

Judge puts Nevada school choice program on hold

By Associated Press

A district judge has put Nevada's sweeping school choice program on hold just weeks before money was expected to flow to parents for private school tuition.

Carson City District Court Judge James Wilson granted a preliminary injunction Monday that orders the state treasurer to stop implementing Nevada's new education savings accounts pending further court deliberations.

The Republican-backed program allows parents to claim more than \$5,000 in state per-pupil school funds each year and use it for qualified education expenses.

A coalition including Democratic former state Sen. Justin Jones challenged the program with a lawsuit filed in August, saying it would divert money from public schools and could run afoul of the state constitution.

Thousands of families who applied were told they could receive funds by February if courts didn't object.

Will California's booming economy pay off in pupil

spending?

By Lisa Leff, AP

Soaring tax revenues have carried per-pupil education spending in California beyond where it stood before the recession, but even the record sum proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown is unlikely to reverse the state's standing as a comparative miser when it comes to investing in public schools, advocates and education officials said.

Brown, a Democrat known for preaching fiscal restraint, released a budget plan last week that would boost state spending per student to \$10,591 in the next fiscal year, compared to \$8,564 per student in 2007 and \$7,008 during the worst of the recession. The rebound stems from a constitutional amendment that guarantees schools a minimum level of annual funding, an amount that grows considerably, as now, during good economic times.

While expressing gratitude, lawmakers and school officials noted that with California consistently ranking in the bottom 10 in state-by-state rankings of school expenditures, student-teacher ratios and other measures, the latest infusion may not be enough to get the state to the national average, never mind the top of the charts.

"We have to be aware of the fact that even though we have increased our funding in education, we're still number 40-something in the nation, so we're still far, far behind in terms of adequately funding our schools in comparison to other states," said Assemblywoman Shirley Weber, D-San Diego, who heads the Assembly budget committee.

Brown's proposal would increase the state's overall K-12 spending to \$51 billion, or \$1.4 billion more than the current year. The figure reflects both cuts attributed to projected enrollment declines and more than \$3.2 billion in new funds.

Most of the money – \$2.8 million – would go toward accelerating one of Brown’s signature initiatives: a new school funding formula that directs extra funds to schools with the most students learning to speak English, from low-income families or living in foster care.

Brown said the funding would bring the formula close to full implementation, a milestone the state originally did not expect to reach until 2020. The funding formula also encourages districts to set class sizes kindergarten through third grades at no more than 24.

Even if California ideally would be spending more on its schools, redistributing the money it does spend could narrow the achievement gap in a state where half the students are eligible for free school meals and 22 percent are learning to speak English, Education Trust-West Executive Director Ryan Smith said.

“The governor’s kept his promise in creating a more equitable funding system. It’s now up to policy makers, districts and schools to live up to their end of the bargain in getting results for students,” Smith said.

Mike Walsh, a Butte County school board member who serves as vice president of the California School Boards Association, said school leaders are thankful for what would be a fourth consecutive year of budget growth following the same number of painful cuts.

At the same time, they are mindful that schools also are being tasked with carrying out instructional, staffing and testing reforms linked to the new funding formula and the Common Core standards – all of which cost money, Walsh said.

“It’s not like we are arguing to be #1 in spending. We are just suggesting that we are moving in the right direction but still have a lot to do to get back to average in spending, even if it was just to hire more teachers to do the work we

have been asked to do.”

State-by-state comparisons of per-pupil funding are based on federal data that typically are a few years old. Education Week’s Quality Counts report, a respected ranking system that accounts for regional living costs and poverty rates, last week listed California at 46th among the states with per-student spending of \$8,213 in 2013, far below the national average of \$11,667.

Since then, schools have received sizable funding bumps thanks to revenue from income tax growth, observed Public Policy Institute of California Research Associate Paul Warren. Increases in 2014-15 and 2015-16 may already have gotten California to the national average, although it likely will be another two years before state-by-state standings can confirm that, Warren said.

