Opinion: McClintock on the wrong side

By Athan Manuel

Over the past several weeks, America's public lands, including our national parks and monuments, became a symbol of the pain caused by the government shutdown. And rightly so.

Visitors were turned away, once-in-a-lifetime trips were canceled and local California economies lost an estimated $8.5 million each day of the shutdown. The public outrage over the closure of our parks, monuments and other public lands made clear the importance of these special places.

U.S. House Republicans, including Congressman [Tom] McClintock found themselves on the wrong side of public opinion. Instead of acknowledging their role in the shutdown, and that they were in fact the reason why our public lands closed, Republicans are callously looking to shift the blame to federal land agency employees for simply doing their job.

In a joint hearing of the House Natural Resources and Oversight and Government Reform Committees recently, Republicans spent hours attacking Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis. The tone was reminiscent of Congressman [Randy] Neugebauer's confrontation with the park ranger at the World War II memorial. More of the same type of bullying is expected this week at another House hearing, tellingly titled "Threats, Intimidations and Bullying by Federal Land Managing Agencies".

Behind the scathing diatribes lies the truth, the closure of our parks and monuments is just the latest example of Republicans' lack of concern for our public lands.

– Appropriations legislation that came through the House this

year slashed parks and public lands funding by $315 million – 13 percent.

– The last Congress was the first since World War II not to protect a single new acre of public land, and the current Congress is on track to be the second.

– Even during the shutdown, congressional Republicans pushed forward legislation to sell off 3.3 million acres of public land to the highest bidder.

Congressman McClintock should be ashamed of his role in this farce. It is House Republicans who are the real bullies here. And it is the American people who are suffering as our nation's natural treasures are neglected. Please use your editorial voice to call on Congressman McClintock to stop using our public lands as political chips and to stand with the American people in support of our special places.

Athan Manuel is director of the Sierra Club's Lands Protection Program.

Editorial: Calif. needs better vision for higher education

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Oct. 18, 2013, Sacramento Bee.***

In a report that should not sit on a shelf, the Little Hoover Commission this week urged Gov. Jerry Brown and legislators to devise a new master plan for higher education to meet anticipated demand for 2.3 million more college graduates

within 12 years.

A revised master plan, completed 50 years after the first one, would make for an ideal undertaking for a governor whose father is identified with the expansion of California's public colleges and universities.

As the commission sees it, California must envision higher education on a much greater level than it does now, embrace online education and create seamless transfers from community colleges to four-year institutions, all worthy notions.

The success of public colleges and universities is an economic development and a social justice issue. College must be kept affordable, though the public institutions should not count on large infusions of more public money, the commission said.

Read the whole story

Letter: When politics trumps policy

To the community,

This nation has gone through 18 government shutdowns in the last 37 years. Fifteen of those 18 shutdowns occurred when Democrats controlled the House. In those 15 shutdowns, the Democrats demanded increased abortion services and labor and environmental policy concessions.

Perhaps the reason we don't remember those shutdowns as vividly is because in those days, presidents negotiated around the clock to resolve the disputes that caused them and did everything they could to minimize the public's inconvenience

and suffering.



Tom McClintock

This time was different. This time, the President refused to negotiate and took unprecedented steps to amplify the pain and suffering that the public endured.

Why would the administration do this? They told us why – because they were winning politically.

What was the outrageous Republican demand that Democrats refused even to discuss during the 16-day shutdown while they ordered our public servants to make life as difficult as possible for people?

On Sept. 30, with the deadline just hours away, House Republicans had dropped all conditions to fund the entire government with one substantive exception: delay the individual mandate that forces people to buy policies against their will. Democrats summarily rejected this proposal and for 16 days refused to negotiate on this single point, while literally accusing Republicans of sedition.

Then this past Monday, the president's press secretary made this stunning admission: the Obama administration may itself seek to delay the individual mandate by dropping the penalty for non-compliance.

They've got to be kidding.

For the 16 days of the shutdown, the only substantive dispute was the Republican plea to delay the individual mandate for

the millions of Americans who couldn’t find or afford Obamacare policies.

