Demographics may alter LTUSD board elections

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District may have to change how it elects board members because of the growing student Hispanic population – which is 41 percent.

The California Voting Rights Act that was enacted in 2002 was implemented to make it easier for racial and ethnic groups to challenge at-large elections instead of contending with the federal Voting Rights Act. The theory is this gives people in all sections of a community a voice.

The irony is that even though LTUSD, like the majority of districts in California, has at-large elections, the five members already geographically represent the district. One lives in the Tahoe Keys, one in Meyers, one in Sierra Tract, one in Al Tahoe and one near Bijou.

They are, though, all white. Three are women and two are men.

The South Shore district is waiting for March when the Census figures come out to know what the overall demographics are of the South Shore compared to the district.

LTUSD has 3,878 students. Whites make up 49 percent of the population, Hispanics 41 percent, and blacks 1.2 percent.

Ultimately, it would be up to the voters to decide which type of representation they want. That could be on a ballot as soon as November, with the decision affecting a school board election two years later.

The legal brouhaha that has ensued since the state Voting Act

was put into place has cost at least one district millions of dollars to fight it. Now a cottage industry has cropped up to assess whether districts need to change how board members are elected.

It can cost upward of $30,000 to sort through the legal mess, not to mention the multitude of meetings involving the county office of education and public.

When Superintendent Jim Tarwater was asked why not skip the consultant telling the district what to do and go to the voters in November, he said the process doesn't allow that kind of logic to be used.

Tarwater has not been given a magic number from the Census that will trigger a review of the district's elections.

Other stats given out at the Jan. 11 meeting include: Males outnumber females by two percentage points at 51 percent.

English learners – those whose first language is something other than English – account for 28 of the students.

The Hispanic population at Bijou is 76 percent, Mount Tallac 50 percent, Sierra House 46 percent, South Tahoe Middle School 41 percent, Tahoe Valley 37 percent, South Tahoe High 32 percent, Environmental Magnet 8 percent.

A figure stated at the Jan. 11 school board meeting that startled the board is the realization 59 percent of the students qualify for a free or reduced lunch. That is up from 45 percent a year ago.

"It reflects the economic times," Tarwater told the board.

The board momentarily discussed how if the proposed cuts by the state to social service programs are enacted, it will create more of an economic crisis for families in the district.

In other action:

• Board member Larry Green said the tutoring program between Lake Tahoe Community College, where he works, and LTUSD has been reinstated.

• CFO Deb Yates will make a formal presentation to the board Jan. 25 about the budget and what might be in store based on Gov. Jerry Brown's proposals.

Obama urges Americans to unify in wake of Ariz. tragedy

By Michael A. Memoli and Michael Muskal, Los Angeles Times

TUCSON – With a plea to the nation to overcome its divisions, President Obama paid tribute to the victims and heroes of the weekend shooting spree in Arizona and sounded a call for Americans to heal themselves.

Obama came to the University of Arizona, where he spoke to a cheering crowd of more than 26,000 – including 13,000 in an overflow area in Arizona Stadium – all seeking solace after days of tumult in the wake of the attack in Tucson that killed six and injured 13. The president and First Lady Michelle Obama earlier visited Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-Ariz.), who was critically injured in the violence that shocked the nation and prompted a debate on civility in politics.



Rep. Gabby Giffords opened her eyes for the first time Wednesday after being shot Saturday.

Most of his speech paid tribute to the victims, especially to 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green, the youngest of the slain. Christina has become a symbol for those, including her parents, who have called for an end to such violence. She had gone to a Safeway shopping center to meet Giffords, who was holding a meeting there with constituents Saturday morning when the attack began.

Read the whole story

Judge's Lakeview Commons ruling may be appealed

By Kathryn Reed

It may not matter what South Lake Tahoe wants regarding Lakeview Commons. Reeve-Knight Construction has filed notice the company intends to appeal the judge's decision that

rendered its contract with the city invalid.

Multiple calls to the Roseville-based company went unreturned. However, City Attorney Patrick Enright confirmed Reeve-Knight has filed a notice to appeal.

Clark & Sullivan Construction in Sparks successfully sued the city over the bid process, which resulted in El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey issuing a decision Nov. 1 that blasted the city for its handling of the bid and rendered the contract null and void.



People may need to get used to this sign near El Dorado Beach. Photo/Kathryn Reed

People close to the issue have told *Lake Tahoe News* if Reeve-Knight goes through with the appeal, it's likely the city will have another stalled construction project on its hands for what could be years with it tied up in legal wrangling.

One difference between this $6 million stalled project and the bankrupt/foreclosed could have been $400 million convention center project is location and functionality.

Lakeview Commons is in the center of town, and a highly trafficked area that is popular with locals and tourists. Access to El Dorado Beach is now cut off.

This compares to the convention center site near Stateline that impacts the players with money in the site, but does not take away an asset from people.

On Jan. 11 the City Council started their morning at 8 in closed session to discuss Lakeview Commons. Enright said no reportable action was taken, but in the same breath said a public hearing is scheduled for Jan. 25 to decide whether to start the bid process from scratch or to award the bid to Clark & Sullivan.

“Discussion in large part was whether to appeal the decision. We wanted this council to decide it,” Enright said of the closed session.

The city only had 60 days to appeal the decision. Tuesday’s session was 10 days after that deadline. This means it’s possible the council again violated the Brown Act by discussing litigation that isn’t relevant.

South Tahoe is also dealing with angry subcontractors on the project who have not been paid.

Dave Galicia, president of GB Construction in South Lake Tahoe and subcontractor for Reeve-Knight, spoke before the council Tuesday saying he submitted invoices to the city dated more than 120 days ago and has yet to see a dime.

Afterward he told *Lake Tahoe News*, “They are arguing over $35,000.” Galicia said Reeve-Knight billed the city for $140,000 for the work done at the site and the city offered $105,000.

Enright confirmed the city has not paid Reeve-Knight any money.

“We are negotiating with them,” Enright said.

He cited Public Contract Code that requires the city to pay hard costs, but not profits on a contract that has been

rendered invalid.

Enright expects that aspect of the issue to be voted on by the council Jan. 25 – the same day it is scheduled to decide how to go forward with the bid. The latter, of course, may be a mute point depending on what Reeve-Knight does.

South Lake Tahoe native trains for first trip to X Games

By Kathryn Reed

Only in his fourth year competing in skier cross, South Lake Tahoe native Trevor Ricioli is headed for the X Games later this month.

“I grew up racing motocross. This is the most similar thing to it on snow,” Ricioli told *Lake Tahoe News*. “There are times when it’s scary, but that’s what makes it fun.”



Trevor Ricioli is ready for any obstacle. Photos/Provided

The 25-year-old has been skiing since he was 5, mostly at Sierra-at-Tahoe. He is competing now for Sugar Bowl – home resort of Olympian Daron Rahlves.

“I’ve skied a few time with Daron. He is a busy guy,” Ricioli said.

Most of Ricioli’s training is with Errol Kerr, who skied in the Vancouver Olympics last year for Jamaica. He placed ninth in skier cross. Ricioli was in Canada last January to watch his friend.

The friends trade off between Sugar Bowl and Kerr’s home resort of Alpine Meadows. This week they are concentrating on giant slalom training so they are ready for the turns.

In the terrain parks is where they practice going over jumps side-by-side.

Skier cross is all about a group of athletes headed down the hill at the same time going fast, flying over jumps and rounding corners – a race against man and clock.

Although the Jan. 27-30 competition in Aspen will be the biggest stage Ricioli will have been on, he is a top contender in his sport. He has been crowned national champion in skier cross the last three years.

Last fall he was in Australia competing in the Continental Cup where he placed fifth.



Trevor Ricioli

Over the holidays he got word via telephone the X Games committee was inviting him to the competition.

“Part of me is nervous, but I’ve wanted to ski in the X Games since I was little. I’ve been wanting this and waiting for this,” the 2004 South Tahoe High School grad said.

He’s been getting advice about this level of competition from Kerr as well as fellow South Lake Tahoe resident Shaun Palmer, another friend. Palmer is a veteran snowboarder.

One of the things Ricioli likes is traveling. He hopes in 2014 his passport has a Russian stamp in it – meaning he’s on the Olympic team.

“My focus is to get a lot of FIS (International Ski Federation) points so when the U.S. team is formed, I get on it,” Ricioli said.

