Opinion: Withholding lawmakers' pay the correct decision

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the June 22, 2011, Sacramento Bee.***

Controller John Chiang's bold decision to withhold pay for lawmakers because they passed an unbalanced budget could prompt a constitutional showdown for the ages.

Some lawmakers are already charging that Chiang's decision violates the constitutional separation of powers and sets a perilous precedent. Some are no doubt urging their leadership to take the controller to court.

Yet if lawmakers were to roll up their sleeves instead of rolling out the lawyers, they could avoid a public relations nightmare that would only further sully their reputations. By focusing on the budget instead of lawsuits, they could avert a costly game of chicken, quickly get their paychecks and – mostly importantly – help California right its fiscal ship.

Lawmakers, particularly Democrats, reacted strongly to Chiang's decision. Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez said the controller was allowing the GOP minority to control the budget process. Assemblyman Bob Blumenfeld, D-Woodland Hills, said Chiang "was acting without clear legal authority."

Read the whole story

Nev. Tourism Commission prepares to absorb other entities

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Nevada Tourism Commission got its first view of its new-look agency that will include the Museums and History Division, the Nevada Arts Council and the Nevada Indian Commission when it consolidates in October.

Commissioners heard presentations from the three organizations' representatives at last Thursday's quarterly meeting and formed a search committee to choose a tourism and cultural affairs director.

Larry Friedman, commission interim director, is overseeing the agencies until the Oct. 1 consolidation.

The Legislature approved the consolidation in the last week of the session this month. Consolidation of agencies was a goal Gov. Brian Sandoval outlined before the session.

A committee of leaders from the three groups and two tourism commissioners will review applications for the director, who will have a seat on Sandoval's Cabinet. The full commission is expected to forward three names for Sandoval's consideration within two months.

Read the whole story

Angora Fire: ‘Being away during the fire was a blessing’

Publisher’s note: ***This is the first of two stories about people who lived through the June 24, 2007, Angora Fire.***

By Susan Baker

The North Coast is one of the most beautiful places in California, probably the reason we vacation there every year right after school is out. June 2007 was no different. We packed our car with all our camping gear, camping clothes and our dog and set out for a week of abalone diving and rest. Many times the weather on the coast can be wet and miserable, but when we arrived at McKerricher State Park the sun was shining, the weather was warm and I was happy.

Two o’clock Sunday everything changed. I was sitting around the campsite reading, John was in the ocean abalone diving with our friends, and Lola (our dog) was napping in the quiet sun. My cell phone rang and I answered it. That phone call started a chain of phone calls that would end the day with our home one of the casualities of the Angora Fire. John and I have discussed many times since that day that being away during the fire was a blessing.



Susan Baker

When we returned to Tahoe a week later and began the process of rebuilding our lives and emotions, not experiencing the fire firsthand was kind of like reading about war compared to living it. We had none of the sensory triggers like the smell of smoke or the sound of the sirens, which I feel for many handcuffed them emotionally to the experience for years.

When John got out of the ocean, with his limit of abalone, and returned to the campsite I informed him I thought our house had been lost in a fire at home. It took him a minute or so to understand what I was saying. As I think back to that conversation, I see the ocean in the background, I hear the seagulls talking, and I smell the salty ocean air and the conversation is surreal. To process and wrap your head around losing everything material you own is difficult when the loss is right in front of you. I have decided it is impossible when it is not right in front of you. John's first reaction was how did I know and was I sure. At that point I was pretty positive our home was gone, but had not heard definitively, like from the authorities. So, John in his calm manner said let's not do anything rash (not sure what that meant) until we were sure.

We continued fielding calls from our kids and friends that afternoon, until the final call from our daughter told us our home was gone. Sara had talked to a friend who is a firefighter who happened to be the one assigned to our street. It was confirmed only two homes remained on our street and ours wasn't one. John and I sat, looked at each other, hugged and continued with our camping trip. Were we in denial? I don't know, possibly, it was very easy to ignore the reality being 400 miles away. I don't remember being sad or mad, I just remember thinking what now? The only decision we made was when we got home we would live with Sara and Brian, our daughter and her husband.

