Movie delves into bullying crisis in U.S.

From Sundance Award-winning filmmaker Lee Hirsch comes a cinematic, character-driven documentary following five kids and families over the course of a school year. Offering insight into different facets of America's bullying crisis, the stories include two families who have lost children to suicide and a mother awaiting the fate of her 14-year-old daughter, who has been incarcerated after bringing a gun on her school bus.

With an intimate and often shocking glimpse into homes, classrooms, cafeterias and principals' offices, "Bully" is a powerful and inspiring film.

Presented by Sierra Nevada College Teacher Education, the free screening of "Bully" will take place March 27 from 7-9pm in Sierra Nevada College's Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences (TCES), room 139-141, 999 Tahoe Blvd., Incline Village.

Idea floated to ban fundraising while lawmakers work

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

The concept of banning California lawmakers from fundraising while they're at work has a new cheerleader: a former head of

the state’s political watchdog agency.

Dan Schnur, a former Republican political consultant who served as chair of the California Fair Political Practices Commission, is launching a new effort to prohibit state legislators and statewide officers from raising cash when the Legislature is in session.

“Fundraising is a legitimate political activity. Legislating is a legitimate political activity. But you can’t do both of those things at the same time,” Schnur said in an interview last week.

It isn’t unusual for lawmakers to leave the Capitol at midday to raise money at a luncheon reception, or ask supporters for campaign cash at off-site fundraisers held before or after a day of votes. They’ve held 47 such events in Sacramento this month alone, according to notices posted in the Capitol Morning Report newsletter.

Changing that practice, Schnur said, will “weaken the link between political giving and government action.”

“Human nature being what it is, a large check written six months before a key vote is simply not going to have the same impact as that same check written 20 minutes before that same vote,” he said.

One plan Schnur is floating would mostly end incumbent fundraising between January and June, and then again in the month of August. The restriction would not apply to challengers.

Fifteen states currently ban campaign contributions while lawmakers are in session, though most meet far less frequently than California’s full-time Legislature, according to data collected by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Schnur, who directs the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics

at USC, said he wants to start his effort by working with members of the Legislature and candidates for statewide office, but will consider backing an initiative on the topic if that doesn't work out.

A former GOP strategist who counts Gov. Pete Wilson and presidential candidate John McCain among his past clients, Schnur said he reregistered as an independent after leaving the FPPC in hopes of approaching campaign finance reform "from a space outside of either of the two parties."

Schnur's plan will likely be a tough sell at the Capitol, where lawmakers have been reluctant to change the rules that govern how they run their campaigns. Similar proposals, including bans during the budget votes floated by former GOP Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, have failed to gain traction with California's lawmakers. There are also varying views among advocates of reform.

Bob Stern, a campaign finance expert who has long called for added fundraising restrictions, said he thinks it makes more sense to ban taking contributions in odd-numbered years when no state elections take place. He agrees that limiting the calendar for fundraising could lessen the practice of special interests "giving for access reasons, to curry favor" while the legislators are at work.

"Ninety percent of the money comes from people who want something from the Legislature," said Stern, the former president of the Center for Governmental Studies. "The more you restrict it in terms of tying it to the Legislature, the better it is and the better it looks in terms of when the money comes in."

Polling suggests that changes to fundraising rules would be a hit with voters. Mark Baldassare, president of the Public Policy Institute of California, said such a proposal could tap into voters' concerns with the role of money in politics.

“One of the things that creates a lack of trust in the state government and representative government in California is a belief that there are these few big interests looking out for themselves, have a lot of influence,” he said.

But some political operatives say fundraising bans won’t solve bigger issues surrounding the rising cost of campaigns and influence of wealthy interests.

Instead, they say, it will shift the timetable for collecting those contributions and possibly force more campaign money into independent expenditure committees that can raise and spend unlimited amounts.

“It’s sort of like sticking a finger in a dike,” said Steve Maviglio, a Democratic strategist who has worked inside and outside the Capitol. “The water is going to come out somewhere, and the money is going to get to legislators by the time they need it for their campaigns.”

Schnur argues that even if it didn’t slow the flow of money in state politics, a ban would ensure that legislators stay focused on governing responsibilities while in Sacramento.

“This would actually free up the legislators’ time to do the work that they were elected to do,” he said.

Tahoe City Wine Walk tickets on sale

The 8th annual Tahoe City Wine Walk returns June 22. More than 800 people could visit 30 regional wineries last year.

This summer’s alfresco event, scheduled from noon to 4pm, will

again focus on varietals from regional California wine producers and will also feature gourmet bites from North Lake Tahoe’s top restaurants and catering companies.

