Opinion: When will the campaign get serious?

By Thomas Sowell

The Republican candidates' circular firing squad now seems to be using machine guns. Whoever the eventual "last man standing" turns out to be, he may not be standing very tall or very steadily on his feet – and he may be a pushover for Barack Obama in the general election, thanks to fellow Republicans.

Whether you are a Democrat, a Republican or an independent, this is a very serious and historically crucial time for the United States of America. What Mitt Romney did or did not do when he was with Bain Capital, or what Newt Gingrich did or did not say to his ex-wife, are things that should be left for the tabloids.

With the economy still faltering and Iran on its way to getting nuclear bombs, surely we can get serious about the issues facing this nation. Or can we?



Thomas Sowell

Mitt Romney's boasts about what he did at Bain Capital are as irrelevant as Newt Gingrich's demagogic attacks on Romney's role there. Romney is not running to become head of Bain Capital.

While Gingrich backed away from his demagoguery about Bain Capital, Romney is continuing to press ahead with his charges that Gingrich was a lobbyist for Freddie Mac. As someone who has been a consultant, but never a lobbyist, I know the difference.

As a consultant, I have offered advice to people in government and in private organizations, both businesses and non-profit organizations. But I have never gone to a government official to urge that official to make a decision favorable to those who were paying me, or to those for whom I did free consulting.

It takes two to tango, and lobbying requires not only a lobbyist but also someone who is being lobbied. With more than 500 people in Congress alone who could have been lobbied, and additional officials in the bureaucracies, if Romney cannot find even a single person to say that Gingrich lobbied him or her, then it is long past time for him to either put up or shut up.

On the other hand, if Romney just wants to sling a lot of mud in Newt's direction and hope that some of it sticks, then that should tell the voters a lot about Romney's character.

So much of what has been said by various Republican candidates, as well as by the media, has been in the nature of unsubstantiated, peripheral or irrelevant talking points for or against particular candidates, rather than serious statements about serious issues confronting the nation.

So common has this approach become that even some conservative writers have come to the defense of John King, the CNN reporter who opened the South Carolina debate with a question about Newt Gingrich's former wife. These writers have declared that question "legitimate," in some undefined sense.

If all that "legitimate" means is that John King was not doing anything that many other reporters would have done in the same

circumstances, that is making common practice a substitute for our own judgments about what is and is not relevant in a given context. Neither the audience in that room nor the millions watching on television were there to find out about Newt Gingrich's marital problems. If it is a common practice for the media to focus on such things, so much the worse for the media – and for the country.

"The politics of personal destruction" – as Bill Clinton called it, and as he himself practiced it – is not the way to solve the nation's problems. It has already poisoned the well of political discourse this season and claimed Herman Cain as its first victim, on the basis of unsubstantiated accusations by women with checkered pasts of their own.

Whether Herman Cain was good, bad or indifferent as a candidate, and whether his chances of winning the Republican nomination were substantial or non-existent is not the issue. Nor is this the issue as regards Newt Gingrich, Mitt Romney or any other candidate.

Poisoning the well of political discourse may be one of the reasons why we see such unsatisfactory sets of candidates for political office in both parties, not only this year but in previous election years as well.

Many able and decent people are understandably reluctant to subject themselves and their families to a mud-slinging contest or to media "gotcha" questions. The creeping acceptance of such practices is hardly a justification, but is itself part of the degeneration of our times.

The time is long overdue to get serious.

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

Opinion: Disarming the hooligan fans among us

By Andy Brooks and Steve Weber

On any given Sunday, you never know who will win an NFL game.

But if you've been to the 'Stick or many other stadiums this year, you know one thing: Fans' actions toward the opposing team's fans will go beyond just emotional or angry to sometimes threatening and even violent.

And it's not just in the United States: A riot after a soccer game in Egypt this week left 74 dead when local fans chased the supporters of the visiting team with knives, clubs and stones up against a locked gate at an exit.

Is the behavior at U.S. football stadiums hooliganism in the making? That's what the British called the unruly behavior that came to dominate their soccer stadiums in the early 1980s. Police in riot gear had to escort each team's fans to and from games. At the stadium, a wall of riot police stood between opposing fans. A game meant tear gas obstructing the field, homemade explosives lobbed at opposing fans and players, and racist chants.

Things have improved in the United Kingdom since then. But is this the NFL's future?

Andy Brooks is a doctoral student at UC Berkeley's School of Information and grew up rooting for the 49ers and A's. Steven Weber is a faculty member at the same school, but devotes his life to the New York Giants and the Yankees.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Why are public lands public?

