Sequester likely to impact air travel

By Bruce Leshan, WUSA-9

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Travel Association has launched a texting campaign urging Congress to fix the sequester and warning that starting this week, travelers could be looking at big delays.

Nearly two-thirds of U.S. residents already think flying is too much of a hassle and many Americans do what they can to avoid it. The Travel Association says the sequester is likely to smack people with even more headaches.

Flying could be more frustrating with fewer federal dollars. Photo/LTN file

Travel experts say with the sequester people are likely to see a sea of red on airport message boards. Delayed, delayed, delayed. Waits of an hour at TSA checkpoints. Two to three hours if you have to go through customs.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood says $689 million in FAA cuts will force him to furlough employees, including air traffic controllers and safety inspectors, for 11 days over the next few months.

TSA workers will face seven days of furloughs.

The Travel Association wants travelers to text their member of Congress while they're waiting in line.

"They can text 'delayed' to 877 877 and let their member of Congress know how they feel about the process," Geoff Freeman, chief operating officer and executive vice president said.

Some Republicans complain the White House is exaggerating the impact.

"There are easy ways to cut this money that the American people will never feel," said Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Oklahoma. "What you hear is outrage because no one wants to cut spending."

But the Airline Pilot's Association says travelers will feel it.

"Make no mistake, we will maintain our current level of safety," said association vice president Sean Cassidy. "And the only way we can maintain that level of safety … is if we turn down the level of air traffic."

Medi-Cal expansion will test capacity

By Emily Bazar

In less than one year, the Affordable Care Act's promise to bring health care to perhaps 1 million more California residents will be tested. On Jan. 1, 2014, Medi-Cal, the publicly funded health program for low-income and disabled residents, launches a huge statewide expansion.

But making a promise is one thing, and delivering is another.

In some places, it’s already difficult for many poor California residents to find a doctor who is able – or willing – to see them. Many medical providers who see these patients say they are overwhelmed, a situation that could worsen when those newly covered by Medi-Cal arrive for care.

“We’re not even talking about 2014. Good luck finding a doctor who takes Medi-Cal now,” said Carmen Burgos of the nonprofit Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance program. Burgos helps low-income Kern County residents find health care and dental services.

More than 7 million Californians are covered under Medi-Cal, and expanding the program is a major piece of President Obama’s signature health law.

Between 2014 and 2019, another 1 million to 1.4 million Californians will enroll in Medi-Cal, according to UCLA and UC Berkeley estimates.

The Medi-Cal expansion will allow applicants with higher incomes and those who were previously ineligible, such as childless adults, to get coverage. State officials say there’s sufficient access to Medi-Cal services and they are constantly monitoring to ensure recipients can get care.

“We do believe that the Medi-Cal provider network provides adequate access in California now,” said Norman Williams, spokesman for the state Department of Health Care Services, which administers Medi-Cal. The state also is “adequately preparing for 2014 and the expansion.”

But doctors and health care experts disagree.

“We’re experiencing provider shortages right now,” said Alex Briscoe, director of the Health Care Services Agency in Alameda County. “Patients often wait months to get access to care,” he said.

Medi-Cal is California’s version of the federal Medicaid program, and the Golden State ranks poorly in doctor participation compared with other states.

Two studies, including one published in the journal Health Affairs in August, show that 57 percent of California doctors accept new Medi-Cal patients. That’s the second-lowest rate in the nation after New Jersey.

California’s neighbors, Nevada and Oregon, accept 75 percent and 80 percent, respectively. The primary reason doctors don’t participate is financial, doctors say.

Here, too, California scores badly, with one of the nation’s lowest reimbursement rates, ranking 47th of 50.

Eye surgeon and ophthalmologist Andrew Calman is an associate clinical professor at UCSF. He also has a practice in San Francisco’s Mission District, and about 10 percent of his patients are on Medi-Cal, he said.

Calman said he wants to help as many patients as possible, but because he loses money on Medi-Cal patients, he must limit the number he accepts. Calman said Medi-Cal pays him $22 for a regular visit; Medicare and private insurance reimburses between $60 and $100.

“We’re performing an important service, but there is a limit to how much of that we can do and still have a viable practice. We have to pay our rent, we have to pay our salaries to our staff. We have to pay insurance. If it costs me on average $60 to see a patient, there are only so many I can see at $20 before I close my doors."

In theory, Calman said, the Affordable Care Act is supposed to improve access by covering those who have been previously uninsured. In practice, however, he said it will be hard for many of the newly insured to find doctors willing to see them.

