

Study: Nevada losing business-friendly status

By Brian Deka, Las Vegas Sun

A cable news channel this week released its rankings of the nation's top states for business, and the results were not kind to Nevada.

The state fell 16 places to No. 45 in this year's CNBC rankings, which evaluate states based on factors such as infrastructure, education, quality of life, economy and the cost of doing business. The study ranked Nevada 46th overall in 2013 and 29th last year.

"The Silver State offers a ready supply of employees, but the workforce is tarnished by the worst education system in the country," the report said.

Read the whole story

Nev. higher ed officials quash critical report

By Bethany Barnes, Las Vegas Review-Journal

When state lawmakers wanted ideas about how to improve the state's community colleges last year, the Nevada System of Higher Education hired a Colorado-based think tank to scrutinize the four schools.

But when the National Center for Higher Education Management

Systems produced a report highly critical of the state's higher education leadership, the study was quashed.

A series of emails between higher education system officials obtained by the Review-Journal through the state's public records law shows state officials feared the report could be used by their critics and suppressed the findings in fear that reforms would dramatically reduce their authority over the schools.

In an email, Constance Brooks, the higher education system's vice chancellor for government and community affairs, remarked to colleagues that the report shed a "very negative light" on the state's Board of Regents and asked if the audience for the report was the system's "antagonists."

"I say we just take what we like out of the report and do away with the rest," she suggested.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Taking pride in the court's decision

By Susan Wood

California Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, who confirmed with *Lake Tahoe News* on Friday that he plans to run for governor of the state, is one of a few people I sought to connect with after the U.S. Supreme Court's epic decision that paves the way for federal recognition of gay marriage.

The long struggle has commanded undaunted dedication amid adversity from certain brave activists.



Gavin Newsom – a crusader to recognize gay marriage before it was politically correct. Photo/Kathryn Reed

As San Francisco mayor, Newsom bucked his party and his own father when he decided in February 2004 to defiantly go against state statutes in issuing marriage licenses through the county clerk's office to gay and lesbian couples. More than 4,000 licenses were issued. Newsom was chastised by the right and the left.

What motivated him?

It was when President George W. Bush vowed to seek a constitutional amendment to bar same sex marriages in the United States at his State of the Union address.

"I was there listening to this message," Newsom told *Lake Tahoe News* on June 26.

We spoke as I was driving to the Bay Area to attend LGBT night at AT&T Park. Newsom had a sense of vigilance to his tone. This was no ordinary chat. I pulled over, and he got personal.

He said he heard a Bush supporter talk about "the homosexual" with such a grimaced venom that it was too much to sit idly

by.

"It made me sick," he said. "It was literally that moment that triggered me to do something about this."

It was what the Jesuits taught him: "We have many parts and one body. When one part suffers, it all suffers."

Newsom attended Santa Clara University, a Jesuit college.

"We believe in social justice. You are who you are the way God created you," he said.

Take those convictions and blend them with Newsom's father's influence and you have the modern-day California activist. His father, William Newsom, is a retired state appeals court judge.

For years the younger statesman could not get his father on board to support his pivotal exercise in the gay rights movement.

It was when the Newsoms attended an Auburn Democratic Club fundraiser that the father publicly stated he "finally came around to my point of view."

"He never told me," Newsom said.

Activism often comes with surprises.

Although Newsom cautioned the opposition is motivated to fight back because "we're not going to stop homophobia, we're not going to stop discrimination," Friday's landmark ruling was poignant for the state official as what he deems "a historic footnote."

"I never thought I'd be alive to see this day, and not that I expected to die young," Newsom said.

I had thought the same thing.

Newsom especially didn't expect it in 2004 when he pushed open the floodgates, declaring four years later: "It's inevitable. It's going to happen whether you like it or not."

The statement became a rallying cry for the opposition.

"I'm someone who's willing to take a risk," he said.

It paid off. Today he should be one of the most celebrated dignitaries in San Francisco's Gay Pride Parade.

