Obama sees global fight for U.S. jobs

By Sheryl Gay Stolber, New York Times

WASHINGTON – President Obama challenged Americans on Tuesday night to unleash their creative spirit, set aside their partisan differences and come together around a common goal of outcompeting other nations in a rapidly shifting global economy.

In a State of the Union address to a newly divided Congress, Mr. Obama outlined what he called a plan to "win the future" – a blueprint for spending in critical areas like education, high-speed rail, clean-energy technology and high-speed Internet to help the United States weather the unsettling impact of globalization and the challenge from emerging powers like China and India.

"The rules have changed," he said.

But at the same time he proposed budget-cutting measures, including a five-year freeze in spending on some domestic programs that he said would reduce the deficit by $400 billion over 10 years.

Drawing a stark contrast between himself and Republicans, who are advocating immediate and deep cuts in spending, Mr. Obama laid out a philosophy of a government that could be more efficient but would still be necessary if the nation was to address fundamental challenges at home and abroad.

"We need to out-innovate, outeducate and outbuild the rest of the world," he said. "We have to make America the best place on earth to do business. We need to take responsibility for our deficit and reform our government. That's how our people will prosper."

Just weeks after the shooting in Tucson that claimed six lives and left Representative Gabrielle Giffords, Democrat of Arizona, gravely injured, Mr. Obama received a reception that was muted and civil.

There were no boos or a shout of “You lie!” as in speeches past. Many Republicans and Democrats sat side by side — the first time anyone here can remember such mixing — and nearly all wore black-and-white lapel ribbons in honor of the dead and injured. Ms. Giffords’s colleagues held a seat open for her.

Read the whole story

SLT council delays moving forward on Lakeview Commons

By Kathryn Reed

Three items on the South Lake Tahoe City Council agenda pertaining to Lakeview Commons were postponed until the Feb. 8 meeting.

However, the council on Jan. 25 did meet in closed session to talk about the issue. Out of that discussion came the announcement an agreement is close with Reeve-Knight Construction, the firm originally awarded the bid for the work.

With a lawsuit and court decision ending their work on the more than $6 million project at El Dorado Beach, the city has been working out a dollar amount to pay the contractor and how to go forward.

The details are expected to be worked out by next week, with the agreement before the City Council next month, according to City Attorney Patrick Enright.

Enright said part of the agreement includes Reeve-Knight dropping its appeal against the court decision that ruled the contract invalid and not submitting a future bid on the project.

At the next meeting the council is anticipated to also decide whether to go out for new bids or award the contract to Clark & Sullivan, the firm that successfully sued based on the bid process being mishandled by the city.

STPUD working out water rates for metered customers

By Kathryn Reed

For the nearly 5,500 South Tahoe Public Utility District customers who have water meters, their rates for this quarter are not going to be what they are used to.

This is because of state mandates. California has required water districts with more than 3,000 connections have their jurisdictions all metered by 2025. STPUD has required all new construction since 1992 to be metered, but did not have a different billing structure.

Districts had to start reading the meters in 2010, with billing to begin no later than 2011.



Water meters are installed in South Lake Tahoe in 2010. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“The state requirement is anyone with a meter now has to be billed volumetrically,” Dennis Cocking, spokesman for STPUD, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The district’s board of directors had a workshop last week about what the rate structure would look like. Board member Mary Lou Mosbacher was absent.

Shawn Koorn and Kevin Lorentzen of HDR Engineering Inc. out of Washington spent 90 minutes giving the board information. They will likely be back before the board in a month when adoption of the rate structure will be voted on.

“I usually go with a higher fixed, then a lower consumption as a transition,” Koorn told the board.

With more than 80 percent of the costs involved with water being fixed, that leaves the rest based on consumption. As it is now, all STPUD customers have the same quarterly bill. It’s the bills sent out April 1 that will be different for those with meters.

Each structure that is built from now on will be billed partially on consumption. The district has no grant money to put in more meters this coming building season. About 3,000 were installed last year.

