

Bill would give DAs more latitude with drug offenders

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

The first time Maria Alexander's drug addiction caught up to her, the reckoning came in the form of a small chunk of crack cocaine that sent her to jail for six months.

The next time, after a small amount of heroin – “scrapings on a spoon,” Alexander recalled – earned her another stint in the correctional system, she sought treatment.

“I was no big drug dealer,” Alexander said. “I was a big user.”

In an announcement hailed as a sea change for the decades-old federal war on drugs, Attorney General Eric Holder said last week that he would direct federal prosecutors to avoid charging low-level drug offenders in ways that carry “draconian” minimum sentences.

“By reserving the most severe penalties for serious, high-level, or violent drug traffickers, we can better promote public safety, deterrence, and rehabilitation while making our expenditures smarter and more productive,” Holder told a San Francisco gathering of the American Bar Association last week.

Read the whole story

Brown receiving more cheers than jeers

By Adam Nagourney, New York Times

LOS ANGELES — When Jerry Brown became governor of California again, three years ago, this state was on a steep decline, crushed by budget deficits, deep spending cuts, governmental paralysis, high unemployment and a collapsing housing market. California, a place that once symbolized promise and opportunity, seemed caught in an intractable reversal of fortune.

But these days, Brown — who at 75 is the oldest governor in the nation and about to become the longest-serving governor in the history of California — is enjoying a degree of success and authority he and his opponents could scarcely have imagined when he returned to Sacramento to begin a second tour as governor in 2010.

The state's budget problems are largely resolved, at least for the short term. Brown is the dominant figure in Sacramento, strengthened by overwhelming Democratic control of the Legislature and the decline of the Republican Party. He has pushed through major initiatives on education financing and prison reorganization. Even Republicans say his re-election next year seems considerably more than likely.

"Some people were ridiculing California, and some were calling it a failed state," Brown, a Democrat, said in an interview. "The unemployment came down from 12.2 to 8.5. Real estate is rebounding. There's a lot of confidence out there. That's what happened."

Read the whole story

Fire outside basin brings smoke to Tahoe

A fire near Yosemite is bringing a substantial amount of smoke into the South Shore today.

There is also the American Fire filtering smoke into the North Shore and when winds change smoke comes to the South Shore. Lightning strikes have caused some area fires, but are not the cause of the smoke. The U. S. Forest Service is working to extinguish those, including using a helicopter.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Fire closes more of Tahoe National Forest

The 16,812-acre American Fire is burning in an old-growth timber stand with no recorded fire history. The terrain is steep, hazardous, dry and full of fuels.

The U.S. Forest Service has implemented a second emergency closure order for the Tahoe National Forest. The first closure had been rescinded. The new closure area is larger than the actual fire perimeter to allow for firefighter and public safety and the preparation of contingency lines designed to stop the fire's progress. A map and detailed description of the closed area is online.

The fire has destroyed four outbuildings.

The fire is 60 percent contained, with full containment projected for Sept. 1.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Children's memorial caught in legal quagmire

By Kathryn Reed

It was a bit like a memorial service at the South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting this week. Somber faces, regret, apologies. And all because children died before their parents.

People who spearheaded and funded the replacement of the children's memorial log made some mistakes. Mistakes that amount to thousands of dollars.

The council is involved because the five electeds are also the five board members of the Great Ideas For Tahoe nonprofit. GIFT is the nonprofit in which people were donating money to for the memorial log to be replaced. But the problem is that like with all nonprofits there are strict guidelines about how money can be spent.

However, the memorial committee, which was completely separate from the city, thought the ceremony for the re-dedication of the memorial could be paid for with the donations sent to GIFT. Not so. All that legally could be paid for was the replacement of the log.

South Lake Tahoe City Attorney Tom Watson on Aug. 20 told the council the other caveat is that no expenses could be paid that were not approved in advance. He said the board could face civil and criminal infractions if it were to approve the expenses that were submitted after the fact or for items that didn't involve refurbishing the log.

The amount being questioned is \$3,665.40. A third of that is for the video that was produced. Some is for the program, some for the porta-potties.

"How could we have had the beautiful celebration without a podium and camera?" Sue Hrbacek-Miller asked the council.

It was her son Rory's death on Feb. 2, 1991, that led her to create the memorial that is on Highway 50 at the corner of Wildwood Avenue. The initial tree was dedicated in 1994.

Ken Curtzwiler, Tom Incopero and Randy Mundt – all who have lost children – all spoke about the need to have compassion, understanding and to understand the intent of those involved.

Ultimately it was Councilwoman Angela Swanson who suggested a compromise. With the quick thinking of City Attorney Watson it was agreed that the money requested would not be paid out, but that staff would look at the possibility of refunding money donated to GIFT that is sitting in the account for the log replacement.

This idea will be refined and brought back to the council for a vote.

If money is refunded, no one who donated cash will be reimbursed because of legal reasons. And those who might be given back money could decide if they would want to give money directly to the children's memorial committee so those who put out money for the Aug. 9 ceremony could be reimbursed.

Incline family not hurt after bear saunters in

A 200-pound black bear wandered into an Incline Village home on Aug. 20 after it pushed through a screen door.

Family members locked themselves in rooms and called for help.

Washoe County sheriff's deputies shot rubber bullets at the animal, which scared it away. The bear was last seen running into the woods.

No one was hurt.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Lightning strikes keep USFS busy

The U.S. Forest Service responded to four fires today caused by lightning strikes.

One was at Heavenly, another in Christmas Valley and two above the golf course in Meyers.

"We had air reconnaissance this morning and three smokejumpers. The four fires together total about an acre," Cheva Heck, USFS spokeswoman, told Lake Tahoe News.

More rain and lightning are expected.

"It's crucial for people to pay attention to fire prevention right now given the number of lightning fires and the demand for firefighters and equipment on the American Fire and other

incidents.”

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tax assessor drops value of Harrah's Reno

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Harrah's in Reno is in bad shape and it won a reduction in its taxable value from the state Board of Equalization this week.

But it's far short of what the hotel-casino sought.

The Washoe County's Assessor's Office set the value at \$20.5 million, and the board – after three deadlocked votes – put the taxable value at \$16.2 million. Harrah's suggested the value at \$8.8 million, said Mark Stafford of the assessor's office.

John Knott, a consultant for Harrah's, told the board the 928-room hotel was not in good condition and it would take \$19 million to make needed improvements.

Read the whole story

Robber strikes at El Dorado

Savings in S. Tahoe

El Dorado Savings and Loan in South Lake Tahoe was robbed today at 9:30am.

The suspect walked into the bank and presented the teller with a demand note. The suspect claimed to be armed but did not display a weapon.



Police are looking for this man in connection with the Aug. 21 bank robbery in South Lake Tahoe.

Photo/Provided

Police are not saying how much money the robber got away with.

A potential suspect vehicle was seen driving quickly away from the area of the bank. This is a black four-door dual-cab Dodge Ram pickup with a tool box in the bed. The estimated year of the truck is 2000-2005. This vehicle turned westbound on Lake Tahoe Boulevard away from the bank.

The suspect appears to be a white male adult in his 50s, approximately 6-feet-2-inches-tall, weight proportionate to height, wearing a beige baseball cap, a short-sleeved plaid button down shirt, khaki cargo shorts and flip flops.

If you have any information, call the police at (530) 542.6100.

Placerville couple accused of tax fraud

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

A Placerville couple has been indicted in a tax fraud case that resulted in charges earlier this year against the owner and employees of a Placerville tax preparation business.

Charles and Victoria Tingler were arrested Aug. 20 on suspicion of conspiracy to defraud the United States and filing multimillion-dollar liens against government officials.

The superseding indictment, unsealed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Sacramento, adds the Tinglers and also adds charges for Teresa Marie Marty. Marty, who owned and operated a tax preparation business called Advanced Financial Services, is also charged with filing liens against the property of three IRS employees and filing liens of at least \$84 million against the property of two U.S. Justice Department attorneys.

Read the whole story