

Big bucks being spent surrounding Calif. online gambling bills

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

Bills to legalize online gambling hit the state Capitol more than two years ago – and are likely headed for another year of debate.

Lobbyists and political campaigns are benefiting from the protracted discussion, collecting millions of dollars from the card rooms, racetracks and Indian tribes seeking to shape the future of Internet wagering.

The conversation centers on how it should be implemented and which of the competing interests will reap the benefits. That creates even more business for Capitol advocates, as they sort out differences among their clients.

“Any time there’s a major new legislative initiative that is contentious, the details of which have to be worked out, it’s good for the business of lobbyists, political consultants and lawyers,” said Howard Dickstein, a lawyer who represents several Indian tribes, including the one that owns Thunder Valley casino near Lincoln.

“Any issue where there is this much money involved is going to attract advocacy on all sides,” Dickstein said.

Gambling interests have long been big political spenders in California – even more so with the advent of Indian casinos in the 1990s. Moving the business online will require another political push.

Read the whole story

Scuba diver found at Tahoe ID'd as missing Reno man

The body of a scuba diver who went missing on a dive in Lake Tahoe in 1994 has been identified as Donald Christopher Windecker.

A friend diving with Windecker 17 years ago told authorities at the time they were surfacing when Windecker appeared to have equipment problems.

Windecker's body was found by other divers last month near Rubicon Point.

Windecker, 44, was a planner for Reno

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nevada in cellar in study about entrepreneurial activity

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada finds itself at the bottom of another economic analysis, this one related to entrepreneurial activity.

The State Entrepreneurship Index, a nationwide analysis and

ranking system that shows how states compare in areas of business formation, patents and related activities, shows Nevada dropping a major 40 spots, from seventh in 2008 to 47 in the newest rankings released in July but using mostly 2010 data.

The index was developed by economists at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Bureau of Business Research and Department of Economics.

The index uses five elements – establishment growth rates, establishment growth rates per capita, raw business starts per capita, gross receipts per proprietor, and patents per capita – to create the rankings.

A state index for each component is assigned based on how much each state's performance is above or below the average of all state data, which has a value of 1.

Tops in the rankings is New York with a score of 2.34. New York also ranked first in the 2008 analysis. Washington was second, up one spot, followed by Massachusetts, which rose six places.

Nevada's score was 0.33, beating out Mississippi at 48, Arizona at 49 and South Carolina in last place at 50. No state dropped more than Nevada in the analysis.

Eric Thompson, associate professor of economics and director of the Bureau of Business Research at the university, said Nevada performed poorly in three categories, generating the large drop in rankings.

"Between the 2008 version of our index and the 2010 version of our index Nevada saw a large decline in the establishment growth rate, both in absolute and per capita sense, and also a decline in the gross receipts per proprietor indicator," he said. "So three of the five indicators fell pretty substantially. That was the reason for Nevada's drop."

The index is in marked contrast to a different entrepreneurial index released in March, but Thompson said the reports are compatible.

Nevada and Georgia tied as the two states with the highest entrepreneurial activity rates in the country in the "Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity," a leading indicator of new business creation in the United States.

The annual index shows Nevada and Georgia had 510 per 100,000 adults creating businesses each month. They were followed by California at 470 per 100,000, Louisiana at 460 and Colorado at 450.

"They focus on starts per capita, and actually, on that measure, Nevada did do pretty well," Thompson said. "You were 8th in 2008 among all the states and you were 10th in 2010. So I think the two results are very consistent."

Despite the results, Thompson said he is optimistic for Nevada's future.

"I think your economy is going to be back, and back in a big way," he said.

Fatal accident on Hwy. 50 near Kyburz

Updated Aug. 9 at 7:45am:

The man who died Aug. 8 was Steven John Evans, 50, of Pollock Pines.

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

A logging truck crashed into the American River near Kyburz this morning, killing the driver.

The crash was reported about 6:15am, the rig ending up partially in the water, spilling logs and fuel. The cab of the truck remained out of the river but the driver was pinned inside the wreckage, said California Highway Patrol officer Rich Wetzel.

The CHP, CalFire, El Dorado County sheriff's deputies and the coroner have responded to the scene between Kyburz and Whitehall. Also responding was the state Office of Emergency Services and the Department of Fish and Game to check on fuel leakage into the river.

Expect traffic delays on westbound Highway 50.

Fire insurance rates for South Tahoe to be reviewed

By Kathryn Reed

What insurance companies charge property owners in South Lake Tahoe may be changing.

Officials with the Chicago-based Insurance Services Office will be in town a week from today to assess the city's fire rating. This is usually done every 10 to 15 years, with South Tahoe's last rating being from 1995.



Several things are looked at, including, but not limited to:

- Where the nearest fire hydrant is
- Water flow capacity
- Ability to deliver the water to a fire
- Distance to a manned fire station
- Dispatch center
- Engine company staffing
- Water flow needs
- Number of large occupancies
- Wildland urban interface.

The latter is a new addition of late. This area is where residences border forested areas.

After the 2007 Angora Fire that destroyed 254 houses, some insurance companies stopped writing new policies in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Each criterion above is not rated equally. The water system is weighted 30 percent, while dispatch is 10 percent.

Division Chief Marty Scheuerman is hoping improvements like increased water flow that have been made in the last 15 years will outweigh the negatives such as fewer people in dispatch and operating a ladder truck that by some standards has outlived its desired life.

South Tahoe is on a two-tier rating with those in the Lukins Brothers Water District an 8, and the rest of the city a 5. The scale is 1 to 10 with 10 being the worst.

“They look at all of our records including maintenance, testing of hydrants,” explained Scheuerman.

A water system map is provided to the rating officials.

But Scheuerman noted that even though the fire department has a good relationship with outside agencies, they don’t have control of them in terms of how they keep records or what they do with water flow.

Several companies provide water to South Lake Tahoe. Besides South Tahoe Public Utility District, which is the biggie, there is Lukins, Tahoe Keys and Lakeside water districts.

The Insurance Service Office will tour the area and review documents, with a score expected in the fall.

The ISO was created after the large-scale fires in Chicago leveled the Windy City and there was a need to quantify fire protection so insurance companies would know what to charge.

Tahoe fire officials working on ways to make their needs heard

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Fire officials are feeling like people have forgotten that every day there is threat of a catastrophic fire in the

Lake Tahoe Basin.

They feel a bit dissed to not be more involved with the Aug. 16 annual environmental summit, when in recent years they have been an integral part of discussions surrounding the event.



Lake Tahoe
Basin fire
officials meet
Aug. 4 in
Meyers.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

The real work is not what is said at the 90-minute public session (which this year is at Homewood Mountain Resort from 9:30-11am), but instead during more intimate get-togethers with the politicians.

Some speculation is that with Govs. Jerry Brown and Brian Sandoval coming – the first time since 1997 the California and Nevada governors have shown up – that more attention will be directed to Nevada's SB271.

In the past, the fire officials had direct access to Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif. That, so far, is not a possibility this year. And she is the hostess this year.

"We need to make sure fire is a priority. When there is limited money to spend there are other folks who are trying to create a higher priority than fire," John Pang, Meeks Bay fire chief, told his peers Aug. 4 at a meeting at Lake Valley Fire

Department.

Money is needed to continue fuels treatment work. Because fire is no longer allowed to naturally burn in a forest, removing trees is the way to reduce the threat of fire. This season in the basin more than 2,000 acres are expected to be treated.

Elwood Miller, who works for the Tahoe Fire & Fuels Team, said he is hearing from congressional staff that because treatments are ahead of the 10-year plan, that perhaps funding should be cut. But with 85 percent of the basin being owned by a state or the feds, many believe they are the ones who need to take more responsibility than the local jurisdictions.

"A wildfire is not going to wait for SNPLMA money," Miller said of a key source of funding for the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

Also, the money being supplied by federal and state agencies to make the forest healthy is for the initial entry, not the upkeep of it.

It used to be thought that crews would need to revisit a site every eight to 10 years, but that has been reassessed to every five to seven. Part of the issue is when trees are thinned the undergrowth sprouts more rapidly. While a ground fire is easier to fight than a crown fire, Manzanita and white thorn burn hot and fast and are not desirable to keep growing in large swaths.

While the fire gang, and state and federal landowners want more attention, they are going to keep working as a group to get what they want and need. Their collaborative approach is something that has been praised at previous summits by the Washington politicians.

Other items from the meeting:

- They collectively said the need for a biomass facility in or

near the basin needs to be built. This came up because the Kings Beach location has been scrapped. Now the Cabin Creek area near Truckee is being considered because this is where refuse from the North Shore is hauled.

- Talk of Arizona's Wallow Fire centered on how it could have been worse without the amount of defensible space work that had been done prior to the blaze.

Men dominate STEM jobs, but earning potential good for women

The U.S. Commerce Department's Economics and Statistics Administration has issued the second in a series of reports on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) jobs and higher education.

As expected, the report "Women in STEM: A Gender Gap to Innovation" finds there are fewer women than men in STEM jobs and attaining degrees in STEM fields. That's true despite the fact the wage premium for women in STEM jobs is higher than that for men and that there's greater income parity between genders in STEM fields than there is in the employment market as a whole.

While women make up 48 percent of the U.S. workforce, only 24 percent have STEM jobs. During the past decade, this underrepresentation has remained fairly constant, even as women's share of the college-educated workforce has increased.

Women with STEM jobs, however, earned 33 percent more than

women in non-STEM jobs in 2009, exceeding the 25 percent earnings premium for men in STEM. Women in STEM also experience a smaller gender wage gap than their counterparts in other fields.

“We haven’t done as well as we could to encourage young people to go into STEM jobs – particularly women – which inhibits American innovation,” acting Secretary of Commerce Rebecca Blank said in a statement. “Closing the gender gap in STEM degrees will boost the number of Americans in STEM jobs, and that will enhance U.S. innovation and sharpen our global competitiveness.”

Women who do get STEM degrees are more likely to enter jobs in fields like education or healthcare, the report finds. And while more women choose to major in math than men – nearly 10 percent versus 5.7 percent – most men with STEM majors select engineering degrees. Engineers are the most male-dominated STEM occupational group but also the one with the smallest gender wage gap.

Several possible factors contribute to the discrepancy of women and men in STEM jobs, including a lack of female role models, gender stereotyping, and less family-friendly flexibility in the STEM fields.

La Niña may be gaining steam to return to Tahoe

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

La Niña, the weather pattern that helped produce an epic winter for the Reno-Tahoe region in 2011, could return in a

few months.

The U.S. Climate Prediction Center on Thursday issued a La Niña watch, citing conditions indicating a return of the climatic phenomenon sometime next fall.



Heavy snow
last winter
forced trees
into houses.
Photo/LTN file

La Niña, characterized by cooler surface ocean temperatures in the eastern Pacific, was in place from late 2010 through much of 2011 but was declared over by the climate center two months ago.

So-called “neutral” conditions are in place today. Predictions into what will happen next vary by computer model, but some suggest the return of a mild La Niña by fall.

The climate center also cites “the historical tendency for significant wintertime La Niña episodes to be followed by relatively weaker La Niña episodes the following winter.”

Read the whole story

Federal government inspecting NV Fire Safe Council's books

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS — Nevada Fire Safe Council's financial ledger is being looked at by more than just the auditing firm the nonprofit hired to do an audit.

The Office of Inspector General spent a week at the Carson City office reviewing grants. *Lake Tahoe News* has also been told the Bureau of Land Management wants to review the records.

Lake Tahoe News first reported on the audit July 21.



Andrew List

Andrew List, executive director of the NFSC, told a group of fire officials on Thursday he believes he knows where the whistle-blower complaint came from. He would not name the contractor, but said a specific firm keeps being denied work from the council because it doesn't have the equipment to do the jobs.

However, a U.S. Forest Service official told *LTN* the inspector general is reviewing an ARRA grant. ARRA is the federal stimulus money.

"They looked at every piece of paperwork," List said.

He added that many questions centered on how the Fire Safe Council chooses contractors for mechanical work. List was told that aspect of the process looked good.

However, List said verbally he was told some changes may need to take place with hand crew contracts – specifically, that they may need to go out for bid instead of being handled exclusively by the fire departments or land owners such as the Forest Service.

A written report will be issued that details the Office of Inspector General's findings.

Minden woman seriously hurt on Blue Lakes Road

A Minden woman sustained life-threatening injuries when the vehicle she was driving up Blue Lakes Road lost control, hit a tree, flipped and came to rest about a mile into the forest on Saturday.

Shellie Scott, 44, was hoisted out of the area off Highway 88 by a CHP helicopter crew. They transferred her to a CalStar helicopter crew who flew her to Renown Medical Center in Reno.

CHP Sgt. Dan Paxton said Scott had extensive bleeding.

She was driving a 1987 Subaru Forester south on the rural road when she lost control shortly before 4pm Aug. 6, Paxton said. There are skid marks where she went off the road.

The speed limit is 35mph.

Paxton said indicators point to Scott possibly driving under

the influence.

– *Kathryn Reed*