

Nevada voters approve recreational marijuana

By Seth A. Richardson, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada went green on Tuesday by approving a ballot initiative legalizing recreational marijuana.

The law makes it legal for anyone over 21 to possess as much as one ounce of marijuana or one-eighth of an ounce of concentrate. A 15 percent excise tax plus fees and licensing for dispensaries will by some estimates generate \$20 million for schools.

Municipalities will not be able to create their own prohibition laws, effectively making marijuana use legal all over the state. However, localities do have some say on zoning for dispensaries.

Read the whole story

Opinion: We all should leave the country post-election

By Joe Mathews

Now that the election is over, are you leaving the country? If not, you should reconsider.

Before the election, only a few prominent Californians—from Samuel L. Jackson to Miley Cyrus —pledged to depart the U.S. to express their disgust with the election. And they're still

here. But I do know one non-celebrity Californian who is taking his frustrations with American-style democracy to Europe this weekend: yours truly.



Joe Mathews

This is not my first such journey. Every couple of years for the past decade, I've helped bring together scholars, journalists, activists, election administrators and politicians who work on participatory democracy, including the initiative and referendum processes for which California is well known. Each gathering is in a different country—South Korea, Uruguay, Tunisia, Switzerland (and even San Francisco). This time our destination is San Sebastián, in Spain's Basque country, which has embraced participatory democracy after years of dictatorship and violence.

I don't particularly enjoy long-distance travel or organizing the events, which requires dealing by Skype at odd hours with prickly foreign professors or officials.

But I do it because by listening to people from around the world explain their challenges I get a much clearer idea of what's wrong with our version of democracy, and how we might improve it.

I wish every Californian would do the same—travel outside the country to grasp how other places make democratic decisions, so that we might better comprehend ourselves. Goodness knows that such understanding is lacking; surveys show big majorities of Californians know little about the basic functions of their state and local governments.

Unfortunately, too many people here consider the very idea of looking for answers overseas as daft, even preposterous. I'm accustomed to watching California audiences tune out when I give talks describing how other countries do initiatives or elections or budgeting better than we do. Singer-songwriter Sheryl Crow has been mocked for circulating a petition to limit the poison of endless electoral politics and adopt a shorter election cycle, like those of Canada and Great Britain.

The resistance to foreign ideas is especially strong in Sacramento, where political staffers heap ridicule on those who make such suggestions (I speak from personal experience). Heaven help elected officials who dare go overseas to learn more about democracy—they are likely to be pilloried for taking an expensive “junket.”

I find this cynicism dispiriting—and surprising. Californians can be among the most open people in the world when it comes to embracing entertainment or technologies from around the world. But we have the opposite attitude when it comes to democracy and governance. We are convinced that our system is so singularly distinctive that the world has little to say to us.

It's hard to overstate just how wrong we are. Almost nothing in California government is a native invention. We borrowed our two-house legislative system from our British colonial masters, plagiarized our first constitution from Iowans and New Yorkers, took our top-two-runoff election system from the French-speaking world, and established our direct democracy system on the Swiss model.

Our reluctance to look overseas for fixes for our many democratic problems makes little sense in the aftermath of this election. Nearly every democratic institution in this country—the presidency, Congress, law enforcement, state election officials, the media—has lost credibility in 2016. In

California, our first open U.S. Senate seat in a generation produced a desultory race, and we turned direct democracy into a bludgeon, littering ballots with 17 complicated and confusing statewide initiatives.

Despite widespread disillusionment with aspects of our democracy, there are few big ideas being advanced for reform. We're not looking far and wide enough for them, and so our insularity embitters us. As Mark Twain famously noted in "The Innocents Abroad", "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts."

In San Sebastián, I'm looking forward to learning more from the world: about how Germans support grassroots groups that bring ideas to the ballot, how Tunisians are creating a new system of local government, how the cities of Seoul and Vienna have found smarter ways to engage citizens in local questions.

I wish I could transport a plane-full of local and state officials overseas with me, so they could learn firsthand from their counterparts elsewhere, the way American businesspeople and scholars seem more comfortable doing.