The Tahoe City Wine Walk runs along scenic North Lake Tahoe Boulevard and provides some of the best views of Lake Tahoe.



A couple enjoys the 2012 Tahoe City Wine Walk. Photo/Provided

Tickets are on sale and run $35/person in advance and $45/person at the event (cash only). Ticket price includes admittance, wine tasting, commemorative wine glass, bite-sized offerings, live music and free on-site parking. Attendees must be 21 years or older and show valid ID when purchasing tickets and registering the day of the event.

The Tahoe City Wine Walk is a fundraiser for the Tahoe City Downtown Association. This nonprofit organization consists of local merchants, property owners, community associations, residents, professionals and contributors whose goal it is to enhance and promote a vibrant and prosperous commercial and social center for the residents and visitors to Tahoe City.

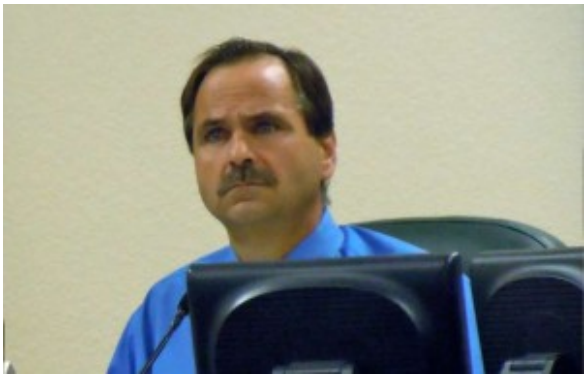
For more information and to purchase tickets online, click to the official website.

El Dorado County supervisor subject of DA probe

By Noel Stack, Village Life

El Dorado County Supervisor Ray Nutting is being investigated for how he used state grant money, according to, El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson.

Through the years Nutting has received more than $74,000 in state Proposition 40 grants to complete fuel reduction projects on his Happy Valley property, according to grant documents. Invoices provided to the Sierra Coordinated Resource Management Council, CalFire's partner agency that contracts with private landowners who complete fuel reductions projects within the parameters of Proposition 40, are being questioned.



El Dorado County Supervisor Ray Nutting is under investigation. Photo/LTN file

"We are aware of it and we are looking into it," Pierson said in a telephone interview. "Beyond that, I can't comment."

Nutting, who contacted Village Life while working on another major Propositions 40 fuels reduction project on 37 of his 340 acres, said he's aware of the investigation. The current project will result in a $49,348 grant.

"If I'd done something wrong, I'd know it," Nutting said.

"I am highly scrutinized by registered forest professionals (hired to oversee the projects) and I'm highly scrutinized by CalFire," the District 2 supervisor explained. "I have no latitude on Prop. 40. I have to do exactly what the grant documents say."

CalFire offers grant opportunities to small forest landowners funded by Proposition 40, the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002, according to the CalFire website.

"The goal of the Proposition 40 Fuels Management Program, or Prop. 40 program, is to contract with private landowners for mutually beneficial forest improvement and wildfire hazard reduction projects designed to reduce fuel loadings that pose a threat to watershed resources and water quality," the website states.

Landowners in 15 Sierra Nevada counties – Butte, Plumas, Sierra, Yuba, Nevada, Placer, El Dorado, Amador, Alpine, Calaveras, Tuolumne, Madera, Mariposa, Fresno and Tulare – may participate. CalFire's website explains, "The Prop 40 Program generally pays 75 percent of the costs and the landowners share is the remaining 25 percent. Landowner management plans, which are required for Prop. 40 program grants, will be paid 90 percent by Prop. 40 program and 10 percent by landowners."

Since its inception, the Proposition 40 program has granted landowners more than $2.5 million.

In 2009 Nutting received $24,893 after three invoices were submitted – project management and addendum invoices in the

amount of $3,137.50 on behalf of Stewart Forestry LLC and a $27,395 invoice on behalf of Nutting Brush Clearing, which shares Nutting's home address in Somerset. A representative of the El Dorado County Treasurer-Tax Collector's Office said they had no record of any business license under that name.

Nutting said interpreting Nutting Brush Clearing as a business is incorrect. The name on the top of the invoice, which was submitted by his registered professional forester, is the project name, not a business name.

"It's a description of the job," he explained. "My forester knows that, CalFire knows that … everybody knows that."

The Nutting Brush Clearing invoice included a cost breakdown — $6,000 for 15 acres of thinning, $4,125 for 15 acres of pruning, $5,250 for 15 acres of slash disposal and $12,020 for 60.1 acres of herbicide treatment. No additional statements were submitted with the invoice but, Nutting said, the rates used to determine the totals for each portion of the job come from the state.

