

Residents want to put a stop to tourist traffic

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – El Dorado County is in the process of crafting a “traction ordinance” that could help keep tourist traffic out of neighborhoods – at least in the winter. It would not solve the summer traffic problem.

The ordinance would allow the county to require chains, snow tires and/or four-wheel drive on county streets. This in turn would mean law enforcement could cite anyone who is violating that law – even locals.

However, with how slow the wheels of government work, the ordinance is not expected to be in place to make an impact this winter.

Residents – especially those in the Meyers area – are tired of sharing their neighborhoods with tourists looking for a short cut. Not only do these wayward drivers want to avoid the backup on Highway 50, many want to bypass the chain inspection at the base of Echo Summit.

What these people don't realize is often the side streets have more snow and really are where two-wheel drive vehicles without chains are going to be the most problematic.

The advent of navigation apps has people going places they have no business being. Some roads are narrow, others are steep, all are residential streets that were never designed to be a thoroughfare. Topography isn't part of the information that is given out, though it may not matter even if it were a feature.

Local authorities have spoken with Apple. Old Meyers Grade is

no longer listed as a viable route. Google officials, though, have been unreachable. Novasel said San Francisco was able to get Google to change some things. The City, unlike El Dorado County, has leverage with Google because the tech company does business there.

Of the 100-plus people who attended the meeting Feb. 13 convened by El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel, more than 30 voiced their frustration about what has become a chronic issue on Sundays or the last day of a holiday period. Questions were asked. Ideas were shared.

One person suggested a class-action lawsuit against the app makers. It was then pointed out even if the more than dozen apps out there affecting the local situation were shutdown, there is nothing to stop someone from creating something else.

One of the more popular ideas was to fight technology with technology. One man suggested using the FasTrak device used on Bay Area bridges so tourists are paying for the use – then ideally upkeep – of local roads. Cameras would record the license plate and the person would be sent a bill if they didn't have a transponder.

Novasel said toll roads have been talked about. Doing so would be reviving a practice what was popular more than 100 years ago.

In addition to Novasel on Monday night there were reps from the California Highway Patrol, El Dorado County Sheriff's Office and county transportation department. The latter had nothing to contribute to the discussion.

Law enforcement pointed out how the roads are public so it's not possible to legally close them to some of the people and keep them open for others. Audience members, though, questioned if public safety were an overriding concern, then perhaps that would be reason enough to regulate who comes and goes.

One of the more immediate and basic things that could be done is better signage. Even the chain requirement sign on Highway 89 toward Hope Valley was covered with snow for about two weeks. New signs were suggested for residential areas to tell people it's not a suggested route, or warning them of the grade/conditions ahead.

Part of the backup problem is farther west beyond Echo Summit. People making snow play areas along Highway 50 are creating traffic problems that reverberate back to the basin. Dealing with those landowners is one strategy. Other ideas included talk of eliminating passing lanes because, according to the CHP, they cause more problems with people jockeying for front position. Another idea is to stop eastbound traffic at Sierra-at-Tahoe for a bit and let multiple lanes of traffic go west to clear things out.

Getting hotels to not all have an 11am checkout, to offer discounts for another night, for restaurants to entice people to stay longer for meal – those are all ideas that have been brought up in the past, but either aren't implemented or don't work.

Long drives from Tahoe to the Bay Area aren't new. It's been happening for decades. And the people making the drive keep doing so weekend after weekend. These people presumably sit in traffic during the week going to work so this isn't much different.

But it isn't the norm for people living in Tahoe. Being caught in Highway 50 traffic is one thing, taking hours to drive a few miles home is another. What those gathered Monday night really want is to be able to get around their neighborhoods and not be delayed by tourists who have no business being on side streets.

Novasel said she'd take the suggestions, concerns and questions back to Placerville where all the real decisions get

made.



Nev. Dems touting state rights to fight feds

By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Donald Trump set a feverish pace at the outset of his presidency by signing nine executive orders in his first 21 days in office.

Some, like those on immigration and health care, hit at the heart of Nevada's political atmosphere, but the Trump administration said this month those orders could take months, or even years, to be fully implemented.

Democratic lawmakers in Nevada have expressed concern over the

actions. They say roughly 400,000 Nevadans could be left without health insurance, undocumented immigrants will be deported and marriage equality could be targeted if all of Trump's policies go into effect.

With Democrats in control of the Legislature, several lawmakers are exploring the power of states' rights to rebuff the president.

