

Nev. regulators to consider solar rate-hike pause

By Michelle Rindels, AP

CARSON CITY – Nevada energy regulators are meeting this week to decide whether to hold off on controversial new rates for solar power customers.

The state Public Utilities Commission has scheduled a hearing on Thursday for requests to pause the rate hike, which was set to take effect Jan. 1. The base service charge is rising from \$12.75 to \$17.90 per month for southern Nevada solar customers and from \$15.25 to \$21.09 for northern Nevada customers.

The changes also reduce the amount the utility pays to buy power back from rooftop solar panels, from 11 cents a kilowatt-hour to 9 cents in southern Nevada and from 12 cents to 10.5 cents in the north. The service charge will rise and the reimbursement will drop every year until 2020.

Regulators approved the changes as a way to reduce a cost-shift from the state's 17,000 net-metering customers to the non-solar customer base, and to reflect the declining cost of solar power. NV Energy says that solar customers still rely on their transmission lines and power plants to keep energy flowing at night or when clouds pass over, preventing the panels from generating power.

Several entities requested the rates be postponed, including the Bureau of Consumer Protection within the Nevada Attorney General's Office. Consumer advocate Eric Witkoski said existing customers weren't properly warned that they would be subject to the new rates, instead of being "grandfathered" in to the more favorable ones.

He also raised concerns that the rate change could run afoul

of the contracts clause in the U.S. Constitution, because the changes are dramatic enough that they could disrupt private contracts homeowners have with rooftop solar companies.

Firms such as SolarCity lease panels to homeowners in mortgage-like agreements that can last for 30 years. The payments customers make each month toward their solar panels are often offset by the credits they receive for selling excess energy back to the utility, and the combined cost of the panel payments and a utility bill is often less than a traditional utility bill alone.

The rate change throws a wrench in that business model and is expected to make a rooftop solar installation less attractive. SolarCity said it is ceasing sales and installations to Nevadans as a result.

Supporters of the rate change note that Nevada has long supported the solar industry, and it's time to phase out subsidies that were put in place nearly two decades ago to get a then-fledgling industry off the ground. But Witkoski says the subsidy Nevada ratepayers foot for solar customers is relatively minor, and is several times smaller than what they pay to subsidize NV Energy's energy efficiency programs overall.

Other entities requesting a pause in new rates include the Southern Nevada Home Builders Association and The Alliance for Solar Choice.

Rethinking the safety behind

heli-skiing

By Paddy O'Connell, Skiing

There exists both a sincere desire and an obvious need for the standardization of safety protocols within the heli-skiing industry, especially in the great wilds of Alaska. What is unclear is what those standards should look like and who should set them.

Alaska has been home to helicopter-skiing operations for almost 40 years, and with every heli segment that lights up the screen in a ski film, the public froths to claim an AK spine. But a recent spike in on-mountain deaths has led to both public and governmental pressure for change.

Most observers agree there's a need for standardized protocols—rules by which all operators abide so that clients and guides are safe and the playing field is level for competing operations. But the specter of increased government regulation worries many operators, who think they know best what standards are and aren't needed. Their hope is to guide the process to a conclusion that enhances safety and oversight while still allowing them to operate profitably and show guests a good time.

Read the whole story

Letter: MontBleu helps at Bread & Broth

To the community,

There's nothing like having a hearty and tasty meat loaf dinner to make you feel like you're eating at home. Thanks to the Adopt A Day of Nourishment sponsor MontBleu and our hardworking B&B volunteer cooks that is exactly what B&B's dinner guests enjoyed at the Dec. 28 evening dinner. The meat loaf was a big hit and despite big first serving portions, when second serving was announced, many diners returned for a second helping.

"This is an amazing program," said Michelle Bergstrom, MontBleu's director of administration. "We are grateful to be able to participate in providing this dinner and give back to our community."

Bergstrom and Ginny Shannon, MontBleu's controller, joined the B&B volunteers at 3pm to help with the dinner's setup and manned the serving line, greeting the guests and doling out hefty servings. Then these two energetic and helpful women stayed to help with the dinner's cleanup.

