

Opinion: Obama should confront GOP on water

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the June 12, 2011, Sacramento Bee.*

Unusual, to be sure. But ever so necessary. Former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt took off the gloves and aimed a one-two combo at House Republicans and President Barack Obama on environmental issues.

Babbitt's well-rounded attack last week was richly deserved. Others should follow his example. It is time for a parade of people to stand up publicly in defense of the nation's public lands and water resources.

House Republicans, Babbitt noted, have "declared war on our land, water and natural resources."

This description is no exaggeration, as seen in the words and actions of the California House delegation, who are leaders of the extremist anti-environmental charge.

The troika of Reps. Devin Nunes of Visalia, Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield and Jeff Denham of Atwater are sponsoring a bill, House Resolution 1837, that would radically alter water law and policy in California and upend years of progress in resolving California's water wars.

HR 1837 would explicitly repeal the two-decades-in-the-making settlement among various interests to restore fisheries and flows to the dewatered San Joaquin River. The bill also would undermine the historic bipartisan legislation in 2009 to find solutions for the Bay-Delta.

Read the whole story

Opinion: What are we really telling college graduates?

By David Brooks, New York Times

Over the past few weeks, America's colleges have sent another class of graduates off into the world. These graduates possess something of inestimable value. Nearly every sensible middle-aged person would give away all their money to be able to go back to age 22 and begin adulthood anew.

But, especially this year, one is conscious of the many ways in which this year's graduating class has been ill served by their elders. They enter a bad job market, the hangover from decades of excessive borrowing. They inherit a ruinous federal debt.

More important, their lives have been perversely structured. This year's graduates are members of the most supervised generation in American history. Through their childhoods and teenage years, they have been monitored, tutored, coached and honed to an unprecedented degree.

Yet upon graduation they will enter a world that is unprecedentedly wide open and unstructured. Most of them will not quickly get married, buy a home and have kids, as previous generations did. Instead, they will confront amazingly diverse job markets, social landscapes and lifestyle niches. Most will spend a decade wandering from job to job and clique to clique, searching for a role.

No one would design a system of extreme supervision to prepare people for a decade of extreme openness. But this is exactly what has emerged in modern America. College students are

raised in an environment that demands one set of navigational skills, and they are then cast out into a different environment requiring a different set of skills, which they have to figure out on their own.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Time to rethink Homewood's development plans

By Rochelle Nason

Tahoe's West Shore is an icon of California's natural beauty. Emerald Bay is one of the most photographed spots on Earth. The entire stretch of shoreline and forest, from Camp Richardson to Tahoe City, with its lake vistas and abundance of public lands, provides inspiration to millions of visitors as well as to its tiny local population.

Unfortunately, the area suffers from terrible traffic congestion and air pollution. Evidence of the poor decision-making of the past is obvious everywhere: A huge landslide scars Emerald Bay because of road construction. The watershed continues to suffer from past mining practices. Forests and meadows are degraded by logging and grazing. Extensive overdevelopment abounds, even on fragile soils and steep slopes.



Rochelle Nason

Is our society capable of making better decisions today? Some are hailing a proposed expansion of Homewood Mountain Resort as part of the solution to the West Shore's environmental problems. But we at the League to Save Lake Tahoe (known for our motto "Keep Tahoe Blue") believe this proposal must be downsized and improved to protect and enhance the watershed, scenery and other environmental features and to avoid worsening traffic congestion.

We recognize the challenge facing the developer. When JMA Ventures purchased the property at the height of the real estate boom in 2006, it assumed expensive legal and moral obligations to stop the property from polluting the lake and to reduce wildfire risk. But we are deeply concerned at its proposal for a host of rule changes to squeeze hundreds of condo and hotel rooms into this small community. Further, changing the protective rules at Homewood could lead to similar transformative changes throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin – yet no analysis of such dramatic changes has been done.

The developer argues that, if it must abide by the limits in effect when it purchased the property, it will have to either sell the property or shut down the ski resort and find another use for the land. However, there is no persuasive evidence that a smaller project could not be economically feasible.

A better vision for Lake Tahoe would direct intensive development to sites near transportation hubs, housing and existing infrastructure. We have helped make this model a success on the South Shore. But today, piecemeal planning is

resulting in large project proposals that move development from urbanized casino areas to less appropriate areas – a sad step backward in land-use planning.

The League is urging the developer to work with the community, conservation groups and regulators to create a vision for the resort that all can support – one that does not sacrifice long-term conservation for short-term economic benefits.

