Letter: Traffic chaos must be addressed

To the community,

We live on Clear View Drive near Sawmill Pond. We've lived here for 40 years and have never seen a traffic jam like the one that occurred Jan. 2. GPS has led visitors to scramble onto any road that heads in the direction of Highway 50. Dave tried to go into town yesterday, got as far as Sawmill and realized that he could get to town, but wouldn't be able to get back home in any reasonable fashion. It took him 45 minutes to get from Sawmill back to Clear View – about one-half mile. He actually wound up driving in reverse in the eastbound lane from Tahoe Mountain to our street.

View Circle, which is frequently used as a short cut, was at a standstill causing folks to start streaming down Clear View only to meet the standstill on View. This after careening to a stop for the sharp right turn at the bottom of our street. It was a traffic mess of epic proportions. Tow trucks also coursed down our street trying to get to the spin outs on Upper Truckee.

Tourists are not prepared for the icy hills on Upper Truckee and spin out. Some people simply ran out of gas while trapped in the traffic. Our neighbor's daughter started out in the morning to drive out to 50 and never got there. After hours of sitting in the back up, the dog needed to get out and the snacks for the kids were gone so she gave up and came back to the house.

As **Moya Saunders' letter** pointed out, people using Upper Truckee circumvent chain control only to cause backups when they do decide to chain up or endanger other drivers if they don't. Locals who once were able to get into town in heavy

tourist traffic can no longer really do it. This impairs access for emergency vehicles and endangers locals as tourists speed through neighborhoods searching for a way to Highway 50.

I'm not sure what can be done about this. Would signage at the Y or at Sawmill get people off the icy hills, out of the neighborhoods and into proper chain control monitoring? I think Upper Truckee is a crucial route for locals to use during busy weekends. If 50, Pioneer and Upper Truckee are all impacted in this fashion, what will the eventual fallout be? There are the obvious dangers of tourists speeding down icy streets they are unfamiliar with … no kids played in the snow yesterday in our neighborhood. God help you if you need a fire truck or ambulance or a head of lettuce. I know this occurs in many other places. GPS can be wonderful, but it can also create the situation we witnessed yesterday.

It really makes us contemplate the increased traffic that will be generated by projects proposed in the basin and adjacent to it. The concept of carrying capacity is illustrated vividly by the situation that we saw yesterday.

Carla Ennis, Meyers

Letter: Frustrated with traffic in neighborhoods

Publisher's note: ***Moya Sanders, who lives in the unincorporated area of El Dorado County in the basin, asked for the following exchange to be published.***

To Whom It May Concern,

I live on North Upper Truckee Road leading from South Lake Tahoe to Highway 50 going south toward Placerville. The chain control on Highway 50 at the south end of Meyers is being bypassed by the cars going this way. The traffic enters Highway 50 above the chain control area going up Echo Summit when it exits North Upper Truckee Road at the south end. This is a problem on North Upper Truckee Road because none of the side streets is plowed, so traffic stops in the middle of the road to chain up, causing accidents and backing up traffic.

Also there must be some liability to Caltrans or the city, if a car crashes on Echo Summit or can't move up the hill because they have no chains on even when they are required. There are no signs at the South Lake Tahoe city end of this road by the Y or by the only turn to put you back on Highway 50 at Sawmill Road. Not even a sign stating that there is no chain up areas on this road, or that the road is very windy and steep and dangerous covered in snow.

Response:

Thank you for your email. I have cc'd our county roads department. This is a serious problem that has no easy answer. The biggest problems are the new apps on cell phones and cars that tell drivers about our backroad access areas. In response to the issue, I convened a meeting last winter of all agencies including CHP, county roads department and sheriff, city of SLTPD, Lake Valley FD, the Tahoe Chamber and LTVA. We looked at several possible solutions, but could not come up with a completely adequate answer to this problem.

CHP stated that they would step up patrols for chain control – they are the only agency allowed to put up controls on any roads – when they had available manpower. Since the roads are public, our sheriff can not close roads to only locals or create roadblocks.

LTVA and the chamber have tried to help by asking lodging

properties to stagger check-out times and promote extra nights during busy holiday travel.

The app manufacturers have been asked to change/delete/add warnings in their apps to alert drivers, but no one has received a response from this group to my knowledge.

I have asked and continue to seek any and all suggestions and would be happy to pass on anything that might help. We will continue to work on this problem.

Thank you again for your email,
Sincerely,
Sue Novasel, EDC supervisor District V

Letter: MontBleu assists Bread & Broth

To the community,

“Bread & Broth’s Monday meal event is always heartwarming and we are very happy to be able to participate in the Adopt a Day of Nourishment program,” commented Michelle Bergstrom, MontBleu’s director of administration.

As the adopt a day sponsor for the Dec. 19 dinner at St. Theresa Church, MontBleu donated $250 to provide the funds to cover the meal costs to provide over 100 meals served to the evening’s dinner guests.

MontBleu casino has been sponsoring two adopts a days annually for the past several years and Bread & Broth is very thankful for their generous and on-going relationship with our program. With the assistance of our sponsors and donors, B&B has been

feeding the hungry for over 27 years and their contributions ensure the program’s sustainability.

In addition to their financial donation, MontBleu casino’s human resources team members Bret Paulin and Mindy Bobadilla joined Bergstrom in helping the B&B volunteers at the dinner. The three MontBleu team members enthusiastically worked alongside the B&B volunteers making sure that the dinner guests enjoyed their meal and left with bags of food to help them through the week. Thank you to MontBleu and their team members for their concern for the hungry of our community.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Why poor Americans are so patriotic

By Francesco Duina

Why do the worst-off American citizens love their country so much?

Patriotism may be defined as a belief in the greatness, if not superiority, of one’s country relative to others. Depending on how one defines the term exactly, somewhere between 85 to 90 percent of America’s poor are “patriotic.” They would rather be citizens of their country, for instance, than of any other country on Earth, and they think America is a better place than most other places in the world.

This is striking for at least three reasons. First, those are very high figures in absolute terms. Secondly, the corresponding figures for working class, middle class, and

upper class Americans are generally lower. And, thirdly, the worst-off in most other advanced nations are also less patriotic than America's—even in countries where people receive better social benefits from their government, work fewer hours, and have better chances of upward intergenerational mobility than their counterparts in the United States.

Why are America's poor so patriotic? The short answer is: We don't know for sure. And we should, because so much depends on the patriotism of poor Americans. Their love of country contributes to social stability, informs and supports America's understanding of itself as a special place, and is essential for military recruitment. It is also a force that can be tapped into by politician's eager to rally a large contingent of voters.

To understand this patriotism, I spent parts of 2015 and 2016 in Alabama and Montana—two distinctly different states that are both "hotbeds" of patriotism among the poor. I hung out in Laundromats, bus stations, homeless shelters, public libraries, senior citizen centers, used-clothing stores, run-down neighborhoods, and other venues. And I interviewed 63 poor Americans of different ages, genders, religious and political orientations, races, and histories of military service.

I came away with three overarching insights.

First, many view the United States as the "last hope"—for themselves and the world. Their strong sense is that the country offers its people a sense of dignity, a closeness to God, and answers to most of humanity's problems. Deprive us of our country, the people I met told me, and you deprive us of the only thing that is left for us to hang on to.

This feeling of ownership is national and personal. Consider the words of Shirley (all names here are pseudonyms, per my

research rules), a 46-year-old unemployed black woman in Birmingham with plans to become a chef: “For me to give up hope on the country in which I live in is almost to give up hope for self. So I gotta keep the light burning for me and for my country or I’m gonna be in the dark.”

That comment connected to a second insight. America appeals to the poor because it is rich. “The land of milk and honey” was a phrase I heard often. The poor see it as a place where those who work hard have a chance to succeed. In my interviews, people separated the country’s possibilities from their own frustrations; many took full responsibility for their own troubles in life. “People make their own life, make their own money the way that they wanna make it and however much they wanna make it,” said Jeff, a white man in a bus station in Billings, Mont.

Many saw this as an American virtue. Here, at least, your failures belong to you. Your chances aren’t taken away by others. “If you fail,” said Harley, a vet now on food stamps, “gotta be bad choices.” This sentiment was articulated with particular frequency by African American interviewees in Alabama—something that particularly struck me, given the legacies of slavery and segregation in that part of the country.

For the same reason, many were confident that the future was about to bring them better things. Several felt that they had just turned a corner—perhaps with God on their side. Rich Americans, they told me, deserve what they have. Besides, they added, look at the rest of the world: They keep trying to come to America. This must be the place to be.

That related to a third source of pride in the nation: America is the freest country on earth. Many of the people I met spoke of feeling very free to come and go from different places, and to think as they wish. America allows people to be as they want, with few preconceived notions about what the good life

should look like. Such a narrative took on libertarian tones in Montana.

For some, this included the freedom to be homeless, if they choose. As Marshall, a young, white homeless man, told me in Billings, “it’s a very free country. I mean, I’m actually, I live on the streets, I’m kinda choosing to do that … sabbatical. Nobody bothers me for it; I’m not bothering anybody. I got my own little nook. There are other places in the world where I’d be forced into some place to shelter up or, you know, herded off or … jailed.”

When conversations turned to freedom, guns were often mentioned. Guns give one security and make hunting possible—enabling one to feed one’s self and family. I was accordingly often reminded that Americans rebelled against the English by making guns. Guns equal freedom. And America, thankfully, ensures gun ownership.

Taken together, these conversations helped me understand that the patriotism of the poor is rooted in a widespread belief that America belongs to its people. There is a bottom-up, instinctive, protective, and intense identification with the country. This is a people’s country.

Of course, some of this patriotism is clearly grounded in misconceptions about other countries. One person told me that there are only two democracies in the world: Israel and the United States. Another told me that Japan is a communist country. Yet another that in Germany one’s tongue can get cut off for a minor crime. Many also assumed that other countries are poorer than they really are. But these were almost tangential reflections that further justified—rather than drive—their commitment to the country. They seldom came up on their own unless I asked about the limitations of other countries.

As I completed my interviews and reflected on what I heard

from these patriots, I realized that their beliefs about America are not a puzzle to be solved. In America, there is no contradiction between one's difficult life trajectories and one's love of country. If anything, those in difficulty have more reasons than most of us to believe in the promise of America.

Francesco Duina is a professor of sociology at Bates College, as well as honorary professor of sociology at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of "Broke and Patriotic: Why Poor Americans Love Their Country," published by Stanford University Press.

Opinion: Outcome of 2017 depends on all of us

By Kathryn Reed

As the fog of ringing in a new year fades, we must collectively begin to face the reality that 2017 is going to be much different than 2016. Some of it we will have control over, some we won't. The worst part will be if people stop being engaged.

As the late U.S. Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill said, "All politics is local."

The Lake Tahoe Basin has plenty of issues that need to be addressed – housing, wages, transportation, and climate change are just a few. These are big topics with no easy answers. They are problems that should not be solved in a vacuum by only a few people. All of these issues affect everyone who lives in and visits the basin. That is why we, the residents,

need to have a say in the cure that will be used to treat what ails us as a community.

Don’t wait until the eleventh hour, don’t wait to be asked for your opinion – just find a forum to express it in a manner that could effect change.

Housing – lack of it and the exorbitant price – is not unique to Tahoe. *Lake Tahoe News* will be exploring this topic through a series of stories beginning later this month.

One thing Tahoe will likely always face is a housing shortage. In some ways this is a good thing because it means we did not pave over paradise. The fact that there is a limit on what can be developed in the basin is a good thing. It means we will continue to live in a wooded forest instead of a concrete jungle.

Should employers provide housing for employees? Should people expect to live and work in the same town? What role should government have in housing? These are some of the bigger questions we need to address collectively to find consensus.

I wonder if people were paid a livable wage, if the housing crisis would not be as severe because they could then afford more. At the same time, it is unrealistic to expect everyone who wants to live here to be able to do so.

California’s minimum wage as of today is $10.50/hour. By 2021 it will be $15/hour. Nevada’s minimum wage is $8.25 an hour, but drops to $7.25 if an employer offers health insurance. The federal minimum wage of $7.25/hour was set in 2009. The average annual household income on the California side of the South Shore is $28,565.

Vail Resorts, one of the larger employers in the greater Lake Tahoe area, in June 2015 made a big splash by announcing it would have a minimum wage of $10/hour. For its three California resorts, it’s no longer relevant.

I’m all for companies making a profit, but at some point that money needs to trickle down to the workers who are doing the heavy lifting. This is true of all sectors. The economic divide is growing dramatically between the haves and the have nots.

Climate change is real. Argue all you want as to why, but it is changing. Scientists have proven this. Look at all that rain we had in the fall. Is this going to be the new norm? The snow line is rising. This could dramatically change our economy if the winter sports season is shorter. It might also mean a longer off-season, as evidenced by the bustling fall the basin and Truckee areas experienced in 2016.

People are clearly wanting to recreate in the basin and Truckee – just look at how congested our roads are. It’s great they want to enjoy our home and drop some cash while doing so. But if their experience is miserable because of the congestion and lack of functional public transportation, how long will it be before they play elsewhere?

It is mindboggling to me that the powers that be keep approving development projects with no answers to how to mitigate the impacts the projects will have on roads and other infrastructure. Nor do these policymakers seem to care that the lack of housing for the workers at these developments means those people will be commuting, thus adding to the congestion. This then adds to air pollution and degradation of Lake Tahoe’s clarity.

As for what is going on nationally – Jan. 20 brings a new president. I have had friends tell me Trump will not be their president. To date I have failed to be persuasive to argue otherwise. Bridges cannot be built with that thinking.

He will be the president of the United States. (It is alarming that a Qualtrics poll taken in December showed 29 percent of the respondents believed Trump won the popular vote. Fifty-two

percent of Republicans said Trump won the popular vote. The reality is Hillary Clinton won that count by more than 2.8 million votes.)

This is part of our collective problem – people refusing to learn (accept?) the truth, the facts.

It is our choice if we want to remain the Divided States.

Finding even the smallest commonality and building on that is critical. Educating people through civil discourse, listening – these are things that need to be done. Protesting and making oneself heard has its place, too. In all of this, there must be purpose beyond anger and telling others they are wrong. That is where the education piece becomes so important. It's a critical component for all sides.

Drawing a line in the sand for equality, to thwart discrimination, and to uphold the Constitution and Supreme Court decisions is righteous. Drawing a line in the sand because you didn't get your way and your person isn't in office is beyond unproductive.

The questions now are – How do we overcome being the Divided States of America? How do we make the greater Lake Tahoe region sustainable for future generations?

Editorial: Great America is one that's more carbon-free

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 25, 2016, Las Vegas Sun.***

Famously, Donald Trump doesn't read long reports. Instead, he

has staffers condense the material into summary memos.

So here’s hoping somebody on his team will crunch a new Brookings Institution report on carbon emissions and put it in front of him.

The report debunks an argument by Trump and others that the economy is being stifled by regulations and policies aimed at reducing emissions from coal-fired power plants.

The researchers found that 34 states had managed to “decouple” growth from carbon emissions – in other words, to grow their economies without a coinciding increase in emissions – from 2000 to 2014. Nevada was among the top 10 of those states, with a 42.5 percent difference between gross domestic product and emissions growth.

Read the whole story

Letter: Find a new venue for SnowGlobe

Publisher’s note: ***The author asked for his 2013 letter regarding SnowGlobe to be republished because he still stands by it – here it is. Below is a new letter.***

To the community,

Look, I know heads in beds is the name of the game in this town. But SnowGlobe is a poorly run event because it doesn’t have a proper venue. This year was the worst ever with noise – bass. The tree removal and site expansion just amplified everything.

It also floods the town with people when we are already at capacity. Not to mention that the SnowGlobe theme doesn't mesh with the family friendly town that the city wants to market. Look, call me a pansy, but when my house shakes and my dual pane windows rattle I have a legitimate complaint. If my neighbors were being that loud, they would be shut down.

Again, have events that bring people to the area. I'm all for it. But be sure to have a proper venue before you establish an event.

John Spinola, South Lake Tahoe

Editorial: Prop. 47 – A failure to learn history's lesson

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 22, 2016, Sacramento Bee.***

In their laudable effort to reverse mass incarceration, California policymakers have been too slow to provide felons with necessary care and treatment upon their release.

That's among the conclusions to be gleaned from an important reporting project by newspapers in Palm Springs, Ventura, Salinas and Redding analyzing Proposition 47, the 2014 initiative that cut penalties for drug possession and property theft, and reduced many crimes to misdemeanors.

"Thousands of addicts and mentally ill people have traded a life behind bars for a churning cycle of homelessness, substance abuse and petty crime," says the report by the

Desert Sun of Palm Springs, *Ventura County Star, Redding Record Searchlight* and *Salinas Californian.*

Read the whole story

Opinion: How Calif. can survive the U.S.-China war

By Joe Mathews

California is trapped—in the dangerous space between two authoritarian regimes that want to fight each other.

One is in Beijing; the other is taking power in Washington, D.C. Viewed from the Golden State, it's striking how much they have in common.



Joe Mathews

Both are so nationalist and bellicose they are spooking neighbors. Both express open contempt for human rights and undermine faith in elections and the free press. Both promote hatred of minorities (anti-Tibetan and anti-Uighur in China; anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant in the U.S.).

And both regimes are captained by swaggering men (President Xi Jinping in China; President-elect Donald Trump in U.S.) who

tend to their own cults of personality and pose as corruption fighters while enriching their own families.

Most frighteningly for Californians, both regimes seem to see advantage in escalating conflict with the other. The incoming American administration is threatening to raise tariffs and label China a currency manipulator, actions that would likely start a trade war. The Chinese administration is provoking confrontations in the South China Sea while the new American strongman embraces Taiwan—actions that could start a real war.

A sustained conflict between China and the U.S. could produce new restrictions on the flow of money and people, with devastating results for California. Our public universities rely on federal funds from D.C.—and top-dollar, out-of-state tuition fees from Chinese students to subsidize the education of Californians. So any Trump restrictions on foreign visitors—or retaliatory Chinese limits on overseas study and travel—could blow up the University of California's business model.

Hollywood depends on moviegoers who live under both regimes, and Silicon Valley's promising ventures in virtual reality and artificial intelligence rely on our ability to bring together manufacturers, investors and technologists from China and the U.S. A trade war would threaten those exchanges. Our tourism relies on Chinese visitors and our housing market relies on Chinese buyers, who spend an estimated $9 billion a year on homes here. But will people still come if Washington's anti-Chinese rhetoric fuels a racist backlash against Chinese nationals and Chinese Americans?

How can California handle such a conflict?

First, by protecting our people and institutional connections to China, with the same fervor we are rallying to protect our undocumented immigrants. This will be especially hard given the hyper-sensitivity of the autocrats in Beijing and D.C. to

the slightest of slights; just as Trump lashes out at "Saturday Night Live" parodies, Xi sees the "Kung Fu Panda" films as American warfare.

And, second, by reminding both regimes—in friendly but firm ways—that we are opposed to conflict because the U.S. and China need each other more than they appear willing to acknowledge.

Californians who doubt this would do well to consult John Pomfret's new book, "The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present". Pomfret, an American journalist long posted in China, writes "The two nations have feuded fiercely and frequently, yet, irresistibly and inevitably, they are drawn back to one another. The result is two powers locked in an entangling embrace that neither can quit."

California's role in this difficult period should be to tell the story of its own deep ties to China and to seek out new areas of productive cooperation, argues Matt Sheehan, author of the forthcoming book "Chinafornia: Working with Chinese Investors, Immigrants and Ideas on U.S. Soil".

"I think of California as a living laboratory for a more practical, productive version of U.S.-China relations," says, Sheehan who also publishes the weekly Chinafornia Newsletter.

But not all collaborations with China would be helpful. Our technologies companies shouldn't be aiding the U.S. surveillance state or assisting the Chinese government in suppressing human rights. And California labor interests should stop playing to anti-Chinese prejudice in opposing trade agreements and advancing union organizing. (The hotel workers' union, as part of an organizing campaign, recently claimed a possible sale to Chinese interests of the Westin Long Beach would threaten national security.)

One possible model for California's strategy might be Anson

Burlingame, whom President Abraham Lincoln dispatched to Beijing to represent the U.S. during the Civil War. Burlingame's approach was to commiserate with the Chinese (we have our terrible rebellion with the South, you with the Taipings) as a basis for collaboration. His work produced the Burlingame Treaty, which welcomed Chinese students to U.S. educational institutions, and opened the way for Chinese immigrants to become American citizens.

Today, Burlingame's accomplishments are mostly forgotten, but his name belongs to a suburb in the Bay Area, a region boasting one of America's most prosperous populations of Chinese Americans.

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

Opinion: Time for Calif. to embrace dirty deals

By Joe Mathews

Raise a glass and bend your mind around this California New Year's resolution: in 2017, let's become more tolerant of political corruption.

While the idea of tolerating dirty deal-making may sound perverse or strange, so are the ways we make decisions in California. Over the last century, we've designed a highly complex government with the primary goal of preventing corruption, by limiting the power and discretion of elected and appointed officials. That is the channel connecting our state's rivers of regulations, oceans of laws, and tsunamis of

formulas for budgets and taxes that defy human navigation.



Joe Mathews

All these obstacles have worked to a point: we're a pretty clean state by American standards, with a relatively low rate of public corruption convictions. And most of these are small stakes—minor embezzlements, small-time cover-ups and violations of tricky campaign laws.

The perverse result: in keeping our government clean but hampered, we've opted to embrace large-scale, incapacitating societal wrongs. In California, among the richest places on earth, we tolerate America's highest poverty rate, we do little in the face of a massive shortage of affordable housing, and we leave our roads and waterworks in dangerous disrepair. Our schools offer too little education, and our tax system, by bipartisan acknowledgment, doesn't tax us fairly.

And yet, attacking such big problems is considered wildly unrealistic. There are too many rules and regulations standing in the way of large-scale action. And if we got rid of those rules, we fear we would be abetting corruption.

Which is why we so desperately need to adopt a new attitude toward corruption.

Samuel Huntington, the great 20th century political scientist, famously observed: "the only thing worse than a society with a rigid, over centralized, dishonest bureaucracy is one with a rigid, over centralized, honest bureaucracy. A society which is relatively uncorrupt … may find a certain amount of

corruption a welcome lubricant easing the path to modernization."

California needs such lubrication to advance larger public goals. The Golden State must expedite the building of affordable housing, homeless housing, housing on lots already zoned for housing—even if it means paying off certain interests to prevent their opposition and handing out exemptions to planning requirements and zoning and environmental laws like party favors.

The poor state of California's roads also cries out for some big corrupt deals, damn the environmental reviews. For years, the state has failed to address a $130-billion-plus backlog in state and local road repairs. But California's mix of limitations on infrastructure and taxes mean we'll keep falling behind—as long as we play by the rules. Raising taxes to cover repairs requires a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature and getting to two-thirds in cases like this requires buying votes with spending. But our abstemious governor hasn't been willing to do the buying. He should resolve to be less righteous and more road-friendly in 2017.

Roads and housing aren't the only contexts where we prioritize following the rules over meeting real needs. In education, state leaders make a fetish of meeting the very low requirement of the constitutional funding formula for schools—instead of finding ways, kosher or not, to lengthen our short school year (just 180 days) and offer students the math, science, arts and foreign language they need, but aren't getting.

Our aqueducts and water mains so badly need updates and repairs that politicians should be raiding other government accounts to secure the necessary funds. But moving money around brings lawsuits and scrutiny. So no one dares resolve the problem, not even in a time of drought.

The stakes of our anti-corruption fixation may get higher in 2017. California finds itself in a confrontation with President-elect Donald Trump. Politicians say they will fight Trump if he attacks California policies or threatens vulnerable people, like immigrants and Muslims. But California is at a disadvantage in a battle with a rich, powerful federal government. In Sacramento, some veteran political players are arguing that California should instead buy off Trump—either personally or in his presidential role—given the president-elect's love of negotiations and his lack of interest in legal niceties. Of course, such creative dealmaking runs up against Californian rules and sensibilities.

That's why the change we need is not legal—it's cultural. We must realize that big progress in governance usually involves actions that are not entirely forthright.

So as we greet 2017, let's raise a toast to dealmaking that brings real progress, even when it's dirty.

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