

Opinion: What works to stop bullying

By Steve Johnson

We've had a year of polarized debate about bullying. On one side we have those who believe the bullying that resulted in the suicide of Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi is a form of anti-gay discrimination and that those who disagree are homophobes. On the other side are those who are convinced that liberals and gay rights groups are advancing some kind of "homosexual agenda" under the guise of an anti-bullying curriculum.

One thing is clear: We're not going to stop bullying in our schools until we stop bullying each other over how to address the problem. Let's make a New Year's pledge to talk about bullying the way we'd like to see our kids talk to each other. Let's focus on proven strategies that can accomplish what all people of goodwill want: an end to the harassment of vulnerable children.

Here's what we know works to reduce bullying in schools:

- Educating, not just punishing, the perpetrators
- Training bystanders to be allies of the victim
- Not allowing the isolation or taunting of any child for any reason.

Steve Johnson, a former teacher and principal, is director of character education at Santa Clara University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. He is the creator of the Character-Based Literacy Curriculum, which is widely used in California counties.

Read the whole story

Opinion: California at pivotal point regarding water

By Ken Salazar and David J. Hayes

California's water hub – the San Francisco Bay-Delta – can no longer do it all. Years of drought, worsening water pollution, rising water demands and the disappearance of wildlife and habitat have left the Bay-Delta in a state of environmental collapse. As a result, a multibillion-dollar agricultural economy, coastal fishing fleets and the 25 million Californians who rely on the Delta for clean drinking water are at severe risk.

This is the deciding moment for California's water future. We can either complete the much-needed long-term California Bay-Delta Conservation Plan on which the Obama administration, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, water users and other partners have made significant progress, or fall back into an endless cycle of conflict, litigation and paralysis.

While the conservation plan is still a work in progress, its essential elements are simple.

First, scientists and policymakers alike have concluded that California's economic and environmental health can no longer tolerate exclusive reliance on a 50-year-old system of pumping water directly through the Delta – a system that reverses river flows, causes direct harm to fisheries, leads to unreliable water supplies and leaves many Californians at risk of losing clean water supplies if there were an earthquake.

Therefore, rather than simply pumping water from north to south through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, there is an

emerging consensus that we should reduce pressure on the system by also moving water around the Delta through a water conveyance system, such as a canal or a tunnel.

Ken Salazar is the secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior. David J. Hayes is the deputy secretary of the Department of the Interior.

Read the whole story

The greatest gifts can't always be wrapped

Publisher's note: *This originally appeared in the December 2010 issue of Ski magazine.*

By Edie Thys Morgan

We have developed a tradition in our house at Christmas. Every year the kids ask for a Wii, and every year they don't get one. This is not because we are the meanest parents in the world (though on some days we'd easily get two votes). This is because my husband and I share a theory about presents, and it is this: We believe the greatest gifts have two things in common: First, they are much needed (need being a relative term here); And second, they inspire us to get outside, rather than stay inside.

Because of our family's shared obsession with skiing, this theory holds particularly true for Christmas presents. What's not to love about comfy boots, flashy new skis, a stylin' warm coat or your very first racing suit—all things that have been under the tree at some point. Inevitably, Christmas Day comes

and goes with no disappointment other than the fact that it's over. I will say though, that it would be much more convenient if Christmas was on, say, Thanksgiving, when the ski season officially starts. It would be kinder too.

The year my oldest son graduated from hand-me-down and ski swap ski boots he was overjoyed and even somewhat surprised to discover the exact pair of bright blue Lange's he had tried on a month earlier—the ones he had fantasized about every time since when he'd crammed his feet into too-small boots. I felt a little bad about the pain, but he got over it. Likewise, it killed me to see my youngest son start his season like every other, in his brother's outgrown battered helmet, and look longingly at the kids with pristine new helmets. But when he unwrapped his first very own helmet, a glittering blue and silver masterpiece with matching goggles, the suffering was forgotten. His suffering, that is.

Read the whole story

Winter activity warnings

To the community,

Before venturing out onto the ice this winter, stop to consider whether it will support your weight.



If there's any doubt, you should keep your pets, children, and yourself away from the ice.

We would also advise everyone involved in heavy snow shoveling activities to take regular breaks and drink plenty of fluids. Watch out for signs of frostbite and hypothermia and avoid any alcohol consumption when engaging in outdoor activities.

We at the city of South Lake Tahoe Fire Department want you to have a fun and safe winter season.

Sallie Ross-Filgo, SLTFD

Opinion: SLT's cultivation ordinance would put lives at risk

By Steve Kubby

It's the holiday season, our mountains are filled with a record snowpack and local businesses are prospering. Life is good, unless you happen to be a patient who depends upon medical marijuana for relief. For this group, the actions of the South Lake Tahoe City Council are a direct threat to their safety and very lives, all because of the misguided attempt by the City Council to fix something that isn't broken.

What new medical marijuana cultivation ordinance can we expect from the South Lake Tahoe City Council in 2011? So far, we've seen proposed ordinances that demand fees and inspections of patient gardens, without offering any meaningful protection in return. The city also wants to demand building permits for anyone who grows cannabis at home, creating a public record for thieves and drug agents to use to locate and invade the homes of bona fide medical marijuana patients.

Even if you are already carefully following every confusing detail of the laws regarding medical marijuana, drug agents have their own interpretations of the law which they believe allows them to ignore the Constitution and enter homes or vehicles, without a warrant or any probable cause other than the alleged odor of marijuana. Too bad that the City Council is about to force patients to violate their own rights and place themselves in the crosshairs of a deadly drug raid.

Leading the fight against sick people is Councilmember Bruce Grego, who has been accused by a grand jury of illegally obtaining and retaining nearly a thousand dollars of city funds. So if the city continues to press for marijuana regulations, while ignoring the findings of the Grand Jury, the very legitimacy of the Council to pass any ordinance will be called into question and brought before the courts.

Whatever the council attempts to pass in the way of marijuana ordinances, it will be dead on arrival if it violates the privacy of patients. That's because the Supreme Court has ruled unanimously that laws cannot be used to force marijuana users into incriminating themselves.

In *Leary v. United States*, (1969), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled upon the constitutionality of the Marijuana Tax Act. Dr. Timothy Leary, a professor and activist, was arrested for the possession of marijuana in violation of the Marijuana Tax Act. Dr. Leary challenged the act on the ground that the act required self-incrimination, which violated the Fifth Amendment. The unanimous opinion of the court was penned by Justice John Marshall Harlan II and declared the Marijuana Tax Act unconstitutional:

"Compliance with the transfer tax provisions would have required petitioner unmistakably to identify himself as a member of [a]... 'selective' and 'suspect' group, we can only decide that when read according to their terms these provisions created a 'real and appreciable' hazard of

incrimination.”

Even requiring patients to disclose their activity to landlords creates a hazard of incrimination and thereby violates their Fifth Amendment rights. If property owners don't want marijuana grown in their homes, they can say so on their leases and evict anyone who violates those terms.

Most legal medical marijuana patients want to comply with the law, but if any law or local ordinance requires disclosures of any kind, it is not constitutional and will not be tolerated. Although California offers a photo ID to patients, those cards have only a photo and a code number which allows law enforcement to determine if the card is valid. No personal information is allowed.

The consequences for anyone who is viewed by law enforcement as a member of a “selective” and “suspect” group associated with cannabis can be as severe as a terrorist attack by Al-Qaeda. That's because drug agents are notorious for kicking down doors, detonating stun grenades, terrorizing occupants, and shooting family dogs, even if the dog shows no aggressive behavior or is actually fleeing. Just ask Cheye Calvo, the mayor of Berwyn Heights, Maryland, about how SWAT team members burst into his home without knocking, terrorized his family and shot his two dogs to death, as the dogs attempted to flee, all because a pound of marijuana was accidentally delivered to his home a few minutes earlier.

It's been just over a decade since my own family was surveilled during the Christmas holidays and then raided by 20 heavily armed agents. I pointed out to the invading deputies that I was only exercising rights that had been granted by the voters in the passage of Prop. 215, an initiative I helped to write and pass. I was told that California's new medical marijuana law “might be fine for those faggots in San Francisco, but it didn't fly in Placer County.” They seized everything, even Christmas presents to our daughter.

My wife and I were then jailed and charged with 19 felonies, over something that was ultimately dismissed. To his credit, Placer County Sheriff Ed Bonner apologized to me and promised his department would respect the new law. Unfortunately, the physical and emotional scars of that holiday raid still haunts my family, especially this time of year when our family should be able to enjoy all that life has to offer.

This holiday that brings so much joy and happiness to the world, isn't quite so rosy when you consider the terrifying threat of any contact with a federal drug agent. Under current federal law, simply growing a small tray of 100 seedlings or clones could force a medical marijuana patient to face a 10 year mandatory minimum in sentencing. Furthermore, as was the case for El Dorado County's own long-time resident, Dr. Marion Fry and her husband Dale, the feds can add up how many plants one grows over several years and if that number exceeds 100, prosecutors can demand and get a 10 year mandatory minimum sentence.

Instead of further endangering sick people, the City Council should be crafting a cultivation ordinance that provides meaningful protection to patients from violent crimes by drug agents conducting a drug raid who shoot the family dog or discharge a weapon when children are present. In fact, the city should demand that no marijuana raid can be conducted by any drug agents, unless a real victim – who is not an agent or paid informant – actually files a real police report and an investigation shows actual violations of state law taking place.

For those who might think anything written here is any sort of exaggeration, I dare you to watch this video of a drug raid showing agents shooting the family dog with a seven-year-old boy present – even though no drugs were ever found. This is exactly the kind of violent, dangerous, state-sponsored terrorism that the current proposed cultivation ordinance would unleash upon our otherwise peaceful and law-abiding

community.

Steve Kubby is a South Lake Tahoe resident who has been active in legalized medical marijuana in California.

Opinion: Gaming's view of other frontiers still evolving

By Jon Ralston, Las Vegas Sun

What's missed in the hyperventilating over whether Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is making a grand payback or bowing before Caesar in his Internet poker push – hello, Occam's Razor – is how both the senator and the gamers, coincidentally, have evolved on the issue.

