Letter: Reminder about where to park in Placer County

To the community,

The Placer County Sheriff’s Office wants those traveling to beautiful Lake Tahoe for the holidays to bring home good memories, not a parking ticket.

Whether coming up to the mountains from the Bay Area or the Sacramento Valley, the sheriff’s office wants to remind drivers that there is no parking on any county roadway or shoulder of roadways from Nov. 1 to May 1.

This includes roads in Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows, Northstar and Homewood ski areas.

Vehicles parked in these areas will be ticketed and may be towed. A ticket costs $55.

Roadways must remain clear for the operation of snow removal equipment.

Happy holidays and drive and park safely!

Ed Bonner, Placer County sheriff

Opinion: Mortgage interest

deduction tied to fiscal cliff

By Jill Teakell

Home is where the heart is. A man's home is his castle. There's no place like home.

These familiar sayings remind us of the emotional connection Americans have with homes and homeownership. However, home also is where our nation's economic recovery resides – which is why all Americans should oppose any proposal that would eliminate or attempt to alter the mortgage interest deduction, as it undermines a century-old commitment to the American Dream of homeownership.

Unless Americans are vocal in their opposition during the current tax reform debate, Congress may, in effect, shove generations of current and future homeowners off "the fiscal cliff" by jettisoning their ability to deduct mortgage interest from their federal income taxes.



Jill Teakell

While current discussions involve reducing the limit to $500,000 for a primary residence and eliminating it entirely for second homes, any attempts to reduce the mortgage interest deduction would not only have deleterious effects on homeownership, but also be tantamount to taking the first step toward a wholesale elimination of this long-standing

deduction.

The mortgage interest deduction makes a substantial difference for lower and middle-income families. If the mortgage interest deduction is taken away, it would cost the average California taxpayer $3,940 annually, and more than 694,000 Californian households would no longer be able to afford to buy a median-priced home.

Eliminating the mortgage interest deduction would have immediate and dire consequences. It would slam the brakes on America’s economic recovery by changing the fundamental economics of homeownership for more than 75 million Americans and slow or even reverse recent home price gains. Since housing is widely regarded as a key economic driver, our country could be driven back into recession.

In high cost areas such as California, the damage would be even worse. California homeowners would lose $356.8 billion in potential tax savings, and the recent recovery in home prices would be jeopardized. The state also could realize a loss of more than 40,000 home sales over time, which would cost the California economy $2.4 billion in lost output.

Lake Tahoe, as a second home market, would be most vulnerable. Fewer vacation homebuyers could reduce the demand for housing and cause a precipitous drop in property values.

Reducing the allowable amount of the mortgage interest deduction wouldn’t be any less damaging either. The tax liability for more than 1.19 million primary or secondary homeowners would be negatively impacted if the deductible interest were limited to $500,000. Furthermore, should the mortgage interest deduction be eliminated for second homes, the potential economic losses to the California economy would total more than $557 million.

How important is the mortgage interest deduction to homebuyers? In a recent survey by the California Association

of Realtors, 79 percent of homebuyers said that mortgage interest and property tax deductions were “extremely important” in their decision to purchase a home. A Pew Research Center study last year found that 80 percent of Americans believe buying a home is the best long-term investment they can make – even considering the real estate downturn.

In the final analysis, “There’s no place like home.” By preserving the mortgage interest deduction, President Obama and Congress can provide the boost most Americans – and our economy – need to keep the American Dream of homeownership alive and well for generations to come.

Jill Teakell is president of South Tahoe Association of Realtors.

Opinion: Time to keep weapons away from the mentally ill

By Ted Gaines

Inspired by the tragic events that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., on Dec. 18. I announced legislative plans to introduce a bill that would make a critical change to California’s existing gun control laws, keeping dangerous firearms out of the hands of the mentally ill.

