

Brown upsets environmentalists with critique of CEQA

By David Siders, Sacramento Bee

If the full extent of Gov. Jerry Brown's frustration with the California Environmental Quality Act was not already clear, it became so last week, when he said, "I've never seen a CEQA exemption that I don't like."

The remark, Brown's plainest yet about the state's landmark environmental protection, reflects his emerging record. Less than two years into office, Brown has signed three bills limiting the ability to challenge projects under the act, and he is openly supportive of at least one more.

Meanwhile, Brown's top political adviser, Steve Glazer, is quietly advising a group of business leaders on other ways to modify the law.

Environmentalists are dismayed: This is the Democratic governor and champion of environmental causes whose election they once cheered.

"We've got a Democratic governor who ran on a platform of being an environmentalist coming in and undermining fundamental environmental laws," said Kathryn Phillips, director of Sierra Club California. "In the past we've had to worry more about Republicans than we have about Democrats, and now we have to worry about the Democratic governor who ran on a pro-environment platform."

Read the whole story

Think tank pursues separation-of-powers case in Nevada

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A libertarian think tank's legal team has filed an opening brief in a case before the state Supreme Court seeking to pursue its separation-of-powers lawsuit aimed at state lawmakers who also work in state government jobs.

The Nevada Policy Research Institute's Center for Justice and Constitutional Litigation filed the brief Friday in its case *Pojunis v. State of Nevada, et al.* – a lawsuit brought to restore adherence to the separation-of-powers clause found in Article 3, Section 1 of Nevada's constitution. It named then-state employee and current state Sen. Mo Denis, D-Las Vegas.

Shortly after the complaint was filed in November 2011, Denis announced his resignation from his computer technician job with the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada.

Carson City District Court Judge James Russell then ruled the case was made moot by Denis' resignation.

The CJCL is seeking to have the case reinstated by the Nevada Supreme Court, citing other lawmakers working in state or even local government jobs that could be affected by a decision in the matter.

Joseph Becker, chief legal officer and director of CJCL, said: "NPRI's Center for Justice and Constitutional Litigation is appealing this case to the Nevada Supreme Court because the

separation-of-powers clause at issue in this case is the same clause that the Nevada Supreme Court has written “is probably the most important single principle of government declaring and guaranteeing the liberties of the people.”

While the interpretation of the separation-of-powers clause may be moot in Denis’ case, Becker is arguing there is a compelling public interest in having the case resolved.

The separation-of-powers clause “makes it perfectly clear that a sitting legislator cannot hold a job in the executive or judicial branch of government, and yet, there are at least 14 conflicting attorney general’s opinions on this issue and no fewer than six current legislators who also hold jobs in the executive or judicial branch of state government,” Becker said.

Even Gov. Sandoval has asked the Supreme Court to “[s]ettle it once and for all,” he said.

“Upholding the Constitution’s separation-of-powers clause is a fundamental and ‘public’ legal issue, and we urge the Nevada Supreme Court to let this case proceed,” Becker said.

The lawsuit was filed by the CJCL on behalf of Las Vegas resident William Pojunis, who said at the time he was unemployed and was qualified for Denis’ position and wanted to apply for the job.

In his District Court filing seeking dismissal, Denis’ attorney said case law shows that Nevada courts only decide “cases that present live controversies.”

“Courts will not retain jurisdiction where ‘a live controversy becomes moot by the occurrence of subsequent events,’ and ‘will not make legal determinations that cannot affect the outcome of the case,’ ” said Denis attorney Bradley Schrager.

Placer County GOP invites locals to help with endorsements

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

The Placer County Republican Party is taking a big-tent approach to the local candidate endorsement process by inviting the party members to a new one-day selection convention.

The Aug. 18 event replaces the normal process, which limited participation to the 27 elected members of the county's Republican central committee. The convention will be used to select the candidates the party will endorse for the Nov. 6 election. Those local races are officially nonpartisan, but endorsements are typical from Republicans and Democrats.

"It has never been done before, to my knowledge," Placer County Republican Central Committee Chairman Jeff Atteberry said of the event. "It will bring a whole bunch more people into the process."

