California unemployment fund running $10 bil. deficit

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

California businesses already pay some of the highest unemployment taxes in the country – and the tab is likely to increase.

The recession and the Legislature's decision years ago to raise benefits have drained the state unemployment insurance fund, which now has a estimated $10.3 billion deficit.

The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office, in a recent report titled "California's Other Budget Deficit," said the state will probably need to raise unemployment taxes on employers as well as reduce benefits to bring the fund back in balance.

Raising the tax would require a two-thirds vote in both houses of the Legislature and might be politically impossible. Gov.-elect Jerry Brown has promised not to raise taxes without voter approval.

But pressure is growing on Sacramento to fix the system soon – whether it wants to or not. California has borrowed about $8.5 billion from the federal government to keep benefits flowing, and the repayment obligations are coming due.

Read the whole story

Nevada State Parks calendar on sale

Nevada State Parks has published a 2011 calendar containing full-color images of many of Nevada's state parks, from Lake Tahoe to Berlin-Ichthyosaur in central Nevada to Cathedral Gorge and Valley of Fire state parks in the southern region of the state.

Many of the images in the calendar were submitted by visitors.

Calendars may be purchased here. A free preview of the calendar is available at that link. A portion of sales goes to State Parks.

Postal Service deadlines to deliver international mail by Dec. 25

Shipping packages to friends and family around the world in time for the holiday season can be as simple as clicking here.

Whether ordering shipping supplies, printing postage, getting information about mailing guidelines, filling out required customs forms or requesting free package pickup, the U.S. Postal Service is ready to help international shippers get a head start on the holidays.

Shipping packages around the world can often be done without leaving your home.

Customers going online can save on postage and order free Priority Mail Flat Rate boxes. Priority Mail Flat Rate boxes are available in four sizes, with shipping prices starting at $11.45 to Mexico and Canada, or $13.45 to most other countries. Priority Mail Flat Rate boxes are also available free at any post office. Postage, labels and customs forms can be printed online anytime using Click-N-Ship.

The Postal Service recommends the following deadlines for international delivery of holiday cards and packages by Dec. 25.

International Mail Addressed To	Global Express Guaranteed (GXG)1	Express Mail® International (EMS)2	Priority Mail® International (PMI)4	First-Class Mail
Africa	Dec. 17	Dec. 11	Dec. 3	Dec. 3
Asia/Pacific Rim	Dec. 17	Dec. 16	Dec. 10	Dec. 10
Australia/New Zealand	Dec. 17	Dec. 16	Dec. 10	Dec. 10
Canada	Dec. 21	Dec. 17	Dec. 13	Dec. 10
Caribbean	Dec. 20	Dec. 16	Dec. 13	Dec. 10
Central & South America	Dec. 20	Dec. 11	Dec. 3	Dec. 3
Mexico	Dec. 21	Dec. 16	Dec. 10	Dec. 10
Europe	Dec. 20	Dec. 16	Dec. 13	Dec. 10
Middle East	Dec. 17	Dec. 16	Dec. 13	Dec. 10

California budget deficit

projected to top $25 bil.

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

In what has become a somber November tradition, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office projected Wednesday that California must close a $25.4 billion shortfall next year, twice as large as legislative leaders predicted.

California faces another major budget problem because tax rates are slated to drop, the federal government will provide less relief and state leaders enacted a flimsy fiscal plan last month, the analyst's office found. The economy is recovering, but not fast enough to overcome the state's budgetary obstacles.

The latest projections suggest a difficult road ahead for Gov.-elect Jerry Brown, who will likely spend much of the next four years wrestling with budget problems. The LAO report forecasts annual budget deficits of about $20 billion through 2015-16 without permanent changes.

The new deficit is larger than last year's $19 billion gap, which took legislators and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger until Oct. 8 to resolve, the latest budget enactment date in state history.

Read the whole story

President Grant's trip

through Nevada

By Guy Rocha

Despite claims to the contrary, former President Ulysses Grant didn’t get into hot water at Walley’s Hot Springs or Steamboat Springs.

Grant, accompanied by his wife and son on a world tour, visited Nevada in October 1879.

Grant had long since left the military as a Union Civil War hero and recently completed two terms as president of the United States (1869-77). His itinerary in Nevada was tightly scripted. Virtually every step he took was covered by the area’s newspapers.

On Sunday afternoon, Oct. 26, 1879, the Grant family detrained at Truckee. A carriage conveyed the party to Tahoe City where they were met at 2:30 p.m. by a delegation of prominent Nevadans, including lumber tycoon Duane L. Bliss. They boarded Bliss’ steamship the Meteor and crossed Lake Tahoe to Glenbrook. There, according to the Carson City Morning Appeal, passage was taken on Bliss’ narrow gauge Lake Tahoe Railroad to Spooner Summit. Renowned stagecoach driver Hank Monk held the reins of Grant’s carriage as it traveled down Clear Creek Canyon to Carson City, where a throng of people jubilantly greeted the former president at 7pm.

Guy Rocha is the former state archivist with the Nevada State Library and Archives, a Division of the Department of Cultural Affairs. For more information, go to http://nsla.nevadaculture.org/.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe gathers to honor local veterans

By Kathryn Reed

Veterans tend to carry scars upon their body, mind and sole. The scars never completely fade away – whether they have left the battlefield or left the service.

Speakers at South Lake Tahoe's Veterans Day ceremony at the packed American Legion Hall reiterated this reminder in their various ways, many on the verge of tears.

The more than 100 in attendance sat on the floor, friend's laps, stood and drifted into the hall to be part of this annual day to honor all veterans.



Curt Emrie leads the Veterans Day ceremony in South Lake Tahoe. Photos/Kathryn Reed

"We understand the sacrifices service members and their

families make every day," said Curt Emrie of Legion Post 795. "We will remember you always not for protecting our freedom, but for putting service before self."

With a heavy heart, George Ramirez, who is the POW representative for the area, spoke about how vets Bill Hanson and Gene Ross are not doing well – and will no likely be here for next year's service.

Hanson was a prisoner of war. Ross is former commander of the local post.

For the six veterans at Barton's Skilled Nursing Center, goody bags were to be taken to them after the ceremony to honor them.

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago spoke of her father who served in Vietnam and was in the Navy for 25 years.

"What I have learned from my father is to stick by what is right," Santiago said. "As your supervisor, I am committed to the veterans of this community."

She mentioned how next week she and her colleagues will be faced with making $5.5 million in cuts for the next fiscal year – just half of what will be slashed in the coming months from the 2011-12 budget. Veterans' services could be axed. Santiago, though, pledged her vote would be to keep the programs intact.

For Patty Smith and Kenny Curtzwiler, Thursday was about their sons who are no longer here. Smith lost her son, Timmy, in combat in 2008. Curtzwiler spoke briefly about his son, Kaleb, who had been in the military, who took his life earlier this year. The boys were high school friends.

John Lingar paid tribute to the prisoners of war and those missing in action. A table sat for one was at the front of the room representing the lone soldier against his or her captors.

The white table cloth a symbol of purity, a single rose for the blood that may have been shed, a yellow ribbon for hope of their return, a slice of lemon for their bitter fight, a flickering candle as the beacon of light in their dreams leading them home.

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Winter driving class in South Tahoe

The California Highway Patrol is offering a driving class called Winter Driving Safety & Survival.

Winter Driving Safety & Survival is aimed at helping educate all drivers about the hazards of winter driving. The class was created in an effort to preemptively reduce the incidence of injuries and deaths resulting from winter-related motor vehicle collisions and incidents.

With the use of still photographs and videos, officers in attendance will address drinking and driving, winter preparation, snow tires, speed limits, snow chain installation, anti-lock braking systems, stopping distances, restraint use and more. This class is conducted within the classroom and does not offer any behind the wheel training.

The class will be Nov. 16 at the South Tahoe High School Library and is free. Class starts at 6pm and will conclude at approximately 8pm.

This class is highly recommended for new drivers, drivers unfamiliar with winter driving conditions and drivers wishing

to learn more about winter driving.

Harrah’s honors vets with free meal

Active military and Armed Forces veterans may enjoy a free dinner at the Forest Buffet at Harrah’s Lake Tahoe in Stateline tonight in honor of Veterans Day.

Military identification is necessary.

Celebration of 2 Tahoe literary journals

Literary Journal Lollapalooza at Bona Fide Books in Meyers is the celebration for two Lake Tahoe literary journals – the Edge and the Kokanee.

The event is Nov. 18 from 7-10pm, 1069 Magua St., No. 4, Meyers – behind the Getaway Cafe.

A glimpse into the rigors of operating a winery

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Rattling off a slew of women's names, Maggie Bush proved men do not dominate the wine industry.

She credits the profession being only a few decades old – at least in the United States – for it being a field equally open to both sexes.

Bush, with husband Paul, owns and operates Madroña winery in Camino.



Maggie Bush

"I've never been in a spot where I was stopped or hit a bridge because I'm a woman," Bush told the group from Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 10 at Harrah's. "Women have always been involved in wine."

As a family operation, she does a little bit of everything. She's picked grapes, crushed them, drove a tractor, tasted wines at 9am (to which she says she's learned to spit), figured out marketing is creating rack cards and knowing the wines are in the correct restaurant, dealt with cash flow (she was once a certified public accountant), and worked on frost protection (where 30 minutes can mean the loss of an entire crop).

Those are just some of the hats she wears.

Bush married into the business. Her in-laws, Dick and Leslie Bush, planted the first grapes in 1973, with the inaugural harvest coming five years later. The tasting room, where 70 percent of the business comes from, opened in 1980. Nine years ago they turned the reins over to the next generation.

Maggie and Paul Bush have two young daughters; one who tells people she is the owner and the other who wants nothing to do with the winery.

Madroña got its name from the large 300-year-old madrone tree in the vineyard that continues to be a pillar in the vineyard. It's the symbol on their label.

While some wineries buy grapes from elsewhere, all of Madroña's are from land the family owns – thus being able to use the term "estate" on all bottles.

Many wineries that bottle 12,000 cases a year specialize in a handful of varietals. At Madroña they grow 27 kinds of grapes. They make what they like to drink.

At the Wednesday gathering Bush was asked what her favorite wine is. She smiled, saying that's a bit like asking which of her children she likes best.

But she did admit Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Riesling are some of her favorites.

In fact, the family will be spending a few months next year in France immersing themselves in the world of Malbec. It's their travels that keep them rejuvenated, Bush said.

Creating wines that go well with food is one of Madroña's goals. For those who want to experience that, for one night there is no need to go off the hill. Madroña's wines will be poured Nov. 12 during the Soroptimists' annual wine tasting fundraiser from 6-9:30pm at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.