Opinion: Whole nation is on government plantation

By Star Parker

Here's free advice for Mitt Romney.

Before bringing up the poor again, read my book "Uncle Sam's Plantation."

Romney has been taking a drubbing about his remarks in a CNN interview that he is "not worried about the very poor … we have a safety net there…If it needs a repair, I will fix it." And then going on to say it is "… middle income Americans … that are really struggling…." that are his concern.



Star Parker

What the now Republican presidential frontrunner missed in his off-the-cuff economic analysis of American class is that the cause driving the struggle among both low and middle income Americans is the same.

Economic stagnation and social breakdown caused by welfare state socialism.

As I explain in "Uncle Sam's Plantation," America's inner cities offer laboratory results for what is wrong today with the whole country.

If you want to know why America is failing, look at why our inner cities are failing.

Gov. Romney is incorrect to label as a safety net welfare state programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training, Emergency Assistance to Needy Families with Children, Section 8 Housing, and Food Stamps.

A safety net is what is provided when a free person, acting on their own initiative, falls and we offer assistance to help them get back up and start again.

The welfare state amounts to wholesale takeover of individual lives. As opposed to government stepping in to soften the blow, the welfare state assumes from the start that individuals won't make it without government managing their lives.

It is not an accident that despite some ten trillion dollars spent on anti-poverty programs since the 1960's there is little discernable change in our poverty rate.

The problem was made worse because the broken families and broken spirits resulting from government plantation dependence have institutionalized inner city poverty.

If America is going to get back on track, we must appreciate that we are doing to our whole country what we did to America's poor.

Seventy percent of government spending today consists of transfer payments – government redistributing funds from one set of individuals to others.

Even before the Obamacare government takeover, our health care market was already dominated by government. About ten percent of our healthcare expenditures today are out-of-pocket expenditures by individuals. About half of health care expenditures in 1960 were individual out-of-pocket expenditures.

Despite the central role that government sponsored enterprises – Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac – played in the recent housing collapse, their role in the housing market today has become even greater.

In 2011, 95 percent of all new mortgages were bought or guaranteed by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, or FHA.

And, of course, just about every working American is part of Social Security and Medicare, both of which are now fiscally untenable.

Now layer on to all this Obamacare, a trillion dollars in spending on stimulus programs, and bailouts of banks and auto companies. And five trillion in new debt, a 45 percent increase, over the last four years as a down payment on it all.

The bigger role government plays in our lives, the more America resembles the post office rather than FedEx.

And the bigger role government plays, the harder it is to fix the problem because individuals become used to these programs and fear fundamental change.

Mitt Romney touts his business experience as his qualification for the presidency.

That business experience amounted to turning companies around, improving their performance by making more efficient use of their assets.

This is exactly what our country needs today. A reallocation of our assets from government to private sector efficiency.

Getting off Uncle Sam’s Plantation is no longer a problem limited to our poor. It is a problem and challenge for the whole country.

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: Jobs deficit more important than federal deficit

By Robert Reich

The most significant aspect of January's jobs report is political. The fact that America's labor market continues to improve is good news for the White House. But as a practical matter the improvement is less significant for the American work force.

President Obama's only chance for rebutting Republican claims that he's responsible for a bad economy is to point to a positive trend. Voters respond to economic trends as much as they respond to absolute levels of economic activity. Under ordinary circumstances January's unemployment rate of 8.3 percent would be terrible. But compared to September's 9.1 percent, it looks quite good. And the trend line – 9 percent in October, 8.6 percent in November, 8.5 percent in December, and now 8.3 percent – is enough to make Democrats gleeful.



Robert Reich

But the U.S. labor market is far from healthy. America's job deficit is still mammoth. Our working-age population has grown by nearly 10 million since the recession officially began in December 2007 but many of these people never entered the workforce. Millions of others are still too discouraged to look for work.

The most direct way of measuring the jobs deficit is to look at the share of the working-age population in jobs. Before the recession, 63.3 percent of working-age Americans had jobs. That employment-to-population ratio reached a low last summer of 58.2 percent. Now it's 58.5 percent. That's better than it was, but not by much. The trend line here isn't quite as encouraging.

Given how many people have lost their jobs and how much larger the total working-age population is now, we've got a long road ahead. At January's rate of job gains – 243,000 – the nation wouldn't return to full employment for another seven years.

When they're not blaming Obama for a bad economy, Republicans are decrying the federal budget deficit and demanding more cuts. But America's jobs deficit continues to be a much larger problem than the budget deficit.

In fact, we can't possibly achieve the growth needed to reduce the budget deficit as a proportion of the total economy unless far more people are employed. Workers are consumers, and consumer spending is 70 percent of economic activity. And cutting the budget means fewer workers, directly (as

government continues to shed workers) and indirectly (as government contractors have to lay off workers) and therefore fewer consumers.

Yet deficit hawks continue to circle. State and local budgets are still being slashed. The federal government is scheduled to begin major spending cuts less than a year from now. Republicans are calling for more cuts in the short term. Austerity economics continues to gain traction.

Meanwhile Congress is debating whether to renew extended unemployment benefits. This should be a no-brainer. The long-term unemployed, who have been jobless for more than six months, comprise a growing share of the unemployed. (In January they rose from 42.5 percent to 42.9 percent).

Republicans say unemployment benefits are prolonging unemployment, that people won't get jobs if they get unemployment checks from the government. That's claptrap, especially when there's only 1 job opening for every 4 people who need a job. Republicans also say we can't afford to extend jobless benefits. Also untrue. Jobless workers spend whatever money they get, and their spending keeps other people in jobs.

Government should extend unemployment benefits, and not cut spending until the nation's rate of unemployment is down to 5 percent. Then, and only then, should we move toward budget austerity.

The job situation is better than it was but it's still awful. The jobs deficit is still our No. 1 economic problem. Forget the budget deficit until we tame it.

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: Climate-change solutions depend on open dialogue

By Thomas Hayden

Katharine Hayhoe is a busy woman. As an atmospheric scientist at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, she studies the regional impact of climate change. As a Christian, she volunteers, sharing her science with church and public groups. And as the mother of a young child – well, enough said.

So it's not surprising she was frustrated when a chapter about climate science she wrote for an upcoming Newt Gingrich book was casually dumped by the Republican presidential primary candidate in the lead up to the Iowa caucuses. "Nice to hear that Gingrich is tossing my #climate chapter in the trash," she wrote in a message to her Twitter followers on Dec. 30. "100+ unpaid hrs I cd've spent playing w my baby."

What happened? The 2012 Republican primary season happened, that's what. In a year when contenders could be leading in the polls one week and down in single digits the next, the list of policy positions candidates can't afford not to hold has grown. To the traditional litany of taxes (no way), guns (absolutely) and abortion (never), add a new Republican litmus test: climate change (not even if the science says it's so).

Throughout the Great Winnowing, Republican primary candidates have been rushing to distance themselves from the scientific

consensus on climate change – that it’s happening, it’s a problem, and humans are the cause. They’re not simply rejecting specific climate policies. Just acknowledging the vast, well-documented evidence that humans are changing the planet’s climate has apparently become forbidden.

That has any number of prominent Republicans worrying their party has become antiscience. But it also raises a deeper question: If we can’t even agree on observable, verifiable facts, how are we supposed to govern ourselves in a democracy?

Thomas Hayden teaches science communication and environmental sustainability at Stanford University. He is a trained scientist and has worked as a journalist for Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report and other publications.

Read the whole story

Opinions: A badge of honor to help feed needy

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to extend a warm thank you for the Brownies/Girl Scout Troop 123 support in our Adopt-A-Day of Nourishment Program. Volunteers from the Brownies/Girl Scout Troop 123 spent their Monday helping Bread & Broth volunteers serve those in need a well balanced nutritious meal to people from the community.

The volunteers from the Brownies/Girls Scouts have gone above and beyond in their efforts to help our cause, and it is helping each of them achieve a Global Action Award.

The Bread & Broth staff that Monday was excited that the Brownies were there to offer their support for our Adopt-A-Day of Nourishment through the Bread & Broth program. 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.

Special thanks to Hailey, Genevieve, Sandy, Kyla, Jennifer, Myliana, Kade, Annaleigh, Tammy, Chloe, Kahleson, Maddy, Linda, Patsy, Susie and Sandy. The volunteers helped serve dessert and drinks, as well as with clean up. Their enthusiasm and helpfulness was greatly appreciated.

Bread & Broth

Opinion: Mayor should know better than to make empty promises

To the community,

She said it. The mayor, Claire Fortier, actually said it: The ice rink will be the hub. The hub of what isn’t quite clear. Well, the town has heard wild claims before. For example, the Embassy Suites was supposed to be the Crown Jewel of Lake Tahoe. That was prior to its bankruptcy. And, of course, the

convention center was to be the town’s economic savior.

Bill Crawford

It’s a worn out story. The town has endured promises of “hubs” galore. But the public knows the score. And as a former editor the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*, Mayor Fortier ought to know. And presently, the ice rink is a large question mark. We have to wait to see if the city’ partnership with a private party to manage the ice rink will work for the tax paying public that financed the ice rink. Right now the hub’s wheel isn’t turning.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: State of the union depends on education

By Vicki Barber

President Obama’s State of the Union address had a good deal to say about education. Rightfully so, high quality education does require a large portion of our nation’s budget. The federal government has directed 15 percent of its budget toward education, which is equal to the amount directed to national defense. Those two budget categories are only exceeded by health care and pensions. Therefore, from a fiscal perspective, education is and should be considered extremely important.

Looking at it slightly differently, there isn't a person reading this article who did not attend school in some way. Regardless of whether this was a public school, a charter school, home school, or a private school, each of us learned to read and write through some means of education. Many of us have children and grandchildren being educated today. Yes, education is extremely important.



Vicki Barber

So what did the president say about education? 1) Without saying the word preschool, he said "… to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, our commitment to skills and education has to start earlier." I can only read that as preschool. 2) He noted that nearly every state in the union has raised the standards for teaching and learning. More specifically, almost all states have aligned their teaching with the National Common Core Standards. 3) He supported more funds for education noting that "… a good teacher can offer an escape from poverty for a child who dreams beyond his circumstances." Having been witness to many children in our county who have come from circumstances that are perceived as less than ideal, but who go on to amazing heights, I know this is true. 4) He supported giving teachers permission to teach with passion. Most teachers go into the profession with energy, passion and enthusiasm. We want to support that enthusiasm and creativity by ensuring all teachers have the skills and experience necessary to provide all students with high quality access to those very important Common Core Standards. 5) The president issued a challenge to every state to do what is necessary to ensure students stay in high school until they graduate or

turn eighteen. Our job is not to just make graduation a possibility, but a reality for every child. 6) Additionally, all students must have access to college, regardless of whether or not they choose to attend college. Encouragement to follow their dreams and to make higher education choices that support the achievement of those dreams is also crucial to the success of our next generation of learners. It is our responsibility as a society to make sure that all students have the opportunities they so deserve. And, yes, that responsibility does have a price tag.

El Dorado County has already stepped up the president's challenges. Preschool is a priority and we see outstanding programs throughout the county. Our state has adopted the Core Standards and our districts are moving in that direction. Budgets are tight, but districts in El Dorado County are actively working to support teachers and schools. We want the best because our children deserve the best. The graduation rate in El Dorado County is 90 percent, whereas the graduation rate of all of California is 74.4 percent. We actively utilize the opportunities made available through the www.CALocalscholarships.org website. Our schools work in collaboration with families to ensure all students who wish to attend college have the funds to do so.

Yes, we are up to the challenge in El Dorado County. We're all about education.

Vicki Barber is El Dorado County superintendent of schools.

Opinion: Water bond will fail if it remains bloated

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Feb. 5, 2012, Sacramento Bee.***

If we had our druthers, we'd let voters decide this November on the once-delayed $11.1 billion water bond, passed by lawmakers in 2009. The sooner voters dispatch this albatross, putting it out of its misery, the sooner California can get serious about smarter and more equitable alternatives for financing needed water infrastructure.

But the very thing that makes this bond so unappealing – its excess flab, the debt payments it will foist on a cash-poor state – are the things prompting Gov. Jerry Brown to get it off the ballot. Brown is pushing a tax increase initiative in November that he doesn't want tethered to this Hindenburg of a water bond. So he's asking lawmakers to push the water bond off to 2014, in the vague hope that an improving economy will make the measure more attractive to voters.

It's wishful thinking. The economy may improve in two years, but there is no telling if it will bring more water-generous voters to the polls than may show up this year.

Intriguingly, a recent Field Poll shows that voters are generally in favor of investing in water projects. But polls also show that few Southern Californians even know that their water comes out of this place known as the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Perhaps by waiting two years, the water community could help educate Californians that the Delta is not just an outlet of the Mississippi.

If they put off the vote, lawmakers should rethink the assumptions and process that produced this water bond. As is too often the case, this infrastructure package was the

product of a group shakedown. If San Joaquin farmers were to get their reservoir, then San Diego insisted it get $100 million to raise a dam and Lake Tahoe supporters wanted their $100 million. Projects were added merely to win votes, with far too few requirements that beneficiaries of water projects put up their own money to share in the costs.

Read the whole story

Opinion: The politics of hunger in the U.S.

By John Packham

It comes as no great surprise that Food Stamps and other means-tested public programs for the poor have emerged as campaign issues during the current election cycle. Expect more of the same as the Republican presidential primary race tightens and the candidates attempt to outduel each other on matters of reducing federal spending and eliminating dependency on "big government."

Newt Gingrich's recent labeling of President Obama as "the best food stamp president in American history" follows a time-honored Republican tradition of demonizing programs for the poor and vilifying their recipients – campaign tactics that hearken back to Ronald Reagan's bromides on "welfare queens" and other stereotypes of aid recipients.

After unemployment insurance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly the Food Stamp Program) has historically been the most responsive federal program in assisting families during economic downturns. SNAP is a

cornerstone of the nation’s public health safety net and, simply put, our most important anti-hunger program.

The full cost of SNAP benefits is paid by the federal government, with the costs of administrating the program shared between Washington and the states, which operate the program. In Nevada, the average monthly benefit per person is $123.

Unlike most means-tested benefit programs, SNAP is only available to households with low-income individuals and limited financial assets. Currently, SNAP eligibility is limited to households whose net income is less than or equal to the federal poverty line (about $18,500 a year or $1,545 per month for a family of three) and who possess assets of $2,000 or less (or $3,000 for households with an elderly or disabled family member).

John Packham is director of health policy research at the University of Nevada School of Medicine and president of the Nevada Public Health Association.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Tips to prevent scalding injuries

By Eric Guevin

Scald injuries are painful and require prolonged treatment. They may result in lifelong scarring and even death. Prevention of scalds is always preferable to treatment and can be accomplished through simple changes in behavior and the

home environment.

In conjunction with Burn Awareness Week, Feb. 5-11, the American Burn Association and Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District are providing information relating to scald burns.

Although anyone can sustain a scald burn, certain people are more likely to be scalded – infants, young children, older adults and people with disabilities. These high-risk groups are also more likely to require hospitalization, suffer complications and experience a difficult recovery. Most burn injuries occur in the person's home and the vast majority of these injuries could have easily been prevented.



Eric Guevin

Tap water scalds are often more severe than cooking related scalds.

The American Burn Association recommends the following simple safety tips to decrease the risk to yourself and those you love from tap water scalds:

• Set home water heater thermostats to deliver water at a temperature no higher than 120 degrees. An easy method to test this is to allow hot water to run for three to five minutes, then test with a candy, meat or water thermometer. Adjust the water heater and wait a day to let the temperature drop. Re-test and re-adjust as necessary.

• Provide constant adult supervision of young children or anyone who may experience difficulty removing themselves from

hot water on their own.

• Gather all necessary supplies before placing a child in the tub, and keep them within easy reach.

• Fill tub to desired level before getting in. Run cold water first, then add hot. Turn off the hot water first. This can prevent scalding in case someone should fall in while the tub is filling. Mix the water thoroughly and check the temperature by moving your elbow, wrist or hand with spread fingers through the water before allowing someone to get in.

• Install grab bars, shower seats or non-slip flooring in tubs or showers if the person is unsteady or weak.

• Avoid flushing toilets, running water or using the dish or clothes washer while anyone is showering.

• Install anti-scald or tempering devices. These heat sensitive instruments stop or interrupt the flow of water when the temperature reaches a predetermined level and prevent hot water that is too hot from coming out of the tap.

Cooking-related scalds are also easy to prevent.

Some things you can do to make your home safer from cooking-related burns include:

• Establish a “kid zone” out of the traffic path between the stove and sink where children can safely play and still be supervised. Keep young children in high chairs or play yards, a safe distance from counter- or stovetops, hot liquids, hot surfaces or other cooking hazards.

• Cook on back burners when young children are present. Keep all pot handles turned back, away from the stove edge. All appliance cords should be coiled and away from the counter edge. During mealtime, place hot items in the center of the table, at least 10 inches from the table edge. Use non-slip placemats instead of tablecloths if toddlers are present.

• Never drink or carry hot liquids while carrying or holding a child. Quick motions may cause spilling of the liquid onto the child.

Eric Guevin is acting fire marshal for Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District.

Opinion: Plan will make California's forests healthy

By Tom Vilsack

America's forests are one of our nation's great treasures. Not only are they wonderful places to be outside with friends and family, they provide us with much of the water we drink, clean the air we breathe, provide habitat for wildlife, and support jobs and growth in rural communities.

Healthy forests are critical to President Obama's vision for an economy that's built to last. More than 173 million visitors come to national forests and grasslands every year to hike, bike, view wildlife, go hunting, fishing and rafting and enjoy being in the great outdoors. This generates billions of dollars and supports hundreds of thousands of middle-class jobs for local communities. Forests and grasslands also support good jobs related to timber and forest products, energy and other multiple uses of our public lands.



Tom Vilsack

The water provided by our public lands – including clean drinking water used by about 20 million Californians – is key to healthy communities and a strong economy. In California, USDA-managed national forests alone provide half of the state's water, used by countless farmers and ranchers while providing habitat for wildlife. The water from national forests also contributes to the president's vision for an American energy economy, supporting clean hydroelectric plants that power 2.3 million California homes each year.

That's why management of the 193 million acres of forests and grasslands overseen by USDA's U.S. Forest Service is so important. Last month, I announced the department's intended course of action in finalizing a new "Forest Planning Rule," which will guide management on the National Forest System – including how the 18 national forests in California develop management plans.

A revised planning rule is long overdue. The 1982 rule does not reflect the past 30 years of new science and changing public values. It is also cumbersome and expensive, with plans taking five to seven years on average to complete. As a result, more than half of our land management plans are more than 15 years old and are past due for revision. Revisions under a new rule would take less time and cost less money while producing better results for people and the environment.

To develop our preferred option for a final rule, we listened to input from the public: holding the most collaborative rule-making process in the agency's history and carefully

considering more than 300,000 comments. The public asked for a rule that is grounded in science, restores our forests to improve forest health, reduces wildfires, and protects water and wildlife. Our proposal does all these things while ensuring that our national forests contribute to the economic vitality of local communities by providing for recreation, forest products, energy and other multiple uses.

Forest management in California has often been characterized by conflict among environmentalists and forest industry. But today we are seeing an increasing number of efforts in California and across the country where diverse stakeholders are working together to restore forests in ways that protect water resources, reduce wildfire and provide jobs for local communities.

Our goal is to encourage just these types of collaborative efforts, requiring opportunities for public participation throughout the planning process. Once the rule is finalized, Californians will have the opportunity to lead the way in promoting this collaboration. Indeed, the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra national forests in California will be among the first in the nation to begin revising their plans under the new rule.

Our public lands belong to us all, whether you can look out your window to the forest, visit for a hike a few times each year, or live in a city and drink water from our forests each day. As we work toward an economy that is built to last, we share a responsibility to also rebuild our natural resources.

The proposal we announced will do just that, ensuring that we build a strong green infrastructure with restored watersheds, resilient ecosystems, habitat for wildlife, opportunities for healthy outdoor recreation and support for job opportunities. In the months to come, we look forward to finalizing and implementing a final rule to build a framework to invest in our national forests so that they are ecologically strong and

support healthy and prosperous communities for the long term.

Tom Vilsack is secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.