

# Tahoe Princess extraction causes oil leak



The Tahoe Princess hit a snag April 10 will being pulled out of the water at Tahoe Keys. Sand covers the spill area. Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Kathryn Reed**

The Tahoe Princess looked like anything but royalty as it sat Friday afternoon on the Tahoe Keys Marina boat ramp.

“A hydraulic line busted when we pulled it,” Vincent Vernaza told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Vernaza recently purchased the pontoon tour boat from Aramark. His plans are to overhaul the vessel and return it to its glory days. To do so it had to be pulled from the water.

One semi-truck was on either pontoon, dragging the boat onto pipes. With the boat just barely out of the water, one of the hydraulic lines on a tow vehicle busted.

Operations stopped so officials could assess the situation.

El Dorado County environmental health and South Lake Tahoe firefighters responded to the hazardous waste spill. The county inspector ensured all the oil was cleaned up, asking for a receipt once it was disposed of and said a fine could be forthcoming. The California Office of Emergency Services also must be notified.

While a boom was placed about a dozen feet from the water line into the marina, no oil is believed to have made it into Lake Tahoe. An absorbent sand-like substance was placed onto all areas of the parking lot where the oil leaked. It will be secured and hauled to a hazardous waste facility in Nevada.

The goal April 10 was to use the pipes as rollers to move the nearly 60-ton boat to a storage area at the marina. It had to be done this way because trailers don't exist for this type of watercraft. Vernaza expects to spend the next six months refurbishing the Tahoe Princess. It was beaten up during the winter when it broke from its mooring at Zephyr Cove and was banging against the rocks. A sundeck platform will be added to the top. Vernaza said it would be nicer, newer and modern when the overhaul is done.

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## **Nev. bill limits students to bathrooms based on biological sex**

**By Associated Press**

CARSON CITY – Transgender activists and progressive groups say

they're appalled with a proposed Nevada law forcing students to use bathrooms corresponding to their biological sex.

Republican Assemblywoman Vicki Dooling is sponsoring AB375, which was discussed Friday in the Assembly Judiciary Committee.

The bill would require students in public schools to use locker rooms and restrooms based on their sex at birth. Dooling said schools would need to provide separate facilities for transgender students and the bill would extend student privacy protections.

Transgender students and activists testified against the bill and said it would lead to more discrimination and bullying against transgender students who tend to face higher rates of suicide and discrimination.

The committee took no immediate action on the measure. The bill would need a committee vote on Friday to survive.

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## **Calif. voters may decide pot legalization in '16**

**By Philip Ross, International Business Times**

Marijuana legalization is once again lighting up California politics. The country's largest state, along with Arizona and Nevada, has a ballot measure in the works to get legal weed before voters next November.

Advocates of legalization in California say if they can get marijuana to the polls in 2016, a presidential election year that will bring more out more young voters, it'll pass with

flying colors.

When retail marijuana went before California residents in 2010, 54 percent voted against it. Political analysts say that public opinion on pot has since shifted.

“I see a parallel – not a perfect parallel, but a parallel – with marriage equality,” Ben Tulchin, a pollster in San Francisco, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* Wednesday. “The first battle you may lose, like in California, but you start a conversation and get the dialogue going. ... And you eventually see a very big shift.”

**Read the whole story**

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## **I-580, Hwy. 50 connector to be done in 2017**

**By Anne Knowles**

CARSON CITY– The Carson City Freeway project to connect Interstate 580 to Highway 50, creating a nearly seamless drive from Reno-Tahoe International Airport to the South Shore, is entering its final phase this summer.

The Nevada Department of Transportation is expected to award the contract to Road and Highway Builders, the Spark-based company that submitted the low bid of \$42 million, at NDOT’s May 11 board meeting.

“We have the federal funds now so you can expect to see the award in two to three weeks and then see equipment here in two to three months,” said Reid Kaiser, NDOT’s assistant director of operations, at an April 9 event here dubbed Stand Up 4

Transportation.

It was designed to draw attention to the need for long-term federal financing of transportation. Current federal transportation funding ends next month.

The freeway project will pave the final four or so miles between Fairview Drive in Carson City, where I-580 currently ends, to Highway 50 where it intersects with Highway 395 at Spooner junction.

The project is scheduled to be completed in 2017.



The project will connect Interstate 580, which currently ends at Fairview Drive in Carson City, and Highway 50 at Spooner junction. Photo/Anne Knowles

“Accessibility is an important aspect to our tourist economy,” Carl Hasty, district manager of Tahoe Transportation District, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “South Shore accessibility is

important.”

