

Placerville's hangtown dummy goes missing

By Anjali Hemphill, CBS-13

PLACERVILLE – Placerville's hangtown dummy slipped his noose for a few hours and ended up at a nearby bar, and police are wondering who helped him escape.

Police say he was stolen late Wednesday night as the Liar's Bench Bar next door closed. People at the bar say he was later found lying in front of city hall.

By the next morning, the dummy some call Willie had made his way to the Liar's Bench.

"They had him standing over there with his hand on the counter, looking out the window so he had a view of Main Street," said bar patron Dave Hasal.

Read the whole story

Calif. lawmakers receive pay hike Monday

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – California lawmakers are set to receive a 5.3 percent pay raise Monday, but a dozen say they won't accept it in the wake of a tax hike approved last November and while many residents are still struggling to recover from the recent recession.

The raises were approved by the citizen panel that determines state officials' compensation. The base salary for most legislators will go from \$90,526 to \$95,291 – still below the \$116,208 that lawmakers received in 2007, before their pay was cut during California's budget crises.

Many rank-and-file state workers will receive pay hikes of 4.5 percent phased in through July 2015, but some lawmakers note that many in the private sector are hurting.

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2 groups express interest in KMS

Douglas County school board members briefly discussed at this month's meeting whether the asking price of Kingsbury Middle School should be changed.

No – was the answer. The \$4 million asking price for the shuttered Stateline school remains. The school was closed because of declining enrollment.

Lisa Noonan, superintendent of Douglas County School District, told *Lake Tahoe News* that two groups are seriously interested in purchasing the property, which includes all of the former school buildings. Until a formal offer is submitted, the names of the groups are not being made public.

"We must take the higher offer as long as it meets all the requirements," Noonan said.

However, oral bids also must be considered. That means there could be a bidding war, so to speak, at the public meeting.

Any oral bid must be 5 percent higher than the highest qualified bid.

The sale of the property will be back on the school board agenda Jan. 14. The board will be at Zephyr Cove Library at 3:30pm.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. lawmakers focus on labor laws

By Marc Lifsher, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – Big issues in the workplace – wages, overtime, time off, working conditions – are also major topics in the state Legislature. And this year, lawmakers delivered some tangible changes that will be felt in the pocketbook.

At the top of the list, of course, is an increase in the minimum wage that swept through Democrat-dominated Sacramento, despite opposition from powerful business interests. But workers didn't get all of their agenda passed into law.

"We were able to improve upon existing protections as well as support workers in a number of new ways, including increasing the minimum wage," said Steve Smith, a spokesman for the California Labor Federation. "If you look at this year, compared to over the past decade, it would be hard to argue that there's been a better year for worker legislation."

Many of the latest changes, Smith said, might seem incremental. But all are important, he explained, because "the cumulative effect is to make it harder for employers to

violate the rights of workers, which is a good thing.”

Read the whole story

Barton puts emphasis on destination medicine

By Kathryn Reed

Traveling to receive medical treatment. More people are doing it every year and Barton Health wants to tap into that market in a more significant way.

Three representatives from the South Shore health care conglomerate recently attended the sixth annual World Medical Tourism and Global Healthcare Congress in Las Vegas.

More than 2,000 people were at the conference. The 200 exhibitors represented locales from around the world.

Barton sent gynecologist John Missanelli; Chris Proctor, director of Tahoe Center for Orthopedics; and Monica Sciuto, director of public relations and marketing. This is the first time anyone from Barton has attended one of the conventions. This is also the first year Barton has belonged to the association.



Barton Health wants to attract patients from outside the Lake Tahoe Basin. Photo/LTN

“With the large number of travelers to our area, we have an opportunity to share with them the incredible team we have and serve them well should they have a medical need. We already have a destination program for orthopedics where we have many traveling from out of the area for our care,” Sciuto told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It is prudent for us to continue to provide a program that serves their needs as well as our locals’ needs. Both will benefit from the improvements we make.”

Barton has a contract with a travel concierge to work with people who are coming from outside the area for medical care. The service is free. It includes booking flights, shuttles from the airport and hotel reservations.

“This service is also used by patients who were initially tourists and find themselves staying in Tahoe for unforeseen medical care,” Sciuto said.

Orthopedic care is the No. 1 service Barton is pushing. Second is the Da Vinci surgery service.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website says, “Medical tourism is a worldwide, multibillion-dollar phenomenon that is expected to grow substantially in the next five to 10 years. However, little reliable epidemiologic data on medical tourism exist. Studies using different definitions

and methods have estimated there are 60,000–750,000 medical tourists annually from around the world.”

But not everyone agrees that medical tourism is growing. “Market size, market share and market strategy: Three myths of medical tourism” will be published in 2014 by Policy Press at the University of Bristol in the journal Policy & Politics.

The International Medical Travel Journal said of the research, “They describe three myths of medical tourism: the rise and rise of medical tourism; enormous global market opportunities; and that national governments have a role to play in stimulating the medical tourism sector through high-tech investment. The researchers say these three widely held assumptions cannot be backed up with hard evidence but are encouraged by interested parties such as associations, healthcare providers, and intermediaries between providers and patients.”

Many of the locations considering themselves medical destinations are places people would want to vacation – such as Thailand, Argentina and Costa Rica.

“Patients have a choice on where they go for their health care. Providers must compete to provide the best care to attract patients. Best care, in our vision, includes high quality care, exceptional patient experience, best outcomes, proactive follow-up and convenience,” Sciuto said. “There are a lot of international hospitals going after the American patient. They say they provide the newest facilities, the best doctors and comparable procedures. There is a big concern by patients, employers and insurers about how these facilities are measured, how a patient follows up if there is an issue with their care and coordination with the patient’s primary care provider back home. It is important for us to consider the concerns of patients and address these same issues locally and with our destination patients.”

To fill the beds with people from out of town Barton has been investing in its infrastructure. This includes upgrading and remodeling patient rooms at the hospital, buying the latest MRI and CT scanners, and improving doctors' offices and the emergency room.

Creating a personalized experience for patients is one way Barton wants to set itself apart from other health care providers. Patient satisfaction is an ever-increasing priority.

"We do not believe that we will receive a significant return on investment from this program. Our hope is that by providing the best service to our community and its visitors that we will create a reputation that will sustain a healthy amount of patients to our health system," Sciuto said. "By consistently investing in our services, we stay ahead of the curve to provide the best care to our patients and continue the loyalty that we have created. Word of mouth has provided us our best marketing."

Dozens of news outlets accuse Obama of limited access

By James Rainey, Los Angeles Times

Nearly 40 news organizations have accused the Obama administration of improperly controlling images of the president by limiting the access granted to independent photojournalists while allowing free rein by the White House's own photographers.

In a letter and a meeting last week, the news outlets and

journalism groups complained to White House Press Secretary Jay Carney about the practice, saying the White House has prevented an unvarnished view of government business, while encouraging officially sanctioned competition for private news organizations.

Limitations on photographers' access to President Obama create "a troubling precedent with a direct and adverse impact on the public's ability to independently monitor and see what its government is doing," charged the letter from the 38 organizations, including the White House Correspondents Association and the Tribune Co., owner of the *Los Angeles Times*.

The White House said it has limited access by photographers only as necessitated by logistics or a desire to preserve a zone of privacy for the president and his family. Carney noted that previous presidents, including George W. Bush, battled with the media over how much of their activity to put into the public domain.

[Read the whole story](#)

WikiLeaks founder unlikely to face charges

By Sari Horwitz, Washington Post

The Justice Department has all but concluded it will not bring charges against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for publishing classified documents because government lawyers

said they could not do so without also prosecuting U.S. news organizations and journalists, according to U.S. officials.

The officials stressed that a formal decision has not been made, and a grand jury investigating WikiLeaks remains impaneled, but they said there is little possibility of bringing a case against Assange, unless he is implicated in criminal activity other than releasing online top-secret military and diplomatic documents.

The Obama administration has charged government employees and contractors who leak classified information – such as former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden and former Army intelligence analyst Bradley Manning – with violations of the Espionage Act. But officials said that although Assange published classified documents, he did not leak them, something they said significantly affects their legal analysis.

Read the whole story

California losing its stature as turkey producer

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

There's an ever-dwindling chance each year that the turkey on your Thanksgiving table was raised in California.

California farmers will produce about 13.5 million head of turkey this year, the lowest number since 1956, according to the latest estimates from the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

It's not that turkeys are getting a reprieve; several other states have seen turkey production increase over the last few decades.

In 1990, California produced 30 million head of turkey, more than all other states except Minnesota and North Carolina. Last year, California ranked seventh.

Read the whole story

Obamacare could raise premiums at workplaces

By Scott Cohn, MSNBC

The estimated 149 million Americans under age 65 who get their health insurance through their employers could be the next group to feel the impact of the Affordable Care Act.

Open enrollment for 2014 is about to begin at thousands of companies, and many employers are blaming Obamacare—at least in part—for cost increases they are passing on to their workers.

Employees' costs are expected to rise 5 to 7 percent next year, according to early estimates. Those annual increases have been a fixture for years. But in some 2014 open enrollment documents reviewed by CNBC, companies are specifically citing the law as a factor in next year's pricing.

“(F)ederally mandated health care changes will require Comcast-NBCUniversal to pay new fees and implement plan design changes that will contribute to the increased cost of our

plans,” says the open enrollment guide for CNBC.com’s parent company, where employee health care premiums are rising by double digits, and deductibles in some cases are doubling. The guide also cites rising health care delivery costs not directly related to the new law.

Other employers have adopted similar language.

Read the whole story

Bears, trash, people a growing problem in Incline

By Jim Carlton, Wall Street Journal

INCLINE VILLAGE – When Brent and Benét Terry moved into their new home in this upscale Lake Tahoe community recently, they were surprised to meet one of the neighbors: a black bear that had taken up residence in a culvert across the street.

“He’s a pretty good-sized boy,” said Brent Terry, a 61-year-old retired airline pilot. “I’m surprised he can even get in there.”

Incline Village is crawling with bears. As of early this month, there were 66 reported sightings this year in the town of some 9,000 people – up 38 percent from all of last year—and the animals are wreaking havoc. Homes and cars have been broken into and innumerable garbage bins and dumpsters pawed through.

The bears’ attraction to garbage appears to be the crux of the problem, most residents agree. But they are divided over both the proposed long-term solution – a mandate to use more-

expensive bear-proof garbage containers – and whether to handle their burly neighbors with tough love or lethal force.

Nevada wildlife officials and private bear-removal services advocate trapping and relocating the animals, frightening them with aversion techniques and, as a last resort, killing them. Bear-friendly activists endorse scaring off bears by yelling and rattling cans of rocks, but not killing them.

“The bears are dying for the transgressions of people,” said Ann Bryant, executive director of BEAR League, a bear-friendly group whose mission is “helping bears and people live peacefully in this world together.”

Read the whole story