Opinion: Time to eradicate polio

By William Keenan and Robert Block, Huffington Post

Few pediatricians in the U.S. are old enough to have experienced the fear of the polio epidemics of the 1940s and 1950s. Without the ability to protect our children, society was defenseless in the face of this terrifying disease. Today, thanks to groundbreaking scientific discoveries, we've broken away from the grip of polio. Armed with effective vaccines, pediatricians, partner organizations and front-line workers around the globe have eliminated 99 percent of all new polio cases.

Last month, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon convened a group of global leaders, including Bill Gates and heads of state of polio-affected countries to renew the commitment to eliminate polio. This show of solidarity reminds us that the fight is not finished. In several parts of the world, the devastating effects of polio continue to be a reality for children, families and doctors. We can't afford to lose sight of this remaining 1 percent of polio cases. With only three countries where transmission has never been stopped – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria – polio is facing defeat. There are fewer cases in fewer districts of fewer countries than at any previous time. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change history, and we must act now.

The International Pediatric Association, and our national members, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, work on a range of priorities that affect child survival in developing countries, including HIV/AIDS, malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhea. While polio no longer affects as many children as it used to, we have not forgotten the urgent need to eliminate this disease while we have the chance. The effort has major implications for children’s health and mortality: it’s proof positive that critical health services can safeguard children living in even the hardest-to-reach places. Pediatricians have witnessed how these efforts help bring primary care service within reach of nearly every single child on the planet – not just with polio vaccines, but with other preventive interventions such as measles, rotavirus and pneumococcal vaccines, Vitamin A supplements and bed nets.

We see the long-term successes of polio eradication efforts across the globe. In September, more than 32,000 children in Pakistan’s conflict-affected Khyber Pakhtunkhwa area received polio vaccines for the first time since 2009, and measles and pentavalent vaccines for the first time ever. In 2011, India – once considered one of the most challenging places in the world to eradicate polio – was declared polio-free. In India, the polio eradication program helped establish systems to identify and vaccinate every newborn and strengthened other preventive health services.

But these programs need funding. Tragically, funding gaps have led to cancelled and scaled-back vaccination campaigns in 24 countries, leaving children vulnerable and threatening progress. The polio virus, by its nature, is extremely difficult to contain; unless the polio eradication program is fully funded and the disease eradicated, polio will return to countries that are now polio-free.

Recognizing the benefits of success and the risks of failure, the global community has united around a Polio Global Emergency Action Plan to improve vaccination campaign quality, protect every last child and ensure accountability. We must all ensure that the solidarity demonstrated at the UN leads to the political will and financial support needed to put this plan into action. At this crucial juncture, leaders at home and elsewhere must invest in the long-term resources to bring about polio eradication. It can be done.

American pediatricians and families are fortunate to have made polio history in our country. Let’s remind our leaders that we must do what we can so that our colleagues around the world will never again have to treat a child with polio.

William Keenan and Robert Block are medical doctors.

Letter: Sunset Gala a success because of community support

To the community,

Live Violence Free would like to thank the sponsors, donors, and guests of the 35th anniversary Sunset Gala who contributed to making this event a success.

The Sunset Gala is the largest fundraiser of the year for Live Violence Free, formerly the South Lake Tahoe Women’s Center, and this year the event brought in more than ever before at over $35,000.

The gracious generosity of Edgewood Tahoe, MontBleu, Harrah’s-Harveys and Lakeside Inn helped create the atmosphere for a unforgettable evening.

In addition to those aforementioned, all our other sponsors, the local businesses who donated items, and of course those who came out to enjoy the event helped make this the most successful fundraiser ever for Live Violence Free. An enormous thank you to all involved; your support will allow us to keep our services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse, up and running.

Scarlet Caldwell, Live Violence Free

Opinion: Lake Valley fire definitely interested in working with SLTFD

To the community,

During the March 2012 meeting of the Lake Valley Fire Protection District board of directors, I made a presentation regarding an annexation proposal for the properties within the city of South Lake Tahoe. The board directed me to make the proposal to the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

Since that time a committee has been formed with representatives from the city and Lake Valley FPD to discuss the possibilities of annexation and the various benefits and challenges of such a move.

Gareth Harris

Annexation of the properties within the city limits would mean that the current fire department tax base would go to Lake Valley FPD, which would become the fire suppression and prevention agency for residents in the city. The proposal includes the hiring of all current South Lake Tahoe Fire Department employees by Lake Valley FPD.

The result would be no increase in cost to property owners in either the city or the county, but the services of a larger, more efficient fire agency. Lake Valley's board of directors sees this as a potential win-win situation for all involved.

Recent comments made by South Lake Tahoe City Council candidates during a community forum have indicated that the administration of Lake Valley FPD does not favor the consolidation. The purpose of this letter is to assure the residents being served by both agencies that the district has not changed its stance, and looks forward to investigating a situation which would be mutually beneficial to all citizens and agency personnel.

Gareth Harris, Lake Valley fire chief

Letter: Rotary thankful for golf course's generosity

To the community,

The staff and golfing guests at Lake Tahoe Golf Course joined together on a community day at the golf course where all course fees collected went to support local nonprofits.

The Rotary Club of Tahoe Douglas was recently presented a check for $620 as a result of those donations.

The American Golf Corporation, concessionaires of Lake Tahoe Golf Course, has a foundation where their mission is to promote the game of golf through education, charity and community service.

Their philanthropic efforts are appreciated by charitable causes and the Rotary Club of Tahoe Douglas would like to thank them for their generosity.

The Rotary Club of Tahoe Douglas has been serving the South Shore community since Sept. 7, 1962. Rotary, a global network of community volunteers, is one of the largest and most influential international humanitarian service organizations worldwide. Founded in Chicago on February 23, 1905, today over 1.2 million members belong to 33,000 Rotary clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas.

Rotary members, as volunteers, conduct projects to address today's humanitarian challenges, including illiteracy, disease, hunger, poverty, lack of clean water, and environmental concerns while encouraging high standards in all vocations. Rotary members strive to build goodwill and peace, and provide humanitarian service in their communities and throughout the world.

Paula Peterson, Rotary

Opinion: Placer County is moving forward

By Jennifer Montgomery

Placer County's budget picture has changed dramatically since I joined the Board of Supervisors in January 2009.

When I arrived, the budget news was dire, the result of the persistent and growing economic slowdown.

At my second board meeting, we approved four mandatory unpaid days off for most county employees and several other budget adjustments to eliminate a mid-year $9.5 million revenue shortfall. The following month, we received a report that predicted the county would continue to face operating deficits for several years.

Jennifer Montgomery

Today, many fiscal challenges remain, but we see light at the end of the tunnel. Revenue is beginning to bounce back, though not fast enough to keep pace with projected cost increases. As staff likes to say, we are tiptoeing, rather than sprinting toward recovery.

As board chairwoman, I am pleased to present this state-of the-county series to give the public a clear picture of where Placer County has been in recent years, where it stands today and how we are planning for a stronger, more stable future.

The last four years have been extremely challenging for the County and I want to be sure everyone fully understands the magnitude of the issues we've faced, and will continue to face.

In hindsight, there are things that we might have handled differently, but we did learn from our mistakes along the way and succeeded in preserving the County's fiscal health, protecting core services to the public and avoiding the large-scale layoffs that many nearby local governments experienced.

I am particularly pleased at how well the board, management and staff worked together to move Placer County through tough times. We struggled at times – we did not rehire unfilled positions, we had to cut hours to certain services and had to put many projects on hold because of budget constraints. But through hard work, commitment to serve the public, internal compromise and sacrifice, we are in a better place than we might otherwise have been.

A few statistics help tell the story.

