

Slow jobs recovery likely to impact holiday spending

By Renee Dudley and Lindsey Rupp, Bloomberg

Katie Smith plans to spend \$200 less on holiday gifts this year because of concerns that weak U.S. job growth will hurt her husband's home-remodeling business.

"We've scaled back," said the 51-year-old project manager for Wake Forest University's medical school as she perused cowboy boots for her 12-year-old daughter at a Salvation Army thrift store in Greensboro, North Carolina. Her family plans to spend about \$1,000 on gifts, down from \$1,200 last year.

With U.S. economic growth trailing the Federal Reserve's projections, shoppers have plenty of reasons to hoard their dollars this holiday season. This week the government said employers added 45,000 fewer jobs in September than August. The news came with consumers already absorbing the implications of stagnant wages, a cooling housing market and the government shutdown and debt ceiling debate.

Retailers from Macy's Inc. and Nordstrom Inc. to Wal-Mart Stores Inc. missed second-quarter sales estimates and cut their forecasts. To lure shoppers who have been shifting their dollars away from apparel and other general merchandise to cars and home-related products, chains are planning to introduce discounts early in the season.

In the past three months, job growth has averaged 143,000 per month, compared with 195,000 in the first half of the year. While consumer spending in November and December may rise 3.9 percent this year to \$602.1 billion, according to the National Retail Federation, that's only 0.4 percent more than last year and lower than 2011, when spending rose 5.1 percent.

Lower health care costs not reaching rural areas

By Reed Abelson, Katie Thomas and Jo Craven McGinty, *New York Times*

As technical failures bedevil the rollout of President Obama's health care law, evidence is emerging that one of the program's loftiest goals – to encourage competition among insurers in an effort to keep costs low – is falling short for many rural Americans.

While competition is intense in many populous regions, rural areas and small towns have far fewer carriers offering plans in the law's online exchanges. Those places, many of them poor, are being asked to choose from some of the highest-priced plans in the 34 states where the federal government is running the health insurance marketplaces, a review by the *New York Times* has found.

Of the roughly 2,500 counties served by the federal exchanges, more than half, or 58 percent, have plans offered by just one or two insurance carriers, according to an analysis by the *Times* of county-level data provided by the Department of Health and Human Services. In about 530 counties, only a single insurer is participating.

The analysis suggests that the ambitions of the Affordable Care Act to increase competition have unfolded unevenly, at least in the early going, and have not addressed many of the factors that contribute to high prices. Insurance companies

are reluctant to enter challenging new markets, experts say, because medical costs are high, dominant insurers are difficult to unseat, and powerful hospital systems resist efforts to lower rates.

Read the whole story

Poll: Majority in U.S. favor legalizing pot

By Adam Serwer, MSNBC

A majority of Americans support legalizing marijuana, a first in more than 40 years of Gallup polling the question.

In 1969, when President Richard Nixon first directed significant federal resources toward interdicting marijuana smugglers at the U.S.-Mexico border, only 12 percent of Americans supported legalization.

According to Gallup, 58 percent of Americans now support legalization, up more than 10 percent in just the last four years.

Two states, Washington and Colorado, legalized recreational marijuana use following statewide referendums in 2012. Perhaps sensing the size of the shift in public opinion, the Obama administration announced in August it would allow such states to continue their experiment with legalization – marijuana is still illegal under federal law – as long as they follow certain guidelines.

Read the whole story

Tahoe's mucky shoreline getting attention

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – The problem with being able to come up with solutions for how to make the water along the shoreline of Lake Tahoe as pristine as the deep water is that there has been no monitoring done in the shallow areas. This means researchers have no data to study to come up with a cause and then an action plan.

This was the message delivered to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board Oct. 23 in Kings Beach. Alan Heyvaert with the Desert Research Institute in Reno presented the report that was created by more than a dozen scientists from DRI, UNR and UC Davis.

“If we don’t have monitoring programs, we can’t say anything in a quantitative sense,” Heyvaert said.



A clam shell, left, and small stringy plants are found Oct. 23 in the water at Regan Beach in South Lake

Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

And without monitoring, there is no baseline from which to establish where scientists will eventually want to get back to in terms of clarity and other measurables.

This is in contrast to the overall clarity of the lake that for decades was first measured with a white dinner plate and now a Secchi disc to see how far down it can be seen with the naked eye. But that all takes place far from shore.

The document – more than 300 pages – is a framework for how to go forward with addressing what is called the near shore. It's a scientific document, not a policy manual. The TRPA board was there to listen and not take action.

The price tag for the "Yugo model" of the monitoring system could be \$400,000 per year.

But some of what is going on with other monitoring programs could be tweaked to satisfy near shore questions. That is going to be looked into. But scientists warn there is no time to waste.

"We are seeing more invasive aquatic plants. We are losing a lot of native macroinvertebrate species that are only found in Lake Tahoe," Heyvaert said.

The group first looked at the 62 standards related to the near shore that TRPA, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and Nevada Department of Environmental Protection use. They whittled those to 38 categories deemed relevant or important. From there the study group came up with 10 metrics associated with four indicators. Those are:

- Turbidity is associated with clarity
- Light transmissivity – clarity
- Chlorophyll – clarity and trophic status

- Phytoplankton – trophic status
- Periphyton – trophic status and community structure
- Macrophytes – trophic status and community structure
- Macroinvertebrates – community structure
- Fish and crayfish – community structure
- Toxins – human health
- Pathogens – human health.

Heyvaert explained it is not a good use of time and money to measure the nutrients at the near shore, that it is better to quantify the amount of algae that is eating the nutrients. This way researchers can determine if algae is increasing or decreasing, where this is taking place and at what times of year. Then the causes can be determined and solutions found.

One of the other difficulties with ridding the shoreline of gunk is that the 72 miles are not all the same. Different problems are occurring different places.

The scientists define near shore as from the water's edge to a minimum of 350 feet from shore and about 69 feet down. The depth is the mid-summer thermocline, or where the warm and cold waters meet.

While there are no definite reasons to why the water along the shore is mucky in places, likely contributors, according to scientists, are aquatic invasive species, pollutants entering the lake from the watershed or groundwater, stormwater, runoff from the developed and undeveloped portions of the surrounding watershed, greater vulnerability to increased temperature from climate change, recreation, existing structures, and fluctuation in lake levels.

Nevada expected to gradually grow in population

Given Nevada's current levels of employment and the potential for growth, the 2013 projections are for a statewide increase of 529,322 people in the next 20 years.

The Nevada State Demographer's Office at UNR released its most recent population projections through 2032.

"As our state recovers, people should bear in mind that Nevada was hit by three economic factors in the last decade: the housing bubble, the spike in fuel prices, and the financial crisis. Even so we grew by 35 percent from 2000 to 2010," Jeff Hardcastle, state demographer, said in a statement. "Currently, we are projecting our state will continue to grow decade to decade at a rate slightly above the projected national rate. From 2010 to 2020 Nevada will grow at 9.6 percent compared to a national forecast of 8.1 percent for example."

Broken out by region the projected increases are:

- Clark County, 377,037 people
- Washoe County, 120,070 people
- Carson City, Churchill, Douglas, Storey and Lyon counties, 26,808
- Elko, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander and Pershing counties, 1,567 people
- Esmeralda, Lincoln, Mineral, Nye and White Pine counties, 3,840 people.

"In looking at Nevada compared to the rest of the country and surrounding states, Nevada lags behind in job growth,"

Hardcastle said. "Since the bottom of employment for Nevada (in September 2010), we have regained 27.9 percent of the jobs that had been lost. Nationally, that compares to 75 percent and 53.4 percent in California for jobs regained as of June."

Gaming continues to be the biggest driver for employment in Nevada.

"Educational services and health care have the most room to grow to meet our state-wide needs," Hardcastle said. "There are good indications that there is more demand for these services compared to their availability in Nevada."

Study: High-quality preschool worth the investment

By Randye Hoder, New York Times

A decade or so ago, when it was time to send my children to preschool, it never occurred to me to do anything else. For an upper-middle-class family like mine, enrolling my kids in a half-day nursery school program with all of its benefits (socialization and school readiness, among them) was a no-brainer.

Now, amid a highly contentious national debate about whether preschool should be made available to all children, a new study provides a mountain of evidence that my parental instincts were right on the money. Literally. High-quality preschool programs are "the most cost-effective educational interventions and are likely to be profitable investments for society as a whole," concludes the study, financed by the Foundation for Child Development and produced in collaboration

with the Society for Research in Child Development.

The report, written by an interdisciplinary group of 10 early-childhood experts, is actually a “research brief” – an overview of “the most recent rigorous research” on a hot-button issue. Among its key findings:

- Large-scale, high-quality public preschool programs can have substantial impacts on children’s early learning.
- Quality preschool education can benefit middle-class children as well as disadvantaged children, though children from low-income families benefit more.
- Quality preschool education is a profitable investment, with \$3 to \$7 saved for every \$1 spent.

The analysis will undoubtedly be greeted as good news by the Obama administration, given the president’s call to make federally funded, high-quality preschool “available to every single child in America.” Not that the critics can’t find fault. The research brief points to evaluations of early-childhood education programs in Tulsa, Okla., and Boston, which found large gains in math and reading among participants. But scholars at the Brookings Institution and elsewhere have attacked the Tulsa and Boston studies for their supposedly unreliable methodology.

Read the whole story

South Shore struggling to be

more than it is

By Kathryn Reed

Connecting the dots of the South Shore is getting closer, but what the end picture will look like remains to be seen.

Tuesday night was the third economic forum in the last year focusing on gathering people to discuss visions for the area and starting the dialog to be able implement ideas. (The other meetings were Oct. 23, 2012, and March 5.)

On Oct. 22, 12 speakers gave brief overviews of what their entities are doing.

They were:



South Shore is trying to figure out what will be the solution for a sustainable economic future.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

- Jason Drew – Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce – talking about the chamber's vision for 2020 and being active politically.
- Tom Greene – Tahoe Prosperity Center – the need for a substantial digital delivery system.

- Kim Kerr – El Dorado County – Meyers plan and recreation on the South Shore.
- Mimi Moss – Douglas County – South Shore area plan, recreation.
- Lew Feldman – attorney – next phase of Chateau project should be done in July.
- James Grant – Vail Resorts – zipline at Heavenly should open in December, rope courses next summer.
- Nancy Kerry – South Lake Tahoe – recreation plan under way, Harrison Avenue next summer, tourist core plan to TRPA in November.
- Carl Hasty – Tahoe Transportation District – loop road progressing, Stateline bike trail ready to ride, bus shelters going in, ferry service to begin environmental study phase.
- Kindred Murillo – Lake Tahoe Community College – planning for next 40 years, becoming an education and cultural center, four-year education, desire for new facilities.
- Mike Cook – Caltrans – projects on South Shore continue through 2019.
- Ivone Larson – South Tahoe High School – unparalleled opportunities through new programs in state-of-the-art facilities.
- Cindy Martinez – Bijou Community School – two-way immersion program.

A common thread weaving through their presentations is one builds upon the other. It's about education, having a knowledgeable workforce, providing recreation activities for locals and tourists, and having the transportation-infrastructure to move people from place to place.

The more than 100 people at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel were asked to use one word to describe what they heard from the speakers. They said – vision, recreation, implementation, progress, community, positivity and education.

Then it came time for four predetermined ideas to be discussed. And while recreation was a common theme at the start of the meeting, it had nothing to do with the four ideas.

The ideas were an outdoor music venue, business incubator-accelerator-innovation center, interpretive discovery center, and arts identity.

The four speakers each gave three examples of other locations that have brought the same ideas to fruition and then they talked a bit about what it took for those venues to prosper.

When it came time to find out what the audience thought should be done going forward there was not overwhelming consensus. However, more hands went up for believing a music venue would have the greatest impact on the area, while creating an arts identity would be easiest to do.

Nev. GOP feels secure with stance on shut down, future

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON – The congressional standoff that shut down the government and brought the country to the brink of defaulting on its debt may not have produced any winners, but polls, pundits and politicians from both sides of the aisle agree

that the biggest political losers are Republican lawmakers.

Yet, in Nevada, Republicans are betting that in a year's time, the political hit they took in October 2013 won't matter much at all.

"OK, you (Democrats) shouted louder and you messaged better," Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., told the *Sun*. "But in terms of drawing any long-term conclusions? We can quit talking about what a bunch of meanies the Republicans are. ... Past this weekend's cycle, it'll be OK."

Amodei, along with Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., voted against a compromise measure to restore the federal budget and raise the debt ceiling through early 2014. The bill passed with the support of the rest of the Nevada delegation, including Republican Rep. Joe Heck.

It is with a collective shrug that most Republicans are greeting the plummeting poll numbers, vitriolic campaign messages and general complaints about their party's unwillingness to make a deal.

"People have short memories, especially when it comes to politics," said Bob List, former governor of Nevada and current Republican strategist. "Life's going to go on. ... It's hard for me to understand exactly why Republicans are taking the heat."

"Victory is fleeting in the world of politics," Nevada Republican strategist Sig Rogich said. "I don't think it's one of those issues that transcends into the 2014 election – it's a long way off."

Rogich isn't one of those Republicans who can't bring himself to criticize his own party. In fact, the former head of the 2010 cycle's "Republicans for Reid" thinks the GOP completely "mishandled" the crisis by "trying to be so hard-edged." He also has no love lost for the Tea Party, some of whom "are

orangutans, for different reasons,” he said.

But Rogich, like many Republicans, questions whether the fallout from the government shutdown was really as bad as Democrats make it out to be.

Read the whole story

Calif. falls behind on mapping quake fault lines

By Rong-Gong Lin II, Rosanna Xia and Doug Smith, Los Angeles Times

After the 1971 Sylmar earthquake, California began to map faults across the state.

Over the next two decades, officials published 534 maps of active earthquake faults. New construction was prohibited on top of these fissures because previous quakes showed that buildings could be torn apart during violent shaking.

But the mapping campaign has slowed to a crawl – with many dangerous faults still undocumented.

Since 1991, only 23 have been drawn. Because of budget cuts, none were completed between 2004 and 2011.

State officials said there are still about 300 maps to draw and even more to revise – including some in heavily populated areas of Southern California. That represents about 2,000 miles of faults statewide.

The slow pace affects public safety. The ban on building atop

faults is enforced only for those mapped by the state; the regulations don't cover faults not on California's official map.

Officials are also concerned about several other zones they believe need further seismic research, including San Diego Harbor, Yorba Linda, the San Gabriel and Pomona valleys, Indio, Napa County and South Lake Tahoe.

Read the whole story

Calif. on the road to legalize marijuana

By Kathleen Miles, Huffington Post

Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of Californians support legalizing, regulating and taxing recreational marijuana in the state, according to a Tulchin Research poll.

The figure, based on responses of 1,200 likely 2016 voters surveyed during the last two weeks, shows a "solid majority" back proposals to legalize adult recreational marijuana, the San Francisco-based pollster said. The poll found 32 percent oppose legalization and 3 percent were undecided.

Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom and American Civil Liberties Union representatives released the poll results during a news conference Thursday and announced the launch of a two-year research effort focused on proposals to legalize recreational marijuana. Newsom will chair a panel of 16 experts, including professors, medical professionals and policy researchers, who will study legal and policy issues involved in adult

recreational marijuana.

“This is about real people,” Newsom said to the *Huffington Post*. “Communities are devastated because of this abject thing called the drug war. Forget the politics. This is the right thing to do.”

Read the whole story