Opinion: A big thanks to Harrah’s Heros

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to thank the Harrah’s Heros for once again contributing to our cause. Harrah’s Heros continues to give service to our community. Throughout the year they have helped financially and with staff. Volunteers from Harrah’s Heros spent the day helping Bread & Broth volunteers serve those in need a hot meal on a cold night, and were happy to do so.

Bread & Broth is able to continue its mission of feeding the hungry of South Lake Tahoe in large part because of the generosity of the local community.

A $250 sponsorship covers the cost of food and beverages for the approximately 100 people who visit each Monday evening. To find out how your family or business can Adopt A Day of Nourishment, contact Connie Blue at midwest2tahoe@yahoo.com or (530) 544.4945.

Bread & Broth

Opinion: Measure B is bad for business

To the community,

The South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce opposes Measure B and the increase in taxes for any business at this time.

Measure B comes from the perspective of assessing a business greater taxes and fees based solely on the number of employees that business has. Gross receipts and number of employees are the indicators, without perspective of costs or true profit margins.

It removes the cap on business license fees, which means the more a business earns, the more it pays. While in theory that may sound attractive, there is no consideration for the expenses of paying employees a decent wage, nor does this consider the wide gap in profit margins. One large business may be paying to conform with new federal and state mandates, new local mandates, and have additional fees for upgrades to licenses, etc. A different kind of business may have a large number of employees, but none of these mandates, especially if they use contract employees.

A business in the city of South Lake Tahoe pays a business license fee, a county DBA fee, and must advertise at their expense to announce this DBA. They may have to pay an additional home occupation fee. If they also work in the county, there is a business license fee. If they sell or work with anyone who sells or gives away even ice, there are environmental reports to be filed. If they buy and resell items, there is a resell license fee. They pay liability and D O insurance. If they plan an event to promote their business, they pay the city for a permit. If they are a store front business, they have all the above expenses in addition to rent or property taxes if they own the building in which their business operates.

Some business owners pay original and renewable licensing or credential fees, as in Realtors, contractors, food handlers, health clearances, and often have to pay to take classes to stay current. Larger businesses pay benefit costs for their

employees and state and federal taxes, including disability and social security. Many are also facing increased mandates by the state and federal governments.

All businesses in the city of South Lake Tahoe were hit this past year by the stated intent to enforce the sign ordinance. The council also enacted a new ordinance, the snow removal ordinance, which also adds to the cost of doing business in the city of South Lake Tahoe. It is also our concern that this does not create an attractive environment for large business to come to, or stay in, South Lake Tahoe.

It stands to reason that an increase in taxes and fees will either cause the business to close it’s doors, pull out of Tahoe, lay off or cut hours for more employees, or raise the rates to the consumers in South Lake Tahoe. More unemployed people or people with hours that have been cut mean less money to be spent in the smaller businesses in South Lake Tahoe. Locals keep some of these businesses alive in the shoulder seasons; where will that disposable income be if their hours are cut?

It is our belief that if the taxes and license fees are raised on these large businesses, more employees will lose their jobs. It also removes the cap on the fees, which in our estimation would result in higher fees for many businesses. Rate increases for consumers may also be a result.

Government must stop going to business to fund excessive expenditures. Please join the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce and vote no on Measure B.

JoAnn Conner **David Kelly**
Danny Freeman **Dick Van Buskirk**

President **Executive director**
Past president **Board member at large**

Opinion: War on drugs being fought on the wrong front

By John Stossel

Unlike Bill Clinton, President Obama admits he inhaled!. "Frequently," he said. "That was the point."

People laugh when politicians talk about their drug use. The audience laughed during a 2003 CNN Democratic presidential primary debate when John Kerry, John Edwards and Howard Dean admitted smoking weed.

Yet those same politicians oversee a cruel system that now stages SWAT raids on people's homes more than 100 times a day. People die in these raids – some weren't even the intended targets of the police.



John Stossel

Neill Franklin once led such raids. The 33-year Maryland police veteran, now executive director of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, locked up hundreds of people for drugs and felt good about it.

"We really thought that these drugs made people evil," he told me.

But 10 years ago Franklin decided that drugs – even hard drugs – do much less harm to Americans than does the drug war.

“Drugs can be – and are in many cases – problematic. But the policies that we have in place to prohibit their use are 10 times more problematic.”

The raids helped change his mind. “We end up with kids being shot … search warrants being served on the wrong home, innocent people on the other side of the door thinking that they are protecting their home.”

And the level of drug use remains about the same.