Property tax revenue, the county's leading source of discretionary revenue, is projected to drop by about 1 percent this fiscal year. If the projection proves accurate, annual revenue from that source will have dropped $16.4 million, or 12.4 percent, since 2007-08.

Since 2007, during a time that demand for services remained the same or grew, the size of the county workforce has fallen 15.4 percent to approximately 2,150 filled positions largely because of a hiring freeze. On the other hand, the county has laid off only about 25 employees during that period.

One of the keys to the county's ability to stay above water while dealing with the economic slowdown has been a far-sighted approach to budgeting, service delivery and infrastructure planning.

In 2003, for example, the board adopted policies that place a high priority on budgeting conservatively to give the county flexibility to handle revenue and cost fluctuations; using one-time revenues for one-time costs, rather than ongoing expenses; and relying on a pay-as-you-go approach as much as possible to keep the county debt load light.

When the recession appeared on the horizon, Placer County acted quickly and decisively.

The board approved a hiring freeze as part of a drive to cut costs and avoid layoffs. It asked employees to pay larger shares of their pension and health premium costs, and created a two-tier pension system that pays new hires less generous benefits, but ensures that benefit costs can be sustained in the long term. People are staying healthy, living longer and collecting benefits longer, which add long-term costs to the County's retirement projections.

The county tried new innovative, cost-effective approaches to providing services and has implemented almost 150 suggestions from a County Cost Savings Task Force.

While Placer County has put some road, building, equipment maintenance, and other projects on hold, our success in dealing with the recession is particularly impressive because we continue to provide all mandated public services, have found ways to handle increased demand for many optional services, and made progress on badly needed construction projects. Those achievements will be my focus in part two of the series.

Jennifer Montgomery is chairwoman of the Placer County Board of Supervisors.

Opinion: Vote yes on Prop. 37

To the community,

Genetically engineered foods are not safe.

The funding of ads opposing Proposition 37 is from biotech companies, like Monsanto, who simply want to make money. Their biotech crops have had no independent testing prior to being released. For example, Monsanto's corn DNA is blasted with a toxin like Bt, which will make an insect's stomach explode and kill it when it eats the corn. The scientists who studied this early on found it to be unsafe, and said so. They were promptly fired and discredited.

We have no reason to believe the biotech people telling us these lies. They've lied to us about the safety of DDT and more.

GE crops were promoted as a way to feed the world, yet they do not produce more food. They do require more and more pesticides as the weeds and bugs become resistant. Now this same company wants to use 2-4-D, also know as Agent Orange, which was used in Vietnam, with many health problems from rashes and infertility to death.

These crops are fed to our cattle, pigs and chickens. Given a choice, they won't even eat them. When their only food is GE corn or soy, they become ill and weak. When we eat these same animals or crops we also become ill and weak. It may be less obvious in us as we get a more varied diet.

But look at our nation's amount of illness. Chronic illness including allergies, asthma, digestive disorders, Parkinson's, autism, birth defects, infertility, Alzheimer's, diabetes and much more have steadily increased since the presence of GE foods in our diet. People with many of these illnesses who go to an organic diet see huge health improvements. The animals too, quickly become healthy when fed organic, or at least non-GMO diets.

Scientists have detected the inflamed stomach lining from animals eating GE foods. Our stomachs respond in the same way and go on to develop leaky gut syndrome where food particles are escaping the digestive tract too soon, and enter the bloodstream where our antibodies know they've never seen anything like this, and attack them. Oh! An allergic reaction!

Since GE soy's introduction to the market, allergies to soy have increased by at least 50 percent. Diseases like chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia were unknown before their advent. All chronic illnesses have dramatically increased.

Countries all over the world require labeling of GE foods. It’s time we knew what we are buying to eat. Monsanto is quite well entrenched in the White House and FDA, but our vote can begin to kick them out. All of us eat. We can all vote and express the need to know what’s in our food.

Please vote Yes on Prop. 37!

