

Opinion: In fighting for the ‘Dreamers,’ Sandoval shines

Publisher’s note: *This editorial is from the Dec.25, 2017, Las Vegas Sun.*

By joining a bipartisan group of governors advocating for “Dreamers,” Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval has once again reminded us how humane, pragmatic and fair the Republican Party used to be.

Last week, Sandoval and 10 other governors sent a letter to congressional leaders urging them to take quick action to protect the 750,000 children eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program – otherwise known as “Dreamers.”

Those children were brought to the U.S. by immigrant parents who were without documentation. As the governors wrote in their letter, the “Dreamers” “played no role in the decision to come here and they have known no other home but the United States.”

Read the whole story

Editorial: Can Calif. afford not to fix dams?

Publisher’s note: *This editorial is from the Dec. 11, 2017, Sacramento Bee.*

California’s dam inspectors appear to be doing their jobs well. Unfortunately, too many dam operators are falling down

on the job, and could be placing the public at risk.

That's the message of a report by The Sacramento Bee's Ryan Sabalow and Dale Kasler. It's also a part of life in California. As vast swaths of Southern California smolder from the unusual late-season fires this dry December, people naturally are focusing less on rain, potential flooding or dam safety.

But as climate changes and the Santa Ana winds to the south and the Diablo winds in our region become more pronounced, Californians will have no choice but to invest in flood control and other water-related public works.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Tackling Tahoe's transportation troubles

By Joanne Marchetta

The rural mountain lifestyle we all enjoy at Lake Tahoe is not isolated from the major urban areas nearby. On a typical holiday weekend, the Tahoe basin turns into a recreation thoroughfare as tens of thousands of day and overnight visitors who sustain our local economy drive up from the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento and Reno.

During peak times of visitation, this influx of cars and people causes traffic congestion on our limited roadways as residents, commuters, and visitors all struggle to get into, out of, and around communities, and as vehicles gather and park at major recreation attractions.



Joanne
Marchetta

Tahoe is taking a systemswide approach to better manage these transportation challenges.

Public and private partners are working together to enhance the basin's transit services, making them more frequent and more reliable, to improve the region's network of bike and pedestrian trails, and to upgrade roadways. Private and nonprofit partners are also stepping up by helping fund projects, running shuttles, bringing new bike share programs into communities, and partnering with smartphone applications that can help people plan trips to, from, and around Tahoe.

But Lake Tahoe's transportation challenges will be difficult to address. Even today, a shortage of bus drivers is preventing more frequent bus service this winter. There is no one silver bullet, no one entity that can solve all the difficulties. Success will not come overnight. We need to form new public-private partnerships, coordinate better, and work together on these issues as a region.

This December, with help from the Federal Highway Administration, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and nearly 60 public and private partners met for an all-day workshop on travel management. The focus was on emerging technologies and best practices we can consider using at Tahoe to better manage traffic congestion and parking problems not only to improve residents' quality of life and visitors' quality of experience, but also to reduce the impact that transportation has on the environment.

Partners at the workshop included local governments, state highway departments, inter-regional transportation agencies, nonprofit groups, ski resorts, lodging associations, chambers of commerce, visitor's authorities, and elected officials. With this broad array of partners and stakeholders in one room, we learned about the technologies and techniques that other tourism communities are using to address transportation issues. We also talked about what we are already doing, what is working and what is not working, and areas where we can work together to grow our initiatives for broader reach and impact.

Our transportation challenges will not solve themselves. Lake Tahoe is in the middle of the rapidly-growing Northern California megaregion, a transportation planning area that includes the Bay Area, Sacramento, Stockton, Truckee, and Reno. As these nearby metropolitan areas continue to grow, we can expect more and more people will be traveling to Tahoe to recreate.

Fortunately, many new tools are available to us today. Today, nearly everyone has a smartphone. That means they have access to online applications that can provide real-time travel and parking information, help them plan trips to avoid congestion, and book new ride-sharing services that make it easier than ever to carpool.

With the right partnerships and a consistent approach throughout the Tahoe region, people could use these new technologies to learn more about our local transit services, bike share programs, and bike and pedestrian trails to avoid driving altogether, not only to and from Tahoe, but during their stay here.