It’s time to take a hard look at gun violence in America and California. As a father of six children and a legislator, I am

sickened by the recent events in Connecticut. While there is no single solution to completely preventing this kind of horrific crime, I believe this bill is an important step in protecting our children and anyone who is at risk from the dangerously mentally ill.



Ted Gaines

Current California law prevents anyone who has been judged by a court to be a danger to others due to a mental disorder or mental illness, or has been judged a mentally disordered sex offender, from owning or possessing a firearm. However, upon completion of treatment or at a later date the person can petition the court to issue a certificate saying they are approved to possess a firearm.

My bill will amend California law to permanently prohibit gun ownership for those people who met the conditions stated above. There would be no petitioning the courts for future firearm possession.

Although California has the toughest gun laws in the nation, there is a loophole that must be closed for those determined by a court to be dangerously mentally ill. I hope everyone with any mental illness gets the treatment and rehabilitation they need to live a healthy and productive life. But if the court has ruled you are a danger to others, that’s it. That is your one strike. We are not going to pave the way for you to own a firearm ever again.

Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen,

Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

Opinion: What we might learn from Newtown

By Scott A. Lukas

Like many people I know, I was deeply disturbed by the events that occurred in Newtown, Conn. Like others, I had emotional reactions to the mass murders. As a social scientist, I am interested in looking at these types of events and placing them in larger social contexts.

After watching some of the coverage and reflecting on the tragedy, I wrote down a series of issues that I believe resonate with the tragedy and other mass shootings. These are intended as initial thoughts on the events in Newtown.



Scott A. Lukas

1. A Culture of Violence: We live in an incredibly violent society and we are unwilling to consider violence at the

systemic levels needed to abate it. More dialogue about the scope and context of violence in our society is needed.

2. A Constitutive Crisis: We are unable to look at violence (including gun violence) as a constitutive issue. That is, we are unwilling to look at the deep, fundamental ways that our society (and all of us) are at least indirectly responsible for the violence we saw in Newtown.

3. A Culture of Dysfunctional Masculinity: Strangely absent from news analyses of Newtown is that the tragedy was an outcome of a dysfunctional masculinity (that we also saw in Columbine, Virginia Tech, École Polytechnique, and many other shootings).

4. An Epic Crisis of Mental Health: As a society, we do not take mental health seriously. We grossly underfund programs that deal with the mental health of young people and we underpay those (like social workers) who are on the front lines of this crisis.

5. An Out-of-Control Gun Culture: Gun lobbies, and some gun owners, have promoted a culture of fear that has resulted in the proliferation of small arms and wonton violence in schools, homes, and public culture. Any critique of the culture is viewed as a form of treason and an attack on the Second Amendment and many individuals are unwilling to look at the statistics that indicate that guns often kill those we know rather than strangers who invade our homes.

6. A Misappropriation of Political Consciousness: Many gun owners have had their political consciousness co-opted by gun lobbies that have convinced them that being a gun owner is a minority political status. It fact, gun ownership is the norm as is the wide public opinion (at least prior to Newtown) that gun control is undesirable. True political consciousness would move beyond the limited rhetoric of Second Amendment defense and focus on the immanent crises before us – the environment,

the decline of civics, the encroachment of capitalism, etc.

7. A Capitalist Mentality: For the individuals who have argued for the right to buy assault rifles, they are simply reflecting the norms of capitalism that say, “You may buy as you like, do as you like, without consequence.” Assault rifles are the equivalent of the countless other bric–a–brac produced under capitalism that also produces its own forms of violence. Pro-guns advocate Philip Van Cleave was quoted on Sunday saying that “Guns are fun, and some of them are much more cool than others. It’s just like we have television sets that look cool, and others are much more boxy.” (Washington Post) There are countless others who, like Van Cleave, view ownership of an assault rifle as both a right and a consumer choice.

