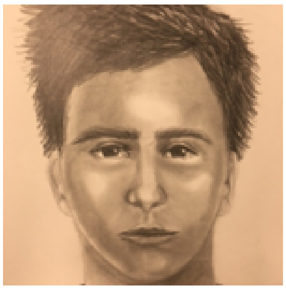
Sketch released in SLT sexual battery case



Police are looking for this man.

South Lake Tahoe police officers have released a new sketch of a man believed to be responsible for attempted sexual battery at Lake land Village on July 25.

A guest at Lakeland Village told officers a man grabbed her from behind and dragged her into a storage closet. She was able to escape, although the suspect fled with her purse.

On July 26 a man fitting the same description approached a resident on Ski Run Boulevard. The woman told police the suspect was aggressive in his behavior and language, and didn’t leave until she told him her family was inside.

The suspect is described as a Hispanic man between 18- and 30-years-old, about 5-feet-5-inches, small to medium build, with dark hair.

Anyone with information about this case is encouraged to call the South Lake Tahoe Police Department at 530.542.6100, or to remain anonymous, Lake Tahoe Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLT wins portion of retiree health care case

By Kathryn Reed

City of South Lake Tahoe retirees have been denied monetary compensation from a lawsuit they filed last year over health benefits.

A group calling themselves the South Lake Tahoe Retirees Association filed the suit in December in U.S. District Court in Sacramento. Who is in this group has not been revealed.

However, the city does not have any contract with this group and has never knowingly met with anyone in the group.

For decades retirees have received the same health benefits as active employees. That's the agreement the city has with retirees. When the plan changed for workers, it changed for retirees. This policy worked until the city did a major overhaul in 2014.

The city created what it calls Plan A. It is a basic health plan that has a $5,500 deductible. The city picks up the cost for singles, couples and families. Vision and dental are no longer offered. If people want a better plan, they can pay the difference for it. The deal also said those eligible for Medicare must apply for it.

The City Council also voted to stop paying for health coverage for future retirees.

The retirees wanted to be compensated for the additional costs, including having lost dental and vision coverage. Their contention is that for the duration of their retirement they should essentially have the health plan from the day they retired.

But that was never going to happen because the plan has always been evolving. There is no plan to go back to because that plan no longer exists.

It would also be impossible for any public or private provider to have stagnant plans. Medicine evolves and costs increase, and deductible amounts change. The deductible went from $750 to $1,500 in 2012 and doubled again under Plan A.

"The city's position is everyone gets the same plan – employees, retirees. The contract under which everyone retires has the same language; that they shall get the same plan as employees as long as there is a plan," City Manger Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. "And the plans have changed every year. This year Plan A will be a little better than last year."

It didn't help the retirees' cause when their attorney didn't show up for the May court hearing.

One thing the retirees have argued is that they are on a fixed income, while employees get raises that can help with additional expenses. The reality is employee raises are subject to approval by the City Council and are not an annual occurrence, while through the California Public Employee Retirement System there is an annual cost of living increase. This means retirees really aren't on a fixed income.

Other aspects of the case remain to be fleshed out, including the actual status of the group. The plaintiffs have 30 days to amend their complaint.

Nevada soldiers face mind-melting heat

Soldiers walk along a road in Taji, Iraq. Photo/Staff Sgt. Victor Joecks/U.S. Army National Guard

By Keith Rogers, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada soldiers who are accustomed to 110-plus degree summer days knew it was going to be at least that hot during their 10-month-long overseas tour in the Middle East.

But it melts their minds to think they endured a historic heat wave in Kuwait that reached 129 degrees on July 21 in Mitribah, Kuwait.

Actually, it was hotter than that. According to the website, Weather Underground, the temperature in Mitribah, Kuwait, on July 21 topped out at 129.2 degrees.

If verified, it would be the Earth's third hottest official temperature, tied with a 129.2 reading in Tirat Tsvi, Israel, on June 22, 1942, said Caleb Steele, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Las Vegas.

Read the whole story

Calif. ballot measures see $65M in 2Q

By Alison Noon, AP

SACRAMENTO — Campaigns supporting and opposing California's 17 ballot initiatives have reported raising at least $65 million from April through June, according to paperwork filed this week with the secretary of state.

The total does not include money spent by people not coordinated with official ballot campaigns.

The vast majority of money spent to influence elections typically comes in the three months before Election Day. If that holds true, California could see a record amount spent on ballot initiatives this year.

A handful of races for the state Legislature are also drawing heavy spending, and candidates for governor are fundraising for a contest still two years out.

Here are some of the initiatives and races attracting the most fundraising in the last quarter:

Drug prices

Pharmaceutical companies reported raising $16.5 million to oppose Proposition 61, an initiative to limit what the state can pay for prescription drugs, bringing the opposition campaign’s cash on hand to a whopping $66 million. The only major contribution supporting the initiative to mandate that California pay no more than the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs does for prescriptions was $5 million from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation.

