

Is an erasable Internet a good idea?

By Farhad Manjoo, Wall Street Journal

This is going to sound silly, but I think Snapchat was the most important technology of 2013.

It sounds silly because Snapchat is just an app. What's more, it's an app used primarily by teens and college students, and wasn't I telling you just a few weeks ago that young people aren't good predictors of tech success?

Snapchat sends so-called ephemeral messages, photos and captions that disappear a few seconds after the recipient opens them. Self-destructing photos sound like a recipe for mischief. When people first hear about Snapchat, they likely picture acts by a certain disgraced former congressman.

If the Snapchat model takes off – if other sites and services began to promote the idea of erasability as a competitive feature – the Internet would look very different from the Internet of today. It would be a more private network, one without the constant worry of every ill-considered picture or thought being held up for ridicule by the whole world, forever. But it also might be a less useful Internet, a network on which you couldn't look up an old photo every time you felt nostalgic, or where computers wouldn't always feed you suggestions based on your history, since your history wouldn't be complete.

Read the whole story

Gaines moves outside Senate district boundaries

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

State Sen. Ted Gaines is going home but leaving his 1st Senate District constituents behind, at least temporarily.

Gaines, who represents Lake Tahoe, recently told recipients of his district's email newsletter that he and his family are leaving Rocklin after deciding to "temporarily move back into our long-time home in Roseville."

In an interview, Gaines said the renters of the family's house in southeast Roseville had recently moved out. Attempts to sell the house or find new tenants were unsuccessful, he said, and it was too expensive to continue renting the family's Rocklin home while paying the mortgage on the empty Roseville house.



State Sen. Ted Gaines no longer lives in the district he represents.
Photo/LTN file

The district starts about a mile east of the Gaines' Roseville home and runs all the way to the state's northeast corner.

While a candidate has to live in the district where he or she

is a candidate, lawmakers can move out of the districts they represent between elections, said Los Angeles attorney Fredric Woocher, an election-law expert.

Read the whole story

World hunger decreasing, but it's not all good news

By Christopher Joyce, NPR

Among the things to celebrate this holiday season is the fact that there are fewer hungry people in the world. Just how many? Well, since 1965, researchers in Europe have been tracking the world's food supply and where it's going.

The good news is: The percentage of the world's population getting what the researchers say is a sufficient diet has grown from 30 percent to 61 percent.

In 1965, a majority of the world survived on less than 2,000 calories a day per person. This was especially true in parts of the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, China and Southeast Asia. Now, 61 percent of the world has access to 2,500 or more calories a day.

But one thing the scientists discovered is that the countries that have a history of food insufficiency didn't just up and start growing lots more food. Instead, for the most part they're increasing supply by importing food from abroad.

Read the whole story

Olympic Valley wants to be its own town

By Kathryn Reed

Olympic Valley – it might be California's next town.

More than enough signatures were gathered this month for Placer County's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) to have to look into the viability of making Olympic Valley a town. Twenty-five percent of the registered voters needed to sign the petitions; 30 percent did so in three weeks.

The town boundaries would be the same as the Squaw Valley Service District, which provides fire, water and parks to the area. If incorporated, it is possible SVSD could become the new town's public works department. The town would go from ridgeline to ridgeline, include the Truckee River corridor south almost to Alpine Meadows and then a little north of the road that leads to the valley.

"A small group started in spring 2013 with the idea we were really frightened by the large-scale proposed expansion of the village," Fred Ilfeld, chairman of Incorporate Olympic Village (IOV) board, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We realized it was possible by incorporating we could get local control of land use planning and other things."



Residents of Olympic Valley want to incorporate the town. Photo/LTN file

Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, a subsidiary of KSL Capital Partners, runs Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts as well as the village at Squaw. In 2012, the company proposed a massive overhaul of the village that would include more housing, a water park and other features that residents balked at. While those plans have since been scaled back, residents still desire having local control instead of deferring to Placer County supervisors who make most of their decisions 80 miles away in Auburn.

About 1,000 people call this area home; of those 560 are registered voters.

Next up is what is likely to be a five-month dual process to have revenue neutrality negotiations between IOV officials and the county, as well a comprehensive fiscal analysis. The latter will be done by an independent agency hired by LAFCo and paid for by IOV.

Public hearings will be scheduled after those two items are completed.

LAFCo officials will then decide whether the issue of incorporation will go before the voters. The decision is supposed to be made based on fact, not emotion. The main facts are whether the town could be fiscally viable and not a liability to the county.

Incorporation proponents would like the voters to be casting ballots in November. The first question would ask if they want Olympic Valley to be incorporated. If yes, a subsequent election would be conducted to elect the town council.

IOV already had to put up \$25,000 with its application to LAFCo to become a town. To date, \$56,000 has been raised for the incorporation process. It's estimated \$155,000 will be needed to complete the process.

"This is something we should have done years ago," Ilfeld said. "We don't want more of the valley to change at the whim of private developers with the support of county supervisors who have a base of representation 80 miles away and 500 feet lower who are not in the same universe."

That doesn't mean IOV supporters don't want the ski resort or others to be able to grow and do new things. What they want is a more direct say in the process.

Proponents also want more of a say as to how the hotel taxes are spent as well what goes on with public transportation. The people of Olympic Valley say they want to govern themselves, to preserve their history, culture and future.

California schools in better financial shape

By Theresa Harrington, Contra Costa Times

SACRAMENTO — California Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson declared a fiscal state of emergency in K-12 education 3½ years ago.

