

Gender gap in education cuts both ways

By Eduardo Porter, New York Times

Why do the best-educated girls do worse at math than top-educated boys?

Concern about this deficit exploded into public consciousness 35 years ago, when researchers in the department of psychology at Johns Hopkins University published an article suggesting the gap might be caused by a “superior male mathematical ability.”

The debate that ensued was furious. It was so hot that a quarter of a century later, a similar controversy contributed to the ouster of Lawrence Summers from his post as the president of Harvard.

Was there anything “natural” about the performance gap? Or was it the product of gender bias working its way through schools? As the debate raged, ending the underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering and math became a critical policy priority.

Amid the din over top girls’ mathematical abilities, something important was forgotten: What is happening that so many boys are falling behind in pretty much everything else?

Last week the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – a collective think tank of the world’s industrialized nations – published a report about gender inequality in education, based on the latest edition of its PISA standardized tests taken by 15-year-olds around the world.

Read the whole story

Nev. considers bill to kill tax roll publication requirement

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – County assessors would no longer be required to publish annual property tax rolls in the local newspaper under a proposal that would save taxpayers statewide hundreds of thousands of dollars at the expense of newspapers.

Senate Bill 95 sponsored by Sen. David Parks, D-Las Vegas, would give counties the option to instead publish the list on their Internet websites. Counties with populations fewer than 100,000 residents – currently all but Clark and Washoe – would have to make at least 10 copies available to the public free of charge.

In testimony Tuesday before the Senate Committee on Revenue and Economic Development, Parks said the existing requirement to publish tax rolls in the newspaper is an “antiquated system” that wastes precious taxpayer dollars.

According to the Nevada Assessor’s Association, the legal requirement cost Nevada counties nearly \$811,000 last year.

Read the whole story

Nev. entertains body-camera law for cops

By Ana Ley, Las Vegas Sun

Nevada lawmakers are pushing a bill that would require uniformed law enforcement officers to wear body cameras, mirroring the nation's intensifying efforts to improve relationships between police and the communities they serve.

Introduced Monday by Assemblyman Harvey Munford, D-Las Vegas, Assembly Bill 162 is one of 87 pieces of body camera legislation being considered in 29 states, according to the Denver-based National Conference of State Legislatures.

Even supporters of AB 162 say the feasibility of the unfunded mandate is questionable, and it will likely be watered down significantly by a series of amendments proposed by law enforcement groups and civil rights advocates. At most, the bill will likely end up requiring police agencies to consider the new technology (which many are already doing).

Read the whole story

Vail Resorts profit soars on stronger revenue

By Tess Stynes, Wall Street Journal

Vail Resorts Inc. said its earnings rose 95 percent on stronger revenue thanks to growth in season-pass sales and spending for other items such as meals and dining during the

quarter ended January.

However, for the year ending in July, Vail lowered the upper end of its forecast for earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization by \$10 million and now expects Ebitda between \$340 million and \$350 million. The updated guidance includes a roughly \$37 million shortfall in revenue at its Tahoe resorts, compared with earlier estimates.

For the current season through March 8, Vail Resorts reported total skier visits edged down 0.3 percent. However, total lift revenue – including impacts of growing season pass revenue – increased 8 percent and spending for ski classes, dining and other ancillary sales all grew.

Chief Executive Rob Katz results in February and early March continued trends the company saw in the latest quarter, with strength in Colorado offset by shortfalls to expectations in Tahoe.

Read the whole story

Marrandino no longer affiliated with Hard Rock



Don Marrandino no longer has
anything to do with Lake
Tahoe Hard Rock. Photo/LTN
file

Don Marrandino's latest stint in Lake Tahoe was short-lived.

"As of March 9, Don Marrandino, senior vice president of operations for Warner Hospitality, is no longer with Warner Hospitality," Jody Lake, COO for Warner Hospitality, told *Lake Tahoe News*. But why he is ousted from the entire company is not being disclosed. Warner is responsible for running Lake Tahoe Hard Rock.

In July during the splashy unveiling of the former Horizon hotel-casino in Stateline becoming a Hard Rock, Marrandino was touted as the man who was going to run the property even though he would be headquartered out of Las Vegas.

He was known as Big D when he oversaw

Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys from 2003-05.

