Democrats find more glory in Sac than D.C.

By Mark Z. Barabak and Richard Simon, Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON – Early this year, Leticia Perez and her husband flew here for a whirlwind 48 hours. The couple dined at the Italian Embassy, visited the Lincoln Memorial and joined the crowd on the National Mall watching as President Obama was inaugurated for a second term.

Their host was the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which hoped to persuade Perez, a Kern County supervisor, to run for a Central Valley congressional seat.

But a few weeks later, Perez ignored the entreaties from Washington when a spot in the state Senate unexpectedly opened up. The trip from the state capital to the Senate district, a 2 1/2-hour drive, was far more enticing than the cross-country flight between California and Capitol Hill, especially with a 2-year-old at home.

Perez was also convinced she could accomplish more in Sacramento – where Democrats hold the governorship and a two-thirds legislative majority – than in Washington, where she would be a member of the House minority. “I feel at this time and place, the state is where I can be most effective,” said Perez, one of five candidates in the May 21 special election.

After years of budget misery, public opprobrium and term-limit-induced turnover, Sacramento is starting to look a lot more attractive to Democratic lawmakers and candidates, who once might have viewed a seat in Congress as the higher, more desirable rung on the political ladder. (A voter-passed change in term limits, allowing legislators to serve 12 years in a single chamber, is another reason staying put has grown more appealing.)

“If you want to be on MSNBC … or quoted in Roll Call” – the Capitol Hill newspaper – then Congress is “a good place to be,” said state Sen. Kevin de Leon, a Democrat from Los Angeles who is favored to become the Senate’s next leader. The Legislature is far better, he said, “if you want to get real, tangible things done.”

He cites legislation creating the first state-run individual retirement program, which has brought De Leon national attention. Over the years, many other laws passed in Sacramento – on issues including family leave, clean air and consumer protection – have served as a model for Washington.

No congressional seat sits empty in California for want of interested candidates, Democrat or Republican. But with recruiting for the midterm elections underway and those races slowly taking shape, there has been no rush for the exits among Sacramento Democrats, even as more competitive primaries and a redrawing of political boundaries have loosened the hammerlock incumbents once held over their congressional seats.

“For all the criticism, much of it legitimate, over the last number of years when we were in the throes of the terrible deficit, look where we stand now,” said state Sen. President Darrell Steinberg, a Democrat from Sacramento who spoke with Perez as she weighed her choices. “We’re not perfect, but we’ve got a balanced budget, we’ve made deep cuts, we’ve passed a tax increase. We’re on the verge of turning it around, and so that’s a selling point.”

(For Republicans, the political dynamic is precisely the opposite. Democratic domination in Sacramento threatens to marginalize any Republican elected to the Senate or Assembly, while the GOP majority in the House of Representatives is an attraction. “You go to Congress and you’re part of a majority that’s likely to exist through the decade,” said Rob Stutzman, a veteran GOP strategist, who lamented the difficulty of

attracting top-flight legislative candidates.)

Congress used to be the place where many of Sacramento's most gifted and ambitious Democratic lawmakers – Philip Burton, Howard Berman and Henry Waxman among them – went to make their mark. The chance to serve in the congressional majority and build clout – the party controlled the House for 40 years, ending in 1995 – helped ease some of the hardship of living and working 3,000 miles from home.

Vic Fazio spent 20 years on Capitol Hill representing the Sacramento area after starting his political career in the California Assembly. The Democrat recalls without fondness the countless hours flying back and forth and having to choose on weekends between "going to your daughter's soccer game or going off to the county fair, or whatever event your political life required."

"It's a very tiring kind of existence," said Fazio, now a Washington lobbyist.

The sacrifice is far less attractive when the reward is serving in the minority, especially for lawmakers who, after about a year or so in Sacramento, have catapulted into leadership positions. California's 38-member Democratic House delegation includes a former Assembly speaker, an ex-Senate majority leader and a number of former committee chiefs.

"That is a little bit of a culture shock," said Democrat Julia Brownley of Oak Park, who spent six years in the Assembly and headed the Education Committee before winning a Ventura County congressional seat in November.

