

Douglas County Commission races heating up



Wesley Rice and Janet Murphy are vying for the District 4 seat that represents Lake Tahoe on the Douglas County Commission.

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – You know it's a new day and age of politics when much of the focus for local government is on the party system.

Hence, the upcoming primary election for Nevadans is June 12, a week after California's, and the candidates running for two seats on the Douglas County Board of Commissioners let it be known they're steadfast Republicans.

Such is the case at the candidate forum sponsored by the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce and the Tahoe Citizens Committee on May 9 in which current District 2 Commissioner Steve Thaler is being challenged by former chief financial officer and police officer John Engels, who's relatively new

to the Douglas County government scene.

Tahoe residents Wesley Rice, a deputy constable, and Janet Murphy, an engineer-turned-government consultant, also squared off in front of about 50 people to hear their ideas for the District 4 seat Nancy McDermid is being termed out on.

All candidates pledged at some point to attest to Republican values – a concept almost nonexistent years ago when the two-party system shared the same ballot.

Murphy even used the “drain the swamp” Trumpism when referring to being a fiscal conservative and making government more accountable to the taxpayers who seek getting the most out of District 4.

For District 2, the cowboy hat-clad Engels called himself nothing short of a staunch conservative Republican, equating affordable housing to gang housing and implying local government employees are paid too much in comparison to other jurisdictions in Nevada. The home page of his website displays the National Rifle Association logo, an inferred symbol of a no-holds-barred form of governing where might prevails over problems.

The more refined Thaler used his cerebral recollection of balancing a complex budget anchored by a \$52 million General Fund as an “always challenging” but necessary task to be proud of without gutting it.

The District 4 race also represents a contrast of sorts in personalities, despite Rice and Murphy being neighbors five houses apart. Rice and Thaler, going for separate seats, appeared to tag team with hosting coffee chats together – one at Casey’s this Saturday.

The mild-mannered Rice, who serves on the Round Hill General Improvement District, opposed Engels characterization of the gang problem as not bad because of superior law enforcement.

Like Engels, he also served as a police officer.

Nonetheless, Rice was predominantly placed at odds with the high energy, multi-tasking, shoot-from-the-hip style of Murphy, who made many of her take-no-prisoner points off the cuff. The experienced administrator for the Tahoe Douglas Utility District seemed to be peppered with questions from the chamber, citizen committee and audience by moderator Steve Teshara about whether her commitment level would be in jeopardy because of her busy schedule or dual party affiliation. She previously ran decades ago as an independent but now considers herself “an independent thinker.”

“I can do the job,” the Zephyr Cove resident repeatedly countered in various ways, making the case it’s “all government” where serving on different boards can mean sharing crossover information.

In November, the winner of the June Republican primary will face Kristi Kandel, a real estate consultant running as an independent with the goal of fixing infrastructure and balancing the vacation home rental quandary among other things.

The candidates never shied away from or ran out of topics to discuss.

“Tiregate” – Douglas County’s debacle involving a \$1 million embezzlement by a former employee was described as shameful and embarrassing by all the candidates. The product of a grand jury investigation may have represented the one item they all agreed should never happen again with proper checks and balances.

Thaler promised those listening: “The criminal side is yet to come.”

Vacation home rentals, growth, cost-cutting, congestion, relationship with the Nevada Department of Transportation and

the abundant supply of general improvement districts rounded out a lengthy list of discussion items.

“Congestion has become unbearable,” Engels exclaimed.

The tourism-driven topic came up again at the prospect of NDOT proposing the concept of reducing Highway 50 down to two lanes.

“It became four lanes for a reason,” Murphy said. Still, she understands why NDOT would want to make the road safer.

Rice partially agreed with his opponent by adding it took his daughter three hours to drive from Meyers to Round Hill on a holiday weekend; a reason to keep it four lanes.

While serving on the board now, Thaler accused the agency of not vetting the lane-reduction idea among government officials before putting it in the public eye. That said, he also noted the relationship with the county as: “working better than it ever has.”

“The best government is the government closest to the people” appeared to be the mantra of the night as the candidates discussed the need for multiple GIDs in the county. Rice listed Round Hill’s as only costing residents \$111 a month for all utility services.

Another phrase in Murphy’s repertoire – “let ‘em retire” – suggested employees leaving the county wouldn’t need to be replaced if others are cross-trained. She also believes the county should police the taxation of VHRs with more scrutiny.

Growth and development resembled a mixed bag of opinions related to the building of a Tahoe events center in the redevelopment area and a loop road to surround it.

All in all, the forum was well received by attendees, who provided limited applause but favored the listen-only mode.

Gardnerville resident Dave Maxwell sat attentively the entire time. Afterward, he told Lake Tahoe News he believed the candidates represented a broad spectrum of opinions and felt the topics put forth were good.

Maxwell would like affordable housing to be considered "quality housing."

Teshara ended the hour-plus session reminding them they will need to be registered Republican to vote for any of the candidates speaking that night.

Douglas County implements fraud hot line

In response to employees being accused of **stealing tires**, Douglas County has launched a public fraud, waste, and abuse hot line.

Using this hotline, the public and county employees will be able to confidentially report alleged inappropriate county activity. Douglas County employees also received fraud waste and abuse training and an ethics course.

The person reporting can choose to be identified or file a report anonymously.

Citizens and employees who report via the hotline will be able to track the status of the report through a report ID number. Reports will go to a third party contractor, which will forward reports to the county's designated internal auditor, who will review each report and either deal with it directly or send it to the appropriate county department to address.

For more information about the program or to access the hot line, go **online**.

Issues surround turning forests into fuel

By William Moomaw, The Conversation

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt recently told a group of forestry executives and students that from now on the U.S. government would consider burning wood to generate electricity, commonly known as forest or woody biomass, to be “carbon neutral.”

The executives, who had gathered at an Earth Day celebration in Georgia, greeted the news with enthusiasm. But I did not.

Biomass does not introduce new carbon into the system, as its supporters point out. Yet it does transfer carbon from forests to the atmosphere, where it traps heat and contributes to climate change.

As a scientist and the coordinating lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report on renewable energy, I have concluded from extensive scientific studies that converting forests into fuel is not carbon neutral. I have also been working with many other scientists to inform governments about the potential for forests to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and the climate perils of burning wood and forestry waste at an industrial scale for electric power.

Turning forests into fuel

Energy can be renewable. Or sustainable. Or carbon neutral. Or some combination. These terms are often used interchangeably, but they mean quite different things. Wind power and solar energy clearly have all three attributes. What about bioenergy – the heat released from burning wood and other plants?

Trees can eventually grow to replace those that were felled to produce wood pellets that are burned to produce electricity. That makes biomass very slowly renewable, if the replacement trees actually do grow enough to absorb all the carbon dioxide previously discharged.

Environmentalists generally oppose forest biomass because it contributes to climate change while disrupting important ecosystems and the biodiversity they support. They also object to this source of energy because it appears that burning biomass releases pollutants that endanger public health.

The scientists who study climate change, the global carbon cycle and forest ecology tend to reject the notion of biomass carbon neutrality. Some forest economists and forestry scientists, however, support the notion of carbon neutrality, depending on the circumstances.

Carbon accounting

To settle this debate, many of my colleagues and I believe it is essential to accurately account for all the emissions from burning wood for electric power. This is more than an academic exercise as biomass already produces significant emissions and industry observers foresee a nearly seven-fold increase in its use by 2050 from 2013 levels.

Forests can, at least theoretically, be managed sustainably as long as annual harvesting doesn't exceed annual growth rates. Suppliers claim to use residues from timber harvesting, thinnings – trees growing too close to other trees to thrive –

and sawdust for this purpose. However, large-scale biomass has led to clear-cutting and the harvesting of whole trees.

Also, experts see the carbon neutrality of forest biomass differently depending on the time frames they consider, and on their assumptions regarding the likelihood that saplings planted to replace burned trees grow sufficiently to offset all of the associated carbon emissions.

Carbon neutrality supporters

Bioenergy supporters say it's possible for replacement trees to eventually remove all the carbon emitted through biomass from the atmosphere.

But this would require growing trees and forests that are bigger than the ones already harvested and burned for fuel. In addition to the emissions from combustion, carbon is released from forest soils when trees are felled. And it takes large amounts of energy to prepare wood pellets and transport them to where they are burned.

Some bioenergy advocates claim that the carbon dioxide emitted when utilities and industry burn wood for energy is removed instantaneously by other growing trees located elsewhere. As long as forests globally are removing more carbon dioxide than is being released from harvesting and burning them, they assert that bioenergy is carbon neutral until combustion emissions exceed the removal rate by live trees.

However, there do not appear to be any quantitative studies to support this concept.

Biomass critics

The scientists and other energy experts who argue that burning wood isn't carbon-neutral – including me – point out that bioenergy releases as much or more carbon dioxide per unit of thermal energy than coal or natural gas.

People are adding nearly twice as much carbon dioxide as natural systems can remove every year. If forests and soils were not continuously doing their job of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, concentrations would grow annually by 75 percent more than they do.

Like most bioenergy critics, I point out that this debate hinges on the choice of baselines for how and when one measures the net carbon impact of biomass emissions. Put another way, you can't count trees – and the carbon they would remove – before they grow.

And if the utilities now using biomass were to deploy solar energy instead, more carbon would remain stored in forests and less would be released into the atmosphere.

Growing trees takes time

Then there is the issue of time. Wood burns within minutes, releasing carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. But studies have determined that it takes about a century to remove the previously emitted carbon dioxide even if typical forest trees are replaced.

Many bioenergy advocates acknowledge that fact. They argue that a 100-year span is a reasonable time frame for achieving carbon neutrality, but over the following 50 years, some tree species can double in size to store twice as much carbon. Furthermore, according to scientific consensus, the world must begin reducing emissions by 2020 to meet the Paris climate agreement's goals to stave off disastrous global warming.

But waiting for full-replacement forest growth is a best-case scenario. The forestry industry usually harvests trees for timber, pulp and other products before they grow to their full potential. And there is no assurance that saplings planted to replace trees cut for biomass will grow enough to meet carbon removal goals before being lost to fire, pests, drought or wind – or that the land where they are planted won't be

converted to agriculture, housing, office parks or parking lots.

Even using forest residues from harvesting, and thinnings from forest management aren't carbon-neutral. Only expanding forests and lengthening times between harvests reduce emissions.

Besides, the consequences of a changed climate, such as flooded coastal cities, irreversibly melted glaciers and sea ice, species extinction and more severe weather events like hurricanes is what really matters – not net carbon emissions. Eventual carbon neutrality does not assure climate neutrality. And even if tree regrowth were to counteract the carbon released through biomass, it would take decades. But the world needs to stall emissions growth now.

And of course if that wood had not been burned, the vast majority of those surviving trees would have removed and stored carbon dioxide emitted from burning coal and other fossil fuels.

Government support

Yet many governments are making forest biomass a mainstay of their renewable energy policies, especially in the European Union – which declared all forms of bioenergy to be carbon-neutral in 2009.

The U.K. is replacing all of its coal-fired power plants with new facilities that burn wood pellets that are largely imported from southern states like North Carolina and Mississippi.

Producing electricity by burning wood now costs more than wind or solar power, making biomass only economically viable with large subsidies. It takes a significant environmental toll on local land, water and biodiversity while generating as much air pollution as coal, or even more, for some pollutants.

The evidence demonstrates that burning biomass worsens climate change. By contrast, protecting and restoring forests increases the removal and long-term storage of carbon from the atmosphere, a highly effective means for slowing global warming.

William Moomaw is professor emeritus of international environmental policy at Tufts University.

Calif. marijuana tax collections lag below expectations

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

California probably won't get a windfall in tax revenue from its newly legal marijuana market this year.

The state collected \$34 million in cannabis taxes between January and March, according to an update released by the Legislative Analyst's Office on Tuesday.

Read the whole story

TRPA releases shore line

environmental docs

Comment on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's draft environmental impact statement for the shore line will be taken until July 9.