I've attended many of these parades over the years. Some decades more than others. At no other time has one become more important to me.



Susan Wood never thought in her lifetime that gay marriage would be legal in the United States.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

I volunteered to defeat the Briggs Initiative that would have fired teachers for coming out. I marched for equality in Sacramento. I assisted the Municipal Elections Committee in Los Angeles as a political activist group. I wrote story after story about the beginning of the AIDS crisis when I lived in Palm Springs and Los Angeles. I watched friends die of the disease. Then, I watched their names unfolding in a quilt large enough to take up the entire UCLA auditorium.

I think of these people now. How they would have loved to see this progress in humanity. Many didn't see it from their own families before they died. They still held their heads high with dignity. In particular, I remember my friend Vince caring for Chris as his health diminished. Then, Vince succumbed not even considering that he could have lived out his last years having fun instead of being a caregiver.

Now that's love. And love will always prevail.

As I ponder the argument against gay marriage being over as states are now mandated by the federal government to get on the right side of history, I wonder how my love hinders another.

I am in no position to marry at this state of my life. But that's not the point. The point is the option is there. And I have loved someone enough to call it a marriage. For all my gay friends who are married, they can go to any state and have their union be legitimate, just as it always has been for my heterosexual friends.

If any marriage serves as an obstacle to yours, you have a bigger problem in the relationship than normal insecurity.

Marriage – gay or straight – it's finally all the same.

BLM wants \$1 mil. Burning Man VIP compound

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

U.S. Bureau of Land Management officials are asking Burning Man organizers to provide "excessive" comforts such as

flushing toilets, washers and dryers, and vanity mirrors in a compound for high-level government officials staying in Black Rock City.

A Burning Man spokesman estimated the compound would cost the event more than \$1 million, bringing its 2015 permit fees to about \$5 million. The renderings of the compound obtained by the RGJ also show various accommodations set aside for VIP visitors but don't indicate who the visiting dignitaries will be.

The request, unprecedented in Burning Man's history, has turned into a point of contention as organizers negotiate with the agency for their annual permit to stage the event in the Black Rock Desert. No permit has been issued for this year's event, which runs Aug. 30 to Sept. 7. Typically permits are issued in early August.

Burning Man has refused to comply with the BLM's request, which the federal agency submitted on June 1, according to Burning Man spokesman Jim Graham.

Read the whole story

Drought causes spike in insurance rates



The Truckee River near Tahoe City should have enough water for rafts to be floating on it.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Michael Bott and Thom Jensen, KXTV

Curb appeal, crime rate and a quality education. Those are the factors most people weigh when buying a home. But, a new investigation found that equation was now influenced by the drought and longer, more intense fire seasons.

Homeowners insurance, once a budget afterthought, was now top of mind for some people.

Residents in a small Placer County community said their premiums are “burning out of control,” and insurance companies are canceling other policies altogether. They lived on the outskirts of Colfax in a heavily wooded subdivision named Alpine Meadows.

Read the whole story

TPRID on path to continue major changes

By Jessie Marchesseau

MEYERS – With a new fiscal year just around the corner, the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District board of directors is gearing up for a year full of change.

Former park manager, Steve Dunn, is out of the picture and moved out of the house in which he had been residing on the property. Now the board must decide what to do about maintenance, management and event planning, not to mention what to do with the house. The 50th anniversary celebration is coming up, bears are in the trash almost daily, new fiscal year financials need to be discussed and to top it off, it's an election year with four of the five board seats up for grabs.

Applications have already been accepted for the events coordinator and park caretaker positions. The directors will be sorting through those and doing interviews in the coming weeks. A third position is also being discussed for seasonal park maintenance. All three positions will be part time, replacing Dunn's solitary full-time one.

