

Funds committed for Kings Beach mental health facility

Placer County Board of Supervisors last week committed \$500,000 in state funding to support the Community House of Kings Beach, a proposed drop-in center for mental health and support services.

The funds will help finance the purchase and renovation of a former motel and residence at 265 Bear St. in Kings Beach by the Community House of Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation. The foundation has completed its purchase of the site and has started renovation work.

The property will be turned into a community center that will house the project's three main partners: Tahoe Safe Alliance, North Tahoe Family Resource Center and Project MANA. The center also will provide desks for other service providers, four individual counseling rooms, a children's therapy area and designated space for family team meetings.

It is estimated the community center will serve about 3,000 people annually.

The \$500,000 will come from funds Placer County receives from the state under the California Mental Health Services Act. In a plan approved by the state in 2009, Placer County identified a community center committed to providing mental health and other services at North Lake Tahoe as a proposed use of MHSA funds earmarked for capital facility and technology projects.

Students continue to be spanked at school

By Alice Park, Time

Fifteen-year-old Taylor Santos let a classmate copy her homework, and she learned the hard way never to do it again. Santos, a student at Springtown High School in Texas, was punished by a vice principal with a swift swat to her bottom using a wooden paddle. The spanking left blisters and forced her to sleep on her side that night.

As upset as Santos' mother was, however, it wasn't the spanking, which she had consented to, that led her to complain to the school board. It was the severity of the punishment and the fact that it was delivered by a male administrator, contrary to the district's policy that only teachers of the same gender as the student may mete out corporal punishment.

Across the U.S., Santos' case and that of another student in the same school have fired up parental passions over whether corporal punishment should be allowed in schools at all. Nineteen states permit it, but researchers say there is little evidence that spanking actually works to change children's behavior for the better.

In fact, kids spanked by their parents tend to be more aggressive than other kids and are likelier to develop behavioral problems as they get older; some studies show that corporal punishment can even lead to lower IQs. "The more kids are spanked, the more problematic their behavior is," says Elizabeth Gershoff of the University of Texas at Austin, who has conducted the most comprehensive analysis to date of studies on corporal punishment and its outcomes.

Still, some experts say that because most of the research on spanking focuses on punishment at home, not in schools, it's

unfair to assume the effects are the same. It's also possible that the studies aren't measuring the impact of the punishment at all but instead simply reflect the fact that disobedient children who are disciplined are more likely to have behavioral problems in the first place. These experts point to studies showing that even nonphysical alternatives like verbal scolding don't lead to positive changes in behavior among children.

Then there's the issue of finding the line between discipline and abuse, which is hard enough for parents punishing their children to define and defend, never mind for non-family members like teachers. That's what prompted Santos' mother to speak out; the vice principal, she feels, just went too far.

In response, the Springtown school board decided to make changes to its corporal-punishment policy. Under the old rules, parents had to opt out of corporal punishment for their kids; now they must provide written permission for it to be administered. And parents can specify whether they want the punishment to be delivered by a male or female teacher, although an official of the same gender as the student must witness the punishment no matter what—meaning two adults will always be present.

For some experts, having to go to such lengths to make corporal punishment acceptable supports the idea that it doesn't belong in schools at all. They say exposing children to any type of violence, at home or in school, can simply be too harmful.

Dozens of countries have taken a simpler approach, banning all forms of corporal punishment against kids, even if it's administered by parents. While the U.S. Congress is considering such a ban in schools, the final vote – on the Hill and in the classroom – is uncertain.

2 Republicans seek to represent Tahoe in state Assembly

By Dana M. Nichols, Stockton Record

SAN ANDREAS – Non-Republicans may cast the deciding votes in the 5th Assembly District in November, even though Republicans have by far the largest registration numbers in the district and a Republican is certain to win.

That's because two Republicans – Rico Oller of San Andreas and Frank Bigelow of Madera County – are on the ballot.

In the June primary, Oller had 33.9 percent of the vote and Bigelow had 29.9 percent. That primary, decided by California's new top-two rule, sent the top finishers on to November regardless of party.

Those registered Democrat and no party preference combined make up just more than half of registered voters in the district, which means the eventual winner will likely need at least some of their votes.

Yet Oller, 54, and Bigelow, 58, are campaigning as conservatives who say they favor small government and believe that cutting taxes and easing regulation on businesses is the way to spur economic growth.

