

More than 7 inches of rain soaks SLT in Oct.



Lake Tahoe experienced more rain than usual in October. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe received 7.29 inches of rain in October. The average amount of precipitation for October is 1.8 inches at the airport.

The National Weather Service in Reno did not have monthly precip records for South Lake, but said this year is bound to be in the top three.

In Tahoe City, 6.96 inches was recorded last month. The October record of 8.34 inches was set in 1962.

Most of the moisture came in four days – Oct. 14-17.

“Three-quarters of the monthly total came in those four days. It was a combination of the atmospheric river and a strong jet stream across the Pacific that brought big surges of moisture,” Brian Brong, meteorologist with the National Weather Service, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Scattered showers will linger today, with the next chance of moisture in the basin possible on Sunday. Snow levels will be above 7,000 feet.

Brong said it will be dry for the next few days in the basin. Truckee could experience some fog. Nighttime temps will be plummeting – low to mid-20s in the basin, in the teens in Truckee.

EDC supervisor's race focuses on housing growth

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

A race for El Dorado County supervisor that's heavily focused on development has gotten testy, with both candidates lobbing accusations.

The opponent of Assemblywoman Beth Gaines, R-El Dorado Hills – who is running for supervisor as her term in the Legislature expires – is questioning her motives for seeking the office and her support by special interests, including developers.

Gaines, in turn, is painting longtime fire district board member John Hidahl as a fiscally irresponsible Democrat in a conservative county. Hidahl, a retired aerospace engineer, has served on the El Dorado Hills fire district board for 33 years.

Gaines and Hidahl are competing to replace Supervisor Ron Mikulaco in District 1, which represents El Dorado Hills.

Read the whole story

Posting ballot selfies: Personal choice or illegal act?

By Bruce Shipkowski, AP

You probably already know whether you'll vote for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton on Election Day, leaving one important question to consider when you walk into your polling place: Is it OK to take a picture of your ballot?

While secrecy in the voting booth has become a thing of the past for those ready to share their views and daily lives on social media, laws nationwide are mixed on whether voters are allowed to take pictures of themselves in the act or of their ballots – “ballot selfies”.

Federal judges have struck down bans on selfies in New Hampshire and Indiana, and rules have been changed in places like California and Rhode Island, but in many states it's still a violation that carries potential fines or jail terms.

There are laws against sharing any photo of your ballot in 18 states, while six other states bar photography in polling places but do allow photos of mail-in ballots, according to a review by the Associated Press.

Critics say such regulations have not kept up with technology and are confusing for voters and election workers. Some states that ban ballot selfies or have moved to block them cite concerns the photos could harm the integrity of the voting

process by encouraging vote-buying or coercion, though some acknowledge there's no evidence to support those fears.

Nikola Jordan, 33, of Omaha, Neb., has been taking such photos for about 10 years and believes they are a great way not only to share her views on the issues, but also to stress the importance of voting and being civically active. A Nebraska lawmaker added a provision to state election law this year to allow ballot selfies.

"I was doing this for years before I learned it was technically illegal," Jordan said with a laugh. "It's all about encouraging other people to get involved in the process, to show it can be fun and exciting to make your voice heard (at the polls). Don't think of voting as some boring thing ... It's your chance to make a difference."

The 1st Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston last month upheld a decision that New Hampshire's ban on ballot selfies was unconstitutional, saying it suppressed a large swath of political speech and there was no evidence to support the state's concerns.

"It goes to the core of democracy," said Gilles Bissonnette, legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Hampshire, which brought the suit on behalf of three people investigated for violating the statute.

Among those filing briefs in support of ballot selfies was Snapchat, which argued they are the latest way voters, especially young adults, get involved in the political process and express support for or against a cause or a candidate.

"We had a failure to recognize the importance of online political speech, especially to the younger generation," Bissonnette said. "The First Amendment needs to be guarded rigorously. These old laws cannot and should not be applied to the modern technology."

California Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill last month that repeals a 125-year-old law barring voters from showing people their marked ballots. It goes into effect after the November election, but legislative analysts have found no occasion of the ban being enforced – and it hasn't stopped people from sharing photos of their 2016 ballots.

Colorado started mailing ballots this week in the all-mail presidential election, and some ballot selfies started popping up on social media. In response, Denver District Attorney Mitch Morrissey on Thursday issued a reminder that publicizing completed ballots is a misdemeanor in the state.

The ACLU criticized his statement as potential voter intimidation. Morrissey's spokeswoman told reporters he had no plans to comb social media looking for folks posting ballot selfies, saying authorities investigate only in response to a complaint.

Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring issued a formal opinion last month that nothing in Virginia law prohibits voters from taking pictures of themselves, fellow voters or their ballot within the polling place.

"This is a product of the times we live in," said Democratic New Jersey Assemblyman Raj Mukherji, who has sponsored a measure to allow ballot selfies. "If voters want to express their pride in participating in our democracy by voting or tout their political preferences on social media, they should be entitled to do so."

Clarissa Livingstone, 26, of Toms River, said she doesn't understand concerns raised over ballot selfies. She doesn't believe people would be influenced by seeing ballot photos that she or anyone else might post.

"People are so rigid in their political beliefs these days," Livingstone said, "they're not going to change their votes once they see how some Jersey girl voted."

Contributing to this report were Associated Press writers Josh Cornfield in Trenton, Alanna Durkin Richer in Richmond, Virginia, and Kristen Wyatt in Denver.

South Shore candidates' finance documents

Oct. 28 marked another deadline for candidates in California to file campaign financial documents.

These documents were provided by the South Lake Tahoe city clerk's office for City Council candidates:

JoAnn Conner

Brooke Laine

Ted Long

Tami Wallace.

Here are forms for other offices provided by El Dorado County:

Annie Davidson – Lake Tahoe Unified School District

Nancy Dalton – Lake Tahoe Community College.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Call center industry flourishing in Nevada

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Amid Nevada's economic slowdown between 2008 and 2013, the call center industry settled in the state.

What it found was a gold mine of talented, unemployed labor.

Most industry settlers came in the form of high-end call centers that require specialized training, boosting today's average call center hourly wage to \$14.86 statewide.

"The (contact center) companies who we talk to now, we'll tell them if you are not paying \$15 an hour, good luck finding a workforce (in Northern Nevada)," said Mike Kazemierski, CEO of the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada.

Read the whole story

Planners to discuss condo project near bi-state park

The **Gondola Vista Estates** condo project is going before the South Lake Tahoe Planning Commission on Nov. 10.

The 20 condos would be built on Lake Parkway between Heavenly's gondola and the state line.

Planning commissioners will consider a major design review permit, negative declaration addendum, and a variance from the city's trash enclosure ordinance.

The meeting will be at Lake Tahoe Airport at 3pm.

For more info, contact John Hitchcock, city planner, at 530.542.7472.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

El Dorado County judge wants to be AG

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey has designs on being the attorney general of California.

He plans to seek the office in 2018. However, to hedge his bets he has also filed paperwork with the state to retain his current job. That election would be in 2020.

Bailey was first elected to the local bench in 2008. He ran opposed in 2014. He has spent the bulk of his time in the South Lake Tahoe courthouse.

He did not return multiple inquiries.

If Bailey goes through with seeking the position of the state's top cop, it's unknown who he might face. Kamala Harris, the current attorney general, is vying to replace the retiring Barbara Boxer in the Senate. If she wins, it would be up to Gov. Jerry Brown to appoint a replacement for the next two years.

It is highly doubtful Bailey's name would surface as a potential appointee. This is because Brown and Bailey are about as far apart as one can get on the political spectrum, even with the governor becoming more moderate as he ages.

Bailey's website has pictures of him with Rep. Tom McClintock and Sen. Ted Cruz.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Ballot puts medical, recreational pot users at odds

By Patrick Whittle, AP

A handful of recreational marijuana legalization drives has the medical pot industry bracing for something it never expected to deal with: competition.

Legalization is on the ballot in five states this November, and all five currently allow some form of medical marijuana already.

Growers, medical professionals and users of medical marijuana say they worry that people who want medical marijuana will buy it on the open market instead of going through the hassle of getting a doctor's recommendation.

"This is being structured for big corporations to come in and in a very short period of time wipe out the caregivers," said Lori Libbey, a board director of a Maine group campaigning against legalization and a nurse who administers cannabis. "I wonder who is going to be able to provide for pediatric patients."

But in Maine and the other states considering legalization, others in the marijuana business are very much looking forward

to the possibility of legalization. And some proponents believe medical marijuana professionals just don't want to lose their monopoly.

Recreational legalization measures are also on ballots in Arizona, California, Massachusetts and Nevada. Concerns from medical marijuana professionals have also cropped up in those states, and they have echoed similar struggles in states that have already legalized recreational marijuana, such as Oregon and Colorado.

Competition in the marijuana market has become part of the landscape in Colorado, which saw nearly \$1 billion in sales of medical and recreational marijuana last year. The state went legal in 2012.

Paul Armentano, spokesman for the leading marijuana legalization group NORML, said some medical users and advocacy groups worry about potential corporatization of marijuana as the market expands. Tension between medical and recreational marijuana supporters, he said, has already become an issue in California.

NORML is sensitive to the concerns of medical marijuana users, Armentano said, but also understands some of the consternation is about angst over free-market competition.

"There is a concern among individuals who largely have the marijuana market solely to themselves that the advent of broader legalization will introduce competition into the existing market and that competition will pose a threat to their existing business model," he said.

Some advocates of medical marijuana feel state regulations are the key to making sure medical marijuana survives in the age of legal pot.

In Massachusetts, the language has alarmed some critics who fear passage of the ballot question could compromise or

perhaps even overrun the state's medical marijuana program, which has already been slowed by regulatory delays since Massachusetts voters authorized it in 2012.

Nichole Snow, executive director of the Massachusetts Patient Advocacy Alliance, said her group, which supports medical marijuana recipients, is neutral on the ballot question and uncertain of its potential impact.

"I hope there is still patient focus (if) this initiative passes," Snow said.

Americans for Safe Access, an organization that advocates for legal access to medical cannabis, said recreational marijuana programs should be kept separate from medical marijuana.

The group sees potential "competing interests" between the two if they are comingled, said Beth Collins, a leader of the organization. The group also sees potential harm from the possibility corporatization of marijuana, Collins said.

"On the negative side, big business may try to impose regulations to keep other players out, which could lead to fewer products," she said. "The best medical cannabis programs allow for both large and small businesses along with access via patient or caregiver cultivation."

Some ardent proponents of medical marijuana are on board with broad legalization.

Carey Clark, a member of the board of directors for the American Cannabis Nurses Association, said recreational legalization will allow people who use marijuana as medicine to have easier access to it.

"When it's legal we're going to see an increase in quality and a decrease in cost, and that is really good for people who need access to this medicine," Clark said. "Things will be labeled and they'll know what they're getting."

Associated Press writer Bob Salsberg in Boston contributed to this report.

Fatal casino bus crashes draw attention of feds

By Brian Melley and Julie Watson, AP

LOS ANGELES — Rosa Ruiz returned from a gambling jaunt to San Diego before dawn Saturday and was back on another bus that evening, headed for a desert casino.

Like others who routinely board buses bound for distant casinos, Ruiz wasn't so much dreaming of striking it rich, just escaping her normal life for a few hours to socialize, snack and play the slots.

But this night out ended in disaster on the freeway near Palm Springs when the bus slammed into a tractor-trailer in the pre-dawn darkness Sunday. Ruiz was killed along with 12 others, including the bus driver who also owned the USA Holiday bus. It was the latest in a growing number of casino bus tragedies around the country, from New York to Minnesota to Texas.

Fatalities involving casino buses have become so frequent that the National Transportation Safety Board, which investigates major crashes, is studying them for common patterns, said Earl Weener, an NTSB board member overseeing the crash probe of the USA Holiday bus.

As casinos have proliferated, buses ferrying gamblers have become a fixture. Many, like Ruiz, travel from big cities to

out-of-the-way casinos and stay for as little as four hours before the buses head home.

The tours typically draw a similar demographic: older, lower-income and, often, minorities. Many of those killed in the crash last weekend were Latinos, and they boarded the bus in the Koreatown neighborhood of Los Angeles.

"They don't take off from the Santa Monica pier. They don't take off from Beverly Hills," said Dr. Timothy Fong, a psychiatry professor and co-director of gambling studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Day and night, people line up at street corners, parking lots and fast food restaurants across the Los Angeles area where the buses arrive and depart for short casino trips.

At the Koreatown location where Ruiz, 53, embarked on her last journey, fellow travelers gathered this week to light votive candles, stick roses and daisies in the bark of a palm tree and remember their lost friends. All the while, white buses pulled up to shuttle others to casinos in the desert or Santa Barbara and San Diego counties.

These so-called curbside carriers are often mom-and-pop operations that have proliferated in the U.S. for tours of all kinds, including gambling trips. Government regulators are stretched to try to ensure all are abiding by safety rules.

Attorney Katherine Harvey-Lee, who has sued bus operators, said casinos typically pay a per-passenger fee to smaller operations like USA Holiday, the one-bus operation owned by Teodulo Elias Vides, who was also the lone driver. Gamblers usually get \$20 to \$30 in tokens or casino credits.

Vides charged \$20 for the roundtrip to Red Earth Casino, a bare-bones operation in the community of Thermal, with about 3,000 residents living next to the Salton Sea, California's largest lake. A gas station and convenience store help draw

travelers on Interstate 10, but the casino, packed with penny slots, lacks amenities and glitz. The dining area resembles a school cafeteria with basic offerings of pizza and sandwiches.

The bus would have passed bigger, fancier and better-known Indian casinos to reach the destination 135 miles from LA.

"The fact that this is a way for them to bring gamblers from hundreds of miles away to a place they would never go or would ever have heard of makes one think there has to be a relationship between the operator and the casino," Harvey-Lee said. "They weren't going to a place where some celebrity was playing in the lounge."

The general manager at Red Earth Casino did not return a call seeking comment.

Investigators are looking at Vides' relationship with the casino along with possible mechanical issues on the bus and what Vides did in the hours leading up to the crash to see whether alcohol or fatigue or some other factor might have contributed.

The bus was traveling "freeway speeds," and it did not appear to brake before slamming into the big rig that was moving at 5 mph as it approached utility work, California Highway Patrol Border Division Chief Jim Abele said. The crash occurred just after 5:15 a.m. when most passengers were sleeping.

While the survivors of the crash and others who routinely board casino-bound buses said the trips are mostly for fun and socializing, there can be a darker side.

Concerned that casinos were targeting vulnerable elders in San Francisco's Chinatown, a health care organization there tried unsuccessfully to distribute brochures about problem gambling on buses and at tour bus offices. The companies wouldn't cooperate, so workers hand out literature on sidewalks near the buses.

“For so many of our clients, that trip to the casino represents hope,” said Michael S. Liao of NICOS Chinese Health Coalition.

The reality is that most of those people end up losing, and some carry huge debts.

“It’s not about how much you lose, but how much you can afford to lose,” he said.

Watson reported from San Diego. Associated Press writers Amy Taxin in Los Angeles and Elliot Spagat in Salton City contributed to this report.

Unions flex muscle in Nev.’s high-stakes Senate race

By Michelle Rindels, AP

A busload of casino housekeepers wearing pinstripe uniforms and Caesars Palace nametags waited at a warehouse early voting site just off the Las Vegas Strip, speaking in Spanish as they clutched pocket-sized brochures listing candidates endorsed by the powerful Culinary Union.