Through partnership and collaboration, progress is being made all around Lake Tahoe. The 2012 Regional Plan, with its unprecedented public-private partnership for community revitalization and environmental restoration, is delivering a

renaissance of projects both big and small that are revitalizing communities, reducing blight, and improving the environment.

More than 50 public, private, and nonprofit partners have made the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program one of the nation's most ambitious and successful conservation and restoration initiatives. Partners are continuing to implement projects each year that restore the lake's famous water clarity, clean up storm water pollution, fight aquatic invasive species, restore meadows and wetlands, improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk, and enhance the public recreation opportunities that drive Lake Tahoe's \$5 billion annual economy.

Lake Tahoe has clearly shown the power of collaboration and public-private partnerships. It's time to focus that power on coming together to solve the region's transportation challenges.

I know we can take our partnership and collaboration to the next level and work together on transportation issues to reduce the traffic congestion in our communities during times of peak visitation, better manage our roadways and parking areas, and make people more aware of alternatives to get to, from, and around Lake Tahoe. Please join us in this work to make Lake Tahoe a healthier, more enjoyable place for all of us, and for future generations to come.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Letter: Heavenly gives back at Bread & Broth

To the community,

With funds provided by Vail's EpicPromise grants, Heavenly Mountain Resort partners with Bread & Broth to annually host six Monday meal dinners at St. Theresa's Grace Hall.

Every other month, Heavenly sponsors an Adopt A Day of Nourishment and sends a team of volunteers to help crew at their sponsorship dinner. On Dec. 11, hosting their last AAD of the year, Heavenly's volunteer sponsor crew was manned by Michelle Beall, Kelly Campbell, Chris Eckert, Katie Ficeto and Frank Papandrea.

"We are so appreciative of all that St. Theresa Bread & Broth does for our community," said Campbell. "It is an honor to support their efforts and help our neighbors and community."

Through their AAD donation of \$250, Heavenly helps B&B provide a hot, full-course meal to the evening's dinner guests. These guests include seniors on a fixed income, struggling families, the homeless, students, and workers earning minimum wage. In many cases, the Monday meal is their only hot meal for the week.

As always, the Heavenly team members were helpful, warm and welcoming. Since most of the crew had served several times at a Monday meal, they jumped right in to make the evening meal a pleasant and welcoming dinner event for the guest. B&B volunteers are always excited when they see that a Heavenly crew will be hosting an Adopt A Day meal. B&B would like to thank Vail corporation, Heavenly Mountain Resort and their employee crew members for their amazing generosity and efforts to serve to those in need.

Opinion: Calif. will likely screw up legalizing pot

By Joe Mathews

California's 2018 transition to legal marijuana contains a mind-bending paradox: Ending prohibitions on marijuana will require a lot of aggressive law enforcement.

On Jan. 1, California will not merely be permitting adults 21 and older to use marijuana for recreational purposes. The state and its cities will be creating a new regime to regulate and tax cannabis.



Joe Mathews

High times have high stakes: The successful legalization of cannabis in America's largest state could help end the drug war in the United States. But if this transition turns messy, the Trump administration—which is devoted both to debasing California and promoting thoughtlessly tough “law-and-order” policies—could bogart everything, stepping up arrests and penalties for drug violations.

There is reason to worry. Smoking weed is said to expand your

mind, but I'm not sure if there is enough marijuana in the state for anyone's brain to comprehend the complexities of all the new rules.

Legalization requires moving a shadowy \$7 billion industry into a highly regulated structure, with extensive taxes and permitting processes. California governments that once took a live-and-let-live approach to cannabis now find themselves having to boost enforcement against cannabis businesses to make sure that companies choose to move out of the black market.

Such policing requires striking difficult balances. If regulatory compliance is too loose, and taxes and permits are too cheap, scofflaws could plague the new industry. But if regulatory compliance is too costly, and taxes and permits too expensive, too many firms might choose to stay in the black market.

At this point, it's hard to be optimistic that California's governments will find that balance.