As a result, nonpolicy questions have become a significant focus in the campaign, with Oller portraying Bigelow as a lukewarm conservative prone to changing his views and Bigelow portraying Oller as a career politician.

"They don't want people that have already served in the Legislature," Bigelow said of why he thinks voters will choose him over Oller.

Oller formerly served two terms in the Assembly and one in the state Senate. Bigelow is a Madera County supervisor.

Both men also own businesses. Bigelow comes from a ranching family that also owns Ponderosa Telephone Company. Oller has a building materials supply company in San Andreas.

Oller criticizes Bigelow for waffling on high-speed rail. Although Bigelow now says he opposes the plan, he voted for it in years past on the Madera County Board of Supervisors.

"I am the same person I have been all through the race and I am not going to change," Oller said. "Frank, on the other hand, is much more morally flexible and is willing to change his positions depending on the circumstances."

Bigelow said his views on high-speed rail changed because more recent reports exposed problems with the viability of such a system.

Bigelow says he, too, is a solid conservative.

"I think I am a strong person who has a conservative ideology," Bigelow said.

Bigelow has raised significantly more campaign donations than Oller, much of it from political action committees tied to corporations and Sacramento lobbying groups. His donors include the California Dental PAC, the California Real Estate PAC, the California Professional Firefighters PAC and the United Indian Auburn Community, which is the tribe that owns the Thunder Valley Casino in Lincoln.

Bigelow's perspective on why these donors give to him: "Maybe because people want me elected."

Oller's perspective: Bigelow is tied to Sacramento special interests.

Oller, too, has donations that indicate the interests he supports. Organizations that have given him money in the past few months include the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association and the National Rifle Association.

The 5th Senate District includes all or part of seven counties on both slopes of the Sierra Nevada south of Lake Tahoe. It also includes a few Valley areas around Madera.

Mixed opinions about usefulness of ballot initiatives

By Daniel B. Wood, Christian Science Monitor

LOS ANGELES — Is the initiative process an invaluable tool that holds legislators to account and allows voters to take on the monied interests that dominate politics? Or has it become a tool of those special interests themselves, confusing voters and making states an ungovernable mess?

Opinions on the ballot initiative process in America vary widely, but California — which has passed more initiatives than any other state except Oregon — has been perhaps the nation's most important laboratory for direct democracy.

In California's experience, both the good and the bad are apparent.

In recent years, many political analysts have come to see the

initiative process as broken.

“Originally, the initiative process was to be a safety valve to allow citizens to go around the legislature held in thrall by special interests,” says Sherry Jeffe, a senior fellow at the School of Policy, Planning, and Development at USC. “What it has become is another tool of special interests to get what they want by buying it from the public or pressuring the legislature, by just threatening to file an initiative to get them to move.”

She says a handful of key initiatives have made governing the state far more difficult:

- Proposition 13, which in 1978 put a cap on the annual increase in property-tax rates, resulted in localities having huge budget shortfalls that must be backfilled by the state.
- Proposition 98 in 1988 required a minimum percentage of the state budget to be spent on K-12 education, tying legislators’ hands.
- Proposition 140 in 1990 created term limits on legislators, which forces them to leave just as many are beginning to understand how lawmaking works.

The sheer number of initiatives can also be confusing.

“This is overwhelming to me, and I do this for a living,” says Barbara O’Connor, director emeritus of the Institute for Study of Politics and Media at CSU Sacramento. “But the average Californian doesn’t like government and is not apt to spend time sorting through all the complicated issue pamphlets.”

Yet John Matsusaka, president of the Initiative and Referendum Institute at USC, decided to study the history of 111 initiatives in California since 1912, asking the question: “Have voter initiatives paralyzed the California budget?”

His conclusion: “Contrary to the claims of many pundits, voter

initiatives have not constrained the California budget to the extent that fiscal crises are inevitable.”

Michael Shires, a professor of public policy at Pepperdine University, acknowledges that initiatives “have complicated finance” but adds: “They are one of the most important parts of our political system.”

Others agree. “Without the initiative process, we wouldn’t have a redistricting commission, political reform such as lobbyist disclosure, ethics laws, a tough enforcement commission, and a chance to repeal the death penalty,” says Robert Stern, former president of the Center for Governmental Studies.

