsthand the operations of almost every Nevada law enforcement agency over the past 30 years.

As a result of this experience, I can tell you that the Douglas County Sheriff's Office is one of the most highly respected law enforcement agencies in the state, due in large part to a dedicated, professional sheriff, and well trained and motivated command staff, supervisors and deputies. That is why 24 years ago I recommended to my son to if he wanted a career in law enforcement he should start with DCSO.

I have also had the privilege of working with Undersheriff Paul Howell while assigned to the TriNet Narcotics Task Force, and it is my opinion that you will not find a man more dedicated to this community than Undersheriff Howell. Sheriff Pierini and Undersheriff Howell have consistently demonstrated that they are fiscally responsible and prudent managers of the agency's budget.

If the undersheriff and the sheriff say we need a new boat, then I trust we needed a new boat. I fish Lake Tahoe and Topaz several times a year. If I run into trouble, or one of Nevada's tour boats runs into trouble I want to know we have the state of the art equipment ready to respond to any situation that may arise.

I see Undersheriff Howell's purchase of a new patrol boat as an example of an agency that is being proactive, and looking out for the safety of the community. As a citizen of Douglas County I want to know that we can count on a rapid response from DCSO, and that that the deputies are working with equipment that is safe, and meets or exceeds the critical challenges of today.

Since 9-11, public safety operating budgets have increased significantly. This may be news to Brady and his supporters, but we do not live in the same world we did 10 or 20 years ago. All law enforcement agencies have had to make drastic changes to meet growing local needs, as well as the possibility of terrorism.

Douglas County has been very fortunate not to experience the same drug and gang problems that Clark County, Washoe County and even Carson City deal with on a regular basis. In his letter to the editor, the gentleman said "an armed robbery in Douglas County is a rarity". Well, we have Sheriff Pierini and his deputies to thank for that. It shows me that they are doing a good job patrolling our communities. The crime rate in Douglas County is lower than many communities of similar size,

and that is no coincidence. The deputies, and sheriff's office staff has worked hard under Sheriff Perini's Leadership to see to it that Douglas County is, and will continue to be a safe place to live.

Douglas County does not need change just for the sake of change; we see how well that worked at the national level. We already have one of the most experienced, knowledgeable, and dedicated sheriff in the state, why trade down? We have the best man for the job right now and he has a proven record of leadership and success. I am proud of our law enforcement officers in Douglas County. We have a great sheriff, and I want to keep it that way.

Take a close look at the challenger, and compare his leadership and experience against that of our incumbent, Sheriff Piernini, and you will find that there is no comparison.

Robert Milby, lieutenant Nevada Division of Investigations (retired), first sergeant Nevada Army National Guard (retired), chief Nevada Legislative Police (retired)

Letter: Yacht club helps at Bread & Broth

To the community,

On Oct. 13, the South Lake Tahoe Yacht Club sponsored a Bread & Broth Adopt A Day Nourishment.

With the $250 donation from the club and the help of club members Nick and Margo Carrell, Ruth Goshorn, Jerry Kahler and

Barbara Marsden, the dinner guests enjoyed Lake Tahoe trout and baked salmon, rice pilaf, sautéed vegetables, green salad, fruit salad, a wide assortment of desserts and drinks. The five yacht club volunteers were wonderful with their warm smiles and welcoming words to the dinner guests.

For Marsden and Kahler, it was their first time experiencing a dinner served by B&B. Marsden “was very impressed by the quality of the food served” and was really glad that through her membership in the yacht club and their charitable contribution, she had the opportunity to volunteer at a B&B dinner. “It is truly a worthwhile cause.”

Goshorn has volunteered several times at B&B dinners and did a great job of running the dessert and drink table. The Carrells are also experienced B&B “substitute” volunteers and regularly give of their time and energy to feed the hungry in our community.

The SLT Yacht Club frequently supports charitable causes and B&B is extremely grateful for their donation and support. Because of the yacht club’s sponsorship, over 130 dinners were served which helped to ease the hunger of people in need in our community.

To help B&B as a donor or sponsor, contact me at 530.542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: LTN off the mark with

DCSO endorsement

To the community,

Regarding your editorial, “Keep Pierini as Douglas County Sheriff”, you say that DCSO candidate Dave Brady’s character has been questioned. That’s an odd use of the passive voice coming from a presumably professional journalist on such an important matter. Who questioned his character, and on what basis? Not including that in your editorial makes that sentence nothing more than an unsubstantiated slur.