Whether or not living in the on-site house will be offered as partial compensation to any of the new employees is still undecided. For now, the board has opted to list the house's estimated rental market value, \$1,100 per month, as part of the annual revenue in the 2015-16 budget. The house is not ready to be rented right now, as Dunn did not meet his deadline to be fully moved out by May 16 and still has some personal property on the premises. The board was considering a dumpster to dispose of the remaining items, but since Dunn has made an effort to clean things up in recent weeks, they

decided to wait a little longer and then reassess.

Also listed on next year's budget is revenue from site rentals, mainly weddings. However, this number is significantly smaller than it has been in the past, as it only includes rentals already confirmed for this season. The board plans to discuss at a later date whether or not to continue hosting weddings in the park as well as the possibility of raising prices to be more in line with other local venues.

After reviewing the rest of the proposed 2015-16 budget prepared by Peter Nelligan, board treasurer, it was unanimously approved June 25 with a balanced operating budget of \$72,900.

Nelligan has also been in charge of trash at the park in the absence of a caretaker. He said bears are constantly getting into the trash and bear cans are a must, sooner rather than later.

"We're creating bad behavior in bears by allowing them to feed in the park, and it's also a mess to pick up," he said.

He estimates the park needs five boxes. Price quotes are being gathered, and the issue will be revisited at the next meeting with the goal of getting them installed as soon as possible. Board Chairwoman Sue Novasel said they would likely be able to appropriate funds from elsewhere since it was not included on the approved budget.

Jan Roman Gonzales reported that the planning of the 50th anniversary celebration on July 11 is moving along. Bands, vendors and sponsors are lined up, flyers are ready to be distributed, and signs and banners will be arriving any day.

The RID recently received notice from El Dorado County that 2015 is an election year for the board. Since two of the seats were appointed midway through their terms and two are expiring, all four will be up for election this year. The two

expiring seats will be four-year terms, and the other two will be for two years. If no more than four people apply, those applicants will simply be appointed to the seats and no election will be conducted. Any resident registered to vote within the TPRID may put their name in for the election by contacting Kim Smith with El Dorado County at 530.621.7490 between July 13 and Aug. 7.

The next meeting will be July 9.

Mandatory vaccination law headed to Calif. gov

By Patrick McGreevy and Rong-gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times

California lawmakers approve one of the toughest mandatory vaccination laws in the nation

California lawmakers on Thursday approved one of the toughest mandatory vaccination requirements in the nation, moving to end exemptions from state immunization laws based on religious or other personal beliefs.

The measure, among the most controversial taken up by the Legislature this year, would require more children who enter day care and school to be vaccinated against diseases including measles and whooping cough.

Those with medical conditions such as allergies and immune-system deficiencies, confirmed by a physician, would be excused from immunization. And parents could still decline to vaccinate children who attend private home-based schools or public independent studies off campus.

It is unclear whether Gov. Jerry Brown will sign the measure, which grew out of concern about low vaccination rates in some communities and an outbreak of measles at Disneyland that ultimately infected more than 150 people.

Read the whole story

Supreme Court says yes to gay marriage

By Adam Liptak, New York Times

WASHINGTON — In a long-sought victory for the gay rights movement, the Supreme Court ruled on Friday that the Constitution guarantees a nationwide right to same-sex marriage.

Justice Anthony M. Kennedy wrote the majority opinion in the 5 to 4 decision. He was joined by the court's four more liberal justices.

The decision, the culmination of decades of litigation and activism, came against the backdrop of fast-moving changes in public opinion, with polls indicating that most Americans now approve of same-sex marriage.

As in earlier civil rights cases, the Supreme Court had moved cautiously and methodically, laying careful judicial groundwork for a transformative decision.

Read the whole story

Drought an issue for governors in West



Forest Schafer with North Lake Tahoe fire on June 25 talks about how the drought is increasing the risk of a forest fire. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – While people were in awe of the setting of the Western Governors’ Association gathering on Thursday, the reality is that in a non-drought year it would never have been able to be there.

The group assembled June 25 at the boat ramp at Sand Harbor. The ramp never opened this season because the water level at Lake Tahoe is too low for motorized vessels to launch.

