Opinion: U.S. needs to rethink its priorities

By Fareed Zakaria, CNN

Something caught my eye the other day: Pat Robertson, the high priest of the religious right, had some startling things to say about drugs.

“I really believe we should treat marijuana the way we treat beverage alcohol,” Robertson said in a recent interview. “I’ve never used marijuana and I don’t intend to, but it’s just one of those things that I think. This war on drugs just hasn’t succeeded.”

The reason Robertson is for legalizing marijuana is that it has created a prison problem in America that is well beyond what most Americans imagine.

“It’s completely out of control,” Mr. Robertson said. “Prisons are being overcrowded with juvenile offenders having to do with drugs. And the penalties – the maximums – some of them could get 10 years for possession of a joint of marijuana. It makes no sense at all.”

He’s right. Here are the numbers: The total number of Americans under correctional supervision (prison, parole, etc.) is 7.1 million, more than the entire state of Massachusetts. Adam Gopnik writes in the New Yorker, “Over all, there are now more people under ‘correctional supervision’ in America…than were in the Gulag Archipelago under Stalin at its height.”

No other country comes even close to our rates of incarceration. We have 760 prisoners per 100,000 people. Most European countries have one seventh that number (per capita, so it’s adjusted for population). Even those on the high end

of the global spectrum – Brazil and Poland – have only a quarter the number we do.

Read the whole story

Garbage bills going up for South Shore customers

By Kathryn Reed

Garbage rates are expected to go up throughout the South Shore starting May 1.

The joint powers authority that oversees waste matters agreed to recommend the rate increase earlier this month. Now the three jurisdictions – South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado County, and Douglas County – need to approve the hike.

Fees are slated to go up 4.48 percent in El Dorado County, and 4.97 percent in South Lake Tahoe and Douglas County. For residential customers this equates to a monthly increase of $1.20 in El Dorado County, $1.15 in South Lake Tahoe and 77 cents in Douglas County. This means monthly rates become $27.97 in El Dorado County, $24.33 in South Lake Tahoe, and $16.33 in Douglas.

South Tahoe and El Dorado have unlimited service and Douglas has one 32-gallon can for those monthly rates.

The city and El Dorado County elected officials are expected to vote on the matter May 1, with the increase taking effect immediately. Douglas County officials did not respond to a request to find out when the vote would be taken nor is any information on the website.



Recyclables don't have much of a return in terms of cash, but they do keep garbage out of landfills. Photo/LTN

Through South Tahoe Refuse company's franchise agreements with the three jurisdictions it is allowed to ask for a rate increase every three years. Normally it comes on Jan. 1. But last year the company with the JPA, which has an official from each of the jurisdictions, worked out a process to streamline the process.

"What we tried to do was standardize the rate application so all three jurisdictions are on the same level," explained Gerri Silva, director of Environmental Management for El Dorado County. "We tried to go through and define what is a good index. Some of us used COLAs, some used CPI."

With this and future rate increase proposals the Garbage and Trash Index will be used to help determine rates.

The idea is this method will eliminate spikes.

Jeff Tillman, president of the South Lake Tahoe-based refuse company, said all of his costs are going up – landfill charges, fuel, insurance, everything – so the increase is

needed.

STR employees have gone without a raise for four years, the pension has been cut, and less equipment is being used.

“We are trying to make it work,” Tillman said, acknowledging no one likes any bill to go up.

While STR is recycling 66 percent of the garbage it collects – exceeding the state mandate – there is little money to recover from those products. What does come in is not profit; it goes into the base rate calculations.

Things beyond STR’s control have diminished its income. The homeowners who did not rebuild after the Angora Fire no longer pay a garbage bill.

Foreclosed properties also don’t have an STR bill.

“When the properties were demolished at Stateline that was a huge chunk,” Tillman told *Lake Tahoe News*.

When something gets built at “the hole” then STR will have several more clients to bill.

Commercial service is based mostly on how many times the dumpster is emptied. With so few people in town this winter, not much garbage was produced, so bills were light for those property owners – which in turn means revenue is down for STR.

Young professionals looking to fill key positions

Tahoe Regional Young Professionals is seeking three board members, an assistant executive director, finance director, and special events director.

Application are being accepted until May 5.

Tahoe Regional Young Professionals is a group of individuals that believes in giving back to the community. By connecting Tahoe's next generation to help better the community, TRYP organizes and participates in charity "FUN"draisers, and networking events while providing career opportunities to help support Tahoe residents an

For more information, email TahoeTRYP@gmail.com.

Hot and sweet combine for mouthful of fun at salsa contest

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Take small bites. That was the advice of Dennis, veteran Sierra-at-Tahoe salsa judge. Still, my tongue was numb for a bit of the contest.

With 19 concoctions to taste, it was a good thing several criteria are involved to come up with a possible total score of 50. However, flavor-taste is the biggie – with a possible

20 points. Overall impression is the next biggest point factor with 10 being the most that can be awarded. Up to five points were give for color-appearance, aroma, originality, and spice blend.

It reminded me a bit of wine tasting – just no spitting. Instead of swirl, smell, sip, spit, it was look, smell, taste, swallow.



Lake Tahoe News Publisher Kathryn Reed tries to decide if she likes this salsa. Photo/Susan Wood

Looking at the various salsas lined up in front of me it seemed a bit daunting. What if I wanted to spit? All those people watching and the maker in the crowd – better just smile.

But this was serious business. The stakes were high. The winner of the traditional and fruit categories would go home with a 2012-13 season pass to Sierra.

There are some wonderful salsa makers out there. My favorite

for the traditional was called The World’s Best. I wasn’t alone. It was awarded the best in that class.

Shane Hammett, the maker of The World’s Best, won two years ago, too.

“Like it lots, including the kick. Woo-hoo,” is what I wrote during the Sunday afternoon contest.

For the fruity segment, my favorite was the Kiwi Kicker Mango Madness created by Dave Young. It had fruit and heat mixed together for a fantastic blend of flavors. The winning salsa was West Bowl Special by Leah Rademacher. However, because Rademacher wasn’t there to claim her prize, the season pass went to Young.

Other judges, for the April 15 event were Dennis – lift operations manager at Sierra, Hugh – ski patrol, Jeff – security, and Lauren – marketing.

Tips for next year’s salsa makers – the pureed ones don’t do well on presentation, so that could be a loss of five points from the start. Most of the fruit is mango, so perhaps a different fruit should be used – watermelon if you could find one this time of year, and pineapple are ideas. The Ish scored high especially with Hugh and me when it came to aroma. That smokiness was definitely intriguing and unique. Only a couple tomatillo salsas were entered, so that is a choice that could be exploited a bit. Too much salt in a couple salsas had them receiving low scores for taste.

But these are just one judge’s comments. I’m thinking I might take this insider info and enter the contest next year.

While Sierra’s West Bowl is now closed, the other side of the mountain is open through next weekend. Too bad West Bowl won’t be open this week – the skiing there on Sunday was as good as the salsa.

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Trying to find a measure for how well colleges do

By Richard Perez-Pena, New York Times

How well does a college teach, and what do its students learn? Rankings based on the credentials of entering freshmen are not hard to find, but how can students, parents and policy makers assess how well a college builds on that foundation?

What information exists has often been hidden from public view. But that may be changing.

In the wake of the No Child Left Behind federal education law, students in elementary, middle and high schools take standardized tests whose results are made public, inviting anyone to assess, however imperfectly, a school's performance. There is no comparable trove of public data for judging and comparing colleges.

Pieces of such a system may be taking shape, however, with several kinds of national assessments — including, most controversially, standardized tests — gaining traction in recent years. More than 1,000 colleges may be using at least one of them.

“There’s a real shift in attitudes under way,” said David C. Paris, executive director of the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability, a coalition of higher education groups. “We used to hear a lot more of, ‘The value of college can’t be measured,’ and now we hear more of, ‘Let’s talk about how we can measure.’ ”

In January, the New Leadership Alliance released guidelines calling on colleges to systematically “gather evidence of student learning” – though not explicitly advocating standardized tests – and release the results. The report was endorsed by several major organizations of colleges and universities.

Advocates say the point is not to measure how each college’s students perform after four years, which depends heavily on the caliber of students it enrolls in the first place, but to see how much they improve along the way. The concern is less about measuring knowledge of chemistry or literature than about harder to define skills like critical thinking and problem-solving.

Read the whole story

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2 nights of learning and creating art in Truckee

Women, Art and the Creative Process is a two-part series celebrating the creative spirit in Truckee on April 22 and April 24.

The two-evening series features the Tahoe-Truckee premier showing of the “Evelyn” panel discussion and art project.

Evelyn Brenner, 94, creates colorful, inspirational art by combining fabrics, paint, clay, buttons, beads and pearls.



Truckee resident Elissa Slanger, an artist in her own right, produced a 30-minute film, “Evelyn,” that will be featured at the event.

Slanger has also assembled artists to speak about their work. Hear from Brooke Bishop, Nancy Tieken Lopez and Eva Nichols who will speak about medium and palette choices, creativity and art.

Acclaimed muralist Susie Alexander will facilitate an upbeat and playful evening. Each participant will dive into texture, colors and diverse shapes to embellish and personalize a pre-cut one-dimensional hat and explore female archetypes.

The Sunday event is 7-9pm and Tuesday is 6-8pm. Both are at Cedar House Sport Hotel, 10918 Brockway Road, Truckee.

For more information and tickets, email nicolecheslock.com.

Opinion: KidZone Museum thanks community for support

To the community,

Thank you for all your generous donations in response to our recent call for support. We’ve been joyfully overwhelmed by

the support and kind letters on behalf of the museum. We received $20,000 in donor contributions.

The KidZone Museum board plans for a much needed campaign for a reserve fund to help us through future difficult situations. Already a supporter has donated $5,000 to begin matching funds for a reserve. Our goal and need is to raise $50,000 which would support museum operations for three months if needed. We plan to remain conservative with our current budget to help us reach this goal quickly.

On April 28 the museum will celebrate its 20-year anniversary at its annual fundraiser Big Night Out- Disco. Please join us at Dragonfly from 5:30-11pm. Tickets are $40 in advance and $45 at the door and includes three complimentary drinks (beer and wine), dinner, dance music by disc jockey Brian Hess, a silent and live auction and raffle. All proceeds go to the KidZone Museum, a nonprofit nationally recognized children's museum. Tickets may be bought by calling (530) 587.5437.

Big Night Out-Disco will raise needed funds while simultaneously, the online auction is also helping us raise funds and is accessible to those unable to attend the event. Online auction closes on April 20.

If you would like more information on the museum, please contact me at director@kidzonemuseum.org.

Again, we are so thankful for everyone's support. Your donations and kind words inspire the museum staff to continue its hard work and to feel increasingly more passionate about being a part of such an innovative learning place for our children.

Sincerely,

Carol Meagher, director KidZone Museum

World of freelancing growing, but not an easy way to make a living

By Kaomi Goetz, NPR

The recession brought widespread unemployment across the U.S., but it also prompted a spike in the number of freelance or independent workers.

More than 30 percent of the nation's workers now work on their own, and the research firm IDC projects the number of nontraditional office workers – telecommuters, freelancers and contractors – will reach 1.3 billion worldwide by 2015.

Typically, freelancers get to choose when and where they work. Many opt to set up shop in "co-working" arrangements, where they can rent a cubicle and other office resources by the day or the month.

It was once a relatively simple process to sign up with a co-working site.

But now, more companies are adopting a selective approach known as "curated co-working." One such company, New York City's Grind, requires an application – and you have to be accepted to get started.

That means some would-be co-workers will find they don't make the cut.

"If you write two words and two sentences [on your application], you're probably not going to hear from me," says Benjamin Dyett, a Grind co-founder and the company's chief

gatekeeper. “But if you write two pages about why you want to work at Grind, I will bring you in for an interview.”

Read the whole story

Volleyball teams needed for annual tournament

The 4th annual Carson Valley Days Grass Volleyball Tournament is June 10 at Lampe Park in Gardnerville.

Adults play 4 on 4, youth (under 18) play 6 on 6. Adult categories are Open, Coed, or Women; youth are grouped by school grades.

There is a guarantee of three matches in pool play, plus elimination playoff in each division. Some divisions may be combined to maintain competitive numbers.

Cost is $15 per adult team member; $5 per youth team member.

Click here for an entry form or call (775) 782.9828 for information.

Glimmer of hope in Tahoe real estate market

While real estate prices continue to decline in the Lake Tahoe Basin, the number of sales in the first quarter increased

compared to 2011.



According to stats released by Chase International, for the quarter ending March 30 there was a 15 percent increase in units sold around the lake compared to a year ago.

Chase reports the median price of a home in Lake Tahoe is $317,000 and the average home price is $623,645, down 25 percent and 31 percent, respectively.

Truckee is showing signs of recovery mostly in sales of $1 million-plus houses.

The condominium market around Lake Tahoe experienced declines for all segments – units sold was down 18 percent, average prices was down 35 percent and the median price down 7 percent.

California bumped Nevada from the leader board when it came to the number of foreclosures. RealtyTrac reports the Golden State had 133,245 foreclosure filings in the first quarter. This accounts for 23 percent of the 572,928 foreclosures in the country.

El Dorado County, according to RealtyTrac, had 23 percent fewer foreclosures the first quarter of this year compared to 2011.

According to Fannie Mae's March consumer attitudinal National Housing Survey, more Americans expect home rental and home purchase prices to increase over the next year.

"These trends may be providing Americans with an increased sense of urgency to buy a home as 73 percent of Americans now believe it is a good time to buy a home, up from 70 percent in February," the California Association of Realtors reports.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report