# Opinion: Tribes should not influence online gaming in California

**Publisher's note:** ***This editorial is from the June 19, 2012, Los Angeles Times.***

Despite federal and state bans on online poker, as many as 1 million Californians spend a total of about $300 million annually playing the game — typically on websites based outside the country. Lawmakers have been debating for more than four years whether to create a legal outlet for these players but have been stymied by opposition from powerful Indian gambling interests. Those forces appear to have scuttled a new proposal by state Sens. Roderick Wright (D-Inglewood) and Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) that was sidelined by a Senate committee last week just before a scheduled vote. There's a good argument to be made for legalizing and regulating online poker or, conversely, working more aggressively to ban it. With the tribes pulling the strings in Sacramento, however, California isn't doing either.

Wright's bill (SB1463) would allow a limited number of parties in the gambling business — tribes with state gambling compacts, card clubs, horse racing tracks and "advance deposit wagering" websites that take bets on horse races — to run poker games online for adults in California after they've been overseen by state regulators for at least three years. To obtain an online poker license, however, they and the company they hire to operate their site would have to undergo a rigorous background examination. They'd also have to pay the state $30 million upfront as a licensing fee and, eventually, 10 percent of their gross earnings.

Some tribes are backing the bill and have already started to

forge relationships with online poker contractors in Nevada and overseas. Others want the state to authorize online poker, but they object to the proposed background checks or the exclusion of tribes without state compacts. Some argue that racetracks and off-track-betting operators have no expertise in poker, unlike tribal casinos and card clubs, so shouldn't be included. And some contend that legitimizing online poker will threaten the revenue and jobs created by tribal gambling.

**Read the whole story**

---

# Opinion: Young adults need to understand finances

**By Mark Hanson**

As children blossom into young men and women, most insist on planning and running their own lives. Parents worry about all the basic essentials for their kids' independent living, like housing, eating properly, staying warm, being careful at night and more.

But most parents forget to teach their youngsters one of the most important lessons of all – financial responsibility. The resulting turmoil can spell disaster for a child's future.

Consider this: The average young adult amasses $45,000 in debt by the time they turn 29, according to a recent PNC Bank report.

This generation of 20-somethings was raised during an economically-thriving period. Undisciplined spending habits, student and car loans, and a tough job market have stymied

their financial growth. Perhaps the worst culprit is financial ignorance, but we can count this as a lesson for future 20-somethings.

For young people, organizing finances can be intimidating to the point of prohibitive.

We need to have a curriculum in schools, from kindergarten through 12th grade, that ensures our kids graduate with financially literacy. From balancing a checkbook to understanding what it means to pay – and earn – interest, kids need basic money management skills to survive in the world, and most aren't getting them.

All teens should know and practice so they can control their financial destinies:

• Saving for dreams – the three-envelope method: Use the first envelope for your day-to-day expenses: gas or lunch money. Pause before blowing this money at the movie theater or a fast-food restaurant. Envelope No. 2 is for short-term goals, which might be clothing or a new laptop. The third envelope is for long-term goals such as a car, college or a "future millionaire club" fund.

• How to create a budget: A budget lets us know what's possible, and not possible, with money. There are six steps to creating a budget. 1. List all of your expenses. 2. List all income. 3. List monthly expenses. 4. Add up these lists separately. 5. Tweak your budget so you can meet your expenses with money left over for savings. 6. Review your budget every week.

• How to set and follow through on goals: First, figure out what your current finances are, then determine what they will be in the future – one year out, then two years out, then four years later, etc. How will you get to your one- or two-year goal? You need a plan, and most of the time that means either earning more money, spending less, or a combination of the

two. Finally, you have to stick to your plan in order for it to work.

• Understanding interest rates, such as credit cards: Interest is a fee paid for using someone else's money. Simple interest is straightforward: 5 percent accrued in your bank account with $100 yields $5 in interest at the end of the year. Compound interest, however, means ever-increasing amounts. This is crucial to understanding debt you may take on from lenders. Know what you are borrowing, and the terms thereof. Just as your money can work for you in a bank account, money borrowed can work against you if it is not paid back in a timely manner.

• How to write checks and balance a checkbook: These days, it's easier than ever to review accounts online, which automatically tracks exchanges. However, banks do make mistakes, which is why it's wise to track your accounts independently. Ask. Don't be embarrassed. Banks are putting a premium on service and want to establish a positive relationship with young customers. If you have a question, speak to someone at the bank. As you take control of your money, you'll also take control of your life.

*Mark Hansen is a successful businessman, a former Palm Beach County, Fla., elected school board member and motivational speaker.*

---

# Opinion: Time to rethink how government works

**By Ted Long**

The 2007-08 El Dorado County Grand Jury in reported case No. 07-025 strongly recommended consolidation of the six West Slope fire districts. They found the districts were out of date with current growth and their ability to provide services. The grand jury concluded that the taxpayers of the county would gain better service and would save more than $944,000 in addition to the county's contribution of $1.3 million needed to keep the districts afloat.

