

2015 could become hottest year on record

By News 10

We are only four months into 2015 and the path to another “hottest year on record” is laid before us.

So far, 2015 has been the hottest start to a year on record for the planet. Many people on the East Coast would disagree with that statement, and they have good reason to be skeptical. The East Coast has been experiencing colder-than-average temperatures, and many locations had either their coldest winter on record or close to it.

The stark fact is the West Coast was just as extreme in the opposite direction and most of the globe was much warmer than average. Folks on the East Coast have a point, but not the point.

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Foreclosure numbers in Nev. a mixed message

By Eli Segall, Las Vegas Sun

Nevada's foreclosure woes showed mixed signals in the first quarter, with a jump in default notices but fewer repossessions compared to a year ago.

One in every 209 homes statewide received a foreclosure-

related filing in the three months ending March 31, the third-highest rate in the nation behind Florida and Maryland, according to a new report from RealtyTrac.

Read the whole story

Tourism expert: People have the money to travel

By Kathryn Reed

MINDEN – People are employed, they are willing to spend and they are saving. Saving for a vacation is what travel industry officials are hoping.

These economic trends are good for tourism, according to Brian London.

London was the keynote speaker April 16 at the Nevada Commission on Tourism's Rural Roundup at the Carson Valley Inn.

"What is something they are saving for? Vacation. That means there is no wrong time to start promoting your destination. Start now to inspire them," London told the crowd of a couple hundred tourism officials.

London is a travel industry analyst who used to work for the agency responsible for marketing Florida.



Tourism reps from rural Nevada – which includes the Carson Valley and Lake Tahoe – are participating in the annual multi-day travel conference. Photo/LTN

Tourism is Nevada's No. 1 industry. The state agency is focusing its pitch on Millennials, the 79 million people between the ages of 20 and 34.

London spoke to the need for destinations to know their demographic and what those people want. It doesn't mean neglecting one segment over another, but it does require knowing not all sectors have the same wants and needs.

"You have to change or you won't be speaking the language of your customer," London said.

He believes Boomers will be the driving force in the travel industry for the next two decades. They have the time and money for travel, and control more than half of the discretionary spending by people in the United States.

They are mostly interested in touring, resorts, casinos and golf – all things Nevada can offer in abundance. They are also less into active sports and recreation, and more into sightseeing and fine dining.

Millennials are attracted to locations with events and to cities. They want to be part of something and then to share it with others.

“Photos are their favorite information currency,” London said. “They grew up with technology. They want instant access. They don’t ask if there is WiFi, they assume you have Internet available.”

If lodging properties, restaurants and the destination itself is not using photos and video as teasers, Millennials are likely to look elsewhere.

Gen X’ers, the group in between, are into the outdoors and theme parks. They want bonding and a connection with family.

Millennials represent 28 percent of the travel market, Boomers 26 percent, Gen X 20 percent, Gen Z and Older 13 percent each, according to London.

London is a strong proponent of businesses paying attention to online reviews. He said average daily rates increase at hotels that respond to complaints. It shows the property cares. It’s called reputation management.

Keeping track of trends is critical, too. London suggested businesses – even the larger destinations – look at reports publicly traded companies file with the Securities and Exchange Commission. This is because they have to tell investors how they are going to spend their money. A tidbit – Hilton is building 245,000 new rooms this year. This is a clear indication they are bullish on the lodging sector – aka travel market.

Tahoe woman jailed on embezzlement charges

A Carnelian Bay woman was arrested April 16 on charges related to the embezzlement of a business in Incline Village.

Pamela Jean Kircher, 61, is suspected of embezzling more than \$850,000 from an undisclosed business over a seven-year period. Victims became suspicious of Kircher late last year and contacted the Washoe County Sheriff's Office to investigate.

Following the investigation, Kircher was arrested on charges of embezzlement, theft and falsifying accounts.

Kircher most recently worked as a housekeeper at various locations throughout Incline Village and detectives are concerned that there may be additional victims.

