

Obama administration: Keep medicinal pot grows small, controlled

By Susan K. Livio, Star-Ledger

TRENTON – State medical marijuana programs and the people who work for them are not likely to run afoul of federal law if they keep their operations small and controlled, and don't allow growers to create "industrial marijuana cultivation centers," according to an eagerly-awaited letter from the Obama administration.

The letter, obtained by the Star-Ledger Thursday evening, comes more than two months after state Attorney General Paula Dow asked the Obama administration whether New Jersey's future medical marijuana program could violate federal law.

Gov. Chris Christie has said he would delay the program until the federal government assures him it won't prosecute anyone employed by the program. Possession and distribution of marijuana is a federal crime, even though 16 states have passed laws making it available to select patients.

In 2009, the Obama administration issued a memo saying it would not devote law enforcement time and money to arresting and prosecuting people involved in legitimate medical marijuana activities. But subsequent memos issued in April seemed to suggest federal law enforcement was not willing to give a blanket immunity to such programs.

U.S. Attorney Paul Fishman sent the letter to Dow Thursday evening. A spokesman for Dow could not immediately be reached for comment.

Read the whole story

Construction on Echo Summit stopped for holiday weekend

Updated: July 1 12:50pm

Construction crews are taking a break from working on Echo Summit from July 1-5 so locals and tourists can travel to and from the South Shore without delays.

Most of the work to replace the crumbling rock wall has been completed. When work resumes July 6 at 7am it will be to replace the guardrail. After the long weekend the hours for work on the guardrail are July 6 7am-5pm, July 7 7am-2pm and July 8 7-10am.



The rock wall on Echo Summit meets safety regulations.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

On July 11 work will go on all week starting at 7am and ending no latter than 5pm; with the road open without controls by 10am that Friday.



Damaged guardrails on Highway 50 will be replaced next week.

The wall needs to be painted as well. This includes painting the grout lines.

“Each has to be hand painted. We want it to look good,” Deanna Shoopman, Caltrans spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The coloring will be like the color of the rock so it blends in. The painting is a protective coating.

The other component to the project is to install a weather station in an area that is not visible to drivers. The parts have been delayed and are not expected to arrive until Aug. 15.

– Kathryn Reed

California's poor getting poorer because of state

budget

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

Things just got bleaker for California's poorest residents.

CalWORKs, the state's "welfare to work" program, took a major hit in the state budget deal that Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law Thursday, reducing grants to their lowest levels in more than 20 years.

Beginning today, monthly grants will be slashed by 8 percent, to an average of \$460 for a family of three. That translates to an income that is less than 30 percent of the amount the federal government has determined is necessary to meet basic needs.

In addition, the new budget reduces the lifetime limit on CalWORKs cash assistance for adults from five years to four, and cuts funding for employment services and child care. Advocates also are lamenting the suspension of the Cal Learn program, which offers aid to pregnant and parenting teens in an effort to keep them in school.

Welfare officials said the cuts will make it more difficult to accomplish the CalWORKs mission of offering temporary cash aid, job training and other help to lift people from public assistance to independence. Some 1.5 million Californians get CalWORKs benefits.

"We are taking people who live on the bare minimum as it is, and they are going back to 1987 levels in funding," said Nancy O'Hara, assistant director of Yolo County's Department of Employment and Social Services. "Who can live on that?"

Read the whole story

NDOT to investigate safety of railroad crossings in Nevada

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

A state agency has launched a statewide investigation into all Nevada roads with high speed limits and railroad crossings after a *Reno Gazette-Journal* report found that nine months ago another truck almost crashed into an Amtrak passenger train at the site of last week's deadly crash.

Scott Magruder, spokesman for the Nevada Department of Transportation, said they now plan to do an inventory on roads with speed limits above 60 mph to ensure they "provide the safest rail crossings and roads possible."

The examination will focus on three Nevada roads that have rail crossings and 70 mph speed limits, and three roads with rail tracks and 65 mph speed limits, Magruder said.

Ron Kaminkow, the engineer on the Amtrak train that was hit last Friday by a truck, leaving six dead, including the conductor from South Lake Tahoe, and dozens injured, said the Highway 95 site is a dangerous crossing and said he hopes changes are made so that crashes like the one he was in never occur again.

"Given what has happened twice in the last nine months, common sense should prevail," Kaminkow said. "Simple cost-effective measures would appear to be available, including warning rumble stripes, flashing warning signs well in advance of the crossing and a reduction in the speed limit on the road."

No one was injured in the near-miss on Sept. 14, 2010. The

truck driver hit the intersection's guard rails instead of the train. The driver was cited by Nevada Highway Patrol for "failure to use due care."

Read the whole story

Douglas County deputies gear up for July 4

With the 4th of July quickly approaching, Douglas County sheriff's deputies are reminding people the possession and discharge of fireworks in Douglas County are against the law.

Anyone found in violation of the fireworks ordinance face criminal penalties, including a fine of up to \$1,000 and/or confinement in the county jail for a period of up to six months.

Additionally, the possession and/or consumption of alcoholic beverages on Nevada Beach on the 4th of July is unlawful. This ordinance came about to reduce the many acts of drunkenness and violence associated with alcohol consumption that were experienced on the beach in previous years. Any violation of this ordinance is an infraction, punishable by a fine up to \$1,000.

The entrance to the beach, as well as the beach, will have a heavy presence of law enforcement personnel. Any cooler, backpack, bag, purse or other container that reasonably could carry a vessel containing an alcoholic beverage is subject to inspection and or seizure anywhere inside Nevada Beach Park.

Elks Point Road will be closed at the intersection of Highway

50 no later than 4:30pm. At that time, no vehicles will be allowed to enter lower Elks Point Road unless proof of residency or proof of campsite occupancy is established. Elks Point Road will remain closed until the completion of the fireworks display.

Heavy congestion in the areas of Nevada Beach, Round Hill, Zephyr Cove, Lower Kingsbury Grade and the Stateline casino core are expected. Lower Lake Parkway may be closed to ingress traffic after the fireworks display should the volume of traffic dictate the need for such a closure. Motorists are cautioned to anticipate delays while traveling in these areas.

State budget may impact building courthouse in Tahoe City

By Bridget Jones, Auburn Journal

Plans for a new courthouse in Tahoe City by 2015 are “up in the air” after a state budget approved by the California Legislature Tuesday.

The new building is scheduled to be funded by Senate Bill 1407, which passed in 2008 and authorized the statewide increase in court use fees. The bill approved the issuance of up to \$5 billion in lease revenue bonds for 41 courthouse projects throughout the state, including this one. The bonds are expected to be repaid by court fees, penalties and assessments, according to the California Administrative Office of the Courts, which is managing the project.

Teresa Ruano, spokeswoman for the Administrative Office of the Courts, said Wednesday the project's original timeline to pick a site in the next month or so could be delayed until it is understood just how much SB 1407 funding will be impacted by the budget.

"This may delay projects," Ruano said. "We don't know how much delay will be involved."

Ruano said the Judicial Council of California, which is the policymaking body for the California court system, will meet about the state judicial branch's budget in mid-July, and after that the AOC might have a better idea of how the courthouse construction will move forward.

There is no plan at this point to completely cancel the project, Ruano said.

Read the whole story

Rec board delays decision to ask voters to revise Measure S

By Kathryn Reed

At the end of a 2½-hour meeting Thursday, the main thing decided by the recreation board overseeing Measure S was to have another meeting.

With it being nearly the eleventh-hour in terms of figuring out whether to put an initiative on the Nov. 8 ballot, the three-member panel has set July 13 as decision day.



The recreation
JPA board of
Norma
Santiago, Hal
Cole and
Deborah
Henderson
listen June 30
to comments.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Hal Cole and Tahoe Paradise Park board member Deborah Henderson are being asked whether a ballot measure is the correct course of action, what the wording of the measure would be, and what the ballot language would be.

Aug. 1 is the deadline to come up with the ballot language. That's the same deadline for people who would want to submit a rebuttal to what is being dubbed Measure R.

The board could also wait until 2012 when there are three elections – February, June and November – to ask voters to revise the initiative.

The JPA board on June 30 decided to allocate \$35,000 for the November 2011 election if the board goes in that direction. This is the taxpayers' money via Measure S. Nearly \$17,000 was spent on the failed Measure B rewrite two years ago.

The actual cost of the election is not known until all special

districts having elections are accounted for.

At issue is whether the 2000 voter approved Measure S bond measure should be rewritten as Measure R so the \$18 a year collected from homeowners could be spent in different ways than originally intended.

Nineteen people spoke (some twice) at the June 30 meeting of the joint powers recreation authority. About 40 people attended the meeting at the county library in South Lake Tahoe.

The ball field proponents brought in enough youth baseball players to field a team, though none of them spoke. Cycling advocates were the first to point out it would be a good idea for adequate trails to be in the ground so those players could get to their games.

While it is Little League advocates like John Cefalu, Carl Buchholz and Steve Noll who spoke in support of Measure R, no one was at the meeting talking about softball fields.

While baseball and softball may seem like the same sport in many ways, the dimensions of the fields are not. It is softball fields that are in most demand on the South Shore – on both sides of the state line, though Measure S/R only encompasses the boundaries of Lake Tahoe Unified School District. Mostly it is adult leagues using the softball fields.

The softball fields are in worse shape than the Little League diamonds.

The language of R in its latest form does not specify baseball over softball, but the backroom maneuvering and plans are for the Little League fields to get the money.

All of the fields are on LTUSD property except for the one built with Measure S money at Lake Tahoe Community College. No

one from the district is on the JPA, nor does anyone from LTUSD ever speak at these meetings. All facilities built on school district property are supposed to meet state education construction standards.

The other discussion not being had in the open is talking about a comprehensive recreation plan for the city, county or entire South Shore. Without that big picture approach, it's hard to analyze where best taxpayer money should go.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has a master bike-pedestrian plan, but no entity has a plan for other sports (except at individual ski resorts) or a vision for recreation in Tahoe.

The room Thursday was split fairly evenly between those who support how Measure R is written and those who don't.

As proposed, Measure R would give a maximum of \$500,000 to ball fields for various improvements starting in 2013 and continuing until the full amount has been received. That date is estimated to be August 2016.

The language used regarding ball fields says, "... 50% of JPA funding available in July 2012 will be directed to this project."

When the board was asked whether bikes or ball fields would get funding first, the board said that had not been decided. But clearly that is a lie because the language gives a time line.

In regards to bike paths, it says 50 percent of JPA funds available in July 2012 will go toward maintenance of trails built prior to the passage of Measure S. Then, after the ball fields receive their full half million dollars, "the JPA is authorized to direct up to 100 percent of available JPA funding to pre-September 19, 2000 separated bicycle trails rehabilitation." It goes on to say, "To the extent funding is

available, El Dorado County will have the flexibility to use funds received from this source to maintain and/or rehabilitate both pre and post September 19, 2000 Class 1 and Class 2 bicycle trails.”

Paying attention to the words is more important than the intent because that is how lawyers will argue it if people don't get what they thought they were getting. Words like “will” are definitive actions.

The July 13 meeting will be at 1pm in the Creekside Room (by the cafeteria) at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe. Meetings are also planned for July 29 and Aug. 10, with times and locations to be determined.

NOAA report shows warmer weather in U.S.

By Ashlie Rodriguez, Los Angeles Times

The new normal is warmer.

“The climate of the 2000s is about 1.5 degree Fahrenheit warmer than the 1970s, so we would expect the updated 30-year normals to be warmer,” said Thomas R. Karl, director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Climatic Data Center.

That recent temperature trend was enough to drag the three-decade moving average, from 1981 to 2010, up by half a degree Fahrenheit from the 1971 to 2000 period, according to the report by NOAA.

The 30-year baseline is used by scientists to understand

climate conditions and trends, including climate change. Besides providing a perspective for daily weather records, the data are widely used by utilities to project energy use, by farmers to make decisions on crop selection and planting times, and by others whose livelihoods are dependent on weather.

Read the whole story

Brown signs budget day before fiscal year begins

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

After a veto fight with his own party and unresolved differences with Republicans, Gov. Jerry Brown signed an on-time \$85.9 billion spending plan Thursday that slashes higher education and the safety net while relying on a windfall of tax revenues.

Besides a February 2009 budget that was \$24 billion out of whack that same May, the plan Brown signed Thursday was the state's earliest since 2006. Democratic lawmakers relied on new voter-approved powers that enabled them to pass a budget with majority support rather than two-thirds.

Since talks with Republicans died over the weekend, GOP leaders have declared victory by blocking tax extensions and allowing taxes on vehicles and sales to fall Friday as 2009 rates expire. They celebrated Thursday by holding a press conference at Downtown Ford.

Democrats were measured in their response, bemoaning the

program cuts but saying it was the best package they could construct without Republican support. Brown chose not to have a public signing ceremony Thursday, signing the budget bills behind closed doors.

Brown and Democratic leaders have vowed to pursue a 2012 ballot initiative asking voters to reinstate those tax hikes. One of the budget bills, Assembly Bill 114, lays the groundwork for such a measure, setting terms for a retroactive \$2 billion school repayment should voters reject taxes or the ballot proposal never materialize.

Read the whole story

Bear claws tent at Camp Rich, leaves camper with scratches

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

State fish and game officials warned the public to take precautions to avoid encounters with bears in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The warning comes in the wake of a black bear tearing at a tent at Camp Richardson over the weekend.

The camper suffered shallow scratches on his back in the late-night attack on Sunday. The camper said that he had no food in the tent, leaving it unclear why the bear was so intent on getting inside.

The bear had been seen around Camp Richardson prior to the incident. After the camper suffered his injury, state department of fish and game officials said the bear had to be

killed because it was a threat to public safety.

Officials warn that bears are constantly searching for food. Access to food or garbage at a campground or in residential neighborhood Dumpsters attract bears.

Bears that get used to scavenging garbage or camp food grow bold and lose their fear of humans.

Read the whole story