"If I cannot add to my own level of understanding, I could ill afford to try to raise that of others," said the Basque country's own Saint Ignatius Loyola. In these times of great anxiety and little understanding, leaving the country might be the most patriotic thing you could do.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Expected record voter turnout in El Dorado County



More than 50 people celebrate election night at the Tahoe Mountain Lab in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

A contemptuous, yet engaging, presidential race, multiple California ballot initiatives and a slew of local measures and races brought El Dorado County voters out in record numbers today.

Registrar of Voters Bill Schultz reported that more than 116,000 residents registered to vote, dwarfing the June primary in which 106,000 or so ballots were issued. The number of registered in South Lake Tahoe is 10,202.

"It's the most we've ever had," Schultz told *Lake Tahoe News* from his busy elections office on Nov. 8. He attributed the level of interest to "one of those perfect storms" in which "people came out who haven't come out in years."

He even took three families who wanted to see the process on a tour. Polling "observers," who showed up across the nation amid claims of prospective voter fraud were also on hand in Placerville, but the office remained civil.

The level of interest kept the Elections Department hopping. The staffers emptied the absentee drop box six times during the day. With just the absentees numbering at least 47,000 collected from the more than 86,000 issued, the county sits at an estimated 48 percent turnout just on the absentees. The county turnout is estimated at a 73.5 percent.

Schultz also pointed out how his department has seen a run-on with provisionals, those ballots counted last and command more attention in checks on accuracy. The county takes 28 days to certify the election largely because of those. Provisional ballots are ones that need extra verification.

South Lake Tahoe was hopping with anticipation – some good and bad – over the election. Parties dot the landscape, including a large group that came out to socialize at Tahoe Mountain Lab.

Many people admitted to being nervous, exhausted and somewhat glad the campaign season is over – if only it culminates with their candidates winning a seat or their pet measures passing. California had an unprecedented number of ballot initiatives that turned the voter guide into a document the size of a small phone book.

Some people who kept one eye on the large screen television in the lobby area at the lab and another on the other people said the one thing about the exhausting and heated presidential race that was welcome was that in turn the local candidates

would get their due.

Coleen Shade characterized the election season as a war of sorts, adding she's shell-shocked by the process.

"I'm nervous for my community and my country," she told *Lake Tahoe News*, noting how the divisiveness in the nation has hit at many levels. "I see the same level of divisiveness in the smaller elections too."

She's not alone.

David Orr, who runs the Tahoe Mountain Lab, said he's drained by the mean-spirited nature of election campaigns.

"We're going for each other's throats," he said. Being a parent, some people who run for office "scare the hell out of me," he admitted.

Heidi Hill Drum, no newcomer to election politics and activism, said it was difficult to balance a full time job and her family and being politically active. But she isn't about to shirk from her civic duty.

"It's pretty hard to be passive," she said.

As the Tahoe Prosperity Center's chief executive officer, she would like to see South Lake Tahoe City Council members "work with the community and staff" to get things done. That to her is what it takes to build a successful community.

Caesars Entertainment reports

3Q loss

By Associated Press

Caesars Entertainment Corp. on Monday reported a loss of \$643 million in its third quarter.

The Las Vegas-based company said it had a loss of \$4.38 per share. Losses, adjusted to account for discontinued operations, came to \$26.80 per share.

The casino operator posted revenue of \$986 million in the period.

Caesars shares have fallen 13 percent since the beginning of the year. In the final minutes of trading on Monday, shares hit \$6.90, a decline of 22 percent in the last 12 months.

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

Workers in special district in EDC go on strike

Employees of the El Dorado Hills Community Services District voted to go on strike over the board wanting to reduce pay by an average of 13 percent for the more than 200 workers.

At the same time the employees cast a unanimous no confidence vote in regards to the five-member board.

According to the state controller's website, the average salary for the 218 employees is \$12,636 a year in 2015.

This is essentially a parks and recreation district for El Dorado Hills.

The union, Local 1-AFSCME, put out a press release saying, "Financial reports indicate that the CSD is currently operating on an \$11.8 million budget with another \$11.9 million sitting in reserve, yet most employees cannot afford to live in the district they serve. The board's proposed health care cuts come as employees are also expected to make additional contributions to their retirement plan."

The district in a press release said the vote to strike is premature and that it has not been notified of the vote.

