

Calif. lawmakers propose 15% pot sales tax

By Melody Gutierrez, San Francisco Chronicle

SACRAMENTO – California would levy a new 15 percent tax on medical marijuana sales to enforce new regulations and pay for state programs, rehabilitation and parks under a bill introduced last week.

The Marijuana Value Tax Act could bring the state more than \$100 million in new revenue. The tax was anticipated after the state passed historic regulations last year that require state and local licenses for medical marijuana businesses under the new Bureau of Medical Marijuana Regulations.

California became the first state in the nation to allow for medicinal use of marijuana two decades ago. Until last year's regulations were signed into law, the billion-dollar industry remained largely unregulated. The Board of Equalization said it anticipates medical marijuana sales to increase with the new laws. In 2014, the state took in \$50 million in sales taxes from 1,623 dispensaries that registered with the Board of Equalization and filed taxes.

Read the whole story

Avalanches close Alpine Meadows for the day

Alpine Meadows ski resort was closed Thursday because of avalanches and the potential danger for more.

Avalanches struck two occupied vehicles on Alpine Meadows Road on the morning of Feb. 18. No one was injured.

Ron Carson with North Tahoe Fire Department said the avalanche pushed the employee bus about 30 feet into a resident's garage on Alpine Meadows Road. Four people were on board. A second avalanche struck a vehicle with one person inside.

"It was considered about one-tenth the size of a normal avalanche for that area," Carson told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The last time there was a major avalanche there was 2011. It occurred in approximately the same area."

The road was reopened about noon after being closed about 7:45am. The bus was towed back to Squaw Valley. The passenger vehicle stayed until it could be dug out.

Carson said the resort itself also had avalanches throughout the day.

Resort officials called the danger level "considerable" after 16 inches of snow fell overnight.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Zephyr Cove woman missing for 3 days

A Zephyr Cove woman has been missing since Monday.



Carolyn
Batchelor

Carolyn Batchelor, 69, was last seen by her roommate about 5:10pm Feb. 15.

Batchelor is 5-foot-7, 180 pounds, with shoulder length blonde hair and blue eyes. She was last wearing a long black coat. She was driving a silver Honda Pilot SUV with Nevada plates HP2295.

Batchelor has not returned calls and her destination was unknown when she left her residence. She may take medications that she needs on a daily basis.

Anyone with any information is asked to contact Douglas County sheriff's Investigator Nate Almeida at 775.586-.7256.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tahoe resorts bouncing back after years of drought

By Jim Carlton, Wall Street Journal

TAHOE CITY – At this time last year, so little snow had fallen around Lake Tahoe that a nearby golf course opened months earlier than usual, and ski resorts had to make their own

powder on runs flanked by bare ground.

But this year, Lake Tahoe is once again a winter wonderland: resorts are enjoying the most snowfall since California's drought began more than four years ago. That is creating a positive ripple effect throughout the picturesque region in the Sierra Nevada mountains, which has suffered economically due to the dry weather.

Squaw Valley/Alpine Meadows says it is on track to record more than a million visitors this season for the first time ever. Vail Resorts Inc. credits strong performance at its Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood destinations at Tahoe for helping lift the company's overall U.S. ski visits 11.1 percent in the season through Jan. 11 compared with a year earlier.

"In the context of the past four years, it's as good as it gets," said Andy Wirth, president and chief executive officer of Squaw Valley Ski Holdings Inc., whose namesake resort has been buried this season in nearly 25 feet of snow—more than in all of the 2014-15 season.

Read the whole story

Lobbyist Whittemore leaves prison

By Siobhan McAndrew, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada lawyer and lobbyist Harvey Whittemore has left the Federal Prison Camp in Lompoc and is now living in a halfway house in San Francisco, according to son Chase Whittemore.

Whittemore was released earlier this month to the Sacramento

branch of the Reentry Rehabilitation Management Program through the Federal Bureau of Prisons after living at a minimum security satellite camp with 477 inmates for the last 17 months.

Whittemore, 63, was sent to prison in 2014 after being convicted of two counts of using employees and family to get around finance limits to contribute to Sen. Harry Reid's re-election bid in 2007. He was also found guilty of causing Reid's campaign to file a false Federal Election Commission report.

Read the whole story

Nevada cops targeting unsafe drivers

More than two dozen law enforcement agencies in Nevada will be joining forces Feb. 19-March 7 to crack down on drivers exceeding speed limits or driving too fast for road conditions.

Speeding is a contributing factor in approximately one-third of fatal crashes on the nation's roadways. Exceeding the speed limit is considered aggressive driving just as weaving in and out of traffic and failing to yield to other motorists.

The Nevada Highway Patrol will be increasing its staffing around the clock for this event. Troopers will be looking for a variety of traffic related violations to include speeding and aggressive driving.

According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

(NHTSA), the consequences of driving too fast include:

- Greater potential for loss of vehicle control
 - Reduced effectiveness of occupant protection equipment
 - Increased stopping distance when the driver perceives a danger
 - Increased degree of crash severity leading to more debilitating injuries
 - Unexpected economic and psychological implications of a speed-related crash.
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Foot of snow and then some covers Tahoe



Shovels and snowblowers are essential today in the basin. Photo/LTN

With at least a foot of snow falling on the South Shore overnight, the lake schools in Douglas County School District

are closed today.

The Sierra Avalanche Center has said the danger level is “considerable” for Feb. 18. Ski resorts are reporting about 2 feet of new white stuff on the slopes.

A winter storm warning and lake wind advisory remain in effect through noon Thursday. A chance of snow is in the forecast for Feb. 19, with partly sunny skies returning for the weekend, according to the National Weather Service in Reno.

Roads are slick many are not clear. For highway road conditions, click on the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

South Tahoe seeks to upgrade design standards



Red Hut on Ski Run Boulevard is an example of building design that works.

By Kathryn Reed

Roof lines, construction material, lighting, landscaping – even how the building is situated on the property – are all aspects of design guidelines being created for future development in South Lake Tahoe.

The goal is to establish a mountain feel, while still being contemporary.

Plenty of negative comments surfaced after BevMo and Auto Zone were built. People said they look like they could have been built anywhere. They met the minimum standards.

Those who have been involved in the design guideline process want more for this town than ordinary, average and homogenous.

Wednesday night marked the second of three informational gathering sessions. After the January meeting there was also an online survey to solicit input.

The final draft is expected to be released at a March 9 meeting. After that, the Planning Commission and City Council will be presented with the document for approval.

Repeatedly at the Feb. 17 meeting the Red Hut restaurant on Ski Run Boulevard was mentioned as a building that works on many levels – from how it is located on the lot to the roof to the materials used.

Stephanie Grigsby with Design Workshop went over some of the responses from the last meeting as well as from the 260 online surveys.

People don't like it when there is little or no landscaping. Instead, the preference is for native vegetation, and plants that need little water. Using the plants as a buffer between the street and building is being touted. Signs that are clean

with a concise message are more desirable than ones that stand on a pole or are cluttered. Boxy designs are passé. Don't have parking be the visual focal point. Create a sense of connectivity to neighboring businesses and open space. Use natural materials. All of these ideas came from survey takers.

Notes:

- The next design workshop is March 9, 5-7pm at City Hall.
 - A second **online survey** is open until Feb. 26 at 5pm.
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Conner's request to change judges denied



South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner with her attorney Jacqueline Mittlestadt fighting the censure hearing last fall. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner's challenge to have a judge dismissed from the case she has filed against the city has been denied.

"His statements were all prefaced with 'I don't know' or 'I don't have the record in front of me' and lastly 'I'm not sure.' The statements do not reflect a predisposition but rather an uncertainty and willingness to consider subsequently submitted evidence and consideration of the law," Placer County Superior Court Judge Frances Kearney ruled.

She was tasked with deciding whether El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey would be biased. Kearney said no; and therefore Bailey will continue to hear the case.

Conner's attorney, Jacqueline Mittelstadt, had requested Bailey be removed from hearing the case she has filed against the other four council members and against Conner's employee, City Manager Nancy Kerry. The case involves whether the censure hearing from last fall followed proper procedure as well as claiming that when Kerry barred Conner from speaking directly to staff she limited her ability to do her job as an elected official.

One of Conner's issues is that by having her card key taken away she no longer has easy access to her mail. That issue was remedied this week with the installation of mailboxes in the lobby of City Hall for all council members.

Mittelstadt's main issue was when Bailey at a December hearing said, "I'm not prepared to go and set aside a political act of the City Council, whether it's something that should have been done or should not have been done, that really is up to the City Council."

She believes this showed bias on Bailey's part by having made up his mind about the censure issue. The censure issue being

challenged is procedural, not whether Conner should be censured or not.

Mittelstadt was unaware of the Placer County judge's ruling until *Lake Tahoe News* called Feb. 17.

"We are happy to proceed in front of Judge Bailey. We will respect whatever decision he makes. It is my hope that in fact that even though he made that statement that he will evaluate the facts under the law and make a fair and unbiased decision once he has heard the evidence and reviewed the law," Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News*.

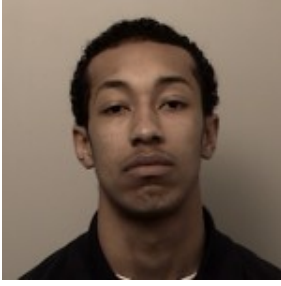
Nira Feeley, assistant city attorney who is filling in while her boss is out of town, did not return a phone call.

A case management conference has been set for March 15.

Cops arrest 2 in S. Lake Tahoe murder case



Tristan Batten



Harvest
Davidson

Two people have been arrested in connection with the murder of an Amador County man that occurred Jan. 30 in the parking lot of the Beverly Lodge in South Lake Tahoe.

Tristan Batten, 18, was arrested Feb. 16 in Vallejo and Harvest Davidson, 20, was apprehended Feb. 17 in Sacramento. Both face one count of murder.

South Lake Tahoe officers said they believe more people are connected to the killing of Dennis Wright Jr., 40. The gun used to kill Wright has not been found.

Wright and his girlfriend Kendra Ghiorso, 45, of Amador County were selling marijuana from their vehicle, officers said, with 100 pounds being confiscated the night of the shooting.

The getaway vehicle was located in the Bay Area.

Anyone who has information about the case is asked to call the police department at 530.542.6100 or Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*