

California bans drones near wildland fires

Multiple times this fire season firefighting aircraft had to be grounded because of drones.

It is now against the law in California to fly the unmanned aircraft near a wildland fire.

“Wildfires continue to ravage our state and we can’t have drones or anything else getting in the way of the first-class emergency response we get from all of our firefighters and public safety officers. These are life-and-death situations where a single delay can lead to tragedy,” state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-El Dorado, said in a statement.

Gaines sponsored the legislation that was signed this week by Gov. Jerry Brown.

Senate Bill 807 will grant civil immunity to an emergency responder who damages an unmanned aircraft in the course of firefighting, air ambulance, or search-and-rescue operations.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Companies with ties to Tahoe developing Snowmass

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

Denver private equity firm KSL Partners, Vail’s East West Partners and Aspen Skiing Co. are partnering to buy the

Snowmass Base Village project from an affiliate of New York's Related Cos., reviving hope for the stalled project that has languished for nearly a decade.

East West, which developed Northstar Village, Ritz-Carlton at Lake Tahoe, Beaver Creek Village, and Bachelor Gulch has been eyeing Snowmass Village for more than 16 years. The company wanted to develop the base village in 2000, but then-owner Aspen Skiing Co. tapped Intrawest Corp. as village developer.

Then Related West Pac bought the base village from Intrawest and Aspen Skiing Co. in 2007 for \$169 million.

KSL is the parent company of Squaw Valley.

Read the whole story

CalPERS poised to cut retiree pensions in tiny Sierra town

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

Patsy Jardin is used to being in the know in the small Sierra County town where she worked for more than 30 years, sometimes as its only public employee.

She understood that Loyalton had broken with the California Public Employees' Retirement System three years ago. She just didn't know that her former employer's departure from the nation's largest public pension fund.

That part of the deal was not clear until she and four of her peers received letters this month warning them that the Sierra County city's failure to pay into CalPERS soon would lead to a

reduction in pensions for her and four of her former peers.

“If I lose it, then I’m really in trouble,” said Jardin, 71.

Read the whole story

Rash of commercial vehicle thefts in Truckee

Truckee police officers are investigating a series of thefts that have occurred in the area in the past few weeks.

Several unlocked commercial vehicles have been stolen from behind secured fences on private property and subsequently used in the commission of numerous thefts.

TPD urges business owners to be vigilant in locking up their vehicles and properties. If you have an alarm at your business, don’t forget to arm it before you leave.

At this point, there are no outstanding stolen vehicles.

Anyone with information about the crimes is asked to call 530.550.2320.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nev. Supreme Court suspends school choice program

By Michelle Rindels, AP

The Nevada Supreme Court has ruled that the state's voucher-style Education Savings Accounts – seen as the broadest school choice program in the country – have an unconstitutional funding mechanism and the program should remain blocked.

Justices issued a 4-2 ruling on Thursday striking down the program – which has been on hold since the winter and never disbursed funds to families as it intended – but upholding some of its key underpinnings.

Parties on both sides of the hotly debated issue claimed victory from the 35-page decision.

“Taxpayer money isn’t to be used to support the private education of a handful of kids,” said Rory Reid, son of Sen. Harry Reid president of the Rogers Foundation, which supported legal challenges against the program. “We’re proud to stand up for that proposition.”

Proponents framed the ruling as a victory, saying it agreed with some of their most fundamental arguments and adding that the program’s defects can be fixed by the Legislature.

“After (Thursday’s) ruling, there is only one step left to take in order to make the vision of educational choice a reality for thousands of Nevada families,” said Attorney General Adam Laxalt, a Republican who enlisted a star lawyer to help him defend the program. “Fortunately, the Supreme Court has made crystal clear that ESAs are constitutional and that the Legislature can fix this funding technicality and allow for the implementation of ESAs statewide.”

Lawmakers passed a Republican-backed bill on a party-line vote last year to create the program. It would allow parents to access more than \$5,000 in funds allocated each year for their child's public schooling and apply it toward private school tuition or other qualified education expenses.

The ruling says the program authorized last spring by the Nevada Legislature did not have its own dedicated funding source and is contradicting the Nevada Constitution by drawing on money allocated for public schools in the state's Distributive School Account.

"I'm angry and I'm disappointed," Republican state Sen. Scott Hammond, who sponsored the original bill, said in an interview shortly after the ruling came out. "Obviously it's going to affect thousands of kids. I'm disappointed that they'll have to wait until they figure this out."

But justices affirmed some central arguments from the proponents. They agreed that public money transferred to accounts for parents' discretion are no longer "public funds" that can't be used for sectarian purposes, such as religious schools.

One of the two lawsuits against the program argued primarily on the grounds of separation of church and state, saying the program would unconstitutionally divert money to religious schools that proselytize or can discriminate against students or staff.

Justices also affirmed that the Legislature can use its power to encourage other methods of education, and that the Education Savings Account program doesn't violate the Legislature's duty to "provide for a uniform system of common schools."

