

Report: Crime dropped overall in nation's schools

By Carole Feldman and Jennifer C. Kerr, AP

WASHINGTON – The latest government snapshot of school crime paints a picture of safer schools with declines in violent crime, bullying and harassment because of sexual orientation.

Still, about 3 percent of students ages 12 to 18 said they were victims of crimes at school in 2014. About 1.3 million students were suspended for at least one full school day for alcohol violations, violence or weapons possession.

Middle school students were more likely to be bullied than high school or elementary school students, said the report, released last week by the National Center for Education Statistics and the Justice Department.

On college campuses, the number of sexual attacks more than doubled from 2001 to 2013. “There’s really no way to say whether those increases reflect an increase in actual forcible sex crimes or just that more people are coming forward and reporting them,” said Lauren Musu-Gillette, an author of the report.

Overall, the report showed progress, said Peggy G. Carr, acting NCES commissioner.

“Bullying is down, crime is down, but it’s not enough,” she said. Even before the report was issued, Ken Trump of the National School Safety and Security Services cautioned about reading too much into federal statistics on school crime.

“Federal and state stats underestimate the extent of school crime, public perception tends to overstate it and reality is somewhere in between,” he said in a presentation to the

Education Writers Association national conference in Boston.

He said in an interview that there is no mandated crime reporting for elementary, middle or high schools.

However, NCES' Musu-Gillette said the report was a nationally representative sample of school crime, taken in large part from surveys of students.

The report indicated that schools are taking steps to reduce crime.

About 75 percent used security cameras during the 2013-14 school year and more than 9 in 10 controlled access to their buildings. Schools also required students to wear IDs and mandated dress codes to try to make campuses safe.

"Our nation's schools should be safe havens for teaching and learning, free of crime and violence," the report said. "Any instance of crime or violence at school not only affects the individuals involved, but also may disrupt the educational process and affect bystanders, the school itself, and the surrounding community."

Trump called security cameras a quick fix that leads to a "false sense of security," and said there has to be a balance between the hardware and the human element of school safety. That includes having counselors and psychologists on hand and training staff to deal with bullying, verbal abuse and other threats.

He said too much focus is on the rare possibility of a shooting, rather than incidents that may occur daily. He asked, for example, whether schools know how to deal with a non-custodial parent trying to pick up a child.

"School administrators are a lot more pro-active about security than they were a decade ago," he said. He said social media and an overall awareness have made it "harder to hide

things that occur in schools.”

The federal Clery Act requires colleges and universities to report and distribute data on campus crimes.

The report said the number of criminal incidents on college campuses declined 8 percent in 2013 from the previous year. The most common type of crime was burglary. There were 23 murders on campus that year.

Despite efforts to improve security, schools still see violence.

The New Jersey Institute of Technology reported Monday that a student was fatally shot during a burglary at a fraternity house. And at the University of Arizona last month a man was shot near a campus building.

In recent years, sexual assaults and the response by colleges and universities have become a focal point of discussions about campus crime.

In a speech last month at the University of Pittsburgh, Vice President Joe Biden urged students to “change the culture” to combat sexual assault.

The Obama administration has an ongoing initiative aimed at reducing the incidence of sexual assault on college campuses.

“This is a character test; you have to pass it and our nation has to pass it,” Biden said.

The crime report said the number of campus sex assaults rose from 2,200 in 2001 to 5,000 in 2013.

A total of 781 hate crimes were reported on college campuses in 2013, most commonly vandalism. Second was intimidation. Many of those hate crimes were related to race or sexual orientation.

FDA imposes rules for e-cigs in landmark move

By Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times

WASHINGTON — After years of debate about the health risks of electronic cigarettes, the federal government on Thursday made it final: They need to be regulated and kept out of the hands of children.

The Food and Drug Administration issued sweeping new rules that for the first time extend federal regulatory authority to e-cigarettes, banning their sale to anyone under 18 and requiring that adults under the age of 26 show a photo identification to buy them.

