# The solar battle on Nevada rooftops

**By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal**

On May 20, 2015, an exasperated Nevada Legislature washed its hands of the net metering debate, punting its resolution to the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada.

Exactly one year later, the issue surrounding rates for rooftop solar is poised to come full circle as a state task force mulls sending it back to state lawmakers.

A May 26 meeting by the Governor's New Energy Industry Task Force to determine whether existing rooftop solar customers should be grandfathered under older, more favorable rates is the latest in an ongoing drama that has garnered Nevada plenty of national attention – mostly of the negative kind.

The situation is a far cry from the heady days of the Nevada solar experiment. State lawmakers passed several policies through the years to support the budding renewables industry, including its first legislation for net metering back in 1997.

**Read the whole story**

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# Year-round hockey academy moving to Meyers

**By Kathryn Reed**

Meyers is about to be home to the Tahoe Hockey Academy.

The year-round facility for boys and girls in middle or high school is expected to break ground this summer. The building permits from El Dorado County are in hand. The project is on the consent agenda of the May 25 Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board meeting.

“We are looking at initiation on the upper dorm as early as June and the first academic year starting in August,” Mike Dill of Aspen Environmental Services told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Dill works for Tahoe Hockey Academy, the group that is looking to move onto the property to create a year-round sports school.

The existing residence would become a dorm, with another 7,000 square feet added to it. A second two-story building will be 13,193 square feet, which will be part dorm, dining hall, kitchen and exercise room. In all, about 90 youths would live there, along with eight residence assistants.

A tennis court, which has been previously approved and graded, but not built, would be converted into a mini ice rink in the winter for 3-on-3 practices. The ice rink in South Lake Tahoe is where they would have full team practices, as well as games.

“The academy will follow the school year – August to May. Then the facility will operate summer camps for groups of 20 to 25 kids,” Dill said. “Basically it’s a prep school and prep academy to get them academically ready for college and physically ready to play Division 1 hockey.”

The 3,800-square-foot residence was erected years ago. This is a legally existing, non-conforming use. Converting the use to a recreation facility will bring it into compliance.

Some Meyers residents are starting to question why this project seems to be getting approved without the usual scrutiny.

“The previous approvals are part of the parcel’s history. It doesn’t mean we don’t do the same level of review,” Paul Nielsen, planner with TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It’s on the consent calendar because until recently there was no known concerns about the project.”

When the notice about the project went out to neighbors this month letters started coming in to TRPA. Noise and water supply are two of the main concerns so far.

In 2006, the 16.4-acre parcel known as Echo Creek was permitted to be a recreation group facility for about 200 people. The infrastructure was put in, the lower loop road built, grading for the tennis court is done, with the basketball court already in place. In fact, 80 percent of the grading for the academy is complete, which includes tree removal.

The problem is the owners at the time – Alex Graf and Paul Gardner – could not find a user. Both men have since died and their trusts are left dealing with the parcel at the bottom of Old Meyers Grade.

In 2012, Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care seriously considered relocating there, but a deal could not be reached.

Tahoe Hockey Academy, which is run by a group of investors, is leasing the property, with an option to buy.

Noise, traffic and vehicle miles traveled have been studied.

“We will have full size buses to shuttle kids to tournaments; passenger vans to get to the rink (in South Lake Tahoe),” Dill said.

There will be 44 parking spaces for general use, and nine for employees. The thinking is because of the age of students most will not have a vehicle at the academy.

Dill does not anticipate the academy having any impact on

those who walk-run Old Meyers Grade, especially because the academy will not use the street for parking. The gate will stay where it is.

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# Shining a light on Nevada’s dark skies



Great Basin National Park during the 2015 Astronomy Festival. Photo/Ryan Berendsen

**By Tony Berendsen**

I’ve often said Nevada has two great resources – rocks and stars. Anyone who has worked land in Nevada can attest to the

abundance of rocks, and anyone that has strayed away from the meager city lights of most of Nevada has seen a multitude of stars in its night sky.

