Study: Nevadans more likely to get cancer than neighboring states

By AP

Nevadans are more likely than residents of three neighboring states to contract and die of cancer, according to a study.

The report, released by the UNLV and Nevada State Health Division last week, notes cancer rates in the region comprising Nevada, California, Utah and Arizona historically have been lower than the national average.

But Nevada showed significantly higher rates of all cancers than those other states between 2006 and 2008, according to the report. Nevada had a cancer incident rate of 457 per 100,000 people, compared with 442 for California, 397 for Utah and 394 for Arizona.

The Silver State also had a higher cancer mortality rate during the same period, with 182 deaths per 100,000 compared with California's 162, Utah's 128 and Arizona's 152.

Dr. Paulo Pinheiro, a UNLV researcher and epidemiologist, argues in the report that Nevada suffers from a lack of screening and less specialized expertise, which forces nearly 10 percent of cancer patients to be diagnosed or treated outside of the state.

The exodus of cancer patients has a major impact on patients' quality of life, he said, and has a negative financial impact on state health care providers and private insurance companies.

The report features a comprehensive analysis of all cancer cases in Nevada from 2006 to 2008, and relies on data from the

Nevada Central Cancer Registry. Nevada had an annual average of 11,209 new cases of cancer over that period.

The report also found “alarming disparities” in the level and quality of care between northern and southern Nevada.

For instance, survival rates for breast cancer in northern Nevada are about 82 percent after four years, which is roughly the national average. In southern Nevada, survival rates are nearly 10 percentage points lower.

“If you are residents of a state you would expect the same level of care anywhere in that state, but this is not happening in Nevada,” Pinheiro said. “This discrepancy does not exist in other states around the nation and points to major differences in access to screening as well as quality health care between the two regions.”

Pinheiro suggests Nevada boost prevention efforts to curb cancer rates.

“An increase in the screening rates especially for those of low incomes, as well as strengthening the interventions to reduce tobacco use and second-hand smoke, could go a long way toward diminishing the cancer risk in Nevada,” he said.

Placer County supes allocate funds for Tahoe-area issues

Placer County, behind Caltrans, is responsible for snow clearing operations on the second highest number of roads miles in the state.

This requires the county to regularly maintain and upgrade its snow removal equipment. At last week's Board of Supervisors meeting, the electeds authorized the purchase of two self-propelled snowblowers. The $1.1 million for the two apparatuses is funded by the county's Road Fund with no net county cost.

Also at the meeting, which was conducted at a snowy Sugar Bowl ski resort, the board agreed to a funding agreement for acquiring property in the Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Resort and replacement of county regulations for liquid petroleum gas used above 5,000-feet elevation.

The board approved a $300,000 contribution in Park Dedication Fees from the Serene Lakes Recreation Area fund to help purchase Royal Gorge. Working in partnership with the Truckee Donner Land Trust, the Trust for Public Lands and the Northern Sierra Partnership, the acquisition of the 2,891 acre-site will permanently protect the property's natural resources and create opportunities for public recreation in an area that has been closed to the general public for 50 years. With the funds being taken from park dedication fees, there is no cost to the county.

The new petroleum regulations approved by the board arose from problems with substandard propane systems. These problems became readily apparent two winters ago when heavy snowfall caused dozens of propane systems to fail and leak. One home in the Donner Summit area was destroyed when leaking propane filled the home and then exploded. No one was injured in the incident.

Casinos face lawsuit from Prestige Travel

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Bankrupt firm Prestige Travel Inc. of Las Vegas has now filed 33 lawsuits against hotels and casino companies as it tries to hold on to its cash.

Saying the slow economy and the trend of resorts booking their own rooms online has hurt its results, the company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization and protection on Tuesday as it shuttered its online component, a business called TripRes.com. About 90 employees were laid off, leaving about 80 workers mostly involved with Prestige's traditional bricks and mortar travel agency.

To preserve its cash, the company is suing casinos and hotels in bankruptcy court to demand limits on draws against letters of credit and to require them to honor customer reservations booked by TripRes.

The court intervention is needed in the coming weeks, Prestige says, because after Tuesday's bankruptcy filing, several of Prestige's "various hotel and show partners indicated that they would not honor future hotel and show bookings previously reserved" by Prestige.

Prestige customers typically book packages with an average value of $324, the company says.

This amounts to an average of $49,000 per day in Prestige-booked business for Nevada hotels and show operators, most of them in Las Vegas.

During a hearing Friday, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Bruce Markell approved plans for the company to continue operating in the short term with existing financial resources while attorneys for Prestige gear up to litigate what appear to be serious financial disputes with creditors including City National Bank and MGM Resorts International.

