Ensign apologizes to colleagues in farewell address

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON – When John Ensign came to Congress in 1994, he did so in a rowdy season of Republican renaissance so fraught with bombast that it came to be known as a revolution. Two years ago, when he announced that he'd been having an affair with his campaign staffer and best friend's wife, the shock waves reverberated so violently that they eventually caused his political career to collapse.

But Monday afternoon, when Ensign took to the Senate floor to say his official farewell, suggest his legacy and offer an apology, his words caused no commotion. Ensign was addressing an almost-empty room.

"The more power and prestige a person achieves, the more arrogant a person can become," Ensign said from the back row of desks to a few security guards and Delaware Sen. Chris Coons, the Senate's presiding officer. "I was blind to how arrogant and self-centered that I had become … unfortunately, the urge to believe in it was stronger than the power to fight it."

Read the whole story

Grego, Lovell try to discredit Mittelstadt with State Bar

By Kathryn Reed

Nearly a year to the day after Jacqueline Mittelstadt turned in her resignation notice as assistant city attorney of South Lake Tahoe she received a letter in the mail from the State Bar of California.

The letter dated March 14, 2011, says, “The State Bar is in receipt of a complaint filed against you by Bruce Grego and Kathy (sic) Lovell. … Mr. Grego and Ms. Lovell filed the complaint in their official capacities as council member and mayor of the city of South Lake Tahoe, respectively.”



Jacqueline Mittelstadt

Their issue, according to the letter, was Mittelstadt used information from her job with the city to help clients she now has in private practice.

One of those people is police Officer Johnny Poland who in June 2010 filed a complaint against the city. Mittelstadt is his attorney. Poland won a contentious lawsuit against the city in October 2009 that allowed him to stay on the force.

Grego and Lovell’s other issue with Mittelstadt was she had

been on staff as the city began working on the medicinal marijuana laws. She is now representing someone who wants to open a dispensary.

Mittelstadt was never asked to sign a no-compete agreement upon her departure.

In her 14-page response to the State Bar, Mittelstadt states, “This is a matter of ‘sour grapes’ and nothing more. Since the day that I refused to submit to Mr. Grego’s and Ms. Lovell’s demands that I engage in illegal and blatantly unethical conduct, both have been on a mission to ruin my good name and reputation, as well as to run me out of South Lake Tahoe.”

On April 6, 2011, the Bar wrote another letter to Mittelstadt. This one says, “The determination has been made that there are insufficient grounds for disciplinary action. Therefore, we are closing our file at this time, without prejudice.”

Grego and Lovell did not return phone calls to *Lake Tahoe News*. Grego is still on the council.

Mittelstadt said, “The fact that the State Bar closed the file the day they received my papers speaks for itself.”

The other three on the council at the time – Jerry Birdwell, Hal Cole and Bill Crawford – said they did not know their colleagues had filed the grievance nor do they support their actions. Cole is the only one of the those three still on the council.

Birdwell said, “The complaints were without merit. I think that filing the complaint was vindictive, and that using their titles as councilmember and mayor in filing the complaint suggested that they were speaking for the entire council. They could have filed the complaint using their names as private citizens.”

Cole said, “As long as they are doing it on it their own and

not as whole council."

Crawford said, "Somehow they had to punish her and going to the Bar is what they elected to do. And it did not work. I'm very happy it did not work."

Mining unexpectedly infuses millions into Nev. budget

By Anne Knowles

CARSON CITY – Nevada's next biennium budget just got $217 million bigger thanks to mining, the Ruby Pipeline project in Northern Nevada and a stabilizing economy.

The Economic Forum, a panel of five businesspeople appointed by the governor and Legislature, met Monday to review its forecast of state revenue for the current fiscal year and the next biennium. By law, the state is required to use the forum's forecast to build its budget.

After hearing presentations from the state's taxation department, budget office and the Legislative Counsel Bureau's fiscal analysis division, as well as from an economist from Moody's Analytics, the forum voted to increase the forecast for fiscal year 2011 by about $97 million, fiscal year 2012 by approximately $59 million and fiscal year 2013 by almost $61 million.

Fiscal year 2011 ends in June, but the additional revenue forecasted for it can be used in 2012, said Russell Guindon, principal deputy fiscal analyst with LCB's fiscal analysis division, bumping the 2012 budget by a total of about $156 million.

"People have asked of it matters since 2011 is almost over, but it does matter in that those revenues will go into a fund balance and can go forward into 2012," Guindon said.

The bulk of the additional money is expected to come from the state's sales tax, which is benefiting from sales of mining equipment and taxes paid by workers on the Ruby Pipeline, a gas pipeline being laid across all of Northern Nevada in Elko, Humboldt and Washoe counties.

Also, visitor numbers were higher than expected, pushing up revenue from the live entertainment tax paid on tickets to events like Celine Dion concerts and other shows, as well as adding to retail sales tax coffers. The forecast on revenue from the room tax paid on lodging was also increased, from an earlier estimate of $104.1 million to $108.5 million in fiscal year 2011. The tax is set to expire – or "sunset" – at the end of this fiscal year, not generating any more income for the next biennium unless it is extended by the Legislature.