Asked who they chose in Nevada’s super-close Senate race, one worker simply said “the Democrat.” Another identified her choice as Democrat Catherine Cortez Masto, explaining with an argument progressive groups have relentlessly lobbed against Republican Rep. Joe Heck even after he revoked his endorsement of Donald Trump earlier this month.

“What I know about Joe Heck is he’s totally leaning toward Donald Trump,” Ana Aguirre, 40, said in Spanish, adding that

she was particularly concerned that Heck is open to revisiting the idea of birthright citizenship.

And on Trump? "I've thought about the possibility that he's president, and I feel terror," she said.

Inflamed by Trump's candidacy but with an eye on turning the whole ticket blue, organized labor groups including the heavily immigrant Culinary Union are in the thick of an aggressive get-out-the-vote campaign that's contributing to Democrats' early voting turnout lead in Nevada, and raising alarms for down-ticket Republicans. The union's work so far this cycle included ensuring 34,000 of its members are registered to vote, reassigning 150 of its members to full-time political work and leading a ground operation that's knocked on more than 200,000 doors.

Workers try to sway their co-workers in casino cafeterias and by phone, and they're leaving no room for excuses in physically getting people to the polls. Chartered buses shuttle casino workers to an early voting site during their paid lunch break, and they're handed a boxed lunch for the ride back.

The election comes just as the union engages in a labor dispute with management at Trump's Las Vegas hotel, adding more ammunition to their campaign against him. A majority of workers voted for Culinary Union representation in December, but management has yet to come to the bargaining table to negotiate a contract.

As a result, union officials say, Trump workers make an average of \$3 less an hour than their counterparts at hotels with union contracts.

"I think the workers at his hotel have a really strong message to bring the country and that is – what happens to them in Las Vegas could happen to America if he gets into the White House," said Yvanna Cancela, the group's political director.

Democrats have a 6 percentage point registration advantage in Nevada but have lived and died on motivating low-propensity voters in their base. Danny Thompson of the Nevada AFL-CIO often rallies his volunteers with reminders of the “red wave” in the 2014 midterm election, when lackluster Democratic turnout wiped out a bench of rising star Nevada Democrats and rendered the party largely defenseless against anti-union efforts in the Republican-dominated state Legislature.

“We lost everything,” he says. “We got a do-over.”

His group has coordinated waves of reinforcements from states like California with less-competitive elections. The LA County Federation of Labor, for example, has its members making phone calls into Nevada to talk about the Senate race and brings busloads of volunteers from Los Angeles for weekends of canvassing in Las Vegas.

“We see the work that’s happening here being critical to the national conversation, and we also have sisters and brothers in need here who are facing an uphill battle,” said Rusty Hicks, executive secretary treasurer of the union. “While we have our own work, we certainly feel a sense of responsibility to support those who need support.”

While they lack union muscle, Republicans point out that they’ve had boots on the ground far earlier than in years past, including 67 paid Republican National Committee staffers in Nevada as of late October. The organization has tried to mimic Democratic successes with a sophisticated data collection program modeled after President Barack Obama’s campaigns.

Republicans say that even though Democrats have an 8-point turnout lead in absentee ballots and the first six days of early voting, Democrats haven’t run away with the election.

“We always knew that we would go into early voting with a deficit. Republicans vote on Election Day. It’s their

conservative mentality,” said Donald Trump’s Nevada State Campaign Director, Charles Munoz. “We feel extremely confident in what we’re seeing and trying out on the ground ... I think we’re going to see that the Democrat lead for turnout taper off.”

But fears of a blue wave that could sink Heck are evident in outside TV spending. Groups linked to the billionaire Koch brothers that pulled off TV to focus on field work returned to the airwaves this week to boost Heck, while the Senate Leadership Fund, linked to Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, planned \$7.5 million in last-minute ad spending in Nevada.

Labor isn’t taking its foot off the gas.

“There is still a difference between people power and money,” said Randi Weingarten, head of the American Federation of Teachers. “They don’t have people power so they try to fight by fear and not by hope. Catherine fights by hope, by opportunity. She exudes opportunity.”