Among the challenges: the state has been slow to issue regulations to create an interconnected framework of rules covering both newly legal recreational adult use and medical use, which has been legal since 1996 but poorly regulated.

Then there are California's cities, which have tremendous discretion in whether to issue permits, but are in many cases still debating what to do. Those municipalities that have issued rules are creating so many different standards that California's cannabis market will resemble a crazy-quilt.

The federal government is also undermining the transition. By maintaining its prohibition of marijuana, it is creating both legal jeopardy for those in the legal industry and real difficulties with banking, since very few financial institutions will serve businesses selling a product that the U.S. considers to be an illegal drug. In an acknowledgment

that cannabis is likely to remain a mostly cash business, state Treasurer John Chiang has offered to provide armored cars so that cannabis businesses can transport their money when they pay taxes.

Because the industry is badly undercapitalized, it has yet to build out the infrastructure—from compliance systems to lab testing to a strong distribution system—necessary for its new regulated reality.

While attending three cannabis conferences this fall, I was struck by the high anxiety around the conundrum of making a business legal without ending up in trouble over the new rules. These days, marijuana business owners sound a bit like homebuilders—utterly frustrated at the endless delays and NIMBY politics that make it so hard to get permits from California’s local governments.

Many businesses are coping by devoting themselves to California’s real drug of choice: marketing.

The fog of industry propaganda obscures questions about the social transformation under way. And cannabis already resembles other forms of awful American commerce, with varieties of products of dubious necessity: cannaboid eye drops to treat your glaucoma, hemp oil to top your brain seizures, cannabis creams to make your skin glow, and cannabis-infused items to get you off addictive opioids.

There are online marketplaces, specialized software for cannabis businesses, and—my personal favorite—PotBot, an “artificial intelligence” app to recommend marijuana strains that show the most promise in relieving your symptoms.

Amid all this smoke, there are nods to some important issues. Los Angeles and Oakland are among the cities working on “social equity programs” to make sure that communities hurt by the drug war enjoy the benefits of jobs and investment in the newly legalized market.

Nevertheless, the cannabis industry probably will mirror California's inequality. Poorer communities have been more open to permitting the businesses, while wealthier places have kept them out. In effect, many places with the enforcement resources to shrink the black market and protect legal businesses are sitting this transition out. Marin County has declined to license new retail dispensaries or adult use shops, despite 70 percent voter support there for legalization.

This New Year's Eve will be full of high spirits, especially at midnight when some Californians legally light up for the first time. But the rest of the transition may feel like a bad trip.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

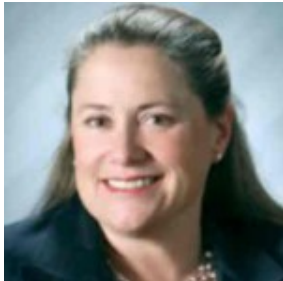
Opinion: Supporting the Wildfire Safety and Recovery Act

By Jennifer Montgomery

Wildfires aren't supposed to happen in December. And yet, just days before the holidays, thousands in Southern California are still evacuated from their homes as the Thomas Fire rages on, almost sure to become the largest wildfire in California history.

Wildfires aren't supposed to burn cities, either. But the Thomas Fire has consumed neighborhoods in Ventura and Santa

Barbara, while in nearby Los Angeles, the Skirball Fire destroyed Bel-Air mansions. All this comes only two months after the Tubbs Fire burned nearly 7,000 homes in the city of Santa Rosa and Napa County.



Jennifer
Montgomery

Catastrophic wildfire is California's new normal, and it's not just a rural problem anymore.

Clearly, saving lives is our main concern. But as California wildfires worsen, a looming crisis of property insurance access further threatens the foundation of our communities, at a time when we are already facing an unprecedented housing crisis.

This week I joined California Sen. Ricardo Lara at the state Capitol to announce the introduction of the Wildfire Safety and Recovery Act, co-sponsored by Placer County. This act, when passed, will help protect responsible homeowners from significant insurance rate rises or cancellations due to wildfire risk.

This partnership – of a rural Northern California county and an urban Southern California senate district – marks a new consensus that when it comes to wildfire, we are all in this together. What was historically perceived as a rural problem is now all of our problem.

Placer County has been on the front line of this battle for affordable insurance for over four years. As wildfire risk has

increased after years of severe drought and tree death due to bark beetle, many of our residents have had been dropped by their insurance carriers or faced the doubling or tripling of their premiums. This despite the actions of so many to reduce their risk by building with non-combustible materials, maintaining defensible space and hardening their homes in other ways against wildfire.

We have been fierce advocates on their behalf, but after years of limited success at bringing property owners relief administratively, it has become clear that the broader solution must be legislative. With this law, California will join states including Arkansas, South Carolina, Texas, New York, Alabama and Florida that prohibit or limit insurance companies from canceling or non-renewing policies following natural disasters, or require them to offer discounts to property owners who harden their homes.

Make no mistake: We want insurance companies to continue to operate successfully and profitably in California. Risk is increasing, but insurance providers must be required to set and adjust premiums based on an understanding of the real risk to the properties they insure. That means balancing the risk equation with the many mitigations property owners can take to reduce their risk.

The Wildfire Safety and Recovery Act will allow insurers to continue to profitably invest in California and to support responsible property owners and local communities who are stepping up to be fire safe.

Ensuring a stable insurance market for insurers and access to insurance for property owners is in all of our interests as we work together to build community resiliency across California in this new age of wildfire.

Jennifer Montgomery is a supervisor for Placer County, representing Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: IVGID explains unbuildable lot issue

By Jason Guinasso

In 2009, Incline Village General Improvement District's board of trustees adopted a Policy 16.1.1 entitled Recreation Roll which discussed unbuildable parcels and the process for how these parcels come back onto the Recreation Roll.

In 2012, Incline Village General Improvement District was approached by the Washoe County treasurer to see if they were interested in acquiring approximately 87 unbuildable parcels and do so under NRS 361.603. The Incline Village General Improvement District responded yes they were interested and the process was completed. It should be noted that the part of the process included going before both the Washoe County Commissioners and the Incline Village General Improvement District board of trustees; both bodies approved the transaction.

Between 2014 and 2015, three unbuildable parcels were sold to private parties in accordance with Policy 16.1.1 specifically paragraph 5. which reads as follows:

"An unbuildable parcel that has been removed from the Recreation Roll by petition can be restored to the Recreation Roll, and thereby have recreation privileges restored by first paying the total amount of recreation and, if applicable beach fees that had been levied since the parcel was taken off the Recreation Roll, plus any fees or penalties permitted by the state of Nevada as defined in Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 99.040(1)."

Using one parcel as an example at the time of acquisition (2012), the amounts owed was \$11,059.42, of which \$10,148 was due to the Incline Village General Improvement District in past due recreation fees and \$911.42 was due to Washoe County in past due property taxes. Washoe County waived its claim for the past due property taxes as defined in Nevada Revised Statutes 361.603 and did so at a public meeting which was unanimously passed.

When the sale was finalized, the Incline Village General Improvement District followed its policy and the sale price totaled all of the back Recreation Roll fees owed on the parcel up to the date of sale. While the ownership of the parcel changed, the identification of the parcel did not and has not up to today. The parcel remains unbuildable and the good news is that the parcel is now collecting the full Recreation Roll fees and Washoe County is collecting property taxes it assesses.

Incline Village General Improvement District completely halted the sales of these parcels following these three sales in order to reflect on the process and contemplate an updated policy. It is anticipated that an updated policy will become a part of the Incline Village General Improvement District code which is forecasted to be presented to the Incline Village General Improvement District board of trustees in February 2018.

IVGID has not violated any law or acted in any way to harm the public. The Bitterbrush properties were legally acquired. Thereafter, three of the Bitterbrush properties acquired were sold. The Washoe County assessor label of unbuildable associated with the Bitterbrush properties will remain preserved in perpetuity because the properties in question are unbuildable and have no other value other than the recreation and beach privileges associated with them. In addition to the stated public purpose being preserved, IVGID continues to have the ability to serve the important public purpose of

recovering delinquent fees and reinstating these properties onto the Recreation Roll. It has been three years since the last property was sold because IVGID has placed a moratorium on the sale of the properties until a process and procedure for sales is adopted by the board. Accordingly, IVGID will not sell any of the Bitterbrush properties until an updated policy can be prepared, considered, and approved, in an open publicly noticed meeting, by the IVGID board of trustees.

