Sandoval works to get Obamacare throughout Nev.

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Gov. Brian Sandoval said Tuesday that the state is “diligently working” to ensure that 14 rural Nevada counties will have health insurance coverage options through the state-based exchange in 2018.

In June, that state got word that no carriers will provide coverage to 14 Nevada counties through the Silver State Health Insurance Exchange, which provides health insurance through the federal Affordable Care Act.

Those carriers cited uncertainties in the market as reasons to forgo the Nevada counties next year.

Read the whole story

Town of Vail wants to be sustainable tourism destination

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

Born from an idea that corralled local businesses to embrace energy-saving strategies, the resort-anchored town of Vail trying to become the continent’s first sustainable tourist destination certified through the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

So, first, what is “sustainable tourism?”

“It’s tourism that is compatible with the community,” said Magdalena Muir, a Canadian professor of energy science and an auditor with Green Destinations. She spent a week measuring Vail’s progress toward involving uniting locals and guests in efforts to build a vibrant economy anchored in a healthy ecology.

Many communities have tourism imposed on them, especially in purpose-built resorts like many Colorado high-country destinations, and that can lead to an us-versus-them mentality pitting locals against visitors. Engaging the community in the mission of driving tourism can help reduce that friction, Muir said.

Sustainable is the hot new buzzword in tourism circles — especially as hosting visitors becomes a roaring economic engine of many rural and urban economies while locals desperately fight to protect the resources and appeal that draw the outsiders.

Read the whole story

Scientists fear Trump will dismiss blunt climate report

By Lisa Friedman, New York Times

The average temperature in the United States has risen rapidly and drastically since 1980, and recent decades have been the warmest of the past 1,500 years, according to a sweeping federal climate change report awaiting approval by the Trump administration.

The draft report by scientists from 13 federal agencies, which has not yet been made public, concludes that Americans are feeling the effects of climate change right now. It directly contradicts claims by President Trump and members of his cabinet who say that the human contribution to climate change is uncertain, and that the ability to predict the effects is limited.

"Evidence for a changing climate abounds, from the top of the atmosphere to the depths of the oceans," a draft of the report states. A copy of it was obtained by the *New York Times.*

Read the whole story

Bay Area money gobbling up Truckee properties

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 Linda Fine Conaboy

TRUCKEE – To live in Truckee and surrounding areas requires a great deal of money; money that seems to be in good supply especially if you've recently sold or are contemplating selling property in the Bay Area, where many of the buyers are cashing out and seeking more reasonable housing options in the Sierra.

Speakers representing various segments of Truckee's wild real estate market comprised the panel of presenters at the Aug. 8 Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce breakfast. They discussed the peculiarities their unique market presents including inventory, long- and short-term rentals, real estate trends and their impacts on the local economy and the community.

"If you make less than $100,000 a year, housing is an issue around Lake Tahoe and Truckee." – Katie Rice, senior loan officer at Guild Mortgage

The cost of housing took up big slices of air time as well it should since the median price of a home in the area is now $585,000, compared to $549,000 in 2016.

Affordable housing issues are numerous, said Matt Hansen, owner/broker of Tahoe Truckee Homes and the panel's moderator.

Sam Drury, president of the Tahoe Sierra Board of Realtors and broker/owner of Padden Properties, agreed and noted Truckee has more full-time residents now than Lake Tahoe, although this hasn't always been the case. The way Drury sees it, Truckee has become a far more stable area, garnering the lion's share of buyers who mostly hail from the Bay Area.

"If you're a second-home buyer and flush with cash, you really don’t worry about price,” he said. “Tahoe is Fantasy Land for Californians. Fifty percent of my deals last year were cash. It’s a very different world up here.”

He added that as far as he can see, price is not an object to these consumers. “People are flush. That’s a really odd thing. They can spend, and want to spend [sometimes] more than $3 million. These customers are the life blood of our community. It’s the way it is, there’s nothing else I can say.”

