Letter: Connecticut tragedy a reminder about safety in Tahoe schools

To the community,

An unspeakable tragedy occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., when a gunman opened fire Friday, killing 20 students and eight adults. This horrific act has left us numb and deeply saddened at the loss of these innocent people with so much of their future ahead of them.

When tragedy strikes, the results are traumatic, both for those directly affected and for the community of people who know them or identify with them. But when something like this happens at a school, to very young children, it hits closer to home and we may feel helpless.

At noon today, Superintendent Jim Tarwater ordered all Lake Tahoe Unified schools on Yellow Alert. Schools were requested to secure all perimeter entrances and monitor school grounds as a precautionary measure against the possibility of a copycat act in our area.

Staff members were asked to be extra vigilant. Administrators and security personnel increased surveillance at schools and continued to be on heightened alert and high visibility until after the dismissal of school today.

Flags at all schools were ordered to half staff in honor of the victims.

Teachers were not directed to discuss this tragedy with the children; parents can decide how best to approach their child with this news.

Although we cannot control the fact that a tragedy has taken

place, adults can do a great deal to help children regain their emotional safety.

This website contains useful advice for parents in dealing with tragic events.

As part of normal operations of the school district, all campuses have comprehensive, up-to-date safety plans in place to address a variety of emergency conditions. The plans are reinforced through drills with students and at regular meetings with our employees.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you of a few tips to ensure your child's safety:

· Update your child's emergency card information throughout the school year. Contact your school if there are any changes.

· Sign-in and sign-out of the front office. Knowing who is on our campuses is for your safety as well as the children.

· Wear a "Visitor's" badge throughout your stay.

· If you are on campus and you see someone who is not wearing any kind of identification, please approach them and inquire who they are.

How will you know what's going on during an emergency at LTUSD schools?

· Wait for a Connect-Ed call to your home or cell phone. Whatever you list on the emergency card goes into our system – Aeries.

· Wait for an email from the superintendent.

· Listen to local radio and local television stations.

· Use your computer to go to websites that post "current news" such as *Lake Tahoe News, Tahoe Tribune*, or KCRA.

· Turn on the television for news breaking events on national television.

· Subscribe to email alerts from newspapers and TV stations in our area.

Please follow these Dos and Don’ts

DO

· Keep your child’s emergency card information updated. It’s how the Connect-Ed call out system can stay accurate.

· Be familiar with the emergency procedures at your child’s school.

· Follow all instructions by school staff and agencies during an event. The safety of all is at stake.

DON’T

· Go to the school site. Your child is being kept safe and you coming may tie up needed space on the roads.

· Contact your child by cell phone. You could be tying up the needed cell phone lines available to emergency personnel and school staff.

In any emergency situation, specific response strategies depend on the nature and scope of the incident and prevailing conditions. In most incidents, public safety and emergency management personnel play a critical role in identifying the specific nature, cause, and extent of the emergency, as well as providing guidance to administrators on the response steps that must be carried out.

Your children are surrounded daily by professionals who have dedicated their lives to helping their students; in the event of an emergency, you can count on these caring individuals to keep your children secure. All employees in the LTUSD continue

to work to make all our schools safe and secure environments.

If you have questions about your child’s safety and school support responses, please contact your principal. If your child is experiencing any anxiety about this tragedy over the weekend, please contact your principal who will contact one of our school psychologists to talk to your child.

Your understanding, support, and cooperation are vital as we take these precautionary actions on behalf of our students.

And finally, although I don’t even need to say this, hug your children a little closer tonight. Our hearts and prayers go out to those whose loved ones were taken away from them all too suddenly today. May they rest in peace.

Take care,

Angie Keil, LTUSD

Letter: A successful chamber Winter Wine Walk

To the community,

The TahoeChamber would like to thank all of the business hosts, volunteers, board members and attendees that participated in the Winter Wine Walk BAHM! (Business After Hours Mixer) in the Shops at Heavenly Village. Over 125 members and friends gathered in the Marriott Grand Residence lobby to pick up their passports and enjoy a taste of El Dorado County wine provided by Madroña Vineyards.

The Marriott lobby was beautifully decorated for the holidays.

Fifteen participating businesses were displaying their goods, offering raffle prizes, pouring tastes of wine, and sampling food.

