Sandoval releases salaries of his staff

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Breaking with tradition, Gov. Brian Sandoval on Monday released the salaries of his 16 staff members, the highest being the annual $124,988 earned by Heidi Gansert, his chief of staff.

The breakdown shows senior adviser Dale Erquiaga will earn $119,997 and deputy chief of staff Ann Wilkinson will earn $103,815.

All staff members are subject to a 4.6 percent reduction from the listed salaries, which affects all state employees. In the past the pay of those working in the governor's office was kept private.

Sandoval's general counsel, Lucas Foletta, will be paid $89,993; Executive Assistant Carrie Lipparelli, $67,692; Constituent Services Officer Christina Davis, $57,774; and Press Secretary Mary-Sarah Kinner, $74,980.

Read the whole story

Burst pipes damage LTCC's student center

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College's student center remains closed

this week and culinary classes are being taught at South Tahoe High School while damage to the area is fixed.

A maintenance worker on New Year's Eve noticed ice and water on the floor in the culinary area from ruptured pipes.



Pipes are exposed in the kitchen area of LTCC. Photo/Kathryn Reed

When the power went out in the Al Tahoe area of South Lake Tahoe during the holidays it was also out at the college. The main hot water circulation pump was cut off at this time.

"The air handling unit remained in service so it brought really cold air into the building," explained Christina Proctor, spokeswoman for the college.

She said no structural damage occurred.

"There may be more problems as we troubleshoot and try to correct the problems," Proctor said. The cost to repair the damage has not been determined. It will be covered by insurance, Proctor said.

Classes for winter quarter started as normal on Jan. 3, though the food courses moved to the high school. They are expected to be back at LTCC next week.

The coffee cart is temporarily in front of the bookstore.

LTCC has a back up generator for emergency lights, but it does not have enough juice to keep things functioning for an extended period of time. The college had been closed for two weeks for the holidays when the pipes burst.

The lack of power also meant the servers that handle online registration were out of service.

Report: Nevada faces long-term deficit issues

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada is on track to developing a serious long-term deficit with its budget unless key changes are made to add balance to the state's revenue and tax structure, a new report found.

The report, released this month by Brookings Mountain West and the Morrison Institute for Public Policy in Arizona State University, analyzed the public budget crises in four states: Nevada, California, Arizona and Colorado.

The report recommended diversification of the tax systems across the entire four-state area, adding that "the region's massive budget gaps cannot responsibly be closed with only spending reductions."

Nevada was singled out for having "one of the least diversified tax systems in the country." The state's addition of tax provisions into the Constitution coupled with a heavy reliance on formula mandates that dedicate revenue to several spending programs also makes it one of the least flexible tax systems in the nation, the report found.

“Nevada relies heavily on sales tax and gaming revenue and has no personal and corporate income tax, so you have one of the most narrow state revenue systems found in the country,” wrote lead researcher Matthew Murray, a professor of economics at the University of Tennessee. “With property and sales tax revenue suffering, it is not at all clear where Nevada will find the revenue to fund services, including those that support economic development moving forward.”

Read the whole story

Skiers flocking to Vail Resorts’ properties boost revenues

Vail Resorts is reporting revenue being up this season compared to a year ago at its six ski resorts based on data through Jan. 6.

Highlights for the two California and four Colorado resorts adjusted as if Northstar-at-Tahoe that was acquired in October 2010 was owned in both periods include:

• Season-to-date total lift ticket revenue up approximately 7.4 percent.

• Season-to-date total skier visits up approximately 10.1, including higher utilization by season pass holders.

• Season-to-date ancillary spending increased significantly, with revenue from ski school up 11.5 percent, dining up 13.3 percent, and retail/rental up 17.5 percent.



Lots of snow in Colorado this season is helping Vail Resorts' bottom line. Photo/Kathryn Reed

CEO Rob Katz, in a prepared statement on Jan. 10, said, “Our early season visitation was strong, especially as our growing season pass holder base enjoyed the outstanding snow conditions across all of our mountain resorts. While the Christmas to New Year’s week was negatively impacted by storm related challenges in the Northeast that kept some of our guests at home, as well as two days of unusually cold temperatures in Colorado, we feel great about results to date and the momentum we have going into the remainder of the season. Importantly, we observed strong ancillary spending, yielding gains in all categories that outpaced lift ticket revenue growth and marked a continuation of the improving consumer spending trends we first reported in the spring of 2010. Furthermore, in our first season of operation, we are pleased with the performance of Northstar-at-Tahoe, as it is showing improved results to date over the prior year. Northstar is proving to be a great addition to our family of premier resort properties and Tahoe area skiers have embraced the opportunity to ski our two Tahoe resorts on one pass product, which contributed to the strong growth in visitation by season pass holders. We also saw strong revenue growth across our lodging division and are seeing a continued strong

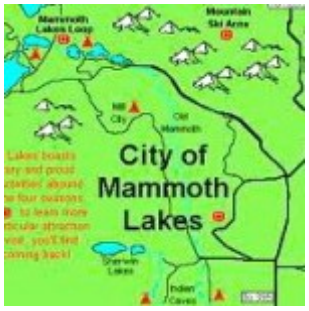
booking pace at all of our resorts.”

The publicly traded company, which also owns Heavenly Mountain Resort in Tahoe, closed up 0.45 to $51.95 on Monday.

Mammoth Lakes on brink of financial ruin

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times

MAMMOTH LAKES — An appellate court decision upholding a $30-million judgment against this High Sierra ski resort has left civic leaders scrambling to avoid financial catastrophe.



Residents reacted bitterly to the breach-of-contract judgment, blaming the town of Mammoth Lake’s five-member council and its staffers for the fiscal dilemma that has overshadowed the snowiest winter in memory in the scenic Mono County community of 7,500 year-round residents, situated about 300 miles north of Los Angeles on Highway 395.

Facing a judgment roughly twice the size of the town’s annual operating budget, the Town Council last week retained a law firm that specializes in appellate litigation and also is developing settlement negotiation options, seeking legal advice on municipal bankruptcy and studying controversial proposals to raise taxes and make cuts in basic services to pay off the judgment, which bears a 7 percent annual interest rate.

Read the whole story

Giffords condition remains critical; nation observes moment of silence

By Michael Muskal, Los Angeles Times

U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona continues in critical condition, a lack of change that is a good sign, hospital officials said on Monday. In Washington, President Obama led the nation in mourning for the victims of the Tucson shooting rampage that left six dead and 14 injured.

Giffords is one of two people who remain in the intensive-care unit at University Medical Center, doctors said at a televised news conference. Two patients from Saturday's shooting have been discharged, and five are listed in serious condition.

Jared Lee Loughner, who has been in custody since the Saturday morning shooting outside a Tucson supermarket where Giffords was greeting constituents, is scheduled to appear in federal court in the early afternoon. Loughner, 22, faces five counts of murder and attempted murder of federal employees.

Investigators have said that Giffords, 40, was Loughner's principal target. She was wounded in the head and remained in critical condition after surgery designed to relieve the danger of damage from swelling of the brain.

"At this phase in the game, no change is good, and we have no change," said Dr. Michael Lemole Jr., chief of the division of neurosurgery. "She is still following those basic commands, and on top of that, the CAT scans are showing that there is no progression of the swelling.

Read the whole story

High-powered attorney to represent Arizona shooting suspect

By Michael Kiefer, Arizona Republic

When Jared Loughner faces a judge in federal court in Phoenix this afternoon, he will be accompanied by the same high-powered defense attorney who represented the “Unabomber,” the Atlanta Olympics bomber and Susan Smith, the South Carolina woman who drowned her two children by driving her car into a lake.

The Federal Public Defender’s Office in Phoenix has recommended that San Diego attorney Judy Clarke take Loughner’s case.

She will appear with him at his initial court appearance and ask to be appointed as Loughner’s attorney.

Loughner, 22, has been charged with five federal felonies: the attempted murders of U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and two of her staffers, and the murders of U.S. District Judge John Roll and Giffords aide Gabriel Zimmerman.

Loughner could face the death penalty, although that decision has not yet been reached.

Read the whole story

Nevada may tap unclaimed property fund to spur economy

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki plans to request setting aside a portion of the state's unclaimed property fund during the upcoming legislative session to help seed companies and boost economic development in Nevada.

Krolicki said the move fits well with Gov. Brian Sandoval's goal of making economic development the No. 1 priority of his administration. Krolicki, who serves as the chairman of the Nevada Commission on Economic Development, talked about the proposal and other economic development-related issues during a meeting with the *Reno Gazette-Journal* editorial board.

"It's a little premature to go into details and dollars at this point," Krolicki said. "But we will introduce a bill draft request that seeks to use unclaimed property as a funding source for economic development matters."

The Nevada Unclaimed Property Division currently oversees more than $400 million in unclaimed property. Under Krolicki's proposal, $5 million, for example, could be set aside annually from the unclaimed property fund and used as economic development bonds. The funds generated through those bonds can then be used as startup money or to help seed businesses and attract companies to the state. The funds also can be invested to grow even further.

Read the whole story

California first state to adopt energy-efficient light bulb standards

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

Californians will see the light – and a resulting energy cost savings – earlier than the rest of the United States.

The California Energy Commission says Golden State consumers will be the first in the nation to save money under a federal law improving the energy-efficiency standard of light bulbs.

The standard outlined in the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 says that a 100-watt bulb manufactured on or after a set date must use 28 percent less energy than a traditional 100-watt incandescent light bulb. In effect, the bulb cannot use more than 72 watts.

The federal law set adoption of the standard on Jan. 1, 2012, but California was given authority to implement it one year earlier to avoid sales of 10.5 million comparatively inefficient 100-watt bulbs in 2011.

The estimated cost savings to consumers for that alone is $35.6 million.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe asks employees, citizens what they want

By Kathryn Reed

This month results of two surveys administered by South Lake Tahoe will be released.



In December employees of the city were asked to answer 71 questions from five categories – communications within the city, my supervisor, my work group, quality of the work environment, and the city as an employer.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke said he could not find any evidence of such a survey being done in the 45 years the city has been incorporated.

"We will have action plans for the survey results within 30 days of the findings," O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Department heads and manager will be accountable to make the changes."

Bill Chiat, a consultant with Alta Mesa Group, is spearheading the process for both surveys. He is expected to share the employee survey results with department heads in mid-January.

Although there were rumors polls were being taken after the employee sessions, *Lake Tahoe News* could find no evidence of this to be true. Employees could talk to each other about how they answered the questions, but neither the unions nor management organized any strategy to gauge results prior to them being collated by the consultant.

More than 90 percent of employees took the survey, O'Rourke said.

Results from the community survey will be available later this month, with the goal of having at least the raw data for when the City Council has its strategic planning session the afternoon of Jan. 25.

Drilling down to compare South Tahoe's data to cities of similar size will take some time, with that analysis possibly not available until February. The last time a citizen survey was taken was 2008. Almost the identical questions were asked so the city can make comparisons to responses.

Nearly 3,000 surveys were sent to a random selection of residential addresses. Questions start with ranking quality of life in South Lake Tahoe and end with items about the budget.

There are 22 questions, but many are multi-dimensional, so it's really longer than that.

O'Rourke is interested to see if the 69 percent who ranked the aesthetics of the town fair to poor in 2008 feel the same way.

"Clearly that issue has been raised in the past and has not been addressed," he said.

The cost of the two surveys is about $16,000 combined, which comes out of the professional services budget. O'Rourke would like such surveys to be a line item in future budgets. He intends to conduct surveys annually to track trends.

"I'm not overly concerned what the issues are. The focus needs to be addressing them. The focus needs to be on the process of constantly improving, not laying blame and retribution," O'Rourke said. "No matter how good we think we are there are opportunities for improvement."

Here is the employee survey and the citizen survey, as well as the 2008 survey results.