Bread & Broth would like to sincerely thank MontBleu for its generous \$250 AAD donation and Bergstrom and Shannon for giving their personal time to take the opportunity to help food insecure community members. Through their generosity, MontBleu and its sponsor crewmembers helped make many lives a little bit better by providing a nutritious and filling meal.

For more B&B information, go **online** or find us on Facebook.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Driver's license may not be enough to fly

By Jad Mouawad, New York Times

Starting this month, a driver's license may no longer be enough for airline passengers to clear security in some states, if the Department of Homeland Security has its way.

Federal officials said they would soon determine whether Transportation Security Administration agents would start enforcing a 10-year-old law that required states to comply with a set of federal standards when issuing driver's licenses.

The issue is quickly intensifying, and the debate over identification and privacy has grown after the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and California.

But some states have bitterly opposed these requirements out of privacy concerns, and more than a dozen have passed laws barring their motor vehicle departments from complying with the law, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The new standards require more stringent proof of identity and will eventually allow users' information to be shared more easily in a national database.

Privacy experts, civil liberty organizations and libertarian groups fear the law would create something like a national identification card.

Read the whole story

Calif. investigating Nestle's water practices

By Associated Press

SAN BERNARDINO — The U.S. Forest Service has begun an environmental review of Nestle Waters North America's bottling operations in Southern California's San Bernardino National Forest, according to a newspaper report.

Nestle was sued in October by environmental and public interest groups who allege the Swiss-based company is operating its Strawberry Canyon facility on a permit that expired in 1988. The groups led by the Center for Biological Diversity said the prolonged drought in California combined with the water bottling operation is affecting wildlife.

Nestle has applied to renew its permit and can continue to operate while that application is pending.

Forest Service spokesman John Heil said recently that his agency has begun reviewing the effects of re-issuing the special use permit, the *San Bernardino Sun* reported Saturday. The review comes under the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires agencies to assess the environmental effects of proposed actions prior to making decisions.

"We are pleased the USFS review process is underway," said Jane Lazgin, spokeswoman for Nestle Waters North America. "We are working with the U.S. Forest Service through the permit renewal process, recognizing the permit remains in effect because the company took the proper steps to request the permit renewal before it became due."

The piping system siphoned about 68,000 gallons of water a day out of the forest in 2014, according to a statement made by the plaintiffs after the suit was filed.

The groups believe species, including Least Bell's Vireo and California spotted owls, could see their numbers increased with improved water supply, the lawsuit said.

For more than 120 years, the Arrowhead bottle water brand, under many different owners, has been fueled by spring water from the San Bernardino Mountains and other springs around the state.

AAA: Gas prices will remain low in 2016

By Ahiza Garcia, CNN Money

Drivers may pay even less at the pump in 2016.

AAA, which compiles gas price information from around the country, is projecting that gas prices will stay lower in the year ahead – maybe even lower than this year.

It estimates that the average price of a gallon of regular, unleaded gasoline would be between \$2.25 and \$2.45 a gallon. In 2015, the average price per gallon was \$2.40 – Americans saved \$540 on gas as a result.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Cati

Cati is a small and active orange tabby cat who is about 2 years old. She is very friendly and likes to interact with people. Cati is good with other cats and dogs.

Cati is spayed, microchipped, tested for FIV, and vaccinated. She are 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

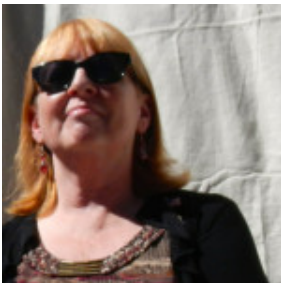
Conner seeks to have judge dismissed

By Kathryn Reed

Because JoAnn Conner believes the judge in her case against the city of South Lake Tahoe has already made up his mind, her attorney is trying to get the matter heard before another judge.

This means the hearing scheduled for today isn't going to happen.

Conner, who is a first-term city council member, at the end of last year took legal action against the city and City Manager Nancy Kerry in regards to being **censured** by her colleagues and being **banned from talking to staff**.



JoAnn Conner

"The law requires a judge not be biased and not to have predetermined the outcome of the case. If evidence arises where it appears to an ordinary person on the street that the judge has made a predetermination on an issue of the case or outcome of the case, it is essentially automatic disqualification because the litigants are entitled to a fair and unbiased judge," Jacqueline Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Mittelstadt, who used to be city's attorney, is representing

Conner.

At the **Dec. 15 hearing**, El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey said he would not deal with the censure issue because it is a political matter and not something for the court to decide. That is where Mittelstadt and Conner believe there is bias, and why they've asked Bailey to be replaced.

If Bailey is replaced, the matter will likely be heard on the West Slope.

If Conner were to prevail, she would likely have censure overturned – though the council could redo it. A censure is a hand slap with zero consequences when it comes to being able to do her job. She would also be given access back to the city offices as well as be able to directly communicate with staff via phone, email and in person.

Today, she can still have questions answered, but they must go through the city manager and/or city attorney.

The council has a card key to access the offices at the airport. However, it has been inconsistent through the years when it comes to which councils have had the access. It is up to the council to decide if they have the card keys.

Councilman Hal Cole on Dec. 30 turned his card in.

"If we need to see someone, we can make an appointment," Cole told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Mayor Wendy David said, "I usually don't need to even use it."

Council members have a mailbox behind the locked doors. There is talk of moving those into a public area, though the boxes would be locked. This would alleviate the need to bother city employees to get the mail.

Multiple emails were sent to City Clerk Suzie Alessi asking about the history of the card keys and why councilmembers have

access. She didn't respond to the inquiries.

Mittelstadt maintains she and Conner are willing to work with the city to resolve the matter outside of the courtroom.

"After the litigation was filed, the Thursday before the City Council's closed session, [City Attorney] Tom Watson called me. During that conversation, we discussed possible resolution with my providing a variety of suggested approaches. He said he would get back to me. He never did," Mittelstadt said in an email. "After the first hearing on the matter, in light of the judge's direction telling us that we should resolve the matter, I approached their outside counsel and referred to what the judge said. I indicated that we would be happy to discuss options to try to resolve the situation, and had tried to do so prior to his involvement. He said he was new to the matter but would consider it and get back to me. I have not heard from him either. Until the city is willing to come to the table and discuss resolution, we have no choice but to proceed with the litigation."

Watson told *Lake Tahoe News* it was not accurate that no one from the city has responded to Mittelstadt. But he would not elaborate because he said it would be inappropriate to do so because he works for all five electeds.

"I have heard nothing from Jacqueline and as I said before we are proceeding within the court process of the suit," David told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Opinion: How we saved the

middle class in the 1980s

By Michael Bernick

It's easy to think that in the world of employment and anti-poverty programs, nothing ever changes, that the same joblessness continues as the government spends billions.

I know this isn't true. For the past two years, I've worked with archivists to sifting through old files and records on employment from the 1970s and 1980s. The work is part of a California State Library research effort to catalogue employment-training strategies in California. I have worked in and with local job-training projects in California since 1979, and the archival project involved my papers on job training and employment programs and the papers of other practitioners and researchers over the past four decades. For the 1970s and 1980s, we collected hundreds of reports and articles about specific projects aimed at youth illiteracy and unemployment, retraining laid off workers, and welfare-to-work approaches.

That era feels very familiar, since people were worried about the same big issues that we are now—growing wage inequality, the hollowing out of the middle class, chronic unemployment. But it's also encouraging, since our responses to those big problems back then actually made a difference.

The 1970s and 1980s are a peculiar and urgent time to visit via an archival time machine. Papers were being written about the elimination of middle-class jobs, particularly manufacturing jobs available to workers without college degrees. Rising teenage pregnancy rates and welfare rolls fueled predictions of increased urban violence and a growing "underclass." There was fear that technology was eliminating jobs in all sectors; in a 1984 report, "Forecasting the Impact of New Technologies on the Future Job Market," Stanford researchers Russell Rumberger and Henry Levin warned that the

high-tech sector was creating a relatively small number of jobs, and was unlikely to be a major employer in the future.

None of the specters of those days has materialized, though. Welfare rolls have dropped dramatically, as have teen pregnancy rates. Job growth has outpaced job loss due to technology and other forces. The middle class has shrunk by some indicators, but remains robust, and new mid-level jobs are being created.

