

Study: Gaming industry pros optimistic about 2012

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

A survey of more than 1,150 gaming industry professionals at last week's Global Gaming Expo finds most participants are optimistic that 2012 will be a good year for the industry.

"These survey results indicate that there are exciting times ahead for the gaming industry," Courtney Muller, senior vice president with expo producer Reed Exhibitions, said in a news release.

According to the survey, 77 percent of respondents feel positive about the direction of the casino industry in 2012 and 80 percent believe the company at which they work will be stronger next year. The survey said 76 percent are not concerned about their future employment situation.

Randall A. Fine, managing director of The Fine Point Group, a casino management and advisory company, told those attending the final session at G2E that they should never stop innovating their products.

Read the whole story

\$11 bil. water bond may be too much for voters

By Jim Christie, Reuters

Concerned about voter angst over California's finances, lawmakers say they may need to overhaul a ballot measure that would provide \$11.1 billion for a slew of long-awaited water projects.

Lawmakers from both parties say the water projects are urgently needed, but the proposed bond measure's price tag may make it a non-starter with voters at a time when the state is facing ongoing budget woes.

California is prone to drought, and the state's aging system of reservoirs and aqueducts that distributes water to both urban and agricultural users needs a number of upgrades.

But voters outside of the state's agricultural centers are not particularly concerned about water, and lawmakers sense they may reject a massive bond that would add to the state's debt burden.

California already devotes 7.8 percent of its general fund to debt service, according to the state treasurer's office. Any further increase in the debt burden would put added pressure on schools, universities and other public services that have already seen their budgets slashed dramatically.

"There's a growing concern that a water bond of this size is a very tough sell," said Joe Simitian, a Democratic state Senator.

Republican Assemblyman Kevin Jeffries agrees: "Now we have a water bond that is so large that I think it's going to be very difficult for the public to support it."

Read the whole story

Nevada controller creates Fraud Hotline

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada State Controller Kim Wallin announced last week that a Fraud Hotline has been posted on her agency's website in order to assist the public and state employees in reporting questionable practices.

Wallin said the link will send information directly to her for review. The types of practices that can be brought to her agency's attention include tax fraud, Medicaid fraud and over-billing by government contractors.

"The Fraud Hotline link will be a way for the public and state employees to provide tips on fraudulent activities so we can crack down on scam artists and save taxpayer money," Wallin said. "The governor's website recently removed a similar link so I felt it was critical to take this responsibility on and make the link a feature of the Controller's website."

Mary-Sarah Kinner, a spokeswoman for the governor's office, said the fraud link on the previous state website did not migrate to the new website unveiled recently. But typing the word "fraud" into the state website search function generates the link as the first search result, which goes to the Fight Fraud website operated by the Nevada Department of Business and Industry, she said.

Wallin said that nationwide, Medicare, Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credit and Unemployment payments account for \$87.5 billion in improper payments. The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, in its "2010 Report to the Nations on Occupational Fraud and Abuse," estimated that the typical organization loses 5 percent of its annual revenue to fraud. Government organizations are the third most frequent victim of fraud

after banking and manufacturing.

Wallin said she has not had such a link on her website previously, but decided to add it when the link on the main state of Nevada webpage disappeared.

“It’s something that needs to be done, we have to do it,” she said. “And I think in one way it is probably a good thing ..., especially for employees reporting. They work for the governor, they don’t work for me. So that way their identities are protected and it is an impartial person looking at it.”

Wallin said she has been reviewing instances of potential fraud brought to her attention internally but has not had a fraud link previously.

The Controller’s office will promote the Fraud Hotline link through service providers and local governments. Each tip through the Hotline will be reviewed internally for potential investigation. Identities will be kept confidential.

The controller, one of the state’s six constitutional officers, is the chief fiscal officer and administers the state’s accounting system and debt collection program. The state Controller’s Office mission is to advance accountability, continuity, and efficiency in the state’s financial operations.

**Calif. Assembly rejects
requests for more info on**

spending

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

The Assembly has balked at releasing additional information about the office spending of its 80 members.