Still, most Americans support the drug war. Paul Chabot, White House drug adviser to Presidents George W. Bush and Clinton, told me: “We should be kicking down more doors. … They’re kicking the door of somebody who’s a violent person.”

Violent? People who get high are rarely violent. The violence occurs because when something’s illegal, it is sold only on the black market. And that causes crime. Drug dealers can’t just call the cops if someone tries to steal their supply. So they form gangs and arm themselves to the teeth.

“We have the violence of these gangs competing for market share, and people get hurt,” said Franklin.

Especially kids. Drug gangs constantly look for new recruits.

“Some of these gangs have better recruitment programs than Fortune 500 companies. They know what to say to kids.”

People think that if drugs were legal, there would be more recruiting of kids. Franklin says the opposite is true.

“Prohibition causes that. We don’t have kids on the corner (saying), ‘Pssst, I got a fifth of Jack Daniel’s.'”

Kids rarely peddle liquor, and there’s little violence around

liquor sales because alcohol is legal. There was lots of violence before 1933, but that was because Prohibition forbade liquor sales. Prohibition gave us Al Capone.

“Organized crime existed well before Prohibition,” Chabot replied.

That’s true. But much less of it. The murder rate rose when alcohol was banned. It dropped when Prohibition was repealed.

“If we were to do away with our drug laws … we know drug usage numbers will skyrocket,” Chabot said.

But we don’t know that.

It’s logical to assume that, were it not for drug prohibition, drug abuse would be rampant. But 10 years ago, Portugal decriminalized every drug — crack, heroin, you name it. The number of abusers actually declined.

Joao Goulao, Portugal’s top drug official, said that before decriminalization “we had a huge problem with drug use … around 100,000 people hooked on heroin.”

Then they started treating drug use more like a parking ticket. People caught with drugs get a slap on the wrist, sometimes a fine.

Independent studies have found the number of people in Portugal who say they regularly do drugs stayed about the same. And the best news, said Goulao: “Addiction itself decreased a lot.”

At first, police were skeptical of the law, but Joao Figueira, chief inspector of Lisbon’s drug unit, told me that decriminalization changed lots of minds.

“The level of conflicts on the street are reduced. Drug-related robberies are reduced. And now the police are not the enemies of the consumers!”

And teen drug use is down.

All good news. But in American and in most of the world, the drug war continues, thousands are murdered and in ghettos the police are enemies of the people.

Governments should wake up and learn something from the Portuguese.

John Stossel is host of "Stossel" on the Fox Business Network. He's the author of "Give Me a Break" and of "Myth, Lies, and Downright Stupidity".

Opinion: Pettiness and mudslinging bring down GOP candidates

By Thomas Sowell

The only good news for the Republicans coming out of the seemingly endless presidential candidate "debates" is that some Republican leaders are now belatedly thinking about how they can avoid a repetition of this debacle in future elections.

What could they possibly have been thinking about, in the first place, when they agreed to a format based on short sound bites for dealing with major complex issues, and with media journalists – 90 percent of them Democrats – picking the topics?



Thomas
Sowell

The conduct of the candidates made things worse. In a world with a record-breaking national debt and Iran moving toward creating nuclear weapons, they bickered over earmarks and condoms. I am against earmarks, but earmarks don’t rank among the first hundred most serious problems facing this country.

Mud-slinging has replaced rational discussions of differences on serious issues – not only during the debates themselves, where the moderators sic the candidates on each other, but even more so in the massive television character assassination ads in which Romney supporters seem to specialize.

Groups supporting Mitt Romney have turned character assassination almost into a science. You take something that most people, outside of politics, do not understand and twist it to sound terrible to those who are unaware of the facts.

Blanketing Florida with misleading ads attacking Newt Gingrich won that state for Romney, after Gingrich scored an upset victory in South Carolina. The ads made a big deal out of charges that the former Speaker broke tax laws – charges that the Internal Revenue Service exonerated him of, after a long investigation.

When Rick Santorum suddenly surged after his upset victories in Minnesota, Missouri and Colorado, the Romney character assassination machine attacked him for having voted in the Senate for various things that conservatives don’t like.

But, when it comes to voting in Congress, seldom do you get a

pure bill that you can agree with in all its parts. If you never voted for bills containing anything you didn't like, you might get very little voting done.

But, if it is a bill to provide American soldiers with the equipment they need to fight a war, and somebody has put into it an earmark for a federal boondoggle in his district, are you going to vote against that bill and let American soldiers go into battle without all the equipment and supplies they need?

Taking advantage of the public's lack of knowledge is something that Barack Obama already does very effectively in his political propaganda. But is that something the Republicans want to imitate?

It has worked during the primary season, when the media are perfectly happy to see Republicans destroying each other. But it will not work in the general election campaign, when even truthful criticisms of the president will have a hard time getting out through the media, which hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil when it comes to Obama.

The pettiness and mud-slinging during the Republican primary campaigns is especially irresponsible during a time when there are very serious problems, at home and abroad, that need to be addressed in a serious way.

Discussions of particular issues, one by one, often miss the larger point that goes beyond the issue at hand – namely, this administration's steady movement toward arbitrary government that circumvents the restrictions of the Constitution.

Nothing demonstrates this more starkly than the president's arbitrary power to waive the requirement that employers have to provide ObamaCare coverage for their workers. That can be the difference between paying, or not paying, millions of dollars. What does that mean for anybody's other rights?

What does freedom of speech mean if criticizing the administration can mean you get no exemption, while your competitor who keeps quiet, or who praises the administration, gets a waiver? The Constitution requires “equal protection of the laws” for a reason.

And what about nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran, the world’s leading sponsor of international terrorism? Is that not worth discussing in something other than sound bites?

Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institute and author of “The Housing Boom and Bust”.

Opinion: Congress needs to get out of the way to save USPS

By Tad DeHaven

The U.S. Postal Service has released a new five-year plan for congressional consideration that it says would get the beleaguered government mail monopoly on sounder financial footing and thus avoid a taxpayer bailout. The plan repeats previous suggestions (i.e., workforce reductions, postal network consolidations, elimination of Saturday delivery, elimination of the retiree healthcare benefit funding requirement) and proposes an increase in the price of a first-class stamp from 45 to 50 cents.

Whether or not it would achieve what the USPS hopes, it probably doesn’t matter given that asking Congress for greater

operational flexibility is like asking a 2 year old to stop playing with their food. That's why the focus should be on completely transitioning the USPS from a government-run business to a privately-run business (or perhaps businesses).



Tad DeHaven

Over at the Courier Express and Postal Observer blog, Alan Robinson says that "just like all plans that came before, [the new USPS plan] started with the assumption that the Postal Service remains a quasi-governmental entity." As a result, Robinson notes that the plan is missing two key ingredients for success that foreign posts have utilized: private capital and an expanded range of products and services.

In an essay on the U.S. Postal Service, I discuss how liberalization in other countries has enabled foreign mailers to diversify into non-postal activities:

Consultants at Accenture have found that diversification not only has a measurable impact on the performance of international posts, but that it is what ultimately distinguishes high performers from low performers. America's relatively dynamic economy is particularly suited for the diversification opportunities that would arise under postal liberalization.

Germany's former postal monopoly, Deutsche Post, illustrates the type of transformation possible by liberalization. Today, the private Deutsche Post World Net has changed its compensation structure, imported managers from other industries, modernized the mail and parcels network within

Germany, and developed new products such as hybrid mail and e-commerce. The company now has interests in not only the traditional mail and parcels business but also express mail logistics, banking, and more.

Given that the USPS's plan is going to be unpopular with various postal stakeholders (i.e., special interests), Alan says that they should consider the advantages of privatization:

It is clear that the business plan that the Postal Service has chosen is not the one that has worked in other countries. The plan avoids talking about either private capital or expanding the breadth of service offerings as neither is on the legislative table. Introducing thinking about how private capital could be introduced and the product offerings could be expanded forces stakeholders to think about privatization, an idea that is nearly as unpopular as the changes that the proposed business model introduced. However, as this brief post notes, privatization offers significant financial advantages that could reduce the operating and price changes envisions by the Postal Service's business plan. Therefore, those who see the greatest harm from this plan need to see if the advantages of privatization could benefit their interests sufficiently to overcome long-held objections to the idea.

I think Robinson is right, but I suspect that the "stakeholders" believe there's a good chance that Congress will ultimately come to their aid with some sort of taxpayer bailout. Therefore, it's possible that they believe that it is in their best interest to continue fighting for the status quo. Unfortunately, the recent bipartisan federal bailouts of the financial industry and the automakers suggest that they could be correct.

Tad DeHaven is a budget analyst at the Cato Institute. Previously he was a deputy director of the Indiana Office of Management and Budget.

Opinion: Raggio's death leaves a void in Nevada

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

No one who knew Bill Raggio could doubt his toughness.

He was, after all, a former Washoe County district attorney best known for burning down Joe Conforte's brothel near Wadsworth – in a community more often willing to turn a blind eye to the shenanigans of Conforte and his ilk.

Fifty years later, Raggio, who died last week while vacationing in Australia, showed his toughness again when he went against his own party to support U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., for re-election. Raggio knew he'd receive harsh criticism in the heat of one of the nastiest political contests in recent memory. As always, Raggio did what he thought was right and let the cards fall where they may. The criticism came, but Raggio never backed down.

It was a toughness that made him a formidable foe as his party's leader in the Nevada Legislature. He could twist arms with the best of them, driving his opponents crazy, especially those in Southern Nevada who learned early on that Northern Nevada was not to be messed with as long as Raggio was in charge.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Rogue tactics undermine climate crusade

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Feb. 23, 2012, Sacramento Bee.***

As big industries ramp up their campaign to discredit the science of global climate change, researchers who've helped document the threats posed by rising greenhouse gases have paid a steep price.

Some have had their emails stolen. Others have come under attack from industry-funded groups. Still others have been summoned to appear before hostile congressional committees.

Amid this organized campaign of intimidation and dishonesty, it is understandable that some might want to fight back with similar tactics.

Understandable, but not acceptable. If climate scientists and their advocates use deceit in the cause of truth, they will only set back their cause. Sadly, one already has.

Peter Gleick, president of the Pacific Institute, an Oakland-based think tank, has admitted using a false name to obtain internal documents from a pro-industry group in Chicago, the Heartland Institute. Gleick then fed the documents – which reveal individual donors to Heartland and the group's plan to use public schools in a campaign to discredit climate science – to bloggers and Internet sites. Heartland has also accused Gleick of forging one of the Heartland documents, which Gleick has denied.

Gleick, recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius award" and a prolific blogger and writer (including op-eds on water issues for The Bee in 2009 and 2011), apologized three days ago on the Huffington Post for his actions.

“My judgment was blinded by my frustration with the ongoing efforts – often anonymous, well-funded and coordinated – to attack climate science and scientists …” he wrote in his post.

Sorry, Mr. Gleick, but frustration isn’t justification for acts that are dishonest and potentially illegal. Moreover, by misrepresenting himself, Gleick has handed red meat to the attack dogs who so frustrate him. He has also taken himself out of an ongoing political debate that so badly needs strong, credible voices.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Well-being of livestock is worth worrying about

By Steve Chapman

Factory farming and its abuses were once the province of an eccentric minority that invited ridicule and scorn. Agribusiness corporations could afford to ignore them. In the real America, nobody wasted time worrying about the well-being of livestock.

But the real America has changed. On Monday, the biggest restaurant chain on the planet, McDonald’s, lined up on the same side as the Humane Society of the United States on a major issue of animal welfare. It informed its pork suppliers that they will have to stop confining pregnant sows in “gestation crates” that are too small to let the animals turn around.



Steve Chapman

McDonald’s buys 1 percent of the pork sold in this country. When it tells pork producers to jump, they ask, “How high?”

Most Americans may not rank animal welfare high on the list of their chief concerns. But given the choice of food produced more humanely or less humanely, enough people will choose the latter to make continued indifference a bad business strategy.

McDonald’s was preceded by such mainstays of American consumer culture as Burger King, Wendy’s, Sonic and Winn-Dixie stores, which have moved against gestation crates. Smithfield Foods – the world’s largest pork producer and one of the most reviled – has also promised to eliminate these cages by 2017. These are not companies whose customer base consists of vegans in plastic shoes who regard meat as murder.

It’s no surprise that Whole Foods Market has built an empire partly by making animal welfare part of its identity. The chain is also known for rarefied offerings and high prices. But retailers like Wal-Mart and Costco, which specialize in mass-market products at bargain prices, are on board as well. Their private label eggs all come from uncaged hens.

In the past seven years, cage-free eggs have increased their share of sales to 8 percent up from 2 percent. A substantial number of Americans are willing to pay a bit more to avoid a conflict between stomach and conscience.

They may not have to. A 2007 study conducted at an Iowa State University research farm found that “group housing may produce pigs at a lower cost than individual gestation stalls in

confinement facilities.”

The egg industry is likewise adapting to changing norms. The United Egg Producers recently reached agreement with the Humane Society to support federal legislation mandating better conditions for laying hens.

Most of these birds spend their lives with just 67 square inches of space – smaller than the size of a standard sheet of paper. The bill would increase it to at least 124.

It would also afford them “enriched” environments where they can scratch, perch, nest and generally behave in a chicken-like manner. Egg cartons would have to carry labels to specify if the hens were caged, cage-free or free-range.

Two states have already banned the notorious “battery cages,” where multiple birds are crammed into small spaces. Given that eight states have banned gestation crates, more protections for hens are very likely.

This may sound like a radical development, but it’s only a natural expansion of normal human sympathies for our fellow creatures. You don’t have to be an animal rights zealot to believe humans are not entitled to inflict needless misery on pigs or other livestock. If dogs and cats are protected from cruelty, why not the animals we eat?

Defenders of the status quo may dismiss their critics as insular urbanites who know nothing about farming. But some of the critics are just a generation removed from rural life and know there used to be better ways to produce food from animals.

Producers are not really to blame for the dismal conditions in factory farms. They are merely responding to the relentless competitive pressure to eliminate every unnecessary expense.

Mandates from major corporations – or from governments – allow

them to adopt new methods without being undercut by less scrupulous suppliers. They provide a space within which humane impulses can assert themselves.

Americans have a strong attachment to the freedom to live their lives with a minimum of interference. But they understand there is no human right to abuse animals.

Before he ascended to the papacy, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger decried battery cages for the "degrading of living creatures to a commodity," a lament that applies to other factory methods as well. When the Pope and McDonald's are both against something, odds are high its time is past.

Steve Chapman is a columnist and editorial writer for the Chicago Tribune.

Opinion: Obama falls victim to lure of super PAC

By Robert Reich

It has been said there is no high ground in American politics since any politician who claims it is likely to be gunned down by those firing from the trenches. That's how the Obama team justifies its decision to endorse a super PAC that can raise and spend unlimited sums for his campaign.

Baloney. Good ends don't justify corrupt means.

I understand the White House's concerns. Obama is a proven fundraiser – he cobbled together an unprecedented $745 million for the 2008 election and has already raised $224 million for this one. But his aides figure Romney can raise almost as

much, and they fear an additional $500 million or more will be funneled to Romney by a relative handful of rich individuals and corporations through right-wing super PACS like “American Crossroads.”



Robert
Reich

The White House was surprised that super PACs outspent the GOP candidates themselves in several of the early primary contests, and noted how easily Romney’s super PAC delivered Florida to him and pushed Newt Gingrich from first-place to fourth-place in Iowa.

Romney’s friends on Wall Street and in the executive suites of the nation’s biggest corporations have the deepest pockets in America. His super PAC got $18 million from just 200 donors in the second half of last year, including million-dollar checks from hedge-fund moguls, industrialists and bankers.

How many billionaires does it take to buy a presidential election? “With so much at stake” wrote Obama campaign manager Jim Messina on the Obama campaign’s blog, Obama couldn’t “unilaterally disarm.”

But would refusing to be corrupted this way really amount to unilateral disarmament? To the contrary, I think it would have given the President a rallying cry that nearly all Americans would get behind: “More of the nation’s wealth and political power is now in the hands of fewer people and large corporations than since the era of the robber barons of the Gilded Age. I will not allow our democracy to be corrupted by this! I will fight to take back our government!”

Small donations would have flooded the Obama campaign, overwhelming Romney's billionaire super PACs. The people would have been given a chance to be heard.

The sad truth is Obama has never really occupied the high ground on campaign finance. He refused public financing in 2008. Once president, he didn't go to bat for a system of public financing that would have made it possible for candidates to raise enough money from small donors and matching public funds they wouldn't need to rely on a few billionaires pumping unlimited sums into super PACS. He hasn't even fought for public disclosure of super PAC donations.

And now he's made a total mockery of the Court's naïve belief that super PACs would remain separate from individual campaigns, by officially endorsing his own super PAC and allowing campaign manager Jim Messina and even cabinet officers to speak at his super PAC events. Obama will not appear at such events but he, Michelle Obama, and Vice President Joe Biden will encourage support of the Obama super PAC.

One Obama adviser says Obama's decision to openly endorse his super PAC has had an immediate effect. "Our donors get it," the official said, adding that they now want to "go fight the other side."

Exactly. So now a relative handful of super-rich Democrats want fight a relative handful of super-rich Republicans. And we call this a democracy.

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: Thanks to STR crew for cleaning up after a bear

To the community,

Last night was trash night. My dog was up all night barking at the bears.

This morning when I went out to get the paper my trash was all over the place. After the trash pick up, almost all of the trash was gone.

We do have the best trash pick up crew I have ever seen. Thanks fellows.

David Dewitt, South Lake Tahoe