

Calif. considering automatic voter registration

By Patrick McGreevey, Los Angeles Times

Every eligible Californian with a driver's license would be automatically registered to vote under a proposal Thursday by Secretary of State Alex Padilla, who estimated it would add millions of people to the voter rolls.

Padilla and Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego, are modeling their legislation on a "motor voter" law signed last week by the governor of Oregon in an attempt to boost voter turnout.

The California proposal is partly in response to the 42 percent record low turnout in California's November election, as well as this month's Los Angeles election, which saw about 10 percent of eligible voters go to the polls.

[Read the whole story](#)

Radio Shack deal dogged by fights

By Tom Hals, Reuters

RadioShack Corp's rescue deal to keep 1,740 stores open was attacked on Thursday by the bankrupt retailer's top creditor, a failed bidder who called the auction a sham and sought a new sale.

RadioShack, which filed for bankruptcy last month, told a U.S. Bankruptcy judge it had selected the Standard General hedge fund as the winning bidder in the private four-day auction, which ended just before Thursday's hearing.

The South Lake Tahoe store is staying open and the Incline Village one is closing.

The hedge fund plans to operate the stores in conjunction with wireless phone company Sprint Corp.

While RadioShack's attorney told the court the deal saved 7,500 jobs and was \$23 million more than a bid by liquidators, the deal provided little cash. The hearing to approve the agreement quickly deteriorated into disputes among lenders over the complex agreements that governed the repayment among creditors.

Read the whole story

Placerville woman on trial for killing another husband

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Three hours earlier, an El Dorado County deputy peeled back covers in her master bedroom and recoiled at what he saw.

Colleen Harris' third husband, retired Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Service Supervisor Robert Edward "Bob" Harris, 72, had been killed with a 12-gauge shotgun the first weekend of 2013. He was shot at close range from just beneath his left ear, leaving a gruesome exit wound on his face.

Yet Colleen Harris, in her interview with detectives, was relaxed and chatty. The Placerville land surveyor and outdoor enthusiast rested her right leg on a chair in front of her. She talked animatedly, in the present tense, about the man she loved. She spoke of him as if he were still alive, still in need of her affection, understanding and forgiveness.

Three decades earlier, Colleen, now 72, sat through a similar police interview. In 1985, her second husband, James Batten, 46, was killed in bed with another shotgun. She said he had been carrying on with a neighbor's wife. She was acquitted after her defense lawyer argued she was a victim of sexual violence at the hands of a husband who had also abused her daughter.

This week, as the prosecution presented its case against her in another murder trial, the highlight was the videotape of Colleen Harris' upbeat narrative provided to detectives after the killing of Bob Harris, a sheriff's seniors volunteer, renowned baseball umpire and globetrotting conservationist.

Read the whole story

Dozens of trains rerouted after derailment in Nev.

By Associated Press

FALLON — Union Pacific officials hope to reopen a stretch of one of the busiest east-west railroad routes in the nation today after a freight train derailed in Nevada's high desert about 60 miles east of Reno.

About 30 freight trains and another three Amtrak passenger trains had to be rerouted after 34 rail cars on a 51-car train derailed Wednesday afternoon 22 miles north of Fallon.

No one was injured but the derailment forced the closure for several hours of a stretch of U.S. Highway 95 while hazmat crews checked for toxic leaks.

Union Pacific spokesman Francisco Castillo says the only leakage came from a car filled with wine. He said Thursday they were working to repair part of the damaged rail. Cleanup efforts will continue for the next few days.

Reid says he won't seek re-election

By Carl Hulse, New York Times

WASHINGTON — Senator Harry Reid, the tough tactician who has led Senate Democrats since 2005, will not seek re-election next year, bringing an end to a three-decade congressional career that culminated with his push of President Obama's ambitious agenda against fierce Republican resistance.

Reid, 75, who suffered serious eye and facial injuries in a Jan. 1 exercise accident at his Las Vegas home, said he had been contemplating retiring from the Senate for months. He said his decision was not attributable either to the accident or to his demotion to minority leader after Democrats lost the majority in November's midterm elections.

"I understand this place," Reid said. "I have quite a bit of power as minority leader."

He has already confounded the new Republican majority this year by holding Democrats united against a proposal to gut the Obama administration's immigration policies as well as a human-trafficking measure Democrats objected to over an anti-abortion provision.

