Lack of cigarette sales good for health, bad for state coffers



By Bobby Caina Calvan, Sacramento Bee

Cigarette sales in California plunged to their lowest level in a decade last year as smokers were squeezed by new taxes and restrictions on where they could light up.

While tobacco use has been steadily declining, the 8.1 percent sales drop was the largest year-over-year decline since 2000, according to the state Board of Equalization.

The number of cigarette packs sold in the state fell to 972 million – down from from 2.8 billion in 1980.

Read the whole story

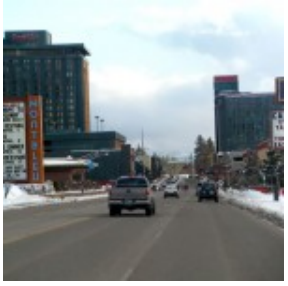
IRS urges casinos to report suspicious, big-money players

By Liz Benston, Las Vegas Sun

Several months ago, the Internal Revenue Service agents who investigate financial crimes in Las Vegas began calling big

casinos to set up meetings with their employees.

The calls were friendly.



Stateline casinos work with the feds when asked. Photo/Kathryn Reed

In fact, the IRS – battling a bumper crop of white-collar crime – needed the casinos' help.

The feds were asking floor workers to drop a dime and report suspicious people gambling with lots of money.

Since the 1980s, Nevada casinos have filed thousands of reports containing the names, Social Security numbers and other identifying characteristics of customers suspected of laundering money or simply gambling with ill-gotten funds. Those figures are rising in the recession and appear to coincide with increased financial crimes across the country.

Read the whole story

Flash floods possible in Tahoe-Reno area on Sunday

With thunderstorms in the forecast for today, it’s possible Truckee could duplicate what it did on Aug. 8, 1989, when 1.21 inches of rain fell.

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a second day of weather warnings for the greater Lake Tahoe area, including Reno and the Eastern Sierra. Expect storm clouds to start forming about 1pm and for them to linger into the evening. The flash flood watch starts at 1pm.

The NWS says rain could descend at more than an inch an hour.

– Compiled by Kathryn Reed

Hazardous weather warning issued for Sierra

A hazardous weather warning has been issued by the National Weather Service for the Eastern Sierra, including the Lake Tahoe and Reno areas.

Thunderstorms will develop Saturday afternoon and into the evening, mainly north of Highway 50 and through Mono County. Rainfall rates could meet or exceed 2 inches per hour and therefore localized flash flooding is a possibility under stationary or slow moving stronger storms, NWS warns.

Moisture could linger into Sunday.

In other weather news, July was the seventh warmest July in Reno since 1906. The temperature reached at least 90 degrees on every day in July except the first four days of the month.

– Compiled by Kathryn Reed

‘Good headway’ on Wolf Creek Fire

The Wolf Creek Fire remains at 580 acres today.

“Firefighters are making good headway as the fire continues to be managed for resource benefits,” fire spokesman Dave Zaski said. “Firefighters are starting to remove excess portable equipment and evidence of chainsaw use for fire line construction to restore the area to its natural characteristics.”

Three hand crews, one helicopter module, and two SEAT fixed wing aircraft that have been on standby will be released today. There are 280 people on the incident.

World’s scientists call warming ‘unmistakable’

By Brian K. Sullivan, Bloomberg News

Scientific evidence that the world is getting warmer is

“unmistakable,” according to a report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration drawing on research from 48 countries, including Russia and China.

The past decade was the warmest on record and the past 50 years have been getting hotter, the researchers said, citing 10 main indicators, including surface and ocean temperatures, the amount of sea ice and glaciers and levels of humidity.

“The records come from many institutions worldwide,” Jane Lubchenco, NOAA administrator and undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere, said in a statement. “These independently produced lines of evidence all point to the same conclusion: Our planet is warming.”

Read the whole story

Longevity pay boosts salaries for El Dorado County workers

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

In El Dorado County, it pays to stick around.

The county’s response to a Bee inquiry last week into the compensation of top city and county managers omitted the county administrator’s “longevity pay.”

