WHEN OUR LEADERS LIE - TO EACH OTHER!

(see VFR Page 3)

DONT TREAD ON ME

THE FOOTHILLS PAPER

THE VOICE OF THE FOOTHILLS

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2018 | TELLING THE TRUTH FOR OVER 13 YEARS | VOLUME 14 • NUMBER 19

L-R Amelia Anderson Chairman, Pattee Colvin, Sandy Capp, Margy Maxon, Linda Fors, Peggy Ryder Acting Secretary, Dr. David DeMulle' Consultant (taking photo)

Traffic Accident Takes Out Power On Haines Canyon

A SUV rollover crash last Thursday took out a fire hydrant along Haines Canyon Avenue in Tujunga, sending thousands of gallons of water down the street for several hours early Thursday along with taking out the high power lines leaving about 300

(Continued on Page 4)

SUV rollover crash last Thursday at Haines Canyon Ave.

Homeless Interim Committee Created

With their motto of "To Shelter Our Own," a STNC committee was created to investigate vacant properties around and near Sunland-Tujunga. Many ideas were put forth and one of the most viable was the vacant property at the intersection of Marybell and Wentworth in Shadow Hills. A safe place is needed to provide shelter and a parking area for the homeless to set up a supervised camp. The next meeting will be October 20 in the North Valley City Hall.

Monica Rodriguez

Arnie Abramyan

Eve Sinclair

Roger Swart

Our CD-7'S 3 Stooges

Great shades of Felipe Fuentes! Our latest CD-7 Councilmember has gone out of her way to mimic our past master of failures, Felipe Fuentes.

It's been only 16 months since Monica Rodriguez (M-Rod) was sworn in as our CD-7 Councilwoman, but it was only 3 months before she began populating

> *"With friends like this, you really don't need enemies."*

(Continued on Page 4)

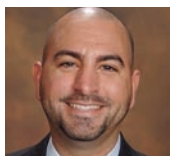
The Mahogany Fire In Tujunga

Sept. 18, 2018: The fire site was listed as 10238 N. Mahogany Trail http://bit.ly/2D4uKg2 Tujunga. A well-coordinated air and ground assault by LACo FD ground & air response with assistance from the Verdugo Regional agencies (including Glendale FD) for less than 5 acres of medium density brush burning with three homes threatened. There was no formal evacuation

Mutual aid with helicopters from LACo and LAFD allowed full containment of this wildfire to an estimated 4 acres of vegetation near the Blanchard Canyon debris basin. There were no injuries. No structure damage, No formal evacuation. It was a mutual aid call and Allied agencies and helicopters were releases when the active flames were out. LAFD and LACo ground crews remained to complete extinguishment and check for hot spots. The fire cause is under investigation although a homeless camp was spotted just above the Blanchard Canyon Debris Basin.

Mutual aid with helicopters from LACo and LAFD allowed full containment of this wildfire near the Blanchard Canyon Debris Basin within 4 hours.

Over 200 distribution sites in the foothills area



Avoiding Fraud: Key Practices in Real Estate

by Ed Castellanos

Whether by compromised data, cracked passwords or phishing, real estate is a target for cyber criminals. More and more, homebuyers and sellers-and the practitioners who serve them-are reporting theft via wire fraud, in which criminals access emails, learn of a pending transaction, and then message phony wiring instructions to victims. Bogus DocuSign emails, emails with illegitimate referrals and ransomware are also on the rise.

Being a victim of wire fraud can be devastating - the funds are almost always irretrievable once sent. And aside from making off with money, criminals can filch personally identifiable information, or PII, through any or a combination of schemes.

So how can you protect yourself when buying a home?

1. Being aware that you may be a target is key to protecting yourself from fraud. By educating yourself on the danger, you›re much more likely to identify suspicious activities and changes to procedure that are utilized by hackers.

2.Be sure that you clearly understand the wiring instructions for your transaction, and ensure that you›re getting that information from a verified source. Title and settlement companies should send you instructions on your wire transfer through a secured service, not just through an email. Many will also have their standard procedures posted on their website. Make a phone call to a number that›s listed on the title or settlement agency›s website to speak with a real person to verify the information. Don›t just call the number listed at the bottom of the written instructions - that information could be bogus too.

3. If something seems wrong or fishy, it probably is. If you are sent a message requesting a partial payment, notifying you in a change in the deadline for your transfer, or detailing a new procedure for your wire transfer, don›t do anything without talking to your agent. Last minutes changes are a big red flags.

kw KELLERWILLIAMS.
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661-510-5762
Edgar Castellanos BRE# 01855534

THE CRESCENTA VALLEY SIERRA CLUB GROUP PRESENTS:

World Travelers Gabrielle and Patrick Reynolds

TUESDAY OCTOBER 9, AT 7:30 PM
Los Angeles County Public Library
2809 Foothill Boulevard,
La Crescenta, California 91214

Gabrielle, with her husband, Patrick, returns to bring us another adventure. They call this one: Three-and-a-Half Adventurers Head Out to See the Solar Eclipse and End up in Canada. The Reynolds bring with them photos of their trip north in August 2017 -- including spectacular shots of the solar eclipse as seen from a vineyard in Silverton, Oregon. Heading north, they photographed landscapes, ferry rides and wild fruit on Whidby Island outside Seattle, and Salt Spring Island off of Vancouver, Canada. Please come and share the fun as they recount the journey.

Our program begins following news of Outings and Conservation. This is a free program and everyone is welcome. Refreshments will be served.

PLEASE CONTACT WAYNE FISHER FOR MORE INFORMATION AT 818 353-4181.

WHAT'S HAPPENING in the FOOTHILLS

News From Kagel Canyon Dexter Park

by Leah Ferrassoli

Hi Everyone,

Dexter Park Page. I've heard there's a new Facebook group for Dexter Park called Dexter Park Page Group. Please join the group to learn details and information that relate to park events. The cover page is green with 2 oak trees on the top. Be sure and say Hi. Please feel free to share this FB page with others.

AUTUMN BEAD CONTEST

come to the park and pick out your selection of beads to create a Harvest themed design. This includes Autumn corn, candy corn, pumpkins, scarecrows, etc. The Contest has begun and ends October 31st.

EVERY FRIDAY

Storytime –Time is 10:00am. Please see attached flyer. It is a great time to get together, have a play date and swap stories

PLEASE NOTE:

Dexter Park is scheduled to undergo electrical maintenance through Edison on Thursday, October 4th from 8:00am-4:00pm; HOWEVER, The KCCA Meeting will go on as scheduled that night.

OCTOBER 5

Story Time and it is World Smile Day

OCTOBER 9

CDBG Meeting Town Hall Meeting - 6:00pm-8:00pm

OCTOBER 10

Take Teddy Bear to Work Day

OCTOBER 19

Book Club - Friday,

OCTOBER 19TH at 1:30pm.

Book Choice is Gilead by Marilynne Robinson. Thank you Valerie.

ONGOING FITNESS CLASS

Happy Feet – Walking Club / Dance the Day Away. It will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1:00pm

You can walk in a temperature controlled environment, select your personal choice of music, get your groove on, hula hoop, or even skip to start your own personal fitness program. The course is measured and charts are available for you to mark your progress. Best of all - It's FREE! Water refills are available. This is for all ages and all fitness levels. Moms with young children are welcome to join in on the fun to walk and push a stroller too. There are mats available to do some warm-up / cool down stretches.

EXCURSION

Please let me know if you'd be interested in taking a day trip to a museum, casino, winery, outlet mall, or some other nifty place. <lferrassoli@parks.lacounty.gov>

Jonathan Goldman's 18 piece

Big Band Swing Express

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now performing regularly in Sun Valley at American Legion Post 520

featuring Vocals by Peter Chinelli

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View from the ROCK BY DOC

WHEN OUR LEADERS LIE - TO EACH OTHER!

Well this has been an interesting couple of weeks. Nothing out of the ordinary, just another 20 accidents, but fortunately no fatalities. There were so many accidents that I didn't even care to cover most of them. So what you see-is what you get.

But, there was a complete failure of the Cleghorn Machine to regain power of the STNC and the community-that was interesting. Please ignore Lydia Grant. She was duped by Pat Kramer and the Machine who were making an end-run behind the shutting down of the Safe Streets Committee. The same one that was so effectively used by M-Rod to win Garcetti's approval and the role of CD-7 Councilwoman.

Councilwoman you say? Yup, and after putting up with the wanna-bees in our community, she has metamorphosed into another Felipe Fuentes. But don't get me wrong, just because she mimics Felipe's behavior, doesn't mean that she's not out there getting into every possible photo-op she can. Oh, and don't forget her slovenly appointee Rock Swart. Rock who just can't keep his mouth shut, has just got to actually take his feet out of his mouth to make even more stupid statements. No one will ever forget his saying that "the American Legion is a bunch of Ass-holes!"

Oh my gawd, can we get him a blond toupee and a can of coke? I really didn't think of it before, PUTZ is a four-letter word. So there Ms. M-Rod. Your appointee is making you look really stupid. Can you survive it? Every photo-op that you are within a mile of Swart, you will find him muscling people out of the way to get a photo next to you. That would be a great ad for personal hygiene for the homeless.

I am really disappointed on what our elected councilwoman has selected as her most visible appointees. Look, I'm not a saint, but I'm not socially corrupt either. Armo Arnie who I consider a basically good person – who hates the machine, and Lydia, and Pat Kramer, and, and, and, have brought the Swart into his realm of reality. (Ooops, we have to talk about more dupes (that's short for duplicitous) such as the S-T Chamber officers. For some unfathomable reason, the Holy Trinity of Kelly, Linda and Julie, took it upon themselves to give the Swart a years free membership in the chamber. AND OF COURSE he started spreading the word that he was given a LIFE TIME MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHAMBER. OK, so that's a little lie. Sort of like him saying he received the Combat Infantryman's Badge (CIB) for his National Guard service during the Watts riots. Hummmm.

Look, it's not going to go away. M-Rod is our elected official and it really doesn't matter what she doesn't do for us. We're stuck with her and her "lickies" for a couple more years. Just work on the basis that she DOESN'T LIKE SUNLAND-TUJUNGA and you'll be able to get to sleep at night. We made another mistake, and I really don't think that we can blame this one on The Water.

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

As a former schoolteacher, I used "teachable moments" in the classroom to provide laudable citizenship and character traits as a standard to adolescents. Senator John McCain's death several weeks ago right at the inception of another school year offered that opportunity to our public school teachers. What better way to teach citizenship than to point out the laudable traits, which made him not only a military hero, but also a politician of honesty and substance. In addition, the lesson is not complete unless the contrast is taught between such a man and our irascible President who sullies the concept of decency by engaging in vindictive bullying behavior on the world's stage. The contrast between the pinnacle which McCain reached in his life, and the wasteland of any redeeming qualities, which the man in the White House acquired, should be taught by alert educators. Otherwise we are doomed--doomed because children have been taught through the ages that to be a President symbolizes an accomplished person in word, thought, and deed. Our President's character is a horrible example for children. He, unfortunately, has made a parody of the office.

Thank you,
Elaine Miller.

STATEMENT FROM SAFE COALITION RE: PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE SEPTEMBER 19, 2018

With the announcement by the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) of SR14 as the Preferred Alternative, reducing the threat posed to people along the E1 and E2 routes, some people in the NE San Fernando Valley and north LA County are exuberant that the threat has lessened, some remain devastated and face a worsening threat, and some are relieved to have information while still feeling threatened either for themselves, their friends, their neighbors, their animals and wildlife, or their environment and open space.

This imperfect announcement matches its imperfect timing, its imperfect result, its imperfect intent, and its imperfect agency. Rather than clearing the decks by abandoning all three flawed alternatives and heading back to the drawing board as we've strongly recommended, CHSRA believes they've chosen the alternative that is the "best candidate" or "strikes the best balance." That's their cold, detached perspective or, as they say, "the science" behind their decision. Their statement could have gone much further to state that they actually heard our voices, understood our fears, considered our losses, and took action to work with us or to protect us. Fact is, we've not heard from them since early 2016, and their silence speaks volumes.

Our perspective is that CHSRA settled, in some respects, on the lesser of several poorly planned evils, and that it should be a crime that anyone remains threatened by a project so poorly conceived, poorly managed, over-budget and politicized that it likely will never materialize.

We have always and will continue to fight the good fight; we could never sell out or compromise as we are the long-time, invested stakeholders and must fight to protect our communities. We extend our concern, love and ongoing support to all who remain most directly in the cross hairs of this project along SR14, within the Burbank to Palmdale Project Section, and beyond, wherever they reside and work.

The most important outcome of this announcement is this: our communities are working together and realize we must remain strong at the grassroots level. Effective leadership from most of our elected officials never materialized over four brutal years. We thank those elected officials that did communicate with us and those that did help us. But, this process served as a window into the souls of many of our elected officials...at least those that have one.

The City of Los Angeles, in particular, from the mayor's office, to the City Council leadership, to the council representatives in the most impacted communities were given every chance to support us, to fight for us and to represent us. They failed us and, by their delay, petty politics and lack of communication, fought against us. A draft Motion (File16-1068) calling for the City's opposition to all of the routes has languished in the Council for so long, since October 2016, that it actually expires on Friday of this week. While we've tried exhaustively to have that Motion resurrected and amended to reflect the will of the City's residents, it remains in limbo and, unless action is taken in the next 48 hours, will serve as a memorial to the failed City leadership.

We, the northeast San Fernando Valley and north LA County, are stronger for this process. Stronger for fighting. Stronger for pursuing the truth and the facts. Stronger for working together. Stronger for our patience and our fairness in dealing honorably with CHSRA and our elected officials. As stated earlier, we fought and will continue to fight the good fight.

SAFE Coalition

CD-7'S *(From Page 1)*

her office with some of the most dis-interested volunteers and staff possible.

First was Eve Sinclair who as Vision Zero representative for the city, when as soon as M-Rod won the council election, was promoted to North Valley City Hall as M-Rod's representative. A paid position.

Then M-Rod brought in the totally scurrilous character in the obese form of Roger (Rock) Swart as her "Senior Volunteer Coordinator." An unpaid position but has a desk in city hall and a pretty city badge. Roger began his new position by calling all the members of the S-T American Legion "A bunch of assholes." But he really loves the word PUTZ. To date, he has called at least nine people that disagreed with him, a putz. He is a real trophy for M-Rod.

Then there is Arnie Abramyan. Making himself to be one of the major civilian contributors to M-Rods campaign, he has surrounded himself with the likes of Roger Swart and Sonia Tatulian, a known small-time thief and now setting up the "Tatulian Cultural Festival" of which all profits go into her pocket. Last year, her "festival" supposedly brought in 10,000 visitors to our community. This year, she dropped the figure to 7,000. Using these bogus figures, she obtained financial support from the L.A. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger and L.A. City Councilwoman M-Rod. Unfortunately, her personal cultural festival is not a non-profit organization and she asked the officers of the S-T Chamber of Commerce to provide the insurance for the event.

That could possibly be considered fraud because the insurance policy that the chamber has covers ONLY CHAMBER EVENTS like mixers and chamber specific events. Ms. Tatulian went over the top crazy a couple of months ago and called for a citywide BOYCOTT OF THE WATERMELLON FESTIVAL. It's hard to be effective when you're making M-Rod look so foolish.

Eve Sinclair must be a fan of Joseph Heller's "Catch 22." I spent 2 days trying to contact her about a constituents question about lighting behind the N.V. City Hall. One day I waited in her lobby for almost an hour and she snuck out the back door. When I called her phone, I was told that she was on a phone and would get back to me. I put her on the speaker and after an hour, her aide Arsen Melikyan informed me that she had gone to lunch. After having hid from me for 2 days, her aide stated to me: "She is not available to answer constituents questions.

There is something just like this in Catch 22.

"Maj. Major Major Major: Sergeant, from now on, I don't want anyone to come in and see me while I'm in my office. Is that clear?

First Sgt. Towser: Yes, sir. What do I say to people who want to come in and see you while you're in your office?

Maj. Major Major Major: Tell them I'm in and ask them to wait.

First Sgt. Towser: For how long?

Maj. Major Major Major: Until I've left.

First Sgt. Towser: And then what do I do with them?

Maj. Major Major Major: I don't care.

First Sgt. Towser: May I send people in to see you after you've left?

Maj. Major Major Major: Yes.

First Sgt. Towser: You won't be here then, will you?

Maj. Major Major Major: No.

First Sgt. Towser: I see, sir. Will that be all?."

Accident *(From Page 1)*

people without power for four hours.

The incident occurred in front of 9700 Haines Canyon Avenue, just south of Foothill Boulevard at approximately 4:35 AM

The water was still gushing from the hydrant at nearly 8 a.m. as water and power crews tried to turn off the flow of water and mud while making repairs to the power lines.

One person was taken to a hospital after the LAFD paramedics arrived. The condition of the crash victim was not known.

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ASK RUSTY Changed my mind after claiming Social Security

by AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor Russell Gloor *Association of Mature American Citizens*

Dear Rusty: I will be 67 years old this September and have been receiving my Social Security benefits since September of last year (2017). I've found that I do not need the money now, and since I don't need the money, I'm wondering if can I repay what I've already collected and just wait until I'm 70 to get a larger benefit? Signed: Changed My Mind

Dear Changed: Situations such as yours are exactly why Social Security has a "do over" option, which allows those who claim benefits to withdraw that application within one year. Reality is that sometimes financial circumstances change. People who lost their job may react by claiming Social Security, and then later find other employment, which provides them the income they need. Or they may simply just change their mind and be sorry they applied for benefits. In any case, the do-over option can be used to fix that but exercising that option does have some important consequences.

The short answer to your questions is "Yes" - you can exercise the "do over" option and totally withdraw from Social Security if you do so within 1 year of the date your benefits originally started. But - and this is a big but - you will have to pay back everything that you have collected, including any withheld taxes, Medicare premiums, and any spousal or other dependent benefits that may have been paid on, to or from your account over the past year. Obviously if you wish to do that you should act with haste to submit Form SSA-521 (Request for Withdrawal of Application), because you're coming up on the one-year anniversary of your original application.

However, since you have already reached your full retirement age of 66, you have another less financially painful option available to you which you might want to consider – you can simply suspend your current benefits, which will allow you to earn delayed retirement credits equal to 2/3rds of 1% per month of suspension (8% per year) up until you reach 70 years of age. You will have lost that initial 8% benefit growth you would have otherwise realized for the 1st year after you reached age 66, but that may be less traumatic than repaying Social Security a very large lump sum for an entire year's worth of benefits paid. Then when you reinstate (un-suspend) your benefits at age 70, the benefit amount will be about 24% higher than it is now. Thus, you'll gain a significantly increased benefit without needing to repay all that money you collected for a whole year.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity.

To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.

North African Tagine

BY CHEF RANDY

A tagine is a conical earthenware pot used for slow cooking. Tagine is also the North African stew prepared in the tagine pot. Historically, the nomads in North Africa used these pots as portable ovens, allowing them to prepare food at any time while moving around.

A traditional tagine stew contains bits of meat (lamb or chicken) and vegetables. Spices, nuts, and dried fruits are also used. Common spices include ginger, cumin, turmeric, cinnamon, and saffron.

My vegan stovetop version is made with onions, carrots, zucchini, potato, chickpeas, cabbage, eggplant, and a special bend of spices. It is wonderful when served over nutty-tasting couscous. If you don't have time to make couscous, serve it with a fresh loaf of French bread. Either way, I think you'll enjoy this slow-cooked vegan flavor flash.

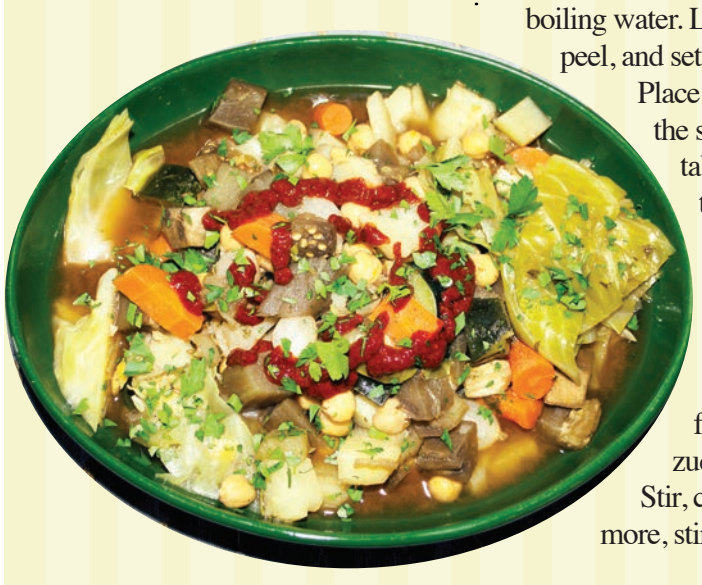
Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon Ginger (peeled and chopped)
- ¼ teaspoon saffron
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 2 tablespoons fresh mint (chopped - divided)
- 2 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley (chopped - divided)
- 1 tablespoon tomato purée
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon Better Than Bouillon (no beef base)
- 2 carrots (cut into 1-inch pieces)
- 1 large russet potato (peeled, cut into 1-inch pieces)
- 14-ounce can chickpeas
- 8 pearl onions (peeled)
- 2 medium zucchini (cut into 1-inch pieces)
- 5 small eggplants (cut into 1-inch pieces)
- ½ cabbage (cut into 8 wedges)
- 10 ounces uncooked couscous
- Harissa (as a condiment) *

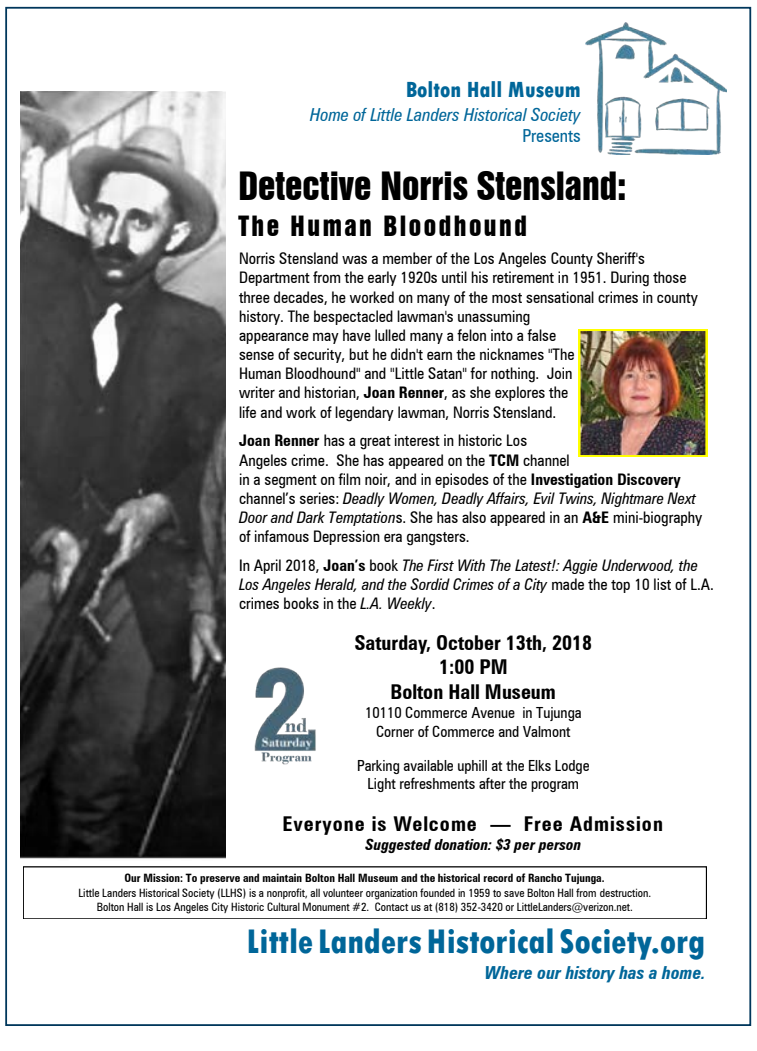
Directions:

Place the onions in a bowl and cover with boiling water. Let stand for 3 minutes. Remove, peel, and set aside.

Place the ginger in a large pan with the saffron, cumin, coriander, 1½ tablespoons of the mint and 1½ tablespoons of the parsley, the tomato purée, vegetable broth, and bouillon. Bring to a boil. Add the carrots, potato, and chickpeas. Reduce heat to medium low, cover, and cook for 10 minutes. Add the onions, zucchini, eggplant, and cabbage. Stir, cover, and cook for 30 minutes more, stirring occasionally.



For additional recipes, see Chef Randy's website at
valley-vegetarian.com



Pair of Hertzberg Technology Bills Signed by Governor

Pair of Hertzberg Technology Bills Signed by Governor
Governor Brown approves bills to require bots to be labeled, and to incorporate blockchain into California business practices

SACRAMENTO – Senator Bob Hertzberg (D-Van Nuys) today announced that a pair of his bills to help government keep up with technology were signed by Governor Jerry Brown. SB 1001, the B.O.T Act of 2018 (Bolstering Online Transparency), will require automated online accounts, or bots, to be identified. SB 838 will authorize the use of blockchain technology for corporate share certificates in California.

The two bills were both key priorities of Senator Hertzberg this year, who introduced them in an effort to help modernize government, and to respond to and anticipate rapidly growing technology in the online realm. Their passage comes on the heels of the Governor signing AB 375 in June, a measure co-authored by Senator Hertzberg that goes further than any law in the country to protect California consumers and their private information online.

SB 1001 was introduced with the support of Common Sense Kids Action to address the growing occurrence of automated bots masquerading as individuals and being weaponized to spread fake and misleading news with a goal of lending false credibility and reshaping political debates.

"Social media has become an integral part of our day to day lives," said Senator Hertzberg. "People have the right to know if the information they read online is actually someone trying to deceive them." James P. Steyer, Founder and CEO of Common Sense, added, "The BOT Act is a step in the right direction to bring transparency to social media but there is a lot more work to do to ensure consumers — including kids — understand who is behind the messages they are seeing on social media sites like Twitter. The country needs to have a national discussion about the impact of social media and digital tools on our democracy to ensure we craft stronger legislation that addresses this serious problem – and that we can hold accountable individuals and platforms who would use digital platforms and tools to undermine our democracy."

> *"People have the right to know if the information they read online is actually someone trying to deceive them."*

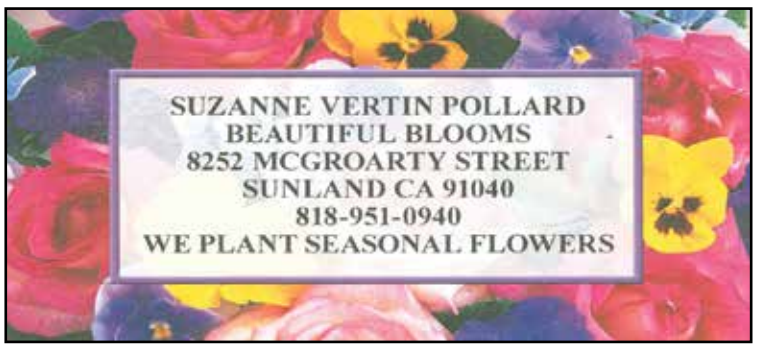
SB 838, on the other hand, looks forward to blockchain, an emerging technology that could help protect California businesses and consumers. California corporations currently provide share certificates to their stockholders to demonstrate the issuance or transfer of stock. This method is time consuming and open to potential cases of fraud. SB 838 will enable California corporations to also issue and transfer corporate share certificates via the blockchain – a method widely considered to be a vastly more secure way of doing business.

"For once, government is catching up to a rapidly growing technology," said Senator Hertzberg. "California has always been a place for innovation and opportunity, and SB 838 shows how we can use technology to increase consumer protection and help prevent cases of fraud."

Blockchain allows records to be more securely stored and updated on multiple computers using a distributed ledger technology. While blockchain is commonly seen as the "wallet" for cryptocurrencies, it also represents what the future of the financial industry, government contracts, stock certificates and more could look like. It is currently being considered for everything from the sale of bonds in Berkeley, California to secure voting systems for service members in Denver, Colorado.

SB 838 was signed alongside AB 2658, another piece of blockchain legislation that Senator Hertzberg co-authored with Assembly Majority Leader Ian Calderon (D-Whittier). AB 2658 defines blockchain under law and establishes a blockchain working group to report to the Legislature on the potential uses, risks, and benefits of the use of blockchain technology – effectively offering a study of the implementation of SB 838.

The bill received widespread acclaim from the blockchain and cryptocurrency industries, and passed both the Senate and Assembly without a single "No" vote.



GOV. BROWN ENDORSES #EQUITYANDJUSTICE MOVEMENT

Cumulative impact of 10 new juvenile and criminal justice reforms promises hope for a generation

SACRAMENTO – In the winter of 2016, Sens. Holly J. Mitchell and Ricardo Lara introduced bills to bring common sense back into the criminal justice system after an era of mass incarceration.

Now, after the signing of their 10th bill on Sunday, California has moved the needle on restoring the values of rehabilitation, equity and family cohesion through their #EquityAndJustice bill package.

Their achievement, quite simply, is unprecedented nationwide.

The milestone changes in law are projected to usher in an era that promotes public safety builds more resilient communities and improves racial and economic fairness for generations.

With the support of Gov. Jerry Brown, who has signed xxx #EquityAndJustice bills over the past two years, the reforms will impact multiple levels of the criminal justice system. From establishing a minimum age for prosecution to providing Miranda Rights to minors to ending excessive fees charged to juveniles found innocent, #EquityAndJustice focuses much of its reforms on children and teenagers who are far too young to be habituated to a system of incarceration.

"I've dedicated my career to ensuring that all children have what they need to be successful," Mitchell said. "We must create a California where every child has access to all the resources they need to thrive. I'm clear that fair and age-appropriate treatment by the juvenile and criminal justice systems is one piece of the puzzle in creating the capacity and the desire to treat youth as the irreplaceable resource they are."

Lara agreed:

"The Equity and Justice bills signed by Gov. Brown make rehabilitation and community recovery the focus of our criminal justice system," Lara said. "Thirty years of harsh sentencing laws resulted in overcrowded prisons without improving public safety. We need to be tough but smart on crime. With these laws, California is reducing mass incarceration through research-based reforms that will contribute to public safety."

The #EquityAndJustice package is comprised of six bills from 2017 and four from 2018.

Last year's bills were Senate Bill 180 – Drug Sentence Enhancements, which reduces sentence enhancements for certain low-level, nonviolent drug offenses; SB 190 – Ending Juvenile Fees, which ended financially burdensome administrative fees for youth involved in the juvenile justice system and their struggling families; SB 355 - No Court Fees for the Innocent, which provides that only those who are convicted of a crime are required to reimburse the courts for legal counsel fees; SB 393 – Sealing of Arrest Records, which ends public access to those arrested but not convicted of a crime; SB 394 – Juveniles Life Without the Possibility of Parole, which bars sentencing juveniles to life without parole; and SB 395 – Miranda Rights for Youth, which requires those age 15 or younger to consult with legal counsel before they waive their constitutional rights.

This year's #EquityAndJustice bills are SB 439 – Minimum Age Incarceration, which would exclude children age 11 and younger from juvenile court jurisdiction; SB 1050 – Services and Support for Exonorees, a call to help the wrongly convicted transition back into society; SB 1391 – Juvenile Justice for Children Under 16, to ensure that youth ages 14 and 15 who commit crimes get services and needed help by prohibiting them from being tried as adults; and SB 1393 – Fair and Just Sentencing Reform, to restore the court's discretion on the imposition of a five-year sentence enhancement for serious felonies.

The projected collective impact of the #EquityandJustice effort over the last two years will be felt first by communities across the state as a tangible reinvestment. Millions of dollars will shift from the housing of individuals in the correctional system to the programing and services offered by cities, counties and communities.

Mass incarceration has been a crisis in the making for decades. In June of 2005, California was forced into federal receivership largely due to prison overcrowding. This was just one symptom of a larger problem. At that time the state had already spent decades entrenched in the failed "war on drugs" and "tough on crime" approach to incarceration and sentencing. The result: skyrocketing recidivism rates and a devastating impact on black and brown communities. This criminalization of the youth and the mass incarceration of black and brown communities resulted in a system so overcrowded that basic health services were not provided and the state's treatment of its prison population was deemed unconstitutional. Furthermore, California's taxpayers felt the burden of a ballooning public safety budget that diverted funds towards methods that were proven to be ineffective through research. Almost 13 years later we continue to struggle with the final solution. The only way to finally end the receivership is to reform the broken system built on a "lock them up and throw away the key" approach rather than accountability, equity and rehabilitation.

Decriminalization of youth is a fundamental component of rehabilitation. Directing resources to ensured best outcomes for our youth is the first step, beginning with the arcane requirement that families already struggling must also pay for their children's contact with the juvenile justice system. Criminologists recently found that juvenile debt correlates with a greater likelihood of recidivism, even after controlling for case characteristics and youth demographics. These negative outcomes from fees undermine the rehabilitative purpose of the juvenile system. Beyond the matter of improving outcomes for the youth, the collection of fees has been conducted in costly and unlawful ways, putting increased fiscal burdens on counties and unlawful financial duress on families.

Now law for nearly 10 months, SB 190, which ended financially burdensome administrative fees, has resulted in nearly all 58 counties now in full compliance. This has saved about $207 million in discharged and relieved debt statewide. While the bill did not address past-due collections, it inspired at least 28 counties to relieve tens of thousands of families of nearly $225 million in old Juvenile Detention fees. The cost of collections on these fees, combined with the negative impact on families, has convinced the lion's share of counties that it is a practice that must end.

As proof, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors is expected to vote to soon cancel nearly $90 million in fees imposed on families that have had children in the juvenile detention system. In an Op-Ed published in The Los Angeles Times on Sept. 11, Jeffrey Selbin, a clinical professor of law and director of the Policy Advocacy Clinic at UC Berkeley School of Law, which has published two studies of juvenile fees in California, welcomed the change.

"As L.A. joins half the state's counties in demonstrating why children and their families deserve debt-free justice, other counties should follow its example and end the collection of these regressive and racially discriminatory fees," Selbin said.

Youth outcomes have historically been linked to their contact with the juvenile justice system, unfortunately not in the way the system was originally intended. Children under the age of 12 end up ensnared in the justice system for exhibiting minor misbehaviors that are labeled misdemeanor offenses, such as petty theft or schoolyard fights. The odds of recidivating once initial contact is made is reason alone to shift away from the criminalization of youth to a more outcomes based approach, not to mention the volumes of studies and reports that support a move from incarceration to treatment.

Of all of the youth interfacing with the system, in 2017 there were only 637 referrals to probation for children under the age of twelve, only nine percent of those children resulted in a petition and from there only three percent resulted in wardship status. If we could intervene with 637 children per year and ensure they receive services and care rather than incarceration and a 70 percent increased risk of recidivating, then why wouldn't we? SB 439 would do just that.

For the 3 percent of children actually involved in serious crimes, there is an existing infrastructure of services available to the courts and counties. Santa Clara and Los Angeles counties are current leaders in providing these alternative services. Across the nation, 21 states have established a minimum age for juvenile court jurisdiction, including Nebraska and Massachusetts. Looked at on a global scale, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 declared that all nations must establish a minimum age no lower than 12 for their justice systems.

SB 1391 reforms laws passed in the 1990s that allowed children as young as 14 and 15 to be sentenced as adults – laws that contributed to recidivism and extreme racial and geographic disparities. By prohibiting 14- and 15-year-olds from being tried as adults, SB 1391 will keep them in the juvenile system that is better prepared for them. California law allows judicial review before a juvenile is released.

When you stop to think about the cost of incarceration, the counties pay the highest price. Prior to its passage in 2017, SB 180, the RISE Act, which calls for greater emphasis on prevention, non-violent, non-serious drug offenders were serving time at $45,000 per year per inmate. These individuals were never a public safety risk, but suffered with a lack of healthcare services as they were facing a public health crisis. This reform measure puts greater emphasis on prevention, rehabilitation and maintaining family cohesion by reducing sentence enhancements for certain low level, nonviolent drug offenses.

Community reinvestment is the building block of rehabilitation. The RISE act was building on the rehabilitation focus of our correction system, aligning California with the rest of the nation in the interest of justice and community reinvestment. This is needed because for nearly half a century the current failed sentencing system has devastated families and individuals with unfair and unjust extended sentencing practices which research has shown to be ineffective while costing the state more money for no gain.

Fair and just sentencing practices in California will align with modern research and studies that reveal the injustice and inefficiency of the current system. SB 1393 continued the sentencing reform efforts by returning judicial discretion for the application of the 5-year sentence enhancement. This measure also reduces the monetary burden on taxpayers that fund unnecessarily long prison terms and instead divert those resources to much needed state programs that benefit healthcare, education and infrastructure. Ultimately, SB 1393 will build upon the concepts of rehabilitation and community reinvestment in a way that serves in the interest of justice.

Public health strategies were sorely lacking as the tough on crime model emphasized incarceration. This ultimately contributed not only to the federal receivership in the corrections system, but also the worst epidemic of fatal opioid overdoses in our country's history, as well as high rates of HIV and viral hepatitis among drug users. It costs on average $45,000 per year, per inmate incarcerated. This adds up to more than $135,000 each time the three-year enhancement was applied. These bills returned valuable dollars to communities, beginning with community-based drug treatment, employment and housing for persons with prior convictions, and preschool and after-school programs which have been proven to reduce adolescent drug use and involvement in the drug market.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT SEN. MITCHELL'S WEB SITE HERE OR AT THE ADDRESS BELOW.

Sen. Mitchell is chair of the Senate Budget Committee. A member of the Legislature since 2010, Mitchell represents nearly 1 million residents of Senate District 30, which includes Culver City and much of Los Angeles. See a map of Mitchell's district that includes a demographic breakdown of its residents and more HERE. More at www.senate.ca.gov/Mitchell

Sen. Ricardo Lara is chair of the Senate Labor Committee and was first elected to the Legislature in 2010. He represents nearly 1 million residents of Senate District 33, which includes Long Beach and the Southeast Los Angeles cities of Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy, Huntington Park, Lakewood, Lynwood, Maywood, Paramount, Signal Hill, South Gate, and parts of Los Angeles. More at www.senate.ca.gov/lara

In summary, Mitchell and Lara believe the two-year legislative effort will have a lasting and positive impact on the state, and hopefully the nation. The guiding principles of #EquityAndJustice for reform include public health, community reinvestment, decriminalization of youth, elimination of mass incarceration and fair and just sentencing reform. It is time to see to the rehabilitation of California's corrections and rehabilitation system.