There is a great history of mining the rocks of our state. It’s part of our culture and heritage. Nevada was built on the wealth of the ore rocks held for those who sought them. And all the time an unparalleled a wealth of stars and view into the cosmos lay above the land of Nevada receiving much less attention.

2016 heralds in a new era for our precious resource of star studded skies. Great Basin National Park has been designated a DSP (Dark Sky Park) by the IDA (International Dark-Sky Association). The designation ensures the pristine darkness of the park will be preserved for visitors of the park to enjoy, and for the health and well being of the animals calling the park home.

The IDA, founded in 1988, works to educate the public about outdoor lighting that does not obscure our view of the stars, and with public and private entities to designate areas of land as dark sky preserves. Great Basin National Park is the most recent of 34 parks (25 in the U.S.) to become a DSP.

I talked to John Barentine, program manager for the IDA, about the status and development of GBNP as a DSP.

“Great Basin started their application effort some time before my arrival at IDA in late 2013. Their case is typical, in that it was a stop-and-start effort that moved ahead when staff and/or volunteers were available to work on it, and otherwise it went dormant for different lengths of time. It’s hard for parks to sustain the application effort, given the resources involved,” he said.

What level of designation did the park receive?

“Great Basin was certified as a gold-tier Dark Sky Park,

indicating the highest level of natural darkness. To put that in context against our other designation tier levels (silver and bronze) Great Basin is certainly one of the darkest parks in our system, largely by virtue of its relative geographic isolation from big cities and the screening effect of topography that tends to block distant light sources like Las Vegas," Barentine said.

What type of astronomy or star gazing programs should visitors to the park expect?

"The park is really exemplary in this respect, putting on over 100 programs a year that are specific to astronomy and/or dark skies, including formal interpretive presentations, an annual Astronomy Festival each September, special events like full moon walks and meteor shower watch parties," Barentine said. "In addition to maintaining an active web and social media presence, they have also reached out to towns in the region to bring the park's night sky resource to the community. They really go above and beyond to uphold the adage that 'half the park is after dark' and offer visitors a significantly expanded experience that doesn't end at sunset and start at sunrise each day."

For more information about Nevada's new Dark Sky Park go to the Great Basin National Park's **website** or **International Dark-Sky Association**.

And of course, if you want to experience the DSP, take out your camping and hiking gear, binoculars, and telescope to spend a few days at the park. I guarantee you will not be disappointed.

*Tony Berendsen, aka Tony the Star Guide, runs Tahoe Star Tours.*

# California voter registration soaring

**By Matthew Artz, Bay Area News Group**

Californians are registering to vote in breathtaking numbers not seen since the Reagan Revolution, as the no-holds-barred presidential primary season and tech-based outreach efforts have roused more than 1 million people from their political slumber.

More than twice as many Californians registered this year than in the same four-month period in 2012, according to Political Data Inc., a Los Angeles County firm that tracks state voter trends. The new voters are trending young and Democratic – two groups more inspired by Bernie Sanders than Donald Trump.

“There is no precedent for this in California since 1980 in terms of the overall surge in voter registration,” said Paul Mitchell, the firm’s vice president. “The motivation to register is as much to vote against somebody as it is to vote for somebody.”

**Read the whole story**

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# Opinion: ‘Dedication to

# upholding the law’



Judge Nelson Brooks is up for re-election on June 7. Photo/Provided

**Publisher’s note:** ***Lake Tahoe News asked both candidates for El Dorado County Superior Court judge to write a guest column. To date the incumbent is the only one to do so. The election is June 7.***

**By Nelson Brooks**

I am honored and proud to be one of your judges here in El Dorado County. I graduated from the University of California’s Hastings College of the Law, and have been on the bench now for approximately seven years after practicing as a trial attorney in Sacramento and El Dorado counties for over 25 years.

