

Reid says he won't seek re-election

By Carl Hulse, New York Times

WASHINGTON — Senator Harry Reid, the tough tactician who has led Senate Democrats since 2005, will not seek re-election next year, bringing an end to a three-decade congressional career that culminated with his push of President Obama's ambitious agenda against fierce Republican resistance.

Reid, 75, who suffered serious eye and facial injuries in a Jan. 1 exercise accident at his Las Vegas home, said he had been contemplating retiring from the Senate for months. He said his decision was not attributable either to the accident or to his demotion to minority leader after Democrats lost the majority in November's midterm elections.

"I understand this place," Reid said. "I have quite a bit of power as minority leader."

He has already confounded the new Republican majority this year by holding Democrats united against a proposal to gut the Obama administration's immigration policies as well as a human-trafficking measure Democrats objected to over an anti-abortion provision.

"I want to be able to go out at the top of my game," said Reid, who used a sports metaphor about athletes who try to hang on too long. "I don't want to be a 42-year-old trying to become a designated hitter."

Read the whole story

Debate over banning online gaming moves forward

By Amber Phillips, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON — In a choose-your-own-facts debate, a Sheldon Adelson-backed bill to ban online gaming got its first airing in Congress with a controversial hearing Wednesday.

Ban proponents, led by powerful members of Congress, argued that allowing online gaming to continue would degrade America's morality by proliferating gaming.

"Every home in America is potentially a casino," said Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, a Texas Democrat.

Opponents of the ban, which include several state lottery officials and representatives for almost every major casino except Adelson's Las Vegas Sands, say a ban would push online gambling further underground and contribute to a \$3 billion illegal offshore online gaming industry.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Brown's lame response to drought

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the March 23, 2015, San Jose Mercury News.*

California is in a drought of historic proportions with no end in sight. Scientists and political leaders, including Gov.

Jerry Brown, agree. The governor called an official state of emergency way back in January 2014 – but you wouldn't know it from his actions since.

Lame doesn't begin to describe Brown's failure to show leadership on this threat to the state's long-range future that's easily as dire as the massive budget deficit he inherited in 2011.

For example: A governor who was serious about conservation would be offering tens of millions of dollars in incentives to urban water users to replace water-wasting toilets, shower heads, dishwashers and washing machines with state-of-the-art, low-flow products.

Instead, Brown's Water Resources Control Board is requiring restaurants to fill customers' water glasses only if they ask and telling hotels to offer guests only one towel during their stay unless they request a fresh one. Oh, the pain of sacrifice.

Read the whole story

Feds abandon Nevada mustang roundup for now

By Scott Sonner, AP

RENO – The federal government has abandoned plans – at least for now – to round up more than 300 wild horses in Northern Nevada after a U.S. judge temporarily blocked the effort last month for fear of harm to the mustangs.

The agency won't move forward with the roundup in the Pine Nut

Range southeast of Carson City until it completes another review of potential environmental effects, lawyers for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management said in papers filed in federal court in Reno.

Judge Larry Hicks had granted a restraining order sought by horse advocates preventing the roundup until he could hear further arguments from both sides on the merits of the case.

Opponents say the Bureau of Land Management was relying on a nearly 5-year-old environmental analysis that ignores the latest scientific evidence about the dangers posed by injecting female horses with a fertility drug that keeps them from reproducing for two years.

Lawyers for Friends of Animals and Protect Mustangs said there's been significant new research about the potential harms of PZP since the federal agency reviewed the effects in 2010. New studies confirm earlier concerns that the interference with the wild herds prompts mares unable to become pregnant to leave in search of stallions in other bands of mustangs, they said.

Hicks said in his Feb. 11 ruling that the agency appeared to have violated federal law, including the National Environmental Policy Act requiring a more stringent examination of the effects than the one Bureau of Land Management scientists conducted.

Leon Thomas, the federal agency's field manager for the Sierra Front based in Carson City, said in an affidavit filed in the government's voluntary dismissal of the case late Tuesday that the agency won't implement the record of decision it issued last year to permanently remove 200 horses and return about 130 back to the range, about half of those mares that would have been injected with PZP.