Rep. Jackie Speier, a Hillsborough Democrat who had hundreds of bills signed into law during 18 years in Sacramento – many by Republican governors – said pursuing policy goals in Congress "can be quite disheartening."

"It doesn't matter how talented you are," she said. "It

doesn’t matter if you have a good idea for a bill…. You can get, as I did the last session, 131 co-sponsors on a piece of legislation and I couldn’t get a hearing.”

Some have adapted better than others. “A lot of it is just finding the way to accomplish legislative ends and help your constituents in an environment where you’re not only in the minority, but it’s a very polarized, dysfunctional place,” said Rep. Adam B. Schiff, a seven-term Democrat from Burbank, who chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee during his years in Sacramento.

Liz Figueroa thinks she has a better idea.

The former Democratic state lawmaker from Fremont teaches part-time in the government program at UC Berkeley. When students and aspiring officeholders ask about a career in politics, she steers them away from Washington and toward Sacramento, where, she says, they can have a much greater impact.

“It’s the size of our state and the largeness of our economy that makes others pay attention,” she said via email. “Better to be the large fish in the small pond.”

NV leaders work hard to pass NV Energy bill

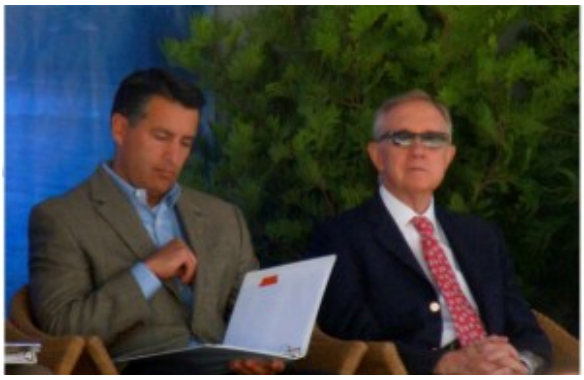
By Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

NV Energy’s plan to shut down coal plants in Nevada moved forward Friday with strong support from some of Nevada’s most influential politicians and business interests.

Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval, Democratic U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, the casino and resort industry, labor unions and state legislators supported a third version of Senate Bill 123, which the utility calls “NVision.”

“The benefits of this for Nevadans are great,” said Sandoval and Reid in a joint statement.

Following a flurry of private negotiations, the state’s power brokers reached a deal earlier this week.



Gov. Brian Sandoval and Sen. Harry Reid are lobbying hard for the NV Energy bill. Photo/LTN file

A legislative committee unanimously passed the negotiated version of the bill out of committee May 17, the first move toward making NVision the law.

Under the bill, the utility would divest from 800 megawatts of coal by 2019 with the controversial Reid Gardner coal plant in Clark County closing by 2017.

The utility’s latest iteration of its plan mandates an accelerated exit from the coal market in exchange for the utility reserving the right to own and operate 550 megawatts of new power generation, which would help the utility’s profit margins.

The Legislature would also mandate NV Energy to construct,

acquire or contract for 350 megawatts of renewable energy, which would count toward the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard, another legislative mandate requiring the state to derive 25 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2025.

For years, the environmental community, Reid's office, and the nearby Moapa Band of Paiutes has hounded the utility to close the Reid Gardner coal plant. The Paiutes have brought a lawsuit alleging that pollution from the plant has harmed the health of the group.

"Retiring coal plants while developing new, renewable energy projects is right for Nevada," Reid said in a statement.

Although three of the Reid Gardner units rarely operate, the bill would call for their official closure by the end of 2014. The larger and newer fourth unit would close by 2017 after the utility buys out a California stakeholder.

Sen. Kelvin Atkinson, D-North Las Vegas, said NV Energy, casino representatives, the governor's office, Reid's office, and labor unions worked for countless hours to craft this compromise.

"It was a lot of people that came together," he said.

Legislators generally seemed pleased with the compromise in which the Public Utilities Commission would exercise more oversight over the utility than in previous versions of the bill.

The amendment also significantly decreases the amount of power generation the utility would construct, own or acquire in exchange for replacing coal. The first version of the bill had 2,600 megawatts of replacement capacity. The latest version has 900 megawatts.

This essentially means that the bill will result in a lower rate increase for consumers than originally forecast.