Court papers show that when Prestige Travel fell behind on financial obligations to its largest creditor MGM Resorts International, Prestige began negotiations with MGM Resorts but Prestige “felt it was unable to work out a mutually agreeable solution without significantly impacting the feasibility” of Prestige’s operations.

That led to the bankruptcy filing and a Prestige lawsuit against MGM Resorts demanding restrictions on MGM Resorts’ ability to draw against a $2.5 million letter of credit.

Samuel Schwartz, one of the Prestige attorneys, told Markell on Friday that because of Prestige Travel’s financial troubles, one of the MGM Resorts properties, the Luxor, declined earlier in the day to honor the terms of a reservation booked through Prestige for a family of seven from Australia. After the hearing, Schwartz and Prestige officials said they didn’t know whether the family ended up obtaining accommodations.

Gordon Absher, vice president of public affairs at MGM Resorts International, said the company is working to assist travelers “falling victim to this unfortunate situation.”

“TripRes booked reservations for travelers, but after filing for bankruptcy cannot provide information or assurance of payment for those reservations,” Absher said. ”No guests are being turned away from any of our hotels. Reservations are not being cancelled.”

”We are holding rooms for TripRes reservations, but are asking travelers for payment by credit card while TripRes works through this matter,” he said. ”To further assist these travelers, we are honoring reservations at the rate they were booked."

Besides suing City National Bank and MGM Resorts International, Prestige has sued 32 more hotel and casino companies: Caesars Entertainment Corp., Treasure Island, the Stratosphere and its sister properties the two Arizona Charlie's and the Aquarius in Laughlin; the Silver Legacy in Reno, the Venetian, Wynn Las Vegas, Trump Tower, the South Point, the M Resort, the Tropicana, the Golden Nugget, the Four Queens, the Gold Coast and its sister properties the Orleans, the California and the Fremont; the Hard Rock, the LVH, the Palms, Palms Place, Hooters, Circus Circus Reno, the Grand Sierra in Reno, the Riviera, the D, Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort, the Tropicana Express in Laughlin, the Tuscany and the Sands Regent in Reno.

Ex-Carson City doc out of jail until trial begins

By AP

CONWAY, Ark. – A former Carson City emergency room doctor charged in a double murder will be allowed to leave jail – and the state – pending his trial in Arkansas after a judge agreed Friday that prosecutors failed to quickly take the case to trial.

Richard Conte, 62, will have to wear an electronic monitor and remain under house arrest at his mother's home in Wisconsin, according to a ruling from Judge Charles E. Clawson Jr.

Conte's attorney, Jack Lassiter, had argued that the former emergency room doctor should be released pending his January trial because the law requires that defendants be freed if they are not tried within nine months of being charged. The judge agreed and granted Lassiter’s request.

Conte was charged in 2011 for the shooting deaths of businessman Carter Elliott, 49, and his associate Timothy Wayne Robertson, 25, in Conway, Ark.

The charges were filed shortly before Conte was released from prison in Carson City where he was serving a sentence for kidnapping his ex-wife, Lark Gathright-Elliott, who was once married to Elliott. Conte held her captive in his Douglas County home.

Conte has pleaded not guilty to the murder charges. His trial is scheduled to begin Jan. 8.

Prosecutor Cody Hiland, who is not seeking the death penalty in the case, said he doesn’t plan to challenge the judge’s decision. He noted that Conte is in a wheelchair and not in good health.

“We’re completely comfortable with his decision, that it’s within the law,” Hiland said.

Funding fight on if Prop. 30 fails

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

Long before political ads dominated the airwaves and arguments erupted over which Nov. 6 tax initiative best serves schools, Gov. Jerry Brown sought crucial support from county officials in a cramped conference room one block from the Capitol.

County leaders in January had one priority – to ensure the state would continue sending them several billion dollars to assume former state responsibilities such as housing lower-level inmates and watching parolees.

Some wanted to pursue their own initiative without the tax hike because they represent conservative voters or thought the governor's initiative didn't stand a chance.

But ultimately the California State Association of Counties threw in its lot with Brown's measure and hoped for the best.

Proposition 30 guarantees in the California Constitution that counties will receive just over a penny on the dollar in existing sales taxes to fund the new duties they assumed from the state. For now, counties have only that promise in state law, which the Legislature can change at any time.

If Proposition 30 fails, Yolo County Supervisor Mike McGowan said, "it's a great unknown how counties will be treated by the state in the future. It's not a bet I'm willing to make, that the state will fully fund counties for services."

