

Nev. anti-bullying bill passes 1st hurdle

By Associated Press

CARSON CITY – A Senate committee has passed a bill backed by Gov. Brian Sandoval that would implement a broad anti-bullying program throughout Nevada's school system.

Lawmakers voted 6-1 on Tuesday to pass SB504, which would create an Office for a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment within the Nevada Department of Education. Republican Sen. Don Gustavson opposed it.

Sandoval has proposed allocating \$36 million over the next two years to hire one school social worker for every 250 students. SB504 deals with the policy portion of the plan, while the funding portion will be considered separately in a money committee.

SB504 would strengthen reporting requirements for bullying incidents, and create a 24-hour hotline and a website for submitting complaints.

Parents of bullying victims gave tearful testimony last week in support of the bill.

Heller talks veterans issues at Legislature

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., said Monday that wait times for Nevada veterans who have filed benefit claims with the Veterans Administration have improved significantly but remain one of the longest in the nation.

Heller, in remarks to the Nevada Legislature, said the wait time has improved from 478 days to 257 days but is still far from the 125 days that the VA has promised.

“It’s unacceptable and until the backlog is eliminated, I won’t back down,” he said.

Read the whole story

Casino exec: Gaming will keep evolving

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

When former Las Vegas Mayor Jan Jones Blackhurst began working at Caesars Entertainment about 15 years ago, it was a very different company.

Then known as Harrah’s Entertainment, the company had just moved its headquarters from Tennessee to Las Vegas, so it was, in many ways, the new kid on the block. Since then, Jones Blackhurst has seen Caesars expand dramatically. It’s now a corporate giant on the Strip and in the broader global casino industry.

As executive vice president of communications, government relations and corporate responsibility, Jones Blackhurst is responsible for growing the company’s corporate philanthropy work. Her achievements recently earned her a 2015 Corporate

Social Responsibility Professional of the Year award from PR News.

Jones Blackhurst recently spoke about Caesars' corporate social responsibility and other gaming industry issues, including the bankruptcy restructuring of Caesars' largest operating division.

[Read the whole story](#)

Nev. driver's licenses may be invalid for air travel

By Andrea Domanick, Las Vegas Sun

If you renew your Nevada driver's license by mail, beware: Soon, you won't be able to use it to board an airplane.

As of November, only licenses renewed in person at the Department of Motor Vehicles are recognized for federal use. That means expired licenses renewed by mail can't be used to access federal facilities, as of October won't work at military facilities, and beginning in 2016, won't be accepted to board commercial aircraft.

Why the change? In 2005, Congress passed the Real ID Act, a federal law designed to combat terrorism and identity theft by standardizing how state IDs are issued. The law set basic criteria for receiving a driver's licence or identification card, such as which documents states may accept as proof of identity and residency.

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Calif. sets water use targets amid record low savings

By Fenit Nirappil, AP

SACRAMENTO – California cities face mandatory targets to slash water use as much as 35 percent while regulators warn voluntary conservation hasn't been enough in the face of a devastating drought.

Underlining their point was data released Tuesday showing a new low in saving water. Residents did less to curtail water use in February than any other month since officials started tracking conservation.

Along the south coast, home to more than a third of Californians from San Diego to Los Angeles, residents actually showed an increase in water consumption despite longstanding calls for cutbacks.

"These are sobering statistics and disheartening statistics," said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the state Water Resources Control Board.

Overall, the numbers indicate that statewide water use fell by less than 3 percent in February as compared to baseline data established in 2013, the last year before Gov. Jerry Brown declared a drought emergency.

The figures mirrored preliminary reports that helped spur Brown last week to demand that urban water users statewide cut back their consumption by 25 percent.

To meet that goal, the water board on Tuesday released draft water reduction targets for more than 400 water agencies

ranging from 10 to 35 percent. The targets are set based on per-capita water use.

Some cities must drastically improve water savings. San Diego and Los Angeles must cut water use by 20 percent after cutting only 2 percent and 7 percent since June.

Others such as Santa Cruz, which cut its water use by a quarter, are likely to easily meet smaller targets.

State officials say they're prepared to slap large fines on agencies that don't take steps to conserve or meet reduction targets, although they haven't used similar powers earlier in the drought.

The newly released water use data show the difficulties of changing longstanding habits, such as watering lawns, washing cars and taking long showers, board members said at the Tuesday meeting. Also, they noted, that water use in February 2013 was already low because the weather was cooler that year.

Still, the governor should be able to use the figures to his advantage. His call for a mandatory 25 percent cutback goes beyond his request asking residents to voluntarily reduce their use by 20 percent when he declared the drought emergency in January 2014. Statewide conservation has been about 9 percent since then.