Although the committee did not take testimony during a rushed work session on the bill, Atkinson did invite the utility, supportive gaming representatives, and energy regulators to the testify on the bill.

The Public Utilities Commission, the body that regulates NV Energy, told legislators that one provision of the bill involving rate mitigation could actually let the company earn more by capping rate increases at 5 percent.

The utility would get to charge interest on the balance of a rate increase above 5 percent, meaning that the company could collect more over time from ratepayers than it would under a straight rate increase.

Otherwise, the commission would now have more authority to decide when the utility would build new power generation. It would also get to modify the utility's plans to build new power generation.

The bill now heads for a vote on the Senate floor. It then faces another full hearing in the Assembly Commerce and Labor committee, where supporters and opposition will have another chance to spar.

But it may be difficult to defeat the bill with support from Reid, powerful utility and gaming lobbyists, and the unusually strong support from Sandoval.

While Sandoval normally does not comment on legislation because it could change before it reaches his desk, he earlier endorsed this proposal in its second iteration and has maintained support through significant changes in the third and current version.

"I look forward to working with the Legislature on this important public policy and urge the Legislature's support so that I can sign it into law," he said.

The Legislature has just over two weeks to pass the bill and get it to the governor within the 120-day legislative session, which ends June 3.

Douglas County's Tahoe area plan nearly complete

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – While the South Shore Area Plan for Douglas County doesn't come with a project per se; it is the map for which one could seek approval.

Area plans are the latest requirement by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency per the updated Regional Plan. They will replace jurisdictions' community plans.

The Douglas County Commission on May 16 heard a presentation from Brandy McMahon, the county's senior planner, about the Tahoe plan. The county Planning Commission earlier this month approved the plan. The commissioners are expected to vote June 20. From there the TRPA Governing Board must adopt it.



Douglas County is close to finalizing the South Shore

Area Plan. Photo/LTN file

Area plans are in theory supposed to give the five counties and one city in the Lake Tahoe Basin more control over development within their boundaries. Big projects – something like the Edgewood Lodge – would still require TRPA board approval.

Douglas County updated its master plan in 2011. Much of what is contained in the area plan is in the master plan. A big difference is that the land use element needs to be updated.

Much of the plan will address redevelopment because Douglas County – and the basin as a whole – is near build-out. The county has 102 vacant lots at the lake, with an expectation they could all be built on in 17 years.

Area plans, per TRPA, must take into consideration erosion control issues. These are part of the stormwater load reduction principles.

Douglas County has 18 percent of the basin's shoreline and contributes 3 percent of the fine sediment that reaches the lake. It is that fine sediment that scientists say is degrading the clarity of Lake Tahoe.

McMahon said the goal is redevelopment projects will have a water quality component that will mean less sediment reaching the lake with the new building compared to what is on the land today.

Best management practices – or personal and commercial erosion control measures – is something a rep from the League to Save Lake Tahoe told the commissioners it is keeping a close watch on.

"One of the remaining issues is BMP enforcement and who will be taking that on," Shannon Eckmeyer with the League said.

McMahon told the commissioners, “Douglas County has the highest BMP compliance rate in the Tahoe basin.”

Attorney Lew Feldman praised the plan.

Tom Hall, whose family has owned property on Kingsbury Grade for decades, also praised the plan even though his property straddles the two Tahoe plans – of which only one is being formulated. The county said down the road that issue would be addressed.

(Those were the only members of the public to speak Thursday.)

The South Shore Area Plan essentially mimics the area that was outlined in the South Shore Vision Plan. Richard Shaw, who works out of the Aspen office of Design Workshop and the key player of that plan, will be at the commission’s June meeting.

Something that was not considered in TRPA’s previous Regional Plan was economics and how land use decisions have a dollar value – even a negative value.

McMahon pointed out how in the Tahoe area of Douglas County gaming revenue decreased 38 percent from 2004 to 2011; employment at the casinos fell 52 percent from 2001 to 2011; the population dropped by 22 percent in the decade starting in 2000; school enrollment is down nearly 50 percent from 1990 to 2010; and half the homes are owned by out-of-towners.

“These are troubling trends we would like to reverse,” she said.

Planners – at TRPA and the county – as well as others believe area plans will be the tool for which redevelopment will go forward in the Lake Tahoe Basin, which in turn will be a financial stimulus with the construction, as well as sustained economic growth via providing a more attractive place to live and visit.

Organic food movement hits Capitol Hill

By Mary Clarie Jalonick, AP

WASHINGTON — The organic food industry is gaining clout on Capitol Hill, prompted by rising consumer demand and its entry into traditional farm states. But that isn't going over well with everyone in Congress.

Tensions between conventional and organic agriculture boiled over this week during a late-night House Agriculture Committee debate on a sweeping farm bill that has for decades propped up traditional crops and largely ignored organics.

When Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., a former organic farmer, offered an amendment to make it easier for organic companies to organize industrywide promotional campaigns, there was swift backlash from some farm-state Republicans, with one member saying he didn't want to see the industry get a free ride and another complaining about organics' "continued assault on agriculture."

"That's one of the things that has caught me and raises my concerns, is that industry's lack of respect for traditional agriculture," said Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., referring to some organic companies' efforts to reduce the number of genetically modified crops in the marketplace.

At the same time, Scott acknowledged that he and his wife buy organic foods.

Growing consumer interest in organics has proved tough for some Republicans on the committee to ignore. Eight

Republicans, most of them newer members of the committee, joined with all of the panel's Democrats in supporting the amendment, which was adopted 29-17.

Rep. Vicky Hartzler, a Missouri Republican who owns a farm equipment business and a corn and soybean farm, said she supported the amendment not only because helping organics is good for agriculture but because many of her constituents eat organic foods.

"Organics are a niche market in agriculture with a growing market share, so it makes sense for me to allow farmers to invest some of their own funds to promote their products," she said.

The amendment would allow the organic industry to organize and pay for a unified industry promotional campaign called a "checkoff" that is facilitated by the Agriculture Department but is no cost to the government. These promotional programs have traditionally been limited to individual commodities or crops, producing familiar campaigns like "Got Milk?" and "Beef: It's What's for Dinner."

The amendment would not set up such a program for organics, but it would allow USDA to approve an organic promotional campaign if the industry decided it wanted one. Laura Batcha of the Organic Trade Association says one reason the industry would approve a campaign is that many organic producers are concerned that consumers don't understand that products labeled "natural" aren't necessarily organic, which requires certification.

The organic industry has exploded in the last decade, with $35 billion in sales and 10 percent growth just last year. There are more than 17,000 certified organic businesses in the country.

Producers of organic crops and conventional crops have long been at odds, as organic products have grabbed market share –

more than 4 percent of food and beverage sales in 2011 – and the industry has advertised organic foods as healthier than other foods. Organic products are required to be certified by the USDA and are grown without pesticides and genetically modified ingredients, mainstays of traditional agriculture.

Government-managed promotional checkoff programs like the one that would be allowed under the amendment are required to be positive and not disparage other products, and some lawmakers seemed wary that such a campaign would be possible.

“How do I present organic pork without disparaging non-organic pork?” asked House Agriculture Chairman Frank Lucas, R-Okla., who opposed the amendment.

Mike Conaway, R-Texas, took issue with part of the amendment that would allow the organic producers to opt out of other commodity campaigns, an option that isn’t given to conventional producers.

“Looks to me like they have a free ride on this thing,” Conaway said, in an at times angry exchange with Schrader.

Despite the rancor, the chances that the amendment will become law are good, as the Senate Agriculture Committee added the same amendment to its version of the farm bill.

Schrader told his colleagues that embracing organics is essential to appealing to consumers in a time when big farms are often demonized by popular culture. He said that many young people are coming back to farms because of nontraditional agriculture.

“American agriculture is under siege,” he said. “Urban folks do not understand where their food and fiber comes from. … The point here is to hopefully position American agriculture where we’re not always trying to catch up to what the American consumer wants.”

Hospice provides sensitive life-ending care

By Rebecca Wass

Enjoying life to the fullest may be difficult for a terminally ill person without help. Hospice care provides physical, emotional, spiritual, and social support for those who need health care associated with a terminal illness.

“Barton Hospice is attentive, sensitive, and responsive to patients’ and families’ needs, from information to reassurance and presence as they move through this difficult period,” says Rebecca Phillipsen, licensed clinical social worker from Barton Home Health & Hospice. “In addition to addressing the physical needs of the patient, hospice understands the importance of listening to and supporting the emotional and spiritual needs of the patient and family together.”

Patients who qualify for hospice care usually have a life expectancy of less than six months.

“Patients must be referred by a physician to qualify, but we’re always here to help answer any questions,” says Jason Collin, director of Barton Home Health & Hospice. “Most hospice care is covered by Medicare, private pay, private insurance, Medi-Cal, Medicaid, and, for those who qualify, Barton’s Helping Hands program.”

Care in the comfort of home

The Barton hospice team works with individuals, their family, and their physician to determine the most beneficial treatment. Care is provided in the comfort of the patient’s

own home.

“We also provide care at our skilled nursing facility at Barton Memorial Hospital,” says Collin.

The type of care provided is dependent on the patient’s needs.

Hospice services include:

• Physician services

• On-call nursing care, 24 hours a day

• Dietitians

• Home health aides

• Symptom and pain management

• Social services and case managers

• Medical supplies

• Inpatient care for acute care and short-term respite

• Physical, occupational, and speech therapy

• Spiritual care

• Bereavement follow-up for family

Family involvement

Family members are encouraged to take an active role in providing supportive care to the patient. In doing so, the family experiences fewer feelings of helplessness.

“Participating in a loved one’s care not only allows a family member to provide love and support—it also reduces any feelings of guilt or regret that may be experienced later,” Phillipsen says, “and it enables everyone to get through it together.”

If you or a loved one is interested in learning more about Barton Hospice, call (530) 543.5581.

Rebecca Wass is the communications specialist for Barton Health.

Chateau project's water lines become an issue

By Kathryn Reed

Who owns the water lines at the Chateau site?

The answer is being debated. And until it's resolved, the necessary contracts to go forward with covering some of the concrete and rebar at the far eastern edge of South Lake Tahoe can't be signed.

When Lake Tahoe Development Company was going to build the convention center, two hotels and retail, it meant some infrastructure needed to go in to service those facilities. Under what is the foundation for the parking garage are 604-lineal feet of 12-inch sewer main, 240-lineal feet of 8-inch sewer main, 50-lineal feet of 6-inch sewer main, eight manholes, 2,700-lineal feet of 14-inch water line and 90.5-lineal feet of 6-inch water line.

Tahoe Stateline Ventures, the company created by property owner Bill Owens, believes South Tahoe Public Utility District owns the water lines. The district isn't so sure.



Water line ownership at the Chateau site remains unresolved. Photo/LTN file

“We didn’t construct the water lines and we don’t believe we own them,” attorney Kara Thiel of Feldman-McLaughlin-Thiel told STPUD’s board at the May 16 meeting. “Our contention is that TSV should not be burdened with ownership of the lines.”

Those lines when they were put in in 2007 were never dedicated to the district. That is why South Tahoe PUD doesn’t believe it owns the lines. However, the district has been using the lines.

While Thiel and Kevin Lane, consultant to the developer, were at Thursday’s meeting seeking a contract agreement, the board unanimously said not so fast. The board wants to see what staff and legal counsel work out with TSV before agreeing to anything.

“I think there is a fair list of things to be settled. I want to see a response to it,” board President Eric Schafer said.

He also said he remembers being “backed into a corner by the city” six years ago and expressed little desire to be bullied again.

Lane, who is the son of Randy Lane, one of the principals of the bankrupt Lake Tahoe Development Company that was to build what was to be a $410 million project, said it’s possible to get STPUD approval at the board’s June 6 meeting so city

permits could be in hand by the end of June. Construction of the proposed 30,000-square-feet of retail along Highway 50 from Stateline Avenue to about McP's Pub must start by July 15 or else the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency permits expire.

Another issue with the existing water lines is the party that has the drawings for where the lines are will not release them. This is because that firm was never paid by Lake Tahoe Development Company in the bankruptcy proceedings.

(STPUD had a third party inspect the water lines at the get-go, for which it has never been paid because of the bankruptcy.)

Where future lines will go is another issue that has not been finalized. Those drawings are supposed to be provided to STPUD by Monday. The next phase that could start this summer includes about 330-lineal feet of 14-inch water line.