The long-awaited regulations, 499 pages of them, shifted the terms of the public debate over e-cigarettes, putting the federal government's heft behind a more restrictive approach to the devices. Many health experts fear that e-cigarettes will eventually hook a new generation on traditional cigarettes, while others worry that a tougher approach will make it harder for addicted smokers to get access to devices that may be their best hope of quitting.

Read the whole story

Heller contemplates run for Nev. governor

By Seth A. Richardson, Reno Gazette-Journal

Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., on Wednesday left a possible run for governor in 2018 on the table.

Heller made the comments on political talk show "Nevada Newsmakers". Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval will be term-limited in 2018.

"I always keep my options open," Heller said. "Frankly, most of those involved in the political process try to keep all their options open. But I just want to reiterate, how thrilled I am to be a United States senator and how much I do enjoy the job, love the committees I am on and will continue to work for the betterment of the state of Nevada."

Heller isn't the first federally elected official to express interest in the job. Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., said in 2015 he would consider running for the post as well if Heller doesn't enter the race.

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Airbus sets sights on stratosphere with Minden

glider flight

By AFP

MINDEN – Airbus on May 7 completed a test flight of a glider set to eventually travel to the edge of space, in a pioneering step into the stratosphere.

The Perlan 2's flight, from an airstrip in Minden, took place two hours after the planned 1:45pm start time due to heavy rain.

"It was short," said chief executive Tom Enders, who served as co-pilot, said after exiting the plane. "Because of the clouds, we couldn't see any more otherwise we would still be up there."

The flight, part of a series in recent months from the mountainous area just east of Lake Tahoe, aims to test how well an aircraft and its crew can fare in conditions similar to those on Mars, with extremely thin atmosphere and bitterly cold temperatures.

Read the whole story

Supporters of marijuana industry: Pot summit at UNR is out of line

By Chris Kudialis, Las Vegas Sun

What's billed as a marijuana education conference this week at

UNR is more like a state-sponsored, government-funded propaganda rally against legalization of the drug, say supporters of the state's marijuana industry.

And they think that if UNR is allowed to put on the event, they deserve equal time.

The conference, titled "Marijuana Summit: What Health Care Professionals, Law Enforcement Officers, Employers and Members of the Court Need to Know," features presenters such as Nevada Assemblyman Pat Hickey, an opponent of legalization efforts; Mel Pohl, medical director of the Las Vegas Recovery Center; and Jim Gerhardt, a Thornton, Colo., police sergeant who has traveled across the country over the past year cautioning legislators of the dangers of marijuana.

Critics question why the Division of Public and Behavioral Health, an arm of the state Department of Health and Human Services, would be involved, given that the division's mission is to carry out public policy and not to sway public opinion on it.

Read the whole story

SLT planners hold builders accountable

By Kathryn Reed

To build or not to build? If only it were that simple.

What is allowed to be constructed and where depends on a slew of criteria. And once those rules are met, local, state and federal mandates come into play. Then when it's all done, the

work must be inspected.

That was the oversimplified version of what the Development Services Department in South Lake Tahoe does. This was week five's lesson for attendees of the Citizens Academy.

The academy is a free seven-week course designed to give residents a better understanding about how the city works as well as an opportunity to ask questions of staff. (This reporter is part of the current class.)

To bring home the complexities of what the department has to deal with the class was divided into three groups to go through exercises that employees deal with on a regular basis. One involved a new fence. This requires a permit, but the applicant is allowed to draw her own site plans, which lowers the costs. This process was deemed simple and straightforward.

Another group dealt with Americans with Disabilities Act regulations. "There is a lot of stuff you don't think about, like door handles," one class member said.

The city has an ADA specialist who works with businesses to make sure they are in compliance. The city is also in the process of making sure all of its facilities are up to code.

The third group had to figure out what uses are allowed in the various sectors of the Tahoe Valley Area Plan and whether a special use permit would also be needed. The Y area allows for residential, tourist accommodations, retail commercial, entertainment commercial, service commercial, light industrial commercial, wholesale-storage commercial, general public service, linear public facilities, recreation, resource management and open space. Categories are further defined from there.