"They'll make a shift," McGowan added, "and we'll get the shaft."

Nearly all of the focus on Brown's initiative has focused on its tax hike on wealthy earners and sales, as well as its impact on education funding. But when Brown mentions funding for "public safety," he's referring to the county money.

Counties took plenty of convincing in 2011 when Brown proposed to send new prisoners to local jails, have probation officers watch parolees and transfer a host of social service responsibilities. The governor said the plan served multiple goals – solving the state's prison overcrowding problem and empowering counties to tailor their programs to suit local needs.

A year after the state began diverting lower-level inmates to counties, the prison population has dropped nearly 17 percent, from 144,456 to 119,938, a level closer to the 110,000 federal judges have demanded.

Republican critics say that has come at a safety cost because they believe local jails are ill equipped to house felons and change their behavior while they serve long-term sentences.

“You’re putting unrehabilitated inmates and parolees in our communities in masses,” said Assemblyman Jim Nielsen, R-Gerber. “Tens of thousands of them, without increasing rehabilitation opportunities.”

Nielsen said Proposition 30 would “fund what’s broken” by locking county revenues into the state constitution. He suggested that lawmakers reconsider the shift of prisoners and parolees, and direct funding to counties as needed.

But McGowan, president of the California State Association of Counties, believes keeping inmates local will reduce the rate at which they reoffend. State officials say as many as 70 percent of inmates now return to the system.

“In general, government works better at the local level than it does at the state and federal levels,” McGowan said.

He suggested that if voters reject Proposition 30, county funding would be subject to the whims of future lawmakers, many of whom will be new and never vowed to protect realignment funds. He also said counties would face cuts in social service programs they deliver on the state’s behalf.

“You can go down the list – there will be less cops on the street, beds in the jail, mental health programs we provide,” McGowan said. “I don’t think the public wants that to happen.”

State leaders also used their realignment program to trim last year’s deficit, which once stood at $25 billion. In a controversial read of the constitution, Brown and lawmakers said they could pay $2.1 billion less to K-12 schools and community colleges because they redirected state tax dollars to counties.

In the contraption that is California's budget, where every piece is linked together, Proposition 30 is the means through which Brown and lawmakers ensured harmony between counties and education groups who might otherwise fight over the same dollars. Because the initiative raises $6 billion more, each constituency remains satisfied.

Brown won counties' support by promising to protect their realignment money. He told the *Bee*'s editorial board that he intends to do that even if Proposition 30 fails, but warned that courts may demand otherwise.

That's because groups representing school boards and administrators could resume their legal fight to recoup $2.1 billion from last year and ensure schools continue receiving like amounts.

"If a multibillion-dollar deficit lingers, you can't exactly promise everybody and everything that there isn't going to be more cuts," said Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento. "That's just reality, just the numbers."

The California School Boards Association, a plaintiff in the $2.1 billion suit, says it will drop its claim if voters approve Proposition 30. If not, the case will proceed. School groups lost the first round in June when a trial judge said Brown and lawmakers did not violate the state constitution by diverting education funds to counties.

"If (Prop. 30) fails, we will continue to do everything in our power to ensure that … schools get the money they're entitled to," said CSBA executive director Vernon Billy.

McGowan knows that counties could be at odds with education.

"It puts local jurisdictions in the untenable position of then having to compete aggressively with another local government partner: our schools," McGowan said. "We don't want to be there."

It's a significant reason why Steinberg, Brown and others are desperate for Proposition 30 to pass. If it fails, groups will scramble in the Capitol to protect their budget dollars, now and in the future.

"Stakeholders get divided and go into their corners pretty quickly, and that's not what we want," Steinberg said. "We want to start next year with the state's fiscal health restored and want to begin a new era in this state."

Raley's management fed up with union tactics

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Raley's pushed its stalled labor negotiations to the brink of a strike Friday, announcing it will unilaterally implement terms of its last contract offer next week.

The West Sacramento grocery chain acknowledged that by implementing terms – which include a wage freeze and other concessions by workers – it could be provoking a walkout.

But it said it's fed up with union leaders' unwillingness to let workers vote on the final offer, which was submitted three weeks ago to the United Food and Commercial Workers.

“Based on the union’s refusal to call an election, I have decided to bring this to a conclusion now,” Raley’s Chief Executive Michael Teel wrote in a memo to workers. The terms will be implemented next Thursday, he said.

By implementing contract terms unilaterally, the company would effectively give the UFCW two main choices – accept the terms or walk out.