Doing so could have ended the impasse instantly. During those 16 days, it was clear to everyone that the exchanges weren’t working. Yet the president and congressional Democrats refused even to discuss the matter, while they turned their formidable propaganda machine to the task of winning politically.

These facts speak for themselves and need no embellishment from me. John Adams once observed that “Facts are stubborn things.” As passions cool and reason resumes its rightful place in the nation’s discourse, these facts will speak eloquently and stubbornly of what happens when politics trumps policy and propaganda trumps reality.

Sincerely,

Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay

Letter: Truckee – Don’t throw Tahoe under the bus

To the community,

Tahoe is being ransomed for development. You may have heard the hurrahs. Sierra Watch and Mountain Area Preservation have negotiated a deal to save 6,600 acres on the east side of Highway 267 above Waddle Ranch from development. It’s great, logging will still be allowed, but no one wants to see 1,360 units and 6.6 acres of commercial on that slope.

But there is a problem: a ransom is involved. The transaction is contingent on the new development team, East-West Partners

(you remember them) and the current owner, Sierra Pacific Industries' ability to obtain program approval from Placer County to build 760 units and 6.6 acres of commercial on 1,100 acres on the west side of Highway 267. That land is currently zoned forest – no development allowed. As if digging up that side of the mountain wasn't problematic enough, here's the kicker, 112 acres of potential new development and we've heard approximately 200 units (they won't acknowledge any number yet) will be on the ridge inside the Tahoe basin. Drive in about 1.5 miles on the Fiberboard Freeway at the summit of Highway 267 and look up the mountain. What will the new project be like: Think Schaffer's Mill Road.

The application requires rezoning, a land use amendment, changes to the Martis Valley General Plan, the Placer County Community Plan and the TRPA Regional Plan. It will increase the population by 2,000, vehicle trips by 3,434/day, years of construction impacts, move 1 million cubic yards of dirt and cut down 200 acres of trees. This will be intense.

Why does developing a mere 85 acres zoned forest in the basin matter? The proposed transfer of units from the east to the west side of the ridge on top of Highway 267 is justified and spun by the saving of 6,600 acres outside the basin in the Martis Valley. As fabulous as Martis Valley is; the Tahoe basin is a designated "Outstanding National Water Resource" that must not be further degraded. And worse yet, another 235 acres could potentially be developed inside the basin in the same flawed way thanks to the TRPA's recently approved Regional Plan update and it hasn't even been a year since it was adopted.

Here's a hyperbole: If you can save New York City from flooding, do you get to develop Lake Tahoe? But seriously, there is a dangerous precedent: if another large landholder who owns land outside the basin agrees to a conservation easement, will the county that oversees the land allow development inside the basin as a worthy trade? You bet they

will.

If East-West and Sierra Pacific Industries want to develop 85 acres on the ridge within the Tahoe watershed they should do it the right way. Apply to TRPA and the county on a standalone application with no justification of outside the basin conservation. Sierra Watch and MAP we applaud your conservation efforts, just don't ensnare Tahoe in the process.

Thank you,

Ann Nichols, North Tahoe Preservation Alliance

Letter: Paid parking does not encourage recreation

To the community:

Recreation has been identified as the "new" vision for South Lake Tahoe.

Recreation in Tahoe is not a new idea. For as long as I can remember our marketing slogan was: Tahoe – America's All Year Playground.

That was until the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority wonks decided to brand South Lake Tahoe "Tahoe South" and put up cartoon drawings on billboards in the Bay Area that invite visitors to "Cross Over to the Wild Side".

We'd probably be well advised to get back to basics.

For a community that is defining its economic future as recreation, a parking program that clearly deters access to

the lake seems contrary to our stated mission.