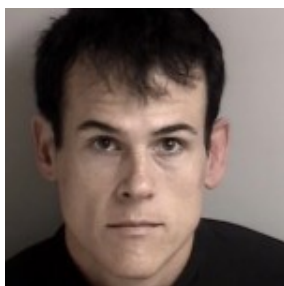
Republican Assembly Majority Leader Paul Anderson, who's leading the effort to keep his party in control of the Assembly during an election cycle more favorable to Democrats,

said his candidates will use the issue to motivate voters. Democrats have fought hard against the program on the grounds that it undermines an already strained public school system, but Republican control could more easily usher in a fix that could revive the program.

“It’s disappointing that more legislators don’t believe in school choice. It should not be a Republican-only issue,” Anderson said. But the funding problem “is much easier to overcome than had they ruled differently on the other points.”

S. Tahoe man admits guilt in Bay Area kidnapping

By Brittney Mejia and Veronica Rocha, Los Angeles Times



Matthew Muller

After a kidnapped Denise Huskins turned up in Huntington Beach in March 2015, police in Vallejo cast her disappearance as a hoax, saying it appeared to be part of an “orchestrated event.”

On Thursday, a Harvard-educated attorney from South Lake Tahoe pleaded guilty to the kidnapping, closing a chapter in a bizarre case that turned its harsh glare first on the victim

and then on the Northern California police department.

Matthew Muller, 39, previously pleaded not guilty to a kidnapping charge for the March 23, 2015, incident. He abducted Denise Huskins for two days and demanded a \$15,000 ransom for her, prosecutors said. Muller faces up to life in prison and a \$250,000 fine, according to acting U.S. Attorney Phillip A. Talbert.

Read the whole story

Cops disband South Shore drug task force

By Kathryn Reed

A South Shore drug task force has disbanded, but it's not because crime has gone away.

Five years ago California said it was shutting down South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team. While the state didn't actually pull its funding until 2014, the remaining two partners – South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County – finally did the same.

“With the significant reduction in assigned personnel, the operational effectiveness of SLEDNET was diminished as major drug investigations require large numbers of law enforcement officers for things like surveillance, drug raids, etc. Last month, the El Dorado County sheriff made the difficult decision to no longer support SLEDNET with assigned personnel, leaving only the SLTPD as a participating agency,” Police Chief Brian Uhler said in a statement. “With only one agency,

a task force by definition cannot continue.”

SLEDNET was formed in 1988, the year before Operation Deep Snow filled headlines. That was the investigation that led to the arrest of South Lake Tahoe Mayor Terry Trupp and 19 others on federal charges that were mostly drug related.

At its peak the narcotics task force included officers from SLTPD, El Dorado County Sheriff’s Department, California Department of Justice, California Highway Patrol, El Dorado County District Attorney’s Office, El Dorado County Probation Department, Alpine County Sheriff’s Department, Douglas County Sheriff’s Department, and Nevada Division of Investigation.

El Dorado will continue to have a drug task force based out of the West Slope. South Lake Tahoe PD’s two officers who were in SLEDNET will join the detectives’ division. Their focus will still be on drugs.

“Unfortunately, there is a serious problem with drugs in South Lake Tahoe. We see direct connections with drug abuse and crime. Just a few months ago, a marijuana transaction-related homicide occurred in our city,” Uhler said. “Social scientists and law enforcement professionals agree that myriad other crimes also have their roots in the drug trade and drug usage. Crimes related to drug use, such as theft, auto theft, and other property crimes, seriously erode the quality of life in our community.”

Gaming expert laments

industry's lack of innovation

By Thomas Moore, Las Vegas Sun

Where is the innovation in casino gaming?

It's a simple question and one Mark Yoseloff, executive director of UNLV's Center for Gaming Innovation, seemed to ask repeatedly during his presentation at the Global Gaming Expo (G2E) on Wednesday.

The resort itself has changed, adding day clubs, high-end nightclubs and other new amenities, Yoseloff said, but when it comes to actual gambling, the industry has lagged.

Read the whole story

Forecasters: Wet winter a 'crapshoot'

By Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

Last year at this time, weather forecasters had a pretty good idea of what was in store as California headed into the rainy season. The Pacific Ocean surface was warming, and they were predicting one of the strongest El Niño weather patterns in recorded history.

El Niño ended up making an appearance, but it wasn't the series of gully washers for which some had hoped. This year, the forecast is even less certain.

"It really is a crapshoot," said Michelle Mead, a

meteorologist with the Sacramento office of the National Weather Service. “We don’t know what exactly we’re going to get, and it’s going to be storm-by-storm dependent.”

In other words, there’s nearly as much chance that California experiences average precipitation or even flooding as there is for another dry winter akin to 2015 when Gov. Jerry Brown stood on a patch of bare grass where several feet of Sierra snow should have been and declared a statewide drought emergency.

Read the whole story

Stateline casinos outperform state in August

By Associated Press

State officials say Nevada gambling revenue was down 5 percent in August after Las Vegas Strip revenues took a sizable dip.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board said Thursday that the state’s casinos won just \$861 million in August.

Stateline revenue rose 27 percent to \$24 million in August.

Revenue on the Las Vegas Strip fell 15 percent year-over-year, to \$450 million. Downtown Las Vegas winnings notched up 7 percent to \$43 million.

Reno casino revenue stayed virtually flat at \$51 million.

The state collected \$48 million in tax money based off the August winnings, which is down 8 percent from the same time

last year.