Hasty said he didn't have data on how the extension would reduce travel time between the Reno airport and South Lake Tahoe. “But (580) saves me 10 to 15 minutes now and I anticipate the same savings,” with the new Highway 50 connection, Hasty said.

Hasty also didn't know if the convenience would encourage more visitors to travel to the South Shore rather than up Mt. Rose Highway or Interstate 80 to the North Shore of Lake Tahoe.

“I think it's up to South Tahoe to redevelop itself or keep losing to the north, with what's being done in Alpine Meadows, Squaw, Northstar, Truckee,” to attract travelers, Hasty said.

The Carson City Freeway was initially planned to be an interchange with a bridge that would allow drivers to connect to Highway 50 by driving over Highway 395 without stopping. But that was deemed too costly and the connection now is an at-grade intersection and the traffic light there will be turned into a four-way light.

NDOT, however, says the project is engineered so that a bridge elevating the traffic can be added later if funding becomes available. At the transportation event Thursday, officials from NDOT, TTD, Carson City Regional Transportation Commission and Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County said the region was facing a serious drop in transportation funding if Congress doesn't act to pass long-term legislation.

The Nevada counties' portion of the Lake Tahoe area, according to NDOT, has an estimated need of \$708 million in transportation funding through 2035. Current revenue to fund that is estimated to be \$116 million, leaving a possible shortfall of \$592 million. The projects within that budget include the Stateline to Stateline bikeway, Highway 50 South Shore community revitalization and the cross-lake ferry.

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# Grand jury slams El Dorado County HR Dept.

By Kathryn Reed

A highly-critical assessment of El Dorado County's Human Resources Department was released this week by the grand jury.

The report's title is "Board of Supervisors neglects Human Resources".

"Members of the Board of Supervisors fail to comply with the legal requirement to notify the HR Department when they become aware of alleged unlawful activity against one of their employees," the report says.

It points out how the same issues the civil grand jury found in 2006-07 are occurring today.

"Human Resource policies are nonexistent or out of date, employee classifications are suspect, significant work is being contracted out to private contractors and no effort has yet been initiated to satisfy various requirements of state and federal employment law," the report says.



Pam Knorr

Part of the problem is there have been four HR directors since

2009. Today Pam Knorr, who is also the acting chief administrative officer, runs the department. She took over the CAO duties in November when Terri Daly was run out of office by the Board of Supervisors and was appointed in February to have the job for one year.

Knorr was hired by Daly to be in charge of the Human Resources Department. No background check had ever been done on Knorr. Knorr has served in various positions in Amador, Napa, Placer and Alpine counties. Before coming to El Dorado County in September 2013 she was CAO in Alpine County for five years. An employee from Alpine County has since filed a lawsuit against her.

Knorr did not return a call from *Lake Tahoe News*.

“Employees fear that a complaint submitted to the HR Department will not be kept confidential and they may be subject to retaliation. The HR director acknowledged that this a reasonable fear, based upon past behavior,” the report says.

Besides recommending the county follow state and federal law, it also believes Knorr should be shown the door.

Recommendations include:

- The Board of Supervisors should aggressively seek a new and qualified chief administrative officer.
- The Board of Supervisors should appoint a qualified manager of Human Resources.
- The Human Resources function should be centralized under a manager reporting to the chief administrative officer.

“I believe that the Board of Supervisors is doing our due diligence to make necessary changes within our organization to ensure that the concerns of the grand jury as well as doing what is best for our employees are addressed. Change does not happen overnight – especially when it comes to cultural

climate change within a large organization,” Supervisor Sue Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I am confident that the county is on the right track to making the long overdue and appropriate changes to our organization.”

Novasel said she did not disagree with report. She believes the hiring of an assistant CAO and risk manager will help Knorr be able to focus on HR more.

The lack of a strong HR Department has been impacting several departments.

Without a functioning HR Department, the county’s legal team is relegated to deal with many issues that come up. This, the grand jury says, has led to more of a punitive reaction to complaints than problem solving.

“Because county counsel is acting as de facto HR director, legal work that could be handled in house is contracted out. The county spends significant sums of money on outside consultants and attorneys for HR related issues. The county has spent significant sums of money on private consultants identifying personnel issues but has taken only the initial steps toward resolving the issues identified,” the grand jury found.

The report goes on to say, “Failure to strengthen the Human Resources Department has led to personnel issues being inadequately and improperly addressed by individual managers or supervisors who do not understand their obligations under California employment law. El Dorado County has a reputation for poor employer-employee practices. It does not attract the most qualified applicants for employment.”

No employee manual exists and training is virtually non-existent.