Anyone who believes they may have been a victim of Kircher, or who may have information useful to this investigation, is asked to contact Washoe County Sheriff's Office Detective Division at 775.328.3320 or Secret Witness at 775.322.4900.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. drought-stricken cities push back

By Sharon Bernstein, Reuters

Cities set to feel the brunt of California's mandated cutbacks

in water use pushed back on Wednesday, calling a plan by regulators to demand reductions of as much as 35 percent in some communities unfair.

Water utilities in the areas surrounding the state capital of Sacramento, in line to face steep rationing despite years of conservation said factors such as leaks in the delivery system from streams and reservoirs, and the needs of big local water consumers like prisons and hospitals should be considered before a region was penalized.

“I am not against severe conservation,” said Rob Roscoe, General Manager of the Sacramento Suburban Water District, which serves about 173,000 people in Sacramento’s northeastern suburbs. “But I want everybody playing from the same rulebook.”

Read the whole story

Bill to regulate Uber fails in Nevada Senate

By Associated Press

CARSON CITY — A bill that would regulate ride-hailing companies such as Uber in Nevada failed in the state Senate on Wednesday after Democrats opposed the measure. But there are still ways the concept could re-emerge later in the legislative session.

Ten Democrats voted against SB439, which would create regulations for companies that allow people to hail a ride using a smartphone and often involve part-time drivers using

their personal vehicles. Republican proponents needed more votes from the Democratic faction to pass the measure because it would raise a fee and therefore needed a two-thirds majority.

The vote came after bickering between senators and several speeches.

"No one, in my opinion, should have the authority to preserve the status quo and stifle technology," said Republican Sen. James Settelmeyer, who held up a candle and then a light bulb to illustrate his points about progress.

Democrats said they opposed the bill because they wanted amendments to improve consumer protections, including one requiring FBI background checks on drivers and another that would have the state Public Utilities Commission regulate so-called surge pricing, when fares rise because of heavy demand.

"Our biggest industry is tourism," said Democratic Senate Minority Leader Aaron Ford. "Allow one bad headline to come out about the way the background checks were done in this instance, and we'll have repercussions that will reverberate throughout the state."

Uber briefly operated in Nevada this fall before a state judge issued a restraining order, saying the company refused to follow regulations governing taxicab companies.

The bill sets requirements unique to companies like Uber, and it adds a 25-cent-per-trip surcharge to each ride. The funds would benefit road construction projects.

Cab companies have strongly opposed the bill, hiring two former Nevada governors to lobby on their behalf and arguing that Uber is wrongly seeking special treatment instead of conforming to the heavy regulation of the taxi industry.

Republican Sen. Mark Lipparelli said he doesn't think the bill

is dead, and he said the evolution of technology is inevitable.

“We don’t have Blockbuster anymore,” he said, “but we do have HBO Go.”

The rejection of the bill came hours after senators approved SB440, a companion bill that set insurance requirements for companies like Uber.

Judge: Pot stays on most-dangerous drug list

By Maura Dolan, Los Angeles Times

Efforts to legalize marijuana suffered a defeat in court Wednesday when a judge upheld the constitutionality of a 1970 federal law that classifies cannabis as a dangerous drug akin to LSD and heroin.

U.S. District Judge Kimberly J. Mueller, announcing her decision at a hearing in Sacramento, said she could not lightly overturn a law passed by Congress.

Mueller agreed last year to hold an extensive fact-finding hearing on the issue, raising the hopes of activists seeking to legalize marijuana and worrying opponents who consider the drug a threat to health and public safety. The hearing marked the first time in decades that a judge was willing to examine the classification of marijuana under the 1970 Controlled Substances Act.

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WHS, DCSD remain at odds about priorities

By Kathryn Reed

Whittell High School parents, teachers and staff spent months coming up with ideas about how the district could improve the 7-12 school. The top priority was to keep the integrity of the middle school and high school concepts despite the grade levels being under one roof.

This was the promise several years ago when the three lake schools were consolidated into two.

This week that promise was officially dissolved. The Douglas County School District board on April 14 agreed with the recommendations presented by Superintendent Lisa Noonan. (Board member Tom Moore was absent.)

No additional staff will be hired for WHS. To deal with an incoming seventh-grade class of more than 40 students, the committee recommended hiring another teacher. This large class will necessitate another section of classes at this grade level. That in turn will take a teacher or teachers out of high school sections.

WHS has 14 full-time instructors and four part-time. A dozen of them teach at the middle and high school levels.

Currently the enrollment at WHS is:

- 7th grade: 35
- 8th: 32

- 9th: 45
- 10th: 31
- 11th: 30
- 12th: 26.

Stacy Noyes, a parent on the committee, told the board the decision is not equitable, that the electeds are not doing their job and that the students deserve better than what they are getting.

Principal Crespin Esquivel is caught in the middle of trying to please his boss, the board, staff, parents and students.

Even before Tuesday's meeting he knew he was not going to have the luxury of more staff. He created the 2015-16 master schedule with that in mind. But what will be new is that all students will be on the same bell schedule. This means little kids changing classes at the same times the big kids are. They've always done so separately.

Esquivel was able to keep the lunch periods separate between the middle and high schoolers.

"My obligation is to do what's best for the kids," Esquivel told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said he is open to new ideas, to being creative. To do so, though, takes the blessing of the district and possibly the state. Esquivel would like the board and district personnel to come to his Zephyr Cove school next year to see how difficult it is to put a master schedule together. He's made the offer, but doubts he'll have any takers.

To make things work, economics and speech will no longer be offered as standalone classes. And grade levels will have to be combined for some sections with teachers asked to essentially teach two classes in one period.

With Whittell being so small, it is hard at times to offer electives beyond graduation requirements, let alone what colleges are looking for. Parents often plot a student's four-year trek starting freshman year to ensure the proper credits are attained because not everything is offered every year.

Noonan said she is doing the best she can. With the Legislature still in session, funding for the next school year has not been solidified. This is why she won't advocate for more staff at Whittell.

"We have a lot of needs and they have price tags and I don't have additional recourses coming in at this time," Noonan told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It's hard to see people sad and frustrated."

But it's not like the district has suspended all additional spending. The board this week approved the use of short-term substitutes to be used when the gifted and talented teacher is out. (Board member Robbe Lehmann's child is in this program.)

Other action taken in response to the committee include:

- Creating a memorandum of understanding with Lake Tahoe Unified School District so students in each district could cross the state line. Noonan said a draft has been created, but she has yet to meet with LTUSD officials. The goal is to finalize it by August, with implementation for the 2016-17 school year.
- An online AP computer science course will be offered in the fall. A teacher spearheaded this.
- Dual credits between high school and community colleges are an issue being contemplated by the Legislature.

Noonan said there is a possibility for more changes down the road if funding becomes available. She said the document serves as a blueprint for WHS and will be used like a strategic plan.

Wife guilty in death of ex-LTBMU chief

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

PLACERVILLE – Colleen Harris insisted the shotgun death of her husband was a horrible event shrouded by the “gray fog” of traumatic memory loss.

In less than two hours, a Placerville jury Wednesday returned a verdict that was crystal clear: The 73-year-old grandmother was guilty of first-degree murder for gunning down her third husband, Robert Edward “Bob” Harris, 72.

The Placerville land surveyor, known to extended family as “Grandma Cokie,” dropped her head and put her hand over her face. She cried as she tried to shield herself from the lenses of photographers in the courtroom.

The jury rejected lesser charges of second-degree murder, manslaughter and involuntary manslaughter. As a result, Colleen Harris stands to receive a punishment of 50 years to life for first-degree murder with a firearm when she is sentenced June 5.

Read the whole story

CalPERS contributions to rise more than 9%

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

CalPERS is about to raise pension contribution rates again, this time by more than 9 percent, a move that will cost state government and local school districts nearly \$600 million.

The increases are the latest step by CalPERS to gradually shore up its finances. In early 2014, CalPERS said it would embark on a series of significant rate hikes, and on Tuesday the pension fund's finance and administration committee recommended higher rates for the upcoming fiscal year.

While CalPERS is continuing to deal with the lingering effects of the 2008 crash in the financial markets, it pinned the latest rate hike primarily on growth in government payrolls and recent demographic assumptions that show retirees living longer.

Read the whole story