Proposal to raise slot fees gains steam in Nevada

By Liz Benston, Las Vegas Sun

A long-running legislative proposal to increase slot machine fees is gaining steam as Nevada deals with a budget deficit of billions of dollars and a gubernatorial mandate to avoid increasing taxes.

Predictably, some casino interests oppose the fee increases, calling them taxes by another name and a shortsighted cash grab that doesn’t fix the underlying problem of a tax system overly reliant on a single industry.

The issue is raising a philosophical debate about whether those who regulate the state’s chief industry should be entirely funded by fees borne by the companies they oversee.

Would funding the budget entirely with fees make the industry’s watchdog more dependent on the fortunes of the gaming industry and thus, hurt its independence?

Will it guarantee robust funds for a regulatory function crucial to the state, assuring that regulators stay ahead of the industry’s growth and complexity?

Read the whole story

Opinion: How about more truth

in politics?

By Jon Ralston, Las Vegas Sun

In the wake of last weekend's horrific shooting, many observers have weighed in with both trenchant and idiotic takes on what the incident means and doesn't mean.

There has been some wonderful stuff – George Will, the National Journal's Kathy Kiely and Josh Kraushaar, to name a few – along with gigabytes of left and right Jabberwocky. But as I have reflected on the tragedy, while marveling at Rep. Gabrielle Giffords' resilience, my reaction has gradually metamorphosed from disgust to resignation.

As many have observed, Jared Loughner so far seems to be a lunatic who does not possess the intellectual moorings to be classified as a right-wing or left-wing maniac. As partisans on both sides discard their self-editing mechanisms to gain advantage, the issue of vitriol in the political discourse is much less relevant than many other topics. And I don't just mean the obvious ones – a renewed debate over limits that should be allowed so Second Amendment remedies are more difficult to carry out and a rare chance to look at how mental health funding, in Nevada and in the country, needs to be revisited.

Those will happen, they will be ephemeral, little will change. But what is dominating the colloquy now, from Capitol Hill to cable TV to the Twitterverse, are calls for more civility in politics, for a tamping down of incendiary rhetoric that may or may not have created an environment for Loughner to act but supposedly could trigger latent Manchurian assassins. And those calls spectacularly miss the point.

Don't misunderstand: There are careless politicians such as Sharron Angle who toss out flammable phrases such as "Second Amendment remedies" and "domestic enemies" and "Sharia law,"

without any regard to the violence that could spring from the small percentage of potentially unhinged folks out there. I never believed, as did some, that Angle was dog-whistling to the nuts; I just think she doesn't think.

Read the whole story

TripAdvisor sponsorships pit North v. South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – TripAdvisor isn't solely driven by free content like customers might think it is. Chambers of commerce and visitors bureaus may buy regions, thus in turn dictating what content viewers see.

The divide is pitting the North Shore against the South Shore in Lake Tahoe.

In July, the North Lake Tahoe Visitors Bureau locked in the use of Lake Tahoe, Calif., as a region. This means people clicking on that region will be fed information dominated by the North Shore entity.

Todd Skelton, sales manager with TripAdvisor, spoke to the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association meeting Jan. 13. He talked briefly that morning about this new product his company has, but more in-depth with *Lake Tahoe News* the following day.

"We do that because user generated content is great for hotels, restaurants and attractions, but it may not be the

best content for a region," Skelton said of the sponsorships.

It's also clearly a tool for TripAdvisor to rake in some cash. The one-year sponsorships range in price from $7,500 to $70,000. The entity that has the rights has first right of refusal when the contract expires.

Skelton said the price depends on how detailed the sponsor wants to be as well as unique visitors to that page.

According to Carol Chaplin, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority executive director on the South Shore, TripAdvisor first offered Lake Tahoe, Calif., to the North Shore. Andy Chapman with NLTRA did not return a phone call.

Skelton said he doesn't have the history of how NLTRA got those rights, but said it is possible for the two agencies to share the name.

"North and South could not play nice in the sandbox. They could not figure out how to split the content," Skelton said.

Starting next week, LTVA will have sponsorship title of Lake Tahoe, Nev.; South Lake Tahoe; and Tahoe area.

"It's an unbudgeted expense, but was required for us to maintain our 'territory,' if you will," Chaplin emailed LTN.

What exactly the respective Lake Tahoe tourism bureaus are paying to TripAdvisor is not known at this time.

TripAdvisor allows nonprofits to buy the regions, not a business. The city of South Lake Tahoe would qualify as such an entity if it so desired.

It wasn't until last year that South Lake Tahoe was listed as its own region. Skelton at the meeting said it has skyrocketed to the 10th most searched California destination – below Santa Barbara and above Napa.

He said even though Expedia bought the 10-year-old company about three years ago, the parent company does not influence placement. For example, a hotel that does not use Expedia will not be placed below ones that do on TripAdvisor, according to Skelton.

One thing that surprised the packed room a the LTVA office on Thursday is people writing reviews from their rooms in Tahoe are likely to not see their posts go live. This is because TripAdvisor's fraud detection system assumes the use of a local IP address is someone in-house doing the review, not a guest in the hotel.

A concern brought up by a meeting attendee was what to do about the customer who complains about something, then threatens to write a negative review on TripAdvisor if their room or meal is not comped.

Skelton advises not giving into to threat. He added that businesses may make a "management response" on the site to counter any negative reviews. However, all the examples he used in doing so were to agree with the person – as in, yes, we are making changes to fix such and such.

Some members in the audience said their experience with TripAdvisor in trying to refute what they called a bogus complaint was unpleasant. It became a he said, he said situation, with the negative review staying.

TripAdvisor and other reviewing sites like Yelp are affecting how consumers choose where to sleep, eat and play. Skelton said TripAdvisor has 35 million reviews, with more than 42 million unique visitors a month.

Lecture about facts of Lake Tahoe

Explore Tahoe Winter Speaker Series continues on Jan. 20 at 6pm. Local author and speaker David Antonucci presents “Amazing Facts About Lake Tahoe.”

The presentation highlights the unique natural wonders of geology, lake depth, and natural history of Lake Tahoe that set it apart from other lakes. Explore Tahoe is located in the Heavenly Village next to North Face at 4114 Lake Tahoe Blvd.

A $5 donation is requested. Refreshments will be provided. A special flat rate of $5 is offered in the parking garage after 4pm. For more information call (530) 542.4637.

Amount of North Shore sewage reaching lake uncertain

By Steve Timko, Reno Gazette-Journal

A five-month-old, $278,000 generator failed Dec. 19 and 150,000 gallons of sewage spilled out of a manhole onto the ground about 260 feet from Lake Tahoe on Dec. 19.

The North Tahoe Public Utility District has hired an expert to try to determine how much of the sewage made it into the lake.

But NTPUD did three tests and there were no indications of pollution in the water, said Pam Lefrancios, an NTPUD executive assistant.

Problems started when the electricity around Lake Tahoe was cut due to weather, Lefrancois said. A $278,000 generator the district had installed the prior July to provide back up power to the sewer pump at the main station kicked on and NTPUD employees then went to install generators at other satellite pumps, she said.

The system notified NTPUD workers that the main generator had stopped working at about 1 p.m. and workers used NTPUD collection system to store the sewage, which averages about 861,000 gallons a day, Lefrancois said.

Read the whole story

California waste to be turned into ethanol in Nevada

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

What Northern Californians throw away might someday end up back in their fuel tanks, courtesy of a newly formed business partnership.

Folsom-based waste hauler Waste Connections has partnered with a Pleasanton company that is ramping up to convert municipal solid waste into ethanol.

Fulcrum BioEnergy Inc. said last week that Waste Connections-collected waste ultimately will be used by Fulcrum's Sierra BioFuels Plant, a planned facility for converting waste into low-carbon ethanol, renewable electricity and other chemical products.

The $120 million facility will be built about 20 miles east of

Reno in the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center in Storey County. It’s expected to be up and running in late 2012.

Fulcrum said the plant will produce large volumes of low-cost transportation fuel and create more than 500 jobs in Northern Nevada while ultimately producing 10.5 million gallons of ethanol annually and 16 megawatts of renewable electricity. Financial terms were not disclosed.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Derby Dames looking for sponsors

Lake Tahoe’s only flat track roller derby league has started gearing up for the 2011 season, with the first bout scheduled for March 12 in Redding. In order to help defray the costs of renting practice space during the winter, uniform costs, traveling to away bouts and hosting home bouts at Lake Tahoe during the summer, the Tahoe Derby Dames seek sponsorship assistance from local businesses.

Besides the warm and fuzzy feeling a local business may receive from supporting a skater owned and operated, fully volunteer organization that also gives back to the community, there are valuable and tangible benefits, ranging from season passes to all home bouts to exposure on the Dames’ website, plus much more.

Sponsorship opportunities start at $100, and can be customized to fit your needs. If you’re interested in supporting the Tahoe Derby Dames in 2011, contact tahoederbydames@sbcglobal.net or call (530) 318.5158.

Study: Devastating floods would be worse than major earthquake

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

California has more risk of catastrophic storms than any other region in the country – even the Southern hurricane states, according to a new study released Thursday.

The two-year study by the U.S. Geological Survey is the most thorough effort yet to assess the potential effects of a "worst-case" storm in California.

It builds on a new understanding of so-called atmospheric rivers, a focusing of high-powered winds that drag a fire hose of tropical moisture across the Pacific Ocean, pointed directly at California for days on end. The state got a relatively tame taste of the phenomenon in December.



More backyards in Tahoe may flood if predictions come true. Photo/Kathryn

Reed

The team of experts that developed the scenario can’t say when it will happen. But they do say it has happened in the past and is virtually certain to strike again.

“This storm, with essentially the same probability as a major earthquake, is potentially four to five times more damaging,” said Lucy Jones, USGS chief scientist on the study. “That’s not something that is in the public consciousness.”

The study aims to fix that.

Read the whole story

Anderson’s slopestyle win puts her atop leader board on TTR World Tour

LAAX, Switzerland – South Lake Tahoe’s Jamie Anderson and Finland’s Roope Tonteri were victorious in today’s slopestyle finals at the 12th annual 6Star Burton European Open.

With her win today, earning 1,000 TTR ranking points, Anderson takes over the Swatch TTR World Tour lead and put herself in an excellent position to make a move for the 2010-11 TTR World Tour Champion title.

This was Tonteri’s first 6Star title of his career, which bolstered his spot at World No. 8 in the TTR World Tour Rankings.

Both secured spots to compete in the 2012 World Snowboarding

Championships taking place in Oslo, Norway, in February 2012.

Anderson rode with her signature smooth style stomping a backside tailslide on the down rail, a Millerflip on the steel ball, tailblunt to fakie on the mailbox and a switch boardslide to 5-0 on the kinked rail in the jib section then threw a backside alley-oop on the quarterpipe into a backside 360, frontside 360 and a huge backside 180 Japan on the kicker line.

Anderson, who skis for Sierra-at-Tahoe, said, “The win feels great. I would love to win the TTR World Tour title again. We’ll see if it’s meant to be. I’m going to do my best, ride strong and hope to do well.”

Complaints against EDSO must be refiled

By Carlos Alcala, Sacramento Bee

A federal judge told employees suing the El Dorado County Sheriff’s Office this week that they must clean up and refile their legal complaints by the end of the month.

U.S. District Court Judge Frank C. Damrell Jr. issued the orders in two lawsuits Monday, giving the plaintiffs 20 days to refile.

The suits were filed last year by then-Deputy Tanya Hunt and three community service officers with the Sheriff’s Office – Nicole Sahaj-Myers, Stacie Walls and Jona Scher.

The women complained that other members of the department had harassed and discriminated against them.

Read the whole story