

Tahoe Mountain News publisher frantic to find missing mom

By Stephen Baxter, Santa Cruz Sentinel

SANTA CRUZ – After three weeks of searches on the sides of Highway 101 and surrounding roads in five counties, Taylor Flynn has not given up hope of finding his mother.

Flynn, the 49-year-old publisher of the *Tahoe Mountain News* in South Lake Tahoe, was one of the last people to see 70-year-old Deanna Brooks before her disappearance Aug. 24. He wrote a column in his paper this week that described parts of two searches he has made – along with crisscrossing searches made by his older brother and younger sister. They flew from their homes in Georgia and New York, respectively.

Brooks, who lives on Berkeley Way in Santa Cruz, had planned a trip on Aug. 24 to see her mother, Nan, for her 90th birthday in San Diego.

She usually took Highway 101, but she failed to arrive in San Diego. She was reported missing Aug. 26.

Flynn described Brooks as a “loving, with-it grandmother of eight who had been planning this trip for weeks.” She is 70 but seems younger and does not have dementia, Flynn said.

“My mind’s always been that she fell asleep and drove off the side of the road,” he said Thursday.

Now, he and other family members don’t know what to think.

In his column “We’re still looking for you, mom,” Flynn described how his heart dropped on Sept. 7 when he learned that a body had been found near highways 101 and 156 outside Aromas.

He called it “one of the worst nights of my life,” in part because it was close to his mother’s intended route. Flynn and his wife watched a video from a television news website “in horror.”

Deputies did not release the name, age or gender of the victim that day, but Flynn said he reached a San Benito County deputy about midnight requesting information.

“I could hear myself rattle off mom’s statistics in a monotone (voice). Then, Sgt. Burbank replied ever so clearly, ‘I cannot tell you anything about the investigation, except that it is definitely not your mother.’”

Read the whole story

Heller wants House to lead on poker legislation

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON — Ever since online poker legislation faltered and failed in late 2010, the prevailing wisdom has been that the road to successful passage leads through the Senate, via the collective efforts of Majority Leader Harry Reid and Republican Sens. Dean Heller and Jon Kyl.

But on Monday evening, Heller broke rank, informing Reid in a letter that “as discussed, it would be beneficial for the House of Representatives to first address this issue.”

His direction might sound like a simple scheduling switcheroo. But for the controversial poker bill, it is a potentially devastating change with ramifications that could undermine the

Nevada economy – and, top Democrats charge, a clear indication that Heller dropped the ball.

“Several months ago Sen. Reid asked Sen. Heller to secure Republican votes to help pass an Internet poker bill and to date, Sen. Heller has not been able to secure any support,” said Reid spokeswoman Kristen Orthman. “Rather than standing to fight for this important issue for Nevada, Sen. Heller has decided to run for cover and attempt to lay blame on others.”

Reid leaned on Heller and Kyl, of Arizona, to come up with 15 Republican senators, according to Democrats, to complement the approximately 45 Democrats Reid has lined up to vote in favor of legislation to legalize playing poker online. It takes 60 votes in the Senate to supersede the threat of a filibuster.

Read the whole story

Placer County man dies from West Nile virus

By Cynthia H. Craft, Sacramento Bee

Placer County has seen its first human fatality from West Nile virus this season, a reminder, officials said, of the very real danger posed by the mosquito-borne disease.

Howard Stolz, a prominent community volunteer, died Saturday after being hospitalized for 10 days with encephalitis, a severe neuroinvasive condition brought on by the virus.

At 74, Stolz fit the profile of those most likely to succumb to the disease, which tends to strike down older people. The four other fatalities in California this year were of a

similar age: an 88-year-old woman in Kern County; an 86-year-old woman in Merced County; an 86-year-old man in Sacramento County; and a 76-year-old woman who died in Fresno County.

In Texas, the epicenter of the West Nile virus epidemic in the United States this year, the same pattern holds, with older people making up the bulk of fatalities.

California has had a relatively mild season this year compared with the peak in 2004, when 779 cases of West Nile virus were detected in the state. So far this season, 75 cases have been confirmed in California.

But the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned Wednesday that, nationwide, the country seems to be on track for its worst West Nile year ever, with Texas producing the most alarming number of outbreaks.

Meanwhile, in the Sacramento region, high-profile aerial spraying has given way to less invasive ground treatments, and public mosquito districts are focusing on the prevention measures that people have heard about all summer.

The region is on the cusp of the season's singularly most aggressive period of West Nile virus onset – late September and October – mosquito district officials warn.

Consider the case of Stolz, a community volunteer many times over, whose daughter, Janet Stolz, points to her father's death as a signal to people to continue to guard against mosquito bites wherever they go.

"His story puts a face to that 1 percent – the 1 percent of cases where West Nile virus advances into encephalitis or meningitis," his daughter said.

"His message would be, 'Do take all the precautions necessary, especially with young children and the elderly, because they are the most vulnerable,'" she said.

The loss of Stolz is being felt in many corridors of the public safety sector where he dedicated himself to volunteering after retirement: at the Foothill K-9 Association; the Placer County Sheriff's Department; the National Night Out Movement against crime; CPR instructional units; and more.

No one knows where he contracted the disease. But many people have bemoaned the loss of a man with a "huge heart" in dozens of tributes on Foothill K-9's Facebook page.

Gaines to face fellow Republican Pugno in Assembly race

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

The race is officially on in the 6th Assembly District.

Republican Assembly candidate Andrew Pugno announced Monday that he plans to move forward with his bid to unseat Assemblywoman Beth Gaines, R-Rocklin, on the Nov. 6 ballot, despite an earlier pledge to stop campaigning if another Republican came in first in the June primary.

The Folsom attorney said in a statement that he has concluded he "cannot, in good conscience, endorse (Gaines') dishonest and unethical campaign tactics," citing what he called "last-minute attack ads that she knew were lies."

"As the only other candidate on the November ballot, stepping

aside and simply handing the election to Beth Gaines would be fundamentally unfair to the voters in light of a primary election tainted by her blatant dishonesty,” Pugno said in the statement. “Whether or not the incumbent should be re-elected is a decision that belongs to the voters, not just to me.”

Pugno said at the launch of his campaign that if Gaines got more votes in the primary he would “endorse her campaign and not actively campaign myself.”

Both Republicans went on the attack in the safe GOP district ahead of the June primary, which also featured a Democrat who failed to make the runoff. One mail piece sent by the Gaines campaign in the final days of the race included misleading and false claims about Pugno’s business and involvement in a nonprofit that organizes junkets for lawmakers.

Despite coming in second to Gaines in the June primary, Pugno continued to raise money this summer as he weighed whether to drop his campaign. Monday marked the first time Pugno – the lead attorney for Proposition 8, the voter-passed state initiative against gay marriage – made his plans for the remainder of the election public.

Gaines’ political consultant, Dave Gilliard, criticized Pugno for not following through with the pledge. He said he believes his candidate is better positioned to reach out to Democratic and independent voters in the newly drawn district, which includes southern Placer County, Folsom, Fair Oaks, Orangevale and El Dorado Hills.

“I don’t think the voters will let him wiggle his way out of that pledge,” Gilliard said.

The race is one of more than two dozen Nov. 6 contests featuring two candidates of the same political party affiliation, an outcome allowed under the state’s new top-two primary rules.

S. Lake Tahoe budget includes layoffs, using reserves

By Kathryn Reed

Deficit spending is continuing in South Lake Tahoe for another year and may be what happens in 2013-14, too.

The budget the City Council is expected to approve Sept. 18 includes \$700,000 from unassigned excess reserves. And while the budget, which goes into effect Oct. 1, is balanced per state law, the city is not living within its means because it has to take from reserves. It would be like the average person dipping into savings to pay routine monthly bills.



"We are solving the budget for today, but we are on notice for tomorrow because we still have problems," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

As of today, it is estimated the 2013-14 budget shortfall will be \$1.5 million.

To help balance the budget for the coming fiscal year Kerry has reorganized city staff to the savings of \$450,000. This includes more layoffs.

Jobs being eliminated as of the end of the calendar year are the risk manager, buyer and street superintendent. The law clerk position will not be funded past May 31, 2013. The director for engineering position goes away as soon as the person who has it goes on maternity leave, which is expected

later this fall.

Sarah Hussong-Johnson, who is the director of engineering, is expected to return in 2013 from leave to be a part-time city engineer as well as deputy public works director.

Positions that will remain on the books, but will not be funded for now are an IT technician, assistant to city manager and community services director.

“Every position is critical, but which can we do in a different way?” is how Kerry said she approached the cuts. She also reiterated what she has said in public – that with staff being cut by 30 percent in the last few years, not everything that got done in the past will get done or at least not as quickly.

“Quality core services” is now the mantra of the city.

In the reorganization, though, some new positions are being created. Part of this has to do with separating public works from community services.

New positions include a public works director who is expected to be hired by Jan. 15. An external search will be conducted for that job.

Kerry met with public works employees who for the most part came up with the plan. They will be broken into streets, engineering, fleet, capital improvement, facilities, and stormwater.

“Not a single one asked for something for themselves. Everyone said they are concerned about the public,” Kerry said.

Better coordination between the entities encompassing public works will be worked on. Cross training in jobs and creating the opportunity for career advancement should be the end result of some of the changes.

Hussong-Johnson's job is new. It falls under public works.

A community service manager to oversee parks and recreation will be hired the latter part of January. It's possible that person could come from within the city ranks.

Funding for a paralegal is being allocated for January as well. That person has administrative qualities that a law clerk doesn't usually have.

The transient occupancy tax auditor will be part time, no benefits. The position is expected to pay for itself based on finding vacation rentals that are not paying their taxes.

In the budget is funding for a deputy public safety director who would be hired mid-year at a cost of about \$200,000 a year – which includes salary and benefits. This person would be second in command to Police-Fire Chief Brian Uhler, but is expected to spend 80 percent of the time at the firehouse.

(Uhler's title is changing to public safety director.)

A year ago, the three battalion chief positions were eliminated. Also in 2011, the fire chief was forced out. That left the rank of captain to oversee fire and medical calls. It's not working.

That is why more command structure is needed and the closing of a fire station is being discussed. The results of the multiday closure of Station 2 have not been released and it's not known if this will happen again or become a permanent situation.

It's possible the deputy public safety director position would not be needed if the city and Lake Valley Fire Protection District settle on a merger or consolidation of the two departments. That decision may not come for another four months as the two agencies negotiate.

Kerry has asked the city fire crew to think even bigger by

defining what world-class fire protection looks like on the South Shore. They are supposed to get back to her with an answer.

Money (\$25,000) is also in the budget for additional part-time seasonal employees who will mostly work at Lakeview Commons and remove snow on sidewalks.

An ongoing savings to the city will be that as of Oct. 1 every city employee will be paying his or her full share of the PERS contribution. That is a savings of about \$1 million this year for South Lake Tahoe.

While the city does have a systemic budget shortfall, sales tax and hotel tax numbers are beginning to show some life. Sales tax is up 8 percent since 2010, while TOT is 6 percent higher than two years ago. The city is projecting a 2½ percent increase in TOT in the 2012-13 budget.

Property tax is flat and remains a concern.

Kerry praised the council of 2003-04 for creating a 25 percent reserve. At that time it was zero. It grew to \$14 million by 2007 and will be at \$9.1 million if the 2012-13 budget is approved. And that figure would be more than 25 percent by \$2.1 million. That is why the \$700,000 being used to balance the budget is called unassigned excess reserves.

Kerry has studied South Tahoe's budgets for the last 30 years. The common theme is spending during good times – especially on staff, then slashing during bad times.

“What we need to do when things get better is continue the reserve. We need to not spend money on staff, but on the community,” Kerry said. She wants to put things in the ground, create programs – use taxpayer money on taxpayers. But she also thinks adding to the reserves in really good times is smart business so when it cycles around to the lean times the cuts are more balanced and less painful for staff and

residents.

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Note: All of these changes are dependent on the council approving them Tuesday. The Sept. 18 meeting is at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

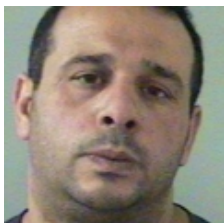
DiMatteo released from jail

By Kathryn Reed

Gino DiMatteo on Sept. 12 was released from El Dorado County jail in Placerville on bail.

