

Experts: Calif. will see more disease-carrying mosquitoes

By Joshua Emerson Smith, Los Angeles Times

Two types of nonnative mosquitoes that can transmit potentially fatal diseases have spread throughout California, and their populations could explode come spring.

The mosquitoes' expansion of territory was largely attributed to abnormally warm weather in the summer and fall.

"It was quicker and more widespread than any of us could have anticipated," said Chris Conlan, an ecologist with the San Diego County Vector Control Program.

The yellow fever mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) and Asian tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*) can carry diseases linked to birth defects, painful illness and tens of thousands of deaths around the world each year.

Read the whole story

Life goes on at brothel despite Odom scandal

By John M. Glinna, Las Vegas Review-Journal

BATTLE MOUNTAIN — Madam Jennifer O'Kane knows a stark little truism about the world's oldest profession: Discretion is a working girl's best friend.

Everything happens behind closed doors between consenting

adults. And any release of personal details could not only crush the spirit of a brothel worker's unsuspecting family, she insists, it could even threaten a woman's safety.

But an October scandal – in which former NBA basketball star Lamar Odom collapsed and nearly died from a drug overdose inside a Nye County cathouse – has cast a chill over the state's 17 brothels, hideaways with names such as Angel's Ladies and the Cherry Patch II.

Paranoia over personal privacy has even hit O'Kane's Calico brothel in this windblown Northern Nevada town, the only bordello in rural Lander County.

Read the whole story

Dry La Niña might follow soggy El Niño

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

Beyond all the hype over a possible drought-busting El Niño this winter is a much grimmer prospect for California: a dry La Niña come fall.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration joined international forecasters recently in predicting the potential rise of El Niño's sister phenomenon, La Niña – a similar shift in Pacific Ocean temperatures, but in the opposite direction with far different repercussions for global weather.

While no one can be certain what a La Niña might mean for California, especially this early, the pattern has generally correlated with drier conditions, particularly in the southern

part of the state. How much this will even matter is also unknown as El Niño is expected to soon ease the state's water crisis with a blast of wet weather.

"It's still too far out to reach any conclusions about La Niña," said Dave Rizzardo, who helps track the state's water supplies as chief of snow surveys for the California Department of Water Resources. "But it would be unfortunate to know that, hey, we had a great year, we bailed ourselves out of the drought, and then we fall right back in."

Read the whole story

NHP working to curb number of fatalities

Nevada traffic deaths rose in 2015 over the previous year. Preliminary data shows that 321 traffic fatalities occurred on Nevada roads in 2015, an increase of 30 deaths compared to the previous year.

When compared with the number of miles driven in Nevada, though, traffic deaths have dropped from an average of 1.54 deaths per every 100 million miles traveled in 2008 to 1.13 fatalities per 100 million miles in 2013. Statewide, traffic fatalities reached an all-time high of 432 in 2006.

Washoe County saw 36 traffic fatalities in 2015, compared to 38 deaths in 2014. Pedestrian fatalities dropped 33 percent, while bicycle fatalities decreased more than 66 percent in Washoe County.

Traffic safety partners across the state updated the Nevada Strategic Highway Safety Plan with enhanced enforcement, engineering, emergency medical and educational strategies in six emphasis areas: pedestrian, intersection, seatbelt and motorcycle safety, as well as reducing impaired driving and limiting lane departure crashes by focusing on distracted driving. The goal is cutting the yearly traffic fatality average in half by 2030, with an ultimate goal of zero fatalities on Nevada roads.

Nevada lawmakers established laws prohibiting U-turns or passing other vehicles in school zones and school crossing zones, additional pedestrian crossing signals have been installed and many other traffic safety enhancements made. The Nevada Highway Patrol and Nevada Department of Transportation have also partnered to place additional troopers and vehicles to enforce safe driving through road work zones. In addition, zero fatalities public education campaigns have reached 97 percent of Nevadans with traffic safety education.

Study: Fewer people using home broadband because of cost

By Associated Press

More Americans are shunning costly home broadband and using their cellphones to get online, a survey shows.

Eighty percent of U.S. adults had Internet access this year, whether through a smartphone or a home Internet connection, up from 78 percent two years ago, according to the survey

published by the Pew Research Center.