The Bureau of Land Management will prepare a new document "analyzing the environmental impacts associated with

gathering, treating and removing excess wild horses from the Pine Nut (management area), and a new decision will be issued before implementing any such gather," he said.

Agency spokeswoman Lisa Ross said Wednesday that the soonest the new review could be completed and clear requirements for public comment would be sometime in the fall, "depending on available funding and holding space."

Horse advocates said the move marked an important victory in their ongoing battle with the federal agency and ranchers over forage on public rangeland – much of it in the throes of drought – in 10 states stretching from Montana to Arizona.

"This case highlights some of the deficiencies with BLM's current management of wild horses, and I hope that in the future BLM considers its obligations to involve the public on decisions that affect our public lands," said Jennifer Barnes, staff attorney for Friends of Animals.

The Bureau of Land Management maintains there are nearly twice as many horse in the Pine Nut Range as the high desert habitat can support without causing ecological damage, some of which could hurt the imperiled sage grouse.

Ross said the agency has no intention of discontinuing use of PZP to help to suppress growth of the herds that naturally double about every five years if left unchecked.

"The BLM did not appeal the February 11 injunction due to the concern for the welfare of the horses," she said in an email to the Associated Press. "The time required to file an appeal would have resulted in a gather during foaling season, which generally starts March 1. Gathering during foaling season presents an increased risk to new foals and pregnant mares. "

Judge appoints examiner in bankruptcy of Caesars division

By Michael Tarm and Kimberly Pierceall, AP

CHICAGO — A former Watergate prosecutor who was later involved in efforts to secure the release of Americans during the Iran hostage crisis while assistant secretary of the Treasury is now investigating business deals made by Caesars Entertainment Corp. before the casino giant's debt-heavy operations division filed for bankruptcy in January.

On Wednesday, a bankruptcy judge in Chicago appointed 68-year-old Richard J. Davis to be the independent examiner in the case to look into disputed business transfers that some creditors say robbed the division of valuable assets and left them without a guarantee on their investments.

As Davis stepped up to a podium Wednesday inside the courtroom, Judge A. Benjamin Goldgar jokingly alluded to the complexity of the case.

"You game for this?" a smiling Goldgar asked him.

When Davis nodded, the judge said, "You're in!"

There was no opposition to Davis' appointment, a rarity in a case fraught with ongoing disputes between the company and some of its creditors.

Caesars Entertainment Operating Co. has some \$18 billion in debt, the result of a \$30 billion buyout in 2008 that involved mostly borrowed money, and tens of thousands of employees

scattered around some 38 hotels and casinos. Company officials hope a plan negotiated with its largest creditors will allow it to shed some \$10 billion of debt.

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys in Stateline.

Based on an earlier ruling approving, generally, the appointment of an examiner, there doesn't appear to be a limit to costs attached to the investigation. Davis must file reports to the court every 45 days.

The scope of Davis' role includes looking into, "any apparent self-dealing or conflicts of interest involving" Caesars Entertainment Operating Co. and its affiliates.

Davis said he plans to charge \$850 an hour, a \$100 discount of his normal rate, according to a court filing supporting his appointment.

Davis, a New York-based attorney, was also involved in the high-profile bankruptcy cases for Enron and Lehman Brothers.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Diamond Peak Ski Resort's last day is March 29.



- Julie Paradysz now owns Tahoe Tot Spot in South Lake Tahoe.

Former owner Amy Thompson is focusing her attention on Inversion Gym in town.

- Caltrans and Truckee will be having a groundbreaking ceremony for the Truckee Mousehole Pedestrian Tunnel on Highway 89 on April 2 at 1pm on the east side of the existing tunnel.

- Authentic San Francisco vibes wrap up the FNCTN Winter Music Series with dance music pioneer Gavin Hardkiss headlining the April 3 event at Xhale Lounge and the funky sounds of Nurelix at the Lake Tahoe Golf Course April 17. Doors open at 8pm and admission is \$10.

- Washoe County Regional Animal Services provides dog bite prevention presentations. To schedule one, email kstark@washoecounty.us.