Low Medi-Cal payments are being addressed – temporarily at least – by the Affordable Care Act.

Starting this past January and lasting through 2014, reimbursement rates for many primary care services in Medi-Cal are rising to Medicare levels, funded by the federal government.

In California, the change is dramatic. On average, payments will increase by 136 percent, according to the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured.

"The payment increase is a significant incentive that we anticipate will help attract new primary care physicians to the Medi-Cal provider network," said Williams of the Department of Health Care Services.

But improving access to care will involve more than convincing more doctors to participate, said Linette Scott, the department's chief medical information officer.

It will be about changing the way care is delivered, she said. As the state moves more Medi-Cal recipients into managed care, she said, models of treatment will rely more on teams of health professionals to care for patients, not just individual doctors.

Plus, health plans must ensure there are enough doctors and other medical providers in their networks to provide that care, Williams said.

In some communities, many Medi-Cal patients have no other choice than clinics, said Debbie Wood, coordinator of school health for the Bakersfield City School District, where nearly 90 percent of students live at or below the poverty level.

"They go to the clinics and they sit there for six, seven, eight hours. They may have an appointment at 8am and not be seen until 4 in the afternoon," she said. While patients ultimately receive care at the clinics, they pay for the crowded conditions in other ways, Wood said. "Many of our families are in agricultural work," she said. "If they miss a day they don't get paid. So they go to the emergency room."

Louise McCarthy, president of the Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County, said clinics are working double-time to hire more doctors and increase capacity, but no one is sure whether their efforts will be enough.

"At a certain point, the clinics are going to need to say, 'I need to cap enrollment or cap my patient load,' " she said. "It's critical we take on new patients in a sustainable manner."

Emily Bazar is with the Center for Health Reporting, an independent news organization based at USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and funded by the nonprofit California HealthCare Foundation.

Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe being rebranded

By Kathryn Reed

The days are numbered for Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe – the largest hotel in the city limits.

In a statement to *Lake Tahoe News* from Hilton Corp., the parent company of Embassy, it says the owners of the hotel "decided to terminate its management agreement with Hilton Worldwide."

It goes on to say, "The resort will continue its day to day operations without disruption of service under the terms of the management agreement with Hilton Worldwide until March 31 or a date to be determined by the owner."

Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe will soon have a new name. Photo/LTN file

It will be called Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel. All 220 employees will keep their job. PHR Management Inc., an affiliate of Ken Corp., will be operating the hotel.

The hotel has been an Embassy Suites since it opened in December 1991. And it has been in and out of financial trouble for those 21 years.

Bill Cottrill, director of sales and marketing for the local Embassy Suites, did not return multiple phones. Dominic Acolino has been replaced by former General Manager John Steinbach to operate the nearly 400-room hotel.

When calling March 4 to inquire about booking a room in April, the reservation's employee knew nothing about the change in hotel management. He also said the signature breakfast and manager's cocktail receptions would be available. Whether this is true next month and beyond remains to be seen.

Hilton PR deferred comments to Masaru Saito with Roppongi-Tahoe Lp. Saito never picked up his phone and voicemail was not available. Max Saito with Ken Corp. did not return multiple calls.

Roppongi-Tahoe Lp, a subsidiary of Ken Corp., has owned the property since 2000. Ken Corp. bought the property in a bankruptcy deal. KOAR-Tahoe Partners was unable to keep up with it payments to Mitsui Trust & Banking Co. The firm had a $53 million seven-year construction loan because it was trying to convert 188 of the rooms to time-shares.

Ken Corp. in February 2012 defaulted on a bond payment and later in the year faced foreclosure. How the finances have been restructured for this ownership group to retain the hotel is not known. Nor is it known where the $5 million to $7 million in upgrades that are expected to start this summer will come from. In December 2006, the hotel underwent $3 million in renovations and has often been recognized for its environmental innovation.

While the owners struggle under debt, the hotel itself has been profitable. Embassy Suites generates the largest percentage of hotel tax on an annual basis of all South Shore properties.

Douglas County plotting course to be recreation oriented community at Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Outdoor fun and buildings that match the natural beauty are the goals of Douglas County's South Shore Area Plan.

"Our overall objective is to transform the casino area to recreation," Brandy McMahon, senior planner with Douglas County, said at a meeting March 1. "We want to provide a wide-range of recreation in walking distance."

It means making a seamless connection between Van Sickle Bi-State Park to the Stateline-to-Stateline bike route that is partially built at Rabe Meadow and will extend to Round Hill Pines later this year, to providing beach access via Edgewood when the lodge is developed, to getting people to Kahle Community Center.