Read the whole story

Nev. considers ways to overhaul voting process

By Alison Noon, AP

CARSON CITY – Lawmakers are gearing up to change how and whether people cast ballots in Nevada as the state faces a shifting electorate and unfounded claims of voter fraud and intimidation.

Eligible Nevadans would automatically be registered to vote and be able to participate in primary elections despite their party affiliation under a couple of the proposals up for debate this session.

Democrats won control of the Legislature in November and have pledged to prioritize access and equality in the state's elections. But proponents of change on both sides of the aisle say they're cautiously optimistic about the proposals.

More than 125,000 Nevadans signed a petition to automatically register people age 18 or older to vote, and update registrants' information, when they apply for any state

identification card at the Department of Motor Vehicles – unless they opt out in writing.

Six states and the District of Columbia have similar policies, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law. Twenty-two state legislatures are considering implementing or expanding automatic registration this year.

Nevada law required the petition to move to the state government, which could implement the policy if lawmakers approve it by mid-March and Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval signs it. Democratic legislative leaders and Sandoval have declined to say whether they support the petition.

If lawmakers or the governor do not approve it, the measure would go before voters on the 2018 ballot.

An assembly committee will hear the bill Tuesday.

A shrinking portion of the Nevada electorate is able to participate in the state's primary elections, which allow only voters affiliated with a political party to take part in that party's primary.

"People have got to have a say in who represents them," said Doug Goodman, who lobbies the Legislature for various election reforms, including one this year to abolish the current primary system. "They are voluntarily giving up that right when you have a closed primary."

Goodman is working with Republican Sen. James Settelmeyer of Minden to enact a new process that would put candidates from all parties on the same ballot and allow the top two vote-getters to advance to the general election.

Settelmeyer sponsored the measure after hearing from registered-nonpartisan constituents frustrated they didn't have a say in the 2016 Republican or Democratic primaries.

Supporters of the top-two primary system say it would not only increase turnout and expand voters' choices, but also force politicians into less-polarizing political positions as they attempt to win over voters.

Opponents argue the parties should reserve the right to select their own candidates.

Nearly 21 percent of Nevadans who voted in November did not identify with a political party. "Recapturing that pool of voters is what drives this whole thing," Goodman said.

The Democratic majority has not deterred Republican efforts for stricter identification requirements in Nevada, where people already must prove their residency in the state to register to vote. Republican lawmakers introduced a bill this week that would give voters the option to decide ahead of an election to voluntarily show proof of identification at the ballot box and prohibit those people from voting at the polling place if they show up without a valid ID.

Senate Majority Leader Aaron Ford, a Las Vegas Democrat, said no voter ID-related bills will succeed under his watch.

But Republican Sen. Don Gustavson of Sparks said he and the measure's four other sponsors hope Democrats will consider it an option for people to voluntarily protect their vote from ballot theft.

Republican Sen. Pete Goicoechea of Eureka said he would elect to show his driver's license at a polling station if for no other reason than to pressure other voters to do the same.

Nevada Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske, a former Republican lawmaker who supports ID requirements, said her office found no evidence of illegal voting in November.

Her office is seeking to correct isolated incidents of voter-registration fraud identified after the November election. Two

people were convicted of tampering with others' registrations, and Cegavske said the state is still investigating the election.

She's backing a ball this session that, among other things, would allow her to require training for anyone who registers voters.

Man found near American River identified



Rescue personnel recover a body from the American River on Feb. 10. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

The man who drowned in the American River on Friday has been identified as Digger Gooch, 37, of Silver Fork.

He was on his way to work in Pollock Pines when it's believed

he lost control of his vehicle on the icy, slushy Highway 50.

A passerby saw his body tangled in brush near the river the afternoon of Feb. 10. This was by the Randall Tract Bridge near Whitehall. Investigators found evidence of the vehicle leaving the road about three-quarters of a mile from where the body was located.

“CHP flew a helicopter up the canyon yesterday and was still unable to locate the vehicle,” El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Matt Underhill told *Lake Tahoe News*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Grassroots effort to deal with affordable housing

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 Terra Breeden

Most of the single-family homes in South Lake Tahoe sit empty. They are second homes, used by the owners only a handful of times a year, or as vacation rentals.

Affordable housing options have become limited in South Lake Tahoe and around the lake. There simply are not enough long-term rental homes or affordable subdivisions to house the local population. Many residents are forced to pay an inflated monthly rent in order to secure a decent living situation, stay in hotel rooms for extended periods of time, or move to

less expensive areas like Minden and Gardnerville.



