Opinion: Reasons to vote for Measure R

To the community,

Several months ago at JPA public meetings on Measure R, I made arguments similar to those in Stephen Reinhard's recent letter opposing Measure R. Unlike Reinhard who didn't attend any of the meetings, I participated in all of the JPA public meetings, and learned about important facts Reinhard has wrong.

The JPA will not seek voter approval again for using the accumulating money for fields or "old" bike trails if Measure R is defeated. They have other options to resolve the situation; those options will make the "extra" money unavailable in the future for fields or "old" bike trails.

The JPA has had unplanned increases in revenue that will amount to several hundred thousand dollars over the life of Measure S. Fields will get $500,000, with bike trails getting the rest plus all the originally planned new bike trail maintenance money; over $800,000 more than if Measure R is defeated.

Next summer, fields and bike trails each get about $235,000. Then fields get all of the money until about 2016 because fields need money "up front" for major work that must be done all at once, and for matching fund donations. We agreed so fields people will support using Measure S money for "old" bike trails. Bike trail renovation can be done in smaller increments and after fields get $500,000, bike trails will get all of the money until Measure S sunsets in 2030.

Reinhard omitted the important final words of the Measure R sentence he quoted. It actually says the JPA can "… direct up to 100% of available JPA funding to pre-September 19, 2000 separated bicycle trails renovation." This allows money to also be used for "old" bike trail maintenance or additional "new" bike trail maintenance.

Vote "Yes" on Measure R and give "old" bike trails $235,000 now.

Charles W. Nelson, founding member and board member of Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition

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Opinion: Brown needs to unleash a public works blitz to create jobs

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

Don Perata remembers the mood and expectations when the Legislature passed a massive $37-billion public works program in 2006.

The mood was jubilant, the former Senate leader recalls. Legislators had acted in a very rare bipartisan fashion. And the expectation was that the record-size bond package — pushed hard by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger — would rapidly begin the rebuilding of California's decaying infrastructure, creating tens of thousands of jobs.

"Everyone was feeling good about what happened. It was one of the high points of my time in the Legislature," the Oakland Democrat says.

"The common goal was to get the projects out now and don't let them get stuck with the bureaucrats arguing over whatever they argue about. We had just begun to realize that something was wrong with the economy."

Voters overwhelmingly approved four bond proposals – for transportation, housing, education and flood control projects. They also passed a fifth bond for water facilities that had reached the ballot through the initiative process. That upped the total bond package to an unprecedented $43 billion.

"There was a sense of urgency," Perata says, "and then we lost it."

Five years later, only roughly half of the authorized bonds have been sold. And of the amount sold, about 30% has not been spent.

So much for pump-priming the economy in a severe recession.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Putting the climate-change debate to rest

By Eugene Robinson, Washington Post

For the clueless or cynical diehards who deny global warming, it's getting awfully cold out there.

The latest icy blast of reality comes from an eminent scientist whom the climate-change skeptics once lauded as one of their own. Richard Muller, a respected physicist at the University of California, Berkeley, used to dismiss alarmist climate research as being "polluted by political and activist frenzy." Frustrated at what he considered shoddy science, Muller launched his own comprehensive study to set the record straight. Instead, the record set him straight.

“Global warming is real,” Muller wrote last week in The Wall Street Journal.

Rick Perry, Herman Cain, Michele Bachmann and the rest of the neo-Luddites who are turning the GOP into the anti-science party should pay attention.

“When we began our study, we felt that skeptics had raised legitimate issues, and we didn’t know what we’d find,” Muller wrote. “Our results turned out to be close to those published by prior groups. We think that means that those groups had truly been careful in their work, despite their inability to convince some skeptics of that.”

In other words, the deniers’ claims about the alleged sloppiness or fraudulence of climate science are wrong. Muller’s team, the Berkeley Earth Surface Temperature project, rigorously explored the specific objections raised by skeptics – and found them groundless.

Muller and his fellow researchers examined an enormous data set of observed temperatures from monitoring stations around the world and concluded that the average land temperature has risen 1 degree Celsius – or about 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit – since the mid-1950s.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Rise and Runnels

right for STPUD

To the community,

My name is Ernie Claudio and I was on the STPUD board of directors for two years in 2007. The only candidates I met while on the board were Dale Rise and John Runnels. These two candidates have proven their ability to say “No” to the STPUD management.

STPUD or the district is a multimillion-dollar organization with dreams of becoming even bigger by increasing water rates. We need candidates who can say, “No, economic times are bad, people are struggling, give the citizens a break and put your growth on hold for awhile.”

The district’s strategy is, “Ask for high rates and see if anybody complains.” “If the people don’t complain, then we will raise the rates.” We need to complain. If there are a lot of complaints, then the board of directors will not let the district increase the water rates. We need Mr. Rise and Mr. Runnels on the board because they are the only candidates who have proven they’re ability to stand up to the powerful district management.

I have a water meter and my bill jumped up by $120. At this rate, my water bill will increase by more than $400 a year. We need to organize. There is a local group called The Citizens for Responsible Government. This group successfully stopped the Business Improve District tax proposed in 2004. This group is thinking of holding a public meeting to see how many people are not in favor of this rate increase.

Meanwhile, we need to show up at every STPUD meeting and speak for three minutes at the beginning of the meeting, the meetings start at 2pm on the first and third Thursdays. Show up, speak and be on our way home by 2:30pm.

See you at the next meeting.

Ernie Claudio, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Important to keep pets safe

By California Emergency Management Agency

The fall season is a festive and fun time of year for children and families, but a stressful and dangerous time for many pets. The California Emergency Management Agency (CalEMA) reminds Californians to take special precautions to ensure the safety of their pets, and those who may come in contact with them, during this season of entertaining and celebration:

* Do not leave your pet out in the yard unattended during high foot traffic community events and visiting hours. There are plenty of horror stories of vicious pranksters who have teased, injured, stolen, and even killed pets during some festivities.

* Keep pets, especially outdoor cats, inside several days before and several days after high foot traffic community events and visiting hours; cats in particular may be at risk from children's pranks or other cruelty-related incidents.

* Candies are not for pets: Chocolate is poisonous to a lot of animals and tin foil and cellophane candy wrappers can be hazardous if swallowed.

* Keep pets away from lit outdoor lanterns: Pets may knock them over and cause a fire. Curious kittens especially run the risk of getting burned.

* Do not dress your dog or cat in a costume unless you know for sure that he or she loves it. Otherwise, it puts too much stress on the animal. If you do dress up your pet, make sure that the costume is not annoying or unsafe; it should not constrict his/her movement, hearing, or ability to breathe or bark. Also, there should not be small, dangling, or easily chewed-off pieces on the costume that your pet could choke on. Pets should always be supervised, especially one that is dressed up in a costume. If your pet goes trick or treating with you, make sure they are always on a leash!

* All but the most social of dogs and cats should be kept in a separate room during visiting hours; too many strangers in costumes can be scary for a dog or cat.

* When opening the door for visitors, be very careful that your dog or cat does not dart outside. It is best to keep them locked in a separate room where they can feel safe away from all the noise.

* Make sure that your dog or cat is wearing proper identification (ID tag, license, microchip, tattoo, etc.). If for any reason they escape and become lost, you increase the chances that they will be returned to you.

For more information on pet safety, visit the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals online, your veterinarian or your local department of animal control.

Opinion: Fight corporate

America with where you keep your money

To the community,

To make a big impression on the big financial institutions, primarily Bank of America and Wells Fargo, move your business to a smaller, local bank; refinance your mortgage with a local lender; do all you can to avoid any business with the "robber barons".

Doing this on a nationwide scale might make them appreciate us.

It will hurt.

Lynne Bajuk, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Why not occupy newsrooms?