And while Brown’s 2016-17 budget takes a more modest approach, “things are probably going to be rosier in June than they are now,” if negotiations with the Legislature and higher-than-anticipated tax revenues yield a bigger payoff for schools, he said.

The new proposal “is the standard Jerry Brown woe-is-me budget, which personally I think is the best approach for schools,” Warren said. “Let’s not get overly excited about how much money is out there, let’s put it out in a paced way so they can absorb it, and not get out ahead of yourself and have to cut because you overspent.”

EDC intensifies push to attract college satellite campus

By Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County is on the hunt for a four-year college that will open a campus within the rural county, hoping to give students an opportunity they now can only find elsewhere.

A four-year campus would benefit students and the community, backers said, reducing the time students often spend commuting and improving opportunities for students to remain close to home. County leaders say El Dorado is a prime venue for studying natural resources, tree genomics and related fields, some of which is already under way.

The effort gained steam last spring when a group led by Treasurer-Tax Collector Cherie Raffety sought to convince UC Davis to establish a campus there. Last week, county supervisors supported a broader search that includes other four-year institutions, she said.

Read the whole story

Tourism official: Nev. is more than casinos

By Las Vegas Sun

The Strip is like a one-night stand for many young travelers.

It's good for a quick visit, but it's not the only memory they want of a Western adventure.

Millennials with cash to travel want interesting and unique stories as vacation memorabilia, said Bethany Drysdale, public relations director for TravelNevada, formerly known as the state Division of Tourism.

TravelNevada is in charge of promoting the Strip but also Nevada's innumerable ghost towns, mountain ranges and natural attractions. The agency is working to adapt to changing media markets and different tourist demographics.

Drysdale said the needs of travelers have changed; the audience has changed. "We were targeting baby boomers – people with more money and free time – with traditional ads. That has changed with the rise of the millennial mindset. If it's Instagram worthy, it is a trip millennials will take. We are doing more social media and more direct-to-consumer outreach. We do Instagram takeovers, selecting someone with a really good audience, letting them post on our account when they are on a trip. In 2014, we had 700 Instagram followers. We hit 10,000 this past November."

[Read the whole story](#)

UNR a leader in federal highway improvement models



UNR Assistant Professor Elie Hajj shows off some test samples in one of the five pavement testing labs. Photo/UNR

By Mike Wolterbeek

When the Federal Highway Administration needed to update its crucial and complicated 30-year-old formula for fuel consumption and vehicle operating cost predictions, it awarded the project to UNR's renowned Pavements/Materials Program. The results of the study will give federal highway managers more accurate data as they seek to improve the nation's transportation network.

"The project is one of the extremely highly critical and influential projects for FHWA and the nation," said Elie Hajj, assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering and the project's lead researcher.

Hajj works with Peter Sebaaly, director of the university's Western Regional Superpave Center, on this and a number of research projects to improve pavements in Nevada and around the country, including asphalt and concrete pavement testing, software management tools used around the world, a national research database and super heavy load research – all in the

department's five labs dedicated to pavement and materials research.

"Pretty much on any road on which we drive in Nevada, the pavement – whether asphalt or concrete – has been to some extent influenced by our laboratory," Sebaaly said. "We work with government agencies and industry in Nevada and around the West to help determine the best materials and mixtures for economical, durable, and sustainable pavements under every conceivable condition."

All of these initiatives combine to give the group in the civil engineering department, and their industry and agency partners, the expertise to tackle this important five-year federal project. The team includes the transportation group in the civil engineering department, Nevada Automotive Test Center, and Dynatest Consulting, a leading manufacturer of pavement testing equipment and analytical expertise.

The research will improve the vehicle operating costs estimation by taking into consideration changes in vehicle technology, vehicle operating speeds, traffic management, driving cycles over the past 30 years – including hybrid and electric vehicles – and pavement types and conditions.

"Savings on vehicle operating costs are a key measure of the effect of improvements of the transportation network," Hajj wrote in his proposal to the highway agency. "Accordingly, vehicle operating costs equations need to adequately describe the effects of different speeds, traffic conditions, roadway characteristics, and current vehicle technology."

Typically, such a study occurs every 20 to 30 years with the last study being in the 1980s. This one will be expected to have a similar lifespan, which shows the need for a comprehensive, research-based approach.

"Most of our research is for asphalt, which is what 90 percent of the paved roads in the country are made of," Hajj said.

“There are 2.5 million miles of asphalt paved roads, under all types of temperatures, climate, humidity, traffic loads. We help design the best mixture of materials and binders through research in our five labs with all of those specific variables in mind.”

For example, in one research project Hajj and his team used a large-scale experiment, with a 6-foot tall, 8-foot diameter tank and numerous channels of instrumentation, to capture data on five variables, including vertical stress distribution, deformation, confinement and slippage condition. The tank lets the University engineers conduct dozens of asphalt and concrete experiments economically in a short time with a variety of depths and layers of soil, aggregates and binders or cements – the glue that holds the mixtures together. The insights gained on this and other research help to inform the researcher’s vehicle cost prediction work for the federal highway administration.

Federal and state governments continuously evaluate the transportation network’s performance and use transportation management programs and performance models to take the necessary corrective actions. They will use the information developed by Hajj and his team in three analysis tools, including revenue forecasting, economic requirement systems and truck size and weight analysis to estimate the potential effects of suggested regulations and investment scenarios over 20-year periods.

The Nevada Automotive Test Center is one of the preeminent groups in modeling and simulation of full vehicle performance, bringing to the table a wealth of experience in vehicles dynamics, powertrain performance, suspension types, and tire characteristics. The test center also brings a unique capability and expertise in the measurements of the onboard fuel economy for gasoline and diesel powered vehicles.

The second phase of the project will specifically look into

the influence of pavement roughness on fuel economy and other vehicle operating costs such as tire wear, vehicle repair and maintenance, and oil consumption. This phase of the study will also quantify and provide means to estimate the effect of traffic congestion on vehicle operating costs.

Phase two will last two years, followed by a final year of evaluation, consolidation of data and a final report to the Federal Highway Administration.

“This grant is an issue that can have immediate effects on the regional and national economy,” Manos Maragakis, dean of the College of Engineering, said. “It’s a great accomplishment that shows our Superpave Center is one of the major leaders in this field.”

Mike Wolterbeek works for UNR.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



· Bryan Davis, Edgewood Companies marketing guy, has been appointed to the Douglas County Planning Commission. JoEtta Brown was reappointed. The elected county commissioners make those decisions.

· South Lake Tahoe fire rescue is hosting a coats for kids drive this month. All donations will be distributed to children in need within South Lake Tahoe. Drop donations at any of the three fire stations now through Jan. 27.

· The El Dorado County’s fair theme for 2016 is Cowboys and Carousels. The fair runs June 16-19 in Placerville.

. The South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority is seeking applicants to the Bicycle Advisory Committee. The application deadline is 5pm Jan. 16. Call 530.542.6004 or email eapalazzo@cityofslt.us for an application.

U.S. rejects protections for Alaska wolf in decline

By William Yardley, Los Angeles Times

For more than two decades, conservation groups have argued that a wolf and the rainforest in southeast Alaska where it lives are at risk.

While the groups have won strong restrictions on logging of the Tongass National Forest, the nation's largest, they have been denied in their efforts to win federal protection for the wolf.

Last week, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service denied them again: The agency determined that the wolf, known as the Alexander Archipelago wolf, should not be listed as an endangered or threatened species.

Read the whole story

Series of mild storms lined up to hit Tahoe

What originally was expected to be a decent storm headed to Tahoe has broken apart.

Forecasters from the National Weather Service in Reno are now saying the system headed to the greater Lake Tahoe area “will brush to the north of the area on Monday and Tuesday with little to no precipitation for the Sierra and western Nevada. Our next decent chance for rain and snow will be on Wednesday, but just how much will be uncertain.”

On Wednesday the snow could be down to the 5,000 foot level. More moisture is in the forecast for later in the week as well.

There won't be much difference between the high and low temperatures – about 10 degrees – as highs for most the week will be in the high 30s and lows in the high 20s.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Big

Big is a beautiful, tall 1-year-old German shepherd. He is a sweet boy who would love to go to training classes. He loves to play with other dogs.

Like many German Shepherds, he is very smart and a bit aloof until he gets to know you, but then he is very affectionate.

Big is neutered, microchipped, tested for heart worm, and vaccinated. He is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go to the Tahoe animal shelter's Facebook page to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call 530.573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go **online**.

– Karen Kuentz

Little interest in Liberty wanting to raise rates

PROPOSED RATE INCREASE

Customer Class	Current Revenue Rate	Proposed 2016 Revenue Rate	Proposed 2017 Revenue Rate	Proposed 2018 Revenue Rate	Total Revenue (\$) Increase	Total Percentage (%) Increase
Residential	\$39,821,901	\$44,993,811	\$44,993,811	\$44,993,811	\$15,515,730	12.99%
Small Commercial	14,627,536	17,696,342	17,696,342	17,696,342	9,206,418	20.98%
Medium Commercial	8,052,346	8,121,444	8,121,444	8,121,444	207,294	0.86%
Large Commercial	13,734,692	18,868,878	18,868,878	18,868,878	15,402,558	37.38%
Street Lights	122,262	93,828	93,828	93,828	(85,302)	(23.26%)
Outdoor Lights	160,784	168,779	168,779	168,779	23,985	4.97%
Irrigation Service	44,451	192,364	192,364	192,364	443,739	332.76%

Source: *Liberty Utilities*

By Kathryn Reed

A proposed 17 percent rate increase by Liberty Utilities generated little interest from the public in the way of giving feedback to the California Public Utilities Commission.

The commissioners, who are responsible for granting or declining the hike, conducted four hearings last week – two in Kings Beach and two in South Lake Tahoe.

Combined, less than 30 people showed up for the meetings, and even fewer spoke.

Commissioners are expected to make a decision in late spring. Assuming an increase is approved, it will be retroactive to Jan. 1. Instead of one lump sum added to bills it would be spread out over a few months. A residential customer using 601.67 kilowatts per month would see an average monthly bill

increase of \$3.95 (or 4.37 percent), from \$86.56 to \$90.54.

Liberty provides electricity to about 49, 000 customers, with about 80 percent of them in the Lake Tahoe Basin on the California side.

Liberty first applied for the 17.34 increase in May. It is designed generate \$13.57 million.

Ken Wittman with Liberty told the commission the actual increase may be scaled back because the cost of natural gas gone down since last spring.

General rate increase filings are required by the CPUC every three years. In 2012, rates went up nearly 5 percent. At that time the CPUC did not require the local public meetings.

"We welcome it. It's an important part of the process," Greg Sorensen, president of Liberty Utilities, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Reasons for the increase include: vegetation management; drought-related fire prevention mandates; more energy efficiency programs/incentives; and the new solar incentive program.

Liberty also needs funds to pay for its **multimillion-dollar upgrade** to facilities on the North Shore and in the Truckee area. The Truckee to Northstar work was done last summer, with the Northstar to Kings Beach work to start after the snow melts in the spring.

"It helps with our reliability," Sorensen said.

Normally peak usage is over the Christmas-New Year's holidays, where the system is on the borderline of requiring customers to scale back use or the company will need to initiate brown outs. While consumption is always monitored, this year – even with so many people in the basin and resorts blowing snow – the usage didn't reach the danger zone. The new line is

credited with supplying enough power, Sorensen said.

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Notes:

- The rate increase application is on Liberty's **website**.