A Proposition 40 grant program audit released by the California Department of Finance's Office of State Audits and Evaluations in 2009 questioned this lack of documentation.

"Without proof of actual costs by landowners (in the form of cancelled checks or information from bank statements), grant funds could be used for purposes not allowed by the program," the audit noted.

Auditors recommended requiring proof of actual costs prior to authorizing payment.

Nutting said he agrees with the auditors findings and will provide additional documentation when submitting invoices related to his latest Prop. 40 grant project, which, he said, he's been working on for more than a year.

“It’s back-breaking work,” Nutting said.

Nutting and his brother, Tom, each have 340 acres in southern El Dorado County. Nutting said the two have been trying to reduce fire fuels since inheriting the land after their parents died. Tom Nutting has also receive Proposition 40 grants. Ray Nutting noted that a few of his neighbors participate in federal fuel reduction programs.

Fire crews have twice come out to his property to douse flames, Nutting said.

“The easier thing to do would have been to do nothing and let it burn,” Nutting said. “I chose to work with the state and spend the years of my life doing these projects … making (the land) fire safe.”

The DA’s Office, which has requested documents and information from other public agencies, hopes to conclude its investigation within 30 to 60 days, Pierson said. If any wrongdoing is confirmed, Nutting could face charges related to presenting false claims and falsifying records submitted to state agencies, both felonies.

1,370 acres near Donner Summit become public

This month’s acquisition of 1,370 acres north of Interstate 80 near Donner Summit should boost recreation opportunities in the Tahoe National Forest.

The high elevation lands near Castle Peak, White Rock Lake and Lola Montez Lakes were noted for their recreational and

wildlife habitat values.



Lola Montez Lakes

“We are quite excited about this purchase. The property will provide opportunities for more sustainable trails, increased access to beautiful lakes, and consolidation of National Forest lands,” Joanne Roubique, Truckee District ranger, said in a statement. “We are grateful to the Trust for Public Land and the Northern Sierra Partnership for facilitating this sale from Sierra Pacific Industries.”

The purchase price of approximately $1.3 million came from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, allocated by Congress primarily from fees paid by companies drilling for off shore oil.

The acquisition provides an opportunity to reroute a popular mountain biking trail into a more manageable loop trail.

“This land helps complete the Hole in the Ground mountain bike trail, one of the nation’s best mountain biking trails and one which is enjoyed by large numbers of riders in the summer,” said Carl Somers, project manager for the Trust for Public Land, said in a press release. “This is an excellent example of our mission of protecting land for people.”

Reno-Tahoe airport security breach causes delays

By KTVN-TV

Officials with the Reno-Tahoe International Airport say things are getting back to normal Monday morning after a security breach caused the airport terminals to temporarily shut down.

Brian Kulpin says two people unintentionally went the wrong way through the security check-point causing officials to re-screen everyone who had already made it through security. This included those who had already boarded their flights.

Kulpin expects delays throughout the day and urges people to call their airlines and check the status of their flights.

Ski report: Weeks of spring skiing to be had



Three to four weeks of spring skiing are left at most resorts.

Here is the March 25 ski report.

— Curtis Fong

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Tahoe Blue Vodka received the Chairman's Trophy for unflavored vodka at the fourth annual Ultimate Spirits Challenge in New York City this month.

• The South Lake Tahoe Softball League is sponsoring an Adult Coed and Men's League. A team meeting will be at Steamers Bar and Grill on April 3 at 6pm. For more information, call Jack at (530) 577. 2405.

• The Tahoe Transportation District board is expected to vote April 12 on which loop road routes will be studied in the environmental documents. A report from the business review committee will be given. The meeting is at the TRPA office in Stateline starting at 9:30am.

• Here is the Caltrans El Dorado-Tahoe roadwork schedule for the week.

• Authors Suzanne Roberts and Tim Hauserman will talk about the John Muir Trail and the Tahoe Rim Trail, respectively, during the March 26 Sierra Club meeting. The free talk starts at 6pm at Emerald Bay Physical Therapy, 812 Emerald Bay Road, South Lake Tahoe.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Julie is a young Jack Russell Terrier mix, perhaps 1 year old. She has wiry fur and a cute underbite like many little terriers. She loves to go for walks.

Julie is friendly with other dogs, is very affectionate, and would make a great pet for just about any household.