Ted Long is DiMatteo's attorney of record. He is working with the Woelfel Law Firm in South Lake Tahoe. Rob Woelfel represented DiMatteo in court Wednesday because Long was out of town, however he was not immediately available for comment.

DiMatteo was arrested Aug. 31 on multiple drug charges and bribery. He has pleaded not guilty to all counts.



Gino
DiMatteo

DiMatteo until earlier this summer ran a medical marijuana dispensary in town. However, a felon was not supposed to ever be able to open such a business in South Lake Tahoe.

South Lake Tahoe officials said a background check, including fingerprints, was done on DiMatteo but nothing surfaced that would have stopped the process.

Even though those records should go back forever, DiMatteo's 1999 weapons conviction did not surface. This could in part be because DiMatteo also goes by Sergio Franco Ottomanelli and this was not known at the time.

The form DiMatteo had to fill out with the city asked if he had been convicted of a crime in the last 10 years. It did not ask if he went by any other names.

South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman Angela Swanson is the elected official the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office says DiMatteo bribed. She has not been charged with any crime.

Swanson is not returning calls. Neither is James Clinchard, the El Dorado County deputy district attorney prosecuting the case.

Californians face rival tax measures that involve school

funding

By Brooks Barnes, New York Times

LOS ANGELES – First came a competing save-our-schools ballot initiative, backed by a wealthy lawyer who proved more persistent than Gov. Jerry Brown had hoped. Then came a summer of minor financial embarrassments that handed Brown's opponents a narrative to use against him.



Now comes a nagging question: Against that backdrop, is Brown's \$8-billion-a-year proposed tax increase in trouble?

On Nov. 6, California voters will face their usual thicket of ballot measures, 11 in all this time around, ranging from a further crackdown on human trafficking to the mandatory labeling of genetically engineered food. But the most prominent by far is a budget-easing measure being pushed by Brown, who wants voters to approve tax increases to head off even more cuts to the state's already decimated education system – a loss would automatically set off about \$5.5 billion in cuts from public schools and \$500 million from the state's public colleges.

Proposition 30, as the measure is called, would increase statewide sales taxes by one-fourth of a cent and impose an income tax surcharge on Californians who earn more than \$250,000 annually. The sales tax increase would expire after four years, and the income tax component would last for seven years. Some of the new money would go to public safety programs, like the supervision of parolees.

Stepping up his campaign for the initiative on Aug. 15, Mr. Brown, 74, framed his argument in biblical terms, telling a

crowd gathered at a Sacramento high school, "To those who much has been given, much will be required," a reference to the Gospel of Luke. The week before last, campaigning in San Diego, he said that students would see "real suffering" if voters rejected the plan.

A defeat could have consequences for the state and for Brown even beyond forcing deeper cuts in a school system that already ranks 47th in the nation in per-pupil spending. So strenuously has the governor pushed the measure, and so closely has he become linked to it, that a defeat would most likely curb his influence, and might even invite a primary challenge from a younger generation of Democrats. As Brown approaches the end of his career, his broader legacy is also in play.

"This initiative has been defined as seminal to his governorship," said Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at USC.

But Proposition 30, supported by California's teachers' unions, has run into two snags, both of which are out of Brown's control.

One is a rival education measure, Proposition 38, which is backed by Molly Munger, a civil rights lawyer who is the daughter of Charles Munger, the billionaire vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway. Munger's initiative would raise income taxes on nearly all wage earners, although wealthy Californians would bear most of the burden.

Her measure would raise about \$10 billion a year, with the bulk going to schools and some going to pay down state debt. It would expire after 12 years and is supported by the California State PTA.

Brown made various attempts to eliminate competing ballot measures; some political experts say multiple tax-related measures could confuse voters, or at least make them weary of

tax issues. But Munger refused to back off, and she has so far poured \$19 million into her campaign. “There’s room for more than one idea about how to fix our schools, and on a topic this important, voters deserve a chance to choose,” Munger said in an email.

Nathan Ballard, a spokesman for Proposition 38, added, “Our TV campaign, focused on making sure voters know Prop. 38 is the only one that sends money directly to schools, will now start rolling out aggressively.”

Read the whole story

4 EDSO cars vandalized in Tahoe

Four El Dorado County sheriff’s vehicles were spray painted with graffiti while parked at the South Lake Tahoe substation Tuesday night.

“Some of the moniker names appear to be gang related. We assume it’s local kids,” Lt. Pete Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Although this occurred on Sept. 11 – a day most Americans pay tribute to law enforcement and firefighters, Van Arnum has no reason to believe the date played a role in the timing of the vandalism. However, anti law enforcement profanity was written on the vehicles.

The crime occurred between 10pm and 11:30pm.

Red paint was used to damage the vehicles. The vehicles were cleaned up Wednesday, but some to the detail now needs to be

fixed. So far, the damage is estimated at \$500.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Political parties become bilingual to attract Hispanic voters

By Padmananda Rama, NPR

If you grew up in a bilingual Hispanic household, listening to the Democratic and Republican conventions may have sounded a lot like home.

It's no coincidence that both parties highlighted politicians like Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro.

Rubio, whose parents are from Cuba, introduced Mitt Romney at the Republican convention; Castro, whose grandmother immigrated from Mexico, became the first Latino to give the Democrats' keynote address.

Their speeches, while delivered in English, included some Spanish. Even Mitt Romney's son Craig opened his speech in Spanish, a language he learned while working as a Mormon missionary.

In this year's presidential election, Latinos are a major voting bloc – and Spanish is getting its close-up.

“As a Latina mom of two children I'm raising bilingual, it's a great way of showing them why they need to continue speaking

Spanish,” writes Roxana Soto, author of the book *Bilingual is Better*, in an email interview with NPR.

“Listening to the various convention speakers sprinkle sentences and phrases in Spanish throughout their speeches is like music to my ears,” says Soto. “I feel like it will help elevate my first language to another level and will hopefully show others that just because we speak Spanish doesn’t mean we can’t speak English, too.”

Read the whole story

U.S. Forest Service approach to river restoration as diverse as the bodies of water

By Kathryn Reed

While the goals are the same – to restore the river channel to what it was before man first messed with it, improve habitat and enhance the entire ecosystem – the approach the U.S. Forest Service is taking on two projects in the Lake Tahoe Basin is drastically different.

Cold Creek runs through High Meadow on the South Shore. The terrain allowed for the channel to be rerouted. Grasses are already growing. The water table is rising, despite this being a summer following a minimal snow year. It is peaceful – even with crews still on site.

On the West Shore, Blackwood Creek runs through the canyon of the same name. It's rocky, rugged and looks like a torrential downpour could wipe out everything that stands in its way. There is no way to reroute the channel so other modifications are necessary.



Craig Oehrli with the U.S. Forest Service stands next to a bank in Blackwood Creek that shows the damage that will be repaired. Photos/Kathryn Reed

"The site conditions are dramatically different so the approach has to be different," Sue Norman, who is overseeing the teams doing the work, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It also means the time it takes to achieve the goals are different, too. In three years, High Meadow may look like construction crews were never there. It may take 10 to 15 years for Blackwood not to look like a "raw, exposed construction site," Norman said.

While both projects have something to do with water quality, that is not the overriding reason millions of dollars are being spent. If Lake Tahoe and its famously clear water didn't

exist, the work would still happen – assuming there was funding.

“The cumulative affects of land use in here is the driver (to do the work),” Craig Oehrli, who is managing the Blackwood site, says as he walks through the project area.

Ecological restoration is what drives the decision-makers within the Forest Service to go forward with projects of this magnitude.

High Meadows restoration started in 2010. The South Nevada Public Lands Management Act is financing the \$2.5 million project. Blackwood Canyon has been undergoing some form of restoration for more than 25 years. The fourth and final phase began in 2010. The entire \$10 million project is also funded by SNPLMA.

The bulk of the work on both sites will wrap up this fall, though monitoring will be ongoing to ensure the goals are met. Some minor work may need to be done in the spring.

Restoring the sections of the Upper Truckee River and Angora Creek that the USFS owns are the next projects; they will begin in 2013. The Upper Truckee project is a definite water quality improvement, as it delivers the most amount of sediment to Lake Tahoe. Blackwood is the second highest producer of sediment reaching the lake. However, Blackwood produces more sediment per square foot than the Upper Truckee watershed.

High Meadow

As the landscape changes, so does the animal life. Amphibian creatures are returning to this meadow at 7,843 feet. As the willows take hold, the riparian habitat will change, too.

Birds have begun to forage, deer prints are abundant, six-point bucks have come by and coyotes are everywhere, according

to the crew on site.

The channel looks more like it would have had grazing never occurred and the creek not been rerouted to accommodate the needs of the private property owners.

Now the creek will be able to flood the meadow. That hasn't happened since the late 1800s. Sediment will be deposited into the meadow instead of going downstream, the meadow will get needed moisture and the stream channel will not erode now that it has a meander to it.

Some pools are maybe 8-feet wide, but most of the channel is no wider than 4 feet. In mid-July water started running through the 3,600 feet of new channel.

"I hope this becomes a big wildflower meadow. It hasn't had the right water for it for a long time," Stephanie Heller, project manager, said as she surveyed the landscape. "Where we removed the dead trees the meadow has come back."

In the staging area logs are stacked and a mound of dirt is piled high. The wood will be used either as slash or chipped when the site is decommissioned. The dirt is from the 2010 excavation. Much of it is going to fill in the north fork.

Eighty of the 280 acres on this parcel have been restored.

The Forest Service acquired the land in 2001. It is estimated the grazing started in the 1880s and diversion of Cold Creek was in the 1890s. This watershed was also logged during the Comstock.

While the Forest Service is able to do the work it wants, there are 700 acres of private land touching this project area – including part of the road that leads to the meadow.

Blackwood

While heavy equipment is needed to move large boulders into

what will be a wild river when the water table rises, and rain and snow descend, the workers are more like surgeons than contractors. They are applying the prescription needed to heal this swath of land that was damaged by previous generations.

Rock was mined from the river to build roads for the 1960 Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley. Trees were logged with machinery in the 1950s and 1960s.

Photos dating to the 1930s help the Forest Service understand how the land and water functioned before the harvest of rock and wood began.

“There is no proof they ran a bulldozer upstream, but it an unnaturally straight channel,” Oehrli says he scampers through the rock terrain. He is almost giddy as he explains the work being done and how it will create not only a healthier river, but also an ecosystem that will thrive.

By the time the job is completed 20 acres of floodplain in this canyon between Homewood and Tahoe City will have been restored.

The crew is raising the floodplain. The floor of the river is 8 to 9 feet below the bank’s edge. It should be 3 to 4 feet.

The water is about 10 feet underground. It’s normal for Blackwood to go dry in August. It did so in July this year and still had water in September 2011.

“This is as dynamic of an area as we have in Lake Tahoe for a river process,” Oehrli said.

To keep that dynamic nature, large wood structures are being erected to resemble what would have naturally occurred. Oehrli had to point out the work because it looks so natural.

Farther up he stands next to an eroded bank that is taller than he is. Before the season is out it will have a human-made logjam against it to prevent erosion.

In 2008 and 2009 the Forest Service erected 13 rock-log flow deflection structures and 28 log-based floodplain roughness structures.

An erosion analysis was done that determined a 500-foot area was contributing 20 percent of the sediment problem. In all, 3,500 feet of the river has been rebuilt.

Oehrli takes a rock and without much effort it dissolves. This volcanic material is throughout the streambed.

"With a little water and weathering it melts in place," Oehrli explains. More sediment.

So much is going on this watershed that it doubles as a classroom. College instructors have brought their students to the area to learn about this ecosystem.

Changing the slope will slow down the energy and dissipate the water. It will mean reducing the sediment flowing into Lake Tahoe, especially after the California Tahoe Conservancy finishes its project that links the river to the lake.

Near where the log structure is in place it looks like a riverbed. A year ago the water was 5-feet deep where people were standing last week. Cottonwoods are beginning to sprout. And while the river has exposed herself here, she meanders in a gentle flow.

These are the changes the Forest Service was seeking when in it first went to work on Blackwood Creek.

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