

Opinion: A vision for No Child Left Inside

By Garry Bowen

Late last week, a significant bipartisan bill was introduced in Congress that could be valuable to the Lake Tahoe economy, not to mention the educational efforts of both of Tahoe's represented states. The fact of a bipartisan introduction these days may seem significant enough on its own, but the fact that this one directly relates to what Lake Tahoe's agencies have always said they are about makes this one an extraordinary opportunity.

The bill is SB2447, the No Child Left Inside Act, introduced by Sens. Jack Reed, D-R.I., Mark Kirk, R-Ill., and Reps. John Sarbanes, D-Md., on July 14. As we approach the 15th annual Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit talks, and with *Lake Tahoe News* reporting yesterday work on a vision for Tahoe, I thought I'd throw mine into the mix. California and Nevada's educational statures are hurting, both being in the lowest 10 percent of the nation, while the United States continues to lose global ground in the very area (called STEM for Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) called for in the 21st century.



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Lake Tahoe can benefit by being of better service to our world.

Says Sen. Reed: "Teaching children about the environment and giving them a hands-on opportunity to experience nature makes them smarter and healthier. Environmental education should be an important part of the curriculum in our schools. This legislation will reconnect more kids with nature and help raise student achievement in core subjects like math, science, and reading.

"Environmental awareness should be second nature for our young people and protecting the environment is crucial to future economic growth."

From Sen. Kirk: "Our education system needs new, innovative approaches to prepare our children to compete in the 21st century global economy. By utilizing the natural world as a classroom, we can engage more students in STEM education while exposing them to the benefits of being outside and living an active lifestyle.

"This bill promotes hands-on learning and an integrated curriculum, while bolstering important science education programs."

From Rep. Sarbanes: "By creating an environmental education grant program and providing teacher training for environmental education across the curriculum, we can prepare our children for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics jobs that will be the cornerstone of the United States' 21st century economy. Research shows that hands-on, outdoor environmental education has a measurably positive impact not only on student achievement in science, but also in reading, math, and social studies.

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What’s my vision surrounding this bill? As I’ve been engaged in this work, that of the North American Association of Environmental Educators and the NCLI Coalition for about two years, along with work on global sustainability for more than a decade, this introduction is particularly noteworthy for our future.

And California Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson conducted a forum on No Child Left Inside the Friday before his election last November – the timing may be “on”.

The model that I am working with to accomplish this is an extremely well-done Nature Center that focuses on K-12 curriculums, is in a LEED gold complex on 255 acres, and has an overlay of a master’s degree program in sustainable development. The complex consists not only of stream environment zones, forests, and several watershed examples, but the solar gain, indoor air quality, and energy saving aspects of green building are all part of the youth experience while there. As this particular model was built without the input of No Child Left Inside directions, Tahoe can indeed improve on a model that already exists to call its own, for an unprecedented future.

As I have been advocating “policies equal to the scenery” for a long time, this direction allows an eco and geo tourism scale not yet seen, but eminently amenable to Lake Tahoe, and as a counteraction to our gaming decline. People will need new reasons to spend additional time here, and my own extensive experience with Bill Harrah for 10 years suggests an intrinsic understanding of our current industry.

The notion that nature plays a key role in boosting brain

function and emotional and physical health has been around for awhile – recently popularized by Richard Louv’s 2005 book “Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Kids from Nature-Deficit-Disorder”. The essence of his message, and the idea that this book is this generation’s “Silent Spring”, comes from the fact that our youth are continually bombarded with thoughts about almost everything but what they will need to realign our world from these distortions.

Third-graders in England, for example, know all the Pokemon characters’ names, but nothing about the tree outside the window. What better place to augment what our Environmental Magnet school is already attempting for our own kids than to expand upon that effort with offerings that contribute mightily to the regional economy. I have spoken elsewhere about a recent study conducted by UC Berkeley Lawrence Hall of Science and KQED that found a major discomfort level with teaching about the outdoors and science, an outgrowth of the last decade’s emphasis on “teaching to the test”, but that just makes a relatively major opportunity to make learning about nature more of a major attraction – with fun, healthy sharing a goal. California alone has more than 250,000 teachers, a not insignificant amount.

With all of our current consternation about funding sources, as SNPLMA dries up, it is interesting to note that U.S Secretary of Education Arne Duncan still has about \$4.5 billion in allocated funds awaiting the receipt of innovative directions for the future. California and Nevada have so far not been able to tap into those funds, as their directions have not been innovative enough – this bill emphasis could be the stepping stone for an entirely new direction for the community and region, as both the demographics and psychographics are addressed by such a direction.

And, as they say, “not a moment too soon.”

Just the work in the direction of more fully comprehending the

inherent vital advantages of global sustainability will assist the basin agencies' in something other than the provincial attitudes they've adopted, while giving all the communities the boost they so fervently want. Contradictions neutralized.

What would be a next step? Well, as the imminent vision effort is about championing projects, mine would be to organize a tour of the facility mentioned above as to its' obvious viability to the directions so often talked about, but not yet realized. Then, marshal the significant resources to actualize "new".

Garry Bowen has a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health. He may be reached at tahoefuture@gmail.com or (775) 690.6900.