I was first appointed to the bench by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2009, and retained by a vote of over 75 percent of our county’s voters in 2010.

My opponent is a trial attorney with barely 10 years total

experience as a licensed lawyer (the absolute minimum required before an attorney may even apply for a judicial position), who earned his law degree at night school. His primary area of practice has been DUI and marijuana defense cases.

I see my role as a sitting judge to be the tireless and unswerving dedication to upholding the law and applying it fairly, without prejudice or preference to all of our counties' citizens who come before me. I believe that our judicial system must provide a respectful, efficient, no-nonsense forum for the fair and equitable resolution of disputes, and that it is an honor and a privilege to have been selected to serve the people of El Dorado County in this capacity.

I am committed to justice and common sense. Being a judge in the El Dorado Superior Court is about experience, integrity and fairness. My opponent is a criminal defense attorney who does not have the knowledge or understanding of the rule of law to do this job. I am endorsed by District Attorney Vern Pierson, Presiding Judge Suzanne Kingsbury, Judge James Wagoner, Judge Ken Melikian, Judge Vicki Ashworth, Chief Public Defender Teri Monterosso, Presiding Appellate Justice Vance Raye and all of the associate justices of the Third District Court of Appeals, which is the appellate court that reviews any of my decisions that might go up on appeal.

I have also been endorsed by the South Lake Tahoe Police Officers Association, South Lake Tahoe Mayor Wendy David, County Supervisor Sue Novasel, the Mountain Democrat newspaper and many others.

I believe that justice should be dispensed without bias and with fiscal efficiency. I have served in virtually every division of our Superior Court, presiding over both court and jury trials.

I was born in Columbus, Ohio, and traveled quite a bit growing

up – my father served our country in the Air Force and was one of the original Tuskegee Airmen during World War II. He continued in the Air Force after the war ended, rising to the rank of full colonel. Over his career our family lived in many places including Germany, the Philippine Islands, and tours at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., before his final assignment at Hamilton AFB in Marin County, where he retired.

Prior to becoming a judge, I practiced law for about 27 years in El Dorado and Sacramento counties. I graduated from UC Hastings College of the Law in 1982 after earning my undergraduate degree from Santa Clara University. I am fully committed to our community. My wife and I met and married here in El Dorado County in 1976. My wife, Tish Starr Brooks, graduated from UC Davis Veterinary School in 1988. She practiced in El Dorado County for many years. We have two adult children who were born and raised on the West Slope in the home in which we still live today.

As an attorney for approximately 27 years, I successfully litigated many thousands of business and personal injury matters, representing both plaintiffs and defendants, and earning one of the highest ratings available from Martindale-Hubbell. As your El Dorado County Superior Court judge I have handled virtually every case type and courtroom assignment. I have gained broad judicial experience in my time on the bench, having worked in every division of our county's court system, including civil and probate, family law, dependency-delinquency, traffic, and, for approximately the past six months, in the criminal arraignment department.

I have presided over jury and/or court trials in all of these areas, and have imposed one of the highest criminal sentences in our county's history in a multiple child abuse-molestation trial: 750 years to life. Handling this volume of cases requires swift but well thought-out determinations as to how these matters should proceed: all the way to trial in the trial courts; or resolution at the arraignment stage, with the

commiserate cost savings to the court and the county, but without compromising the defendant’s constitutional rights to a full and fair hearing.

My decisions must be made quickly and efficiently in order to keep the never-ending flow of criminal cases moving smoothly. In the time that I have been in this assignment I have been able to establish a record of efficiency and timeliness in accomplishing these goals. During my over 30-year career as a lawyer and judge, I have worked as a civil litigator and tried cases in both federal court and in state courts throughout Northern California. In those 30-plus years of practice, both as a lawyer and as a judge, I have never been disciplined, sanctioned nor investigated for any alleged misconduct. In my private practice before coming on the bench, I have never had any complaints lodged against me by clients or adversaries for unethical or even questionable conduct.