More fundamentally, we are asking the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to consider: How much additional development can the West Shore of Lake Tahoe sustain? What development rules should apply to the basin as a whole? What is the big-picture plan to save the lake? We owe it to future generations to plan carefully to keep Tahoe blue.

Rochelle Nason is the executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Retirement savings should start at young age

By Rick Rodgers

When our generation was growing up, we were taught about Social Security, and many of us had grandparents who were reasonably comfortable with a combination of their investment income and their government checks.

Today, not so much.

Over the last few years, we have seen the market crash and burn, and Social Security is on its way toward doing the same. So, if we're scrambling to salvage our retirement income,

imagine what it will be like for your kids. If you haven't done that already, one expert has some good news for you.

When we were just starting out in life, our parents told us to start saving money right out of the gate, but we didn't listen. Instead, we ran up our credit card debt, spent more than we earned and bought more house than we could afford. But our kids can and should learn from our mistakes and helping them to start saving now could give them a nest egg or millions instead of thousands.

Here's some advice:

- **Start at 16** – Just \$5,000 contributed to a Roth IRA each year for five years starting at age 16 could be worth more than a million by the time they reach age 65. In a Roth IRA all that growth would be tax-free when withdrawn.
- **10 Percent Rule** – Everyone should save a minimum of 10 percent of their take home pay.
- **Shelter Early** – Ideally, you should save in a Roth IRA account at the beginning of your career. When you reach your peak earnings (usually around age 40), switch to a tax-deferred account like a 401(k).
- **Fun or Fund?** – Take half of what you have been spending on gifts (toys, games, etc.) and invest it in a mutual fund for your child.
- **Birthday Booster** – Encourage friends and relatives to contribute to the mutual fund account you've started instead of buying gifts for birthdays and holidays.
- **Every Little Bit Helps** – Contributing small amounts on a regular basis is a better strategy than waiting to accumulate a larger sum. Get in the habit of saving something regularly.
- **Use the Refund** – Let the government help. Currently the child tax credit is \$1,000 per child until they reach age 17.

Discipline yourself to save the credit when it is returned to you as a refund.

It doesn't take a lot to give your kids long term security. The magic of compounded interest can do more of the heavy lifting as long as you start early and contribute often.

Rick Rodgers is a certified financial planner, chartered retirement planner counselor, certified retirement counselor, and member of the National Association of Personal Financial Advisers.

Shriner Hospital for Children gives thanks

To the community,

Again, many thanks to all of our Shriners Hospital for Children Northern California Sacramento screening clinic volunteers. What a warm glow it brought to my heart to see all of you using the bulk of your day volunteering for the children of the South Lake Tahoe area.

We saw 27 children (June 4) and referred 19 to Shriners Hospital for Children for further evaluation and potential treatment at no cost to the families.

Some of the children, as you may have noticed, were desperately in need of our services.

Many thanks to Steve Larson, M.D. and Kyle Swanson, M.D. Special thanks and appreciation in addition to the two physicians to the following: Lake Tahoe Unified School nurse Mary Burns; Angie Keil from the Lake Tahoe Unified School

District; Becky Fortier from South Tahoe Middle School; South Tahoe High School teacher Tim Wright and Kriszti Kotka from El Dorado County Public Health Department for their interpreting, without whose assistance we would not have succeeded.

Also David Barnekoff for his assistance in putting this event together and these three people who may have been the busiest of all: Marlene Sorsabal at the reception/greeting desk, my wife, Barbara, who was the coordinator and Fred Sorsabal at the exit desk.

It was also nice to have Potentate Mike Grottkau visit with us. Please forgive me if I left out special recognition to anyone, but you are all special and God Bless.

Michael Day, chairman El Dorado County Shrine Club Screening Clinic for Shriners Hospital for Children Northern California Sacramento

Opinion: Plan to improve South Tahoe's roads

By Tony O'Rourke

As the city sets its sights on improving the roads of South Lake Tahoe, it's a good time to reflect on the overall condition of the streets and how the Road to Tahoe ever got paved in the first place.

- The city's current roadway network is comprised of over 256 lane miles of roadway.
- Prior to 1960–1965, "rural road standards" existed throughout the community. In 1965 when the city incorporated

it inherited the roadway network from the county.



