Sandoval advocates modernizing gaming regulations

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Tucked away in one paragraph of his 22-page State of the State address, non-gambler Gov. Brian Sandoval is calling for a modernization of regulations over the casino industry.

Sandoval says Nevada must remain the "undisputed leader in the gaming economy." Some regulations have been on the books since the 1970s and don't include technology and innovations developed since then, he said.

Mark Lipparelli, chairman of the Nevada Gaming Control Board, said the state must "streamline" the process to deal with technology that has evolved.

For instance, he said some existing regulations make it impossible to test the software, technology and new machines that become available. As technology has advanced, he said the regulations failed to keep pace.

Read the whole story

Principal shot to death in

Placerville

By Kim Minugh and Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

The principal at Louisiana Schnell Elementary School in Placerville was shot to death today in his office on campus.

Sam LaCara, 50, died at Marshall Hospital from a single gunshot wound, said Placerville Police Chief George Nielsen.

The suspected shooter has been identified as John Luebbers, 43, a custodian at the school. Luebbers has been arrested.

The shooting was reported to emergency personnel about 10:40 this morning.

Marinas said “every available law enforcement” has been sent to the school to help secure the scene.

Read the whole story

Cocaine making resurgence in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Watching the suspect make his deliveries around South Lake Tahoe, his clientele runs the gamut of residents from moms to construction workers to the seedier elements of town to cooks.

“This guy had established a little network,” Jeff Catchings, commander with South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “There was no shortage of people waiting to buy from him.”

He is talking about Isidro Roberto Rojas Guzman, 44, of South Lake Tahoe. He was booked into El Dorado County Jail in South Tahoe last week on charges of selling cocaine.

“The amount of cocaine was significant. He probably just got a kilo and was down to 10 ounces or so. He had broken it in grams, eight balls and ounces,” Catchings said.

Although this is Guzman’s first arrest in the city, he has prior arrests for sales of narcotics in other California cities and in Nevada, Catchings said. His family is well known to law enforcement in the area. They get arrested and deported.

“For whatever reason they keep coming back to Tahoe,” Catchings said of the family.

In the 1980s, cocaine was the drug of choice in Tahoe for people selling and using. It’s gaining in popularity again as the price drops below what meth can be bought for on the street.

Catchings said consumption is a big deal locally. When it comes to SLEDNET officers seizing narcotics “cocaine is the highest numbers-wise.”

IRS wants its money from Stateline man caught in CalPERS scandal

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The Internal Revenue Service wants the courts to crack down on

Alfred Villalobos, the businessman in the middle of the CalPERS bribery scandal.

Saying Villalobos is “depleting” his fortune, the IRS last week asked the judge overseeing Villalobos’ Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection to convert it to a Chapter 7 liquidation. In a Chapter 7 case, Villalobos’ real estate holdings and other assets would be placed under the control of a trustee.

Under Villalobos’ control, his assets are being “grossly mismanaged,” the IRS states in court papers. Villalobos is falling behind on mortgage payments while letting family and associates live in his nine homes, charging them little or no rent, the IRS said. The agency said it is owed more than $2.5 million by Villalobos.

The Lake Tahoe businessman filed in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Reno last June. That came about a month after then-Attorney General Jerry Brown accused him in a lawsuit of bribing key officials with the California Public Employees’ Retirement System. Brown’s lawyers quickly obtained a court order placing Villalobos’ assets under control of an examiner.

By filing for bankruptcy protection, Villalobos halted Brown’s lawsuit and was able to regain control of his assets.

Now the IRS is trying to take that control away. If the bankruptcy is converted to a Chapter 7, a trustee could sell assets to pay the IRS and other creditors.

Read the whole story

Final campaign finance statements released

Final financial statements from the November election were due Jan. 31.

All candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council who were required to file the forms based on contributions/expenditures have done so except for Steve Kubby and Elizabeth Hallen, according to City Clerk Suzie Alessi.

Two forms were filed by Angela Swanson because she had activity on the account in January before closing it.

Click on the person's last name to read the form:

Tom Davis

Claire Fortier

Angela Swanson (Swanson2)

Joy Curry.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Dismal fiscal year for Nevada gaming

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada's largest casinos lost $3.4 billion in the fiscal year that ended June 30, cutting costs by nearly $4.5 billion to

help trim losses in an even worse prior year, the state reported Monday.

The figures were part of the annual Gaming Abstract released by the Nevada Gaming Control Board.

And they were no surprise to Reno gaming analyst Ken Adams.

“We knew this,” he said of the figures for the last fiscal year. But he said that since June, monthly statewide gross gaming revenues, at least, have shown some improvement.

“The truth is, the state has, since last June, shown several months with revenues up from the prior year,” he said. “The news is not great but certainly better.”

In Washoe County, 31 casinos combined to lose $27.5 million on revenue of $1.5 billion, the report showed.

But unlike the statewide monthly gross gaming revenues since June, Washoe County’s casinos have continued to struggle with revenue rising just once, in October. The latest month, November, showed a 19.6 percent drop from November 2009.

“Our problems are related as much to the local economy with 13.8 percent unemployment (in December),” Adams said. “And they’ve got casinos in California, Oregon and Washington. That’s our feeder market.”

To the south, the biggest casinos in the Carson City-Carson Valley corridor showed a net loss of minus 0.3 percent from a year earlier while Stateline casinos at Lake Tahoe showed a 24.7 percent drop in net profits.

Read the whole story

Blockbuster closing South Tahoe location

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe will be down to one video store in a matter of days after Blockbuster locks its doors for good.

Patrick Pearson, manager for the store, said an exact date has not been given for closing shop – it could Feb. 8 or Feb. 10.



"We had a good customer base, but not enough with the cost of rent," Pearson said Tuesday morning. "This town, there are so many people in tight spots."

He found out about the impending closure on Jan. 27.

Pearson said many of his customers are business owners who say they are also close to pulling the plug. On Monday, Ace Hardware closed. The Midas shop also ceased operation in January.

Pearson points to the economy, locals not having money and tourists not coming to town as reasons for the store's demise, more than Red Box and Netflix.

Pearson, who has worked at the store for 11 years, said at one time he was the owner's regional manager. The South Tahoe location is the last of the eight to close.

With Blockbuster's prominent location at the Y, it will be another blemish on town with another massive building sitting empty.

Until the doors close, the five employees will be selling

movies instead of renting them.

Brown argues for his budget plan in State of State address

By Evan Halper and Anthony York, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – Gov. Jerry Brown told lawmakers Monday that "it would be unconscionable" not to let voters decide whether to pay more taxes to help balance the budget, using his first State of the State address as California's 39th governor to press Republicans to agree to a special election.

Invoking the democracy movements in North Africa to bolster his bid that the people be heard, Brown warned GOP lawmakers against impeding a referendum that would allow voters to sanction – or refuse – extended income, sales and car levies to help close a $25-billion budget shortfall.

"When democratic ideals and calls for the right to vote are stirring the imagination of young people in Egypt and Tunisia and other parts of the world, we in California can't say now is the time to block a vote of the people," Brown said. "…The state belongs to all of us, not just the people in this chamber."

The governor, who unveiled no new policy proposals in his 14-minute address to a joint session of the Legislature, stayed focused on his wish to take the tax question to voters in the summer, which would require lawmakers to act by late March. But there has been little movement in the Legislature since

Brown announced his idea several weeks ago.

Read the whole story

Kindertown faces state closure; owner going to court

By Kathryn Reed

Kindertown parents found out Monday night at an emergency meeting the state intends to shutdown the South Lake Tahoe day care center Friday.

This is the second time in 16 months the state Department of Social Services has issued such a notice.

Mike McLaughlin, who successfully defended owner Maria Barrows-Crist in El Dorado County Superior Court last year, intends to file a stay on Thursday. If granted, it would mean the center with 90 youngsters and 18 employees would at least temporarily remain open.



Maria Barrows-Crist on Jan. 31 tells parents Kindertown's

future is in jeopardy. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Barrows-Crist, holding back tears at Kindertown, told the more than 40 adults and about a dozen children she is going to fight the current allegations just like she did the prior ones.

The most serious of the allegations in the 25-page document is a young boy with Downs syndrome wandering away from the facility to Highway 50, which parallels the facility a block away.

The report details how the boy was found by a family driving down the highway, how police were called, and the subsequent interview of Barrows-Crist and one of her employees.

In addition to a child being able to leave the premise unattended, the state says Barrows-Crist did not file the proper Unusual Incident Report.

“I thought he was hiding. We looked everywhere. I got in my car and searched the neighborhood,” Barrows-Crist said in an exclusive interview with *Lake Tahoe News* before the Jan. 31 meeting with parents. “I reported it. They said they didn’t get the Unusual Incident Report.”

Police officers are also obligated to report such incidents to the state, so it’s not like Barrows-Crist could hide what happened.

The paperwork ordering the license for the preschool and the license for the infant center be revoked was signed by Administrative Law Judge Ann Elizabeth Sarli on Jan. 3.

Barrows-Crist, unable to hire an attorney, represented herself at the late-November hearing that led to that decision. It was

Jan. 26 that Frank S. Furtek, deputy director of the legal division for the Department of Social Services, signed the paperwork for the closure to be effective Feb. 5.

The state Department of Education will be at the center at 6:45 Tuesday morning telling parents where else they can enroll their children. Part of Barrows-Crist's funding is from the state through subsidies parents receive.

"We've got your back" and "we'll be here" were said by parents gathered on Monday. Many have been through this before.

John Cocores was at the Sept. 23, 2009, meeting Barrows-Crist conducted to let parents know about the first threat of closure. He was there Jan. 31, 2011, too.

Cocores took his 4-year-old son, Ryan, out of Kindertown for a bit during the uncertainty of whether is would remain open. The second day at the new place, which Cocores would not name, Ryan suffered a head injury.

"He is progressing wonderfully," Cocores says of his son at Kindertown. He only has good things to say about the care his child receives.

Cocores goes on to say, "At some point you have to wonder when it's harassment. Do they inspect all the schools as much as this do (Kindertown)?"

Kori Tomlin, senior staff attorney with the Department of Social Services, deferred comments to the public affairs section of DSS. A representative could not immediately be reached for comment.

Throughout the report Barrows-Crist's credibility is called into question.

The report says, "Respondent's attitude towards [sic] these two citations for lack of care and supervision demonstrated her lack of understanding of the seriousness of her

violations. She maintained that the Department was unreasonable for citing her and was persecuting her because of her success in opposing earlier disciplinary action. She maintained that no child had been hurt in the almost 30 years she has been operating her facilities. Her position was that she had been set up for license revocation. She completely disregarded the fact that the Department is obligated to respond and investigate when a child is found running into and along side Highway 50, choosing instead to view the investigation and citation as persecution."

In speaking with *Lake Tahoe News*, Barrows-Crist does believe she is being singled out. She also acknowledged the gravity of the charge, but says her site is not the first the child has run from, just the first to be closed because of it.

Barrows-Crist said the child's father continues to bring the youngster to Kindertown.

Barrows-Crist said the worst that will happen if the state prevails in shuttering the facility that opened in July 1973 is she files for bankruptcy, the children must find other care facilities, and the employees new jobs.

For now, though, she is counting on a judge issuing the stay this week. Then she needs to raise $20,000 to keep McLaughlin on as her attorney. She's already in arrears on paying Feldman, Shaw, McLaughlin LLP.

She has spent more than $100,000 in attorneys' fees in the last 16 months. The Kindertown bus is for sale. If Barrows-Crist can get through this chapter of turmoil, she plans to sell the center. She has a meeting with a real estate agent Tuesday.

Clean Tahoe recycling discarded items

By Kathryn Reed

Recycling has taken on new meaning when it comes to garbage.

Clean Tahoe, the South Shore program on the California side that goes beyond what the regular garbage company does by hauling away debris dumped in meadows and emptying trash bins in public areas, is now in the furniture recycling business.

Ellen Nunes, director of the program, started Project Dinner Table last year. Her crews take furniture that has been illegally discarded that is still usable and gives it to the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center for their clients. The effort is supported by a grant from Soroptimist International.



Picking up abandoned couches is part of what Clean Tahoe crews do. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Nunes made her annual presentation to the South Lake Tahoe City Council at its last meeting.

“This upcoming year I would like the City Council to place more emphasis on code enforcement,” Nunes said. “Eighty percent of the cans in South Lake Tahoe don’t have lids.”

This has helped lead to one-third of the calls placed to Clean Tahoe being a result of animals in garbage.

What Nunes would like to see is for language in the code to be altered so the “mays” and “coulds” are eliminated. This, she says, would put some teeth into the laws.

She told the council she is not aware of any fines or mandates for bear-proof containers for people caught violating the law.