Thank you to the following participating chamber member businesses: Red Poets & Skyhawk Lane Wines, Pacific Crest Gallery, Apricot Lane, Base Camp Pizza, Around Tahoe Adventures, Marriott Grand Residences, Blue Sky, K-Tahoe Radio, Fire & Ice, Patagonia, Quicksilver, Heavenly Sports, Serenity Day Spa, and Kalani's At Lake Tahoe.

A special thank you goes out to the following food and beverage providers: Exquisite Grill, Crystal Basin Cellars, Madroña Vineyards, Bumgarner Winery, Grace Patriot Wines, and Tahoe Blue Vodka.

South Lake Tahoe offered free parking in their covered garage and Yellow Cab gave free safe ride vouchers to the attendees.

Many guests completed their passports for a chance to win the grand prize gift basket consisting of an item from each participating business.

Thanks to all who came out for the festivities and mark your calendar for the third annual Winter Wine Walk Dec. 12, 2013. Have a safe and Happy Holiday.

Jessica Cunningham, TahoeChamber

Letter: Thank you from Operation Christmas Child

To the community,

We wanted to write to thank all of the residents of the Lake Tahoe area who generously gave of their time and resources to help impact thousands of hurting children this Christmas through Operation Christmas Child. Together we were able to pack 47,500 shoe boxes – filled with toys, school supplies and basic necessities– 8,600 of these being packed at one large packing party. Our region's shoe box gifts, joined by millions of others, are now on their way to needy children in 100 countries. During the 2012 collection season, Operation Christmas Child reached a milestone – more than 100 million children have been impacted by the power of a simple gift since 1993.

We would also like to thank the volunteers at our local collection sites. Although all 14 of our drop-off locations are closed, there is still plenty of time to get involved through the project's "Build a Box" online tool where you can virtually pack a shoe box gift. Gifts are also received year-round at Samaritan's Purse by mailing them to 801 Bamboo Road, Boone, N.C. 28607.

Thank you again to everyone who participated in this project. A simple gift, packed with love, can communicate hope and transform the lives of children worldwide.

Sincerely,

Jodi L. Church, Operation Christmas Child greater Sacramento region

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Letter: Asking S. Tahoe for

help with snow removal

To the community,

This letter is addressed to whoever is responsible for snow removal along the bike path on Al Tahoe Boulevard. Could the residents of Pioneer Village get the snow cleared at one of the two marked crosswalks that lead from the bike path to our area?

The crosswalks are marked by signs and road paint. If you (the operator) could spend a couple of minutes to clear us some access, we would really appreciate it. Myself and a lot of my neighbors (yes we have neighbors) use the path during the winter to get out and walk with our kids, dogs and each other.

Thanks.

John Spinola, South Lake Tahoe

Editorial: California lawmakers pushing the limit on perks

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 8, 2012, Sacramento Bee.***

No sooner did a poll come out showing that legislators are less unpopular than they have been since 2008, word comes that they still don't quite grasp that they should pay for their own car repairs.

Associated Press reporter Don Thompson reported that as the state was ending the perk of providing legislators with cars in 2011, a dozen lawmakers imposed on taxpayers to pay for repairs or upgrades to those vehicles, and later bought them for their personal use.

We all paid to fix dents, replace wheel covers, put on new tires, and make repairs costing hundreds or thousands of dollars.

One, former Sen. Bob Dutton, a Southern California Republican, had $6,000 worth of repairs done and evidently used $12,681 in campaign funds to buy his 2005 Chevy Tahoe, prompting the Fair Political Practices Commission to open an inquiry.

In a sense, the legislators were doing what any smart used car buyer would do – get the vehicle inspected and repaired before buying it. But legislators' relationship with state vehicles long has been troubled.

As the *Bee's* Dan Smith reported last year, legislators regularly crash their cars and send the bills to the state, rather than paying for the repairs themselves as good and honest people would do.

In 2011, the California Citizens Compensation Commission took away legislators' cars and their state-issued gasoline credit cards. The decision was short-sighted and vindictive, typical of actions taken by commissioners who were appointed by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

California is a large state and legislators are expected to live in their districts. Lawmakers who represent Redding or Bakersfield must drive vast distances, and have every right to bill the state for all legitimate mileage. Those bills regularly exceed $1,000 a month.

