

Strategies to save money during tax season

By Reid Abedeen

Millions of Americans face a challenge in meeting their budgets every month – not just financially, but also in their time budgets.

Knowledge is power and time is often money, but what if you don't have the time to empower yourself with knowledge? For many households, that often means losing out on thousands of dollars through tax deductions.

As a family man myself, I understand what it means to work hard to provide the best possible for my wife and children. Had I not worked in the financial sector for almost two decades, I might not have understood how to best troubleshoot my tax return, I sympathize.

Here are strategies that may be relevant for your family this tax season.

- **Take tax deductions for capital loss.** If your capital losses exceed your capital gains, the excess can be deducted on your tax return and used to reduce other income, such as wages, up to an annual limit of \$3,000, or \$1,500 if you are married filing separately. However, you may deduct capital losses only on investment property, not on property held for personal use.
- **Fund your retirement to the max.** You can contribute up to \$5,500 to an IRA in tax-year 2014, or \$6,500 if you are age 50 or older. Workers in the 25 percent tax bracket who contributed \$5,500 to an IRA would save \$1,375 on their 2014 tax bills. You'll want to check your eligibility and understand the deadline for the 2014 deduction. If you make a deposit between Jan. 1 and April 15, you need to tell the

financial institution which year the contribution is for.

- **Advisory fees are tax-deductible.** Don't feel like spending money to save and make money? There's a workaround. Before closing the door on the possibility, inquire with a financial expert. Most are happy to give a free initial consultation, and you don't have to be a millionaire to make it worth your while.

- **Gift assets to children.** You don't even have to file a gift tax return on an asset that's valued less than \$12,000, which is not taxable. If the fair market value of the gifted asset is more than \$12,000 per person per year, but less than \$1 million, there is the requirement of filing a gift tax return, but you won't be taxed. The gift still is not income taxable to the recipient.

- **Deduct a home-based office when used for your employer.** If space in your home is used exclusively and regularly for a trade, you can count that as a deductible. Calculate the square footage of your home office and divide the area of your office by the area of your house. If the percentage is 14 percent, for example, that represents the percentage of your total home expenses that can be allocated toward the home office deduction. For further questions, consult a professional.

You'll want to be very vigilant regarding these details of these deductions. For any questions, I seriously recommend consulting a professional."

Reid Abedeen is a partner at Safeguard Investment Advisory Group. As an investment advisor, Abedeen has helped retirees for nearly two decades with issues such as insurance, long-term care planning, financial services, asset protection and many other areas.

Poll: More Californians want mandatory water rationing

By Christopher Cadelago, Sacramento Bee

Amid stubborn drought conditions, more Californians are warming to the prospect of government-imposed mandatory water rationing, but a majority still favor the state's current approach of urging residents to voluntarily curtail their water use.

Support for rationing swelled to more than a third of voters in the latest statewide Field Poll, a rise of 7 percentage points since last spring. Support is greatest in the Bay Area and other parts of Northern California.

Meantime, an increasing number of voters think that the state is experiencing a severe water shortage. Ninety-four percent describe the situation as "serious," with nearly seven in 10 characterizing it as "extremely serious." To put that in perspective, when the state was in another long-term water shortage in 1977, far fewer voters (51 percent) described their feelings at the time as "extremely serious."

"You can see that as the seriousness of the situation seems to be expanding in the public's view, it's willing to start making more trade-offs in certain areas than it was willing to do before," said Mark DiCamillo, the director of the poll. "As the shortage continues, we'll see how far voters are willing to go."

Read the whole story

Reading could earn kids free burgers

The Douglas County Public Library is participating in the In-N-Out Burger Cover to Cover Club reading program starting March 7 and continuing through April 18.

Children ages 4-12 are eligible to receive certificates for a free In-N-Out hamburger or cheeseburger by reading books. Both branches of the library are participating in the program.

Fill out a file card at the library to enroll in the program. Each reader will earn an Achievement Award redeemable for an In-N-Out hamburger for every five books read at their reading level. Up to three certificates may be earned per child. Children too young to read on their own may have a parent read to them.

The Douglas County Public Library is located at 1625 Library Lane in Minden and 233 Warrior Way in Zephyr Cove.