But much has changed since then. Now, Torlakson says, schools are in better financial shape and ready to take on the challenges of new education standards and computerized testing, which are expected to better prepare students for college and careers.

Below is an excerpt of an end-of-the-year phone interview with Torlakson that also touched on parent involvement in schools, controversy over new Common Core standards, and the federal government's threat to withhold funding due to the state's elimination of most STAR tests.

Read the whole story

Burning restrictions imposed in Carson Valley

Strong temperature inversions and stagnant weather conditions are causing air pollution levels to increase rapidly in the valleys of Carson City and Douglas County.

The Nevada Division of Environmental Protection is asking people in the Eagle and Carson valleys to refrain from burning wood this week. Where wood is the only option, people should burn as cleanly as possible.

When haze is visible over the valleys, residents are urged to refrain from using fireplaces, wood and pellet stoves and to use an alternate heat source until a weather system moves in to clear out the trapped air pollution. Reducing burning now can help prevent air pollution from reaching unhealthy levels.

Existing weather conditions are forecasted to last through the

New Year.

Air pollution can pose a serious health threat to children with asthma, the elderly and those with respiratory issues.

Value of airline reward miles falling

By Justin Bachman, Bloomberg

The number of award miles needed to snag a seat in the premium cabin will rise dramatically next year at Delta and United – and airline mile collectors are fuming.

The biggest changes in both airlines' loyalty programs will be for international travel in first and business class, where some award levels on United will jump as much as 87 percent. To be awarded a first-class ticket now from North America to the Middle East, for example, a traveler has to spend 150,000 frequent-flyer miles. Beginning Feb. 1, that award seat will require 280,000 miles when flying on one of United's partner airlines. The same trip on United's own planes will require 180,000 miles, up from 150,000. From North America to Europe, first class on a partner airline will rise 63 percent, from 135,000 to 220,000 miles.

Delta is introducing increases on June 1, with round-trip business class from the U.S. to Europe rising by 25,000 miles, to 125,000 miles; round-trip flights to Asia will increase 20,000 miles, to 140,000. (Delta plans smaller award level hikes from Feb. 1 to June 1.) The new award levels for coach seats are largely unchanged, with only minimal, 5,000-mile hikes on some routes.

Read the whole story

Sac County prosecutor faces DUI charge in accident involving SLT driver

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

For the second time in his career, a Sacramento County deputy district attorney faces drunken driving charges after getting into a car accident.

The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office this month filed a criminal complaint in Superior Court against Alan Scott Hengel, 58. The complaint alleges that Hengel had a blood alcohol content of 0.10, above the 0.08 legal limit in California.

Around midnight on Oct. 31, Hengel was driving approximately 70 mph west on Highway 50 near Kyburz when he failed to negotiate a curve, crossed the median and hit an oncoming truck driven by Raphael Townsend of South Lake Tahoe, according to a report from the California Highway Patrol.

Hengel blamed the driver of the other vehicle for the accident, then refused to submit to a drunken driving test, the report states.

Read the whole story

Civil attorney running a second time for judge

By Kathryn Reed

Joe Hoffman isn't letting the bitter, nasty campaign of 2012 stop him from running again for El Dorado County Superior Court judge.

The 44-year-old is running to replace Judge Daniel Proud, who is retiring. The contentious battle of 2012 was against incumbent Curt Stracener.

"I think this time will be different than last. It's very difficult to unseat a sitting judge. I believe that was part of the challenge last time," Hoffman told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We never put out a single piece of negative mail or other medium. I'm proud of that."



Joe Hoffman

Many of the reasons remain as to why Hoffman wants to be a judge and believes he is who should be elected.

"My belief is we need people who have been practicing in the county with a broad-based legal background who want to be in

that position," Hoffman said.

Since graduating from law school in 1994 Hoffman has been a private attorney in El Dorado County. He opened his law firm in January 1995. His goal was to practice every type of law he could so he would always be learning.

He and his wife run the law practice together. For a while they narrowed their focus to family law, but have since broadened it again. Hoffman believes this has prepared him well to be a judge because he has a diverse background and is not afraid to learn new things.

"No doubt there will be a steep learning curve with criminal cases," he said. "With my background and nature, I can learn a new area of law and become proficient in a short period of time."

Hoffman has been a judge pro tem since 2001, which means he is assigned by the court to help resolve cases before they go to trial. The goals are the litigants resolve their issues and a trial is not needed. He does not get paid for this work.

One thing Hoffman wants to bring to the bench is a more effective way to run the courtroom. Complaints are fairly consistent that the local courthouses are backed up and improvement is needed.

"I think there is a more efficient way to run the courtrooms so you don't waste time and therefore money," Hoffman said.

He believes his years of managing his office in a fiscally prudent and time-sensitive manner will serve him well as a judge.

Tech investor wants to divide Calif. in sixths

By Peter Delevett, San Jose Mercury News

Lots of folks believe California is ungovernable. Venture capitalist Tim Draper has a solution: Six Californias, including one called Silicon Valley.

Draper, a maverick tech investor who once poured \$20 million into a statewide school voucher initiative, on Monday laid out his case for a proposed ballot measure that, if passed by voters, would demand Congress slice and dice the nation's most populous state.

"We're simply too big and bloated," Draper declared in a news conference from Draper University of Heroes, the San Mateo school for aspiring startup CEOs he opened earlier this year.

Veteran political observers were quick and unanimous in assessing the plan's odds of success at zero. At the same time, they said Draper's modest proposal could spark discussion about how to fix the state's manifold problems, such as bursting prisons and jockeying over water rights.

Read the whole story