Opinion: California budget isn’t really balanced

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown blunted the expansionist tendencies of his fellow Democrats in writing a new state budget, but that doesn’t mean it’s the “balanced” spending plan that he and other Capitol politicians are claiming.

They define “balanced” as the state’s having enough revenue to pay for the 2013-14 budget’s appropriations. However, their budget ignores some very real obligations that, if recognized, would put the state many billions of dollars in the red.

Moreover, many of the commitments the budget does make – such as a sharp increase in school spending – could bite back later in the decade because they are financed from the temporary sales and income tax increases that voters passed last year.



Dan Walters

It’s important to remember both of those points because the politicos are already patting themselves on the back, such as Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez’s self-appraisal, “a tremendous achievement,” or Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg’s claim: “Ho-hum, another on-time, balanced budget. This is the third year in a row.”

The obligations being ignored include the California State

Teachers' Retirement System's declaration that it needs $4.5 billion more per year to maintain solvency, and more than $50 billion in unfunded liabilities for state retiree health care.

Both of those debts – that's what they truly are – are growing by millions of dollars each day, as is the $10 billion that the state has borrowed from the federal government to prop up its insolvent Unemployment Insurance Fund.

A big chunk of the temporary tax increase is going to schools, as required by the state constitution. Some repays debts owed to the schools and some finances the governor's overhaul of how state aid is distributed, giving more to districts with large numbers of poor and/or English-learner students.

Indirectly, by shifting a portion of the sales tax to counties, the state is giving them more than $5 billion a year to finance another Brown priority, a so-called realignment of low-level felons into county jails and supervision.

What happens when the temporary taxes run out in a few years? How will the big boost in school money and realignment be financed then? Implicitly, the budget assumes that either the extra taxes will be made permanent or the economy will be booming again.

Meanwhile, Brown's fellow Democrats have only temporarily abandoned plans for rolling back earlier reductions in health and welfare programs. If revenues spike upward later in the year, they said, they'll try again, arguing that welfare grants, home-aide assistance and other "safety net" services are life-and-death issues for the poor and infirm.

Within a few months, Brown may face this dilemma – whether to pay debts and build reserves or expand spending that others in his party seek.

Opinion: Civil unions are not enough

By Nathaniel Frank

As Americans await U.S. Supreme Court rulings this month on two same-sex marriage cases, June – the traditional month for weddings and pride parades – gives gay people the chance to reflect: How have their own lives and views changed since a Hawaii court ruling first thrust marriage equality onto the national stage 20 years ago? And what might a fully legal marriage mean to them?

For many gay people, including for me, the weight of this prospect has taken a while to sink in. Each time a hurdle to equality is removed, I find myself looking to the next roadblock. When the Supreme Court struck down sodomy laws 10 years ago, I applauded – but quickly lost myself in the fight to repeal "don't ask, don't tell." When Massachusetts became the first state to legalize gay marriage, I was thrilled – but my eyes focused on the 49 remaining states. Even now, as the court appears poised to strike down the federal Defense of Marriage Act, I fear that the related ruling on California's Proposition 8 could fall short of ending marriage bans in all states.

Still, an end to DOMA might finally resolve something that's long hindered my ability to fully celebrate progress on marriage equality. It has to do with the meaning of marriage as a legal right, one fully recognized by community and country without reservation.

This symbolic and psychological meaning of marriage – its power to shape how we feel and act – has not always been

apparent to many LGBT Americans. And not all of us have valued it. Indeed, in the 1970s and 1980s, when just a handful of visionaries had uttered “gay” and “marriage” in the same breath, many LGBT Americans took little note of the idea and some actively opposed it.

They were focused more on securing privacy for their scorned relationships than winning the kind of public recognition that marriage represents. Some sought to challenge what they saw as a patriarchal and confining institution rather than to join it. Others made the principled argument that marriage privileged coupling over building community, a case buttressed by the heroic webs of support formed to respond to the AIDS crisis.

In interviews I conducted for a history of the gay-marriage movement, a prominent lesbian legal activist told me she was concerned about “leaving some of our own people behind” by fixating on marriage. Such a focus meant foreclosing on a broader range of options for recognizing diverse family — and human — relationships. As another respected colleague of mine put it: “As strangers to marriage for so long, we’ve created loving and committed forms of family, care and attachment that far exceed, and often improve on, the narrow legal definition of marriage.”

But such ambivalence toward marriage began to wane as advocates recognized that the issue was ideal for spurring millions of water-cooler conversations about the equal worth of same-sex love. And over time, the idea of marriage equality not only attracted more support from straight Americans but also won over gays themselves.