But after years of home broadband growth, slightly fewer adults in 2015 got Internet from providers like home phone or cable company, mostly because it's too expensive for them. The number dropped to 67 percent from 70 percent in the center's 2013 survey.

Meanwhile, the number of people relying on cellphones alone for Internet rose to 13 percent this year from 8 percent in 2013.

That plateau in home broadband use comes as the Obama administration has pushed for greater broadband access and criticized the lack of competition among home Internet providers.

The dip in home Internet use could just be temporary, said Pew researcher John Horrigan. Adoption also flatlined five years ago before picking up again, which he said likely had to do with economic difficulties in the aftermath of the recession.

For those without home Internet, 33 percent say the biggest reason is the monthly cost is too high, while 10 percent say a computer is too expensive.

But 12 percent say they don't need it, a smartphone is sufficient.

Of those only getting access through a smartphone, the increase is biggest among low-income Americans. But a smartphone isn't as easy to use as a home computer when it comes to applying for jobs and is often limited by data caps.

Only 5 percent of people who don't have home broadband access say that it's primarily because it's not available or the speed is too slow, underscoring the growth of broadband networks throughout the U.S. over the past 15 years.

Nearly half of people who don't have broadband at home have

never had it and aren't interested. That's partly tied to age: 39 percent are 65 or older.

The Pew report drew on a September 2013 survey of 6,020 U.S. adults and several polls conducted in spring, summer and fall of 2015 that included, in total, 6,687 adults.

The margin of error for the home adoption finding was plus or minus 1.3 percentage points in 2015 and 1.4 percentage points in 2013.

Unused sick time, vacation boosts retiree compensation

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

Thirteen local government employees in the capital region received lump-sum payments of more than \$100,000 in 2014, the *Sacramento Bee* found in an analysis of data from the State Controller's Office. The analysis included city and county governments in Sacramento, El Dorado, Placer and Yolo counties and did not include special districts.

The payments provide a big boost to an employee's final-year salary and also increase their retirement benefits.

Lump-sum payments totaled \$31 million in the region, the *Bee* analysis found.

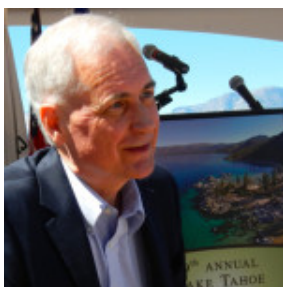
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McClintock not only Calif. lawmaker not living in district he represents

By Javier Panzar, Los Angeles Times

It was the spring of 1998. Then-Assemblywoman Grace F. Napolitano was in the middle of a heated battle with fellow Democrat Jamie Casso.

With the primary to fill the House seat opened up by the retirement of Casso's father-in-law, Democratic Rep. Esteban Torres, approaching, Napolitano and her advisors zeroed in on what usually amounts to a throwaway issue. Casso, a longtime Torres aide, did not live within the boundaries of the congressional district he sought to represent.



Rep. Tom McClintock represents the California side of Lake Tahoe.

Photo/LTN file

Napolitano won that primary by 618 votes.

Some state and local lawmakers have been prosecuted for not living in the districts they ran to represent – a requirement under California law. When it comes to Congress, federal law only requires members live in the same state as the district.

Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, faced attacks from opponents in 2008 when he sought to represent a Northern California district hundreds of miles away from his state Senate district in Ventura County.

As he announced his bid for the 4th Congressional District on the steps of the historic Auburn courthouse in Gold Rush country, a U-Haul truck drove around the building carrying a sign reading “Termed out Tom All the way from L.A,” according to a report in the *Ventura County Star*.

Former Rep. Doug Ose, one of McClintock’s rivals for the GOP nomination that year who also lived outside the district boundaries, was responsible for the truck, the *Star* reported.

Read the whole story

Nev. regulators to consider solar rate-hike pause

By Michelle Rindels, AP

CARSON CITY – Nevada energy regulators are meeting this week

to decide whether to hold off on controversial new rates for solar power customers.

The state Public Utilities Commission has scheduled a hearing on Thursday for requests to pause the rate hike, which was set to take effect Jan. 1. The base service charge is rising from \$12.75 to \$17.90 per month for southern Nevada solar customers and from \$15.25 to \$21.09 for northern Nevada customers.

