

Opinion: Troops deserve praise for serving in Iraq

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Dec. 15, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.*

Only time will tell whether President Barack Obama was right on Wednesday when he told troops recently returned from Iraq that "we are leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq ..."

But there can be no disagreement with his tribute (spoken in a TV interview) to the men and women who gathered in a hangar at Fort Bragg, N.C.:

"We must not forget the men and women who gave their lives, tens of thousands wounded, all those missed birthday parties, missed soccer games and missed dinners because folks were on their second or third deployment. We should not take that for granted."

It would behoove all of the politicians in Washington, D.C., to remember the president's words while they are glibly tossing around threats to take action against this nation or that – most recently it has been Iran.

The sacrifices made by the men and women of our armed services, many of them from the Guard and Reserves, have indeed been great. The war in Iraq has taken the lives of more than 4,400 Americans. (By some estimates, more than 100,000 Iraqis have lost their lives because of the war in the past nine years.) Many more have been injured. All have seen their lives drastically changed by the call to duty.

They have paid a high price to leave behind a "sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq," and we must never forget what they did.

When President George W. Bush announced nearly nine years ago that the U.S. military had invaded Iraq in an effort to rid the country of its belligerent dictator, Saddam Hussein, and destroy his weapons, no one imagined that the troops would still be there in 2011.

Read the whole story

Sugar Bowl Philanthropy Day helps with domestic violence issues

Sugar Bowl's Philanthropy Day is Jan. 22 – benefiting Tahoe SAFE Alliance.

Sugar Bowl will donate the proceeds from 500 tickets priced at \$35 to support programs that help to reduce the incidence and trauma of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse in North Lake Tahoe and Truckee.

The ticket is good Jan. 22-26.

Tickets may be picked up Jan. 22 at Mt. Judah Lodge at Sugar Bowl. They may be purchased online.

Doctors to give lesson in preventing ski-snowboard injuries

Tahoe Center for Orthopedics' and U.S. Ski and Snowboard Team physicians Terrence Orr and Jonathan Finnoff will give a lecture focusing on ski and snowboard injury prevention and treatment options on Jan. 5 from 6-7pm at Lake Tahoe Community College (One College Avenue, South Lake Tahoe).

The event is free.

In addition to ski and snowboard injury awareness, surgical and non-surgical approaches to injury treatment will be addressed.

Orr and Finnoff bring years of winter injury experience, serving Lake Tahoe and beyond. From the beginner snowboarder to the advanced skier, this talk will address a multitude of accident scenarios and prevention techniques.

This lecture is part of Barton Health's 2012 wellness lectures. Attendees will receive an attendance "punch card" and automatically be entered to win a 2012-13 season pass to a Lake Tahoe ski resort, in addition to other prizes.

For more information, call (530) 543.5656.

Sierra Nevada College expanding writing program

Sierra Nevada College Brian Turner has spent the last year assembling writing talent to teach in the program which kicks off this January. Eleven writers join Turner as faculty members, each with published works and accolades of their own: Kelle Groom, Nathalie Handal, Lee Herrick, Joanne Meschery, April Ossmann, Gailmarie Pahmeier, Suzanne Roberts, June Sylvester Saraceno, Patricia Smith, Laura Wetherington.

Together they have designed the low-residency MFA in creative writing program as a challenging and inspiring two-year program committed to a student's art and artistic development. The program is designed to bring writers together in order to foster unique, individual voices within a dialogue of global dimension. Over the course of four semesters and five residency periods, students will focus on their chosen genre – fiction, poetry, or literary nonfiction – while testing the mixed-genre boundaries of artistic form and intent.

Each residency is an eight-day intensive series of workshops, seminars, readings, and more—all intended to expand a writer's sense of possibility within the written and spoken arts. From the practical need-to-know tricks-of-the-trade to the heights of conceptual nuances, residencies will explore the wide landscape of the writing life. Residencies will take place in early January and early July. Every fifth residency will be located overseas.

Turner this week was selected as the Poet of the Month by Radio 1 in Sweden.

Even though his poetry and essays have been published in the *New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *Poetry Daily*, *Georgia Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and other journals, the

recognition never gets old, not does the challenge of a being a professional writer.

Turner earned his MFA before serving for seven years in the Army. He is now director of the Low Residency MFA program at the college.

Lahontan Water Board needs new leader; Singer retiring

By Kathryn Reed

After 40 years of employment with the state water board, Harold Singer is retiring.

He has been executive officer of the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board since the late 1980s and was working for the state board before taking the job in South Lake Tahoe.

What he does next is unknown because Singer chose not to return multiple calls. Nor is it known when his last day will be.



Harold Singer

When *Lake Tahoe News* started inquiring about Singer's departure, most people didn't know he was leaving, though some knew he had been talking about retiring.

