Opinion: U.S. should be embracing foreign tourists

By Matthew Yglesias, Slate

For a depressed economy, exports function as a magic elixir. Demand—and with it jobs—appears from outside, generating new income that cycles through the economy. This is why President Obama, as part of his recovery strategy, has set a goal of doubling exports over five years.

Talk of exports normally conjures up images of factories and container ships, but many of America's exports are services. The nation's biggest service export is in some sense not an export at all—it's travel and tourism, an industry begging for respect on National Travel and Tourism Week. I'm pleased to report that America's international travel export sector is healthy, with nominal revenues reaching an all-time peak last year of $153 billion—about 1 percent of GDP. Still, despite recent successes, it's not clear that American tourism has ever really recovered from the tough blow it took after 9/11, suggesting there's plenty we could do to further boost the industry.

As far as the national balance sheet goes, tourism functions exactly like an export. Foreigners come here and spend money, leaving extra funds in American hands, with which we can purchase oil and Chinese toys. It's an export realm in which the United States has very strong fundamentals.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Chemicals are disrupting the human body

By Nicholas D. Kristof, New York Times

Scientists are observing with increasing alarm that some very common hormone-mimicking chemicals can have grotesque effects.

A widely used herbicide acts as a female hormone and feminizes male animals in the wild. Thus male frogs can have female organs, and some male fish actually produce eggs. In a Florida lake contaminated by these chemicals, male alligators have tiny penises.

These days there is also growing evidence linking this class of chemicals to problems in humans. These include breast cancer, infertility, low sperm counts, genital deformities, early menstruation and even diabetes and obesity.

Philip Landrigan, a professor of pediatrics at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, says that a congenital defect called hypospadias – a misplacement of the urethra – is now twice as common among newborn boys as it used to be. He suspects endocrine disruptors, so called because they can wreak havoc with the endocrine system that governs hormones.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Fortier provides

sweet dreams

To the community,

At 3am my muse shook me. She said, “Wake up.” I said, “Why? I’d rather sleep.” Again, she said, “Wake up. Claire’s leaving.”

“Claire, who?” I asked, still in semi-sleep.

“Look sleepy head, wake up, Claire Fortier, the mayor, is leaving,” my muse said.



Bill Crawford

“Oh,” I said, now awake.

So I asked, “Is this Fortier the same Fortier that filed as a candidate for the City Council in 2002?”

“Yes,” my muse replied.

“The same Fortier that after the ballot was printed and sent out dropped out of the race; screwing up the election with hundreds of votes that didn’t count?” I asked.

“You got it,” my muse said.

“Well, what about that?” I said.

“Yes, what about that?” my muse wondered out loud.

Then to myself I said – two out of two ain’t bad and went back

to sleep – to sweet, sweet dreams.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Mother’s Day mixer a success

To the community,

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce would like to thank the event sponsors, volunteers, vendors and attendees of the Mothers’ Day BAHM for a fabulous evening last week at Valhalla.

The weather was perfect and more than 100 people were there to support the two winners of the Mothers’ Day Makeover.

A special thank you to Tahoe Tallac Association and their volunteer staff; they were a great group of people and a huge help at the event. Thanks to Harrah’s and Harveys Catering who provided the appetizers including chicken skewers, grilled vegetables, and a cheese and fruit platter. The food was a hit, as well as the wine poured by BellaGrace Vineyards and Crystal Basin Cellars. Raising the Bar Beverage Catering was on hand with a no host bar set up outside on the patio overlooking the lake.

The two winning moms looked lovely on the stage during the fashion show sponsored by Sidestreet Boutique. Vaolrie Hazley from V’z Image Optionz was one of the models in the show as well as one of the providers of the makeover services donated to the winning mothers. Additionally, the moms received dental

care from Mireya Ortega at High Sierra Dental, babysitting from Lake Tahoe Sitters, three months of training from Escobar Training Grounds and a couple of tickets to the Improv at Harveys for a night on the town.

The chamber would like to thank all involved for spoiling the two deserving moms as well as the community for another great BAHM!

Jessica Cunningham, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce

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Opinion: Truckee Donner Land Trust in acquisition mode

To the community,

It’s as if the good Lord hit a switch, but spring has arrived in our corner of the Sierra. The trails below 7,000 feet are mostly snow free and, after a short-lived winter, spring is here.

While we are stunned that the bank that holds the note for Royal Gorge rejected our very fair offer, we remain confident we will protect this remarkable property. Ours, as the bank admitted, was the best – if not only offer – they received. Fingers crossed, but I am certain we will prevail. We absolutely must seize this opportunity. Meanwhile, our fundraising is gaining steam. I will keep you posted.

I am also pleased to report that we closed on a small but critical property sandwiched between Waddle Ranch Preserve and another property we acquired in the Martis Valley. Slowly but surely we are achieving a long time objective of protecting

the landscape east of Highway 267 and onto the Mt. Rose Wilderness and Toyiabe National Forest – more than 70,000 acres of natural lands, wildlife corridors, and habitat.

Warm regards,

Perry Norris, Truckee Donner Land Trust executive director

Opinion: Professionals take stress out of buying first house

To the community,

After 25 years in South Lake Tahoe, we were able to recently purchase our first home.

We wanted to just give a shout out of thanks to two very special people who helped to make this happen for us.

First, thank you to Ron Yokotake from Associated Mortgage, who with his magic calculator, pencil, and yellow paper showed us the way to home ownership. Ron is no nonsense, and told us exactly what we could afford, and showed us choices of loans. Any time we ever called Ron, he was always there with answers. Ron is the best. Thanks also, to Jan Alcott, who works in the office for her efficiency and kindness.

Thank you to Doug Rosner, who works at Chase International, for your kind and gentle nature, for your extensive knowledge of, well, everything.

Doug was there for us the whole way … any time we wanted to

see a house, he set it up immediately … any time we had questions, he always answered them, and any time we needed advice, he was there. Thanks also to Angie Corry, who works in the office, she was always so nice to us.

Doug Rosner the best real estate agent ever.

We never really knew that we could buy a house, but after meeting Ron and Doug, who make a great team, we were able to do it and we just wanted to express our gratitude to them publicly for a great experience, and if you are wondering if you can and hoping to have a little piece of the American Dream, it is possible.

Sincerely,

Jody and Sallie Filgo, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Is sustainability collaborative in Lake Tahoe?

By Garry Bowen

In our most recent Monthly Message from the Mayor, Her Honor Claire Fortier made a serious point for all of us with regards to TRPA's hallowed threshold program. As TRPA has relied upon those thresholds as justification for so long they are known as sacred cow' to some of the very people who oversee them, it was refreshing to have someone at a certain level admit that there may be a "fundamental flaw" in basing basin planning on them.

I thank Claire for this brave acknowledgment.

Her preceding sentence, just before the comma sharing that enlightened thought, was this: “thresholds were never intended to include humans in the mix”, bringing the long-term stresses into perspective as we enter the era of the Sustainability Collaborative. There were quite a number of people who showed up at the first Sustainability Collaborative meeting at Lake Tahoe Community College on Monday: from South Shore, Incline Village, and as far as Truckee – but was sparsely attended by anyone from other North Shore places, nor any from ethnic communities.



Garry Bowen

That, in facilitator Michael Ward’s view, needs to be rectified in the near future.

In being thankful to Claire for her clarity with regards to her view of the threshold issue, I have to say that that view substantiates something that has been ever-present in my rear-view mirror for awhile now, a focused personal mantra for Tahoe’s future: “policies equal to the scenery”.

That phrase has captivated me since I read “Community and the Politics of Place”, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990) by the renowned former mayor of Missoula, Mont., Daniel Kemmis. With all the strife represented by the “knock down, drag-out” nature of fighting over Lake Tahoe’s beauty and ownership, we still don’t have those – but hopefully they may finally be on the horizon.

Is sustainability going to provide policies equal to the scenery? Given the fragmented nature of the numerous other

agency silos here, the brilliance of Claire's comment resides in the fact that one must be aware of the problem to do anything about it, and she has in fact isolated it: if thresholds were never intended for humans to be "included in the mix", then that might lead to a simple, fundamental comprehension of sustainability's role – it is essentially about human behavior and its impact, ironically the same rationale for TRPA's very existence, although its focus has morphed a bit to claim ownership for Tahoe's clarity.

