

Study: More Americans have health insurance

By Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times

Federal researchers reported on Tuesday that the number of Americans without health insurance had declined substantially in the first quarter of this year, the first federal measure of the number of uninsured Americans since the Affordable Care Act extended coverage to millions of people in January.

The number of uninsured Americans fell by about 8 percent to 41 million people in the first quarter of this year, compared with 2013, a drop that represented about 3.8 million people and that roughly matched what experts were expecting based on polling by private groups, like Gallup. The survey also measured physical health but found little evidence of change.

The findings were part of the National Health Interview Survey, a nationally representative examination that is considered a gold standard by researchers. It interviewed about 27,000 people in the first quarter, fewer than Gallup, which interviewed 45,000 people in the second quarter alone. But researchers say it is considered particularly trustworthy because federal interviewers conduct the survey in Americans' homes. It also sets a federal level that others can use as a benchmark.

Read the whole story

Laine: Advocate for enforcing city's ordinances

Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News asked the seven South Lake Tahoe City Council candidates a series of questions. All are the same except for one that is specific to each candidate. This is the final one.*



Name: Brooke Laine

Profession/work experience: Bank manager, US Bank – January 2014 to current

Assistant sales and service manager, Bank of the West – December 2007-March 2013

President, Laine Photolabs Inc. – January 1990-October 2010.

Age: 50 years old

What organizations, committees or groups are you or have you been involved with?: Sports: South Tahoe National Little League, Babe Ruth, Pop Warner Football, The Quarterback Club, American Youth Soccer Organization.

Volunteer: South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation, Clean Tahoe Program, South Tahoe High School Alumni Foundation.

Liaisons (past and present): Tahoe Transportation District, LAFCo, Solid Waste JPA, Clean Tahoe Program, California Tahoe

Conservancy, South Tahoe Public Utility District, Local Area Formation Committee.

Why are you running for City Council?: This community needs to continue heading down the positive path that we are currently on. Issues that can be resolved involving business, recreation and the environment will have my direct focus.

Why should people vote for you over the other candidates?: I am passionate. I am honest. I am focused. I get results.

What do you think is the most pressing issue facing South Lake Tahoe and how will you deal with it?: City unfunded health care is the elephant in the room. The City Council in partnership with our current employees and retired employees, are working hard to come to a positive resolution that will free this city from a financial burden so large that it cripples our ability to simply maintain our infrastructure let alone invest in new recreational opportunities.

If the city cannot reach an agreement with its bargaining units, are you willing to go to impasse? Why or why not?: I believe that the employees will resolve this matter under normal negotiations. The desire of our employees is as strong as the council's desire to reach a mutually agreed upon and beneficial solution. I would be willing to go to impasse if necessary because we are putting our best offer on the table. We have nothing to hide.

How would you resolve the CalPERS and health care issues in the city?: The public retirement system, known as CalPERS, needs revamping. The recent internal corruption may create an opportunity for the state of California to examine their "system" and makes some necessary changes. In the meantime, the city must remain fiscally prudent in securing the necessary retirement dollars needed so that our employees are secure. We will continue to chisel away at the health care issues as we continue to negotiate with our current labor force.

What is your opinion about term limits for the council?: Absolutely. There is value in having experience but there is also value in turnover. This position takes a minimum of two years just to get your arms around some of the issues and to gain a sense of how government works. I feel that two to three terms max is plenty. Then it is time to move on and share this opportunity with others in the community who want to leave things better than the way we found them.

If the city has positive cash flow, where should the money be spent?: Invest wisely! No "tax and spend". Infrastructure and sustainable business and recreation are vital.

What are your ideas for increasing the city's revenues?: Investing in our core product, recreation, will attract the families and individuals who appreciate the outdoors and want to experience Tahoe. The city will prosper as the business sector prospers.

What is your vision for the 56-acre project?: I was instrumental in advocating that the city purchase property in the industrial area at the Y. The purchase of this property now affords the opportunity to relocate our public works yard that is currently next to the campground. This move will free up valuable land that can now be used for additional improvements and added amenities to the campground that are articulated in the 56-acre project.

What would you do to improve relations with El Dorado County?: I currently represent the city by serving on the Local Area Formation Committee which meets in Placerville on a monthly basis. The composition of that board is multi-jurisdictional with representatives from the city of Placerville, the city of South Lake Tahoe, and representatives from the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors in addition to others. We work hard on that board to establish a good working relationship with all of the representatives. This has allowed me a base to build from.

Is the city on the right course with restructuring debt and focusing on recreation? Why or why not?: At this time, it appears the city is on the right course. We restructured our debt to take advantage of lower interest rates. The city's focus on recreation is right on.

Name one vote the City Council made in the last four years you are proud of and one you are disappointed in – and why?: I am proud of the council's decision to support the direction of the TRPA's – Regional Plan update which was an important, historical move toward returning power back to local government; giving back local control; and focusing on the larger issue for TRPA – as environmental governance and lake clarity. City government continues to improve with few disappointments at this time.

What is working in the city and what isn't; and how would you go about changing what isn't working?: The city of SLT has begun to view itself as a business.

What isn't working: Enforcement. Policies are in place, but we lack the political will and financial resources to enforce our own rules. Our sign, outdoor display, and vacation rental ordinances stand out as perfect examples of lack of enforcement. I will advocate for proactive enforcement of the city's ordinances and will support the necessary level of funding to make it happen.

Being on the council requires working with four others. Give readers an example of how you work well others in difficult situations with differing opinions: There are two meetings a month. Every meeting is a mutual meeting of the minds in an effort to manage the city. Differences may arise and are heard and resolved with a vote. Everyone brings something to the table. Elected officials must respect the opinions expressed.

What is your opinion about the following topics:

- **Ferry service on Lake Tahoe?:** I have always liked this idea.

- **Loop road?:** Depends on the option.
- **Future of Lake Tahoe Airport?:** General aviation has my support. Current facilities need a facelift.
- **Increasing the transient occupancy tax?:** Not supportive. I see this as a short-term remedy to a long-term solution. Growing the economy has greater impact in the long term.
- **Changing the vacation rental ordinance to reduce the number of such units in neighborhoods?:** Support.

Some consider you a good ole girl – in a negative way. How do you address this criticism?: What a kudo to be called a “good ole South Lake Tahoe girl” at 50! I am the product of parents who owned a successful business. I was born at Barton, educated in the SLT school system and a graduate of the University of California, Santa Cruz with a degree in economics. This is my hometown. I married my husband, Jose here. We raised two children in Tahoe.

It’s my honor to serve this community as a “thank you” to all SLT has afforded me and our family.

Living and working here makes this good ole girl with fresh ideas work harder for our community.

Tell the voters something about yourself that they may not know: I love to hike and do so on a daily basis. My goal is to complete every mile of the Rim Trail.

Crews losing ground on King Fire



A huge plume of smoke covers Placerville.
Photo/Renee Gorevin

Updated Sept. 15 11:55pm:

The King Fire near Pollock Pines grew to 8,600 acres on Monday night, with 5 percent containment.

Highway 50 is reduced to one lane through the fire area.

The California Air Resources Board will be installing a temporary PM2.5 monitor at South Tahoe High School to monitor smoke from the King Fire in Pollock Pines.

Under normal circumstances there is a PM10 monitor located in South Lake Tahoe. It only measures coarse dust particles such as rushing or grinding operations and dust stirred up by vehicles traveling on roads – not smoke particles.

The smell of smoke is evident in parts of the basin, and from many areas it can be seen.

Several firefighters on Sept. 15 had to deploy their fire shelter. CalFire said everyone is safe. Earlier a firefighter had been injured. The extent of the injuries is unknown.

The fire, which erupted in the late afternoon Sept. 13, is burning in a canyon of the South Fork of the American River, northeast of Pollock Pines. It is spreading at a rapid rate.

All Pollock Pines schools will remain closed on Sept. 16.

Highway 50 remains open. However, Forebay Road at Blair Road and Forebay Road at Pony Express Trail are closed.

Mandatory and voluntary evacuations remain in effect for hundreds of residents. Sierra Ridge Middle School is being used as a shelter for people and small pets.

The cause is under investigation.

Agencies from throughout Northern California are working the fire, including crews from Lake Tahoe.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Kings Beach hotel crawling with bugs, garbage

By Thom Jensen, KXTV-TV

JMA Ventures owns some of the priciest resorts and restaurants from San Francisco to Seattle. It also operates Homewood Mountain Resort.

But one of JMA's lesser known properties is not living up to the same reputation among travelers.

Inside room 224 at the Tahoe Inn in Kings Beach cameras captured ants crawling across bed sheets, blankets and pillows. Under a nightstand were dozens more ants. Beneath the bed was a collection of garbage, which included two nitrous oxide dispensers known as "Whip-Its." Nitrous oxide is also known as laughing gas and is a popular drug with young partiers that's known to cause dizziness and feelings of euphoria. Also in the room was a pill that a narcotics detective identified as a Ecstasy. Ecstasy is another drug known to bring on feeling of euphoria, but unlike "Whip-Its" Ecstasy is illegal.

JMA declined an on-camera interview, but in a written statement, founder Art Chapman said, "We take News10's allegations very seriously and will investigate them thoroughly." He also wrote that the Tahoe Inn is, "scheduled for demolition by spring 2015, at which time the land will be fully restored to its natural state."

Read the whole story

Small vegetation fire in Truckee

CalFire and Truckee firefighters on Sunday night extinguished a small vegetation fire in Olympic Heights.

Officials believe the Sept. 14 9:20pm fire may have started from a discarded cigarette.

A plot about 20 feet by 30 feet burned. Officials said it was luck there was no wind that neighbors jumped on the fire before firefighters arrived.

“Remember it is still fire season and vegetation is very dry. Some of the largest fires in California have happened in September and October,” Truckee firefighters said in a press release.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

LTCC part of online education pilot program

Lake Tahoe Community College is one of eight colleges selected to be part of a pilot program involving online education.

California Community Colleges' Online Education Initiative (OEI) begins this fall and goes through spring 2016.

The goal is to increase student access to online courses throughout California and define the future of online education in California's Community College system.

California's community colleges have offered online courses for more than 20 years. Last school year, 620,000 students took more than 41,000 online courses. However, there has been little coordination between the state's 72 community college districts in terms of technology platforms or student and faculty support. Retention rates in online courses remain low, as they do nationwide. The hope is that bringing extra technology resources and centralization to California's community college system will improve online student success

rates.

Associate degree for transfer online courses that will be included in the initial phases of the pilot program include: introductory courses in anthropology, criminal justice, communications, micro and macroeconomics, human geography, psychology, and others.

The OEI will also look at developing a common course management system. There are upward of 10 systems in use now. The OEI intends to create one system to be used by all community colleges.

Other colleges in the pilot program are: Mt. San Jacinto College, Butte College, Coastline Community College, Foothill College, Shasta College, Fresno City College, and Ventura College.

Construction related fire at Stateline residence

A fire on Tramway Drive in Stateline on Saturday did not reach the interior of the structure.

The two-alarm fire Sept. 13 at 6:42pm burned the deck of the residence and the siding.

“(The cause) is under investigation related to construction activity,” Tahoe Douglas Fire Marshal Eric Guevin told *Lake Tahoe News*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Fire burning east of Pollock Pines

Updated 5:15pm:

Smoke drifting into Truckee and that is streaming over the ridge on the South Shore is from the King Fire burning out of control near Pollock Pines.

“Heavy fuels are burning and timber,” Terri Mizuhara, spokeswoman for CalFire, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It’s traveling east, northeast with a rapid rate of spread.”

It is burning away from the town of Pollock Pines.

It was reported Sept. 13 at 4:32pm. Less than 24 hours later about 2,000 acres near Mountain Road had been consumed; with zero percent containment. This is a steep canyon area. Winds have been brisk.

Evacuations have been ordered for 188 residences, with more than 400 on voluntary evacuation. Pollock Pine Community Center was the evacuation center, with 120 people having shown up. However, it lost power. Red Cross has established an evacuation center at Sierra Ridge Middle School, 2700 Amber Trail, Pollock Pines.

Power is out in the area to about 4,000 PG&E customers.

Air and ground resources are attacking the fire. A strike team from Lake Valley Fire Protection District has been sent to the fire.

Highway 50 is open in both directions, but there are road closures closer to the fire.

At this time the cause is under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tesla deal prompts economic benefits debate

By Matthew L. Wald, New York Times

When Nevada lured Tesla Motors to the Reno area to build a giant battery factory, a triumphant governor, Brian Sandoval, proclaimed that every dollar his state was spending in tax incentives and other subsidies would yield \$80 in economic activity.

But experts in industrial development say that his estimate is not so clear-cut. The calculation, they say, relies on two big assumptions: that the factory, which is to be built on a scale never tried before for a battery plant and is to employ 6,500 people, will achieve the radical cost savings that Tesla envisions, and that all the business it spurs will go to local companies. And even then, not all of the \$80 would reach governments; most of it, in fact, would go to the private sector.

A crucial issue is that whenever a state offers an incentive for a company to build a factory, the economic stimulus is

rarely concentrated in the surrounding area. Building and equipping the battery factory, for example, will cost about \$5 billion, and while some of that money will have to be spent in Nevada, many of the equipment purchases, for example, cannot be.

“Are there any factories in Nevada that make the equipment to manufacture lithium-ion batteries?” said Greg LeRoy, the executive director of Good Jobs First, a nonprofit watchdog group in Washington that generally opposes such state incentives. “I don’t think you get to count that as a Nevada impact.”

That logic did not carry the day in Carson City. Late Thursday, the Nevada Legislature, in a special session, approved a \$1.3 billion package of incentives, which Governor Sandoval immediately signed into law. He thanked the Legislature for its comprehensive review, in a session that he had called 48 hours earlier.

The package was more than twice as large as the \$500 million that Elon Musk, Tesla’s chief executive, had said a month earlier that he was seeking. But Sandoval stressed that it would provide a lift for a state that has not recovered from the recession, and increase its gross domestic product by 4 percent.

Read the whole story

Initiative to split Calif. in

6 not on the ballot

By Josh Richman, San Jose Mercury News

Silicon Valley venture capitalist Tim Draper has missed a key step in his audacious plan to break up California into six states: He failed to gather enough signatures to qualify his initiative for the November 2016 ballot, the Secretary of State's Office reported Friday.

The slipup seemed like the punch line to what had mushroomed into a national joke, with TV talking heads and late-night comedians taking potshots at the Golden State's latest political weirdness.

Political experts expressed amazement Friday that Draper's \$5.2 million personal investment in the proposed ballot measure didn't do the trick.

Thad Kousser, a UC San Diego political expert, said that the effort's failure doesn't say anything about the merits of the proposal. Instead, he said, "I think it says everything about a lack of organizational savvy by its proponents."

The Secretary of State's Office reported that county registrars did a random check of about 54,000 of the more than 1.1 million petition signatures that Draper's campaign collected. Based on that sampling, officials estimated that only 752,685 signatures would be valid – far less than the 807,615 needed to qualify.

Read the whole story