Bill would give DAs more latitude with drug offenders

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

The first time Maria Alexander's drug addiction caught up to her, the reckoning came in the form of a small chunk of crack cocaine that sent her to jail for six months.

The next time, after a small amount of heroin – "scrapings on a spoon," Alexander recalled – earned her another stint in the correctional system, she sought treatment.

"I was no big drug dealer," Alexander said. "I was a big user."

In an announcement hailed as a sea change for the decades-old federal war on drugs, Attorney General Eric Holder said last week that he would direct federal prosecutors to avoid charging low-level drug offenders in ways that carry "draconian" minimum sentences.

"By reserving the most severe penalties for serious, high-level, or violent drug traffickers, we can better promote public safety, deterrence, and rehabilitation while making our expenditures smarter and more productive," Holder told a San Francisco gathering of the American Bar Association last week.

Read the whole story

Wine event at Squaw benefits MS group

Wine lovers can enjoy early fall in the Sierra at the 25th annual Alpen Wine Festival on Sept. 1 from 2-5pm at the Village at Squaw Valley.

All proceeds from the festival benefit Can Do Multiple Sclerosis, a national nonprofit organization sponsoring lifestyle empowerment programs for people with MS and their support partners.

For a $40 donation, guests may enjoy wine from more than 30 Northern California vineyards. Lady & the Tramps and Milton Merlos will perform on two stages to accompany the festival.

Amidst the background of wine and music, guests may peruse the silent auction and raffle.

Last year, the Alpen Wine Festival raised $18,000 for Can Do MS.

Tickets for the event will be available on site starting at 1pm that Sunday or in advance online.

Brown receiving more cheers than jeers

By Adam Nagourney, New York Times

LOS ANGELES – When Jerry Brown became governor of California again, three years ago, this state was on a steep decline,

crushed by budget deficits, deep spending cuts, governmental paralysis, high unemployment and a collapsing housing market. California, a place that once symbolized promise and opportunity, seemed caught in an intractable reversal of fortune.

But these days, Brown – who at 75 is the oldest governor in the nation and about to become the longest-serving governor in the history of California – is enjoying a degree of success and authority he and his opponents could scarcely have imagined when he returned to Sacramento to begin a second tour as governor in 2010.

The state's budget problems are largely resolved, at least for the short term. Brown is the dominant figure in Sacramento, strengthened by overwhelming Democratic control of the Legislature and the decline of the Republican Party. He has pushed through major initiatives on education financing and prison reorganization. Even Republicans say his re-election next year seems considerably more than likely.

"Some people were ridiculing California, and some were calling it a failed state," Brown, a Democrat, said in an interview. "The unemployment came down from 12.2 to 8.5. Real estate is rebounding. There's a lot of confidence out there. That's what happened."

Read the whole story

Fire outside basin brings

smoke to Tahoe

A fire near Yosemite is bringing a substantial amount of smoke into the South Shore today.

There is also the American Fire filtering smoke into the North Shore and when winds change smoke comes to the South Shore. Lightning strikes gave caused some area fires, but are not the cause of the smoke. The U. S. Forest Service is working to extinguish those, including using a helicopter.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Plot out what you'll spend in retirement

By Jeff Gorton

Age 85 is a bad time to go broke. Personal savings, various investments and, yes, Social Security may prove to be short of what you'd expected.

Budgeting how you spend money before retirement can often be a misleading measurement of how you'll actually spend it during retirement.

Spending 40 hours a week at work not only earns you a paycheck, it also keeps you from spending money on more vacations, matinee screenings at the movie theater, extra trips to the mall or shopping online. You need to be exceedingly realistic in your planning, and the five years before retirement are actually the most crucial in solidifying

post-employment stability.