Still, legislators have only themselves– or their dim colleagues – to blame for losing state-leased cars. There have

been too many instances in which lawmakers misused state vehicles and taxpayer money.

In its latest survey, the Public Policy Institute of California found 34 percent of this state's adults had favorable views of the Legislature, the highest since January 2008. With a few more revelations about misuse of tax money, lawmakers' approval rating will slide back into the 20s.

Letter: Congress needs to be honest with the people

To the community,

In a criminal case, the police may say there's a person of interest. Congress has members who are persons of interest. Mark Twain wrote, "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress."

For instance, Congress is prepared to push us over its made to order fiscal cliff in a ballet with the executive. There's an attack on Social Security and Medicare. But it's never mentioned that both are trust funds and as of 1999 the government owed the funds $2 trillion. The government "borrowed" from the funds.



Bill Crawford

And in this country, church property isn't taxed. Thus, churches are subsidized. But it's taboo to address the subject. Mum's the word in Congress.

And it's never mentioned that when Congress passes new tax law, it takes the IRS years to implement the legislation; as much as five years. No wonder the tax code is a tangled jungle.

And the bottom line is that in 1947 [President Harry] Truman created the national security state. Then we began arming ourselves to police the world. The fiscal cliff is the borrowing of money to finance war and more wars. If we would stop the profiteering, cost overruns for guns, we wouldn't have to mobilize the Army.

Mark Twain summed it up with, "I guess that the government that robs its own people earns the future it is preparing for itself." And the forgotten president, John Quincy Adams, spoke truly when he said to Congress, "The great object of civil government is the improvement of the conditions of those who are parties to the social compact." How sad that Congress has breached the compact with we the people.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: LTVA thanks community for great tree lighting event

To the community,

The Community Holiday Tree lighting, recently held at the Lake Tahoe Visitor Center, was a huge success with approximately 350 people enjoying the festivities.

This is an annual event that the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority sponsors to spread holiday cheer in the community.

Thank you to all who supported this event. Lake DJ, South Lake Tahoe Senior Center, Mr. Paul Kushner and the South Lake Tahoe Children's Choral Society, Santa and his Elves, Borges Sleigh Rides, Temple Bat Yam, Sierra-at-Tahoe, Liberty Utilities, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority staff and the Tahoe Chamber staff.

See you next year.

Anne Sutterfield, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority

Opinion: Precautions can make for safe holiday season

By Tia Rancourt

The winter holidays are a time for celebration – and that means more cooking, decorating, entertaining and overall increased risk of fire due to heating equipment.

According to the National Fire Protection Agency, between 2005-09, U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 240 home fires that started with Christmas trees per year. These fires caused an average of 13 deaths, 27 injuries, and $16.7 million in direct property damage annually.

There are simple life-saving steps you can take to create a safe and happy holiday.

Preventing Christmas tree fires:

o Selecting a tree for the holiday – When buying a live tree, look for one that is not shedding needles. If needles fall off or branches snap when bent, the tree is already too dry.

o Keep trees watered. A mixture of lemon-lime soda and water will keep a tree moist longer.

o Keep trees away from all heat sources including fire places, stoves and room/space heaters.

o When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label “fire resistant”.

o Secure the tree firmly in tree stand to keep it from toppling over.

o When tree becomes dry, promptly discard it. Please consider using the IVGID Waste Not Free Holiday Tree Recycling Program.

Lights and candles:

o Please do not use candles on a Christmas tree.

o Place candles where they will not be knocked down.

o Keep candles away from curious pets and children’s reach.

o Be extremely careful with candles that have leaves, flowers, pine cones or other decorative items cast into them. These items can become wicks and ignite the candle in a way that the

candle is not designed.

o Keep lights or candles away from anything that could easily catch fire. (NFPA reports that half of home candles fires occurred when some form of combustible material was left or came too close to the candle.)

o Please do not leave holiday lights or candles unattended.

o Inspect all lights and cords before using them. Discard all lights with cracked or broken wiring and never overload circuits.

Holiday decorations:

o Keep wrapping paper and ribbons away from heat sources. This includes candles, lights, fireplaces, stoves and heaters.

o Wrapping paper and ribbon should be thrown away in trash containers, not fireplaces. Burning paper and ribbon could cause a chimney fire.

o Put decorations high enough on the tree so your child or pet can’t reach them. Children can choke or cut themselves on ornaments or ornament hangers.

o Holly and mistletoe are poisonous. Keep them away from children.

o Use only nonflammable or flame-retardant decorations and place away from heat vents.

o If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame-retardant.

Watch what you heat:

o Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling or broiling food. If you leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, turn off the stove.

o If you are simmering, baking, roasting or boiling food, check it regularly and use a timer to remind you that you're cooking.

o If you are using a turkey fryer, please follow the manufacturer's guidelines and instructions, and remember that the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) has chosen not to certify any turkey fryers with the UL mark because they consider them to be dangerous to use presenting numerous safety hazards to consumers.

Fireplace safety:

o Check and clean the fireplace and chimney every year.

o Always put logs and newspapers on a grate inside fireplace and use a fireplace screen.

o Please do not use gasoline, lighter fluid or kerosene to start a fire and make sure the fire you build "fits" your fireplace (use an appropriate amount of newspaper and logs).

o Place completely cooled ashes in a metal container. Keep metal container outside away from the house in a safe place.

Give holiday gifts that promote fire safety:

o Smoke alarms. If a fire occurs, having a smoke alarm cuts the chance of dying by half.

o Carbon monoxide detectors – helps detect carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas.

o Flashlights for emergency lighting instead of candles, to avoid the risk of fire from an open flame.

o Sturdy candleholders to prevent tip-over when candles are lit.

o Sturdy fireplace screen, to keep embers out of the room.

o Gift certificates for chimney cleaning can reduce oily creosote build-up in chimneys that can be easily ignited.

o Portable fire extinguishers, with clear instructions on how to use them.

o Oven mitts for handling cooking equipment.

o House address numbers – our local ordinance requires 6 inch for residential and 12 inch for commercial structures.

Tia Rancourt works for the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District.

Letter: Meyers chiropractor made Thanksgiving special

To the community,

Thanks to Josh Welch, the guests at Bread & Broth's Thanksgiving dinner on Nov. 22 also received food items to take home with them.

Welch of Safe Haven Chiropractic in Meyers conducted a food drive to help members of the South Lake Tahoe community. From Nov. 1-17 he exchanged chiropractic services for five non-perishable food items. Current, new or reactivating patients received a chiropractic adjustment for their donation.

As a result of his food drive, he collected 35 bags of canned and dry foods which he gave to the Bread & Broth program for distribution to needy members of our community.

Welch believes giving from the heart without expecting anything in return is what creates a strong community. Bread & Broth salutes Welch for his care, concern and generosity for those who are less fortunate and need a helping hand.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Rural fire fee needs to be overturned

By Ted Gaines

I am pleased to announce that I introduced legislation that would repeal the fire tax.

This $150 fire tax is illegal and unfair – plain and simple. Many rural property owners already pay local fire agencies for protection so it is clearly double-taxation and it is being dumped on the backs of rural Californians when the state has 10 percent unemployment and families are struggling to make ends meet.

Senate Bill 17 would reverse the governor's and legislative Democrats' decision to raise $84 million in taxes by charging rural property owners a "fee" for fire prevention services as part of the 2011-12 budget.



Ted Gaines

These communities are located in “State Responsibility Areas” designated by CalFire, even though their property taxes already contribute to the service contracts that counties have with CalFire.

This tax has been imposed on the owners of more than 800,000 properties in the state. According to Census and CalFire data, my largely rural district includes nearly 25 percent or approximately 200,000 of the properties whose owners will be subject to the fee.

I have been a leading critic of the fire “fee” since its inception, leading a referendum attempting to overturn the tax and co-authoring legislation last session to see it reversed. I’ve also strongly supported the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association’s class action lawsuit to overturn the fire fee.

The fire tax attempts to sidestep Proposition 26, which prevents the Legislature from disguising taxes as “fees” and circumventing constitutional requirements for passing higher taxes.

I vow to fight this in every way possible and encourage everyone who might get stuck paying this phony fee to get in the arena and fight it too. The answer to fire protection in California is not illegal taxes, but budgets that invest in core government services that protect every citizen in the state – rural, urban and suburban.

I will keep you updated on the status of this bill as it makes its way through the legislative process.

Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, represents Lake Tahoe in the California Senate.