Viral video shows bears in Lake Tahoe

By Mike Luery, KCRA-TV

A cellphone video that has been seen more than 5 million times after KCRA 3 shared it on Facebook Tuesday. It shows a mother bear and her two cubs swimming at Pope Beach in Lake Tahoe, near Camp Richardson.

It’s not every day you see a family of bears playing in a public lake – unless you’re a biologist.

“At Lake Tahoe, we get bears down at the lake frequently,” said Jason Holley, a supervising wildlife biologist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

In the video, which was shot last week, the mama bear doesn’t seem to mind the paddleboarders and other people nearby.

Read the whole story

SLT wins portion of retiree health care case

By Kathryn Reed

City of South Lake Tahoe retirees have been denied monetary compensation from a lawsuit they filed last year over health benefits.

A group calling themselves the South Lake Tahoe Retirees Association filed the suit in December in U.S. District Court

in Sacramento. Who is in this group has not been revealed.

However, the city does not have any contract with this group and has never knowingly met with anyone in the group.

For decades retirees have received the same health benefits as active employees. That’s the agreement the city has with retirees. When the plan changed for workers, it changed for retirees. This policy worked until the city did a major overhaul in 2014.

The city created what it calls Plan A. It is a basic health plan that has a $5,500 deductible. The city picks up the cost for singles, couples and families. Vision and dental are no longer offered. If people want a better plan, they can pay the difference for it. The deal also said those eligible for Medicare must apply for it.

The City Council also voted to stop paying for health coverage for future retirees.

The retirees wanted to be compensated for the additional costs, including having lost dental and vision coverage. Their contention is that for the duration of their retirement they should essentially have the health plan from the day they retired.

But that was never going to happen because the plan has always been evolving. There is no plan to go back to because that plan no longer exists.

It would also be impossible for any public or private provider to have stagnant plans. Medicine evolves and costs increase, and deductible amounts change. The deductible went from $750 to $1,500 in 2012 and doubled again under Plan A.

“The city’s position is everyone gets the same plan — employees, retirees. The contract under which everyone retires has the same language; that they shall get the same plan as

employees as long as there is a plan," City Manger Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. "And the plans have changed every year. This year Plan A will be a little better than last year."

It didn't help the retirees' cause when their attorney didn't show up for the May court hearing.

One thing the retirees have argued is that they are on a fixed income, while employees get raises that can help with additional expenses. The reality is employee raises are subject to approval by the City Council and are not an annual occurrence, while through the California Public Employee Retirement System there is an annual cost of living increase. This means retirees really aren't on a fixed income.

Other aspects of the case remain to be fleshed out, including the actual status of the group. The plaintiffs have 30 days to amend their complaint.

Calif. ballot measures see $65M in 2Q

By Alison Noon, AP

SACRAMENTO — Campaigns supporting and opposing California's 17 ballot initiatives have reported raising at least $65 million from April through June, according to paperwork filed this week with the secretary of state.

The total does not include money spent by people not coordinated with official ballot campaigns.

The vast majority of money spent to influence elections typically comes in the three months before Election Day. If

that holds true, California could see a record amount spent on ballot initiatives this year.

A handful of races for the state Legislature are also drawing heavy spending, and candidates for governor are fundraising for a contest still two years out.

Here are some of the initiatives and races attracting the most fundraising in the last quarter:

Drug prices

Pharmaceutical companies reported raising $16.5 million to oppose Proposition 61, an initiative to limit what the state can pay for prescription drugs, bringing the opposition campaign's cash on hand to a whopping $66 million. The only major contribution supporting the initiative to mandate that California pay no more than the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs does for prescriptions was $5 million from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation.

Tax increases

An association of hospitals gave a $9 million loan to Proposition 56, the campaign for a $2 tax increase on every pack of cigarettes sold in California. Initiative supporters ended last quarter with about $10 million in the bank. Tobacco companies R.J. Reynolds and Altria affiliates gave $16 million to defeat it in July, after the quarter ended. A separate proposal to extend a tax on high-income earners through 2030 to benefit public schools and health care has drawn no opponents, but that hasn't kept supporters from fundraising. The California Teachers Association has given $13 million this year to support Proposition 55 and union groups gave another $900,000 from April through June, bringing the campaign's bank account to $14 million.

Marijuana legalization

Six separate campaigns supporting an initiative to legalize recreational marijuana received a total of $6.8 million from April through June, and have reported another $3 million since then. Law enforcement officers and anti-drug associations have given about $130,000 to a campaign opposing Proposition 64 since April.

