Poll: Californians put high priority on environment

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

As California emerges as a force on climate change and a counterweight to President Donald Trump, residents of the green-minded state widely support environmental actions taken by leaders in Sacramento, according to a survey released Wednesday.

Fifty-one percent of California adults approve of the way Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature are handling environmental issues, the Public Policy Institute of California survey shows, even as state climate policies threaten to raise gasoline and electricity prices.

According to the survey, approval for Brown's handling of the environment is up 16 points since he took office in 2011, while the state Senate and Assembly have seen a 20-point spike in their approval over the same period. Just 28 percent of people frown on Brown's environmental performance, while only 33 percent disapprove of the Legislature's record.

Read the whole story

A first — Burning Man 'man' being built in Reno

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

Inside a 1940s bottling factory in the Biggest Little City, a man is being built.

He’s going to be 40 feet tall, made of wood and he’ll be a giant pile of ashes in a month.

Although Burning Man, the annual arts ballyhoo scheduled for Aug. 27 to Sept. 4, is based out of San Francisco, the most important component of Black Rock City is being puzzled together in Reno for the first time ever.

For the past two and a half months, the brick and glass bottling plant built in 1940 as an expansion to the long-shuttered Reno Brewing Co. has housed the construction of Burning Man’s central effigy.

Read the whole story

Man drowns at Sand Harbor

A man swimming at Sand Harbor on Saturday drowned.

He had been swimming near the rocks. Lifeguards quickly pulled him out of the water on July 29 at about 5pm, but life-saving measures were not successful. He was taken to the hospital in Incline Village where he died.

His name, age and hometown were not immediately available. Officers said they believe he was in his late 20s.

“People need to use caution. The water is still very cold,” Washoe County sheriff’s spokesman Bob Harmon told *Lake Tahoe News.*

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

· David Young of Barton Cardiology will give a free lecture on supplements and cardiovascular disease, including information about CoQ10, fish oils, vitamin D, and calcium supplementation. The talk is Aug. 2, 6-7pm in the board room at Lake Tahoe Community College.

· Cemetery Gin won a Silver Award at the San Francisco 2017 Worlds Spirits Competition. Cemetery Gin is 100 percent made and produced in Nevada. The spirt is distilled and bottled by Frey Ranch of Fallon and distributed to Virginia City local watering holes along with retail outlets throughout Northern Nevada through Southern Wine and Spirits.

· Kylie Shepherd is Douglas County Sheriff’s Office’s newest deputy. She grew up in Lyon County, and attended Western Nevada College where she earned AA degrees in applied science in criminal justice. She will be assigned to the jail division.

· On Aug. 23 from 9am-noon there will be informational meeting regarding tetrachloroethylene (PCE) contamination near the Y. The Lahontan Water Board meets at 971 Silver Dollar Ave., South Lake Tahoe.

· Incline Village’s Alibi Ale Works now has a location in downtown Truckee. This location includes a kitchen and stage.

Hot Tahoe weather may break records

It might be necessary to give flowers extra water this week as temps soar. Photo/LTN

By Lake Tahoe News

Hot, hot, hot. That’s the forecast for Lake Tahoe.

“For the end of July and early August we are definitely going to be flirting with near record temperatures,” Evan LaGuardia, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Temperatures are forecast to reach the 90s in parts of the Lake Tahoe Basin early this week, with Reno topping the century mark. It’s possible record high temps could fall throughout the region.

A high pressure system sitting over the area is responsible for the hot weather. The stable air and lack of wind will mean hot weather for a few days.

Mid-week there could be a break. It all depends on where the high pressure goes. Afternoon thunderstorms are in the forecast for now for later in the week, but the Weather Service said the confidence in those developing is low.

The problem with thunderstorms is they come with lightning, making for dangerous fire conditions.

Lightning sparked hundreds of fires of various sizes throughout Northern California and Northern Nevada in the last week.

Opinion: The impact of Sears on the American economy

By Vicki Howard

The lifetime of Sears has spanned, and embodied, the rise of modern American consumer culture. The 130-year-old mass merchandiser that was once the largest retailer in the United States is part of the fabric of American society.

From its start as a 19th-century mail-order firm, to its heyday on Main Street and in suburban malls, and from its late 20th-century reorientation toward credit and financial products to its attempted return to its original retail identity, Sears has mirrored the ups and downs of the American economy. It was a distribution arm of industrial America. It drove the suburbanizing wedge of postwar shopping malls. It helped atomize the industrial economy through manufacturer outsourcing in the 1970s and 1980s. It played a key role in the diffusion of mass consumer culture and commercial values. For better and for worse, Sears is a symbol of American capitalism.