Officials at the meeting said the level is at 6,220 feet. The

natural rim is 6,223 feet. The dam in Tahoe City allows for another 6.1 feet of water above the rim to be stored in Lake Tahoe. Without much of a spring runoff because of the dismal winter snowpack, the lake has been dropping since the May rains ceased. Plus, about 0.1 inches is lost every day to evaporation. According to the Tahoe Fund, that evaporated water could serve the daily needs of 3.3 million people in the United States.

Cave Rock is the only launch ramp open in Nevada; even so, only one of the two lanes is accessible.

Much of the Western United States is suffering from drought – it's not just California and Nevada.

Gov. Brian Sandoval is chairman of the Western Governors' Association, having chosen drought to be his focus.

"We have to work together in this time of catastrophic drought," the Nevada governor said.

Several people attending the multiday conference at the Hyatt in Incline Village went on a tour Thursday of the area, which highlighted the effects of drought in Tahoe. Besides the governors and their staffs, people from federal agencies and private companies that work with them were in attendance.



Motor boats cannot access Sand Harbor's boat launch area because the water is so

low.

Bob Mergell, deputy administrator for Nevada Division of State Parks, said parks are losing visitors because boaters are going elsewhere. To compensate his department is ramping up its efforts to attract non-motorized watercraft.

And while the low lake level means there is more beach area, not all of it is pristine.

"It's a hard battle with noxious weeds," Mergell said.

Fire is another threat all landowners are having to contend with as the drought stresses trees, making them more susceptible to beetle infestation. Plus, they are thirsty, which dries them out and makes them more prone to being wiped out if flames were to reach them.

Under increasingly smoky skies from the Washington Fire burning near Markleeville, a trio of fire officials spoke to the group from along Tunnel Creek Road – the same dirt path Flume Trail mountain bike riders descend.

"It looks like one forest, but politically it is very complex," explained Forest Schafer with North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District.

Collaboration to treat areas has been critical so there is a uniform approach to managing the forest, he said.

Roland Shaw with the Nevada Division of Forestry said the biggest thing the May rains did was to accelerate the growth of cheat grass that will dry out and add fuel to the forest.

He said evidence of bark beetle infestations are starting to show, something he expects to become worse as it spreads to various species of trees.

"Fire historically has been the great equalizer," Shaw said. "Today, fire is getting the reputation as the great eraser,

not the great equalizer. It's making the restoration of sites more difficult."

He said how Tunnel Creek usually has water in it into June if not July. It's been dry for a couple years. No water means vegetation is less – especially berries that bears like to dine on. There is less protein in plants.

All of this means wildlife is looking for food and water in other places. It could mean in Incline having to cross Highway 28 to get to Lake Tahoe as a drinking source. It means human garbage becomes even more attractive.



Idaho Gov. Butch Otter, right, talks about what his state is doing to fight fires.

While agencies are working to thin the forest to make it healthier and less susceptible to fire, Brian Garrett with the U.S. Forest Service lamented that the policy stating trees larger than 30 inches in diameter cannot be cut down is hindering the agency from meeting its goals.

Leaving more of the larger trees per acre than the feds would like is putting stress on them, which in turn makes them ripe to be infested by beetles. Plus, the larger the tree, the more water it needs to stay alive.

Fire is inevitable the officials said. Suppression will be difficult in places where stands are denser. The Washington Fire in Alpine County is a prime example of this.

Idaho Gov. Butch Otter said his state has been using rural fire protection (RFP) districts for the past six years. This program allows ranchers to fight fires.

“Those guys are the ones who know the land,” Otter said.

He said each of the RFPs cost about \$150,000 to start. They are helping to protect more than 3 million acres.

The RFPs are growing in popularity because of the stress on traditional firefighting agencies in terms of money and manpower. With the fire season starting earlier, lasting longer and being more prolific – especially in drought-prone locales, non-traditional measures and personnel are being deployed to douse the flames.

