‘Free college’ is a new rallying cry in California

By Alexei Koseff, Sacramento Bee

When State University of New York and City University of New York students return to campus this fall, tens of thousands of low-income undergraduates will pay no tuition under a new scholarship program.

Rhode Island will also begin to cover tuition for nearly all recent high school graduates entering the state’s community college.

And San Francisco will, for the first time, waive enrollment fees at City College of San Francisco for any resident.

Read the whole story

Truckee gas leak causes evacuations, road closures

Donner Pass and Moraine roads in Truckee are closed due to a gas leak in the area.

The area affected has been evacuated by fire personnel.

There is no estimated time for reopening.

No further details were available.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Ex-Heavenly worker admits to child porn charges



Stephan L. DeGraffenreid

By Marcella Corona, Reno Gazette-Journal

A former children's ski instructor at Heavenly Mountain Resort pleaded guilty to three felony child pornography charges.

Stephan DeGraffenreid, 26, pleaded to one count of sexual exploitation of a minor and two counts of attempted sexual exploitation. He faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years in prison for each charge.

Acting U.S. Attorney Steven Myhre for the District of Nevada made the announcement of DeGraffenreid's guilty plea in a news release on Tuesday.

Read the whole story

Key housing measure stuck in Calif. Assembly

By Taryn Luna, Sacramento Bee

After balking last week, the California Legislature is preparing for a vote on a series of bills that would help offset the state's housing crisis.

Senate Bill 2 from Sen. Toni Atkins, D-San Diego, is the most controversial measure in the housing package. The bill would impose a $75 to $225 fee on real estate transactions and generate as much as $258 million per year for low-income housing development and programs to combat homelessness.

Atkins has struggled to convince two-thirds of the Assembly – all 54 Democrats – to support a fee increase after they raised gas taxes on motorists earlier this year. Besides the unpopular transportation measure, the Legislature extended the state's cap-and-trade program climate change, which will raise the price of gas.

Read the whole story

Man dies hiking Tahoe Rim Trail



Gordon Yorke

A man who set off to the hike the 165-mile Tahoe Rim Trail was found deceased not far from where he started.

Gordon Yorke, 56, was found Sept. 4 by search and rescue crews near Freel Peak.

No foul play is expected. An autopsy will be conducted.

The Canadian was hiking the trail alone. When family didn't hear from him and he missed supply pick-ups, authorities were notified.

Teams from El Dorado and Douglas counties participated in the search.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

S. Lake Tahoe on cusp of limiting vacation rentals

By Kathryn Reed

Owning and operating a vacation rental in South Lake Tahoe is likely to become more restrictive.

The City Council on Tuesday spent nearly six hours listening to the ideas staff and the subcommittee of councilmembers

Austin Sass and Wendy David came up with, and then heard 35 people give their input. (Several people had to leave and never got a chance to talk.)

What the council didn't identify was what problems exist that necessitate any changes to the current ordinance.

A cap on the number of vacation rentals and the density of those types homes in neighborhoods are the two big unresolved issues.

Sass is of the thinking everyone believes there is a saturation point for VHRS. But that is factually inaccurate. Plenty of people in the room believed free market should dictate the number.

Even among the council there was not consensus on a cap.

Comments on Sept. 5 spanned the spectrum from wanting a ban on the rentals to having an unlimited supply.

Most believe enforcement needs to be a bigger part of the picture. That has been an ongoing theme as these meetings. Noise, trash and parking remain the top three complaints.

The police department has the responsibility to make sure the laws are enforced. Community service officers are hired to do this. A second person is coming on board soon, which means there will be coverage seven days a week.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine believes enforcement is lacking – saying one CSO working four days a week is not robust enforcement.

Sass doesn't believe there will ever be enough enforcement to satisfy people.

An increase in permit fees for owners was supposed to pay for added enforcement. The city admits it has had a hard time finding people to fill that position, so the added enforcement

has not been consistent. This means it is not known if adequate enforcement would resolve real or perceived problems.

From mid-December through mid-March, High Security Patrol workers were hired in a pilot program to work 10-hour overnight shifts. They did not interact directly with people at the VHR, but instead reported back to the community service officer who made the face-to-face contact. The $30,800 for the 90-day contract came from the Undesignated Vacation Home Rental Fund.

As of Tuesday's meeting, there were 1,350 active vacation home rental permits, with 92 pending. This represents about 18 percent of the housing stock in the city limits. Including the tourist core, there are about 1,800 VHR permits.

While the city contends the number of VHR permits is going up, based on stats provided by staff in **July 2015** there were 1,600 permits before the changes took effect that year and were closer to 2,000 after the new rules.

In 2015, it was stated that vacation rentals are a $20 million business in town. Changing the rules could reduce that figure. As one person said, a cap would be a "community killer." Secondary businesses like cleaning, hot tub service and landscaping are part of the VHR economy.

For the city, transient occupancy tax is its main revenue source, equating to millions of dollar a year.

The council has been tweaking the ordinance nearly every year since it was first adopted in January 2003.

While no action was taken Sept. 5, direction was given to staff to come back with a revised ordinance that would include:

· Mandatory bear boxes for VHRs.

· Allowing homeowners associations in the Tahoe Keys and

Tahoe Tyrol to enact their own rules.

· Increasing fines.

· Eliminating warnings.

· Counting children as occupants.

· Limiting hot tub use from 7am-10pm.

· Occupancy totals being two per bedroom. Occupancy is any time of day – not just those sleeping there.

· Eliminating zoning hearings.

The tourist core area would not be affected by any changes in the next iteration of the ordinance.

Many of those commenting spoke about the potential of new VHRs not being allowed within 250 feet of an existing one. (This was a subcommittee recommendation.) With many neighborhoods having 50- to 60-foot frontages, that would mean about every fifth house could be used as a VHR. The city, though, could not provide a figure for how many VHRs would then be allowed.

Laine did math at the meeting and came up with a total of 250 VHRs would be allowed if the 250-foot rule were enacted.

Staff said they'd come back in October to show how many VHRs would be allowed based on different density scenarios.

Existing VHRs would be grandfathered in. However, industry representatives said about 15 percent of VHRs turn over each year. Their fear is ultimately there would be a dramatic decrease in the number of VHRs because the homeowner could not meet the 250-foot criteria.

Jerry Goodman, who has been a longtime opponent of VHRS because of the problems in his neighborhood, said he would consider getting a permit to stop others from being able to get one.

The subcommittee thought going forward 1,100 square foot homes or smaller should not be allowed to be a VHR. The thinking is this could help free up housing stock for permanent residents.

Councilman Jason Collin said it's important to separate the VHR issue from housing for full-time residents. He mentioned how he recently rented a small place and knows people coming to Tahoe might want a similar abode. Plus, he believes those owners should be able to make money.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine seconded those thoughts. She said it's better to incentivize what the council wants, not set up obstacles to what they don't want.

David supports 1,100 square foot and smaller houses being taken out of the VHR pool because she believes locals would be able to live there.

Ultimately, the 1,100 square foot threshold was eliminated.

(Councilman Tom Davis had recused himself from the entire discussion because of his ties to Tahoe Keys Resort Association.)

The subcommittee had wanted owners to be subjected to the same rules as renters, which would include noise and occupancy. That rule would mean owners could essentially not have parties because they would be over the occupancy threshold. That idea got dropped.

It was also agreed to back off on the idea of having an owner or their rep have to meet with the renters in person.

The council is slated to revisit the vacation home rental ordinance at the first meeting in October.

At the end of the meeting the council asked staff to bring back an agenda item to discuss possibly limiting the size of house on lots to thwart McMansions that tend to be built primarily as a vacation rental.

Accident causes delays on Kingsbury Grade



Vehicles had to be towed from Kingsbury Grade on Sept. 5. Photo/Natalie Yanish

A multi-car accident on Kingsbury Grade early Tuesday evening had traffic backed up in both directions.

The road has since reopened.

According to the Douglas County sheriff's personnel, no one was injured.

Further details were not available.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Smoke, rain an issue in Tahoe basin



Smoke and rain on Sept. 5 have erased what was a sunny day to start with. Photo/LTN

Cloudy, smoky skies have replaced what started out to be a beautiful, sunny day in Lake Tahoe.

Fires south of the basin are responsible for the smoke.

Radar from the National Weather Service in Reno at 2:30pm showed several strong thunderstorms rolling into the region. Heavy rain and hail are expected. Wind gusts could reach 40 mph.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Catastrophic storms, once

rare, are almost routine

By Amina Khan, Los Angeles Times

While climate change did not cause Hurricane Harvey, it could explain the intensity of this tropical cyclone as well as other catastrophic storms that have hit the United States in recent years, experts say.

Harvey is the latest in little over a decade of “500-year” and “100-year” floods that once were considered rare. The storm, a Category 4 hurricane when it initially made landfall last week, has dumped trillions of gallons of water onto southeastern Texas, submerged houses and freeways, driven Houston-area residents from their homes and resulted in more than 20 deaths.

Climate change won’t mean more storms overall – but it probably will mean that that biggest storms become even bigger, scientists say.

Read the whole story

Nev. pursues more business information for database

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

How many veteran-, women- and minority-owned businesses are there in Nevada?

The state might have that information, but in different pieces scattered throughout different agencies. The state does not

have one aggregated database containing demographics of Nevada businesses.

Starting at the start of next year, though, new business license applicants and those renewing their business licenses on Nevada’s online portal, SilverFlume, will be asked to complete a voluntary survey to help create such a database, per two Assembly bills that will go into effect by Jan. 1.

Read the whole story