Proposed NV Energy rate increase raises concern

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Consumer advocates are concerned about a proposed rate filing from NV Energy because it would raise the fixed monthly service charge by 31 percent.

The request was added this month to a June rate filing with the Nevada Public Utilities Commission. The fixed monthly charge would increase for all residential non-solar customers from the $12.75 to $16.76.

“To be clear, NV Energy is asking for no additional revenue for its core operations,” the utility said in a statement. “As directed by a Public Utilities Commission of Nevada order issued last Friday, NV Energy is requesting in its general rate review filing to change how costs are allocated amongst different customers due to the implementation of new private solar generation policies enacted in the most recent legislative session.”

Read the whole story

Money Matters: Keep stock market performance in perspective

By Rick Gross

The stock market has enjoyed an extended period of strong performance that dates back to the end of the last bear market in early 2009. While stock market performance can be measured in myriad ways, it’s the Dow Jones Industrial Average that has surpassed several 1,000-point milestones so far in 2017: The Dow first topped the 20,000 mark on Jan. 25, before passing the 21,000 level just over a month later. Then in early August, it broke through the 22,000 mark. As August ended, the seemingly smooth sailing market rally hit a few bumps.


Rick Gross

While no one can predict the future, market strategists and analysts are suggesting that we could see some additional market volatility in the months ahead. So how do investors keep all of this in perspective while trying to manage their portfolios?

Here are three points to keep in mind as you follow the stock market:

1. The real value of each underlying move in the Dow index diminishes as the market rises

While the Dow Jones average is often used to provide a general reading on the state of the market, the index includes the 30 largest company stocks. When the Dow Jones Industrial Average climbs higher, the actual impact of each change in its price is reduced. For example, when the Dow broke through the 2,000 barrier in January 1987, it marked a notable 100 percent increase from the 1,000 level first reached nearly 15 years earlier. By contrast, when the Dow moved 1,000 points to reach

22,000 between March and August of this year, it represented just a 4.5 percent increase.

The same perspective applies to day-to-day market moves. The stock market makes headlines when the Dow Jones average moves up or down 100 points in a day. 20 years ago, when the Dow stood at about 8,000, a 100-point move in the market represented a 1.25 percent change in value. Today, a 100-point move is equivalent to less than a half-percent change. In short, 100 points in the Dow Jones Industrial Average doesn’t mean what it used to.

2. Markets can retreat from record levels

Just as stock markets can rise, history shows they can fall as well. In spring 1999, the index reached the 11,000 mark. It moved higher for a few more months before a severe bear market occurred. The Dow dropped to 7,286 in 2002 before returning to the 11,000 level in 2006. Similarly, the market topped 14,000 in 2007 just before the start of another severe bear market. It fell and did not reach that level again until early 2013.

No one can guarantee what will happen to stocks over the next week, month or year. Stock markets are unpredictable in the short-term, as fluctuations are part of the market’s behavior over time. Price swings are a reality for stock investors, but over time, stocks historically have recovered.

3. Indexes may not be representative of your portfolio

While indexes often generate headlines, their performance may not be an appropriate reflection of your own portfolio. Emotions run high when there are market swings, but don’t let fear get the best of you. Stock market swings can act as a reminder to review your financial position, making sure that your asset mix matches your long-term goals. Remember that the most important factors of your investment success are your goals, the time you have to invest, your risk tolerance, and your commitment to save.

Reacting to the stock market or speculation about events that may happen in the future might make for interesting dinner conversation, but remember that it's not a proven investing strategy.

If you'd like help aligning your financial plan with your feelings on the stock market, consider working with a financial advisor you trust. A financial professional can provide an objective perspective and help you stay focused on your financial goals.

Rick Gross is a financial advisor and private wealth advisor with Ameriprise Financial Services Inc. in South Lake Tahoe.

State fines Kirkwood $750K in contamination case

By Susan Wood

Kirkwood Mountain Resort has agreed to pay more than $750,000 to settle a wetlands contamination case brought against the ski resort by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The water board found through a complaint in April 2016 that the ski resort used asphalt grindings "for dust mitigation" in its unpaved parking lots.

The approximately 3-inch petroleum-based grindings measuring up to 1,840 cubic yards collectively were spread into sensitive zones in the Timber Creek, Nordic Center and Red Cliffs areas – which could have jeopardized Kirkwood Creek. Although petroleum hydrocarbons were found in samples from the creek, no fish kills were reported in the agencies' inspections.

The following month after the complaint was filed the state issued a notice of violation to the "Heavenly Valley Limited Partnership dba Kirkwood Mountain Resort" for violating water codes. Kirkwood Creek, a tributary to Caples Creek, flows to the South Fork of the American River upstream of Placerville.

The flows may affect the municipal water supply, along with hydropower generation, water recreation and wildlife habitat downstream.

