Opinion: S. Tahoe council could be filled with rookies

To the community,

It’s a grand mess the city of South Lake Tahoe is in. Actually, it’s more like a nightmare. The following could happen or will happen.

The mayor will leave the city without finishing her term. If charged with a crime and convicted, Angela Swanson will vacate her seat on the council. There will be an election in November and the two incumbents might be defeated. If the incumbents lose and the mayor and Swanson leave the council, then Tom Davis will be the lone man standing. Poor Tommy. By January, that’s when the mayor has said she will leave the city, Mayor Davis will be sitting with two new faces on the council and one empty seat for sure, maybe two if Ms. Swanson has to resign.



Bill Crawford

At that time the City Council will have to appoint to fill vacancies or call a special election. That’s not likely because it’s costly. So it is possible the city will be governed by a three-member council, at least for a while. Looks like a crazy sitcom-reality show scripted by a devilish trickster. So the audience should be prepared to hang onto their seats and not tune out, but tune in and enjoy the fun and laughs. No tears please.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

PS: If an elected official is offered a bribe and does not report the offer, then the official can be charged with a crime. And as the playwright has said, “Fair play is a spectator sport.” And by the way, on Sept. 9, 1850, California was admitted to the Union as a free state. When I was a child it was state holiday. Times change.

Opinion: Gary Johnson should be the next U.S. president

To the community,

In the movie “Searching for Bobby Fisher” there is a moment where Joshua Waitzkin offers his opponent a draw. The opponent, looking at what he thinks is a tactically superior position spurns the offer, “why would I do that”. Joshua, having clearly seen his path to victory, replies, “You’ve already lost, you just don’t see it yet.”

I think there are very few who will see Gary Johnson as having won the current presidential race. For that matter, there are actually only a minority of people in this country who even know of his candidacy, including the owner/publisher of this e-newspaper. But Gary Johnson is the kind of guy who will find a way to surmount obstacles. This presidential candidate has climbed Mount Everest, so if you can find a bigger obstacle than that: Bring it on. Gary has a long history of achieving his aspirations.

I am most impressed by his business history. Gary started out as a one-man handyman business in college. He grew that business to over a thousand employees before deciding to go and do other things. Gary understands business, especially what we really need in this country, small business.

After selling the business he turned his hand to politics. He ran for governor of New Mexico. As governor, he took a state that had a serious budget deficit when he entered office, and by the time he was termed out eight years later left the state with approximately a billion dollars in its coffers. And he cut taxes 14 times.

But he’s not just an adventurer, businessman, politician – he’s a real thinker, too. And he thinks about things like: If this is the land of the free, why do we lock up more people than anyone else in the world? And why do we lock people up for drug use when it would make so much more sense to treat it as the medical/psychological/economic issue that it really is? Legalize marijuana, regulate it, tax it and top the drug wars. In fact, stop all the wars.

Sounds good on the surface, but you’ve still never heard of him? Check out more online.

OK, sounds good, but he’ll never get elected? That is exactly where the title of this piece comes from. Because really, it’s “we the people” who are poised for an epic win. Gary has no corporate sponsor. When he becomes president, he really will be “the peoples president” because it really will be because of people like you and me who get him elected.

Gary needs to be in the debates. You can help put him there. Do we believe in fair play and the guy with the best ideas should win in this country or not? Help Gary get his chance to make his case for us on the presidential debate stage.

Donavan Spencer, Porterville

Opinion: It’s time to raise the minimum wage

By Mark Weisbrot

WASHINGTON – The federal minimum wage is just $7.25 an hour and hasn’t been raised in three years. But a raise is much more overdue than that. If we look at the minimum wage 44 years ago, and simply adjust it for inflation, it would be more than $10 today.

This is another ugly symptom of what has gone wrong in America over the last 35 to 40 years. From 1979 to 2007, about 60 percent of the income gains have gone to the now infamous 1 percent at the top, with the majority of those gains going to the top 0.1 percent – people who made, on average, $5.6 million per year.

But some of the worst effects of giving more to those who have the most have affected people toward the bottom of the income ladder, and there is no excuse for it.

Productivity – the amount that a worker produces in an hour – has more than doubled over the last 44 years. When the minimum wage doesn’t rise, or falls in terms of its purchasing power, it means that these millions of low-income workers are not sharing in the gains from improved technology, knowledge and organization.

There is currently legislation before Congress to raise the federal minimum wage from its current $7.25 an hour to $9.80, over three years. After that it would be indexed to inflation.

Contrary to prevailing myths about who would benefit from a

proposed increase in the minimum wage, 88 percent of the 28 million workers affected are not teenagers.

