Washoe County agrees to temporary changes in pet laws

Washoe County commissioners agreed to proposals by the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office to allow Regional Animal Services to provide pet owners with free microchips and waive late fees for dog license renewals.

The sheriff’s office proposed these two campaigns as part of efforts to increase successful returns of lost pets and raise awareness about the value of dog licenses.

Animal Services will determine dates and locations for the campaigns, which are scheduled to begin in February.

The proposed microchip campaign allows Animal Services to provide free microchips to pet owners for one year.

A microchip is a small, electronic chip enclosed in a glass cylinder about the size of a grain of rice. The microchip is activated by a scanner which receives information about the pet’s owners and home from the chip.

The goal of waiving late fees for dog licenses is to increase public awareness about the importance of dog licenses. Licenses benefit the animals, the dog owners and the community in many ways. The program will be for one year.

Temperature a key to drinkable box wine

By Helen Thompson, NPR

Bag-in-the-box wine doesn't have the classiest of reputations. It's usually cheap and in the past at least, has been aimed at less sophisticated consumers. But in recent years, boxed wine has tried to buck the stereotype, whether by gussying up the product packaging or simply putting higher-quality wine in the box.

Still, if you're planning a holiday party and you want to try one of the new-fangled versions, don't think the fancy new packaging is going to protect your wine from going off any better than the old fashioned bottle, scientists say. In fact, it may be worse in some instances.

Temperature is a key factor in a wine's shelf life. "There's common knowledge in the wine industry that you shouldn't keep your wine in a warm place," says Helene Hopfer, a post-doctoral chemist and food sensory scientist at UC Davis, especially if you plan to keep it around awhile. That's because the warmer the wine, the faster oxygen reacts with the compounds inside, which causes the wine to lose some of its aromatic compounds and turn a darker color. Basically, it becomes vinegar.

Hopfer and her colleagues wanted to see how different packaging strategies held up at different temperatures and recently published their results in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry. They put the same California Chardonnay in five different packages: natural cork, synthetic cork, screw cap, and two kinds of bag-in-box containers. For three months, they stored the wine at three different temperatures: 50 degrees Fahrenheit (10 C), 68 degrees

Fahrenheit (20 C), and 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40 C).

They chemically analyzed the wine periodically, and a panel of tasters ultimately evaluated the wines' smells, tastes, and looks. At 68 degrees Fahrenheit, the bag-in-box wines showed small differences from the bottled wine, but at 104 degrees Fahrenheit, they aged significantly more quickly than bottled wine. (For what it's worth, the researchers didn't find a significant difference between real cork, fake cork, and screwtops.)

Temperature is something to think about when it comes to wine, says Hopfer. "You often get wines that are thermally damaged if you ship across the country because there can be huge temperature differences during transport."

And while many of us would expect a vacuum-sealed bag to do a better job of keeping oxygen out than a breathable cork, it's not the case. The bag component of bag-in-box wines is made of a thin plastic polymer (polyethylene or polypropylene) that's actually pretty easy for oxygen to cross. Whereas "if you look at the glass bottle, the only way oxygen can get in is through the cork," says Hopfer.

Perhaps the more important finding is that at the colder temperature, boxed wine had basically aged the same as bottled wine. That's because companies have been layering different oxygen-stopping polymers over the initial breathable layer. "They've fine-tuned that bag for the wine industry," she says.

So, if you're stocking up wine for this season's holiday parties, boxed wine can meet your grape expectations. Hopfer advises: "The cooler, the better."

Feds may take legal action against states that legalize pot

By Charlie Savage, New York Times

WASHINGTON — Senior White House and Justice Department officials are considering plans for legal action against Colorado and Washington that could undermine voter-approved initiatives to legalize the recreational use of marijuana in those states, according to several people familiar with the deliberations.

Even as marijuana legalization supporters are celebrating their victories in the two states, the Obama administration has been holding high-level meetings since the election to debate the response of federal law enforcement agencies to the decriminalization efforts.

Marijuana use in both states continues to be illegal under the federal Controlled Substances Act. One option is to sue the states on the grounds that any effort to regulate marijuana is pre-empted by federal law. Should the Justice Department prevail, it would raise the possibility of striking down the entire initiatives on the theory that voters would not have approved legalizing the drug without tight regulations and licensing similar to controls on hard alcohol.

Some law enforcement officials, alarmed at the prospect that marijuana users in both states could get used to flouting federal law openly, are said to be pushing for a stern response. But such a response would raise political complications for President Obama because marijuana legalization is popular among liberal Democrats who just turned out to re-elect him.

“It’s a sticky wicket for Obama,” said Bruce Buchanan, a political science professor at the University of Texas at Austin, saying any aggressive move on such a high-profile question would be seen as “a slap in the face to his base right after they’ve just handed him a chance to realize his presidential dreams.”

Federal officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter. Several cautioned that the issue had raised complex legal and policy considerations – including enforcement priorities, litigation strategy and the impact of international antidrug treaties – that remain unresolved, and that no decision was imminent.

The Obama administration declined to comment on the deliberations, but pointed to a statement the Justice Department issued last week – the day before the initiative took effect in Washington – in the name of the United States attorney in Seattle, Jenny A. Durkan. She warned Washington residents that the drug remained illegal.

“In enacting the Controlled Substances Act, Congress determined that marijuana is a Schedule I controlled substance,” she said. “Regardless of any changes in state law, including the change that will go into effect on Dec. 6 in Washington State, growing, selling or possessing any amount of marijuana remains illegal under federal law.”

Durkan’s statement also hinted at the deliberations behind closed doors, saying: “The Department of Justice is reviewing the legalization initiatives recently passed in Colorado and Washington State. The department’s responsibility to enforce the Controlled Substances Act remains unchanged.”

Federal officials have relied on their more numerous state and local counterparts to handle smaller marijuana cases. In reviewing how to respond to the new gap, the interagency task force – which includes Justice Department headquarters, the

Drug Enforcement Administration, the State Department and the offices of the White House Counsel and the director of National Drug Control Policy — is considering several strategies, officials said.

One option is for federal prosecutors to bring some cases against low-level marijuana users of the sort they until now have rarely bothered with, waiting for a defendant to make a motion to dismiss the case because the drug is now legal in that state. The department could then obtain a court ruling that federal law trumps the state one.

A more aggressive option is for the Justice Department to file lawsuits against the states to prevent them from setting up systems to regulate and tax marijuana, as the initiatives contemplated. If a court agrees that such regulations are pre-empted by federal ones, it will open the door to a broader ruling about whether the regulatory provisions can be "severed" from those eliminating state prohibitions — or whether the entire initiatives must be struck down.

Another potential avenue would be to cut off federal grants to the states unless their legislatures restored antimarijuana laws, said Gregory Katsas, who led the civil division of the Justice Department during the George W. Bush administration.

Katsas said he was skeptical that a pre-emption lawsuit would succeed. He said he was also skeptical that it was necessary, since the federal government could prosecute marijuana cases in those states regardless of whether the states regulated the drug.

Still, federal resources are limited. Under the Obama administration, the Justice Department issued a policy for handling states that have legalized medical marijuana. It says federal officials should generally not use their limited resources to go after small-time users, but should for large-scale trafficking organizations. The result has been more

federal raids on dispensaries than many liberals had expected.

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2 arrests made in rash of Thanksgiving thefts in Truckee

Two Truckee residents were arrested Dec. 11 because of their suspected involvement with a series of thefts during Thanksgiving weekend.

People had reported electronics and personal property being stolen from unlocked vehicles.

Placer County sheriff's deputies were interested in talking to Wiley Washam on an unrelated matter.

"During their investigation, a detective noticed Washam was in possession of a distinct property item. The detective notified Truckee police detectives and the item was confirmed as recently stolen in Truckee," Truckee officers said in a press release.

Detectives searched a residence in Truckee and recovered numerous stolen items, including pieces of identification belonging to victims.

The occupant of the residence, Brittany Nash, was arrested on charges of possession of stolen property, conspiracy and criminal activity while on bail. Washam was charged with possession of stolen property and conspiracy.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Ski report: Get out the fat skis



Fresh powder everywhere in the Tahoe area. However, winds could hamper lift operations.