He is also concentrating on getting sponsors so he has money to travel to events that will get him to the next level.

Ricioli expects skiing will always be part of his life – but what lies beyond the slopes remains uncertain. He has dabbled in several things. He’s into photography and fashion, having started the Donovan Smyth Clothing company out of high school. Ricioli, his mom and sister opened the Donovan Denim Bar after that, which closed after a couple years because of the sour economy.

He recently started an electronic band called Thunderwolf with his friend Austin Ellis.

The qualifying round for skier cross at the X Games is Jan. 28, with the competition Jan. 30. Here is the ESPN TV schedule.

“I really want to bring some hardware to South Lake Tahoe,” Ricioli said.

South Tahoe asks employees, citizens what they want

By Kathryn Reed

This month results of two surveys administered by South Lake Tahoe will be released.

In December employees of the city were asked to answer 71 questions from five categories – communications within the city, my supervisor, my work group, quality of the work environment, and the city as an employer.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke said he could not find any evidence of such a survey being done in the 45 years the city has been incorporated.

"We will have action plans for the survey results within 30 days of the findings," O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Department heads and manager will be accountable to make the changes."

Bill Chiat, a consultant with Alta Mesa Group, is spearheading the process for both surveys. He is expected to share the employee survey results with department heads in mid-January.

Although there were rumors polls were being taken after the employee sessions, *Lake Tahoe News* could find no evidence of this to be true. Employees could talk to each other about how they answered the questions, but neither the unions nor management organized any strategy to gauge results prior to them being collated by the consultant.

More than 90 percent of employees took the survey, O’Rourke said.

Results from the community survey will be available later this month, with the goal of having at least the raw data for when the City Council has its strategic planning session the afternoon of Jan. 25.

Drilling down to compare South Tahoe’s data to cities of similar size will take some time, with that analysis possibly not available until February. The last time a citizen survey was taken was 2008. Almost the identical questions were asked so the city can make comparisons to responses.

Nearly 3,000 surveys were sent to a random selection of residential addresses. Questions start with ranking quality of life in South Lake Tahoe and end with items about the budget.

There are 22 questions, but many are multi-dimensional, so it’s really longer than that.

O’Rourke is interested to see if the 69 percent who ranked the aesthetics of the town fair to poor in 2008 feel the same way.

“Clearly that issue has been raised in the past and has not been addressed,” he said.

The cost of the two surveys is about $16,000 combined, which comes out of the professional services budget. O’Rourke would like such surveys to be a line item in future budgets. He intends to conduct surveys annually to track trends.

“I’m not overly concerned what the issues are. The focus needs to be addressing them. The focus needs to be on the process of constantly improving, not laying blame and retribution,” O’Rourke said. “No matter how good we think we are there are opportunities for improvement.”

Here is the employee survey and the citizen survey, as well as the 2008 survey results.

Tahoe Rim Trail's breathtaking views highlight Trails Day

By Jessie Marchesseau

STATELINE – For the most part, the trek was silent, save for the sounds of nature and the crunching of crusty snow beneath nearly a hundred snowshoes.

The troupe of 37 participants and six guides traveled single file along the already packed down trail. The snow was unusually deep for this time of year, with a crunchy crust on top from the sunny days of the previous week.

Tahoe Rim Trail Association volunteer trail designer and builder Clay Grubb took the lead, stopping periodically to share interesting tidbits about the trail and its natural environment such as the species of trees growing in the surrounding forest, the type of animals making tracks in the nearby snow or where any forks in the road may take you.



Winter Trails Day introduces three dozen people to the

Tahoe Rim Trail. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

The 2.8-mile guided snowshoe hike Jan. 8 was hosted by Explore Tahoe and the Tahoe Rim Trail Association. Participants departed the Kingsbury North Trailhead at 9am to hike the Castle Rock loop that follows the Tahoe Rim Trail part of the way and then switches to the Castle Rock Trail.

Starting under blue skies and morning sunshine it was perfect conditions for a jaunt on the Tahoe Rim Trail in honor of the 16th annual National Winter Trails Day.

As the tour neared its destination of Castle Rock, clouds began to roll in, turning the morning bluebird skies a soft gray. The clouds, however, did little to wilt the cheery demeanor of the hikers or the beauty of the views from the series of vistas along the way.

“One thing we try to do when we build a trail is make sure it leads to great view points,” said Chuck Kelley, a volunteer trail builder for the Tahoe Rim Trail Association and guide for the day. “It makes it attractive to hike to and keeps people on the trail.”

There is no shortage of spectacular view points on the Castle Rock loop. With the overall pace for the day being rather leisurely, participants took full advantage of the numerous photo ops along the way, especially from the top of Castle Rock.

Jared Odell of Brentwood and Mary Visceglia of San Mateo had their photo taken at the top of Castle Rock with Lake Tahoe glistening in the background. The couple was in town celebrating Odell’s 40th birthday and testing out his new snowshoes. They had learned to cross country ski at Kirkwood

last year on National Winter Trails Day and wanted to give snowshoeing a try this time.

“I’m liking it,” Odell said halfway through the hike. “I’m thinking we might try Yosemite in the winter next year.”

By the time the trek was over, Visceglia was in full agreement. “It was awesome,” she declared. “We’re addicted.”

That was exactly the outcome Lauren Thomaselli from Explore Tahoe was hoping for. She said the whole point of National Winter Trails Day is to “promote winter recreation and the health and social benefits of winter recreation.”

Thomaselli pointed out how this coincides with Explore Tahoe’s focus “to encourage people to be involved in the natural environment and outdoor recreation opportunities right out our backdoor.”

“This is the kind of recreation really in demand right now,” she said. “People want to have a deeper connection to the environment.”

This was evident in the fact that the event had originally been limited to 15 participants. However, the overwhelming response prompted organizers to open it up to everyone interested, resulting in more than twice the original expectations.

The second goal for the event was to inspire people to get involved in the Tahoe Rim Trail and other stewardship projects. That goal was reached as well.

“People at the end, they didn’t care about the refreshments or anything else,” Thomaselli said. “They wanted to know how to sign up and make donations.”

Odell and Visceglia were among those ready to donate time to trail building this summer. Since they enjoy using the trails, Odell said it would be a great way for them to give back. He

also pointed out that any excuse to come to Tahoe is worth taking.

This was the inaugural Winter Trails Day event on Lake Tahoe's South Shore, but, considering the success of the event, Thomaselli predicts more National Winter Trails Day events on the South Shore in the future.

Meanwhile, locals and visitors to the Lake Tahoe area may enjoy free guided snowshoe hikes on the Tahoe Rim Trail every Saturday through the end of March. Visit the website for more information.

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Snowshoe to Fallen Leaf Lake – a wonderous trek

By Kathryn Reed

FALLEN LEAF LAKE – Snow glistens as though ice crystals are diamonds in the wild. Wind gusts send clouds of snow off the top of Mount Tallac. Fallen Leaf Lake is still, beckoning the dogs to swim in the icy water.

It's one of those postcard days in Lake Tahoe. Everywhere you look it's a Kodak moment.

We have the trail to ourselves – the eight of us, plus four dogs.



Dormant aspens line part of the trail near Fallen Leaf Lake. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Strapping on our snowshoes in the Cathedral Road parking lot off Highway 89 we begin our journey into the wild. At least it seems that way as the quiet envelops us.

The snow-covered road is wide enough to stride along in pairs and not be knocked over by one of our four-legged friends.

At times the trail closes in from the thick conifers, then suddenly it’s as though there is a meadow of snow.

Not far in we veer to the left to take the trail to get off the road even though no motor vehicles can drive on it this time of year.

It becomes single track. One by one we saunter forward. At times water crosses our path and we do a bit of improvising. With it being one of the wettest Decembers on record, water seems to be everywhere.

Taylor Creek is heading toward Lake Tahoe at what looks like capacity. Though it’s not rushing, the level seems high – especially for late December.

Onward we go, deciding to head to Fallen Leaf Lake to the left instead of going right which would have us loop back to the

parking lot. Good choice.

Up and over the dam with snowshoes on takes a bit of dexterity and concentration. No problem.

Contrails line the blue sky, crossing through the wispy clouds to create a one-of-a-kind canvas. The still water reflects the mountains of Desolation Wilderness until the canines send ripples across the alpine lake.

Break time means peeling off clothes as the sun beats down on us. Most of the dogs venture into Fallen Leaf Lake to retrieve sticks, unfazed by the ice floating nearby.

Back we go, though not exactly as we came. We end up making a loop to our left through what during late summer is one of the most incredible patches of lupine. This day it’s the stark white bark of this grove of aspen that captures our attention.

The whole time it’s just the 12 of us. What a Christmas Eve to remember.

Getting there:

Head north on Highway 89 from the Y in South Lake Tahoe.

Go past Camp Richardson. Pass the turn for Fallen Leaf Lake.

Cathedral Road is on the left. A Sno-Park permit is required or take the chance of being fined. The permits may be bought at various locations or online. They are $5 for the day or $25 for the season.

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Providing health care in Africa tests S. Tahoe doctor's skills



Yesterday I literally had to fight back tears after the first hour. I am not ashamed to say that, but their suffering was very emotional and they have been waiting for some hope.

One patient was seventeen and looked seven. She had terrible deformities from previous burns, but also a belly full of ascites. I think it is the fist case of kwashiorkor I have ever seen.

By Kathryn Reed

Steve Bannar sent several emails like this to family and friends when he was in Tanzania in November administering health care to people who don't often see doctors with his skills.

The surgeon with Tahoe Orthopedics & Sports Medicine in South

Lake Tahoe spent a month with Health Volunteers Overseas in this remote outpost of Africa. It was a test in many ways – in ingenuity, creativity, resolve, and medical know-how.

Though fixing clubfeet is not something he does in his everyday practice, at least it involves orthopedics. For one case the child sucked on his mother's bosom – that was his anesthetic.

Much of what Bannar was doing in this village near the shores of Lake Victoria had nothing to do with his specialty.

"The basic concepts are the same. The science is the same. It's more adapting to what is available. You certainly can't rely on technology," Bannar said.

Deformities run rampant. They are the result of poor nutrition, parasites and neglect.

Bones stick out. Burns are common. Infections normal. Trauma constant. Mosquito nets help prevent the spread of malaria.

Bannar divided his time between two hospitals – one government run, the other a Catholic facility. The latter being significantly cleaner.

"I have never felt so dirty in my life. I try to be as clean as possible but that is impossible. I saw over thirty patients without soap or towels, nasty. I return to the room to shower and a cockroach the size of a mouse is in there with me," he writes in an email home.

He had to practice medicine in facilities that are nowhere near what he is used to.

It was a bit of a struggle to get all of his goods through customs, but eventually he made it. Barton Health provided many of the tools he left behind for the medical community to use after his departure. He took lower-tech equipment, but even some of that was more modern than anyone in this village

was used to.

“I took the tools to the machine shop to sharpen them for surgery,” Bannar told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I used a hand drill to put pins in.”

He spent some time with a witch doctor who most of the people believe in. He, too, is a believer.

“I’m not sure how well it works, but it’s been around for a couple thousand years, so it has some validity,” Bannar said of the various potions.

But it was his modern tools that helped an albino be able to feed himself by creating a better pinch on his arm. In this part of the world albinos are said to have magical powers. Their body parts are harvested – even while they are alive. This particular boy had one arm missing and fingers of the other hand cut off.

Despite being steps from Lake Victoria, Bannar couldn’t cool off by swimming in the refreshing looking water. A parasite that goes through the skin lurks beneath the surface.

Rice and fried minnows was a normal meal. Bananas are everywhere and seemed to be put in nearly every dish. Fried grasshoppers are another delicacy of sorts.

“The small intestines [of some unknown creature] was the nastiest, slimiest, chewiest piece of meat I have ever had,” Bannar sends home in an email.

Despite the poverty, the ravaging of forests for fuel, the injuries from motorcycle accidents on roads he decided not to venture out on with two wheels, and the overwhelming need for Western doctors to visit more than once a year, Bannar is ready to go back.

He’s been a member of Health Volunteers Overseas for 15 years, having traveled to Vietnam and St. Lucia.

“It’s really rewarding. I like adventure, to see new cultures,” Bannar said, sitting in the confines of his spacious, clean office. “You eat and live like a national. Instead of going as a tourist and taking, you are giving. You leave something.”

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Photos provided by Steve Bannar.

Spooner Summit fire station ready for USFS to occupy

By Kathryn Reed

SPOONER SUMMIT – Tucked off the side of the road near the top of Spooner Summit is a new fire station that belongs to the U.S. Forest Service.

The contractor finished the nearly $1 million project last month. Half of the money for the structure is from Forest Service coffers, while the other half came from the Aramark Corporation. Aramark is the concessionaire – operating as Zephyr Cove Snowmobiles. The two entities share the building.

The two old structures that had been on the property were destroyed. They were in such sorry shape the regional Forest Service office in Vallejo condemned the structure in 2006 for winter use because of cracks in the beams and the threat it wouldn’t hold the snow.



The fire station is on the left, the snowmobile operation on the right. Photos/Kathryn Reed

“We started the process nearly a decade ago,” Mike Gabor, USFS engineer, said of the agency’s desire to create a functioning facility. Funding was the hold up.

No longer are rodents running around. No longer must a porta-potty be used. No longer is the inside temperature similar to the outside chill. No longer does the fire engine have to be kept outside.

The old buildings didn’t even have foundations, let alone running water.

Gabor said crews used to operate out of a 20 foot by 30 feet one-room building.

Although the fire station does not have an engine year-round, with the snowmobile operation going on, the site will be used 12 months.

During fire season one engine with five crew members and one fire prevention technician will be stationed at the building. However, the men and women sleep in their own bed each night.



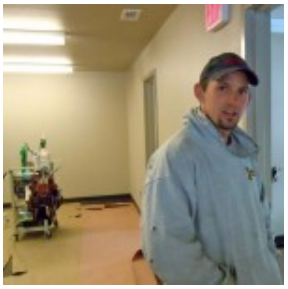
A pile to clean up a week before the USFS took over.

The Forest Service has space for three offices, a weight room, and break room-training area, in addition to the bay for the engine.

The snowmobile side has a slightly smaller bay for storage of the sleds, an efficiency kitchen, and restrooms that can be accessed from the outside for the public during operating hours.

The structure is built to LEED standards, but because of the cost involved to get the green building certification the USFS opted not to go that route.

Cory Jennings, with Building Solutions out of Reno, is the superintendent on the project. Despite contending with snowstorms, he said drilling the six 200-foot holes for the pipes for the geothermal system was the trickiest part of the job.



Cory Jennings,

construction superintendent, talks about the energy efficient building.

The engine bay has heated floors. Passive solar is being used for the heat exchange.

Neither diesel nor propane is on site.

Recycled blue jeans were used as the insulation.

This acreage on the south side of Highway 50 just before the junction of Highway 28 has an interesting history. Concrete from the ski hill the Bliss family operated in late 1940s-early 1950s still exists behind the new firehouse.

Prior to that, the area was known as the Spooner Station and Summit Camp during the Comstock era.

In 1961, the state of Nevada built tent housing at the site for working inmates. Two years later a Carson City motel was brought up the road to provide some housing, office space and a dining area. The Spooner Honor Camp stopped operating in 1970.

Speculation is during this time is when the structures that were destroyed this summer were built.

The Forest Service acquired the property in 1971, using the old motel as a fire station starting in 1972. That structure was destroyed a few years later.

Gaines wins state Senate seat; wife may run for Assembly

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe will have a new state Senator in Sacramento on Thursday and at the same time will be without a representative in the Assembly.

This is because on Jan. 4 Ted Gaines soundly won the special election for the 1st Senate District seat. He garnered 63. 2 percent of the vote (81,945 votes) to Ken Cooley's 36.8 percent (47,743).



Ted Gaines

At 10:30pm, Gaines Tweeted, "Just received a very nice message from Ken Cooley. I'm honored to serve the 1st District in the Senate & looking forward to getting to work."

The election was necessary to fill the seat left vacant by Dave Cox's death in July. No one won more than 50 percent of the vote in November, necessitating the runoff between Republican Gaines and Democrat Cooley.

Gaines is from Roseville, but has a second home on the North Shore and is familiar with Lake Tahoe issues.

Cooley is the mayor of Rancho Cordova.

Gaines, 52, was re-elected in that same November election to his third term as assemblyman. He will now have to resign from that position. His wife, Beth, is considering running for that seat.

Gaines is familiar with much of his Senate district, with about a third of being part of his Assembly district. The Senate seat encompasses parts of Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento and Sierra counties.