Opinion: GOP puts party before country

By Paul Begala, Newsweek

As the poet predicted, the center cannot hold. But it's not because both the right and left are tearing at it equally. In an age in which journalism and punditry are terrorized by the demands of false equivalency, it is time to speak a simple truth: conservatives are to blame.

It was not liberals who ended the career of Richard Lugar. The longest-serving Republican in the Senate was unceremoniously dumped last week by the Tea Party fringe. He was not, as the saying goes, caught with a dead girl or a live boy. He was just too doggone moderate, too ready to compromise with the Democrats. Thanks for that, Senator Lugar. Oh, and you're fired.

Today's Republicans are different. They truly have put partisanship ahead of patriotism, as the political scientists Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann document in their book, Even Worse Than it Looks. "The GOP," they write, "has become an insurgent outlier in American politics. It is ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence, and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

Careful, guys, they're going to revoke your pundit license. Don't you know you're supposed to say "Both sides are to blame"? Their response is powerful—and as damning of conventional media analysis as it is of the GOP: "'Both sides do it' or 'There is plenty of blame to go around,'" they write, "are the traditional refuges for an American news media intent on proving its lack of bias." They describe the standard calculus of compromise—both sides moving toward the

middle—as “a strategy that is simply untenable when one side is so far out of reach.”

Sure, the Democrats hated George W. Bush. But when he wanted to meet them halfway on education, even Ted Kennedy helped him. And when he wanted to make an impressive commitment to fighting AIDS, TB, and malaria in Africa, Harry Reid and Joe Biden—along with Richard Lugar—made it happen.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Brown’s tax plan on shaky ground

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

The state budget that the Legislature will enact this week will assume that half of its deficit will be covered by voter approval of new income and sales taxes next November.

However, it’s looking steadily less like a reasonable assumption and increasingly like just another in a long string of budget gimmicks, not unlike last year’s bogus assumption that the tax system would generate an extra $4 billion.

Indeed, one could say that Gov. Jerry Brown and fellow Democrats are doubling down on miracle money, from last year’s $4 billion to this year’s $8.5 billion.

History does not favor new state taxes. Voters have very rarely approved any new levies and even more rarely any new taxes that they would pay themselves.

Brown tries to get around that reluctance by emphasizing that most of the new taxes would be paid by those at the upper end of the income scale.

But one portion, a quarter-cent sales tax increase, would be paid by everyone. Polling indicates that as small as it is, the sales tax hike is a tough sell in a moribund economy.

Last week, a new Field Poll found that just 52 percent of registered voters favor Brown's tax plan.

Read the whole story

Opinion: We need true discourse, not a cheer(leader)

To the community,

In Mayor Claire Fortier's June message to the community, she spoke of a trip to Monterey and Livermore sponsored by TahoeChamber.org. The mayor's purpose of sending the message was to cheer the good things those cities have done to rebuild Monterey and Livermore. The mayor spoke warmly about Livermore's rerouting a main artery. The later was a subtle endorsement of the purposed loop road in South Lake Tahoe without using the term loop road. The mayor contends that Tahoe is "… a place with a vision, not a quagmire of contention. Let's hope we can realize that vision and not stall in fear or indecision."



Bill Crawford

Of course the mayor may cheer for whatever she wishes to cheer for. However, her hopes and cheers should not stop discourse and discussion on any subject that’s vital to the general public. Contentions arise out of need. South Tahoe is a border town and often the state line divides us in more ways than one. Example: For whatever reasons the City Council and Douglas County reps have canceled planning meetings.

The bottom line is some folks fear discourse because they might lose the debate or have to compromise. It is vital to have discourse on the loop road because if it gets done, it will not ever be undone. Also, some rushed to start the convention center, the crater in the ground. Well, it hasn’t been done, and there is no vision in sight to undo what was incompletely done. We need a healthy dose of skepticism and caution to avoid another quagmire like the convention center.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: South Lake Tahoe

needs to say ‘no’ to loop road

Publisher’s note: ***The following letter was submitted to Lake Tahoe News by the author.***

Dear Mayor [Claire] Fortier and Council Members:

I am writing on behalf of Michael McKeen and business and property owners in South Lake Tahoe who oppose in its present form the project and the application by the Tahoe Transportation District for federal funds to construct the project commonly referred to as the Loop Road. The applicant agency has not done its job in resolving outstanding issues and concerns that I have highlighted below.

