

Nev. health exchange focused on reaching more people in need

By Adam Candee, Las Vegas Sun

First, a reassuring word from the woman in charge of the state's Affordable Care Act program to the 89,061 Nevadans who signed up for coverage this year: You're good.

"There isn't any concern about 2017," said Heather Korbolic, executive director of the Silver State Health Insurance Exchange.

That island of relative certainty amid the swirling sea of questions about the ACA's future under a hostile Congress and presidential administration stands as rare encouraging news for Nevadans accessing health insurance through the public marketplace. Republican pledges to repeal and replace the ACA hovered over the program's open enrollment period, tasking Korbolic and her team with considerable myth-busting.

Read the whole story

Calif. storms: Wettest water year in 122 years

By Mark Gomez, Bay Area News Group

The first five months of California's water year are the wettest in 122 years of record keeping, according to federal

scientists.

Between October 2016 and February 2017, California averaged 27.81 inches of precipitation, the highest average since 1895, according to data released Wednesday by the National Centers for Environmental Information, part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

This current water season slightly outpaced 1968-69 (27.34 inches average), when a series of powerful storms in January and February resulted in widespread flooding in Central and Southern California, resulting in at least 60 deaths, according to a federal report. The third wettest October-February occurred in 1997-1998, according to the data.

Read the whole story

911 cell phone access out in various locations

AT&T customers throughout much of the United States cannot call 911 from their cell phones.

In South Lake Tahoe people are being told to call 530.542.6100 if they have an emergency. In El Dorado County, call 530.573.3300 and in Douglas County 775.782.5126.

Placer County Sheriff's Department is not reporting an issue.

AT&T is aware of the issue, but doesn't know how many states are affected or when the issue will be fixed. The problem started in the early evening of March 8.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Senate rolls back rule on public lands

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – The Senate voted mostly along party lines Tuesday to kill a federal rule that gives a voice to the American public on the use of public lands in Western states – including 47.5 million acres in Nevada.

Republicans sought the rollback of the planning rule imposed by the Obama administration, arguing that it shifted the decision-making of use of lands in the West to bureaucrats in Washington.

Conservationists and Democrats argued it protected those lands from commercial interests.

Read the whole story

Casino industry worried about ACA changes

The casino industry is worried that gambling disorders will no longer be considered a health issue.

Leaders of the American Gaming Association, Indian Gaming Association, National Council on Problem Gambling and Association of Gaming Equipment Manufacturers on March 7 sent a

letter to Congress to keep the language that is in the Affordable Care Act.

In part the letter says, "Today, gambling disorders are recognized under the ACA's essential health benefits. We believe this recognition, which did not exist prior to the passage of ACA, is critical not only to enable adequate funding for research, but also to ensure necessary resources and treatment facilities are available."

Problem gambling is listed with other addictive disorders in the ACA.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Senator: Passing ERA brings Nev. into 21st century

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review Journal

CARSON CITY – Supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment on Tuesday disputed arguments that the time for the ratification of the amendment to the U.S. Constitutional is past, saying equality for women is long overdue.

Sen. Pat Spearman, D-North Las Vegas, who sponsored Senate Joint Resolution 2, told an Assembly committee that passage of the amendment 35 years after a congressional deadline will make a powerful statement that Nevada is ready to move from the 19th century to the 21st century.

While Gov. Brian Sandoval does not have to sign off on the resolution should it pass the Legislature, he said Tuesday that he supports the proposal.

SLT's No. 1 priority – improving roads

By Kathryn Reed

The 13 strategic initiatives that came out of the South Lake Tahoe City Council's strategic planning session last month were whittled down March 7, with roads being the No. 1 priority.

It was agreed a survey will be taken soon, with the goal of having results presented to the council by May. The survey will gauge what voters think of raising the sales tax by one-half percent to be used strictly for roads. It could then be on a ballot this year. (The state sales tax rate went down 0.25 percent on Jan. 1.)

With requiring 66 percent of the voters to approve it, the money would be solely for roads and could not go anywhere else. While there was no proof given, Councilmember Austin Sass said 75 percent of the tax burden would be absorbed by tourists.

Sass also advocates for a toll fee; something the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Tahoe Transportation District are looking into. He is on both of those boards, though the council as a whole is not in agreement that is a good idea.

Another survey question would be asking people's thoughts about creating a road authority. It would be similar to the now defunct Redevelopment Agency in that the council members

would likely be the road authority members. However, the council could put community members on the authority's board. The point of such an organization would be to make sure there is no question in residents' minds about where the money is going. The authority could also have decision making responsibilities beyond just where that tax money is spent.



South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry on March 7 leads the strategy session workshop. Photo/LTN

South Lake Tahoe needs \$3.2 million a year to maintain its roads. A dedicated program will bring jobs – internally and externally. The goal is to improve the pavement condition index. According to Jim Marino, deputy public works director, within three to four years the public would see a significant improvement with a dedicated funding source for roads. By year 15 the money would be for preservation and keeping the roads in good shape.

The city's roads were never constructed correctly. Last week a plow took a huge chunk out of a street – not just a pot hole size section.

Even without a new revenue stream, the city will be spending at least \$1.5 million on road repairs this season. The contract is signed and work will begin as soon as the weather allows. Plus, the city is trying to get as much money out of the state and feds from storm damage. That should at least

fund pot holes as things dry out.

The council decided to combine Fixin 50 with business façade improvement and single room occupancy hotels into what will be a new program. Staff will bring back this yet to be named program to the council with achievable outcomes. This is when one-time funding would be used. The city would provide financial incentive for business owners to improve the aesthetics of their buildings to meet design standards, but those structures also must be up to code. The money will be for businesses fronting highways 50 and 89.

The Fixin 50 initiative was passed when Tony O'Rourke was city manager, but it didn't go anywhere. The hope is it would be better received this go-round because the economy is better, the city is likely to put more money into the program – maybe \$500,000, and a better marketing plan will be devised. With this, Police Chief Brian Uhler wants more enforcement of codes.

Vacation home rentals is not coming off the work plan, but because a study is under way on the subject there is nothing to decide at this moment. The study outcome should be released in May or June, and at that time decisions will be made.

Council wants to make sure VHR enforcement is happening. The 90-day extra enforcement ends mid-March. After that a report will be forthcoming. Uhler said few complaints are made about VHRs. Kevin Fabino, development services director, said the industry is beginning to change and be more compliant.

When it came to the idea of creating one Tahoe county, the council opted to make it a future workshop topic in order to delve deeper before making a decision about pursuing this. A positive is that it would reduce duplicate administrative services. For every dollar in property taxes sent to the county the city gets 40 cents back in services.

Councilmember Brooke Laine, who is spearheading the idea,

wants to hire a consultant to gather financial data. Sass said because 51 percent of El Dorado County needs to approve this and that there has not been a new county in 100 years, he is skeptical of its ever becoming a reality and doesn't see the reason to put money toward to it. Councilmember Tom Davis wants to know the costs and political process.

Regarding marijuana, in particular recreation use, the city needs to have a policy in place by the end of the year before the state starts allowing the use in 2018. State voters last year approved recreational marijuana.

Delivery services are one concern. According to Uhler, the district attorney will not prosecute those cases, but the city could still shut the operations down in other ways.

Community workshops will be forthcoming, then the council will decide what to do. If pot were taxed, there is the possibility that money could go to restore the narcotics task force. For taxation to happen, it could go to voters in June 2018.

The plan is to have a workshop and talk to folks in Colorado. Advice to date from others is to go slow with decision making.

Some call it marijuana tourism. At the one local medical pot shop there are 38,000 cards, which proves with only 55,000 people living in the entire basin that this isn't just a medicinal business.

Everyone agreed housing is an issue; what needs to be decided is what the city's role should be. Councilwoman Wendy David is the champion for this cause. Single room occupancy, vacation home rentals and affordable housing need to be talked about together. It was noted there is limited state money for affordable housing.

Coverage and commodity rights are the biggest obstacles, according to Marino.

City Manager Nancy Kerry mentioned the El Dorado County-led housing task force, spoke of how the city has created a lot of housing projects, and said the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency needs to change commodities.

With anyone allowed to buy here (or anywhere in the United States), the supply-demand issue cannot be resolved. But it's possible to limit second homebuyers as other jurisdictions have done.

An issue is that old tourist hotels are becoming single residency occupancy lodging for locals because they are profitable.

Renewable energy goals are being deferred to the public, with those advocates asked to bring more information to the council. Creating a sustainability committee is being considered.

Fiber optics – Tahoe Prosperity Center is working on this. The plan is to keep funding TPC to work on this endeavor. Tied into this is the support of “dig once” policy. Ray Jarvis, public works director, said conduit should be put in the ground when someone cuts the road.

Regarding an outdoor events center, Marino believes this would be a huge money generator. Councilman Jason Collin said it should not be a priority.

Staff will bring back a work plan to the council, most likely in April. Other things on it will include airport improvements and possible rent hikes, relocation of the public works yard, negotiations with the county regarding the 56-acre site, changes to development services, financial policy stabilization initiative, CalPERS, communications infrastructure, storm water program and the recreation center.

Workshops are going to be part of this council's future in order to delve deeper into topics and help determine where to

go with specific issues.

Water conservation in Calif. continues in January

A wet January made it easy for Californians to conserve water.

Californians' monthly water conservation was 20.5 percent in January, an increase from the 17.2 percent savings in January 2016.

"Californians continue to conserve despite the wet weather in many areas," said State Water Board Chair Felicia Marcus. "This ongoing effort is important rain or shine for all sorts of reasons, in light of the greater extremes we can expect with climate change and increasingly weird weather. We're going to need to use all our tools including conservation and efficiency, water recycling, stormwater capture, and storing water above and below ground in wet times to get us through the dry times to deal with the Mack truck of climate change that has already arrived."

In February, the board extended its existing water conservation regulations. Gov. Jerry Brown has said he will reconsider the regulations this spring.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Battle over ownership of public lands in Nevada

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review Journal

CARSON CITY – The decadeslong battle over federal ownership of nearly 110,000 square miles of Nevada is about to be re-engaged at the Nevada Legislature.

With about 85 percent of those acres under control of a variety of federal agencies – primarily the U.S. Bureau of Land Management – some Nevada political leaders want a transfer of as many as 7 million acres to state control in a first phase that could eventually see large tracts of land become state lands.

Economic development is the primary driver for the introduction of Senate Joint Resolution 7, but some proponents see it as the first step in a state takeover of much of the federal public land in Nevada.

[Read the whole story](#)

Gaming industry steering clear of pot business

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

When Attorney General Jeff Sessions explained how and why the

Justice Department would address pot smoking, for both medical and recreational purposes, it sent a wave of trepidation through Nevada, where voters in November approved legalizing marijuana consumption.

One place where it was business as usual after the announcement was within the office of the state Gaming Control Board, which in November reminded companies in the casino industry to stay away from the marijuana business because state gaming agents intend to continue to treat pot possession and distribution as a felony.

A directive from Control Board member Terry Johnson in May 2014 essentially told licensees to make a choice: Either participate in gaming or in marijuana distribution because you can't do both. In November, after Question 2 legalizing marijuana was passed, Nevada Gaming Commission Chairman Tony Alamo repeated Johnson's message.

Read the whole story