Hospital fees for Medi-Cal

Opponents of the proposal requiring voter approval of changes to hospital fees for state-subsidized health care revved up two campaigns with nearly $8 million in contributions in the last quarter. But opponents' $3.6 million cash on hand is still far less than the $18 million Proposition 52 advocates have in the bank, despite receiving no contributions since March.

Criminal justice reform

Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat, contributed $2.6 million from his ballot initiative committee for his proposal to expand sentencing credits in prison, allow parole for nonviolent felons and make other reforms to the state criminal justice system. The California Democratic Party, unions and a few individuals gave another $2.3 million to Proposition 57. No opposition campaign has been reported.

Gun control

A proposal by Democratic Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom to require background checks to buy firearm ammunition and prohibit large-capacity magazines reported $1.8 million in contributions from April through June, and received another $400,000 from Silicon Valley entrepreneur Sean Parker on July 1. Opponents of Proposition 63 reported contributions totaling about $200,000 last quarter.

Legislature

Democratic Assembly candidate Eloise Reyes reported her campaign was in the red at the end of June, having spent everything to finish the June 7 primary 8.5 percentage points behind incumbent Democratic Assemblywoman Cheryl Brown, who had $272,000. The race to represent San Bernardino County has drawn more than $2 million in independent expenditures. In Senate District 15 in the east San Francisco Bay, Sen. Jim Beall reported $125,000 on hand June 30 while Assemblywoman Nora Campos, also a San Jose Democrat, had $21,000 after she lost the primary by 22.5 percentage points.

2018 governor

State Treasurer John Chiang reported that he raised $2.3 million for his 2018 bid for governor of California after joining the race in May. A fellow Democrat, Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, reported raising $1.6 million in the first half of 2016, bringing his gubernatorial war chest to $6.4 million. None of the other 11 lesser-known candidates who have officially joined the race have filed financial statements.

Calif. law to fight global warming gets strong support

By Melody Gutierrez, San Francisco Chronicle

SACRAMENTO – A poll found that California voters strongly support the landmark state law adopted a decade ago to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and that voters favor expanding efforts to fight climate change.

The Public Policy Institute of California survey released last week shows 62 percent of likely voters favor the law, with

most support coming fromDemocrats and independent voters. Eight in 10 Democrats favor the law, while 56 percent of independent voters did. That’s compared with 44 percent of Republicans who favored the law.

The Legislature adopted AB32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act, in 2006. The law calls for California to reduce greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020. Greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, nitrous oxide and sulfur hexafluoride, which trap heat in the Earth’s atmosphere near the planet’s surface.

Read the whole story

Calif. water conservation evaporates a bit

By Associated Press
Californians conserved less water in June, the first month after statewide mandates were eased and control over drought restrictions returned to local water agencies, officials said Tuesday.

The State Water Resources Control Board reported that Californians used 21.5 percent less water in June than they did in 2013, a drop of 6 percentage points from a year earlier and nearly 7 percentage points from May.

A dip in conservation was expected after the statewide mandate was eased, and conservation overall remained high, said Felicia Marcus, water board chairwoman.

“The community spirit of realizing that water is something to treat with respect and not take for granted is holding,”

Marcus said. “Most importantly is for people to keep the lawn on a water diet.”

The state has cumulatively conserved 24 percent of water over the last 13 months, close to the 25 percent target, water board officials said. That amounts to 571 billion gallons of water saved, enough to provide 8.8 million people with water for a year, said Max Gomberg, of the water board’s Office of Research, Planning and Performance.

The monthly report comes as state officials begin returning conservation efforts to local cities and water districts following a near-average amount of winter rain and snowfall that eased the dry spell – mostly in Northern California.

Water districts throughout the state pushed regulators to drop mandated conservation that had required cutbacks up to 25 percent compared with 2013. That was the year before Gov. Jerry Brown declared a drought emergency.

Districts argued that the blanket mandate didn’t give many of them credit for investing millions of dollars in water recycling and desalination plants or other means of making them drought-proof.

Since June, districts that show they have enough water to get through another three years of drought may relax conservation – or completely escape strict conservation orders.

In many communities, there is no need to live under emergency conditions, said Tim Quinn, executive director of Association of California Water Agencies, the nation’s largest coalition of public water agencies.

“If you are a resident of California getting water from responsible water agencies … you don’t have to put a bucket in your shower,” he said. “You can flush when you need to.”

Garden Grove in Southern California has ample water supplies,

said William Murray, the city's public works director. It draws water from an underground aquifer that is refilled with treated waste-water.

The city, however, won't lift its strict bans on washing cars without a turnoff nozzle and running sprinklers more than twice a week until officials in Sacramento approve its drought plan. That could come by the end of August.

The city's 186,000 residents look forward to turning on the sprinklers often enough to have grassy, green parks again for playing soccer and relaxing, he said.

"In some parks it looks like residents are playing in a dust bowl," Murray said. "We'd like to get our health parks back for our residents."

Forecast: Wildfire danger to increase in Nev., Calif.

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Forecasters expect worsening fire conditions across Nevada and California for at least several more weeks.

That's according to the latest National Wildland Fire Potential Outlook released on Monday.

The forecast, from the National Interagency Fire Center, attempts to gauge the potential for wildland fires based on temperature, moisture and fuel availability predictions.

For Nevada and California forecasters expect a continuation of conditions that have already produced enough fire to make

skies hazy throughout the region.

Read the whole story

Conner, South Lake Tahoe reach settlement

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner has agreed to drop her lawsuit against the city.

In December, Conner filed the lawsuit seeking to have the censure imposed on her in October by her four council colleagues be overturned. The censure came about because the council believed Conner's behavior toward staff was unprofessional and that she was a bully who needed to be controlled.



JoAnn Conner

Also named in the lawsuit was City Manager Nancy Kerry. She is one of two employees who the council actually directly oversees. A councilmember suing her employee in California was unprecedented.

The two sides met in June to mediate the dispute after a

couple hearings in El Dorado County Superior Court.

“It’s not signed yet, so whomever is discussing it, is in a violation of what is intended to the agreement and could cause the deal to fail,” Jacqueline Mittelstadt, Conner’s attorney, told *Lake Tahoe News* on Aug. 2.

Conner was also asking to have the judge rule that the ban on her speaking to city staff be illegal. Protocols since Conner has been on the council always said the elected officials were not to go to staff they don’t actually manage. This is to avoid political favor and not have employees be micromanaged. After all, the council’s job is to set policy, not manage people other than the city manager and city attorney.

Other items in the suit pertained to Conner wanting to email any staff member. This was after Kerry mandated all of Conner’s emails go through her or the city attorney. Kerry set this policy based on what she determined to be inappropriate correspondence.

Kerry also took away Conner’s key card allowing her access to city offices. Council mailboxes were moved so the need for councilmembers to go into a key card area was eliminated.

Conner also wanted the court to weigh in on when a policy about parades should be heard (Conner in the past has put on a parade in the city limits) and wanted the judge to make her colleagues assign her to committees.

The council at its meeting Aug. 2 met in closed session. Afterward it was reported that a settlement had been reached. Specifics have not been released. When the deal is signed, the details will be made public.

One detail is that no money will be exchanged.

Kronick, Moskovitz, Tiedemann & Girard was hired by the city to handle the case. The council allocated $100,000 and to date

has spent $87,450.

It isn’t known how much Conner has spent on this case. Mittelstadt has to charge her $400 an hour because that is what was billed to the city for the censure hearing that legally had to be reimbursed to the plaintiffs. Government Codes 87460 and 87461 regulate monetary gifts/loans for political officials. Legally Mittelstadt cannot reduce her fee to Conner or waive any of costs. Previously, Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News* that Conner was on a payment plan. Conner has posted on social media a desire to establish a legal defense fund of sorts.

Tahoe woman headed to 6th Olympic Games



Louise Feller, red hat, trades pins at the London Olympics in 2012. Photo/Provided

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – Louise Feller is all too familiar with overcoming adversity.

That's why when she decided to attend her sixth Olympic Games as a volunteer, the notion of particular challenges associated with Rio in 2016 left her unfazed.

After all, she worked the Games in Athens with a broken leg – the result of a bicycle accident near Lake Tahoe two months before. She was forced to do her volunteer job with a full walking cast. But there was no way the diligent 67-year-old who takes volunteering to a level unknown to many would change her plans.

The biggest obstacle was on a very personal level.

"All the bathrooms in Greece were downstairs," she said.

The perpetual optimist took the challenge in stride, making the Olympic adventure her vacation of the year.

Sure, she knows Rio is plagued with issues. There's the mosquito-borne Zika virus that has prompted some athletes, mainly golfers, to decline the invitation. Feller shrugged off the danger.

The threat isn't enough to keep her away.

In addition, political strife resulting from a money-laundering scheme as well as rising crime has cast a shadow over the city. And Guanabarra Bay providing a water supply to residents remains polluted. Plus, the Tim Maia bike path collapsed killing two people and injuring three after a giant wave hit it.



Olympic memorabilia covers the wall above Louise Feller's couch. Photo/Susan Wood

Still, when the lights come up, the athletes take their marks and the stories unfold – it will be all about the greatest event to display the best in humanity.

And Feller will be there to help like she has since going to the 1996 Summer Olympiad in Atlanta as a spectator. It was like a light bulb came on.

