

Workshop focuses on revamping Placer County in Tahoe

As part of continuing public outreach efforts, Placer County will host its second community workshop for the Tahoe Basin Community Plan update on June 13.

There are four county working groups representing four plan areas which will encompass the Tahoe Basin Community Plan boundary within Placer County's portion of the basin. The plan areas are:

West Shore Plan Area, which includes Homewood, Sunnyside and Tahoma;

Greater Tahoe City Plan Area, which includes Tahoe City, Lake Forest, Dollar Hill and the Tahoe City Gateway;

North Tahoe West Plan Area, which includes Carnelian Bay and Tahoe Vista; and

North Tahoe East Plan Area, which includes Kings Beach and Stateline.

The June 13 meeting is from 6-9pm at the North Tahoe North Tahoe Event Center, 8318 North Lake Blvd., Kings Beach.

Nonpartisan primary in

California challenges 2-party system

By Jennifer Medina, New York Times

THOUSAND OAKS — When new redistricting maps changed the boundaries of this Congressional district to give Democrats a slight edge for the first time in decades, party loyalists were elated.



But now it seems possible that come November there will not even be a Democrat on the ballot. On Tuesday, for the first time, California voters will participate in a nonpartisan primary. Instead of the top candidate from each party advancing to the general election, the two candidates with the most votes will be placed on the November ballot, regardless of party affiliation.

This year will be the first test of a new kind of election aimed at breaking the partisan gridlock that has seized Congress and state legislatures all over the country. When the change was presented to California voters by a ballot initiative in 2010, advocates said it would usher in a new era that embraced politicians who would be more pragmatic than ideological.

"The elected officials in Sacramento are often on the far left and far right and certainly not reflective of the majority of people in the state," said Aaron McLearn, who worked on the change as an aide to Arnold Schwarzenegger, then the governor, and is now a political consultant. "What we wanted is a lot more candidates coming in even if they are not anointed by the party. It may take a few cycles to manifest itself, but you will have wild cards who can make some real change in the

Capitol.”

How the changes will play out on Election Day is still unclear. Much will depend on how many people vote and who those voters are. Many analysts expect that turnout will continue to be low and will largely consist of the party faithful, so it remains to be seen whether candidates who get the voters to the polls are simply the most partisan of the pack.

Read the whole story

London company clears hurdle to take over 3 Nevada sportsbooks

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

London-based William Hill PLC, assuring gaming regulators there would be no loss of jobs, won a unanimous recommendation Thursday to take over Lucky's, Leroy's and Club Cal Neva sportsbook operations in Nevada.

The Gaming Control Board's blessing of the \$53 million acquisition, first announced a year ago, now goes before the Nevada Gaming Commission on June 21 for final approval and licensing.

William Hill officials told regulators they hope to begin putting their brand on 164 sportsbooks and kiosks statewide before month's end, including 26 Leroy's Sportsbook and 31 Cal Neva locations in Northern Nevada along with Lucky's Race & Sports Book operations in John Ascuaga's Nugget, the Grand

Sierra Resort and Casino and Casino Fandango in Carson City.

James Henderson, director of retail sales, sought to dispell any concern over closing sites and eliminating jobs.

"The answer is a simple 'No,'" Henderson told the three-person board. "We plan to keep them all and most certainly look to increase them. There are huge opportunities to grow these businesses. We see Nevada as an entry point to other U.S. opportunities as they arise."

Ralph Topping, William Hill CEO, told regulators that 92 percent of his company's revenues are generated in the United Kingdom, where the company is the biggest operator, and he is looking for opportunity beyond those borders.

"The United States is most interesting to us," he said.

Sports betting is currently limited to a handful of states led by Nevada, which last year took in \$2.3 billion in sportsbook revenue, the most in the past five years, according to Gaming Control Board data.

In his testimony, Topping said the Lucky's, Leroy's and Cal Neva sportsbook staffs will be welcomed into William Hill, which offers "extensive" training in customer service.