Nothing happened. Why? The consolidation, while benefiting the county residents, would eliminate six fire chiefs and their use of their red car. The chiefs resisted the effort and like most things requiring real effort, time and apathy let the opportunity slip away.



Ted Long

While the effort of that grand jury focused on service and efficiency, in this current time of serious financial shortfall should we bring to the forefront the whole issue of why we have government, what are our priorities and how can they best be served? We need to save money, cut waste and improve efficiency, but also we need to really look and see that we are truly serving the needs of society. After all, isn't that why we have government?

In its origin government was intended to provide those limited services that we could not do individually. Right up through Herbert Hoover's administration the emphasis was on individualism. The declared common interest of that time was limited mostly to defense nationally and locally, world

commerce, and on the local scene, fire protection and the beginning of a public educational system. Over the years the role of government has grown, not only in the size of the original services intended, but in additional services, most notably beginning with Social Security and unemployment benefits of the Roosevelt administration.

Our world and our nation are in very different places today. Prior to World War I we had a standing army of about 25,000. Today we are the world's leading peacekeeper with troops all over the world. Perhaps it's a good time to relook at the entire system. Have many of our oginal purposes actually disappeared? As we have grown to a more prosperous nation, have our priorities changed? While we allowed people to go hungry in the past, is that tolerable today? I could go on with so many things, that I believe we need to examine our entire system – what is the role of government?

One conversation I hear very little about is the country of Denmark. On one hand it has the highest taxes in the world, yet a recent survey showed that the Danes are the happiest people in the world. How can that be? Well, the basic issues that keep us awake at night have been resolved in that system: health care, education, retirement are no longer issues. Yes, I am sure that they struggle with many things, but like the rest of us, many of those things are not life threatening, they are only issues of preferences.

Let's make lemonade out of this lemon, let's set aside out traditional often unquestioned positions and take an honest look at our priorities and where do we want to spend our money on? What laws do we really want to enforce and on what terms? What levels of government do we, can we, should we, eliminate in favor of a healthier, happier society? I'll bet the first thing we would do is consolidate those outdated fire districts and seriously examine the millions spent to maintain a level of government at the city level. Did you realize, for example, that the City Council, five members, when you take the entire

budget cost us over $150,000 a year alone? South Lake Tahoe is protected by the city police, the sheriff, the highway patrol and the FBI, all for 20,000 residents. Could some of this money be used to support a local economy? Egos aside, this is not the Wild West any more.

*Ted Long is a former South Lake Tahoe City Council member, planning commissioner and current foreman of the El Dorado County Grand Jury.*

---

# Opinion: Mayor didn’t need to dig up the past

**To the community,**

On June 20, at the dedication for the new El Dorado Beach project, Mayor Claire Fortier said in praise of the project manager he, Jim Marino, “had to deal with two contentious city councils.” Why the mayor would drag previous councils into what was supposed to be a celebration is a mystery because the facts don’t support her statement.

The contentious part of the project, if there was contentious behavior, developed because of a lawsuit against the city. In the beginning the City Council by a vote of 4-1 let the contract for the project to contractor A. At that point contractor B sued the city.



Bill Crawford

The court decided that the contract let to contactor A by the City Council was flawed. Thus, the project was delayed for a year. Contractor B was awarded the project contract and completed the project.

The reason for the messy delay and the city's loss in court is clear. The city attorney in great haste advised the City Council to let the contract to contractor A. Thus, the 4-1 vote. After the court's decision, the City Council questioned the city attorney about why he advised the council as he did. In a moment of candor, he said he had been pressured by members of the council to hurry up, rush to let the contract and he gave in to the pressure. As for Mr. Marino, he supported letting the contract to contractor A.

I have no idea what the court case cost the city in dollars. In the beginning, I voted with the majority on the 4-1 decision. I felt, after listening to the city attorney's confession that I had been duped, made a fool. Just why Mayor Fortier would open up this can of worms, I have no idea. But she did.

**Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe**

# Opinion: Education funding in California not equitable

**Publisher's note:** ***This editorial is from the June 18, 2012, Los Angeles Times.***

Wouldn't it make sense for education funding in California to be transparent and equitable, with money spent according to students' varying needs? Gov. Jerry Brown is proposing to inject some overdue clarity and logic into the process by allocating to schools a flat amount per pupil, plus a large additional sum for low-income students or those who aren't fluent in English.

The governor's plan is far from perfect — it's especially lacking in accountability — and the Legislature appears unwilling to support it this year for reasons both political and philosophical. But the reasoning behind it is sound, and legislators should work with the governor to move the state in this direction in coming years.

California's system for allocating public school dollars — if it can be called a system, which implies that there's an organizing principle behind it — has needed an overhaul for decades. Only a handful of people in the state claim to understand how it works. Some school districts receive more money for each student than others, even when living costs and student characteristics are roughly the same. The Inglewood Unified School District receives about $1,200 less per student annually than Los Angeles Unified, for example, although the two have almost identical demographics and educational challenges. Some affluent districts get far more than the statewide average; others receive less.

**Read the whole story**

# Opinion: UC system caters to the rich and foreign

**By Thomas D. Elias, San Jose Mercury News**

The more that foreign and out-of-state students register at the University of California and higher tuition and fees are pushed, the more legitimate it becomes for taxpayers who built and still largely fund the 10-campus system to wonder who it will belong to in the future.

It’s a question that got new force early this month when UCLA officials voted to take their graduate school of business private, making it depend solely on a variety of grants, plus student tuition and fees.

No one knows if the UC system will remain as it has been for more than 70 years – the single biggest incubator for upward mobility of young Americans – or if it will become a playground for the rich of California and other places.

But all indications at this moment are that UC campuses are gradually going to cater more and more to the wealthy.

It’s all because of money: The state doesn’t have as much as it needs to fund many basic services that have come to be expected, from parks to elementary and high school education to caring for the disabled elderly who have paid taxes all their lives and expected a bit of a safety net in their twilight years.

One result has been a steady reduction over the last decade in state support of UC, California State University and community college campuses. That has translated into major increases in

tuition and fees that have hit all those campuses. UC tuition is about triple what it was 10 years ago, after increases of as much as 20 percent in some years. Taking away inflation, in 1980 the value of a typical California home would buy more than 200 years of a UC education. In 2011, it bought only approximately 30 years. So tuition, amazingly, has risen even faster than housing costs.

Another result of the funding cuts has been a decrease in the number of students transferring to UC schools from community colleges – always a good measure of future upward mobility – and a parallel increase in admission applications from other states and countries. Applications from out-of-staters don't usually arrive spontaneously; they tend to result from outreach efforts.

**Read the whole story**

---

# Opinion: From rags to resorts through entrepreneurship

**By Doug French**

When most people think of starting a business, or contemplate others doing so, the common belief is that a person should go into a business they have knowledge in – not just something they know about, but something they know lots about. But is expert knowledge of a particular industry really a prerequisite to opening a new business in that industry or taking over an existing business?

Self-made billionaire Sheldon Adelson says the secret to his success was "never knowing anything" about the businesses he

entered. That sounds like an exaggeration, but he emphasized that point when speaking to students at UNLV recently, upon receiving the Hospitality Industry Leader of the Year by the UNLV's Harrah Hotel College.



Doug French

"You could hand me your laptop and I wouldn't know how to turn it on," Adelson told the students. "It was amazing I had success in developing Comdex."

Comdex was a computer expo in Las Vegas and was one of the largest computer trade shows in the world. Geek Week, as it was called, had a stunning rise from its beginning in 1979, with 167 exhibitors and just over 3,900 attendees to a peak in 2000 of 2,337 exhibitors and over 211,000 visitors.

Adelson's company, the Interface Group, sold the show to Softbank Corp., a Japanese software conglomerate, in 1995 for nearly $1 billion.

Adelson purchased the Sands hotel and casino on the Las Vegas Strip in the early '90s with hopes of building a convention center to house Comdex. "Entrepreneurs are not in the business of making others rich," Adelson said, explaining why he bought the Sands to build his own convention center rather than leasing facilities from the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, an entity funded by the room tax that operates the competing Las Vegas Convention Center.

Adelson knew little about the gaming industry and says he doesn't even know how to play baccarat, the game that generates most of his company's earnings at casinos in Macau

and Singapore, properties that generated more than 83 percent of the company's revenues in the latest quarter.

Gaming insiders laughed at him for thinking he could build a fortune catering to low-rolling convention goers. Now Las Vegas depends on convention traffic to fill its rooms during weeknights. Every new property built in Vegas includes convention space – after Adelson proved the model works.

Scholars in the area of entrepreneurship might call Adelson's acumen Kirznerian alertness, or Schumpeterian innovation, Schultzian adaptation, or Misesian foresight of future consumer preferences. Or more completely, as they explain in their new book, "Organizing Entrepreneurial Judgment: A New Approach to the Firm", Nicolai Foss and Peter Klein stress an entrepreneur's judgment making "in the specific context of exercising control over heterogeneous resources in the service of satisfying future imagined customer preferences."

However, for the seventh-richest man in America, it's much simpler. "This is the nature of entrepreneurship. It's the willingness to take a risk," Adelson said. "It's a willingness to do things a little bit different."

Thinking differently included not accepting the Las Vegas business-as-usual practice of kowtowing to the Culinary Union. When Adelson purchased the Sands, he inherited its union employees and didn't necessarily care one way or the other about being a union property. This changed one morning when Adelson went to buy a yogurt.

The Culinary Union employee working behind the counter refused to serve him. The employee who had the job classification that allowed for waiting on customers was on break. The two employees left behind the counter could not, per the union contract, serve him (or anyone). What Adelson quickly realized was; he couldn't operate a 5-star resort with those union rules.

However, the Culinary leadership wouldn't budge, and told Adelson that the Venetian would never get out of the ground if he didn't sign their contract. After all, Las Vegas is a union town, the "new Detroit" they called it. Bartenders and maids can't be outsourced to India.

