Opinion: Truancy is a sign of bigger problems

By Ellie Herman

He was 15 years old but looked 12, a reedy, pale little guy with a mop of dark hair. When he stood in front of the class to tell his story, he was so nervous you could see his skinny legs trembling under his khakis. The drama class assignment was to tell a story about a minor life event that led to some new realization about the world – an assignment designed both to help the kids get over their shyness and to teach the meaning of the word "epiphany."

The "minor" life event the boy chose to relay was the time his father, addicted to meth and hallucinating, threw himself out a fourth-story window and died. At the end of the story, my student, sobbing, told us that his epiphany was that he was alone in the world.

We hugged him, many kids told him they loved him, and he said he felt better for having told the story. But that didn't fix his life. His mother had remarried a man who disliked him, so sometimes that year, he'd stay after school and do homework in my classroom. But there were also many days he didn't come to school at all. He didn't come no matter how much I begged him or called his house, no matter how often our counseling staff met with the student or his mother.

I've been thinking of that boy lately as state and national officials are vowing to get tough on truancy. It would be hard to find an educator who doesn't agree that truancy is a problem. Kids who skip class tend to do poorly in school, and they often don't graduate. That in turn harms their career prospects and earning ability.

But to hear California Attorney General Kamala Harris or U.S.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan talk about the problem, solving it is simply a matter of holding schools and families accountable.

What do they think we've been trying to do?

Ellie Herman is taking a year away from the classroom to learn from teachers in schools across Los Angeles. She is blogging about it at gatsbyinla.wordpress.com.

Read the whole story

Opinion: What did we learn from the shutdown?

By Patrick Stelmach

Government is simply a word for the things we decide to do together. And if there is one lesson that the recent 16-day government shutdown taught us, it is this: there are a lot of things we Americans have decided to do, together, and people were angry when these things were taken away.

Michelle Langbehn and hundreds of other cancer patients were heartbroken when they were denied potentially life-saving treatment protocols after the shuttering of the National Institutes of Health. World War II veterans rebelled when they couldn't visit the monuments in Washington. Wildland firefighters were justifiably upset when they were forced to work, putting their lives in harm's way, without pay. And it all had a ripple effect – when Yosemite National Park was closed, when spending by government agencies ground to a halt, when thousands of federal workers in Rep. Tom McClintock's

district were, in effect, furloughed, it drained $24 billion out of the U.S. economy, according to the S&P index.

This all supposedly was a fight over Obamacare, but actually it was about much, much more. The conflict centered on a fundamental question: What is the rightful place of government in our lives? During the shutdown, several competing philosophies emerged.

One philosophy, embraced by Rep. McClintock and the Tea Party faction of the GOP, held that government has no role in our lives, save for the bare essentials (and even those were threatened by the shutdown). And they were willing to sacrifice our economy to get their way. It is a shame that Rep. McClintock voted no on the measure to end the government shutdown and to avoid default, after seeing weeks of demonstrations outside his office calling for a budget deal.

The day before the vote, Oct. 15, Michelle Langbehn and California Fair Share delivered the petition signed by over 140,000 Americans urging Congress to end the shutdown and help her fight cancer. Michelle shared her inspirational story and said, “I stand here as a voting American whose voice is being ignored. We, the citizens, are the losers. We voted for politicians, like Tom McClintock, who shut down the government and put American lives at risk. We deserve better.”

The second philosophy, and one that we at California Fair Share believe in, along with most Americans, is pretty different: Let’s do all we can for an economy that works for all of us, and that gives the most people a chance at a fair shot at a good life. And a shutdown that nearly destroys all progress toward this goal is almost antithetical to this philosophy.

Is there any question that this second approach is embraced by the majority of Rep. McClintock’s constituents? Consider that after the rise of Sen. Ted Cruz and after the Tea Party

overran Republican leadership in the House, an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found that only 24 percent of respondents held a positive view of the GOP -– the lowest such finding in the poll's history.

And now, government is up and running again, much to the relief of Californians who want to take their families camping in Yosemite and small-business owners, from Truckee to Oakhurst, who rely on the outdoor recreation community for their livelihoods.

But the budget fights are not over. Government is only funded until January, and the issue of the debt ceiling will return a month later. Now is a good time for all of us to reflect on the proper role of government in our lives and our priorities as a nation, and, most importantly, how we might align these two things.

Patrick Stelmach is the state organizer for California Fair Share.

Letter: Spend money on buses, not airport

To the community,

For years the city has dumped money on the airport, a loser. The airport is supposed to be a self-supporting enterprise, but that is fiction. Early in his career Councilman Hal Cole said the airport was an albatross around the city's neck. That hasn't changed.

Today the city funnels money to the airport by paying rent,

which if not a lie, is one more fiction, self-deception. The “rent” is a subsidy pure and simple.



Bill Crawford

The city should run its own bus system. Some people like the idea, but rightly ask, “Where is the money to operate the system?”

The city should stop the airport subsidy and use the money to help support the bus system. What the city is doing is subsidizing the well healed who use the airport to fly in. Hal Cole has said he supports use fees for paid parking OK, why not the airport users?

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

PS: Before the city started airport rent the city made loans to the airport until the auditor said the loans should be called gifts because the city would not get the money back.

Letter: Heavenly serves Bread & Broth dinner

To the community,

As they entered St. Theresa’s Grace Hall on Oct. 7, Bread &

Broth’s dinner guests were greeted by the smiling faces of the sponsor crew representing Heavenly Mountain and Kirkwood resorts’ marketing and communications team.

In addition to helping with the dinner’s setup and cleanup, Kelly Campbell, senior brand manager; Sally Gunter, communications manager; Ashley Smith, communications coordinator; and Margo Stoney, graphic design specialist, generously filled each guest’s tray with baked salmon, roasted veggies and green salad.

“We were very happy to be able to help out with such an amazing organization that gives back to our community in such an impactful way. It was nice to see the smiles our actions put on people’s faces.”

As the evening’s Adopt A Day of Nourishment sponsors, Heavenly and Kirkwood resorts once again supported the efforts of B&B to feed the less fortunate of our south shore community both with their monetary donation from the Vail Echo Foundation and their employees volunteering at the dinner.

Bread & Broth is very grateful for the monthly Adopt A Day sponsorships hosted by Heavenly Mountain and Kirkwood resorts. Every Monday, sponsorships feed over 90 members of our community who are in need of a healthy and filling meal.

To help B&B as a donor or sponsor, please contact me at (530) 542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Sierra Club loses local conservation leader

To the community,

Well-known conservationist Bob Anderson and his wife, Grace, were on a 70th birthday trip to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in the Serengeti National Park in Kenya when a van accident caused fatal head injuries to Bob and injured Grace.

The couple had completed their successful climb of the over-19,000-foot high mountain.

Bob served as president of the local bi-state Tahoe Area Sierra Club for several years. He was also a member of LTFAC, the Lake Tahoe Federal Advisory Committee to TRPA, as well as a board member of the Washoe Meadows Community Group. In addition, Bob was a board member of the Tahoe Institute for Nature Studies.

Bob had a long history of successful conservation campaigns in Montana before he met and married Grace Proulx of Meyers. The two shared an interest in energy transmission, as well as hiking, backpacking, and climbing. Bob was a former two-term elected member of the Montana Public Utilities Commission.

As a seasoned conservation activist and prominent commissioner, Bob brought his great skills to managing the local Sierra Club group as the issues of the proposed Regional Plan became more and more worrisome regarding the impacts on Lake Tahoe. Bob was very effective and will be remembered by many for his conservation efforts in the Tahoe basin.

The Tahoe Area Sierra Club is stunned by the loss of Bob and our hearts go out to his wife, Grace, who was injured in the accident. We look forward to Grace’s recovery and return to her beloved cabin in Meyers, where she entertained her small

grandchildren with great pleasure. Grace has been the leader for planning and producing the club's fund-raisers for the past four years.

Laurel Ames, Tahoe Area Sierra Club conservation chair

Opinion: Bullies don't belong on City Council

By Kathryn Reed

Politicians are elected to **SERVE** the public.

Many seem to have forgotten that. They have their own agendas. They want to represent a few instead of the majority. They forget about doing what's right for the greater good and refuse to put aside personal opinions. And it's not just happening in Washington, D.C.

The Oct. 15 South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting was embarrassing to sit through.

Once again the topic of banning plastic bags was before the council. It's been talked about for four years, but by the way some councilmembers act it's like the ban is a new idea.

What was so horrendous is how Councilwoman JoAnn Conner treated the people who spoke in favor of the ban. And then how Mayor Tom Davis allowed her to get away with it. The mayor is supposed to run the meeting and have control. Clearly, that was not the case on Tuesday.

They are also the only two who for the second meeting in a row voted the same way – against the ban.

Eleven of the 13 members of the public who spoke Tuesday favor banning single-use plastic bags.

Conner was combative after nearly every single pro bag banner spoke. She bantered with them, questioning in a harsh tone as though her only intent was to belittle them.

The point of public comment is for the council to listen. Questions should be to clarify something, not to degrade the person for their opinion. The public is not there for an inquisition. No one should be vilified for his or her opinion.

There are ways to disagree and still be respectful. But Conner should not have even been engaging these people in conversation in the first place.

If that is the new norm for how the public will be treated, I would think the number of people coming forward at future council meetings would diminish.

When it came time for the councilmembers to give their comments Conner went on a rant. This is supposed to be the time when the council members state their opinions and try to convince their colleagues to vote with them.

Not so with Conner.

At no time did she even have eye contact with the other four electeds. Instead, she stared at the audience – the ones who had just spoken and the few others in attendance. She chastised them, practically ridiculed them, and scolded them as though their opinion were irrelevant.

Wake up Conner. You were elected to represent all 20,000-plus residents, not just your opinion or the ones who call you. Have you ever thought that those who disagree with you are afraid to call because of the way you treat people in public? One can only imagine the venom that might spew from you in private.

One has to wonder why the mayor didn’t take control of the meeting. Was it because Conner was his only ally on this topic?

Davis said he would rather support a statewide plastic ban. It’s likely another such bill will circulate through the Legislature after the first of the year. Normally Davis is one for local control and doesn’t like to abdicate his authority to others.

But by getting the council to write a letter in support of the statewide ban with his signature on it while he is still mayor, he comes out looking good even if it never goes anywhere in Sacramento.

He constantly says there is no plastic bag problem in Tahoe, then cites Clean Tahoe and South Tahoe Refuse. Maybe you don’t see the problem because they do such a good job. The problem, though, Mr. Mayor, goes beyond whether you see a bag on the street or in the lake. The problem is in the landfills as well as with wildlife.

And Mr. Mayor, since you are a board member of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, one would think you would have insider info about the hazards of plastic and wild animals.

I’m not saying we should have 5-0 votes on the council. Disagreement is fine – even good at times. But decorum should be mandatory.

—-

And for the record: I am against the plastic bag ban because I don’t want government telling me what to do. However, I think it’s good for the city to set a standard of environmental stewardship. If I were on the council, I would have voted for the ban because it’s for the greater good.

Opinion: Tahoe inspires planning professionals

By Joanne Marchetta

As planning professionals from 13 states converge on Lake Tahoe this week for the annual Western States American Planning Association Conference, Tahoe's record of environmental protection and land use planning are taking the regional stage. A few of the attendees on Monday shared with me their excitement over having the conference in Lake Tahoe this year. Besides the spectacular fall weather and incredible surroundings, Tahoe is full of hidden interest about what makes this a special and challenging place for what planners call "place-making".

Professional and citizen planners from around the nation and the globe look to our mountain home as a leader in environmental management and trendsetting policies, and Tahoe offers lessons to those who want to carry away its wisdom. The Lake Tahoe Regional Plan, Transportation Plan, and Environmental Improvement Program are headliner topics this week for the three-day conference in which attendees study innovations in the topics of growth, redevelopment, and environmental improvement.



Joanne

Marchetta

So, what makes Tahoe the place that it is? The 11th deepest lake on the planet? The second largest at this elevation? The 39 trillion gallons of water it holds? Yes, but Tahoe was also one of the first places in the nation that started looking at planning at a regional, landscape scale. There are over 200 multi-state compact agencies nationwide, but TRPA is unique by being the only regional agency with the authority to implement land use and environmental regulations. We also started earlier here, more than 40 years ago, to protect the lake first against nutrient pollution, banning septic systems and requiring that all treated sewage be exported outside the watershed. We've continued that epic charge with water quality best management practices, pollutant reduction targets, and stream restoration among other measures.

Our small, permanent population of 55,000 contrasts with a huge influx of between 3 million and 5 million visitors each year. On Tahoe's mostly small, two-lane roadway system, we have to manage spikes of 300,000 people or more on peak holiday weekends. Of particular interest to planners coming from other areas is the fact that we have one of the strongest growth control systems in the nation that prohibits new subdivisions and stopped new development on sensitive lands. These are the characteristics that generate so much interest from planners around the nation who are facing the dual challenges of dwindling natural resources and population growth.

The award-winning updates to the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan are taking center stage in many of the conference's 30 workshop sessions. The new Regional Plan for Tahoe embodies a growing trend in planning: to collaborate more broadly across sectors and across jurisdictions and move more toward regional-scale work. Many new alliances and partnerships are being spawned across the country recognizing the need to scale up planning

to this landscape, ecosystem level in order to become more effective at addressing emerging land use, transportation, and conservation problems.

TRPA recognizes that regulation alone is not enough to restore Lake Tahoe and the restoration effort called the Environmental Improvement Program is an equally important part of the conference events. The EIP is one of the most comprehensive, large-scale investments in environmental restoration in the nation, on the scale of the conservation work at other great water bodies like Chesapeake Bay, Everglades, Puget Sound, and Great Lakes.

The conference this week highlights the role that Lake Tahoe has on the national and international stage of environmental conservation and development planning, but what we can all be proud of is the positive results that are beginning to show from our combined efforts. The loss of lake clarity has flattened and more than 60 percent of TRPA's environmental standards are in attainment or improving. Tahoe's land and water is special to us, but the knowledge and experience we have to offer others may be more meaningful than we imagine.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Opinion: U.S. focusing on wrong fiscal issue

By Larry Summers

Washington is consumed by the impasse over reopening the government and raising the debt limit. It seems likely that this episode, like the 1995-96 government shutdowns and the 2011 debt-limit scare, will be remembered mainly by the people directly involved. But future historians may well see today's crisis as the turning point at which American democracy was shown to be dysfunctional – an example to be avoided rather than emulated.

This tragedy is compounded by the fact that most of the substance being debated in the current crisis is only tangentially relevant to the major challenges and opportunities facing the United States. This is the case with respect to the endless discussions about the precise timing of continuing resolutions and debt-limit extensions, or the proposals to change congressional staff health-care packages or cut a medical-device tax that represents only about 0.015 percent of gross domestic product.



Larry Summers

More fundamental is this: Current and future budget deficits are now a second-order problem relative to other, more pressing issues facing the U.S. economy. Projections that there is a major deficit problem are highly uncertain. And policies that indirectly address deficit issues by focusing on growth are sounder in economic terms and more plausible in political terms than the long-term budget deals much of the policy community is obsessed with.

The latest Congressional Budget Office projection is that the

federal deficit will fall to 2 percent of GDP by 2015 and that a decade from now the debt-to-GDP ratio will be below its current level of 75 percent. While the CBO projects that under current law the debt-to-GDP ratio will rise over the longer term, the rise is not large relative to the scale of the U.S. economy. It would be offset by an increase in revenue or a decrease in spending of 0.8 percent of GDP for the next 25 years and 1.7 percent of GDP for the next 75 years.

These figures lie well within any reasonable confidence interval for deficit forecasts. The most recent comprehensive CBO evaluation found that, leaving aside any errors due to policy changes, the expected error in projections out only five years is 3.5 percent of GDP. Put another way, given the magnitude of forecast uncertainties, there is a chance of close to 40 percent that with no new policy actions, the ratio of debt-to-GDP will decline over 25 or 75 years.

Of course, debt problems could also be much worse than is now forecast.

But in most areas, policymakers avoid strong actions without statistically compelling evidence. Few would favor action to curb greenhouse gas emissions without evidence establishing that substantial climate climate change is overwhelmingly likely. Yet it is conventional wisdom that urgent action must be taken to cut the deficit, even as prevailing short-run deficit forecasts suggest no problems and long-run forecasts are within margins of error.

To be sure, some steps that matter profoundly for the long run should be priorities today. Data from the CBO imply that an increase of just 0.2 percent in annual growth would entirely eliminate the projected long-term budget gap. Increasing growth, in addition to solving debt problems, would also raise household incomes, increase U.S. economic strength relative to other nations, help state and local governments meet their obligations and prompt investments in research and

development.

Beyond the fact that spurring growth has a multiplicity of benefits, of which reduced federal debt is only one, growth-enhancing policies have more widely felt benefits than measures that raise taxes or cut spending.

Spurring growth is an area where neither side of the political spectrum has a monopoly on good ideas. We need more public infrastructure investment, but we also need to reduce regulatory barriers that hold back private infrastructure. We need more investment in education but also increases in accountability for those who provide it. We need more investment in the basic science behind renewable energy technologies, but in the medium term we need to take advantage of the remarkable natural gas resources that have recently become available to the United States. We need to ensure that government has the tools to work effectively in the information age but also to ensure that public policy promotes entrepreneurship.

If even half the energy that has been devoted over the past five years to “budget deals” were devoted instead to “growth strategies,” we could enjoy sounder government finances and a restoration of the power of the American example. At a time when the majority of the United States thinks that it is moving in the wrong direction, and family incomes have been stagnant, a reduction in political fighting is not enough. We have to start focusing on the issues that actually are most important.

Larry Summers is a professor and past president at Harvard. He was Treasury secretary from 1999 to 2001 and economic adviser to President Obama from 2009 through 2010.

Opinion: Lost opportunity to unite Calif. GOP

By Mark Z. Barabak, Los Angeles Times

Arnold Schwarzenegger has a story he has often told about the lightning-strike moment he became a Republican.

He had just arrived in the United States in the roiling year 1968, with the closely fought Richard Nixon-Hubert Humphrey presidential race in full swing. He remembers watching television as a friend translated, from English to German, the back-and-forth between the two candidates. Nixon spoke of "free enterprise, getting the government off your back, lowering the taxes and strengthening the military," Schwarzenegger recounted to cheers at the 2004 Republican National Convention. "I said to my friend, 'What party is he?'"

"My friend said, 'He's a Republican.'"

"I said, 'Then I am a Republican.'"

When Schwarzenegger entered the 2003 California gubernatorial recall race, with a surprise announcement on Jay Leno's "Tonight Show," it was a similar bolt from the blue. The California GOP was already well on its way to marginalization, thanks to positions on immigration, abortion and other issues that pushed the party increasingly to the right of most Californians.

But the fiscally conservative, socially liberal Schwarzenegger offered hope: to broaden the appeal of California Republicans, move the state party away from the ideological fringe and even, thanks to his celebrity and uber-personality, make the GOP seem a little less old and stodgy.

Read the whole story

Letter: Barton Auxiliary helps at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to thank Barton Hospital Auxiliary for sponsoring an Adopt A Day of Nourishment on Sept. 23.

With their donation of $250, B&B was able to serve 120 guests a full course dinner and provide a safe gathering for those in need. In addition, auxiliary members George Ramirez and Louise Mitchell, who is also a B&B volunteer, helped with the dinner's setup and cheerfully greeted and served the evening's dinner guests.

"Thank you for letting me help and pay back to the community," commented Ramirez at the end of the evening. This is a common theme for those who volunteer at their sponsorship dinners and experience firsthand the spirit of good will that comes with helping others.

Due to generous donors like Barton Hospital Auxiliary, B&B is able to improve the lives of many less fortunate members of our community by serving meals every Monday at St. Theresa Church's parish hall and every Friday at South Lake Tahoe Presbyterian Church.

Bread & Broth would like to commend Barton Hospital Auxiliary for their many contributions to the community of South Lake Tahoe and is thankful for their support of B&B by Adopting a Day of Nourishment.

To help B&B as a donor or sponsor, please contact me at (530) 542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth