

Aerial fire retardant – good or bad?

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Sept. 14, 2010, Los Angeles Daily News.*

During Southern California's fire season, most people become accustomed to visions of helicopters dropping a spray of red elixir, fire retardant, onto blazing hillsides.

The red substance – a mixture of water, fertilizer, an anti-corrosion chemical (to sustain the tank that carries the retardant) and red dye – draws out the oxygen from a wildfire, preventing its spread. However, the retardant, when dropped in bodies of water can be harmful to endangered species and their habitat.

In July, a federal judge found fire retardant aerial drops to be illegal and gave the U.S. Forest Service until the end of next year to find an alternative to the environmentally corruptive practice.

While environmentalists say they are not against the practice of using fire retardant all together, they do want to minimize the harm aerial drops may have on endangered species and waterways.

Others have mentioned the danger posed to pilots who must navigate highly smoke-congested areas to deliver the retardant as a reason to stop the practice.

Supporters of the the aerial drop claim its use is justified because, ultimately, it can buy ground forces time to fight a wildfire head on. Basically, in conjunction with ground crews, fire retardant can be a valuable asset.

Read the whole story

Charter blocking LTUSD email transmissions

To the community,

The Lake Tahoe Unified School District has been keeping parents, staff, and community members “informally informed” on current events, local and school news, Board of Education meetings, and community happenings for the past six years.

If you are not currently receiving regular emails from the district’s public information officer, Angie Keil, and wish to join the email list you may contact her at akeil@ltusd.org.

Please indicate whether you are a LTUSD parent or a community member.

Charter Internet customers will need to use an alternate email address as Charter now blocks these community emails from being sent to their customers. Charter customers who have been receiving these updates are being advised to contact Charter to resolve the issue or provide an alternate email address such as @gmail.com or @yahoo.com.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District

Opinion: State water issues

won't wait for bond

By Juliet Christian-Smith and Heather Cooley

Now that California lawmakers have pulled an \$11 billion water bond measure off the November ballot, California is facing new questions about how to fix our long-standing water problems, including the long-term health of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and the future reliability of our water supply.

A number of commentators have praised or pilloried the delay of the bond, but one thing we can all agree on is that California's water challenges have not gone away. The recent state Water Resources Control Board report that finds we must halve our water withdrawals from the rivers and streams that sustain the Delta is simply one more indication that we have over-tapped California's precious water resources and that we must find innovative ways to do more with less.

The Legislature has two years to fix some of the key flaws with the current water bond, including its size, unclear definitions and unbalanced approaches. A recent Pacific Institute analysis – “The 2010 California Water Bond: What Does it Say and Do?” – offers principles for amending the current water bond to make it more effective. But it would be a serious mistake to do nothing until 2012. The good news is that there is a lot that can be done now.

Read the whole story

Juliet Christian-Smith is senior research associate and Heather Cooley is co-director of the Water Program at the Pacific Institute in Oakland. They are two of the authors of the new report “California's Next Million Acre-Feet: Saving Water, Energy and Money.”

Opinion: No on Prop. 20, Yes on Prop. 27

By Daniel Lowenstein

Charles Munger Jr., son of Wall Street player and billionaire Charles Munger Sr., donated \$1 million in 2008 to the campaign supporting Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's bizarre legislative redistricting initiative scheme, Proposition 11.

Now, Munger Jr. is the major sponsor and so far only contributor (well, others have given \$100,000; Munger Jr. has given \$3.7 million as of Aug. 31) to what he calls the Voters First Act for Congress – Proposition 20.

Prop. 20 would give power over redistricting of California's congressional districts to a panel of 14 randomly selected volunteers – who must, by law, have no experience in government or real-life redistricting. Those volunteers would be chosen by a process that only a tax accountant could love. In fact, anonymous tax accountants play a big role in the selection but what is most puzzling about Munger's Prop. 20 is that it mandates that all California's political districts be segregated by income level – each district to include only people of the same income. That's right, Munger's initiative orders that all districts be segregated according to income – “similar living standards ... similar work opportunities” – these are the exact words he put into Prop. 20.

Read the whole story

Daniel Lowenstein is director of the Center for the Liberal Arts and Free Institutions at UCLA. He has served as deputy secretary of state of California and was the first chair of

Opinion: Annual testing a good assessment of student achievement

By Vicki Barber

I recently watched a rerun of “Little House on the Prairie.” All the children were in a one-room schoolhouse that I remember my grandmother talking about when she was a child. In those days, you took a test at the end of the year, left school for the summer, and came back the next September to take up where you left off unless you stayed on the farm to help.

Things are a bit different now, or maybe not so much. We all know that at the end of every year kids take a series of tests. In California, we call them STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting Program) tests. The tests are usually given in April or May to ensure that much of the teaching and learning has already been completed before testing.

In August, school districts receive their assessment data from the year before and, of course, the first question is how did the kids do? Did they learn anything last year? Did they get what was taught? Educators use the assessment data to give teachers an idea about how much of the previous year’s curriculum children learned. Teachers also use this data to make determinations as to where exactly to begin the current year’s instruction.



Vicki Barber

No, the tests don't cover everything. A young child might have learned that dogs have large teeth, bark loudly, and protect you when the police officer came to school with his canine companion. A question about a dog may not show up on the test but a question like $2 + 2 = \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ would. Both items are important, but only one will be tested. Both items will be stored in a child's brain for future reference.

The STAR tests are mainly concerned with how much core academic learning a child has acquired. The results from each child are combined with those of the rest of the school, the district, and the state, to give the public an idea of how much core academic learning is taking place. A major goal at the national level is for every child to be at or above proficiency in English-Language Arts/ELA (reading, writing, and oral language) and Mathematics for his or her grade level by the year 2014.

So how'd we do this year? In 2010, in California, 52 percent of the 2-11 grade students who took the tests scored at or above proficiency in ELA. That's a significant improvement from the 35 percent proficiency rate of the students who took those tests in 2003.

Math is a bit harder to analyze because of all of the types of math available in high school, but in grades 2-7, 48 percent of California's students scored at or above proficient in math this year, while we were only at 35 percent able to do proficient or above math work in 2003.

Science end of the year tests are up from 29 percent in at or above proficiency in 2003 to 40 percent proficient or above at this point in time. History-Social Science has risen from 29 percent in 2003 at or above proficiency to 44 percent in 2010.

We are pleased to note that El Dorado County students continue to show improvement in all core curriculum areas and consistently score higher than the state in these areas as well. In 2010, 66.3 percent of El Dorado County students scored at or above the proficient level in English-language arts. In mathematics, 60.9 percent of El Dorado County students scored at or above the proficient level, while in history-social science 57 percent and in science 69.2 percent of El Dorado County students scored at or above the proficient level.

When looking at test data, it is also important to consider the results of the California High School Exit Exam which high school students are required to pass prior to receiving their high school diploma. Once again, El Dorado County students are scoring extremely well. In 2010, 83 percent of our students passed the English-language arts portion of the test as compared to 64% of students statewide. In mathematics, 80 percent of our students passed the CAHSEE as compared to 63 percent of students statewide. Please keep in mind that this data represents the percentage of students who pass this exam in their 10th-grade year. Those who do not pass at this point will have additional opportunities to take and pass the test in their 11th- and 12th-grade years.

So what does that mean? It means we still give tests at the end of the year just like we did when Laura Ingalls Wilder reminded us of a much earlier school life. The tests may look more complex than they did back then, but we all know that there's certainly a lot more information for children to know in 2010. Although end of year assessment is not an exact science yet, it definitely helps all of us know how to help more and more children meet the challenges of today's prairie.

Vicki Barber is superintendent of education for El Dorado County.

Opinion: Yes on Prop. 20, No. on Prop. 27

By Alice Huffman

According to a recent Field Poll, a dismal 16 percent of California voters approve of the job the Legislature is doing, and just 19 percent approve of Congress – the lowest congressional rating in the history of the poll.

This is not surprising, considering that politicians on both sides of the aisle are seemingly unable or unwilling to effectively address the massive problems our state faces in light of a \$19 billion budget deficit. What is surprising – shocking, really – is the number of politicians fervently focusing their energies on maintaining the dysfunctional status quo, simply so they can retain their power.

Read the whole story

Alice Huffman is the president of the California NAACP.

Opinion: Going backward on

tax law kills jobs

By Gail Maderis

When you're out of work, what you need most is a job. When more than 12 percent of Californians are out of work, what California needs most is to keep the jobs we have and to bring in new jobs. So when something like Proposition 24 puts new jobs and existing jobs at risk, is that what California needs most? No.

You'll hear talk from the Prop. 24 people about tax loopholes. But 24 isn't just a slogan – if it passes, it will be a law.

And that law would undo three targeted, common-sense tax reforms put in place to do exactly what's needed most now – keep the jobs we have, encourage new hiring and jump-start our economy.

Read the whole story

Gail Maderis is president and CEO of BayBio, a Northern California association of biotechnology companies.

Opinion: Restoring golf course reach of river good for Tahoe

By Lester Snow and Ruth Coleman

An article advocated the need to protect the natural habitat and environmentally sensitive lands regarding the Upper

Truckee River Restoration and Golf Course Reconfiguration Project. The commentary suggested creating more wetlands, meadow and wildlife habitat to restore the Upper Truckee. We agree with those points, which are clearly spelled out in the proposed project's goals and objectives. However, given the statements expressed by the author, it would appear that he was unfamiliar with the proposed project.

Contrary to the suggestion that this is a politically motivated golf course expansion, there is no proposal to expand the golf course. There are five alternatives under consideration. Among them are proposals to eliminate the course, reduce the size to nine holes, or keep it at 18 holes and relocate nine holes farther from the banks of the river to less sensitive areas of the existing state park land.

Read the whole story

Lester Snow is secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency. Ruth Coleman is director of California State Parks.

Opinion: Business tax breaks must have fairness

By David A. Sanchez

California voters have an opportunity in this election to send a clear message about the future of our state. Passing Proposition 24, the Tax Fairness Act, will help prevent more than a half-billion dollars from being cut from our public schools and colleges and will help ensure that everyone in the state is paying their fair share.

Prop. 24 does not raise taxes. It keeps taxes for large corporations in California at their current level. If Prop. 24 does not pass, about 2 percent of California's largest corporations will get a \$1.3 billion tax cut without any requirement to create jobs in California.

It is unconscionable, in these tough economic times, that a handful of large corporations, which are reaping record profits and handing out bonuses to their executives, would eagerly seek new sweetheart tax breaks.

It's equally important to understand how Prop. 24 came about. During the state's budget crisis of 2009, backroom deals were cut that became part of the final budget agreement, providing billions in permanent tax breaks to large corporations.

Read the whole story

David A. Sanchez is president of the California Teachers Association.

Preston Development wins \$900 in ads from LTN at Bijou Bash

Lake Tahoe News congratulates Preston Development general contractors of Tahoe Paradise for winning the advertising give-away at Saturday's Bijou Bash.

About 3,000 people meandered through Bijou Community Park in South Lake Tahoe during the annual event.



Owner Dan'l Preston entered his card in *Lake Tahoe News'* drawing. The general contractor won \$900 worth of advertising on *Lake Tahoe News*. South Lake Tahoe

Parks and Recreation Director Gary Moore picked the winning business card at the end of the event Sept. 11.

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Thank you everyone for your support of *Lake Tahoe News*, Tahoe's daily news source.

It was a pleasure to meet all of you.

Kathryn Reed, LTN publisher