Letter: It’s time to vote McClintock out of office

To the community,

So, you voted for a congressman, Tom McClintock, who promised to curb government spending. According to your news sources (Fox) the deficit continues to grow and the excessive spending has not stopped at all, even though the House of Representatives is supposed to appropriate all the funds for the government.

Perhaps Tom McClintock’s method of blocking everything and saying no to anything did not work after all. Perhaps it would have worked better if there had been some Congress people that were willing to work together and craft a solution that headed us in the right direction instead of just voting “no, no, no”. Those all-or-nothing Congress people like McClintock created the present total gridlock in our government.

Republicans block anything the Democrats propose and Democrats block anything Republicans bring forth. And it will not matter who becomes president. If congress remains as deadlocked as it is now, the government will continue to be as ineffective and wasteful as it is now – nothing will change or get done for another two years. And we, the citizens of this country, will pay the price.

If you are serious about curbing excess government spending and if you are serious about creating jobs in our region, there is an alternative to Tom’s “NO, NO, NO” policies.

Take a serious look at John Uppal. He is a moderate running against Tom McClintock and he is eager to talk and work with anybody who wants to move the government out of its morass. The tactic of voting “no” on everything did not curb government spending and most certainly did not create any

jobs. Perhaps electing someone willing to listen to and work with the other side would give us a better chance to get out of the current recession.

Here is Jack’s website.

Sincerely,

Urs Schuler, Placerville

Opinion: Collusion involved in California gas price spike?

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the Oct. 9, 2012, Los Angeles Times.***

California’s record-breaking rise in gasoline prices over the last week was so sudden, and so apparently unjustified by the supply-and-demand factors that usually control markets, that it’s natural to suspect some kind of conspiracy at play. Among the suspicious is Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who sent a letter to the chairman of the Federal Trade Commission on Monday calling for an investigation.

Meanwhile, regardless of the spike’s cause, Gov. Jerry Brown moved swiftly Sunday to implement a solution, asking state environmental regulators to allow early sales of California’s winter-blend gasoline formula, which is cheaper but potentially more environmentally unfriendly than the summer blend. That was probably the right thing to do to help stave off serious economic harm. But in light of the conspiracy allegations and other factors, it also sets a worrisome

precedent.

Are Californians the victims of market manipulation? That has been asked many times after sudden hikes in gas prices, but probes have turned up little or no evidence that companies intentionally restricted supplies. Because there are relatively few refineries that produce California's gasoline, which is cleaner but more expensive than blends sold nationwide, a slowdown here or there can have a dramatic impact on prices. The recent pain at the pump can be explained away as the result of an August fire that closed a big Chevron refinery in Richmond, a pipeline disruption and a power outage that temporarily shut down an Exxon Mobil refinery in Torrance.

And yet … the state's most recent data on gasoline supplies, which are just 2.5 percent below last year's level, may not justify the 50-cents-a-gallon surge in the average pump price over the last week. In her letter to the FTC, Feinstein raised questions about whether commodity traders might have colluded to sell at exorbitant prices after refiner Tesoro Corp. was allegedly caught short on supplies and had to buy extra fuel to meet its commitments. That could have caused overall market prices to soar. Yet proving such illegal collusion isn't easy.

Brown's action on the winter blend, which usually isn't sold in California until Oct. 31, is expected to bring down prices by up to 20 cents a gallon in the next week. We can't fault him for that, but he is gambling on the weather; the winter blend is more susceptible to evaporation in high heat, so another heat wave like September's could have bad environmental consequences. Moreover, one can't ignore the possibility that suppliers did conspire to raise prices; if so, Brown is rewarding bad behavior by allowing them to sell gas that's cheaper to produce. If there's a price spike next fall and the governor is under pressure to switch blends early again, it will give more credence to the conspiracy theorists.

Letter: Fortier’s rant proves whose side she’s on

To the community,

It seems that we have the Queen of Hearts serving as mayor. In Alice in Wonderland when the Queen was unhappy with whomever or whatever in an angry burst, she shouted, off with their heads.

