Perez: Putting money toward resources, not himself

Letter to the Publisher,

With 12 vacant deputy positions, we must look introspectively at what we can do for our county and Sheriff's Department to help improve public safety and community services. Personally, I have chosen to reduce my salary if elected sheriff.

As you may know, the sheriff of El Dorado County receives a salary of $15,236 each month, plus benefits totalling thousands more each year.

I've said from the beginning of my campaign that if elected sheriff, I will reduce my pay to $1 above that of the undersheriff. This will result in an immediate savings to the county and Sheriff's Department of $27,384 each year.

Further, once in office, I will work to eliminate overlapping coverage I may already have such as medical, dental, life insurance, and long term care insurance. Additionally, if I'm elected sheriff, the county can eliminate its contribution into the PERS retirement system on my behalf. These benefit reductions will realize additional savings of thousands of dollars each year.

My self-imposed cuts will save precious dollars which I will ask be redirected to help fill vacant deputy positions. This is but one example of many fiscal restructuring efforts I will implement, if elected sheriff, to return more deputies to our schools and neighborhoods.

Stan Perez, El Dorado Hills

Vets a priority in Placer County

Provided by Placer County

More than 32,000 veterans call Placer County home, and it's Rick Buckman's job to reach out to them and provide the help and services they need to obtain benefits.

During the 2008-09 fiscal year, Buckman, the county's veterans services officer, and his staff filed 3,500 claims for Placer County veterans, garnering $22 million in benefits for them. This was an increase from 1,700 claims and $10 million received in benefits for veterans the year before. Since Buckman's arrival to Placer County in May 2006, services to area veterans have increased dramatically.

The proof is in the numbers. In the year before his arrival, the office filed about 400 claims on behalf of veterans.

"All it takes is a veteran from any war to stop by our office, and we do all the work to file a claim for them," Buckman said. "We are not the VA – we're the county and our job is to get our local veterans the federal money and assistance available to them."

The Veterans' Service Office provides assistance and advice to veterans and their dependents in obtaining veteran benefits. Its mission is to promote the interests and welfare of veterans and their dependents and survivors and to enhance their quality of life through counseling, education, claims assistance and advocacy.

Some benefits available to veterans include compensation for

service injuries, pensions for non-service disabilities, health care enrollment, claims filing for payment of insurance policies and a college fee-waiver program for dependents of disabled veterans who wish to enroll in a communitye college, CSU or UC.

Buckman, who has more than 20 years experience in veterans' services and is retired from the Army, isn't surprised at the number of veterans, especially those from World War II, who come into his office unaware of the benefits available to them.

"The older veterans were told years ago they weren't eligible for benefits, and even though the laws have changed, they still don't know. They don't know to ask. Many veterans aren't aware they have benefits, unless they are connected to a veterans' group," said Buckman.

For instance, last year a significant new benefit became available for all veterans, no matter when they served. This benefit allows compensation for veterans suffering from ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Surviving spouses are also eligible for compensation. However, Buckman said, most veterans were not aware of this benefit.

"The VA posted it on the website, but most people don't read their website, and I only had one or two people come in to file a claim. However, when a letter appeared in the newspaper, in one of those nationally syndicated advice columns, then I suddenly I had about 10 people come in to file claims."

Vietnam veterans should be aware of a recent benefit which specifically affects them. Three more diseases have been added to the presumptive list, meaning if Vietnam veterans suffer from these diseases, they will receive compensation. The diseases recently added to the list are: Parkinson's disease, Ischemic heart disease and hairy cell leukemia.

Since Buckman took the job as veterans service officer in 2006, he made veterans who are seniors a top priority because many eligible World War II and Korean War veterans were not receiving benefits such as pensions and compensation for injuries. He also found caregivers who assist veterans sometimes are ill informed about how to obtain benefits for veterans. The Veterans Office also took steps to reduce the time needed to process claims by automating the process for submitting claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

As part of his outreach to veterans, Buckman speaks to veterans' groups and community organizations, such as Veterans and Families and the Gathering Inn. His office also contacts discharged veterans who settle in Placer County to help them with their benefits. Recently, Buckman started visiting Sierra College one day a week to connect with younger, recently discharged veterans to help them file claims for injuries and free VA health care benefits.

To help veterans find jobs, the office works with Roseville One-Stop Career Center and the California Employment Development Department.

Buckman is a busy man. The office has four full-time staffers and the department talks to or helps an average of 450 veterans a month. The three phone lines are constantly busy, and Rick personally sees a client every 30 minutes.

Wednesday is Veterans Day and that morning Buckman and other veterans will march through downtown Auburn in the annual parade. After the parade, Buckman will emcee Veterans Day events at the fairgrounds. This year the theme is "Welcome Home, Vietnam Veterans."

In mid-January 2010, the Placer County Veterans' Services office will move from the DeWitt Center in Auburn to its new and larger home at 1000 Sunset Blvd. in Rocklin. The move is due partly to outgrowing its current space and partly to be

closer to a larger population of veterans. The new office will combine the Auburn office and the current Roseville office.

Office hours will remain the same: 8am-noon and 1-5pm Monday through Friday.

For more information about the Veterans' Services Office, call (530)889.7968, email veterans@placer.ca.gov or visit the county website at Placer County Veterans' Services.

STPUD water meter project grows by more than 80%

By Kathryn Reed

A lackluster economy is boding well for South Tahoe Public Utility District.

It means instead of 1,525 water meters being installed in 2010, a total of 2,775 will be.

This is the result of the initial bid coming in much less than anticipated. The district expected to use the bulk of its $4.38 million grant from the federal stimulus package on 1,525 meters.

However, all eight bids came in at less than $3 million. The project was awarded Oct. 29 to Tiechert of Sacramento for $1.98 million.

“That did free up some money,” said John Thiel, principal engineer at STPUD. “We were burning the midnight oil this weekend to get the specifications done (for the next round).”

This is because a contract needs to be in place by Dec. 22 or the district loses the cash it hasn’t spent. It was just on Friday that the board gave the go ahead to start advertising for the additional meter project. The board is expected to award the second bid on Dec. 17.

Technically, the additional 1,250 meters will be the third bid on meters. This is because 163 were installed this fall off of Ski Run Boulevard and near Los Angeles Avenue.

The Tiechert contract is for meters in the Al Tahoe, Glenwood and Gardner Mountain areas.

The next bid will be for work in the Angora burn area, Twin Peaks, North Upper Truckee and Christmas Valley areas.

“There is additional money so we can do quite a bit more than we thought,” Thiel said.

Water meters are going to be mandatory by 2025 per California law. The total cost to install the 10,000 meters for STPUD customers is estimated at $20 million. The more grants the district can obtain, the less impact to ratepayers.

Running away – the whys, the consequences

By Laura Salinas

Between 1.6 million and 2.8 million youth run away each year

and even more contemplate running. What would lead teens to believe life is better on the streets than in their home? Factors that lead youth to run away are family conflict, sexual orientation, drug/alcohol related issues or escaping state care. For whatever reason youth choose to run away, life on the streets further exposes them to life threatening risks.

Youths under the age of 18 are at higher risk for homelessness than adults. Young people who have made the choice to leave their homes are at an elevated risk for pregnancy, suicide attempts, substance abuse, and participating in criminal activity.

Awareness and prevention is the best way to help the youth in our community from feeling that running is the best solution.

November is National Runaway Prevention Month. It is a public education campaign coordinated between the National Runaway Switchboard, Tahoe Youth & Family Services, and people in the community. The goal is to increase awareness of the issues facing runaways and to find solutions to prevent youth from running away.

When a youth runs away, the impact is felt throughout the entire community. Everyone is encouraged to participate in National Runaway Prevention Month. Working together to identify resources and to help youth develop life skills can make the difference between a youth running away or a youth finding needed resources. Youth and families need to know that there are options and alternatives to running away from home and living on the streets.

Tahoe Youth & Family Servicesâ€™ Drop-In Center is an excellent resource for runaway, homeless, throwaway and couch surfing youth in our community to get their basic necessities met. The Drop-In Center is a great place for youth to Get Recharged, Get Resources, and Get Respect. Staff at the Drop-In Center can assist youth with food, clothing, laundry

services, showers, and hygiene kits, help looking for a job, a place to live, and obtaining proper identification.

For more information on the Drop-In Center or how you can help runaway youth in our community, please contact Tahoe Youth & Family Services' main offices at (530) 541.2445 in South Lake Tahoe, or (775) 782.4202 in Gardnerville. The Drop-In Center in South Lake Tahoe is open from 1-5pm Tuesday through Friday and 1-7pm on Saturdays. The Gardnerville Ranchos Drop In Center is open Tuesday-Friday 3-8pm and noon-8pm on Saturdays. (Both Drop In Centers are closed Sunday and Monday.)

Tahoe Youth & Family Servicesâ€™ 24-hour crisis line is (800) 870.TYFS (8937).

Laura Salina is an outreach assistant with Tahoe Youth & Family Services.

Roethlisberger talks about rape case to ESPN

By Scott Brown, Tribune-Review

Ben Roethlisberger will tell his side of the story â€" or at least what he has been through since being accused of rape in a civil lawsuit â€" tonight on the ESPN magazine program E:60.

The Steelers quarterback talks one-on-one with reporter Michael Smith at 7 p.m. about a subject on which he has said very little since being named in the highly publicized lawsuit. It was filed on behalf of a former employee of a Lake Tahoe resort who claims Roethlisberger sexually assaulted her in his hotel room in 2008.

Read the whole story

Eco-eating lecture, dinner

The A.W.A.R.E. Club at Lake Tahoe Community College is sponsoring an organic, vegan dinner and speaker with a Thanksgiving theme on Nov. 20. Hope Bohanec, Grassroots Campaigns Director, IDA, will be the speaker. Her topic is Eco-Eating: The Power of Your Plate. She will discuss the environmental impacts of our food choices including global warming, deforestation, water use and pollution, topsoil depletion, loss of biodiversity and species, and over-fishing of our oceans. The dinner will be prepared by culinary arts students under the direction of Chef Steve Fernald. Cost is $9 (advance purchase). Tickets are available at Student Services from through Nov. 18.

Gibbons wants to overhaul landfills

Gov. Jim Gibbons this month announced his intention to sponsor a major initiative to completely eliminate landfills as presently known.

â€œThere have been huge leaps in recycling technology,â€ Gibbons said in a statement. â€œWe can conserve natural resources, create clean energy and create jobs by looking at landfills not as places where we bury our trash, but as places

where recycling and energy recovery begin.â€



Gov. Jim Gibbons

Gibbons said at least 75 percent of the trash now sent to landfills in Nevada can be recycled or used as a renewable energy source using existing technology. Similar results have been attained by the San Jose, according to his office. Gibbons recently toured a waste recycling operation there.

â€œFederal law does not allow us to ban the importation of waste from California. But state law allows me to require enough recovery that a waste stream becomes an asset. The availability of economical recycled materials will encourage manufacturers to locate in Nevada,â€ Gibbons said. â€œMandated waste recovery can be a significant part of diversifying our economy and provide much needed jobs.â€

Cefalu extends lead over Wallace

It may be a bit awkward tonight at the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board of education meeting.

With challenger Judy Cefalu now 11 votes ahead of Duane

Wallace, it’s just a matter of time before she replaces him on the board.

The El Dorado County Elections Department expects to certify the Nov. 3 election on Nov. 19. On Dec. 8, LTUSD will have its organizational meeting where Cefalu will be sworn in (assuming the vote totals don’t change), and the president and clerk will be selected.

Wallace was appointed to the board this summer to fill the term vacated by Angela Swanson.

Not much is on tonight’s agenda. Click here to see it.

In other election updates, Measure B, the initiative to alter the 2000-voter approved Measure S to allow bike maintenance funds to be used for ball field improvements, lost ground. With two-thirds of the voters needed to pass it, last count had it at 60.79 percent.

No other significant changes have occurred since Election Night totals were tallied. The changes came counting provisional votes.

Nancy Garrido’s attorney removed from case

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Nancy Garrido’s court-appointed attorney has been removed from the case, pending a possible appeal later this month, court records indicate.



Nancy Garrido

The move took place last Thursday in a secret court hearing during which only Nancy Garrido, defense attorney Gilbert Maines, court staff and security officers were present, according to El Dorado County Superior Court records.

Read the whole story

Film award for Tahoe Forest Service employee

Gina Thompson of the U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, received the honor of Public Employee of the Year-Federal at the California Film Commissionâ€™s Annual On Location Awards.

The event honors those with successful efforts working with film commissioners and local communities, resulting in positive economic impacts of film productions throughout California.



Gina Thompson, left, and Kathleen Dodge. Photo/Provided

Thompson was nominated for this honor by Kathleen Dodge, El Dorado-Lake Tahoe Film & Media Office and Beverly Lewis, Placer-Lake Tahoe Film Office.

A panel of entertainment industry professions selected Thompson as the winner and she was honored at the California on Location Awards ceremony in Los Angeles. Thompson has assisted with numerous productions in her 21-year career with the Forest Service. In January 2009, she was successful in working to restart the environmental analysis process to authorize more than 30 filming locations in the Lake Tahoe Basin.