Putting $2 per hour parking meters at El Dorado Beach, Venice Drive and in front of the privately owned Lakeside Beach and calling it a user fee seems to lack vision. The beach attendance at Lakeside this summer was down by more than 50 percent. The $55 parking tickets that overzealous parking enforcement employees were writing just added to the mass exodus. The many businesses at Lakeside Beach are reporting a substantial decline over last year's sales. In addition, all businesses near paid parking have become the front counter for the parking complaint department.

The city made the case early on that this parking program was all about the money. The projected income for the city was $312,900 and was identified as enough revenue to preserve two police positions that would be lost if we didn't raise that amount. The city then proceeded to spend/borrow more than $300,000 plus staff time to install the meters and the dozens of pay to park signs that for reasons not completely clear face into the street where they are not visible to the driver. This may begin to explain the estimated 2,000 tickets that were written this summer. The $312,900 projected profit will not be realized; however, city management is calling the program a success. Forty percent of the more than $300,000 investment in the kiosks sat mostly vacant as parking customers for Venice Drive and Paradise Avenue never materialized.

The city is now probably thinking that they need to find a new home for those 13 kiosks that were not performing in two locations. Moving them to the airport would allow city staff and council members to better understand the hardship that minimum wage seasonal workers faced when their free parking was replaced by the $10 per day fee. An estimated 150 workers found themselves scrambling to find free parking at Nevada casinos and in residential areas.

City sponsored programs that are solely designed to generate income should not harm local businesses and displace low wage workers.

On Nov. 5, the City Council will be reviewing the paid parking program. This will be their opportunity to listen to the community and decide to keep or dismantle the program or let the voters decide with a city sponsored ballot initiative. If a ballot initiative is not volunteered, it will require just 836 registered voter signatures for citizens to advance an initiative to the ballot.

Peggy Bourland-Madison, committee member Tahoe 4 Tahoe

Letter: Apologies for drag show cancellation

To the community,

Live Violence Free owes our community an apology for the postponement of our Drag for Love show. It is unfortunate that due to unforeseen scheduling complications our hard work and effort towards making the show a success has fallen short.

We deeply apologize for any and all inconveniences that the cancellation of the show has caused anyone, especially all of our supporters. We'd like to thank all of the groups and businesses that have dedicated their time and services to us for the show; the South Tahoe High School Ally club, the Sierra Foothills AIDS Foundation, Lake Tahoe Pride, Lake Tahoe Community College faculty and staff, our local performers, the Family Resource Center, and our Live Violence Free Heart volunteers.

We look forward to hosting this event in the future and encourage our community to continue to support our agency and its mission for a violence free community.

If you have purchased a ticket, please feel free to call me at (530) 544.2118, ext. 7628 for a full refund.

Thank you,

Diana Meza Cabrera, Live Violence Free

Letter: New S. Tahoe hotel a questionable neighbor

Publisher's note: ***The following letter was first sent to the South Lake Tahoe City Council and then to Lake Tahoe News.***

Dear Mr. Mayor and South Lake Tahoe City Council Members:

I am writing to bring notice to a very frustrating situation in regards to the construction taking place on the new hotel The Landing. We live right next door. For the last year and a half, we have been dealing with excess noise at inappropriate hours, garbage and trash on our property and workers walking across our property and flower beds with no regard.

We have maintained neighborly respect for a couple of reasons: 1. Because we are excited about something new and fresh to replace the Valhalla. 2. Because South Lake Tahoe is long overdue for a five star property.

However, over the past few days we have become very alarmed and upset by their lack of neighborly respect for us.

Two summers ago on Fourth of July, we met the owner who assured us that the construction project would take place very fast and the community would be kept in the loop. As a year went by, we knew that there was construction occurring but had not heard from them. During this most recent Fourth of July holiday, we sought out the project's general manager and asked him about the bordering fence we shared with the hotel. This was our biggest concern because we have a lake view from both our front and back yards that we did not want to lose. At the time, the project manager assured us that when it was time to replace the fence, we would be given plenty of notice and that the plan was to use rod iron to build the fence. This met our satisfaction.

We understood that our backyard would be looking at their busy parking lot, but that is a sacrifice we were happy to make to keep the beautiful lake view. We trusted their word.