Sincerely,

Peggy A. Cooley, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: California’s economy better than people think

By Mike Rossi

Recently it has become popular in some circles to blame California’s “business climate” when companies eliminate jobs. The inaccurate depiction of California as unfriendly toward business is a marketing narrative that was developed by other states trying to compete with our success.

Now it has been adopted by partisan media commentators who trumpet the virtues of less successful states and allow companies to avoid accountability for laying off hardworking Californians by invoking the “business climate” scapegoat.

The fact is that California is once again the national leader in job creation. In the past year, California has added 298,000 private-sector jobs – an increase of 2.1 percent, which is more than New York, New Jersey, Florida and Nevada combined.

Furthermore, the construction industry added 31,000 jobs in that same period, accounting for 6 percent job growth – that's the largest gain since before the housing crash. Our information technology jobs have surpassed pre-recession levels, and professional services, health care, education, trade and transportation have all posted significant gains this year.

Yet, in some circles, the facts are no match for anonymous surveys of CEOs that rank California at the bottom of the list. These surveys report the same findings year after year no matter how well or poorly our economy is doing. Exactly the same "findings" were reported in 2006, when California was enjoying three straight years of record growth, with close to the lowest unemployment in our state's history and a $6 billion surplus.

California was riding a wave of economic success and yet the CEOs who were enjoying record profits still ranked California at the bottom of the list.

Meanwhile, Texas consistently ranks toward the top with states like Nevada, South Dakota and Wyoming following close behind. What do all these states have in common besides vast uninhabited areas with no population and no requirements for infrastructure?

None of them has personal or corporate income taxes. When CEOs say they are overtaxed in states like California, New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan and New Jersey (all states at the bottom of the list) what they really mean is that given the choice, they would rather pay no taxes at all.

Another oft-cited but completely misleading statistic is the number 254.

That’s supposed to be the number of businesses that left California in 2011. But that number was generated solely by a “relocation specialist” who wants to move companies out of California.

That number – if it’s even accurate – represents less than 0.007 percent of the total number of California firms.

Yes, companies have chosen to expand elsewhere, but we have also seen companies moving and expanding in California like Samsung, Dell, Bluhomes, Altec, Zollner and Advanced Call Center Technologies. All of these companies performed nationwide searches for places to relocate or expand and ultimately chose California.

While these are great acquisitions, the Public Policy Institute of California noted most job gains are due to the expansion of existing companies.

Just this week Sutter Health announced it is opening a new facility in Roseville that will employ upward of 1,000 people, and Amazon announced the opening of a San Bernardino facility that will create 700 jobs, in addition to the 350 jobs it created in Patterson earlier this year.

And, of course, California now gets $1 of every $2 in new venture capital funding as our leading innovators and entrepreneurs choose California as the place to be.

The bottom line is our competitors built a narrative while California was enduring the most disruptive economic crisis in our state’s history. They did this to try to usurp our position as the nation’s leader. Don’t help our competitors carry out their scavengery by rehashing the same tired talking points that are not supported by facts.

No one is denying that our state has challenges that need to be addressed. But encouraging companies to leave only further erodes confidence and contributes to job losses.

There was once a time when someone took a shot at the home team and the fans would rally to defend the honor of the franchise.

It’s time for Californians to recognize the state’s positive momentum and do whatever it takes to keep it going.

Mike Rossi is Gov. Jerry Brown’s senior adviser for jobs and business development. This column originally appeared in the Sacramento Bee.

Editorial: Veerkamp for El Dorado County supervisor

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the Oct. 21, 2012, Sacramento Bee.***

El Dorado County’s 3rd District Supervisorial District covers Placerville, Camino and the Diamond Springs areas. None of the six candidates on the ballot during the June primary garnered the margin of victory required to avoid a runoff. The top two vote getters, El Dorado Hills Fire Chief Brian Veerkamp and business owner Richard Barb, face each other in the November general election.