But this scenario can leave the local who’s looking for a reasonably priced family home out of the running.

A second-home owner purchasing a house priced at about $527,000 can expect an average monthly payment of $2,700, said Katie Rice, senior loan officer at Guild Mortgage. “Locals can’t afford this, and with so much cash floating around, sellers usually will take the cash offer. It’s a struggle, but cash offers are easier.”

Houses are not affordable for the average worker in Truckee. Photos/Linda Fine Conaboy

Starter homes in Truckee remain solidly within the $400,000 to $500,000 range, causing some to look for housing in Reno and elsewhere. “But there’s a big affordable housing problem in Reno too,” Rice said.

Even if people can find an affordable home in Truckee, other expenses can ruin monthly budgets, especially when you consider that many pay up to $1,000 in childcare costs, not to mention food, utilities and other monthly essentials.

And the picture becomes even more dismal as Rice paints a grim scenario describing costs that can be incurred on a $407,000 “starter home,” which includes a 20 percent down payment. She said the base monthly payment pencils at $1,600, but with the addition of taxes, insurance and other fees the final monthly figure comes in at $2,124.

“No one’s doubting we have a problem here,” declared Jim Winterberger, partner and president at Tahoe Getaways. “But business is good and housing prices are high here because this is a cool place to be.”

Winterberger added that solutions to the dilemma need to include housing pockets such as Martis Camp, Shafer’s Mill and Northstar.

“As the long-term rental pool shrinks, it’s forcing people out of the market—this is affecting Truckee as a community.” He added, “As an investor, you need to put at least 50 percent down and you need a long-term tenant. If not, it can be a challenge.”

Chiming in, Drury alluded to the number of unknowns yet to be discovered. “The Bay Area is an economic engine running the problem and it’s on full throttle now; but there it costs a ton to buy a house. The excess money might be being sucked up by the high cost of living. Californians need to be reminded about how wonderful we are," he laughed.

An audience member asked why there are so few multi-family dwellings in the region. The answer from the panel: it's expensive and hard to get financing and insurance.

"We're all dealing with really tight margins," Rice said. "Even if investors have emotional ties to Truckee, they still have to make money."

In addition, Rice added, "We need to figure out how to keep our work force here. People in our community are not connecting the dots about housing. If someone has to commute from Grass Valley or even Fernley, you can reach a point of diminishing returns.

"I don't think there's one solution, it will take everyone working together to solve this. If you make less than $100,000 a year, housing is an issue around Lake Tahoe and Truckee."

Ashley Cooper, Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation communications and grant manager was a visitor at this meeting instead of a presenter as she has been in the past. TTCF helped create the Mountain Housing Council.

"Everyone's talking together," Cooper said. "We're trying to build awareness [of this housing situation]. People care about other people."

She invited guests to participate and send her their thoughts and ideas. "We need you and your solutions," she said.

Anthem pulling out of Nevada health exchange

By Reuters

U.S. health insurer Anthem Inc. said on Monday it will no longer offer Obamacare plans in Nevada's state exchange and will stop offering the plans in nearly half of Georgia's counties next year.

The moves come after Republican senators last month failed to repeal and replace Obamacare, former President Barack Obama's signature healthcare reform law, creating uncertainty over how the program providing health benefits to 20 million Americans will be funded and managed in 2018.

Hundreds of U.S. counties are at risk of losing access to private health coverage in 2018 as insurers consider pulling out of those markets in the coming months.

Read the whole story

Federal cuts will end some PBS stations, CEO says

By Lynn Elber, Associated Press

The chief executive for PBS is sounding the alarm about public broadcasting's future if federal funding is axed as called for by President Donald Trump.

"PBS will not go away, but a number of our stations will," CEO

Paula Kerger said Sunday. “There is no Plan B for that.”

PBS’ share of the roughly $450 million in federal funds allocated for public TV and radio goes largely to support public TV stations nationwide, a number of which rely on it for up to 50 percent of their budgets and can’t survive without it, Kerger told a TV critics’ meeting.

