Opinion: If health reform law dies, California's working poor would lose

By David Lazarus, Los Angeles Times

If the healthcare reform law is thrown out by theU.S. Supreme Court – as many fear could happen based on the comments of conservative justices – more than 700,000 low-income Californians could lose a once-in-a-lifetime chance to obtain affordable health insurance.

At stake is what's known as a Basic Health Plan. This is a system provided for by the reform law, fully funded by the federal government, that would extend coverage to people who may not be able to afford conventional insurance policies but don't qualify for Medi-Cal.

State Sen. Ed Hernandez, D-West Covina, chairman of the Senate health committee, is the author of legislation that would create a Basic Health Plan in California beginning in 2014. It would provide coverage to about 720,000 people for as little as $30 a month.

But that's only if the reform law remains intact, providing up to $3 billion in federal funds needed annually to make the program a reality.

"If the court throws out the entire law, that's the nuclear option," Hernandez told me. "The Basic Health Plan would lose all funding. It's what I'm afraid of most."

Critics of the healthcare reform law focus primarily on its requirement that most people buy insurance or face a modest tax penalty, which is the trade-off for a separate requirement that insurers provide coverage to everyone, regardless of

medical condition.

These critics seldom acknowledge other aspects of the law aimed at helping insure some of the roughly 50 million people in this country who now lack coverage.

That's an act of pure selfishness (even though we'd all benefit from having fewer people relying on emergency services for treatment). It's also a display of heartlessness unbefitting a country that claims to define itself by love-thy-neighbor Judeo-Christian values.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Plan now in case wildfire strikes

By Teri Mizuhara

A new and improved "Ready-Set-Go" fire and life safety program has been developed by CalFire.

Everyone living in the Sierra has a responsibility that many urban/suburban dwellers do not face. Fire is a natural part of our ecosystem which helps clear out the weeds and brush (understory) and create a healthier forest dynamic.

Since naturally occurring fire has not been allowed to do what it should because fire agencies must suppress fires that threaten lives and property, it is vital that people do their part and create a space around their homes.

Defensible space works.

Creating a buffer zone between your home and the wildland greatly reduces the risk of your home catching on fire from radiant heat or flying embers. These embers can destroy homes and even entire neighborhoods that are far from the actual flame front of a wildfire.

Keys to creating defensible space are:

Zone One extends up to 30 feet (or your property line whichever is closer) from every structure on your property.

– Remove all dead and dying vegetation

– Remove leaf litter from your roof and rain gutters

– Relocate woodpiles well away from your home

– Trim trees so that they are a minimum of ten feet away from your chimney and roof line

– Remove ladder fuels (low-level vegetation that could allow fire to spread from the ground to shrubs and bushes to the tree canopies).

Zone Two extends from 30 feet to 100 feet (or to your property line whichever is closer).

– The key is to keep plant material separated from each other both horizontally and vertically, this prevents the vegetation from acting like a ladder and allowing the fire to move from the ground to the tree canopies

– Cut annual grasses down to a maximum of 4 inches in height.

Preparing and practicing your family’s disaster plan is also key to being ready for fire season. This plan can make evacuating ahead of a wildfire or other disaster far less stressful.

It is important that every member of your family understands what to do in the event of a wildfire in your area. Practice this plan on a regular basis so each member of your family knows their role and what they need to do; keep a copy of this written plan in an accessible place so that you can refer to it quickly and easily.

Things to include in the plan are: meeting locations away from your home, communication plans and evacuation plans for your family and your pets. Identify where your gas, water and electrical shut-offs are and how to use them. Plan several evacuation routes in your neighborhood and drive them so you are familiar with them day or night. Assemble emergency supply kits and have them ready for yourself, family and animals. Don’t forget to include a portable radio and/or scanner so you can stay updated on critical fire information.

Finally, take steps to make your home more fire resistant; if you are building a new home or renovating your home, consider these fire resistive measures (hardening your home):

Roofs are the most vulnerable surface on your house. Make sure your roof is made out of “class A” materials, such as composition, metal or tiles.

Rain gutters should be screened or enclosed to prevent accumulation of plant debris which can catch on fire from a flying ember during a wildfire.