In a recent rant our mayor, Claire Fortier, raved in a tantrum on how unreasonable so many of us are. Translated, she’s sore because there’s a strong opposition to the loop road. She’s gone loony over the loop road. She wants it. Thus, those in opposition are unreasonable and divisive. Bad boys and girls.

Bill Crawford

Well, at least the mayor has taken off her disguise. She’s playing her cards to support the TTD and the Park Cattle Company. And the pressure’s on her to deliver. But it appears that she’s going to be knocked off her would-be throne.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

PS: Hale Cole needs to be reminded that the deal between Randy Lane and the city on the hole was signed in July 2006 and that his signature is on it.

Opinion: Candidates fail to address Western issues in debate

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

Though President Barack Obama and presidential candidate Mitt Romney got down deep in the weeds on taxes and health care in last week's debate, some viewers – especially in the West – may have been left with the impression that they skipped over more than they addressed.

The only presidential debate solely focused on domestic policy featured no discussion of immigration or the courts and only passing mention of the housing crisis. Sure, they frequently mentioned education (usually preceded by the lead-in "I care about" or "I want to invest in") but offered few details of anything resembling a plan.

In one sense, that shouldn't matter too much, as the debates are really the election's final home stretch, when the candidates are simply trying to drive home the messages they've spent the better part of the last year framing.

But as we've seen in the last week, sometimes the candidates can clarify or change their positions, even close to the election. And in swing states such as Nevada, new revelations on subjects that hit close to home could potentially sway undecided voters in decisive ways.

For instance, on immigration: Nevada's electorate is 14 percent Latino. While Latino voters don't rank immigration as a top issue, according to polls, they tend to consider a

candidate’s stance on the issues as a potential dealbreaker.

Forty-eight hours before the debate, Romney revealed to the Denver Post that he would honor Obama’s pledge to undocumented youths if elected president. This summer, Obama instituted two-year deferments of deportation proceedings and authorized work permits for young people who entered the U.S. before age 16 and enrolled in college or the military.

But that topic didn’t come up in Wednesday night’s debate.

In the same interview with the Denver Post, Romney also said that he was considering capping itemized income tax deductions at $17,000, a threshold that could adversely affect certain middle class families accustomed to being exempted from taxes on employer-provided health care and their mortgage interest.

During the debate, Romney started tossing around different numbers – $25,000 and $50,000 – much higher caps that would likely only adversely affect the wealthy. But neither he nor Obama were pressed to clarify their positions on health care or mortgage interest deductions, so we still don’t know exactly where they stand on this issue – and probably won’t until one or the other is elected.

Yet that’s the kind of stuff that could affect Nevadans’ bottom line, whether they’re filling out their tax returns, or just hoping to restore the value of their home– and for the undecided voter not being swayed by the war of words over “Obamacare,” “Big Oil” or the 47 percent of Americans Romney recently suggested are self-pitying government freeloaders. Oh wait: That 47 percent thing is another late-breaking twist they forgot to mention at the debate (and the Democrats are frustrated with Obama for the omission).

It is hard to address everyone’s niche issue in the 90 minutes allowed each time these candidates face off. But there’s a reason the debates started in the West: Because with Colorado and Nevada among the small handful of swing states at the

center of this contest, the West is likely where the elections are going to end.

For that reason alone, the candidates might be well served by discussing some of these other domestic issues that directly affect Nevada in the next debate.

That faceoff is Oct. 16 and focuses on domestic and foreign policy. Let’s see – that means they still have 45 minutes to do it.

Opinion: Diminishing Sierra snowpack impacts all of California

By Forrest Shearer

As a professional snowboarder lucky enough to ride mountains around the world, I have seen the impacts of climate change first-hand. I’ve seen once-famous slopes now with zero snow, ski resorts that have shut down, and glaciers that are disappearing.

In my native state of California, boarders and skiers are bracing for the effects of a warmer world. Scientists are predicting the Sierra snowpack will decline by 25 percent by 2050. We caught a preview this past ski season, when Lake Tahoe and Squaw Valley had to make their own snow well into February. It’s no wonder the California Ski Industry Association is a big supporter of AB32, the state’s landmark clean energy and climate law.