Adelson believed his employees should vote as to whether they wanted union representation. The union brass would have none of it. They would only organize from the top down, demanding that Adelson sign a "neutrality agreement" that is anything but. Adelson chose to fight, and against all odds, the Venetian remains the only nonunion Strip property to this day. But the fight goes on daily; with labor laws stacked in the union's favor, it takes crafty lawyering and Adelson's iron will to keep them at bay.

*Forbes* magazine estimates Adelson to be worth $24.9 billion, with the majority of his wealth being Las Vegas Sands Corporation stock. But a look at the price chart for LVS shows that it has been anything but a smooth ride, illustrating Adelson's determination, confidence, and guts.

The company began trading on Dec. 14, 2004, with the shares jumping in price 61 percent the first day of trading to close at $46.56. The stock then steadily marched upward to over $133 in the fall of 2007. People around Vegas thought the shares could hit $200. But the financial crisis eradicated funding for Sands projects in Macau and Singapore. The company was bogged down with over $10 billion in debt and Las Vegas Sands shares went into free fall, declining to under $2 each in early 2009. But while the public believed a bankruptcy filing was possible, Adelson was shaking up Sands' management and investing another $1 billion of his own money in the company.

Recently, Las Vegas Sands reported to Wall Street that it collected more than $1 billion in pretax earnings during just the first quarter of this year, a first for a gaming company.

While academics try and identify what entrepreneurship is and what entrepreneurs do, with the hopes of training future generations of Sheldon Adelsons, what is apparent is that success can't be created without change. And changes to an industry or to the world don't come from tired, internal thinking but from fresh, external thinking.

Also, it's apparent that entrepreneurial abilities lie outside the particular skills and knowledge needed in a specific industry. You don't need to know how to make a Bloody Mary to start a successful saloon. At the same time, knowing how to make a killer martini doesn't mean the bartender has the required business judgment to make the saloon successful.

"Knowledge can be a subtle curse," writes Jonah Lehrer in his impossible-to-put-down "Imagine: How Creativity Works". "When we learn about the world, we also learn all the lessons why the world cannot be changed. We get used to our failures and imperfections." Lehrer goes on to point out that to be creative over time, "to not be undone by our expertise – is to experiment with ignorance, to stare at things we don't fully understand."

Studies show that people's creativity tapers off as they get older. But Dean Simonton, a psychologist at UC Davis, explains that it's not age that saps creativity; it's that experience in a discipline makes people risk averse and they become part of the status quo. "If you can keep finding new challenges, then you can think like a young person even when you're old and gray," says Simonton.

Adelson, while now a billionaire many times over, started or acquired 50 businesses, and each time, as the Las Vegas Review-Journal's Howard Stutz writes, "he wasn't sure exactly what he was getting himself into." Suffice it to say, the success of one of the businesses overshadows the other 49. However, Adelson has for the most part been consistently successful, starting with the first business he purchased –

Vend-A-Bar, a candy-bar vending company he bought at age 16, using $500 he had saved, a $3,000 loan from a credit union, and a seller-carryback note of $6,500.

The young entrepreneur had to repair half the machines that came with the sale, but he expanded the business selling ice cream at the factories where his machines were located during the summer.

He learned court reporting at night, and became the secretary to Celia D. Wyckoff who had taken over Magazine of Wall Street from her husband after their divorce. By 1963, Adelson was in the mortgage business and at age 30 was a multimillionaire. But at the end of the decade he was broke. In the 1984 book "The Computer Entrepreneurs: Who's Making It Big and How in America's Upstart Industry", authors Robert Levering, Michael Katz, and Milton Moskowitz, write of Adelson's brief downturn: "Not one to dwell on failure, he refers to that incident as a 'two-hour cry,' as opposed to the 'half-hour cry' he had a couple years later when he lost $1 million in a condominium development that went bust."

Quickly back on his feet, Adelson purchased a small publishing company, but, "He was no more interested in publishing than he was in quantum physics. It was just another company to invest in."

Adelson saw the trade show as "a magazine in the flesh," with the exhibitors as the advertisers, attendees as the readers, and the editorials as the conference. "Hey, I got a magazine. Why can't I do something like this? I'd make a million dollars in three days," said Adelson, and eventually Comdex was born.

At age 78 Adelson is not slowing down. Besides expanding his Asian presence with possible projects in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, he intends to test his integrated-gaming-resort model in Spain, at a cost of $35 billion. "We are looking at 12 integrated resorts, 3,000 rooms each. A mini Las Vegas, about

half the size of the Las Vegas strip in Spain for the European market," said Adelson, speaking recently ahead of the opening of another Macau property.

Clearly something continues to drive the man Levering, Katz, and Moskowitz call "a Jewish Horatio Alger." Mises perhaps described it best in "Human Action": the entrepreneur is "a speculator, a man eager to utilize his opinion about the future structure of the market for business operations promising profits." And while the entrepreneur is confident in his view of the "uncertain future," that view "defies any rules and systemization."

Hard to define and impossible to model, entrepreneurship makes the capitalist world go around and the rest of us much better off.