Visitors, however, aren't gambling like they once did. Percentage fees on gaming wins were actually forecasted downward by the forum, from an earlier forecast of $658.6 million to $647.9 million in fiscal year 2011, from $679.5 million to $665.4 million in fiscal year 2012 and $702.2 million to $683.4 million in fiscal year 2013.

And although the state's modified business tax is being lowered, and bringing in lower revenue than before, the forecast for it was upped by more than $30 million over the next three fiscal years.

There was also some positive news on the jobs front for Nevada, which still has the nation's highest unemployment rate. In March, the state recorded positive job growth and the unemployment rate dropped to 13.2 percent, the lowest rate since late-2009, according to Bill Anderson, chief economist with the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation.

Most of the job growth, said Anderson and others, has come from the leisure/hospitality industry, which added 5,400 jobs in the last 12 months, and healthcare and professional services. The labor pool is also shrinking, either because people are leaving the state to find a job or because they're still here but have given up looking for work, said Anderson.

"For a decade we were the fastest growing state in the nation and now we're doing a 180 off that," Anderson said May 2.

All the economists warned, however, that any number of factors could adversely affect the state's stabilizing but fragile economy, especially the price of gas, which, if it continues to rise, could deter visitors and sap discretionary income.

Former USS Cole commander speaks about bin Laden from Carson home

By Lenita Powers, Reno Gazette-Journal

Kirk Lippold, the former commander of the USS Cole and a Carson City resident, said he is "absolutely thrilled" that almost 11 years after the terrorist attack on his ship in

which 17 crewmen died, Osama bin Laden finally has been killed.

“I think it was a definite strike for freedom and demonstrates that the United States will be resolute and unwavering in our pursuit of those who seek to do our nation harm and kill our citizens,” Lippold said Monday.

The details of that attack, organized and directed by Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaida members, are etched in Lippold’s memory.

“We had pulled into Aden, Yemen, that morning at 11:18 on Oct. 12, 2000, for a refueling stop,” he said.

“We had been there about 45 minutes when there was a thunderous explosion. We could feel the ship being almost lifted out of the water when lights went out and the ship began to sink,” he said.

Read the whole story

Caltrans sticking with May 11 to close Echo Summit

By Kathryn Reed

Caltrans is not backing away from its May 11 start date to close Highway 50 over Echo Summit.

A conference call the afternoon of May 2 between state highway officials, state Sen. Ted Gaines, reps from the two South Shore chambers of commerce, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority’s Carol Chaplin, Steve Teshara of South Shore Transportation Management Association, South Lake Tahoe staff, a California

Tourism and Travel Commission official and Andrew Strain from Heavenly ended with Caltrans not backing down from its schedule.

This was the second conference call of the day.



Highway 50 over Echo Summit will be closed May 11 for 10 solid days. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Caltrans promised the highway would be open by noon on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend. Of course, as has been the caveat all along, everything is weather dependent.

The closure for 10 days is so the rock barrier that is crumbling can be replaced for safety reasons.

What had South Shore officials in distress is that it means people coming to the May 15 Amgen Tour de California bike race will need to do a bit of touring themselves to reach the area.

“When all of the factors as we understand them today were weighed, the May 11th start date was considered by all to be the wisest course of action. This, despite the fact that all recognized that a detour during Amgen is undesirable and that we must all work to ensure that visitors know that South Lake Tahoe is open for business and a great place to watch the

race," B Gorman, CEO of Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A series of letters between Caltrans and South Shore officials dating to last fall indicate officials should not have been surprised by the start date.

Plus, a series of meetings between the city, Caltrans and chambers took place two years ago. The South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce was making presentations to the City Council as early as August 2009. Caltrans made a presentation to the council the month before.

What does have some surprised is why the tourism agency that represents the South Shore would ever go after the country's most prestigious professional bike ride for 2011 knowing the main artery to get to the South Shore could be off-limits. Chaplin did not return phone calls.

The summit should be closed for 10 straight days and then opened to controlled traffic for about six weeks.

According to Gorman, Caltrans is updating the reader boards with the actual dates. What the ones at the base of Echo Summit heading west and the one at Johnson Pass Road heading east said the morning of May 2 was "Closed Early May."

This has some people confused since it is early May.

Although Johnson Pass Road is clear, heavy machinery prevents people from using it right now.

Orange signs saying "road closed" are up – with the words covered until the work begins.

More information on the schedule and alternative routes to the area are in this story.

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Attempted robbery at S. Tahoe pharmacy ends in arrest

A man is behind bars after allegedly trying to rob the CVS Pharmacy on Emerald Bay Road in South Lake Tahoe and then concocting a story about a home invasion involving his children.

Officers said Adam Roland confessed he had planned and executed the robbery of CVS Pharmacy with someone he owed money to.

Roland was arrested May 1 on charges of conspiracy to commit a crime, attempted robbery and false reporting of an emergency.

Marriott increasing number of rooms in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Marriott Timber Lodge will break ground on its fourth and final phase this week.



When the property opened in 2002 it was to have three phases totaling 264 units. Those three phases have been completed.

The second-floor sales office of the South Lake Tahoe complex in the Heavenly Village will be transformed into 14 villas. The sales staff was disbanded 1.5 years ago, which allows for the additional units. Marriott had the tourist accommodation units, so no haggling for them had to be done.

Each of the units being built will be two bedrooms. Sales will not begin until they are finished in January. Pricing has not been disclosed.

SMC Contracting, the company doing the work in Lake Tahoe Unified School District and who built the Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly, will be the lead on the project.

With Marriott Vacation Club going from selling traditional time-share weeks to a points program last year, there is demand for more inventory, according to Marriott officials.

The neighboring Marriott Grand Residence is already fully built out. The Heavenly gondola separates the properties.

Marriott Grand Residence Club, according to minutes from the January meeting, finished 2010 with occupancy of 52 percent. This was higher than anticipated. Forecasts were for a 49 percent rate.

Greg Campbell, general manager of the Grand Residence, at a meeting last week said occupancy is up from prior years, but not reaching the level of 2006-07 – the pre-recession years.

When it comes to sales, he said, “There is activity in the fractional sector.” This is because the financial market is loosening its hold on money and not just the cash customer can be looking to buy.

Although his board, with the exception of Robert Perez, agreed to put in a $58,800 fire pit, Campbell told *Lake Tahoe News* he isn’t sure it will be built this summer.

Osama bin Laden dead; crowds celebrating in U.S.

By Peter Baker and Helene Cooper, New York Times

WASHINGTON — Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the most devastating attack on American soil in modern times and the most hunted man in the world, was killed in a firefight with United States forces in Pakistan on Sunday, President Obama announced.

In a dramatic late-night appearance in the East Room of the White House, Mr. Obama declared that "justice has been done" as he disclosed that American military and C.I.A. operatives had finally cornered the Al Qaeda leader who had eluded them for nearly a decade and shot him to death at a compound in Pakistan.

"For over two decades, Bin Laden has been Al Qaeda's leader and symbol," the president said in a statement carried on television around the world. "The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation's effort to defeat Al Qaeda. But his death does not mark the end of our effort." He added: "We must and we will remain vigilant at home and abroad."

The death of Mr. Bin Laden is a defining moment in the American-led war on terrorism. What remains to be seen is whether the death of the leader of Al Qaeda galvanizes his followers by turning him into a martyr, or whether it serves as a turning of the page in the war in Afghanistan and gives further impetus to the Obama administration to bring American troops home.

The death of Mr. bin Laden came nearly 10 years after Al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four American passenger jets and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon outside Washington and the countryside of Pennsylvania. Late Sunday night, as the president was speaking, cheering crowds gathered outside the gates of the White House shortly before midnight as word of his death began trickling out, waving United States flags, shouting in happiness and chanting "USA! USA!"

Read the whole story

Varied opinions about redistricting in El Dorado County

Publisher's note: ***The redistricting meeting in South Lake Tahoe is May 19 from 6-8pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.***

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

As El Dorado County works to draw new supervisorial districts to match 2010 census figures, one of five draft maps is drawing attention – good and bad.

The county must redraw lines to reflect the county's growth – about 25,000 more people than 10 years ago – but there are different ways to do that.

"No. 3 down there is clearly an abomination," said Jack Sweeney, the District III supervisor, as the five maps were introduced to the Board of Supervisors last week.

The No. 3 option is also known as “the accordion” for the way it puts districts into north-south stripes that squeeze close on the west end of the county – where population is dense – and expand to the east.

But one man’s accordion crime is one woman’s ideal.

Read the whole story

Calif. water districts could be taxed under proposed bill

By Bradley J. Fikes, North County Times

Retail water districts would pay a new tax under proposed state legislation to fund water-related supply, environmental and recreation projects. The size of the tax has yet to be calculated, but it would be significant.

A hearing is scheduled May 4 for the bill, Senate Bill 34, in the California Senate’s Governance and Finance committee. Since the bill would impose a tax, it requires two-thirds approval by the Legislature.

SB34 was introduced in the Natural Resources and Water committee by state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto. The influential legislator is perhaps best known as the author of California’s hands-free cellphone law. The water tax bill was approved April 12 by the committee on a 5-3 vote.

Simitian is offering SB 34 as an alternative to an $11.4 billion water bond measure the Legislature recently placed on the ballot for November 2012. The bill doesn’t specify the level of taxes but is expected to be revised later to do so.

Backers say the bill pays for necessary upgrades to California’s water infrastructure, especially in the Sacramento River delta, which showed its inadequacy during the state’s recently ended drought.

Opponents say SB34 doesn’t give specifics about where the money will be spent. They include water districts around the state and the Association of California Water Agencies, a statewide organization of water agencies.

Read the whole story