Read the whole story

Foreclosure on Olson property on hold

A judge has given Patty Olson her request of time.

Olson, whose commercial property in the Bijou area of South Lake Tahoe is tied up in court, was granted an extension to the stay. This means while her appeal to the bankruptcy court’s decision is ongoing the foreclosure process on the real estate is on hold.

The stay has been extended to Oct. 30 or until the appeal is decided, whichever comes first. There will be a status conference in October to assess where the case is.

The court, though, mandated Olson start paying US Bank $1,500 a month. Olson owes $640,696.16, plus interest. Interest accrues at $155.72 per day and totaled $79,488.22 as of June 30.

This strip mall is where Tahoe Wellness Cooperative operates. The medicinal pot shop is tied up in the bankruptcy case, but has a separate but related dispute going on with the city of South Lake Tahoe. A hearing on that case is set for later this month.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

KMS deal collapses; property going back on market

The future of the former Kingsbury Middle School is still a mystery. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE — The vote and tone of Tuesday's Douglas County School District board meeting proved the electeds are tired of dealing with Patrick Taylor.

Taylor is the Cave Rock resident who a year ago entered into an agreement to buy the shuttered Kingsbury Middle School property. He has been given multiple extensions throughout the process.

On Aug. 8 the board unanimously said no more extensions would be granted. The board will seek a new appraisal on the 22-plus acre site that has 36,000-square-feet of space. It will then be put back on the market.

The original asking price was $4 million when the board in January 2012 put it on the market. In September 2015 the price was lowered to $3.125 million by averaging the two appraisals.

It’s anyone’s guess what the new appraisal will come in at.

Whoever buys it will have to contend with zoning issues and potentially irate neighbors. The public has been slow to show up at meetings to voice their concerns. While the room was packed Tuesday afternoon, only three people spoke.

Despite the decision, Taylor could submit another offer.

The board’s issue with him was the delays. They didn’t see what good it would do to keep extending an offer without getting anything in return. Taylor was adamant in telling the board, “There is no way in the world I would extend it to just Sept. 17 and I won’t put up more money.”

His $55,000 deposit is now the district’s to do with what it wants. (The district is paying about $5,000 a month for the upkeep of the site, which includes utilities.)

Asked after the meeting if he had a Plan B, Taylor told *Lake Tahoe News*, “Nah, I’m done with them.”

Whether that was said in anger or if he’ll change his mind remains to be seen.

The school was closed in 2008 because of declining enrollment.

It was pointed out by a member of the public that Taylor’s plan to build affordable housing could have created a scenario where the remaining two DCSD schools at the lake would be overcrowded if his plans came to fruition and families filled those residences.

Tarkanian to challenge Heller for Senate seat

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Republican Danny Tarkanian, a prominent Las Vegas businessman, announced Tuesday he is mounting a primary challenge to Nevada Sen. Dean Heller, considered one of the Senate's most vulnerable Republicans in 2018.

The bid by Tarkanian, 55, who aligns himself with President Donald Trump, makes good on conservatives' threats to challenge incumbents they blame for hurting their years-long quest to dismantle the Obama-era health care law.

Read the whole story

Will Congress fix wildfire funding?

By Rebecca Worby, High Country News

The West is in the midst of another intense wildfire season.

With President Donald Trump proposing to cut the U.S. Forest Service’s firefighting budget by nearly $300 million, the question of how to manage and fund wildfire suppression on public lands has again reared its head.

Over the past decade, as wildfire season has lengthened and fires have grown more severe, firefighting has claimed more and more of the Forest Service’s funds, accounting for 56 percent of its overall budget in 2016. Conservatives in Congress have long tried to push legislation that, though ostensibly geared toward wildfire risk reduction, would benefit the timber industry. And with a Republican majority and an administration intent on rolling back environmental review processes, such legislation may gain more traction this time around.

Read the whole story