Washington Fire containment may take weeks



The Washington Fire burns on a ridge June 25 with no visible sign of fire personnel. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

Updated 9:50pm

The fire has burned 17,622 acres and is 29 percent contained.

“The availability of water to support firefighting efforts is a concern in large portions of the West this year. Thanks to a generous donation by Park Ranch and support from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife the use of Heenan Lake water is contributing to the suppression of the Washington Fire,” officials said.

Nearly 1,200 people are fighting the fire.

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By Susan Wood

MARKLEEVILLE — As the day turned to night, the crackling of fire against dry fuel on a treacherous, steep ridge above layers of heavy smoke overshadowed the beauty of a bucolic

meadow where crickets chirped and displaced deer tried to find refuge.

This Washington Fire has had Markleeville on edge since it erupted nearly a week ago. It started about eight miles south of town off Highway 4 along Wolf Creek Road in the Carson Iceberg Wilderness where historic cabins dot a pristine landscape. It is now within three miles of the town.

The fire was caused by a lightning strike from a storm about 10 days before it was detected, according to officials. The exact date is still being determined.



White ash fills the nearly 17,000-acre landscape burned by the Washington Fire. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

As of Thursday night, the time line in which fire agencies responded to the fire had not been released to *Lake Tahoe News* despite repeated requests.

Larry Lucas, U.S. Forest Service spokesman, said signs of

smoke were first reported by the duty officer to the fire management officer of the Forest Service office in Markleeville at 6:10pm on June 19. USFS firehouses are not staffed around the clock. Alpine County has a volunteer fire department.

Tactical team Division Chief Kevin Kutterer, who works for the Bureau of Land Management, said he wanted more personnel and equipment to work with when he arrived.

"Our most challenging thing was the lack of resources like hand crews," Kutterer told *Lake Tahoe News* on June 25 while leading a crew up the long, arduous drive along Wolf Creek.



Inmates, based at Turtle Rock Park, get dinner June 25 after working the fire line. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

The feds have diverted many resources to Alaska, which is being blanketed with fires. He also cited the steep, rocky terrain as a hindrance.

Kutterer expects full containment could take a few weeks as firefighters battle the elements and conditions to get a grip

on the stubborn blaze. His sense of optimism seemed dwarfed by the fire's back-and-forth nature and the immensity of the work ahead of his crews.

"The winds could kick up anytime," he said.

The terrain's densely forested areas will require much monitoring, he pointed out.

The wildland fire as of Thursday night had consumed nearly 17,000 acres.

Early on nearby campgrounds were evacuated. Markleeville has been turned into a ghost town even though mandatory evacuations are not in place. Turtle Rock Campground on Highway 89 has been turned into a small village of firefighters. Shift changes have some spending the night there, others resting in little coves along Highway 4 and the core backpacking or flown deep into the fire line.

Firefighters have been battling the original fire and spot blazes in an attempt to keep the flames from the town and away from the 15 historic buildings and cabins tucked in the trees. A fire truck on the night of June 25 was parked next to one of the nicer cabins along Wolf Creek Road.



Ebbetts Pass is closed, as are other roads in the burn area. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

More than 900 people have been assigned to fight the Alpine County fire, with 50 engines, 12 water tenders, eight air tankers and 11 helicopters supporting the effort.

The hard-earned suppression push paid off Thursday with low winds. The break was well needed because containment has represented a seesaw between 10 percent to zero and back up to 15 percent containment by the evening.

Forecasts for Friday call for a chance of dry thunderstorms with winds picking up to 15 mph.

Highways 4 and 89 remain closed for public safety reasons.

The Carson Valley has been enshrouded in smoke for most of the week as winds burn the fire and smoke northeast. Smoke inundated Incline Village on Thursday and reached Truckee, too.

Fire restrictions go into effect for western Nevada and

eastern California Friday, the Forest Service
reported Thursday.