The next day we spoke to our kids and got a glimpse of the horror the town was going through. They had not slept much, watching the fire, worrying about their homes and their

friends, listening to the media and trying to make sense of the whole disaster. We had decided to stay put and not come home and finally convinced them to come to the coast. In retrospect, that was the best family decision we could have made. The rest of the week we had time to try to make sense of what had happened and plan for the immediate future. The only thing I knew was that I needed to be with family. We had lost everything, but still had each other and I needed to cling onto that, so that was the plan.

The rest of our vacation was perfect; beautiful weather, friends, lots of abalone, walks on the beach and time.



The Bakers' rebuilt house was on the 2010 home tour. Photos/LTN

The ride home after the week was over we were anxious, not really sure what we were coming home to or how we would feel. It was good to have a tentative plan, but the fear of the unknown was real. We drove directly to our street and took in the devastation from North Upper Truckee to Tahoe Mountain. We pulled up to where our house had been and just sat in the car and looked. I was trying to remember where things had been, our deck, my strawberry garden, the big tree in the middle of the yard, the front door, my favorite spot to sit in the sun and read. Nothing was familiar. We got out of the car and walked around the lot, sifted through a few piles of ash,

talked about what was supposed to be where, began to mentally label what was gone.

A while later our kids showed up and they were more interested in sifting through the ash and actually found a few things … a few broken ceramic crèche figures, a ruby ring John had given me one Mother's Day, and a few coins. We all left and went to Sara and Brian's.

Life has an interesting way of making amends. After one day at our daughter's house we realized it wasn't going to work. Our friends that we were camping with had offered their vacation home to us right after the fire, but we had said no because I was sure I needed to cling closely to my children. We decided to accept their gracious offer and eight days after the fire moved to our new home on Lake Tahoe for the next year and a half. As we enjoyed our year and a half living on the lake, I am convinced that helped wash away so much debris in our minds from the fire. We are now in our new home which we rebuilt on our lot and back in our neighborhood. Life is good.

Dance at South Tahoe Senior Center

South Lake Tahoe Senior Center is featuring a 17-piece Tahoe Dance Band on June 24 from 7:30–10pm.

All ages are encouraged to attend.

Appetizers, wine and dessert are available, with admission $10.

Call Francine Garcia at (530) 541.8380 for more information.

Dangers of boating-drinking part of national ed campaign

Operation Dry Water is a national weekend of boating under the influence detection and enforcement aimed at reducing the number of alcohol and drug-related accidents and fatalities and fostering a stronger and more visible deterrent to alcohol and drug use on the water.

It is always the weekend before Fourth of July.



Law enforcement is in education mode about boating and drinking. Photo/LTN file

Officials will be on Lake Tahoe helping educate people about the dangers of BUI.

It is coordinated by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators – with the states, the U.S. Coast Guard and other partner agencies.

Curbing the number of alcohol and drug-related accidents and

fatalities is key to achieving a safer and more enjoyable environment for recreational boating.

According to the most recent U.S. Coast Guard statistics, boating under the influence is still the leading contributing factor in fatal boating accidents, with 17 percent of boating fatalities a direct result of alcohol or drug use.

Quakes shake North Shore area

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Two earthquakes strong enough to be felt struck north of Lake Tahoe near the California-Nevada border this afternoon.

One measured 3.0 and the other measured 3.1, according to the Nevada Seismology Laboratory. Both were about 1 p.m. They have been reviewed by a seismologist. They were about 6 miles north of Crystal Bay and were about 4 miles to 4. 5 miles deep.

Washoe County Sheriff’s Office spokesman Armando Avina said dispatchers at the Incline substation felt the quakes but got no calls from the public.

Read the whole story

Sandoval snubs NV Energy

lobbyists with veto

By David McGrath Schwartz, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Gov. Brian Sandoval entered office with an impressive resume and sterling reputation, a moderate-to-conservative governor for a moderate-to-conservative state.

If there was a criticism, it was that he, like many Nevada politicians who climb the ranks, was too close to the traditional interests that pull the levers of power in the state.

Some are rethinking those assumptions, however, after Sandoval vetoed a bill rammed through the Legislature at the last minute.

The legislation was Assembly Bill 416, which was pushed by NV Energy, the state's powerful electric monopoly that once employed Sandoval, and its hired lobbyists, Pete Ernaut and Greg Ferraro, the friends Sandoval credits with first suggesting he leave the federal bench to run for governor.

They both later served as volunteer campaign managers.

The veto "demonstrated he's not owned by anybody. He's his own man," said Susan Fisher, a Nevada lobbyist who represented Valley Electric Association, a rural utility co-op, which opposed the bill. "It put to rest a lot of questions and rumors swirling around even before (Sandoval's) election. These buddies, are they going to tell him how to vote? Clearly, no."

Timothy Hay, a former state consumer advocate forced out when Sandoval was attorney general, said, "I think it showed the governor has enough independence to look beyond the short-term politics of legislation, to the long-term impacts of energy policy. It's a refreshingly good sign to me."

The transmission bill was NV Energy's top legislative priority. It would have allowed the utility to build transmission lines to export power using Nevada ratepayer money to fund it, a policy that critics said risked as much as $1 billion in consumer financing.

Not only the legislation was questioned. It was the way it passed.

NV Energy lobbyists, including Ferraro and Ernaut, pushed to get the language passed in the final hour of the session, after traditional avenues to pass legislation failed. The *Sun* detailed the last-minute maneuvering and the fact that some lawmakers didn't know what they had voted for.

Read the whole story

Kindertown remains open per judge's order

By Kathryn Reed

Kindertown Day Care and Preschool was granted a reprieve this morning, allowing it to remain open for at least a month.

The South Lake Tahoe center for youngsters has been in a fight with the Department of Social Services for nearly two years.



This may not have been the last graduating class at Kindertown. Photo/Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Warren Stracener changed his mind June 22. Six days ago he said the center must close June 24. Today he said owner Maria Barrows-Crist will have her day in court July 22 in Placerville.

“I’m not only thrilled for myself, but I’m thrilled for my families,” Barrows-Crist told *Lake Tahoe News* after the hearing.

Mike McLaughlin, who represented Barrows-Crist in court, said the judge reversed his stance from a week ago based on information he received in the last week. He wants both sides to present more information to him in the next month.

None of the families who have children at Kindertown had taken their kids out after being told last week about the threat of closure by Barrows-Crist. State licensing officials were also calling families starting June 17.

The center will be small and private again starting July 1 because the state has eliminated its funding. This leaves about 50 children at the center, though there is room for more.

With the loss of the children who were receiving the state subsidy, it means Kindertown needs fewer employees. A total of eight workers will have left because of this forced decline in enrollment.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Signs are going up along Highway 395 on the Eastern Sierra signifying its historical significance.

• El Dorado County has a webpage devoted to the Lake Tahoe Boulevard project.

• Talking or texting while driving is now illegal in Nevada unless talking with a hands free device. Warnings will be given to begin with, with fines starting Jan. 1.

• North Lake Tahoe takes its music outdoors with a variety of concerts, headliners and festivals – all part of High Notes – North Tahoe's Summerlong Music Series that runs through September.

• South Lake Tahoe Yacht Club's annual Blessing of the Boats is June 26 at 10:45am at the end of the Tahoe Keys property owners' pier.

Learn about bats

Bats are some of the most misunderstood animals. Join park volunteer and bat expert Brian Buttazoni for a program called The World of Bats.

Learn about what bats eat, where they live, how they are beneficial to humans and how to observe them.

The event is June 25, 8:30-9:30pm at the group area at Dayton State Park, located on Highway 50 one half mile east of the stoplight in Dayton.