But Jon Fleischman, a conservative blogger and former state Republican Party executive director, questioned whether the delegates will add new voices or simply be pawns of existing players.

Under the plan, each central committee member can appoint up to 10 delegates.

Read the whole story

Report: Child poverty increasing in United States

By Saki Knafo, Huffington Post

The “Kids Count” report, one of the most widely cited surveys of how children are faring in the United States, hasn’t offered much good news in recent years, and this year’s edition offered few surprises.

Drawing mostly on U.S. Census data, the report noted that the percentage of children living in poverty increased by nearly a third between 2000 and 2010, and that it rose 16 percent between 2005 and 2010. The rate of children whose parents lack secure employment rose by 22 percent in the period roughly coinciding with the first two years of the global recession, beginning in 2008, the report said.

The annual report is published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, one of the largest private charitable organizations in the U.S. devoted to improving the lives of children.

As of 2010, according to the report, 1 out of 11 teens was neither in school nor working, and 4 out of 10 children were living in households where the cost of housing was high. The latest number of kids living in high-poverty neighborhoods had increased by 22 percent, compared with 2005.

By other measures, things didn’t look quite so bad. The number of high school students graduating on time has increased, as have reading and math scores across the country – though not by much. There were more children attending preschool in 2010 than in 2005, and there’s been a significant improvement in

the number of children who have health insurance, a change that the foundation attributes to expansions of Medicaid and the State Children's Health Improvement Program. (The Children's Health Insurance Reauthorization Act of 2009, signed by President Barack Obama, added an additional 4 million children and pregnant women to the program's rolls.)

Read the whole story

Meteorologists on the scene helping with forest fires

By Julian Granka, Sacramento Bee

National Weather Service meteorologist Mike Smith sits at a desk most of the year. In wildfire season, however, he takes on a new persona: He wears a fire suit and camps out for days at a time at ground zero of major forest fires.

Smith spent a week and a half this month as the resident meteorologist at the Mill fire in the Mendocino National Forest – the 55th fire where he was the meteorologist on scene.

“I got here the day after it burned 10,000 acres,” he said while he was finishing up his work there.

Smith and the weather experts like him are the “incident meteorologists” who inform firefighters of every nuance of the weather – from heat and humidity to changing gusts of wind. They make those calls from their tents and makeshift offices in the camps where fire crews refer to them as an “IMET.”

Such on-scene weather experts are essential to building

strategies to fight major wildfires. Using an IMET's information, fire chiefs determine the most effective and safe ways to contain raging fires.

"You belong to them," Smith said. "For any incident, any fire, you're the weather support for that particular site."

Julie Hutchinson, a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection battalion chief, explained the need for detailed information about past, current and future weather. "We can go in and remove vegetation, remove grass, brush, and timber ... but the one thing we have zero control over is the weather," she said.

So that the fire crews know what to expect, an IMET briefs them each morning before they head to the fire.

"They're writing the forecast for the shift package that the crew carries in their back pocket," said veteran IMET John Snook. As predictive services manager for the interagency Northern California Geographic Area Coordination Center, Snook now provides long-term decision-making support regarding wildfires.

During their 15-to-16-hour days, IMETs also provide constant weather guidance and outlooks for the coming days.

By getting out of the office, an IMET "can stand under a fir tree" and take local measurements of temperature, humidity and wind, said Snook. For a firsthand look, an IMET often gets even closer to the fire, doing the same assessments with the firefighters on the line.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County woman hospitalized after accident on Rubicon Trail

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

An El Dorado Hills woman remained in critical condition Monday after her vehicle rolled off the Rubicon Trail, causing a 2-acre forest fire and stranding as many as 300 other Jeeps participating in the Jeepers Jamboree.

Rachel Anne Gray, 21, was part of a large caravan of off-road enthusiasts driving north on an El Dorado County road early Saturday evening when the 1961 Jeep Willy she was driving careened off an embankment near Cadillac Hill, said Officer Dan Stark, a spokesman for the California Highway Patrol.

The vehicle overturned several times, ejecting Gray and a 34-year-old male passenger from Pilot Hill before catching fire, Stark said. Both Gray and the passenger were transported to the UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, he said.

A hospital spokeswoman confirmed Gray's condition early Monday afternoon. The passenger suffered minor injuries.

By early Monday morning, the fire was contained and the rugged, rocky road reopened.

Lacey Stiles, an employee of the Georgetown-based event, said the trail was reopened at 7am thanks to the U.S. Forest Service, which is battling the fire.

While some of the Jeeps turned back, most – lacking enough fuel for the return trip – waited out the fire before completing the final three to four hours of the trip toward Lake Tahoe.

Neighborhood bear killed on Homewood beach

By KRNV-TV

HOMEWOOD- — A Placer County sheriff's deputy says a bear was found shot and killed on a beach in the Homewood area Sunday night.

The deputy told News 4 the investigation is now in the hands of the California Department of Fish and Game.

According to Placer County authorities, a person can obtain a permit to shoot and kill a bear. A permit can only be issued if there is a reason; if a bear is a problem bear or has done damage to property. If there was no permit, Placer County authorities say this would be considered illegal.

According to bear advocates, this bear has been in the area for years. They says the bear's name was Sunny and it was a mascot for the BEAR League, a bear advocacy group in the Lake Tahoe area.

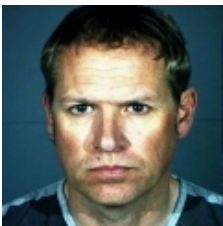
5-year prison sentence for former El Dorado County

sergeant

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

The former president of the El Dorado County Deputy Sheriff's Association has been sentenced to five years in state prison for embezzling more than \$300,000 over six years from the association.

Attorney General Kamala D. Harris and El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson announced the sentencing of Donald Philip Atkinson, a retired El Dorado County sheriff's sergeant. Atkinson pleaded no contest last month and was sentenced today in El Dorado Superior Court on three felony counts of embezzlement, elder fraud and perjury.



Don
Atkinson

He was ordered by the court to pay more than \$400,000 in restitution. While in state prison and on parole, Atkinson has agreed to pay \$1,000 per month from his retirement fund to the victims.

Authorities said Atkinson opened bank accounts in his name and submitted forged documents to the Deputy Sheriff's Association to justify payments made to him and his companies. Much of the money was obtained through ATM withdrawals and checks payable to Atkinson, which made his actions difficult for auditors to trace, according to an Attorney General's Office news release.

The case was investigated by the El Dorado County District

Attorney's Office with support from the Attorney General's Office. The investigation showed that Atkinson falsified Fair Political Practice Commission forms and submitted forged documents to the Deputy Sheriff's Association.

Read the whole story

Mountain lion spotted near elementary school in Meyers

A mountain lion was seen near the Environmental Magnet School in Meyers on Monday morning.

El Dorado County sheriff's officials said the animal was walking in someone's front yard about 9am July 30.

"It did not appear threatening or injured, and then walked away from the area," sheriff's Lt. Pete Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He is asking people to be on alert, especially with the number of children in the area playing at the school and attending the nearby child care center.

This is the second mountain lion sighting in the county in the past few weeks. The other was near the meadow area between Hunkpapa and Golden Bear Trail.

Mountain lions are native to this area, and travel and hunt throughout the Sierra and Lake Tahoe Basin.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Tourism agency puts up \$600,000 for Reno Air Races

By Chris Ciarlo, KTVN-TV

It's now official, the 49th annual National Championship Air Races will take to the Reno skies once again this year, now that they have the funding they need – thanks to a \$600,000 sponsorship from the Nevada Commission On Tourism.

After last year's crash, the air races insurance premium spiked nearly \$2 million, but when the NCOT announced their sponsorship, it gave the air races the green light.

"From the casino resort community, community leaders and that kind of stuff, they wanted to know that we are working hard and that we're committed to making sure this event was going to be as successful as it's been in the past and safer than it ever has," said Mike Draper with R&R Partners.

Draper said the Air Racing Association has been able to meet both goals and that's why they are seeing the support pour in.

Read the whole story