Jim Ward, vice president of operations for Warner Hospitality, is the interim general manager of the local Hard Rock. Warner Hospitality is looking to hire a permanent GM.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Paying for ambulance service

a conundrum

By Kathryn Reed

A shared resource or a subsidy? Being able to answer that question is what the financial disagreement over ambulance service on the South Shore is coming down to.

The Cal-Tahoe JPA, which has two board members from the South Lake Tahoe City Council and two from the Lake Valley Fire Protection District board, has a little more than one year left in a five-year contract with El Dorado County to run the ambulance service in their jurisdictions. There is then the possibility to renew the contract for five years in one-year increments. The county pays the JPA \$2.06 million a year to do so. That money comes from a parcel tax assessed to property owners (\$500,000) and fees paid by patients or their insurance companies (the remainder).

The contract deals with response time and says there will be five available ambulances, with access to a sixth.



Who pays for the cost of ambulance service is being debated. Photo/LTN file

The problem is the fire departments believe three ambulances are needed at all times to meet the response times. But the amount paid by the county never covered that level of coverage. The city and Lake Valley at the time agreed to share

that expense.

This contract also calls for a flat fee for taking patients to out of area hospitals, which is often a loss for the JPA.

The city is also absorbing dispatch expenses that went from \$65,000 to \$95,000 to \$150,000 per year. The city calls this a subsidy to the JPA and wants reimbursement from the county.

But the contract says otherwise. The county pays a flat fee for X amount of service whether that is medical care or dispatch.

On the flip side, the county only has to pay for ambulance service – not when a fire truck rolls with the medic unit. That is where the shared resource aspect comes into play.

Most of this was brought up at the monthly JPA board meeting on March 11. The four board members spent the bulk of the meeting in closed session to discuss how to respond to a Feb. 12 letter from Don Ashton, director of the county's Health and Human Services Department. There was no reportable action.

Board attorney Dave Hale claimed the way to go into closed session was to call it potential litigation. The board agreed this was logical and not a violation of the Brown Act.

The departments are going to look at what all the real expenses are to run the ambulance service. This means looking at what it costs to store ambulances at the fire stations, the use of phones and other office related expenses. Those numbers will then be presented to the county.

Per the contract it's possible to revisit issues. This first was talked about last summer, with the initial formal meeting between the JPA and county in October. JPA Executive Director Ryan Wagoner and Ashton with the county met Wednesday after the JPA meeting.

In the past it was disclosed that not all residences are

paying the ambulance fee, but Wagoner said that is not true. He told *Lake Tahoe News* condos and mobile homes are in a different category, but still contribute to the cause.

El Dorado County was a bit put off by last month's presentation by South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston to the City Council regarding ambulance service. Ashton said as much in his to letter Wagoner last month.

Wagoner insists discussions are going the way the contract states that they can, everyone is playing nice and that talks are progressing. But he underlined how the county and the West Slope ambulance agency have been negotiating for 1½ years, so these things take time.

The next JPA meeting is April 13 at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Fire emphasized in sage grouse habitat strategy

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A new wildfire strategy designed to protect sagebrush terrain vital to a chicken-sized bird now under consideration for endangered species protection was announced by Interior Secretary Sally Jewell Tuesday, with Nevada officials praising proposals that they've been pushing for years.

The plan is detailed in the first of two reports called for in a secretarial order issued by Jewell in January and outlines actions and activities designed to reduce the size and severity of rangeland fires as the summer 2015 fire season quickly approaches. In Nevada, wildfire and the related

invasion of cheatgrass and other non-native vegetation is described as the foremost danger facing populations of the greater sage grouse, a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The plan calls for a firefighting strategy making protection of prime sage grouse habitat a top priority. To do so it will, among other things, rely to a greater degree on the expertise of veteran fire crews, rural fire departments and fire protection associations made up of ranchers who can respond to a fire quickly.

Read the whole story

Senators unveil bipartisan medical marijuana bill

By Adam Howard, MSNBC

Democratic Sens. Cory Booker and Kirsten Gillibrand, as well as Republican Sen. Rand Paul, unveiled arguably the most progressive medical marijuana legislation in history on Tuesday.