During the sheriff’s candidate forum last week at CVIC hall in Minden, (Ron) Pierini blabbed the name of his gang task force officer to the crowd for the sake of puffing up his campaign. If you know enough to editorialize about who should be running DCSO, you would know that the Norteños – the primary gang presence in Gardnerville – targets gang officers and their families. Pierini recklessly put this officer’s life, and his family’s lives, in danger out of selfish vanity. Would that meet your criteria for questioning someone’s character?

As to editorial credibility, you might have asked Sheriff Pierini why his budget has gone up fivefold in 28 years – from $3 million to over $16 million, yet he fields the same number of patrol cars now as then, as he confirmed to the *Record Courier* in May 2013.

Sheriff Pierini’s experience, education, and training have proven to be the perfect qualifications for running the Douglas County Sheriff’s Department in 1992. Now, not so much. He and his very well paid command staff have no idea how to manage a budget. Given that it’s not their money and no one is looking over their shoulders, they have no incentive to learn.

Dave Brady has far more street-level law enforcement experience than Pierini, plus the education and experience to fix what’s wrong in DCSO. Brady should be elected sheriff.

Lynn Muzzy, Minden

Opinion: EDC budget in trouble

Publisher's note: ***This was given to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on Oct. 21.***

Dear Board Members:



Joe Harn

At the October 13, 2014, Budget Committee meeting, the CAO's Chief Budget Officer presented an updated budget forecast for fiscal 2015-16. Her latest budget forecast indicates a $19,000,000 general fund shortfall for fiscal 2015-16. Further, her forecast assumes a $5,000,000 savings due the County's investment strategy. I do not believe that this $5,000,000 savings is a reasonable assumption. I must conclude that using the projections from the CAO's Office that we have a general fund budget shortfall of around $24,000,000 for fiscal 2015-16.

I urge your Board to take immediate action to reduce spending this fiscal year in order to prevent the need to make draconian budget cuts next summer.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Joe Harn, El Dorado County auditor-controller

Letter: Keep Davis on council

To the community,

Tom Davis first came into our lives in the ’70s when he worked at Sahara Tahoe as the pilot for their luxury yacht. He has been very supportive of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care since the organization started in April 1978, offering his experience and support to help in the growth.

During our time of friendship, Davis has always been a community person. A South Lake Tahoe community person, specifically. His love for South Lake Tahoe has been evident with the 12 years he has served on the City Council as well as the four times he served the city as mayor. His firsthand knowledge of the city is matched by few and his leadership skills have shown him as a proven leader within our government.

He has championed a number of projects within the city that show he can get things accomplished.

We need his continued service on our City Council. Cheryl and I recommend you vote for Tom Davis for City Council on Nov. 4.

Tom and Cheryl Millham, Meyers

Letter: Pierini runs fiscally sound department

To the community,

The Dave Brady for sheriff campaign claims that “public safety dollars are not being spent wisely” by Sheriff (Ron) Pierini. I want to say that I believe that this claim is a clearly false and misleading statement.

Here is why. The claims expressed in a recent Brady campaign brochure stated the sheriff’s annual budget had “skyrocketed” from $3.1 million in 1986 to $16 million. While the raw numbers appear correct, Brady’s analysis and interpretation are very wrong. At first blush the increase seems astronomical and that is what Brady wants you to think. The problem is that this representation is a classical “apples and oranges” comparison.

The 1986 $3.1 million budget had not been adjusted for annual price inflation which, if done correctly, would have made the numbers truly comparable. The failure to adjust for price inflation is a very significant omission rendering the 1986 and 2014 budget numbers completely non-comparable. The omission may have been deliberate since Brady claims many academic and other credentials and should have known better.

Nevertheless the omission appears to have led to a series of false claims and representations on the part of the Brady campaign.

When the 1986 $3 million budget number is adjusted for annual inflation over the course of the 28-year period from 1986 to 2014, the $3.1 million number becomes approximately $12.2

million. The $12.2 million number is now comparable with the 2014 $16 million budget.

Using a financial industry standard HP 12C calculator for all calculations, I determined that the budget growth rate over the 28-year period comes out to be approximately 0.97 percent. This means that Sheriff Pierini’s real annual budget adjusted for price inflation has only grown at the rate of slightly less than 1 percent per year for the last 28 years. More significantly, Pierini’s budget growth rate of approximately 1 percent per year has been less than half the 2.4 percent rate of population growth.

Frankly, that is simply an outstanding budgetary management accomplishment that deserves to be applauded and appreciated by all us voters and tax payers. On top of all that he has kept us safe and for that I am truly appreciative.

Dennis Favero, Minden