The goal is for approval by the end of the year.

These regulations have not been substantially updated in three decades. TRPA tried to do before but was sued.

With new regulations for piers, buoys, boat ramps, and marinas, the proposed plan aims to improve public recreation access to the lake, protect the environment and the scenic beauty of Lake Tahoe's 72 miles of shoreline, provide new temporary strategies for shoreline structures to remain functional during low lake levels, and streamline shoreline permitting processes.

It would lift a decadelong moratorium on new shoreline structures at Lake Tahoe, authorizing up to two new public boat ramps and 10 new public piers, as well as up to 128 new private piers that would be permitted gradually with a priority for pier projects that serve multiple property owners or retire pier development potential on other lakefront properties. The proposed plan would authorize up to 1,430 new buoys for lakefront properties and homeowners associations and create a reserve pool of 630 buoys or boat slips for use by public agencies and marinas. The proposed shoreline plan would not authorize any new marinas but would allow marinas to expand or reconfigure their sites if they incorporate environmental improvements that reduce stormwater pollution, control aquatic invasive species, or reduce boat emissions.

The draft environmental impact statement is available for review **online**.

TRPA and shoreline planning partners will host two community

workshops to share information and collect feedback about the plan, one at the TRPA offices from 5:30 to 7:30pm on June 4, and one at North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach from 5:30 to 7:30pm on June 6. Upcoming public hearings for the plan include May 23, TRPA Governing Board, 9:30am in Stateline and June 13 at 9:30am, TRPA Advisory Planning Commission in Stateline.

LTCC expands its incarcerated program

The Incarcerated Student Program at Lake Tahoe Community College is partnering with the Sierra Conversation Center facility in Jamestown to provide students there with a transfer degree pathway.

ISP staff from the college visited the minimum and medium custody inmate facility last week to register 55 students, many of whom are continuing college students. ISP expects to have up to 100 students from the center registered by fall quarter.

All of these inmates will have the opportunity to earn an associate in arts degree for transfer in sociology – a broad-based program that when complete, gives them the option to pursue a bachelor's degree as a junior upon release or while incarcerated, with a partnering institution in California.

The Sierra Conservation Center is a parent facility that oversees 20 male inmate camps located from Central California to the Mexico border that serve as training facilities for firefighting techniques. Inmates at these facilities are routinely dispatched to help fight wildfires and other

emergencies around the state, along with a variety of other community work projects.

LTCC's Incarcerated Student Program was first approved as a pilot program in 2015. The idea was to serve inmates in California's correctional facilities and promote their educational success. LTCC's ISP has grown to serve seven prisons: High Desert State Prison, Folsom State Prison (men), Folsom Women's Facility, Folsom State Prison Minimum Support Facility, CSP Sacramento, the Growlersburg Conservation Camp, and now the Sierra Conservation Center.

Hazardous chemical spills into Carson River in Alpine County, closes highways, forces evacuations

By Kathryn Reed

Unknown amounts of a bleach-like chemical spilled into the Carson River on Wednesday near Woodfords.

Even though the tanker truck carrying the sodium hypochlorite crashed into a power pole about 10am May 9, no one had been allowed into the area as of 6pm because of the danger the chemical poses. Depending on the concentration it is dangerous to inhale or touch.

A one-square mile from the crash site was evacuated.

Hazmat crews from the Nevada National Guard were sent in to secure the site.

The chemical is a disinfectant similar to bleach. In fact, when it is combined with water it becomes bleach. It can cause pH in the water to increase.

“There are too many variables to speculate the impacts at this point,” Scott Ferguson with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Because his team and others have not been allowed into the discharge site it has not been determined how much of the chemical reached the west fork of the river. Also unknown is the concentration of the chemical. The river flow will be another factor.

Most of the users downstream are livestock and agriculture. Ferguson said without more facts he could not say if there is any danger or if the chemical could have dissipated.

He added that agencies from both states are cooperating.

According to an alert sent out by the California Office of Emergency Services the driver of the truck died. California Highway Patrol was not able to confirm this or to give out any information about the driver.

Traffic is not allowed to head west on Highway 88 at Picketts Junction. The road is also closed at the California/Nevada border. There is not estimation when it will be opened.

‘Probationary’ removed from STHS accreditation

By Kathryn Reed

A stressful two years has ended with South Tahoe High School now being fully accredited.

“Sometimes in crisis comes the opportunity for reestablishing a focus,” Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges had placed the school on a two-year probationary status in 2016. Lake Tahoe Unified School District appealed the decision to no avail. Chad Houck, principal at the time, did not have his contract renewed.

The new accreditation is for six years, but only goes through June 2022. This is because the two-year probationary period is considered part of those six years. As is custom, there is always a site visit from WASC officials at the midpoint. That means they’ll be back in spring 2019 – the three-year mark in how they count.

The letter dated May 3 to Principal Carline Sinkler from WASC says, “South Tahoe High School is required to prepare an in-depth progress report for the mid-cycle visit. The report and visit should demonstrate that the school has:

- Addressed the critical areas for follow-up through the schoolwide action plan;
- Made appropriate progress on the implementation of the schoolwide action plan; and
- Improved student achievement relative to the schoolwide learner outcomes and the academic standards.”

Tarwater said two main things changed between the outcome two years ago and receiving the good news. One, is the increased parent involvement with better communication and including their vision into the school’s philosophy. The second, is more staff involvement so “everyone has skin in the game.”

“They liked the facilities, programs and technology. They

wanted more professional development, more implementation of Common Core, and collaboration with staff," Tarwater explained.

The district gave each school \$50 per student to be used for professional development. This is an ongoing line item in the budget. Training has been acknowledged as a necessary component to keep teachers and staff updated on the latest trends, technology and other nuances needed in a classroom.

In the last four years the district has hired 84 new teachers. They and the veterans all need that support.

STHS changed what needed changing, brought in outside help like that of former Principal Ivone Larson, and engaged more people – including students – for what turned to be the correct combination to have accreditation acknowledged without an asterisk.

"STHS is on a clear path toward being a school as extraordinary as the place we live," Principal Carline Sinkler said in a community email. She did not return *LTN's* call.

While on the probationary status STHS was still full accredited and there was no risk to students going onto college.

The Viking Graduate Profile was created in the aftermath of the probationary notice. The goal is to promote six enduring qualities – critical thinking, collaboration, curiosity, communication, character, and healthy independence. Those traits are also now being focused on younger grade levels as well.

In assessing the culture, academics and other issues at the high school, it led to an evaluation of the entire district. After all, if things are not going well at the feeder schools, it's likely to carry-over into the high school.

The district as a whole is focusing more on the entire student and not just academics. Starting next school year there will be a nurse at every school site. This is not a common practice in districts.

"I think it will help support the critical needs kids," Tarwater said. He added it should help with attendance as well.

Something else coming to the schools is a social worker.

"It will give support to parents during trauma times," Tarwater said. "We want to do a whole wrap around."

It's no longer just about academics in schools. The social and emotional well-being of students now lies with the schools. The world has changed and school districts are trying to catch up to be way more than the three R's.

Caesars no longer screening job applicants for marijuana use

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Caesars Entertainment Corp., which is the parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys, has joined the ranks of companies that no longer screen job candidates for marijuana use as a condition of employment.

But that doesn't mean the company has stopped all testing.

A company spokesman on Monday said the need for good workers

coupled with the state's recent legalization of recreational marijuana use has ended pre-employment testing for pot.

Read the whole story

Inside the \$4.1B Calif. measure to fix parks, waterways

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

A far-reaching measure before California voters in June would authorize the state to borrow \$4.1 billion for investments in outdoor recreation, land conservation and water projects. But Proposition 68, which needs a simple majority vote to pass, is not your typical water and parks bond measure.

The proposition steers clear of flashy, big-ticket items like new dams and major state park expansions. Instead, it favors upgrading smaller neighborhood parks, protecting local greenways and open space and cleaning up polluted riverbanks and groundwater supplies, largely in urban and suburban areas.

Read the whole story