1. The project is ill conceived and not ready for funding because it does not have the support of those dozens of property owners who are most impacted by it;

2. The project will displace approximately 80 residential properties and 13 existing small businesses;

3. The project appears to displace dozens of lower-income and minority workers living in the path of the proposed road realignment who do not have many affordable housing options in the area;



Dave Jinkens

4. The project is bad for the city of South Lake Tahoe tax

base and local economy in a city that already has an unemployment rate last reported over 17 percent where small businesses are struggling under a poor local economy and enormous bureaucratic and regulatory control in the Tahoe region;

5. The project will likely require the use of eminent domain to acquire all or a portion of the parcels needed because many owners are not in favor of selling yet there is no agency that has expressed its intent to use eminent domain to acquire the properties. TTD does not have the power of eminent domain. Caltrans will not use eminent domain, and the City Council of South Lake Tahoe, where the project is located, has not expressed its intent to use this extraordinary confiscatory process. I applaud the city for not doing so;

6. Eminent domain is a highly controversial tool that most residents of the city do not favor even if a California public agency chose to use it;

7. The project has not received environmental clearance under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and is arguably a premature grant application. TTD is proceeding independently as though the project has received all necessary approvals.

8. The project and application for grant funds to implement this incomplete project arguably places a cloud over title of the residential and commercial properties subject to acquisition. This could will discourage investment in the properties by property owners and reduce the likelihood that lenders will make loans available for improvements; and

9. The project arguably creates potential claims in inverse condemnation. Approving a project that does not have the support of owners of property to be acquired who cannot then get loans to improve or repair their properties could create the case and argument of a “taking.”

As you know from the petition in opposition that was submitted to you by Michael McKeen (a directly affected party), there is growing opposition to the project by the people of South Lake Tahoe who are most directly negatively impacted by the Project and by people living in the area.

The Tahoe Transportation District needs to do its homework and leg work with the people most impacted by this project and gain their support before seeking funding for it and attempting to implement it. Opponents do not see the project in its present rendition as a *fait acompli*.

I would argue as well that even if the project proponents overcame the objections of directly affected property owners, it will have a negative impact on existing business in South Lake Tahoe by dramatically shifting the shopping base to the Nevada side of Stateline. All of us have a high regard for our fine Nevada neighbors, but not to the extent of damaging the business base in South Lake Tahoe. The city of South Lake Tahoe needs to focus its attention and efforts on improving the economy and lives of the people living and working in South Lake Tahoe first.

I urge the City Council to oppose the Loop Road Project in its present rendition and support local business owners and residents who oppose it for the reasons stated above. I ask that the City Council place this matter on the agenda in the near future so that clear direction from the City Council is provided for all to see and hear in advance of the general election in November.

Thank you and best wishes,

Sincerely,

David Jinkens, retired South Lake Tahoe city manager and community advocate

Opinion: Tahoe businesses' generosity stretches to Kenya

To the community,

The Zawadisha Fund would like to thank the following local businesses for their generous donations and participation in She Is Beautiful Lake Tahoe fundraiser: BioSpirit Day Spa, Bliss Skin Care Studio, Elevate Wellness, Gaia-Licious, LauraNidra Yoga, and Mountain Yoga.

Together they raised $1058, which will fund self-defense and HIV/AIDS prevention workshops for girls and micro-loans for women in Kenya.

To learn more or to get involved, contact Julie at jules@zawadisha.org.

Julie Lowe, Zawadisha co-founder

Opinion: Whittemore overreached, but so does indictment

By Jon Ralston, Las Vegas Sun

During his Carson City heyday, Harvey Whittemore was the King of the Overreach.

Mostly on behalf of the gaming industry, superlobbyist Whittemore tried to get jury verdicts against casinos retroactively annulled, pushed for a special art tax break for Steve Wynn and even persuaded a Senate committee chairman to hear a special amendment to help Whittemore build a pier at Lake Tahoe.