"I want to be able to go out at the top of my game," said Reid, who used a sports metaphor about athletes who try to hang on too long. "I don't want to be a 42-year-old trying to become a designated hitter."

Read the whole story

Debate over banning online gaming moves forward

By Amber Phillips, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON — In a choose-your-own-facts debate, a Sheldon Adelson-backed bill to ban online gaming got its first airing in Congress with a controversial hearing Wednesday.

Ban proponents, led by powerful members of Congress, argued that allowing online gaming to continue would degrade America's morality by proliferating gaming.

"Every home in America is potentially a casino," said Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, a Texas Democrat.

Opponents of the ban, which include several state lottery officials and representatives for almost every major casino except Adelson's Las Vegas Sands, say a ban would push online gambling further underground and contribute to a \$3 billion illegal offshore online gaming industry.

Judge appoints examiner in bankruptcy of Caesars division

By Michael Tarm and Kimberly Pierceall, AP

CHICAGO – A former Watergate prosecutor who was later involved in efforts to secure the release of Americans during the Iran hostage crisis while assistant secretary of the Treasury is now investigating business deals made by Caesars Entertainment Corp. before the casino giant's debt-heavy operations division filed for bankruptcy in January.

On Wednesday, a bankruptcy judge in Chicago appointed 68-year-old Richard J. Davis to be the independent examiner in the case to look into disputed business transfers that some creditors say robbed the division of valuable assets and left them without a guarantee on their investments.

As Davis stepped up to a podium Wednesday inside the courtroom, Judge A. Benjamin Goldgar jokingly alluded to the complexity of the case.

"You game for this?" a smiling Goldgar asked him.

When Davis nodded, the judge said, "You're in!"

There was no opposition to Davis' appointment, a rarity in a case fraught with ongoing disputes between the company and some of its creditors.

Caesars Entertainment Operating Co. has some \$18 billion in debt, the result of a \$30 billion buyout in 2008 that involved mostly borrowed money, and tens of thousands of employees scattered around some 38 hotels and casinos. Company officials hope a plan negotiated with its largest creditors will allow it to shed some \$10 billion of debt.

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys in Stateline.

Based on an earlier ruling approving, generally, the appointment of an examiner, there doesn't appear to be a limit to costs attached to the investigation. Davis must file reports to the court every 45 days.

The scope of Davis' role includes looking into, "any apparent self-dealing or conflicts of interest involving" Caesars Entertainment Operating Co. and its affiliates.

Davis said he plans to charge \$850 an hour, a \$100 discount of his normal rate, according to a court filing supporting his appointment.

Davis, a New York-based attorney, was also involved in the high-profile bankruptcy cases for Enron and Lehman Brothers.

**Heavenly eyes epic
construction season to begin**

evolution into year-round resort

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Going forward, Heavenly Mountain Resort will no longer be known as just a ski resort. Its Epic Discovery project received unanimous approval from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing board on Thursday.

“It’s conceivable if all the pieces fall into place, we could break ground on a handful of projects this summer,” Heavenly General Manager Pete Sonntag told *Lake Tahoe News* moments after the vote.

Still needing to be secured are approval from Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and the final record of decision from the U.S. Forest Service.

Sonntag would not put a price tag on what will ultimately be a multi-million dollar endeavor.

Epic Discovery is Vail Resorts answer to creating year-round resorts. It is developing these adventure parks at Heavenly, and in Colorado at Vail and Breckenridge.



Heavenly's summer offerings are about to explode with Epic Discovery's approval. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

It's possible some of the activities will be accessible in the winter. It will allow Heavenly to be more of a year-round destination, though there will still be times when it will have to close. Annual maintenance to the gondola starts every September, which is why scenic rides are limited to weekends and then it is offline the entire month of October.

With the Forest Service in 2011 allowing ski resorts to expand recreation opportunities into the summer, ski areas started to turn their attention to things like ropes and canopy courses, alpine coasters and mountain biking. But the Forest Service is keeping a close eye on this transformation.

"We've required a phased construction to make sure we consider the effects on the natural environment," Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais told the board. The USFS also wants to see designs when they are 30 and 60 percent complete to ensure they meet all the regulations.

Because these types of projects on national lands are new and

some of the components are not standard protocol, Marsolais' bosses in Washington weighed in on some items.

An issue that was raised through comments was how the proposed Panorama Trail would impact Van Sickle Bi-state Park.