Heavenly eyes epic construction season to begin evolution into year-round resort

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Going forward, Heavenly Mountain Resort will no longer be known as a just a ski resort. Its Epic Discovery project received unanimous approval from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing board on Thursday.

“It’s conceivable if all the pieces fall into place, we could break ground on a handful of projects this summer,” Heavenly

General Manager Pete Sonntag told *Lake Tahoe News* moments after the vote.

Still needing to be secured are approval from Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and the final record of decision from the U.S. Forest Service.

Sonntag would not put a price tag on what will ultimately be a multi-million dollar endeavor.

Epic Discovery is Vail Resorts answer to creating year-round resorts. It is developing these adventure parks at Heavenly, and in Colorado at Vail and Breckenridge.



Heavenly's summer offerings are about to explode with Epic Discovery's approval. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

It's possible some of the activities will be accessible in the winter. It will allow Heavenly to be more of a year-round destination, though there will still be times when it will have to close. Annual maintenance to the gondola starts every September, which is why scenic rides are limited to weekends

and then it is offline the entire month of October.

With the Forest Service in 2011 allowing ski resorts to expand recreation opportunities into the summer, ski areas started to turn their attention to things like ropes and canopy courses, alpine coasters and mountain biking. But the Forest Service is keeping a close eye on this transformation.

"We've required a phased construction to make sure we consider the effects on the natural environment," Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais told the board. The USFS also wants to see designs when they are 30 and 60 percent complete to ensure they meet all the regulations.

Because these types of projects on national lands are new and some of the components are not standard protocol, Marsolais' bosses in Washington weighed in on some items.

An issue that was raised through comments was how the proposed Panorama Trail would impact Van Sickle Bi-state Park.

The Forest Service, Heavenly, Tahoe Rim Trail Association and Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association created an agreement to monitor the effects over time.

"This is a different way of doing business," Marsolais said of the adaptive management plan.

One thing he put the kibosh on was the proposed coaster in Sky Meadows because of the stream environmental zone, pine marten habitat and potential effects on skiing.

Andrew Strain, govern affairs guru for Heavenly, said the hub of the non-skiing fun will remain at Adventure Peak near the top of the gondola.

"We will be using developed areas of the ski resort," he said.

Heavenly will greatly expand beyond the ropes courses it opened last summer. Much of what will be constructed will

continue to be off the ground fun.

The mountain bike park will be outside the basin on the Nevada side.

"Heavenly today is essentially the black hole of mountain biking," Strain said. Trails will connect to already established routes are that mostly known by locals.

For those who are a little less adventuresome or may have physical limits there will be tours of the mountain on existing roads via Heavenly vehicles.

Twenty people spoke at the March 26 meeting; all were in favor of the project.

(El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel recused herself because her daughter works for Vail Resorts in Colorado. This was her choosing even though legally she did not have to.)

Many of the comments underscored how this will allow Heavenly to hire people year-round. The economic impact has not been quantified, but many business owners see Epic Discovery as a potential boon to their bottom line by people extending their visits because there will be more to do on the South Shore.

Plus, it's in alignment with the desire of turning the region into a recreation destination.

Several people praised the educational component of the project; with the hope people will be better stewards of the land.

It was also pointed out that for many tourists this would be their first encounter with national forest land. It's an opportunity to educate them about what grows and lives in the forest, as well as the threat of fire.

Heavenly sees about 110,000 people on the mountain now during the summer and expects to increase that by about 50 percent.

Traffic and parking are not expected to be an issue because the thinking is people who are already in town will be the users and this will not be destination unto itself.

Tahoe boat inspections to resume; no fee hike

Enough money has been pieced together for the boat inspection program at Lake Tahoe to continue this summer without raising fees for boaters.

The program, first adopted in 2009, requires all boats being launched at Lake Tahoe to be inspected. Those found to be carrying invasive species pay an additional fee to be decontaminated.

Dennis Zabaglo, aquatic resources program manager for Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, on March 26 stressed to the Governing Board the importance of maintaining the program. He said in 2014 there were 6,800 inspections and 3,300 decontaminations. More than 50 boats were carrying an AIS, with 12 of those being quagga mussels.

“That validates our efforts,” Zabaglo said.

