Anderson secures spot on Olympic slopestyle team

By Nick Zaccardi, NBC

Jamie Anderson of South Lake Tahoe clinched the first U.S. Olympic berth in slopestyle snowboarding by winning the third of five women's events earlier Thursday, while Shaun White crashed in his first run and aborted his second run midway through in the third of five Olympic selection events.

No U.S. man has clinched one of three automatic U.S. Olympic spots in slopestyle yet. White fell from first place to fourth place in Olympic selection standings, but can clinch his spot with a win in either of the final two events Friday and Sunday.

Anderson, 23, is the two-time reigning Winter X Games champion and a gold-medal contender in Sochi. She won Friday with 92.7 points in her first of two runs, edging Karly Shorr by 2.9 points.

Read the whole story

Politicians' private emails not always private

By Jack Gillum, AP

WASHINGTON — Personal emails at the center of the brewing scandal for New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie may have remained secret, had the public and press relied solely on the state's

open records law.

Emails disclosed this past week show a top Christie aide asking the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to shut down three lanes on the busy George Washington Bridge, resulting in major backups for days last September. Those emails were leaked to reporters last week, even though one newspaper requested them nearly a month ago, only to be told they didn't exist.

The use of private emails adds Christie, a possible Republican presidential candidate in 2016, to a growing list of administrations that use private email accounts and other digital services to conduct official business. In turn, state and federal officials, regardless of political party, have sidestepped public records laws meant to keep government activities transparent.

The Record of Bergen, N.J., said it filed an open-records request last month asking for emails related to the Port Authority's decision to close the bridge lanes. The request specifically sought emails between David Wildstein, a Christie-appointed Port Authority official, and employees in the governor's office.

The newspaper received a response from Christie's office 10 days later, stating that the office "reviewed its records" but did not find any responsive emails. Weeks later, however, emails similar to what the *Record* asked for were made public after being obtained under subpoena by state Assembly Democrats.

It's unclear why the governor's office didn't turn over apparently responsive emails from the Yahoo Mail account of Christie's former deputy chief of staff, Bridget Anne Kelly. She used the service to send messages to Wildstein, who ordered the bridge lanes closed. Representatives in Christie's office did not immediately return messages seeking comment

Friday.

Public records laws, which can vary widely from state to state, govern how officials' documents and correspondence should be stored and released. But those laws largely have been slow to catch up to the digital age.

The result creates a gray area for how state and federal employees can use electronic services, such as personal email accounts and phone text messages, to conduct their business. It also creates murkiness for how those records should be disclosed to an inquisitive public.

For instance, the Associated Press found last year that some of President Obama's political appointees, including Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, used secret, unpublished email accounts at work. Officials said the emails are still searchable under the federal Freedom of Information Act, although the AP was unable to confirm that practice.

Christie's Democratic predecessor, Jon Corzine, had fought to keep secret emails he exchanged with his ex-girlfriend, a former union leader. The state's highest court ruled in 2009 he could keep those messages private.

Across the Hudson River, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo responded to a month-old AP request under the state's Freedom of Information Law by saying the governor has never written an email – state or personal – for public business. Instead, he uses an untraceable Blackberry message system.

Cuomo, a Democrat, later called it a way to prevent hacking. His office didn't immediately reply when asked Friday if he still uses that approach.

Across the nation, judges have been left to interpret how nascent technology fits into public records laws, often written before the dawn of the Internet.

In October 2012, the Alaska Supreme Court said state employees can use private emails, but that they must be preserved under records laws. The decision stemmed from the practice of former Gov. Sarah Palin's use of private emails in government. When Palin was the Republican vice presidential nominee in 2008, journalists fought for and received thousands of personal emails she initially claimed were exempt from disclosure.

During the 2012 presidential campaign, GOP nominee Mitt Romney confirmed news reports that when he stepped down as Massachusetts governor in 2007, he authorized top aides to buy and remove computer hard drives containing key data about his administration. The AP submitted a records request for his emails, but learned Romney and top aides had used private email accounts to conduct state business during his stint as governor.

Massachusetts officials said any Romney administration private emails used for state business belonged in Massachusetts archives. But Romney campaign officials refused to make the material public, citing a state court ruling that said Massachusetts governors retained full access over administration records.

The highest court in Arizona, a state with comparably expansive public records laws, said only private emails that have a "substantial nexus" with government activity can be released to the public. That stemmed from the *Arizona Republic* newspaper's 2005 request for emails from a county official who later went to prison for felony theft and fraud.