The decision comes in the wake of an analysis by The Bee that concluded member expenditures released Aug. 26 underreported the amount of money spent to run legislators' offices and overreported committee spending.

The gap was created partly by the use of committee funds to pay for legislators' personal staff. Numerous employees were switched from legislators' staff payrolls to committee, caucus or leadership payrolls this year, records showed.

The Bee requested documents identifying the employees transferred and specifying when those moves took effect. The Assembly declined this week, citing state law that permits it to withhold legislative medical, personnel, correspondence or draft documents.

More than two dozen Democratic aides were moved from office to committee or leadership ledgers, staff rosters showed. Transfer requests tended to be filed in the six weeks before the Assembly released its member expenditure records Aug. 26.

Read the whole story

Grant to fight underage

drinking, alcohol sales on North Shore

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

The Placer County Sheriff's Office has announced that it will use a \$40,000 grant from the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control to fight underage drinking and alcohol sales to minors.

The problem was apparent during a recent Sheriff's Office decoy operation in the Lake Tahoe area, where 40 percent of the businesses visited sold alcohol to the decoys, according to a Sheriff's Office news release.

The grant will assist in promoting awareness and providing training in alcohol-related crimes and their effect on schools, parents and students countywide. Anyone who sells or furnishes alcohol to a minor faces a fine of \$250 and up to 24 hours of community service. If a business sells alcohol to a minor, the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control can take administrative action on the business' alcoholic beverage license, impose a fine, or both.

Read the whole story

East Shore real estate market outperforms rest of basin

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

The East Shore continued to outperform the rest of the Lake

Tahoe real estate market, which saw home values fall overall during the third quarter.

The median price for a single-family home in Lake Tahoe fell 10 percent to \$370,500 from July to September, according to Chase International's latest housing report. Average price also fell to \$630,984 –an 11 percent drop. Unit sales fell by 4 percent to 712 units.

One bright spot was the East Shore, which continued its positive pace from the second quarter. The median price for an East Shore home in the third quarter was \$575,000, up 7 percent from the previous quarter. East Shore also posted a 51 percent jump in average price to \$1.4 million.

Read the whole story

A year later – Lahontan, El Dorado County still at odds

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors say there is no way the county has the money to pay for the unfunded mandate to reduce sediment from entering Lake Tahoe. It's the same message they delivered in 2010.

The supes met Oct. 11 in South Lake Tahoe for their once-a-year venture outside the West Slope. Just like last year Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board Executive Director Harold Singer addressed the five electeds.



Harold Singer

And just like 2010, it was a sparring match between he who makes the rules and those who must carry them out.

The big picture is the total maximum daily load – the EPA policy funneled to the state that regional water boards pass on to local jurisdictions. It's about reducing fine sediment from reaching any major body of water. It's not just a Lake Tahoe thing.

Singer, though, also brought up how the county's stormwater permit with Lahontan expired a year ago. They are usually good for five years. It's possible the water board will grant a new permit at its December meeting in South Lake Tahoe.

Supervisor Ray Nutting is perplexed Lahontan can have a policy when it does not know what the effects of the runoff from U.S. Forest Service owned land is. The Forest Service owns about 80 percent of the acreage in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Nutting was visibly shocked and dismayed to learn Lahontan's baseline year for sediment is 2003 when the state agency has been in existence since the 1960s.

Supervisor Jack Sweeney said, "I find the TMDL rather subjective. I think we are wishing for something. I'm not sure it is scientifically achievable or economically achievable. I feel bullied into this."

Singer kept emphasizing it is the urban areas that are making Lake Tahoe less clear than years gone by, that is why the counties and city in the basin are being tasked with reducing

what runs off from the land in their jurisdictions.

He said his agency would like to monitor the various types of best management practices being used in various locations to see what works so the ones with the most gains in terms of reducing sediment can be used elsewhere in the basin.

Singer also acknowledged that if significant changes made to the landscape to reduce fine sediment from reaching Lake Tahoe do not equate to substantial improvements in lake clarity, Lahontan will have to reassess what it is asking jurisdictions to do.