As the Economic Policy Institute has shown, the majority are full-time workers, and on average they earn about half of their families' income. And 28 percent of the nation's 76 million children would have a parent who would benefit from the raise.

Another oversize myth promoted by the fast-food industry and other low-wage employers is that raising the minimum wage hurts workers by increasing unemployment. Although it is theoretically possible to raise minimum wages enough to cause employers to hire fewer workers, there is hardly any indication from economic research that the proposed increase in the minimum wage would have this effect.

Employment in the overall economy depends on aggregate demand or spending, which is determined – especially in our currently weak economy – by macroeconomic policy, including the Federal Reserve, and fiscal policy.

And raising the minimum wage doesn't only cut into profits, it also increases demand in the economy by moving income to workers who spend more than those who receive profit.

The EPI estimated that the proposed increase in the minimum wage would actually increase employment.

In Brazil, the minimum wage was raised by 60 percent in real terms by the country's most popular president, Lula da Silva – a former metal worker and union leader – as Brazil's economy moved toward record low levels of unemployment. Across South America, other governments including Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela have significantly reduced inequality while increasing economic growth.

What a shame that the hemisphere's richest country, where it would be so much easier to lift-up the working poor, has moved

in the opposite direction.

It means that the U.S. political system is actually more corrupt and less democratic in very important ways than those of our developing country neighbors to the south.

The vast majority of Americans would favor an increase in the minimum wage, as well as restoring the rights of labor to organize unions. But our financial elite have a veto over what we want to vote for, in large part because of our system of legalized bribery – aka, the financing of political candidates' elections.

Raising the minimum wage is about the minimum that we could do to reverse America's retreat from civilization at home.

Mark Weisbrot is the co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Opinion: South Lake Tahoe can endure any scrutiny

By Claire Fortier

Let's start with the elephant in the room: A councilmember has been linked to a bribery investigation.

If anything is amiss, the repercussions will be significant. If nothing is amiss, the devastation to this councilmember, her reputation and her family is immeasurable and horrific.

But no matter the outcome, the damage has already been done. Trust and confidence in the city's leadership has been shaken. A big question mark – "what now?" – hangs in the air.



Claire Fortier

Which brings us back to the room: The city of South Lake Tahoe.

The city is doing a stellar job despite significantly reduced staffing and enormous cost cuts. The operation of the city of South Lake Tahoe rests with competent and hard-working staff and excellent management. While still under the pressure of budget shortfalls, the city is in far better financial shape than most other California cities.

Efficient and responsive government is what the city of South Lake Tahoe is doing every day at every level.

This didn’t happen in a vacuum. Over the past few years, it has taken real work to focus our mission, fix our budget crisis and finish major projects, despite limited funding and staff.

The city has done that and so much more. It has been a key player in collaborating on regional planning and projects. It has created a community core in its community parks. It has managed events and projects beyond a scope ever considered before.

The work of the city is a constant process. Council set policy, city management puts policy into practice and city employees make that practice work every day, day in and day out.

When all aspects of the process work, city government works. And the city of South Lake Tahoe is working well.

Now it’s up to City Council to make sure it stays that way. We must focus on goals we adopted. We must hold the city’s best interests as our only objective. We must consider the future of our city, and not stay mired in the past.

As a council, we understand the significant challenges we face in coming days. We also understand that the investigation must work through the proper channels and not in the council chambers. We will cooperate with the district attorney in every way. And we will wait for all the conclusions to be drawn by his office, not by us.

We will stay focused the ability to deliver good government every day, day after day. That’s what our residents rely on and what we have vowed to deliver.

So, in answer to the question “what now?” – we have a great city that is doing an excellent job. We plan to keep it that way.

Claire Fortier is mayor of South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Hidden hotel fees are ripping off tourists

By Ed Perkins, Tribune Media Services

“Stop hotels from hiding part of their true prices from consumers and business travelers.” That’s the message Kevin Mitchell of the Business Travel Coalition and I sent to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) on Aug. 27, 2012.

Our target, of course, is the mandatory “fees” that hotels add to the room rates they post as supposedly independent fees

rather than as integral parts of their true prices. The most common are “resort,” “housekeeping,” and “Internet access” fees, but business travel columnist Joe Sharkey recently identified mandatory fees for grounds-keeping and a “bell captain” fee.

Our objection to these fees is simple: If they’re mandatory, they should be included in the hotel’s base room rate. As it works now, these fees are yet another case of “split pricing,” or as the FTC calls them, “drip pricing.” You know how it works: A hotel that wants to collect, say, $200 a night for a room, instead posts a phony rate of $170 a night, then adds one or more mandatory fees to make up the $30 difference.

