Opinion: EPA is gambling with U.S. economy

By Marita Noon

Folks who stop at a slot machine in the Las Vegas airport between flights can usually risk the few dollars that will probably disappear, but the serious gambler—whether the stock market, the ponies, or cards—assesses the risk before they cash in their chips. Even then, they make miscalculations. That's why they call it gambling.

Last week, Fred Krupp of the Environmental Defense Fund miscounted his cards when he claimed that new EPA regulations will "protect the IQ of countless of American kids and help clear the air for millions of Americans with asthma." Citing the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards the EPA rolled out on Dec. 21, that he said was 21 years in the making, his widely-published op-ed said that the US "has always had good sense when taking on hazardous substances in our environment."

The first card Krupp lays down in support of his argument that the US has "good sense" is DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane)—which the Environmental Defense Fund's (EDF) co-founder, Victor Yannacone, was instrumental in banning back in 1972. Using DDT as an example of "good sense," Krupp says it was banned "after learning that the pesticide was killing birds of prey." Even though the EDF sprang up in the late sixties with the single purpose of battling the use of DDT, it is surprising that he is still trying this old trick.

Since DDT was used in WWII to successfully control typhus and malaria, it has gone from winner to loser and back to winner again. In 1948, Dr. Paul Muller, the scientist who discovered the insecticidal properties of DDT, was awarded the Nobel

Peace Prize for his work. The tables turned when Rachel Carson wrote “Silent Spring” in 1962 and referenced experiments done that claimed DDT thinned birds’ eggshells. Ultimately, through the work of EDF, DDT was banned in 1972. Because of that decision, malaria has spread, and millions have died from it. Instead of eliminating the disease’s vector, the mosquito, drugs have been developed to treat the disease, and those drugs are now proving ineffective, as malaria has grown resistant to them.

Since then, additional studies have been done and the eggshell findings have been revisited. DDT wasn’t the problem it was once believed to be. In 2006, the World Health Organization declared that, DDT “will once again play a major role in its efforts to fight the disease.” DDT kills the mosquitoes that spread the disease.

The world gambled on what seemed to be a sure thing—but it turned out to be just hysteria and propaganda. Millions have died from the bad bet.

In recent history, we’ve collectively bet on “sure things” and lost.

We once believed there was an energy shortage—but modern technology and resource expansion have created a global oil glut, and natural gas is so plentiful that it is currently priced at a two-year low. America is now a net exporter of fuel.

Renewable energy was a sure thing. Presidents Bush and Obama threw taxpayer dollars at it—but it hasn’t paid off. Solyndra (and others) have gone bankrupt, taking taxpayer dollars with them. First Solar was the single worst performer in the SPX in 2011. Biofuel production has fallen off while the production of traditional fuels is up.

The planet was said to be warming. It was thought to be a crisis. But before a global agreement could be signed to fix

the problem, new studies were done, and data was found to be falsified. The cooking of the books became known as “climate-gate.” The earth began to cool on its own—warming and cooling as it has done for billions of years.

Now we may have “mercury-gate.” The EPA and the environmental groups pushing for the “21 years in the making” Mercury and Air Toxics Standards have not looked at all the data, and data that they have looked at is used selectively to draw the desired conclusions.

Krupp claims that current levels of mercury (a naturally occurring element) will damage the IQ of “countless American children,” leaving the reader with mental pictures of rooms full of special needs children. When, in fact, their study shows the estimated total IQ points lost nationwide to mercury contamination of fish consumed by humans is 510.8 IQ points (see ES-5, Table ES-3 “Estimated IQ benefits from HG reduction”). That’s not per person (or child). That’s not per state; it is the total national benefit: 511 (let’s be generous) IQ points saved at an estimated annual cost of $9.6 billion. So, nationwide, 500 children might lose one IQ point, or 1,000 might lose a half a point.

Similar to the tactics used to push the climate-change agenda, the EPA has once again selected data to support its predetermined outcome—they’ve then launched an advertising campaign to sell the expensive plan to the public. In his analysis of the EPA’s study, Dr. Willie Soon says: “It ignored well-documented, respected, and readily available research that conflicted with its apparently predetermined outcome and agenda.”

To read Krupp’s op-ed, you’d believe that implementing the EPA’s findings—which will cause some coal-fueled power plants to be mothballed and raise energy costs for consumers and industry—will eliminate all mercury from the environment. According to the Soon study, this is not true. He says:

“America’s coal-fired electrical generating units are responsible for approximately 0.5% of mercury found in the air Americans breathe. Even eliminating every milligram of this mercury will not affect or reduce the other 99.5 percent in America’s atmosphere.” Major sources include forest fires and volcanoes.