By the early 20th century, Sears already was a household name across the United States, one that represented rural thrift and industry as well as material abundance and consumer pleasures. The company was founded as a modest mail-order retailer of watches in the 1880s by Richard W. Sears and Alvah C. Roebuck. Julius Rosenwald, a Chicago clothing merchant who became a partner in the firm in 1895, directed its rapid growth, expanding into new products and ever-broader territory. Mail-order firms like Sears were able to penetrate underserved rural areas by leaning on new infrastructure, such as the railroads that linked far-flung regions of the country. Government regulation also aided the company's growth, with the Rural Free Delivery Act of 1896 underwriting its distribution chain by expanding mail routes in rural areas.

In an era when print media reigned supreme, Sears dominated the rural retail market through its huge catalog, an amazing work of product advertising, consumer education, and corporate branding. Titled the Book of Bargains and later, The Great Price Maker, the famous Sears catalog expanded in the 1890s from featuring watches and jewelry to including everything from buggies and bicycles to sporting goods and sewing machines. It educated millions of shoppers about mail-order procedures, such as shipping, cash payment, substitutions and returns. It used simple and informal language and a warm, welcoming tone. “We solicit honest criticism more than orders,” the 1908 catalog stated, emphasizing customer satisfaction above all else. Sears taught Americans how to shop.

Sears also demonstrated how to run a business. Cutting costs and tightly controlling distribution fuelled its rise to power. The company built a massive Chicago distribution complex in 1906, which occupied three million square feet of floor space. A full-page illustration of the plant, in all its bright redbrick glory, graced the back of the Sears catalog. Any customer could see how his merchandise was received and held, how his orders were filled and shipped out, and where the catalog itself was published. The distribution center was its own best advertisement; among the largest in the world, it was a symbol of the mail-order company's dominance.

The company innovated in other ways, too. Bricks-and-mortar retailers today have to contend with new consumer habits brought about by e-commerce. Similarly, mail-order firms like Sears faced potential loss of their markets as the nation urbanized 100 years ago and entered the automobile age. Sears navigated the challenge brilliantly when it opened its first department store in Chicago in 1925. Under the managerial leadership of Gen. Robert E. Wood, who had formerly worked with mail-order competitor Montgomery Ward, Sears initiated a rapid expansion outside of urban centers. By 1929, on the eve of the Great Depression, it operated more than 300 department stores.

Growth continued even during the economic downturn, because Sears wisely championed an aesthetic of thrift. The chain made its name selling dependable staples such as socks and underwear and sheets and towels, rather than fashion items like those found in traditional department stores such as Marshall Field's in Chicago or John Wanamaker's in Philadelphia or New York. Sears outlets were spare, catering to customers who were interested in finding good value, to meet practical needs. By the end of the Depression decade, the number of stores had almost doubled.

After World War II, still under Wood's leadership, Sears continued to open new stores across North America, in the bustling new shopping centers populating the expanding suburban landscape. In the United States, the number of Sears stores passed 700 by the mid-1950s. The firm also expanded across the borders north and south, opening its first Mexico City store in 1947 and moving into Canada in 1952 (incorporating with a Canadian mail-order firm to become Simpson-Sears). Sears benefited from being a pioneer chain in a landscape of largely independent department stores. Along with J.C. Penney, it became a standard shopping mall anchor. Together, the two chains, along with Montgomery Ward, captured 43 percent of all department store sales by 1975.

Sears wouldn’t really lose any footing until the 1970s, when new challenges emerged. Skyrocketing inflation meant low-price retailers such as Target, Kmart and Walmart, all founded in 1962, lured new customers. The market became bifurcated as prosperous upper-middle class shoppers turned to more luxurious traditional department stores, while bargain seekers found lower prices at the discounters than at Sears.

In 1991, Walmart overtook Sears as the nation’s largest retailer. As big box stores began to dominate the country, the department store industry responded through mergers, reorganization and experimentation with the department store category itself. Sears was no exception. The company took many different tacks under a series of problematic leaders, losing sight in the process of its traditional niche, which it ceded to discounters. Sears moved into insurance and financial services. Its credit card business, for example, accounted for 60 percent of its profits at the turn of the 21st century. In 2003, however, it tried returning to its retail core, selling its credit and financial business to Citigroup for $32 billion.