The problem, of course, is that it’s the phony $170 price the hotel posts online and submits to the online pricing sites; you don’t find out about the true $200 price until later — maybe not until you’ve made a nonrefundable purchase. Hiding the fees from their initial price displays, even when shown before final purchase and sometimes not even then, is clearly deceptive. A related deception is failure to include a value added tax (VAT) in displayed prices for European hotels.

As we note in our submission to the FTC, mandatory artificial “fees” and hidden VAT make a hotel’s posted rate appear to be below its true price often enough to drive consumer choices in the travel marketplace. This widespread drip pricing damages almost all important stakeholders in the marketplace for hotel/resort accommodations.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Brown is wrong to expand tribal gaming

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

Gov. Jerry Brown waited until Friday's deadline to announce his support for two controversial off-reservation casinos that are likely to usher in a troubling new Indian gambling boom in California.

It's unfortunate that Brown blessed these two bad deals initially approved by the Obama administration's Interior Department. The first allows the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians to build a casino along Highway 99 in Madera County, 40 miles from their existing reservation near Yosemite. The second allows the Enterprise Rancheria of the Estom Yumeka Maidu Tribe to build its casino near Oroville, 50 miles from its historic tribal lands. The governor approved that casino even though residents of Yuba County signaled in a 2005 advisory vote that they did not want it.

Both casinos were opposed by established gambling tribes, who argue they will not generate new revenue but take profits from existing casinos. The most troubling aspect of Brown's decision is that it adds pressure to approve off- reservation casinos for other tribes.

When voters approved Proposition 1A a dozen years ago, they were promised gambling would be contained on existing Indian lands and that the expansion authorized by the initiative would be modest.

That's turned out to be a lie. Today, California has more than 60 Indian casinos, some of them quite massive. Gambling tribes rake in close to $7 billion annually, more gambling revenue than in any other state in the nation.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Why is Timber Cove Pier charging for access?

To the community,

I went to Timber Cove Pier to watch the fireworks last Sunday night and “they” were charging to go out on the pier to watch the show. Then we sat on a bench and half an hour later we were informed by a large family that the bench we were on was reserved for them and “didn’t we see the caution tape” indicating the “reservation” they had made through the Bistro restaurant manager?

What the heck is going on? Is it a public pier or privately owned and selling “views” to the highest bidder? We checked with someone at the Bistro and they didn’t seem to know anything about it.

What’s the story on Timber Cove Pier?

Denise Upton, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Saving America’s

small farms one apple at a time

By Chris Mittelstaedt

For more than 100 years, farmers in Graton and Sebastopol have been raising and harvesting the fickle and short-lived Gravenstein apple. In the 1940s, when this Sonoma County region shipped dried Gravenstein apples and applesauce to American troops, there were more than 10,000 acres in production. Today there are 900 acres, with only 15 farmers keeping this rare apple's production alive.



Saving the Gravenstein goes beyond the foodie arguments for preservation, the noble goals of sustainability or the sentimentality for things of yore. Saving the Gravenstein and other small farms and their unique products makes our cultural and economic immune system strong with self-sufficiency, draws on a legacy of Grange hall independence that strengthens communities, and pushes back against the trend that values sameness.

Small agriculture defines a sense of place in a way that goes beyond food and straight to the meaning of democracy and capitalism. In our modern world, where from Beijing to Boston to Belfast you can order a burger and count on its exact reproduction, we often confuse the opportunity for material equality with freedom. The comfort that comes with sameness lulls us into complacency.

We forget how to do things for ourselves.

We assume that there is an invisible system running programs and that they (whomever they are) will make sure that things are done well and safely on our behalf.

We begin to value what is familiar rather than what is innovative or different.

There is some confusion and concern following the passage of the Food Safety Modernization Act, the sweeping reform of our food safety laws signed into law in April, as the FDA has yet to come out with rules to implement it. Small farmers we work with say, regardless of the final rules, the large buyers, insurers and other entities will hold sway over farming operations, and will raise the bar of compliance beyond what is reasonable for a small farm.

There are concern that animals, including birds, bats, deer, foxes, and even dogs, will be deemed hazardous. While I understand the food safety concerns, the concept of sterilizing the biodiversity of a farm only leads down one path: to no more outdoor farms.

There is discussion about accommodating small growers, but the trend is not good, and the mood is akin to an agricultural Patriot Act, where an over inflated concern about food safety puts at risk American agricultural life as we know it.

While food safety is important, the sameness that drives compliance threatens consumers, may not make food safer and muzzles the important and independent voice of small farms.

