Opinion: Ocean drowning in plastic

By Mark Gold and Cara Horowitz

You've probably seen the images of dolphins caught in abandoned monofilament fishing nets, or of vast areas of plastic trash floating in remote waters of the Pacific, or of sea turtles consuming plastic bags that look remarkably like one of their favorite foods: jellyfish. Or perhaps, after a rainstorm, you've walked on a beach that resembled a landfill. Some 20 million tons of plastic pollution enters the oceans each year, and it's devastating the marine environment.

Plastic litter is also costly. On the West Coast alone, according to a recent EPA study, the cost of cleaning up marine litter comes to more than $13 per person per year. And because plastic typically does not degrade in the ocean, today's pollution will be a problem for many generations to come.

Locally, there have been some success stories. Thanks to state and federal environmental requirements, the Los Angeles region has installed screens on more than 50,000 storm water basins, as well as inserts that keep all but the smallest plastic pollution out of local rivers, beaches and bays. Additionally, bans on single-use plastic bags in a number of local jurisdictions have reduced plastic bag use by tens of millions of bags annually. And West Hollywood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and Malibu have banned single-use foam food packaging. All of these measures have meant less plastic ending up in the ocean locally.

Statewide, legislation to ban plastic bags has failed numerous times due to successful lobbying efforts from plastic bag manufacturers and others, but nevertheless, more than 10

million Californians live in cities that have banned the bag. The State Water Resources Control Board will soon release a statewide trash policy that builds on the Los Angeles area's successful trash control measures.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Calif. wrong not to test students

By George Miller and Russlynn Ali

You don't need a crystal ball to see America's future. Just look inside California's classrooms, where you'll find 1 in 8 American children. How our country does tomorrow depends on how California's schools do today. Will America be ready to compete? Are our students on track for success in college or career? Which schools are doing well and which need improvement?

Last month, Gov. Jerry Brown signed misguided legislation that makes all of those essential questions harder to answer. Under AB484, for the first time in nearly two decades, California won't test all of its students, won't provide data about student performance to parents, teachers or schools, and will not hold itself accountable for raising student achievement.

Brown and Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson heralded AB484 as a modernizing move to implement the new standards known as the Common Core, adopted by California and 44 other states. The theory is that we should throw away the

old tests and start a year from now with the new tests, but in the interim we'll stop giving vital information to parents and students. AB484 effectively blindfolds educators during this transition at a time when it's most critical to measure student learning to inform instructional change.

Thoughtful implementation of Common Core is an important issue facing states and school districts across the country. But eliminating testing, even if just for a couple of years, is not the solution. Other states such as New York, Kentucky and Massachusetts are working through this challenge by aligning their testing systems with the new standards and helping parents understand that, with new assessments, initial drops in test scores are expected. They are making sure students are comfortable with new computer-based assessments, and are helping teachers get ready to use the new testing and evaluation systems, giving them several years before any consequences are tied to new assessments.

These states are making the difficult but necessary transition to higher standards without compromising on important values, like a parent's and a student's right to know how they are performing; a teacher's need to know which students deserve extra attention; whether the rights to equal education are being upheld for students with disabilities and English learners; and the state's responsibility to hold itself, its districts and its schools accountable for student achievement.

Elected leaders in California, instead, have chosen to fly blind for the next few years. And in so doing, they are defying the will of the people. According to a Rossier/PACE poll of California voters, 66 percent of parents with school-age children believe students should be tested in each grade to ensure they are progressing.

California annually receives more than $3.5 billion in federal funds designed to protect the civil rights of and promote educational opportunity for students. As part of its plan with

the federal government to receive those funds, California agreed to assess students annually and report on the performance of poor students, students of color, students with disabilities and English learners. AB484 violates the state's agreements with the federal government, threatening access to the federal funds California relies on to serve its most disadvantaged students.

Worse still, the new law will force districts throughout the state to violate the nation's civil rights statutes, laws the Obama administration is required to enforce. Without the federal government as the guarantor of its people's civil rights, progress toward equity has historically faltered.

Brown and the Legislature have restored America's largest state to fiscal solvency, even in the middle of the worst economic crisis since the Depression. They deserve credit and our deepest gratitude.

However, we must have an honest conversation about our state's ability to provide a world-class education. California ranks 47th among all states in eighth-grade math, and 45th in fourth-grade reading – and the long-term consequences of drift and delay are incalculable. The Common Core provides the promise and the opportunity for California to again lead the country in education, but not if the state blocks access to student performance data, even for a couple years.

A year is a valuable time in a child's education. That's why we are standing alongside a coalition of California parents, advocates, civil rights leaders, educators and teachers coming together with our lawmakers to rethink AB484. They know this is no time for a blackout on student testing.

Californians have a choice. We can stop assessing our students and schools, and stifle progress, furthering the growing perception that our state's best public education days are behind us. Or we can transition responsibly to new, better

standards and uphold California's education system as one that truly serves the needs of all children.

Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, is the senior Democratic member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee. Russlynn Ali is the chair of the Emerson Education Fund at the Emerson Collective in Palo Alto, and was the assistant secretary of education for civil rights in the Obama administration.

Letter: CalStar membership a life-saver

To the community,

No one wants to wind up in an emergency room to begin with, let alone face the idea of being transported away from your support base of home. Once you get through your situation, it's then that you begin to think about the costs involved; it's only natural.

I have to tell you about one cost that we had control over and that was with the transportation needed to go from Barton to St. Mary's Hospital in Reno.

The hubby had a scary situation (he's just dandy now) and needed transport. We have belonged to CalStar for as long as they've provided membership and are we glad of it. I know that our $45 investment on an annual basis has been the best money ever spent. Had we not had that coverage, I would be expecting a bill to exceed $30,000.

I continue to be amazed at the many folks that have lived here

for a number of years and they still do not have membership to this service.

With the holidays coming, why not consider getting your family members or your friends coverage as their gift. CalStar covers multiple service areas that include Concord, Gilroy, Auburn, Ukiah, Salinas, South Lake Tahoe, Santa Maria, Vacaville, and McClellan. It’s the gift that you hope is never used but when it’s needed, the amazing crew of CalStar will get you to your destination safely and with great care.

I want to thank the amazing crew that morning who got my husband where he needed to be. Your talents and compassion helped to keep me calm and Paul knew he was in good hands. Thank you Jen Drennan, Stephen Poehis and pilot Kris Hunt. I am forever grateful.

Lisa Huard, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Recalling the day Kennedy died

By Bob Schieffer, AARP

I was a footnote of sorts to the awful events of that weekend in 1963 when John Kennedy died in Dallas.

In those days, I was the night police reporter on my hometown newspaper, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. President Kennedy had made a breakfast speech in Fort Worth before going to Dallas on that fateful day.

When we got word he had been shot, I raced to the office and, as I pulled into the Star-Telegram parking lot, the bulletin

came over the radio: The president was dead.


Bob Schieffer

There was total bedlam in the newsroom. Every phone was ringing. I grabbed one. A woman caller asked, “Is there anyone there who can give me a ride to Dallas?”

“Lady,” I said, “we’re not running a taxi service. And besides, the president has been shot!”

“Yes,” the woman said. “I heard on the radio that my son is the one they arrested.”

It was Lee Harvey Oswald’s mother.

I jotted down her address and told her I would be there shortly to take her to Dallas. The paper’s automobile editor, Bill Foster, was test-driving a Cadillac that week, so I commandeered Bill and his sedan and drove to the address on the west side of Fort Worth that Mrs. Oswald had given us. She was standing on the curb, and we drove her to the Dallas police station. I sat in the back with her; Bill drove, and I interviewed her along the way.

In those days, we never told people who we were unless they asked. Since I always wore a snap-brim hat, the Dallas cops assumed I was a young detective. At the station, I just approached the first policeman I saw and said, “I’m the one who brought Oswald’s mother over from Fort Worth.” The officer took us to a room in the burglary-squad office. After a while, Mrs. Oswald asked me if they would let her see her son, so I

approached the chief of homicide and asked.

Things were much more informal in those days, but I was still stunned when he said, “We should probably do that,” and we were ushered into a holding room off the jail.

I was on the verge of the biggest story of my life – a chance to question the man who was charged with killing a president.

It was not to be. After six hours in the police station, an FBI agent finally did what someone should have done when I arrived: He asked who I was. He was not amused to discover I was a reporter. He told me to leave immediately, seemed in a mood to kill me and said something to that effect.

I never got that scoop. But I had gotten the first interview with Oswald’s mother, my story was picked up by both *Time* and *Newsweek*, and for the next two days I covered the awful story that left the nation in shock and altered America forever.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Where is the U.S. middle class?

Publisher’s note: *This editorial is from the Oct. 21, 2013, Sacramento Bee.*

Our Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal.” Over the years, Americans have removed many barriers to that great aspiration – with the Fourteenth Amendment, the vote for women, the civil rights acts, public

education and more.

But since the late 1970s, the United States slowly has become the most unequal of the world's developed nations in its distribution of income and wealth. Our middle class is shrinking.

A new film, "Inequality for All," hopes to bring attention to this. The protagonist is the passionate Robert Reich, an economics professor at UC Berkeley, and a former labor secretary during the Clinton administration.

The timing certainly is right for a clear explanation of what has happened economically to the middle class in the last 30 years, and the impact it is having on our democracy. All to the good if it can begin a spirited conversation to consider remedies.

Read the whole story

Letter: Truckee River Watershed Council says thanks

To the community,

The Truckee River Watershed Council would like to thank the 450-plus community volunteers that spent a beautiful fall day working on 14 projects throughout our watershed on Oct. 20.

This one day of work has a long-lasting, positive impact on the watershed. Together, we:

Completed floodplain restoration Coldstream Canyon.

Erected fencing along Cold Creek to protect vulnerable trees from beavers.

Re-routed and maintained four separate trails to encourage trail use and protect sensitive wetlands, fragile streambanks and native habitat.

Continued restoration of the old Town Corporation Yard by planting plants, spreading native seeds and mulching the area.

Planted conifer trees and sugar pine seedlings to help promote healthy reforestation.

Placed gravels in Prosser Creek to improve fish habitat.

Relocated barriers on the bottom of Martis Creek Lake to eradicate Eurasian water milfoil.

Removed the remnants of an old barbed wire fence that presented a hazard for wildlife, dogs and people in Martis Valley.

Surveyed for invasive New Zealand mud snails in the Truckee River.

Restored an eroded area at the Donner Lake boat ramp to prevent further damage.

Released over 400 fingerling Lahontan Cutthroat trout in the Truckee River to help with LCT recovery.

We are especially grateful for contributions from our dedicated project partners:

The USFS Tahoe National Forest, Truckee and Sierraville; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Martis Wildlife Area; California State Parks, Donner Memorial State Park; Sugar Pine Foundation; Tahoe Donner Forestry; Tahoe Divers Conservancy; Tahoe Resource Conservation District; Town of Truckee; Trout Unlimited, along with the Feather River and Truckee Chapters;

Truckee Donner Land Trust; Truckee Donner Recreation and Parks District; and our 50 group leaders.

This event would not be possible without these dedicated volunteers who give their time and energy to planning, preparing and managing the day's restoration projects.

Donors to the Truckee River Watershed Council, Vail Resorts Echo, and the Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce, Sierra Watershed Education Partnerships (SWEP), US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ed Lupyak, Stefan McLeod Photography.

Kathy Whitlow, Truckee River Watershed Council

Editorial: Calif. higher education needs to evolve

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Oct. 22, 2013, Los Angeles Times.***

The California Master Plan for Higher Education decreed that it was the job of the state's community colleges to train students for technical careers and for the sort of semi-professional occupations that generally require a two-year associate's degree. Those who wanted a bachelor's degree — and the sort of jobs that go with one — could move on to either California State University or the University of California.

But the master plan was written during the postwar baby boom, and like many of us who were born back then, it's beginning to develop wrinkles. In 1960, the year the plan was approved, office manager jobs required only a high school diploma. Now most employers require a bachelor's degree for this job and

others like it. At the same time, fewer Californians are able to afford a four-year education. Many don't live within commuting distance of a Cal State or UC campus, and living expenses are the greater part of college costs.

So it makes all the sense in the world to expand the degrees that community colleges are allowed to confer. A proposal now under consideration by the chancellor's office, for instance, would allow community colleges to grant bachelor's degrees in nursing.

Read the whole story

Letter: Fear and hatred are destroying the U.S.

To the community,

Fear and hate defines the political age we live in; an age of attempts to manipulate the mass of citizens to fear and hate the target of the manipulators by any means necessary. Distortions, lies, whatever works.



Bill Crawford

An example is the campaign to disarm the president of the United States. For openers, he isn't a citizen. Though

disproven time and time again, the birthers keep that iron in the fire. Regardless of the merits or lack of merits, the president supports a national health program. Therefore, he is a socialist. Those who make the charge never bother to define the word socialist. But everyone knows it's bad. And he's not a Christian. He's a Moslem. Has to be because his father was a black man from East Africa. So now the haters impose a religious test to hold public office. And the president is black (half). And for some citizens black men are feared. Therefore hated.

So with the above hit list some Americans are willing to bring down the federal government because the government is corrupted by the twice elected president who in the eyes of many is opposite of what America stands for. Home of the free and the brave have been lost, so they say. Texas is American and Washington, D.C., is a foreign place, un-American full of strange hateful thoughts and ideas about civil liberties, voter rights, and social legislation to bring abut basic equality for all citizens. The manipulators are bent on destroying the Four Freedoms, the New Deal, anything that messes with their desire to have power.

We should be careful about what we wish for. For example, Nazi Germany. Many Germans "were drawn to one of the most poisonous myths to take root in defeated Germany, the so-called stab-in-the-back conspiracy. According to this myth, Germany hadn't lost the war on the battlefield, but rather had been betrayed form within. Chief among these internal traitors were Germany's liberal political parties…." (This is from Scott Anderson's "Lawrence in Arabia".)

From the destruction of the Weimar Republic came Hitler and the goosestep and World War II. Time flies, sometimes backward.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Alcohol and sexual assault tied together

By Emily Yoffe, Slate

In one awful high-profile case after another – the U.S. Naval Academy; Steubenville, Ohio; now the allegations in Maryville, Mo. – we read about a young woman, sometimes only a girl, who goes to a party and ends up being raped. As soon as the school year begins, so do reports of female students sexually assaulted by their male classmates.

A common denominator in these cases is alcohol, often copious amounts, enough to render the young woman incapacitated. But a misplaced fear of blaming the victim has made it somehow unacceptable to warn inexperienced young women that when they get wasted, they are putting themselves in potential peril.

A 2009 study of campus sexual assault found that by the time they are seniors, almost 20 percent of college women will become victims, overwhelmingly of a fellow classmate. Very few will ever report it to authorities. The same study states that more than 80 percent of campus sexual assaults involve alcohol. Frequently both the man and the woman have been drinking.

The men tend to use the drinking to justify their behavior, as this survey of research on alcohol-related campus sexual assault by Antonia Abbey, professor of psychology at Wayne State University, illustrates, while for many of the women, having been drunk becomes a source of guilt and shame.

Sometimes the woman is the only one drunk and runs into a particular type of shrewd—and sober—sexual predator who lurks

where women drink like a lion at a watering hole. For these kinds of men, the rise of female binge drinking has made campuses a prey-rich environment.

I've spoken to three recent college graduates who were the victims of such assailants, and their stories are chilling.

Let's be totally clear: Perpetrators are the ones responsible for committing their crimes, and they should be brought to justice. But we are failing to let women know that when they render themselves defenseless, terrible things can be done to them.

Young women are getting a distorted message that their right to match men drink for drink is a feminist issue. The real feminist message should be that when you lose the ability to be responsible for yourself, you drastically increase the chances that you will attract the kinds of people who, shall we say, don't have your best interest at heart. That's not blaming the victim; that's trying to prevent more victims.

Read the whole story

Letter: Camp Rich helps at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Hosting their first Adopt A day of Nourishment, Camp Richardson Resort sent an energetic sponsor crew to volunteer at Bread & Broth's Oct. 21 dinner.

The crew, consisting of Travis Lauinger, retail manager; Vanessa Santora, sales manager; Christy Catts, general store

manager; Mai Dalton, lodging operations director; and Charlie Gaspar, front desk manager, were involved in all aspects of helping the B&B volunteers throughout the evening. They enthusiastically bagged giveaways, greeted guests, served dinner, drinks and desserts, dried dishes and packed up chairs and tables.

“We’re so grateful to have been a part of the Adopt A Day program. Everyone was so welcoming to us. It is important for us to give back to the community we love being a part of.Thank you to the crew. We will be back,” said Vanessa Santora at the end of the evening. As a nonprofit, all volunteer organization, Bread & Broth appreciates and is thrilled to have Camp Richardson Resort’s support in feeding the less fortunate.

For over 24 years, B&B has been serving nutritious meals to families, seniors on fixed incomes, the homeless and people dealing with difficult situations. B&B salutes Camp Richardson Resort for their generous monetary donation and concern for struggling members of our community. Bread & Broth is looking forward to working with Camp Richardson Resort and their employees when they sponsor their second AAD on April 7.

To help B&B as a donor or sponsor, please contact me at (530) 542-2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth