

Inexperienced lawmakers take over Calif.

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

Like fire clearing an old-growth forest, last week's election elevated a class of freshman lawmakers who will join last cycle's surge of first-term legislators to form one of the least experienced Legislatures in years.

When the 2015-16 Legislature convenes later this year, a majority of lawmakers – 72 out of 120 – will arrive with at most two years of state-level experience. The critical mass of relative newcomers reflects a shift in California's term limit rules with dual consequences: While the incoming class of lawmakers is sparse on state legislative experience, it could also remain largely intact for a decade.

"I think it's probably the most profound change in the Legislature as an institution since term limits passed," said David Leshner, director of government affairs at the Public Policy Institute of California.

Critics of California's term limits have long warned of unintended consequences. Voters hoped to make the Legislature more accountable and to loosen the grip of long-serving politicians. But in the process, skeptics say, voters deprived their representatives of the experience and policy fluency that comes from years steeped in lawmaking.

Read the whole story

State fines Tahoe Keys Marina

Tahoe Keys Marina received five citations from the state Department of Industrial Relations.

Inspectors had been at the South Lake Tahoe marina in April. The state Occupational Safety and Health Administration opens an investigation when an employee files a complaint, there has been an injury or a complaint has been filed. Cal-OSHA is designed to protect workers from health and safety hazards in the workplace.

“The penalties were for things like no injury and illness prevention plan, the way they stored cylinders, HAZMAT issues and no crane wheel guards,” Jules Bernstein with DIR told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The marina was fined \$1,310.

The state also issued 13 information memos altering management that potential exposure exists if employees come in contact with those issues. These are issued when the state can't prove employee exposure at the time of inspection, Bernstein explained.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Is snowboarding dying?

By Joe Lindsey, Men's Journal

When sporting goods giant Nike quietly announced it was

dropping snowboarding, it seemed like yet more confirmation of the sport's downward trend that got so much press last year. After all, participation peaked a decade ago, and has declined 31 percent since, according to figures from the National Sporting Goods Association.

So is snowboarding, credited with reviving snowsports in the 20th century, cooked for the 21st?

Industry sources understandably claim the concerns are overblown. Snowboard icon Jake Burton spoke to that feeling last month in an interview with action-sports industry website Shop-Eat-Surf, saying, "A lot of haters jumped on it as an opportunity to take a shot at snowboarding and I think a lot of it was really misguided."

Pro boarder Jeremy Jones of Truckee agrees, but also admits boarders have to face the numbers. "There's no denying that there are fewer boarders out there than there used to be; that's the reality of the sport," says Jones, who is also founder of Jones Snowboards. The question then is what's driving the decline and whether it will continue.

Snowboarding faces several obstacles. It's almost impossible to learn the sport without falling a bunch, which isn't true of skiing. And for various reasons – including equipment availability and basic physical development skills like balance – most resorts' lesson programs start as young as three years old for skiing but only five or older for snowboarding.

Read the whole story

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Gait analysis may help runners

By Amanda MacMillan, Outside

A full gait analysis is definitely more informative than whatever you've heard from your shoe store or a well-meaning jogger in the park, but it'll cost you—usually more than \$200. Here's what to consider before you shell out.

“There's an old idiom in sports medicine: If it's not broken, don't fix it,” says Lewis “The Running Doc” Maharam, MD, past president of the New York chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine and former medical director of the New York City marathon. “If you're happy with your times and you're not getting injured or experiencing pain, there's no need.”

If you are broken—meaning you're chronically injured, or pain is affecting your running form—Maharam recommends seeing a sports medicine doctor. If that doctor says your problem could be gait-related, then it's time to have an analysis done, either by that doctor or by someone he or she recommends.

[Read the whole story](#)

Record high set in S. Lake

Tahoe; rain midweek

In a week's timespan the Lake Tahoe Basin will experience a record high and fresh snow.

On Nov. 9, South Lake Tahoe had a high of 69 degrees, which broke the record by six degrees. The previous record was set in 2003 and 1995.

Marvin Boyd, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno, said it was unusual for a record to be broken so substantially, adding normally it's only by a degree or two.

Reno also set a record on Sunday with a high of 76 degrees. The old record of 73 had been set in 1990, 1941 and 1913.

A high pressure system off the California coast is bringing the unseasonably warm weather to the region.

"What made the high pressure so big is there was a massive low pressure in the Gulf of Alaska," Boyd told *Lake Tahoe News*. "When you get those big pressure changes like that it affects everything downstream."

Temperatures will return to normal this week, with highs in the 50s in Tahoe.

A small system will move through the area on Wednesday, but Boyd said snow should only be falling at the higher peaks. It will be rain at lake level.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Last winter impacting lodging reservations

Some mountain lodging establishments are looking at a better winter even though the ski season has barely started.