The board credited some already water-conscious communities, including Stockton, Santa Cruz and Mountain View, for slashing use in February.

Places such as Newport Beach expected to make drastic improvements. Water use must plummet by 35 percent in the wealthy beach town during the same months consumption fell only 7 percent.

Newport Beach has reduced lawn watering to four times a week, which is twice as often as state recommendations allow, and it

prohibits residents from refilling their pools more than 1 foot a week.

Since July, Newport Beach residents used about 120 gallons a day, compared to about 100 for others who live along the southern coastline.

Newport Beach officials have spent months informing residents about new regulations and ways to cut back, and they're now seeking new authority to issue fines.

"We liked the friendly approach, and it seems to be working well, but we aren't afraid to issue citations," said George Murdoch, the city's utilities general manager.

The water board has given local water departments discretion to come up with their own conservation rules, but it has established some statewide regulations, such as banning lawn watering 48 hours after rain and prohibiting restaurants from serving water unless customers ask.

The agency also plans to have municipalities penalize overconsumption through billing rates.

Water use along the coast is expected to increase this summer as tourists and seasonal residents flock to beach homes.

Meanwhile, some water agencies are working on more drastic actions of their own. Southern California's giant Metropolitan Water District will vote next week on a plan to ration water deliveries to the 26 agencies and cities it supplies, according to spokesman Bob Muir.

The cuts, which would take effect July 1, were proposed before the governor imposed the mandatory restrictions and are expected to drive agencies to curb demand and help meet the conservation goals.

SLT council solidifies vacation rental rules

By Kathryn Reed

Vacation rentals are a \$20 million business in South Lake Tahoe – and then some.

That's just how much is collected each year by property managers. It's a big business that was brought to light at Tuesday's South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting. People and entities are profiting greatly from this somewhat controversial industry.

The city collects a 10 percent hotel tax on those properties. That amounts to \$2 million a year.

Some property managers – the middlemen between owners and renters – take 40 percent off the top.

House cleaners, repair people, hot tub cleaners and others are ancillary businesses benefiting from the vacation home rental (VHR) market. Then there are the businesses and employees in and around the neighborhoods that provide services and goods to the tourists.

This economic pyramid was brought to light April 7 during the course of the several-hour discussion about how the VHR ordinance should or should not be changed.

On the flip side were those who are furious about having residential areas being turned into lodging rows, where it's not about having neighbors, but instead being party central every weekend. It's about having strangers populate the street on a regular basis.

Some wondered why permitted lodging establishments must meet Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and other laws, while VHR properties don't.

An unknown is whether the proliferation of VHRs is contributing to the low occupancy rate at hotels in the city.

In all, 30 people spoke at the meeting. The city received 57 letters. The room was packed, with about another two dozen in the lobby watching the proceedings on television. (Councilman Tom Davis was outside the chambers because he is not allowed to participate because of his ownership in Tahoe Keys Resort.)

Enforcement of the rules already on the books was a constant refrain. Property managers were quick to point to the 162 complaints the city received from the 22,000 rentals – saying that is minuscule. What the industry doesn't disclose is how many complaints are made to them that the city – aka public – never knows about.

At the end of the day, the council agreed:

- To have future VHR permit applicants follow a process similar to getting a special use permit, which will include notifying neighbors of the desire to use the structure as a vacation rental. Exact details will be brought back to the council this spring.
- Occupancy should be limited to two people in a studio, four in a one-room, then two per bedroom plus four others for two-bedroom and larger places.
- To have two ordinances – one dealing with rentals in neighborhoods, one for those in tourist areas that would include places like Marriott and Lakeland Village. This is because the commercial areas have different rules already for things like trash, and health and safety regs.
- No noise is permitted after 10pm.

- Trash mandates would be deferred to the Waste Management JPA, which expects to have rules in place for its three jurisdictions – South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado and Douglas counties – in the coming months.
 - To not deal with individual room rentals in a residence.
 - Renters and owners who violate the ordinance will face fines, with the fourth infraction in a 12-month period resulting in revocation of the VHR permit.
 - To hire people to make the program work – including more and better enforcement.
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Marijuana operation busted up in Tahoe Keys

An indoor marijuana grow house in the Tahoe Keys was raided by officers last month, with processed and packaged pot with a street value of \$76,500 confiscated.

Sgt. Joe Sherry with the California Highway Patrol on March 17 at 10:15pm saw a pickup on Emerald Drive in South Lake Tahoe illegally parked and partially blocking the road. He reportedly saw several people unloading what appeared to be a large quantity of marijuana from the vehicle into a residence.

Suspects ran into the residence, though Sherry was able to detain one person at the front door.

“The subject admitted to unloading marijuana from the vehicle into the residence and confirmed there was an indoor marijuana grow operation inside the residence,” officers said in a press release.

A search warrant uncovered what officers said was an elaborate filtration and hydroponic system along with a large number of live marijuana plants.

The CHP has not released the names of the suspects who were arrested.

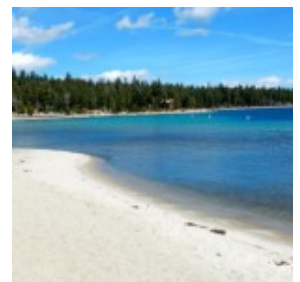
– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Lake Tahoe clarity improves substantially

Drought is a good thing for Lake Tahoe's clarity.

This was proved with today's announcement that the largest gain in clarity in more than a decade occurred in 2014. A disc that looks like a white dinner plate could be seen to a depth of 77.8 feet, an increase of 7.5 feet.

The Secchi disk has been used for decades to measure lake clarity. It's dropped over the side of a boat at various locations and then someone eyeballs how far they can clearly see it. The deepest point was 93.5 feet on July 7, and the lowest was 57.4 feet on Sept. 16.



**Annual average
clarity
readings since
1997:**

- 2014: 77.8
feet
- 2013: 70.2
feet
- 2012: 75.3
feet
- 2011: 68.9
feet
- 2010: 64.4
feet
- 2009: 68.1
feet
- 2008: 69.6
feet
- 2007: 70.1
feet
- 2006: 67.7
feet
- 2005: 72.4
feet
- 2004: 73.6
feet
- 2003: 71
feet
- 2002: 78
feet
- 2001: 73.6
feet
- 2000: 67.3
feet
- 1999: 69
feet
- 1998: 66.1

feet

- 1997: 64.1

feet

Source: TERC

“While these latest data are very reassuring, they should not be interpreted as victory in our joint restoration efforts,” Geoff Schladow, director of the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center, said in a statement. “Complete restoration is still decades away, and some of the greatest challenges still lie ahead of us. We are enduring drier and warmer conditions than we have ever encountered, and the restoration consequences of that are still far from understood.”

In light winters there is less runoff into the lake. This means less sediment to cloud the water. Warmer temps also means the lake water is mixing less; this also is good for clarity. (It also brings a whole different set of ecological issues.)

Researchers provided measurements for winter (December–March) and summer (June–September). Winter clarity last year improved by 1 foot. The winter average of 78.7 feet was well above the worst winter average, 66.6 feet seen in 1997. The largest improvement was seen in summer clarity, where there was a 13-foot improvement over the preceding year. At 78.7 feet this is the highest value since 2002.

Scientists are also giving credit for the improvement to the entities working to curtail sediments from reaching the lake. This is through the total maximum daily load and environmental improvement programs. More than \$1 billion has been spent in the last decade on projects related to Lake Tahoe’s clarity.

In 1968, the disk could be seen to 102.4 feet. Efforts are under way to get back to that level, but it’s not expected to happen for more than a half century.

Low bidder says Calif. will overpay testing contractor

By Christopher Cadelago, Sacramento Bee

California education officials relied on three paper slips and a box to help determine who would win a nearly quarter-billion-dollar contract to overhaul the state's system of testing students.

At a state Board of Education meeting last month, board President Michael Kirst drew each of the three firms' names to decide the order in which they would present their case.

The apparent loser says it was anything but fair. Pearson School questions whether it was put through an elaborate charade designed to pick the state's current testing vendor, Educational Testing Service. Pearson representatives want the job rebid and are threatening a lawsuit.

In the world of lucrative government contracts, the effort to design and build a system for more than 3 million students a year could have far-reaching implications. The new assessments are considered a cornerstone of the state's education system, helping improve classroom instruction and marking progress in English and mathematics for kindergarten through 12th grade. Given the innovative approaches being considered, experts said the winning bidder would be in position to parlay the agreement to provide tests to other states.

Read the whole story

Bill would require warrant for digital files

By Katie Orr, Capital Public Radio

Law enforcement officers need a warrant if they want to search your house. A bill in the California Legislature would require they also get one to search your email.

The bill is sponsored by the ACLU of Northern California. It would require that law enforcement agencies obtain a warrant to search digital files, such as emails or documents saved on a “cloud” server.

ACLU attorney Chris Conley says the state’s privacy laws must be updated to reflect modern times.

Read the whole story