Here is the Dec. 12 ski report.

— *Curtis Fong*

More tech equipment may be added to Tahoe Keys facility

Additional antennas and other equipment may be added to what already exists in the boat storage area of the Tahoe Keys Marina.

A zoning administrator with South Lake Tahoe will review the design and special use permit at a public hearing on Dec. 19 at 2pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

John Yu with ATT Mobility/Lyle Company of Rancho Cordova is the applicant.

What is being proposed is adding two equipment cabinets within

the lease area, three antennas, six remote radio units, one DC surge protector, and one GPS antenna to the existing monopole.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

The Mayan calendar says the world is going to end Dec. 21. What are your thoughts?

TOCCATA rehearsing for January performances

TOCCATA – Tahoe Symphony Orchestra and Chorus – kicks off its 8th Winter MusicFest with a concert series that features violinist Elizabeth Pitcairn performing Prokofiev's Concerto in D major on the legendary Red Stradivarius Violin.

The program also includes the Tahoe Symphony Chorus in selections from Bach's masterpiece, the B minor Mass.

The performances are Jan. 19 at 3pm at St. Patrick's Church in Incline Village; Jan. 20 at 3pm at St. Theresa Church in South

Lake Tahoe; and Jan. 22 at 7pm at Trinity Church in Reno.

Tickets are available at the door or online.

General admission to all concerts is $30 adults, $25 seniors, $5 students aged 19 to 23 and preferred seating is $40. Youth 18 and younger are admitted free.

For information or preferred seating, contact TOCCATA online, call (775) 313.9697, or email ToccataTahoe@gmail.com.

Sierra-at-Tahoe providing incentives to give to food bank

Sierra-at-Tahoe is collecting canned food to the Food Bank of El Dorado County.

Titled CANucopia, Sierra is encouraging guests to bring canned non-perishable foods such as soup, pasta, crackers, and pasta sauce to the collection bin located at the base of the mountain next to the season pass office until Jan. 12.

Sierra will motivate guests to bring canned food with the incentive of getting the resort's general manager, John Rice, to participate in a variety of activities based on volume goals. If guests fill up one bin before Dec. 23, Rice will sing and play holiday carols at Sierra Resort on Christmas Eve. If two bins are collected by Jan. 1, kids in the Wild Mountain Children's Center will get to throw pies at Rice. If three bins are filled by Jan. 12, Rice will allow customers

the opportunity to hit a target and submerge him in a dunk tank.

According to Feeding America's 2011 Map the Meal Gap study, 15.26 percent of El Dorado County, or 27,850 individuals are food insecure. Food insecurity is the USDA's measure for lack of access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

The Food Bank of El Dorado County provides food assistance on a daily basis to more than 40 local emergency food response agencies, including battered women's shelters, senior centers, local food pantries, under privileged youth programs, youth shelters, soup kitchens, maternity homes, and more.

Letter: Congress needs to be honest with the people

To the community,

In a criminal case, the police may say there's a person of interest. Congress has members who are persons of interest. Mark Twain wrote, "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress."

For instance, Congress is prepared to push us over its made to order fiscal cliff in a ballet with the executive. There's an attack on Social Security and Medicare. But it's never mentioned that both are trust funds and as of 1999 the government owed the funds $2 trillion. The government "borrowed" from the funds.



Bill Crawford

And in this country, church property isn't taxed. Thus, churches are subsidized. But it's taboo to address the subject. Mum's the word in Congress.

And it's never mentioned that when Congress passes new tax law, it takes the IRS years to implement the legislation; as much as five years. No wonder the tax code is a tangled jungle.

And the bottom line is that in 1947 [President Harry] Truman created the national security state. Then we began arming ourselves to police the world. The fiscal cliff is the borrowing of money to finance war and more wars. If we would stop the profiteering, cost overruns for guns, we wouldn't have to mobilize the Army.

Mark Twain summed it up with, "I guess that the government that robs its own people earns the future it is preparing for itself." And the forgotten president, John Quincy Adams, spoke truly when he said to Congress, "The great object of civil government is the improvement of the conditions of those who are parties to the social compact." How sad that Congress has breached the compact with we the people.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe