Boarded up Meyers gas station on track to reopen



A Shell station is slated to open in Meyers at this site. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

The dilapidated, graffiti-ridden, eye-sore of what once was a gas station in Meyers could be history this time next year.

The building isn't going anywhere – but it will undergo a major remodel. The former use is staying the same; only instead of a Beacon gas station it will be a Shell. The owners are the same ones who have let the site sit in disrepair for years.

It's not a done deal, but all of this has been in the works for a while.

County staff has been working with the applicant since last fall. Sutton and Associates out of Sacramento is representing the owners, Meyers Holding Co. based in Concord. Azad Amiri is the face of Meyers Holding Co.

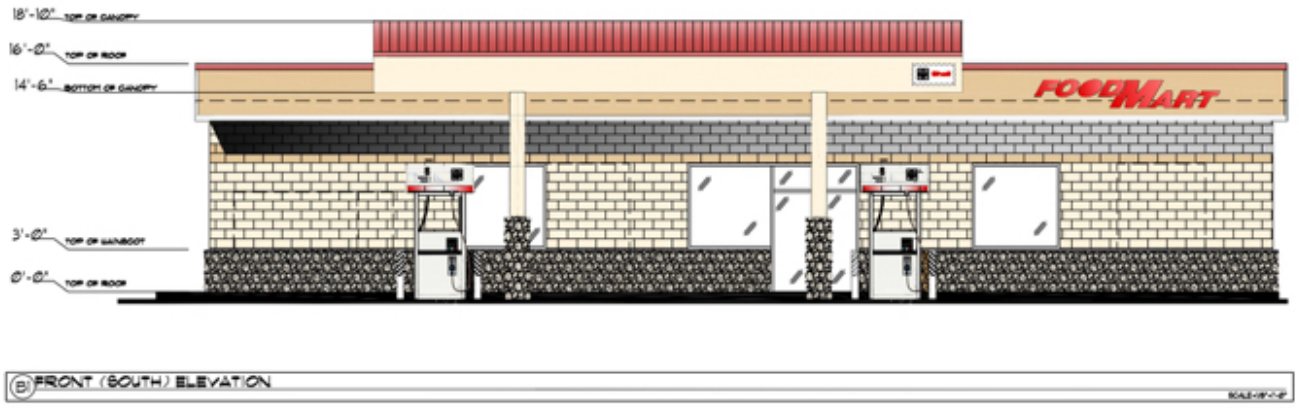
The **state in 2005** sued Amiri and Sarbjit Singh Kang, who own several gas stations, for allegedly mishandling underground storage tanks.

Regarding the Meyers location, the state Water Board spent $1.1 million to clean up the site.

“We worked with the attorney general to request reimbursement and we received a fraction of that amount back. The state is no longer pursuing reimbursement of funds,” Lauri Kemper with the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The old tanks are still in the ground and will have to be unearthed prior to the station reopening. The new ones will be installed closer to the fueling islands for better delivery access.

“Because we have to remove the tanks we cannot break ground this year. It will be next spring,” Steve Sutton with Sutton and Associates told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It won’t take long to get it done. Everything is pretty much preordered at this time, but we want issuance for the use permit, so it will be sometime next year, midsummer when we’ll be open for sales of fuel.”



A visual of what the gas station is projected to look like. Rendering/Sutton and Associates

To open, the county must issue a special use permit, which is something the Planning Commission would vote on. Their decision can be appealed to the Board of Supervisors.

“I think the best thing we can do is get the community involved. They should be writing, they should be participating,” Supervisor Sue Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The Planning Commission has allowed and not allowed things that the community has needed and wanted. The community may feel like it has its hands tied, they don’t. They need to voice their opinion one way or not.”

Because the county has never approved the Meyers Area Plan, this application comes under the outdated community plan. However, both planning documents would allow for a gas station at this location (3208 Highway 50) and both would require a special use permit.

Meyers has had three gas stations in the past; and the Shell station would make it so this enclave at the base of Echo Summit has three again.

Several residents who worked on the new area plan had hoped the location would be something more than a gas station and mini mart; something outdoorsy, and certainly a conduit to the trails in the area.

Free market, zoning and private property rights, though, are factors here.

(Novasel said the area plan's environmental documents should be released this fall.)

The county on Aug. 16 sent a letter to area agencies and government bodies notifying them about the gas station application. Comments and concerns are due at the end of the month. The county's technical advisory committee is then set to meet Sept. 18 "to take one or more of the following actions; 1) make an environmental determination, 2) determine final project conditions and/or, 3) confirm the public hearing date." That meeting is not open to the public.

In an email county planning chief Roger Trout sent to Novasel and CAO Don Ashton, he said it will be three to six months before the Planning Commission takes up the special use permit.

The email further said, "Often the public will be interested in the early steps of processing this special use permit, but it is a little early in the process for public comment. However, we would welcome members of the public informing planning of their interest in the project. They should contact the staff planner, ask questions, and ask to be added to the mailing list for the future public hearing."

The plan is to remodel the 1,900-square-foot building, have eight pumps on two islands, add interior bathrooms, a new sign, new asphalt, and removal of the old diesel pump in the back.

"It won't look like the same building when we are done with it," Sutton said.

Millions consumed potentially unsafe water in the past 10 years

By Agnel Philip, Elizabeth Sims, Jordan Houston and Rachel Konieczny, News21

WOLFFORTH, Texas – As many as 63 million people – nearly a fifth of the country – from rural Central California to the boroughs of New York City, were exposed to potentially unsafe water more than once during the past decade, according to a News21 investigation of 680,000 water quality and monitoring violations from the Environmental Protection Agency.

The findings highlight how six decades of industrial dumping, farming pollution, and water plant and distribution pipe deterioration have taken a toll on local water systems. Those found to have problems cleaning their water typically took more than two years to fix these issues, with some only recently resolving decades-old violations of EPA standards and others still delivering tainted water, according to data from the agency's Safe Drinking Water Information System.

Many local water treatment plants, especially those in small, poor and minority communities, can't afford the equipment necessary to filter out contaminants. Those can include arsenic found naturally in rock, chemicals from factories and nitrates and fecal matter from farming. In addition, much of the country's aging distribution pipes delivering the water to millions of people are susceptible to lead contamination, leaks, breaks and bacterial growth.

Experts warn contamination in water can lead to cancer,

gastrointestinal diseases and developmental delays in children.

Read the whole story

Officials: Nevada ready for self driving cars

By Bailey Schulz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Experts disagree on exactly when Nevada will see self-driving cars, but state officials say policies are ready for their commercial debut.

The Nevada Legislature passed a bill June 16 that allows for the testing and operations of fully autonomous vehicles, whenever they come onto the market.

The bill also clarifies the legal authority for those testing and operating the self-driving vehicles and authorizes the commercial use of fully-autonomous vehicles.

Read the whole story

Calif. Legislature grapples with affordable housing

By Angela Hart, Sacramento Bee

Democratic state lawmakers aiming to ease California's housing shortage say they are focused on three bills they estimate would generate $20 billion for affordable housing development over the next five years and lead to 70,000 new low-income apartments.

They acknowledge it won't be enough to solve the state's unprecedented housing problems. But Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon calls the package he and other lawmakers are working on "an important first step." The Legislature begins the final month of the 2017 session today with housing atop its agenda.

"We know we're not going to address it entirely this year," Rendon said in an interview. "Doing streamlining and getting some funding for affordable housing would be a tremendous victory … our efforts are going to carry into the future regardless."

Read the whole story

Eclipse diffuses sun's light, drops temp in Tahoe



The eclipse on the sidewalk at Cave Rock as seen through a tree. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

While the sky didn't go dark in Lake Tahoe during the eclipse Monday, the light was muted and the temperature definitely dropped.

"The main thing out here is everyone noticed the temperature dropped," Bob Nielsen of South Lake Tahoe said while at Cove East.

According to the National Weather Service in Reno, the

temperature in South Lake Tahoe dropped 4 degrees when the moon passed in front of the sun on the morning of Aug. 21.



Jessica Randall of South Lake watches the eclipse Aug. 21. Photo/Kathryn Reed

In South Lake Tahoe, the eclipse started at 9:04am, with the peak (84 percent) at 10:19am, and it was over by 11:42am.

Arless Lopez-Taylor, 7, liked watching it through his glasses, seeing how the shape of the sun kept changing. He is a bit of an astronomy nut, even likes to read astronomy news.

He was sitting on a log at Cove East, with Lake Tahoe behind him as he looked east with his dad, Nick Taylor, beside him.

Jessica Randall of South Lake Tahoe had her spot along the

Upper Truckee River staked out just off Venice Drive. Being in her late 20s she knows it could be a few decades before another eclipse is so prominent where she lives. She'll have stories about this one to tell when the next one comes along.



Players at Zephyr Cove Tennis Club call a timeout to watch the eclipse. Photo/Dave Nostrant

It's not that solar eclipses are rare. At least two occur each year. It's just that most occur where people can't see them – like over some body of water.

This one, though, had a large swath of the United States in its path – from the Northwest to South Carolina, and an arc in between, able to experience the total eclipse. The total eclipse only encompassed an area 70 miles wide.

Even though the sun's diameter is 400 times larger than the

moon’s, the sun is 400 times farther from Earth than the moon. This is why the two orbs look the same size, and the eclipse is possible.

For Darla Sadler of Bend, Ore., it was her dad who got her to travel to Prairie City, Ore., for today’s event. It was Jim Sadler of Concord who said the partial eclipse in the Bay Area wasn’t enough, nor was the 99 percent in Bend. He wanted the full deal. This bucket list item was “spectacular” for him.

“I didn’t really know what to expect, but it was so worth seeing. If there is another in my lifetime, I will definitely go see it,” Darla Sadler told *Lake Tahoe News.*



Cynthia Gorney uses a homemade device to view the eclipse. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Many who were out at Cove East didn’t have the special viewing glasses. It was a bit amazing when offered to look through a pair many said no thanks. Once convinced, the facial

expressions and words of wonder were evidence they were seeing something special.

For Cynthia Gorney and Bill Sokol of Oakland they hurriedly put together a cereal box viewing contraption this morning. With foil attracting the sun and a hole in the box it was possible to see the eclipse reflected at the bottom of the box.

“I felt compelled to see the eclipse. And it’s the last day of our vacation. It’s a giant solar celebration of the wonderful three weeks we’ve had in Tahoe,” Gorney told *Lake Tahoe News.*

South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler had one of the more unusual vantage points for the event. He was flying in his plane at 14,000 feet in Central Oregon near Mount Jefferson.

“I wasn’t expecting it to be like it was. As soon as the direct light from the sun was covered by the moon it instantly illuminated this bluish-white coronal light you usually don’t see,” Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. He was flying his plane with his brother, Mark, as the passenger.

Uhler flew into Bend this morning, had breakfast and then went up to see the eclipse. He’s already back in Tahoe working.

Lightning causes minor fires in region

Afternoon thunderstorms in the region are keeping firefighters busy because of the lightning strikes.

On Aug. 19 multiple fires reported.

The Alpine View was off of Jacks Valley. It was out 45 minutes after being reported at 5:42pm.

Ninety minutes later fire crews doused a fire near Grover Hot.

A transformer blew up, knocking power out for hundreds of valley residents.

Thunderstorms cold be the norm most of this week. Hail may be part of the mix.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

All income levels impacted by Tahoe housing crunch; moving a little east often the answer

Publisher's note: ***This is one in a series of stories about affordable housing in the Lake Tahoe-Truckee region. All articles may be accessed via the home page under Special Projects, 2017 Affordable Housing.***

By Susan Wood

There's something extraordinary going on in the Lake Tahoe housing market when "The Guy from Tahoe" isn't.

Curtis Fong, who long has had a connection with Tahoe (hence the name), moved to Gardnerville 30 years ago – marking a trend that hasn't slowed down. In the last few decades, he's

had company. Some former Tahoe residents have moved as far away as Dayton to make the dollar go further, among other reasons.

“Bottom line, it was a better value,” Fong said of his family’s move to the Ranchos. The popular Carson Valley neighborhood was also a better place to raise children, he added.



“And when I look back 30 years ago in the days of ‘Deep Snow,’ there were drugs all over town, and most kids were latchkey kids,” Fong said of the 1989 undercover law enforcement operation that resulted in the arrest and conviction of then South Lake Tahoe Mayor Terry Trupp.

In 1987, the average price for a home in Tahoe was about $140,000. At the time, a three-bedroom on one-third of an acre in Carson Valley was $75,000. Thirteen years ago, the appraised value was $200,000 for that same property. And through the last decade, the median for a comparable property in Lake Tahoe has still dwarfed the price in comparison to its high desert neighbor. The median in South Lake Tahoe runs $404,200. In Gardnerville, it’s $330,700 at $213 per square foot, while the Ranchos is a little higher at $233.

Granted, moving outside of a tourism hotbed, especially ski towns, is not a new phenomenon to the housing market. In Mammoth, workers live in Bishop. Vail employees commute in from the far reaches of Eagle County.

Fong, who is better known as an activity-based tourism guru and icon, believes he made the right choice for financial and quality of life reasons to “go off the hill,” as it’s called.

He empathizes with those seeking a home to buy at the lake or even to rent, with the latter climbing in price but falling in inventory.

“I feel for those people out there looking for a place to live,” he said.

Where does he see the trend of Tahoe going culturally?

“It’s interesting with the **millennials**. I kind of see a shift to young professionals moving in, but I guess time will tell,” Fong said of the age group 18-36.

His kids, Matthew and Erin, are now in their 30s as well, and he still spends a lot of work and play time in Tahoe. He even owns office space at the lake.



Living in the Carson Valley allows Bob and Tita Anderson to enjoy things they couldn’t at the lake – like having a

prolific garden. Photo/Susan Wood

In good company

Fong is not alone in keeping limited ties with Lake Tahoe while living east of it. Some made the exodus decades ago like Fong. Others just ventured down recently. Either way, it's a continuing trend that is worth noting.

South Lake Tahoe accountant Weldon Wulstein moved to Carson Valley four years ago. He lived in Tahoe Paradise neighboring Meyers five years ago, but the family needed space and the right zoning. His daughter was into horses.

They moved onto Foothill Road south of Genoa where Wulstein said the family likes "the quiet nature" of the community.

"It's only 15 to 20 minutes away (from the Tahoe region), but it's a completely different world," he said. "And prices are rising down here too, but not as fast as the lake.

"It's interesting to straddle two communities. You can't be as spontaneous," he said.

He also thought about moving his South Lake Tahoe offices to the Carson Valley, but decided against the idea.

"It's too late to start over," he told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Wulstein runs into people he knows from Tahoe in stores in Carson Valley.

"I think more and more people are moving here because of the affordability factor," he said.

Just down the road from Wulstein are Bob and Tita Anderson, a couple who moved to the Carson Valley with similar circumstances after being at the lake 36 years.

The Andersons, who also have horses, sought a place three

years ago that was ideal for their retirement – one that provided good bang for the buck while, like Wulstein, they kept their company operating in South Lake Tahoe. One difference from Wulstein – the Andersons added a satellite office in Gardnerville to run two sites. The financial endeavor tripled their business market.

Through the years, the Andersons have felt the pain from their employees seeking housing in Tahoe, with rentals averaging between $1,500 to $1,600 a month in some locales.

“The biggest factor is the inventory is so low,” he said, echoing what’s become a well-known trend in a region thought of as “poverty with a view.” There’s a price to have a piece of paradise.

“Quite simply, Tahoe is a great place for young people to have fun. We don’t need as much excitement,” Bob Anderson told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Nonetheless, the couple has no regrets about their life path but emphasize how paradise has taken on a different meaning.

For one thing, they get to look straight up the Sierra at the snow when it dumps at Lake Tahoe. Their lower elevation allows them to tend to a prolific garden full of beets, zucchini, lettuce, squash and other lush produce. Their horses have plenty of room out the gorgeous back yard to roam when they’re not seeking cookies by the fence. They’ve quasi adopted stray ducks that follow Bob Anderson around and stroll up to the relaxing deck that resembles a sanctuary. And the chickens are tame, happy and productive with eggs.

In other words, their home could be the setting of a tourism commercial for the good life in the West.

“We loved our years we lived up there, but we haven’t heard of too many people going back,” he said.



Rich Heffelfinger is able to provide more for his boys by living in Dayton. Photo/Susan Wood

Seeing the movement every day

Even the Sierra Nevada region's real estate agents have experienced the migration – some personally and professionally.

A 37-year real estate agent, Jim Valentine of Re/Max came from the lake but now lives and works in the Carson Valley.

He's seen the exodus up close and personal.

"A lot of people started coming down. The migration started in the '80s. When things were getting pricey, the Gardnerville Ranchos were built," Valentine said.

At first, it seemed the middle class wanted simple affordability, but then things changed in recent years.

“What we’re seeing now coming off the hill is more high-end people,” Valentine said. These residents are seeking a certain lifestyle, space and quiet time like the Wulsteins and Andersons. And like Fong, Valentine cites parents looking for a place for their children to thrive.

“People are looking to escape California,” he said.

And even though the topsy-turvy real estate market took a dive in 2009 to coincide with the recession, the rebound has allowed many homeowners to get the equity back in their properties.

“It was a bucket of tears at that time,” Valentine said of the industry. “But now we’re seeing levels we saw in 2003 and 2004, with the economy getting stronger.”

Valentine expects to see a huge growth spurt with major, innovative corporations such as Tesla and Apple moving into Northern Nevada.

“Talk about a tremendous amount of employees coming here in the next few years,” he said. The influx will drive the commercial market along with it, he anticipates.

“We’ll have more people with more demand for more things,” Valentine told *Lake Tahoe News.*

That same drive for affordable housing in the last 30 years will drive companies to supplement the need of an expanding workforce.

Take Rich Heffelfinger. The longtime Harrah’s Lake Tahoe concierge manager describes his life at the lake like the toast of the town.

He now works in a hardware store in Dayton where he lives with his family with different priorities. Now it’s all about spending quality time with his children and watching the sunset in the high desert.

Still, he reflects on those 11 years in Tahoe with fondness as a more charged, glamorous environment of perks and recognition. However, it was a tough road from professional success to personal success for the man who started his hospitality career as the “Voice of the M.S. Dixie” at age 18.

“I thought Tahoe was my home. I moved to Tahoe (in 1996) with the intention of setting up roots. I grew up in the Washington (D.C.) suburbs, so I know about setting up roots,” he said. “I found it quite unaffordable to live here (in Tahoe).”

Being in his 20s early on, buying a home wasn’t on his radar in 1997. He rented a cabin for $400 a month.

“I wish I would have been in the mindset, but I didn’t feel like it at that stage in my life,” Heffelfinger told *Lake Tahoe News.* Then, there’s the perplexing challenge of getting the capital together.

More than four years ago, Heffelfinger rented a duplex for $1,800 a month in the meadow behind Lakeside Casino. His mother-in-law lived downstairs.

He wanted more for his money, so he moved from Tahoe to the Carson Valley on a lease option, but that deal fell through.

“I didn’t mind the commute (to Harrah’s), and I was trying to follow a budget,” he said.

A year ago, he ended up in Dayton with his three boys and two dogs. It backs up to open space in Storey County where the wild horses often make appearances outside their $1,000 a month rental house.

In the meantime, Carson Valley rentals have gone up alongside Lake Tahoe’s. He was looking at rentals for $1,800 a month before deciding to migrate farther east.

It’s definitely a different lifestyle.

“I’ve learned the simple things – to appreciate nature, solitude and good friends,” he said.

The commute to Harrah’s was unfeasible from Dayton. He ended up getting laid off within the last year anyway. He took the downtime as a way of spending quality time with his boys.

“If there was a winter to be laid off, it was this last one,” Heffelfinger said. Staying put proved safer than struggling with an hour and a half commute under normal weather conditions.

“I’m learning to like Dayton, and we’re learning to live with less,” he said. The family eats in most of the time as a healthier and less expensive alternative to flitting around restaurants most nights in Tahoe.

The 38-year-old man is saving to buy a home and is “grateful for what we have,” he said of his change of heart.

“In Tahoe, it was tough trying to keep up with the Joneses. I felt like I had to be ‘on’ in tourism concierge. I love living the simpler life,” he said.



The apartment complex Randy Valiente lives in would be demolished if the loop road goes through. Photo/Susan Wood

Life loops around

Randy Valiente could be facing a similar life choice if the loop road project comes to fruition like the Tahoe Transportation District plans.

The project, which is undergoing an environmental review, calls for Highway 50 to be diverted through the Stateline area from Pioneer Trail around the 7-Eleven convenience store, connect with Montreal Road in front of the Van Sickle Bi-state Park and hook up with Lake Parkway as it weaves back to its main channel on the east side of MontBleu.

The controversial proposal is intended to make the casino corridor into a pedestrian hub. But there's more to it than that.

Part of the deal calls for a denser replacement of units to make up for the modest, to-be-demolished checkerboard houses, cabins and apartments now located on those "shortcut" streets such as Moss, Fern, Chonokis and Primrose avenues. In an ambitious government maneuver, a land swap is required to move the highway to become city property. The California Department of Transportation would take over the new highway and put greenbelts alongside it.

Valiente's apartment at 3734 Primrose is right in the path – within a block east of Moss Avenue, straight up from the 7-Eleven.

The food and beverage worker now walks to his job at Harrah's and wonders what will happen if the project goes through in the coming years.

The Stateline renter shared that he had no knowledge of the project since the landlord has not discussed the subject with him.

He is open to suggestions in moving from his two-bedroom

apartment he rents for $850 a month.

“For us, if they give us a place to stay, then fine. That’s a problem living around Tahoe. It’s quite hard,” he told *Lake Tahoe News,* while sitting outside his place.

Motorists whizzed by on this popular shortcut used to circumvent traffic backups on Highway 50 in the casino corridor.

That’s precisely what Tahoe Transportation District Director Carl Hasty expects to hear and wants to answer.

“Housing is important. That’s how I look at it. It doesn’t solve all our housing issues, but it takes care of much of it,” Hasty told *Lake Tahoe News* during a stroll through the affected area. “This is a way of getting density housing in.”

The plan is for 76 residential units to be built, with “no net loss” of housing. Still, displacement is a hard sell anytime residents are relocated in the name of what proponents call progress. And with Hasty’s long planning tenure in Tahoe including as a high-ranking authority at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, he may know better than anyone.

A relocation assistance analysis study was conducted in respect to the loop road.

“Acquisition and relocation are the most expensive part of the process,” he said. Fair market value will be the order of the day.

But of course it comes with the territory as South Lake Tahoe knows. Redevelopment in Stateline was never easy but turned out to be a financial boon in tax dollars if one forgives a few hiccups along the way associated with albatross amenities such as the parking garage at Heavenly Village.

But what’s the alternative to moving ahead?

“There are multiple reasons (for) and benefits to this. If there’s no project, it’s a lost opportunity,” Hasty told *Lake Tahoe News.* “It would accelerate the city’s local area plan objective.”

The city has special districts at Ski Run Boulevard, the Y referred to as Tahoe Valley, and Harrison Avenue.

On one recent summer morning, Hasty paused a long time at the corner of Moss and Pioneer to imagine the prospects of what could be developed at an open lot there.

“The question becomes what happens here. This is the gateway. There are endless creative opportunities,” he said, while pondering the future. “It’s time to build for the next 75 years.”

Items near open flame catch fire inside house

A fire inside a house on Grizzly Mountain Drive in Meyers was able to be extinguished quickly on Sunday morning.

Lake Valley firefighters were called out because neighbors saw smoke on Aug. 20. When they arrived at the residence the two occupants were putting out the fire.

They had had a fire in the fireplace on Saturday night. Overnight items close to the fireplace caught on fire.

“If you are going to start using fireplaces in the evenings, make sure they are cleaned out and you don’t put material in front of them,” firefighter Perry Quinn told *Lake Tahoe News.*

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nev. plan to use untried execution drugs draws criticism

By Ken Ritter, AP

Prison officials in Nevada drew immediate criticism Friday for proposing an untried three-drug combination for the scheduled Nov. 14 lethal injection of a twice-convicted murderer who says he wants his execution sentence carried out.

The state has supplies of the sedative diazepam, the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl and the muscle paralytic cisatracurium it proposes to use to carry out the execution of 46-year-old Scott Raymond Dozier, Nevada Department of Corrections spokeswoman Brooke Keast said.

Prison administrators didn’t immediately respond to questions.

Read the whole story

Covered California is 1st in

U.S. to promise insurers help

By Catherine Ho, San Francisco Chronicle

Covered California, the health insurance exchange created under the Affordable Care Act, will take the unprecedented step of offering insurance companies financial incentives, and guardrails, to encourage them to continue selling health plans through its program.

The agency’s board on Thursday approved a proposal to allow insurers to raise premiums more than normal between 2019 and 2021 if they lose more money than expected in 2018 due to federal policy changes, such as a lack of federal enforcement of the health law’s individual mandate. This will allow insurers, in future years, to recoup losses they may see in 2018.

The move by Covered California is an aggressive tactic that has not been attempted by other states, said health policy experts. It signals that state officials are willing to take bold steps to ensure the exchange remains viable.

Read the whole story