Neither the Lahontan office in South Lake Tahoe office nor the state office in Sacramento have a bio or resume for Singer on file. Neither of those offices nor the Victorville office for Lahontan would release contact information for Lahontan board members.

Even the state board's public affairs folks didn't know he was leaving until *Lake Tahoe News* called.

Board President Jack Clarke was asked by Sacramento officials to call *Lake Tahoe News*. He didn't. *Lake Tahoe News* sent board member Amy Horne an email, but she didn't answer it.

Singer's job has been posted several places. Here is the job description for the position that pays between \$112,068 and \$121,176 a year. The deadline to apply was Dec. 16.

It will be up to the regional board to hire his replacement. The state doesn't get involved. This could happen behind closed doors, at a special meeting, or a subcommittee could be put together to vet the applicants.

Lahontan has been a lightning rod of late. Pre-Angora Fire in 2007, it was the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency which received the bulk of public badmouthing. That changed as it came to light the rules the water board has that some say thwart progress in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Lahontan is often said as though it is a four-letter word. Every agency and jurisdiction in the basin has had difficulty with the regional water board – from permits to thin trees, to the recent sediment load regulation, to working in stream zones, to redundancy, to being unwilling to compromise.

With Singer not returning calls, his second in command, Lauri

Kemper, out until the end of the month, and the board being incommunicado, Lahontan chose to have no voice in this story.

While Lahontan's jurisdiction covers a much greater area than Tahoe, stretching to Southern California, the news from there is not all great, either. Think Erin Brokovitch and Hinkley – the issue brought to the world through the film starring Julia Roberts. Lahontan and PG&E are still dealing with contaminated drinking water.

Many thought Singer would soften after his family lost their home in the Angora Fire. As executive officer, not much changed, according to people who spoke to *Lake Tahoe News* off the record.

But as a neighbor, Singer is seen as one of the good guys.

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, whose jurisdiction encompasses the 254 houses that burned to the ground that June, has witnessed Singer be a friend to his neighbors, and as she put it – that neighbor everyone wants to have.

Singer has also given a lot to youth sports. He has been an umpire in softball leagues and referred youth soccer.

Santiago said, "He is a very dedicated individual to the mission of Lahontan. He has always been very open with me, straightforward and taken the time to teach me so I could gain an understanding of the information as it relates to Lahontan."

Joanne Marchetta, TRPA executive director, said, "Harold has made significant contributions to the lake and his community of South Lake Tahoe. We wish him well in the next phase of his life."

Claire Fortier, South Lake Tahoe mayor, said, "He has kept Lahontan focused for 20 years. He has run an effective organization for as long as he has been there."

The next Lahontan board meeting is Jan. 11-12 in Apple Valley. The agenda is not posted so it's not known if the board will discuss the executive officer position.

Registration open for Tahoe Science Conference

The Tahoe Science Consortium and Sierra Nevada College will host the 2012 Tahoe Science Conference May 22-24 on at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village.

The theme of the conference will be "Environmental Restoration in a Changing Climate". Lake Tahoe and many other high alpine lakes around the world are being increasingly stressed by climatic changes and urban development. Compounding these factors are economic stresses on government agencies, local communities, the environmental community, and the public.

The 2012 Tahoe Science Conference is designed to encourage creative dialogue among scientists, artists, environmental managers, public officials, and the general public about how to protect high alpine ecosystems under changing environmental

and social climates.

The registration fee covers all program activities beginning Tuesday afternoon and extending through Thursday evening. Register online.

For more information, contact Tina Triplett at (775) 473.5473 or creativerno@charter.net.

Opinion: Local elected officials need to listen to the middle class

Publisher's note: The following was a speech read by South Lake Tahoe resident Ernie Claudio at the Dec. 15 South Tahoe Public Utility District meeting.

My name is Ernie Claudio and I am here today to give notice. There is something wrong in our nation. The middle class is dying. We are suffering, we are losing our jobs and we are losing our homes. I've been to seven Occupy protests collecting opinions from the middle class about "The Problem".

The problem is our elected officials, from top to bottom, including the elected officials in this room today.

We (the middle class) are losing money and that money is our buying power and it is this buying power that keeps this country going. So every penny that comes out of the pockets of the middle class is part of the hemorrhaging that is causing the death of the middle class. So if the water rates go up, then you (the board of directors) are part of the problem and I respectfully ask that you remove yourselves from office,

because that's what's coming.

The elected officials were supposed to protect us, and they failed. The elected officials were supposed to protect our jobs and they failed. Now there is a nationwide outcry, ports were shut down on Monday. We are looking for politicians who can stop this hemorrhaging.

It's like a pendulum, it's gone as far as it can one direction and now its time to swing back. So the Occupy Movement, the middle class will do what it has to do to protect itself and most important, our children. I mean, how are our kids going to be able to afford to buy a house if they can't find a job.

And to make matters worse our country has dropped down a notch when it comes to respect and honor. This happened the day a congressman from South Carolina named Joe Wilson called our president a liar in an open meeting. Do I have that right? Can I call you a liar? Well, apparently so, because he got away with it and he was not punished for it.

So this brings us into a new era; a new era of politics where respect for public officials means nothing and to insult a public official is OK. Now am I going to do that now? No, but I am warning you that its coming. Because the Occupy Movement, the middle class will do what it has to do to protect itself.

So if these rates go up one penny, you will be putting yourself in the position where you are part of the problem. That's why we would respectfully ask you to resign from office, if you cannot keep these rates frozen of even lower them.

Nevada recovers \$8.3 mil. in civil and criminal fraud cases

By Nevada News Bureau Staff

CARSON CITY – The U.S. Department of Justice recovered \$5.6 billion in civil and criminal fraud efforts in 2011, a 167 percent increase over 2008.

In Nevada, recoveries totaled \$8.3 million in 2011, a 137 percent increase over 2008 when \$3.5 million was recovered.

Of the \$5.6 billion recovered by DOJ in 2011, more than \$2.9 billion was in health care fraud, the agency reported.

Nevada was one of 21 states where recoveries more than doubled.

“All across the country, the Department of Justice continues to move aggressively to protect the American people from fraud,” Deputy Attorney General James Cole said. “In this past fiscal year, we recovered more money from fraudsters than ever before, over \$5.6 billion. These efforts not only send the message that those who commit fraud will be held to account, they also result in more dollars in the national treasury and demonstrate a high rate of return on the American taxpayers’ investment in the Justice Department.”

As a next step in an aggressive campaign to crack down on Medicare fraud, the Department of Health and Human Services will direct all Medicare prescription drug plans to use every tool at their disposal to prevent fraud. Patients sometimes “doctor shop,” visiting numerous doctors to get multiple prescriptions for OxyContin, Percocet, and other painkillers and narcotics. In some cases, these medicines are abused by

the patients. In others, patients sell the extra drugs.

OxyContin and Percocet abuse, prescription drug fraud, and so-called “doctor shopping” are major problems. The Government Accountability Office recently reported that “170,000 Medicare beneficiaries received prescriptions from five or more” doctors for drugs that are frequently abused, like OxyContin and Percocet.

While not all of these cases are fraudulent, some are. In 2008, for example, one Medicare beneficiary “received prescriptions for a total of 3,655 oxycodone pills [such as OxyContin]...from 58 different prescribers.”

This week, HHS announced it has urged insurance companies to take every step possible to prevent such fraud. Specifically, HHS’ guidance tells prescription drug plans to withhold payment on suspicious claims, including when enrollees use multiple doctors to obtain painkillers and narcotics.

Companies that offer prescription drug plans already process each of a patient’s prescriptions. While HHS generally requires prompt payment, today’s guidance clarifies that if a plan sees signs of suspicious activity, it should withhold payment to pharmacies until it verifies the claim is valid.

Driver arrested after vehicle strikes Stateline area hotel

A vehicle driven by an alleged drunken driver crashed into the back of the Ski Haus Lodge in South Lake Tahoe, breaking a

natural gas line that necessitated temporary evacuation of lodging guests there and at the Economy Inn.

Ronald MacKenzie, 26, of Colorado was arrested on charges of driving under the influence after the Dec. 16 8:30am accident. A test at the scene showed a blood alcohol level of 0.11 percent, according to officers.



The driver of this vehicle was arrested Dec. 16 on DUI charges.

Photo/SLTPD

Officers said MacKenzie was driving about 40 mph on La Salle Avenue when he tried to make a left onto Cedar Avenue. He didn't make and instead struck the building. The speed limit in the area is 25 mph.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Wacky weather patterns

throughout California

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

La Niña is back in control of California's weather, and like last winter, her temper seems to be flaring.

First it was strafing November winds. Then persistent December frost. Now half the state is dry – not a drop of rain in Sacramento this month, and Lake Tahoe ski resorts are yearning for snow. And at the other end, Los Angeles is breaking rainfall records.



Lots of ice to be found on the shoreline of Lake Tahoe, but not any snow.

Photo/LTN

“It’s been a strange La Niña,” said Ken Clark, a senior meteorologist at AccuWeather based in Southern California. “It’s playing havoc with our precipitation amounts so far. We’ve got a lot of signs that were right on track, but the weather pattern’s been kind if screwy.”

What’s screwy is a high-pressure system parked offshore of Northern California, diverting storms around the region and into Southern California instead. That’s not normal La Niña stuff.

La Niña is a periodic cooling of the equatorial Pacific Ocean that causes the jet stream to arc far to the north. It is a fickle phenomenon in California because the position of the jet stream determines whether the state is wet or dry in La Niña conditions.

In Central California latitudes, including Sacramento and Lake Tahoe, the outcome is often a tossup.

Read the whole story