

Why it's hard to punish drivers who kill pedestrians

By Henry Grabar, Salon

What makes it hard to walk in your city?

Is it the quality of sidewalks, buckled by tree roots and submerged in puddles, appearing and vanishing like a disused deer trail? The foreboding urban-renewal landscapes? How about the zoning requirements that set storefronts behind tremendous fields of permanently vacant parking spaces, or ban shops and cafes from residential areas? Is crossing the street a prohibitive inconvenience, a near-death experience? Or is it simply illegal?

Such is the legacy of a century of planning for automobiles. Enshrined in laws and codes, American urban design has made driving easy. As a consequence, it made walking hard.

But design is only half the problem. Less obvious, but no less consequential, was the legal shift through which society absorbed and dismissed the hazards of urban driving, exonerating individual drivers for crashes, even when they killed pedestrians. (In New York City, for example, 95 percent of traffic fatalities do not lead to arrests.) And riding a bicycle) legally vulnerable.

Read the whole story

Winter returns for Carson Pass snowshoe



Rosemary Manning makes her way along a snowshoe trail at the Carson Pass. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

CARSON PASS – Sometimes it's not about the destination.

At least that was the philosophy we embraced when we didn't make it to our desired end point. Arriving in a blizzard not knowing exactly where we were going was bound to have that outcome.

But what this trek two weeks ago proved is that exploring the outdoors of the greater Lake Tahoe area is more about the journey and friendship.

Rosemary and I plus our four-legged companions left South Lake Tahoe where there was no sign of nasty weather. By the time we arrived at Carson Pass we were in a different world.

Visibility was limited, the snow was coming down horizontally and there was no trailhead sign.

We had been told to park on the right side of Highway 88, just beyond the main parking lot for the trail that leads to Winnemucca Lake, Round Top and other destinations. But what we weren't told is that the trail required us to walk down the road a bit. While we knew the road to Woods Lake was just down the road, we were under the impression we could get to the trail from where we parked if we just crossed the highway.

We tried. We failed.



AJ explores a mini snow cave.

We started our snowshoe by following those who had been there before us. And we headed to the right, which we at least knew was the correct direction. But it didn't take long before it was a dead end.

Circling back, we found a path that eventually met up with the main trail out of Carson Pass.

It was eerie and beautiful at the same time. The trees seemed dense compared to a day when the sky is blue and sunlight is coming through. Snow pelting our faces was like a constant exfoliation.

We come to a wide-open space where backcountry skiers are

schussing through the fresh snow.

Behind us we see Caples Lake in the distance.



A backcountry skier enjoys freshies.

We are losing our trail that those ahead of us had made. We don't see those people or even know if they had been out that morning. Now the wind and snow is coming down in such a way that the imprints from our snowshoes are disappearing.

It's time to turn around. Even though we are not far from Winnemucca Lake, it didn't make sense to go forward considering the nasty weather was deteriorating.

By the time we reach the car we are soaked. It's raining now – and we're at 8,500 feet. It's been one of those winters. But what a joy to finally experience winter.

Bill would alleviate Nev. teacher shortage

By Ana Ley, Las Vegas Sun

A bill that would make it easier for some immigrants to teach

in Nevada's classrooms is gaining momentum in the Legislature because it would help alleviate the state's crippling teacher shortage.

Assembly Bill 27, which has broad support and cleared its first legislative hurdle on Wednesday, has special significance for the state's immigrant community. The bill's success would be a small victory for advocates who are reeling from a blow dealt by a court decision this week that temporarily halted a federal program that would have spared tens of thousands from deportation in Nevada.

AB27 would benefit people who have work permits through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which grants deportation relief to undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as children.

Existing law lets the state superintendent give teaching licenses to those who aren't citizens but have work permits only if there's a teacher shortage for the subject that person can teach. Otherwise, only U.S. citizens and legal residents can apply.

Read the whole story

Playing the Oscar odds with a bettor's mind-set

By David Leonhardt, New York Times

The Academy Awards ceremony will emphasize the suspense of the unknown on Sunday night. But Hollywood insiders are well aware that many nominees have little chance of winning – and know

who those nominees are.

Not only will the award for best picture most likely go to “Birdman” or “Boyhood,” but the best director award also seems destined for one of those two films. Eddie Redmayne (“The Theory of Everything”) will probably win best actor, though Michael Keaton (“Birdman”) has a shot. The other acting categories – best actress, best supporting actress and best supporting actor – appear to offer even less suspense, with Julianne Moore (“Still Alice”), Patricia Arquette (“Boyhood”) and J. K. Simmons (“Whiplash”) each a runaway favorite.

There is nothing new, of course, about Hollywood going into Oscar night with a very good idea of what will happen. That’s been the case for years. The new development is that any of the rest of us who want to know the likely outcomes can do so, with nothing fancier than an Internet connection.

Several betting markets, including European bookmakers, the Wynn Las Vegas casino and a prediction market known as the Hollywood Stock Exchange, publicly list Oscar odds. And their record over the past decade is remarkably good.

Read the whole story

DCSD board hears how to make WHS better

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – A roadmap to Whittell High School’s future has been laid out to the school district board and staff by a committee of concerned parents and staff.

"This work you've done is a living document," Douglas County School District Superintendent Lisa Noonan said at the end of the special board meeting Feb. 19.

The committee that came about nearly a year ago because of frustration with the district and the board by those at the lake culminated this week with a path to go forward. And while it's understood the recommendations by the committee may not all be implemented, it was an amiable meeting that showed both sides could talk and listen to one another. That in and of itself is progress from last spring.

Noonan said when the board meets at the lake in April she hopes to bring forward some ideas that could be implemented.

The committee proposed having the school calendar and bell schedule be more aligned with Lake Tahoe Unified School District than the valley schools. This would allow for students across the state line to have easier access to individual classes in the neighboring district.

That is another idea – to allow students to take specific classes rather than just attend the other district.

As it is now, DCSD students may pay to attend LTUSD, but the reverse is not true.



Douglas County School District board member Cindy Trigg, center, makes a point Feb. 19 as colleagues Ross Chichester and Karen Chessell listen. Board member Neil Freitas was absent. Photo/LTN

Committee members reached out to LTUSD administrators who are open to discussing a possible memorandum of understanding to bridge the education divide. They would like the district staff to continue the dialogue.

Working with the state Legislature to recognize Lake Tahoe Community College is really the two-year institution WHS students would attend rather than Western Nevada College in the valley is another goal. The problem is LTCC is in California.

Delving into distance education or online classes is another goal of the committee's. This could open up more elective options to Whittell kids. That is an area that is lacking because of the small student population.

As with most things in public education, laws and money govern what can happen. It's possible the district would lose some funding if this were to occur.

Board member Tom Moore was the most vocal about money being a constraint. He said it's necessary for spending to be equitable among all the schools.

Committee member Greg Felton said, "Part of it is how do you judge equity? Cost is one way. Opportunities for students is another. We need to find some way to judge what is equitable."

He pointed out how Douglas High students have so many more course offerings – questioning whether that is equitable.

Taking a formal survey of students and parents to gauge what electives they would like was presented to the board. That could then be the basis for future course offerings.

Offering incentives to teachers to obtain additional qualifications to be able to teach a broader spectrum of classes was brought up. This would help with curriculum choices as well as not be a financial burden to teachers.

The committee would like Whittell to have more autonomy. Exactly how that would look still needs to be ironed out.

All signs are pointing to enrollment increasing in the future. This has to do with the economy on the South Shore improving. It was pointed out that Lake Tahoe Hard Rock hired about 25 percent of its work force from out of the area. The presumption is some of those people are bound to have school-age kids. And other businesses are opening or expanding.

This led the committee to believe discussion of further consolidation of the lake schools is a moot point.

Committee members also foresee their work not being finished and that a group like this could always have a role.

Reid on a course to run for re-election

By Amber Phillips, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON – Will he or won't he?