It costs about $1,300 to put in a meter in Lake Tahoe because not being able to move dir year-round, having to put them about 3-feet deep in a vault to deal with freezing, and the granite soil.

The state's theory when the legislation was passed is meters will help people conserve water. What the consultants have found with other districts is water usage drops initially because people want smaller bills, but over time they use what they want and pay the consequences.

One consideration the South Tahoe PUD board has to consider is being able to bring in the same revenue it has been in order to pay bills and be within budget.

The goal is for people to have relatively the same bill if they are average water consumers. It's the people who irrigate heavily who will undoubtedly see higher water bills in the future.

Mural in works to spruce up convention center site

By Kathryn Reed

This week work will begin on an 8-foot-high mural that will be erected in front of the foreclosed convention center project in South Lake Tahoe.

Normally Scott Blumenthal and his team from Dreams & Visions Art Company would do the mural onsite. However, with the fence being so close to the edge of Highway 50, the painting is being done elsewhere.



A mural will be put up in front of the fence near Stateline by March 1. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The plan is for the 600-foot-long piece of artwork to be assembled by March 1. Along Stateline Avenue, the first side street drivers see coming from Nevada into California, will have a bit of a face-lift as well. It will have a mural saying, “Welcome to South Lake Tahoe, America’s Year-Round Playground.”

The city is paying $10,000 for the South Lake Tahoe company to do the work. (The business relocated to South Tahoe from Long Beach last year.) City employees will be responsible for putting it into place.

“Hopefully, it will make people smile. It will be a definite improvement,” Blumenthal said.

He said the background will be scenery – with things like the lake and mountains. The foreground will be images of all things related to recreation that people can do in town – hiking, biking, skiing, fishing, horseback riding and more. It will also depict animals that are native to the area.

“The theme is the four seasons of South Lake Tahoe,” explained Gene Palazzo, South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Agency director.

It’s his budget from where the money is coming from to do the project.

He credits City Manager Tony O’Rourke for the idea of the mural. Blumenthal was one of two bids on the project.

The mural will go in front of the current fence.

The city is still looking into constructing a walkway in front of the 11-acre site. Bids for that project have not gone out.

Bay Area woman dies on slopes at Granlibakken

A 22-year-old Bay Area woman died snowboarding at Granlibakken ski resort in Tahoe City over the weekend.

Rahsheka Keith, who graduated from UC Santa Cruz last May, was using her snowboard like a sled when she slid into a lift tower on Jan. 22, authorities report.

She had attended high school in Lake County.

This is the fourth ski related death reported at a Tahoe resort this season. On Jan. 19, Maison T. Ortiz, 15, died when he lost his footing walking down the slick slopes of Mount Rose and slid into a tree. Nancy Blachly, 58, of South Lake Tahoe was pronounced dead Jan. 12, two day after being found on the slopes of Heavenly Mountain Resort. Shawnte Marie Willis, 25, of Tahoma was found in December in a tree well two days after being reported missing at Alpine Meadows.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Sandoval mixes optimism with harsh reality

By Guy Clifton, Reno Gazette-Journal

Gov. Brian Sandoval mixed an optimistic tone with harsh reality in his first State of the State address on Monday, announcing a focus on economic development, fundamental changes to state programs and calling for “shared sacrifice” during the economic downturn.

In an broad-based, hour-long speech to a joint session of the Nevada Legislature and a packed gallery, Sandoval outlined a $5.8 billion budget, which takes the state general fund back to 2007 levels.

“Some believe government is the only solution to our current plight,” Sandoval said. “I disagree. Unemployment, foreclosures, bankruptcy – the cure is not more government spending, but helping businesses create jobs. The key is to get Nevada working again.”

Sandoval proposed “consolidation, elimination, or centralization” of 20 state departments and said jobs will be eliminated and “layoffs will occur.”

His budget calls for cuts in per-pupil spending for K-12 education and sharp cuts to higher education.

“Our education system is broken,” Sandoval said. “Not the people, but the system.”

He called for ending teacher tenure, relying on student achievement data to evaluate teachers and administrators, providing parental choice in selecting schools, and giving

individual school districts more autonomy.

“Educators who are effective at teaching students and leading schools are paid exactly the same as those who are failing,” he said.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County DA opposes delay in Garrido trial

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

The prosecutor in the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnap case is asking a judge to deny a delay in the trial of Phillip Garrido, saying the suspect “has manipulated the legal system and escaped justice for too long.”

El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson said in court papers that there is no valid reason to delay the Feb. 28 jury trial set to determine whether Garrido is mentally competent to stand trial on charges that he kidnapped Dugard in 1991 when she was 11 and sexually assaulted her repeatedly.

Garrido’s public defender, Susan Gellman, filed papers last week stating that she still has an enormous amount of evidence to review and still may ask for a change of venue in the case.

Read the whole story

Police: Body found at Mt. Rose a suicide victim

By Jaclyn O'Malley, Reno Gazette-Journal

Washoe County Sheriff's deputies say a body found Saturday at the Mount Rose Summit was of a person who likely died from suicide.

Deputy Armando Avina said Monday that detectives are not treating the death as suspicious.

Read the whole story

Power out in parts of South Lake Tahoe

Updated Jan. 24 2:33pm: ***South Tahoe High School got out early today because of the power outage. According to district officials, the power company could not say when the power would be back on so the school had to cancel classes. The power is back on.***

By Kathryn Reed

Nearly 3,500 electric customers on the South Shore are without power.

"It could be a problem with the breakers," said Randy Kelly with Liberty Energy. "We will transfer the load to other circuits."

The power went out shortly after 11am Monday. Kelly said it

could be back before 1pm.

NV Energy, the company that had been responsible for providing electricity to the entire Lake Tahoe Basin, sold its 45,000 California customers to Liberty as of Jan. 1. NV is still responsible for the substations and has been called by Liberty to come assess the problem.

People without power are in the North Upper Truckee area, down Lake Tahoe Boulevard, and into the Tahoe Island area.

Residents in the Tahoe Island area have reported four outages since the beginning of the year – on days when weather has not been an issue.

BlueGo funding not coming through as budgeted

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – An ambitious budget to fund transit on the South Shore is proving to be unattainable.



"All the revenue sources are not materializing," Carl Hasty, executive director of the Tahoe Transportation District, told his board Jan. 21. "The lawsuit is not helping."

He was referring to MV Transportation suing the entities and individuals who made up the now bankrupt South Tahoe Area Transit Authority. A hearing on the case is scheduled for Feb. 23 in Reno.

TTD took over operation of BlueGo, the bus system on the South Shore that has routes into the Carson Valley, after STATA filed bankruptcy.

It was outlined in staff reports prepared by TTD for Friday's meeting that:

• Anticipated transit contributions will be reduced by $156,500 without the participation of Harrahs/Harveys;

• The district has not yet secured agreements with Lakeside Inn and MontBleu;

• Monthly fare box revenue is tracking approximately $20,000 less than anticipated;

• Legal fees will be more than originally forecasted, mainly due to the litigation with MV Transportation.

Steve Teshara, TTD board member, recognizes the lawsuit has a chilling effect on what transit partners might want to do, but he also said it's time to get out there to tell them why they should be part of BlueGo.

"What I'm trying to avoid is BlueGo goes to TTD and BlueGo goes into the crapper," Teshara said. "We need to put this back on the right track."

Norma Santiago, El Dorado County's representative to the board, said, "There also has to be the perception by the public that TTD can deliver."

The county has been a holdout on providing funding.

Bruce Grego, South Lake Tahoe's rep on the board, had thought a subcommittee with former STATA board members was going to be formed. His concern Friday was "it seems like everyone is on their own since the litigation."

A committee of TTD will be convened of representatives of

South Shore entities to talk about operations of BlueGo.

Curtis Garner, general manager of BlueGo, told the board his big issue is with the on-call service. He would like to do away with same day reservations. He anticipates better customer service and a cost savings.

Garner also questions not having a penalty for canceling a call on the same day.

The operations committee will address the on-call issues.