The record-breaking summer for occupancy and revenue among Western mountain resorts is carrying into the winter booking season, according to DestiMetrics, a Denver-based organization that tracks mountain lodging bookings at 19 Western mountain resorts in six states.

Winter bookings for November through March are showing an aggregated 7.4 percent gain in occupancy for the upcoming season compared to the same time last year with increases appearing in the first five months of the ski season that data is available. Aggregated revenue is also strong with a 15.5 percent increase for the first five months of the 2014-15 season.

Snow conditions from last season are having a distinctly different impact on bookings for Colorado-Utah-Wyoming compared to California-Nevada-Oregon. While the Rocky Mountain resorts are tracking 8.9 percent higher in occupancy with a 16.4 percent increase in overall revenues, the Far West resorts are experiencing the opposite effect. Their aggregated occupancy was down 6.5 percent and related revenues are down 7.7 percent.

The briefing concluded that while skiers and riders are loyal and committed mountain travelers even in tough economic times, weather and global geopolitics will require close monitoring this season.

“At this point, we’re seeing skiers and riders taking up right where they left off last year because of snow equity,” says Ralf Garrison, director of DestiMetrics. “While this is

working to the benefit of destinations in the Rockies, it is posing a challenge to Far West mountain resorts where negative snow equity is dragging booking pace. However, a major break in the drought or a few good early season snowstorms would be a powerful antidote for what ails them.”

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Tina

Tina is a friendly cat who likes to play. She is just 1-year-old, and would love to cuddle with you on a cold winter night. She would be happiest as the only kitty in your household.

Tina’s adoption fee has been sponsored.

Tina is spayed, microchipped, tested for FIV, and vaccinated. She 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

Controversy surrounds future EDC courthouse

By Joann Eisenbrandt

PLACERVILLE – Plans to build a spacious new El Dorado County courthouse in Placerville by fall 2020 are moving forward, but not without allegations of backdoor politics, favoritism and manipulation of the system for personal financial gain.

On Nov. 6, the Judicial Council had a public meeting in Placerville to explain the draft environmental impact report.

Laura Sainz with Environmental Compliance and Sustainability, Office of Real Estate and Facilities Management explained the areas in which significant environmental issues were found, including aesthetics, noise, biological and cultural resources and transportation and circulation, and how these would be mitigated to “less than significant.”

The sparsely attended meeting was composed mainly of government agency representatives, but local resident Lisa Johnson expressed the sentiments of some residents living nearby the project.

“I just recently purchased my home here because of the rural quality of life. Why was this project not disclosed to me at that time? There is only one road in and out of where I live

onto Forni (Road)," she said.

She was also concerned about years of potential construction noise.

"I hear the (El Dorado County) fairgrounds like they're in my backyard. And this will be on my side (of Highway 50)," Johnson said.

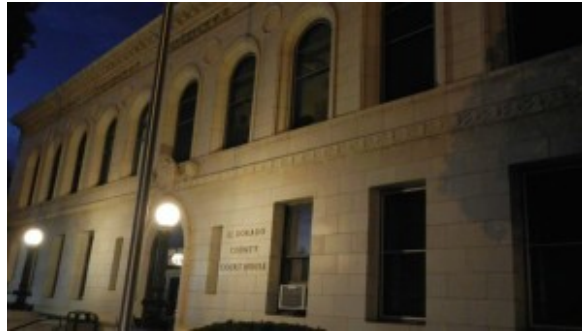
Sainz responded that no project has formally been approved yet, so notification was not possible.

John Koster, project manager with the Office of Court Construction and Management, noted that the quietest construction techniques would be used; hopefully without any blasting or pile driving, and that the first six months of construction will be the noisiest.

An additional concern is the fate of the historic Main Street courthouse once operations cease there. In a 2012 letter, Placerville resident Kathleen Newell noted the "adverse economic effects on Historic Downtown Placerville after the courthouse is moved to another location. Specifically with the issue of creating a blighted Main Street due to businesses vacating downtown and relocating closer to the new site."

The courthouse is more than 100 years old and appears eligible for listing in the California Register, making it an "historical resource." In September, the city and county agreed to the formation of a Blue Ribbon committee of city and county stakeholders to explore potential reuses of the Main Street courthouse.

"It's the heart and soul of downtown," Placerville City Councilmember Wendy Thomas said at the Thursday public meeting. "It's a huge issue."



The old courthouse in Placerville needs replacing.
Photo/LTN

Slow process

The Placerville courthouse project has been in the planning stages since 2008. It will be funded and managed by the state, not the county, as the courts are a separate branch of government, independent of the county's administrative structure. This funding is not from the state's General Fund, but from statewide increases in court user fees authorized in 2008 by Senate Bill 1407. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), the staff agency of the Judicial Council of California, is responsible for site acquisition, design and construction of this and other critical-need courthouse projects throughout California.

