Documentary explores public education

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

Political pressure on teachers unions has been mounting for months, with national attention focused on charter schools, merit pay and other approaches to education that unions generally hate.

Now the pressure is moving to the big screen in a manner sure to pervade the public consciousness in a whole new way. Three new documentary films explore public education, taking stances that have inflamed teachers unions and brought applause from organizations that support charter schools and other union-busting changes.

The films criticize tenure and highlight how difficult it is for school districts to fire bad teachers. They present the unions as a major cause of problems in America's public schools. The solution, offered in two of the films through compelling stories of children trying to get into better schools through a lottery, is charter schools.

Read the whole story

California budget agreement possible next week

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

State leaders broke a dubious record today as California

entered the 86th day of the fiscal year without enacting a budget.

Perhaps that served as sufficient motivation. Legislative leaders and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger announced Thursday they had agreed on a “framework” for a budget agreement that could be voted on as early as next week.

But they provided no official details on the plan they discussed at Schwarzenegger’s private office in Santa Monica. And they were hesitant to call it an official compromise until after they brief lawmakers and meet again Monday in Sacramento. The state faces a projected $19 billion deficit, more than one-fifth of the general fund budget.

“The governor and legislative leaders have reached the framework of an agreement, will work through the details over the weekend, and hope to come to a final agreement when they reconvene Monday,” Schwarzenegger spokesman Aaron McLear said in a statement that was reviewed by legislative leaders.

Read the whole story

Toy Run to benefit Christmas Cheer

Lake Tahoe’s 20th annual Toy Run is Oct. 2.

Line up at Turn 3 Sports Bar at 2227 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe at 10am. Depart at noon for the Flight Deck Restaurant at Lake Tahoe Airport.

There will be live music, food, drinks and raffles. Deep Fryed Mojo and Cash Only bands will play from noon-8pm.

Entry fee is one new toy. They all go to Christmas Cheer.

For more information, call Mary Luckel at (530) 541.4332 or (530) 416.4166.

Sierra-at-Tahoe trash cleanup party

Sierra Resort has planned its annual Keep Sierra Clean day for Oct. 10 at 10am and has set a target of collecting 10 pounds of trash per attendee from the slopes.

In addition to doing good for the local environment, this event annually builds momentum heading into winter for those most loyal to Sierra-at-Tahoe. Friends, family, local ski and snowboard teams, and dedicated passholders turn out to show their love for the mountain by giving their time and effort to keep it beautiful.

This year’s collection effort will cover some of the most impacted trails and base area locations, as well as spread out across areas that have not been covered by previous year’s events. All of the trash will be weighed and collected, with prizes given in a variety of categories. There will be a barbecue with live music by Acoustic MoJo at the end of the day to celebrate Keepín Sierra Clean.

Participants should come prepared to navigate steep and sometimes rocky terrain with sturdy footwear. Work gloves are recommended. To help keep the event low-impact, participants should also bring their own water bottles.

After the conclusion of the event, there will be a tailgate

ski swap in “B” Lot, where participants are invited to buy and sell ski and snowboard gear. There is no fee to participate in the swap, which will end at 3pm.

Event schedule:

10:10am registration begins

10:30am head out on the mountain

Noon live music by Acoustic MoJo

12:30pm gather by the main lodge to weigh trash

1pm BBQ begins

1:30pm prizes distributed

2pm ski swap begins

3pm event concludes.

Garrido returning to court today

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

In the latest twist in the Jaycee Lee Dugard case, kidnap suspect Phillip Garrido is set to return to court today, where his attorney may say she doubts his mental competence.

A closed hearing on the matter was held Thursday morning in El Dorado Superior Court, followed by an order that Garrido return to court today at 1 p.m.



The order did not specify what action may be taken, but at the last hearing for Garrido and his wife, Nancy, the judge noted that the issue of Phillip Garrido's mental competence might come up.

The development comes a day after word leaked that the couple had been indicted by an El Dorado County grand jury in a maneuver that may lead to the cancellation of a planned preliminary hearing set for Oct. 7.

Read the whole story

Real estate brings Vail Resorts' quarterly profits down

By Ed Sealover, Denver Business Journal

Vail Resorts Inc. ended fiscal year 2010 with increased revenue year-over-year from its mountain segment, but decreased net revenue from its lodging and real estate segments, leading to an overall 11.1 percent decrease in revenues, according to fiscal results released Thursday.

Net income for the Broomfield-based company (NYSE: MTN) was $30.4 million, or 83 cents per diluted share, in the fiscal year that ended on July 31, compared to $49 million, or $1.33 per diluted share, in the prior year.

Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz lauded the performance, noting that

net revenue increased 3.9 percent for the important mountain segment that covers the company's four Colorado ski resorts and one on the California-Nevada border.

The overall 37.9 percent net income decline was due primarily to the timing of real estate closings at the company's newly opened properties in Breckenridge and Vail – closings that he expects to increase in the current fiscal year.

Read the whole story

Donation from marathon keeps BMX rolling

To the community,

Les Wright of the Lake Tahoe Marathon recently donated $1,000 to the South Lake Tahoe BMX Association. The BMX Association is a nonprofit organization designed to provide quality BMX programs that promote safety, fun, and good sportsmanship in a positive and healthy environment.

The track is open June 1 through Oct. 1 and just completed its 11th season of operation.

On behalf of the youth and families that participate in BMX, thank you to the Lake Tahoe Marathon for the generous donation.

Lauren Thomaselli, BMX organizer

South Tahoe housing prices keep dropping

By Ron Trujillo, Sacramento Business Journal

Sacramento-area home prices dropped last month compared to a year ago, as the four-county region remains one of the most sluggish markets for a recovery in the state.



The region's median home price – meaning half the homes sold for more, the other half for less – dipped 2.8 percent to $186,750, compared to August 2009. Home sales have plummeted 11.3 percent from a year ago, largely because home-buying incentives stopped, according to a California Association of Realtors report released Wednesday.

There is some gain with home prices in the region, but it's modest compared to other markets in the Golden State.

The four-county region's current price is 11.6 percent hgigher from the trough price of $167,340 in April 2009, the third-worst performance in the state – and 18 percentage points lower than the current price-to-trough price recovery statewide, according to the association.

And the region's current home price remains 53 percent lower than the peak of $394.450 in August 2005, though only slightly worse than the peak of the market-to-current price statewide.

A county-by-county look:

• El Dorado – Homeowners here endured the most pain in the region, with home prices tumbling 7.2 percent to $290,000, from $312,500 in August 2009, according to a California Association of Realtors report released Wednesday. Placerville

accounted for much of the decline, with home prices falling 19.6 percent from a year ago. However, El Dorado Hills and South Lake Tahoe home prices also fell.

Read the whole story

O’Connor backs changing how Nevada selects judges

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

Retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor continued her push Wednesday to change the way Nevada selects its district judges and Supreme Court justices.

O’Connor, the first woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court, is backing Ballot Question 1, which would end Nevada’s system of electing judges and replace it with a system where judges would first be appointed by the governor after a review by a judicial committee.



Sandra Day O'Connor

Those appointed judges, however, would face voters in a retention election within two years of their appointment and would remain on the job if 55 percent of Nevada’s voters approve of them. After their initial retention vote, judges

would then face the voters every six years in an election where they would run against their record – not an opponent.

O'Connor spoke to the editorial board of the Reno Gazette-Journal on Wednesday, saying the proposed system would do away with the election of unqualified candidates and would remove politics and cash contributions from judicial election campaigns.

Read the whole story

Water board monitoring Leviathan Mine activity

By Harold Singer

The Water Board's Leviathan Mine treatment contractor began this year's acid mine drainage (AMD) treatment activities on July 9. This followed the late-June sludge disposal activities for about 600 tons of sludge from the previous year's treatment activities.

Three ponds at the Alpine County site collect AMD from a former mine tunnel (the Adit) and from an underdrain system in the former mine pit. The ponds were constructed in 1984 by the Water Board as part of a pollution abatement project at the site. The ponds capture these two AMD sources that otherwise would discharge to Leviathan Creek.

Significant mining activities that started in about 1952 by the Anaconda Company exposed the pyrite and other sulfide minerals in the rocks at the site to water and air. AMD is formed by the oxidation of these minerals, resulting in the

production of hydrogen ions, and ultimately sulfuric acid. This acid solubilizes iron and other metals in the rock.

The resultant AMD is very acidic (typical pH of about 2) and contains arsenic, cadmium, copper, aluminum, nickel, iron, and other metals at concentrations that are deleterious to water quality and that would adversely affect aquatic organisms. The Water Board's capture and treatment of the AMD results in removal of most of the metals, neutralization of the acidity, and discharge of water that meets the established U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) discharge criteria.

As of mid-August, the Water Board's treatment contractor had treated and discharged about 5.8 million gallons of AMD from the ponds. Water Board staff estimate that a total of about 7.5 million gallons of AMD will be treated this year, making it the third highest volume treated since the Water Board began treatment in 1999. The variation in amount of AMD generated in any year is directly proportional to the amount of precipitation.

Higher precipitation years result in greater groundwater flows into the adit and underdrain system. All of the AMD in the ponds is treated during the summer in order to maximize the pond volume available for AMD capture through the fall, winter and spring, when access to the site is limited and treatment is not readily available.

Water Board staff provide oversight of the treatment contractor through the treatment season. Oversight activities include checking plant operations, treatment quality, sludge production, and effluent quality. Effluent discharge monitoring is conducted twice weekly by Water Board staff through sampling and laboratory analysis. Stream monitoring is conducted monthly at numerous sampling sites by Water Board staff. All treatment and monitoring activities are conducted in conformance with the USEPA's orders to the Water Board and Annual Workplans approved by the USEPA.

A couple of significant staffing changes have occurred on the project this past month. Laurie Scribe, an environmental scientist who has worked on the project for ten years, transferred to the TMDL and Basin Planning Unit to expand her Water Board experience.

Scribe managed all the Water Board's monitoring activities, laboratory contracts, and much of the supply and equipment purchasing for the project, as well as providing support for other Leviathan project activities. Her presence on the project will be missed. Scribe has trained Lisa Scoralle, an engineering geologist, to take over the monitoring and related activities.

Also, Chein Kao, the Leviathan Mine Unit supervisor, retired at the end of July, after two and a half years with the Water Board and many years at the Department of Toxic Substances Control. Due to the current state budget situation, we will not be able to fill that supervisory position for some time. Chuck Curtis, division manager for the the Cleanup and Enforcement Division of Lahontan, will be in charge in the interim.

Harold Singer is executive director of Lahontan Water Quality Control Board.