Raley’s unionized employees already voted last spring to authorize a strike, and union leaders denounced Teel’s announcement. They have been lining up support from other key unions that do business with Raley’s, including the Teamsters. That could make it much harder for Raley’s to keep its stores open if the UFCW does strike.

But there’s no walkout yet. The UFCW on Friday offered to resume talking.

“We will be mobilizing over the coming days to prepare for our response to this careless provocation,” said Jacques Loveall, president of Roseville’s UFCW Local 8, in a prepared statement. “Meanwhile we are prepared to begin a dialogue at any time to reach a settlement worthy of recommendation to our membership.”

Labor expert Ken Jacobs, of UC Berkeley, said: “A lot can happen in the next week. It’s not unusual to see each side ramp up pressure.”

Last month Save Mart Supermarkets of Modesto secured wage and benefit concessions from the UFCW, and Safeway Inc. has been negotiating a new contract. Those two companies, like Raley’s, say they need concessions to compete with nonunion grocers like Wal-Mart.

A walkout would leave Raley’s “very vulnerable and very isolated,” Jacobs said.

Raley’s spokesman John Segale acknowledged the possibility of a strike.

“It is a risk but we feel strongly that this package is superior to the Save Mart package,” he said. Workers have been telling managers they want to vote on the offer, he said.

Raley’s is clearly frustrated with the lack of progress on negotiations, which have dragged on for about a year. The two sides met Friday, but only to give Raley’s a chance to clarify some of the points in its final offer. Raley’s officials notified union leaders at that meeting of their plan to implement the terms of the final proposal.

The final offer includes a two-year pay freeze. It also eliminates some of the “premium pay” for working holiday shifts.

Raley’s also wants to change its health coverage. But for the time being, those proposals aren’t part of the package Raley’s plans to implement next week. Only the changes to the pay structure would be implemented.

UFCW officials have said they’re willing to help Raley’s, as they did Save Mart, but say they aren’t yet convinced that Raley’s finances are in such dire shape.

Loveall took a jab at Raley’s lead negotiator, labor consultant Bob Tiernan. He called him “an outsider who could very well take the company off a cliff.”

Overdue hiker safely rescued

from Desolation Wilderness

An overdue hiker has been found alive in Desolation Wilderness.

Nathan Sperring, 29, who had been overdue since Tuesday from his hiking/camping trip, was found Thursday afternoon by search and rescue personnel at his campsite near Dick’s Lake in the Desolation Wilderness.

Sperring, according to El Dorado County sheriff’s deputies, had done a lot of things right, but overlooked the possibility of rapidly changing mountain weather.

He had not dressed for windy, snowy conditions. Sperring woke up last Sunday morning to find 6 inches of snow on the ground. The weather had cleared some, so Nathan packed up his camp and began to walk out. His tennis shoes and light coat proved to be insufficient for the conditions.

As the weather became more severe, Sperring followed his tracks in the snow back to his protected campsite and set up camp again to wait out the foul weather and the arrival of help. This may have saved his life, deputies said.

On Thursday, multiple SAR teams were flown into the Desolation Wilderness and dropped off in strategic locations. Just after a helicopter dropped off one of the teams and left the area, SAR personnel heard a whistle off in the distance. Sperring had seen the helicopter and was blowing his rescue whistle.

Apple Hill growers not complaining about economy

By Kathryn Reed

CAMINO – People want their apples and they are willing to drive for them.

Parking lots were full Friday in Apple Hill and apple treats of all kinds were being consumed.

Granted, many of the license plates were from Nevada on Oct. 26 because a slew of workers had the day off in celebration of Nevada Day.

“Our Nevada customers are very loyal. They appreciate fresh produce,” Christa Campbell with Rainbow Orchards said.

Apple Hill orchards offer numerous varietals at their farms. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Still, those in the apple business say the economy has not hurt them except in terms of growth being slower.

“I keep expecting the economy to affect us, but business keeps getting better,” Denver Dale Martin of Denver Dan’s told *Lake Tahoe News*. “People want fresh produce and you can’t get any fresher than picking it off the tree.”

Campbell said, “In the last couple years we’ve noticed a lot of people from Tahoe.”

In part, she attributes this to Rainbow Orchards participating in the Sample the Sierra food and wine event, which is now on Labor Day weekend in South Lake Tahoe. One year she sent blueberries to a chef and another year blackberries. She thinks it was 60 pounds of her Triple Crown blackberries that were turned into a dessert.

“People know we’re here because of Sample the Sierra,” Campbell said.

She added that gas prices have not slowed the stream of cars into the area.

It’s Mother Nature who makes or breaks a season.

