Opinion: Why Measure R deserves to be defeated

Publisher's note: ***The following is the rebuttal argument for Measure R that was submitted for the voter guide.***

I feel the best way to decide your vote on Measure R is to simply tour the two facilities in question. At the ball fields you will find new paint, poles, bleachers and grass. All of these improvements were accomplished through the hard work of several individuals and organizations without any financial support from Measure S. Voters should reject Measure R since it will not add any new fields, it will simply destroy and rearrange a fully functioning complex.

Along the bike trail you will find large dangerous cracks that as residents we told the JPA to fix years ago with Measure S. It's obvious the wording of Measure S needs to be changed to allow bike trails the use of its own funding, but why steal half of its money for unnecessary field renovations. Cities like Sacramento, Boise, and Bend have world renown bike trails and, in our struggle to rebrand our city, a freshly paved bike trail system would be a great start.

As residents, we deserve all of our trails to be in the same renovated condition as the Al Tahoe section recently completed.

Locals should vote no on Measure R because our trails need 100 percent of the money voters restricted for its use not just half. With 100 percent of trail funding available, improvements like public restrooms and bike parks can be envisioned and implemented. Safe bike trails benefit all and the unwarranted money grab for the ball fields in Measure R should receive your no vote.

Stephen Reinhard, former South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation

commissioner

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Assemblywoman Beth Gaines, R-Roseville, testified Aug. 17 before the State Water Resources Control Board against what she calls new burdensome stormwater permits that are estimated to cost the state billions of dollars and have a detrimental effect on local businesses and governments.

• There is free yoga on Nevada Beach on Aug. 26 from 5:30-6:30pm, followed by a potluck, wine and snacks. This is put on by Svadhyaya Yoga Studio. Donations will be accepted.

• Tahoe Derby Dames are in action Sept. 17 at 2pm at Bijou Community Park.

• Lorenzo Gigliotti, former South Lake Tahoe fire chief, is now a consultant at Sierra Nevada Strategies.

• South Lake Tahoe's planning staff has been told not to expect a tenant application for the old Mikasa building at the Y for a few months. Exterior and interior improvements, though, are continuing.

• On Aug. 21, Hilride will be back on the South Shore to review their plans for lower Corral Trail. They will be on the trail from 9-11am, so give your input if you are out there.

• Here is Caltrans' Sierra roadwork schedule for next week as well as the Tahoe schedule.

South Shore event pairs wine with barbecue

By Kathryn Reed

Food and wine pairings are nothing new, but beer is the beverage often associated with barbecue. But not if you are Larry Rice.

Rice owns The Best Barbeque Catering Company in Gardnerville. He is bringing his cooking apparatus to Valhalla four times this season to pair his food with wines from El Dorado County.



On Aug. 24 will be the second event this year, with Bella Grace Vineyards being the featured winery.

“The inspiration for the pairings comes from my love of grilling. I’ve been doing this 20 years professionally,” Rice said.

He is familiar with the wines each winery has so that way he knows what best to put on the grill.

Primarily he cooks with mesquite charcoal for the smoky flavor.

Rice has created three rubs and a barbecue sauce (not yet sold commercially) that he likes to use on the meat and fish he barbecues.

“We have a couple barbecues on trailers and several smaller

portable units as well," Rice said. One trailer is what he brings to the South Shore event. "Everything we do we do on location. Nothing is parboiled or precooked. We put it on the grill fresh and it's served as soon as it's off the grill."

Tickets to the events – Aug. 24, Sept. 21, Oct. 19 – must be purchased ahead of time so Rice knows how much food to bring. Tickets are $34.95 and available online.

This is the first year the Tahoe Tallac Association has had events like this. Fifteen percent of the proceeds go back to the organization.

A list of the remaining events at the Valhalla Art, Music and Film Festival are online.

Budget uncertainty hits geothermal sector

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

The highly-polarized budget debate combined with wishy-washy renewable energy policy from Washington, D.C., were identified as key threats to the speedy development of the U.S. clean economy, said experts at a national geothermal conference in Reno.

The need to pare an extra $1.2 trillion from the federal budget especially raised concerns at the Geothermal Energy Association's National Geothermal Summit, largely because of its potential impact on federal tax credits and incentives currently available for renewable energy projects.

These include temporary tax credits and loan guarantees that

developers consider essential in kick-starting expensive and oftentimes high-risk projects.

“The debt ceiling and debt reduction issue in Washington, D.C., really sucked the oxygen out of many firms,” said Jonathan Weisgall, vice-president of legislative and regulatory affairs for MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co. “It is really the overriding issue that will trickle to all parts of the economy, including renewables.”

The concern was echoed by Keith Martin, a partner with international law firm Chadbourne and Park, LLC.

“Think about what was going on just a year ago – there was incredible euphoria about renewables,” Martin said. “Now, renewable folks are trying to stay in the shadows while trying to find “» which budgets will get cut (by Congress). They’re hoping to come out into the daylight next year and push an extension for these incentives.”

Read the whole story

Event focuses on writers from and stories about Lake Tahoe

A Celebration of Writers around the Lake is Sept. 16 at 7:30pm.

Tahoe Writers Works hosts talent from the lake and beyond in a smart, funny, and inspirational night of prose.

Reception starts at 7pm at the Valhalla Boathouse Theater on the South Shore.

The $10 admission includes wine reception and reading.

Survivor of Rwanda genocide to speak in Truckee

On Sept. 17, experience Immaculée Ilibagiza, storyteller, author and inspirational speaker, who will present “Left To Tell: Discovering God amidst the Rwandan holocaust” at the Truckee Community Recreation Center from 7 to 9pm.

Ilibagiza, a survivor of the genocide that took most of her family members, is a powerful example of one woman’s spirit. She and seven other women spent 91 days huddled together in the cramped bathroom of a local pastor’s house during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. She entered the bathroom a lively, 115-pound university student with a loving family and emerged weighing just 65 pounds to learn that most of her family members had been brutally murdered. Ilibagiza credits her salvage mostly to prayer.

Ilibagiza’s first book “Left to Tell; Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust” quickly became a New York Times Best Seller. She was featured in “Architects of Peace” which honored other legends including Mother Teresa, Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama, and she recently signed a contract to produce a major motion picture. Ilibagiza is a leading speaker on peace, faith and forgiveness.

The cost is $30 adults, $15 for those 18 and under. For tickets, call (530) 550.8981.

S. Tahoe retirees grapple with potential spike in health care

Publisher's note: ***This is the second of a two-part series about South Lake Tahoe's fiscal situation.***

By Kathryn Reed

Fixed incomes and health care payments are beginning to clash for South Lake Tahoe retirees.

As retirees, most of their retirement checks are set. Not so when it comes to health care benefits. They get what employees get. And this may mean they could be paying more as of Oct. 1.



While discussions sputter along between city negotiators and the seven collective bargaining units, the retirees are making noise. They want a seat at the table, but are being denied. They say in past years they've been able to have a voice, but say City Manager Tony O'Rourke is denying them that opportunity now.

"As to why the retirees are not at the table: 1. It is not in the seven collective bargaining MOUs. 2. It is exclusive bargaining right of the city and current employees to amend the health plan and cost structure. 3. If retirees were at the table, it is only fair city taxpayers were also there since they ultimately pay for all our health care costs," O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Retirees have three representatives residing in Lake Tahoe – none allowed a seat at the table.

Lake Tahoe News obtained the following message from a 28-year city employee retired for 16 years who sent the following email to O'Rourke, "What is being proposed will put some of us on welfare. The cost of insurance has not gone up very much for the city and to try to increase our deductible by 300 percent for individual and 450 percent for family and a 400 percent increase in individual out of pocket and a 600 percent increase in family out of pocket. My retirement pension is $28,000 per year. We will have to go on welfare. Please don't do this to the retirees. Those that are working can still plan for their future. I'm 70 years old and I cannot; my future was planned 16 years ago and now you're trying to kill me."

Retirees are subject to the same health care as employees – so if employees agree to changes, retirees have no choice.

The current deductible for retirees is $250 and the city is looking at increasing it to $750. Now they must pay $1,000 out of pocket, with the possibility of that increasing to $4,000.

"I wouldn't have left if I knew they were going to take the medical away," said Mike Pollack, who worked for the public works department from 1982-2009. "I have no idea what the recourse is but go back to work."

Retirees have told *Lake Tahoe News* they are looking into their legal options. With one of them being a retired city attorney, they have connections.

One thing several retirees told *Lake Tahoe News* is they sacrificed pay increase with the promise of premium health benefits upon retirement.

"When we retired we expected no changes in our benefits. We had a realistic expectation that what we went out with, we would keep," Candy Morganson, who worked as a secretary for

the fire department, and building and safety from October 1979 to December 2004, said. “What happened is the day you walk out the door they hand you a piece of paper and they force you to sign it. Whatever current employees have, you get, too.”

Many who talked to *Lake Tahoe News* believed they were retiring with a defined health benefit that could not be changed. That’s not the case.

“It’s not my fault they don’t have the money,” Al Turner said. He blames previous councils and city managers for their financial choices as to why there isn’t money now to pay for retiree benefits.

Turner worked for the city in the roads department for nearly 30 years, having retired in April 2004.

He said his colleagues gave up about 12 percent worth of raises to have the city pick up the pension and health care costs.

“Don’t tell me I’m not paying for it,” Turner said.

To reel in costs, a previous City Council passed a policy that says anyone hired after Jan. 1, 2008, will not receive health benefits from the city upon retirement.

Currently, 134 retirees are on the city’s health care plan and 188 employees use it.

The following is an example of a vesting schedule as provided by the city:

> Less than 10 years: employee pays 100 percent, city pays zero.
>
> More than 10, less than 15: employee pays 75 percent, city 25 percent.
>
> More than 15, less than 20: employee pays 50 percent, city

50 percent.

More than 20, less than 25: employee pays 25 percent, city pays 75 percent.

More than 25: employee pays zero percent, city pays 100 percent.

The city is self-insured. The last time the city went out for a request for proposal for health insurance was in 2010.

For 2011-12, the city has budgeted $1,989,712 for retiree health benefits. Health costs are estimated to increase between 4 to 5 percent annually over the next five years, according to the city.

“Assuming a middle point, 4.5 percent increase, then the total amount estimated for the next five years would be $10,885,137,” city spokeswoman Nancy Kerry said.

She broke down the figures as follows:

• Fiscal year 2011-12 $1,989,712

• FY 2012-13 $2,079,249

• FY 2013-14 $2,172,815

• FY 2014-15 $2,270,592

• FY 2015-16 $2,372,769.

Retirees have their own budgets, costs and stories to share.

The following is from Morganson:

“Last August, my husband suffered a life-threatening medical emergency requiring emergency bilateral brain surgery. He spent a combined total of seven weeks in three different hospitals in Reno and San Francisco – nine days in ICU at Renown Medical Center, a month at Tahoe Pacific Hospital

(respiratory rehab) as he required a tracheotomy immediately post-op as he could no longer breath without assistance, and then two weeks in the acute rehab section for TBI at St. Francis Hospital in San Francisco. As you can imagine, the costs for this care were staggering. This doesn't count the cost of the ALS ambulance transport from Reno to San Francisco and from San Francisco back home in Incline Village.

"While Medicare picked up a substantial portion of the costs after their deductible, the city insurance also picked up the balance after applying deductibles. Luckily I had the few thousand dollars to handle that. If the same occurred with the newly proposed cuts in coverage/increased co-pay and 'stop loss' amounts, the result would be financially devastating. As retirees, we exist on a fixed income with very little 'wiggle room' in our budget.

"While nobody can plan for a catastrophic event such we experienced, it only takes once to financially devastate a family. That is yet another reason we retirees want our medical coverage – to remain as it was when we retired and as we were led to believed it would, at least until the day each of us retired and were forced to sign the form I described to you. I think I would be safe to say that retirees would have no problem if current employees want to impose these increased costs on themselves, but we want the city to honor it obligation to us retirees & leave our medical benefits alone."

When Tom Fay started with the city he made $1.85 an hour. By the time he left in 1996 he was making $19/hour as street superintendent of public works. His pension is less than $28,000 a year, he said.

"We gave up several years of raises to get the medical package," Fay said. "The majority of retirees were there when the salaries were low. Medical benefits were the asset they were looking forward to."

Miranda Lambert brings country star husband on stage

Blake Shelton made a surprise appearance at Lake Tahoe on Friday night.

The country music star shared the stage with his wife Miranda Lambert for one song.



Blake Shelton and Miranda Lambert at Harveys on Aug. 19. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Lambert was the real star of the night as she was the headliner on the stage at Harveys as part of the outdoor concert series.

Lake Tahoe News will have more about this dynamic country concert on Monday.

May Ray Fire containment now expected on Sunday

Updated 10:45pm Aug. 19

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Full containment for the 3,895-acre wildfire in Douglas County has been pushed back to Sunday, Sierra Front fire responders report Friday night. Now at 85 percent containment, the fire continued to smolder Friday, officials said.

Two 15-year-old boys suspected of starting a wildfire that burned more than five square miles southeast of Gardnerville will remain in detention until a hearing can be held.

District Judge David Gamble denied requests by defense lawyers Thursday to place the teenagers under house arrest or in the custody of their parents.

Defense lawyers said that the Ray May Fire, which has an estimated 3,895 acres, was an accident that went terribly wrong. Officials said the teenagers built a campfire near a makeshift fort and didn’t properly extinguish it.

But prosecutors said that one of the boys allegedly admitted starting other fires.

KRNV News 4 reported that Gamble offered to recuse himself because he lived in the fire area, but both the prosecution and defense opted to keep him on the case.

The Ray May Fire was 85 percent contained Friday night, and fire crews expected to have a line completely around the fire by Sunday, two days later than originally estimated earlier in the week. The fire continued to creep and smolder on Friday, Sierra Front fire responders said.

Seven structures burned, including one unoccupied dwelling owned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, a seasonal guest house on private land, and five outbuildings.

Pinenut Road was closed for everyone except residents Friday.

Read the whole story

Free movie about Aldo Leopold

“Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time” will be shown at the outdoor theater at the Sagehen Creek Field Station, north of Truckee on Aug. 23. The movie will begin at 6:30pm.

All are welcome to bring a picnic and eat during the movie.

Aldo Leopold was a U.S. Forest Service employee and developed important conservation ideas that were new to his time but still applicable today. He is probably best known for his book “A Sand County Almanac”. This movie was produced by the Forest Service and the Aldo Leopold Foundation.

It is free.