Rabe Meadow in Stateline is part of the vision to develop a more recreation-focused community. Photo/LTN file

While the vision for the South Shore from Kahle Drive in Stateline to Ski Run Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe has been the subject of many intense discussions for more than a year, each jurisdiction must define its own vision. While they do so, the respective planning departments are conferring with each other to create similar design standards.

Douglas County has three community plans and 30 residential plan areas on the books. With the adoption in December of the Regional Plan by the Governing Board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the five counties and one city in the Lake Tahoe Basin are tasked with creating area plans. In many ways they are like the community plans, but updated.

The South Shore plan for Douglas combines what was the Casino Core and Lower Kingsbury community plans.

A change for Douglas County is that the commissioners at a meeting in February agreed to take over permitting for residential construction. As of 2012, at the lake Douglas County has 102 vacant parcels. If nine building allocations are give out annually by the TRPA, this would mean those lots could be built out in a dozen years.

Only two single-family residences have been identified in the South Shore Area Plan. Those are on the Edgewood site. Today no one resides in them. And they are slated to be demolished when the lodge is built in the coming years.

This means it is commercial, recreation, public lands and multifamily housing units that will be affected by the South Shore Area Plan.

Paying attention to the various thresholds within the TRPA guidelines is critical to all the area plans, as well as looking at ways to reduce pollutants reaching Lake Tahoe.

Today, the Stateline area has not attained the scenic threshold because of its outdated built environment.

Douglas County contributes a negligible amount of fine sediment into Lake Tahoe — 3 percent of the total — or 125,000 pounds per year, according to the Lake Tahoe Total Maximum Daily Load Technical Report.

The mandate is to reduce that amount by 10 percent by 2016.

All documents related to the South Shore Area Plan are expected to be put on the county's website as they become available. Comments are being sought and should be sent to Brandy McMahon at mbcmahon@co.douglas.nv.us.

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Dates to know:

• March 12, 5:30-8pm South Shore Area Plan workshop at TRPA, 128 Market St., Stateline.

• March 20, 6-9pm South Lake Tahoe is hosting a public workshop on the Tourist Core Area Plan, formerly known as the Stateline/Ski Run Community Plan, at Lake Tahoe Airport.

• April 9, 1pm Douglas County Planning Commission meeting in Minden. All documents related to the South Shore Area Plan area expected to be discussed, with action likely.

• May, Douglas County commissioners expected to vote on plan.

• June, TRPA Governing Board may hear Douglas' plan.

California lawmakers accept fewer freebies

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

California lawmakers accepted food, travel, tickets and other gifts totaling more than a half-million dollars last year, ranging from a $14,000 trip to Brazil to a $1.89 Coca Cola drink with straw.

Gift-giving to the Senate and Assembly totaled about $500,500 – roughly $171,500 in gift items and $329,000 in travel, according to annual financial disclosure statements released Saturday.

The total represents a belt-tightening from 2011, when lawmakers accepted more than $750,000 in gifts of all kinds, including travel. The bottom line was about $520,000 in 2010.

A key reason for the lower total last year, however, is that it represents records of current legislators, including 39 rookies, not veterans who were termed out or not re-elected last December.

Unusual gifts to lawmakers last year included a $5 reusable bag, $5 handkerchief, $7.50 stuffed animal, a $90 desk pen, $20 in Big Foot beer and $110 in first aid kits.

Sports and entertainment tickets were a hot item, with lawmakers receiving thousands of dollars' worth for football, baseball, basketball, Disneyland, SeaWorld, musical concerts and Rose Bowl-related events.

Lawmakers also took numerous trips bankrolled by Capitol interests, nonprofits or foreign groups. Hawaii, Brazil, China and Korea were among destinations last year.

Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez topped the Legislature by accepting $8,000 in gift items. The Los Angeles Democrat also received more than $9,800 in travel assistance, including $836 from the Association of Life and Health Insurance Cos. to attend a Pebble Beach event.

The Senate leader, Darrell Steinberg of Sacramento, reported receiving $2,297 in gift items and $2,116 in travel. He also attended the Pebble Beach event, receiving $959 from the insurance group.

Gifts to Pérez included nearly $700 in cigars or cigar boxes, more than $500 in crystal ducks (he collects ducks), a $250 UC Berkeley football helmet and two bobblehead dolls worth $53 and $40, respectively.