The storm that brought snow to Tahoe this week dropped rain on the West Slope. This time of year all the wet stuff does is wash away the dust. It also slows the harvest because tractors tend to sink in the mud.

Campbell said the goal is to have the harvest wound up by the first hard freeze; otherwise the fruit won’t be any good.

Apple varieties ripen at different times. Pink Ladies were just being brought into the selling area Friday afternoon. Campbell said this has become a favorite of consumers because they are a little sweet and a little tart, anything can be done with them, and they can last until June if refrigerated.

Cold weather is good for apples – it helps with the color, according to Scott Larsen, who is one of several family members working at Larsen Apples.

People are all over his property – some in the warehouse trying to figure out which of the nearly 20 types of apples to buy, others are enjoying lunch.

For the previous two years, Larsen only capitalized on about 10 to 20 percent of the crop because of the weather. A cold snap in the spring struck his Pippins and Pink Ladies. Still, this year’s harvest is substantially better than the last two falls, with 60 to 70 percent of the apples making it to market.

One thing he said that is hard to keep up with is when the consumer catches wind of a varietal and it becomes the trendy thing to have. It’s not like trees can be planted and immediately they produce the latest fad.

Martin of Denver Dan’s says the same thing. The 80-year-old has been in the apple business for 50 years. While he likes to grow traditional apples (Macintosh, Jonathan, Goldens) on his farm where the customer does the picking, he said this year it’s Honey Crisp people are looking for, while last year it was Pink Ladies.

It’s Golden Delicious that does the best at Larsen and Grandpa’s Cellar because they are good for eating, good for cooking and have a bit of a shelf life.

The aroma wafting from Grandpa’s Cellar is overwhelming – in a good way. All things apple are being baked – and all from scratch.

Pat Scheuner opens the freezers – pies, struddles, turnovers, dumplings – are stacked high. These delicacies, more so than bushels of apples, are what keep the cash registers ringing. People come with coolers to haul the goods away to be baked at a later date.

“Our business is up this year,” Scheuner shared with *Lake Tahoe News*.

She said one thing that is rare is this growing region adheres to strict quality assurances. Folks from the Apple Hill Agriculture Commission test for sugar and juiciness of the apples. No apples are picked until they are ripe.

“You won’t get an apple that doesn’t have flavor and juice,” Scheuner said. “We have standards. That is pretty unique.”

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Notes:

• Each orchard has different hours of operation. Many are open through Thanksgiving weekend, and then weekends only until the end of the year.

• Apple Hill Growers Association website has more information.

• Not all orchards have the same types of apples, some sell food already made, some sell food to take with you.

• Some orchards let you to pick the apples, while most have picked them.

• Many places have other items for sale – like pears, pumpkins and apple cider.

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Fire at Genoa eatery destroys kitchen

A fire at the Genoa Station Grill and Bar on Oct. 26 caused about $75,000 in damage.

The fire broke out in the kitchen area and was contained to the kitchen and attic area. The cause of the fire is still under investigation, but arson has been ruled out, according to Douglas County sheriff's deputies. No injuries were reported.

The fire was reported just before 9am Friday.

Genoa Station, next to the town hall, is one of the newest businesses in this Nevada town.

Approximately 18 firefighters responded to battle the fire, while Douglas County Sheriff's and Nevada Highway Patrol assisted with traffic control.The road that runs through Genoa was closed for approximately two hours.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

More chipmunks on South Shore found to have plague

Two more chipmunks on the South Shore have tested positive for plague. This brings the total number to three this fall.

One of the chipmunks was found in the Tallac Historic Site area and one was near the U.S. Forest Service Taylor Creek Visitor Center.

The chipmunks were tested as part of a surveillance effort initiated by health officials after learning earlier this month that another chipmunk had tested positive for plague at the U.S. Forest Service Visitor Center in the Taylor Creek area.

A total of 41 rodents (38 chipmunks and three squirrels) were tested as part of the most recent surveillance effort. Interim El Dorado County Health Officer Robert Hartmann, in a press release said, the surveillance test results are not unexpected, but do warrant precautions and notification to the public.

Warning signs will continue to be posted in the affected areas and surrounding campgrounds throughout the coming months.

“Risk of transmission is significantly reduced during the winter months because rodents and their fleas are less active when the weather is cold,” Hartmann said.

Plague is an infectious bacterial disease that is spread by squirrels, chipmunks and other wild rodents and their fleas. People can become infected through close contact with infected animals or infected fleas. Plague can be prevented by avoiding contact with these wild rodents and their fleas, and by keeping pets away from wild rodents and their burrows.

To report a sick or dead rodent, contact El Dorado County Vector Control at (530) 573.3197.