

4.6 mil. Californians expected to travel this weekend

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

High heat and gas prices apparently will not deter Californians from enjoying the first summer holiday of the year.

AAA projects that more than 4.6 million Californians plan to travel at least 50 miles or more during the three-day Independence Day weekend. That represents a 1.5 percent increase over 2013.

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Fireworks injuries, sales on the rise

By Steven Overly, Washington Post

It's all pomp and patriotism until someone burns a limb.

The number of fireworks-related injuries soared to their highest level in more than a decade last year, according to a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission report released last week. An estimated 11,400 injuries were reported during 2013, a staggering 31 percent climb compared to 8,700 injuries reported the year before.

Bob Adler, the commission's acting chairman, said a direct cause for the jump is difficult to determine. On the one hand, he said, states such as Michigan, Maine and Arizona made fireworks more accessible to consumers. In other states, however, people may be taking safety for granted regardless of regulations.

"My first hope is that it's just a fluke and an aberration," Adler said. But "what we've seen is an expansion in the ability for members of the public to get access to fireworks, and that's not necessarily a good thing."

The 44-page report also details eight deaths in 2013 caused by head and chest trauma, or house fires that resulted from mishandled fireworks.

Still, the sudden rise in injuries may be a cause for concern as the nation prepares for the Fourth of July holiday and families load up on sparklers, bottle rockets and other backyard pyrotechnics. The American Pyrotechnics Association in Bethesda, Md., predicts sales of consumer fireworks will exceed \$675 million in 2014, an all-time record.

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Lawyer: Ex-CalPERS CEO to plead guilty

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

SAN FRANCISCO – The former chief executive of CalPERS is about to plead guilty to a conspiracy charge in connection with the bribery scandal that erupted at the nation's largest public

pension fund five years ago.

Fred Buenrostro, who ran CalPERS from 2002 to 2008, will enter a guilty plea next week. The dramatic twist was revealed Monday by his lawyer, William Portanova, during what was scheduled as a routine pretrial hearing in U.S. District Court.

Portanova said Buenrostro will cooperate with the government's prosecution of his old friend and mentor, Stateline businessman Alfred Villalobos, and "fully lay out the full story between the two of them." The two men stood about 10 feet apart during the court hearing and didn't appear to acknowledge each other.

Until Monday, Buenrostro, 64, insisted he'd done nothing wrong. He had no comment, during the hearing or afterward.

The criminal case against Buenrostro and Villalobos resulted from the biggest scandal in the history of the California Public Employees' Retirement System. The indictment focuses on a fairly narrow allegation: that the two men created fake letters on CalPERS stationery in order to ensure Villalobos was paid millions in fees for his work on behalf of a Wall Street investment firm.

Read the whole story

Skimpier health plans could

be costly

By Michelle Andrews, NPR

People are worried about being able to pay for health insurance. So the insurance industry and a group of Democratic senators have proposed offering cheaper, skimpier “copper plans” on the health law’s marketplaces that could draw in people who were unhappy with the cost of available plans.

But consumer advocates and others who study the insurance market suggest that there may not be a big demand for these plans and that they could expose people to unacceptably high out-of-pocket costs if they got sick.

“It’s a false promise of affordability,” says , project director at Georgetown University’s Center on Health Insurance Reforms. “If you ever have to use the plan, you won’t be able to afford it.”

Coverage through the Affordable Care Act is divided into five types of plans that require different levels of cost-sharing. Platinum plans pay 90 percent of medical expenses, on average; gold plans, 80 percent; silver plans, 70 percent; and bronze plans, 60 percent. Tax credits to help pay premiums are available for people with incomes up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level (\$46,680 for an individual in the 2015 plans). In addition, a catastrophic plan is available, mainly to people younger than 30; it covers only limited services before the deductible is met and isn’t eligible for subsidies.

Read the whole story

Community college students need 4 years to graduate

By Jason Song, Los Angeles Times

About half the students enrolled in California's community colleges take more than four years to graduate, double the traditional two-year commitment, a study released Tuesday found.

Of the nearly 64,000 who received a single associate degree in the 2012-13 academic year, the median student took 4.1 years, the nonprofit Campaign for College Opportunity said.

"We're all talking about a college affordability crisis," said Michele Siqueiros, executive director of the group that examined the graduation rates of the 2012-2013 graduates. "And time is part of that crisis."

State community college officials said that nearly 80,000 students received an associate degree in the 2012-13 year, but some may have earned additional certificates or degrees. The study only examined students who earned an associate's degree.

Read the whole story

Conflicting reports on care at Barton Hospital

By Kathryn Reed

Mixed messages are being sent to Barton Health regarding its

care for hospital patients.

"The Joint Commission is the major governing body for hospitals across the nation. They have invited us to share best practices on one of our safety measures because of our good work here," Monica Sciuto, spokeswoman for Barton, told *Lake Tahoe News*. The invite came last week.

But it came on the heels of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services announcing Barton Memorial Hospital is one of 761 hospitals with a high rate of patient harm.

Analysts looked at rates of infections in patients with catheters in major veins and their bladders, blood clots, bedsores and accidental falls. A score of 1 to 10 was given; with the higher number meaning the hospital had a greater rate of patient harm. Barton scored a 10.

Barton has not been officially notified about the analysis and findings.