Now, in a twist worthy of O. Henry, Whittemore has been indicted in what might eventually be seen as the Great Government Overreach. He is essentially charged with bundling $150,000 to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (this is legal) but then reimbursing those who contributed (this is not legal). I'm not saying Whittemore is not guilty – he may be. But the law is an anachronism of a bygone, pre-Citizens United campaign financing world, and the potential punishment of years in prison not only does not fit the crime, but is disproportionate to similar offenses that have occurred in this state.

Whittemore's criminal indictment comes after a lengthy and still unresolved civil squabble between the lobbyist turned developer and his partners after the recession turned his dream of Coyote Springs into a financial sinkhole, sparking recriminations and lawsuits. And now comes the Department of Justice making a federal case out of Whittemore allegedly inducing employees and family members to pony up to funnel money to Reid.

A brief moral equivalency digression: This comes in the same week that the DOJ agreed to a plea deal with the maliciously prosecuted Doug Hampton, the man whose life was destroyed by Sen. John Ensign, who has been left alone, presumably while the Justice Department reads Federal Election Commission reports.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County: Fire proved what the area is capable of

By Norma Santiago

Memories of the Angora Fire and its aftermath can renew feelings of pain, despair and loss. There are some of us who, with each anniversary, take time to reflect on the events of that day. Some look at the rebuilt homes, neighbors settled in, and new landscape with gratitude, but long for those special things that can never be replaced; a gift from a child, a family portrait, a treasured knick-knack. Each year, as we meditate or pray in gratitude, we also reflect with reverence.



Angora Fire --
5 years later

In the five years since the fire, some of us feel “healed”. With the exception of physical scars in the surrounding forests, we look very healthy. Some of the burned out lots have been replaced with neighborhood gardens or places of meditation created by property owners. Beautiful homes have been rebuilt a little larger than before and in record time (80 percent were rebuilt one and a half years after the fire – unprecedented in the state of California). Empty lots were sold to new families who wanted to build a new home in this

area. There are aspen groves along creeks once hidden in a thick forest that are now visible. Wildlife has returned with even certain species not seen for a while. And, the forest, thanks to many, is being replanted with not only the Jeffery pine, but also, cedar, and sugar pine so that over the course of many, many years the forest will be more diversified.

I think back to a few weeks before the fire, the Tahoe Resource Conservation District had an outdoor community workshop on Boulder Mountain as an educational opportunity for the surrounding area to learn about best management practices, invasive weeds, and even defensible space. Kim Carr, then working for EDAW (a private environmental consulting firm), put together a poster showing the integration of BMPs, defensible space and water conservation. Attendees asked about their decks, pine needles, BMPs, and a host of other concerns and issues.

Another tragic irony is that just two weeks before the fire, I walked along Mt. Shasta with Jessica Mahnken, then with Lake Valley Fire Protection District, distributing “Living with Fire” information. It was painfully incongruent that this effort and the enthusiasm we shared in reducing the risk of wildland fire be followed so closely by the events of the Angora Fire.

Like any catastrophic event, I think we all remember where we were in those early moments when the fire began. It was almost disbelief as the fire grew so rapidly. The response from emergency services was nothing less than heroic. To evacuate homeowners, visitors, families, animals and organize an attack on the fire, to manage resources, and to do it without loss of life was a remarkable accomplishment. I was in the midst of true professionals who knew how to create, control and command a multi-jurisdictional arena. The fire was on county land with Lake Valley Fire Protection District first on the scene, and contingency crews rapidly joining in from the city, state,

federal, and outside districts and metropolitan areas. It was a war zone managed by professionals knowing exactly when, how and with what to proceed as components and elements constantly shifted. I will never forget being inside that circle as it developed into a sophisticated command center and communications operations. Everyone had a job and nothing was done outside of the information organizational chart. These professionals worked nonstop, slept little, ate only after hours of duty, were responsive, dedicated and put their lives on the front line to save people, homes, property, an industrial area, the high school and natural resources. I cannot provide praise enough for our emergency services personnel for what proved to be life saving measures for our community.

The community also deserves great praise. During the fire, what was created seemingly from chaos, was a community response to serve those who were immediately displaced and in shock. It was a beautiful collection of concerned service providers and city staff who immediately coordinated a shelter with food, supplies and support. The Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce jumped into action to set up a fund, nonprofits joined together to provide services and the South Shore community came to action to help one another. It was a truly spiritual moment in the history of our community. I have never experienced such gracious giving as when we tooled up to assist our neighbors. And, I will never forget it. This is what I know to be the real caring capacity of our community. That is a threshold that will never need redefining.

And, after the fire, when the smoke settled, what next? What happened was nothing less than historic. Never before have state, federal, county and private forces come together in such a way that allowed an immediate solution to the massive cleanup of the toxic remains of the Angora Fire. Ravaged homes, vehicles and furnishings now potentially impacted a watershed that could have devastated Lake Tahoe. Because the

state and county elected officials and departments worked together so closely on an immediate solution to clean up the sites and have it paid through the Office of Emergency Services and insurance companies, and by fast-tracking building plans and waiving fees, homeowners could settle with their insurance companies quickly and begin the rebuilding process. Recovery from the Angora Fire was an incredible display of possibilities with government facilitating a solution and then getting out of the way. The Angora Protocols, as they have been coined, were so proactive and responsive that other communities affected by devastating wildfires have had trouble organizing components of its success.



El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago talks at the 2010 Environmental Summit. Photo/LTN file

And, in the last five years, county, state and federal crews have worked tirelessly to minimize the impacts of watershed damage by clearing devastated vegetation, replanting, and building stream restoration and erosion control projects to reduce the sediment flow into the lake. These efforts combined with best management practices and a new consciousness in our community will surely improve our chances to prevent and withstand another event such as the Angora Fire.

What I take away from this event in these five years is how immense our love is in this community, for each other and for our environment. If indeed the Chinese symbol for crisis includes both danger and opportunity, I contend that our community grew together, faced danger and built opportunity from the ashes. I am incredibly honored to be your representative.

Norma Santiago is on the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors representing the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Opinion: What about all the junk food bought with food stamps?

By Lincoln Brown

A study from the University of Tennessee which was cited in Reuters indicates that despite what New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg may think, limiting people's options on food, even junk food, does not help them to lose weight.

So if the Great Twinkie Prohibition of 2012 is not going to be successful at controlling the national waistline, what will it control? My guess is free agency and the free market. After all, if our dear leaders are so intent on managing our sugar and carbs, a la Mayor Bloomberg., shouldn't they be concerned with the dietary choices of those people on assistance programs? How long will it be until someone decides that those the same stringent regulations that are being applied to those

in the free market can be applied to those on SNAP?



Lincoln Brown

And you on the Left, don’t tell me that people buying junk food on SNAP cards doesn’t happen. Once on a Sunday evening I had to run up to the radio station to handle a technical issue. It being summer, ice cream seemed seasonally apropos. So on the way back I stopped at a convenience store for a gallon of Rocky Road. The woman in line ahead of me had a stack of frozen pizzas and a six pack of Pepsi. She paid for it with food stamps. I thought to myself that what those items were probably not what the food stamp folks had in mind when they devised the program. But it was after all, food. (The woman also pulled a roll of twenty dollar bills out of her pocket and bought several cartons of cigarettes. But that is another story for another time.)

Will the time come when one cannot purchase “all that and a bag of chips” with a SNAP card?

Probably not. Feast your eyes, if not your stomach on this from the SNAP to Health website:

“For several years now, cities and states across the country have expressed interest in limiting the purchase of certain foods and beverages with SNAP benefits. However, because the criteria for SNAP purchases are federally-regulated policies, any states that wish to place their own restrictions must apply to the USDA for a waiver. To date, the USDA has rejected all applications for waivers. In 2010, the debate over restrictions of SNAP purchases was revived when New York City

applied for a waiver to permit restrictions of sodas with SNAP benefits. The waiver was also rejected, but it raises the question of how to weigh the issue of the regulation of SNAP purchases and the rights of SNAP clients against the emerging obesity epidemic in the United States."

Funny how when it comes to the government freebies, the government has to "weigh the issue" of the junk food versus and the obesity epidemic over which we should all be panicking. However, when it comes to cash on the barrelhead, or on the soda cup, Democrats are more than willing to clamp down on the exchange of goods and services. I guess it just doesn't pay to take a Slim Jim out of the same hands you hope will pull the metaphorical lever for you in November.

In the end it boils down to the same old issue that has driven the left for years-government control versus personal responsibility. Congressman Rob Bishop once commented that conservatism is about allowing people to make choice for themselves but it is also about those same people taking responsibility for their choices- be it homeownership, personal spending, healthcare insurance or even what they choose to toss down their throats. It's their decision, but it is also that person's responsibility to manage and pay for the outcome.

If someone wants a Big Gulp, or a Super Big Gulp, or for that matter wants to drag a 55 gallon drum into the store, or even intubate themselves with a tube running from the fountain and into their gullet that is fine with me as long as their drink and subsequent heart bypass are on their nickel and not mine. But that would mean less government regulations and lower taxes, something that is heresy among Democrats.

Lincoln Brown is the program director at KVEL radio in Vernal, Utah. He hosts "The Lincoln Brown Show" Mondays through Fridays from 8-9am.

Opinion: Return war power to Congress

By Cal Thomas

On Sept. 2, 1945, aboard the battleship USS Missouri at the end of ceremonies marking the unconditional surrender of Japan and the formal end of World War II, Gen. Douglas MacArthur spoke for a world weary of war and hoping for peace: “Let us pray that peace be now restored to the world and that God will preserve it always.”

That prayer was not answered as Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and a host of regional and tribal conflicts have preserved war, not peace, as the means by which too many attempt to settle their differences.



Cal Thomas

With U.S. combat operations in Iraq effectively over and Afghanistan in the process of winding down (for us, if not for the resilient enemy) there will be little rest between wars as Iran now appears to be the next target.

Politicians start wars, generals plan strategy to wage them and soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen (not to mention civilians) die in them. Since the beginning of

the human race, people have sought ways to prevent wars, but every attempt at bringing lasting, or even short-term peace, has failed.

At the United States Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., there are some who are now asking the hard questions about America's role in warfare. Elisabeth Bumiller of The New York Times wrote about it in a story with the headline, "West Point Asks if a War Doctrine Was Worth It."

The discussion, even debate, at West Point is first about the effectiveness of counterinsurgency in places like Afghanistan. Col. Gian P. Gentile, director of West Point's military history program, is quoted as saying that counterinsurgency could work in Afghanistan if the United States makes a multi-decade commitment: "I'm talking 70, 80, 90 years," he said. With many countries, including France, pulling out of Afghanistan (in France's case earlier than previously expected due to orders from the country's new president) and with shattered economies in need of rebuilding, including our own, this leads to a larger question: Can America afford to virtually "go it alone" in defense of the liberty of others who are not willing, or able, to bear the burden and pay the price for their own freedom?

I'm not sure there is a satisfactory answer to the question but it is a question that needs to be debated since we always seem to be the ones who pay the highest price. "Is it worth it?" How will we measure worthiness? These are questions at the heart of the debate.

Former President George W. Bush said, "We're fighting them over there so we don't have to fight them here." But we are already fighting them here as demonstrated by Sept. 11, 2001, the Fort Hood shootings and numerous other successful and unsuccessful attacks.

Somewhere between "come home, America," which would lead to

isolationism and intervention in every conflict there is a pragmatic approach to war that America should consider. This ought to be an issue in the upcoming election, but it won't be unless journalists ask the right questions and demand answers from those who have, or are seeking, the power to start or join wars and send our sons and daughters to fight and perhaps die in them.

Perhaps a return to the constitutional principle that only Congress has the power to declare war would help. That is what Rep. Ron Paul argued for during the presidential primary. He raised an important issue, one that should be discussed now, before the next war starts and American leaders decide another generation of young people should fight it.

Cal Thomas is co-author (with Bob Beckel) of the book "Common Ground: How to Stop the Partisan War That is Destroying America".

Douglas County: Stay away from Preacher Fire burn area

Sierra Front Interagency Fire Dispatch Center is asking citizens to stay out of the area where the Preacher Mine Fire recently burned in Douglas County.

Curious citizens and off-road vehicle operators have been utilizing the roadways and backcountry area where the fire burned, and this has caused problems for the fire mop-up crews still operating in the area.

Some smoldering hot spots still remain in the area, and hand crews will be operating in the area for several more days

extinguishing them.

— Douglas County Sheriff’s Department