Opinion: Calif. overdue for a budget-busting recession

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

It’s the economy, stupid.



Dan Walters

The line, uttered by James Carville as he managed Bill Clinton’s successful 1992 campaign for the White House, still holds true, as this year’s presidential election proved anew.

Whatever we may hope for California in 2017, it all begins – or ends – with the state’s uniquely complex, notoriously volatile economy.

The technology-heavy San Francisco Bay Area has almost single-handedly lifted California’s economy and while other regions are better off than they were during the depths of the recession, their recoveries have been more sluggish.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Year of conquering negative thinking

By Lesley Alderman, New York Times

Here’s a New Year’s challenge for the mind: Make this the year that you quiet all those negative thoughts swirling around your brain.

All humans have a tendency to be a bit more like Eeyore than Tigger, to ruminate more on bad experiences than positive ones. It’s an evolutionary adaptation that helps us avoid danger and react quickly in a crisis.

But constant negativity can also get in the way of happiness, add to our stress and worry level and ultimately damage our health. And some people are more prone to negative thinking than others. Thinking styles can be genetic or the result of childhood experiences, said Judith Beck, a psychologist and the president of the Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Bala Cynwyd, Pa. Children may develop negative thinking habits if they have been teased or bullied, or experienced blatant trauma or abuse. Women, overall, are also more likely to ruminate than men, according to a 2013 study.

Read the whole story

Letter: Help at warm room appreciated

To the community,

Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless would like to thank Champion Floors to Go for their donation of carpet and floor runners to the South Lake Tahoe warm room. This donation helps keep our guests cozy and comfortable in our facility this winter. With recent extreme weather patterns in Tahoe, we are proud to offer overnight refuge from the elements to men and women who are experiencing homelessness.

TCH opened the South Lake Tahoe warm room for the winter 2016-17 season on Dec. 18 and served 56 different individuals in December, providing 455 shelter bed nights. The Warm Room plans to remain open through early April. In addition to warm beds and light food and beverages, TCH provides access to social workers and resource referrals to assist our neighbors without housing.

Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless is seeking volunteers and donations. We have one final training on Jan. 9 at 7pm at Unity at the Lake at 1195 Rufus Allen Blvd. Email Rachel@tahoehomeless.org for more information. We can be contacted at tahoewarmroom@gmail.com or 775.573.0822. Donations are welcomed to aid in funding. Checks can be made payable to Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless and mailed to PO Box 13514, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.

Sincerely,

Marissa Muscat, executive director

Opinion: Reality begins to

penetrate CalPERS

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

It’s very rare, but always welcome, when reality intrudes on political decision making.



Dan Walters

Thus, it’s noteworthy that overseers of the nation’s largest pension trust fund, the California Public Employees Retirement System (CalPERS), last month reduced – albeit reluctantly – its projection of future earnings by a half-percentage point.

With earnings on investments the last two years barely exceeding zero, CalPERS has been compelled to sell assets to make its pension payments, which far outstrip contributions from state and local governments and their employees.

Read the whole story

Letter: Schools appreciate SnowGlobe

To the community,

The South Tahoe High School and Whittell High School booster clubs participated in SnowGlobe this year by running the merchandising booths. The SnowGlobe staff was unbelievable, Chad Donnelly, Leah Chisholm, Lauren Winschester, Kaitlin (in accounting), Erin (credential) and Luke White.

The job was a little larger than described, but it was a great learning experience and fundraiser for both schools. We would like to thank the following people and businesses that helped us pull this endeavor off: LTVA, Thrans, Barton Foundation, Meeks Lumber, the Yochheim families, the Heidel family, Mr. Rippett, Mr. Jones, Ms. VanDoren, Ms. Reyes, Dylan and Quinn Kixmiller, the Sullivan family, Makena Snipes, Gaby Trachsel, Kody Dangtongdee, the Krolicki family, Aurora Gooch and many more.

Sorry if we didn’t list you. Our fearless, always smiling leader was Kate Krolicki. We couldn’t have done this event without you.

Thank you all. Looking forward to next year.

Kelly Krolicki, booster volunteer

Letter: Community makes warm room a success

To the community,

Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless (TCH) would like to thank Alpine Carpet One for their support. In December, TCH opened the South Lake Tahoe warm room for the winter 2016-17 season. Alpine Carpet One was a generous supporter not only of our

fall fundraiser but by donating carpet for our space. This donation helps keep our guests experiencing homelessness more comfortable in the warm room.

The warm room plans to remain open through early April. In addition to warm beds and light food and beverages, TCH provides access to social workers and resource referrals to assist our neighbors without housing with some of the challenges that they face.

Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless is seeking volunteers and donations. We have one final training on Jan. 9 at 7pm at Unity at the Lake at 1195 Rufus Allen Blvd. Email Rachel@tahoehomeless.org for more information. We can be contacted at tahoewarmroom@gmail.com or 775.573.0822.

Donations are welcomed to aid in funding. Checks can be made payable to Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless and mailed to PO Box 13514, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151 or **online**.

Sincerely,

Marissa Muscat, executive director

Opinion: Don’t wait – prepare for storms

By Tracy Franklin

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is forecasting a major atmospheric river to hit the region this weekend starting on Jan. 8 and continuing through Jan. 9 with widespread flooding expected.

NOAA is also forecasting another atmospheric river arriving in the region on Jan. 10t-11. NOAA is stating that this event could be similar or greater than the floods of 1997 and 2005 which greatly impacted South Lake Tahoe.

An atmospheric river is a conveyor belt of vapor that extends thousands of miles from out at sea, carrying as much water as 15 Mississippi Rivers. Each storm can dump inches of rain or feet of snow. NOAA is predicting 6-8 inches of rain falling in the Tahoe basin between Sunday and Monday; if these predictions hold, residents and visitors of South Lake Tahoe need to be prepared.

City public works and public safety crews are working around the clock between Friday and Monday to prepare for the storm. Friday and Saturday crews will be out clearing snow and storm drains. Residents need to prepare for the storm.

Today we encourage residents to get prepared by doing the following:

- Stay home. If you really don't have to go out, don't. Even if you can drive well in the snow, not everyone else can. Don't tempt fate: If you don't have somewhere you have to be, #StayHomeStaySafe.
- Get sand bags. Sand bags are available at the city yard at 1160 Rufus Allen Blvd. and also at fire station No. 3 at 2101 Lake Tahoe Blvd.
- Clear storm drains. There are 1,874 storm drains in the city. City crews will be out clearing to clear high priority drains in expected flood areas. Residents can also help by clearing any storm drains in front of their home. Use a shovel or pick to break ice and snow away from storm drains so that water can enter the drains.

- Prepare for utility outage. Gather flashlights and replace batteries. During the storm, Liberty Utility crews will work 24/7 to restore power where needed. To report a power outage, call 844.245.6868.
- Keep roofs cleared. Snow with high water content is heavy. When it's followed up by torrential rain, existing snow on your roof will become heavier. Spend Friday and Saturday clearing as much snow off your residential structures before the next storm arrives.
- Expect berms. Heavy snow is more difficult to plow and often results in berms in driveways and at street intersections.
- Stock up on supplies. People using oxygen tanks need to have battery back-up power on hand. Residents should store up on food, water, batteries, pet food. #StayHomeStaySafe
- Don't drive through water that is too deep. If flooding occurs, don't drive through it.
- Stay informed.
- Get the word out. Advise neighbors, friends and family of expected flooding and to plan and prepare.
- Emergency operations. In anticipation of flooding and severe weather, the city has already contacted American Red Cross and prepared its emergency operations teams to be on call and ready to open evacuation centers as needed. Stay up to date with emergency and weather information with the city's social media accounts, Twitter feed, Facebook, and **NewsFlash reports**.

During the 1997 and 2005 floods the following neighborhoods experienced flooding and we anticipate flooding to occur again during these storms:

- Lower Tahoe Keys
- State streets
- Mobile home parks at Third Street and Jean Avenue and

Woodbine
- Winnemucca and Highway 50
- Pioneer Trail and Blackbart at the meadow

Recreation center staff are currently working with the Red Cross to have emergency shelter established for residents displaced during the storm. The recreation swim complex is located at 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Tracy Franklin is the public information officer for South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Frugality a necessity in EDC

By Larry Weitzman

On Dec. 28, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors gave its residents a huge, new obligation of about $2.3 million annually.

EDC is borrowing about $57 million to pay for the building of new sheriff's facility on some land off of Missouri Flat Road in Placerville which was purchased about a year ago, at a cost of about $2.7 million for this specific purpose. There is little question that a new sheriff's facility is needed, but at what cost? Whether it would be $30 million or $60 million, there is no question of the need.



Larry Weitzman

What appears to be the problem is how are we going to pay for it? There is no question that this is a very low cost loan deal at a 2.38 APR with a 40-year amortization term when compared to current home loan interest rates which have "ballooned" to 4.5 percent recently. If this deal, which was approved at this BOS meeting by a 5-0 vote, had gone into next year, the loan rate would have increased by a full percentage point. The BOS was advised at the meeting that this increase would cost EDC another $600,000 a year annually in interest and a total cost of $24 million over the life of the 40-year loan. Actually, because it is a fully amortized loan, while the first year might cost an additional $600,000, the last year it would be almost zero, so the total additional interest cost would be about $12 million.

The problem is how is EDC going to pay for this? The budget is already stretched to the limit if not already underwater. But with this new loan simultaneously also comes a new, even greater obligation foisted upon us by CalPERS, which is the administrator of EDC's retirement system.

With our $600 million plus retirement account came the bad, but more realistic move by CalPERS last month of lowering of the "discount" rate (from 7.5 to 7 percent) which is the projected rate of return of EDC's retirement fund. This is the result of at least two very bad years where the actual rate of return fell to 2 percent and then to 0.6 percent. Many experts think the discount rate should be reduced to at least 6.5 percent or even 6 percent. But the effect of the one-half percent lowering of the rate alone will equate to an

additional $3 million annual cost to EDC's annual expenditure starting in a couple of years. This is on top of the $2.3 million created by the new EDC long term obligation, but CalPERS additional funding spending was already going to increase by a total of $61 million over the next six years which now becomes more like $75 million of additional spending over the next six years. Up until now, EDC had no long-term debt. Now it will have an additional annual expenditure of over $5 million.

But wait, there is more significant future obligations coming due. First are the long-term county obligations of funding the health care costs of county retirees. Nothing has been set aside for these known costs and the unfunded liability is estimated to be approaching $63 million, a bill that is coming due and which is unplanned for.

Also, unaccounted for are the fiscally failing rural fire districts. While El Dorado Hills Fire is sitting in fat city and flush with money, mostly because of their initially generous Assembly Bill 8 rate, the rest of the 10 or so districts are in dire straits (no offense to the rock group of the same name who sang "Money for nothing"). El Dorado County Fire is sustaining itself via cutbacks, but the other small, rural districts have bleak futures without EDC involvement. Where will those millions of dollars come from?

More unplanned for expenditures are deferred EDC maintenance of its facilities. And then there is road maintenance of EDC's over 1,000 miles of county maintained roads. In the past, this obligation has been funded by General Fund money of $1 million to $3 million a year, but with a BOS edict recommended by prior CAO Larry Combs, General Fund road maintenance was suspended by the BOS. While it has been reinstated, it was done so in name only by the current BOS as their plan is to take $2 million from the MC & FP which will be difficult at best as described in a prior column. Combs also said in the recruitment bulletin for the new CAO that EDC was in strong

financial condition and that the F/Y 2015-16 budget was structurally balanced. That's what you get when you hire a carpetbagger who has no interest in our county and a CAO (Combs) that the BOS doesn't vet.

All of these fiscal problems, issues and more were laid out in a four-page letter dated Dec. 28, 2016, and made part of the hearing's public record to the BOS from the county watchdog and head accountant, Joe Harn. It can be seen and read on the Legistar for the meeting.

BOS members said the usual platitudes about taking on this new EDC obligation, Supervisor Brian Veerkamp saying, "We will be up against the wall in other areas;" "Kick the can down the road Ranalli" did kick the can by saying "Harder decisions will have to be made in the future." Maybe Supervisor Michael Ranalli should be trying out as a punter for the 49er's (no offense meant regarding their already dismal season). Supervisor Sue Novasel made the brilliant remark, "The way we can grow is by growing the revenue." No suggestions were made of cutting the red tape for business, however. The BOS's true fiscal conservative, Shiva Frentzen, remarked that "…must watch every penny we will spend. I will be even more frugal." We will have to see what newly elected Supervisor John Hidahl will do.

Newly minted CAO Don Ashton perhaps summarized the situation best when he said we all know we need a new sheriff's facility, but "this loan … will make things difficult … and some will be painful decisions. We are paying for prior decisions, it's a situation we all inherited because of (a prior) failure to plan and save money."

While CAO Ashton is saddled with the here and now, it was the BOS' failure to direct prior administrative staff for more austerity. They had plenty of warning not only from my columns over the past three years, but from the Auditor-Controller who continually said for at least the past three and a half years

that there was going to be a painful, fiscal train wreck. Three and a half years ago, EDC ended the fiscal year with a $54 million cash balance, almost the exact amount of this new loan.

Ashton knows what to do; spending must be cut. The BOS should direct the CAO to do what is necessary to make EDC fiscally sound with the least detrimental effect on EDC residents. It can be done as in the city of South Lake Tahoe recently. Residents should feel no pain because of the BOS' bad prior decisions.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Letter: Plow drivers need to do better

To the community,

My wife and I have been residents in Tahoma since 2001. For the last several years the snow removal/plow has done a questionable job of clearing our street. They do a fine job of either plowing us in or plowing us out of our driveway.

The plows have a drop gate that prevents snow build up in the opening to our drive. It is a simple technique that does not seem to be used. I personally went down to the yard where the plows are stored and spoke to several gentleman to discuss my concerns. I was told that they "always" drop the gate. Well I can tell you that every time it snows, I need to get my snow plow out and remove up to 4 feet of snow. (Tuesday) after the plow went down the street, I checked to see if the gate had been dropped. No way!

I had to get my plow out and clear my drive opening. And if we have been out of town and return, we need to park in the street and plow away the “wall of snow” before I can enter my drive. If this happens at 12 midnight, it leaves a bad taste.

These employees are paid from our tax dollars and it seems that they would try to do everything to make the homeowners appreciate them rather than resent them. It is part of their job duties and responsibilities.

John High, Tahoma

Opinion: Fed land transfer key to Calif. secession

By Robert H. Nelson, High Country News

Many Californians woke up the night after the presidential election thinking that they were living in a different country. A few felt so alienated that they publicly raised the possibility of seceding from the United States.

There is no constitutional way, however, to do this. But there is a less radical step that would amount to a limited secession and would require only an act of Congress. Forty-five percent of the land in California is administered by the federal government — including 20 percent of the state in national forests and 15 percent under the Bureau of Land Management. Rather than outright secession, California could try to assert full state sovereignty over all this land.

Until Nov. 8, California wouldn’t have cared about this, but with the prospect of a Donald Trump administration soon

managing almost half the land in the state, Californians may want to rethink their traditional stance. Otherwise, they are likely to face more oil and gas drilling, increased timber harvesting and intensive recreational use and development on federal land in the state.

Read the whole story