

Nevada treasurer rewrites state budget

By Laura Myers, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Putting together a budget for the state of Nevada isn't so easy after all.

State Treasurer Dan Schwartz, who proposed to the Legislature a spending plan to rival fellow Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval's budget, said he's rewriting it because Nevada can't raise \$540 million as he'd like from a proposed \$5-per-passenger airport fee. That's because those fees are controlled by the federal government and prohibited by states.

"It doesn't work," said Schwartz, a conservative who's working with state Controller Ron Knecht on his budget plan.

Schwartz was scheduled to present his proposed alternative budget to the Senate Finance Committee today.

Read the whole story

Human skull found on West Slope

A resident panning for gold on the West Slope found more than he wanted. He unearthed part of a human skull.

The El Dorado County resident was in the Bear Creek picnic area near Traverse Creek Road on Feb. 10 when he came across the remains. The person had been digging in the dirt when the

discovery was made.

El Dorado County sheriff's detectives have anthropologists assisting with the investigation.

No other body parts have been located.

– *Read the whole story*

Roof reimbursement program not adding up

By Kathryn Reed

Nancy Gaynor has been waiting nine months for a check to arrive from Lake Valley Fire Protection District. This is three months longer than what was promised to be the absolute deadline. And the latest word is that it could be a couple more months, maybe longer.

The South Lake Tahoe woman is one of the 366 homeowners participating in the shake roof rebate program.

The grant through FEMA allowed homeowners in Lake Valley, South Lake Tahoe and Meeks Bay fire districts to be reimbursed 70 percent, up to \$7,500, to get rid of their fire hazard roof for something more fire resistant like a composite roof.

Applications were taken two years ago, with 2014 being the first building season and 2015 being the final year of the grant.

The problem is that of the 231 roofs that were completed last

year, 108 of those residents are still waiting to be paid.

"We are getting smaller chunks of money than we anticipated. We are pretty caught up right now. It's not overwhelming right now like it has been," Terri Tucker, coordinator for the program, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

But still, nearly half of the people who got roofs last year have not been reimbursed.

Tucker called people "impatient".

Lake Valley's board members, though, see there is a problem and at their last meeting agreed to front \$200,000 to speed up the process, according to spokeswoman Leona Allen.

"It's not a program that is living up to its promises. It sounds like a really good deal, so a lot of us bought into it," Gaynor told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The homeowner must qualify for the program, use one of the nearly 30 roofers who were certified by Lake Valley, pay the roofer and then submit paperwork to be reimbursed.

Gaynor took out a loan to cover the cost of her nearly \$9,000 roof. The expectation was that it would be paid off in three months, with the bulk coming from the reimbursement check.

While she is grateful to have the new roof, had she known there would be any question about a prompt reimbursement, she likely would have figured out a different way to front the money than to be paying interest on a loan.

"What is disheartening is that you are told one thing and nothing happens," Gaynor said.

Lake Valley officials say it's not their fault the money isn't flowing.

"They will get their money. It is guaranteed. It's a very

cumbersome process,” Allen told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We recognize it is a slower process than we imagined. The money is coming from FEMA, they send it through Cal-EMA.”

But neither Allen nor Tucker could explain the hold up other than to say it’s government and then pointed to how long it took people to get paid by FEMA after Hurricane Katrina.

The point of the grant was to get as many people as possible to have a more fire safe roof, which in turn protects neighborhoods. People in the program also had to have their defensible space done. From that standpoint, as well as keeping roofers busy for two seasons – making it an economic boon, the fire folks say the grant has been successful.

Nevada health officials dismayed with asbestos find

By Deborah Blum, New York Times

For the past few years, the geologists Brenda Buck and Rodney Metcalf have combed the wild terrain of Southern Nevada, analyzing its stony dunes and rocky outcroppings – and to their dismay, tallying mounting evidence of a landscape filled with asbestos.

Asbestos occurs naturally in many parts of the country, mostly in the West but also along some mountain ranges in the East. But in Nevada, the scientists found, natural erosion and commercial development were sending the fibers into the wind.