Hal Dash, a Democratic consultant, can see both sides. “The initiative process has helped to fund schools, housing for veterans, medical research, and other good things,” he says. “But too often initiatives are the end result of the failure of government to do what we all elected them to do – make the tough decisions for the good of all Californians.”

Student drug use in DCSD increasing

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – The percentage of Douglas County School District students testing positive for drugs mirrors the national school district average of between 2 and 3 percent. DCSD was at 2.3 percent for the 2011-12 school year.



Of the 15 positive tests – and that could be one student testing positive more than once as was the case at Whittell High – all had marijuana in their system.

The data was released to the board at last week's meeting.

All students participating in athletics or extracurricular activities are randomly tested. If someone refuses to be tested, that is considered a positive test and the student endures the same consequences. Consequences include being removed from the activity for the rest of the season, participating in a drug counseling program through Tahoe Youth & Family Services, and being subjected to follow-up drug tests.

The tests are looking for use of alcohol, amphetamines, barbiturates, benzodiazepines (valium), cocaine, marijuana, methadone, expanded opiates like codeine, hydrocodone and oxycodone, phencyclidine, and propoxyphene (darvon).

The district has been mixing up the add-on tests. Not everyone gets all of those because of the expense. The additional drugs the district may test for are ecstasy, nicotine, ETG alcohol, anabolic steroids and spice.

Of the 776 tests administered last school year, there were 15 positive results and three who refused to take the test. Five the positives were from Whittell, with one student testing positive twice. Nine were from Douglas High, and one from Carson Valley Middle School.

In the 2010-11 school year, 1.3 percent of DCSD students tested positive or eight kids and in 2009-10, the first year of the program, 3 percent or 17 students tested positive.

In other action:

- No one has offered to buy the old Kingsbury Middle School. It will continue to be on the market, with the board evaluating that strategy every quarter when it meets at the lake.
 - The district collectively passed the federally mandated Adequate Yearly Progress. However, the district will no longer be subjected to AYP under No Child Left Behind because it will be working under the Nevada School Performance Framework.
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Nevada panel wants more money for probation, parole

By Ed Vogel, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Gov. Brian Sandoval should increase funding for the state Division of Parole and Probation in the budget he prepares for the Legislature to consider next year, a commission of legislators, judges, police and the attorney general decided Wednesday.

The Commission on the Administration of Justice proposed changes to boot camps and sentencing programs that could lead to more people receiving parole, rather prison time. But members fear the changes would increase parole costs and would not be funded in the governor's budget.

"Everything surrounds funding probation in a reasonable way," said Phil Kohn, a commission member and the Clark County public defender. "Some of these things will cost money but may save in the long run. We can all agree the Division of Parole and Probation has to be adequately funded, or the whole system

breaks down.”

But state Sen. Greg Brower, R-Reno, thinks he has a better idea. He said later he is drafting a bill to do away with parole completely. Instead, offenders would serve determined-length sentences. A former U.S. attorney, Brower said the federal correctional system does not have parole.

He noted that Phillip Garrido had been sentenced to a 50-year sentence in Nevada before he kidnapped 11-year-old Jaycee Lee Dugard in South Lake Tahoe in 1991. Largely through parole system failures, Dugard was not discovered for 18 years. The California Legislature made a \$20 million settlement to Dugard.

“If Garrido had served even half of the 50-year sentence, he would have been in prison (at the time Dugard was kidnapped),” Brower said.

The Division of Parole and Probation is authorized to hire 432 employees and has 401 people on the job. The commission Wednesday did not give a figure on how much in extra funding Sandoval should request.

Sandoval proposed in the legislative session last year to reduce state spending on the agency – which had been funded at \$40 million a year – to \$32 million. Legislators later restored the funding to about \$39 million. But even the \$40 million had been deemed too low by some. A legislative audit in 2008 determined that 31 percent of parolees were not visited by their parole officers twice a month as recommended.

Although the state may be short in funds, commission members voted to propose that the Division of Parole and Probation must provide pre-sentence reports to courts by 21 days before sentencing. In 3,700 cases over the past year, district judges delayed sentencing in part because they wanted more time to review reports that were not submitted in a timely manner.

Commissioners also recommended that the Legislature re-establish a 90-day safe keeper evaluation program under which some inmates would be evaluated and might be released to non-prison programs by judges.

Assemblyman Richard McArthur, R-Las Vegas, repeatedly questioned how the commission could support increasing parole and correctional programs when the state does not have money to fund them adequately now.

"We are just setting ourselves up for failure," said McArthur, who was defeated in a state Senate primary race in June. "I am not sure why we are drafting this letter. We are supposed to make policy decisions, not fiscal ones."

But Assemblyman William Horne, D-Las Vegas, said the commission should not reject parole and inmate sentencing changes just because it assumes they won't be funded.

"Let's face it, not everything this commission or another subcommittee recommends is fundable," Brower responded.

Horne, the commission chairman, noted the commission had been rebuffed by a past governor when it recommended higher funding for Parole and Probation.

"The administration budget was woefully short of the target," said Horne, who did not name the governor, although he likely was talking about Sandoval's predecessor, Jim Gibbons. "The director's hands were tied by the budget the governor submitted for his department."

Also Wednesday, commissioners took no action on a proposal to establish an independent office to conduct coroner's inquests. The proposal grew out of controversial officer-involved shootings in Clark County.

Firm on track to begin gold mining in Amador County

By Mark Anderson, Sacramento Business Journal

Sutter Gold Mining Inc. says it is on track to begin gold mining and gold production before the end of the year.

Construction has progressed on above-ground buildings and site work, and the company has made progress in expanding its underground shafts. The company anticipates its first gold pour in December, said Bob Hutmacher, chief financial officer.

Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Sutter Gold is developing its Lincoln Mine Project just outside of Sutter Creek in Amador County.

The modern gold mine is in what was the historically the most productive gold district of California's Mother Lode.

The exterior of the mine's mill building has been completed and the equipment is being installed. A shop and staff building is progressing.

Other site work is also nearing completion, and the mine is hiring employees. It will eventually employ about 100 people. The site now is a flurry of construction contractors and crew, Hutmacher said.

The company has also added two more access tunnels to the mine's main shaft, the Stringbean Alley Decline.

The main decline is a modern mine, large enough for heavy trucks to pass each other.

While the mine is on track to begin production this year, it will only begin full production in the first half of next year.

S. Tahoe council keeps nonprofit in place as avenue to accept donations

A program started in 2001 by the South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Department as a means for people to earmark a donation is now under the purview of the City Council.

The change that took place this month is because there aren't enough people to form a board of directors the old way. Members had primarily been parks and rec employees and now that arrangement doesn't work with staffing levels.

Greg Ross, parks supervisor and board member of Great Ideas For Tahoe (GIFT), lobbied the council to essentially be the board of directors.

The council agreed to this.

Staff will come back at a future council meeting with the appropriate documents to solidify the changes. It's also possible this nonprofit could encompass more than donations related to parks and recreation. That will be up to the new board of directors and how the bylaws are written.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said the reason to have something like GIFT is because "community members don't feel comfortable donating to the city. They want to have a nonprofit where it cannot be absorbed by the general fund."

Donations could be for a bench in the dog park, improvements at ball fields – things like that.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Woman survives fall of more than 100 feet at Eagle Falls

A 20-year-old Chico woman sustained serious injuries when she fell near the Emerald Bay overlook at Lake Tahoe on Oct. 13.

According to El Dorado County sheriff's deputies, she fell approximately 100 feet down the lower Eagle Falls.

The woman's name has not been released.

The incident occurred about 2:15pm.

"Due to the location of the victim and her major injuries, rescuers called for the California Highway Patrol helicopter H-2) to conduct a hoist operation and turn the victim over to CalStar for transport to Renown Medical Center," Deputy Damian Frisby said in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

El Dorado County man found dead at Soledad prison

By AP

California prison officials are investigating the recent death of a Soledad prison inmate as a homicide.

Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation officials made the announcement Thursday after receiving an autopsy report.

Rick Stockton, 52, was found unconscious in a bathroom at the medium-security Correctional Training Facility on Sunday. He was declared dead at an outside hospital shortly afterward. CDCR didn't disclose the cause of death.

Stockton entered the prison system on August 1999 from El Dorado County, where he was convicted of possession of a deadly weapon, grand theft, robbery, and forgery. He was serving a sentence of 25-year-to-life.