To prevent a rude awakening during retirement, start with a written income plan. Here are some benefits and the importance of this “living document”:

• A comprehensive list of life expenses paints a clearer picture. For a 65-year-old married couple today, there is a 72 percent chance that at least one spouse will live to age 85; a 45 percent chance that one will live to age 90, and an 18 percent chance that one will reach age 95, according a recent study from the CDC National Center for Health Statistics. You may not think of listing things like pet care, yard maintenance, and regular visits to salons or spas. But if you enjoy those services now, you may want them during retirement, and you might find that you underestimated the real cost of maintaining your desired lifestyle. And, that’s not including gifts to children and grandchildren.

• The forecast of a two-legged stool. A WIP helps you appreciate the reliability of retirement income. What sources of income do you anticipate having? Traditionally, retirement funding has been viewed as a “three-legged stool,” implying a balance between Social Security, retirement plans and savings/investments. As the baby boom generation ages, Social Security benefits may decrease – and the age at which an individual can collect benefits may increase. Changes in employment may affect retirement plans. As a result, the third leg of the stool, savings/investments, may become even more important.

• Who is authoring your WIP? As with all written documents, you must always consider the source. What you may not realize is that a financial planner is liable to have a stake in selling you a financial product. Just like a retailer may have an incentive to move certain brands of products, many planners are incentivized to have you invest in specific financial vehicles from major institutions. What plan works best for

you? Seek advice from an expert who isn’t trying to sell you something, such as an independent firm.

If you don’t have a written income plan, then you’re just hoping things will work out.

Jeff Gorton is a certified public accountant and a certified financial planner specializing in individual tax and retirement planning.

American Heart Association to recognize LTUSD

Brian Zambor with the American Heart Association will be at the Sept. 24 Lake Tahoe Unified School District board meeting to recognize the schools and students who helped raise money for his organization.

Three Lake Tahoe Unified schools participated in the American Heart Association’s Jump Rope for Heart program last school year and collectively raised $13,625.36. This was the third highest sum out of more than 30 districts.

The environmental magnet school, Sierra House and Tahoe Valley participated.

Letter: Spiritual home provides Unity

To the community,

“Unity at the Lake is a thriving, diverse spiritual community that celebrates God, nurtures wholeness, embraces oneness, and embodies the truth of our being”. This is the mission statement I recite on Sundays when I attend services at my spiritual home, Unity at the Lake.

Many reading this may well have already discovered the positive spiritual message that Unity at the Lake brings. I am writing this letter out of appreciation that we have the voice and presence of Unity at the Lake here in South Lake Tahoe. I have attended Unity at the Lake since soon after moving to Tahoe 15 years ago. Since the day I walked through those doors (then we were at the Senior Center) I have felt consistently uplifted and inspired. Unity at the Lake lives its mission statement.

Our congregation is diverse, representing people of all faiths and lifestyles. Christians, Buddhists, Jews, and those who do not identify themselves with any religious affiliation all find a home within our walls. One of the primary slogans of the Unity church/movement is, “Many paths, One God”. All spiritual seekers are welcome.

Our lessons incorporate a rich tapestry of teachings from the great spiritual leaders of our time, including, but not limited to, the teachings of Jesus. Wholeness. Unity sees every individual as inherently good and as a divine reflection of God or divine nature. Unity celebrates our goodness and our “Godness” for we are never separate from God. Unity believes in the power of affirmative prayer. We give thanks for the health, abundance, and love we are rather than praying for

what we “want”.

We gratefully accept the divine flow (“God”) as working for our highest good in all things and at all times. As we affirm what we have and the truth of who we are we see more goodness manifesting in ourselves and in our lives. This is one of the truths we believe and endeavor to live.

Prayer, gratitude, affirmation, meditation, and celebration are our primary spiritual tools. Our spiritual leaders, the Revs. Stew and Hillary Bittman, lead our community in a joyful, authentic, and accessible manner that I have not found elsewhere in my spiritual journeying. I am so grateful for the spiritual community I have found in Unity at the Lake. I have grown, and continue to grow, in gratitude, joy, love, and prosperity because of the messages I have received and the tools I have learned to practice as a result of being a part of the Unity at the Lake family.