8. A Society Lacking Ethics: The social Darwinism of capitalists, the rhetoric of gun owners who will “protect their homes” at any costs, and the individualism promoted by the media and consumerism has resulted in a society that forgets that ethics are the most important foundation of a society. The total lack of care demonstrated by psychopathic gun-wielding killers is mirrored by tens of thousands of “normal” people who are disinterested in the future of society and whose apathy is the latest pandemic. As President Obama stated recently, there needs to be new dialogue and new direction in terms of civics if the United States has any hope of preventing future heinous acts like those in Newtown.

9. A Non-Research Culture: In the face of studies, evidence, and policy suggestions offered by social scientists and others, we are unwilling to allow research (especially applied forms) to enter the discussion of this and other crises. Even though evidence suggests that guns do not make us safer, that the simulated forms of violence in video games and popular culture desensitizes us from real violence, and that cultures with violence at their core cannot survive, we are unwilling to act on this research and change the course of our culture. Perhaps we could.

Scott A. Lukas teaches anthropology and sociology at Lake Tahoe Community College and is editor of "Recent Developments in Criminological Theory" (with Stuart Henry) and wrote "Behind the Barrel: Reading the Cultural History of the Gun in Video Games" for "Joystick Soldiers: The Military/War Video Games Reader". He was a graduate student at the University of Iowa during the campus shootings of 1991 that killed five and left one paralyzed.

Opinion: Schools owe it to children to be more safe

By Lisa Huard

Details in the Newtown, Conn., tragedy will continue to evolve for quite some time. Lives will never be the same; rather they will end up being a "new normal" for the families and friends of all the individuals lost.

Did it happen because gun control allows people to buy assault weapons? Was he mentally ill? Was he bullied? Was he on drugs?



Lisa Huard

When bad things happen we want a definitive answer. We want this because if we have it, then we can prevent it from happening again.

Turn on any newscast throughout the nation and you'll see schools and districts practicing their drills this week and reviewing their safety plans. Because this situation occurred at an elementary school safety is now again the flavor of the month. Safety and what encompasses it should always be at the forefront of concerns and operations for all schools.

I can tell you as someone who works in the field that it is always an uphill battle to get schools to focus on plans and procedures because it takes away from subject time in the classroom. If safety and all that encompasses it were on standardized tests, I believe our children would grow up healthier and happier and more productive.

As a safe schools consultant I've had emails and phone calls this past week asking me basic questions on how this kind of an event can occur. And each day the media poses a new question with headlines. Today it's asking "Who is to blame?" I don't believe there is ever only one source at the root of violence, rather a continuum of weaknesses in our systems that harm many of our kids, and therefore our society.

I became a teacher in the early 1980s and have watched our school system become less student centered, less humanized. There was a time when our focus did concern itself with what our kids dealt with outside of the school walls. There was a time that the system wanted us to build inclusion in our classrooms, as it was believed that individuals who felt connected and cared for become more secure within themselves and therefore would be better individuals and create better communities.

Many remember years ago when our own school board's mission statement was that all children would have an advocate. We as

teachers were a part of trainings that built on this basic need. We as teachers were encouraged and supported to build relationships with our kids and with each other. We in essence built family.

Because of this we were more connected with our kids. We knew the kids who were struggling and who were having trouble and furthermore we had in place support systems to help these kids. As in life, you can't "fix" all situations, but I will tell you, we did fix many.

This premise is no longer the case here. In fact, it's no longer the case throughout the nation. The days of our schools being supported financially to provide the basic elements for a happy and healthy life for kids is no longer available. "Penny wise and pound foolish" in our education system has become the norm.

When I work with school districts in developing safety plans, more often than not, they think about only about procedures for lockdowns, evacuations, and such. On the news I've seen story after story about how schools around the nation are going to be adding more fencing, security cameras, and other such hardware. It's sad how money is available to do this, but money is not available to address the root of the problem. Again, we're reacting with a Band-Aid rather than working on the probable issues. While I do believe there are certain tactics that are essential, I worry that we could be building situations that detach us even more. I don't believe creating fortresses is the answer.