Barb has lived in the county 17 years. He runs a small business that builds custom shutters and other window finishes for homes and businesses. If elected, he says his major goal is to reduce government regulations and bureaucracy to help stimulate economic growth in the county.

Veerkamp, a lifelong resident of El Dorado, stresses his long experience in public service, including 14 years on the Camino Union School Board and his service as El Dorado Hills fire chief. A 2011 county grand jury report criticized lavish spending at the fire district, including high pay and pensions.

But Veerkamp shouldn’t be held responsible.

After Proposition 13 passed in 1978, state law allocated a set proportion of local property taxes to the independent fire district, then a rural backwater. As urbanization increased, that set proportion of property tax soared well beyond what was reasonable, which, in turn, led to lavish pay and pensions at a number of standalone fire districts, including El Dorado Hills. State law needs to change to solve that problem.

In their discussion with voters, both candidates stress that the slumping local economy is the biggest issue facing El Dorado County.

Both say they want to scale back regulations and fees on builders and other businesses. Veerkamp supports the voter-approved county general plan and the work of the El Dorado County Economic Development Advisory Committee, which seeks, sensibly, to steer high-density development to urban centers that have the infrastructure to support it.

Veerkamp’s long service on a school board and in the fire service gives him a deeper understanding of government budgets and planning challenges in these difficult economic times. For that reason, The Bee recommends Brian Veerkamp for El Dorado County supervisor.

Letter: Praise for South Lake Tahoe library

To the community,

I cannot begin to emphasize my love and appreciation for our local public library. It is the go-to place to find deeper information on a myriad subjects and so many good reads.

If any books or music are not readily available, they are freely available via request via the county service area.

It has been most satisfying to be a member of the Friends since moving here over 12 years ago. Following a long and enriching career in the public library, I can attest to the veracity of the quote by writer Anne Herbert: “Libraries will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries.”

Sherna Kopple Svensson, president of Friends of the Library South Lake Tahoe

Endorsement: Bosetti should

represent 1st Assembly District

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Oct. 2, 2012, Sacramento Bee.***

Two conservatives with solid histories of public service are running against each other in the newly drawn 1st Assembly District. The largely rural district stretches from the Oregon border to Lake Tahoe and west to the Sierra foothills.

Rick Bosetti, a businessman and former pro baseball player, has been a member of the Redding City Council since 2006. Brian Dahle, a third-generation farmer, is a small-business owner who has been a Lassen County supervisor for 16 years. Both are Republicans and both have signed the "no-tax pledge," which is unfortunate. It will make their ability to break through the partisan gridlock in Sacramento to solve the state's serious fiscal problems more difficult.

Of the two, Bosetti is more pragmatic and earns our endorsement for that reason. Born and raised in Redding, he returned to his hometown after nearly a decade in professional sports and started a small technology business. Although he signed the "no-tax pledge," Bosetti said he supports a new law backed by the timber industry that would impose a 1 percent tax on forest products to help cover the regulatory costs of timber harvest plans.

While Dahle opposes the bill on strict anti-tax grounds, Bosetti notes the bill included regulatory streamlining and lawsuit reform that he thinks will help his district's timber industries and the jobs they support.

Redding recently faced a large deficit fueled in part by ballooning public pension costs. When unions refused to grant concessions, the City Council put a measure on the 2010 ballot that for the first time required city workers to contribute to their own pensions. A second advisory measure asked if voters thought the council should create a vesting period before city workers could qualify for retiree health benefits. Incredibly, prior to that measure, employees vested almost from the day they were hired.

It was an acrimonious campaign. The unions ran three candidates against City Council incumbents, but in the end Bosetti prevailed, emerging as the top vote getter. Voters overwhelmingly approved the pension and health care reform measures. The pension fight helps explain why Dahle has the support of police and fire unions and Bosetti does not.

To correct the many problems that beset Sacramento, elected officials from both parties will need to stand up to powerful special interests. They must also show flexibility on the revenue side. Bosetti has shown he can do both when the public’s interest is at stake.