On Oct. 18, we arrived at our house (we spend half of our time in Sacramento and half of our time in Lake Tahoe) and found the fence torn out, our bushes and vines mauled and our flowers with stacks of dirt covering them and trampled. We were shocked to say the least. We have spent three years working on our yard. And we were promised to be kept in the loop specifically regarding the fence.

I immediately contacted the manager and construction foreman. They came down to look. All we heard were excuses. Without looking us in the eyes out of shame, they told us "too bad." That costs of the planned rod iron fence were too expensive, so they changed. They informed us that now the fence would be solid wood and 6-feet tall!

When I showed them trampled landscaping and explained that it had cost us $2,000 to fix up our yard, they disrespectfully scoffed and said it didn't look like it cost nearly that much.

I'm sure you can imagine how upsetting these series of events

were to a couple that takes great pride in our home, wants to see their project succeed, and has shown them a great amount of respect and patience.

Not only were we upset, the fact that we didn't have a fence was a huge inconvenience we had not planned for. I canceled my work flights from Reno because we were unable to leave the dog in the back yard.

The next day my newly pregnant wife and I were cleaning up the mess they left, we came across the foreman who gave us Bob Hutchison's number. Bob is a representative for the owner. He agreed to meet with me today. I took a day away from work to drive back to Tahoe to meet with him with the hope of finding middle ground. I walked away shaking because he was so inconsiderate. The sum of his attitude was; "we are the new game in town. The community is going to have to adjust to us." And he was so insulting he actually insinuated that our house and yard is too ugly to see through a rod iron fence. He said, "Heidi Klum is going to visit and looking at our cabin in the shape it's in is not up to her standards" – which led them to their decision to put up a solid fence.

In an effort to meet in the middle, I asked Bob to consider bypassing a fence in the front yard. If we must lose our backyard view, we can at least try to salvage the view from our front yard. After all, they have put a catch basin for their BMPs right there and human traffic would not be an issue. Or I offered the solution of a 4-foot fence with rod iron rails on top. He told me that the construction foreman did not speak for the owner and that no flexibility would be given. Within 10 minutes, the framing crew arrived and started framing the fence.

I run an extremely large cattle brokerage firm with sales of over $150 million per year. I understand the complexities of business, but truly believe in doing things right and with honor.If my employees commit to anything, right or wrong, I

honor their word. Deals are done on a handshake.

Rather than honoring their word, the folks at The Landing have decided to change plans and not keep us involved as promised. They are using the trimmed back bushes and fall foliage as an excuse to tell us our yard and house is not nice enough for people to look at while they are parking their cars.

Thank you for taking the time to read this lengthy email. My request is that you look further into what fencing plans were approved. Possibly encourage them to consider more friendly fencing options. Most of all, I hope you will encourage The Landing to try and become part of the community, not rule it. As proud residents of South Lake Tahoe, we want to have friendly relations with the big businesses attempting to improve our city. Not feel helpless and disrespected.

Please consider this request and respond when you can.

Many thanks for your time and leadership.

Jake Parnell, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Americans have funny relationship with animals

By Hal Herzog

We Americans like to think of ourselves as animal lovers. But is this claim true? One way to answer this question is to follow the money.

According to government, industry and interest group stats, we spend about $50 billion on our pets annually and donate

another $6 billion to animal-related and environmental charities. This sounds like a lot until you compare it to the amount we collectively devote to killing members of other species: $72 billion on hunting and fishing, $60 billion on animal research and $240 billion on meat, poultry and seafood.

In short, Americans fork out nearly seven times more toward harming animals than toward protecting them.

Our cultural schizophrenia over the treatment of other species is also reflected in our behavior. In 2010, PETA named Bill Clinton Man of the Year because he had forsworn the consumption of animal products and become a vegan – no meat, no dairy, no honey. Yet on CNN last year, while extolling the benefits of his new vegetable-only lifestyle, the former president casually added, "Now I try to eat salmon once a week."