"Barton can challenge the findings if the data presented does not seem correct. If we are notified, we will have the opportunity to validate the data and look at every case to make sure it is correct," Clint Purvance, Barton's chief medical officer, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The goal of the feds is to quash the occurrences of people getting sicker or acquiring a new medical problem while hospitalized. Hospitals with a score of 7 or higher will receive fewer reimbursements from Medicare.

"It is our understanding that some adjustments in the measures may be made for smaller hospitals and for hospitals in rural areas because of the small patient population sizes and the large effect just a few events makes to their scores," Purvance said.

He went on to say, "To give you a sense of scale, our daily

hospital census averages 20-21 patients per day versus a larger, urban hospital who may have upward of 600 patients per day at their facility. As an example, when one patient suffered from a Foley catheter urinary tract infection, this gave us a 17 percent rate on the report. In larger hospitals, one event like this would be a small drop in the bucket.”

On the positive side, in October, Barton received the highest recognition in the American Hospital Association’s Partnership for Patient campaign. The South Lake Tahoe hospital was selected as a mentor hospital by the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services.

This is the same group that six months later released the unflattering report.

Part of the problem is different data are used. The negative results come from infections during the 12-month period from July 2012 through June 2013. The California Hospital Association uses current data. Final data, used for the penalty phase, will include Jan. 1, 2012, to Dec. 31, 2013, according to Purvance.

Barton posts patient safety information online. Here are some examples:

- Catheter associated urinary tract infections in 2013 – zero
- Ventilator associated pneumonias since 2010 – zero
- Central line associated blood stream infections since January 2012 – zero
- Falls with injuries since January 2012 – zero.

Barton admits in 2008 it was considered average for the number of “adverse events”. A commitment to patient safety and training employees led to a turnaround.

Today, Barton spends more than \$1 million a year on staffing for patient safety and quality initiatives including a quality management team, patient safety officer and chief medical officer. In 2008, that dollar amount was \$100,000.

Kubby to be chairman of medical-recreational marijuana startup

By Russell Contreras, AP

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A Nevada-based startup that plans on selling medical and recreational marijuana products named former New Mexico governor and U.S. Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson as its CEO and president, the company announced Tuesday.

The announcement came as Cannabis Sativa Inc. said it had acquired marijuana research business Kush while company officials work to navigate changing state laws on marijuana and potential challenges from the federal government, which still views marijuana as a controlled substance.



Steve Kubby

In addition, Cannabis Sativa announced Tuesday it named Kush's founder, Steve Kubby of South Lake Tahoe, as its chairman.

Kubby was the 1998 Libertarian Party nominee for California governor.

Johnson said he hoped to expand Cannabis Sativa into a major marijuana business and intends to work out of New Mexico to help develop products that are legal in states like Colorado and Washington.

"I generally believe this is changing the planet for the better," said Johnson, who will be paid \$1 a year and receive equity in the company. "It also is a bet on the future ... We think we have the creme de la creme of marijuana products."

Johnson, who owned a construction company that helped build Intel Corp.'s Rio Rancho, N.M., plant before entering politics, said the company will make marijuana-based oils aimed at helping children with epilepsy. The two-term governor also said it will make cough drop-like products for recreational use.

"Couple of things hit you when you try the product. One is, wow, why would anybody smoke marijuana given this is an alternative?" Johnson said. "And then secondly, it's just very, very pleasant. I mean, very pleasant."

The company still is working to determine what its limitations are under federal law, which is in conflict with Colorado and Washington, Johnson said.

However, Johnson said he's betting more states and the federal government eventually will allow recreational use of marijuana.

"I think in 10 years, for the most part, the U.S. will legalize marijuana," Johnson said. "And what the U.S. does, so does the world."

2 bears caught, 1 killed by car in Tahoe

Two black bears were captured Tuesday morning by the Nevada Department of Wildlife in separate traps in Incline Village. They will be released in the mountains above Lake Tahoe on Wednesday morning.

A third bear was hit and killed by a car near Spooner Summit early Tuesday morning. Since 1997, 170 black bears have been killed by cars in Nevada.

“July 1 marked the beginning of Bear Logic Month in Nevada and the bears quickly illustrated the reason why the special month to promote bear awareness in Nevada is needed,” Chris Healy, with Nevada Department of Wildlife, said in a statement.

The two bears at Incline were captured near homes in culvert bear traps. Both animals were displaying nuisance behavior related to access to human garbage. The 9-year-old female was first caught in the Lake Tahoe Basin in 2009. The yearling female had never been captured before by NDOW.

Officials believe this summer will be a busy for nuisance bear activity because the ongoing drought has dried up many natural food sources and bears are expected to greatly expand their search for food in urban areas.

Thief steals from Boys & Girls Club

Two days after someone broke into the Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club the suspect remains at large.

A window was smashed at the South Lake Tahoe facility on June 29.

“A computer game station was stolen among other miscellaneous items,” police Lt. Brian Williams told Lake Tahoe News.

The investigation is ongoing.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

S. Tahoe city attorney earns positive review

Tom Watson, South Lake Tahoe’s city attorney, received a glowing review July 1.



Tom Watson

Watson, who has been with the city for one year, did not receive a raise. He has received an automatic step increase that brought him to the top step. It is possible in the near future that his contract will be extended beyond the two years that are remaining.

Mayor Hal Cole told *Lake Tahoe News* that Watson is going to bring back a proposal to the council concerning the length of the contract.

Per the contract, Watson was evaluated after the first six months, at the one-year mark and will now receive reviews annually. Cole said there were a few things for Watson to work on in the last six months, but what needed to be addressed and improved upon has been.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*