Polls confirm this trend. A 2007 Hunter College poll shows that younger gay people rank marriage and parenting rights at the top of their list of policy priorities, while gays and lesbians over 65 hardly rank them at all. A Harris Interactive poll before last fall’s presidential election found that 86%

of LGBT Americans under 30 “strongly support” marriage equality, while only 53 percent of LGBT seniors do.

Still, until recent years, the marriage equality fight seemed centered on the more than 1,000 rights and benefits that federal and state governments offer married couples.

But as civil unions and other arrangements emerged to plug those legal gaps, an even stronger motivation for marriage equality surfaced: gaining equal respect and recognition for taking the grown-up step of committing your life to another. And this impulse is not just the wish of a despised minority to be accepted by the majority. In my view, it’s a fundamental ingredient of what marriage is – for gays and straights alike.

The focus on concrete benefits, for all their value, downplays a crucial function of marriage: to engage our community not only in publicly celebrating our private commitments but also in enforcing them.

I came to understand this role when a straight friend of mine told me as much on the eve of her wedding. “It’s a way of enlisting my friends, family and community,” she said, “in supporting what will surely be a difficult set of commitments over time.”

Marriage is about a couple’s intimate choices, yes, but it’s also about the interplay between public recognition and private feelings and behavior. Internalizing that the people around us, and the law of the land, acknowledge our commitments can help us remain steadfast when the going gets tough.

Looked at this way, marriage is not just a commitment between two people but a shared public identity. It is freely chosen but ultimately constricts an individual’s freedom in the interest of greater goods: that of the couple and that of their community and nation.

I often hear gay people express some variety of this sentiment: “I don’t need the state’s stamp of approval for my love” or “I don’t care what straight people think of my relationship, so long as I have equal rights.” These views reflect a belief that caring about the opinions of others is a weakness. It seems disingenuous, however, to seek public recognition for our love on the grounds that our relationships are entirely private affairs.

If legal benefits were all that mattered, civil unions would have been enough. Yet separate is inherently unequal — because marriage is not just about inheritance rights and tax law but about sharing in the symbolic space of first-class citizenship. Gay people deserve the same access to the institution of marriage enjoyed by straight people because our need for support is identical to theirs. Our relationships and our communities deserve no less.

This is why having the country I love (and not just my state) recognize my relationship with the man I love matters to me. It’s also why gay support (and donations) for President Obama surged when our nation’s leader endorsed same-sex marriage last year. This change is not merely symbolic nor just rhetorical. Marriage plays a central role in tying families, and our country, together.

No court will decide if I marry Dom; he’ll decide that when I propose today. But we’ll have so much more to celebrate if the Supreme Court holds that, in the eyes of our United States, all marriages are worth defending. Sure there is more work to do, but if the court strikes down DOMA, as I think it should, it will be a moment to savor — fully and without reservation.

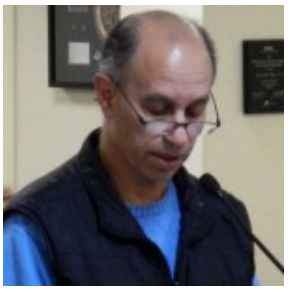
Nathaniel Frank, author of “Unfriendly Fire” and a visiting scholar at Columbia’s Center for Gender and Sexuality Law, is writing a book called “The Anti-Gay Mind.” This column first appeared in the Los Angeles Times.

Letter: Questioning leadership choices at Mt. Tallac High

Publisher's note: ***The letter below was first sent the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board of education and superintendent. It is reprinted with permission.***

Dr. [Jim] Tarwater and School Board Members,

The Mount Tallac High School graduation is scheduled for Friday morning. It is truly a remarkable achievement for a group of students who have overcome so many challenges and obstacles during their lifetime. For some, they will be the first in their family to graduate high school. The graduation ceremony is a very happy, but emotional time for the students, their families and friends, the Mount Tallac staff, and the many community members who attend the ceremony.



Harry Segal

Susan Baker, the heart and soul of the school, will certainly have a day filled with mixed emotions. Susan's determination and passion for helping each and every student, and along with the help of an incredible dedicated staff and many community members have made the school what it is today. Susan knows

better than anyone what is needed to continue moving Mount Tallac forward in a positive direction.

Unfortunately, Dr. Tarwater and the school board have decided they know best. Not allowing Susan and the Mount Tallac staff to be a part of the decision-making process to choose her replacement, is an absolute disgrace. It shows a total lack of respect for Susan, the entire staff and especially a lack of good judgment and being sensitive to the needs of the Mount Tallac students.

