Opinion: United approach to Tahoe-Reno Games the correct decision

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Thursday's agreement between the lieutenant governors of Nevada and California to join forces offers our best hope to lure the Winter Olympics back to Reno-Tahoe, which last played hope to the world's winter athletes in 1960.

Nevada's Brian Krolicki and California's Gavin Newsom announced the merger of the two state committees that have been looking into the possibility of bidding for the event, most likely for 2022.

Because of an ongoing dispute between the U.S. Olympic Committee and the International Olympic Committee over the distribution of money from the sale of TV rights, it's yet to be determined whether the U.S. will vie for the games in 2022. Negotiations are continuing, and the USOC is expected to make a decision in 2013.

If the decision is to go for it, it is critical that Reno-Tahoe be prepared with the strongest possible bid. Developing a winning bid would be difficult for Reno and the Lake Tahoe ski resorts. With the help of California, however, we would be a strong competitor the other communities expected to bid, Denver, Salt Lake City and maybe even Bozeman, Mont.

Working together, we could, in fact, win.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Government is the problem

By Star Parker

What are the ramifications if the Supreme Court finds the individual mandate provision of Obamacare unconstitutional? This is the provision that requires individuals to purchase government defined health insurance or pay a fine.

I hope it will serve as a wake up call to a nation that I believe is still sleeping through a crisis.



Star Parker

Liberal and open ended interpretation of the Constitution, to the point of rendering it practically meaningless, opened the door to steady growth of the federal government and its inexorable encroachment in our lives over the last half century. The problems we are having today all originate here.

Even if Obamacare is repealed, we still have a major problem in healthcare. Costs keep escalating because there is no real, functioning marketplace in healthcare. Ninety percent of healthcare expenditures are made by third parties – government, employers, insurance companies. All due to direct or indirect government controls.

Our growing burden of taxes and government debt – what now is

breaking European countries and about to break us – all stem from the growth of government programs that open ended interpretation of the constitution enabled.

Our private economy, where freedom and the creative spirit are still allowed to operate, is going great.

A miracle is taking place in energy with new domestic production of oil and gas made possible by new drilling technologies.

Oil imports as a percentage of our overall domestic oil consumption has dropped almost 25 percent just since 2005. In North Dakota, where much of this new oil production is happening, production has increased from 10,000 barrels a day in 2003 to 400,000 barrels a day.

Natural gas production has increased 26 percent since 2005. This is producing prices in the United States for natural gas that are the lowest in the world. As result, according to University of Michigan economist Mark Perry, firms that use natural gas, like chemical and fertilizer businesses, are actively talking about returning to the United States.

New technologies abound, with more and more gadgets appearing all the time at lower and lower prices.

Computer equipment that cost $1,000 in 1997 today would sell for about $65, Perry calculated.

So why are we turning more and more of our lives over to the most unproductive, least efficient part of our country – government?

Just over the last four years, government spending has increased to take 25 percent of the American economy from 20 percent.

The result is the most sluggish economic recovery since the great depression. It is a sign of the depressed spirit of the

American people that it is actually viewed as good news that unemployment is now 8.3 percent. This is almost two and half points higher than the average unemployment rate in our country from 1948 to 2010.

But while we suffer, Washington parties.

While the national unemployment rate is 8.3 percent, it's 5.5 percent in Washington, D.C.

According to demographer Joel Kotkin, 2.7 percent population growth in Washington, D.C., in 2011 was the highest in the nation.

He reports that the economy in the national capital region expanded 14 percent since 2007.

Over the last decade, 50,000 new jobs in the federal government bureaucracy were created, along with an increase in local federal spending of 166 percent.

No wonder in a survey just released by Gallup, residents of Washington, D.C., expressed the highest level of confidence in the U.S. economy in the nation.

Isn't it time to turn this around? Why are Americans still tolerating this?

If we are going to get the nation back on track, we've got to get our resources out of Washington and back into the private sector where they can be used creatively and productively. This is how to create jobs.

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".

Opinion: A deeper truth under the hoodies

By Phil Taylor, Sports Illustrated

What do you see, America? What do you see when 13 black males stand before you, their faces partially obscured by hoodies? Do you see a group or a gang? Men or menace? Such a powerful image circulated last week, a kind of team photo never seen before: the Miami Heat players in their black, team-issued hoodies, heads bowed both in mourning and protest over the death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American teenager who was shot to death on Feb. 26 in Sanford, Fla. LeBron James, who came up with the idea along with Dwyane Wade, posted the picture on Twitter last Friday, with the hashtags #WeAreTrayvonMartin, #Hoodies, #Stereotyped and #WeWantJustice. The photo was a statement, but also a question: Look at us, America. Pretend you don't know us as LBJ, D-Wade and friends. Pretend you don't know us at all. What do you see?

Trayvon was killed by George Zimmerman, 28, a neighborhood watch volunteer of Caucasian and Latino descent who apparently found something threatening about a skinny, 17-year-old black kid walking down a street of middle-class townhouses in a hooded sweatshirt. The tragedy became a flash point for age-old anger about the treatment of African-Americans by whites and police. It wasn't just the shooting but also the seeming indifference of investigators. Why, even considering the Florida law that gives wide latitude for the use of force, had Zimmerman not been arrested? Why had police accepted his claim of self-defense even though he was carrying a gun and Trayvon reportedly was packing only Skittles and a can of iced tea?

Why had Zimmerman continued to follow Trayvon against the advice of a police dispatcher?

When the Heat photo hit the Internet, it felt as if everyone involved stopped talking for a moment and did a double-take, surprised that athletes would dare join the discussion. We have become accustomed, after all, to players backing away from political and social issues, as if in a prevent defense. Remember when Latino baseball players threatened to boycott the 2011 All-Star Game in Phoenix to protest a controversial Arizona immigration law? It never happened. Or when Michael Jordan declined to make an endorsement in a hotly contested 1990 North Carolina senate race, reportedly explaining, "Republicans buy shoes too"? Most of the greatest stars—think Jeter, Tiger, Brady—have been alike in their neutrality, as it had been with James and Wade.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Lake Tahoe's future depends on Regional Plan update

By Joanne Marchetta

While spring can be elusive at Lake Tahoe, the calendar reminds us that warmer days are approaching. Earth Day is just around the corner. So it seems fitting that the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is rolling out an updated vision for the future of Tahoe where the lake and our communities are restored and sustainable.

With the advent of Earth Day in 1970, the environmental movement took shape and began to form my views. In my youth, I believed that people damaged the natural landscape and should be kept out of exceptional places. I still have a passion for the environment, but over a 30-year career, my youthful views are now more nuanced. I've grown to see that striking a sustainable balance where people and communities live in harmony within the natural environment as a fully functioning system is a necessity.



Joanne Marchetta

At Tahoe, our system is out of balance. The lake's clarity has been degraded by past development in what we know now were sensitive lands and our highway network transports polluted runoff into streams or directly into Lake Tahoe. Our economy is in freefall and our communities are struggling. But we have an opportunity to restore balance to the system, which is the theme of our Regional Plan update.

On April 25-26, TRPA will release an updated draft Regional Plan. Public hearings and workshops are scheduled in May to explain what the updates mean for the future of Lake Tahoe. Word of mouth about its contents is traveling fast. Despite some of the rhetoric you may hear to the contrary, the plan could ultimately become a model for communities around the world. I hope you'll keep in mind the overarching objective is to restore Lake Tahoe and deliver other environmental gains through a host of policy changes such as incentives for environmental redevelopment and the removal of existing

development from our most sensitive areas.

First, the Tahoe basin is nearly “built out” and development caps and other existing growth control measures are staying in place under the draft plan. The draft does not propose any substantial new development rights. There are only about 4,000 development rights left of the basin’s approximately 50,000 parcels. The rate of development allocations to local governments is proposed to change very little through the update. In the draft alternative proposed by TRPA, a maximum of 2,600 standard residential allocations and 200,000 square feet of new commercial floor area is proposed for distribution over a 20-year period as long as environmental improvements continue.

The carrying capacities of the Tahoe basin are well defined and there are no blank checks being written to developers. All types of land uses in the basin will remain capped. No new tourist accommodation allocations would be created since enough already exist in the region for today’s market and there are approximately 300 unused tourist units remaining from the current plan that are carrying over. What this means is that to redevelop tourist units in most cases would require that they be removed from elsewhere and the site restored. To keep environmental improvements on pace, we need to become adept at doing more with less.

Without some modest policy changes, the next 20 years could lock in the status quo of our built environment, which is an outcome we can’t afford in terms of lake restoration or community revitalization. Amendments to TRPA’s land use regulations in town centers are a key component of our focused strategy to encourage the redevelopment of older, polluting properties. Proven incentives for walkable town centers include allowing the appropriate height, density, and mix of uses.

Here is what is proposed. Four-story buildings would be

allowed in most of the basin's town centers just as they currently are today. From Ski Run to Stateline in South Lake Tahoe, six-story buildings would be allowed just as already exist around the Heavenly gondola. And on the four parcels containing the South Shore casino properties, the existing height would be grandfathered in if renovations deliver other environmental benefits and reduce land coverage. No changes to height or compactness standards are proposed outside town centers.

Most development in the Tahoe basin occurred before TRPA's current Regional Plan was adopted. The land coverage system has had the unintended consequence of locking grandfathered coverage rights in place. If land coverage rights could be transferred anywhere within the Tahoe basin, versus in the immediate watershed area under today's rules, crucial relocation of pavement, roads and buildings from the most sensitive lands to more appropriate, non-sensitive properties could result.

Outside Lake Tahoe's town centers – in the places we walk, hike and bike – few changes are planned other than continued protections and restoration. But certain recreation areas such as Heavenly have highly disturbed base areas that are in need of environmental redevelopment. TRPA is proposing changes to allow skier accommodations and employee housing if plans and projects can demonstrate a net environmental benefit.

Every person who cares for our lake and communities needs to have a clear understanding of the issues and proposals in order to help shape Lake Tahoe's future. TRPA's Governing Board is scheduled to act on the final plan at the end of 2012. To be engaged in the Plan, go online or send comments and questions to regionalplaninfo@trpa.org.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Opinion: Political primaries are a waste of time

To the community,

The party primaries that select candidates for the presidency of the USA are harmful and destructive because they destroy party discipline. Ideally political parties cut and debate important national issues. It’s the job of parties by discussion and debate to educate citizens by defining the terms on a given subject. Without clear definitions, there cannot be meaningful discourse.

Presently no major party provides clear, concise language on important issues such as national health care, war, national security, etc. The parties drift into meaningless verbal chaos. They throw around words such as liberal and conservative, words that the political culture is lost for definitions. The country doesn’t have parties that teach the discourse. We have factions that divide the nation. There is no agreement on what is the national purpose.



Bill Crawford

Also, party primaries damage the political process because candidates must raise and spend fortunes to compete. The money is spent on a process that produces nothing but empty advertising that reduces the language to slogans and ripe baloney. Wealth is wasted, language is destroyed.

Before there were political party primaries, H.L. Mencken covered many party conventions that selected candidates for the presidency. He reported for the Baltimore Sun. His articles were collected in a book, “A Carnival of Buncombe”. Mencken was a severe critic of the idiocy that he witnessed in American politics. We have changed the method of selecting candidates, but the idiocy is intact. But because big money talks there is no chance there’ll be meaningful reform today or tomorrow.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

PS: We can’t solve problems at home. So phony wars’ diversion controls the throne.

Opinion: Chamber thankful for successful Business Expo

To the community,

TahoeChamber would like to thank everyone involved for yet another amazing Business Expo. There were 96 exhibiting vendors and more than 1,100 event attendees.

The event could not have happened without the support of our generous sponsors – Getaway Reno/Tahoe, Harrah’s, Heavenly

Mountain Resort, Sacramento Airport, Corporate Nevada, South Tahoe Refuse, MUN CPAs, Frontier Communications, K-Tahoe Radio, Lake Tahoe TV, KRLT/KOWL, *Tahoe Daily Tribune*, and Tahoe Arts and Mountain Culture; many thanks to all of them.

A special thank you to the entire team at Harrah's for hosting the Expo, to emcee Dreu Murin for a job well done, to the volunteers for all their hard work, and to the event exhibitors for truly embracing the "Get Connected" theme.

There were over 100 tweets, Facebook postings, photos and videos sent out during the event. South Tahoe Refuse's "zero waste contributors" were responsible for encouraging attendees to properly dispose of their trash, resulting in almost 500 pounds of food waste and plastic products being recycled and composted to help keep our community clean.

Thanks again to the South Shore business community for a great event.

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce

Opinion: Plenty of reasons to visit Nevada

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

When I lived in Flagstaff, Ariz., I was always astonished to run into a local resident who had never been to the Grand Canyon.

Every year, people travel thousands of miles to see what arguably is the most spectacular natural attraction on the planet. Yet there were people who lived just over an hour away

and had never been there.

I made it my quest to see as much of the Grand Canyon as I could and to head all directions in the state to see all of Arizona.



Rabe Meadow in Stateline provides a scenic walk to Nevada Beach. Photo/LTN file

Now, I’m a Nevadan and I made it my objective to see as much of this state as I can.

Lucky for me, with relatives in Elko and children attending the University of Nevada, I’ve been able to put together side trips to some of the places many of us have heard about but few have seen.

Over the years, I’ve made it to about half of Nevada’s 24 state parks, driven the “Loneliest Road” (U.S. 50 across the center of the state), the Extraterrestrial Highway (Nevada State Route 375) and hiked and explored national parks on the state’s western border (Death Valley), eastern border (Great Basin) and southern tip (Lake Mead).

One of these days, I’ll get to Black Rock Desert and find my way to the Fly Geyser. Nevada is blessed with remarkably rugged beauty, north and south. Visitors to our state often discover this by accident when they stumble upon our scenery

when indulging in the attractions that make us famous worldwide, the Las Vegas Strip.

How many of the thousands of Southern Nevada residents have never seen Valley of Fire or Cathedral Gorge state parks? Both are easy day trips from Las Vegas. How many have never checked out the spring blooms in Death Valley or the sand dunes near Amargosa?

Only recently had I made my first visit to Nelson. It’s only an hour away from home and it’s a scenic and historic treasure.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Higher gas prices requires rethinking habits

By Rick Rodgers

There is nothing that makes your wallet squeal louder today than pulling into the gas station and dropping $50. Gasoline prices have risen more than 12 percent in the past 12 months, and some experts are predicting they’ll reach $5 per gallon in the next six months.

The average household now spends $50 per month more on gasoline than last year.

But that’s not the whole picture. Higher fuel prices affect a lot of other expenses in the family budget, from heating to food. The government estimates the average household is spending $150 per month more this year because of higher oil prices.

You can try to ease the pain at the pump by using your car less, but you should also look for other places to offset that extra $150. Car insurance is a good place to start.

According to the Insurance Information Institute, the national average auto insurance premium is $850 per year. Can you reduce that? **Here six ways:**

• **Shop around regularly.** Your insurance agent doesn't have a lot of incentive to reduce your premiums. I recently met a consumer who told me he had been with the same agent for 15 years. After he shopped his insurance with another agent, he saved $1,600 on his premiums for all his coverage. The Internet makes it easy compare costs for the same coverage, or you can get an independent insurance agent to shop for you. Contact the Independent Agents Association at 800.2217917. (Be sure the company you go with has a good credit rating and claims-paying history.)

• **Bundle your coverage.** Bundling is combining different types of policies (auto, homeowners, liability, etc.) with the same company. The theory is that the company will discount the premiums if they have all of your business. The most common combination is packaging your auto insurance and homeowner's policies together. Or, find companies that will bundle auto insurance with renter's or tenant's insurance. Bundled packages usually result in a 10 to 15 percent savings.

• **Ask for discounts.** You may qualify for discounts, but you won't know until you ask. They're commonly offered for good driving records, anti-theft devices, vehicle safety features (anti-lock brakes, air bags, automatic seatbelts), low annual mileage and insuring more than one car. The spunky Flo from Progressive claims discounts are also available for buying your policy online, paying in full up front, and being a loyal customer.

• **Take a defensive driving class.** Even if you've been driving

for years, you can learn a lot from driver education and most insurance companies recognize the value of a refresher course, which can help you avoid accidents. The amount of discount varies by insurance company and from state to state, although most insurers offer a 10 percent discount on your premium for three years. AARP offers a driver safety program for those over age 50, and it’s available online.

• **Increase your deductible.** Do your auto and homeowners policies have low deductibles? If so, you may be able to reduce your premiums 15 to 30 percent by raising the deductible on your collision and comprehensive coverage. Make sure you have an emergency fund set aside to cover the cost of repairs before you make the change. But your homeowners policy may be the first place to consider raising the deductible, since statistics show the average homeowner files a claim only once every nine years. Be sure to check with your mortgage holder first; some specify maximums.

• **Change cars.** This is probably the most difficult savings tip to implement but may have the largest impact on your premium. Used cars are cheaper to insure than new ones (excluding antiques); sports cars are more expensive to insure than minivans. Insurance companies like cars with safety features and low repair costs. Insure.com surveyed 900 vehicles in the 2012 model year and lists the rankings from the most expensive to least expensive on their website. Six of the 10 cheapest were minivans.

Rick Rodgers is a certified financial planner.

Opinion: Brown is not looking out for the environment

By Huey D. Johnson, Sacramento Bee

Once upon a time, when I was Gov. Jerry Brown's Resources secretary, his office was all about the moon; now it's narrow economics that have taken over. While the governor deserves being seen as a good leader with a tough fiscal burden, it is no excuse to let the environment go down the drain. Our precious resource assets include forests, parks, air and soil, to name a few factors that make California a world-class place to live. No issue is as important as water for the future of our state.

The governor's failure to make appointments robs the public of progressive management of our resources. There is not even a director of Water Resources and there are far too many vacancies across numerous departments to list here. If Brown had a strong, informed environment adviser in his office he could catch up and complete all the appointments in two hours.

There are a number of issues showing decline. The Department of Parks is especially off kilter. The director, a Schwarzenegger appointment, is trying to turn over some public parkland to double the size of a golf course at Lake Tahoe. Wall Street's Goldman Sachs is the likely developer.

What's the huge issue threatening California's future quality of life and survival? Water, of course, the basis of life. For a state that has been so progressive, the antiquated, corrupt water matters are unbelievable.

Huey D. Johnson, former state secretary of Resources, is president of Resource Renewal Institute.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Dealing with steroid fatigue syndrome

By Phil Taylor, Sports Illustrated

For years my buddy Russ has been advocating an all-steroids Olympics—no substances off limits, no lab-coat police, may the best chemist win. Let the athletes eat, drink or inject anything that will make them run faster, jump higher or grow stronger. Allow them to rub testosterone gel all over themselves like sunscreen or binge on HGH if they prefer. Imagine the results if we allowed athletes to soup up their bodies like ’68 Mustangs and see what those babies could do. Sprinters would finish the 100 meters so quickly, it would feel as if your eyes were on fast-forward. High jumpers would have longer hang times than a 60-yard punt. Weightlifters would clean-and-jerk midsized sedans.

To me, the idea of allowing athletes to freely use performance-enhancing drugs borders on absurdity. I don’t want to see competitions decided according to which athlete is most willing to take chemical risks with his or her body. But my resolve weakens with each convoluted case of suspected PED use. Maybe we really should turn athletes loose in all sports. That would at least eliminate the tedious, drawn-out investigations and prosecutions of suspected drug cheats that all too often come to no definitive conclusion—like the case of Ryan Braun, the Brewers’ slugger whose 50-game suspension for testing positive for synthetic testosterone was overturned by arbitrator Shyam Das last week. Braun triumphantly declared

that his innocence had been proved, but of course that's not true. In these high-profile steroid cases little is ever really proved.

Braun argued that the test was invalid because the sample wasn't shipped to the lab the day it was collected. But he has not disputed that the sample tested positive, nor has he offered a plausible explanation for why it showed a testosterone ratio more than 20 times higher than normal. (At his press conference last Friday, he referred vaguely to possible tampering with the sample, but in making his case to the arbitrator, he reportedly never suggested that as the cause, and there is no evidence that the sample was doctored.)

The most logical explanation for the positive result is that Braun did, intentionally or not, use testosterone from an outside source. The suspicion lingers that he took a performance-enhancing drug but escaped on a technicality, leaving him in that familiar PED limbo along with other well-known athletes who have been acquitted but not exonerated, or convicted of only a tangential offense, or freed from investigation but forever suspected.

Is it worth the time and money spent on these probes when so many come to such an unsatisfactory conclusion that we can't remember how—or even if—they ended? Quick: Where does Roger Clemens's prosecution stand? If you answered correctly (without going to Google) that his first court action ended in a mistrial last July and the retrial is set for April 17, you get a free copy of the thousands of pages of legal documents his case has generated in the four years since he was accused of lying under oath about steroid use. The storm of controversy that once surrounded Barry Bonds tapered off to a light drizzle by the time he was convicted of one count of obstruction of justice in December, five years after he was indicted. Bonds was sentenced to 30 days of home confinement—not very harsh when your home is a Beverly Hills mansion.

Read the whole story