Once again, Americans are being forced to make a bad bet. The EPA would like us to spend $9.6 billion (that is billion with a “B”) for a proposed saving in healthcare costs of $6 million (that is million with an “M”) and it doesn’t add up – especially when considering the conflicting data. Even an amateur gambler wouldn’t make that bet. The odds are against you.

When the first card Krupp played was pulled from his sleeve, there is no reason to trust anything else he says. With an annual salary of nearly half a million dollars, Fred Krupp can afford to gamble, but the US cannot. The EPA is on a binge, gambling with the heart of the US economy and making our citizens the losers.

Marita Noon is executive director of Energy Makes America Great.

Opinion: Grateful for giving community

To the community,

The fundraiser committee for Jake Fonken & Taryn Callahan would like to thank you all so very much for your kindness, care, and thoughtfulness.

The turnout for the fundraiser on Jan. 6 was amazing and donations for the silent auction and raffle exceeded all expectations.

We would also like to thank the Flight Deck at Lake Tahoe Airport for providing such an amazing venue for this event. We are so lucky to have a community like ours. Please keep Jake & Taryn in your thoughts and prayers.

Friends of Jake & Taryn

Opinion: Barton proactively pursues health of the South Shore

By John Williams

The New Year has always been the perfect time to reflect and look ahead with a fresh perspective. As the primary wellness provider for the South Lake Tahoe area, I would like to address questions you may have about the future of healthcare and what Barton Health has planned for 2012 and beyond.

With healthcare in flux, many of us have questions and are wondering: “How will healthcare reform affect us?” While a great deal of unknowns exists, I’d like to share what we do know and help you make educated, sound health decisions for the future.



John Williams

In March 2010, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care and Health Care Act (PPACA) and the Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (amendment the PPACA Act) were signed by President Obama. This law serves as the primary basis for healthcare reform legislation of the 111th Congress.

Healthcare reform was designed to address three main issues:

• Increase access to healthcare

• Improve patient quality

• Reduce cost.

For hospitals that rely on patient insurance coverage, the reform bill is a double-edged sword. While there will be more insured patients, insurance is expected to pay the hospital at a lower rate for inpatient services. In return, outpatient care will grow as more of the uninsured will have access to more healthcare facilities, rather than being treated in the emergency department, which has guaranteed treatment for patients. These are just a few of the provisions and changes that will take place in the next four years. With this in mind, Barton continues to be proactive in seeking valuable services for the community and visitors. We are looking at 2012 optimistically, while pursuing the health status of our community by addressing wellness education patient access and improving care.

Looking ahead

As a proactive rural community healthcare provider, our priorities lie in addressing healthcare reform, enhancing our medical services and working collectively with community partners to help ensure the success of our economy. Barton Health's key focuses for 2012 include:

• Implementation of an electronic medical record system

• Conducting a Community Health Needs Assessment

• Securing the designation of a Level III trauma center

• Implementation and expansion of specialty services

• Innovation and recruitment.

Electronic medical records

To meet healthcare reform requirements, Barton will join other facilities across the nation and implement an electronic medical record system. The Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) will ensure safe and quality care for patients. The system will provide easy access to health information for caregivers including lab work, medications and X-rays and will enable a seamless transfer of patient medical records from one facility to another.

Quality measures

The success of a hospital is based on the care we provide and I am proud to state the quality-of-care we provide has improved significantly over the past few years. Under healthcare reform, all hospitals will be judged on the quality and the consistency of care they deliver through a program known as Value Based Purchasing.

The hospital value based purchasing program rewards hospitals for improving our patient's experience of care while reducing medical mistakes. Hospitals will be measured on patient experience and quality of care. With these scores, the federal

government will take funds from the poor performing hospitals and reward the outstanding performers.

Hospitals will benefit if they have high scores and show improvement. Barton will continue to focus our efforts in this arena, benefitting our community with exemplary patient experience.

Community Health Needs Assessment

The Community Health Needs Assessment is not only a requirement of healthcare reform, but will identify the health issues that are in the greatest need of support on the South Shore. Barton plans to identify barriers to access for healthcare, preventative healthcare needs, modifiable health risks and quality-of-life issues. The goal is to obtain a quantifiable gauge of the overall health status of our community. We will be requesting input from the public and will work alongside health experts in the area to identify issues and create programs to address the major needs within our community.

Expansion of services

Trauma Center: Barton Memorial Hospital, in conjunction with the region's emergency medical services response team, is working to establish Barton Memorial Hospital as a Level III trauma center by seeking approval from El Dorado County to begin operations by spring 2012, with official designation by spring 2013. This designation will improve the overall quality-of-care for trauma patients, allowing them to stay in the area for care rather than being transferred to another medical facility outside of the area.

Tahoe Center for Orthopedics: Barton Health is well on its way to creating an orthopedic center of excellence. Tahoe Center for Orthopedics is comprised of the area's leading orthopedic surgeons, nurses, sports medicine specialists and support staff, all designed to offer a first-rate patient experience

like none other in the region. In 2011, we remodeled the private-patient-rooms at Barton Memorial Hospital, added a pre-operative education component, hired a nurse dedicated solely to the care of orthopedic surgical patients and added a home visit rehabilitation program. New for 2012, TCO will expand its orthopedic program, allowing patients to receive surgical and rehabilitation care the same day an injury occurs.

Innovation and recruitment

In 2011, our services expanded throughout the region with growth of specialty services, physicians and technology. We recruited a world-renowned physiatrist from the Mayo Clinic, a talented audiologist and introduced dedicated cardiac services. Telemedicine, a program allowing patients to remotely consult with physicians outside of the area, will expand in 2012.

With grant funding through Access El Dorado, a countywide community collaborative, the program will provide telemedicine equipment to out-patient offices and assist in offering adult endocrinology, psychiatry (adult and child), cardiology, neurology, dermatology and infectious disease consults. Our telemedicine program has minimized the need for patients to leave the area for care while enhancing medical services in our community.

In addition to telemedicine and specialists, Barton continues to increase technology and procedures that rival our “big city” counterparts, such as the single-incision gall bladder surgery, incisionless reflux procedure, the HALO breast exam and colon hydrotherapy.

Meeting the needs of our region

Barton’s mission is simple – to support our residents regardless of their insurance coverage or ability to pay. With the unemployment rate in South Lake Tahoe at a 16.7 percent,

Barton is committed to offering free to low-cost wellness programs and services.

Free wellness lectures, discounted flu shots and complimentary health screenings are among some of the vital services we offer.

Additionally, the Barton Community Clinic treats nearly 19,000 uninsured and underinsured patients each year and continues to grow. Helping Hands, our financial assistance program, is designed to relieve some of the burden of medical bills for residents who are eligible. Barton's Community Advisory Committee has awarded nearly $75,000 in grants since 2009, addressing oral and mental health, obesity, nutrition and physical fitness programs for both children and adults.

Growth and prosperity

Our goals are aggressive as we pursue improving the health status of our community – both economically and medically. Our partnership with Lake Tahoe Basin Prosperity Plan will help create a more resilient economy, while supporting the revitalization of environmental quality and an improved standard of living for our residents.

While we enhance patient care, expand our wellness programs and improve our facilities, we plan on continuing to support the economic wellbeing of South Lake Tahoe. We will accomplish this with contract work, mostly local, to expand our Community Clinic, by continuing to upgrade our patient rooms and by improving other patient care facilities.

In addition, as the largest year-round employer in South Lake Tahoe with more than 900 employees and contracts with groups who employ more than 140 physicians, we continue to support our area's businesses. We look forward to supporting our community's health for years to come.

John Williams is president and CEO of Barton Health.

Opinion: Women’s center grateful for toy donations

To the community,

The South Lake Tahoe Women’s Center would like to take a moment to thank Tyler and Cheryl Cannon for their incredible outpouring of generosity this holiday season.

Tyler and Cheryl, along with their friends, donated over 100 new toys to the women’s center. The toys helped bring a brighter holiday to many local children with families affected by violence. The Women’s Center is tremendously grateful for individuals like Tyler and Cheryl, who help to make this community so special.

Emily Peart, South Lake Tahoe Women’s Center development coordinator

Opinion: Proper disposal of hot ashes can prevent unwanted fire

By John Poell

Improperly stored fireplace ashes are being blamed for a Christmas Day blaze in Connecticut which killed five people. Locally, several recent fires were started by the same thing.

Fortunately, the Lake Valley Fire Protection District, with the assistance of South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, has been able to control and contain the fires. Discarded fireplace and wood stove ashes are a major cause of house fires every year.

Locally, the Lake Valley Fire Protection District has kicked off a Can Your Ashes campaign.

The campaign is designed to educate residents about the inherent dangers associated with disposing of fireplace, wood stove or barbecue ashes in an improper container or location. Embers, often concealed in what appears to be cold ashes, can remain hot enough to kindle a fire for several days.

In one of the recent blazes, a resident placed hot ashes into a plastic trash container, and then placed the trash can on the back deck. The trash later caught fire, burned through the container, and set the outside wall of the home on fire. The fire finally breached the wall, which ultimately caused major damage throughout the entire structure.

In a second Meyers-area fire, Lake Valley FPD officials found hot ashes from a wood stove were placed into a non-metal container (a 5-gallon plastic construction bucket) and placed in the laundry room. The next morning the residents discovered that the bucket burned a hole through the floor and was still

smoldering underneath the subfloor.

According to the most recent National Fire Protection Agency statistics, between 1994 and 1998 improperly discarded ashes caused 9,870 residential structure fires, 32 civilian deaths and 171 civilian injuries. Two residents recently died in their home within the Tahoe basin due to a similar incident with hot ashes.

To safely dispose of ashes, we offer these tips:

• Never store ashes in bags or boxes.

• Place discarded ashes in a heavy metal container, douse with water, and cover with fitted metal lid.

• Store the container outside, away from structures, decks, fences, wood piles or other combustible materials.

• Never use a vacuum cleaner to pick up ashes.

• Contact your local trash collection agency for their disposal recommendations after ashes have cooled and embers are out.

Manufacturers advise that wood stoves should never be completely cleaned of ashes during the burning season. They burn more safely and efficiently with a layer of ash in the bed.

General fire safety tips:

• Make sure you have working smoke alarms on every level of your home, outside each sleeping area, and inside each bedroom. Test them at least once a month.

• Keep anything that can burn at least three feet from space heaters and other heat sources.

• Never leave the kitchen when something is cooking.

• Keep candles and matches out of the reach of children.

• Extinguish all fires, even candles, when you leave the room or go to sleep.

• Remember to call 911 for all fires, no matter how small.

This public safety campaign to Can Your Ashes can save lives and property.

Please contact us at (530) 577.3737 for further information.

John Poell is battalion chief-fire marshal for Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

Opinion: Lack of trust poisons Sacramento politics

By Jon Coupal

The biggest challenge for California Republicans this year will be trusting Democrats.

There’s a lot of loose talk making its way around the halls of the state Capitol these days about Republican irrelevance. Gov. Jerry Brown has made it clear that he is going to bypass the Legislature, where some Republican votes would be needed to increase taxes, and instead push for more taxes via ballot measure.

This strategy follows on the heels of Senate President Pro Tem Darrel Steinberg’s declaration last summer that Democrats will be working without Republicans to increase job growth in

California. This is a particularly risky course for Democrats. California's Democrats have three vulnerabilities:

– Erosion of the quality of public schools;

– Mismanagement of government finances; and

– Inability to foster private sector job creation.

By declaring Republican legislators to be irrelevant, they are assuming full responsibility for fixing the state government's fiscal health and California's high unemployment rate, itself the result of the accumulation of decades of Democratic-dominated regulatory and fiscal policies. We will all have to see how well that works out. There's an old adage that says be careful what you wish for. Cooler heads among Democratic leaders might question whether it's such a good idea to take on full accountability for California's economic future.

Jon Coupal is the president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

Read the whole story

Opinion: People should not be living in fear

To the community,

One of the great things about the neighborhood I live in is that we haven't had to worry about burglars. Until now.

Suddenly, our neighbors are reporting their cars are being

broken into. However, in most cases, these break-ins are not reported to the police because many of my neighbors grow medical cannabis and they are afraid to contact the police for fear they will be raided and shut down by city officials for violating the new South Lake Tahoe cultivation ordinance.



Steve Kubby

Here’s a report from one of my neighbors: “Last night my husband and I went to bed to be awoken by the teenager that lives with us at midnight because when he walked home from a neighbor’s house he noticed all our car doors open and the interior lights on. My husband and I sprang out of bed (my wallet was in the car with over $200 in it) to find that our car was ransacked. The thief stole many items: our roadside emergency kit worth about $200, our daughters’ DVD players worth $250, my husband’s GPS worth $500, our phone charger and adapter for listening to music on the radio, our cargo net and ratcheted tie downs, and they even took the girls’ sunglasses. It is so upsetting to know that random people just walk down our street (Oakland) and check for unlocked vehicles to steal from. We work hard for what we have and it is really disturbing to have some low life come and rip it away from us.”

My neighbor then told me that about a dozen break-ins have occurred in our neighborhood, but that she was the first person to report it to the police. Since my neighbors are so afraid of the police, they have decided to form a vigilante committee to catch the thieves and punish them.

Thanks to the misguided efforts of the City Council, we now have an epidemic of break-ins and the prospect of some teenage thieves getting beaten to a pulp. This is the scary and destructive outcome of local council members creating more hardship and dangers through the unintended consequences of creating bad laws.

The time has come to replace the terrible and unworkable current cultivation ordinance with one that actually helps reduce odor emissions and still protect our fellow citizens who rely upon the medical use of cannabis, under their physician's supervision, as provided by California law.

This Friday, the South Lake Tahoe city attorney issued a "Title and Summary" for a new, citywide, voter initiative that will fix the current dangerous and unworkable SLT cultivation ordinance. That means that we can start gathering signatures for the new SLT voter initiative over the next week at local grocery store parking lots.

Until then, lock your cars and leave the outside lights on at night.

Steve Kubby, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: The good and bad of Congress in 2011

By Ed Feulner

It's hardly news to say that the American people are fed up with Congress. Public disapproval of the legislative branch is practically as old as the country itself. But lawmakers seemed

to reach a new low in 2011.

One Wall Street Journal/NBC poll showed that one out of every three Americans considered the first session of the 112th Congress to "below average." Another 42 percent said it was "one of the worst" in the institution's 222-year history. A poll by CNN, meanwhile, found that only 41 percent think their representative should be re-elected – the first time that figure had dropped below 50 percent.

Is this distrust deserved? Let's review some of the issues Congress handled in 2011.

We'll start with the positives:

1) A Balanced Budget Amendment. This is the first shot of a long war to limit the size of government while making it virtually impossible to raise taxes to balance the budget.

The Senate recently had the opportunity to vote on a BBA sponsored by Sen. Mark Udall, D-Colo., one that would exempted Social Security. This despite the fact that fast-growing entitlement spending is playing a huge role in our burgeoning national debt.

Udall's BBA even threw in some class warfare. It would have enshrined the following provision in the U.S. Constitution: "Congress shall not pass any bill that provides a net reduction in individual income taxes for those with incomes over $1 million." But it was soundly defeated with votes from both parties.

In the House, a version supported by Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., also crashed and burned. Its major problem: It would have made it easier for Congress to resort to higher taxes to help balance the budget. Or try to balance it, that is: Anyone who knows history can tell you that higher taxes inevitably leads to higher spending.

A stronger, sounder BBA would certainly be a good thing. In the Senate, Utah Republicans Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee did sponsor one that sidestepped the pitfalls of the Udall-Goodlatte approach. (It was voted down as well.) But avoiding a tax-hiking BBA definitely counts as a congressional positive.

2) Obamacare Repeal. The president's signature law may be approaching a day of reckoning in the Supreme Court, but the House already did its part, voting 245 to 189 last January to repeal Obamacare. The vehicle: a bill sponsored by Rep. Eric Cantor, R.-Va., the Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act.

3) Budget Votes. President Obama's budget went down 0-97 in the Senate. The Democratic-controlled chamber, in fact, still hasn't passed a budget, as required by law, in more than 900 days. But no wonder Obama's budget tanked: According to Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., his $3.7 trillion plan would have created $8.7 trillion in new spending, added $1.6 trillion in new taxes, and led to $13 trillion in new debt over the next 10 years.

A far more sensible budget plan by Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wisc., meanwhile, drew the support of all but five Senate Republicans. His budget was a good first step to start down the road of comprehensive entitlement reform.

4) No New Taxes. Conservative legislators successfully stymied efforts by President Obama and liberal legislators to raise taxes.

On the negative side of the ledger:

1) The Supercommittee. The debt-ceiling fight that raged over the summer led to its creation. Its mission: find $1.2 trillion in cuts over 10 years. If it didn't succeed, defense was scheduled for massive cuts. Liberals may have failed to raise taxes, but having defense put in the budget cross-hairs

like this is an obvious conservative loss.

2) New Debt. The Congressional Budget Office counted $1.3 trillion in new debt last year. Preventing new and higher taxes is key, but it must be accompanied by serious and meaningful budget cuts. The fact that Congress continues to show no stomach for this necessary step offers a big clue as to why public disapproval is so high.

3) Gridlock. It can often be a good thing, especially when there are bad ideas to shoot down. But the gridlock in 2011 was often needless. Worse, conservatives always seemed to lose policy battles in the end. It was hardly encouraging, for example, to see the Ryan budget plan abandoned when the time came to pass the annual appropriations bills.

4) Government Shutdown. Washington came within minutes of one last April before a compromise was finally worked out. The final deal cut projected increases in spending, but brought no serious reforms to the federal government. Stop-gap measures to avoid making things worse are better than nothing, but conservatives need to start winning the bigger battle.

Will Congress will do better in 2012? That depends on how willing lawmakers are to make difficult decisions.

Take the “cut, cap and balance” plan, which won House approval last July. It’s good to see lawmakers stand behind an effort to make substantial spending cuts, pass enforceable budget caps, and pass a strong BBA. But unless they redouble their efforts to turn these good intentions into reality, lawmakers will stay unpopular back home.

Do they really want to do that, especially in a major election year?

Ed Feulner is president of the Heritage Foundation and co-author of “Getting America Right: The True Conservative Values Our Nation Needs Today”.

Opinion: O’Rourke’s performance worthy of an F

To the community,

In his essay “The Prevention of Literature” (1964), George Orwell wrote that “freedom of the press, if it means anything at all, means the freedom to criticize and oppose.”

Thus, it is time to assess South Lake Tahoe city manager’s performance. He has been on the job for nearly a year and a half. I believe over all he has earned a grade of C minus because of the following: When the city was terminating employees wholesale, he advocated giving the school district $250,000 to form what he called a partnership. Fortunately, he was brought to his senses, and the gift was not given. However, the item raises the question, what is the actual financial condition of the city?



Bill Crawford

Another situation, one that is presently in a mess, is the contract outsourcing the management of the ice rink. The contract as signed without the parties knowing the IRS rules for such a deal. So now the contract is in limbo, and will remain so until the tax issue is settled. A question, what will it cost the city to correct the situation?

Most recently, the city brought SnowGlobe to town, and again important details about SnowGlobe's operation, time limits, etc., were neglected. And whether the city manager likes it or not, it's trite to say, but true, the buck stops with the city manager who is responsible for city operations.

Albert Camus said, "Style is the man." The city manager's style is huggermugger. On important city business he has been sloppy, muddled and confused about city management. Under the conditions he has created, city management is disorderly. In the process of writing all of the above, I have changed my mind about the grade of C minus. I now change it to an F, failure.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Late-night comedians have it in for the GOP

By Bill O'Reilly

President Obama may not know it, but he has a nice advantage in the world of late-night TV. A new study by The Center for Media and Public Affairs at George Mason University says that in 2011, late-night comedians mocked Republicans three times more than they did Democrats. The biggest ideological difference was between David Letterman and Jay Leno. Letterman told 77 jokes at the expense of Obama, while Leno told 156 – about 100 percent more.

The Republican presidential candidates got whacked across the

board in late-night precincts. Herman Cain was mocked 191 times, Rick Perry 186, Michele Bachmann 128, and Newt Gingrich 110.

Interestingly, Mitt Romney was only singled out for teasing 79 times, perhaps signifying a certain blandness on the part of the governor.

The George Mason survey doesn't count the GOP mocking by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, possibly because researchers would have collapsed trying to chronicle that. The fact is that every late-night comedian is liberal, and so are most of their writers. Leno is the most neutral; Letterman, Stewart, Colbert and Jimmy Fallon are the furthest left.

The question is: How much will this matter in the 2012 election? Tough to answer, but one thing is certain: The late-night shows are not as well watched as they used to be.

However, popular culture does have an effect on the distracted voter: those people who do not pay much attention to the news. They often pick up the political narrative from entertainment programs and stuff they read on the Internet. There is no question that Obama's rock-star status in 2008 was largely defined by Oprah and other entertainers. And that stodgy old John McCain did not exactly dominate the rundown on "Entertainment Tonight."

If Romney is the Republican nominee, boring jokes will rule the day. If a committed conservative like Rick Santorum were to run, the writers would go wild. I can see a Santorum impersonator on "Saturday Night Live" wearing a sleeveless sweater and a "Re-elect John Adams" button. Huey Lewis once sang, "It's hip to be square." Not on late-night TV, it isn't.

Americans should expect the media to back Obama again, although the enthusiasm couldn't possibly match that of 2008. We live in sobering times, and even though many believe it's all George W. Bush's fault, that punch line is not working

anymore. There will be a new narrative, and it most likely will involve highlighting the dumbness of the GOP guy, not the accomplishments of the president.

In the end, the election will not be decided on late-night TV. Republicans already have lost there. Luckily for them, the Electoral College is a daytime operation.

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".