But whether or not you’ve ever strapped on a board or some

skis, all Californians should get behind the state's groundbreaking efforts to save energy and tackle climate change. Because sooner or later, our changing climate will affect all Californians.

Consider that declining mountain snowpack I mentioned. It's not just important for skiers and boarders and the businesses that rely on them. It also provides about one-third of California's drinking water.

Or look at the record heat that's been roasting parts of California, along with much of the rest of the country. It's been epic; in fact, July was the hottest month on record for the continental United States, with drought covering almost two-thirds of the lower 48 and wildfires burning up two million acres.

Scientists tell us that extreme heat will become more and more common as the world warms. And we can expect more severe droughts, heavy rainfall events, and other extreme weather, as well as more wildfires.

Communities in vulnerable areas across the country are already feeling the burn of global warming. Through a program with the environmental nonprofit, Protect Our Winters, called "Hot Planet/Cool Athletes," I go to schools in mountain communities throughout the U.S. to talk about climate change.

Through these visits, I've seen that young people get it. Their future depends on a healthy environment, and they are committed to doing their part. At one school, a teacher talked about the school's recycling efforts, and said anyone who wanted to get involved should see a student who was in charge of the whole program. I was very impressed with that kid and it's my hope that today's young students become tomorrow's environmental leaders.

But we shouldn't put the burden on kids to protect the environment.

Adults have to take responsibility for the mess we've made and not leave it for future generations to clean up.

So far, California is doing pretty well. The first step in tackling climate change is burning less fossil fuel, and California leads the nation in energy efficiency. Then you develop alternative energy sources that are cleaner or that don't pollute at all. California leads the country in solar power, wind power, and electric vehicle deployment. And now with AB32, we will show the nation how to create a successful market-based system for reducing emissions.

What Californians do is especially important, because what happens here will be imitated elsewhere. Californians are trendsetters, especially when it comes to influencing younger people. Surfing, skateboarding, and snowboarding started here, movies and television shows are made here, and environmental trends get started here – the rest of the country, and much of the world, ends up following our lead. Through AB32 and other smart energy policies, California is blazing a trail to a sustainable clean energy future.

For some people, it's too much. They want us to slow down. But we can't stop now.

When you're tackling gnarly terrain on a snowboard, you can't hesitate. You have to know that you've trained, trust your instincts, and commit yourself fully. California has made a great start on a rad run. Let's stay committed.

Forrest Shearer grew up as a Southern California surfer and is now a professional snowboarder. He works with Protect our Winters, the Alliance for Climate Education, and the Action Sports Environmental Coalition.

Opinion: Lawsuit against fire tax is a good move

By Ted Gaines

I applaud the class-action lawsuit filed by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association against the illegal fire tax.

I attempted to fight the fire tax through a referendum and legislation and am pleased to see the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association challenging it in court. I 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.



Ted Gaines

The class-action complaint, filed in Sacramento County Superior Court, seeks to overturn the fire fee, which costs property owners an additional $150 per year for each habitable structure on their property. The class-action names plaintiffs from Kern, Mendocino, Calaveras, Butte, San Bernardino, Solano, San Luis Obispo, El Dorado and Lassen counties, who together represent a cross-section of the roughly 825,000 property owners subject to the new fee.

As the state's largest taxpayers' association, HJTA is challenging the constitutionality of the fee on the grounds

that it is really a tax that needed a two-thirds vote in the Legislature to pass, but garnered only a bare majority and therefore never should have become law.

The complaint was filed against the California Department of Forestry and the Board of Equalization, as the two agencies responsible for identifying owners of the parcels subject to the new tax and collecting the tax, respectively. If the class-action suit is successful, approximately 825,000 homeowners could be eligible for refunds.

To be eligible for a refund, property owners must first pay their bill, and then file a protest with the State. HJTA has established a website that shows how to protest the fee and provides the necessary forms. Property owners can also sign up for free email bulletins that will keep them informed of the progress of the class-action suit. For more information, go online.

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 more than 10 percent unemployment and families are struggling just to make ends meet. I look forward to seeing it overturned.

Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento and Sierra counties.

Opinion: ‘It’s time for reason to replace rage’

By Claire Fortier

Progressive or provincial? That is the crux of the issue facing our South shore community during this election and well into the next decade.

Do we want a viable, prosperous community that our children and grandchildren are proud to call home? Or do we want the Tahoe of yesterday – only older and shabbier, with fewer families and more boarded up businesses?



Claire Fortier

The question is not new. Yet every time we take baby steps forward in this town, howls of outrage drown out the most reasoned and moderate of voices. Those howls aren’t coming from people who envision a better Tahoe. The howls are indicative of how we have allowed NIMBYism to usurp community benefit.

Democracy is a messy business, but it is not a mud wrestling contest nor a death match. Yet, we as a community, have become accustomed to rage over reason.

The one area where we all agree, or at least seem to agree, is

on preserving this slice of heaven we call the Jewel of the Sierra. Ensuring the pristine beauty and purity of Lake Tahoe for generations to come is a value deeply ingrained in the hearts of those fortunate enough to live here.

The problem is the setting for the famed Jewel: The increasingly second-rate 1960s town called South Lake Tahoe.

For almost a decade, we have soul-searched, conducted endless community meetings and spent millions in planning money to answer the critical question of envisioning our future.

We have the answer. It's called the city's General Plan. That plan was hailed at the state level for its elements of sustainability and environmental innovation.

The General Plan, as well as the TRPA's new effort to allow local jurisdictions more control over their destiny, should give South Lake Tahoe hope. It may soon be possible to take what we have and rebuild it better. That should be exciting news.

But you certainly wouldn't think so if you listen to the outrage over the loop road or the ceaseless thrashing over the hole or even the fatalism that the TRPA should be eliminate all together. (Hint to those willing to trash the TRPA: It won't do the city a bit of good because we are still in California and subject to even more stringent regulations without the bi-state agency.)

On a more local level, the city's recent push to clean up and fix up our town to make it more attractive to tourists, which is our economic life blood, should engender enthusiasm. Instead we find ourselves mired down in the vitriol of the very vocal few. That vocal minority realize they can thwart most any project or process just by raising their voices louder and more harshly than anyone else in town.

This small-ball way of doing business will ensure that nothing

changes, only continues to deteriorate. But the reality is the Tahoe of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that the vocal few seem so passionate about preserving is never coming back, even if nothing changes. With no change, our town will simply deteriorate further.

We will continue to decline unless we elevate the community's expectations and reinvigorate the community conversation.

As we sit on the verge of renewal or degeneration, it is time for those in this community who have a view beyond their special interests to get into the conversation. It's time to push city council candidates to answer real questions on what they want for their community in the future. Are they content with what is or do they see what could be?

It's time for reason to replace rage. It's time to re-establish our core commitment to South Lake Tahoe's future and not squander our limited window of opportunity for a small-minded few.

Finding consensus takes time, energy and emotional investment. Is our community, through our community leaders, really ready to find consensus or stay mired in yesteryear?

Claire Fortier is mayor of South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: California's school funding hard to figure out

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

If you want your head to spin, try to figure out how much money we spend each year to educate California's 6 million

K-12 school students.

Official agencies and outside groups publish numbers, but they rarely agree. They either take their snapshots at different times or include different types of spending and/or different sources of financing.

Gov. Jerry Brown's budget pegs the number at $63.4 billion during the 2012-13 fiscal year, but assumes that voters approve his sales and income tax increase measure, Proposition 30, on the Nov. 6 ballot.

If it fails, that budget number would presumably drop by $5.5 billion, unless he and the Legislature change their minds after the election.

With that caveat, Brown's number appears to be fairly accurate because it includes income and outgo that other reporting agencies often ignore, such as federal funds (about $7 billion), state payments for teachers' pensions ($1.2 billion) and the repayment of school-construction bonds ($3.3 billion). It's also roughly in line with the Census Bureau's annual report on school spending.

Why are accurate school-financing data important?

It's because Brown focuses on school finance in his campaign for Proposition 30, and because wealthy civil rights attorney Molly Munger is pushing a rival tax measure, Proposition 38, whose proceeds would almost all go to schools.

