Opinion: Alter pensions, collective bargaining in California

By Allan Mansoor

Recent events in the Midwest have put a spotlight on one of the most volatile budget issues of the day: pensions for public employees.

Some have described the idea of requiring members of public employee unions to contribute a little bit more to their taxpayer-funded pensions as an assault on working families. But nothing could be further from the truth.

The truth is this: Costs for public pensions have soared nationwide and will continue to soar unless reforms are made. Estimates vary, but they range anywhere from $200 billion to $500 billion in California alone. Last year, a Stanford University study estimated the state's unfunded pension liability at $500 billion, or about six times the current state budget.

Even if the actual number is less, trying to find a couple hundred billion dollars is going to be tough. Taxpayers will be forced to make up the difference either through higher taxes or more cuts in services – or both.

Assemblyman Allan Mansoor, R-Costa Mesa, is serving his first term in the California Legislature and represents the 68th Assembly District.

Read the whole story

Alpine to host Lake Triple Jump Line event

Alpine Meadows Ski Resort’s Take the Lake Triple Jump Line Competition is March 18-20.

Take the Lake hosts some of the country’s top amateur and pro-am skiers and snowboarders —- and this year’s competitors can expect a triple jump line judged by some of the industry’s most sought-after judges.

A $15,000 purse is on the line; and the top finishers of the ski and snowboard divisions will walk with the winnings.

In addition to this marquee competition, Take the Lake competitors, spectators, and party goers will have a chance to throw down their best tricks in the TTL Rail Jam, open to anyone. Starting at 4pm March 19, this on-snow rail jam invites skiers and riders to show off their style – right in front of the Alpine Meadows base lodge. Rail jam entry fee is $5 and prizes include swag as well as cold hard cash.

Registration fee is $100 and includes the March 18 practice day; the March 19 qualifying rounds; and for those who qualify, the March 20 finals. For a detailed competition schedule or to register, go online.

Blister rust threatens to destroy Tahoe's sugar pines

By Kathryn Reed

Orange tinged pine needles signal a tree that is likely to be a skeleton of itself in a couple years. If standing, it will be a dead gray stick of sorts.

White pine blister rust is killing three species of pines found in the Sierra – sugar pine, Western white pine and white bark. With less than 5 percent of sugar and Western white pines having a natural resistance to the fungus, these trees could one day be extinct.



Sugar pines are often more than a foot long.

The Sugar Pine Foundation is attempting to do what it can to prevent them from being wiped out in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

John Pickett founded the nonprofit in 2004. His wife, Maria Mircheva, is executive director. Tressa Gibbard is development coordinator. The trio relies on a wealth of volunteers to further the cause of saving the sugar pine.

Gibbard recently spoke to Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra about the foundation's efforts.

“Blister rust goes from pines to rag weeds to pines. It would not spread if there were no rag weeds,” Gibbard explained.

In the short video the group saw it says 45 percent of the trees on Barker Pass are infested with pine blister rust, while the percentage is 40 on Dick’s Pass.

Pickett, in the film, talks about the billions of dollars spent on attempts to improve the clarity of Lake Tahoe, but wonders why no money is being spent by the states and feds on what is going on in the higher elevations.

He said fewer trees absorbing groundwater means more will flow downhill – and faster. It will contain fine sediment that clouds the lake. Other impacts to the ecosystem would also naturally occur if a species of trees were killed off.

What the foundation is doing to save the sugar pine species is climbing trees each September to harvest cones from the trees that have a natural resistance to the rust. Then the U.S. Forest Service, Pickett’s former employer, grows them into seedlings that can be planted throughout the region.

This spring a group of South Tahoe High School students is slated to plant seedlings in the Angora burn area.

The first plantings by the foundation were in 2008. Gibbard said more than 30,000 seedlings have been planted since then, with the anticipation of 10,000 more going in the ground this year.

Besides volunteering to plant seedlings, people can also become members of the foundation. Details about that and other aspects are on the Sugar Pine Foundation’s website.

Sugar Pine Foundation events:

• March 24: Maria Mircheva and John Pickett will give a talk at Explore Tahoe in Heavenly Village in South Lake Tahoe, 6pm

• April 16: South Lake Tahoe Earth Day at Bijou Park, 10am-4pm

• April 23: Tahoe-Truckee Earth Day at Squaw Valley, 11am-5pm

• April 30: Community Planting in the Angora Burn off Mule Deer Drive, 10am-noon (weather permitting).

Weather system to descend on basin through Monday

A winter weather advisory is in effect from 10pm Sunday to 10am Monday in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The heaviest snow will occur between 10 tonight and 4am Monday. Expect 3 to 6 inches at the lake, with 5 to 10 inches above 7,000 feet.

The Monday commute over the mountain passes is expected to be slick.

Snow was coming down heavy Sunday morning at Sierra-at-Tahoe, while drizzle descended in South Lake Tahoe most of the day.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report



Chart House manager Corinne Best

took pictures of three bears March 5 near the Stateline restaurant.



Three coyotes were roaming in the field March 6 on Venice Drive near Sierra Athletic Club. Photo/Kathryn Reed

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Mammoth snowboarders do well in halfpipe on home terrain

By Lindsey Sine, U.S. Snowboarding

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN -– Kelly Clark of Mt. Snow, Vt., was back at it again Saturday as she, joined by first-time Grand Prix winner U.S. Snowboarding Rookie Matt Ladley of Steamboat Springs, Colo., took to the top of the halfpipe podium at the

Sprint U.S. Snowboarding Grand Prix at Mammoth Mountain. The win cemented Clark's Grand Prix overall title, along with fellow champion Louie Vito of Sandy, Utah, who was third for the day.

"It's great to come out and get another win here. More than the placing, I'm happy with my riding. That's the most important thing for me and the good placing follows that," Clark said.

Clark was followed in second by Gretchen Bleiler of Aspen and Sarah Conrad of Canada was third.

In favor of securing an early lead, Clark put together a run she knew she had on lock with a front 9, back 5, front 7, cab 7 and stalefish.

The event marked the seventh win in-a-row for Clark, who moves onto the Burton U.S. Open this week and hopes to add more wins and titles to her arsenal.

Following behind Ladley were hometown favorite Greg Bretz of Mammoth Mountain for second and Vito with the third.

"It's really good that I was able to come home and perform well. It's kind of bragging rights that I can put it down at home," Bretz said.

And, while it wasn't the exact result he was looking for, Vito was still pleased to come away with his second series title of the season.

The event marked the final tour stop of the Grand Prix series for the 2011 season.

Official results,, 2011 Sprint U.S. Snowboarding Grand Prix, Mammoth Mountain, Halfpipe Snowboarding

Men

1. Matt Ladley, Steamboat Springs, CO, 45.40

2. Greg Bretz, Mammoth Mountain, CA, 43.90

3. Louie Vito, Sandy, UT, 43.00

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4. Trevor Jacob, Mammoth Lakes, CA, 41.60

9. Zack Black, Breckenridge, CO, 35.40

Women

1. Kelly Clark, Mt. Snow, VT, 48.20

2. Gretchen Bleiler, Aspen, CO, 44.50

3. Sarah Conrad, Canada, 35.90

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4. Ellery Hollingsworth, Stratton, VT, 34.60

7. Kaitlyn Farrington, Sun Valley, ID

8. Clair Bidez, Minturn, CO, 14.20

Teller just misses skicross podium

By Freddy Perryman, U.S. Ski Team

MEIRINGEN-HASLIBERG, Switzerland -– X Games champion John Teller of Mammoth Lakes raced to fifth Sunday at Meiringen-Hasliberg, Switzerland. The result moved Teller into fourth in

the FIS World Cup skicross standings. Finland's Jouni Pellinen topped the men's podium with Anna Holmlund of Sweden the women's winner.

Teller, who has been working all season to improve his qualifying runs, ran 10th Saturday to qualify for Sunday's finals. The top eight in qualifying get priority in lane choice during the finals, an important advantage.

In the first heat and quarterfinals, Teller was second in his group, advancing him to the semifinals. For the semifinals, he got out of the gate third, but wasn't able to find the opening he needed to move into second and make his way into the championship round.

Making the small final, Teller got out of the gate and found himself at the back of the pack. With a deft move over the first gap hit, he jumped two spots to get into second. Biding his time over the remaining course, Teller found his opportunity to take the lead in the final stretch crossing the line first to win the small final and finish fifth on the day.

"It was a good race, a lot of passing," said Teller of his small finals performance.

Unfortunately for Teller, Pellinen's win today makes his bid for finishing the skicross season in the top three more difficult. Teller, who has moved to fourth in the skicross standings, trails Pellinen by 78 points with two events remaining.

As the season nears its end, Teller is quick to recognize the roll of his teammates and their support.

"The whole season, it has been really key to have such hard work from my teammates. It is really cool that the ASA [American Skicross Association] team is helping each other, because without them there is no way I would've done what I've done this season," said Teller.

Official results, FIS World Cup,Meiringen-Hasliberg, Switzerland, Skicross

Men

1. Jouni Pellinen, Finland

2. Andreas Matt, Switzerland

3. Daniel Bohnacker, Germany

—

5. John Teller, Mammoth Lakes, CA

Women

1. Anna Holmlund, Sweden

2. Katrin Mueller, Switzerland

3. Ophelie David, France

LTUSD music program

Lake Tahoe Unified School District's Instrumental Music Program presents "Bands In Concert" on March 9 at 7pm in

the South Tahoe Middle School multipurpose room.

The program will feature 200 music students in grades 6-12.

It is free.

Seminar to help businesses get government money

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is partnering with the Federal Technology Center to host a workshop titled Responding to Requests for Proposals on March 10 from 9am-noon.

This is for owners or managers of a small business who would like to expand their sales or services to the government and need ideas.

This event is free and open to the public. It will be at the chamber office, 169 Highway 50, Stateline.

Pre-registration is required – go online or call 866.382.7822.

Ski report: Wear something waterproof



Wind may be an issue higher up. Moisture is coming down, but it’s not all snow.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

U.S. goes 1-2-4 in women's super G

By U.S. Ski Team

TARVISIO, Italy -– The U.S. Ski Team finished 1-2-4 in the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup super G Sunday with Lindsey Vonn of Vail taking the win and her third consecutive World Cup super G title. Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley was second with World Cup rookie Laurenne Ross of Klamath Falls, Ore., in fourth to earn a start at World Cup Finals.

Germany's Maria Riesch was third, yet slipped to a 96 point lead in the overall standings over Vonn with six races remaining in the women's season.

The win was the 41st of Vonn's career and notched her third 2011 title in three days after locking super combined on Friday and her fourth straight downhill title Saturday.

Official results, Audi FIS Alpine World Cupk Tarvisio, Italy, Super G

1. Lindsey Vonn, Vail, CO, 1:21.75

2. Julia Mancuso, Squaw Valley, CA, 1:21.98

3. Maria Riesch, Germany, 1:22.25

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4. Laurenne Ross, Klamath Falls, OR, 1:22.45

11. Leanne Smith, Conway, NH, 1:22.73

26. Stacey Cook, Mammoth Mountain, CA, 1:23.84

Current Super G Points Standings

1. Lindsey Vonn, Vail, CO – 560

2. Maria Riesch, Germany – 389

3. Julia Mancuso, Squaw Valley, CA – 315