The changes also reduce the amount the utility pays to buy power back from rooftop solar panels, from 11 cents a kilowatt-hour to 9 cents in southern Nevada and from 12 cents to 10.5 cents in the north. The service charge will rise and the reimbursement will drop every year until 2020.

Regulators approved the changes as a way to reduce a cost-shift from the state's 17,000 net-metering customers to the non-solar customer base, and to reflect the declining cost of solar power. NV Energy says that solar customers still rely on their transmission lines and power plants to keep energy flowing at night or when clouds pass over, preventing the panels from generating power.

Several entities requested the rates be postponed, including the Bureau of Consumer Protection within the Nevada Attorney General's Office. Consumer advocate Eric Witkoski said existing customers weren't properly warned that they would be subject to the new rates, instead of being "grandfathered" in to the more favorable ones.

He also raised concerns that the rate change could run afoul of the contracts clause in the U.S. Constitution, because the changes are dramatic enough that they could disrupt private contracts homeowners have with rooftop solar companies.

Firms such as SolarCity lease panels to homeowners in mortgage-like agreements that can last for 30 years. The payments customers make each month toward their solar panels are often offset by the credits they receive for selling

excess energy back to the utility, and the combined cost of the panel payments and a utility bill is often less than a traditional utility bill alone.

The rate change throws a wrench in that business model and is expected to make a rooftop solar installation less attractive. SolarCity said it is ceasing sales and installations to Nevadans as a result.

Supporters of the rate change note that Nevada has long supported the solar industry, and it's time to phase out subsidies that were put in place nearly two decades ago to get a then-fledgling industry off the ground. But Witkoski says the subsidy Nevada ratepayers foot for solar customers is relatively minor, and is several times smaller than what they pay to subsidize NV Energy's energy efficiency programs overall.

Other entities requesting a pause in new rates include the Southern Nevada Home Builders Association and The Alliance for Solar Choice.

Driver's license may not be enough to fly

By Jad Mouawad, New York Times

Starting this month, a driver's license may no longer be enough for airline passengers to clear security in some states, if the Department of Homeland Security has its way.

Federal officials said they would soon determine whether Transportation Security Administration agents would start

enforcing a 10-year-old law that required states to comply with a set of federal standards when issuing driver's licenses.

The issue is quickly intensifying, and the debate over identification and privacy has grown after the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and California.

But some states have bitterly opposed these requirements out of privacy concerns, and more than a dozen have passed laws barring their motor vehicle departments from complying with the law, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The new standards require more stringent proof of identity and will eventually allow users' information to be shared more easily in a national database.

Privacy experts, civil liberty organizations and libertarian groups fear the law would create something like a national identification card.

Read the whole story

Calif. investigating Nestle's water practices

By Associated Press

SAN BERNARDINO – The U.S. Forest Service has begun an environmental review of Nestle Waters North America's bottling operations in Southern California's San Bernardino National Forest, according to a newspaper report.

Nestle was sued in October by environmental and public interest groups who allege the Swiss-based company is

operating its Strawberry Canyon facility on a permit that expired in 1988. The groups led by the Center for Biological Diversity said the prolonged drought in California combined with the water bottling operation is affecting wildlife.

Nestle has applied to renew its permit and can continue to operate while that application is pending.

Forest Service spokesman John Heil said recently that his agency has begun reviewing the effects of re-issuing the special use permit, the *San Bernardino Sun* reported Saturday. The review comes under the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires agencies to assess the environmental effects of proposed actions prior to making decisions.

"We are pleased the USFS review process is underway," said Jane Lazgin, spokeswoman for Nestle Waters North America. "We are working with the U.S. Forest Service through the permit renewal process, recognizing the permit remains in effect because the company took the proper steps to request the permit renewal before it became due."

The piping system siphoned about 68,000 gallons of water a day out of the forest in 2014, according to a statement made by the plaintiffs after the suit was filed.

The groups believe species, including Least Bell's Vireo and California spotted owls, could see their numbers increased with improved water supply, the lawsuit said.

For more than 120 years, the Arrowhead bottle water brand, under many different owners, has been fueled by spring water from the San Bernardino Mountains and other springs around the state.