Calif. races to have licenses that work at airports

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

Facing the prospect of millions of Californians turned away at airport security checkpoints, the Brown administration is racing to bring the state's driver's licenses up to federal standards.

Gov. Jerry Brown's revised budget proposal includes $220.6 million over the next six years to hire more than 2,700 workers to process applications for licenses and state-issued identification cards that comply with the U.S. Real ID Act. Congress approved the law after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks exposed security weaknesses in many states' driver's licenses.

About 25 states have licenses and ID cards that comply with the 2005 law, but California and other states were granted extensions. The Trump administration, though, has signaled there will be no more delays: Beginning Oct. 1, 2020, every air traveler will need to show a driver's license or state-issued ID card that complies with the federal law to board an airplane, or bring along a passport or other form of identification accepted by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration.

Read the whole story

Sportsbook regulations would

target money launderers

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

When the Nevada Gaming Commission meets Thursday, members will consider tinkering with Regulation 22, the state's rules governing race and sportsbook wagers.

Under scrutiny will be a section that would require new record-keeping requirements on all wagers that pay out more than $10,000.

Most sportsbook players won't be affected by the changes proposed because there's already a mechanism in place for books that generate more than $1 million in annual gross gaming revenue to file paperwork with the Internal Revenue Service whenever someone wins more than $10,000 on a sports bet.

Read the whole story

Open government not a priority of Nev. Legislature

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – For the most part, the 2017 session of the Nevada Legislature has not been one to foster open government.

Bills have run the gamut and had mixed results, as the Legislature has considered proposals dealing with government transparency, accountability, lobbying, campaign finance and even an inspector general to investigate government agencies.

Some measures have fared better than others, but the session will do little to improve Nevada's poor standing as a transparent state for open government.

Read the whole story

Downsizing in Truckee an expensive endeavor

By Sage Sauerbrey, Moonshine Ink

When the housing market crashed about a decade ago, one of the results was a trend toward downsizing. The phrase "tiny home" emerged, people scaled down to smaller homes, RVs became potential retirement properties, and an overall tendency toward living within or below one's means began to take shape. Here in Truckee/Tahoe this trend toward living small has been presented as one of many potential solutions to our housing issue, but it is up against a series of obstacles in the form of ordinances and fees that are still catching up.

More than one year ago, *Moonshine Ink* spoke with a couple who had moved to Tahoe with the dream of living small, tiny, that is. In February 2016, Sean and Tara Flanagan were exhausting all possible avenues to find a home for their 140 square foot tiny home on wheels. Now, after more than a year of moving from place to place, researching tiny home regulations, and speaking in public forums on the subject, their wheeled tiny home is gone, and Sean and Tara are living in a 450 square foot home in Carnelian Bay. Sean said they are in the process of drawing up plans for a tiny home of their own that is on a permanent foundation, and built A-frame style to help accommodate snow load requirements.

"The main constraint that we've encountered, or at least the public has seen as a constraint, is that we require any home on a single-family lot to be on a permanent foundation," said Yumie Dahn, associate planner for Truckee. "Tiny homes, generally we just see them as – if they're stick built and on a foundation – they're just like any other home. If they're on wheels, then they're considered RVs or mobile homes and would need to be in a mobile home park right now."

Read the whole story

Retiree obligations sucking SLT coffers dry

By Kathryn Reed

In five years, nearly one-quarter of South Lake Tahoe's General Fund is expected to be allocated for retiree pensions. This doesn't even include what goes out for health benefits, let alone current salaries.

It's normal for employees to be the No. 1 expense for public agencies. The amount though, is getting to be astronomical.

The California Public Employees' Retirement System, or CalPERS, has warned jurisdictions that what they must contribute is going up. Today the city of South Lake Tahoe pays $4.7 million a year to CalPERS. By 2022 that figure is expected to more than double to $9.7 million. That's for current employees and those who have retired.

The spike has to do with bad investment choices by CalPERS, believing at one-time the agency was superfunded and therefore didn’t need members to contribute, the change in retirement age (making it lower), and pay increases to workers when everyone thought CalPERS was flush with cash.

It was bad math and illogical. The superfunded status was really a blip in time in about 1997. By 2000 funding levels had already started to drop. When the dot-com bubble burst thus began the freefall for CalPERS. While the evidence was there to prove the meteoric rise of the fund could not be sustained, the powers that be chose to be enraptured by these larger numbers.

The largest public pension fund in the country in 14 years went from superfunded to having a $241 billion deficit by 2014. Superfunded is defined as being 120 percent over the amount needed to pay retirees at that given point and time.

And while retirees like to say they are on a fixed income, those drawing on CalPERS and CalSTRS (the education equivalent) all get an annual cost of living increase that averages 2 percent each year. This annual raise is paid for by the taxpayer with no benefit to the taxpayer.

All of this will be explained by South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry on May 16 at the City Council meeting. This is part of the five-year business plan review.

While the presentation is not expected to be all doom and gloom, it is a bit of a punch in the gut – especially for taxpayers who are the ones footing this bill.

In the narrative of Kerry’s presentation she goes over the history of the city’s finances, and what has been done to make it solvent. It includes conservative budgets, not spending money until it is in hand, realistic revenue and expense projections, refinancing bonds to lower debt, and overhauling the health plan.

She will also explain that the city is handcuffed to CalPERS.

The problem with being a CalPERS member agency is that it’s impossible to get out. And what’s worse is that jurisdictions per state law are not allowed to negotiate a different payout with employees.