The quagga mussels have devastated the water bodies they’ve entered, like Lake Mead in Southern Nevada.

Half of the money to operate the inspection program comes from the boating fee, the other half mostly from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act. With that money nearly gone, other sources are being looked at. Last week TRPA was awarded a \$200,000 quagga free grant from the state. There may

also be money from the Army Corps of Engineers. Worst-case scenario is the need to tap into reserves.

The board on Thursday approved all the contingency budget plans as well as the fee schedule.

New this season will be an inspection station at the Truckee Airport. This replaces the one at Northstar. The cost to run it will be shared by Truckee as that town makes a concerted effort to keep AIS from Donner Lake.

The other inspection stations are in Meyers, Alpine Meadows and Spooner summit.

One board member questioned whether the boating season might be a little lackluster this season because of the low lake level. Zabaglo said that was a concern last year as well and was unfunded, and that TRPA believes boaters will still be coming to Tahoe this summer.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

No gardening space – no problem

By Melinda Myers

Brighten up your patio, deck or front entrance with containers. They're an excellent way to add color, fragrance and beauty where plantable space is limited or non-existent.

Set a few containers on the front or back steps, in the corner of your deck or other location where they can be enjoyed. Try stacking and planting several containers to create a display

with greater vertical interest. Check the views when looking from inside the house out as well as when enjoying the space outdoors. Strategically place containers for the greatest viewing pleasure.

Save even more space by using railing planters. You can dress up the porch or deck by filling these planters with colorful flowers and edibles. Make sure they are sturdy and easy to install. Reduce time spent installing and maintaining with easy-to-install self-watering rail planters.



Railing planters filled with colorful combinations can add sparkle to balconies, decks and porches. Photo/Gardener's Supply Company

Don't limit yourself to flowers. Mix in a few edibles and bring some homegrown flavor to your outdoor entertaining. You and your guests will enjoy plucking a few mint leaves to flavor beverages, basil to top a slice of pizza or sprig of dill to top grilled fish.

Herbs not only add flavor to your meals, but texture and fragrance to container gardens. And the many new dwarf vegetable varieties are suited to containers. Their small size makes them easy to include and many have colorful fruit that is not only pretty, but delicious.

Add a few edible flowers like nasturtium and pansies. Dress up a plate of greens with edible flowers for a gourmet touch. Or freeze a few pansy flowers in ice cubes and add them to a glass of lemonade or sparkling water.

Include flowers like globe amaranth (*Gomphrena*), *Lisianthus*, and daisies that are great for cutting. You'll enjoy your garden inside and out throughout the season.

And don't forget to plant some flowers for the butterflies to enjoy. Zinnias, cosmos, and marigolds are just a few that are sure to brighten any space, while attracting butterflies to your landscape. *Salvia*, penstemon and flowering tobacco will help bring hummingbirds in close, so you'll have a better view.

So make this the year you select a container or two that best fits your space and gardening style. Fill it with a well-drained potting mix and combination of beautiful ornamental and edible plants to enjoy all season long. The additions are sure to enhance your landscape and keep your guests coming back for more.

Gardening expert, TV/radio host, author and columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written more than 20 gardening books.

U.S. home prices surge 13 times faster than wages

By Victoria Stilwell, BloombergBusiness

For most people, buying a home is no cheap venture. That's

especially the case when the growth in U.S. home prices is beating wage increases 13 to 1.

Wages climbed by 1.3 percent from the second quarter of 2012 to the second quarter of 2014, compared to a 17 percent increase in home prices around that time, according to a new report from RealtyTrac. The real-estate data provider used the Labor Department's weekly earnings data to measure wage growth, while home prices were derived from sales-deed data in December 2014 and compared to December 2012 on the hypothesis that a change in average wages would take at least six months to affect home prices.

Using localized earnings data, RealtyTrac also found that 76 percent of housing markets posted increases in home prices that exceeded the wage growth there during that time frame, led by the regions of Merced; Memphis; Santa Cruz; and Augusta, Ga. Others include the Detroit, Houston and Miami regions. (To be fair, some of these areas are still considered affordable and experienced massive price drops during the housing bust and recession.)

Read the whole story