Opinion: N.J. non-smoking casino worth paying attention to

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the March 28, 2012, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

When the $2.4 billion Revel casino resort opens in Atlantic City on Monday, it will include a spa, 14 restaurants, 10 pools and a theater that seats 5,050 people.

Nevada casinos have spas, restaurants, pools and theaters, of course, many of them just as nice as those in the Revel.

But Revel will have one feature that no major Nevada casino can match: It will be totally nonsmoking, the first in New Jersey and one of the few anywhere in the U.S.

There's no doubt that it's a gamble for a resort that a couple of years ago appeared unlikely to be completed. (It took state tax incentives to get the job finished.) The few times Nevada casinos have experimented with a no-smoking policy, they've failed, and casino owners here have long argued that gambling and smoking are inseparable.

If Revel is successful, however, it could mark the beginning of a welcome revolution in gaming. Nevada casino owners should watch it closely.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Young Americans going nowhere

By Todd G. Buchholz and Victoria Buchholz

Americans are supposed to be mobile and even pushy. Saul Bellow's Augie March declares, "I am an American … first to knock, first admitted." In "The Grapes of Wrath," young Tom Joad loads up his jalopy with pork snacks and relatives, and the family flees the Oklahoma dust bowl for sun-kissed California. Along the way, Granma dies, but the Joads keep going.

But sometime in the past 30 years, someone has hit the brakes and Americans — particularly young Americans — have become risk-averse and sedentary. The timing is terrible. With an 8.3 percent unemployment rate and a foreclosure rate that would grab the attention of the Joads, young Americans are less inclined to pack up and move to sunnier economic climes.

The likelihood of 20-somethings moving to another state has dropped well over 40 percent since the 1980s, according to calculations based on Census Bureau data. The stuck-at-home mentality hits college-educated Americans as well as those without high school degrees. According to the Pew Research Center, the proportion of young adults living at home nearly doubled between 1980 and 2008, before the Great Recession hit. Even bicycle sales are lower now than they were in 2000. Today's generation is literally going nowhere. This is the Occupy movement we should really be worried about.

For about $200, young Nevadans who face a statewide 13 percent jobless rate can hop a Greyhound bus to North Dakota, where they'll find a welcome sign and a 3.3 percent rate. Why are young people not crossing borders? "This generation is going through an economic reset," said John Della Volpe, who directs polling at Harvard’s Institute of Politics, which surveys thousands of young people each year. He reports that young people want to stay more connected with their hometowns: “I spoke with a kid from Columbus, Ohio, who dreamed of being a high school teacher. When he found out he’d have to move to Arizona or the Sunbelt, he took a job in a Columbus tire factory.”

In the most startling behavioral change among young people since James Dean and Marlon Brando started mumbling, an increasing number of teenagers are not even bothering to get their driver’s licenses. Back in the early 1980s, 80 percent of 18-year-olds proudly strutted out of the D.M.V. with newly minted licenses, according to a study by researchers at the University of Michigan’s Transportation Research Institute. By 2008 — even before the Great Recession — that number had dropped to 65 percent. Though it’s easy to blame the high cost of cars or gasoline, Comerica Bank’s Automobile Affordability Index shows that it takes fewer weeks of work income to buy a car today than in the early 1980s, and inflation-adjusted gasoline prices didn’t get out of line until a few years ago.

Todd G. Buchholz is the author of “Rush: Why You Need and Love the Rat Race.” Victoria Buchholz, a student at Cambridge University, is at work on a book about the neuropsychology of the teenage brain.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Government has a

role in industry and innovation

By Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger

In the early days of the Solyndra debacle, as the reality dawned on the White House that its half-billion-dollar investment was about to go belly-up, former Obama economic adviser Larry Summers famously observed that, “Government is a lousy venture capitalist.” The quip, discovered after House Republicans subpoenaed White House e-mails about Solyndra, fairly well characterizes good Washington opinion these days in the wake of the Solyndra bankruptcy.

But before we conclude that government ought to get out of the business of betting on new technologies, we’d do well to try imagining our modern economy without computers, the Internet and jet travel, all of which were heavily subsidized by the federal government.