*Doug French is is president of the Mises Institute and author of "Early Speculative Bubbles & Increases in the Money Supply" and "Walk Away: The Rise and Fall of the Home-Ownership Myth".*

---

# South Lake Tahoe: A link between the people and the action

**By Kathay Lovell**

I will never be able to get out of my mind the sights and smells of the Angora Fire. I was at ground zero on the morning of June 25, 2007. I never want anyone to experience that again

– the loss of their mementos, personal belongings and their beloved pets. All things lost during the fire that can never be replaced.



Angora Fire --
5 years later

In my opinion, South Lake Tahoe forever changed at 2:15pm, June 24, 2007. I was mayor at the time of what would be later known as the Angora Fire. The events over the course of the next week following the fire were the most difficult times for our community. Others will recount the details of the cause and circumstances of the fire.

For me, the most vivid details started shortly after the fire started. From my house I had a clear view of the initial plume. I knew it was trouble just by the heat, wind, and a very dry previous winter. I snapped a few pictures from my Blackberry and sent them to the city manager who was working that Sunday at the airport. We spoke briefly and he said that this was a significant event. According to the city's fire chief, the fire at that time was within the jurisdiction of the county but on track to move toward the city. Details were sketchy, but the conditions and location of the fire caused great concern. The city manager and I decided it was imperative to open the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) located at the airport in the City Council chambers just in case the fire escalated.

I left my home for the EOC never imagining how aggressive the fire had become or was about to be. We (the city manager,

police chief, city clerk, city attorney, and a few senior staff members and myself) were briefed. The fire wind gusts were up to 50 miles per hour and the fire area was heavily timbered with a dense canopy in the path of hundreds of homes. People were being evacuated. Federal, state, and local fire agencies responded on the initial attack and it quickly became evident that home protection and evacuations were the priorities.

The appropriate staff and other local agencies were notified the EOC was being opened. It seemed like within minutes the room was full. There wasn’t a lot of talking at first, everyone was setting up tables, computers, and phones lines were being drug across the floor. The city’s information technology staff was laying additional lines and setting up fax machines and televisions. Different public safety agencies were flowing in. Staff was soon making arrangements at the Parks and Recreation Center for evacuees. The pre-existing disaster recovery plan was in full swing.

Everyone was very professional and operated in a unified environment. The mission we were tasked with was to gather information as it was coming in and disseminate out to the public as quickly as we could. It was very fluid. I called the El Dorado County sheriff and undersheriff to tell them how serious this fire was and how quickly it was spreading. The sheriff immediately dispatched this county EOC staff. The fire chiefs and U.S. Forest Service had immediately made all the necessary requests for other additional assistance.



Kathay Lovell speaks about the Angora Fire while the governors of Nevada and California, Lake Tahoe Basin fire chiefs and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., listen. Photo/Kevin Chandler

There was an almost immediate intense media presence and their numbers were growing at a rapid rate. The media overwhelmed us. The city had no public information officer, so the city manager and I were the point of contact. The city clerk and the city attorney would gather updated information from our briefing and the city clerk would provide to us, almost every 10 minutes, with updates so we could inform the media and public as rapidly as possible. Every time we got an update we were relieved there were no reported human casualties, but the number of lost homes was unclear. Lives of residents and first responders were constantly a worry.

In the meantime, my son called me while I was at the EOC. He told me he and his wife were evacuating. I told them just go to my house with whatever they could take and safely get out. It was a long night with information coming in quickly.

We had every type of media truck in the parking lot at the airport. The city manager and I did constant interviews with the media most of the night as information was coming in to us. I went home sometime around 3am to return at 6am Monday.

As I arrived, I was being updated. The sheriff was on his way up from Placerville. The fire chief was making arrangements to take the sheriff, the police chief, and me to the burn area.

As we drove into ground zero of the burn area, the thick stench of burnt timber and building materials hung in the air. The blue sky Tahoe is famous for was gone and a gray haze of smoke surrounded us. Suddenly we could see the total devastation of homes and forest. Everyone was silent as if to pay reverence to the loss. Cars were reduced to metal hulls. Homes burned to the foundation. Smoldering ashes surrounded us of what was no more.

We stopped the car as the fire chief began to explain the course and intensity of the fire. A few feet from where we stopped there was a child's bicycle, completely charred. The bike was in front of what used to be someone's home. I could only think it was a miracle no one died.

That same Monday night was the first of three public meetings. I attended every public and community meeting regarding the Angora Fire during that summer. Not all locally elected attended those public or community meetings. They should have and this bothered me. The community needed all of us, even if to vent or have a shoulder to lean on. I wanted to be there for my community. This first meeting was in the gym at the middle school. The estimated attendance was 1,500. I think all the Angora Fire victims and their families were there; rightfully so, I sensed a lot of fear, anger, and questions.

The Forest Service firefighters, sheriff, CalFire, fire chiefs and others were there to answer questions and provide current information. TRPA Executive Director John Singlaub took questions but was quickly verbally attacked by the audience. It was a pivotal moment. Many in the audience believed that the fire was made worse by regulations forbidding homeowners from clearing adequate "defensible space" from around their properties. Every agency realized there had to be a

collaborate effort to deal with defensible space in the future. It was an emotional night and we needed to provide comfort and answers.

Tuesday, I was again at the EOC, and we were briefed about the containment. It was of grave concern because the same conditions as Sunday, with high heat and dry winds, were expected. I went home for an hour to take care of my dogs. While outside with them, I saw a plume of smoke. I took pictures and immediately sent them to the city manager and the fire chief. I was told the fire had rekindled and spread quickly. Due to the conditions, it had broken containment and was heading toward South Tahoe High School, the Gardner Mountain housing tract and Tahoe Keys. A few moments later, while still in my back yard with the dogs, I began to see huge red glowing embers of wood blowing onto my roof and yard. I soon found out I was going to have to evacuate. Now I was experiencing what many others in the path of the fire had already been through.

My husband had been in Alaska since Friday on a fishing trip. He was at a remote lodge with no phones or cell service. I couldn’t contact him during the first few days of the fire. He was of no help. My son, who was able to return to his home that he had previously evacuated, came to get my things and my dogs. I was not organized and ran in a bit of a circle as to what to take and what to leave. My son said, “You have 2 minutes or I will carry you out.” I grabbed my dogs, dog food, leashes, my laptop, a few pieces of jewelry, some jeans and tops, and my son said I was done. As we departed, he grabbed a collage I had with pictures of the family.

We were trying to leave the Tahoe Keys area along with everyone else. We went to 15th Street first only to find it was blocked. After a long wait on Tahoe Keys Boulevard we made it out along with everyone else. Yes, it was a disaster and very frightening. To add to my concern, as my son was driving on Tahoe Keys Boulevard, I realized I had forgotten my pet

bird. He would not turn around – it was bumper to bumper. My daughter also resided in the same area and I frantically called her. She left work and gathered her two dogs and a few possessions before evacuating.

My son dropped me off at the EOC. He took my things and dogs to his house. I needed to regain my composer; I needed to do my job. It was another night of horrible fires and valiant efforts to successfully save our high school and surrounding residences. I made my way home around 2 or 3am. I laid my head on the pillow fearing for my community. I could see Gardner Mountain was aglow with flames; we were still under siege. I got a few hours of sleep and then returned to the EOC. The following days brought more containment and resources until finally the fire was out. So many had fought this fire in order to save lives and homes; some that fought the fire lost their own homes in the process.

In the days, weeks, months following the devastation of the Angora Fire, it was clear we had to do everything possible to help our community. For those who lost everything, we had to be there to comfort and help them. We had city employees and we all had friends who lost homes. One of the councilmembers suggested we give up a month's salary and contribute to employee victims, three of us did. Additionally, the City Council took action on July 12, 2007, to put in place city code changes and purchased supportive firefighting equipment including a wildland fire engine and new programmable radios. These changes along with defensible space clearing around city owned properties were positive steps toward future fire prevention.

In retrospect, the healing process for the community was both grief and joy. The losses were incredible, but so was the community support for the victims. So much so, the victims refused to be labeled anything other than "survivors". The fire was an emergency. Nothing works perfect in an emergency, but from my viewpoint at the EOC and in the time following all

agencies went above and beyond. While personal belongings, pets, and keepsakes were lost during the fire and can never be replaced, not one human life was lost nor was anyone seriously injured as a direct result of the fire. The devastation of homes and the fire damage is insurmountable and still scars our lives.

*Kathay Lovell was mayor of South Lake Tahoe during the Angora Fire.*

---

# Lahontan: Water issues a concern now, during and after fires

**By Lauri Kemper**

June 24, 2007, began strangely. My niece and her family were spending their last day of their vacation with us. We set out to hike around Echo Lakes early that morning. The hot, dry winds were so fierce that sand from the trail was blowing into my grandniece’s eyes. It was no fun, so we returned to my home off North Upper Truckee Road to take a walk to Osgood Swamp, instead, because it is more protected behind Flagpole Peak.



Angora Fire --
5 years later

On our way back, we saw a puff of smoke that I first thought was a lone thundercloud. But quickly the puff became a tower of billowing smoke.

To get back to the subdivision, we had to move toward this tower of smoke before turning away from it. We started running, as if our lives depended on it. My niece and her family had already packed their car, so they jumped in and left the basin, probably reaching Echo Summit before the first fire truck got there.

From my house, we watched the smoke grow in size and density. We watered our yard and hosed down the house, but luckily for our neighborhood, the winds kept the smoke and fire away. Still, we were evacuated, because a change in wind direction would have brought the fire to us.

Two of my water board colleagues lost their homes in the Angora Fire, and several employees were evacuated.

The Lahontan Water Board was not directly involved in the fire suppression efforts. During a fire emergency, the water board is not a first responder. Over the years, the water boards and the USEPA have advised fire suppression agencies to take steps, where possible, not to adversely affect streams and lakes during fire suppression activities. For example, fire retardants contain phosphorus that, if dumped directly into a lake or stream, could cause fish kills and large increases of algal growths. So, fire agencies avoid applying fire

retardants directly to streams and lakes.