Severe cuts to the judicial branch's budget in 2011-12 delayed funding for the project, but in February 2013 the Court Facilities Working Group recommended the Judicial Council proceed with funding this and other high priority courthouse projects. The 88,000-square-foot facility would be located on property owned by El Dorado County adjacent to the existing county jail just off Forni Road in Placerville. It would also require purchase by the county of 5.2 acres from an adjoining parcel owned by John Briggs, father of El Dorado County Supervisor Ron Briggs, grandfather of Placerville Planning Commissioner Brian Briggs and father-in-law of Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey. The county entered into an Option Agreement with the Briggs Family Trust for this purchase in

2012. It was extended once and now expires on Dec. 18.

Some claim this is more than a happy coincidence for the Briggs family.

Currently, Superior Court services are divided between two locations – the historic Placerville Courthouse on Main Street that was built in 1913, and a portion of Building C in the county Government Center. Both buildings fail to meet current standards for security and other services. The project would consolidate operations in one secure facility capable of handling all case types, providing secure parking for judges as well as 240 on-site parking spaces for staff, visitors and jurors.

The technical part of this process is straightforward. In March 2011, the state Public Works board approved the selection of a potential courthouse site. The Judicial Council, the policymaking body of the California courts and the lead agency for the project, circulated a notice of preparation of a draft environmental impact report in April 2012. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires lead agencies for projects to consider potential environmental impacts, determine if any are significant, and propose mitigation measures for those impacts.

The DEIR was prepared, and a 45-day circulation period, during which agencies and individuals can comment on the report ends Dec. 1.

Controversy lingers

The issues not addressed at last week's meeting are the allegations that this was not necessarily the best or only site and its selection is tinged with political cronyism. El Dorado County Taxpayers Group sent a letter to the Judicial Council in July 2013, pointing to, "the local corruption going on regarding the proposed new court house project in Placerville," and asking that the state not fund the site. The

letter alleges Supervisor Briggs had been pushing this site selection behind the scenes for his family's gain.

The letter says, "The remaining six project parcels and other nearby abutting parcels are held in Ron Briggs and his son's name will not be required to pay for their normal proportional and equitable share of reimbursement of the heavy master infrastructure improvement costs and off-site improvements"

The letter also notes the group asked the El Dorado County Grand Jury to investigate the issue twice but, "The grand jury was abruptly disbanded in February 2013 " by El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey, Ron Briggs' brother-in-law.

In September 2013, Curt Child, chief operating officer of the Judicial Council, sent a letter to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and then El Dorado County Counsel Ed Knapp stating the Taxpayer's Group's concerns warranted treatment of the site as "controversial," and requested a response from the county explaining "what action the Board will take to address these concerns."

In a January letter to Presiding Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury, Steven Jahr, administrative director of the courts, indicated that El Dorado County counsel had "provided written documentation to address the concerns raised by the Taxpayers Group," concluding that the site was no longer considered controversial and the project would continue. *Lake Tahoe News* was unable to obtain a copy of that documentation.

After the DEIR comment period ends Dec. 1, the Judicial Council will prepare written responses to all comments received, circulate the report for 10 days and then decide whether to certify it. Once it's certified, El Dorado County would likely purchase the private parcel from the Briggs Family Trust, and the Judicial Council would then purchase the entire project site from the county. Bids for construction and other project services would then begin, with estimated

completion now set for fall 2020.

Editorial: Plastic bag makers in denial

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Oct. 17, 2014, Fresno Bee.*

It's a true if gruesome fact that chickens that have been relieved of their heads sometimes run around for a while before they quite realize their irreversible predicament.

That appears to be happening to the plastic bag industry. It would explain why it hasn't figured out that the ubiquitous single-use plastic grocery bag has just suffered a killing blow. Its days are numbered.

The very day the governor signed a statewide ban on single-use grocery bags, Sept. 30, the industry filed papers to start the process for a referendum. If it qualifies by gathering enough signatures, it will delay the July 2015 implementation of the ban until it can be decided by voters during the November 2016 election.

Then, the industry will spend many millions of dollars to try to trick Californians into thinking that it's a good thing that billions of single-use plastic bags are clogging up our storm drains and rivers, tangling up in our native flora, filling up the oceans and doing God only knows what other environmental mischief.

Read the whole story

Court blames Northstar for flooding neighbors

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Truckee-area homeowners say an opinion by a California appeals court vindicates their longtime claims that the Northstar Village resort development is responsible for flood damage in their condominium community.

The claims date back to 2004 when developers of Northstar Village built a retention pond meant to capture storm runoff as part of an expansion of the winter resort.

But the project instead dug into and disrupted groundwater in the area resulting in changes to the water table that flooded the Aspen Grove condominium community, killing historic trees and causing damage to building foundations.

[Read the whole story](#)