There is a tendency to look at Sears’s decline, and the potential loss of a grand icon of American business, with fond nostalgia. This would be a mistake. Sears embodied many of the uglier aspects of American capitalism, too. Many times, the firm’s management pushed back against forces that benefited workers. Sears tried to undermine organized labor, successfully resisting it even though several other traditional flagship department stores had unionized by the 1940s and 1950s. Company leaders resisted 20th-century progressive social movements that sought economic equality for African Americans and women. Like other department stores, Sears contributed both to structural and daily acts of racism, against customers and workers. African-American boycotts against Sears in the 1930s, for example, exposed racist hiring practices; in the late 1960s, welfare-rights activists revealed the firm's discriminatory credit policies. Gender inequality was deeply entrenched in its work structure—and challenged, prominently and unsuccessfully, in the famous 1986 "Sears case," which emerged from an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint concerning discrimination against women, who had been passed over for lucrative commissioned sales jobs in traditionally-male departments.

All of it, good and bad, reflects our nation's struggle to adapt to larger economic, political, and cultural forces. For historians like myself, who see business as a social institution through which to view and critique the past, the end of Sears will mean more than just one less place to buy my socks.

Vicki Howard is a visiting fellow in the Department of History at the University of Essex. The author of the award-winning From Main Street to Mall: The Rise and Fall of the American Department Store (Penn Press, 2015), she comments on American and UK retail on Twitter at @retailhistorian. She wrote this for Zócalo Public Square.

California advocates of foam packaging ban go local

By Laurel Rosenhall, San Francisco Chronicle

SACRAMENTO — Foam burger boxes and ice cream cups could eventually go the way of the flimsy plastic shopping bag — banned throughout California.

It’s not likely to happen this year. Environmentalists who push for the bans lost a big fight last month when the Legislature voted down a bill that would have banned foam takeout containers statewide. But growing pressure from communities that are passing the bans could eventually lead to changes on the state level.

With inaction in the state Capitol, environmentalists are concentrating their efforts on cities and counties.

Read the whole story

Calif. June 2018 ballot starting to take shape

By Phil Willon, Los Angeles Times

While a bevy of political hopefuls have jumped into the 2018 races for governor and lieutenant governor, most of California’s other premiere statewide political posts aren’t exactly drawing a crowd.

Aside from governor, California has seven constitutional officers chosen by the statewide electorate — all of which will be on the 2018 ballot.

Two Democratic incumbents, Controller Betty Yee and Secretary of State Alex Padilla, have yet to get challengers. And the state treasurer and insurance commissioner posts, usually catnip to the politically ambitious, have just a single candidate apiece.

Most striking is the dearth of Republican candidates, a possible symptom of the party’s decline in California and dismal prospects for victory. The last time a Republican won a statewide race was 2006.

Read the whole story

Investigation into Congero’s exploits expands

By Kathryn Reed

The investigation into former Lake Tahoe Humane Society leader Niki Congero is not limited to **embezzlement allegations**.

Congero, who was fired this spring from her job in South Lake Tahoe, had sought unemployment benefits. The nonprofit denied them. She appealed that decision. To do so meant giving testimony under oath.

Lake Tahoe News sought a transcript of that hearing from the state Employment Development Department.

“The EDD has declined to provide access to the records you requested,” was the email response. They said the information was privileged and not subject to the Public Records Act.

If Congero were to have lied to the judge about her circumstances, she could face perjury charges.

Congero is accused by the Humane Society of taking more than $100,000 from the agency. The Humane Society no longer responds to *LTN*'s calls or emails.

Congero left Tahoe earlier this summer reportedly for the Midwest. Because she is a native of New Zealand there is speculation she will try to leave the country. To obtain a no-fly hold on a person is a cumbersome process, and the crimes she may have committed may not rise to the level of federal intervention.

Local police officers have served several search warrants. More evidence leads to more questions, which could lead to charges beyond stealing money that was earmarked for dogs and cats. Detectives want to create an air tight case that will ensure the District Attorney's Office presses charges. Until everything is in place, Congero remains free and to this day has not been charged with any crime.

Calif. counter-attack could stop federal land transfers

By Tay Wiles, High Country News

The morning after the 2016 presidential election, California's legislative leaders issued a message that has set the tone for the state under the new administration, under President Trump. "Today, we woke up feeling like strangers in a foreign land," it said.

Since then, many Californians have pushed back against conservative policies on everything from immigrant rights to the environment. One of those offensives is Senate Bill 50, which, after sailing through committee this spring and summer, aims to stop the federal government from transferring or selling off public lands to corporations.

The Public Lands Protection Act is part of a series of three bills introduced in late February called the “Preserve California” package, meant to preempt any efforts by the Trump administration to weaken environmental laws. The bill would allow California’s State Lands Commission first dibs on lands the federal government wants to sell, and would let the state have a say in transferring to a new owner.

Read the whole story