Tax increases

An association of hospitals gave a $9 million loan to Proposition 56, the campaign for a $2 tax increase on every pack of cigarettes sold in California. Initiative supporters ended last quarter with about $10 million in the bank. Tobacco companies R.J. Reynolds and Altria affiliates gave $16 million to defeat it in July, after the quarter ended. A separate proposal to extend a tax on high-income earners through 2030 to benefit public schools and health care has drawn no opponents, but that hasn’t kept supporters from fundraising. The California Teachers Association has given $13 million this year to support Proposition 55 and union groups gave another $900,000 from April through June, bringing the campaign’s bank account to $14 million.

Marijuana legalization

Six separate campaigns supporting an initiative to legalize recreational marijuana received a total of $6.8 million from April through June, and have reported another $3 million since then. Law enforcement officers and anti-drug associations have given about $130,000 to a campaign opposing Proposition 64 since April.

Hospital fees for Medi-Cal

Opponents of the proposal requiring voter approval of changes to hospital fees for state-subsidized health care revved up two campaigns with nearly $8 million in contributions in the last quarter. But opponents’ $3.6 million cash on hand is still far less than the $18 million Proposition 52 advocates have in the bank, despite receiving no contributions since March.

Criminal justice reform

Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat, contributed $2.6 million from his ballot initiative committee for his proposal to expand sentencing credits in prison, allow parole for nonviolent felons and make other reforms to the state criminal justice system. The California Democratic Party, unions and a few individuals gave another $2.3 million to Proposition 57. No opposition campaign has been reported.

Gun control

A proposal by Democratic Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom to require background checks to buy firearm ammunition and prohibit large-capacity magazines reported $1.8 million in contributions from April through June, and received another $400,000 from Silicon Valley entrepreneur Sean Parker on July 1. Opponents of Proposition 63 reported contributions totaling about $200,000 last quarter.

Legislature

Democratic Assembly candidate Eloise Reyes reported her campaign was in the red at the end of June, having spent everything to finish the June 7 primary 8.5 percentage points behind incumbent Democratic Assemblywoman Cheryl Brown, who had $272,000. The race to represent San Bernardino County has drawn more than $2 million in independent expenditures. In Senate District 15 in the east San Francisco Bay, Sen. Jim Beall reported $125,000 on hand June 30 while Assemblywoman Nora Campos, also a San Jose Democrat, had $21,000 after she lost the primary by 22.5 percentage points.

2018 governor

State Treasurer John Chiang reported that he raised $2.3 million for his 2018 bid for governor of California after joining the race in May. A fellow Democrat, Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, reported raising $1.6 million in the first half of 2016, bringing his gubernatorial war chest to $6.4 million. None of the other 11 lesser-known candidates who have officially joined the race have filed financial statements.

Caesars reports second quarter loss

By Associated Press

Caesars Entertainment Corp. on Wednesday reported a second-quarter loss of $2.08 billion, after reporting a profit in the same period a year earlier.

The Las Vegas-based company said it had a loss of $14.25 per share. Caesars is the parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys.

The casino operator posted revenue of $1.23 billion in the period.

Caesars shares have risen slightly since the beginning of the year. In the final minutes of trading on Tuesday, shares hit $7.91, a rise of 46 percent in the last 12 months.

Tahoe’s hottest ticket: Harry Reid and friends

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Whoever said public policy doesn’t sell hasn’t tried to scrounge up VIP tickets to the Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit.

Sales of VIP tickets to the “yearly gathering of federal, state, and local leaders dedicated to the goal of restoring and sustaining Lake Tahoe,” were halted this week over concerns that scalpers were buying up the inventory with an eye for a markup and resale.

“We became aware that some tickets are being resold for profit and we are suspending VIP ticket sales until we can identify a way to protect the integrity of this event,” stated an email from Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, the summit host. General admission tickets are still available online.

Read the whole story

Calif. law to fight global warming gets strong support

By Melody Gutierrez, San Francisco Chronicle

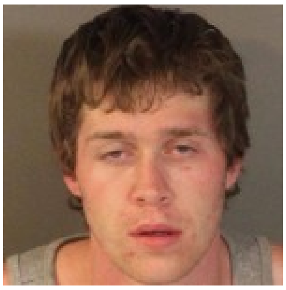
SACRAMENTO — A poll found that California voters strongly support the landmark state law adopted a decade ago to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and that voters favor expanding efforts to fight climate change.

The Public Policy Institute of California survey released last week shows 62 percent of likely voters favor the law, with most support coming fromDemocrats and independent voters. Eight in 10 Democrats favor the law, while 56 percent of independent voters did. That’s compared with 44 percent of Republicans who favored the law.

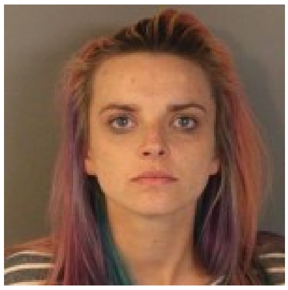
The Legislature adopted AB32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act, in 2006. The law calls for California to reduce greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020. Greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, nitrous oxide and sulfur hexafluoride, which trap heat in the Earth’s atmosphere near the planet’s surface.

Read the whole story

Duo staying at Ritz accused of making credit cards



Jason Paul Bourquin



Natasha Newlun

One night the couple was sleeping at the Ritz Carlton Lake Tahoe and the next they were in a jail cell.

Jason Paul Bourquin, 24, of Washington, and Natasha Newlun, 26, of Alaska were allegedly making fake credit cards in their hotel room.

Placer County sheriff’s deputies said once the hotel discovered what was going on they locked the couple out. When the couple returned to their room July 28 and couldn’t enter, they went to the front lobby to obtain a new key card. As deputies arrived, Bourquin ran into the woods near the Truckee hotel. He was apprehended that night not far from the hotel. Bourquin was a fugitive from Washington wanted on an escape charge.

Inside the couple’s hotel room and vehicle deputies said they found credit card-making equipment, drugs and paraphernalia, stolen credit cards, and evidence of identity theft.

They are both being charged with possession of stolen property, making credit cards, identity theft, defrauding an innkeeper, conspiracy, possession of a controlled substance, and theft of an access card. Bourquin was also charged with resisting arrest.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. water conservation evaporates a bit

By Associated Press

Californians conserved less water in June, the first month after statewide mandates were eased and control over drought restrictions returned to local water agencies, officials said Tuesday.

The State Water Resources Control Board reported that Californians used 21.5 percent less water in June than they did in 2013, a drop of 6 percentage points from a year earlier and nearly 7 percentage points from May.

A dip in conservation was expected after the statewide mandate was eased, and conservation overall remained high, said Felicia Marcus, water board chairwoman.

"The community spirit of realizing that water is something to treat with respect and not take for granted is holding," Marcus said. "Most importantly is for people to keep the lawn on a water diet."

The state has cumulatively conserved 24 percent of water over the last 13 months, close to the 25 percent target, water board officials said. That amounts to 571 billion gallons of water saved, enough to provide 8.8 million people with water for a year, said Max Gomberg, of the water board's Office of Research, Planning and Performance.

The monthly report comes as state officials begin returning conservation efforts to local cities and water districts following a near-average amount of winter rain and snowfall that eased the dry spell – mostly in Northern California.

Water districts throughout the state pushed regulators to drop mandated conservation that had required cutbacks up to 25 percent compared with 2013. That was the year before Gov. Jerry Brown declared a drought emergency.

Districts argued that the blanket mandate didn’t give many of them credit for investing millions of dollars in water recycling and desalination plants or other means of making them drought-proof.

Since June, districts that show they have enough water to get through another three years of drought may relax conservation — or completely escape strict conservation orders.

In many communities, there is no need to live under emergency conditions, said Tim Quinn, executive director of Association of California Water Agencies, the nation’s largest coalition of public water agencies.

“If you are a resident of California getting water from responsible water agencies … you don’t have to put a bucket in your shower,” he said. “You can flush when you need to.”

Garden Grove in Southern California has ample water supplies, said William Murray, the city’s public works director. It draws water from an underground aquifer that is refilled with treated waste-water.

The city, however, won’t lift its strict bans on washing cars without a turnoff nozzle and running sprinklers more than twice a week until officials in Sacramento approve its drought plan. That could come by the end of August.

The city’s 186,000 residents look forward to turning on the sprinklers often enough to have grassy, green parks again for playing soccer and relaxing, he said.

“In some parks it looks like residents are playing in a dust bowl,” Murray said. “We’d like to get our health parks back for our residents.”

Solar panels no longer pay in some states

By Diane Cardwell, New York Times

LAFAYETTE — It was only two years ago that Elroy Holtmann spent about $20,000 on a home solar array to help cover the costs of charging his new electric car. With the savings on his monthly electric bills, he figured the investment would pay for itself in about a dozen years.

But then the utilities regulators changed the equation.

As a result, Pacific Gas & Electric recently did away with the rate schedule chosen by Holtmann, a retired electrical engineer, and many other solar customers in this part of California. The new schedule will make them pay much more for the electricity they draw from the grid in the evening, while paying those customers less for the excess power their solar panels send back to the grid on sunny summer days.

As a result, Holtmann's solar setup may never pay for itself.

The paradox is playing out around the country. Even as policymakers at the federal and state levels promote clean energy to fight global warming, the economics of electricity can often be at odds with those goals.

Read the whole story