I take pride in my commitment to this community. Tish and I fell in love with El Dorado County and knew that we wanted to raise our family here and give back everything we could to continue making this an incredible place to live. I served for nearly a decade on the Snowline Hospice Board of Directors, coached youth soccer and basketball, and am a past president of the El Dorado County Bar Association. I have previously served as a trustee for the County Law Library, been chairman of the Evelyn Horn Scholarship Selection Committee and continue to serve as a volunteer judge for the county’s Teen Court Program.

Since taking office on the El Dorado County Superior Court, I have worked to improve operations by eliminating unnecessary, duplicative and expensive court appearances. I also helped implement a new, streamlined system for requesting necessary appearances directly. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to continue efficiently handling the great volume of cases that must be processed through this department.

In the time I have served on the bench I have assisted in implementing the following:

· We have an online request for oral argument process available online. I helped create that when I was assigned to civil.

· Our public website is more accessible, user friendly, and has more information for attorneys and the public.

· We now have transcripts available online, speeding the process and saving money on copying costs.

· Our court is very fiscally strong and even with the reduction of some of our workforce, we have been able to keep afloat operationally, with little noticeable difference to the public.

· The court now has its own telephone appearance system. This system generates revenue for the court and allows attorneys and parties to appear by phone for brief appearances.

· We now handle most search warrants electronically.

· We have created an online orientation for family law litigants prior to mediation. Prior to that time, the parties had to come to court for that purpose.

· We now provide interpreters for all case types.

· Other efficiencies include being able to pay traffic and criminal fines, fees and restitution online and via credit card. People now also have the ability to handle some aspects of their traffic tickets remotely.

It has been my honor to serve the people of El Dorado County as your Superior Court judge and I respectfully ask for your vote on June 7, 2016, so I can continue to serve our community in the future.

# California losing most land to development

**By Paul Rogers, Mercury News**

The natural landscape of the American West is gradually disappearing under a relentless march of new subdivisions, roads, oil and gas production, agricultural operations and other human development, according to a detailed mapping study released Tuesday.

From 2001 to 2011, an area totaling 4,321 square miles – or 15 times the size of San Jose, Oakland and San Francisco combined – was modified by development in the 11 Western states, the report found, with California losing the most natural land, and Wyoming and Utah changing at the fastest rate.

“We are nibbling away at our wild places at a fairly rapid clip,” said Mike Dombeck, former chief of the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in the 1990s.

The report was produced by scientists at Conservation Science Partners, a nonprofit research organization based in Truckee, who spent a year analyzing more than 30 large databases and a decade of satellite images over Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

**Read the whole story**

# Why are ski towns seeing more suicides?

**By Kelley McMillan, National Geographic**

On a sunny morning in late February, Tom Slocum, a 57-year-old ski bum in Telluride, Colo., walked up Tomboy Road, a popular hiking route that winds above the north side of town. An avid athlete and skier, Slocum moved to Telluride in 1984, a couple of years after graduating college. Like many ski town residents, he'd worked several jobs over the years, in hotels, mostly. Over the last five or so years, he'd grown frustrated with his life—presumably by the fact the he was a middle-aged man living in a shack behind a multimillion dollar home, struggling to get by in one of the country's most idyllic ski towns.

About a mile up Tomboy, Slocum pulled over and sat down next to a small creek. From his perch above Telluride, he looked out at the majestic San Juan Mountains, which towered above the 2,000-person town and its pastel Victorians. Across the valley, the Bear Creek basin etched up the east side of the resort and disappeared into a playground of snow-capped peaks. Then, just after dawn cast its first rays, Slocum pulled out a handgun and shot himself.

Slocum's death was the first of three suicides that occurred in San Miguel County over two weeks in late February and early March. Then in May, a 46-year-old skier widely regarded as one of the best riders in the San Juans, took his life. The rash of self-inflicted deaths boosted the county's rate of suicide by firearms over the past 12 months to more than six times higher than the national average. But Telluride isn't alone. The number of suicides in Aspen, Colo., is three times the country's mean rate. Utah's Salt Lake County, home to Alta and Snowbird, has almost twice as many suicides as the national

average. And six suicides over two and a half years in Truckee prompted the community to launch a suicide task force in 2014. Though tourists from around the world flock to these locales to ski their slopes and ride their single track, paradise harbors a darker reality: resort town residents are taking their lives at alarming rates.

**Read the whole story**

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# Demand for mental health care grows in Tahoe

**Publisher's note:** ***This is one of several stories about mental health issues in the Lake Tahoe Basin that will be running through October.***

**By Kathryn Reed**

Mental health is a growing problem on the South Shore that is affecting all ages and has no socio-economic boundaries.

More people are committing suicide. Substance abuse is an issue, which exacerbates mental conditions.




These are some of the findings in Barton Health's latest Community Needs Assessment. Officials from the Tahoe healthcare conglomerate spoke to the South Lake Tahoe City Council this month – which is Mental Health Awareness Month. A different foursome – three from Barton, one from NAMI

(National Alliance on Mental Health) – gave a talk a few days earlier at Lake Tahoe Community College.

“We see worsening trends,” Clint Purvance, CEO of Barton Health, said.

The top three priorities from the 2015 assessment are mental health, substance abuse and access to services. All are interrelated.

South Lake Tahoe has a higher rate of suicides compared to the state and national averages, as well as more drinkers and drug-induced deaths. The access to primary care physicians, though, is less than the state and national averages.

Barton is going after grants to help implement programs to help address these issues.

What worries Purvance is that there are so many outside factors contributing to one’s mental health that are out of the immediate purview of Barton, such as homelessness among school-age youth and adults living in motels.

When Councilman Tom Davis asked Purvance to put a price on dealing with the issue on a communitywide basis, the answer was at least seven figures with no true number having been calculated.

For Barton, the next steps are to maintain and expand mental health services, spearhead community collaboration and engagement to improve the care flow system, and to build awareness through education and prevention campaigns.

At the community talk Tracy Protell – psychiatrist at Barton; Betsy Glass, licensed clinical social worker at Barton Community Health Center; Kate Mosher, licensed clinical social worker with Sierra Child and Family Services; and Jeanne Nelson of NAMI El Dorado gave some insight about they see in the community, particularly regarding depression.

“The key is all levels are treatable. You really can get the brain back to a healthy state,” Protell said.

She said depression is often misdiagnosed in younger people as attitudinal behavior issues.

A clinical diagnosis of depression is when someone has five of the following nine symptoms for more than two weeks:

· Sadness/irritability

· Anhedonia

· Sleep disturbance

· Decreased energy

· Appetite disturbance

· Difficulty with concentration

· Excessive feelings of guilt-worthlessness

· Psychomotor agitation/retardation

· Suicidal thoughts.

The experts are proponents of starting with lifestyle changes – eating, sleeping, exercise, social interaction – before medication.

Therapy, though, is also a viable option for many people. However, there is an extensive wait list for psychiatric and psychotherapy through Barton. The good news is new patients are prioritized, with the most severe cases rising to the top.

A third psychiatrist is coming on board with Barton this summer, which should help.

Money can also be a deterrent for people when it comes to seeking care.

NAMI offers some free group therapy sessions and has a wealth of information. El Dorado County operates a 24-hour crisis line. A therapist will meet patients at Barton Hospital's emergency room.

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# Cheap gas good news for tourism industry

**By Scott Mayerowitz, AP**

Grab your sunglasses, a giant cup of coffee and prepare to hit the highway: 2016 is shaping up to be the summer of the road trip.

Cheap fuel prices have left many American families flush with spare cash, which they now plan to spend on vacations. And with summertime gas prices predicted to be the lowest in 13 years, the travel industry is looking forward to a blockbuster July and August.

"We're pretty excited," says Steve Joyce, CEO of Choice Hotels, which includes Comfort Inn and Econo Lodge. "Last year was a record summer for us. We're going to be a lot stronger this year."

The hotel chain is seeing an increase in bookings. And low gas prices throughout the winter means that Americans had cheaper commutes and more disposable income.

"That's a raise in our guys' pockets which means they are going to take another trip," Joyce says.

The job market is also giving Americans a reason to take a vacation: The economy created about 2.4 million jobs between

last Memorial Day and the end of April

Initial data for the Memorial Day holiday weekend, the start of the travel season, is already signaling a strong summer for the tourism industry.

Enterprise Rent-A-Car is seeing a 44 percent spike in reservations for the holiday weekend compared to last year.

And AAA, one of the nation's largest travel agencies and a car lobbying group, is predicting 38 million people will travel for the holiday, the most since 2005. That's 700,000 or 1.9 percent more travelers than last year.

The overwhelming majority of Memorial Day travelers – 89 percent – plan to go by car. That's the highest percent of drivers since AAA began tracking holiday travel in 2000.

"The great American road trip is officially back thanks to low gas prices," says Marshall Doney, CEO of AAA.

The average price for a gallon of gas is expected to be $2.24 by July and $2.20 in August, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Adjusted for inflation, that would be the lowest summer prices since 2003.

Those who choose to fly this summer will have plenty of company too. The lobbying group for most U.S. carriers, Airlines for America, is predicting that 231.1 million passengers will fly in June, July and August. That's a 3.8-percent increase over last summer's record numbers.

Airlines have added more flights and are using larger planes, leading to the most number of seats in the sky since 2008. That, along with low fuel prices, has led to a 4-percent drop in domestic airfares so far this year, according to the airline lobbying group.

The airlines have a message for fliers: Get to the airport early. Long lines at Transportation Security Administration

checkpoints have plagued thousands of travelers this spring, causing many of them to miss flights. The situation is expected to get worse in the summer with an average of 2.5 million passengers a day flying.

Last year, 19 of the 25 busiest days for the TSA occurred during the summer. The top five busiest were: July 31, July 2, June 26, May 22 (right before Memorial Day) and July 24.

San Francisco International Airport is already advising fliers that all parking lots are expected to be at or near capacity during peak summer days.

U.S. theme parks are predicting 376 million visitors this year, up 3 percent from last year.

The National Park Service saw a record 307 million visitors last year and expects to match that high level of attendance this year. The bulk of visitors at the 411 parks, recreation areas and national memorials come during the summer months.

That’s great news for Geoff Ballotti, CEO of Wyndham Hotel Group. Half of his company’s Travelodge properties are within 25 miles of a national park.

“We believe it’s going to be a hot summer for us,” Ballotti says.

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# Casino industry working to curb money laundering

**By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun**

Casinos in Nevada and beyond continue to put a lot of emphasis

on how to combat money laundering – enough, at least, to fill a ballroom every year.

About 400 people gathered at the South Point on Tuesday for the latest installment of the Bank Secrecy Act conference, an annual gathering of industry lawyers and others. Presented by the gaming law section of the State Bar of Nevada, the conference generally relates to what casinos are and should be doing to prevent their businesses from being used to disguise the flow of illegal money.

The issue has made big headlines over the last year or so, as the government hit Caesars Palace and the former ownership of the Nugget casino in Sparks with big fines regarding weakness in their anti-money laundering efforts. Also, a recently announced state fine against Las Vegas Sands Corp. stemmed in part from millions of dollars it agreed to pay years earlier to conclude a money-laundering investigation.

And as proof that the industry is paying attention to making improvements in anti-money laundering, the American Gaming Association in 2014 released a set of best practices in that area that were updated last year.

**Read the whole story**