While it is unfortunate that all the foregoing factual information has not been considered by some of IVGID's public and was not otherwise included in the media reports, IVGID maintains its commitment to transparency in government. IVGID welcomes any and all questions from the public which can be sent to IVGID at info@ivgid.org or directly to your IVGID district General Manager Steve Pinkerton at sjp@ivgid.org.

Jason Guinasso is IVGID's general counsel.

Opinion: 2 skyscrapers and the Calif. imagination

By Joe Mathews

This is a tale of two cities and two new skyscrapers.

The Wilshire Grand Center, a project of the conglomerate that owns Korean Air Lines, towers 73 stories and 1,100 feet over downtown Los Angeles, making it the tallest building west of the Mississippi River.



Joe Mathews

The soon-to-open Salesforce Tower, named for the cloud computing giant that will be its signature tenant, rises 61 stories and 1,070 feet over San Francisco, making it the second-tallest building west of the Mississippi.

Each building has changed its city's skyline. Considered together, however, they make a more earth-bound and less flattering point about the state of the California imagination.

The Wilshire Grand, like Los Angeles, is skinny and well-lit. But up close, it feels remote even though it's in the middle of a metropolis. Reaching the Wilshire Grand on foot isn't easy, given how it's cut off by traffic on the 110 freeway and Wilshire Boulevard and Figueroa Street. And when you enter, you're pointed in the direction of an elevator that takes you up to its most significant space the public can access – the 70th floor lobby of the Intercontinental Hotel.

While the lobby offers great views, the whole structure reveals the city's weaknesses. L.A.'s relatively stagnant economy has left a glut of office space that has made the building tricky to lease. And the building's Korea-based ownership serves as a reminder that L.A., for all its size, is more an overgrown outpost than a capital of anything. Its signature institutions – from the *L.A. Times* to the Dodgers – are owned by out-of-towners.

By contrast, Salesforce Tower is very San Francisco, both for better and for worse. Like the Bay Area's tech industry, the

skyscraper is a dominant, almost menacing presence hanging over the city. The tower's city connections are deliberate: A bridge connects it to a park atop the under-construction Transbay Transit Center and the building has a public street-level plaza and a giant lobby opening right onto Mission Street.

But the Salesforce Tower also embodies a San Francisco paradox. This place that connects the world can feel small and insular. Between the new skyscraper and two buildings across the street, Salesforce is creating its own campus within the city, with retail and stores to satisfy workers' every need. "It's all right here. Right now," boasts the tower's publicity.

The preciousness of the project cries out for parody. The building literally breathes, with "innovative outside air intakes on every floor" that "provide outdoor-fresh air to each occupant to support health and wellness." The interior is also expected to include "mindfulness zones."

Such touches fit the only-from-San Francisco corporate culture of Salesforce, which wraps relentless acquisitiveness (now more than 24,000 employees and \$8.4 billion in annual revenues), in touchy-feely corporate language that appropriates the Hawaiian concept of "Ohana," or extended family.

An excerpt from the most recent annual report: "We are the #SalesforceOhana, a trusted family of employees, customers, partners and communities, united around delivering success to all of our stakeholders and improving the state of the world."

For all the municipal differences that the two skyscrapers reflect, their similarities are even more striking.

Both are glass towers designed for maximum environmental sustainability and earthquake safety. And both make themselves appear taller than they really are. The Wilshire Grand gets

its extra height from a 295-foot tall spire on top, while Salesforce has 170 feet of open space on the top that won't have any people in it.

Neither building makes you say "wow." In fact, both buildings were supposed to be bigger—Wilshire Grand was originally planned as two taller towers, and Salesforce as a 1,200-foot-tall giant—but were downsized for economic reasons. And neither structure matches the public esteem for the towers they now top. In L.A., the U.S. Bank building, also known as the Library Tower, sits on Bunker Hill and thus looks taller than the Wilshire Grand. In San Francisco, the hulking presence of the Salesforce Tower seems out of scale compared to the graceful Transamerica Pyramid, 200 feet shorter.

But to protest these new skyscrapers is pointless, because both buildings reveal a hard truth about power in California: Despite our boasts about creating new modes of business and living, our corporations still stand the tallest. Korean Air's logo lights the Wilshire Grand's crown. And San Francisco has agreed to rename the Transbay Transit Center and the park on top of it for Salesforce.

But these two competent corporate buildings don't seem to be about much more than branding. And if California is going to build giant monuments above faults, then why can't our skyscrapers offer edges that incite love or hatred, that provoke us to aim higher?

Structures that tall really should stand for something.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Opinion: Could Calif. be seeing the onset of a recession?

By Dan Walters, CalMatters

Twice each year, once in January and again in May, Gov. Jerry Brown warns Californians that the economic prosperity their state has enjoyed in recent years won't last forever.

Brown attaches his admonishments to the budgets he proposes to the Legislature – the initial one in January and a revised version four months later.



Dan Walters

Brown's latest, issued last May, cited uncertainty about turmoil in the national government, urged legislators to "plan for and save for tougher budget times ahead," and added:

"By the time the budget is enacted in June, the economy will have finished its eighth year of expansion – only two years shorter than the longest recovery since World War II. A recession at some point is inevitable."

It's certain that Brown will renew his warning next month. Implicitly, he may hope that the inevitable recession he envisions will occur once his final term as governor ends in January 2019, because it would, his own financial advisers believe, have a devastating effect on the state budget.

A new report from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis, however, hints that the downturn may have already started.

The BEA releases state-by-state economic data each quarter and its reports for the first and second quarters of 2017 are not good news for California.

Last year was a very good one for the state's economy. The 3.3 percent gain in economic output in 2016 was more than double that of the nation as a whole and one of the highest of any state.

However, California stumbled during the first half of 2017. California's increase was an anemic six tenths of one percent in the first quarter compared to the same period of 2016, and 2.1 percent in the second quarter, well below the national rate and ranking 35th in the nation.

The report revealed that almost every one of California's major sectors fell behind national trends in the second quarter, with the most conspicuous laggard being manufacturing.

The only big California sector showing robust health was "information," reflecting the unfortunate truism that the Silicon Valley-centered technology industry continues to prop up an otherwise lackluster overall economy.

It may be only a hiccup in California's \$2.6 trillion economy, the fifth or sixth largest in the world were it a nation. But maybe not.

Were the oft-predicted recession to finally hit, the most obvious effect would be on the state budget. It is highly dependent on income taxes paid by a handful of high-income Californians, particularly on their investment gains and particularly in the tech-heavy San Francisco Bay Area.

The last recession a decade ago revealed just how that

dependency backfires in recession.

The state is even more dependent now, thanks to voter-approved increases in marginal tax rates, so a new recession would have even harsher fiscal effects.

However, the impact would not be confined to the budget. We could see unemployment, which has been at record-low levels recently, skyrocket as it did a decade ago with collateral impacts on housing, retail sales and virtually every other economic activity.

We would also see a new debate over whether California's high taxes, high labor and housing costs and high levels of regulation have, as critics allege, made the state less attractive to job-creating investment and more vulnerable to recession.

Will it happen? Yes. A recession is inevitable as Brown warns. What we don't know is when and whether it would seriously impact the high-tech industry. It is so vital to California's overall economic health that were it to falter, an otherwise mild recession could be devastating.

Opinion: How Congress funds firefighting needs fixing

By David Edelson and Tim Quinn, Sacramento Bee

California continues to experience the worst wildfires in its history, with tragic loss of life and devastation to communities, a disaster for our state by any definition.

Congress has an opportunity to act now to reduce the risk of

future such disasters. California's representatives in Congress – especially House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi – should make sure that it does.

Congress is working on yet another bill to fund disaster recovery, as part of a larger year-end bill to keep the government operating. A fire funding fix belongs in that bill. Not all of this year's fires involved our federal forests, but the fires burning in Southern California right now do, and future fires will.

Read the whole story