LTVA finalizing website, ready to promote winter on S. Shore

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – A mountain biker navigating the thin Flume Trail with Sand Harbor in the background – that's the type of image South Shore tourism officials want people to think of when they are planning their next trip to Tahoe.

Recreation – it's the mantra they are embracing, with gaming taking a back seat.

With nearly \$300,000 spent overhauling Lake Tahoe Visitor Centers' website, the final tweaks are being made so it is ready to go live by Dec. 1. The LTVA board was given an update on the site at Thursday's meeting, with the folks from Duncan/Channon phoning in the presentation, but able to manipulate the screen from their San Francisco offices.



LTVA wants the new website to focus on recreation.

Play, Sleep, Eat, Events, Deals, Blog – those are the categories on the website. But not all board members think they are the best.

John Koster, Harrah's-Harveys rep on the board, said, "Sleep seems incredibly boring."

Sleep, he said, is not the word that comes to his mind when thinking about lodging.

Mindi Befu, who is on the LTVA's marketing committee, said it is important to pick words that people intuitively understand as well as that help with search engine optimization.

The board does want to see what the final photo selections are because they were not thrilled with some of the placeholders – like the one of Emerald Bay that had a dead tree in the foreground.

"I want photos that you can't duplicate elsewhere," Koster said.

Carol Chaplin, executive director of LTVA, after the Oct. 13 meeting told *Lake Tahoe News* what people will notice most with the new site compared to the current site is more continuous fresh content, outstanding photography and video, and a look that is more current.

Noble Studios in Reno will be adding the content. Blogs will be in place for people to write about their passions.

“It will be more dynamic overall,” Chaplin said.



The logo LTVA will use to promote the South Shore.

The board also agreed to the logo changes, with the T in Tahoe not being straight across as the main change from previous versions.

Open meeting law violation

The winter ad campaign was not on the posted agenda, but was added by the board members at the meeting. The same scenario transpired regarding discussing sending a letter supporting alternative 2 for the Washoe Meadows golf course-Upper Truckee River proposal.

Board member Tom Davis, South Lake Tahoe's rep to the board, said he thought doing so would violate the Brown Act – which even though LTVA is based in Nevada, must still adhere to because of receiving California dollars and doing business in the state. To that, board President Pat Ronan, the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association's LTVA rep, said, “We've done it before.”

The board's conclusion is they could add things to the agenda, discuss them, but not take action. But they took action on

both items – so the Brown Act was violated because the public was not informed of the agenda items 72 hours in advance of the meeting as is required per the law. Even discussing the add-ons is a violation.

This could invalidate the decisions regarding the winter ad campaign and sending the letter.

Winter ad campaign

While the LTVA has not had its own winter ad campaign in years, it is going to this year. Through its affiliation with Ski Lake Tahoe, LTVA has had a voice in the past. Plus, the individual ski resorts are out in force touting their slopes.



Boarding often involves chilling, especially at Sierra -- a message LTVA will convey.
Photo/LTN file

With about \$200,000 in carryover dollars for advertising, the board agreed to buy a billboard ad in San Francisco for January-February-March. This will use about half those dollars.

Tied to that billboard will likely be a promotional campaign with a Bay Area radio station that will include give-aways to the South Shore.

Laura Davis, with Duncan/Channon, told LTVA that billboard receives 756,000 impressions a week.

In changing policy with having a winter campaign, Chaplin said, "We felt we hadn't talked to those people directly in a long time. We feel a need to do our own thing year-round."

Drawing Nevada's political boundaries coming down to the wire

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – The business of drawing new political boundaries will now get under way by three court-appointed special masters following two days of public hearings on what Nevada's legislative and congressional districts should look like for the next decade.

The clock is ticking.

The special masters, Carson City Clerk-Recorder Alan Glover, Las Vegas attorney Thomas Sheets and former legislative Research Director Bob Erickson, have until then end of next week to draw four congressional and 63 legislative districts based on the 2010 U.S. Census data as directed by Carson City District Judge James Todd Russell last month.

Russell will receive the maps on Oct. 21 and release them to the public. By mid-November he will decide whether to accept them or send them back to the special masters for refinement.

All this is happening as the 2012 election season moves ever

closer. A number of people have announced they are running for one of the four congressional seats even though there are no districts yet to run in.

The redistricting process outlined by Russell will continue even as the Nevada Supreme Court has decided to weigh in on the issue, which ended up in the courts after the Democrat-controlled Legislature failed to reach a compromise with Republicans on new district lines.

Gov. Brian Sandoval, who vetoed two Democrat-sponsored redistricting bills in the 2011 legislative session, weighed in on the controversy again today when asked, saying there is no reason to call the Legislature back into session to approve new maps. On Monday he said he had not had any conversations with lawmakers about calling them back to deal with redistricting.

"There are no facts and circumstances at this time that would justify calling a special session," he said.

Sandoval said he has faith in the judicial system, and the process outlined by Russell, to resolve the impasse.

While the Supreme Court has scheduled oral arguments for Nov. 14 on questions raised by Secretary of State Ross Miller, it did not stop the process set up by Russell to develop new maps. In his petition filed with the court, Miller argues the state constitution makes it clear that it is the responsibility of the Legislature to draw the political boundaries, not the courts.

Because the court refused to block the process outlined by Russell, the special masters heard public testimony Monday in Las Vegas and Tuesday in Carson City on how the maps should be drawn. Twenty-two speakers testified in Las Vegas. Only a handful participated in Carson City.

One major issue for the special masters is whether to draw an

urban Las Vegas congressional district that would include much of the Hispanic community. Democrats in their proposed maps split the Hispanic vote among three congressional districts, while Republicans are advocating for creating a single district with a large percentage of Hispanic voters.

At the hearing in Carson City, Democrat Forrest Darby presented a new set of maps for the masters to consider, saying the Southern Nevada congressional districts included in the plan would allow either the Republicans or Democrats to win any or all of the three.

"We really believe this is a fair map," he said.

Darby said he has also petitioned Russell to reconsider his requirement that the four congressional seats have virtually no population deviation. A slight deviation would make for cleaner and more logical districts, he said.

"You cannot get down to one person," Darby said. "If you do you will have horrible, ugly boundary lines, period."

Also testifying was state Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Gardnerville, who recommended that the special masters look at Assembly Bill 570, the measure creating the 13 new political boundaries for the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents, as a starting point to draw congressional and legislative districts. The bill passed both houses of the Legislature unanimously and was signed into law by Sandoval, he said.

"I voted for it. For me it preserved the communities of interest, it did not pack individuals, it also created a situation where the deviation was only 0.37 percent in the creation of those 13 districts," Settelmeyer said.

Former Assemblyman Bernie Anderson, a Democrat from Sparks, said the special masters are qualified to address the issue, but that redistricting is not a responsibility of the court

system.

“I am of the opinion, however, that you do not have the authority to do this,” he said. “And I believe it is a question of separation of powers. And my base view is I want to make sure that does get into the record. That this is a legislative issue and should be left to the Legislature to take care of.”

Sheets asked what the answer is to resolving the redistricting issue when the Legislature cannot agree.

“I guess we are an imperfect solution to this problem that seems to have no other resolution if you have intractable parties,” he said.

Kingsbury Grade improvements overbudget, overdue

By Brooke Boone, KRNV-TV

STATELINE — A road construction project in South Lake Tahoe moving into its fourth year is costing tax payers millions and giving neighbors' headaches.

“It’s really been a burden on our community from day one,” says longtime Kingsbury Grade Resident Linda Bronken. “A lot of people have moved off because never ending construction.”

The erosion control project along Kingsbury Grade began in 2009. It was slated for two years. Now in its third year the project remains incomplete.

According to Construction Manager Greg Frehner, they were

unable to follow the schedule from day one due to unforeseen problems. What were those problems? "It's an old road. There are a lot of things under there," says Frehner. "The first year only ten percent complete."

According to state law, Nevada Department of Transportation has to go with the lowest responsible bidder. Out of eight, Las Vegas based Peek Construction Company came in with the lowest bid at \$6.8 million dollars.

Read the whole story