Time for Calif. to pay down unfunded liabilities

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

Any struggling family knows that first you put food on the table, make sure there's a roof overhead and lay in some daily essentials. Only then can you realistically think about paying down the credit card.

True, you shouldn't have run wild with the card in the first place. But that's past. Now, you create a repayment plan and muster some discipline.

That's where Sacramento sits currently with its daunting credit card debt.

The state's annual budget that covers daily expenses is finally balanced after years of recession-plagued deficits. Yes, previous politicians deserve criticism for bad planning. They gave away unaffordable tax cuts and spent lavishly, especially for generous public employee pension upgrades.

But the treasury has been replenished because of the Legislature's program cutting, Gov. Jerry Brown's soak-the-rich tax increase and a recovering economy. Moreover, two years ago, there were some modest pension rollbacks for future state employees and teachers.

Now it's time to tackle those potentially crippling credit cards – especially the unfunded liabilities for retiree pensions and benefits.

Brown listed them in January while unveiling his budget proposal. The unfunded liabilities totaled $218 billion – including $80 billion for teachers' pensions, $64 billion for state retiree healthcare, $46 billion for state employee

pensions, $25 billion for University of California pensions and retiree healthcare and $3 billion for judges’ pensions.

The most troubling, by far, is the big hole in the California State Teachers’ Retirement System, called CalSTRS.

Read the whole story

Dogs off-limits at Upper Truckee Marsh

The annual seasonal dog closure at the Upper Truckee Marsh begins May 1.

It will reopen Aug. 1, at which time dogs are allowed on leash.

The purpose of the California Tahoe Conservancy closure of this South Shore area is to keep dogs out of breeding habitat for special, threatened and endangered species such as yellow headed blackbirds.

The El Dorado County sheriff’s deputies enforce the seasonal dog prohibition and CTC staff monitors for compliance.

For more info, call Nick Meyer at 530.543.6073.

Early morning heist at Simpson’s Jewelers

Four masked men stole thousands of dollars worth of merchandise from Simpson’s Jewelers in South Lake Tahoe.

They used a sledgehammer to gain access to the South Lake Tahoe store in the Raley’s center near Stateline.

“We believe the truck was stolen from another location and used to commit the smash and grab,” Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It suggests a higher level of sophistication with the planning.”

The truck is believed to be a Ford F250.

The burglary occurred in the early morning of April 29. The incident was caught on videotape. The suspects were in the store for less than five minutes.

“We are trying to clean it up here and get the inventory done,” a store employee told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The exact value of the goods taken has not been determined. However, the more expensive product is stored in safes.

Detectives will look to see if there is a link between the Tahoe heist and the March burglary at Devon’s Jewelers in the Meadowood Mall in Reno.

Anyone with information is asked to call the police department at 530.542.6100.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

All of Calif. in at least a moderate drought

By Olivia Allen-Price, KQED-TV

For the first time in the 15-year history of the National Weather Service Drought Monitor, 100 percent of California is judged to be in moderate to exceptional drought.

It’s a dramatic-sounding milestone, although the state has been lingering at the 99.8 percent mark since March 18.

Though it’s a first for California to be completely in drought, other states have been there before, including New Mexico in June 2013, and Texas from September through November 2011.

You’d need to return to a time before the Drought Monitor existed to see California in such a dire situation.

Read the whole story

Study: Chardonnay comes with a serving of health benefits

By Lenny Bernstein, Washington Post

Red wine gets all the good press for the cardiovascular benefits of the flavonoids it contains, but U.S. Department of

Agriculture researchers are reporting that one white wine grape has the reds beat when it comes to slowing weight gain and lowering cholesterol, at least in laboratory animals.

The researchers put hamsters on a high-fat diet supplemented by flour made from the seeds of grapes used for Chardonnay, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon wines. They found that the white grapes easily beat the reds in slowing the hamsters' weight gain and limiting production of cholesterol.

They believe the higher levels of flavonoids in the Chardonnay grape seeds altered the work of genes related to fat metabolism.

Read the whole story

Zephyr Cove Tennis Club season kickoff party

Zephyr Cove Tennis Club's season kickoff is May 24 starting at noon.

All levels are welcome to play in the doubles tennis mixer.

Cost is $10 per person or free to 2014 members. Membership is $80 per person or $140 for two years. Membership payment via the website will be available soon, or it may be done in person.

The kickoff party will include tennis, hamburgers and hot dogs. Participants are encouraged to bring drinks (no glass), side dish or dessert.

For more info, email zctennisclub@gmail.com.

Professional skier from Squaw dies skydiving

By Rina Nakano, Fox-40

ACAMPO – A 27 year-old professional skier died in a skydiving accident at the Parachute Center on Tuesday afternoon.

Timy Dutton was a sponsored free skier from Squaw Valley, who also engaged in many types of sky diving activities for the last few years.

According to the owner of Parachute Center, Bill Dause, he and a friend jumped off a plane wearing wing suits. This is an advanced sky dive, where jumpers wear a high performance body suit and fall at speeds faster than 100 miles per hour.

Read the whole story

Dispatch center a constant hum of activity



Sue Keast keeps an eye on three monitors in the South Lake Tahoe dispatch center. Photo/Lesia Witkowsky

By Kathryn Reed

“When you pick up the phone and hear screaming, you know it’s not going to be a good call.”

Those are the words of a South Lake Tahoe dispatcher. It’s something they deal with around the clock, seven days a week.

But then there are the calls from people wanting to know what the weather is like or asking when power will be restored. They end up tying up one of the five dedicated 911 lines. Those questions are not why the emergency system was installed nor are they questions dispatchers should have to deal with.

Sometimes people are surprised to get a busy signal when they call 911. But if everyone calls when they see a wreck, those five lines will get tied up pretty fast.

Besides phones going off, the dispatchers are monitoring three

screens. Soon there will be a fourth that will have mapping software.

A new phone system is coming, too.

They are dispatching for city police officers, and fire calls for the city, Lake Valley and Fallen Leaf Lake, and all ambulances on the South Shore.

Stressful work

One ear is paying attention to the person on the phone, the other to the officers, firefighters or paramedics. Sometimes they are helping direct CalStar to a scene.

All the while they are typing what's going on.

And multiple calls at a time are the norm.

They work in a relatively small room that only has artificial light. The one window is covered because it looks out to the front waiting area. This is where they take breaks. A trip to the bathroom better be fast.

They work as a team and consider the other person their partner.

While there are four desks, no one can remember when four dispatchers actually worked at the same time. The dispatch center is so understaffed that often only one person is working. Otherwise it's two people. And it's always two people on Friday and Saturday nights. Fourth of July and New Year's Eve often warrant three dispatchers.

"We try not to work more than 14 hours except in cases like New Year's Eve. Sometimes you might have to work longer, or if there is a fire or some sort of incident where you can't leave," Sue Keast, who supervises the dispatchers, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Checking probation status, driver's license, warrants – it's all part of the job. They are the records department after normal business hours. Dispatchers enter citations and warrants.

Not that long ago they didn't provide a caller with much medical help. Today there are a slew of issues they can help with. A computer program prompts them to ask questions based on the answer given.

Linda, a dispatcher who doesn't want her last name used, says the goal is to calm people down, to try to provide whatever assistance they can before paramedics arrive. It could be a life and death situation if a person can start CPR before the ambulance arrives.

Personal involvement

Being such a small area it's not unusual for the dispatchers to know the caller or victim.

"I was on the fire radio and my mom called 911. My partner took the call. She recognized the address and tried to get my attention. When I saw the address you could hear my voice shaking as I dispatched an ambulance out to my parents' house," Keast said. "Everyone's fear is they are going to dispatch to a family member."

Coming this year people will be able text 911. It's a federal mandate. While this is seen as a good thing for when there is a prowler or another circumstance where it's best if the intended victim doesn't say something, the use of pictures is what worries dispatchers.

It's bad enough hearing everything that is going on. They don't need pictures.

For Joe, who also just wanted to use his first name, someone died every day the first two weeks he trained.

Everyone has stories to tell – like the lady on the phone whose husband was face down in the bathtub. She was too frail to turn him over and could only watch him drown. The dispatcher could only listen to her tears.

Debriefing for dispatchers is only now becoming part of the norm. They were not included in the debriefing after the Angora Fire – yet they all knew people who lost their homes – including one of the dispatchers.

It's not always a single event that lingers, but the accumulation of calls. Last summer, the dispatchers say, was one of the worst. There were two murders, several deaths, the child at Camp Sacramento who went into anaphylactic shock and died, the swimmer who drowned at Emerald Bay.

"It was pretty devastating to our staff," Keast said of all the tragedies. She said the department is getting better at addressing the stress involved with being a dispatcher.

Ambulance issues

South Lake Tahoe believes it is subsidizing the CalTahoe JPA by $60,000 a year in dispatch services. The JPA contract pays $90,000, but the city says the cost is more like $150,000.

Funding for ambulance JPAs in the county differ.

"The West slope JPA was started before the passage of Prop. 13. Accordingly, the West Slope ambulance JPA gets a portion of the base 1 percent of each tax bill on the West Slope. That is what state law requires," Joe Harn, El Dorado County auditor-controller, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The CalTahoe Ambulance JPA was after the passage of Prop. 13. Accordingly, the CalTahoe Ambulance JPA does not get a portion of the base 1 percent of each tax bill in Tahoe. That is what state law requires."

Counties can decide how ambulance service is provided. Mike

Applegarth who works in the chief administrative office chose not to answer the following basic questions:

- Why is the county in the ambulance business?
- Why not let the fire departments run it themselves?

“As part of the JPA contract we have to provide dispatch, ambulances have to meet certain criteria. It’s a comprehensive package,” Jeff Meston, South Lake Tahoe fire chief, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It favors the county.”

Meston said the county is getting money via taxpayers and by billing for ambulance service, but all of it is not returned to the CalTahoe JPA.

“The money exists in accounts we cannot get our hands on,” Meston said.

Last year the JPA board sent out a request for proposal for dispatch service, but it wasn’t done properly so it never went anywhere. The board is made up of two Lake Valley Fire Protection District board members and two South Lake Tahoe City Council members. North Tahoe Fire used to be part of the JPA, so then there was a fifth vote.

CalTahoe Ambulance JPA has been without an executive director until Monday when Ryan Wagoner was hired. He recently took a medical retirement from the city police department. He has also been on Lake Valley’s board. He is also an emergency medical technician.

Other than being dispatched to calls, Wagoner said he is not yet privy to the intricacies of issues surrounding dispatch.

“I heard it will be one of the first things the chiefs want to talk about,” Wagoner told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Letter: Cutting off lake access a bad precedent

To the community,

The story of the Somers Loop Right of Way trail begins with a generous offer, but could end with the local residents and other public losing a well-known trail to the lake.

Nevada Pacific Development Corporation (NPDC) is proposing to donate to the public 16 acres comprising acreage surrounding the Incline Flume/Bullwheel as a trade-off for a long-standing trail to a Crystal Bay beach. This is a generous offer by the owner. But the proposed abandonment and reversion to NPDC of a portion of the Somers Loop Road and the public access trail easement to Lake Tahoe adjacent to NPDC's lakefront properties violates the public's right to use this old trail to the beautiful sandy cove.

While it is exciting that Nevada Pacific Development will donate their other 16 acres, what they propose is a trade-off that results in the loss of public lake access. Tradeoffs are always difficult, but lake access is so limited on the North Shore that existing access to coves and beaches must take precedence.

1. LOSS OF PUBLIC LAKE ACCESS – Public access to the lake in Crystal Bay is limited today; losing one of the area's few access points to Lake Tahoe does substantial harm to the public.

2. LAKE ACCESS/ROW IS PRICELESS – The value of the public right of way and a public access to the lake is a gift that cannot be rejected.

a. The Somers Loop Right of Way is currently used by the public and has been for years.

b. The proposed lake easement can also be accessed from the water.

c. Improving the access route would mitigate runoff and improve accessibility.

3. DANGEROUS PRECEDENT – The proposed abandonment creates a dangerous precedent for the elimination of future public rights of way and lake access easements at Tahoe.

4. PROCESS MUST BE TRANSPARENT –

a. This abandonment process requires an application, a public hearing by both Washoe County and TRPA, and notice to neighbors. County commissioner approval alone is inadequate, as public access to the lake is a TRPA priority and must be heard by the Governing Board.

b. Washoe County has once before required a former owner of this property to submit an abandonment application for the same trail.

c. The application process was never followed.

Laurel Ames, conservation chair Tahoe Area Sierra Club Group

Job fairs ditch paper for bar codes

By Melissa Korn, Wall Street Journal

Job fairs can be infuriating – and inefficient.

Candidates wait on line in front of a booth. When they finally get to the front and start asking questions about that dream career in engineering, the recruiter says he’s actually handling marketing jobs for the company and that other guy, also surrounded by a crowd of candidates, is the right person to talk to. Half an hour, down the drain.

For employers, it’s not much better. Recruiters spend hours talking to hopefuls who stand no chance of being hired, while the really stellar candidates who need to be courted get frustrated and walk away.

There’s no easy fix, but there are signs of progress. Nearly 80 companies, including Bank of America Corp. and bio-pharmaceutical company AbbVie Inc., have partnered with Chicago tech firm Recsolu LLC to make the process slightly more palatable.

Using the firm’s Recpass technology, job-fair attendees can submit their information (name, contact info, résumé) once via a mobile app, and then use a QR code, a type of bar code, to reload it for each company whose booth they visit.

Representatives from those companies can immediately screen for work authorization or years of experience, directing those who don’t meet qualifications to one area, where the applicant can learn some basics about the company, and sending top prospects to another group, where they can be courted a little more personally. Some firms even use the quick screens to invite candidates to hospitality suites for additional meetings that same day.

Read the whole story