Opinion: Thinking regionally will improve overall economy

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Nov. 17, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

When it comes to revitalizing the economy, the Reno-Sparks area can't go at it alone. Neither can Carson City, Minden-Gardnerville, Lyon County or Storey County.

We are all in this together, and we will all have to work together to rebuild an economy devastated by the recession of 2008, which still lingers in Northern Nevada.

That was a warning from a panel that was part of the Gazette-Journal's Reno 2020 project earlier this year. And it was confirmed by the report of Brookings/SRI, released on Monday in response to Assembly Bill 449 of the 2011 Legislature.

It's imperative that the development authorities and the myriad other organizations that work to attract new businesses to the area and expand existing businesses strengthen their relationships with each other and work together on the common goal of creating more and better jobs for the residents of this area.

The days of isolation for the communities of Northern Nevada ended many years ago. The boom of the 1980s and '90s demonstrated that we all rise together; the recession has demonstrated that we all fall together, too.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Time to rectify imbalance of wealth, political power

By Robert Reich

The biggest question in America these days is how to revive the economy.

The biggest question among activists now occupying Wall Street and dozens of American cities is how to strike back against the nation's almost unprecedented concentration of income, wealth and political power in the top 1 percent.

The two questions are related. With so much income and wealth concentrated at the top, the vast middle class no longer has the purchasing power to buy what the economy is capable of producing. (People could pretend otherwise as long as they could treat their homes as ATMs, but the borrowing ended when the housing bubble burst in 2008.)

The result is prolonged stagnation and high unemployment as far as the eye can see. The Labor Department recently reported 80,000 new jobs in October. But more than 100,000 are needed just to keep up with the growth of the nation's working-age population. And the wages of most people with jobs continue to drop.

Until we reverse the trend toward inequality, the economy can't be revived.

Yet the biggest question in our nation's capital right now has nothing to do with any of this. It's whether Congress' supercommittee – six Democrats and six Republicans charged with coming up with at least $1.2 trillion in budget savings – will reach agreement in time for the Congressional Budget

Office to score its proposal, which then must be approved by Congress before Dec. 23 to avoid an automatic $1.2 trillion in budget savings requiring major across-the-board cuts starting in 2013.

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at UC Berkeley and the author of "Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future."

Read the whole story

Opinion: Ecological restoration critical on forest lands

By John Heil

California's landscapes are under siege from a host of threats. Catastrophic wildfire, climate change, invasive species and increasing human population put these delicate ecosystems at risk. The U.S. Forest Service has recognized and battled these threats for decades, but recently the agency recognized the need for a more focused approach on ecological restoration as the primary goal for all land management actions.

The goal is to retain and restore ecological resilience of the National Forest lands to achieve sustainable ecosystems that provide a broad range of services and value. Ecologically healthy and resilient landscapes, rich in biodiversity, have greater capacity to

adapt and thrive in the face of natural disturbances and large scale threats.

The Forest Service recognizes that it cannot achieve its goals alone.

“The emphasis will be placed on expanding and developing partnerships to increase organizational capacity and the use of large-scale stewardship contracts operating at the landscape level to achieve restoration goals,” said Randy Moore, Pacific Southwest Regional Forester.

In Northern California, the Eldorado and Mendocino national forests and the Lake Tahoe Basin have been working hard on various ecological restoration projects.

On the Eldorado National Forest, restoration activities continued this year in the Bassi Falls-Millionaire Camp area on the Pacific Ranger District. In the past, vehicles drove across a web of user-created roads on public and private lands to access Bassi Falls. In 2002, the Pacific RD coordinated with the adjacent land owner, Sierra Pacific Industries, to improve watershed conditions by closing user-created roads, blocking access and replanting denuded areas. A non-motorized hiking trail was constructed to allow access to Bassi Falls and a parking area was identified in the Millionaire Camp for access to a popular dispersed camping area along Big Silver Creek. Shortly after the original restoration project, the private land in the area was acquired by the Forest Service through the Silver-Pearl land exchange.

Restoration efforts on this project have continued over the past several years with a focus on improving conditions on those lands acquired through the land exchange. There are several areas where large amounts of soil have eroded away from motorized vehicle impacts, and are still eroding despite the removal of motorized vehicles. In addition, much of the hiking trail, which is made up of old user-created roads have

poor drainage and erosion issues.

Current restoration activities include repairing hillsides that have old roads that are currently causing problems in various streams and rivers. The work includes a variety of activities primarily to prevent water running down the middle of roads. In some cases, small dams will be constructed to catch sediment before it gets to streams and rivers. Water quality problems will be resolved by removing some dirt roads and returning the hillside to a more natural state. To do this, some roads will be plowed with heavy equipment so trees and other vegetation will grow where the road was located. We will also repair some streams in meadows that are eroding along the streamsides.

The Mendocino National Forest has a variety of ecological restoration projects, including marijuana site restoration and fuels reduction.

Illegal marijuana cultivation not only poses a risk to public and employee safety, it also directly harms the environment. The illegal use of pesticides can cause extensive long-term damage to natural resources. For example, the supply of public drinking water for hundreds of miles may be impacted due to one marijuana growing site. Overall, the negative impact of marijuana sites on natural resources is severe. Human waste and trash are widespread, contamination from sites affects fish and wildlife habitats, and soil erosion is common. In addition, water usage is extreme because each marijuana plant is estimated to require a gallon of water per day – water that is critical to native vegetation, wildlife and public drinking water sources.

“Reclaiming sites damaged by illegal marijuana cultivation is an important part of Ecological Restoration efforts,” said Mendocino National Forest Supervisor Lee Johnson. “All resources are touched by this activity – water, soils, wildlife and the overall health of the forest. Restoration

efforts help not only the forest resources, but also benefit the public that uses the National Forest System lands for recreation, as well as for clean water and clean air."

Another ecological restoration project on the Mendocino National Forest is the Alder Springs Fuel Reduction Project which was begun to thin the dense second-growth conifer stand that developed after a fire in the 1920s. The intent was to improve forest health and reduce the risk of a stand-replacing fire in the future. The Alder Springs project also included prescribed burning of adjacent non-conifer vegetation to expand the fuels reduction work and to maintain fire processes. A carbon budget study was integrated into project implementation in partnership with Wheelabrator and Winrock International.

"The Alder Springs Project is an example of how Ecological Restoration has been essential to managing the resources on the Mendocino National Forest," said Johnson. "Ecological Restoration on the Forest includes an integrated approach across all resources, utilizing opportunities on a broader landscape for better results, working with partners, finding opportunities for research for further understanding and development, and continuing the project through maintenance and developing a unified vision for future management."

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit recently completed the latest phase of tree thinning aimed at restoring the health of meadows, aspen groves and forest uplands near Big Meadow Creek. Contract crews worked to thin conifers on 55 acres surrounding the popular Scotts Lake Trail, off Big Meadow Trailhead near Luther Pass on Highway 89. In all, the Forest Service expects to treat about 640 acres, piling the material to burn later.

The tree thinning is part of a larger project, the Big Meadow Creek Watershed Fire Regime Restoration, which will continue for several years. Prior to the recent practice of actively

suppressing fires, ground fires occurred naturally. The Washoe Tribe also deliberately used fire to encourage the growth of desired plant and tree species, such as willow and aspen, and attract the wildlife that depend on this vegetation. Without periodic fires that destroy conifer seedlings, the trees overtake aspen stands and meadows and can lead to forest die-off from insect infestation, drought or fire.

Once the initial thinning and pile burning are complete, the Forest Service will begin meadow burns that more closely simulate the natural role fire once played in the ecosystem.

“Thinning trees reduces competition for water, nutrients and sunlight, which helps meadow vegetation and aspens thrive and allows the remaining trees in forested area to grow larger,” said Forest Supervisor Nancy Gibson. “This work, funded through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, will help to restore the Big Meadow ecosystem, providing important wildlife habitat and preserving one of our special places in the Lake Tahoe Basin.”

“Ecological Restoration crosses land boundaries and includes many different projects,” said Moore. “Ultimately we want to create landscapes that survive and thrive in a changing environment and provide goods, services and recreation opportunities now and for generations to come.”

John Heil works for the U.S. Forest Service in the regional office in Vallejo.

Opinion: Tips for a safe

holiday season

By Armando Avina

The holiday season is fast approaching, so now is a good time to talk with family, friends and neighbors about keeping each other safe during this busy and exciting time.

If you have not already done so, this is also a good time to get to know your neighbors. This includes the people who live next door, across the street and over the back fence. Neighbors watching out for neighbors help keep an eye out for suspicious activity and make communities safer.

You can also increase your home security by signing up for the free online neighborhood safety service, Alert ID, or by starting Neighborhood Watch program. For more information on both, go online.

Beginning Nov. 21, follow the Washoe County Sheriff's Office on Twitter @washoesheriff to receive the 12 Tweets of Holiday Safety. The sheriff's office plans to provide a series of daily Tweets with holiday safety tips to help kick off the traditional holiday shopping season.

Shopping:

* Lock your vehicle and hide valuables, preferably in the trunk or locked compartment.

* Before sunrise and after sunset, park and walk in well lighted areas and carry keys in your hand.

* Stay alert to your surroundings and take a moment to glance around for possible suspicious persons, vehicles, and/or situations.

* When in crowded places, be alert for potential thieves. Don't overload yourself with packages. Maintain visibility and

mobility to avoid potential threats.

* Be wary of strangers approaching you for any reason. The holiday season is notorious for “con-artists” who may attempt to distract you with the intention of taking your money or belongings.

* When possible, avoid carrying large amount of cash and valuables, and avoid wearing expensive jewelry.

* Never leave personal belongings unattended.

* Avoid shopping alone; there is added safety when shopping with a companion.

* Keep a record of all your credit card numbers in a secure place at home.

* When shopping with children, keep a close eye on them at all times. Consider coaching them to go to a store clerk or security guard if they become separated, and be sure they know their first and last name so they can advise someone who they are.

* Give children a contact phone number that they can carry on their person in case they do become lost.

Travel:

* Inform someone who’s trustworthy where you will be and when you might be expected back to your residence.

* Ask a neighbor or other dependable persons to watch your house and retrieve your newspapers and mail if possible.

* Prior to getting into your vehicle take a look inside and around before entering. If you observe evidence of a possible burglary, call your local law enforcement agency. For the sheriff’s office, call (775) 832-9276.

* Anticipate inclement weather and plan accordingly – carry

chains, keep sufficient gas in the tank, and use extreme caution while driving.

Home safety:

* Be extra cautious about locking windows, sliders, and doors when leaving for any length of time. We suggest keeping all entrance points into your house secured while you're at home as well.

* Set indoor and outdoor lights on timers and think about doing the same with a television or radio to make it appear as if someone is home.

* Never keep gifts or valuable objects in plain view from any window. Close blinds, shutters, drapes, and curtains because if a burglar can see those items they may attempt to take them from you.

* If a person knocks at your door and you don't recognize them, don't feel obligated to open your door. Teach your children that by no means will they open the door to anyone prior to your knowledge and authorization.

Armando Avina is a deputy with the Washoe County Sheriff's Office.

Opinion: Questioning logic of controlled burn

Publisher's note: *This letter was sent to the U.S. Forest Service office and then to Lake Tahoe News on Nov. 18.*

I'm not sure who to direct this comment to, and although I did

not lose my home in the Angora fire, it started 4 streets up from us and we were evacuated for 3 days. Last night driving home, with the gusty winds and seeing the whole hillside on fire was like a nightmare being awake. (expected to conduct operations on a total of approximately 40 acres near Mule Deer Circle)

How can these fires remain under control under these windy conditions? There is no control over Mother Nature. Did anyone actually check the weather?

I don’t think that the timing, planning and weather conditions were thought out very well with this set of “controlled” burns.

I really hope that nothing happens. I work with a number of people that did lose their homes and I know that they are afraid every time you burn over there. It would be tragic for anything else to happen after they have lost everything once and are re-building their lives, in their new homes.

This is just my opinion.

Terrified,

Sierra Soleta, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Attic thanks community for support

To the community,

On behalf of the Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary, I would like to thank the community for their support of the Attic.

Your donations in 2011 made for another successful Attic Holiday Faire on Nov. 6 at St. Theresa Grace Hall.

We saved the “best of the best” treasures donated to the Attic throughout the year to be sold at this one-day-event.

We raised more than $12,000 for the expansion and renovation of Barton Community Clinic of which we hope to see break ground in 2012.

I would like to give a many thanks to the volunteers and their family members who helped at this wonderful annual event throughout our 35 years.

Cathy Vogelgesang, Attic Holiday Faire chair

Opinion: Legal and political analysis of Regulate Marijuana Like Wine

By Steve Kubby

Medical marijuana is under assault like never before. Multiple federal agencies including the IRS, DEA, and DOJ all have their own proprietary programs to end California’s experiment with the medicalization of cannabis.

Furthermore, an increasing number of voters are fed up with what they perceive as abuses of the MCDs and the easy access to cannabis for young people who otherwise appear healthy. For many in California, “medical marijuana has become a joke.”



Steve Kubby

In addition to the federal assault, two recent decisions in state appellate courts have ruled that local jurisdictions can ban dispensaries. In Riverside v. Inland Patients, the court ruled that nothing in state law prevents cities or counties from banning dispensaries. In a similar case in Long Beach, the court went even further and ruled that only the federal government can regulate marijuana and any attempt by a local jurisdiction is illegal and a violation of the Controlled Substance Act.

California laws “do not provide individuals with inalienable rights to establish, operate or use” dispensaries, nor do they say that dispensaries “shall be permitted within every city and county,” wrote Justice Carol Codrington for a unanimous court in City of Riverside v. Inland Empire Patients Health and Wellness Center. California law expressly allows localities to regulate dispensaries and restrict their locations, Codrington wrote, adding that a total ban is “simply a means of regulation or restriction.”

In the days since the ruling was announced, a number of localities have already either moved to enact bans or halted plans to regulate dispensaries.

Fortunately, our campaign team saw this coming a year ago when Michele Leonhart was confirmed as Obama’s choice to head the DEA. During her confirmation hearing in the Senate, she was asked if she intended to uphold Obama’s promise to respect state laws on medical marijuana and she didn’t hesitate to say no, it’s illegal under federal law and that she intended to

enforce the law. We knew then that current laws would not protect dispensaries, growers or patients and we needed to create new laws, as well as a new legal strategy to overcome the many hurdles that we now face.

To understand the revolutionary and widespread benefits of the Regulate Marijuana Like Wine Act, we must begin by asking, "Why didn't Prop. 215 protect patients from arrest? After all, we specifically said that 215 Exempts patients and caregivers."

The biggest problem is that we assumed "exempts" meant "protects from arrest," but we didn't say that. Instead, by saying "exempts" we laid the groundwork for prosecutors to define the "affirmative defense" as our "exemption". So it is clear that any future initiative needs to specifically and clearly spell it out. This is exactly what we do in RMLW2012:

(b)(6) This Act enjoins the search, arrest, prosecution, property seizure, asset forfeiture, eradication costs, and/or any criminal or civil penalty, or sanction, for activity authorized herein.

(Note: "enjoins" is a legal term that means legally prohibited from doing something)

The next major problem with 215 is that it failed to remove bad laws from the books. California's medical marijuana laws are not in conflict with the CSA or federal drug laws, as they merely decriminalizes possession and cultivation of marijuana statewide, for certain individuals, in a defined medical class. Nothing in the CSA or federal law requires California to pass any state laws outlawing marijuana use, possession, sales or cultivation. However, by stopping at decrim, instead of repeal, we left the door wide open for police and prosecutors to find ways to charge bona fide patients, who were compliant with 215, with criminal activity nevertheless. RMLW fixes this problem by repealing all those terrible

marijuana laws:

(b) This act does all of the following:

(1) Repeals California Health and Safety Code sections 11357, 11358, 11359, 11360, 11361, 11485, Vehicle Code section 23222(b). Marijuana is removed from Health and Safety Code sections 11364 through 11375, 11366, 11366.5, 11469 through 11495, 11532(b)(7), 11590, 11703, and 11999. Adults 21 years of age and older, and approved business entities shall no longer be prohibited from association, use, possession, trade, processing, packaging, gifting, vending, sales, distribution, storage, transportation, production, or cultivation of marijuana. This act establishes rights not defenses.

Notice that in the last sentence, we state that RMLW is establishing actual civil rights, not just affirmative defenses.

The final major problem with 215 is it didn't prohibit the Feds from simply buying the cooperation of local police and prosecutors. For example, last month the Feds gave California $72 million to arrest and prosecute marijuana growers and sellers. That money goes directly to police and prosecutors who understand they are being paid to make marijuana arrests and to obtain convictions. RMLW puts an end to this bribery under color of law and specifically forbids any cooperation by state officers with federal agents:

(e) State, local, elected, appointed, hired employees, officers, and officials shall not directly or indirectly cooperate with or assist federal, state, local officers or officials, volunteers, or employees who eradicate marijuana, act for seizure or forfeiture, or to defeat any liberally construed purpose of this Act, nor may any state or local agency contract to eradicate marijuana that is being grown, manufactured or stored under the provisions of this act.

Another important feature of RMLW is that no longer will kids

get a criminal record or be locked up with career criminals for minor marijuana crimes, since we remove all criminal penalties and replace it with a stiff civil fine of $2,500 instead.

Of course, we expect the feds to challenge RMLW in the courts once it passes. We welcome such legal challenges. According to William McPike, “The law is all about challenge. A good initiative should challenge the law and even be prepared to lose a few clauses in court battles. Because of the Severance Clause we would still have enough rights and protections under our new initiative, to block the feds from enforcing their laws. For example, our non-cooperation clause, just by itself, is a powerful tool for ending Federal raids and prosecutions.”

Mr. McPike also points out the the attorney general must defend these cases, as specifically required by RMLW, so we won’t have any big litigation costs and we can still submit our own amicus briefs to ensure we make good arguments in court.

We believe that once this voter initiative passes, we will have the upper hand in court. Firstly, we believe the recent unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision in Bond v. US can be used to argue the Tenth Amendment provides states with sovereign powers:

“Some of these liberties are of a political character. The federal structure allows local policies “more sensitive to the diverse needs of a heterogeneous society,” permits “innovation and experimentation,” enables greater citizen “involvement in democratic processes,” and makes government “more responsive by putting the States in competition for a mobile citizenry.” Gregory v. Ashcroft, 501 U. S. 452, 458 (1991). Federalism secures the freedom of the individual. It allows States to respond, through the enactment of positive law, to the initiative of those who seek a voice in shaping the destiny of their own times without having to rely solely upon the

political processes that control a remote central power. True, of course, these objects cannot be vindicated by the judiciary in the absence of a proper case or controversy; but the individual liberty secured by federalism is not simply derivative of the rights of the states. Federalism also protects the liberty of all persons within a State by ensuring that laws enacted in excess of delegated governmental power cannot direct or control their actions. See ibid. By denying any one government complete jurisdiction over all the concerns of public life, federalism protects the liberty of the individual from arbitrary power. When government acts in excess of its lawful powers, that liberty is at stake."

Secondly, we note that NORML is currently mounting a legal challenge to the Federal raids, by relying upon the same Ninth and Tenth Amendment arguments that we do. Finally, like the NORML attorneys, we are eager to set the record straight regarding Gonzalez v. Raich to show that the Commerce Clause can only be applied where there is a contract between an individual and the Federal government in which they are paid by the government not to grow more than an agreed upon amount of a crop.

But wait. How will voters respond to such a radical and far-reaching measure as RMLW2012? According to our latest poll and analysis, voters absolutely love this new initiative. Here's the report from Angelo Paparella, CEO of PCI Consultants:

PCI Consultants Inc. has collected over 47 million signatures, qualifying 250 plus measures across the country, and we have provided analysis for measures over the past 20 years.

This past week we put the new Regulate Marijuana Like Wine petition in play with five of our primary coordinators statewide. They in turn distributed it out to approximately 150-165 or so circulators throughout California. At the time of this report (Nov. 13) we've amassed 10,421 signatures in six days. Approximately 7,000 of these signatures have been

validated to date and we are running at 75.3 percent valid rate thus far.

We did a simple categorization of responses by having petition circulators ask the public to grade the petition on an A, B, C basis whereby A was the best grade – meaning the petition was of great importance as a topic that deserved a statewide vote – on down to C as the lowest. Note that in the past the only petitions to get an "A" rating have been the slam-dunk issues at the ballot, such as increasing the minimum wage or support local governments or medical marijuana when it first came out.

About 75 percent of the circulators said the public rated the petition as an "A". About 20 percent rated the petition a B – either the Marijuana petition was duly deserving, but other matters like resolving California's pension system were probably more urgent. The other 5 percent fell into the indifference C category, "I signed to help you make your rent, buddy." Those 5 percent are typical of any petition drive, people signing just "because" with no affinity for the issue.

One interesting response that we did not anticipate and we heard numerous times, especially from the better educated (and therefore the most likely voters), is the "medical dispensaries are such a mess, let's just legalize it and be done." Other responses were quick and to the point, "yeah, it's time" or "let's collect taxes on marijuana sales".

My reading of the notes from the five statewide coordinators is that a marijuana petition would probably be a stopper (an issue the public goes out if its way to sign) – a lead issue amongst a majority of circulators. That is typically a really good sign for success at the ballot.

Also, we have this report from our statewide volunteer field coordinator, M. Barnes:

"In our experience, drawing someone to the table is as easy as asking, 'Will you help us legalize marijuana this year?' The

simple question stops people in the tracks and the signature is usually as easy as asking what county they are registered to vote in. Several paid petitioners have asked to use our petition as a leader for the death penalty one they were circulating. It was a much easier draw for them. Public opinion in this state seems to expect legalization as a given, they seem tired of the complications. Most signers do not have questions until after they sign. When they want details it seems like what they really want is talking points."

That's right, paid petitioners are asking to carry our petition for free, just because RMLW is such a powerful magnet for drawing voters to come and sign our petition, so that these petitioners can then get signatures on their paid petitions.

The latest Gallup Poll, which shows support for legalization has soared in just two years from 46 percent to 50 percent, with 55 percent support documented for the West. Just look at the graph and you can see that we have clearly reached a tipping point:

The November 2012 presidential election affords proponents of a ballot initiative to change state law concerning the regulation of marijuana a strong opportunity for success. The most significant consideration is that the California electorate for the next presidential election will be considerably younger. Our analysis indicates that 21 percent of all voters will be under the age of 35, compared to just 16 percent in the November 2010 election. Also, in November 2010, 27 percent of voters were ages 65 and older but in November 2012 seniors are expected to comprise 20 percent of the electorate. As the table below shows, the composition of the electorate will be more advantageous for our initiative, as a greater share of the electorate will be under the age of 40.

Age Group	Prop. 19 Yes Vote (Field Poll-10/31/10)	Percent of Nov. 2010 Electorate	Percent of Nov. 2012 Electorate	Difference
18-39	54%	21%	30%	+9%
40-49	39%	17%	20%	+3%
50-64	47%	35%	30%	-5%
65+	29%	27%	20%	-7%

Steve Kubby is CEO of Strategic Campaigns LLC and serves as chief officer and campaign chairman for a new California voter initiative to Regulate Marijuana Like Wine.

Opinion: Inmates under county control offers a chance for innovation

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Nov. 13, 2011, Los Angeles Times.***

Californians shouldn't be surprised by recent reports, that county jails are filling up. Public safety realignment is no secret. After years of refusal to consider sentencing reforms, inability to provide adequate drug treatment, unwillingness to prepare parolees for lives outside prison and a continuing insistence on locking up more people longer, state prisons became so overcrowded that the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the population reduced. There was no appetite among the public or their elected representatives to build and staff more prisons. The state's options were to immediately release 33,000 inmates

onto the streets, or to “realign”: move much of the authority for inmates to the county level. Gov. Jerry Brown wisely chose the latter course. Counties now have to do what state government couldn’t: make choices about whom to keep behind bars, whom to monitor at home with ankle bracelets, whom to refer for drug treatment.

The emergency realignment builds on a nationwide movement of more thoughtful, more deliberative decisions to incarcerate less and rehabilitate more. Many of the progressive innovations in criminal justice are coming not from supposedly liberal states and officials, but from conservatives who are determined to focus on cost and outcomes while keeping justice in the forefront. The group Right on Crime is setting the pace in states such as Texas. At the same time, leaders on the left, in California and elsewhere, have been conspicuously quiet about making realignment work. It’s time for liberals who have long criticized the prison-industrial complex to redirect the local discourse from panic to progress.

There’s no doubt that our current realignment program – the one that threatens to fill county jails – was less the result of a thoughtful plan than a slap-dash move in response to crisis. It would have been preferable for California to move forward without such emergencies. On this issue, however, as with so many others, it didn’t.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Foreclosure system

continues to hold back economy

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Nov. 13, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

Speaking in Las Vegas recently, the Republican presidential candidate and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney was blunt when asked what he would do about the large number of homeowners facing foreclosure in Nevada, the nation's leader in foreclosures.

The best thing the government can do, Romney said, is to let the foreclosure process run its course. Let the system work, he said.

In ordinary times, Romney would be right, of course, just as he would be right when he argues that the federal government should have let General Motors go through the bankruptcy process, and possible liquidation, instead of lending the auto giant money from the government's depleted coffers.

In ordinary times, the system is able to deal with these sorts of financial troubles with a minimum of disruption to the nation's economy.

These are not ordinary times, however, and they haven't been since the near collapse of the U.S. banking industry in 2008, when overnight Wall Street's failures suddenly became Main Street's problems.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Why does Southwest gouge Reno-Vegas passengers?

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

You'll never get an argument from me that Southwest Airlines is a fine company and a terrific airline.



Southwest was one of the airlines that made it possible for everybody to fly, not just the jet-setting rich and famous. It was a champion of the so-called democratization of air travel.

As the busiest commercial air carrier at McCarran International Airport, Southwest has been a leading conduit for tourists coming to Las Vegas, and every Southern Nevadan should be thankful for the partnership between the airline and the local tourism industry.

That said, Southwest should be ashamed at how it has priced its flights between Las Vegas and Reno.

Today, the base price for a one-way ticket from Las Vegas to Reno is $91. Make it a round trip and throw in the taxes and the ticket price is $203. And, yes, on Southwest, bags fly free.

But consider a flight between Las Vegas and Los Angeles International Airport, a trip of roughly the same distance. On that, the base price is $49 and a round trip with taxes costs $119.

Why such a disparity? The reality is that Southwest charges more to fly to Reno because it can. It has no competition on the route. The Las Vegas-to-Los Angeles route, meanwhile, is

served by American, Delta, US Airways (for now), United, SkyWest and Spirit. You can add JetBlue to the list if you don’t mind flying into the Long Beach airport instead of LAX.

Read the whole story