"For us, highly motivated, energized employees are the best asset of any company," he said. "There's no room for complacency in our company. It's not a fluke we have highly motivated, creative people, and people who live by these principles are rewarded accordingly."

An Internet search found a report by the London Evening Standard that William Hill pulled out of Italy in 2008 after just two years and, according to an Irish Times report, closed 14 sportsbook locations in Ireland in 2009, resulting in 53 lost jobs.

Additionally, the company in 2010 cut 150 jobs at its centers

in the United Kingdom cities of Leeds and Sheffield, according to proactiveinvestors.co.uk.

William Hill executives Thursday declined to speak beyond their testimony before the Gaming Control Board. In a written statement released to the media afterward, Topping said, "We now look forward to our hearing with the Gaming Commission. Nevada regulators have been extremely fair and detailed in their assessment of our entry into the state, and we are grateful for their decision today."

Reno gaming analyst Ken Adams said he expects there will be no cuts in Nevada by William Hill.

"The sportsbook employees will be just fine. (William Hill) didn't pay \$50 million thinking they didn't have a business opportunity here," Adams said. "And besides, they see the possibility of being on the ground floor with Internet gaming in the U.S."

As a sports-betting company begun in 1934, William Hill brings "a broader table of opportunity" to Nevada, Adams said, adding, "They've got a lot of experience. They know what they're doing."

Topping said William Hill will establish state headquarters in Las Vegas with Jeff Siri, CEO of the Club Cal Neva in Reno, stepping down from that post to become chief operating officer of William Hill in Nevada.

William Hill PLC is traded on the London Stock Exchange, and on Thursday, executives outlined the company's finances and breadth, including:

- 16,000 employees worldwide.
- \$1.3 billion in revenues in 2011.
- 25 percent share of the United Kingdom market, where William Hill is the biggest bookmaker with 2,350 locations.

- \$183 million in cash on hand at the end of 2011.

Topping told regulators that profits were held down last year by tax increases, as well as the fact that 2011 was compared with 2010, the year of soccer's World Cup, a major betting event. But Topping told Nevada regulators his company has been successful with its innovations, including a growing online business, mobile sportsbook launched last year and a betting app this spring.

William Hill would not be the first foreign business to enter the gaming industry in Nevada, according to the Gaming Control Board. Several other foreign companies are already in the state, including Crown Casinos of Australia and Dubai World in Las Vegas, and gaming manufacturers Lottomatica of Italy and Konami of Japan.

LTWC takes in bear cubs as Department of Fish Game investigates why man had them

By Kate Mather, Los Angeles Times

All the man was trying to do, he told authorities, was find the bear cubs a good home.

California Department of Fish and Game wardens are investigating a Northern California man found Wednesday outside a gas station with two baby black bears in a cage, department spokesman Patrick Foy said.

A passerby in North San Juan, 75 miles northeast of Sacramento, called a Fish and Game poaching line and said the

man was selling the bears, according to Foy. Nevada County sheriff's deputies and a game warden went to the Sierra Super Stop, where the man told authorities he was "just trying to find them a good home."

The reason, he said, was because he had shot their mother on his property a few days before and assumed she eventually died.

"He told us he had shot the mother bear in self-defense and the mother bear ran off, leaving the cubs behind," Foy said. "He apparently kept the cubs for a couple of days, then made his decision."

Authorities went to the man's property to look for the mother bear's body, Foy said, but found no sign of her. The man had no injuries indicating a bear encounter.

"There's a lot of parts to this person's story that don't add up," Foy said.

Experts guess the cubs, a male and female that weigh 11 and 13 pounds, are 5 to 6 months old. Although they're in good health, they are too young to be released into the wild, Foy said, which is why they will spend several months at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care.

Read the whole story

California cuts threaten universities

By Jennifer Medina, New York Times

LOS ANGELES – Class sizes have increased, courses have been cut and tuition has been raised – repeatedly. Fewer colleges are offering summer classes. Administrators rely increasingly on higher tuition from out-of-staters. And there are signs it could get worse: If a tax increase proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown is not approved this year, officials say they will be forced to consider draconian cuts like eliminating entire schools or programs.