That's the question entertaining Nevada and Washington's political class this winter as they debate whether Harry Reid will run for a sixth term to represent Nevada in the U.S. Senate.

The case for the doubters: Despite the fact he's said publicly and privately he's running, the 75-year-old would be 84 by the time he finishes the term. His latest approval ratings barely pass 41 percent in Nevada, and polls show he's got an uphill battle to win re-election against any number of opponents. The \$1.4 million sitting in his campaign account today is relatively low. Couple all that with a brutal exercise accident on the first day of 2015 that could leave him partially or totally blind in one eye, and it's easy to see a path for Reid to retire.

But those close to the Democratic leader say that argument completely misses a fundamental understanding of what drives Harry Reid – and why he's almost definitely running for a sixth term in 2016.

Read the whole story

States leaving standardized tests behind

By Haley Sweetland Edwards, Time

If you had wandered late last year into Matthew Tosiello's third-grade science class at Abingdon Elementary School in Virginia, you would have encountered an army of frogs. Origami frogs, that is—palm-size critters made of green index cards, each equipped with a tongue made of either masking tape or water-sodden paper.

Tosiello had asked his 8- and 9-year-old students to design an experiment to determine which natural adaptation—a sticky tongue or a wet tongue—was better for lapping up flies, a role played by eraser-size chads left over from a three-hole punch. The kids then had to describe their hypotheses, methods and findings in a lab report.

It may not have looked like it from a distance—there were no blue books or timed segments, and the classroom was far from silent—but the origami-frog project was actually an exam. A Virginia law that went into effect this year eliminated a handful of mandatory, fill-in-the-bubble standardized tests in public schools, including one for third-grade science. Instead, the law asked teachers to perform “alternative assessments”—performance-based projects to monitor students' progress.

In the origami-frog unit, for example, Tosiello was able to determine which students were struggling with mathematical concepts like symmetry or measurement (frogs had to be folded precisely, with their tongues exactly 6 cm by 2.5 cm) and which grasped the more complex scientific ideas. “It's a more appropriate way of looking at a student's growth,” explained Joanne Uyeda, the principal at Abingdon Elementary. “It's more

authentic.”

Read the whole story

Douglas inches toward revamping Stateline



The event venue on this South Shore Vision Plan rendering, in blue on the right, is being studied. Rendering/Design Workshop

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – A 6,000- to 7,500-seat indoor-outdoor event center on the South Shore is gaining traction.

The South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts has put up \$100,000 for feasibility and blight studies for the project. The blight study is because it would be considered a redevelopment project. Within the next few months a decision is likely as to whether this is something worth pursuing.

“It needs to be walkable to Stateline from California,” Mike Bradford, with STAR, told *Lake Tahoe News*. That is one of the preliminary findings.

This has a lot to do with if the venue were to be used as a convention center-meeting place, because California agencies must rent rooms in the state even if they convene elsewhere.

That is why the original Chateau project in South Lake Tahoe was going to have a convention center – to attract the business-tourist market.

In the South Shore Vision Plan that was created in 2011, and funded by STAR, it calls for such an event center to be built behind what is now Lake Tahoe Hard Rock. But a plot of land behind MontBleu is now also under consideration.

Originally, it was to be completely an indoor facility, but that thinking has changed. It could be more similar to what those on the North Shore envision to be built at Northstar.

Bradford said Harrah's-Harveys is on board with the idea, knowing the outdoor concert series at Harveys' parking lot would move to the new venue. A bit of irony is Harrah's at one time was going to be the driving force behind the convention center project in South Lake Tahoe, but declined to do so.

The new facility could possibly generate more than \$20 million in annual revenue. More exact numbers will come from the feasibility study. Who would own and operate it are other factors to be worked out.

If things pencil out, then STAR will take its findings to the

Douglas County commissioners.



Support for the loop road and better connectivity was voiced Feb. 19 at the Douglas County Commission meeting. Rendering/Design Workshop

On Feb. 19 this events center was alluded to more than once as commissioners received updates on the Countywide Connectivity Transportation System, and Recreation and Tourism Plan.

All 13 speakers want the commissioners to go forward with the connectivity plan – namely the loop road that ties Douglas County and South Lake Tahoe in the casino area – and the greater South Shore Vision Plan. And while the electeds support the idea, they question whether the broader community will support the plan when it comes to funding.

Commissioner Greg Lyon expects a “hurricane” of backlash to

come from the valley. That is because raising taxes is how it will likely be paid.

Douglas County has the Nevada Legislature's permission to implement a 2.5 percent utility operator fee that would raise \$2 million, a 5-cent fuel tax to generate \$900,000 and a 25-cent sales tax to raise \$1.5 million. The money would benefit the lake and valley.

County officials say that nearly \$5 million could become \$50 million after bonding and then it could be used as a 25 percent match. (Gone are the days where state and federal dollars come without the need for local dollars.) This was then broken down to be \$4.84 per month per resident (not household), with one-third of the money coming from tourists.

Commissioners took no action Thursday.

Staff, though, envisions one of the top priorities being the loop road. Every Stateline casino is behind it based on testimony Feb. 19, as are Edgewood Companies, Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel and Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Other priorities are: Highway 395 Main Street revitalization, an alternate truck route, Ranchos connectivity path, and airport multi-modal regional transit. The county would need \$22 million, with the remainder from other sources, according to staff.

The event center also ties into the recreation plan as a venue.



Kahle Community Park is a money generating facility at Stateline.

Douglas County used the same consulting firm – MIG out of Oregon – as South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County did for their recreation master plan. They were done at the same time in order to look at the greater needs of the entire South Shore.

Cindy Mendoza with MIG gave a presentation to the commissioners on Thursday, saying the No. 1 key project is the event center.

Signage is another important thing to let people know where recreation facilities are and then to explain to people where they could get to on a particular trail and what the mileage is.

While Kahle Community Center's long-term plan was to have an aquatic center, Mendoza said with South Lake Tahoe looking at a leisure type swimming pool at its rec center then Douglas County might instead consider expanding its gym.

The goal is to have the recreation facilities on both sides of the state line be for everyone on the South Shore, and then be used in a coordinated manner to attract athletic events.

Scott Morgan, who heads the recreation department for Douglas, would not say if the vacant Kingsbury Middle School might

still be an option for the county when it comes to expanding facilities. That Stateline site has sat vacant for years with not one person or entity putting in an offer to buy it.

Indoor tennis courts at Zephyr Cove Park are still on the books. Morgan told *Lake Tahoe News* the new library director does not oppose such a scenario, but added that it would not happen anytime soon. The library last year allowed the Zephyr Cove Tennis Club Foundation to transform part of the building, which sits next to the courts, into a pro shop.

Critics try to ban coyote hunting in Nev.

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Critics of coyote hunting contests hope to ban the controversial practice in Nevada, insisting it amounts to little more than wanton slaughter of wildlife.

Hunters counter that it is a legally protected sport that may help keep in check a soaring coyote population increasingly posing threats to livestock, pets and people.

Don Molde of Reno and Fred Voltz of Carson City have petitioned the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners for regulatory changes that would outlaw contests awarding cash or other prizes for killing coyotes.

Read the whole story

Daily dose of nature good for kids

By Cynthia Orlando, Statesman Journal

Today more than 80 percent of the U.S. population lives in urban areas. It's therefore fortunate we now understand many of the physical and psychological benefits healthy trees provide urbanites: Our parks and trees are more than aesthetically pleasing areas that help address pollution problems.

Unfortunately, life for everyone these days can be demanding – even for children. School, societal pressures and even relationship challenges with family members or friends can be stressful for kids and young adults. Also, children are spending more time than ever indoors and on electronic devices, including laptops, cell phones and electronic games.

In the last 10 years or more, the medical field has found these sorts of habits and stresses are unhealthy and can affect the immune system.

A renewed focus on the many health benefits children receive from exposure to nature and play in the natural environment is called for.

Read the whole story