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## BAN ON BED TANS

California is the first state to prohibit the use of ultraviolet radiation tanning beds by anyone under age 18. Supporters said the increase in melanoma, the most deadly type of skin cancer, among young people required the complete ban. The previous law required only parental permission for children between the ages of 14 and 17. Melanoma is the No. 1 cancer killer of young women between the ages of 25 and 30, and second only to breast cancer in 30- to 34-year-olds. “Indoor tanning is especially harmful because of the intense and dangerous type of UV rays emitted from the tanning beds,” California Senator Ted Lieu said. “Moreover, the skin damage is cumulative, so the more exposure one gets younger in life, the worse the harmful effects will be.” Research, he says, shows those who use tanning beds before age 35 increase their lifetime risk of melanoma by 75 percent. The measure goes into effect on Jan. 1, 2012. John Overstreet, a spokesman for the Indoor Tanning Association, told the Associated Press that sunscreen sellers are behind the legislative push, and that it’s not been proved that tanning beds cause melanoma.

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## ONE BALLOT, MANY LANGUAGES

Fewer jurisdictions in 2012 than in 2002 will be required to provide minority language assistance, as required by the Voting Rights Act. The Census Bureau recently released a list of 248 “covered” jurisdictions in 25 states, which is down from 296 jurisdictions in 30 states in 2002. Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires native language assistance for Hispanics, Native Americans, Alaska Natives and certain Asian language groups, a total of 68 languages. The requirement applies to elections in jurisdictions where more than 10,000 speakers (or more than 5 percent of all voting age citizens) are in a single minority language group and have limited English proficiency. Illiteracy rates for these limited-English citizens also are considered.

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## LISTERIA-MANIA

Listeria monocytogenes sickens nearly 1,600 people every year in the United States, killing about 250 of them, according to the Centers for Disease Control. It’s the third deadliest food-borne pathogen. The outbreak this year from contaminated cantaloupes infected 139 people from 28 states, killing 29 of them, as of Nov. 1. State reporting of diseases to the CDC is voluntary and required at the state level only by state legislation or regulation. Although the list of diseases that must be reported varies by state, all require health care providers to report cases of listeriosis. The CDC’s Listeria Initiative is an effort to improve investigations of listeria outbreaks and clusters. The 40 participating states conduct prompt interviews with patients using a standard report form. The information is maintained in a central database.

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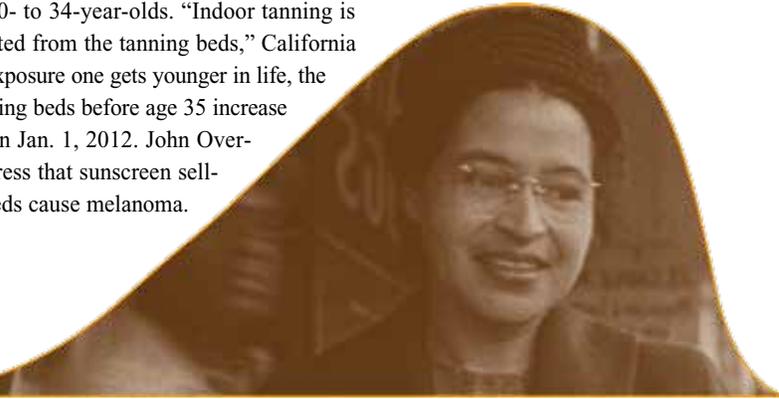
## BELL CURVE FOR CIVICS

States recently were graded on how well they teach civil rights history by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Looking at various aspects of a state’s education standards and curriculum on civil rights history, only three—Alabama, Florida and New York—received an “A.” Sixteen states have no state requirements to teach civil rights history, but leave it to local officials. Thirty-five states received an “F.” Most of the states that earned a “C” or better are in the South.

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## CAPITAL LACKS CAPITAL

The city council of Harrisburg, Penn., the state capital, voted in mid-October to file for Chapter 9 municipal bankruptcy protection. The petition cited “overwhelming debt,” as the reason and that the city was in “imminent jeopardy” from creditor claims. State lawmakers passed legislation shortly thereafter allowing the governor to declare a financial emergency and requiring the city’s leaders to obey a financial plan drawn up by his appointee. The plan, released in early November, includes freezing spending on discretionary programs and on hiring, restricting overtime, and limiting capital projects. It also calls for increasing the cost of parking tickets and business fees, and cutting city employee positions. Chapter 9, enacted in 1937 following the Great Depression, has been used about 600 times by various cities, according to the Associated Press.



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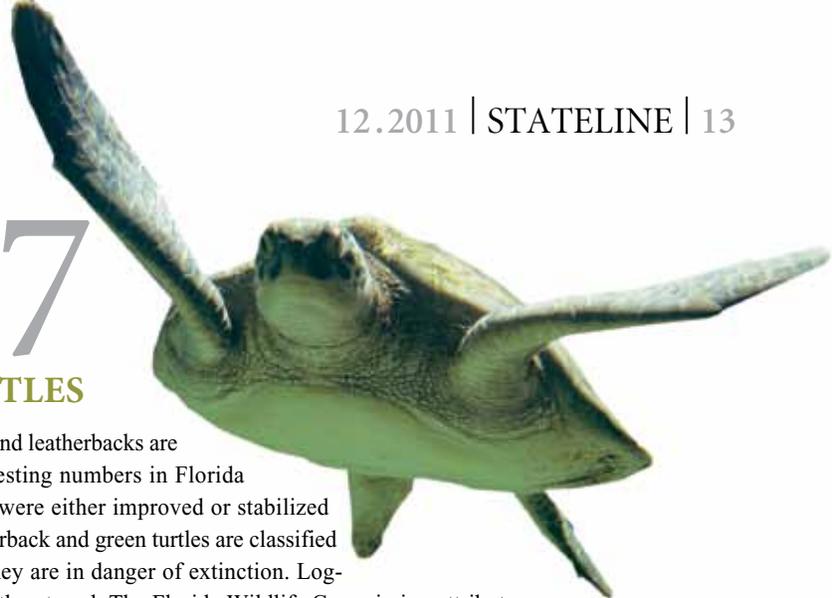
Just a couple of years ago, “texting” was first used to transmit small donations to international disaster relief efforts. (Remember the 2010 earthquake in Haiti?) These texted donations were available to agencies virtually instantaneously, and donors loved the speed at which they could act on their charitable impulses—a win-win. California officials now have decided to permit donations to be texted to political campaigns in the same way, another first-in-the-nation for the state. Now it’s up to campaigns and phone-plan carriers, who will set up the donation systems. Text donations will be treated just like other donations in terms of campaign reporting requirements.

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**TENACIOUS TURTLES**

Loggerheads, green sea turtles and leatherbacks are making a comeback. Recent nesting numbers in Florida are a reason to celebrate; they were either improved or stabilized from previous ones. Both leatherback and green turtles are classified as endangered, which means they are in danger of extinction. Loggerheads are classified as only threatened. The Florida Wildlife Commission attributes the improvements, at least in part, to major conservation efforts over the past few decades. “It’s important people keep obeying turtle nesting regulations and obey laws that prohibit going near sea turtle nests,” Carli Segelson, Florida Wildlife Commission spokesperson, told the Palm Beach Post. About 2,300 sea turtle nests were washed away during Hurricane Irene.



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**GOLDEN IDEA**

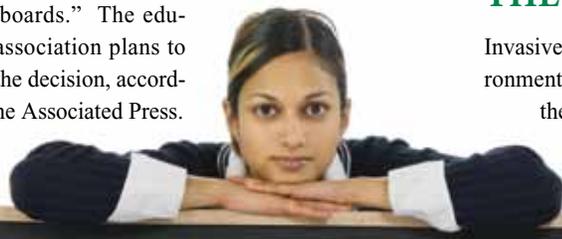
Utah lawmakers have voted to make gold and silver legal currency, making their state the first to do so. The law creates a depository for precious metal coins that consumers can use in exchange for a debit card that will draw on the coins’ value. Representative Brad Galvez sponsored the bill in part as a message to Congress that the current system isn’t working. “We’re too far down the road to go back to the gold standard. This will move us toward an alternative currency,” he told the Associated Press. The law exempts the sale of gold and silver coins from the state capital gains tax, but doesn’t require businesses to accept the coins. The Gold Standard 2012 project, backed by American Principles in Action, is promoting the gold standard with state lawmakers to create “a new standard of value that balances trade flows and gives our currency an intrinsic worth,” according to its website. President Richard Nixon formally abandoned the gold standard in 1971.



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**NO TRIUMPH FOR TEACHERS**

The Idaho Legislature passed legislation this year that limits several teacher protections, including collective bargaining and the use of seniority in layoff decisions. It also establishes merit pay for teachers, limits teacher contracts to one year, and shifts some money from salaries to classroom technology. The Idaho Education Association challenged the law in district court. Judge Timothy Hansen upheld it as constitutional, and wrote in his 18-page decision that the law’s provisions furthered legitimate purposes, “one of those purposes is returning decision-making power to local school boards.” The education association plans to appeal the decision, according to the Associated Press.



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**THE BATTLE OF THE BUGS**

Invasive species—alien plants, animals, diseases, parasites—are not only threatening our environment and human health, but also are eating away at state and local budgets, according to the National Invasive Species Information Center. Take, for instance, the Asian emerald ash borer. It probably hitched a ride on an airliner, was first spotted near the Detroit airport in 2002, and has now destroyed tens of millions of ash trees across Michigan and the Midwest. In nine years, it has spread to 15 states and two Canadian provinces, according to emeraldashborer.info. Along with its foreign cousins, the ash borer is costing local governments \$1.7 billion in expenditures and \$830 million in lost residential property values every year, according to a study by the U.S. Forest Service. Invasive.org puts the total number of these invaders at 2,789, costing the United States as much as \$138 billion annually. Much of the cost of fighting the various pests is borne by state and local governments.