Worried about the possible health risks, Buck and Metcalf, professors of geoscience at UNLV, reached out to experts in

asbestos-related diseases. With data from Nevada's cancer registry, an epidemiologist prepared a preliminary report that outlined what she felt was a troubling pattern of mesothelioma – a cancer often related to asbestos exposure – among residents of the affected areas.

But if the scientists expected to be applauded by state officials for their initiative, they were mistaken.

Upon learning of the report, the Nevada Department of Health forced the epidemiologist, Francine Baumann of the University of Hawaii, to withdraw a presentation of the findings at a scientific conference and revoked her access to the state cancer registry. Metcalf and Buck offered to meet with state officials but say they were rebuffed.

Read the whole story

Managing forests to prevent catastrophe

By Katie Campbell and Courtney Flatt, KCTS-TV

WINTHROP, Wash. – Snow blankets the landscape in north central Washington. What you can't see is the scorched earth left from last summer's Carlton Complex fire.

Even through the snow, Susan Prichard, a fire ecologist for the University of Washington, can see the damage. She can also see signs of recovery in the bitterbrush and aspen trees.

Susan Prichard, a fire ecologist for the University of Washington, looks for signs of recovery in the aspen trees.

“Aspen, and cottonwood and willow species are all very fire adapted and disturbance adapted in that they’re sprouters,” Prichard said. “We’ve already seen, even in the fall following the Carlton Complex fire, just amazing sprouting by the aspen in particular.”

Although these aspen trees are resprouting, the fire this summer damaged other areas far more severely.

The Carlton Complex fire burned more than a quarter million acres – most of it in less than two days, as 30 mile-per-hour winds pushed hot smoke and embers through Okanogan County. Fire swept across shrublands and blazed through forests.

Prichard said it could take half a century or more for this area to recover. But she said there are ways to slow future wildfires.

“We know fire is going to re-occur. These are fire dependent ecosystems,” she said. “It’s not a question about if fire is going to return, but how it’s going to return and how much it’s going to burn and how much it’s going to allow to survive.”

Prichard said the best way to help forests in the long run is through thinning and controlled burns.

The question is: How much acreage needs to be treated to make a difference?

Thinning forests reduces the amount of fuel, like small trees, fires have to burn. This could help prevent explosive wildfires.

Reese Lolley, the Eastern Washington forest program director for The Nature Conservancy, said the emphasis on fire suppression in the last century helped create the conditions that have lead to more extreme fires.

Lolley said some fires actually need to burn. Smaller

wildfires reduce fire fuel and ultimately create habitat and help regenerate trees.

Liberty customers all out of the dark after storm

It took until Tuesday morning for Liberty Utilities to restore power to all of its customers after wind gusts between 130-150 mph along the Sierra Crest knocked over power poles and toppled trees onto electrical wires.

Liberty services the California side of the basin, as well as Truckee, Alpine and Mono counties. NV Energy provides power on the Nevada side.

“Basically, crews have been working nonstop since the first storm arrived on Friday,” Mike Smart, Liberty Utilities-CA president, said in a statement. “For the past four days, we’ve reset poles, restrung wire and even made repairs to another utility’s infrastructure because it affected our ability to serve our customers.”

Approximately 16,400 Liberty customers were affected. When NV Energy has issues, Liberty has problems because the energy comes from NV.

Around South Lake Tahoe, there were three broken poles and six spans of electrical wire down due to trees falling, mostly in the Camp Richardson area. There were other smaller outages around town.

Tree related issues affected Tahoe City, the Truckee River corridor, and Glenshire as well as the communities of Portola,

Loyalton, Hobart Mills, Russell Valley and Sierra Brooks in Plumas and Sierra counties. Two transmission lines serving that area went down at separate times. The 609-power line that runs from the Truckee substation to the Squaw Valley substation along Highway 89 was restored on Sunday morning. The 132-power line running parallel and to the east of the 609-power line went down on Sunday evening and wasn't restored until Tuesday morning.

Liberty's crews replaced nine downed power poles in the Coleville/Walker region in Mono County. Other repairs were made to poles that had wires downed and/or cross-arms on the poles broken by toppled trees.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Gun control advocates see Nev. as a source of hope

By Amber Phillips, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON — As a gun-loving state where Republicans have launched a wave of pro-firearm proposals since taking control of the Legislature in 2014, Nevada might seem like anything but a source of hope for supporters of tougher gun laws.

But gun control advocates say they're optimistic that Nevada could provide a turning point in the national gun-control debate, thanks to a 2016 ballot initiative that would expand background checks to all gun sales in the state. Advocates in Washington, D.C., are planning to aggressively organize in

Nevada to help it pass, fueled by the belief that if change can come to this state, it can happen anywhere.

So far, Nevada is the only state with a background-check question on its ballot next year. Current Nevada law doesn't require FBI background checks for unlicensed firearm dealers at gun shows and private sales. Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval vetoed a Democratic bill to expand background checks in 2013, saying it restricted Nevadans' rights.

Read the whole story

LTUSD selects newcomer as board member



Adam Jones will be sworn in to the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board in March. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District board members went with experience over longevity in the community when it came to appointing a fifth board member.

Adam Jones, 43, will fill the seat vacated by Sue Novasel. He will be sworn in at the next meeting, March 10. Novasel resigned last month after being elected to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. This term ends Dec. 2, 2016.

"He is likely to bring in ideas from the outside and not be too insular," board member Mike Doyle said of Jones during the Feb. 10 deliberations.

Jones and his wife have owned a vacation home here for a number of years. Last summer they became full-time residents with their children, who are in third and fifth grade.

He told *Lake Tahoe News* the schools were a factor in deciding to relocate here. He likes the programs and facilities at South Tahoe High School, and that per pupil spending is higher in LTUSD compared to the South Bay district they came from.

Jones told the board that LTUSD uses technology better than the district he came from in Santa Clara.

While this is the first political board Jones has been on, his experience on a school board started in high school when he was the student rep to a board.

What he brings to LTUSD is experience in other avenues. He has a bachelor's in public policy from Stanford University and a master's in education.

In the Bay Area Jones has been the president and finance director of the Don Callejon School Community Organization, which would be the equivalent to the local education foundation. He also was a member and chairman of the school

site council.

The way he talked about education during the interview process proved he understands the system, even if he doesn't know the nuances of the local schools.

For the past 21 years, Jones has worked for SimulTrans in Mountain View. He is still the chief operating officer for the translation firm. He returns to the Bay Area about every other week, but otherwise works remotely.

Five people were vying for the seat – Jones, John Drum, Kyle Martinez, Madelyn Rios and Jennifer Peterson. Now that LTUSD board seats are broken up into districts, the person had to reside in the area that represents Meyers.

The five were interviewed in open session, asked the same 10 questions without the other candidates in the room, and then the four-seated members deliberated with everyone hearing the discussion.

In the initial round of picking their two finalists, all current members – Barbara Bannar, Larry Green, Mike Doyle and Ginger Nicolay-Davis – all had Jones on their list. Two voted for Rios and two for Drum.

In further discussions it was clear Jones and Drum were the top choices. But ultimately Jones won out because of what board members said would be his ability to jump onto the board without much of a learning curve.

6-month sentence in Truckee

carjacking case

A Las Vegas man was sentenced last week to 180 days in Nevada County jail for an attempted carjacking in Truckee in October.



Nathan Daniel
Jones

Nathan Daniel Jones, 29, in January pleaded no contest to an assault charge.

In addition to the time behind bars, Jones will be on three years supervised probation.