Tony O'Rourke

- The “typical” roadway structure on these rural roadways has been a minimal two inches of asphalt over existing compacted dirt. In most cases, no drainage infrastructure nor curb or gutter was installed. By comparison, today’s standard residential roadways are 4 inches of asphalt over 8 inches of compacted Class II aggregate base material.
- Making the old roadway conditions even worse, the asphalt mixture used to create these roads included an oil-based binding material resulting in strong, but inflexible roads causing large thermal cracking throughout the network.
- In 1995, the city began investing approximately \$546,903 per year for roadway rehabilitation and overlay – for a total of \$7,109,749 expended, excluding years 2000, 2004 and 2005.
- In 2007, the city created a pavement management system to more accurately evaluate and prioritize road maintenance. Prior to the new system, windshield surveys were used to visually observe the road conditions and repairs were scheduled based on appearance. Using the new system, the city inspected every roadway and assigned a score based on the amount of pavement distress per segment. The higher the score, the better the road condition. The average score on a scale of 1 to 100 is an overall 50 or an F grade.
- The city recently evaluated the cost to convert and improve all roadways from rural conditions to “complete streets,”

which includes curb, gutter, sidewalk, landscaping and lighting at cost of approximately \$300 million.

- For the first time in the city's history, the City Council adopted a Strategic Plan and five-year financial plan which places roadway rehabilitation as a high priority and for the first time the city is allocating a substantial amount of funds to roads. The city will be expending approximately \$4 million annually or \$20 million over the next five years for roadway improvements. This figure is eight times the amount spent on any previous year in the city's history.

The roads to Tahoe will finally begin to look and wear better than ever.

Tony O'Rourke is city manager of South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Replacing the food pyramid a good start

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the June 7, 2011, Los Angeles Times.*

No matter which food group was at the top and which at the bottom, the venerable food pyramid never did make much sense. How big were the servings supposed to be? And what were all those rainbow-colored stripes? The pyramid also lost a lot of respect over the years when the public realized that its recommendations – whether to fill up on meat, dairy or mountains of grains – were based in part on which segments of the agricultural industry wielded the most clout.

The new icon and recommendations released last week by the

U.S. Department of Agriculture are a lot healthier and are a more helpful contribution to public well-being. MyPlate is a large circle representing a dinner dish, divided to show that fruits and vegetables should make up half the food consumed, with protein and grains sharing the other half. A small blue circle representing low-fat or nonfat dairy rests to the side. There is no place on this plate for junk food.

The simple “plate” makes it easy for people to see what a meal should look like in terms of nutrition – and there are few plates of food served up in the country right now that resemble it. More common: a hunk of meat as the centerpiece, accompanied by a heaping helping of pasta or bread – usually from refined grains. Vegetables are an afterthought, more a colorful decoration in the corner than a significant part of the meal.

Read the whole story

Opinion: SB271 an opportunity to open dialogue between states

By Joanne Marchetta

In the final hours of the 2011 Nevada state legislative session, the bill known as SB271 passed, bringing with it opportunities for the two states that bound Lake Tahoe to reinvigorate the spirit of compromise that created the Tahoe Regional Planning Compact more than 40 years ago. The bi-state consensus that brought about that original agreement was no doubt hard-fought, and when Lake Tahoe’s future is in the

balance, the spirit of compromise has succeeded in bringing the two states together in a significant way.

SB271 is the latest signal sounding that Lake Tahoe's future is currently in the balance. Discussing bi-state consensus is again in order, but the pressing issues are different. Forty years ago, the problems were rampant growth and a lack of environmental controls on new development. Change was needed. Today, Lake Tahoe faces an outmoded economic base, aging infrastructure, and the need for a stormwater control program to restore lake clarity that could cost up to \$1.5 billion over the next 20 years.



Joanne
Marchetta

Throughout the proceedings on SB271, the Nevada legislators and stakeholders who worked on this bill showed clearly that they want to protect Lake Tahoe. But they also want TRPA to again be the solution, not the roadblock, to needed changes at Lake Tahoe. And rather than look at this legislation as a negative for the lake, the better view is for the community to see the encouraging possibilities for reasonable reforms it opens up for us.

The hearings gave us an opportunity to show many that TRPA had already set a new course within the agency with its strategic plan. Since last year, we have been changing and improving our operations to meet more regional challenges and to reposition the agency as an environmental innovator and partnership builder. We were able to educate them on how we are honing the

focus of the Regional Plan Update on water quality gains and the need for environmental redevelopment of Lake Tahoe's commercial centers. The feedback we received on the agency's new direction was positive and our commitment to changing the way we do business received broad support from legislators, state agency representatives and members of the public. Regardless, concerns lingered about provisions in our bi-state Compact.