By William H. Meadows

As the Republican presidential nomination process moves on to the states of Nevada and Colorado, a new topic has arisen in a race that has already seen many twists and turns. That issue is the purpose and importance of public lands. In a recent interview with the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, the leading contender for the GOP nomination, was quoted as saying, in reference to the large acreage of public land in the state, “I don’t know why the government owns so much of this land.” As an organization whose mission is to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places, I think it is important to answer the governor’s query for all people who enjoy and benefit from our public lands.

Our public lands, which include national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges and national wilderness areas, among others, are vital to America’s economy. Through recreation, such as hunting, fishing and hiking, and tourism, our public lands contribute over $1 trillion to the nation, not to mention millions of jobs.

Public lands provide much of our clean drinking water and without protection, much of it might be contaminated. Our public lands have also played an extremely important role in

energy development, and the economic importance that comes with it. Oil and gas exploration could not have exploded the way it did during the early 20th century without our public lands, and now as we move forward in the 21st century, public lands can help us advance renewable energy development. Public lands provide some of the best places in the world for solar and wind energy and the energy self-dependence that the United States needs.

William H. Meadows is the president of The Wilderness Society.

Read the whole story

Opinion: How the UK is lowering tax rate on corporations

By Priya Guha

Around the world, nations are looking for ways to accelerate their recovery from the global recession. While the tactics may be different, the strategy is the same: encourage robust, sustainable growth.

In the United Kingdom, a central plank of our plan for growth is a reduction in the corporate tax rate. It is an approach that we believe will encourage entrepreneurship and attract foreign investment, without damaging our important social safety net.

As it stands now, our corporate tax rate – 26 percent – is already the lowest among the G7 nations. (The United States, at 35 percent, ranks second highest, after Japan.) Over the

next three years, the government plans to reduce the rate even further, to 23 percent.

Our corporate tax scheme is one of the reasons that international analysts and publications have rated the United Kingdom among the world's best places to start a business. Starting a business in the United Kingdom takes on average 13 days; in other countries of Europe, the average is more than a month. The combination of low taxes and streamlined regulations means an entrepreneur's good idea can get to market and start creating jobs more quickly.

Entrepreneurship and innovation are our path back to the top. If we are at the cutting edge, the jobs lost in the global recession can be replaced by ones in entirely new industrial sectors. As one example, we are already one of the world's largest players in clean energy: there were more offshore wind facilities installed in the United Kingdom last year than in all of Europe. Clean energy is an area where we have developed quite a bit of expertise, and we're keen to share it with partners in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Priya Guha is the United Kingdom consul general in San Francisco.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Governor's cuts to fire safety in Tahoe don't

make sense

By Ted Gaines

As we near the fifth anniversary of the devastating Angora Fire that ravaged the Lake Tahoe area, leaving destruction in its wake, I am baffled by the governor's decision to put lives and property in even more danger by cutting fire protection funding for the region.

The governor's proposed budget eliminates the entire $2.3 million general fund money for Lake Tahoe Basin fire protection, and leaves only one forester and four part-time seasonal forestry aids to provide fire prevention services such as defensible space inspections and enforcement.



Ted Gaines

Residents will continue to have some fire protection services through local fire districts. If these cuts are implemented, however, resources could be stretched thin and emergency response times could be delayed. As witnessed with the Angora Fire, every second counts in containing potential wildfires.

Lake Tahoe fire safety officials also expressed concern with the lack of funding and vowed to work with me on the issue.

"We are equally troubled by this latest cut to the vital fire protection services we provide the community and will do all we can to reverse this budget decision," North Tahoe Fire District Chief Duane Whitelaw.

I intend to follow up on this matter until funding for the safety and protection of the residents of Lake Tahoe is fully restored.

I encourage people to contact the governor’s office to express their discontent with his proposed cuts.

One of the essential services government should provide its citizens is public safety. We need to seriously evaluate things when we’ve reached a point where we can’t even provide that peace of mind to residents. If you are as upset about this budget decision as I am, I urge you to call Gov. Brown and ask him for reconsideration. The governor can be reached at (916) 445.2841.

Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento and Sierra counties.

Opinion: Kindness is more than random in Lake Tahoe

Random Acts of Kindness has been wildly successful because of you.

When the idea first percolated last fall we wondered what the reaction would be. Would people embrace it? Would they write in? Would businesses want to be part of it?



Within the first hour of asking businesses to contribute a gift, three slots on the January calendar were filled. It was not difficult to fill up the remaining 28 days.

We even had people asking to be part of Random Acts of Kindness once it got started.

Thank you to the following businesses or organizations for donating to *Lake Tahoe News'* inaugural Random Acts of Kindness promotion. We have hyperlinked their website so you can more easily check out these kind businesses. Maybe your Act of Kindness could be to frequent them a little more often knowing they are true members of the Lake Tahoe community who care about being kind.

• Heart Rock Herb & Spice Company – two gift baskets

• Knox & Associates – two one-hour business consulting sessions, plus Steve Jobs' biography

• Echo Restaurant – two $25 gift certificates

• Lake Tahoe Marathon – entry into the 5K or 10K in September 2012

• Sealed with a Kiss – $50 gift certificate

• Sierra-at-Tahoe – midweek, non-holiday lift ticket

• Sprouts – two $10 gift certificate

• *Lake Tahoe News* – two Giants-A's tickets

• Cork & More – two sandwich vouchers

• Black Bear Inn – bed and breakfast cookbook, two mugs

• Howie Nave – two tickets to the Improv at Harveys

• Tahoe Tallac Association – Friend of Tallac membership for 2012 season

• Barton Health – preparedness backpack

• Tahoe Best Friends – doggie day care

• Tahoe Health Touch – EFT session

• Bona Fide Books – two books and balm

• Aramark – two day cruises on Tahoe Queen

• Weidinger Public Relations – round of golf at Edgewood Tahoe

• A Massage at Tahoe – one-hour massage

• First Tracks Productions – DVDs

• Dirk Yuricich Photography – note cards

• Alpen Sierra Coffee – 1 pound of coffee

• KizmeTech – one-hour digital ad design

• Sierra Athletic Club – one-month membership

• Squaw Valley – two passes on the tram

• Tahoe Arts Project – 4 tickets to The Gizmo Guys.

And then, you, the readers of *Lake Tahoe News* need to be applauded as well. Your stories moved those who read about the Random Acts of Kindness. Thank you for sharing.

All of the stories will remain under the Random Acts of Kindness category at the top of the page at least through February.

We hope you all will continue being kind – random or otherwise..

– Lake Tahoe News staff

Opinion: State Parks' rehearing of Washoe Meadows was a farce

By Nancy Graalman

After a misplaced display of pique – directed at citizens exercising their public meeting rights instead of at California State Parks staff responsible for an awkward do-over of actions taken last fall – State Park

Commissioners approved last Friday a re-packaged resolution that downgrades portions of Washoe Meadows State Park to clear the way for golf course development as part of the Upper Truckee River Restoration and Golf Course Configuration Project in South Lake Tahoe.

The mulligan was prompted by State Parks' seeking to "correct" the procedures that were the foundation of the Commission's vote last October to reclassify Washoe Meadows and approve the river repair project.

It quickly became obvious at the Jan. 27 meeting in Brentwood that the "reconsideration" directive was merely for technical and pre-emptive purposes. The revised reviews, draft resolutions, and findings of fact handed out at the meeting, bolstered by statements by State Parks' legal representation, seemed to be a response to the lawsuit filed in November by the Washoe Meadows Community against the Commission and Parks Department for environmental studies inadequacies as well as violations of statutory obligations related to the reclassification of Washoe Meadows.

It was clear from the start that the the re-vote was a mere formality.

However, because the issue was part of the commission's agenda open for public input, citizens introduced substantive material that adds to mounting evidence that the Parks Department's chosen alternative – which relies on extending nine holes of the Lake Tahoe Golf Course into current Washoe Meadows parkland – remains problematic for issues ranging from geomorphologic claims to economic analyses about golfing trends and the reality of potential burdens on California

taxpayers.

Among last Friday's speakers who urged the commission to reject the reconsidered project – or at least delay the vote – was Norma Santiago, El Dorado County supervisor and current chair of the Governing Board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Ms. Santiago not only cited the significant economic and environmental concerns over the state's proposals, she also offered fresh, creative and positive ways to look at river restoration, golf continuation, and South Lake Tahoe recreational opportunities.

Defense of Place, while firmly denied permission to speak the usual five minutes given to organizations, urged the commission not to leave a legacy as the board that opened the door to the downgrading of legislatively protected state parks, leaving natural resources vulnerable to unintended consequences. (California's only previously publicized attempt to reclassify a protected state park area occurred in September 2010 when the Parks Department yielded to public alarms about legal and ecologic risks and withdrew its proposal to reclassify a portion of Tolowa Dunes StatePark as a state recreation area.)

Nancy Graalman is a member of Defense of Place.

Opinion: Organizations keep Bread & Broth alive

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to thank Heavenly Mountain Resort for its continued support in our Adopt-A-Day of Nourishment Program.



Volunteers from spent their Monday helping Bread & Broth volunteers serve those in need a well balanced nutritious meal to people from the community.

The volunteers from our local Kiwanis have been very generous in their efforts to help our cause. The Bread and Broth staff that Monday was excited that the Kiwanis 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.

Bread & Broth

Opinion: JPAs need to be more

transparent

To the community,

As a member of the City Council, I served on three JPA boards (joint powers authority). They were the recreation JPA created by Measure S; the refuse JPA; and the fire-ambulance JPA.

Recently, the recreation JPA has been through a meat grinder. It has paid for two elections; one failed, one passed. It has been decided that non-taxable Mello-Roos bonds will become taxable bonds which will bail out the contract for the private operation of the ice rink. The JPA board is comprised of a city rep, a county rep, and a Tahoe Paradise rep. A staff employee handles the books for a wage of $40 per hour.



Bill Crawford

The refuse JPA has a city rep, a Douglas County rep, and an El Dorado County rep. This JPA does not make sense because each member has a separate contract with the South Tahoe Refuse Co. The city’s contract has mandatory residential pick up. Douglas County does not have mandatory pick up. El Dorado County pays a different rate than the city for the service.

The ambulance-fire JPA has a board of two, the city fire department and Lake Valley. I was short termer on the JPA. I attended two meetings. At that time, the JPA was six years behind in its audits.

The major problem with the three JPAs is the lack of

oversight. Who is accountable? For example, the recreation JPA has never (as far as I know) had an audit. It only has a mandated once a year meeting. Special meetings can be called as was the case in the feuding between advocates for bike trails and ball fields. JPAs are mostly out of sight and out of mind. But they do conduct the public's business. They need to be out of the shadows in full view.

The city should mandate that twice a year each JPA will in open City Council meetings provide full disclosure of their financial operation and financial condition. Such information would help the council decide if the partnerships should continue.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

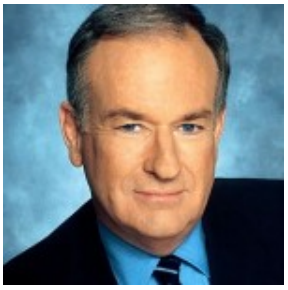
Publisher's note: ***This Aug. 11, 2011, Lake Tahoe News story has information about the recreation JPA audit.***

Opinion: Being 1 percenter is not something to be ashamed of

By Bill O'Reilly

Growing up in Levittown out on Long Island, I remember my father buying pants through the mail. This seemed strange to me. There was a Robert Hall clothing store nearby, and it had pants all over the place. But my dad said he could buy two pair for the price of one from some guy in South Dakota. One problem: The pants never fit.

My father didn’t much care. He saved some money, which he put in the bank, affording me an opportunity to go to private schools.



Bill O'Reilly

My parents never wanted to be rich and did not resent those who were, although my dad did not like Joseph Kennedy. He called JFK’s father a bootlegger. The truth is, we O’Reillys did not even know any rich people. They lived in Garden City, about five miles away.

Today, I am a rich guy, a 1 percenter. I can buy all the pants I want. My late father could not even fathom how much money I make. I have trouble processing it, as well.

But I never worked for cash. I always wanted to do something interesting and actually walked away from a high-paying TV job back in the 1990s to attend Harvard, where I secured a master’s degree in public administration. There were tons of rich folks at Harvard. I did not resent them.

Today, the Occupy Wall Street crew and many progressive Americans believe that I am a greed head, even though they have no idea what I do with my money. Just the fact that I have it gives them license to brand me a dreadful “1 percenter.”

The reason that I have prospered monetarily is that I put freedom to good use. I worked hard, got a great education, paid my dues in journalism and, finally, hit it big. America gave me the freedom to do all those things. In the past, my

achievements might have been celebrated. Not today. Now, more than a few folks say I am not paying my fair share to ensure the security of my fellow citizens.

According to the IRS, the 1.4 million households that comprise the 1 percent (that is taking in about $350,000 a year) pay 37 percent of the nation's income tax. That's a big number, is it not? And the *New York Times* reports that the 1 percenters contributed about 30 percent of all charitable donations in 2007. Another big number.

So I've decided that those demanding more of my money for "social justice" are really attacking freedom. In this country, it is not wrong to prosper. You should not be demeaned for "having."

President Obama will be doing the nation a huge disservice if he bases his upcoming campaign on class warfare, because that's really an assault on individual freedom. Yes, we are all Americans, and we should all be in it together. But that doesn't mean the government can guarantee individual outcomes. In a free society, it can't.

Bill O'Reilly is host of the Fox News show "The O'Reilly Factor" and author of "Who's Looking Out For You?" and "Pinheads and Patriots".