Julie is spayed, microchipped, and vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go online to see photos and description of all pets at the shelter.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

STHS grad retells near-death experience to help others

Publisher's note: ***This is one of a few articles about the Drug Store Project. This marks the 10-year anniversary of the program. This year's event will be April 2 at Lake Tahoe Community College. For more info about volunteering, donating or if you have questions, email Lisa Huard at lhuard@ymail.com.***

By Molly Cocking Lovell

I was your regular 15-year-old kid. I thought I was untouchable, nothing could ever happen to me. Yes, I had those people come talk to us in health class about bad things that had happened to them because of drugs or alcohol, but it could never happen to me.

That all changed the summer after my freshman year in high school. I had just finished my first year at South Tahoe High School, excelling in my studies, completing my reign as class president, and creating great memories with a wonderful group of friends. I went out to a party for my first time that summer, lying to my parents, telling them I was going to a friend's house to watch movies. The last thing I remember from that night was drinking my first beer; the next thing I remember was waking up in the intensive care unit at Barton Memorial Hospital with a tube down my throat breathing for me.



Molly Cocking

Lovell

The rest of the night has had to be retold to me by friends and family who were there to witness the worse night of my life, all due to the choices I decided to make.

After my first beer I started drinking hard alcohol like it was lemonade. At that point I was so intoxicated I had no gag reflex telling me what I was ingesting was toxic. I woke up in the morning with cuts, bruises and aches everywhere, which was explained to me that there was a group of guys at the party I didn't know holding me up and taking bets on how long it would take for me to fall over once they let go of me. I also fell down a flight of concrete stairs, which ended in a very expensive CAT scan of my head when I arrived at the hospital.

My friends I was with started to get concerned when I was in the bathroom vomiting blood and they couldn't get me to respond to them. My friends wanted to call 911, but people at the party didn't want to get in trouble and told them to just let me sleep it off in the back room; "I'd be fine."

To this day I owe my life to my friends who didn't listen and called 911, because when I arrived at the hospital the emergency room physician said if I had gotten there 15 minutes later, I might have not been able to be resuscitated. My friends, in a panic, started driving me to the hospital instead of waiting for an ambulance. In route a friend put her hand over my mouth and realized I had stopped breathing. When we arrived in the ambulance bay my parents were there and started CPR on me on the pavement until a gurney came. Inside the ER a tube was placed down into my lungs to breath for me because I was so intoxicated I had lost the drive to breath. IVs were started, my stomach was pumped, a catheter was placed into my bladder and a diaper was put on me because I had lost control of my bowel movements.

My blood alcohol came back at 0.25, with the added suspicion

that some sort of synthetic medication might have also been put in my drink due to my unresponsiveness.

I was moved to the intensive care unit where the doctor told my parents they had done everything they could, but there was a chance I wouldn’t make it through the night. I had drunk in one night what many adults might drink in a month or two. The doctor informed them my organs had begun to shut down and time would only tell if I came out intact.

I woke up the next morning still not remembering anything from the night before, but as soon as I opened my eyes and saw my mom next to my bed I knew what I had done and what I had put my family and friends through.

They extubated me that morning from the machine breathing for me and started to pull tubes and lines, which was all very unpleasant. I was discharged later in the afternoon to go home very banged up and possessing the worst hangover anyone could ever imagine.

For less than 24 hours in the hospital the bill my parents were hit with was more than $20,000. This was more than 10 years ago, so the bill today would be at least double.

I had weekly appointments with my primary care doctor to check on my liver and kidney functions to make sure everything was still functioning correctly. I’m very lucky to say I walked away physically unscathed after my wounds healed and the weeklong hangover ran its course.

My emotional wellbeing took some time to get back. I had done something horrible to my family that no one ever wishes to do. I had made my parents face potentially having to bury their child and my brothers to go on without a big sister. I had put all my friends who had stuck their necks out for me in a bad position with their parents and the law. But those friends are why I’m alive. If they hadn’t been watching out for me, I would not be here today to tell my story, and hopefully

prevent other people from making the same mistakes I did.

I speak every year at the Drug Store Project not so much telling kids “don’t drink” but instead “to make smart choices”. The easiest way to not get yourself into a situation like mine is to abstain from drinking. But if it’s something that is decided must be tried, you need to have people around you who care about you and have your best interest in mind if something were to happen.

I also caution students about the ever evolving date rape drugs, and the importance of never leaving your drink (alcoholic or non-alcoholic) unattended. This too was very likely what I ran into that night as well. In the years that I have done Drug Store, if I have even touched one kid, I’ve done what I set out to do. If I prevent one person and their family and friends from going though what we all went through that night, this whole project has been worth it!

Molly Cocking Lovell is an emergency room nurse at Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center.