"The parties just concluded mediation and are scheduling a fact finding hearing as part of the impasse procedures set forth in the Government Code. Given the fact that the impasse procedures have not yet been completed, the threat of a strike is premature," the district said. "The dispute between the union and the district is primarily focused on the issue of how much money (cash) an employee should receive in lieu of health benefits."

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Soroptimist groups looking for award nominees

Each year Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra and Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe collaborate to honor deserving recipients for two awards in our community.

The Violet Richardson Award honors young women in the

community grades 8-11 who are engaged in volunteer deeds to make a difference in the community or beyond such as fighting drugs, crime and violence; cleaning up the environment; or working to end discrimination or poverty. Each Violet Richardson recipient will receive \$100.

The Live Your Dream Award is given to women in the community who are the sole supporter of their family, and are overcoming many challenges to further their education and career opportunities in order to make a better life for their children. Each Live Your Dream recipient receives \$2,000.

Nominations for both of these awards are due Dec.1. For more info or an application, go online www.sitahoesierra.org or email Lydia Rogers at lydiajrogers@yahoo.com.

Wolf sightings confirmed in N. California



California officials are tracking two wolves in Lassen County. Photo/CDFW

Two gray wolves are living in western Lassen County.

Gray wolves were eliminated from California more than 100 years ago, until the return of OR7 in 2011.

This summer, photographs, tracks and eyewitness sightings suggested the presence of two canids frequently traveling together.

After a wolf-like canid was photographed by trail cameras in Lassen County in fall 2015 and spring 2016, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife began operating additional trail cameras in the area and regularly searching for wolf scat and tracks.

Genetic analysis from scat samples confirmed the presence of a male and a female gray wolf.

Analysis of scat indicates that the male wolf was born into the Rogue Pack in 2014, and most likely dispersed to Lassen County in late 2015 or 2016. The founder of the Rogue Pack is the well-known gray wolf OR7 (collared in Oregon by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) who dispersed from northeast Oregon and traveled around Northern California in 2011 and 2012 before eventually finding a mate and establishing a territory in southern Oregon in 2013.

The DNA of the female wolf does not match that of any known individual wolves from Oregon, and initial analyses indicates she is not a close relative of current Oregon wolves.

Gray wolves are listed as endangered federally and in California.

USFS wants to stop putting out some fires



Crews on Nov. 6 try to stabilize the burn scar left from the Emerald Fire on Tahoe's South Shore. Photo/LTN

By Lauren Sommer, KQED-TV

California's fire season hasn't turned out to be as bad as some feared this year. In fact, forest managers say that certain kinds of fires – the “good” fires – were sorely lacking.

Sierra Nevada forests are adapted to low-intensity fires that clear the underbrush and prevent trees from getting too dense. After a century of fire suppression, many forests are overgrown, which can make catastrophic fires worse.

So forest managers are piloting a new policy designed to shift a century-old mentality about fire in the West.

The idea is to let naturally-caused fires burn when they aren't a threat to homes or people. But actually making those decisions on the ground isn't easy in a crowded state like

California.

Read the whole story

Dollar Creek Trail bid higher than expected

Additional funding for the next 2.2 mile-phase of the Dollar Creek Trail was approved by the Placer County Board of Supervisors.

The county now has \$297,000 committed to the \$3 million project. The bulk of the funding is coming from the state and feds.

The additional money was needed because the bids came in higher than expected.

When it's built, the will connect Kings Beach and Tahoe City with a continuous shared-use path.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

· Tahoe Rim Trail Association is putting on two guided hikes the day after Thanksgiving. For more info, go **online**.

- The Meyers Community Foundation's annual tree lighting festival is Dec. 2 from 5-7pm. Santa will be arriving via CalStar helicopter, Lake Valley Fire Department will have its decorated truck, there will be popcorn and hot chocolate, and fun community vibes all evening in the parking lot of Divided Sky-Downtown Café.

- Zion Roots will play at Whiskey Dick's in South Lake Tahoe for free on Nov. 26. Doors open at 9pm.

- Sierra Strings of Tahoe will be performing for free at the South Lake Tahoe Library (1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.) on Dec. 3 at 11am.

- John Hindmarsh, who writes science fiction and thrillers, will be sharing his newest book "Mark Four, Fracture Lines and Diamond Cut" on Dec. 14 at 6pm at the South Lake Tahoe Library (1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.) The reading is free.