But it is possible, through talks with bargaining units, not to offer CalPERS to future employees. While no one is saying that is on the current negotiating table, it’s not out of the realm of possibilities in future years.

What is likely to happen first is for the city management team of about a dozen people to have a drastically different compensation package.

“The executive team is working on a wages and benefits package to present to the City Council that offers defined contributions to 457 retirement plans based on years of service, encourages employee contributions to 457 retirement plans by offering additional 457 matching amounts, offering contribution to health reimbursement arrangements, elimination of city-sponsored medical insurance,” the staff report says. A 457 is similar to a 401(k) in the private sector.

The goal is to reduce the pensionable compensation, which means lowering the city’s obligation to individuals post-employment.

Because the city is obligated to pay whatever bill CalPERS sends, staff and the electeds must come up with the cash. The five-year forecast shows a structural deficit by 2020. A possible solution is to use the reserves and/or restructure the maximum amount in that pot of cash.

Today the city puts aside 25 percent of the General Fund into reserves. It has not been tapped – not during the Angora Fire, not during the Great Recession. Kerry will talk about having a set amount in the pot or a lower percentage that would still protect the city in an emergency. It would take a four-fifths vote of the council to alter the reserve allocation.

The staff report goes on to say, “If CalPERS projections hold, reduction in staff and services may become necessary by 2020.”

Altering the energy market in the West

By David R. Baker, San Francisco Chronicle

For several years, officials in California and states throughout the West discussed merging control of their electricity grids to create one vast, integrated power market that would span the entire region.

A unified grid, they reasoned, would be more efficient, keeping costs down. It could also help states more easily tap renewable power generated outside their borders.

Then Donald Trump won the presidency.

Suddenly, California legislators started wondering whether combining grids could expose the state’s climate and energy policies to a new line of attack from a hostile administration. Interstate commerce, after all, falls squarely under federal control.

Read the whole story

No more Sierra snow? Think again

By Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

Winter isn’t quite ready to release its snowy grip on the Sierra — even after record-breaking precipitation.

Tuesday, a cold storm is expected to blow in and drop snow levels to as low as 5,500 feet.

While only a few inches of snow may fall, the shift from pleasant spring weather “may catch travelers off guard,” said Idamis Del Valle, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

Read the whole story

Illness briefly closes Pet Supermarket in SLT

Pet Supermarket in South Lake Tahoe has reopened after being closed for a few days last week.

The store on Emerald Bay Road closed because an illness among employees was thought to be the result of something they had contracted in the building. A store employee said the building was found to have nothing to do with the illnesses.

Lake Tahoe News was deferred to corporate offices in Florida, which are not open on Sunday, so what the illness was and why the building may have been a factor are not known.

Pet Supermarkets are mostly found in the southeast, with the only stores on this side of the country being in South Lake Tahoe and Sparks.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

LTCC not clamoring to renew SnowGlobe contract

By Kathryn Reed

SnowGlobe's future in South Lake Tahoe is murky.

Lake Tahoe Community College's board of trustees on May 9 heard a recap about the 2016 music festival. Promoter Chad Donnelly asked to be able to talk to the board and give a presentation, so he did.

The board is most concerned about protecting the new grass fields. Last year the ground was just dirt. Wear and tear on the college campus, a timely demobilization (**unlike this year**) and a larger deposit to protect the college are what the electeds mostly talked about.

Donnelly said he's willing to purchase turf insurance for the fields.

However, Donnelly didn't have adequate enough answers for all the questions, so the electeds are hoping in the next month he provides more robust solutions.

This last event, in addition to annoying locals with the booming bass, irritated a whole new crop of people because the remnants remained into April, making that stretch of Al Tahoe

Boulevard and the roads into the college looking ghetto-like.

“The common thread for the board was the desire and need to protect the college and the asset that was entrusted to us,” LTCC President Jeff DeFranco told *Lake Tahoe News.* “There is a much deeper look being taken at SnowGlobe now.”

No action was taken at Tuesday’s meeting. The topic is expected to be on a June agenda, at which time the board will be asked if the three-day music festival should be given another contract. The college has had a year-to-year contract for the last six years. The city of South Lake Tahoe has a three-year contract that expires this year.

“Our goal is to develop a meaningful and lasting partnership that is mutually beneficial to both parties,” Donnelly’s presentation said. “With that in mind, SnowGlobe respectfully requests a multi-year partnership agreement that is aligned with the multi-year contract we are seeking from the city.”

City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News* there is no time line for the city to entertain any such contract with Donnelly.

Donnelly was so bold in his written material provided to the board to call SnowGlobe the “largest New Year’s Eve event in North America.” Apparently he hasn’t heard of Time Square, which has about 1 million revelers compared to his 10,000.

Three members of the public spoke at the LTCC meeting – Steven Denzler, Peggy Bourland and Tami Wallace – all in opposition of the festival.

Most homes still worth less than before the recession

By Andrew Khouri, Los Angeles Times

Home values have risen for years amid the economic recovery. And in some corners of California, prices are even setting records, surpassing levels reached during the height of the housing bubble.

But for most of the state – and indeed the nation as a whole – values remain below those peaks, underscoring both the depths of the Great Recession and the unevenness of today's housing recovery.

That's the finding of a new report released this month from real estate website Trulia that found only 34.2 percent of all U.S. homes are worth more now than they were at the peak of last decade's housing bubble.

Read the whole story