By comparison, Gov. Jerry Brown reported receiving $2,500 in gifts. He also accepted travel valued at more than $3,700 from a business-backed nonprofit group, the California State Protocol Foundation.

The Legislature’s top recipients of gift items included Assemblyman Das Williams, D-Santa Barbara, $5,274; Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, $4,348; and Assemblyman Curt Hagman, R-Chino Hills, $4,332.

Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Los Angeles, and Assemblyman Luis Alejo, D-Watsonville, reported receiving $6,572 and $5,495 in gift items, respectively, but many of the freebies were wedding presents.

The Assembly leader in free travel was Norma Torres, D-Pomona, who accepted $20,000 in trip aid, including $10,811 from the American Israel Education Foundation.

Sen. Anthony Cannella, R-Ceres, was the Senate’s top recipient of travel gifts, $18,979, including a Brazil trip underwritten by the California Foundation on the Environment and the Economy.

State law permitted legislators to accept gifts valued at up to $420 from a single source in 2012.

No dollar limit is imposed for travel provided by foreign governments or by nonprofit groups if the trip is for a governmental, legislative or policy purpose.

Motorcyclist who died on Geiger Grade ID'd

Update: March 3 8:55pm:

Kyle Banko, 24, of Carson City died Saturday while riding his motorcycle on the Geiger Grade.

A motorcyclist died March 2 on the Geiger Grade. Photo/NHP

Nevada Highway Patrol officials say on March 2 at approximately 1:58pm the sport bike traveling north on Highway 431 toward Reno in a no-passing zone passed a silver Subaru Outback traveling in the same direction. The motorcycle struck the left side of the Subaru and the rider was ejected, troopers said.

Banko died at Renown Medical Center in Reno where he had been airlifted.

The occupants in the Subaru, a 28-year-old Gardnerville woman and her two children, ages 4 years and 3 months, were not injured.

The highway was closed for approximately 30 minutes. The highway was completely opened at 6:26pm.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Dry West spurs worries of drought, wildfires

Snow has been scarce in the Lake Tahoe Basin in 2013. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Jack Healy, New York Times

DENVER — After enduring last summer's destructive drought, farmers, ranchers and officials across the parched Western states had hoped that plentiful winter snows would replenish the ground and refill their rivers, breaking the grip of one of the worst dry spells in American history. No such luck.

Lakes are half full and mountain snows are thin, omens of another summer of drought and wildfire. Complicating matters, many of the worst-hit states have even less water on hand than a year ago, raising the specter of shortages and rationing that could inflict another year of losses on struggling farms.

Reservoir levels have fallen sharply in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada. The soil is drier than normal. And while a few recent snowstorms have cheered skiers, the snowpack is so thin in parts of Colorado that the government has declared an "extreme drought" around the ski havens of Vail and Aspen.

"We're worse off than we were a year ago," said Brian Fuchs, a climatologist at the National Drought Mitigation Center.

Last week's blizzard brought a measure of relief to the Plains when it dumped more than a foot of snow. But it did not change the basic calculus for forecasters and officials in the drought-scarred West. Ranchers are straining to find hay – it is scarce and expensive – to feed cattle. And farmers are fretting about whether they will have enough water to irrigate their fields.

"It's approaching a critical situation," said Mike Hungenberg, who grows carrots and cabbage on a 3,000-acre farm in northern Colorado. There is so little water available this year, he said, that he may scale back his planting by a third, and sow less thirsty crops, like beans.

"A year ago we went into the spring season with most of the reservoirs full," Hungenberg said. "This year, you're going in with basically everything empty."

National and state forecasters – some of whom now end phone calls by saying, "Pray for snow" – do have some hope. An especially wet springtime could still spare the Western plains and mountains and prime the soil for planting. But forecasts are murky: They predict warmer weather and less precipitation across the West over the next three months but say the Midwest could see more rain than usual.

Water experts get more nervous with each passing day.

“We’re running out of time,” said Andy Pineda of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. “We only have a month or two, and we are so far behind it’s going to take storms of epic amounts just to get us back to what we would think of as normal.”

Parts of Montana, the Pacific Northwest and Utah have benefited from a snowy winter. But across Colorado, the snowpack was just 72 percent of average as of Feb. 1, which means less water to dampen hillsides and mountains vulnerable to fire, less water for farms to use on early season crops, and less to fill lakes and reservoirs that ultimately trickle down into millions of toilets, taps and swimming pools across the state.

Heavy rains and snow have recently brought some hope to the parched states of Iowa, Minnesota and Missouri, where the drought is easing. But 55.8 percent of the United States remains locked in drought, according to the government’s latest assessments. And states like Nebraska and Oklahoma are facing precipitation deficits of as much as 16 inches.

Without damp soil, many wheat crops will have trouble growing come March and April when they should be in full bloom, and corn and soybeans could be stunted after they are planted this spring. In a year when farmers are planning another record planting, some might be forced to sow fewer seeds because there is not enough soil moisture to go around.

In southwestern Kansas, Gary Millershaski said the wheat on his 3,000 acres was as dry as it had ever been after two years of drought. But as snow fell around him, he was smiling, a guarded optimist for this year’s planting. “If we get above average rainfall from here on, we’re going to raise a wheat crop,” he said. “But what are the odds of that?”

Sen. Mark Udall, Democrat of Colorado, put it this way: “Mother Nature is testing us.”

But Washington is also posing a challenge.

Udall, Sen. Michael Bennet, a Democrat, and other members of Colorado’s Congressional delegation are seeking $20 million in emergency funds to help restore watersheds in Colorado ravaged by last year’s wildfires. So far, there has been little action on the measure. Western politicians are also urging the Forest Service to move more quickly to modernize the shrinking and aging fleet of tanker planes it uses to douse wildfires.

With the across-the-board budget cuts taking effect March 1, financing for the Forest Service’s Wildland Fire Management program was be cut by $134 million. As many as 200,000 acres — an area about the size of Kansas City, Mo. — will not be treated to remove dry brush, dead wood and other tinder for wildfires.

In dry states like Colorado, officials are already preparing for the worst. Wildfires did $538 million in damage last year, burning hundreds of homes and driving away summer tourists. As late as December, when the high country should be blanketed by snow, a 4,000-acre fire continued to burn in Rocky Mountain National Park. To some officials, it was a harbinger of longer, fiercer fire seasons that may come with climate change. “It’s just so dry here,” said Tom Grady, the emergency manager in Aspen and the surrounding county, which is already meeting to fine-tune its fire plans for the summer.

Denver Water, which serves 1.3 million people, depleted many of its reservoirs after last year’s dry winter and an unrelenting spree of 90- and 100-degree summer days. Those basins never fully recovered, and are now an average of 63 percent full. The agency has already idled one water treatment plant to conserve its reservoir supplies, and officials say they are likely to declare a Stage 2 drought, limiting when people can water their lawns.

In northern Colorado, a combination of drought and wildfire is shutting off the spigot for scores of farmers. Cities are worried about ash and sediment flowing from the burn areas into the rivers that supply their water, so they are holding onto every drop possible this year and not selling any water to local farmers.

In 2011, the northern Colorado city of Greeley alone leased enough water to irrigate 13,000 acres of farmland — representing millions of dollars in wages for farmhands, seed money, fertilizer sales and profits for farmers. Every year, just after midnight on Jan. 1, farmers start calling the city to sign up to lease the surplus water. This year, Greeley had to call them all back to say there was none to be had.

Eldon Ackerman, who grows sugar beets, pinto beans and alfalfa on his farm in Wellington, said he had water supplies for only about one-third of his fields. He was praying the spring snow and rains would come to save him. If they do not, he said he might have to let 1,000 acres lie fallow this year.

“There isn’t any more water to get,” Ackerman said.

GoPro changes how people document their lives

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE — GoPro is a storyteller. No words needed. Sometimes not even sound is necessary. It’s all about motion evoking and provoking emotion.

The little silver cameras are changing the way people participate in sports, view their lives and socialize with family and friends. It’s impossible to visit a Tahoe ski resort without seeing them used as a helmet-cam. And now snowboarders are putting them at the end of what looks like a ski pole, but is more like a tripod, to allow for more than helmet angles.

There’s even an app people can use to see what the camera is seeing so the person knows if they would want to adjust the camera wherever it’s mounted.

GoPro Marketing Vice President Paul Crandell speaks Feb. 28 at Harveys during Tahoe Snowcial. Photo/Kathryn Reed

GoPro founder Nick Woodman is a 36-year-old billionaire. The humble beginnings of the company started somewhat by accident. Woodman wanted to document his buddies catching waves so he mounted a disposable camera to a surf leash. That led to what consumers know today as GoPro.

“GoPro enables people to self-document moments during their favorite activities,” Paul Crandell said.

Crandell, vice president of marketing for GoPro, spoke Feb. 28 on the first full day of the four-day Tahoe Snowcial confab at Harveys.

The fifth annual South Shore event sponsored by Heavenly Mountain Resort, and Harrah’s and Harveys Lake Tahoe is designed to bring together technology, social media and snowsports enthusiasts who are looking to increase their knowledge base and connect with other brands in the digital world.

“We’ve democratized content capture. We want to capture content sharing,” Crandell said. That is the company’s next goal. What that will look like Crandell would not divulge. But he did say there is enough innovation at the San Mateo-based company to keep their product fresh for the next three to four years.

Crandell, who came to GoPro from Red Bull, said what the two companies have in common is a focus on athletes and passion for the outdoor lifestyle.

“We built the brand through athletes. It took a lot of relationship building and working with these athletes. That’s the commonality between Red Bull and GoPro,” Crandell said. He said Red Bull’s approach was to be a sponsor to anything a bank wouldn’t. The energy drink company has risen to the top of its industry in short order.

Much of the video Crandell showed involved the use of more than one GoPro camera. This ensures not just your friends are in the final product, but so are you. It also allows for more angles, more footage – and more editing at the end of the day.

“We are becoming a media company by default,” Crandell said.

GoPro sends video press releases that media outlets are using in newscasts.

Five years ago companies were creating social network teams. Now they are putting together video teams to share their story. And GoPro, naturally, wants the story told with their product.

Crandell had a camera strapped to his chest while he was on the stage. The red light was a clear indicator everyone in the audience was being filmed. While it would be boring to watch the group taking notes on their various devices, it showed that the GoPro camera can be a business tool beyond action sports.

Judge refuses to expand sports betting

By David Porter, AP

NEWARK, N.J. — A federal judge upheld a 21-year-old law prohibiting sports betting in all but four states, dealing a setback to New Jersey's attempts to revive its struggling casino industry by grabbing a piece of what has become a multibillion-dollar industry, both legal and illegal.

The ruling published late Thursday night marked the second defeat for New Jersey in a lawsuit filed last year by the four major professional sports leagues and the NCAA. In a December ruling, U.S. District Judge Michael Shipp denied the state’s claim that the leagues and the NCAA didn’t have standing to bring the suit because they couldn’t demonstrate tangible harm to their products if New Jersey were to allow sports betting.

“We believe firmly in the principles of our position on sports betting and that the federal ban is inequitable, violates New Jersey’s rights as a state and is unconstitutional,” Gov. Chris Christie said.

State Sen. Ray Lesniak, the prime sponsor of the sports betting bill, said New Jersey would appeal Shipp’s “patent misinterpretation of the Constitution.”

This week, Christie signed a bill making the state the third in the nation to allow gambling over the Internet. New Jersey’s casino industry has seen revenues decline steadily over the last several years in the face of competition from neighboring states. Atlantic City’s newest casino, Revel, announced last week that it will file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection next month, about a year after it opened.

New Jersey voters passed a sports betting referendum in 2011, and last year the Legislature enacted a sports betting law that limited bets to the Atlantic City casinos and the state’s horse racing tracks. Bets wouldn’t be taken on games involving New Jersey colleges or college games played in the state.

The NFL, NHL, NBA, Major League Baseball and the NCAA sued the state last year, and the NCAA has moved several of its championship events out of New Jersey because of the sports betting law.

New Jersey, represented by former U.S. Solicitor General Theodore Olson, among others, had attacked the 1992 Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, or PASPA, on several constitutional levels. In filings, the state argued the law unfairly “grandfathered” Nevada, Oregon, Montana and

Delaware, which already have some form of sports gambling.

On Thursday, Shipp said that although some of the questions raised in the case were novel, "judicial intervention is generally unwarranted no matter how unwise a court considers a policy decision of the legislative branch. As such, to the extent the people of New Jersey disagree with PASPA, their remedy is not through passage of a state law or through the judiciary, but through the repeal or amendment of PASPA in Congress."

Motorcyclist dies on Geiger Grade

By KTVN-TV

The Nevada Highway Patrol is investigating a fatal motorcycle accident south of Reno Saturday afternoon.

The motorcyclist sustained fatal injuries March 2. Photo/Rachel Mosley/KTVN

Troopers say it happened about 2pm on Geiger Grade. Troopers say the unidentified man on a sports bike was driving down the road heading toward Reno from Virginia City.

Troopers say he was traveling at a high-rate of speed when he passed a car on a curve. He sideswiped the car and lost control of his bike.

He was taken by a Careflight helicopter to Renown Regional Medical Center where he later died.

The driver of the Suburu was not injured.