SB271 brought these frustrations to the fore in Nevada and they can be seen clearly in the final text of the bill. The law calls for amendments to the Compact regarding our board's voting rules, consideration of changing economic conditions in our regional planning, and placing the legal burden of proof that an action violates the Compact on the challenger.

When one considers the hurdles it takes to amend the Lake Tahoe Regional Planning Compact, the significance of Lake Tahoe as a natural resource is evident. Amending the Compact to reflect the provisions in Nevada's SB271 would require a vote of both houses of the California Legislature, as well as ratification by the U.S. Congress and signatures from the governor of California and the president of the United States.

But keep in mind that the Compact was successfully amended once before. The Compact under which TRPA operates today was amended in this way in 1980 to require the adoption of Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities and to add broader state representation to the TRPA Governing Board. What ushered those amendments through the process was the possibility for more radical outcomes. Ultimately, statesmanship and a spirit of compromise that focused on what the two states had in common rather than their differences prevailed. What they had in common was the continued health of a natural resource that is invaluable to both states and the nation. The same holds true today.

It's important to note the final Nevada bill does not pull the

state out of the Tahoe Compact and sets 2015 as a date for changes to be implemented with a possible extension to 2017 if the state proclaims that progress is being made. While nothing immediately changes on the ground as a result of this bill, TRPA remains committed to its mission to protect the spectacular environment of the Tahoe region and to implement the policy direction of the two states.

We've made considerable strides in our 40-plus-year history – we didn't allow Lake Tahoe to become a city the size of San Francisco. We worked with agency partners to conserve thousands of sensitive parcels in the Lake Tahoe Basin. And, we've arrested the slide in the lake's extraordinary clarity. These accomplishments would have been impossible working in a vacuum and continued partnerships are crucial to attacking the Basin's challenges. If Gov. (Brian) Sandoval signs SB271, we're hopeful the Nevada legislation will kick start a revitalized dialogue between California and Nevada about the direction of Lake Tahoe so TRPA can continue making the positive difference needed for the lake and our communities in the 21st century.

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

Opinion: Sandoval was correct to adjust to 'new reality'

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the June 7, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.*

Gov. Brian Sandoval got it exactly right when he explained his reversal on a handful of tax increases that were due to sunset

next month: “I felt that I had to deal with a new reality.”

“I know that some people perceive that as I broke my promise,” the governor told the Associated Press’ Sandra Chereb on Friday. “I think that’s an oversimplification of what I had to deal with.”

The possibility of “a new reality” is precisely why a candidate for public office shouldn’t make the kind of promise that Sandoval and others, including those lawmakers who also found themselves backtracking in recent days, made during the campaign on taxes.

Sandoval pledged during the campaign that there would be no new taxes, no tax or fee increases and no extension of some tax increases approved at a 2010 special session of the Legislature to help the state weather a fiscal emergency.

That fiscal emergency continues today, and even Sandoval and his staff understood that the resulting budget would be devastating to the state. That’s why they resorted to the budget gimmicks – taking money from school district construction reserves, for instance, or taking 9 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation from the counties – that caused so much trouble when the Nevada Supreme Court said that the state couldn’t help itself to other government agencies’ money.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Partnerships may backfire for South Tahoe

To the community,

Now that redevelopment, except for the gigantic debt, is dead, the city has a new mantra, partnership. It is routine for the word to pass from the lips of the city manager, Mr. (Tony) O'Rourke.

He supports giving \$250,000 to the school district. Why? Will there be a contract between the parties?



Bill Crawford

And he supports exporting a large number of TAUs out of the city to a hotel project at Edgewood. In exchange for the TAUs, Edgewood promises to build a park playground on 1 acre in the city. Again, is there a contract between the parties? When will the park be built? What are the specs for the park? What about parking?

The export of TAUs to Nevada could have serious blow back for the city down the road. Perhaps a project in the city would need the TAUs. And it is a question mark how building an upscale hotel at Edgewood will influence what will be done with the convention center site, and what affect on the city's TOT revenue.

Also we've heard all the rhetoric before. Such as a world-class destination will bring the rich to town. Hence, the city will reap millions in sales taxes, etc. That is nonsense, pure bunkum. The hotel will be in Nevada and if it truly is world class, it will house fine shops, cafes and so on. It will be self-contained. The proposal is a transparent political deal. It is not a business partnership. As such, it is "business" as usual. Nothing new, nothing new. The city has been a push over

time and time again.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe