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Letters to the editor

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Hey, EDD, answer the phone

Re "EDD racks up big phone bill" (Capitol & California, March 9): What an outrageous waste of taxpayer money. Has the state Employment Development Department forgotten it is in the business of helping people find jobs? A simple and cheaper solution would be to hire 50 people on a temporary basis to answer phones at a phone bank established for the purpose of answering EDD calls. This certainly could not cost \$4.4 million for three months and would give 50 people jobs for that period of time.

Wake up, people! Is a recorded message worth that much? Do your job and put people to work instead. I still can't believe how stupid and wasteful government solutions to a problem can be.

– Cecil Combs, Sacramento

Levee repairs needed urgently

Re "Legal action could stall levee repairs" (Our Region, March 9): The article reports a community group's lawsuits to stop Sacramento River levee repairs in Natomas. The suits claim the repairs would eliminate 1,000 trees that provide wildlife habitat. The suits could delay repairs for years.

Rep. Doris Matsui's warning that "we must move swiftly to reduce the risk of flooding in the Natomas basin" brings to mind a similar situation along the Feather River.

In 1990, after levee inspections near Olivehurst, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers urged levee repairs: "Loss of life is expected under existing conditions, without remedial repairs." Like the Sacramento community group's habitat preservation lawsuits, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service barred repairs until the levee's elderberry bushes, habitat to the longhorn elderberry beetle, could be replaced. To comply, the local reclamation district had to acquire 76 acres for \$2 million, among other burdens.

In early 1997, repairs still unmade, warm rains and melting snow burst the levee's weak spot. The flooding killed three residents, inundated homes and caused enormous economic damages.

A common-sense balancing of concern for people with concern for species could have prevented this tragedy. It's a lesson worth remembering.

– Dave Stirling, Sacramento

Pacific Legal Foundation

Budget cuts hurt students

I am a 22-year-old student at California State University, Chico.

I, along with thousands of other California college students, am putting my heart into my education while juggling one part-time job, one full-time job and 15 upper-division units. I know that my education is the key to a successful future.

Cuts to the CSU budget will be detrimental to me and thousands of other California students. It is we who will be the next working force of our state and of our country. Without education, the next phase of working people will be inept to handle crisis situations such as the budget problems we are facing as a state.

Please do not cut the budget for the CSU or educational programs of all kinds. There must be some other way.

– Camille Thompson, Chico

Perata probe senseless

When will this ever stop? Former state Senate leader Don Perata has given so much of his time and energy to making positive changes in this state, and all the government can do is try to rehash frivolous accusations against him. The FBI and a multitude of others have investigated him many times, only to come up with nothing.

Perata has left public office and he deserves to leave behind the futile investigations that have not provided anything despite the lengthy investigations.

Why doesn't the government focus this much time and energy in cleaning its own house? As a taxpayer, I would like to know that my tax dollars are being used for positive change instead of political back-stabbing.

– JoAnn Galliano, Alameda

No need for mileage tax

Re "Is mileage tax just around the corner?" (Page A1, March 7): The current system of securing transportation funds to build and maintain transportation systems has a proven track record. Taxing each gallon of gasoline/diesel is a simple and accepted method to raise funds. Furthermore, it is an equitable system because vehicles that consume more fuel per mile pay proportionally more per mile by choice and/or by their respective impact on roadway wear.

Fuel tax rates should be increased if there is a need to raise more funds. There is no reason to create a new system and a costly bureaucratic organization to administer the system, especially considering that the replaced taxed fuel system functions simply and efficiently. Furthermore, it would be ludicrous to have two parallel taxing systems.

The promoters of the mileage tax are merely trying to camouflage a tax increase. There is no question that more funds are required to solve transportation problems. The public needs to understand that the problems will not disappear without some financial pain. However, the mileage tax is not the solution. It is a fraudulent ploy.

– Ray Zelinski, Carmichael

Mileage tax delivers results

Mileage-based policies could fund transportation improvements and help encourage drivers to reduce unnecessary trips, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. This has been proven in projects in Oregon and elsewhere.

Existing technology can deliver strong privacy protection and be required by law to protect drivers who use it. California can quickly gain benefits of a mileage-based program by simply

requiring drivers to self-report annual odometer readings when annually registering their vehicles, verifying numbers during smog-check years and determining incentives based on miles driven. This would make it easier for Californians to take advantage of pay-as-you-drive insurance discounts.

Pilot projects now under way show that a mileage-based approach can deliver results for drivers without raising privacy issues. California's leaders should consider incentive-based efforts, such as these pilot programs, to help Californians get more sustainable funding for better transportation, cheaper car insurance, safer roads and cleaner air, with less greenhouse gas pollution.

– Lauren Navarro, Sacramento

Environmental Defense Fund

Restrain animal passengers

Re "State lawmakers set sights on animal rights" (Page A4, March 9): The article is missing one important issue that needs to be addressed: the issue of pet owners allowing their animals to roam free in their cars while driving.

In this day and age, with all of the laws that are supposed to protect everyone from distracted driving, the Legislature needs to address this issue. The requirement to have animals restrained within your vehicle is just as important to safety as the requirement for seat belts and child-safety seats. It prevents interference with the driver and secures the animal in case of an accident. I know people often consider their pets as family members, but would you let your child ride in your lap and stick his head out the window, if it weren't already against the law? I don't think any parent would.

– Del Kerby, Rocklin

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