Their new bill – The Compassionate Access, Research Expansion and Respect States (CARERS) Act – would end federal prohibition of medical marijuana and also introduce a host of other reforms aiming to curb restrictions on its transport, prescription and availability.

“We need policies that empower states to legalize medical marijuana if they so choose – recognizing that there are Americans who can realize real medical benefits if this

treatment option is brought out of the shadows,” Booker told reporters at a press conference Tuesday on Capitol Hill. “Doctors and patients deserve federal laws that are fair and compassionate, and states should be able to set their own medical marijuana policies without federal interference.”

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe works on solutions for mental health

By Molly Hucklebridge

Change ‘I’ to ‘we’ and you go from illness to wellness.

More than 80 mental health clinicians, medical providers, law enforcement, social service groups, and the school district staff attended the mental health forum on March 5. Attendees discussed local mental health issues and walked away with specific plans to improve our community’s mental health in the next six months.

Donald Ashton, director of El Dorado County Health and Human Services, started the morning with the “the ugly, the bad, and the good” to describe the state of county mental health services.

According to Ashton, domestic violence in El Dorado County rates $1\frac{1}{2}$ times higher than the state. Suicide rates are double California’s rate and substance abuse is high particularly in South Lake Tahoe.

Pregnant women in the county suffer from mental health issues $2\frac{1}{2}$ times more than their state counterparts. Mental health

services and substance abuse programs are limited, but more El Dorado County residents suffer from a mental illness than ever before.

In the 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment, Barton Health identified mental health as one of the top three issues in the South Lake Tahoe community. Access to healthcare services and substance abuse, the other top priorities, are closely linked to mental health. As Ashton pointed out, Marshall Hospital's Assessment produced the same results and South Lake Tahoe is not alone.

At the mental health forum, medical providers, law enforcement, social service groups, school district staff, and community members shared their own stories, hopes, and concerns about mental health issues. Attendees discussed professional and personal experiences with every age level, and offered their insights and ideas.

In the afternoon, the insights and ideas were transformed into short-term action items. Sub-groups each had a different age group to focus on and determine key actions and next steps to improve the community's state of mental health in the next six months.

"We all know mental health issues are complex and solutions will take time," explained Michael Ward, the forum's facilitator. "But what steps can we take in the next six months to achieve a victory for mental health?"

Attendees in each age group offered between 10 and 20 action items. Then, within their groups, individuals and agencies committed to specific actions. Some attendees formed teams to execute a plan.

"I am so impressed by the enthusiasm and number of the ideas that came to the table," said Kindle Craig, director of Strategy and Development at the Barton Foundation. "If we accomplished just three of these goals in the next six months

– a local mental health services directory, mental health first aid training for all first responders, and the return of NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) to our community – these services and amenities would make such a difference for our community.”

Molly Hucklebridge works for Barton Health as the communications specialist.

Barton Health fires CFO after 7 months

By Kathryn Reed

Steve Neff, chief financial officer of Barton Health, was fired today.

Neff had been on the job since August.



Steve Neff

“He got fired today. I’m not at liberty to give all the reasons behind that,” Kirk Ledbetter, chairman of the board, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It was something the leaders at Barton felt was appropriate.” Ledbetter sent a memo Wednesday letting the rest of the board know what was going on.

The CFO reports to the chief executive officer. Only the CEO reports to the board.

CEO John Williams was not available Wednesday afternoon. However, the morning of March 11 he sent an email to staff saying Neff had been terminated.

Mindi Befu, spokeswoman for the South Lake Tahoe-based healthcare organization, told *Lake Tahoe News* because it's a personnel issue the reasons for Neff's firing could not be disclosed, but added that the terms of his contract were followed.

Befu would not say what Neff's salary was. His predecessor was making about \$400,000 a year.

Neff joined Barton after Dick Derby, who had the position for 14 years, retired last summer. Before coming to Tahoe Neff had been a partner with Renaissance Healthcare Partners in Massachusetts for 17 months. He has been in health care for more than 30 years, with 14 of them in leadership positions.

At the time he was hired, Williams in a statement said, "We look forward to his experience and leadership in the coming years."

Recruiting for another CFO will begin in the next month. Ledbetter expects the board to be updated on matters at the March 26 meeting.