Yvon Chouinard, the founder of the company Patagonia said, “We are not citizens any more; we’re consumers.” But if what we can consume is hindered before it gets to us, then the vote we cast is no vote at all.

So when you shop, think about what you are voting for. Saving the Gravenstein or the Blenheim apricot or the Fey Alberta peach or a small farm growing acres of greens is about

creating environments and markets for that produce.

Laws and regulations shouldn’t hand a competitive advantage to large farms. Small farms are more than just places that grow food – they are vital to our democracy.

Chris Mittelstaedt is the founder and CEO of The FruitGuys. He is working with the Russian River chapter of Slow Food to raise funds for the Gravenstein farmers.

Mom: Son making slow recovery after hit while on bike

To the community,

I wanted to give you an update on our son, Adam. He has been released from Renown and is at home, trying to heal as best he can.

He sustained a compound fracture of his left arm and has a steel rod implanted along with seven screws and a plate. He also sustained a compound fracture of two bones in his right leg and almost lost the lower leg and his right foot. That leg has a titanium rod, six pins, bolts and a plate. He has more than 100 sutures and staples and multiple abrasions and bruises. We are amazed he did not suffer any head trauma.

In the midst of such an incredibly difficult time, I have been so impressed by Adam’s attitude. I have not heard him complain one time.

Not only is he dealing with the physical pain and trauma, he

has to come to grips with the way this will affect his ability to earn a living. He is trying to be upbeat and positive. We are so very proud of him.

Thanks once again to South Lake Tahoe residents for their wonderful help and support.

Kind regards,

Terry Soule

Publisher's note: *Adam Rose, 38, was on his bicycle Aug. 21 when he was hit by an alleged hit-and-run drunken driver.*

Opinion: Weekly meal should be a community event

By Kathryn Reed

It's called a community dinner, but it doesn't really meet the definition of a community dinner. I want to change that.

Earlier this year I started volunteering at Bread & Broth one day a month. (My first experience was the Thanksgiving meal last year.)

Each Monday from 4-5:30pm anyone may drop by Grace Hall in South Lake Tahoe to receive a free hot meal. It doesn't matter your age or income or if you are a family or single or a couple. No questions are asked.



John Mauriello makes garlic bread for Bread & Broth diners. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It's evident most of the people *need* this meal. A few appear to be there for the camaraderie as well.

These people are so incredibly grateful. The smiles of gratitude – it can bring tears to your eyes. And they look you in the eye. They say thank you.

I'm the one who has had to work at looking them in the eye. I'm the one saying thank you. They probably don't know this, but they give me so much more than I am giving them.

I wish I could do more.

Part of the more is to make these Monday night gatherings a true community dinner. The reasons to do so are plentiful.

I have questions for the people who aren't at this meal. Where are you?

Where is the City Council, city staff, Douglas County commissioners, El Dorado County supervisors, Lake Tahoe Unified staff and board, Lake Tahoe Community College staff and board, Douglas County School District staff and board, people working in social services, people working in food service, the people who call the South Shore home? So, everybody, where are you?

If the people in position of power could see the needs of the other half (three-quarters?), it would perhaps shed some light on why Lake Tahoe continues to be called “poverty with a view”. Imagine a city councilmember at each of the tables, but not able to talk to one another. Just eating, listening, breaking bread with their constituents.

Would the real issues of the city become clear? Would they figure out a sandwich board sign really isn’t that important? Would they figure out people are what’s important?

Then imagine interspersed with the regulars at Bread & Broth are you and your neighbors. Because, after all, the B&B regulars are your neighbors even if they don’t live on your street.

Would you then think twice about the person on your street who doesn’t use a bear proof can – is it that they don’t care or that $100 to buy one is a month’s or more worth of food to them? Would you help your neighbor more if you knew them better?

Bread & Broth doesn’t have the resources to feed a huge influx of people. So, to pay for this, I challenge businesses to individually or collectively sponsor an Adopt-A-Day. For $250 (tax deductible) this feeds more than 100 people. *Lake Tahoe News* is sponsoring tonight’s meal.

And I have suggested to some of my team members that a donation jar be put out each night. (This was really my mom’s idea because it’s what they do where she volunteers.) A $5 donation would pay for you and the person next to you to eat.

Besides getting a healthy meal and giving back, you would get to meet new people. People whom also call Lake Tahoe home.

Lake Tahoe has plenty of things wrong with it. But it also has plenty of things right with it. But as long there are people who struggle to find a meal each night, there is definitely

something wrong. We can all help to make each Monday night evolve into a place people *want* to be instead of *need* to be.