And how this change is so like other changes, especially for Nevada gamers who for years have fluttered about like a gaggle of Chicken Littles until they saw a lot of money to be made. For those of us who have watched this for decades, it's a striking case of déjà vu that shows just how the political elite bend to the whims of the gaming doyens and raises the age-old question: Is what's good for the big casinos always good for Nevada?

A quick review of history:

1970s – New Jersey legalizes gaming. Nevada casinos say it will kill the state. State lives. Gamers invest in New Jersey.

1980s – Domestic, foreign gaming catches on. Nevada casinos say it will kill the state. State lives. Gamers invest in

other jurisdictions.

1990s – Indian gaming begins to spread. Nevada casinos say it will kill the state. State lives. Gamers invest in tribal gaming.

2000s – Chatter about new frontier of Internet gaming grows. Nevada casinos say it will kill the state. State lives. Gamers push the Strip Dream Act, authored by Reid.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Cooley should be elected to state Senate

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Dec. 20, 2010, Sacramento Bee.*

Voters in the Senate district that stretches from Fair Oaks and Roseville to Lake Tahoe and Susanville have unfinished business, selecting a replacement for the late Sen. Dave Cox of Fair Oaks.

The choice on Jan. 4 is between Assemblyman Ted Gaines, the Roseville Republican, and Rancho Cordova Mayor Ken Cooley, the Democrat.

Gaines is the clear front-runner in the heavily Republican district. But Cooley would be a worthy and appropriate replacement for Cox, a politician who had served his district well by understanding the wisdom of compromise.

Gaines is a decent man, but has few accomplishments as an assemblyman. As a backbench senator, he would have little

clout.

Because he says he would not vote for a budget that earmarks money for family planning clinics that provide abortion services for poor women, Gaines never would vote for a California state budget. That alone guarantees he will never be a significant player on behalf of the residents of Senate District 1.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Education key to Nevada's diversification

By Buck Wargo, Las Vegas Sun

The people who champion low state taxes as a way to recruit businesses to Nevada are undermining the state's future by not advocating what businesses really need for success: better schools.

That is the conclusion reached by 40 community leaders who examined the role of education in diversifying Nevada's economy.

If low tax rates were the key to attracting businesses, Silicon Valley-style economic clusters would be sprouting in Nevada rather than in Northern California, Seattle, Boston or North Carolina's Research Triangle, the group said.

"Touting ourselves as a low tax state as the only reason people want to come here has proved to be a failure," said John Restrepo, principal of Restrepo Consulting Group and a member of the study group. "If low taxes were all we needed,

and we have been touting that, we wouldn't have a 15 percent unemployment rate."

The group's report, "Nevada: 50th in the Nation for Education," emanated from a round-table discussion among representatives of banking, architecture, law enforcement, education, real estate and government.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Importance of reading to children

To the community,

Reading aloud is one of the most important things we can do to help young children eventually learn to read. Together with community partners, First 5 El Dorado promotes early literacy through reading programs that develop both pre-literacy skills and children's love for books. These programs have been extremely successful, and have grown to meet community needs. Between September 2009 and May 2010:

- * The Ready to Read @ Your Library Project provided early literacy services to approximately 4,400 children newborn-5 years of age and their parents, teachers and care providers through library storytimes and outreach visits to preschool and childcare sites throughout the county. Storytimes were offered in English and Spanish.

- * Storytimes for young children were provided at the main library in Placerville; Cameron Park, El Dorado Hills, Georgetown, Pollock Pines and South Lake Tahoe branch

libraries; and at Northside School in Cool.

* Library staff visited 127 preschool sites where children listened to stories and each month preschools received a free book or puppet to support ongoing literacy activities.

The reach of storytime extends beyond the library walls. In 2009-10:

* 75 percent of parents who answered the First 5 El Dorado Parent Survey reported reading to their children every day. Families that attended Ready to Read programs at the library were even more likely to read to their children, with 85 percent of this group reporting that they read to their children each day.

Together our community can help ensure that all children have the foundations for reading. This issue is dedicated to information and resources on early literacy.

Sincerely,

Rick Alford, First 5 El Dorado

Opinion: Clearing trees along rivers is not the answer

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Dec. 12, 2010, Fresno Bee.*

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is expected to soon decide whether to enact a draconian policy of tree cutting along river levees nationwide. The policy is a misdirected reaction to the Hurricane Katrina flooding of New Orleans, which

exposed federal government to unprecedented liability.

Seventeen members of the California congressional delegation urged the Corps to reconsider this levee vegetation policy, for both economic and environmental reasons.

Trees in the wrong place undoubtedly pose a threat to levee integrity. Yet instead of taking a selective approach, the Corps following Katrina proposed a rigid ban on woody vegetation within 15 feet of levees and flood walls.

If enforced nationwide, flood districts could be forced to take chain saws to thousands of miles of riparian forest.

The Corps has a variance option, and recently granted one for 42 miles of levees in Natomas under repair by the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency. Yet SAFCA had to spend a large sum to obtain the variance and meet Corps directives relating to vegetation.

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