That incentive increased County Administrator Gayle Erbe-Hamlin’s annual salary from the $180,000 base pay reported by The Bee to an actual take-home pay of $202,545.

The adjustment boosts El Dorado County’s current top executive pay from 13th to 10th highest among the Sacramento region’s 22

city managers and county administrators.

Read the whole story

Governor: Let gays begin marrying

By Kevin Yamamura and Susan Ferriss, Sacramento Bee

In an extraordinary court filing, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger asked Friday that gay marriages be allowed to resume immediately in California after a federal ruling that the state's voter-approved ban on gay marriage is unconstitutional.

The Republican governor filed his brief with U.S. District Court Judge Vaughn R. Walker before a Friday deadline to submit arguments on whether to continue a stay of Walker's decision against Proposition 8.



Arnold Schwarzenegger

"The Administration believes the public interest is best served by permitting the Court's judgment to go into effect, thereby restoring the right of same-sex couples to marry in California," wrote Kenneth C. Mennemeier, an attorney

representing Schwarzenegger, in the brief. “Doing so is consistent with California’s long history of treating all people and their relationships with equal dignity and respect.”

Walker concluded in a decision Wednesday that Proposition 8 violates the equal protection and due process rights of gays and lesbians. The initiative passed with 52 percent of the vote in November 2008.

Read the whole story

Firefighters gain on blaze near Markleeville

By Kathryn Reed

More than 200 people continue to fight the Wolf Creek Fire, which is burning about 14 miles south of Markleeville.

The fire that was started by lightning had burned 580 acres as of 3:15pm today. The fire had smoldered for several days before firefighters began fighting the blaze on Aug. 3.



Smoke from the Wolf Creek Fire can be

seen from miles away. Photo/Dave Zaski

“We are not really going to contain this fire. We are going to turn it over to the U.S. Forest Service,” said Dave Zaski, spokesman for Sierra Front. “We are going to let it cleanup the undercarriage of the forest.”

The fire is about a mile from Wolf Creek Campground in the Iceberg Wilderness in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. It is being kept off private property and out of the Wolf Creek drainage.

Eight hand crews are working the fire, along with a helicopter that is getting water from Wolf Creek.

Zaski said the fire was at 500 acres this morning.

“We did an 80-acre burn out operation where we are using the burnout to secure a part of the fire so it doesn’t get out of control. It was very successful today,” Zaski told *Lake Tahoe News*.

There are no definitive plans for how long the fire will be allowed to act as a prescribed burn or how many more acres will be treated in this manner.

Hang-up over South Tahoe redevelopment being ironed

out

By Kathryn Reed

It looks like a lawsuit regarding redevelopment in South Lake Tahoe has been averted.

A flurry of meetings, conversations and correspondence have been going on and exchanged this week between South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County officials.

The issue is regarding the expansive redevelopment area the City Council approved earlier this year. The county has taken issue with the city's definition of blight and the large swath of land involved.



Lake Tahoe Airport is a major issue for city and county officials. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The county still has 10 days to make a final decision about suing. The next regular board meeting is Aug. 10, though a special meeting could be called before the Aug. 16 filing deadline.

"I think we'll come to common ground," El Dorado County

Supervisor Norma Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News*. “There are some issues we may have to agree to disagree on.”

A sticking point has been the inclusion of Lake Tahoe Airport in the redevelopment area. All of the details have not been worked out or voted on by the City Council, but it looks like the area may be condensed so at least that entire parcel is not in the redevelopment area.

Mayor Kathay Lovell said, “There is dialog when before there wasn’t any.” She also described the negotiations as “fragile”.

Staff and electeds from the city and county met at the airport on Monday. Both bodies discussed redevelopment in closed session at their respective meetings Tuesday. The county then sent a letter, which has not been shared with the media, to the city on Tuesday.

“We are very encouraged by their communication,” Lovell said of the letter. “We’ll be meeting again.”

The city and South Tahoe Public Utility District have resolved their differences about the redevelopment area and other issues that subsequently arose. Lovell and district board Chairman Dale Rise signed an agreement on Aug. 4.