Critics of government investment in technology cherry-pick high-profile failures such as Solyndra, the 1970s “synfuels” program to make gasoline out of coal, and corn ethanol. But these relatively marginal failures pale in comparison to the long history of successful government investments that have transformed our economy and contributed mightily to our affluence over the last century.

The idea that technological innovation is what drives economic growth — 80 percent or more by some estimations — is now broadly accepted by most economists. And there is even broad agreement that not all technologies are created equal. The technologies that really matter are those that economists call “general purpose technologies,” things like the steam engine, electricity, and microchips. General purpose technologies make an outsize contribution to economic growth because they find their way into all sorts of new applications, increasing productivity across large swaths of the economy.

But the question of where general purpose technologies actually come from remains hotly contested. The pat answer that mainstream neoclassical economists offer is that technological innovation primarily happens when private firms, disciplined by competitive markets, create new technologies and products in pursuit of profits. They argue that government investments in innovation have been, at best, a sideshow and brandish economic studies which purport to show that nations that spend more on public research and development don't grow any faster than those that spend less.

Ted Nordhaus is the chairman and Michael Shellenberger is the president of the Breakthrough Institute in Oakland.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Being gay should not matter in professional sports

By Phil Taylor, Sports Illustrated

The most difficult conversation of Patrick Burke's life did not come on the day his younger brother, Brendan, revealed he was gay. That was a relatively easy talk, at least for Patrick, now a scout for the Flyers. It was just after Christmas in 2007, and he was 24, five years older than Brendan. They were bringing in Patrick's luggage from the car after a scouting trip when Brendan told him, and for Patrick it didn’t change a thing. Why would it? They were brothers. Just to make sure it wasn’t one of Brendan’s jokes, Patrick made him swear on the Stanley Cup that he was serious, the way the brothers often did, because hockey runs in the Burkes’ blood. Brendan, then the student manager of the Miami (Ohio) men’s hockey team, swore accordingly. “I love you,” Patrick told his brother. Then he told him to grab a suitcase.

No, the hardest conversation of Patrick’s life came a few days later, after he’d had time to think about the years that his brother had felt the need to keep his sexuality secret. He thought about the stereotypes he had joked about in front of Brendan and how he had casually used the word gay as an insult. They weren’t hateful comments, just unthinking ones, but Patrick could hear them now the way Brendan must have heard them then. He would later learn why Brendan had quit his high school hockey team before his senior season: As a closeted gay player, he was uncomfortable with just that type of locker room banter.

“I had to sit down with my little brother, my best friend, and apologize,” says Patrick. “I said, ‘I’m sorry if I made your life harder. I’m sorry if I ever made you think that because you’re gay, I would love you any less.'” It was Brendan’s turn to reassure him. Whatever Patrick had said in the past hadn’t changed the way Brendan felt about him. They were brothers. “He said, ‘I knew you loved me,'” Patrick remembers. “But still I couldn’t believe some of the things I had said.”

You may know what came next, that after Brendan came out publicly in November 2009 and after his father, Maples Leafs president and general manager Brian Burke, not only accepted him but also accompanied him to Toronto’s Gay Pride parade, fate bodychecked the Burke family into the boards. On Feb. 5, 2010, the SUV that Brendan was driving slid out of control on a snowy Indiana highway and into the path of an oncoming pickup truck, killing Brendan, 21, and Mark Reedy, 18. It was a tragedy deepened by its cruel timing—Brendan’s life was over just as he was beginning to live it openly. The Burkes have dedicated themselves to gay activism in his memory ever since, and their latest project is the You Can Play initiative cofounded by Patrick.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Important to help animals in hard economic times

By Irvin Cannon

Among the biggest victims of the economic recession are the once beloved family pets surrendered to shelters as their owners deal with extended joblessness. The U.S. Humane Society estimates 6 million to 8 million dogs and cats enter shelters each year — and 3 million to 4 million are euthanized.

“We don’t have firm numbers but we know anecdotally that the communities that have been hardest hit by the economic downturn are seeing that reflected in their shelter intake numbers,” says Inga Fricke, director of sheltering issues for the U.S. Humane Society.

“And, unfortunately, while the majority of the public is in favor of adopting pets from shelters, very few — usually about 20 percent — actually do. That has recently gone up slightly to the mid-20s.”

My new book “For the Love of Dog Tales” gives voice to man’s best friend, with the hope people getting back on their feet will consider adopting a shelter dog, perhaps in observance of

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month in April.

You won’t find a better companion, whether you bring home a mystery mixed-breed or a purebred Labrador. Everyone thinks mutts are smarter and generally healthier, but really, it all depends on their mix of breeds and which breed strain is dominant.

Border collies and Rottweilers are two of the smartest breeds. But they tend to have other traits, too, which are just as important to consider when choosing what dog best suits your lifestyle. Remember – dogs are as individual as people. A dog’s breed, or breed mix, is no guarantee that it will have certain traits.

That said, border collies tend to need lots of room to run and lots of attention – they’re high-maintenance, Cannon says. If you can’t spend a lot of active time with them, they’ll be unhappy and you’ll have problems.

Rottweilers are fast learners and lovable family animals, but they also tend to have bold personalities associated with pack leaders. If you don’t think you can assert your authority, or if you have young or shy children, you might want to consider a more submissive breed. Dominant dogs that are allowed to bully their family members can become dangerously aggressive.

Here are some other tidbits regarding breeds:

• Among other dog breeds known for intelligence: Shetland sheepdogs, golden retrievers, Labrador retrievers, poodles, Australian cattle dogs, Papillons and Doberman pinschers.

• Bulldogs, beagles and Basset hounds all start with B but get much lower grades for smarts.

• It’s a myth that mutts have fewer health issues than purebred dogs. Because some breeds have tendencies toward problems such as deafness, blindness or hip dysplasia, remember, these are genetic issues that are inherited. So if you're mixed-breed includes some German shepherd, it may also have hip dysplasia (a problem with the joint's bone structure).

• If you're in the market for a purebred dog, you have a 25 percent chance of finding one – although maybe not the breed you want – at a shelter. If your heart is set on a specific breed, check your area for a rescue group specializing in that breed.

Don't forget to mark your calendar for Prevention of Animal Cruelty Month, which recognizes the 1866 charter signing of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Irvin Cannon was a poor kid growing up in Detroit when his family took in a stray dog. It surprised young Irvin that his father would be willing to share the family's meager groceries with a dog, but he soon discovered the return on their investment was enormous. A former police officer in Detroit and Denver, he also worked as a corrections officer in Arizona.

Opinion: Obamacare, cannabis and the Supreme Court

By Steve Kubby

If you've been following the Supreme Court hearings regarding Obamacare, you've undoubtedly heard pundits and legal experts proclaiming that the Commerce Clause preempts state law, which in turn provides constitutional support for the government to require you to buy health care insurance. However, such statements are false and deliberately misrepresent the historical record.

The Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution proclaims: “The Congress shall have power … To regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.”


Steve Kubby

It would seem obvious that, if you’re growing plants for your own personal consumption, then you’re not engaged in commerce with another state, an Indian tribe, or a foreign nation. But, according to the Supreme Court, you’d be wrong.

That’s because the court ruled in Gonzales v. Raich and even growing one cannabis plant, for strictly personal use, is forbidden by federal law and the Commerce Clause.

Now that decision has become center stage in the current review of Obamacare by the Supreme Court because the federal government is relying upon the Supreme Court decision in Gonzales v. Raich, which found that consuming one’s locally grown marijuana for medical purposes affects the interstate market of marijuana, and hence that the federal government may regulate – and prohibit – such consumption. This argument stems from the landmark New Deal case Wickard v. Filburn, which supposedly held that the government may regulate personal cultivation and consumption of crops, due to the effect of that consumption on interstate commerce, however minute it may be. That may be true, but only under certain circumstances.

Lost in all the arguments presented in Gonzales v. Raich was the fact that Roscoe Filburn was a farmer who accepted New Deal federal money to limit how much wheat he grew. Filburn was caught violating his contract with the federal government by producing wheat in excess of the amount permitted. The government then sued Filburn for violating the terms of his contract, Filburn objected on constitutional grounds and the case went to the Supreme Court.

During 1941, producers who officially enrolled in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 received an average price on the farm of about $1.16 a bushel, as compared with the world market price of 40 cents a bushel. Filburn signed up for the federal program and was paid to not grow over an allotted amount of wheat. In July 1940, pursuant to the Agricultural Adjustment Act, Filburn's 1941 allotment was established at 11.1 acres and a normal yield of 20.1 bushels of wheat per acre. Filburn was given notice of the allotment in July 1940 before the fall planting of his 1941 crop of wheat, and again in July 1941, before it was harvested. Despite these notices and a signed contract with the federal government, Filburn planted 23 acres and harvested 239 bushels from his 11.9 acres of excess area.

Filburn argued that because the excess wheat was produced for his private consumption on his own farm, it never entered commerce at all, much less interstate commerce, and therefore was not a proper subject of federal regulation under the Commerce Clause. Unfortunately, Raich failed to point out that once Filburn accepted Federal money and violated the terms of his contract, then and only then, did it become a Federal matter. Had Raich argued that Wickard v. Filburn only applied in cases where farmers had enrolled in Federal programs, signed contracts and accepted Federal money, the Supreme Court would not have had any basis to render the defective decision that they did.

Hopefully, the Supreme Court will revisit Wickard v. Filburn and recognize that only when private citizens enter into a contract with the government, and accept money from the government, can the Commerce Clause be applied.

Steve Kubby is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: America's moral crisis lies in boardrooms, not bedrooms

By Robert Reich

Republicans have morality upside down. Santorum, Gingrich, and even Romney are barnstorming across the land condemning gay marriage, abortion, out-of-wedlock births, access to contraception, and the wall separating church and state.

But America's problem isn't a breakdown in private morality. It's a breakdown in public morality. What Americans do in their bedrooms is their own business. What corporate executives and Wall Street financiers do in boardrooms and executive suites affects all of us.

Robert Reich

There is moral rot in America but it's not found in the private behavior of ordinary people. It’s located in the public behavior of people who control our economy and are turning our democracy into a financial slush pump. It’s found in Wall Street fraud, exorbitant pay of top executives, financial conflicts of interest, insider trading, and the outright bribery of public officials through unlimited campaign “donations.”

Political scientist James Q. Wilson, who died last week, noted that a broken window left unattended signals that no one cares if windows are broken. It becomes an ongoing invitation to throw more stones at more windows, ultimately undermining moral standards of the entire community

The windows Wall Street broke in the years leading up to the crash of 2008 remain broken. Despite financial fraud on a scale not seen in this country for more than eighty years, not a single executive of a major Wall Street bank has been charged with a crime.

Since 2009, the Securities and Exchange Commission has filed 25 cases against mortgage originators and securities firms. A few are still being litigated but most have been settled. They’ve generated almost $2 billion in penalties and other forms of monetary relief, according to the Commission. But almost none of this money has come out of the pockets of CEOs or other company officials; it has come out of the companies – or, more accurately, their shareholders. Federal prosecutors are now signaling they won’t even bring charges in the brazen case of MF Global, which lost billions of dollars that were supposed to be kept safe.

Nor have any of the lawyers, accountants, auditors, or top executives of credit-rating agencies who aided and abetted Wall Street financiers been charged with doing anything wrong.

And the new Dodd-Frank law that was supposed to prevent this from happening again is now so riddled with loopholes, courtesy of Wall Street lobbyists, that it’s almost a sham. The Street prevented the Glass-Steagall Act from being resurrected, and successfully fought against limits on the size of the largest banks.

Windows started breaking years ago. Enron’s court-appointed trustee reported that bankers from Citigroup and JP Morgan Chase didn’t merely look the other way; they dreamed up and sold Enron financial schemes specifically designed to allow Enron to commit fraud. Arthur Andersen, Enron’s auditor, was convicted of obstructing justice by shredding Enron documents, yet most of the Andersen partners who aided and abetted Enron were never punished.

Americans are entitled to their own religious views about gay marriage, contraception, out-of-wedlock births, abortion, and God. We can be truly free only if we’re confident we can go about our private lives without being monitored or intruded upon by government, and can practice whatever faith (or lack of faith) we wish regardless of the religious beliefs of others. A society where one set of religious views is imposed on a large number of citizens who disagree with them is not a democracy. It’s a theocracy.

But abuses of public trust such as we’ve witnessed for years on the Street and in the executive suites of our largest corporations are not matters of private morality. They’re violations of public morality. They undermine the integrity of our economy and democracy. They’ve led millions of Americans to conclude the game is rigged.

Regressive Republicans have no problem hurling the epithets “shameful,” “disgraceful,” and “contemptible” at private moral decisions they disagree with. Rush Limbaugh calls a young woman a “slut” just for standing up for her beliefs about private morality.

Republicans have staked out the moral low ground. It’s time for Democrats and progressives to stake out the moral high ground, condemning the abuses of economic power and privilege that characterize this new Gilded Age — business deals that are technically legal but wrong because they exploit the trust that investors or employees have place in those businesses, pay packages that are ludicrously high compared with the pay of average workers, political donations so large as to breed cynicism about the ability of their recipients to represent the public as a whole.

An economy is built on a foundation of shared morality. Adam Smith never called himself an economist. The separate field of economics didn't exist in the eighteenth century. He called himself a moral philosopher. And the book he was proudest of wasn't "The Wealth of Nations," but his "Theory of Moral Sentiments" — about the ties that bind people together into societies.

Twice before progressive have saved capitalism from its own excesses by appealing to public morality and common sense. First in the early 1900s, when the captains for American industry had monopolized the economy into giant trusts, American politics had sunk into a swamp of patronage and corruption, and many factory jobs were unsafe — entailing long hours of work at meager pay and often exploiting children. In response, we enacted antitrust, civil service reforms, and labor protections.

And then again in 1930s after the stock market collapsed and a large portion of American workforce was unemployed. Then we regulated banks and insured deposits, cleaned up stock market, and provided social insurance to the destitute.

It's time once again to save capitalism from its own excesses — and to base a new era of reform on public morality and common sense.

Robert Reich is chancellor's professor of public policy at UC

Berkeley. He has served in three national administrations, most recently as secretary of Labor under President Bill Clinton. He has written 13 books.

Opinion: Choices of adults make me sad

By Kathryn Reed

I looked around at the students – all sixth-graders – wondering how we got to this place. And I felt sad.

I didn’t know the phrase “gateway drug” when I was their age. I could not have told a narcotics officer what drugs were dangerous. (I didn’t even know what a narcotics officer was.) These kids could and did. They mentioned cocaine, meth and black tar heroin.

That, too, made me sad.

I’m not of the generation that didn’t do drugs. I have my stories. I have my lessons.

I just wonder where we went wrong that life’s dangers are robbing children of their youth, of their innocence, of what should be the time of their life when they shouldn’t have to worry about all of these adult issues.

Maybe I’m naïve. I’m OK with that.

I just wonder how life got so out of hand that we have to have programs for sixth-graders about the dangers of drugs. I wonder how we got to the place where some of them, and even those who are younger, have felt peer pressure to try drugs.

I know life isn't easy. And I know some of these kids at 13 have experienced things I hope to never experience.

I grew up with a father who smoked cigarettes until I was in junior high. (They weren't called middle schools back then.) A friend and I took a few from his truck. I gagged. I still don't understand the allure of smoking.

I remember dad drank Manhattans. Plenty of hard alcohol was consumed on duplicate bridge nights. That was my exposure to drugs in my home.

I remember being offered pot in high school, telling one of my sisters and subsequently getting a lecture that left me scared. Big sisters are that way. They can be more convincing and threatening than parents.

Maybe at 46 I just wish the world were a little less dependent on drugs. The clean air of Tahoe, the natural beauty – they are intoxicating in their own right. There I go again – being naïve to think those things are enough.

When I choose to poison my body I do so with alcohol – usually wine. I don't have a problem with adults doing what they want as long as they don't endanger others.

Blame can be spread around as to why drugs are getting into young people's hands. But at some point we have to look in the mirror. What is our individual role in all of this? Did I drink in front of a young person when I shouldn't have? Did I laugh about a story about college that glamorized drug use? Did I unknowingly encourage dangerous, illegal behavior? Probably. Intentionally? No.

But I'm still responsible.

We all have choices. I just don't want mine to have unintended consequences.

I'm angry that as a society we have gotten to the point where middle school and elementary students need to be taught about the dangers of drugs. We, as a society, have failed them. If it weren't for adults and our behavior, children would not be into drugs.

That, too, makes me sad.

All the programs in the world are not going to stop the drug problem. Adults need to take the blame and the responsibility.

The message of Drug Store Project is that we all have choices. As a community, especially the adults, shouldn't our choices be to allow kids to be kids, for them not to have "adult" concerns, and for each of us to lead a life that is worth emulating?

Go ahead and disagree with me. All you'll do is make me even sadder.

Opinion: Dangers on slopes can be manmade

By Dick Penniman

Have you ever hit a tree while skiing? It doesn't take much to imagine what it feels like. It hurts, but worse … it can kill you. That's why most skiers and snowboarders stay on open, groomed trails.

What about hitting a lift tower, a signpost or a snowmaking gun? Is it the same as hitting a tree? The answer is “No!” These are “manmade” structures scattered along the groomed trails, and they are usually made of steel. Clearly, a 3-inch steel pipe can cause more serious injuries than a 3-inch sapling.

And what about those brightly colored mats used by most resorts. Do they offer adequate protection? Again, the answer is “No!” In California, there are no laws or regulations requiring resorts to pad or protect anything. The 3-inch to 4-inch mats most resorts use on lift towers are far too thin to offer any protection beyond collisions of just a few miles per hour. These mats look like pads but barely protect the obstacles, themselves, from getting scratched.

Why pad anything? Shouldn’t we just steer clear of obstacles? We’ve all seen the cartoons that show a character flattened upright against a tree with arms and legs wrapped around it. They always get up and walk away. But that’s in the cartoons and not the way collisions happen in real life. Nearly all collisions with fixed obstacles result from sliding into the object after a simple fall on icy snow. It’s not funny and, tragically, real people often can’t get up and walk away.

Kids are particularly at risk because:

• They go fast, fall more often and don’t have as much control over where and how they fall. Teach your child to ski or ride slower, particularly when it’s icy.

• They are not very aware of their surroundings. Teach your child to steer clear of every fixed object on the slopes, even if they look like they’re padded. I’ve seen kids intentionally run into padded lift towers thinking it would be funny because they would just bounce off. Sadly, they learned a “hard” lesson.

In addition, check if your favorite resorts are doing anything seriously to reduce collision injuries. Review the California Mountain Resort Safety Report online. The report includes an assessment of almost every California resort and gives you information that will help you compare them and decide which resort is best for you and your family.

Dick Penniman is the chief research officer of the SnowSport Safety Foundation.

Opinion: Explaining what the '****' talk is all about

By Kristin Luker

I was a first-year graduate student at Yale in the late 1960s and had been called into the room of a faceless bureaucrat. What I mostly remember about the man was how gray he was: gray eyes, gray hair, garbed in the traditional Ivy League charcoal-gray suit.

He told me that the fellowship I was on was being dropped, and I needed to switch to another one. The problem, it seemed, was that I was eligible for two fellowships; one roughly the equivalent of what I had, and one much more generous. After looking at me for a long moment, he summarily dismissed the very idea of awarding me the better fellowship. "Well," he said, leaning over the table so he could explain the facts of graduate school life to me, "we absolutely can't give you that fellowship. You might get pregnant and get married." And yes, he did say it in that order.

Note what he didn’t say. He didn’t say that I might choose to become pregnant, or that such a question never arose when male graduate students were under consideration. (I know because I asked them.)

And that’s what all this slut talk is really about.

Kristin Luker, a professor of law and sociology, is the founder of the new Center on Reproductive Rights and Justice at UC Berkeley School of Law.

Read the whole story