“In my mind, there is no difference between workforce housing and affordable housing.”

—Sue Novasel, El Dorado County supervisor

Because of the housing crisis, South Lake Tahoe is losing many of its longstanding current residents and potential newcomers. This creates a community where actual residents are scarce and vacationers are plentiful.

“Seventy-five percent of our residents are in a low income bracket,” El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel said at a meeting Feb. 10. “There are 1,800 employees who come here for the winter and we can’t get them to stay in Tahoe. In my mind, there is no difference between workforce housing and affordable housing. So now we are asking, ‘what are people’s needs’ and looking at the economic side of it.”

Progress for Tahoe hosted a community meeting at Mountain Lab on Friday to discuss the South Lake Tahoe housing crisis. Progress for Tahoe, a grassroots movement founded last year, has declared the lack of affordable housing to be one of the most pressing issues facing South Lake Tahoe residents. The meeting was attended by about 20 community members from El Dorado County officials to concerned residents.



“As a local, I wanted to be at this meeting and let the community know about their options,” founder of the Tahomes Facebook page and South Lake Tahoe resident Kelsey Adams said. “A lot of people are into affordable housing, but I have to turn down about 30 people who

are looking for homes each day.”

At the meeting, attendees broke into small groups and brainstormed solutions to the housing crisis. They discussed a variety of proposed ideas, from improving the balance of vacation home rentals and long-term rentals in South Lake Tahoe to reviving the Silent Second Mortgage program. Any idea that might create more affordable housing in the community was considered.

Crested Butte, Colo., a ski resort town similar to South Lake Tahoe, was introduced as a model of what a small community can do to build affordable housing for its residents. Crested Butte has built multiple affordable housing units (without relying on grants or government money) by issuing a \$2,000 to \$50,000 fee for building new homes in the area and installing a public transportation tax. The money gathered from these incentives is put into a community pot that is used explicitly to build affordable housing for its long-term residents.

“We want to honor the fact that we live in a beautiful place and it’s sensitive to development, but if we look at communities like these, we see that it can be done,” a woman in the audience said.

Other ideas discussed at the meeting included reviving the Silent Second Mortgage program, a program that helps people who make less than \$60,000 a year purchase homes. Troy Matthews, a member of the Progress for Tahoe steering

committee, wants to make an appointment with the city manager to see if the city of South Lake Tahoe can reinstate the program.

Zoning South Lake Tahoe neighborhoods so that ratios of vacation home rentals, second homes, and long-term rentals are equalized was another solution proposed at the Progress for Tahoe community meeting. By zoning neighborhoods, the belief is the city could create a required ratio of long-term rentals for residents and help solve the housing crisis.

Everyone at the meeting agreed that there is a substantial shortage of long-term home rentals for families and short-term rentals for Heavenly Ski Resort employees in South Lake Tahoe. But building one affordable housing unit is not going to solve the housing crisis. And there are several obstacles to building new homes in Lake Tahoe. The cost to even put a shovel in the soil and break ground is humongous due to zoning and government fees.

However, Novasel has put together a task force to look at what can be done to reduce building fees and to collect data on current housing conditions in South Lake Tahoe.

“We want to look at zoning, fees, and the fact that we have limited space to build,” Novasel said. “These are the three major barriers to building more affordable housing.”

With pension reform looming, Calif. went on a hiring spree

By Adam Ashton and Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

On the eve of major pension changes that would crimp retirement benefits for new hires, a handful of California government agencies went on a holiday hiring spree.

The Board of Equalization hired 25 new faces that week. Seventeen reported for their first day of work on New Year's Eve.

By beginning work in the waning days of 2012, the employees enrolled in the California Public Employees' Retirement System just in time to gain a generous pension formula adopted during the dot-com boom of 1999 that allowed most public workers to retire at age 55.

By contrast, most employees hired after Jan. 1, 2013, would have to work until age 67 to gain their full benefits.

Read the whole story

Gaming numbers cruncher has lots to digest

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

This time of year, David Schwartz, the director of UNLV's Center for Gaming Research, crunches more numbers than an accountant on a tax-filing deadline.

If it has anything to do with revenue generated on a casino floor, Schwartz has a chart filled with historical data to explain its significance.

It was a busy time for Schwartz last week because the state Gaming Control Board released its December numbers capping

another calendar year.