Hal Herzog is a professor of psychology at Western Carolina University and the author of "Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It's So Hard to Think Straight About Animals" and the blog Animals and Us.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Squaw Valley's plans diminish natural fun

Publisher's note: *Squaw Valley is not in the Lake Tahoe Basin.*

By Tom Mooers

Lake Tahoe is no stranger to wild development schemes.

The latest threat to the Tahoe Sierra centers on Squaw Valley, where developers are proposing a series of high-rise hotels and condos – even an indoor amusement park the likes of which the Sierra has never seen.

In the 1860s, the Lake Tahoe and the San Francisco Water Co. wanted to dig a tunnel from Squaw Valley under the crest of the Sierra and into the Sacramento Valley to drain the lake for the young city's water needs.

A hundred years later, planners and speculators mapped a proposal to encase Lake Tahoe in concrete and subdivisions with double and triple bands of freeways ringing the lake and a causeway across the mouth of Emerald Bay.

At stake now is one of those great Tahoe settings where the natural scenery provides a unique sense of place. Squaw Valley's own iconography is a matter of its meadow and mountains – the flat of the valley quickly giving way to some of the world's most challenging ski terrain.

But developer KSL Capital Partners' proposals promote a very different version of the Squaw Valley experience – based not on the great outdoors but, instead, on indoor amusement.

All told, the proposed development would be 10 times as big – and twice as tall – as the existing village. New development would include as many bedrooms as the four big high-rise casinos at Stateline combined. And it would encourage us to turn our backs on what makes the Tahoe Sierra so special in the first place.

One indication of the scale of development is the projected construction time: 20 years. In other words, developers propose so much that Squaw Valley would be a construction zone for two decades – raising big questions not only about what we leave behind for future generations, but also how we experience Squaw in our own lifetimes.

At the heart of the proposal lies a dangerous, publicly asserted misconception of the Tahoe Sierra – a false notion that "there is nothing to do here in the summer." So, instead of opportunities to swim in Lake Tahoe, hike the Pacific Crest Trail or raft down the Truckee, the development would be built around a massive, indoor amusement park – about as big as an average Costco warehouse store – with indoor water slides, a fake "action river" and an arcade. It sounds like fun, but does it sound like Tahoe?

Fortunately for us, Tahoe was not drained in the 19th century, and it wasn't encased in concrete in the 1960s. Now it's time for us to appreciate Tahoe for what it is – and not try to remake it into what it is not.

The alternative for Squaw Valley developers is simple: pull their proposal and work together. There are plenty of examples of how conservationists, landowners and developers can cooperate – including last month's agreement to allow limited development and secure permanent preservation of the neighboring Martis Peak property.

Squaw Valley provides a perfect opportunity to engage local know-how, regional expertise and sound planning to come up with a blueprint that makes sense – a plan that respects the timeless beauty of our Tahoe Sierra and ensures an outcome that, looking back, we can all be proud of.

Tom Mooers is the executive director of Sierra Watch.

Letter: Mutt Strut a success

for ACT

To the community,

Thank you to all who braved the chilly temperatures and occasional snow to help make the ninth Mutt Strut one of our best.

And thanks to our generous donors. We had a wide variety of raffle and poker hand prizes that were snapped up by ticket buyers. We greatly appreciate your support, and are pleased we are able to keep our spay-neuter program going.

But we’re not just sitting back enjoying the success of the Mutt Strut – we have also planned our next fundraiser, another bowling night at Tahoe Bowl. Join us on Nov. 8 from 6-9pm – we’ll once again have great raffle prizes, and Tahoe Bowl is offering game, shoe rental, food, and drink specials, and a portion of your bowling purchases will be donated to ACT.

And here are two other fun October events for you and your pooch:

Dog Dog Cat dog costume party and parade, Oct. 26 at noon at the store (4000 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe).

Tahoe Best Friends Howl’oween Costume Party, Oct. 27 from 1-3pm, 2197 Ruth Ave., South Lake Tahoe.

Animal Coalition of Tahoe