New Jersey law says officials can be disciplined and fined up to $5,000 for violating the open-records act, and that agencies have to reimburse a requestor's attorney fees if the state loses an open-records lawsuit.

Associated Press writers Stephen Braun in Washington and Michael Virtanen in Albany, N.Y., contributed to this report.

Navy Cross to be awarded posthumously to El Dorado County marine

Two Marines, one from El Dorado County, who are from 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion will be posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for actions while deployed to Afghanistan last year.

The awards will be received by the families of Staff Sgt. Sky R. Mote and Capt. Matthew P. Manoukian, respectively, during a ceremony at 1st MSOB Headquarters on Jan. 18 at 3pm.

Mote, of El Dorado, and Manoukian, from Los Altos Hills, were assigned to Marine Special Operations Team 8133, Marine Special Operations Company C, 1st Marines Special Operations Battalion, Marine Special Operations Regiment, U.S Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command in support of Operation Enduring Freedom when they came under intense enemy fire from an Afghan uniformed police officer attacking from inside the perimeter of their tactical operations center.

Mote, an explosive ordnance disposal technician was gravely wounded during the initial attack, not knowing the actual enemy threat or the status of his Marines, he exposed himself to a hail of gunfire drawing attention away from others and halting the shooter’s pursuit of his comrades. In his final act, he remained in the open and engaged the shooter, now less than 5 meters in front of him. He pressed the assault on the enemy until he received mortal wounds.

Manoukian, the team commander, was working in the operations center when the initial attack commenced with AK-47 fire

ripping through walls and partitions of the operations room. He immediately exposed himself to further enemy fire and commanded his Marines to maneuver to safety as he engaged the enemy.

The Navy Cross is the second highest valor award, second to the Medal of Honor and must be approved by the secretary of the Navy before being awarded. Mote and Manoukian will become the third and fourth Marines in MARSOC's seven-year history to be awarded the Navy Cross, and are the 15th and 16th Marines in the Marine Corps history to receive this award.

Community college fee waiver to be tied to grades

By Carla Rivera, Los Angeles Times

California community college students starting in fall 2016 will have to meet minimum academic standards to receive financial assistance under rules approved by the system Monday.

The California Community Colleges Board of Governors voted to require that students maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA for two consecutive terms and complete at least half of their units with a D grade or better to receive a fee waiver.

Community college fees are currently $46 per unit, among the lowest in the nation. Of the state's 2.6 million community college students, about 40 percent have their fees waived.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe paid parking on divergent paths

By Kathryn Reed

In the same week South Lake Tahoe's anti-paid parking advocates secured enough signatures to forward their petition to the El Dorado County Elections Department, members were given documents from a 2011 Southern California case that prohibits the initiative process from getting rid of parking meters in any city.

Bruce Grego, who has been retained to work as the attorney for Tahoe4Tahoe for free, had yet to review the documents when contacted by *Lake Tahoe News*. But he told *LTN* that in some ways it does not matter what they contain. "The bottom line is the government should do what the people want and they don't want this particular tax."

Tahoe4Tahoe collected 1,422 signatures from residents who said they want paid parking to be decided by the voters of South Lake Tahoe. City Clerk Suzie Alessi counted the signatures Jan. 15 and was to take them to Placerville that day. The county must now certify they are valid signatures of registered voters. Then it comes back to the city.



A pilot parking meter program started in 2011 on Bellamy Court. Photo/LTN file

"(The council) can enact the initiative without it going to the people, they could put it on the ballot, or they could have staff review the financial and legal impacts of what the initiative says," City Attorney Tom Watson said. If the latter position were taken, the city staff has 30 days to do so and then present their findings to the council.

The legal work can be done in house, but it's undetermined if the fiscal impact would have to be hired out.

Peggy Bourland, spokeswoman for Tahoe4Tahoe, deferred comment on the legal documents to Grego.

It was the City Attorney's Office that provided the documents to the anti-paid parking group.

"It was simply legal research that my office performed anticipating the initiative may be moving forward," Watson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The case out of Ventura parallels what is going on in South Lake Tahoe. Residents didn't want parking meters and drew up an initiative to ban them, and had the paperwork all set for the ballot.

Ventura went to court seeking its removal from the ballot and

won.

Parking meter jurisdiction has been covered by the state Vehicle Code and upheld by the courts since the 1960s – including the California Court of Appeal.

The court said, "… since the subject of traffic regulation on the public streets and highways of the state is a matter of statewide concern, it is not a 'municipal affair' unless the state shall completely abandon all or some part of that field. Under the constitutional and statutory provision here applicable, the initiative can come into play only through its use by all the people of the state, and not by some local segment thereof."

Courts have ruled that parking programs are an administrative function of a city that does not require voters to have a say.

Grego, though, said, "This paid parking, is it really about traffic regulations or tax revenue? I think that is an important issue."

Court docs repeatedly say all paid parking comes under the Vehicle Code, so it is a state rule, not a city regulation.

The way the local group – and others – could have legally tried to stop the process is through the referendum process. But the deadline to do so has long since passed. There is a 30-day window after ordinances are passed before they become law so challengers may file a referendum. They could have also asked to repeal the ordinance.

The last clause of Vehicle Code 22508 reads, "Any ordinance adopted pursuant to this section establishing a parking meter zone or fixing rates of fees for such a zone shall be subject to local referendum processes in the same manner as if such ordinance dealt with a matter of purely local concern."

Paid parking has been discussed as a revenue generator for

South Lake Tahoe since 2010. It wasn't until after the council had adopted previous budgets that included parking revenue that the public became super engaged and enraged.

The first parking meters were installed in summer 2011 – 20 spaces on Bellamy Court near the state line. Last summer parking kiosks were put in on Venice Drive, near Lakeview Commons and by Lakeside Beach.

The council has not changed its mind – to date – about paid parking. Councilman Tom Davis has always been against it and the others for it. The five will discuss the matter again on Feb. 18. A scenario being floated is to abandon the program on Sept. 30 – the end of the fiscal year. This would not impact the current budget. However, $144,000 is projected to be needed to dismantle the program. That money would come from the 2014-15 budget.

Watson said, "The city obviously would like to listen to the community and I think the council has been doing that. On Feb. 18 we are going to bring back a comprehensive review of the program and make appropriate adjustments that folks here think or feel are necessary or appropriate."

Grego said, "I hope this gets resolved in a more amicable fashion. We don't need confrontation."

Grego said when he was on the council he voted in November 2012 against paid parking. He was voted off the council that month and therefore did not have an opportunity to vote at the second reading. (He is planning to run for council again in November.)

Letter: Meyers catalyst project must be shelved

To the community,

Having read the 71-page catalyst project paper, I am appalled and disheartened. If we could take a poll of Meyers residents, I bet the outcome would be this: we like our community the way it is. We moved here to live in the county, not the city. We don't care if big crowds of tourists stop here.

The catalyst project amounts to "taxation without representation" because ultimately it will be the residents or "stakeholders" that will pay the enormous debt on these bonds. If the debt is not serviced, will the project end up as a time share? This does not benefit the residents in any way whatsoever.

After the wildly unsuccessful debacle at Stateline, that is, an attempt to build a convention center where none was needed, many parallels exist here. Without a real airport, a convention center was not viable. There are few nonstop flights to Reno and then the traveler faces a 90-minute bus ride to South Lake Tahoe. From Southern California, it's far easier to travel elsewhere to ski or recreate. That leaves a narrower market of Northern California, primarily Sacramento and San Francisco Bay Area. Snow country does not attract routine conventions that have to be canceled at the last minute due to weather, so winter months further decrease usability. These are but a few of the myriad reasons for the failure at Stateline.

Likewise, the proposed training center for world class athletes – is this really feasible? Professional athletes will seek treatment from elite physicians and facilities that already exist. World-class doctors will be at big city

hospitals or university settings; I can guarantee they will not reside in Meyers and maintain a thriving business. Other training centers exist such as Salt Lake City where the 2002 Olympics were held and others like it are well established. Therefore the need for ancillary businesses such as restaurants is a pipe dream because they would be underutilized. This center is not for residents – it's for outsiders. We don't want a mega resort or mega anything. The right of eminent domain is to be used for public highway or structure, not an enterprise. We don't want big businesses; we would like to support small businesses that are here. Give equal signage and road access, be fair with the little guy as much as a popular gas station.

The dictate to "park and go" arises from an ecological ideal, but undermines the very freedom of citizens. Also in question is how well these required electric vehicles with low ground clearance and 2-wheel drive can negotiate a snowstorm and who will be liable for accidents. Charging private residents a fee to use their own vehicles amounts to extortion. Meyers does not want to be the parking garage for the basin. Another idea to build a "bridge to nowhere" over highway 50 would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars is simply a waste. The grandiose ideas outlined in the catalyst project are unreasonable and extremely expensive, and wrong. It's wrong to take away people's homes, churn up a community by a handful of people and spend millions and millions of dollars that will not suit our community. This is big money at its worst. To trust the same people who were involved at Stateline to do another project is foolhardy.

Elizabeth Swope, Meyers

Bruno Mars coming to Lake Tahoe

The first act for the 2014 Harveys Outdoor Summer Concert Series has been booked – Bruno Mars.

He will be in Stateline Aug. 14 at 7:30pm.

Tickets go on sale via Ticketmaster on Feb. 3. Tickets are $69.50-$135.50.

With 130 million singles sold worldwide, the 18-time Grammy Award nominee and winner has made music history more than once, including such milestones as scoring his first five Billboard “Hot 100” chart-toppers faster than any male solo artist since Elvis Presley.

Recently named Billboard magazine’s “2013 Artist of the Year,” Mars is also among the top nominees for the upcoming Grammy Awards.

Bruno Mars will also be playing during the halftime show of the Super Bowl on Feb. 2.

Supreme Court won’t hear Monsanto seed case

By Diane Bartz and Carey Gillam, Reuters

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld Monsanto Co’s biotech seed patents on Monday, dealing a blow to a group of organic farmers and other activists trying to stop the biotech company from suing farmers if their fields contain a few plants containing the company’s genetically modified traits.

The Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association and a group of dozens of organic and conventional family farmers, seed companies and public advocacy interests sued Monsanto in March 2011. The suit sought to prohibit the company from suing farmers whose fields became inadvertently contaminated with corn, soybeans, cotton, canola and other crops containing Monsanto’s genetic modifications.

Monsanto has genetically engineered its specialty seeds to withstand dousings of glyphosate, the main ingredient in the company’s Roundup herbicide.

Read the whole story

Wildlife officers rack up convictions in 2013

California Department of Fish and Wildlife had several high profile criminal investigations and convictions in 2013 for resource violations.

In El Dorado County, two men shot, but didn’t kill a deer that they then put in their small SUV. The deer woke up and panicked inside the vehicle. The poachers then hacked the deer to death with a machete. They were both convicted and received jail time for poaching and animal cruelty.

In Nevada County, a wildlife officer was able to apprehend two bear poachers through an in-depth investigation that revealed an abundance of criminal activity including drug trafficking, stolen vehicles and violence. The primary suspect, Jason Wilkison, baited and killed a bear out of season with a military style rifle with no tags and no license. Wilkison, a convicted felon, was sentenced to two years in state prison for his part in the crime.

Fourteen people were arrested in Sacramento and the Bay Area for illegally harvesting and selling abalone on the black market. Many of the suspects had previous poaching convictions and are now facing additional charges.

In Southern California, wildlife officers filed several cases of lobster poaching, illegally selling fish directly to restaurants and one case in which a diver attempted to catch fish by squirting rubbing alcohol into the rocks forcing fish into open water where he then netted them. Most of these cases are currently pending.

A Madera County wildlife officer jumped into the cold, swift current of a slough, twice, to save the lives of two small children clinging to a branch. With no equipment, life jacket or help, he brought each girl safely to shore. In Monterey, a wildlife officer took off his boots to help save a drowning woman in the ocean then gave her the boots so she could walk across rocks to the waiting ambulance. In five separate incidents wildlife officers along with local agencies prevented people from committing suicide.

In a case that brought national attention, wildlife officers

and San Bernardino County Sheriff deputies spotted, pursued and exchanged gunfire with former Los Angeles Police Officer and murderer Christopher Dorner.

Other gunfire incidents occurred in three marijuana growing operations in Northern California. In a Shasta County incident, shots were fired during a marijuana raid. Two men were then arrested, both after being apprehended by a CDFW K-9.

More than 350 wildlife officers are responsible for patrolling 1.8 million acres in California.

Study: Adolescent obesity tied to economic status

By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

From many corners of the United States – Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Mississippi – recent years have brought heartening news about the relentless rise in obesity among American children: Several years into a campaign to get kids to eat better and exercise more, child obesity rates have appeared to stabilize, and might be poised for a reversal.

But a study published Monday in the journal PNAS suggests that among adolescents, the hopeful signs are limited to those from better-educated, more affluent families. Among teens from poorer, less well-educated families, obesity has continued to rise.

Nationally, rates of obesity among adolescents 12 to 19 did not rise between 2003-04 and 2009-10. But during that period,

obesity rates among adolescents whose parents have no more than a high-school education rose from about 20 percent to 25 percent. At the same time, the teenage children of parents with a four-year college degree or more saw their obesity rates decline from 14 percent to about 7 percent.

Read the whole story