Brown's number, which assumes Proposition 30 passes, is about $10,500 per student, somewhere in the lower third among the states.

Were it to fail – its chances are about 50-50 – a contingency plan already in the law would cut schools by $5.5 billion, but only about half would be real-time operating funds ($400 per pupil), accomplished by counting bond service as state aid.

The remainder would be further delay in repayment of money already owed to schools.

Conversely – and this is very tricky – were Proposition 30 to pass, it would interact with the allocation formula under Proposition 98, the state school-finance law. Schools would see very little, if any, increase in operational financing, at least during the plan's early years, according to the Legislature's budget analyst and the California School Boards Association.

Munger has repeatedly hit that point because her Proposition 38 would, if enacted, raise income taxes and devote nearly all its revenue to classroom spending – by as much as $2,000 per pupil per year when fully implemented.

However, were Proposition 30 to lose and Proposition 38 win – a very unlikely event, polls indicate – school spending cuts for 2012-13 would take effect, unless they are modified, while Proposition 38's new money wouldn't kick in until the following fiscal year.

Confusing?

Absolutely, but when you look at how school money is allocated within the state, it's even more so.

Opinion: Important to have 2 escape routes

By Teri Mizuhara

Knowing two ways out of every room in your home may save your life during a house fire.

“It’s not just knowing two ways out of your home, typically that is easy, but do you have two ways out of every room in your home and can you safely use each exit?” asks Unit Chief Kelly Keenan of the Amador-El Dorado Unit of CalFire.

Keenan adds, “If not, then you need to create a plan, share this plan with everyone living in your home, and most importantly, practice your plan with your family during daylight hours and in the middle of the night since 50 percent of fatal home fires occur between 10pm and 6am.”

Here’s how to begin:

Sketch a floor plan of your home and indicate with arrows two ways out of every room.

Have a flashlight or headlamp next to each bed in case you need to exit your home in the dark.

Walk through the plan with everyone you live with including visitors.

Make sure you have one “meeting place” for everyone to go to after they have exited the home. Never go back inside a burning home for anything, leave that to the firefighters.

Call 911 once you are outside the burning building, calling from inside the home wastes valuable time that you need to escape.

Purchase escape ladders if you have a two- or three-story home and know how to use them safely.

Post your plan in a prominent place such as your refrigerator door.

Practice your plan during the day and again at night. Do this a minimum of twice a year.

If you have small children, disabled or elderly individuals,

make sure you have a plan for their escape. Add ramps and other equipment if necessary. Several years ago an 83 year old woman died of her injuries because she could not safely escape from a house fire. She used a walker and had no ramps to the deck off her bedroom, so she was forced to walk through her home which was on fire. Firefighters found her deceased outside her home.

Keep in mind, small children often hide when they get scared, so practice the exit drill more often so that they are comfortable with the idea. Don't forget to crawl low under smoke while exiting your home, sleep with doors closed, have a smoke detector in each bedroom, in main hallways and on each floor.

For more information please visit CalFire's website or call (530) 644.2345 to receive free fire and life safety information.

Teri Mizuhara works for CalFire.

Opinion: Hike for Housing organizers say thanks

To the community,

Habitat for Humanity, El Dorado County Chapter and St. Joseph Community Land Trust had a partnership fundraiser Hike for Housing on Sept. 15 at Spooner Lake and would like to thank Nevada State Parks for co-sponsoring the event.

We thank the many hikers who came out to support our missions to raise money to help beautify and provide affordable housing

in our community. We thank our generous donors: Laurie Ault, Casey Conroy, Linda LaFavor-Coyle, DIY, Hair Cuts by Janice, Heart Rock Herb & Spice Co., Heaven Scent Salon, Lillian’s Tan & Nails, Lira’s, Angie Peart, Raley’s, Jim Stamates, South Shore Bikes, South Tahoe Stand-Up Paddle, Jan Carr with Tahoe Mountain Soap Co., Tahoe Queen, Cindy Tedeschi.

Carolyn Meiers, Habitat for Humanity