Read the whole story

California's roads are in dire shape

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

In more than four decades as a top transportation planner in California, Will Kempton says the state's roads have never been in as bad condition as they are right now.

Kempton, 69, who is retiring as executive director of the advocacy group Transportation California, said he is "frustrated and disappointed" that California has failed for decades to agree on a plan to pay for a \$136-billion backlog of repairs on state highways and local roads. Gov. Jerry Brown and legislative leaders said they will take another crack at reaching a deal during the next two months, which Kempton said is welcome news.

"This is the worst I have seen," he said of street conditions in California.

Read the whole story

Truckee plans seven more roundabouts

By Jim Hemig, Moonshine Ink

We all have stories of out-of-towners who can't seem to get it right. You know the ones, the drivers who stop right in the middle of the roundabout to let you enter, which is nice, but wrong. Or those who don't even bother to look on their way in, blasting through the circle, oblivious to any other cars. At least it's easy to spot the tourists in our town!

I personally love roundabouts, also known as traffic circles. Sometimes I'll skip my exit and just go around and around. Is that legal?

I like them so much I have a hard time fully stopping at stop signs. Now, I know that's illegal.

Fully on the roundabout bandwagon, Truckee now has seven, last I counted. Does seven seem excessive for a small town? What if I told you Truckee plans to add seven more in the next several years?

[Read the whole story](#)

Caltrans: Hwy. 50 to be closed indefinitely



Mudslides continue to make Highway 50 inaccessible through the American River Canyon. Photo/Caltrans

Updated 6:54pm

Highway 50 in the Kyburz area will remain closed indefinitely due to multiple mudslides.

This means the main route between the South Shore and Placerville is off limits at least as a thoroughfare. It is possible to access some points along the route from each direction. For example, Sierra-at-Tahoe is open.

Crews are working on three significant slides in a 12-mile area along the American River Canyon, along with other minor slides.

The first major slide occurred Feb. 10 near Sand Flat. The second slide, which is between Whitehall and Kyburz, came down Saturday afternoon. The third slide is two miles east of Kyburz and has been slipping for the last few days. It came down Saturday afternoon.

Highway 50 was closed for four weeks in January 1997 for what

was called the Mill Creek landslide. That year 350,000 cubic yards of debris were removed at a cost of \$4.5 million, according to Caltrans.

There is still no time for when Highway 50 in Nevada will open either.

By Kathryn Reed

Highway 50 linking Tahoe and Placerville will not be opening on Sunday, nor will motorists be able to use Highway 50 in Nevada to get from the South Shore to Carson City any time soon.

Neither Caltrans nor NDOT have an estimate when the highways will open. Both transportation departments said it is too dangerous to have people driving through the area. And in California, it's just impossible to do so because of all the debris crossing all lanes.

"It is constantly moving with water moving through the mountains," Deanna Shoopman with Caltrans told *Lake Tahoe News*. It is literally a fluid situation.

Highway crews had hoped to open the roadway this evening, but that is not happening because it is not safe. What is being called a tall slide, as opposed to wide, fell near Whitehall. This is in addition to the major slide that fell Friday and shutdown this main artery between the South Shore and points west.

Shoopman said the hill an engineer was standing on Saturday to observe the situation is gone today.

"It's crazy how many waterfalls there are; there are waterfalls I've never seen," one Meyers resident who drove through 50 to Sonoma County on Friday said. She will be able to get back using Highway 88 via Kirkwood, though there could be delays with avalanche control in the Carson Spur area.

Interstate 80 westbound from state line to Truckee is down to one lane because of a mudslide. It is estimated to open Feb. 13 at 10am.

Highway 395 is open in both directions.

Boulders in the road and an unstable hillside have shut down the Nevada part of Highway 50 at Logan Creek since Feb. 8.

"It all depends on Mother Nature, if it dries out," Meg Ragonese with the Nevada Department of Transportation told *Lake Tahoe News* in regards to opening that stretch of road. For now the hillside is too soaked to be able to stabilize it.

In all of the slides in the region there has one been one vehicle reported to be damaged. That was near Pollock Pines and Ice House Road where the initial large slide was on 50. The Jeep had been pinned against a tree, which prevented it from rolling into the American River. The occupants were able to get out safely and without injury.

The weather forecast is for it to be dry in the greater Lake Tahoe-Truckee area until Wednesday night, when rain is expected to start falling – again.