A performance bond will be required by the district for the line.

The right-of-way is an issue for where the line will be placed. Still to be worked out is if the line is in the Caltrans right-of-way or if it would be put in under the yet-to-be-built sidewalk.

"I'm concerned about placing it under a sidewalk for future repairs," South Tahoe PUD attorney Gary Kvistad said.

Kvistad brought up another unresolved issue – the agreement between STPUD and Lakeside Park Association. Lakeside provides much of the water for that area. But it never had the capacity for this project.

STPUD was to provide all the water for fire suppression and potable water for Phase A. Lakeside was to provide potable water for Phase B. With the project being more than those two phases, a new agreement needs to be drawn up.

Kvistad also said the district will make sure the six parcels that are slated to be built on this summer have one parcel map. The city allowed construction to start on the 11-plus acre site six years ago without consolidating the 29 parcels.

S. Tahoe police officer expected to plead guilty

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe police Officer Johnny Poland is expected to plead guilty next week to federal charges.

“They said in court that they needed a week for negotiations,” Lauren Horwood with the U.S. Attorney’s Office told *Lake Tahoe News* after the May 15 hearing in Sacramento. “Another hearing is set for May 22 for entry of a guilty plea.”

Poland was indicted earlier this year on three counts related to tampering with a witness, victim or informant, and one count dealing with obstruction of an official proceeding.



Johnny Poland

He could have been sent to prison for 20 years on each count if the case had gone to trial and he were found guilty. It is not known what the plea agreement is. Horwood said because the

two sides are negotiating the terms of the plea, details are not being released.

Sources have told *Lake Tahoe News* that Poland is expected to plead to one felony count and more than one misdemeanor. It's possible he would not face any prison time, but could be put on probation.

Poland is out on bond, but could not be reached. He remains active in the Army National Guard.

The FBI, which was heavily involved in the case, said until the case is over, their office has no comment.

Poland is still on the local police force, but he is not getting paid. An internal civil investigation remains open.

"We are hoping it resolves in close time proximity to the criminal case. It could, or it could drag on two or three weeks after that," Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The biggest reason for trying to resolve it is to get the slot resolved."

The department cannot fill Poland's position as long as he has not resigned.

Median sales price of houses jumps in El Dorado, Placer counties

By Hudson Sangree, Sacramento Bee

The median price of resale homes in El Dorado County jumped by

about 33 percent last month compared with April 2012, DataQuick reported Wednesday.

Placer and Yolo counties also experienced double-digit percentage gains, the San Diego-based real estate information service said.

“These eye-popping increases in medians remain a function of two things: home values going up because a lot of people are trying to buy in a supply-constrained market … and we’re seeing a lot more move-up activity,” said DataQuick analyst Andrew LePage.

The median is the price at which half of houses sell for more and half sell for less. Factors that influence it include the mix of homes sold.

Last year at this time, investors snapping up foreclosures dominated the region’s market. Today, foreclosure sales have plummeted and traditional buyers account for the majority of the open market, with many buying pricier move-up homes.

Sales of Sacramento County homes in the $300,000 to $800,000 range nearly doubled in April compared with the same month a year ago, while the number of homes that sold for less than $200,000 dropped by 26.5 percent, LePage said.

Median prices in all four counties also rose from March to April. In Sacramento County, for instance, the median sale price for detached single-family homes went from $162,000 in April 2012 to $208,000 in March to $215,000 last month.

Sales volume has also been picking up across the region, though the number of homes on the market remains at historic lows. Last month, the number of resale homes bought in Placer County was the most for any April since 2005, near the peak of the housing boom.

Tahoe residents serve their country with pride

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Ask someone what Armed Forces Day is and they'll probably respond with a puzzled look.

It was created in August 1949 to have one day dedicated to the men (mostly at that time) and women serving in every branch of the U.S. military. At the same time, it was also instituted to replace the separate days of recognition the various branches had in place. And while the Marines take part in Armed Forces Day, they have also retained a day unto themselves.

Memorial Day is to honor those who have died serving their country, while Veterans Day recognizes all former members of the military.



Armed Forces Day is always the third Saturday in May – which is May 18 this year.

A few women from the Lake Tahoe area who have served in the military spoke at the May 15 Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe meeting at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

Throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin there are about 4,000 veterans.

Carol Olivas, who is the secretary for the American Legion Auxiliary in South Lake Tahoe, described a veteran as someone

who wrote a blank check to the military that could be paid with their life.

One of the things Auxiliary members do is spend time with the vets who are living at the Barton Skilled Nursing Facility. Two are there now, while last year nine called the South Tahoe center home.

Olivas said four vets who have served in Afghanistan are now attending Lake Tahoe Community College.

“All come back with post-traumatic stress,” Olivas said. “You don’t go to war and come back the same.”

Pat Bailey, who lives in Gardnerville and served in the Army as a dental specialist from 1975-78, told the group, “When people thank me for my service, I thank them for my college education.”

The GI Bill, which pays for college tuition, has long been one of the benefits of serving in the military.

All of the women who spoke Wednesday had positive things to say about their time in uniform. None got into the nitty-gritty of what life was really like, though.

Communication is one of the big things that has changed. There was a time when letters would be months apart between the service member and their loved ones who were in the States. Now computers allow for instantaneous emails and at times Skyping is available. And while this isn’t possible for all of the men and women serving overseas, it is a modern convenience even in times of war.

Francine Turner was in the Air Force during the Vietnam era. She was one of the first women to go through the jet mechanics course.

Locally, though, what she is known for is playing “Taps” on her bugle. She says it’s an honor. It’s also something Turner

has done since was she a teen on a base in Texas.

Veronica Hawkins moved to Tahoe in 1978 with her parents. She graduated high school from the Carson Valley in 1995. From there she went right into the Air Force. She got out in 2000.

Hawkins served in Operation Desert Storm and was in the Bosnia conflict. One of her jobs was to tell people about their next deployment; which she said did not make her popular.

Patience Wenck, who is now a nurse practitioner with Barton Health, joined the Army Reserves in 1983. Her one weekend a month and two-week summer commitment grew as her rank and time served increased.

She was on active duty from 1987-90 before joining the Reserves again. From January 2005 to March 2006 she was in Germany helping wounded soldiers.

And while she met her husband, Fritz, through the military, he spent less time on a ship as a member of the Navy than she did going from island to island in Fiji administering medical care.

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Notes:

• The annual Memorial Day service is at Happy Homestead Cemetery in South Lake Tahoe on May 27 at 11am.

Justice Dept. secretly obtained journalists' phone records

By Sari Horwitz, Washington Post

In a sweeping and unusual move, the Justice Department secretly obtained two months' worth of telephone records of journalists working for the *Associated Press* as part of a year-long investigation into the disclosure of classified information about a failed al-Qaeda plot last year.

The *AP's* president said Monday that federal authorities obtained cellular, office and home telephone records of individual reporters and an editor; *AP* general office numbers in Washington, New York and Hartford, Conn.; and the main number for *AP* reporters covering Congress. He called the Justice Department's actions a "massive and unprecedented intrusion" into newsgathering activities.

The aggressive investigation into the possible disclosure of classified information to the *AP* is part of a pattern in which the Obama administration has pursued current and former government officials suspected of releasing secret material. Six officials have been prosecuted, more than under all previous administrations combined.



The Justice Department defends its taking of AP phone records. Graphic/Christian Science Monitor

In a letter to Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr., the *AP*'s president and chief executive, Gary B. Pruitt, said that the Justice Department sought information beyond what could be justified by any specific probe and demanded that the government return the phone records and destroy all copies.

"There can be no possible justification for such an overbroad collection of the telephone communications of the Associated Press and its reporters," Pruitt wrote to Holder. "These records potentially reveal communications with confidential sources across all of the newsgathering activities undertaken by the *AP* during a two-month period, provide a road map to *AP*'s newsgathering operations, and disclose information about *AP*'s activities and operations that the government has no conceivable right to know."

The inquiry is one of two leak investigations ordered last June by Holder. The second involves a New York Times report about the Stuxnet computer worm, which was developed jointly by the United States and Israel to damage nuclear centrifuges at Iran's main uranium-enrichment plant.

The two leak inquiries were started after Republicans in Congress accused the Obama administration of orchestrating news stories intended to demonstrate the president's toughness on terrorism and improve his chance for reelection. The Republicans sought a special prosecutor, but Holder instead named two veteran prosecutors to handle the inquiries.

In the *AP* case, the news organization and its reporters and editors are not the likely targets of the investigation. Rather, the inquiry is probably aimed at current or former

government officials who divulged classified information.

But experts said the scope of the records secretly seized from the *AP* and its reporters goes beyond the known scale of previous leak probes.

“This investigation is broader and less focused on an individual source or reporter than any of the others we’ve seen,” said Steven Aftergood, a government secrecy expert at the Federation of American Scientists. “They have swept up an entire collection of press communications. It’s an astonishing assault on core values of our society.”

The office of the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia on Monday released a statement saying it is not required to notify a media organization in advance of issuing such subpoenas if doing so “would pose a substantial threat to the integrity of the investigation.”

“We take seriously our obligations to follow all applicable laws, federal regulations, and Department of Justice policies when issuing subpoenas for phone records of media organizations,” said a statement from Bill Miller, spokesman for the office. “Those regulations require us to make every reasonable effort to obtain information through alternative means before even considering a subpoena for the phone records of a member of the media.”

Justice Department guidelines require that subpoenas of records from news organizations must be approved personally by the attorney general. Holder’s office did not reply to repeated requests for comment.

Lucy A. Dalglish, dean of the journalism school at the University of Maryland, said she thought the scope of the seizure was unprecedented. “Unfortunately, the Justice Department does this now and again,” said Dalglish, former executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. “What’s very unusual is the scope of the

subpoenas."

Republicans also quickly condemned the targeting of journalists and sought to portray the Justice Department's actions as part of a pattern of Obama administration overreach, noting that the Internal Revenue Service was already enmeshed in a scandal over the reported targeting of conservative groups.

"Coming within a week of revelations that the White House lied to the American people about the Benghazi attacks and the IRS targeted conservative Americans for their political beliefs, Americans should take notice that top Obama administration officials increasingly see themselves as above the law and emboldened by the belief that they don't have to answer to anyone," said Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Vista, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick J. Leahy, D-Vt., said in a statement that he is "very troubled by these allegations" and wants to hear the government's explanation. "The burden is always on the government when they go after private information – especially information regarding the press or its confidential sources," Leahy said. "I want to know more about this case, but on the face of it, I am concerned that the government may not have met that burden."

In the *AP* investigation, Pruitt said, the Justice Department obtained the records without notifying his news organization or narrowing the scope of its subpoenas to specific matters relevant to an ongoing investigation.

The story at issue included details of a CIA operation in Yemen that foiled an al-Qaeda plot in the spring of 2012 to set off a bomb on an airplane headed to the United States. The April and May 2012 phone records of the reporters and editor of the story were among the material seized by the Justice Department.

Pruitt said that on Friday, the *AP*'s general counsel, Laura Malone, received a letter from Ronald C. Machen Jr., the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, who was appointed by Holder to lead the *AP* inquiry. He said that last year, the Justice Department obtained telephone records for more than 20 separate phone lines assigned to the *AP* and its journalists.

A grand jury based in Washington's federal court has been investigating the possible leak of classified information to the *AP* for several months, according to a government official familiar with the probe who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing case.

In most cases when investigators seek information about a media organization's source, the news organization moves to quash any subpoena for its records. But in this case, the *AP* was not aware that the records had been obtained.

Law enforcement officials say leak cases are difficult because hundreds of people often have access to the classified information. In the *AP* case, knowledge of the details of the al-Qaeda plot would have been highly compartmentalized, which would limit the number of people with access to it. A former government investigator said telephone records could be valuable in narrowing the pool of suspected leakers.

Numerous senior government officials have been interviewed in connection with the investigation into the *AP* story. Among those questioned was John O. Brennan, who served as Obama's counterterrorism adviser before becoming CIA director this year.

In his confirmation hearing in February, Brennan said he had cooperated voluntarily with the Justice Department and had been interviewed. He acknowledged speaking to former U.S. government officials who work as commentators on television news, but he denied sharing any classified information.

Greg Miller, Carol D. Leonnig and Julie Tate contributed to

this report.