Jones was originally arrested on two counts of attempted carjacking, felony battery, battery on a peace officer, resisting arrest, possession of an illegal weapon and possession of a pound of suspected marijuana.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

The shame of America's family detention camps

By Wil S. Hylton, New York Times

Christina Brown pulled into the refugee camp after an eight-hour drive across the desert. It was late July of last year, and Brown was a 30-year-old immigration lawyer. She had spent a few years after college working on political campaigns, but her law degree was barely a year old, and she had only two clients in her private practice in Denver. When other lawyers told her that the federal government was opening a massive detention center for immigrants in southeastern New Mexico, where hundreds of women and children would be housed in metal trailers surrounded by barbed wire, Brown decided to volunteer legal services to the detainees. She wasn't sure exactly what rights they might have, but she wanted to make sure they got them. She packed enough clothes to last a week, stopped by Target to pick up coloring books and toys and started driving south.

As she pulled into the dusty town of Artesia, she realized that she still had no idea what to expect. The new detention center was just north of town, behind a guard station in a sprawling complex with restricted access. Two other volunteers had been in town for about a week and had permission from federal officials to access the compound the following day.

Brown spent the night at a motel, then drove to the detention camp in the morning. She stood in the wind-swept parking lot with the other lawyers, overlooking the barren plains of the eastern plateau. After a few minutes, a transport van emerged from the facility to pick them up. It swung to a stop in the parking lot, and the attorneys filed on. They sat on the cold metal benches and stared through the caged windows as the bus rolled back into the compound and across the bleak brown landscape. It came to a stop by a small trailer, and the lawyers shuffled out.

As they opened the door to the trailer, Brown felt a blast of cold air. The front room was empty except for two small desks arranged near the center. A door in the back opened to reveal dozens of young women and children huddled together. Many were

gaunt and malnourished, with dark circles under their eyes. "The kids were really sick," Brown told me later. "A lot of the moms were holding them in their arms, even the older kids – holding them like babies, and they're screaming and crying, and some of them are lying there listlessly."

Brown took a seat at a desk, and a guard brought a woman to meet her. Brown asked the woman in Spanish how she ended up in detention. The woman explained that she had to escape from her home in El Salvador when gangs targeted her family. "Her husband had just been murdered, and she and her kids found his body," Brown recalls. "After he was murdered, the gang started coming after her and threatening to kill her." Brown agreed to help the woman apply for political asylum in the United States, explaining that it might be possible to pay a small bond and then live with friends or relatives while she waited for an asylum hearing. When the woman returned to the back room, Brown met with another, who was fleeing gangs in Guatemala. Then she met another young woman, who fled violence in Honduras. "They were all just breaking down," Brown said. "They were telling us that they were afraid to go home. They were crying, saying they were scared for themselves and their children. It was a constant refrain: 'I'll die if I go back.' "

As Brown emerged from the trailer that evening, she already knew it would be difficult to leave at the end of the week. The women she met were just a fraction of those inside the camp, and the government was making plans to open a second facility of nearly the same size in Karnes County, Tex., near San Antonio. "I remember thinking to myself that this was an impossible situation," she said. "I was overwhelmed and sad and angry. I think the anger is what kept me going."

Over the past six years, President Obama has tried to make children the centerpiece of his efforts to put a gentler face on U.S. immigration policy. Even as his administration has deported a record number of unauthorized immigrants,

surpassing two million deportations last year, it has pushed for greater leniency toward undocumented children. After trying and failing to pass the Dream Act legislation, which would offer a path to permanent residency for immigrants who arrived before the age of 16, the president announced an executive action in 2012 to block their deportation. Last November, Obama added an executive order to extend those protections to their parents. “We’re going to keep focusing enforcement resources on actual threats to our security,” he said in a speech on Nov. 20. “Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who’s working hard to provide for her kids.” But the president’s new policies apply only to immigrants who have been in the United States for more than five years; they do nothing to address the emerging crisis on the border today.

Since the economic collapse of 2008, the number of undocumented immigrants coming from Mexico has plunged, while a surge of violence in Central America has brought a wave of migrants from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. According to recent statistics from the Department of Homeland Security, the number of refugees fleeing Central America has doubled in the past year alone – with more than 61,000 “family units” crossing the U.S. border, as well as 51,000 unaccompanied children. For the first time, more people are coming to the United States from those countries than from Mexico, and they are coming not just for opportunity but for survival.

Read the whole story