Myths about Tahoe to be dispelled

David Antonucci will debunk the common myths and provide accurate answers to the most common questions about Lake Tahoe on March 24.

His talk – Fibs, Fakes and Falsehoods – Mistaken Tahoe – is an opportunity to gather correct and accurate information about Lake Tahoe.

The talk is at 6pm at the Tahoe Science Center in Incline Village.

It is co-sponsored by UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center and North Lake Tahoe Chamber/CVB/Resort Association. The happy hour mixer will run from 5-7pm.

Go online to register for the event.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- Five El Dorado wineries will host a wine and food experience on Memorial Day Weekend celebrating Rhone varietals grown in the rocky soils of El Dorado's Pleasant Valley. The wineries are Auriga, Holly's Hill, Miraflores, Narrow Gate and Sierra Vista. The event is May 23-24 from 11am-4pm. To buy tickets, to online.

- Graham Kent (South Tahoe High class of 1980) from the UNR Seismological Laboratory will give a presentation on Alert Tahoe on April 18 at 1pm at the South Lake Tahoe Library – 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd. Alert Tahoe is a one-of-a-kind, fire camera and multi-hazard tracking system that includes smoke investigation, prescribed fire oversight, wildfire tracking, Earthquake Early Warning, and monitoring of extreme weather events.

- Coyote Grill at Round Hill Square changed ownership this month and will become Casey's, an American cantina. Tom Gallatin of Zephyr Cove is the new owner.
 - Daffodil Hill opened Feb. 23; usual opening is mid-March. Call ahead to ensure is open – 209.296.7048.
 - Check out this video from the *New York Times* about 26 hours in Tahoe-Truckee.
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Adjunct faculty make case for equality

By Kathryn Reed

She wheels around what looks like an oversized briefcase. It's heavy. People ask why she does it. Her answer – it's her office.

This is Julie Ewing's reality. For 12 years she has been an adjunct faculty member in Lake Tahoe Community College's English Department. As such, she doesn't have an office to store things. No adjunct faculty member does. That means taking everything with her every day she teaches. Taking it home. Taking it from room to room.

Adjunct faculty throughout the United States on Feb. 25 brought their issues to light in various ways. At some schools they walked out in protest. At LTCC there was an hourlong assembly where nearly 100 people – mostly students – heard the issues that face these part-time instructors.

Most of these instructors have the same education as full-time faculty. But being part time means they get paid less. On

average they make \$25,000 a year. They don't have health benefits. They don't have contracts and there is no job security. With no offices, they can't have office hours for students.

At LTCC, the adjunct teaching non-credit ESL classes don't get paid for holidays or snow days.



Nearly 100 people listen
Feb. 25 at LTCC about the
plight of adjunct faculty.
Photo/LTn

These part-timers don't get to take sabbaticals every seven years for enrichment opportunities like the LTCC full-timers do. They don't get time to do research – at least not paid time. Ewing said she has never made \$25,000 a year. She was close one year. But that was the year she spent on the road working at schools here, in Reno and Incline Village.

For Maxine Alper, who has been an adjunct faculty member at LTCC since 1997, she is wondering how her rent will be paid in the fall. On Friday a full-time faculty member bumped her. Full-timers have first rights to a class. The loss in pay is equivalent to two-thirds of Alper's monthly rent.

It wasn't a woe-is-me pity party, but instead an informative session about the disparity between those who work full time as instructors and those who work part time and how this may be impacting students and the community at large.

“It damages student learning, faculty governance, and academic freedom. Each of these is an educational cost that institutions incur when they choose not to invest adequately in their instructional missions,” Scott Lukas said. He teaches anthropology and sociology at LTCC – full time.

Lukas was one of four presenters Wednesday. Joining him were Albert Ponce – full time political science professor, Alper and Ewing. Alper said adjunct at LTCC make one-quarter to one-third what full-time faculty make.

Colleges use adjunct faculty because they can be paid less and benefits are not included.

At LTCC in fall 2014 and winter 2015 there were 158 contracts for adjunct faculty. Both quarters there were 39 full-time faculty members on the payroll.

Ponce called it a two-tiered system.

“We need to delink from this neo-liberal logic. We need to follow a model other than this one,” Ponce said.

It was acknowledged that much of the problem is at the state level where funding decisions are made and that people should be addressing lawmakers.

Jessica Sota, who is part of the LTCC student senate, said students need to be more involved and aware of who is teaching them.

LTCC students were in Sacramento on Feb. 25 voicing their concerns. They will be returning Monday for the annual March in March, at which time they will also be speaking with individual lawmakers about concerns at community colleges.

Opinion: California Republicans – evolve or die

By Brian O’Leary Bennett, Los Angeles Times

Delegates to the California Republican Party state convention that begins Friday in Sacramento should be asking themselves just two questions: Why can’t they find an electable U.S. Senate candidate and how do they revive a state party that’s become irrelevant?

This state went from red to blue because the California GOP lost its Reaganesque compass and, alarmingly, a willingness to discern between moral absolutes and generational evolution. Ronald Reagan brilliantly never let himself be the captive or defender of the status quo or party orthodoxy. He embraced broad principles and found ways to solve problems without selling out.

Voters, popes, presidents and even some elders have evolved. The state party has not and seems to be perversely proud of it. Political parties are meant to win elections, not be martyrs to lost causes of bygone eras.

Read the whole story

The differences with Williams and O’Reilly

By Jonathan Mahler and Emily Steel, New York Times

Hours after the news broke that Brian Williams had

misrepresented his account of a helicopter trip in Iraq, he issued an on-air apology. NBC News started an investigation, and within days had suspended Williams, calling his actions “wrong and completely inappropriate.”

When the magazine *Mother Jones* reported that Bill O'Reilly had engaged in self-aggrandizing rhetoric about his coverage of the Falklands war, he called one of the authors of the article “an irresponsible guttersnipe” and used his nightly show to fight back against his accusers. His bosses at Fox News, including the chief executive, Roger Ailes, rallied to his defense.

Fox's handling of the controversy says a lot about the network. It also says a lot about its most visible star, a man who perhaps more than any other has defined the parameters and tenor of Fox News, in the process ushering in a new era of no-holds-barred, intentionally divisive news coverage.

Since dethroning CNN's Larry King as the king of cable news almost 14 years ago, O'Reilly has helped transform a start-up news channel into a financial juggernaut, with estimated annual profits of more than \$1 billion. He and Fox News have risen not on the back of big interviews or high-impact investigations but on the pugnacious brand of conservatism personified by O'Reilly.

There are other differences between the two controversies. The incident at the center of O'Reilly's occurred more than 30 years ago; Mr. Williams's happened in 2003. And his accusers are journalists, not military veterans as they were in Williams's case. But the most meaningful point of distinction – and the reason O'Reilly's job is almost certainly safe – is that he is not an anchorman, with all of the cultural weight that title carries. He's a professional provocateur.

The accusations against O'Reilly, which have since been substantiated by other journalists in Argentina at the time,

have played neatly into the network's narrative of being the conservative outlier in an industry dominated by liberals.

Read the whole story

Gun injuries declared public health emergency

By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

Seven medical specialty societies, the American Bar Association and the American Public Health Association on Monday joined forces to declare gun-related injuries, which annually kill an average of 32,000 Americans and harm nearly twice that number, “a public health crisis” that should be studied and solved “free of political influence or restriction.”

The professional societies jointly issued a “call to action,” and declared their collective backing for universal background checks, a ban on military-style assault weapons and large capacity magazines, more federal support for gun-injury research, and an end to laws that would punish physicians who discuss the safety of gun ownership with their patients.

They also called for better and more timely care for those with mental illness and substance abuse problems, and urged lawmakers not to stigmatize those patients or discourage them from seeking care in drafting laws to keep guns out of the hands of some.

Read the whole story

Drought could mean a bad West Nile year

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

Abbey Murphy never felt the mosquito bite that eventually swelled her brain and left her unable to walk for weeks.

"I had uncontrollable vomiting, severe migraines," said Murphy, a sophomore at UC Berkeley. "I couldn't get up to get breakfast."

Murphy eventually recovered from her West Nile virus infection, though it took months. She was one of roughly 800 Californians infected last year during the worst West Nile outbreak in a decade, new state figures show.

Experts say the ongoing drought was largely to blame and predict another bad year in 2015.

Read the whole story