On Monday, Lahontan water board staff members joined the state's Emergency Management System, including a multi-agency response team. Lahontan water board staff brought their knowledge and expertise in communication, water quality, science, engineering, and public funding to assist in the effort.

A local assistance office with phone banks was set up to answer the public's questions and concerns. Lahontan water board loaned a staff person to the office to answer calls and provide information to the public. We were fortunate to have a student intern working for us that summer who was a South Lake Tahoe native, a great communicator and forestry major. As our key staff person at the assistance center, he was instrumental in effectively handling inquiries and linking individuals to the specific resources they needed. Our technical and communications staff participated in regular updates to the multi-agency team so that all current information was shared and collective responses could be prepared to address new information or concerns.



The types of fuel reduction allowed in Angora Creek has been

debated. This is the area in May 2012. Photo/LTN

The Lahontan water board's primary role following the fire was to protect water quality. Water board staff participated on several teams addressing debris removal (from the burned homes), erosion and runoff controls, and water quality monitoring.

We served on the Debris Removal Multi-Agency Committee ensuring that plans were designed and implemented to address the risks to water quality and public health from the debris remaining at the burned home sites. When a home burns, all contents are burned with it, including appliances, carpets, paints, pesticides, cleaning products, automobiles and building materials. The ash and debris remaining may contain toxic levels of chemicals and pollutants that pose risks to public health and safety, and to aquatic life and wildlife. Additionally, the debris itself constitutes a nuisance.

This group of dedicated local and state agency staff persons was instrumental in successfully removing all the debris before the fall rains hit. Many logistics involving property owner approvals, insurance company involvement, health and safety concerns from debris and dead trees, disposal methods, and erosion control/site restoration were resolved by the committee members, including Lahontan Water Board staff. Debris and contaminated soil and ash associated with the burned home sites were removed, and building sites were protected from erosion by a single contractor overseen by El Dorado County and the state's Integrated Waste Management Agency staff.

Water board staff requested and received approval for $380,000 from the state water board's Cleanup and Abatement Account funds. This money was used for water quality monitoring of Angora Creek and supported increased county and city road and

drainage structure maintenance efforts, and an emergency water treatment system at Angora Creek proposed by El Dorado County. Staff coordinated with the California Tahoe Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, El Dorado County, and U.S. Geological Survey to plan and coordinate water quality sampling in several locations to assess the impacts on Angora Creek. The Water Board contributed $90,000 to an approximately $350,000 interagency water quality monitoring program.

The U.S. Forest Service implemented its Burned Area Emergency Response Team (BAER) to evaluate the risks to water quality, soils and vegetation resources from the Angora Fire, which was primarily on lands it manages. The U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service assessed erosion risks on private and county lands. Water board staff advised these teams, providing input to the field reports, risk ratings and corrective action plans. The BAER Team found that 76 percent of the soils within the burn area were hydrophobic (meaning that the soils may resist infiltrating or percolating rain water). If the burn area were not treated, stormwater runoff would carry ash and sediment to nearby streams and to Lake Tahoe. With Lahontan water board's support and assistance, Forest Service, El Dorado County and city of South Lake Tahoe received resources from state and federal agencies to install runoff control measures such as basins, channels and sand bags, and to control erosion using mulches, seeding and other measures.

**"The water board is committed to working with land managers and landowners in the Tahoe basin to facilitate fuel reduction activities**

**while encouraging the restoration and improvement of watershed functions.”**
**– Lauri Kemper**



We believe these efforts to control erosion and manage increased stormwater runoff prevented substantial amounts of sediment and ash from reaching streams and lakes. Additionally, the weather cooperated and delivered below normal precipitation following the fire, reducing the amount of runoff that would carry sediment and debris to streams. Data collected showed some minor increases in sediment, nitrogen and phosphorus to Angora Creek, but the impacts to water quality could have been much worse. The Water Board had provided El Dorado County funds to rent an emergency water filtration system that was stationed at the junction of Angora Creek and Lake Tahoe Boulevard to be operated during runoff periods, where the creek was anticipated to be highly turbid from runoff carrying ash, debris, and sediment. The treatment system was set up and ready to operate, but was not used because the turbidity didn’t increase to the levels anticipated or to the point where treatment would be beneficial.

Following fire response and recovery, water board staff participated in the Bi-state Tahoe Basin Fire Commission. A water board member served on the commission and staff members participated in working groups to identify constraints to fuel

reduction projects and to craft creative solutions and improvements to hasten the implementation of fuel reduction projects.

In May 2008, the governor of California issued a proclamation encouraging the water board to take expedited action to implement the recommendations of the Fire Commission or develop findings why any recommendation should not be implemented. Ten recommendations of the commission applied to the Lahontan water board. By March 2009, these recommendations had been implemented or otherwise addressed.

The water board adopted a revised regional waiver of waste discharge requirements for vegetation management activities, including fuel reduction projects. This waiver simplified or eliminated permitting application and reporting requirements for many “low threat to water quality” fuel reduction projects. For defensible space projects and for projects involving hand crews, no application, fee, or water board review is required. Other fuel reduction projects receive expedited review.

The 2009 waiver provides a table listing several types of fuel reduction activities, including the use of mechanized equipment and burning that can be conducted in stream environment zones without separate authorizations from the water board. The water board must separately review and authorize other activities involving soil disturbance in stream environment zones. This review and authorization involves a 10-day public notice and can be approved by the executive officer. The 2009 waiver has been instrumental in protecting communities and hastening fuel reduction efforts throughout the Lahontan region.

The fire commission encouraged all public agencies and private property owners “to work together more effectively to implement fuel reduction projects designed and prioritized to minimize the risk of wildfires.” Water board staff continues

to participate in the Tahoe Basin Tahoe Fire Fuels Team meetings, coordinating and cooperating with fire districts, and state and federal agencies to ensure rapid implementation of the highest priority fuel reduction projects. Water board staff also provides input on the design of research projects to address areas of uncertainty related to potential impacts to water quality from more aggressive forest treatments, such as burning piles of slash in stream environment zones, using heavy equipment or innovative low ground pressure equipment on steep slopes and in stream zones.

In 2012, water board staff intends to bring a Basin Plan Amendment to the water board for its consideration to further clarify exemptions allowed for soil disturbance work within stream environment zones to facilitate tree and vegetation thinning. This year, water board staff will also be providing input into TRPA's Regional Plan updated to ensure agency consistency in the rules and regulations concerning fuel reduction and vegetation management activities.

The water board is committed to working with land managers and landowners in the Tahoe basin to facilitate fuel reduction activities while encouraging the restoration and improvement of watershed functions.

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board is a California agency established to protect and restore water quality, including restoration of Lake Tahoe's transparency. The water board regulates discharges of pollutants to water quality.

*Lauri Kemper is assistant executive officer of the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan Region.*

# Opinion: Lessons from Angora not forgotten, more work to do

**By Ted Gaines**

Five years ago Sunday, the terrible Angora Fire swept through the Lake Tahoe Basin, destroying 254 homes, buildings, and changing lives and landscapes forever. While we will never be able to tame nature completely, public safety is government's highest priority and government leaders must always be improving their response to emergencies and natural disasters.

As a result of the fire, the governors of California and Nevada convened a Blue Ribbon Fire Commission to analyze the efforts to fight the Angora Fire and issued a set of recommendations to strengthen the region's ability to prevent and respond to these catastrophes.



Ted Gaines

It does not take a cynic to assume that many blue ribbon reports and commissions come to life as a result of

politicians needing to “do something” in response to a crisis and then accomplish very little. As the event fades from public consciousness, the reports gather dust and the recommendations quietly fade away.

That absolutely cannot be the case when it comes to the Lake Tahoe region and fire safety. Tahoe’s conditions – steep canyons, ample fuel, dry years such as in 2007, when the area received only 29 percent of normal precipitation, high winds – are a recipe for forest fire disaster. This year’s conditions are similar and the community, rightfully, is nervous heading into fire season.

For all these reasons, I initiated a non-partisan Senate Office of Research review of the Blue Ribbon Fire Commission recommendations to check their status. I am disappointed to issue a C-minus grade, but inspired to keep working for greater safety for the region.

Things are better than they were five years ago. Thanks to the successful implementation of report recommendations by the governors of California and Nevada, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, CalFire and other stakeholders, we now have more effective forest management, better education, and better cooperation and communication among regional fire protection agencies, all of which should lessen the chance of catastrophic forest fires.

But there is still work to do and the area is still a tinderbox. Many of the recommendations have not been implemented or their status is unclear. We cannot leave them undone, and must continue to effectively implement the recommendations in progress, both for public safety and for the continued health of the Tahoe regional economy.

Lake Tahoe is Northern California’s crown jewel and its economy is heavily dependent on tourism. The barren moonscape

left behind after the fire is no match for the rich forest lands destroyed in the fire. Charred trees and driveways leading to empty lots where homes have not been rebuilt still dot the landscape. Changes in erosion threaten the Lake's legendary clarity that draws people from around the world. Tahoe has to be safe and beautiful to remain a first-class destination.

While we are all thankful for the protection firefighters provide, each of us must also take personal responsibility for fire safety. It is critical that we exercise extreme caution with cigarettes, campfires, tools, engines or anything else that could possibly spark or otherwise cause a fire – which is how the Angora Fire began. When fires inevitably start, homeowners will always be the first line of defense. There is no substitute for defensible space around a home. Be vigilant and clear out brush at least 100 feet around your house, if possible. It is my hope that effective execution of the recommendations and smart individual actions mean we can observe an anniversary this year, and not a reenactment.

On this fifth anniversary, I also want to recognize the fantastic performance of the firefighters who ultimately controlled the Angora Fire. They are a battle tested group whose bravery and excellence is unmatched around the country. By implementing the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Fire Commission, governments are helping to ensure that their lives are not needlessly put at risk.

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

—-

**Note:** State Sen. Ted Gaines is hosting a forum about the Angora Fire on June 25, 6-8pm at South Tahoe High School.