There is no excuse for someone who has no connection with the school, other than title, to make a decision based on politics, rather than what is best for the children. There is no excuse for elected school board members to go along with the decision. The students depend on the superintendent and school board to do what is best for each and every child in this community, including the students at Mount Tallac. Do any of you actually believe the current decision for Susan's replacement is the best possible option?

This is not about Karen Tinlin, who is a very capable administrator. It is about the future of a school that helps students who have faced despair and hopelessness. It is about a school that gives positive guidance and hope to students. It is about a school that teaches students how to be successful in life. It is about a school where students feel safe and secure. It is about a school that performs "miracles" every day.

There is no way any of you can justify what has been done. Is this how all of you have chosen to thank Susan for her dedication and passion to help these children? Shame on all of you!

The choice is yours. You can make the needed changes to restore the integrity of our school district. Do what is right for the children of our community.

Harry Segal, South Lake Tahoe

Editorial: State should not risk county public health

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the June 5, 2013, Sacramento Bee.***

Protecting public health is a basic government function. County health officers track illnesses and deaths from West Nile virus to hospital infections to food-borne contamination. They conduct vaccination campaigns and restaurant inspections. They respond to outbreaks and disasters.

Unfortunately, this essential public health function is being lost in the budget battle between Gov. Jerry Brown and the counties in the jostling over preparing for the federal Affordable Care Act. The governor wants the state to take back the bulk of a $1.5 billion block grant (so-called "county health realignment funds") that goes to counties for the medically indigent and for public health.

Counties, justifiably, are up in arms. Yet legislative leaders have sent no clear signal where they stand. As the June 15 budget deadline approaches, that should change. Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, and Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez, D-Los Angeles, need to step up.

Brown is right that under federal health care reform, many of the uninsured who now fall back on county care will be covered after Jan. 1 either under an expanded Medi-Cal paid for by federal dollars or in the exchange of private insurers with

federal subsidies. Counties won't need as much money to cover the medically indigent.

The best estimates so far are that of 6 million uninsured Californians, 2 million to 3 million of them will get insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act. Some 3 million to 4 million, however, will remain uninsured.

The governor is justified in wanting to reduce the amount that goes to counties for covering the medically indigent – so counties have an incentive to get people enrolled in Medi-Cal and the exchange. At the same time, counties are justified in wanting to ensure they can care for the remaining uninsured and continue basic public health functions.

In 2013-14, Brown would take $900 million of the $1.5 billion block grant. After that, he would take $1.3 billion. That's too much.

Counties historically have spent more than half of the grant on public health, according to the California State Association of Counties – though there is variation among them. If Brown sweeps the bulk of the funds, counties will have to choose between covering the remaining uninsured or continuing basic public health functions, when they should be doing both.

The governor wants to allocate the block grant based on actual county costs for the remaining uninsured, which is fine for the part dealing with indigent care. But what about public health?

In a compromise, the counties have proposed a formula that would reserve 30 percent of the block grant for public health. The rest would be divided between the counties, for caring for the remaining uninsured, and the state – with a true-up at the end of each year to make sure that counties get money only for actual services to uninsured individuals. This would take effect in 2015-16 – providing a transition.

The Legislature, a co-equal branch of government, needs to jump into the fray, sending the message that public health is important.

Editorial: Obama needs to stop eavesdropping

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the June 6, 2013, New York Times.***

Within hours of the disclosure that federal authorities routinely collect data on phone calls Americans make, regardless of whether they have any bearing on a counterterrorism investigation, the Obama administration issued the same platitude it has offered every time President Obama has been caught overreaching in the use of his powers: Terrorists are a real menace and you should just trust us to deal with them because we have internal mechanisms (that we are not going to tell you about) to make sure we do not violate your rights.

Those reassurances have never been persuasive — whether on secret warrants to scoop up a news agency's phone records or secret orders to kill an American suspected of terrorism — especially coming from a president who once promised transparency and accountability.

The administration has now lost all credibility on this issue. Obama is proving the truism that the executive branch will use any power it is given and very likely abuse it. That is one reason we have long argued that the Patriot Act, enacted in the heat of fear after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks by members of Congress who mostly had not even read it, was reckless in

its assignment of unnecessary and overbroad surveillance powers.

Based on an article in the *Guardian* published Wednesday night, we now know that the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Security Agency used the Patriot Act to obtain a secret warrant to compel Verizon's business services division to turn over data on every single call that went through its system. We know that this particular order was a routine extension of surveillance that has been going on for years, and it seems very likely that it extends beyond Verizon's business division. There is every reason to believe the federal government has been collecting every bit of information about every American's phone calls except the words actually exchanged in those calls.

Articles in the *Washington Post* and the *Guardian* described a process by which the N.S.A. is also able to capture Internet communications directly from the servers of nine leading American companies. The articles raised questions about whether the N.S.A. separated foreign communications from domestic ones.