That all other agencies focus on that, too, to mollify stepping on toes is in itself mystifying. What fell through the cracks over the years is the populace's own awareness of their surroundings, as they've been preoccupied with relying on their taxes to pay the agencies to take care of "those things" for them.

As sustainability is about human behavior and its impact, it is, and should be, a short but simple step to: if we change the behavior, we lessen the impact – conversely, if we don't change, the impacts will continue (to our continued detriment). This thought necessarily includes human wellbeing, as well as those of other species, so change should be a clear choice, but of what? Water, air, nutrition, ecosystems and habitats, the increasing need for pharmaceutical solutions, and overall human equity issues are all sustainability concerns, but here are mostly couched as merely about a better economy, as if that in itself will solve all those other things right along with it. This should not be thought of in such limited terms, as it is a much more rewarding and fun challenge to oneself to learn in what ways man has outdone himself, and in discovering simple solutions, all based on what nature has already been providing us.

That TRPA is considered the "villain-in-the-piece" can now be considered irrelevant, as it can be much more rewarding to understand and take responsibility for one's own choices of behavior and their impact (in fact the only real way to impact

the impact). Sustainable ways are truly very important.

The Sustainability Collaborative takes on the mantle of savior of a lackluster, in the doldrums, long-in-the-tooth community structure hoping to revive our fortunes towards some sort of future we won't otherwise have – a noble and worthwhile endeavor if ever there was one.

Will this collaborative succeed, when others have dwindled or themselves become irrelevant: will its' grasp equal its' reach?

Former Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo made an interesting kick-off speaker, as she is now the executive director of California's new Strategic Growth Council, the agency purportedly responsible for executing the principles inherent in AB32, California's now-famous climate change Initiative, and SB375, the so-called Sustainable Community Strategy. That sustainability might be about significantly more than reducing automobile usage (think air quality along with reducing emissions) means the idea is given short shrift, given how many cars are actually in California, and given the sheer number of people who will need to change behavior. There is much more to human behavior than just driving – that idea alone might be a lot to absorb, given how much time Californians devote to it each day, of delight to OPEC, and their minions.

In her new role, Ms. Fargo spoke of communities needing to have design professionals who "understand what smart growth is", and that she expected Tahoe to perform (sort of in a "policies equal to the scenery" way) in "so significant" a fashion that they might be eligible for an "international award".

She herself was refreshing, as she faced the attendees in a relaxed, conversational way – one particularly interesting point was about all the Federal government ownership here:

“you needn’t feel any guilt about approaching them for funds”, as a number like 85 percent means that, with so much of the land agency-owned, they don’t contribute to the local tax revenues anyway.

Interesting thought, lost on most here – due to the constant drumbeat as to how important they all are.

Patrick Wright, executive director of the California Tahoe Conservancy, was quite eloquent in following Ms. Fargo, as he envisioned a Tahoe much more than what it is today, and asked attendees about “re-thinking community”, to assist in re-energizing Tahoe’s potential, which to my biased mind sounded like a plea, once again, for “policies equal to the scenery”.

No mention was made of his co-creation of the Tahoe Fund, apparently created to attract the now ubiquitous idea of public-private partnerships, as if the corporate world will supplant the funds now diminishing from the sale of Federal land in Las Vegas, and we will be all the better for it if they do.

So far, I have seen no recognition that vitality will require other than agency thinking, as most answer to someone elsewhere. The most prominent examples of public-private partnerships here are in the ski industry, so with the nascent Olympic effort (aborted now three times, starting with 2014, to 2018 upon the award to Whistler (2010), to the current 2022 idea, given the Olympic Committee goings-on) the fact that the ski industry is exceedingly well represented on the Tahoe Fund board in itself gives short-shrift to any seasonal direction other than winter. This makes any sustainable effort accountable for all seasons, as it should be, but the lack of vitality vision puts strong responsibility on this volunteer effort, however well intended.

Apparently, the fact that the collaborative has now received almost $2 million in funding for the next few years is calming

any fear of failure, as Tahoe is now so well known for, along with, and due to, its pattern of strife and inappropriate inaction. As this is to be a volunteer effort, what does that pay for?

The very real current challenge is on the malfunctioning status quo to brave some of their own demons in abandoning a hold on the "way we do things around here", as it will require more than a few hundred people participating in a Sustainability Collaborative to mitigate impact enough to satisfy agency goals.

This is true also because the agencies represented in the supposed Partnership for Sustainable Communities have all been given more-or-less a "right of first refusal" to anything brought forth by the collaborative, as they themselves are not participating in the collaborative in any meaningful way, other than to field the ideas generated by the community volunteers for their use. That may not be sustainable, nor will it garner the innovative qualities necessary for transformation – a term now lost in the shuffle of agency survival. The concept of the wolf guarding the henhouse unfortunately comes to mind, as does the phrase "good enough for government".

This column started with the mayor, and will end with the mayor, as she herself was the first chair of the city's own Sustainability Commission, created after the adoption of the Sustainable Action Plan in 2008, now approaching the type of time span that got TRPA in such hot water, not completing their 20-year Regional Plan update in 20 years, by being almost six years late? S.A.P. – 4 years?

Would a Sustainability Collaborative even have been necessary had a stronger stance been taken to encourage success for South Lake Tahoe's own – and set standards high enough for anyone to emulate?

The answer to that is pure sustainability: nature has for millions of years operated in complexity (a tree, a bird, a snake, water, soil, photosynthesis, a wolf, a butterfly – all somehow end up working together; man, however, complicates himself, so much around him, so many other species, the air currents, the ocean currents – that Tahoe can indeed play a role in transformation that others can emulate, be a much better place to be, in becoming a model – but of what?

Sustainability can be a joyous antidote to our complications, as the best forms handle nature's complexity in a simple, elegant, and profound way, without complication; Lake Tahoe and folks who choose to live here deserve no less, so that others will enjoy joining us, at no additional cost but much considerable benefit. That is in the true spirit of collaboration.

Garry Bowen has a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health. He may be reached at tahoefuture@gmail.com or (775) 690.6900.

Opinion: O'Rourke leaving is a good thing for S. Tahoe

To the community,

The recent announcement of City Manager Tony O'Rourke's leaving can only be viewed as a positive direction for the city of South Lake Tahoe. In May 2011, we informed the city of

an approximately $500,000 a year loss in transient occupancy tax collections. We spent five to six months working with the city to develop a program to audit and verify the proper payment of transient occupancy tax by rent by owners.

After the city's implementation of the reporting forms by the Finance Department, Mr. O'Rourke backed his staff that there were too many objections to the form and therefore they abandoned the project. Mr. O'Rourke made a statement in a meeting with our company staff that they could procure any number of companies that would monitor and collect the tax owed the city and that this could be achieved through penalties and fines at no cost to the city.

We were to receive notification of the request for proposals from the city on or after the middle of December.

Here we are, a year has passed since the city was notified of the potential loss of over $40,000 per month for failure to pursue TOT collections and still no action by the city. Maybe now the council can act without their star manager who has moved on to greener pastures.

Let's hope.

Jim Morris, Lake Tahoe Accommodations

Opinion: Gaines should be voted out of Assembly

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the April 27, 2012, Sacramento Bee.***

Republican attorney Andrew Pugno is challenging Assemblywoman Beth Gaines in the June primary to represent one of the most heavily Republican districts in California – Assembly District 6, which includes parts of Sacramento, El Dorado and Placer counties.



Pugno also is the author of Proposition 8, the 2008 initiative that banned same-sex marriage. The Bee disagrees strongly with his position on Prop. 8.

Yet Gaines shares the same views on gay and lesbian rights, and Pugno has demonstrated he would be a far more effective representative than she would be for the 6th Assembly District.

Democrat Regy Bronner also is running and would be a credible choice in the top-two primary on June 5. Bronner is a thoughtful moderate who, unlike his Republican opponents, has not signed the no-tax pledge.

In some ways, Bronner reflects his district. As he notes, many people in the area are retired, as is he at age 69. But while he likely will emerge from the June 5 primary as one of the top-two vote getters, a Republican stands a far stronger chance of winning in November.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Life for a mom is about 15-minute segments

By Eileen Wacker

I am the mother of four kids, aged 8- to 14-years-old, and trying to launch a business. I live life in 15-minute increments.

Our house wakes up at 6am during the week. Getting everyone to eat something is a challenge so I let them eat whatever they want – leftover pasta, soup, mac and cheese, cereal, bagels, whatever. Then I either drive them to school, leaving at 6:45 or go to my office and start to work. I usually have appointments racked and stacked as I work with a team located across Korea, India, Vancouver, San Francisco, Mexico City and Honolulu.

Today, I'm also trying to keep fish from dying. My son went to a birthday party and the party favor was a beta fish. I groaned when I saw it and secretly vowed to get even with the mom. Then my son named the fish Medallion because it was like gold to him. So, yesterday I went to the pet store to get some accommodations for Medallion and we left with six mollies and an aquarium. Anyway, the six mollies are named – Blaze, Spike, Buster (girl), Anna, Crusoe, and Razor.

This morning, I came upon our dog, Buster Brown, with the fish food container in his mouth. He had eaten nearly the whole can and I had to wrestle the container from him. Apparently, he had climbed up on the chair and snatched the food. He was utterly remorseless standing there with fish flakes sticking all around his mouth. And he apparently scared a fish to death. Poor Spike met an untimely death.

Buster Brown is also going to the vet today as his ears are infected and he has been chewing his paws. So now I add

allergy medicine and pet hospital to the bills. Lately we have been cracking down on him running away to visit our neighbor's chihuahua as our other neighbor feels menaced by small dogs and calls security.

My assistant arrives and we crank through as much as humanly possible as we are launching April 1. Then school pick-ups start at 2:45. Someone helps with the driving but we are both in our respective cars from 2:30 until 6pm every day. Each child has school, a sport and an instrument. But we also have doctor and dental appointments, birthdays, school orientations, parent conferences, school fairs, major sports events, dances, play dates in all different venues. And, they keep growing and needing new clothes and shoes.

I arrive home at 6 from the vet, picking up my 13-year-old son from tennis along the way. My 8-year-old daughter runs to the door to remind me the bake sale is tomorrow and we promised to send in cheesecake brownies, cut into pieces, bagged and labeled. Luckily, I have brownie mix and cheesecake filling. We preheat the oven and start to make them. I am making dinner at the same time, boiling water for pasta. So it appears to be working out. Then I discover we have no canola oil. I rush to the store to get the oil. I am almost home and my oldest texts me – "just ran out of milk." I text her back "drain the pasta and I'll get milk."

As I walk in the door, one of my kids calls me to report an "infestation" in the kitchen. Sure enough there are a thousand little ants just by the door. We run and douse them with enough "raid" to fill a bathtub.

I have three kids to help with homework; one is independent or I should say refuses to let me see his work. I listen to how everyone's day went, then showers, piano practice and a little free time. If I don't tell them to go to bed, they forget (but if I attempt to send them to bed early, it is treated as a crime committed against children everywhere.)

I still lay down for five minutes with my youngest when she goes to bed. She goes down at 8:15 and that 15-minute increment is critical to her. Then, I cut and bag the brownies, make lunches, make sure all laptops are charged-up, and check for correct shoes for in-school and after-school sports. Last, I confiscate all cell phones until morning as they text their friends incessantly.

Just when I feel like my “sportsmomship” might give out, my kids give me a hug and tell me I’m the best mom ever. I get re-energized and work a little longer as India and Korea are up and working. I have a glass of wine with my husband and ask him about his day. I usually don’t remember his response as I am so exhausted. At ten, I go to sleep dreaming about ski vacations and sleeping in.

Every Sunday, we look at the calendar and figure out what items we have in addition to the regular routine. I slot them all into the schedule in 15-minute increments. My youngest son likes to play flag football and says he is great at “juking.” This is modern-day parent “juking.” And tomorrow I start booking the summer camps, trips and schedule. But at least I’ve made enough pasta tonight to eat for breakfast tomorrow.

Eileen Wacker, a Harvard Business School graduate, lived and worked in seven different countries, including the United States. Wacker now resides in Honolulu with her husband and four children.