One of the problems the city runs into is people doing construction without a permit. In the last year 198 stop work orders have been issued. Mostly it's people knowingly doing

illegal work – like remodels without a permit. There is a fine of \$321 and then the original permit fee is doubled for those who are caught.

Inspecting vacation rentals has become a big job of this department, with 712 inspected since October and another 800 or so to go. Most have failed the initial inspection. Hot tubs without permits are one of the biggest infractions. Emergency lighting, defensible space and handrails are other common violations.

The city has a checklist for owners so they can work on things before inspectors come to the dwelling, so most of the required fixes should not be a surprise.

New to the department is a fire inspector. The 115 hotels in the city limits will be the first to be inspected. South Lake Tahoe has not done commercial inspections in more than eight years.

As Canada burns, fires down dramatically in Calif.

By Lindzi Wessel, San Jose Mercury News

The ferocious wildfires incinerating parts of Western Canada this week feel eerily familiar for Californians whose wildfire season has become a yearlong affair in many parts of the parched state.

But after the rainiest winter in five years, the Golden State is greener than gold this May, and the number of early season fires is dramatically down from this time last year.

“The rain has been great,” Dan Berlant, a spokesman from CalFire, said Friday.

It’s been so great that CalFire crews have responded to hundreds of fewer wildfires in the first four months of this year – 609 – compared to last year – 917 – and most of this year’s blazes have been minor. What really shows how El Niño rains have dampened early-season fire danger in California is the number of acres burned: Last year, through the end of April, wildfires had already scorched more than 9,200 acres – 15 times the number of acres burned so far this year. Fires are also down by more than half in California’s national forests so far this year.

Read the whole story

Ed secretary: Bathroom laws are ‘hateful’

By Tyler Kingkade, Huffington Post

BOSTON – Education Secretary John King Jr. called for so-called bathroom laws to be repealed on Monday, hinting that his department won’t sit on its hands if schools ignore federal law protecting the rights of LGBT students.

“They’re hateful laws and should be repealed,” King said at a conference for education reporters.

Among other things, HB 1523 in Mississippi allows schools and employers to discriminate against people who are trans, while HB 2 in North Carolina requires state universities to bar

trans students from using locker rooms or bathrooms corresponding with their gender identity. University of North Carolina officials have said they plan to abide by HB 2, but do not know how they are supposed to enforce it.

Read the whole story

Beetle infestation poses fire risk in California

By Amy Graff, San Francisco Chronicle

A determined beetle the size of a rice grain is drilling into California's trees, turning the lush forest blanketing the Golden State into a sea of dead wood that's highly flammable.

The most recent data from 2015 estimates bark beetles have killed over 29 million trees, and Cal Fire Education Officer Amy Head said that number is now higher, increasing the fire risk even more.

"They're this itty bitty bug that can do an enormous amount of damage," Head said. "This bug is literally changing the face of our state."

Head is encouraging homeowners who live in urban interface areas to clear dead trees from their yards in preparation for the fire season.

Read the whole story

NV Energy to ditch plans to build \$1B plant

By Daniel Rothberg, Las Vegas Sun

NV Energy does not expect to build a new fossil fuel power plant in the next decade, making it unlikely that it will go forward with a controversial \$1 billion natural gas plant that the utility had proposed last fall.

The utility, instead, signed an agreement early last month to purchase an existing Arizona natural gas plant, according to a recent federal regulatory filing. Pending state and federal approval, NV Energy would close on Calpine's South Point Energy Center no later than the first quarter of 2017.

That same year, NV Energy is scheduled to complete a shutdown of the Reid Gardner coal-fired plant and will lose another power source with the expiration of a 10-year contract with a natural gas plant in Arizona. While the purchase of the South Point plant was largely done to replace the natural gas power that will be lost from Arizona, it comes when state energy leaders are grappling with whether the utility should invest more in renewables.

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