The Forest Service, Heavenly, Tahoe Rim Trail Association and Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association created an agreement to monitor the effects over time.

"This is a different way of doing business," Marsolais said of the adaptive management plan.

One thing he put the kibosh on was the proposed coaster in Sky Meadows because of the stream environmental zone, pine marten habitat and potential effects on skiing.

Andrew Strain, govern affairs guru for Heavenly, said the hub of the non-skiing fun will remain at Adventure Peak near the top of the gondola.

"We will be using developed areas of the ski resort," he said.

Heavenly will greatly expand beyond the ropes courses it opened last summer. Much of what will be constructed will continue to be off the ground fun.

The mountain bike park will be outside the basin on the Nevada side.

"Heavenly today is essentially the black hole of mountain biking," Strain said. Trails will connect to already established routes are that mostly known by locals.

For those who are a little less adventuresome or may have physical limits there will be tours of the mountain on existing roads via Heavenly vehicles.

Twenty people spoke at the March 26 meeting; all were in favor of the project.

(El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel recused herself because her daughter works for Vail Resorts in Colorado. This was her choosing even though legally she did not have to.)

Many of the comments underscored how this will allow Heavenly to hire people year-round. The economic impact has not been quantified, but many business owners see Epic Discovery as a potential boon to their bottom line by people extending their visits because there will be more to do on the South Shore.

Plus, it's in alignment with the desire of turning the region into a recreation destination.

Several people praised the educational component of the project; with the hope people will be better stewards of the land.

It was also pointed out that for many tourists this would be their first encounter with national forest land. It's an opportunity to educate them about what grows and lives in the forest, as well as the threat of fire.

Heavenly sees about 110,000 people on the mountain now during the summer and expects to increase that by about 50 percent. Traffic and parking are not expected to be an issue because the thinking is people who are already in town will be the users and this will not be destination unto itself.

Tahoe boat inspections to resume; no fee hike

Enough money has been pieced together for the boat inspection program at Lake Tahoe to continue this summer without raising

fees for boaters.

The program, first adopted in 2009, requires all boats being launched at Lake Tahoe to be inspected. Those found to be carrying invasive species pay an additional fee to be decontaminated.

Dennis Zabaglo, aquatic resources program manager for Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, on March 26 stressed to the Governing Board the importance of maintaining the program. He said in 2014 there were 6,800 inspections and 3,300 decontaminations. More than 50 boats were carrying an AIS, with 12 of those being quagga mussels.

“That validates our efforts,” Zabaglo said.

The quagga mussels have devastated the water bodies they’ve entered, like Lake Mead in Southern Nevada.

Half of the money to operate the inspection program comes from the boating fee, the other half mostly from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act. With that money nearly gone, other sources are being looked at. Last week TRPA was awarded a \$200,000 quagga free grant from the state. There may also be money from the Army Corps of Engineers. Worst-case scenario is the need to tap into reserves.

The board on Thursday approved all the contingency budget plans as well as the fee schedule.

New this season will be an inspection station at the Truckee Airport. This replaces the one at Northstar. The cost to run it will be shared by Truckee as that town makes a concerted effort to keep AIS from Donner Lake.

The other inspection stations are in Meyers, Alpine Meadows and Spooner summit.

One board member questioned whether the boating season might be a little lackluster this season because of the low lake

level. Zabaglo said that was a concern last year as well and was unfunded, and that TRPA believes boaters will still be coming to Tahoe this summer.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

U.S. home prices surge 13 times faster than wages

By Victoria Stilwell, BloombergBusiness

For most people, buying a home is no cheap venture. That's especially the case when the growth in U.S. home prices is beating wage increases 13 to 1.

Wages climbed by 1.3 percent from the second quarter of 2012 to the second quarter of 2014, compared to a 17 percent increase in home prices around that time, according to a new report from RealtyTrac. The real-estate data provider used the Labor Department's weekly earnings data to measure wage growth, while home prices were derived from sales-deed data in December 2014 and compared to December 2012 on the hypothesis that a change in average wages would take at least six months to affect home prices.

Using localized earnings data, RealtyTrac also found that 76 percent of housing markets posted increases in home prices that exceeded the wage growth there during that time frame, led by the regions of Merced; Memphis; Santa Cruz; and Augusta, Ga. Others include the Detroit, Houston and Miami regions. (To be fair, some of these areas are still considered affordable and experienced massive price drops during the housing bust and recession.)

Read the whole story