Education always swings on a big pendulum and with that pendulum goes the money. As I said, there were years of financial support from the state and federal government with training and programs to help children develop stronger values and respect for themselves. We believed that helping youth to develop more resiliencies would help them to cope better in life and therefore stay healthier and happier.

Unless tragedy strikes, all children become adults. Our desired outcomes for those adults begin when our kids enter school as those precious young beings. I believe if time and money were spent on our kids feeling safer at school, cared about if they miss, if they were more included as individuals and as a group, then, teachers could teach, kids could learn, test scores would improve, and perhaps communities such as Newtown would not have to suffer.

Santa, if you have time to listen to an adult, would you please bring the basics back into our schools and keep them there forever?

Lisa Huard is a safe schools consultant who lives in South Lake Tahoe.

Letter: Sass should be appointed to S. Tahoe council

To the community,

In light of Claire Fortier's expected, yet somewhat sudden, departure from the South Lake Tahoe City Council last week, the big question that looms in the minds of many of us city Of South Lake Tahoe voters is who and how will Claire Fortier be replaced.

In my opinion, and in the opinion of many of my fellow South Lake Tahoe voters, whom will hopefully voice their opinion on this matter in some way, shape, or form, feel that the only

one specific course of action that would be an acceptable resolution to this situation would be to appoint Austin Sass to the council seat vacated by Ms. Fortier.

By virtue of the results of last month's election it's quite obvious that the voters have no desire to see Bruce Grego return to a council seat. I am also quite sure that most city of South Lake Tahoe voters would be highly dismayed were the council to opt for a costly special election. The voters have spoken and the council, in my opinion, should not waste any more time or money on this issue, and should appoint whom I, and many others, see as the most qualified candidate, who burns with a fire to serve his community to the best of his ability. And I just want to remind you that those abilities are highly developed, and he is highly qualified and prepared to take on the work load that accompanies the job of a city council member of the city of South Lake Tahoe.

Respectfully,

Toogee Sielsch, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Thanks for helping get snow removed

To the community,

This is a follow up letter to my request last week for some snow removal so the people of Pioneer Village could access the bike trail safely.

I would like to thank K and K Services for taking the time to clear the snow that day and also I would like to thank whoever

has placed trail markers so the access can be kept clear.

Thanks to all parties involved and to *Lake Tahoe News* and *Tahoe Daily Tribune* for printing my letter and getting the request out there.

John Spinola, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: World's dictators threatened by social media

By Joel Brinkley

Most of the world's dictators share a common fear, and it's not of the United States, NATO, the United Nations or any outside entity. No, the force that most threatens them is social media.

Originally designed as enhanced online chat forums for young Americans, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and the rest have spread around the world and are now being used as cudgels against authoritarian leaders in places like Vietnam, Russia, Belarus and Bahrain. In those states and so many others, the leaders are attacking tweeters and bloggers as if they were armed revolutionaries. And the repression is spreading.

In India a few days ago, a 21-year-old medical student posted a mildly critical comment about a Hindu political figure who'd just died. Within 24 hours, police arrested her and a friend who had "liked" the student's Facebook post and charged them with engaging in hateful, offensive speech – this in one of the world's strongest democracies. (Police let them go a few days later.)

A more typical example comes from Belarus. There, President Alexander Lukashenko, commonly known as Europe's last dictator, seems to be fighting online verbiage all the time.

Recently, Ecuador's Supreme Court turned down an extradition request from Belarus for a blogger who fled there after the government charged him with fraud. Alexander Barankov had been blogging about widespread government corruption. That particular extradition denial stands as a bold demonstration of the fraud charge's absurdity because Rafael Correa, Ecuador's president and an acolyte of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, is no champion of press freedom. Far from it. And yet he defied the Belarus request.

Barankov is hardly the only example. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe declaimed Lukashenko's record of arresting journalists and bloggers, saying "unfortunately recent detentions and searches in Minsk and elsewhere in the country show continued efforts to muzzle dissenting voices and clamp down on freedom of expression online."

Iran, not surprisingly, is even tougher. Bloggers are given long prison terms or sentenced to death, charged with "enmity against God" and subverting national security. Human-rights groups say the bloggers and tweeters are tortured in jail. In mid-November, one died in police custody for unexplained reasons.

Iran actually is trying to set up its own internal Internet. There, the government says, "unregulated social media and other content likely to encourage dissent" simply won't be available.

But the sad truth is, the dictators whose people are the most repressed – locked in abject poverty – don't have to worry about the social-media problem. In Laos, Cambodia, Eritrea, Mozambique and a handful of other states, most people have no

access to computers or cell phones. Many of them are illiterate and couldn't use the devices even if they had them. That leaves their leaders to trample over their rights with near-impunity.

China demonstrates this better than any nation. The state's economic-development program pulled millions of Chinese out of poverty. Previously, Chinese were relatively quiescent. But with prosperity came a new understanding of how venal and repressive the Chinese Communist Party really is. So, millions of Chinese took to new social-media platforms to complain.

Now China spends more money on internal security – including a massive online censorship office – than it does on its military. Persistent online critics are imprisoned or worse. That demonstrates a clear fact: The Chinese government fears its own people far more than it does any outside power.

Other states are catching up. Russia is implementing a massive new online Internet filtering system, ostensibly to protect children from offensive sites. But human-rights advocates warn that it can just as easily be used to block social-media commentary the government doesn't like.

In Oman this fall, six people were jailed for defaming the state on Facebook. That came after the National Human Rights Commission of Oman (an oxymoron if I've ever heard one) labeled those posts and others "negative writings that violate Islamic principles."

Nearby, Bahrain is trying to have it both ways. On the one hand, it jailed a human-rights advocate for tweeting criticism of the nation's tyrannical prime minister. Then authorities arrested four more Bahrainis for Twitter posts considered to be critical of the king.

At the same time, though, the government allowed one of the state's biggest companies, a telecom provider named Zain Bahrain, to sponsor a major business conference there,

undoubtedly because it will be quite profitable for the island's hotels, restaurants and other travel-related businesses.

What was the conference about? Its title: The Social Media Masters Forum.

Joel Brinkley, a professor of journalism at Stanford University, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning former foreign correspondent for the New York Times.

Letter: Money for library carpet a waste of funds

To the community,

I belong to the El Dorado County Library System. I live in Pollock Pines. I support libraries, but not the following.

My library is 1,242 square feet. How come their expenses for the carpet project cost $5,000. (And why didn't the county pay for it or at least help? It's a county building.)

I'm running out of people to tell. I think all Friends of the Library money should be frozen by the FOL corp before they spend it all. And why did it go the the director as a donation from our branch?

They claim that the people in our town wanted this. Not the people I know. Not this much money for a library that has little parking. Our food lines up here are just getting longer with the mill closed and forest problems.

I support the $900 they spent on the children's program. They

should have given the children’s librarian more.

Fran Duchamp, Pollock Pines

Letter: Community made for successful Festival of Trees and Lights

To the community,

Thank you to the many businesses and individuals who make the Lake Tahoe Festival of Trees and Lights possible. Your donations of time and monetary support have made this event the regional kick-off to the holiday season.

We want to especially acknowledge Bill Horning, Dreu Murin, Kenny Curtzwiler and K&K Services, Nancy Harrison, Ann Jones, Angela Moore, the entire steering committee who starts planning in February of each year, the volunteers who staff the event, the designers who create their masterpieces, the entertainers who keep us wanting more, the Barton employees who create mini trees and wreathes to decorate our walls, and the retailers and sponsors without whom we would not be here.

And of course a special thank you to you, our community because of all of you – we are making a difference.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Kindle Craig, executive director Barton Foundation