

4.5% across-the-board raises in LTUSD

By Kathryn Reed

Every employee in Lake Tahoe Unified School District is getting a 4.5 percent raise, which is retroactive to July 1.

The teachers union on Feb. 23 ratified the contract with the district. The classified group is set to vote Feb. 25. The school board is expected to take action March 8. The confidential employees and administrators will be getting the same raise.

Both unions are working on one-year contracts.

For the prior school year everyone received a 6.5 percent increase, in 2013-14 it was 3.5 percent. Raises were nonexistent for about five years as the district, as an extension of the state, wallowed in the recession.

During that time LTUSD lost 25 classified, 20 certificated and nine administration positions.

"What we are proud of is keeping the class-size reduction and music. Kids should not suffer because of tough times," Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said now is the time to reward people for their work.

An item the teachers have been negotiating for some time is the rules concerning when someone wants to transfer jobs or departments. That language is now more transparent, according Jodi Dayberry. Dayberry is president of the local teachers' union.

Another concession by the district is to pay \$1,000 more for employees' health insurance. The cap is now at \$10,232 a year.

“I think we have had very positive negotiations. This last round especially. We were working collaboratively with the district,” Dayberry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Opinion: California out-of-bounds with taxes

By Ted Gaines

If you think Cam Newton, quarterback for the Carolina Panthers, suffered a crushing defeat on the football field during super Bowl 50, then you haven't heard about the other beating he is about to take from the California tax man.

Newton's "loser's" share for the championship game is \$51,000. According to CPA and athlete-income specialist Sean Packard in *Forbes* magazine, the so-called "jock tax" rules in California, which factor in days worked in the state and annual income, would throw Newton for a loss – literally. Packard calculates that the athlete is set to pay a staggering 172.2 percent of his bonus in California taxes. That's right – Newton will pay \$87,800 in taxes on \$51,000 of income, a scenario that would make even Bernie Sanders shudder.



Ted Gaines

Ultra-wealthy professional athletes are not the most sympathetic characters in tax policy dramas. Even with our state picking his pocket, it's unlikely that Newton will be clipping coupons or flying coach on Southwest any time soon. But California's oppressive tax regime punishes every income strata. Want regressive taxes that hurt the poor? Our sales tax is the highest in the nation. Our gas taxes are in the top five, with a total burden of nearly 70 cents a gallon, which takes a big bite out small business, commuter, and rural driver pockets.

Want anti-competitive taxes that drive businesses to other states and put a drag on job creation? Our 8.89 percent corporate income tax is the highest in the west and it inspires businesses to move to the less expensive surrounding states and especially towards the low-tax, smartly-regulated Texas. It's part of the reason business relocation expert Joe Vranich estimates that 9,000 businesses have "disinvested" (moved operations or made major investments in other states) from California in the past seven years.

For working people struggling to make ends meet, our state taxes are hardly trivial. Between 2004-15, roughly 900,000 more people moved out of California than moved into California from other states. The majority of those people leaving are in the middle- and lower-income categories, driven from California by high costs and seeking opportunity in our more affordable surrounding states.

Remarkably, Sacramento politicians and special interest groups are pushing for new and extended taxes this year. That is the worst fiscal idea imaginable. California's stratospheric taxes already punish Californians and make them artificially poor. You don't have to be sacrificing nearly 200 percent of your Super Bowl bonus to see that the state is bent on shaking every last dollar out of taxpayer pockets, even to the point of absurdity. Time to cut taxes. Enough is enough.

Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

Easy win for Trump in Nevada caucuses

By Steve Peoples and Nancy Benac, AP

Notching three in a row, Donald Trump decisively won Nevada's Republican caucuses Tuesday as Marco Rubio bid to elbow out Ted Cruz for second place in an increasingly urgent effort to slam the brakes on the Trump juggernaut.

Trump now can claim victories in the West, the South and Northeast – a testament to his broad appeal among the mad-as-hell voters making their voices heard in the 2016 presidential race.

"We're winning, winning, winning the country," Trump declared. "Soon, the country is going to start winning, winning, winning."

Ticking off a list of upcoming primary states where he's leading in preference polls, Trump predicted he'll soon be able to claim the GOP nomination. "It's going to be an amazing two months," he told a raucous crowd at a Las Vegas casino. "We might not even need the two months, folks, to be honest."

Six in 10 caucus goers said they were angry with the way the government is working, and Trump got about half of those angry voters, according to preliminary results of an entrance poll.

With time running out, Nevada was a critical test for Rubio and Cruz, the two senators battling to emerge as the clear alternative to the GOP front-runner. Rubio was out to prove he can build on recent momentum, while Cruz was looking for a spark to help him recover from a particularly rocky stretch in his campaign.

Lagging far behind the two senators in the Nevada vote were Ohio Gov. John Kasich and retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson.

Rubio, already campaigning in Michigan as caucus results rolled in, sought to project confidence that he can consolidate the non-Trump voters who have been splintering among an assortment of GOP candidates, saying, "we have incredible room to grow."

But after finishing third in Iowa, fifth in New Hampshire and second in South Carolina, Rubio needs a win soon to support the idea he can beat Trump.

Cruz, a fiery conservative popular among voters on the GOP's right, finished a disappointing third in South Carolina after spending much of the past two weeks denying charges of dishonest campaign tactics and defending his integrity. Another disappointing finish in Nevada would raise new questions about his viability heading into a crucial batch of Super Tuesday states on March 1.

The election calendar suggests that if Trump's rivals don't slow him by mid-March, they may not ever. Trump swept all of South Carolina's 50 delegates, giving him a total of 67 compared to Cruz and Rubio who have 11 and 10, respectively. There were 30 delegates at stake in Nevada, and a whopping 595 available one week later in the March 1 Super Tuesday bonanza.

The billionaire businessman, in his victory speech, dismissed the notion that if more GOP candidates drop out of the race, they'll coalesce around an alternative.

"They keep forgetting that when people drop out, we're going to get a lot of votes," he said.

Nevada's caucusing played out in schools, community centers and places of worship across the state – a process that's been chaotic in the past.

Count Tracy Brigida, fed up after her husband was laid off from his mining job, among those caucusing for Trump.

"I want a businessman to run the biggest business in the world," Brigida said as she caucused at a Las Vegas high school.

Jeremy Haight drove straight from his marketing job to caucus for Marco Rubio at the same high school.

"He's the most level-headed. He hasn't said anything stupid or crazy ... which is really what I think the country needs," Haight said.

It was Cruz for Megan Ortega, who declared: "He's consistent, he's bold and he's a class act."

Preliminary results of the entrance poll found that about 3 in 10 early caucus goers said the quality that mattered most to them in choosing a candidate was that he shares their values, slightly more than the quarter who said they want a candidate who can win in November. About a quarter said they want a candidate who can bring change. About 2 in 10 want one who "tells it like it is."

The GOP field that included a dozen candidates a month ago has been reduced to five, with former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush the latest to drop out after a disappointing finish in South Carolina. Kasich and Carson could play spoilers as Trump, Cruz and Rubio, battle for delegates with an increasing sense of urgency.

Indeed, Republican establishment heavyweights have been

flooding to Rubio in recent days, including Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis and Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch. South Florida's three Cuban-American members of Congress announced their support for him in the hours before the Nevada contest.

Nevada marked the first Republican election in the West, the fourth of the campaign. And it's not one that's gotten much attention from the GOP candidates.

Through Tuesday, the Republican candidates and the super PACs supporting them had spent a combined \$3.8 million on television and radio advertisements in Nevada – less than a tenth of the \$39.3 million spent ahead of last weekend's South Carolina primary, according to Kantar Media's CMAG data.

The entrance poll survey was conducted for the Associated Press and the television networks by Edison Research as Republican voters arrived at 25 randomly selected caucus sites in Nevada.

Calif. lawmaker wants to ban tobacco at youth sports events

By Alexei Koseff, Sacramento Bee

State Sen. Richard Pan is taking another swing at tobacco.

The Sacramento Democrat has introduced a bill that would prohibit cigarettes, chewing tobacco, e-cigarettes and other tobacco products within 250 feet of any game, practice or activity organized by a youth sports team in California where

athletes under the age of 18 are present. Violators would be punished with a \$100 fine.

“Youth sports is about promoting good health and athleticism and excellence,” Pan said. “We should encourage behaviors that support those goals and discourage ones that don’t.”

Read the whole story

Group takes step for loop road to go to voters

By Lake Tahoe News

Three former South Lake Tahoe city councilmembers and a founder of the city are on a quest to get the loop road before the voters.

Bruce Grego, John Cefalu, Bill Crawford and Laurel Ames have filed a **notice of intent** to circulate a petition regarding the loop road.

The loop road is a project spearheaded by the Tahoe Transportation District to realign Highway 50 so it goes behind Harrah’s Lake Tahoe and MontBleu casinos. It would make the current highway a city and county street from about Park Avenue to Lake Parkway. It would also require the demolition of several residences and a handful of businesses in South Lake Tahoe.

“While the group has serious concerns about the loop road project, including the use of eminent domain, they believe that putting this decision in the hands of the voters will empower the community to get involved and make an informed

decision on a project that has far reaching implications now and in the future,” Grego said in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

The foursome wants to prohibit the city from approving or supporting the loop road. That is what would be before voters.

City Attorney Tom Watson has 15 days to write a legal summary that does not exceed 500 words and he must write a ballot title, assuming one can legally be written. If it cannot, the petitioners could start over.

Assuming Watson writes the summary, the quartet must publish the intent in an adjudicated publication, and then take that document to the city clerk. Then the group must get nearly 1,000 valid signatures on the petition. If certified by the county elections department, it goes on the ballot.

The city would be responsible for bearing the costs of the election, which could be about \$10,000.

El Nino weakens a tad

By Seth Borenstein, AP

Meteorologists see signs that the super El Nino is weakening ever so slightly, but they caution months will pass before people in the Americas will feel it.

The World Meteorological Organization said Thursday that El Nino has passed its peak based on specific temperature, wind, and atmospheric pressure conditions.

That’s technically true, but Michelle L’Heureux, lead El Nino forecaster for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Prediction Center, said there’s a few

months lag time before the changes affect the Americas.

El Nino is the occasional but natural warming of the central tropical Pacific which, along with changes in the atmosphere, alters weather patterns worldwide. It often brings more rain to California and parts of the U.S. West and South, warms temperatures globally a bit, and causes droughts elsewhere in the world.

In December and January, El Nino measurements showed it tied 1997-1998 for the strongest since records started being kept in 1950.

"It's still strong, but it has reached a peak value and it's starting its decline," said University of Oklahoma meteorology professor Jason Furtado. "It's still there; it's not like we don't have El Nino anymore. We can still expect (El Nino) like conditions in March and April and even into May, as well."

Mike Halpert, deputy director of the climate prediction center, said this El Nino hasn't brought drought-struck California as much moisture as previous strong El Ninos, but there are still two months to go to get significant rainfall.

With El Nino still kicking, NOAA forecast a spring that's wetter than normal throughout the South, much of the West and part of the East. Only the Great Lakes region and Pacific Northwest are forecast to be dry. It also predicts warmer than usual weather along the entire West Coast and most of the country north of Colorado, Missouri and Tennessee, with only Texas, parts of Oklahoma and New Mexico cooler than normal.

The International Research Institute at Columbia University forecast that once this El Nino fades, there's a 50 percent chance it will be followed directly by El Nino's flip side, a La Nina. La Nina often means droughts in parts of the Great Plains and Southwest with more rain in the Northwest. La Ninas often mean warmer winters in the Southeast and cooler winters in the Northwest.

Calif. pension fix leads to risk as market volatility soars

By Romy Varghese, BloombergBusiness

It's hard for states to fix pensions – just look at New Jersey and Illinois. And even when legislators in California agreed two years ago on a way to keep the teachers' retirement fund from going broke, it left the state's finances more exposed to financial-market swings.

Under the plan, California, school districts and teachers will gradually increase their contributions to make the second-biggest U.S. public pension fully funded in 30 years. The catch: the state's share depends on whether the fund hits its 7.5 percent annual investment target, meaning it could jump in bad years or plummet in good ones, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office. Three decades from now, the difference between market winning and losing streaks could mean as much as \$5 billion.

The uncertainty over the state's future payments to the California State Teachers' Retirement System, which oversees benefits for about 896,000 people, underscores the risks in betting on a continual surge in California, where the government's fortunes have tracked the booms and busts of the equity market. For now, California's still reaping a revenue windfall from the post-recession bull run that crested in the middle of last year.

Read the whole story

Ex-firefighter going to prison for arson

A former CalFire firefighter from Placerville with a penchant to set fires is going to prison for five years.

Benjamin Cunha, 33, was sentenced Feb. 23 after admitting to setting at least 30 wildland fires in El Dorado and Amador counties during the summers of 2006 and 2007. Two of these fires burned onto federal land.

He must also pay \$246,862 in restitution to CalFire.

When he was arrested in December 2008 this was not the first time he was charged with arson. In March 2008 his sentence for having set three fires was suspended with several conditions. They included registering as an arsonist for the rest of his life and wearing a tracking device during the fire season.

“As he admitted in his plea agreement, this defendant set a multitude of fires with a callous disregard for the danger to life and property that he was inflicting,” U.S. Attorney Wagner said in a statement. “(Tuesday’s) sentence is a just result that takes a serial arsonist off the streets.”

On Oct. 6, he pleaded guilty to one count of arson for the July 6, 2007, Mine Fire, a vegetation fire that burned approximately 80 acres.

Cunha was a seasonal employee for CalFir during the 2001, 2002 and 2003 fire seasons. At the time of the arson activity, he was a volunteer firefighter for Diamond Springs.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Dry future weighs heavy on Calif. ag

By Sena Christian, High Country News

On a hot summer afternoon, California farmer Chris Hurd barrels down a country road through the Central Valley city of Firebaugh, his dog Frank riding in the truck bed. He lurches to a stop in front of Oro Loma Elementary School, which was built in the 1950s to accommodate an influx of farmers' and farmworkers' children. "All three of my sons went here," Hurd says, as we walk through overgrown weeds toward the shuttered building, closed in 2010. "I was on the school board, the grass was green, kids were running around. Now it's a pile of rubble."

Agricultural land stretches out in every direction. Most of the town's 8,300 residents are involved in growing or packing produce. The city is on the west side of the San Joaquin River, an area hit particularly hard by a historic drought, now in its fifth year. Wells have run dry and farm-related jobs are running out. Many other places in the eight counties comprising the San Joaquin Valley have suffered similar fates. These areas were disadvantaged to begin with, rural and isolated, lacking infrastructure, public transportation and safe housing. Persistent drought has compounded the struggles of some of the poorest communities in the nation.

As of late January, 64 percent of the state was experiencing extreme drought – down from 78 percent that time last year. But even a stellar El Niño year won't undo all the damage.

Economically, California remains the largest agricultural producer in the United States. But El Niño's precipitation not

withstanding, the prolonged drought is putting some farmers under heavy duress, and no one is sure how far California's Eden will sink.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- Truckee Town Hall's entryway in March will be transported back in time to the late 1700s and the era of Spanish exploration in California with work from Tahoe Expedition Academy students.
- Conde Nast Traveler magazine rated Lake Tahoe as one of the best places for a bachelor or bachelorette party.
- Fire Sign Café on the West Shore is rated as one of the top five mountain breakfasts by Outside magazine.
- CCMedia, formerly Creative Concepts Media + Marketing, is celebrating its 25th year in business. The company has offices in Truckee, Reno and Las Vegas.