The slope north of the cross country ski area parking lot covered with asphalt grindings blown
during snow removal operations in 2015-16. Photo/Provided

As recently as **last October**, parent company Vail Resorts may have been facing a $4.44 million fine in civil liabilities for a violation of the Federal Clean Water Act and the California Water Code. Ski resort staff worked last fall until winter hit to clean up the sensitive wetlands. Last season's phenomenal snowfall delayed further cleanup.

The penalty was reduced to $754,732 as a result of the ski resort's progress. There's more to do in five areas: Nordic Center, Red Cliffs Lodge, Kirkwood Meadows Drive, chair 9's Timber Creek lot and Kirkwood Creek near Snowkirk's chair 1 – which awaits the Army Corps of Engineers to supervise that part of the work plan.

The proposed settlement signed off by the water board last week is due to become final in 30 days following a public comment period.

Water board Assistant Executive Officer Andrew Altevogt told *Lake Tahoe News* comments would be taken into account when the settlement becomes final.

"They've done most of the work required," Altevogt said of the administrative order signed off a few weeks ago by Kirkwood General Manager Doug Pierini, who came on board a few months after the complaint was made.

"I don't think they knowingly spread this stuff around (the streambed)," Altevogt said, adding it was the first time he had encountered a ski resort subject to this type of violation. Kirkwood has pledged to continue to work closely with the agencies involved to "remediate impacts to the environment" as well as conduct ongoing site assessments of the areas affected.

"Notably, third party test samplings that the agencies asked us to conduct did not demonstrate any impact on the surrounding groundwater," Kirkwood said in a statement issued through spokesman Kevin Cooper.

"Kirkwood Mountain Resort takes seriously our role in responsibly stewarding the environment and the public land in which we are entrusted. We have already altered our snow removal procedures and will seek opportunities for our employees and contractors to learn from this," the statement reads.

The contamination case, which in one area was referred to as "a black snow field," has served as a black eye to Vail Resorts – a giant in the ski industry.

Opinion: The truth about vacation rentals

By Jim Morris

I read with great interest Mayor Austin Sass's recent column of how he and Wendy David have been living, sleeping, and eating the VHR issue for over two years. I internalized these words and reflected how we, as responsible vacation home rental managers, have been dealing with inept City Councils and city management for over 12 years.

Jim Morris

Back in 2003, our industry was blindsided by an ordinance that was drafted and conceived by a half-dozen locals and a city attorney meeting in secret ready to set upon our legitimate tourism industry. We immediately organized and, together with prominent business owners and chamber members, sought input to legislation which could have destroyed our livelihoods. After months of stakeholder meetings, an ordinance was crafted which attempted to placate the anti-VHR crowd and allowed our commerce to continue. A permit fee of $50 per year was required to cover administration of the ordinance. Now it is as much as $800 in many cases. Fines have gone from $250 to $1,000 under the current proposal.

For years our industry requested that citations be given to any disrespectful tenants who have broken the rules of the ordinance, but the city and the police department said they couldn't unless the reporting party would sign a complaint as a police officer could not have his peace disturbed. We did not feel that it was fair to a home owner/management company to penalize them when they had used "best efforts" to prevent unruly behavior by the renters. Finally, after 10 years, the city figured out a way to cite the tenants, but they were still intent on punishing the owners even though they have obtained proof in writing that the guests were informed of the rules about city regulations.

The city police department never did take the ordinance seriously for over 10 years as they didn't even do the basics in informing the owners or management companies of unruly tenant behavior. In the numerous rewriting of the VHR ordinances, there was never a year reported by the city that VHR complaints exceeded 200 per year. This is an extremely low figure as over 20,000 calls per year are received by police dispatch. The latest number reported by the police department indicates that only 33 citations were given in the previous 13 months involving verified VHR violations.

Mayor Sass and other council members agreed to a "socio-economic study" to assess the seriousness of the problem at the urging of the VHR industry. The report came out this spring resulting in a “made as instructed” report by the city. It was seriously flawed as the consultants failed to perform the economic study due to “their inability to obtain reliable statistics” as quoted by the consultants. The data used in their study on reported violations was in error by 400 percent based on a computer program glitch created by the city administration. Verified noise complaints per year are 2 percent of the total vacation rentals, approximately 1,500 total rentals in the city.

The mayor, city manager and city attorney are totally into their genius mentalities as they have discovered the Googling art of finding ordinances created by “similar” cities such as Santa Monica, San Diego, etc. They are now trying to intimidate our two newest council members into approving the knee-jerk proposals suggested by any member of the public who has an opinion. They include occupancy restrictions from 25 percent to 50 percent without any analysis to actual citations and disturbance complaints. A saturation model was proposed without any study of the actual geography involved. There was no discussion of the crazy sensitivity of neighbors who are disturbed by the sound of suitcase wheels on the sidewalk.

The current city manager, mayor and pro-tem mayor want to create a verdict before any trial has occurred. They want to deny permits to any property owner who has never been given a chance to manage his or her vacation rental by imposing a moratorium on future permits. They also want the denial of permits to the unfortunate owner who happens to be within 250 feet of an existing permitted rental.

The city administration raised permit fees by $500,000 to add two community service officers to the police department and in more than two years we are only able to hire one individual to handle less than four calls per week year-round.

The vacation rental industry provides $3,500,000 per year to the General Fund of the city. The city is already in a deficit due to mismanagement of retirement funds and exorbitant benefits provided by prior councils. Don't you think the council has an obligation to know the economic impacts of serious restrictions in one of the only growth industries in the city? Again, we ask the question, "Who owns the all year playground?" Maybe it is the citizens of the world and not the few locals that accumulated enough money to buy a piece of the lake and keep it all to themselves.

Jim Morris is a 30-year resident and president of Lake Tahoe Accommodations, a company producing 10 percent of the total VHR transient occupancy taxes to the city and managing 80 city properties without a VHR fine in 14 years.

P.S. – Mayor Sass has said that there is a group ready to put this issue on the ballot and if this happens then it will get very ugly. I have more confidence in the level headed citizens of South Lake Tahoe than I have in the misguided views of two council members. We don't believe that an election would destroy one of our greatest tourism attractions. I say "bring it on" as the VHR detractors will never accept any compromise until they get their chance to destroy our legitimate industry at the ballot box.

Audit: Calif. schools not prepared for gun violence

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

Despite the risk posed to students and staff, many California schools fail to include active shooter scenarios in state-required safety plans, according to a new audit.

Schools and colleges were the second-most common location for shooting incidents from 2000 to 2015. California law, though, does not mandate that school safety plans address the issue, such as by creating procedures for lockdowns or evacuations.

Last week's report by the Bureau of State Audits highlighted lax oversight of plan preparation by state and local officials. In some cases, the audit found, schools repeatedly filed the same plans year after year while some submitted none at all.

Read the whole story

Liberty hosting solar workshop in SLT

Liberty Utilities is hosting a free solar for homeowners and small businesses workshop to provide information on solar energy as well as its solar incentive program.

It will be Sept. 23, 1-2pm at the South Lake Tahoe Library on Rufus Allen Boulevard.

Utility representatives will be available to discuss various aspects of installing and using solar energy for residential and small business facilities. Anyone may attend, but only Liberty Utilities customers are eligible to apply for the utility's program that provides cash incentives to offset the cost of installing solar panels on home or small business; schools within Liberty's service territory are also eligible.

Although reservations are not required, interested individuals are encouraged to arrive early as seating space may be limited.

NDOT close to resolving stormwater runoff violations

By Art Marroquin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The Nevada Department of Transportation is abiding by the terms of a federal consent decree aimed at resolving stormwater runoff violations, with only one unfulfilled requirement that must be met by the end of this year, officials said Monday.

A comprehensive stormwater management plan must be completed by Dec. 31 in order to fully comply with a settlement reached last year with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said David Gaskin, head of NDOT's Stormwater Management Program.

EPA spokeswoman Margot Perez-Sullivan confirmed Monday that NDOT "fully complied" with the consent decree and the two agencies are working together to fulfill the final stipulation.

Read the whole story

Food-themed road trip in

Nevada

Lake Tahoe is featured in a new food-themed road trip itinerary through Northern Nevada developed by TravelNevada and Reno Bites. The food event is Oct. 9-15.

The itinerary focuses on locally owned restaurants in Reno, Fallon, Carson City, Carson Valley, Stateline and Incline Village, along with recreational and touristy activities in those communities.

Go **online** to see the itinerary. Click on the "Featured Itineraries" link and scroll through to the Reno Bites Road Trip itinerary.

People who visit the communities on the itinerary and post pictures of their restaurant meals in those communities with the hashtags #RenoBitesRoadTrip, #DFMI and #TravelNevada will be entered into a drawing.

Multiple accidents bring I-80 to standstill

Wrecks litter Interstate 80 on Sept. 12. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Motorists going west on Interstate 80 this afternoon in the Sierra are not moving because of multiple accidents.

Hail and heavy rain have caused numerous vehicles to spin out, including a big-rig that jackknifed at Cisco Grove at about 1pm Sept. 12.

Westbound I-80 is closed at Rainbow because of a crash. Crews are hoping it will be reopened just after 3pm.

According the California Highway Patrol, the hail storm in the Gold Run area led to the collisions. It is not known if there is just property damage or when the entire stretch of highway will be open.

Thunderstorms are in the forecast for this area as well as the entire Tahoe-Truckee region for the rest of Tuesday.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Lawsuit challenges sale of Nev. oil and gas leases

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Two environmental groups on Monday filed a lawsuit challenging the Bureau of Land Management's June sale of oil and gas leases in Northern Nevada.

On June 14, the BLM offered nearly 200,000 acres of public lands in Nevada's Battle Mountain district for fossil fuel development, including hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking.

The lawsuit filed in Las Vegas by the Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club argues the BLM failed to consider the potential consequences of oil drilling in the area, from contamination of critical desert water sources to emission of climate-altering greenhouse gases.

Read the whole story