The civil grand jury usually makes its findings public in June, but instead posted five reports this week. In addition

to the HR report, there are ones on the jails, Ponderosa football field, El Dorado Hills Community Services District, and outpatient mental health.

A call was placed to the grand jury office. No one answered and it was not possible to leave a message.

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# **Ruling could open Calif. legislative records**

**By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee**

California's open-records section of the constitution does not exclude the Legislature, a Sacramento County judge has ruled, advancing a newspaper group's lawsuit seeking legislative records.

The Bay Area News Group sued the California Senate and California Legislature last summer, seeking appointment books, calendars, and other records of indicted then-lawmakers Ron Calderon, D-Montebello, and Leland Yee, D-San Francisco.

Senate officials had denied the requests, asserting that the requested records were exempt under the Legislative Open Records Act.

**Read the whole story**

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# Gaming industry comes out swinging against tax bill

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

A major tax plan proposed by Assembly Republicans – that features an expansion of the Modified Business Tax as a main component – met its major adversary Tuesday at the Legislature.

And that is the gaming industry – Nevada's largest taxpayer and employer.

The Nevada Resort Association made its opposition clear to a plan that officially is sponsored by the Assembly Taxation Committee and raises the rate of the state's payroll tax – or Modified Business Tax – and expands its reach by about 5,000 more Nevada businesses.

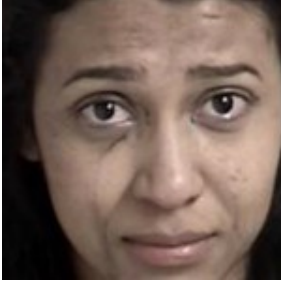
Gaming representatives pushed back on Assembly Bill 464, saying the tax will have a narrow base of taxpayers, hurts job growth and lacks fairness.

**Read the whole story**

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## Manslaughter charges filed in DUI crash

A South Lake Tahoe woman faces manslaughter charges in the death of her friend.



Olga Pena Arce

Olga Pena Arce, 21, was arrested April 8 on charges for gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated and driving under the influence. Bail is set at \$250,000.

The accident occurred Nov. 24 at 4:30am on Pioneer Trail and Edna Street in South Lake Tahoe. Police officers say Arce was driving west on Pioneer Trail at nearly 80 mph in a 35 mph zone when she lost control of the vehicle, went into a slide, struck two signs, then crossed onto Edna Street where the vehicle bounced off a wood retaining wall. The impact caused an imprint of the right rear wheel and lug nuts on the retaining wall.

One of the passengers, 20-year-old Aimee Campos of South Lake Tahoe, died at the scene. The other passenger, 25-year-old Wayne Walker of South Lake Tahoe, was ejected from the car. He survived.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

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## Washoe Meadows State Park EIR

# ruled invalid

By Kathryn Reed

A five-year legal battle ended this month with a judge ruling the Washoe Meadows State Park environmental impact report is invalid.

Friends of Washoe Meadows filed the lawsuit against California State Parks saying the EIR was not consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act.

The state wants to restore the section of the Upper Truckee River that runs through its property on the South Shore, reconfigure holes at Lake Tahoe Golf Course in Meyers and reclassify some of the property so there would be less land as a state park and more as a recreation area.

All public landowners are reconfiguring the river so it flows more naturally – before it was straightened during the heyday of cattle grazing in the basin. Through the years the channel has gotten steeper, erosion became a problem and fine sediment was and is being carried to Lake Tahoe.

“We would really like to see them take a more rational approach to river restoration that does not sacrifice Washoe Meadows’ resources,” Lynne Paulson, who spearheaded the lawsuit, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We are sorry it had to come to this. There should be river restoration and a better plan for the park and the golf course.”

Paulson’s group is concerned that downgrading the state park status will be precedent setting.

“The plan to move up to nine holes of a golf course into Washoe Meadows State Parks is inconsistent with the new vision for California State Parks issued by the Parks Forward Commission. The Commission’s priorities include long-term

natural resource protection, the preservation of habitats that may serve as a climate refuge, and increasing the diversity of park users,” Paulson said. “In addition, it seems inconsistent for the state to encourage any golf course development on its land in light of the new demand for stringent reduction in water usage.”

The state has a few options. It can do nothing, it can appeal the decision of the Alameda County Superior Court judge, or it can fix the segments of the document the judge took issue with and hope for a different outcome. It will be up to the Attorney General’s Office to decide how to proceed.

“We are very disappointed in the decision and we were not expecting it,” Cyndie Walck, hydrologist with State Parks, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Most of what the issue was was procedural.”

Crews will continue improving the trail network this summer, but nothing substantive can occur until the master plan for the park is developed. That got derailed because State Parks headquarters took away the funding as the lawsuit lingered. The golf course continues to be on a year-to-year lease.

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## **Sandoval creates forum to tackle drought**



Gov. Brian Sandoval talks April 8 about Nevada's drought. He should be standing in 3 feet of water, but Washoe Lake is a half mile away. Photo/Anne Knowles

**By Anne Knowles**

WASHOE VALLEY – Standing on Washoe Lake's dry lakebed, yards from the state park's boat ramp but half a mile from any water, Gov. Brian Sandoval signed an executive order creating the Nevada Drought Forum.

The forum is tasked with finding ways to address the ongoing drought and provide sustainable water resources for the state's citizens, farmers and businesses.

"I'm establishing the Nevada Drought Forum to ensure a path forward for all Nevadans," Sandoval said Wednesday.

Anticipating comparison to California, where Gov. Jerry Brown last week signed an executive order mandating a statewide 25 percent reduction in water use, Sandoval was quick to say the

two states are not alike.

“Some of the things they’re doing, we’ve been doing for years,” said Sandoval. “I commend Gov. Brown. But Nevada is different.”

When asked, Sandoval conceded he also lacks the same authority to call for cuts, a power that lies with the Southern Nevada Water Authority and the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

“Nevada water law is very different than California’s,” he said.



It's hard to see the water in Washoe Lake from the boat ramp. Photo/Anne Knowles

TMWA last week asked its customers to voluntarily reduce water use by 10 percent in order for the water purveyor to save and store 5,000 acre-feet of water for use next year. (An acre-foot will cover 1 acre with 1 foot of water.)

TMWA is also working with the state to secure a loan to build a \$17 million pipeline to transport water between Fish Springs, 40 miles north of Reno, to the Truckee Meadows.

Mark Foree, TMWA general manager, said the water authority is working with its myriad partners to implement the Truckee River Operating Agreement signed in 2008, which will eventually double TMWA's upstream drought storage.

TMWA also has access to some water in Stampede Reservoir, in addition to water in Independence and Donner lakes, something the water purveyor didn't have during the state's worst drought from 1987-1994.

During that time, Lake Tahoe was below the rim for  $4\frac{1}{2}$  years, Foree said. He said the lake fell below the rim six months ago and is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches below it now.

"This is not the worst drought on record. Could it become the worst drought? We'll know more next year," said Foree. "We are not expecting any flow into the Truckee (at Tahoe City) and by the end of May or early June all natural flows into it will probably end."



Lake Tahoe normally provides water to the Reno area via the Truckee River.  
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The state engineer, Jason King, has ordered a 50 percent reduction in groundwater pumping in two of the state's basins, orders that have been stayed by the court.

"We have seen significant groundwater declines and if left unchecked, the basins will not be sustained," Leo Drozdoff, director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, said at the forum announcement.

The Truckee Carson Irrigation District, which serves farmers in the Fallon and Fernley area, last month told farmers they would receive just 20 percent of their normal allocation.

SNWA, which relies on the Colorado River, has long worked to conserve water.

John Entsminger, general manager of SNWA, said the Las Vegas area has reduced water use by 40 percent in the last 15 years despite a 25 percent increase in population during the boom before the recession.

"Nevada is the poster child for the country," said Entsminger. "We've shown how you can grow the economy and use less water."

Despite all that, some didn't think the governor's response to the ongoing drought was enough.

"I thought it was a start, but not a very strong one," Bob Fulkerson, state director of the Progressive Leadership Alliance, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I wanted to see more action, more recognition of the dire problem we're in, and more of a commitment to a new way of thinking instead of status quo like 'we'll make sure there's always enough water for anyone who comes'."

The forum, according to the executive order, will comprise the director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; director of the Nevada Department of Agriculture; state engineer; chief of the Nevada Division of Emergency Management; Nevada climatologist; dean of the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension; and representatives from the Desert Research Institute and SNWA.

DRI announced that its representative would be Justin Huntington, associate research professor of Hydrology.

Sandoval ordered all state offices to conduct an audit of their water use. He also ordered all state agencies with

drought responsibilities and all municipal water providers to deliver a summary of their actions to the forum by May 15, which the forum will consolidate and make available by June 15.

The Western Governors' Association Drought Forum, created by Sandoval, is delivering its final report in late June, which the state's agencies and water suppliers will then utilize to make recommendations to the Nevada forum by the end of August, according to the executive order.

The Nevada Drought Forum will have a multi-day summit in September and deliver a final report by Nov. 1.