

Calif.'s 'gig economy' could be hit by ACA repeal

By Sammy Caiola, Sacramento Bee

On a recent Friday at Old Soul Coffee Roasters in Sacramento, actor Ian Hopps hunched over his laptop as he edited a flier for an upcoming performance with the Davis Shakespeare Ensemble. He had just come off a shift from the East Sacramento restaurant where he waits tables and was killing time before his curtain call for "The Tempest" later that evening.

The 26-year-old lives paycheck to paycheck as a freelance actor/part-time server and doesn't get health benefits through either position, he said. After turning 26 and becoming ineligible for his parents' insurance, he enrolled in a Medi-Cal plan, made available only after the Affordable Care Act became the law of the land in 2010.

With private insurance out of his price range, Hopps said he was relieved to have an accessible option and not have to "bite the bullet" of taking on a full-time job for benefits. As Medi-Cal and other federal health programs face an uncertain future, part-time and self-employed workers such as Hopps wonder how they'll pursue their careers, and stay covered, if the law is repealed.

More than any other state, California embraced former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, expanding eligibility for the low-income Medicaid program to childless adults and creating the Covered California exchange, which offers subsidized plans to people who can't afford private insurance. About 3.7 million people have enrolled in Medicaid since the health law was implemented, and 1.3 million now have plans through Covered California.

Read the whole story

Nevada U.S. attorney dumped by attorney general

Nevada's U.S. attorney is one of the lawyers ousted by the Trump administration.

Daniel Bogden's last day on the job was March 10.

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions asked for the resignation of 46 U.S. attorneys who were holdovers from the Obama administration.

Bogden served two stints for a total of 14 years as Nevada's top prosecutor. He was appointed by President George W. Bush in 2001 and then let go by him six years later. Obama put him back in the job in 2009.

Steven Myhre is the interim head of the Nevada office.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

How is Burning Man affecting

the Black Rock Desert?

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Black Rock Desert is due for an environmental checkup – one that specifically determines whether Burning Man is having an impact on the land – though it may be a while before the desert gets a diagnosis.

The most recent environmental assessment that addressed Burning Man's impact, conducted in 2011, set the parameters for how the event should be conducted for the past five years. The 343-page document, however, expired last year. It could be another two or more years before Burning Man and the Bureau of Land Management are able to complete another assessment.

The BLM, which oversees the Black Rock Desert and issues an annual multi-million dollar recreational permit for Burning Man, has been conducting assessments since 1991, Burning Man's second year in the desert. At the time, less than 300 people took part.

Read the whole story

Swaps help the West manage water

By Zack Colman, Christian Science Monitor

When a market for trading water rights opened in central Nebraska last year, one of the initial bidders wasn't a corn farmer, or even a water user at all in the traditional sense. It was the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, a

conservation group investing to replenish the region's major river, the Platte.

By buying some water and then not using it, the group is allowing more to stay in the river.

The move bucked tradition, for sure. Typically, water rights aren't traded at all or they are swapped among farmers. But the West may be at the dawn of a new era in water management.

Markets for water trading are on the rise, backed by many conservationists and farmers alike. They say there's a major opportunity here if done right – the chance to make the most of a precious resource.

Read the whole story

SLT Knights Inn-Whole Foods project resurrected

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe officials are expected to sign a deal Tuesday that would raze the dilapidated Knights Inn motel that fronts Highway 50, and replace it with a Whole Foods 365 and other retail establishments.

On Monday morning, Pradip Patel, who owns the Knights Inn, signed an agreement to sell his property to the city of South Lake Tahoe for \$5.935 million. The appraisal came in on March 10 for that amount.

The City Council will have a special meeting March 14 at 4pm to accept the deal.

The goal is to dramatically enhance this highly visible area of the city. By June the 110-room motel and other associated structures are expected to be demolished. Construction could begin in late summer on the new buildings, with people potentially able to shop at the grocery store by spring 2019.

The store will be at least 25,000-square-feet. The Austin, Texas-based chain has been gradually opening more of these smaller concept stores. "The stores will feature a simple, affordable and convenient shopping experience that offers the high quality standards that Whole Foods Market pioneered," Whole Foods said in a press release.

The company entered into a lease agreement in November for the South Lake Tahoe store. Details have not been disclosed.



This is an example of the architecture Whole Foods uses. Rendering/Provided Funding details:

- *\$4 million from Halferty to the city for the developable portions of the Knights Inn property*
- *\$1.1 million from Halferty to the city for the southwest corner*
- *\$800,000 from Placer County to the city for TAUs*

- \$800,000 from CTC to the city to study the upper watershed for restoration
- \$3 million from CTC money is possible on March 16.
- \$750,000 for demolition to be paid from the city's reserves. This could be recovered by selling the remaining 42 TAUs and the residential unit which together should net \$650,000.

Environmentally, it's possible thousands of pounds of sediment will no longer reach Lake Tahoe each year. The entire 850-acre Bijou Park Creek Watershed will be studied for potential restoration.

The California Environmental Quality Act document regarding the project should be released in a matter of weeks, with completion in the next few months.

Analysis of the upper watershed area will be phase 2 of the project. That should be completed in 18 to 24 months. Improvement projects will be phase 3.

The city will sell the developable rights from Knights Inn to Halferty Development of Southern California. This is the company that is in escrow to buy the southwest corner at Highway 50 and Ski Run Boulevard that is adjacent to the Knights Inn property.

The two properties will be linked by a bridge. They will share parking. Parking is also available at the garage on Ski Run.

The structure on the corner will be single-story with various storefronts-restaurants of about 5,000-square-feet in size.