Where did we go right? There is no one answer. Success came as a result of a complex mix of influences: government, private sector, and volunteer education and training programs; demographic shifts; macro-economic policies. But that's not enough of an explanation. All the improvements are linked in ways to a dynamic that too rarely gets mentioned in policy discussions: the willingness of people (policymakers, practitioners, and ordinary citizens) to stand up to then-dominant ideologies and refuse to be paralyzed when problems are described as intractable.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the consensus on welfare held that expanding government benefit programs was inevitable, that entrepreneurship would be replaced by the collaboration of big government and big private-sector companies, and that the country's employment future lay in a model of big government, big labor, and big private sector companies. It was a consensus adopted by top officials in government, private foundations, large nonprofits, and the prominent think tanks of the time.

How was this consensus broken? Slowly, by people on the left and the right challenging the establishment. Welfare reform only began its first steps when a few elected Democratic officials in Sacramento, such as then-state Sen. John Garamendi, were willing to break ranks and establish welfare time limits and redirect welfare agencies to become job placement agencies. Eventually, a different way of approaching

welfare took hold—one that aggressively pushed welfare recipients into the work world. Caseloads dropped from 900,000 cases in 1996 to fewer than 500,000 in 2004. The next eight years to fewer than 500,000 cases by July 2004.

And while deindustrialization and technology produced the envisioned job losses, they also produced unexpected job gains that replaced the losses.

The main driver of job growth since that era has been entrepreneurship, that supposedly disappearing value. Its promotion came not from the federal government or elites connected with employment strategies, but from non-profits such as the Corporation for Enterprise Development, minority business development groups, and local community development corporations pushed forward strategies on local levels emphasizing entrepreneurship such as the expansion of inner-city loan funds, and purchasing networks for fledgling businesses. The developing market-oriented think tanks, such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation, identified the tax changes and culture changes necessary for entrepreneurship to expand. George Gilder's 1981 best-seller "Wealth and Poverty" was also crucial in creating an argument and language to explain the value of entrepreneurship.

The history of the past three decades in California shows that in the areas of welfare, teen pregnancy, job growth, and new business generation, improvement is possible. But there is no room for complacency. Today, California's foundations, social welfare nonprofits, and government entities continue to be led by persons who see their role as expanding government benefit programs or adding free community college or other free goods to reduce income inequality or poverty. These approaches, not anchored to employment, business growth, or entrepreneurship, won't have any more success than similar programs of the 1960s and 1970s.

Today's job training and anti-poverty practitioners and policymakers rarely study the efforts of previous decades. That's unfortunate, and the California State Library archival project is aimed at showing how much there is to learn from the past. We will need to keep to true to the values that drove our social and economic successes of the past three decades. If we do so, we'll be able to revisit our archives of today's records in another 30 years, and see that, once again, we made progress.

Michael Bernick is the former director of California's labor department, the Employment Development Department, and has been involved in job training and placement since 1979. He currently is a Milken Institute Fellow and a Zócalo contributing editor.

Girl survives fall from chairlift at Squaw Valley

Updated Jan. 5, 7:45am:

By Kathryn Reed

A young girl who fell nearly 40-feet from a chairlift at Squaw Valley on Saturday is expected to survive.

"The child was flown to Renown [Medical Center in Reno] in fairly stable condition," Marcus Dorsey-Hirt, clinical manager with CareFlight, told Lake Tahoe News.

He said the 8-year-old from Los Gatos sustained broken bones in the fall. Resort officials said she was conscious when ski patrol arrived.

"The skier was wearing a helmet at the time of her injury, however the restraint bar on the chair had not been used at any point during the lift ride," Squaw officials said in a statement. Squaw said the mother of the victim said the restraint bar was not used.

Dominique Roddier of the Bay Area said his wife and daughter saw the girl fall Jan. 2 at about 3pm from the Big Blue chairlift. He said the victim was near the end of the lift when the accident occurred.

"The lift was stopped. When it started again ... they think she slipped and fell," Roddier told *Lake Tahoe News*. "My daughter said she landed on her side."

Personnel at the hospital could not release any information, including if the girl was still there, because of medical confidentiality laws.

Big Blue is a six-seater that starts at mid-mountain, with mostly green runs off of it.