

Don't let it burn

A few years ago at an election forum, Chico City Council candidates were asked how they would direct resources to Bidwell Park. One candidate, who shall remain nameless, laughed at the question. "There's no money for that," he muttered.



by
Robert Gregg

Born and raised in Chico, the author returned to his hometown in 2013.

On June 18, the Chico Elks Lodge parking lot was filled with fire engines, crews and their police escort, having worked through the night to protect our town after a predictable trigger. A human being, intentionally or not, caused a fire at Bear Hole after 9 p.m., which used to be the park's closing time. That fire destroyed a huge swath of land.

Post-blaze, city planners and officials should do a cost-benefit analysis in short order: What did the response cost? Then there's the less quantifiable costs, including residents losing a night of sleep and children losing access to Monkey Face and the trails off the

North Rim for the foreseeable future.

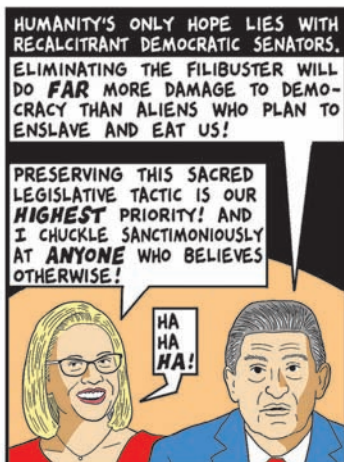
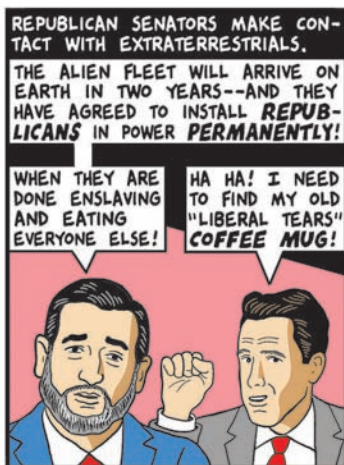
It's time for an Upper Bidwell Park user fee, just like at the state parks, to offset the costs of adequately patrolling the space. Such revenue would allow the city to perform sweeps to actually close the park at 9 p.m., as well as enforce other laws already on the books. This includes the ban on smoking, the proper use of its one-way streets and the policy that requires dogs to be leashed after 8:30 a.m. in Lower Park.

Again, the problem is not that we're lacking laws. It's that enforcement has been selective because "there's no money for that."

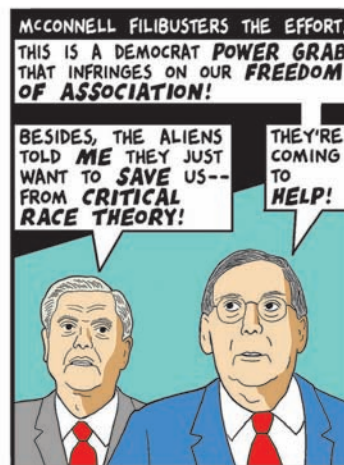
In short, it's time for an ounce of prevention to save our community, rather than letting things take their own course. The job of city planner includes the word *plan* in it, which means determining the best way to use a city's land and its resources. Such work is especially critical in terms of wildfire prevention.

Bidwell Park is an amazing resource, preserved in many places since people began using it thousands of years ago. My message to the city's elected officials and administrators: Kindly don't sit on the sidelines as it burns to the ground. □

THIS MODERN WORLD



BY TOM TOMORROW



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