The city will retain what is described as a mote-like section where the environmental improvements are planned. A creek used to run in this area, but was paved over years ago. The plan is to bring it to the surface again.

All of this water that runs through the property is why the motel would flood each year. About 20 percent of the rooms have been damaged this winter.

This project has been on the books for years. It had fallen off the tracks for various reasons, but now all the parties are on board. Besides Patel and the city, this includes the California Tahoe Conservancy and Placer County.

Patel did not return a phone call.



The area in green represents the property the city is buying from Pradip Patel, while the gold is the “southwest corner” at Ski Run and Highway 50. Map/South Lake Tahoe

CTC is involved because it could be a major funding partner, plus it has neighboring properties that would be impacted by the environmental improvements. That state agency’s board

meets Thursday. Money could be allocated then; which city officials will be advocating for. If funding is not forthcoming, some of these environmental improvements may not be realized.

Patrick Wright, CTC executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News* he would have answers to questions at the March 16 meeting.

Placer County at a meeting in April is expected to OK the purchase the 64 tourist accommodation units for \$800,000. Placer needs these TAUs for a lodging property in its jurisdiction.

“This project should demonstrate why it is so difficult to redevelop projects that both benefit the environment and the economy,” City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Regulations are so complex that it has taken government four years to solve its own issues.”

She said it is near impossible for developers to navigate their way through the maze of regulations in the Lake Tahoe Basin. This is why few choose to do business here. Kerry praised Halferty for staying in the game this long.

The roller coaster ride this project has been on clearly proves the system is broken even though in the end the paperwork will be signed for the project to be developed.

Wet winter creates issues at toxic mine site

By Kathryn Reed

Crews are diligently working at the Leviathan Mine superfund

site in Alpine County to ensure contaminants don't reach nearby waterways.

"We are doing our best to prevent a discharge, but it is touch and go," said Scott Ferguson who is in charge of overseeing the regulatory and compliance aspects of the site. Last week he gave an update to the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board directors about what is going on with this project.

The ice and slush on the ponds make work difficult. Several feet of snow still remain. Just accessing the area is problematic, let alone working in those conditions to treat the acid mine drainage. The work is labor intensive.

This is only the fourth year for spring treatment operations at the mine site. The other years were in 2005, 2006 and 2011. And this year was unique in that the work started a month sooner than those three years because the abundance of rain and snow this winter.

The threat is that all of the moisture and the spring runoff could lead to toxins leaving the immediate area and polluting waterways downstream. Leviathan Creek, Bryant Creek and the East Fork Carson River are all nearby. The mine is five miles east of Markleeville and six miles west of Topaz Lake.

The last time there was a discharge was in 2006.

Leviathan has not been an operating mine since the 1960s. The previous 100 years it was a sulfur mine. In 2000 it was deemed a superfund site. Various lawsuits, with the last **settlement agreement** coming in 2015, has Lahontan and ARCO working together to find a final resolution for cleaning up the site. This whole process, though, will take decades and may never be completely resolved.

Nonetheless, the goal for now is to treat as much of the discharge as possible.

Removed from the site since 1999 have been:

- 405,000 pounds of aluminum
- 5,500 pounds arsenic
- 590,000 pounds iron
- 6,400 pounds nickel.

In 2016, 163 tons of sludge were trucked to Beatty, Nev., and 5.7 million gallons of acid mine discharge were treated.

Teen airlifted to Reno after sledding accident



CalStar takes a teen to Reno March 12 after a sledding incident. Photo/EDSO

A 16-year-old girl had to be airlifted to Renown Medical Center in Reno on Sunday after sustaining injuries while sledding.

She was sledding in the Saw Mill Pond area of the South Shore.

CalStar landed near there about 4pm March 12.

The exact injuries are not known. Her name and hometown have not been released.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Signs of El Niño on the rise

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

If you don't think California has seen enough rain this year, just wait. There may be more to come.

Federal forecasters said Thursday that the chances of an El Niño developing by fall are on the rise – now between 50 and 55 percent –an outlook that could skew the odds in favor of yet another wet winter.

“There are a lot of players on the (weather) field,” said Emily Becker, a research scientist with the Climate Prediction Center, the federal agency that released the latest report on the El Niño climate pattern. But “El Niño is associated with an increased chance – not a 100 percent chance, but an increased chance – of higher-than-average rainfall in California.”

The state is already seeing some of its wettest weather in recorded history.

Read the whole story

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LakeTahoeNews.net is the largest online-only news publication in Tahoe, serving up real-time news about Lake Tahoe seven days a week. Based in South Lake Tahoe, we have more than 100,000 unique monthly visitors, with tens of thousands of readers inside and outside the Tahoe basin. And we have the hard numbers to back that up.

We regularly cover breaking news events, with original reporting as well as content curated through associated news networks.

New stories are posted about every 90 minutes, seven days a week, meaning there's always a reason to be checking *LTN*.

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 - A multipart series on mental health.
 - A deep-dive into our national parks system in honor of the 100th anniversary.
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Heavy snow load destroys Stateline duplex



The weight from snow was too much for this roof in Stateline. Photo/Provided

Six feet of snow was too much for a roof on Upper Kingsbury grade. The weight forced the collapse of the duplex on Friday.

"That weight stressed the wood and the wood gave out," Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas fire told *Lake Tahoe News*.

With no new snow in days, it was just fatigue on the structure.

No one was home at the time of the collapse. It is used as a vacation rental.

A man out walking his dog March 10 heard the roof cave in and called authorities.

The duplex is on Kingsbury Grade just below South Benjamin Drive. Damage is estimated at more than \$100,000.

"The big thing is there are a log of roofs like that up there and all over the basin that people have not cleared," Guevin said. "It is important to get it off of there."

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*