Opinion: Whole nation is on government plantation

By Star Parker

Here's free advice for Mitt Romney.

Before bringing up the poor again, read my book "Uncle Sam's Plantation."

Romney has been taking a drubbing about his remarks in a CNN interview that he is "not worried about the very poor … we have a safety net there…If it needs a repair, I will fix it." And then going on to say it is "… middle income Americans … that are really struggling…." that are his concern.



Star Parker

What the now Republican presidential frontrunner missed in his off-the-cuff economic analysis of American class is that the cause driving the struggle among both low and middle income Americans is the same.

Economic stagnation and social breakdown caused by welfare state socialism.

As I explain in "Uncle Sam's Plantation," America's inner cities offer laboratory results for what is wrong today with the whole country.

If you want to know why America is failing, look at why our inner cities are failing.

Gov. Romney is incorrect to label as a safety net welfare state programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training, Emergency Assistance to Needy Families with Children, Section 8 Housing, and Food Stamps.

A safety net is what is provided when a free person, acting on their own initiative, falls and we offer assistance to help them get back up and start again.

The welfare state amounts to wholesale takeover of individual lives. As opposed to government stepping in to soften the blow, the welfare state assumes from the start that individuals won't make it without government managing their lives.

It is not an accident that despite some ten trillion dollars spent on anti-poverty programs since the 1960's there is little discernable change in our poverty rate.

The problem was made worse because the broken families and broken spirits resulting from government plantation dependence have institutionalized inner city poverty.

If America is going to get back on track, we must appreciate that we are doing to our whole country what we did to America's poor.

Seventy percent of government spending today consists of transfer payments – government redistributing funds from one set of individuals to others.

Even before the Obamacare government takeover, our health care market was already dominated by government. About ten percent of our healthcare expenditures today are out-of-pocket expenditures by individuals. About half of health care expenditures in 1960 were individual out-of-pocket expenditures.

Despite the central role that government sponsored enterprises – Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac – played in the recent housing collapse, their role in the housing market today has become even greater.

In 2011, 95 percent of all new mortgages were bought or guaranteed by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, or FHA.

And, of course, just about every working American is part of Social Security and Medicare, both of which are now fiscally untenable.

Now layer on to all this Obamacare, a trillion dollars in spending on stimulus programs, and bailouts of banks and auto companies. And five trillion in new debt, a 45 percent increase, over the last four years as a down payment on it all.

The bigger role government plays in our lives, the more America resembles the post office rather than FedEx.

And the bigger role government plays, the harder it is to fix the problem because individuals become used to these programs and fear fundamental change.

Mitt Romney touts his business experience as his qualification for the presidency.

That business experience amounted to turning companies around, improving their performance by making more efficient use of their assets.

This is exactly what our country needs today. A reallocation of our assets from government to private sector efficiency.

Getting off Uncle Sam’s Plantation is no longer a problem limited to our poor. It is a problem and challenge for the whole country.

Star Parker is founder and president of CURE, the Center for

Urban Renewal and Education, a 501(c)3 think tank which explores and promotes market based public policy to fight poverty, as well as author of the newly revised "Uncle Sam's Plantation: How Big Government Enslaves America's Poor and What We Can do About It".

Shakespeare Festival looking for 4-legged performer

If you ever thought your dog had a future on the stage, look no further. The Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival is having auditions for "Crab" – the dog who plays an important and loving role in William Shakespeare's "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" which will be performed from July 13-Aug. 26 at Sand Harbor State Park.

The ideal candidates should be extremely mellow in nature, must be able to perform outdoors in any weather and resist the temptation to run, act upon or be interested in outside distractions such as bugs, animals, people, sound and lights. The dog must also be agile, able to negotiate a flight of stairs (up and down), be well behaved and respond to simple commands like "sit", "stay" and "down" or similar behavioral commands.

The first round of auditions is set for March 21 from 4:30-7:30pm at the Donald W. Reynolds Nonprofit Community Center, 948 Incline Way, Incline Village. To qualify for an audition, interested parties must send a headshot of the dog, owner/handler information and any additional details that they'd like to share to info@tahoebard.com. Once the information is reviewed, all applicants will receive a call to

confirm a time for the first interview. If the dog is selected to continue with the audition process, the final audition will be April 24 from 4:30-7:30pm.

As the 2012 LTSF production runs six nights a week throughout a six-week period, two dogs may be selected to play the part of Crab.

Rehearsals start July 9 and the dogs must be available every night as scheduled, from 7-10:30pm, Tuesdays through Sundays to perform in approximately four scenes. Owners must also be on site during the entire duration of the scheduled shows.

For more information about the dog auditions, email info@tahoebard.com or call (775) 298.0147.

S. Tahoe budget hole would grow without parking meters

By Kathryn Reed

For people to say they didn't know South Lake Tahoe intended to charge for parking near beaches, makes one wonder if they had their head in the sand for the past year.

"The other new source of revenue is via metered parking, especially near beaches." That's from a March 2, 2011, *Lake Tahoe News* story.

The city in its budget for 2011-12 – that would be this year – is counting on more than $300,000 from parking revenue in the form of citations and meters.



Venice Drive in South Lake Tahoe is slated to have parking meters this summer. Photo/LTN

On Feb. 7 the City Council was expected to approve an amendment to a city ordinance that would have expanded parking meter zones to Regan Beach, Stateline Beach, Venice Drive between Tahoe Keys Boulevard and Tahoe Keys Marina, and Saddle Road between Ski Run Boulevard and Wildwood Avenue. Instead, the four (Angela Swanson was absent) caved to pressure from marina interests.

“We did have 200 people at both budget hearings, so it is not like this is news,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke said.

Jay Kniep with Lakeside Park Association; Bob Hassett who operates the marinas at Camp Richardson, Tahoe Keys and Lakeside; and Zan Barker the president of the Lakeside Park Association said at the council meeting last week that they found out about the parking issue this month.

This, despite the fact the parking issue has been discussed at multiple public meetings for nearly a year, has been written about multiple times, is included in the current budget year which started Oct. 1, and that meters already were erected near Heavenly Village.

“It’s chilling to have this announcement and no input,” Barker

said. “Everyone I’ve talked to is concerned. I beg you to step back.”

Step back the council did.

A special meeting just to accommodate these three men and their special interests has been scheduled for Feb. 22.

These men think paid parking will hurt their businesses. After all, they won’t be making a dime off the fee. It will go into the city’s coffers.

But paid parking is not new on the South Shore. Even Hassett charges for parking every summer to get to the Beacon restaurant and adjacent marina. But he gets to keep those dollars.

The Ski Run Marina owner charges in the summer and the U.S. Forest Service has a fee at some locations.

If the council doesn’t move forward, it’s possible the summer paid parking season will be cut short. Originally the council was expected to have on its Feb. 21 agenda an item to approve buying the parking meter kiosks. Clearly that won’t happen because the special interest meeting will be the day after the next council meeting.

Police Chief Brian Uhler, whose department handles the bulk of the parking issue, said each week and month that decisions are delayed means that much longer for the equipment to be purchased, put into the ground and to become operational. Which in turn could mean less money collected that would necessitate mid-year changes to the budget.

O’Rourke pointed out the council can do whatever it wants as long as the electeds remember they adopted a budget that banks on parking revenue. If they want to back away from meters, then another revenue source needs to found or the council can keep making cuts.

Meeting info:

Date: Feb. 22

Time: 6-7:30pm

Location: Parks & Recreation Complex, Cedar Room, 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe

More info: (530) 542.6136.

Prescribed burn planned for Kingsbury Grade area

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will begin prescribed fire operations above Andria Drive on Kingsbury Grade on Feb. 14.

The project will begin with approximately 5 acres and may expand depending on the weather. Operations will continue through the week and possibly the weekend, weather permitting.

Residents and visitors can expect to see smoke from this prescribed fire project area. Smoke may be visible on Kingsbury Grade. The Forest Service strives to minimize the impacts of smoke on local communities. Smoke-sensitive residents should consider staying indoors and keeping doors,

windows and outside vents closed.

To directly receive prescribed fire updates, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Forest Service staff will post road signs around areas affected by prescribed fire, and update the local fire information line at (530) 543-2600, No. 6.

McClintock behind secretive California water deal

By Michael Doyle, Sacramento Bee

Controlling California water can seem like a covert affair on Capitol Hill. If you're not in the club, you're left in the dark.

Republican lawmakers, led by Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, have been quietly overseeing the rewrite of a huge California water bill since last summer. The bill could shape everything from the San Joaquin River to Sacramento Valley water deliveries. Despite the broad-based impact, Democrats feel shut out.



Tom McClintock

“I don’t think they have any interest in talking to us,” said Democratic Rep. Mike Thompson of St. Helena, adding that he has had “no contact” from Republicans writing the water bill.

Equally frustrated at what he described as his aides being “blown off,” Rep. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, confronted McClintock at a recent committee hearing.

“He said, when the bill is ready, he’ll let us know,” Garamendi said. “I think it’s a very bad way to do legislation, especially legislation that’s so sensitive.”

McClintock, who represents Lake Tahoe in Congress, declined repeated requests to discuss the bill over the course of a week. His communications director, Jennifer Cressy, said in an email Thursday that “when proponents have a draft ready to propose, the bill will be ready for public discussion.”

The original bill introduced last May covers a lot of turf. It stops a San Joaquin River restoration program, restores longer irrigation contracts and limits environmental protections in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Skeptics fear the bill as originally written could also steer more water south of the Delta, away from users north of the Delta.

The bill’s chief author, Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, said Thursday that the bill is now “in good shape” and needs only scheduling with the committee.

“We’re trying to fix 30 years of malfeasance by the left,” Nunes said, “and it takes a lot of time to get it right.”

Read the whole story

Doctors in the habit of hiding truth from patients

By Karen Kaplan, Los Angeles Times

Some things are better left unsaid – and that includes certain aspects of your medical condition, doctors say.

In a nationwide survey of roughly 1,800 physicians, 17 percent had some level of disagreement with the notion that they should "never tell a patient something that is not true." Not only that, but 11 percent of those surveyed acknowledged that they had told a patient "something that was not true" in the past year.

The survey, led by Lisa Iezzoni, director of the Mongan Institute for Health Policy at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, didn't ask doctors for specifics about the type of untruths they told. But at least some of them were probably more than just spin – in another question, 55% of doctors admitted they had "described a patient's prognosis in a more positive manner than warranted."

One motivation for shading – or flat-out hiding – the truth appears to be the fear of being sued. The survey found that 34 percent did not completely agree that "all significant medical errors" should be disclosed to patients, with 20 percent saying they had withheld information about medical mistakes in the past year.

Read the whole story

Needy business owners may get help sprucing up exteriors

By Kathryn Reed

A state grant may allow South Lake Tahoe businesses to improve their facades as long as they meet strict income requirements.

The money will come from the Community Development Block Grants the city receives from the state. The bulk of the first grant has been spent, with another $300,000 being awarded to the city to be used through June 2013.

Through a formal bidding process the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce had been awarded the contract for the business coaching services. An amendment to the agreement approved last week by the City Council would allocate $153,125 for façade improvements to businesses the chamber is working with. The state must still say this is an allowable use of the funds.

Hilary Roverud, director of Development Services, told the council she does not anticipate many business owners falling into the income criteria. It’s possible three to five structures could be aided with the money available.

All of the money must be spent on South Lake Tahoe businesses.

During the presentation the council heard from chamber CEO B Gorman, coaches in the program and recipients of the help about the effectiveness of the program. In the past 15 months, 47 businesses have received coaching, with 25 of them being new businesses.

“Twenty-two existing businesses have benefited from the program by improving their skills, expanding products and services offered, thereby creating approximately 15 new [full

time] jobs as well as a second location being opened by one of the businesses," the staff report says.

Before the chamber took over running the program, a group off the hill had the contract. Gorman said the chamber in turn has local experts be the coaches so even more money is staying in the area.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe

Sophie is a nice 2-year-old cat with beautiful blue eyes. She gets along well with other cats, and has lived with small children and dogs.



She is an indoor cat, and would make a great addition to just about any household.

Sophie is spayed, microchipped, and vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

League done challenging South Tahoe's General Plan

By Kathryn Reed

The League to Save Lake Tahoe has agreed not to appeal the January federal court decision that was in favor of the city of South Lake Tahoe in regards to the lawsuit the League had filed to stop implementation of the city's General Plan.

Carl Young told *Lake Tahoe News* that through collaboration, cooperation and negotiations with the city that objectives the conservation groups seeks will be obtained.

"It's the first time I understand that we have ever successfully defeated the League to Save Lake Tahoe in a lawsuit," City Attorney Patrick Enright told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We are going to fight back and we are not just going to roll over. We will defend the city."

The city is so ecstatic that Mayor Claire Fortier wrote an entire column about how wonderful this is.

"What ties up the rebuilding is the opinion of those who support the League's 3-decade-old myth that Tahoe is on the verge of becoming overbuilt. It's the League's fear-mongering and knowingly false hyperbole that helps the League raise money for costly lawsuits that ultimately destroy projects offering extensive environmental good," Fortier wrote. "Litigation at Lake Tahoe has become a costly, extremist and

antagonistic way of blocking the improvements that would actually stall and reverse lake clarity degradation. Even the most environmentally sound and economically feasible ideas or plans are challenged, sued and ultimately delayed for years, making the costs for such projects prohibitive and the benefits unobtainable.”

In the settlement agreement that was announced Feb. 13, both sides will pay their own legal costs. It was handled in-house by the city, with Assistant City Attorney Nira Feeley being the lead litigator, so no external costs were incurred by South Lake Tahoe. The city’s attorneys office put in about 120 hours on this case.

Odds are against a March Miracle saving Sierra snowpack

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

After the driest December in 22 years, and a January that was merely damp, California weather watchers are hungry for any whiff of change in the air.

So when news seeped out that this winter’s cursed La Niña conditions may at last be weakening, some of those eager observers began to pine for a repeat of the legendary “Miracle

March” scenario of 1991 that helped California break a long drought.



Normally the area where Trout Creek enters Lake Tahoe is covered in snow on Jan. 31 -- not in 2012. Photo/LTN

Not so fast, say the forecasters.

The pattern is definitely shifting, but so far there are few signs of really big storms on the horizon that could salvage the ski season and stave off drought.

“I don’t see it being a similar pattern,” said Jim Mathews, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Sacramento. “To hang your hat on a wet March, I think the odds are not in our favor.”

The weather service dug up some stats on the 10 driest November-through-January periods in Sacramento since the Gold Rush. This winter made the cut at No. 10.

Then it looked at how many of those winters, after January, concluded with above-normal rainfall. Only three did, including 1991.

Hence the long odds.

“We continue to do our snow dances, I can tell you that,” said Andy Chapman, chief marketing officer at the North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce. “We do whatever we can to help the skies open up a little bit.”

Tahoe’s ski industry went without natural snowfall over the economically vital Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday stretch. Many ski resorts managed to open terrain using snow-making machines.

Read the whole story