"I said: 'I'd really like to see the other side of the Games'," she told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Adorning the walls of her Stateline home are posters from the various Olympic Games. In the kitchen, she created Olympic-themed collages with pictures and other take-aways from the various host cities. Feller has worked as a volunteer for the Games in Salt Lake City, London, Torino, Italy, Beijing and Athens – the birthplace of the Olympiad.

When she applied for her first gig in Salt Lake City, Feller was asked to secure her own lodging before even applying.

"I lived in a motor home for three weeks," she said. It also helped that she ran an educational touring company.

She is often asked to be the "go-to" girl, running errands for coaches, directors and athletes. She tends to help out most in

the sport of taekwondo. At a mere 5-feet tall, she performed security functions. It seems spectators and others would try to trespass or linger too long in the athletes' dining room.

For South America, she has landed the dream assignment of working an information kiosk.

Volunteers are fed one meal per day on their shifts, but being a diabetic Feller brings her own food. Good ole peanut butter hits the spot for nutrition and diversity when eaten with other things.

The workers also get a thank you dinner, watch, credentials and uniform.

What is her favorite Olympic Games thus far?

Torino (or Turin depending on where you're from) had her staged in a nice little apartment, with an Italian restaurant on the corner. She built her own community at the eatery.

"I went to dinner there every night. They started making it for me (before I arrived)," she said.

On top of that, the Games sent her to the speed skating arena where she met Apolo Ohno, the U.S. short-track gold medalist.

Her stint in Beijing turned out quite interesting in terms of allowing the other volunteers to take the pins she brings to give away from her collection. When she laid them out on a table and asked her comrades to choose which ones they wanted "they'd have a hard time because in China they're not used to choosing."

And there lie cultural differences among the 50,000-plus volunteers who form a diverse army for the Olympics. There's also a gap in the hierarchy between languages.

"English is an important language in the Olympics," she said, adding that all referees are expected to speak it.



Memorabilia from past Olympic Games where Louise Feller has been a volunteer. Photo/Susan Wood

Feller doesn't tune in the Olympics while she's working at the Games. If anything, when they're in another country, the coverage is dominated by that nation's homeland athletes much like in the U.S.

She comes home to watch online.

Still, the experience overall is an incredible one – an event that allows a person to be a part of something larger than themselves.

"I like the camaraderie during the Olympics, and I wanted to give back," said Feller, who splits her time between Lake Tahoe and Florida.

"America is a great country. I love to share it," she said. "We're very fortunate."

The Rio 2016 Volunteer Programme is billed as “the place for all those who are passionate about sports and volunteering.”

“The volunteers are indispensable for the success of the Games. They are the soul of the event,” Flavia Fontes, head of the Rio 2016 Volunteers Programme, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “A person in the city could go through the Games without seeing an athlete with their own eyes, but it would be impossible not to meet a volunteer. They play a part in everything, helping and providing information to spectators, assisting heads of state and providing operational support at the ceremonies.”

The Olympic Games in Rio start Aug. 5 with the opening ceremonies in Maracana Stadium and end Aug. 21 with the closing celebration. A total of 7.5 million tickets are expected to be sold – 200,000 less than London’s 2012 Summer Olympics because the venues are smaller. NBC Sports will televise the Games for its duration.

More than 200 nations are expected to participate in 306 events at 33 venues in the host city and at five venues in Sao Paulo.

Food waste clogging up California’s landfills

By Steve Scauzillo, San Gabriel Valley Tribune

Each year, Americans throw out 66 billion pounds of food – organic material wasting away at the bottom of a landfill.

While successful programs recycle tons of aluminum cans, glass, plastic, cardboard, and newspaper and help account for

63 percent of waste diverted from landfills in California, you can't say the same about table scraps. With no widespread re-use and few programs, food waste has emerged as one of the biggest categories of refuse filling up the nation's landfills, making up 18 percent of the trash buried in California landfills, according to state records.

Aside from the social issues of Americans wasting billions of pounds of food every year, there's an environmental problem. Organic material decomposing in landfills creates methane, which can leak into the atmosphere. Methane is 87 times more potent in terms of warming the Earth than carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas, scientists point out.

Read the whole story

Don't expect rules around shell companies to tighten

By Tim Johnson, McClatchy News Service

Who made the United States into a refuge for secretive shell companies?



Dean Heller

Look toward Congress to find politicians who helped turn

Nevada into a major home for shell companies, which can be used to evade taxes and hide illegal assets from around the world.

Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., now a member of the Senate Finance Committee, was a strong advocate while Nevada’s secretary of state for a 2001 state law that broadened legal protections for shell companies, allowing owners to remain secret.

The change made incorporating a company easier than getting a library card and helped spur the registration of thousands of shell companies in Nevada.

Read the whole story