By David Carr, New York Times

Almost two weeks ago, *USA Today* put its finger on why the Occupy Wall Street protests continued to gain traction.

"The bonus system has gone beyond a means of rewarding talent and is now Wall Street's primary business," the newspaper editorial stated, adding: "Institutions take huge gambles because the short-term returns are a rationale for their rich payouts. But even when the consequences of their risky behavior come back to haunt them, they still pay huge bonuses."

Well thought and well put, but for one thing: If you were looking for bonus excess despite miserable operations, the best recent example I can think of is Gannett, which owns *USA Today*.

The week before the editorial ran, Craig A. Dubow resigned as Gannett's chief executive. His short six-year tenure was, by most accounts, a disaster. Gannett's stock price declined to about $10 a share from a high of $75 the day after he took over; the number of employees at Gannett plummeted to 32,000 from about 52,000, resulting in a remarkable diminution in journalistic boots on the ground at the 82 newspapers the company owns.

Never a standout in journalism performance, the company strip-mined its newspapers in search of earnings, leaving many communities with far less original, serious reporting.

Given that legacy, it was about time Mr. Dubow was shown the door, right? Not in the current world we live in. Not only did Mr. Dubow retire under his own power because of health reasons, he got a mash note from Marjorie Magner, a member of Gannett's board, who said without irony that "Craig championed our consumers and their ever-changing needs for news and information."

But the board gave him far more than undeserved plaudits. Mr. Dubow walked out the door with just under $37.1 million in retirement, health and disability benefits. That comes on top of a combined $16 million in salary and bonuses in the last two years.

And in case you thought they were paying up just to get rid of a certain way of doing business — slicing and dicing their way to quarterly profits — Mr. Dubow was replaced by Gracia C. Martore, the company's president and chief operating officer. She was Mr. Dubow's steady accomplice in working the cost side of the business, without finding much in the way of new revenue. She has already pocketed millions in bonuses and will now be in line for even more.

Forget about occupying Wall Street; maybe it's time to start occupying Main Street, a place Gannett has bled dry by offering less and less news while dumping and furloughing journalists in seemingly every quarter.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Denial will not heal what ails South Lake Tahoe

To the community,

I watched and listened to Mayor Hal Cole's state of the city speech. There are two parts to any speech, substance and tone.

On substance, Mayor Cole outlined the city's needs and problems comprehensively. He said the city is solvent and will keep a 25 percent general fund reserve. He said we need to fix the streets, clean the city up, attract more tourists, and increase city revenues.

Bill Crawford

On revenues, he said the city will seek a TOT tax increase in the future. And he clearly said the city's economy depends on resources of others. Those others are agencies such as the Forest Service, the CTC, Caltrans, and grants. Mayor Cole favors more BIDs, business improvement districts like the Ski Run BID. Partnerships between private businesses and the city.

Mayor Cole defended past Redevelopment Agency action. He said redevelopment tax increment revenue, new higher property taxes stay in town. That's false. By law it goes to serve redevelopment debt, to pay the bondholders.

On tone, he simply recited what was written. The tone was flat. It lacked enthusiasm. That's understandable considering the city's fiscal pain.

Mayor Cole made a plea for peace. Please, no finger pointing. The past is the past. It was denial of any consequences of decisions that led to failure(s) such as the convention center. It's a plea to forget, to erase memory so there can be harmony.

So where is the city now? Mayor Cole said the city must have outside financial support to rebuild the city. If so, the city's a charity case chasing the rainbow's pot of gold. And there can't be peace and harmony until Mayor Cole atones for errors like the convention center. Soon he will have served 16 years on the council and been the mayor many times. He has played a big role in creating the political and economic plight of the city. Atonement heals. Denial does not.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Feds’ pot crackdown bad medicine

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the Oct. 22, 2011, Orange County Register.***

In the design of America’s founders, the states are supposed to be centers of democratic experiment. They’re not supposed to be uniform. For example, even though alcohol Prohibition ended in 1933, local laws restricting sales exist in 33 states. In Arkansas, more than half of 75 counties prohibit alcohol sales.

This design is why it is disturbing to us that the Obama administration has launched a crackdown on medical marijuana, which is legal in 16 states and the District of Columbia, the home of the federal government. California led the way with Proposition 215 in 1996, which passed with 56 percent of the vote. It allows a patient, according to state law, to use medical marijuana with a prescription from a medical doctor. The Register supported Prop. 215 in editorials, primarily written by our late colleague, Alan W. Bock.

There have been numerous controversies pitting medical marijuana users and dispensaries against state and local authorities. But overall, things have worked fairly well. The dire consequences of critics – of a state lost in a pot haze – never happened. In 2002, the California Supreme Court upheld Prop. 215. And when San Diego and San Bernardino counties challenged Prop. 215 in federal court, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case in 2009, allowing Prop. 215 to stand.

The Bush administration, despite cracking down in many areas of the “war on drugs,” never seriously challenged Prop. 215 or other states’ medical marijuana laws. There was great hope that the Obama administration would normalize the matter by formally letting states set their own policies. In 2006, Barack Obama admitted to using marijuana. “I inhaled frequently,” he said in a televised interview. “That was the point.”

In his 2008 campaign, Mr. Obama pledged, “I’m not going to be using Justice Department resources to try to circumvent state laws on this issue.” After Mr. Obama became president, Deputy Attorney General David W. Ogden wrote in an Oct. 19, 2009, memo to U.S. attorneys in states that had legalized medical marijuana, “As a general matter, pursuit of these priorities should not focus federal resources in your states on individuals whose actions are in clear and unambiguous compliance with existing state laws providing for the medical use of marijuana. For example, prosecution of individuals with cancer or other serious illnesses who use marijuana as part of a recommended treatment regimen consistent with applicable state law … is unlikely to be an efficient use of limited federal resources.”

Why the change? Jeffrey A. Miron, a Cato Institute scholar specializing in the economics of illegal drugs, said the Obama administration may be trying to offset its liberal image by “doing some things on the right,” such as cracking down on drugs. “But this is alienating a lot of people in the middle, the independents.”

“We saw this coming,” Steve Kubby told us of the tougher stance by the Obama Justice Department. Mr. Kubby was a co-author of Prop. 215, and has used medical marijuana for more than 25 years to keep in remission an otherwise fatal form of adrenal cancer. Mr. Kubby disputes a 2005 Supreme Court decision, Gonzales vs. Raich, green-lighting a federal ban on medical marijuana on the basis of the Constitution’s interstate commerce clause. He cites the 10th Amendment, which stipulates, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Read the whole story

Opinion: Why Nevadans do nothing about wildfire threat

By Ed Smith

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, in collaboration with Nevada's firefighting organizations, recently hosted the Nevada Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Summit. The summit's purpose was to discuss ways to reduce the wildfire threat to Nevada's wildfire-prone communities. This year's summit theme addressed the concept of creating fire adapted communities, or FACs.

A FAC is a community that can survive wildfire with little or no assistance from firefighters. This is possible because of the way the homes are built, the manner in which vegetation is managed and the knowledge possessed by its residents. To accomplish this, community members must be proactive. Unfortunately, many Nevadans living in high-fire-hazard areas fail to take action before the wildfire occurs.

Why? What prevents them from taking the steps necessary to protect their families, homes and possessions? At the summit, we asked approximately 80 community leaders and firefighting agency representatives from 30 high-fire-hazard communities in Nevada those questions. Presented below are some of the popular responses.

Cost and time: The perception that reducing the wildfire threat (e.g., creating defensible space, replacing untreated wood roofs, etc.) would be too costly, in terms of money and time, was identified as a major obstacle to taking action. This is also a question of priorities. Some property owners living in high fire-hazard areas have discretionary income and leisure time. They choose to spend this extra money and time on things they consider to be more desirable than creating a fire-safe environment.

Ed Smith is a natural resource specialist with University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.