# Opinion: The good and bad of Congress in 2011

**By Ed Feulner**

It's hardly news to say that the American people are fed up with Congress. Public disapproval of the legislative branch is practically as old as the country itself. But lawmakers seemed to reach a new low in 2011.

One Wall Street Journal/NBC poll showed that one out of every three Americans considered the first session of the 112th Congress to "below average." Another 42 percent said it was "one of the worst" in the institution's 222-year history. A poll by CNN, meanwhile, found that only 41 percent think their representative should be re-elected – the first time that figure had dropped below 50 percent.

Is this distrust deserved? Let's review some of the issues Congress handled in 2011.

**We'll start with the positives:**

**1) A Balanced Budget Amendment.** This is the first shot of a long war to limit the size of government while making it virtually impossible to raise taxes to balance the budget.

The Senate recently had the opportunity to vote on a BBA sponsored by Sen. Mark Udall, D-Colo., one that would exempted Social Security. This despite the fact that fast-growing entitlement spending is playing a huge role in our burgeoning national debt.

Udall's BBA even threw in some class warfare. It would have enshrined the following provision in the U.S. Constitution: "Congress shall not pass any bill that provides a net reduction in individual income taxes for those with incomes

over $1 million.” But it was soundly defeated with votes from both parties.

In the House, a version supported by Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., also crashed and burned. Its major problem: It would have made it easier for Congress to resort to higher taxes to help balance the budget. Or try to balance it, that is: Anyone who knows history can tell you that higher taxes inevitably leads to higher spending.

A stronger, sounder BBA would certainly be a good thing. In the Senate, Utah Republicans Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee did sponsor one that sidestepped the pitfalls of the Udall-Goodlatte approach. (It was voted down as well.) But avoiding a tax-hiking BBA definitely counts as a congressional positive.

**2) Obamacare Repeal.** The president’s signature law may be approaching a day of reckoning in the Supreme Court, but the House already did its part, voting 245 to 189 last January to repeal Obamacare. The vehicle: a bill sponsored by Rep. Eric Cantor, R.-Va., the Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act.

**3) Budget Votes.** President Obama’s budget went down 0-97 in the Senate. The Democratic-controlled chamber, in fact, still hasn’t passed a budget, as required by law, in more than 900 days. But no wonder Obama’s budget tanked: According to Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., his $3.7 trillion plan would have created $8.7 trillion in new spending, added $1.6 trillion in new taxes, and led to $13 trillion in new debt over the next 10 years.

A far more sensible budget plan by Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wisc., meanwhile, drew the support of all but five Senate Republicans. His budget was a good first step to start down the road of comprehensive entitlement reform.

**4) No New Taxes.** Conservative legislators successfully stymied

efforts by President Obama and liberal legislators to raise taxes.

**On the negative side of the ledger:**

**1) The Supercommittee.** The debt-ceiling fight that raged over the summer led to its creation. Its mission: find $1.2 trillion in cuts over 10 years. If it didn't succeed, defense was scheduled for massive cuts. Liberals may have failed to raise taxes, but having defense put in the budget cross-hairs like this is an obvious conservative loss.

**2) New Debt.** The Congressional Budget Office counted $1.3 trillion in new debt last year. Preventing new and higher taxes is key, but it must be accompanied by serious and meaningful budget cuts. The fact that Congress continues to show no stomach for this necessary step offers a big clue as to why public disapproval is so high.

**3) Gridlock.** It can often be a good thing, especially when there are bad ideas to shoot down. But the gridlock in 2011 was often needless. Worse, conservatives always seemed to lose policy battles in the end. It was hardly encouraging, for example, to see the Ryan budget plan abandoned when the time came to pass the annual appropriations bills.

**4) Government Shutdown.** Washington came within minutes of one last April before a compromise was finally worked out. The final deal cut projected increases in spending, but brought no serious reforms to the federal government. Stop-gap measures to avoid making things worse are better than nothing, but conservatives need to start winning the bigger battle.

Will Congress will do better in 2012? That depends on how willing lawmakers are to make difficult decisions.

Take the "cut, cap and balance" plan, which won House approval last July. It's good to see lawmakers stand behind an effort to make substantial spending cuts, pass enforceable budget

caps, and pass a strong BBA. But unless they redouble their efforts to turn these good intentions into reality, lawmakers will stay unpopular back home.

Do they really want to do that, especially in a major election year?

*Ed Feulner is president of the Heritage Foundation and co-author of "Getting America Right: The True Conservative Values Our Nation Needs Today".*

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# RAOK: Giving clothes and giving away RAOK prize

In the spirit of Random Acts of Kindness, the person selected as today's winner has generously given her prize to Shannon Parker.




Babette wrote in about giving to a family who lost many of their belongings in a storage shed.

While the current prize may not help them with that loss, it will give Shannon something to look forward to. Les Wright has donated an entry into either the 5K or 10K during the September Lake Tahoe Marathon weekend.

Area businesses are helping make Random Acts of Kindness extra special. *Lake Tahoe News* is providing a forum for people to write in about a Random Act of Kindness they saw, did or received. All you have to do is write about it at the end of

this story.

For more details about Random Acts of Kindness and the few rules associated with it, check out this story.

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# Report: Officials stay one step ahead of aquatic invasives

**By Kathryn Reed**

STATELINE – Sixty-three percent of the vessels inspected in 2011 had to be decontaminated before being allowed to enter Lake Tahoe.

Of the 30,400 boats that were launched, 7,600 had to be checked for aquatic invasive species, with 4,800 of those needing to be decontaminated. While most of the boats originated in California or Nevada, Utah, Oregon and Arizona were the states with the next highest number of boaters.



Small mouth bass are a threat to

mackinaw in
Lake Tahoe.

Overall, that was 9,000 more than in 2010. Ted Thayer, aquatic invasive species program coordinator for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, said how data is collected changed between 2010 and 2011, so while marinas reported business was up, it may not have been as significant as the AIS program numbers indicate.

Thayer on Jan. 11 updated the Advisory Planning Commission about how the AIS program worked last year. The TRPA Governing Board will hear the presentation at its Jan. 25 meeting in Stateline.

“This was a very successful year for the program,” Thayer said.

The program since its inception in 2007 keeps evolving. Prevention, monitoring and controlling are the mantras. Weeds, Asian clams and warm water fish are the predominate invasives that partners in the program are trying to eradicate, control or prevent from reaching Lake Tahoe. Fallen Leaf and Echo lakes also come under the purview of this program.

But what makes Fallen Leaf Lake different than Tahoe is no aquatic invasive species have been found in that body of water off Highway 89. Motor boats are inspected at the marina, with a roving inspector checking non-motorized watercraft that are mostly launched from the U.S. Forest Service-owned campground at the other end.

The Fallen Leaf Lake report shows of the 428 inspections, 24 vessels came from lakes known to have quagga or zebra mussels, or New Zealand mud snails.

Other regional bodies of water like Donner Lake and Lahontan Reservoir are outside TRPA’s control. However, as funding these programs becomes more difficult with the disappearance

of federal dollars, a broader regional approach to aquatic invasive species is likely to occur.

Thayer said this could mean one day the decontamination station on the North Shore being outside the basin and closer to Truckee, and possibly having a station in Carson City instead of at the top of Spooner Summit. Those are just ideas now. Eventually permanent stations are the goal.

TRPA is not alone in the AIS program. A number of agencies and groups are involved, including, but not limited to, Tahoe RCD, UC Davis, California Department of Fish & Game, and Nevada Department of Wildlife.

In 2011, 6.51 acres of Emerald Bay were treated for invasive weeds. This compares to the 1.1 acres treated in 2010. Commercial divers helped with the removal of the plants.

Milfoil is one of the biggest problems throughout Lake Tahoe, especially in the lagoons of Tahoe Keys on the South Shore.

“This project was designed to test multiple methods,” Thayer said. “Tahoe Keys is a very different environment. There is a lot denser growth of weeds, with a lot of boat docks.”

A dye that is invisible to the human eye was used in this area. Thayer praised Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board’s decision late last year to allow herbicide use in Lake Tahoe on occasion. He said this may be needed for the Keys.

Using a barrier to suffocate Asian clams was most effective in summer, but worked in the winter as well – it just takes longer when the water is colder. Marla Bay is where the winter tests were done.

Knowing this works means the material could be used in areas with a ton of boat activity – like Ski Run Marina area – that during the summer make it dangerous for divers to work.

A pilot program to rid the mouth of Emerald Bay was less

successful because of the topography and water exchange.

A warm water fish eradication program encompassed about 14 acres, mostly in the Tahoe Keys. An electrical charge was sent into the water that stunned the fish. They were then scooped out of the water – all 12,000, which weighed 2,157 pounds.

The small mouth bass, according to Thayer, is what concerns officials the most. They can threaten the mackinaw. Even though the mackinaw is not native – it was introduced as a sport fish – it is not considered an invasive species.

A change going forward is creating a lakewide permit for AIS treatments. Thayer said that should be in place this year.

In the past, engines were flushed for one minute to decontaminate them. That will decrease to 10 seconds this year. Thayer said this is to conform with industry standards. For boaters it will speed up the process and decrease potential propeller damage from the decontamination process.

Monitoring the water at 60 locations throughout Tahoe, Fallen Leaf and Echo is how scientists determine if invasives have reached those bodies of water. The most threatening are quagga and zebra mussels. They have not reached any of these waters.

To keep the program going, an increase in watercraft inspection fees is being proposed. The Governing Board will make that decision. The document linked here is what was presented to the APC and is likely to change before it reaches the Governing Board in 12 days.

# Jam event at Boreal for skiers and boarders

Boreal’s Expression Sessions are returning for the 15th consecutive season. The Expression Sessions are a series of four jam-style events between January and April for skiers and snowboarders of all ability levels.

Anyone over the age of 7 is encouraged to compete in any and all of these events. Awards are given to the top three skiers/riders in each division, plus tons of other prizes will be randomly distributed and raffled off to spectators and competitors throughout each event.

New this year, each Expression Session will build on the theme of Junkyard Jams. Before each session Boreal will unveil a never-before-seen terrain feature that has been reduced, reused or recycled for a second life. The first event Jan. 13 will feature a slightly modified 1,000 gallon propane tank. The final event on April 6 will be a showdown on all three features from the previous events.

For each competition the terrain features and prizes will change, giving everyone something to look forward to. The age divisions are decided after registration, based on the ages of those registered. Registration will begin at 5pm the day of each event and competition will begin at 6:30pm.

Entry is $5 for anyone that has a Boreal lift ticket or season pass. Helmets are required.

Other session dates are Feb. 10, March 9 and April 6.

# Freeride Flow Fest

Kirkwood Mountain Resort is hosting the inaugural Freeride Flow Fest on March 16-18.

The three-day event brings together novice and recreational winter athletes with professional athletes, backcountry experts and top industry vendors for clinics, demonstrations, electronic disc jockeys, performances and a whole lot of après ski.

Tickets are on sale online.

Confirmed athletes include: Sage Cattabriga-Alosa, professional big mountain skier; Alison Gannett, leading the KEEN Rippin' Chix Backcountry Camp and Steeps Clinics; legendary ski pioneer Kent Krietler, as backcountry guide and yoga instructor; Lorenzo Worster, world renowned telemark skier; Hanna Hardaway, two-time Olympian; Brooke Edwards, freeride instructor and Tough Guy Productions event coordinator; Maeve Nevins, backcountry instructor; and Wendy Lautner, published author and backcountry enthusiast.

Clinics focus on backcountry skiing including avalanche and beacon search, alpine, telemark and snowboard freeriding, women's only clinics, park riding, big air bag jumping and yoga. As well as being a leave no trace earth conscious event, a portion of the proceeds from the festival will go to Protect Our Winters, an environmental center point of the global winter sports community, united towards a common goal of reducing climate change effects on sports and local economies.

# Teen Court looking for youth to participate

El Dorado County Teen Court program in Placerville will conduct training for new student volunteers, and for all student attorneys currently in the program, on Jan. 18 from 6-7:30pm at the El Dorado Superior Court House located at 495 Main St. in Placerville.

Teen Court is a local program for El Dorado County students in grades 8-12 who want to take an active role in the juvenile justice system. Upon completion of the mandatory training, teens will serve as court personnel for real cases in which an offense has been committed by a minor, the minor has admitted to the offense, and has chosen to be judged by his/her peers.

The Teen Court program began in 1992 in El Dorado County and is funded through the Alcohol and Drug Programs of the El Dorado County Public Health Division, Health and Human Services Agency. Cases are referred and managed by the El Dorado County Probation Department. Superior Court judges and sheriff’s office also are program partners.

The Teen Court program generally runs from October through May of each year; court hearings are generally on the first and third Wednesday of each month at Superior Court on Main Street in Placerville at 6pm.

For more information about Teen Court, call (530) 621.6130.

# Fire officials on heightened alert because of dry conditions

Due to the lack of measurable precipitation and drying north and east winds, all burning in El Dorado and Amador counties have been banned on state responsibility lands until further notice.

“Since this is one of the driest winters on record, we have decided to take this action in order to protect life and property. We have put into place a staffing pattern that maintains one fire engine in each of our divisions and one conservation camp crew in each of our camps 24/7,” Chief Kelly Keenan of the Amador-El Dorado Unit of CalFire said in a release.

The public is being asked to not burn debris piles and check on old debris piles to make sure they are completely out.

“We are seeing escape control burns almost daily due to these extreme weather conditions,” Keenan said.

The U.S. Forest Service has put the fire danger level at moderate – an occurrence almost unheard of in January.

“The overwhelming majority of our wildland fires are human-caused. As usual, the No. 1 cause was illegal or abandoned campfires,” Forest Service spokeswoman Cheva Heck said in a release. “We ask that that people remember that campfires and warming fires generally are not allowed on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.”

The chart shows fire stats for the LTBMU for 2011.

The Forest Service this winter has responded to two wildland fires caused by residents dumping woodstove ashes in the forest near their homes.

A couple lost their rental house near Meyers from putting hot ashes on a deck.

Fire agencies recommend placing ashes in a metal container, which should be stored on a non-flammable surface like a concrete walk. They should cool for four days before final disposal

Nevada officials are also worried about fire as precipitation this winter is still non-existent.

Fire agencies usually spend winter months training, maintaining equipment and preparing for the next wildfire season, but so far this winter, wildfires have occurred weekly throughout Nevada.

In 2011, Nevada experienced 814 wildfires and lost approximately 423,768 acres, just shy of the five-year average of 428,084 acres burned.

Conditions are similar to late summer or early fall, and the potential for a rapidly spreading wildfire during daylight hours is high. In several cases, fire behavior has been extreme because of the lack of precipitation, high winds, low humidity and extremely low fuel moisture.

*– Lake Tahoe News staff report*

# Biathlon course open in Tahoe City

Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area and Tahoe Peak Endurance will be hosting a free Laser Biathlon “do-it-yourself” mountain biking and/or running course Jan. 14 from 10:30am-2:30pm.

Six biathlon stations, a penalty lap and a main lap will be set up between these hours to give people the opportunity to try your hand at biathlon. Bring your bike and/or running shoes to test your endurance.

Some biathlon facts:

It is the most popular winter sport watched on European TV.

Skiers average about 4 minutes per mile when racing.

Heart rates on the ski course reach 180 beats per minute.

Missing the correct wax and improper ski base preparation will cost a racer more time lost than missing a target.

The best nations in biathlon are Germany, Norway and Russia.

The rifle weighs about 8 pounds but feels much heavier when one skis uphill.

Volunteers needed or for more information, call (530) 583.5475 or email ski@tahoexc.org.

# 6 nominated to be Youth of the Year by Boys & Girls Club

Every year 4,000 Boys & Girls Clubs across the country honor one of their own outstanding teens with the prestigious honor of Youth of the Year to represent their local club.

The six finalists for the Boys & Girls Club of Lake Tahoe are: Alejandro Aguirre, Michael Bergsten, Jade Burghard, Aria D'Aintree, Angela Rheault, and Owen Slater. All six were selected using the National Boys & Girls Club of America criteria of sound character, leadership, and willingness to serve.

These are the qualities that make a Youth of the Year. They are also some of the most important qualities young people need to realize their full potential.

On Jan. 18 the winner will be announced at the club's monthly Family Chili Dinner Night. Josh Kornbeck, Youth of the Year 2011, will be making the announcement.

The public is invited to this free event that takes place at the club's main site at 1100 Lyons Ave., South Lake Tahoe.

To learn more about the Boys & Girls Club, go online.

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# Austin's House fundraiser

The fourth annual Mardi Gras Magic Dinner & Dance to benefit Austin's House is Feb. 17 at the Carson Valley Inn. This

fundraiser recreates the party atmosphere of Bourbon Street in New Orleans on Fat Tuesday with food, music, dancing, raffle prizes and a grand prize drawing for a trip to The Big Easy.

The evening starts at 6pm with a cocktail hour. Then feast on a Cajun buffet dinner.

Dancing music is provided by Fabrizio.

Tickets are $50. Only 200 tickets will be sold. Call Austin’s House at (775) 267.6711 for tickets.

Austin’s House is the only emergency children’s shelter in rural Northern Nevada. Austin’s House provides services and care for up to 10 children from infants to age 18.