A senior administration official quoted in the *Times* online Thursday afternoon about the Verizon order offered the lame observation that the information does not include the name of any caller, as though there would be the slightest difficulty in matching numbers to names. He said the information "has been a critical tool in protecting the nation from terrorist threats," because it allows the government "to discover whether known or suspected terrorists have been in contact with other persons who may be engaged in terrorist activities, particularly people located inside the United States."

That is a vital goal, but how is it served by collecting everyone's call data? The government can easily collect phone records (including the actual content of those calls) on "known or suspected terrorists" without logging every call

made. In fact, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act was expanded in 2008 for that very purpose.

Essentially, the administration is saying that without any individual suspicion of wrongdoing, the government is allowed to know whom Americans are calling every time they make a phone call, for how long they talk and from where.

This sort of tracking can reveal a lot of personal and intimate information about an individual. To casually permit this surveillance – with the American public having no idea that the executive branch is now exercising this power – fundamentally shifts power between the individual and the state, and it repudiates constitutional principles governing search, seizure and privacy.

The defense of this practice offered by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who as chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee is supposed to be preventing this sort of overreaching, was absurd. She said on Thursday that the authorities need this information in case someone might become a terrorist in the future. Sen. Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, the vice chairman of the committee, said the surveillance has "proved meritorious, because we have gathered significant information on bad guys and only on bad guys over the years."

But what assurance do we have of that, especially since Ms. Feinstein went on to say that she actually did not know how the data being collected was used?

The senior administration official quoted in the *Times* said the executive branch internally reviews surveillance programs to ensure that they "comply with the Constitution and laws of the United States and appropriately protect privacy and civil liberties."

That's no longer good enough. Obama clearly had no intention of revealing this eavesdropping, just as he would not have acknowledged the killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, an American

citizen, had it not been reported in the press. Even then, it took him more than a year and a half to acknowledge the killing, and he is still keeping secret the protocol by which he makes such decisions.

We are not questioning the legality under the Patriot Act of the court order disclosed by the *Guardian*. But we strongly object to using that power in this manner. It is the very sort of thing against which Obama once railed, when he said in 2007 that the surveillance policy of the George W. Bush administration "puts forward a false choice between the liberties we cherish and the security we provide."

Two Democrats on the Senate Intelligence Committee, Ron Wyden of Oregon and Mark Udall of Colorado, have raised warnings about the government's overbroad interpretation of its surveillance powers. "We believe most Americans would be stunned to learn the details of how these secret court opinions have interpreted Section 215 of the Patriot Act," they wrote last year in a letter to Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. "As we see it, there is now a significant gap between what most Americans think the law allows and what the government secretly claims the law allows. This is a problem, because it is impossible to have an informed public debate about what the law should say when the public doesn't know what its government thinks the law says."

On Thursday, Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, R- Wisc., who introduced the Patriot Act in 2001, said that the National Security Agency overstepped its bounds by obtaining a secret order to collect phone log records from millions of Americans.

"As the author of the Patriot Act, I am extremely troubled by the F.B.I.'s interpretation of this legislation," he said in a statement. "While I believe the Patriot Act appropriately balanced national security concerns and civil rights, I have always worried about potential abuses." He added: "Seizing phone records of millions of innocent people is excessive and

un-American.”

Stunning use of the act shows, once again, why it needs to be sharply curtailed if not repealed.

Opinion: Tahoe City residents being ignored in planning



This is one vision for a section of Tahoe City. Rendering/Design Workshop

By Melody Monk

As a long time Tahoe City resident, arriving in 1972, I am concerned the Tahoe City Community Plan decision making process has been seized by special interests: Tahoe City Public Utility District, Chamber of Commerce, and the Resort Association.

I attended a Tahoe City “visioning” meeting May 8, 2013, at the Gatekeepers Museum and found that the committee members, sadly, had no patience for any public comment, and second homeowners and locals appear to be left out of the conversation. We live here, what do we all really want?

The committee members are hell bent on maximizing development, scale and height. I guess this is only natural for the Chamber of Commerce, Tahoe City business owners, the Resort Association, and now the TCPUD as owners of the golf course. Although the Tahoe City Golf Course was purchased with supposedly no intent to develop it, now there is talk of a huge hotel right on that golf course, which was purchased with our public money.

Most of us moved up here, being willing to live a harder lifestyle in the mountains, to be among nature and our beautiful and very rare clear lake, and to take care of that gift. No one at the meeting was speaking about what we leave future generations, the vastly growing algae in Lake Tahoe, the animals or the forest or the detrimental effects of large resort development. It brought tears to my eyes, literally.