If you have not yet discovered Unity at the Lake, please consider this letter an enthusiastic invitation to check us out – even online.

Namaste’ (“The Spirit within me salutes the Spirit in you”).

Janice Eastburn, South Lake Tahoe

Fire closes more of Tahoe National Forest

The 16,812-acre American Fire is burning in an old-growth timber stand with no recorded fire history. The terrain is

steep, hazardous, dry and full of fuels.

The U.S. Forest Service has implemented a second emergency closure order for the Tahoe National Forest. The first closure had been rescinded. The new closure area is larger than the actual fire perimeter to allow for firefighter and public safety and the preparation of contingency lines designed to stop the fire's progress. A map and detailed description of the closed area is online.

The fire has destroyed four outbuildings.

The fire is 60 percent contained, with full containment projected for Sept. 1.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Judges announced for South Shore band competition

After an extensive process, almost as intense as Dancing with the Stars, CASA has figured out who the judges will be at Friday's South Shore's Best Sunset Band fundraiser.

Critically evaluating the five bands vying for the 2013 title are: Mike "Old Time Rock and Roller" Dupree, Dan "Animals" Norman, Hal "Rock King" Cole, Angela "Phestival Phiary" Phillips, and Leslie "Mistress of Musical Mischief" David. They will each rate the bands on a scale of 1 to 10.

In addition, there will be a People's Choice Award based on the tips that the bands get from their faithful followers.

The local bands are Black Star Safari, Little Town, Deep Fried Mojo, 4 Piece Puzzle, an Cash only Band.

They are playing to raise money for CASA El Dorado.

The free event is Aug. 23 from 3-8pm. Bring money to vote on the bands, buy food and beverages, raffle tickets and for bidding on the live auction.

Children's memorial caught in legal quagmire

By Kathryn Reed

It was a bit like a memorial service at the South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting this week. Somber faces, regret, apologies. And all because children died before their parents.

People who spearheaded and funded the replacement of the children's memorial log made some mistakes. Mistakes that amount to thousands of dollars.

The council is involved because the five electeds are also the five board members of the Great Ideas For Tahoe nonprofit. GIFT is the nonprofit in which people were donating money to for the memorial log to be replaced. But the problem is that like with all nonprofits there are strict guidelines about how money can be spent.

However, the memorial committee, which was completely separate from the city, thought the ceremony for the re-dedication of the memorial could be paid for with the donations sent to

GIFT. Not so. All that legally could be paid for was the replacement of the log.

South Lake Tahoe City Attorney Tom Watson on Aug. 20 told the council the other caveat is that no expenses could be paid that were not approved in advance. He said the board could face civil and criminal infractions if it were to approve the expenses that were submitted after the fact or for items that didn't involve refurbishing the log.

The amount being questioned is $3,665.40. A third of that is for the video that was produced. Some is for the program, some for the porta-potties.

"How could we have had the beautiful celebration without a podium and camera?" Sue Hrbacek-Miller asked the council.

It was her son Rory's death on Feb. 2, 1991, that led her to create the memorial that is on Highway 50 at the corner of Wildwood Avenue. The initial tree was dedicated in 1994.

Ken Curtzwiler, Tom Incopero and Randy Mundt – all who have lost children – all spoke about the need to have compassion, understanding and to understand the intent of those involved.

Ultimately it was Councilwoman Angela Swanson who suggested a compromise. With the quick thinking of City Attorney Watson it was agreed that the money requested would not be paid out, but that staff would look at the possibility of refunding money donated to GIFT that is sitting in the account for the log replacement.

This idea will be refined and brought back to the council for a vote.

If money is refunded, no one who donated cash will be reimbursed because of legal reasons. And those who might be given back money could decide if they would want to give money directly to the children's memorial committee so those who put

out money for the Aug. 9 ceremony could be reimbursed.