For generations, the University of California system – home to such globally renowned institutions as Berkeley and U.C.L.A. – has been widely recognized as perhaps the best example of what public universities could be. Along with the California State University system and the state's vast number of community colleges, higher education options here have long been the envy of other states.

But after years, and even decades, of budget cutbacks from the state, that reputation is under increasing threat. University leaders, who had responded typically to earlier budget cuts with assurances that their institutions were still in top form, now are sounding the alarm. In trying to rally support, they openly worry that their schools do not offer the same quality of education as a decade ago.

"I'd be lying if I said what we offer students hasn't been changed and that there hasn't been a degradation of the learning environment," said Timothy White, the chancellor of UC Riverside, which has had record growth in recent years. Last year, plans to open a medical school on the campus were shelved after state budget cuts.

While there are more students than ever, the number of academic advisers has dropped to 300, from 500 a few years ago, for more than 18,000 undergraduates. Courses that used to require four writing assignments now demand half that because professors have fewer assistants to help them with grading papers, something other campuses have implemented as well.

While no one is arguing that cutting higher education spending is a good thing, some say that the state budget crisis makes it necessary – and may provide an opportunity for needed changes.

Jon Coupal, the president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, which strongly opposes the proposed tax increase, said the colleges should do more to show they are cutting spending, like reducing pay for top administrators or closing programs that do not directly benefit the state.

Read the whole story

CalFire warns people about activities that could lead to wildfire

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Fire officials urge property owners to use caution when engaged in activities such as clearing defensible space and burning debris piles.

Every spring, fire agencies remind homeowners of the importance of clearing dead grass and brush 100 feet from homes to prepare for the fire season, but how they clear this space is equally important to preventing fires, according to a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection news release.

The spark from a metal lawn mower blade against a rock can easily ignite a wildfire.

“While it’s important to clear dead grass and brush, we don’t want homeowners doing the right thing the wrong way,” Cal Fire director Chief Ken Pimilott said in a wirtten statement.

Two weeks ago, a wildfire known as the Banner Fire was sparked by unsafe equipment use, charring 5,321 acres just east of Julian in San Diego County, officials said. They urge homeowners to take advantage of this week’s cooler weather to clear any dead or dying vegetation before temperatures rise again.

Officials with Cal Fire’s Amador-El Dorado Unit also remind property owners to be careful when burning yard waste. Citing a recent increase in escaped vegetation debris pile burns, they remind residents that anyone who loses control of a burn pile can be cited and billed for the cost of putting out the fire.

Read the whole story

License of Incline contractor revoked by state

By Northern Nevada Business Weekly

The Nevada State Board of Contractors has revoked the licenses of two Northern Nevada contractors and disciplined a third.

The board revoked the license of G L & R Quality Services, a carpentry and remodeling contractor in Reno. State officials said the company abandoned a job, acted beyond the scope of its license, misrepresented material facts and committed several other violations.

The company also was fined \$23,450. The license of Eric Hosmer, who worked as Blue Water Remodeling in Incline Village, was revoked after he was convicted of embezzlement from a Lake Tahoe-area homeowner. He also was fined \$10,750.

R & A Drain Service & Plumbing Repair of Reno, meanwhile, was fined \$500 for willful disregard of building laws and failure to establish financial responsibility.

Votes not all counted in Assembly races

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

Beth Gaines and Ken Cooley knew Wednesday that they'd won a spot on the November ballot for a Sacramento-area Assembly seat – but they couldn't be sure who they'll run against.



The 6th and 8th Assembly districts were left hanging, with second-place finishers to be decided by the counting of an undetermined number of dropped-off, mailed-in or provisional ballots received on election day.

Under California's new top-two primary system, the two highest vote-getters in legislative and congressional primary elections will square off in November, even if they're from the same party.

Gaines, an incumbent Republican assemblywoman from Rocklin, doesn't yet know whether she'll be challenged by a Democrat or a Republican in the 6th District.

Democrat Regy Bronner, a retired business executive, has no hope of overcoming Gaines for first, but he held a lead of less than one percentage point Wednesday over Republican Andy Pugno for the second spot.

The three candidates seek the seat of a newly drawn Assembly district based in Placer County but extending into Folsom, Fair Oaks, Orangevale and El Dorado Hills.

Placer County had an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 ballots left uncounted Wednesday, but the number affecting the 6th Assembly District was not known.

Read the whole story

Tobacco industry's ad blitz helps sink ballot measure

By Jim Christie, Reuters

SAN FRANCISCO – California voters narrowly rejected a ballot measure that would have added a \$1 tax to a pack of cigarettes in the state's primary election Tuesday, an outcome observers attributed to a \$47 million ad blitz by the tobacco industry.

The measure, known as Proposition 29, was defeated 50.8 percent to 49.2 percent on a day of light voter turnout, according to election results posted on Wednesday by California's secretary of state. Some absentee and other ballots remained to be counted.

The result reflected a long-standing political divide in California, with San Francisco Bay area counties heavily supporting the measure, while conservative suburban counties

in more populous Southern California overwhelmingly opposed it.

Revenue from the proposed tax, estimated at \$735 million in its first year, would have supported medical research on tobacco-related diseases and programs to prevent and control tobacco use.

The measure, championed, among others, by the American Cancer Society and cycling great and cancer survivor Lance Armstrong, had enjoyed a commanding lead in polls earlier in the year.

But opponents, led by Altria's Philip Morris and Reynolds American Inc, vastly outspent their rivals, blanketing the airwaves in much of the state in recent weeks with a message that cast doubt on how the new tax revenues would be spent.

The result mimicked a 2006 effort at increasing tobacco taxes, which voters also rejected after a fierce industry-sponsored ad campaign.

California voters last approved a measure to increase the state's tobacco tax in 1998. It narrowly passed.

S. Tahoe finance director a rookie in public sector

By Kathryn Reed

Experience with financial forecasting is one of the driving reasons why Michael Nakama has been hired to be South Lake Tahoe's finance director.

Nakama begins the job that comes with a \$130,000 paycheck on June 11.

The vacancy was created when Christine Vuletich left in February to work for Douglas County. She was making \$140,000 when she departed.



Michael
Nakama

Nakama was most recently working for Southern California Edison before being downsized earlier this year. When South Tahoe picked him up, Nakama was still unemployed.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke said on paper Nakama was one of the top three candidates. There was a large applicant pool, with a few candidates from the South Shore. However, no locals made it to the final round.

"Staff liked him the most. He is very analytical," O'Rourke said of Nakama.

Assistant City Manager Nancy Kerry was also involved in the hiring because she will be his boss when O'Rourke leaves at the end of the month for a job in Washington. The City Council had also been kept in the loop during the hiring process because of the unique situation of a key department head being brought on by someone who will not be around for long.

"His forte is financial analysis and budgeting. He will be a huge asset for the city," O'Rourke said.

While Nakama does not have experience in the public sector, O'Rourke sees this as a good thing. His experience with larger companies like UNIFI Companies and American Golf and Airport

Corporation are seen as assets.

Like Vuletich, Nakama will also be in charge of overseeing the IT department and the airport. He has experience in both.

Another plus is Nakama has been involved with financial system conversions, according to O'Rourke.

The city is looking to overhaul its financial software because what is used now is like having an abacus. Nakama will be a key player is reviewing the request for proposals and picking what system the city goes with.

Between a software system that allows standard financial reports to be run and a finance guy who knows how to crunch numbers both in terms of understanding the meaning of the numbers and being able to produce answers based on what's in the budget and what could be coming down the pike, O'Rourke is confident Nakama is the piece to the management team the city had been missing.

Even though Nakama is used to the flat land and warmth – being from Hawaii, getting an MBA from Stanford and living in the Los Angeles area – he likes the outdoors.

When he interviewed he spent an extra day in the area, on his own dime. He swam at the rec center, drove around the lake and went for a run.

"He is a triathlon type," O'Rourke said in describing Nakama.

Nakama did not return phone calls.