TRPA designated “Town Centers” as areas targeted for redevelopment. Tahoe City is a designated town center that would shockingly allow up to 56 feet in height and 40 units/acre density compared to the present allowable 34 feet in height and 15 units/acre density. That’s a huge difference. The Tahoe City team is even going for the maximum height allowed of 56 feet. To give you a comparison, the new unsightly Domas building in Kings Beach is 48 feet. Interestingly, the Kings Beach Plan team doesn’t want heights greater than 48 feet and those only on the mountain side of the highway. Smartly, they want to keep the low scale beach feel. I’d like to see the same in Tahoe City. Why visit Lake Tahoe when you can’t even see the lake?

In the last few minutes of the meeting, the team all agreed to incorporate more parcels into the Tahoe City Town Center: the Golf Course (owned by the TCPUD using our money), “64 Acres” where the empty and little used Transit Station is located, and the lakefront parcel located between Tahoe Tavern and Tavern Shores. These three large parcels will be zoned “mixed use recreation”, which with these changes certainly doesn’t

mean open space. Recreational use businesses can, and probably will, fill the area because they can.

This is all justified by “trying to save a dying Tahoe City”. I wonder about the wisdom of embracing large resort development like Northstar and Squaw’s new condo proposal and water park (we need this by Lake Tahoe?) as the solution to the economic woes of the recession. It seems to me low scale development on the order of Truckee, Calistoga, Santa Cruz, Carmel, Yountville, and Healdsburg … authentic mountain charm, is the real solution. These are the places people really want to go.

How can Tahoe City compete with Northstar’s horseback riding, golf, tennis, pool, bike trails, skiing, and skating rink, and why would we? Don’t get me started on the proposed Northstar roller coaster. What? Tahoe City has Lake Tahoe and bike trails, but it needs its open space and opportunities for recreation. Let’s have more to do, more quality low scale lodging, and the right amount of commercial given the limitations of our infrastructure and small population. Please!

We’re already at maximum capacity for the summer and New Year’s holidays. And that’s the stated opinion of the Chamber of Commerce. We don’t want to look like South Lake Tahoe. Let’s keep our quaint charm. Who wants to leave the city to visit just another overdeveloped city?

Please, people, get involved and find out what is in store for you if no one becomes aware of what is being planned or takes any action. Gentrification is not good. Read “Down Hill Slide” by Hal Clifford to see what happened with the rape of Vail. Don’t be fooled by the “green wash” postcards being mailed. Please check it out yourself. I’m honestly scared for our beautiful jewel, Lake Tahoe.

Melody Monk is a resident of Tahoe City.

Opinion: Nevada fails to protect Lake Tahoe

By David von Seggern and Laurel Ames

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval on Thursday signed SB229, which repeals the 2011 legislative effort (SB271) to withdraw Nevada from the Lake Tahoe bi-state Compact. Environmental groups are calling the new law a major setback in protecting Lake Tahoe from development.

The Compact is the federally approved agreement between California and Nevada that was enacted to protect Lake Tahoe's famed blue waters from runoff and other pollution caused by excessive development. The repeal would become null if California fails by January 2014 to meet conditions similar to what SB271 had required to prevent Nevada's pull-out from the Compact.

The conditions include amending the Compact to require the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to consider economic factors in land-use planning, e.g., "changing economic conditions."

They also include California's declaration of its support for "full implementation" of the Regional Plan Update approved by TRPA in December 2012. If California does not meet the conditions, SB271 will go back into effect.

The Sierra Club is disappointed in the new law.

While keeping Nevada in the Compact is commendable, this new legislation does not guarantee that the lake will get the protection it needs. The new law still presents California the choice of either ending the Compact or "saving" a much

weakened version that places development on a par with environmental protection of the lake.

The desires of Tahoe's developers and large corporations to keep up with the glitz of other areas, in order to compete for additional tourists, has nothing to do with assuring restoration of the lake – it's all about increasing their bottom lines while local governments count the increased tax revenues. And those desires require reducing existing standards that are the hallmark of the TRPA – protecting the lake's clarity, protecting the natural areas around the lake, protecting the beautiful scenery, protecting open spaces, and controlling air pollution.

Environmentalists also object to SB229's call for California's support for the Regional Plan update, "This new plan puts forth flawed approaches for Lake Tahoe that seriously reduce protections for the treasured mountain lake. The new plan shifts authority over future development decisions to local jurisdictions which do not have a mandate to protect the lake. The new plan also allows those towns and counties to adopt weaker pollution and development controls than otherwise required by TRPA. This would undermine the very idea behind the agency's creation—that protecting the water quality, clean air, and natural beauty that make Tahoe so popular is a top priority, and one that must be handled at the regional level," Earthjustice attorney Wendy Park explained.

On Feb. 11, 2013, the Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore filed suit in federal court to block the implementation of this flawed Regional Plan Update.

The Sierra Club has a long history of activist interest in Tahoe, starting in 1969, when the TRPA was created. We are disappointed at the state of the TRPA today, and will work to undo the worst of the Regional Plan update that the Nevada governor has endorsed through SB229.

David von Seggern is with the Toiyabe Chapter Sierra Club and Laurel Ames is with the Tahoe Area Sierra Club.

Opinion: Climate change guilt trip

By James Turner

A friend recently returned from a camping trip in the Sierra Nevada. His eyes shone as he described the opalescent sky, the vitality of wildlife in spring and the fun he'd had playing with his two young daughters during the mellow evenings. It had been a really good trip, an experience to treasure, he said.

I casually asked how long it took to get there. "Oh, it wasn't too bad," he said, and then caught himself, as if he'd said something wrong. "But we took the minivan this time, which I suppose means we weren't so in tune with nature after all."

I felt slightly hurt. I am an environmentalist – I work for Greenpeace. Did he think that makes me some moral arbiter of fun, sternly passing judgment on those who ignore the perils of climate change to enjoy a weekend in the mountains?

Of course, it wasn't really about me. What my friend expressed was climate guilt, a feeling that many of us who care about environmental issues experience every day. I am not immune. We feel guilty about driving cars and watching TV and turning on lights, as if that makes us personally responsible for this gigantic threat that looms over us.

For years, caring governments and thoughtful corporations have

communicated the idea that we're all in this together, that if we each just do our bit we can solve this global warming mess. Duke Energy, a utility company that depends heavily on coal, points out that "saving the environment can be as easy as changing a light bulb." It's a gentle, brotherly tone. But there's something in the subtext here too – a warning: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone."

In economics this would be called a barrier to entry, an obstacle that makes it difficult to gain access to a given market. In this case, rather than economic, the barrier is philosophical. If you aren't taking mass transit, you have no right to oppose drilling for oil in the Arctic. Until you've cleaned up your act entirely, you're not entitled to criticize the major oil companies for cashing in our children's future.

Whether this "guilt barrier" is deliberately constructed or just innate to our psyches, it's being exploited by the fossil fuel cartel. Its members are content to have us feel guilty, particularly if it contributes to a sense of helplessness. Where once companies such as Exxon Mobil denied that their products were causing dangerous levels of pollution, now they claim it is impossible to switch from them. "Look at your life," this thinking goes. "You're up to your neck in it. You really want us to turn off the tap?"

This accusation is based on a false premise: that all alternatives are equally accessible to consumers, and we're all happily choosing fossil fuels. That's simply not true, and nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the oil industry's greatest threat: the electric car.

Despite encouraging news that the Toyota Prius has become the No. 1 selling car in California, fully electric vehicles remain out of financial reach for all but the most affluent families. And like most of America, our state lacks the charging infrastructure to support many such cars anyway. More barriers to entry.

Whatever my friend might personally think about climate change and air pollution, he has to stick to a budget that will support his whole family. Nor will he risk stranding them all along I-5. His “choice” of a minivan is in fact no choice at all. He’s left feeling disempowered, implicated and hypocritical. Any desire to act is supplanted by resignation. But whose fault is it?

Oil companies have made up the most powerful industry on Earth for the last 50 years. They have consistently lobbied against fuel efficiency standards. They’ve fought any taxes on the pollutants we must breathe. They’ve sneered at electric vehicles and insisted on a market so rigged that only one technology could ever win out anyway. They indefensibly refuse to pay for the carbon their products – though they would say “your cars” – spew into the atmosphere.

Maybe it’s time for us to remove the guilt. Yes, I drive a car that runs on gasoline. I fly for work when necessary and occasionally for vacation. But doing these things is not the same as admitting they are inevitable. Five years ago I flew more; now I use Skype. Bike lanes have been newly painted in my neighborhood, so I cycle to the store. In a couple of years, electric cars might come into my price range. In the meantime, I refuse to feel guilty.

In the battle against climate change, we should not be waging guilt trips on one another. Rather, we should take the fight to those who use our sense of personal responsibility against us. Climate change is a problem, and we must fix it. But it’s certainly not our fault.

James Turner is head of communications for Greenpeace International’s Save the Arctic Campaign. This column first appeared in the Los Angeles Times.

Opinion: We excel at breeding nutrients out of food

By Jo Robinson

We like the idea that food can be the answer to our ills, that if we eat nutritious foods, we won't need medicine or supplements. We have valued this notion for a long, long time. The Greek physician Hippocrates proclaimed nearly 2,500 years ago: "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food." Today, medical experts concur. If we heap our plates with fresh fruits and vegetables, they tell us, we will come closer to optimum health.

This health directive needs to be revised. If we want to get maximum health benefits from fruits and vegetables, we must choose the right varieties. Studies published within the past 15 years show that much of our produce is relatively low in phytonutrients, which are the compounds with the potential to reduce the risk of four of our modern scourges: cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and dementia. The loss of these beneficial nutrients did not begin 50 or 100 years ago, as many assume. Unwittingly, we have been stripping phytonutrients from our diet since we stopped foraging for wild plants some 10,000 years ago and became farmers.

These insights have been made possible by new technology that has allowed researchers to compare the phytonutrient content of wild plants with the produce in our supermarkets. The results are startling.

Wild dandelions, once a springtime treat for Native Americans, have seven times more phytonutrients than spinach, which we consider a "superfood." A purple potato native to Peru has 28

times more cancer-fighting anthocyanins than common russet potatoes. One species of apple has a staggering 100 times more phytonutrients than the Golden Delicious displayed in our supermarkets.

Were the people who foraged for these wild foods healthier than we are today? They did not live nearly as long as we do, but growing evidence suggests that they were much less likely to die from degenerative diseases, even the minority who lived 70 years and more. The primary cause of death for most adults, according to anthropologists, was injury and infections.

Each fruit and vegetable in our stores has a unique history of nutrient loss, I've discovered, but there are two common themes. Throughout the ages, our farming ancestors have chosen the least bitter plants to grow in their gardens. It is now known that many of the most beneficial phytonutrients have a bitter, sour or astringent taste. Second, early farmers favored plants that were relatively low in fiber and high in sugar, starch and oil. These energy-dense plants were pleasurable to eat and provided the calories needed to fuel a strenuous lifestyle. The more palatable our fruits and vegetables became, however, the less advantageous they were for our health.

The sweet corn that we serve at summer dinners illustrates both of these trends. The wild ancestor of our present-day corn is a grassy plant called teosinte. It is hard to see the family resemblance. Teosinte is a bushy plant with short spikes of grain instead of ears, and each spike has only five to 12 kernels. The kernels are encased in shells so dense you'd need a hammer to crack them open. Once you extract the kernels, you wonder why you bothered. The dry tidbit of food is a lot of starch and little sugar. Teosinte has 10 times more protein than the corn we eat today, but it was not soft or sweet enough to tempt our ancestors.

Over several thousand years, teosinte underwent several

spontaneous mutations. Nature's rewriting of the genome freed the kernels of their cases and turned a spike of grain into a cob with kernels of many colors. Our ancestors decided that this transformed corn was tasty enough to plant in their gardens. By the 1400s, corn was central to the diet of people living throughout Mexico and the Americas.

When European colonists first arrived in North America, they came upon what they called "Indian corn." John Winthrop Jr., governor of the colony of Connecticut in the mid-1600s, observed that American Indians grew "corne with great variety of colours," citing "red, yellow, blew, olive colour, and greenish, and some very black and some of intermediate degrees." A few centuries later, we would learn that black, red and blue corn is rich in anthocyanins. Anthocyanins have the potential to fight cancer, calm inflammation, lower cholesterol and blood pressure, protect the aging brain, and reduce the risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

European settlers were content with this colorful corn until the summer of 1779 when they found something more delectable — a yellow variety with sweeter and more tender kernels. This unusual variety came to light that year after George Washington ordered a scorched-earth campaign against Iroquois tribes. While the militia was destroying the food caches of the Iroquois and burning their crops, soldiers came across a field of extra-sweet yellow corn. According to one account, a lieutenant named Richard Bagnal took home some seeds to share with others. Our old-fashioned sweet corn is a direct descendant of these spoils of war.

Up until this time, nature had been the primary change agent in remaking corn. Farmers began to play a more active role in the 19th century. In 1836, Noyes Darling, a onetime mayor of New Haven, and a gentleman farmer, was the first to use scientific methods to breed a new variety of corn. His goal was to create a sweet, all-white variety that was "fit for

boiling” by mid-July.

He succeeded, noting with pride that he had rid sweet corn of “the disadvantage of being yellow.”

The disadvantage of being yellow, we now know, had been an advantage to human health. Corn with deep yellow kernels, including the yellow corn available in our grocery stores, has nearly 60 times more beta-carotene than white corn, valuable because it turns to Vitamin A in the body, which helps vision and the immune system.