Exterior walls of your home should be made of ignition resistant materials such as cement siding, stucco or fire retardant treated wood.

Windows should be double paned with one of the panes made of tempered glass which will reduce the potential of the heat from a wildfire breaking the window and catching the interior of the house on fire.

If your home is dependent on a well for water, install a

backup generator so that you have water in case the electricity goes out.

The following areas of your home should be checked annually and maintained as needed:

Check that your chimney has an approved spark arrestor (screen) in good condition covering the opening. The screen should have openings no smaller than three-eighths inch and no larger than half inch.

Keep the area under your deck or balcony free of combustible material. Never store your firewood under your deck.

Consider having multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and any structure on your property.

Wind driven embers can fly up to one mile during a wildland fire so “hardening” your home with fire resistive material, creating a solid buffer zone of defensible space and preparing and practicing your family disaster Plan are critical.

Being ready for wildfire season is your best defense. Preplanning for a disaster can save your life and the lives of the ones you love.

For more detailed information on what you have read, go online or call (530) 644.2345 to receive a free brochure.

Teri Mizuhara works for CalFire.

Opinion: Fallen Leaf Lake residents on USFS land cannot vote

Publisher's note: ***This email is reprinted with permission. It relates to the April 29, 2012, Lake Tahoe News story about who is legally allowed to vote at Fallen Leaf Lake.***

Our Region 5 Recreation Residence policy includes the following:

"Principal Residence The principal residence can be a house, apartment, mobile home, or other reasonable domicile, either owned or rented, and must be open and available to the permit holder at all times. The principal residence cannot be simply an address used to give the appearance of living in a home elsewhere. It must be the place where the permit holder routinely receives mail, is registered to vote, from which children attend school, and from where the permit holder normally commutes to work."

A recreation residence may ***not*** be a principal residence. Therefore, regardless of how the term domicile is defined by the state of California, if a permit holder is using the recreation residence to register to vote, it directly conflicts with our policy.

I hope that helps.

Jonathan Cook-Fisher, acting Recreation Special Uses Program Manager, Pacific Southwest Region, U.S. Forest Service

Opinion: Tahoe should form its own county

To the community,

Mountain people don’t like to be told what to do or how to do it. Self-reliance and personal freedom are part of our DNA. It’s just how we roll.

In contrast, there are a lot of people living down the hill who regard Tahoe folks as living in “La La Land.” Unfortunately, these people have ultimate control over our lives in everything from what roads we can use to what sort of justice we will face. Instead of a jury of your peers, who are far more liberal up here, you’ll be dragged down the hill to face a jury of retired military conservatives who think people like you are what is wrong with this country. Good luck with that.



Steve Kubby

In short, we need to break away from El Dorado and Placer counties and form our own Lake Tahoe County. All those tax dollars that have been going down the hill will stay here instead.

No longer would our world-class resorts be saddled with Third World roads – or roads arbitrarily closed by El Dorado County. No longer would we be forced to waste time and gas to go over the hill to do our business or seek justice. No longer would

we be slaves to people who neither respect nor understand us.

Lake Tahoe is a very special place, with very special people. We deserve our own county, run by people like us. We have far more in common with Tahoe City and Squaw Valley than Placerville or Auburn.

It is time to stand up for our rights and our unique lifestyles by forming our own county and taking back control of our own lives.

Steve Kubby, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Collaboration needed in Tahoe basin, not divisive letters

To the community,

Having been a volunteer firefighter (almost 30 years), EMT (four years)and reserve deputy sheriff (12 years) in Alpine County, been the Alpine County Board of Supervisor's rep on our Fire Safe Council, plus one or two other activities, I personally feel Mr. [Carl] Ribaudo's letter was, although I'm sure heartfelt, just a cheap shot.

After this last Lahontan board meeting I had coffee with Nancy Gibson, USFS supervisor, and told her of our experience on the Alpine County Board of Supervisors. We have worked collaboratively with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest on a NEPA-CEQA document regarding the Hawkins Peak Communications project, certainly not to the scale of the Lake Tahoe Fuels Project, the Humboldt Toiyabe National Forest is from Region

4, out of Ogden, Utah, with the forest operated out of Sparks and the Carson Ranger District, out of Carson City, Nevada.



Don Jardine

There was a bit of a learning curve on each side, but working together, we both saw all issues addressed, each in its own manner and this project is basically completed.

On a personal note, if Region 4 can make it happen, collaboratively, can Region 5, out of San Francisco, do it?

As I talked with Nancy Gibson, I imparted that we each have a role to play, regarding NEPA-CEQA, particularly in the Lake Tahoe Basin. There is a higher standard. But working together, we can meet these standards. We may or may not have another Angora Fire, I pray not, but working together we can reduce the public safety issues.

This does not even bring up the perfectly valid points brought up by the U.S. EPA rep at our meeting.

I feel Mr. Ribaubo’s letter was destructive and was no help as I talked with my friends at CalFire, Lake Valley Fire Protection District, our friends and cooperators with USFS, California State Parks and others about collaboration.

I feel all of the involved agencies and public have a continued opportunity to work together.

I’m sorry, his letter really burns me. We have many issues that we are required to address. Many thanks to all.

Don Jardine, chairman Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board

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Opinion: O’Rourke is in breach of contract

To the community,

There is a lot of noise buzzing around the city manager’s search for a new employer. So, for the record, the vote to hire Mr. (Tony) O’Rourke as South Tahoe’s city manager was 4-1. I cast the lone no vote. But I should back up and explain why I did not take part in the interview process for selecting a city manager.

The process was tainted from the beginning because the field to be interview had been reduced to just two candidates, O’Rourke and another candidate. The City Council had selected four to be interviewed. Before the process started two dropped out. At that point, I phoned Mayor (Kathay) Lovell and told her that the list was too short and that the council should open the selection process again. The mayor said no to my request; there would only be two to be interviewed. Because of her response I bowed out. To me it was clear that O’Rourke had a lock on the job because when the council learned that O’Rourke was from Beaver Creak, the glow of Vail lit up the face of more than one councilmember.



Bill Crawford

As said, the above is by gone. History. Presently, after less than two years, O’Rourke is searching for a new job and it is reported that he has been offered a city manager’s job in Washington state. If he doesn’t take that job, I believe he will be in breach of contract with the city of South Lake Tahoe. Clearly, he hasn’t any intention of fulfilling the contract with the city. I think the claim of breach is solid, that he can be fired without collecting a basket full of dough.

From the beginning, the selection process for hiring O’Rourke lacked integrity. It was incomplete. The bias was there and clear. And now the joke is on the city. Also, it is clear that O’Rourke falls short of having integrity. But in fairness to O’Rourke, the City Council majority got what it ordered.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

PS: If according to the current mayor and council O’Rourke is the real deal – good as gold – why are they prepared to release him from his contract?

Opinion: Vote yes to raise tobacco taxes

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the April 22, 2012, Sacramento Bee.***

Despite its reputation as an unwelcoming place for smokers, California ranks 33nd among states in taxing tobacco. Smoking-related diseases cost us hundreds of millions of dollars yearly in health care and lost productivity. Thousands of young people get hooked on nicotine each year.



California can do better. To save lives, it must do better.

Passage of Proposition 29, on the ballot in June, would be a major breakthrough for public health. This initiative would add $1 to the per-pack tobacco tax in California, currently 87 cents.

There is no dispute that raising the price would result in significant declines in smoking. Health groups backing the tobacco tax hike estimate that it would cause 118,000 adults to quit smoking and prevent 228,000 young Californians from becoming addicts.

Increasing the tax would raise more than $700 million yearly, and under Proposition 29, nearly all of it would go to cancer research and smoking cessation.

While the revenues would decline over time as smoking rates dropped, the funding would nonetheless help scientists come up with better treatments for cancer patients, and possibly new

ways to detect tumors in their most early stages.

Opponents of Prop. 29 – largely the tobacco industry and groups that receive funding from cigarette companies – are trying to derail the initiative as the work of "a washed-up politician," former state Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata. It's true that Perata, a survivor of prostate cancer, helped launched the initiative and has raised money for it. But Prop. 29 is supported by the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, the American Heart Association and other reputable groups and individuals that can't be smeared by the "taint" of serving in public office.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Barton Auxiliary deserves recognition

By John Williams

In recognition of National Volunteer Month in April, Barton Health would like to take a moment to honor some frequently unsung heroes in the South Lake Tahoe community: The dedicated volunteers who make up the Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary.

Auxiliary members offer many essential benefits to the hospital and its patients in various capacities. They staff the hospital's front desk; provide assistance in the emergency department; assist in the skilled nursing facility; operate the gift shop in the hospital lobby; and sell thousands of "previously enjoyed" items in the Attic Thrift Store – the largest contributor to the Auxiliary's funds. Auxiliary members are an active, enthusiastic bunch. They host book

fairs in the hospital, offer the festive Holiday Faire each November and don’t forget those tasty famous Cheese Balls they create and sell each holiday season, along with the Barton Foundation’s annual Festival of Trees and Lights.



John Williams

Barton’s Auxiliary began before the hospital was built. The year was 1960 and the vision was that of a community hospital for our mountain township, by 24 Charter Members of the Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary. Three years later, after endless work and fundraising, Barton Memorial Hospital became a reality.

In 2010, the auxiliary celebrated 50 years of giving and of these members, 89 dedicated 29,393 hours to the hospital—saving Barton more than $600,000. Today there are more than 135 members who volunteer their time and talents each year to the Auxiliary’s many endeavors. Barton Memorial’s Auxiliary has given approximately $800,000 in the last three-years to the renovation and expansion of the Barton Community Clinic – expected to break ground on June 4. Since that first year – and to date – the Auxiliary has donated approximately $6 million to Barton Memorial Hospital.

The Auxiliary has been helping to save lives with Sacramento’s BloodSource since 1966, by sponsoring and hosting six Community Blood Drives each year. The blood drives take place at Embassy Suites, between noon and 6pm, the first Monday of every other month. The next blood drive is slated for June 11. In addition, members also assist with year-round with flu and

immunization clinics and Barton community health and wellness outreach efforts to help ensure the health status of the South Lake Tahoe community and beyond.

The Junior Volunteer Program has been an excellent opportunity for Auxiliary members to teach the younger generation in our community the value of giving of their time and exposing them to the healthcare environment– where they may find a future career path. Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary gave $6,000 in scholarships, in June 2011, to students pursuing healthcare careers at a four-year-university. The awards were based on academic achievement, leadership qualities, participation in school and community activities.

A lot has changed since 1960 but not the dedication of Barton's Auxiliary members.

May their successes multiply and their spirits unify to celebrate teamwork and volunteerism.

John Williams is president and CEO of Barton Health.

Opinion: Bread & Broth thankful for Heavenly's support

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to express its heartfelt gratitude to

Heavenly Mountain Resort volunteers for recently, and yet again, adopting a Day of Nourishment.

Volunteers from the Heavenly team spent their time helping Bread & Broth volunteers serve a hot meal to those in need of one. They served a well balanced, healthy meal to all who came in hungry.

All of our co-coordinators that Monday were delighted the Heavenly continues to support our Adopt-A-Day of Nourishment through the Bread & Broth program.

Bread & Broth is able to continue its mission of feeding the hungry of South Lake Tahoe in large part because of the generosity of the local community. A $250 sponsorship covers the cost of food and beverages for the approximately 100 people who visit each Monday evening.

To find out how your family or business can Adopt-A-Day of Nourishment, contact Connie Blue at midwest2tahoe@yahoo.com or (530) 544.4945.

Bread & Broth

Opinion: Make polluters, not taxpayers, responsible for the damage

By Steve Kubby

The first thing you and I have to do, if we really want to clean up our planet, is identify the biggest polluters. Who is the biggest polluter in our country today? Unfortunately, it

is the U.S. government.

How, then, can our government claim to protect you and me from pollution when, in fact, they are the worst polluter?

For example, examine the environmental record of the military. In 1991, Pentagon spokesperson Kevin Doxey told the National Academy of Science, “We have found some 17,400 contaminated sites at 1,850 installations, not including formerly used sites.”



Steve Kubby

He was referring to toxic solvents used to de-ice military planes, byproducts from the manufacture of nerve gas and mustard gas, and radioactive waste. Back in 1988, the Energy Department estimated that it would take 50 years and $100 billion to clean up just 17 of these sites.

You cannot expect the country’s greatest polluter to protect you. Instead of guaranteeing your right to a hazard-free environment, government sets acceptable standards for pollution. The time has come to embrace strict liability, private property, and the principle of trespass to protect you and me from polluters.

Liability is a key element of any policy to clean up our environment. It means that those who pollute our air, land or water will be held accountable for their damage. Unfortunately, politicians conspire in pork barrel dealings to waive liability for many polluters.

For example, in the late 1950s, private insurance companies would not insure nuclear power plants. The insurance companies felt that the huge risk of a possible nuclear accident was unacceptable. Without insurance, power companies refused to consider nuclear power. Leave it to the politicians and some well placed influence peeling to change that. Congress passed the Price Anderson Act.

That law limited the amount of money victims could claim in case of nuclear accident. The law also specified that 80 percent of the cash damages would come from taxpayers, not the people or companies that caused the damage. Once the law was passed, nuclear power proliferated, because they wouldn't have to be so careful with taxpayers assuming most of the risk. Instead of protecting your rights and mine, the government sided with special interests.

Private property rights are equally important in protecting the environment. A long time ago, the British learned how to prevent pollution of their rivers. Fishing rights in British streams and rivers are considered private property that can be bought and sold. During the last century, angry owners routinely hauled polluters into court and forced them to clean up any damage they caused. Every owner became an environmental protector because each can profit from nurturing the environment.

Before government intruded, shrimp fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico claimed parts of the gulf as their property. They used the time-honored practice of homesteading. They formed a voluntary association to keep the waters productive and to avoid over-fishing.

Private ownership also encourages preservation of endangered species. Compare the elephant herds in Zimbabwe and Kenya. In Zimbabwe, homesteading claims of natives to are respected and include elephants on their land. Elephants and their products are freely bought and sold. The people have a strong incentive

to raise as many elephants as possible to improve their own lives. They have the incentive to report and convict unscrupulous poachers. As a result of this policy, the Zimbabwe elephant herd increased from 30,000 to 43,000 over the past ten years. On the other hand, the Kenyan government built their elephant protection plan along the lines of U.S. government policies. During the exact same period that elephants prospered in Zimbabwe, Kenya's herd shrank by 67 percent.

Here in America, we see huge tracts of federal forests clear cut and left desolate. Yet this doesn't happen to land owned by paper companies and lumber interests. They replant their land and tend it with care. Why? Barren land is a liability for a profit-oriented company. Yet when politics enter the picture, you and I see bidding wars as unscrupulous politicians and business interests go in and ravage public forests.

Private ownership does not mean it has to be corporate commercial land. Nonprofit groups like Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy are excellent examples of groups that acquire land to nurture delicate ecosystems. Whom would you trust more to protect our redwoods and coastal fauna, ecologists or politicians? We urgently need to encourage more private ownership by caring environmentalists, so that our precious resources are not subject to the whim of politicians voting late in the night. It's sad to know that the top environmental lobbies spent more than $1 billion on politics last year. Imagine how much land and water could have been protected if they had simply bought the resources and cared for them.

Trespass is a simple, age-old principle designed to protect your rights. If your neighbor does anything to pollute the air you breathe, the water you drink or the land you own, they have committed an act of aggression that must be stopped. Then they must be held liable to correct the damage they have done.

Under current policy, if a simple majority says some pollution is acceptable, you have no say in the matter. Nobody should be allowed to trespass against you, even if all your other neighbors tolerate such a violation.

The bottom line is that we must make polluters pay for the damage they cause. Not you and me and other taxpayers. The polluter.

If somebody pollutes or destroys that piece of the earth owned by another, the polluter has to restore that property. In practice, this would be so expensive that a polluter could be bankrupted by his or her own carelessness. To make sure that this policy would work effectively, corporate officers have to be held personally responsible for deliberate acts of pollution. They cannot hide their bad acts behind a corporate curtain. When we make polluters, not taxpayers, responsible for the damage they do, the profit will be gone from pollution.

Steve Kubby is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.