Supersweet corn, which now outsells all other kinds of corn, was born in a cloud of radiation. Beginning in the 1920s, geneticists exposed corn seeds to radiation to learn more about the normal arrangement of plant genes. They mutated the seeds by exposing them to X-rays, toxic compounds, cobalt radiation and then, in the 1940s, to blasts of atomic radiation. All the kernels were stored in a seed bank and made available for research.

In 1959, a geneticist named John Laughnan was studying a handful of mutant kernels and popped a few into his mouth. (The corn was no longer radioactive.) He was startled by their intense sweetness. Lab tests showed that they were up to 10 times sweeter than ordinary sweet corn. A blast of radiation had turned the corn into a sugar factory.

Laughnan was not a plant breeder, but he realized at once that this mutant corn would revolutionize the sweet corn industry. He became an entrepreneur overnight and spent years developing commercial varieties of supersweet corn. His first hybrids began to be sold in 1961. This appears to be the first genetically modified food to enter the United States food supply, an event that has received scant attention.

Within one generation, the new extra sugary varieties eclipsed old-fashioned sweet corn in the marketplace. Build a sweeter fruit or vegetable – by any means – and we will come. Today,

most of the fresh corn in our supermarkets is extra-sweet, and all of it can be traced back to the radiation experiments. The kernels are either white, pale yellow, or a combination of the two. The sweetest varieties approach 40 percent sugar, bringing new meaning to the words “candy corn.” Only a handful of farmers in the United States specialize in multicolored Indian corn, and it is generally sold for seasonal decorations, not food.

We’ve reduced the nutrients and increased the sugar and starch content of hundreds of other fruits and vegetables. How can we begin to recoup the losses?

Here are some suggestions to get you started. Select corn with deep yellow kernels. To recapture the lost anthocyanins and beta-carotene, cook with blue, red or purple cornmeal, which is available in some supermarkets and on the Internet. Make a stack of blue cornmeal pancakes for Sunday breakfast and top with maple syrup.

In the lettuce section, look for arugula. Arugula, also called salad rocket, is very similar to its wild ancestor. Some varieties were domesticated as recently as the 1970s, thousands of years after most fruits and vegetables had come under our sway. The greens are rich in cancer-fighting compounds called glucosinolates and higher in antioxidant activity than many green lettuces.

Scallions, or green onions, are jewels of nutrition hiding in plain sight. They resemble wild onions and are just as good for you. Remarkably, they have more than five times more phytonutrients than many common onions do. The green portions of scallions are more nutritious than the white bulbs, so use the entire plant. Herbs are wild plants incognito. We’ve long valued them for their intense flavors and aroma, which is why they’ve not been given a flavor makeover. Because we’ve left them well enough alone, their phytonutrient content has remained intact.

Experiment with using large quantities of mild-tasting fresh herbs. Add one cup of mixed chopped Italian parsley and basil to a pound of ground grass-fed beef or poultry to make “herb-burgers.” Herbs bring back missing phytonutrients and a touch of wild flavor as well.

The United States Department of Agriculture exerts far more effort developing disease-resistant fruits and vegetables than creating new varieties to enhance the disease resistance of consumers. In fact, I’ve interviewed USDA plant breeders who have spent a decade or more developing a new variety of pear or carrot without once measuring its nutritional content.

We can’t increase the health benefits of our produce if we don’t know which nutrients it contains. Ultimately, we need more than an admonition to eat a greater quantity of fruits and vegetables: we need more fruits and vegetables that have the nutrients we require for optimum health.

Jo Robinson is the author of the forthcoming book “Eating on the Wild Side: The Missing Link to Optimum Health.” This column first appeared in the New York Times.

Letter: SnowGlobe becoming a case of extortion

To the community,

SnowGlobe is stuff and nonsense because it has become a case of extortion. SnowGlobe wants guaranteed money or they threaten to take their icy ball elsewhere.

Such behavior points in one direction. They want others to

shoulder the risks, which means that the relationship with the city cannot be sustained. SnowGlobe wants a one-sided deal or else.



Bill Crawford

It is written that when pecuniary interest becomes the primary goal, then the gates of hell open. They city should not allow itself to be blackmailed. That will lead to more of the same by SnowGlobe and other opportunists. For too long the city has been an easy mark for developers and their lawyers, i.e. the convention center.

And because of the hassle with SnowGlobe, this is the time to rethink whether or not it is a good fit for the community. The show is billed as a music festival. That’s debatable. Much of the sound is loud synthetic noise. But there’s no accounting for taste. It runs from A to Z. George Bernard Shaw said, “Music is the brandy of the damned.” That’s worth thinking about, especially so when it’s applied to SnowGlobe.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe