Opinion: Why heroin costs less than cigarettes

By Lenny Bernstein, Washington Post

I’m no expert on the street price of heroin, but after talking to some people who are, I can tell you this: The illegal opiate at the center of the latest drug epidemic is very cheap. A couple of experts compared it to the price of a pack of cigarettes.

As a non-smoker, that sort of amazed me, so I decided to check. In many states, it is indeed true.

Ashley Kennedy, an addict currently in rehab, told me she could buy a bag of heroin in Baltimore for about $5. According to this survey conducted by The Awl, a pack of cigarettes costs $7.75 in Maryland. The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids put the price of a pack at $6.45 in 2013. Either way, a single dose of heroin is less expensive than 20 smokes.

Read the whole story

Opinion: This is no time to be lax about fire

By Jeff Meston

Early in 2015, the U.S. Forest Service, as well as our partners at the National Weather Service, predicted this to be a significant year for wildland fires throughout the Western states.

A combination of a sustained period of drought, coupled with weather that is conducive to nearly perfect burning conditions have challenged local firefighting resources. Those predictions have rang very true as we continue to hear about new fires occurring almost daily all over the Western states. This year will go down as one of the most hazardous years for wildland fire.



Jeff Meston

Locally, firefighters have responded to a variety of wildland fires within our region and thankfully have been able to mitigate them quickly and efficiently. Sadly, we recently lost a USFS firefighter who tragically lost his life battling an incident south of Echo Summit.

The California Fire & Rescue Mutual Aid System is the best in the world, and our agencies along with our partners in Nevada have deployed local resources to fight fires throughout California. This year our local U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit obtained use of the Super Scooper, a superb firefighting plane to reinforce our ground firefighting resources, now based at the Lake Tahoe Airport. Our No. 1 goal is to prevent the ignition of wildfires, and to accomplish that, we need the public’s help.

We live and play in a forest. Where are you discarding your cigarette butts? Are you parking on dry grass? Did you start a campfire in a prohibited location? Did you put it out completely? Are you burning your trash? Are you causing sparks while driving? Over 90 percent of unintended wildfire is

human caused in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

If you live in or own a home in the region, have you completed your defensible space? If not, why not? Without defensible space, it is unreasonable to think that fire agencies can place a fire truck to defend your home during a wildland fire. Look around your neighborhood, how many homes are there? Is it easy or hard to gain access to your home? Are your streets wide enough for a fire truck to access the neighborhood and for you and your neighbors to pass that engine to evacuate? Firefighting resources are limited and there is not a home in existence worth a firefighter's life.

Help us to help you by following the following basic defensible space tenants.

· Vegetation surrounding a building or structure is fuel for afire. Even the building or structure is considered fuel.Research and experience have shown that fuels reduction around a building or structure increases the probability of it surviving a wildfire. Good defensible space allows firefighters to protect and save buildings or structures safely without facing unacceptable risk to their lives. Fuels reduction through vegetation management is the key to creating good defensible space.

· Properties with greater fire hazards will require more clearing. Clearing requirements will be greater for those lands with steeper terrain, larger and denser fuels, fuels that are highly volatile, and in locations subject to frequent fires.

· Creation of defensible space through vegetation management usually means reducing the amount of fuel around the building or structure, providing separation between fuels, and/or reshaping retained fuels by trimming.

· In all cases, fuels reduction means arranging the tree,shrubs and other fuel sources in a way that makes it

difficult for fire to transfer from one fuel source to another. It does not mean cutting down all trees and shrubs, or creating a bare ring of earth across the property.

· A homeowner’s defensible space clearing is limited to 100feet away from his or her building or structure or to the property line, whichever is less, and limited to their land.

· Homeowners who complete fuel reduction activities tha tremove or dispose of vegetation are required to comply with all federal, state or local environmental protection laws and obtain permits when necessary.

· For more information on what homeowners can do to create defensible space around their home and property, go **online**.

Jeff Meston is fire chief of South Lake Tahoe.

Letter: Chamber says thank you

To the community,

The Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and El Dorado County thank Lake Tahoe Golf Course for providing the perfect setting for the Sample the Sierra Pop-Up Dinner.

Over fifty people gathered to enjoy a special four-course dinner at Lake Tahoe Golf Course on Sept. 4 to begin the Labor Day weekend celebrations. Though the weather did not cooperate, Lake Tahoe Golf Course was more than accommodating

with moving the event indoors to provide a warm and wind-free location for Blend Catering's delicious dishes.

Thank you also to Blend Catering, Petal to the Metal for the beautiful flowers and Red Carpet Events & Design for décor.

Shannon Earley, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce

Letter: Questioning Nevada's bear policy

Publisher's note: ***This letter was sent to Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval and is printed with permission.***

To Gov. Sandoval,

If education and workforce development are your priorities, would you start by addressing the Keep Our Bears Wild program and the executive proclamation leading to Bear Logic month that are not being enforced by NDOW? Where is the education of the public to reduce the bear welcoming mat? Why are bears being trapped and killed under false pretenses? Why doesn't your organization educate homeowners on bear aversion tactics? Why aren't bear proof boxes mandatory? Why aren't businesses fined for overflowing garbage bins? Why are bears euthanized when a homeowner leaves a door open inviting intruders? Why don't bear lives matter more? Why doesn't NDOW refuse to trap when it's the homeowner's fault like California? Where is NDOW's accountability? Who do they answer to?

They sure seem to be running amuck. Educate the public. Educate NDOW.

There is no reason we cannot coexist with bears when we are

living in their territory. Stop sacrificing the bears and start educating the public and holding NDOW accountable.

Sincerely,

Dianne Gross, El Dorado Hills

Letter: SLT Library grateful for successful summer

To the community,

The South Lake Tahoe Library just wrapped up our Summer Reading Club, which encourages children to read all summer long by rewarding them with prizes, and we would like to thank the many businesses and organizations that donated to the library. Our theme this year was Every Hero Has A Story and we had many local heroes who helped make our program a success.

This summer children read a total of 3,700 hours and the prizes that they could choose from included gift certificates from local businesses, including Applebee’s Restaurant, Baja Fresh Mexican Grill, Blue Dog Gourmet Pizza, Heavenly Village Cinema, Jamba Juice, Magic Carpet Golf, McDonalds, SLT Parks and Recreation Swimming Pool, and Tahoe Bowl. Thanks to the Raley’s NickelAid Community Giving Program books were also purchased for prizes. Gaia-Licious Global Gift Boutique and Wildwood DIY Boutique also donated gift certificates for the adult program. Thank you to all of these businesses for their generous donations.

Many other agencies and organizations also supported the library. For our Local Superheroes Day the South Lake Tahoe

Police Department, South Tahoe Refuse, and U.S. Forest Service wildland firefighters volunteered their time so children could meet some real life heroes. The Kiwanis Club of Lake Tahoe and Aktion Club members volunteered their time at our kick off party, assisting with games and crafts. The South Tahoe Optimist Club generously sponsored the Wild Things Inc. performance, where over 200 children and adults enjoyed viewing and learning about seven different wild animals. All other performances and prizes were made possible due to the wonderful support from the Friends of the Library.

On behalf of the South Lake Tahoe Library, I want to say thank you again to all of these businesses and organizations for so generously supporting our library and the community that we serve.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Diebolt, library assistant

Opinion: STPUD clarifies franchise issues

By Richard Solbrig

I would like to provide information to clarify portions of ***Lake Tahoe News'*** **Sept. 2** article on franchise agreements and provide some additional information that was not available when we spoke prior to my meeting with the city on Aug. 31.

The article commences with a reference to "since early summer." This is in reference to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the city and district concerning water issues,

which in various versions has been in place for most of the city's 50-year history. A basic tenet of the agreement has been a defined quantity of water provided to the city at no charge. Sewer charges have never been involved. Over the years, other services and fee waivers have been exchanged between the two agencies. The most recent MOU, which expired July 15, 2015, stipulated that the district would not pay encroachment permit fees in exchange for a quantity of water (2,500,000 cubic feet per year). At current rates for water ($1.28/100 cubic feet), this equates to $32,000, not the $100,000 stated in the article. This was the maximum amount saved, if the city utilized the whole allotment, which occurred three out of the last five years.

In exchange for the water, the district did not pay for encroachment fees on projects located within the city right-of-way, but continued to be subject to repaving and traffic control requirements of the city. The city's current encroachment fee is equal to 1 1/2 percent of the construction cost of water main replacement type projects. This results in a $15,000 encroachment fee for each $1 million spent on projects within the city's right-of-way. Thus, the total saved by the district was based upon the actual projects done. Projections based upon the district's 10-year capital improvement programs resulted in a fairly even trade of waived costs over the life of the MOU. The city and district mutually agreed to not renew the MOU, based upon transparency, accounting and administration considerations. The city now pays for all water used, and the district pays for encroachment permit fees.

The district was informed several months ago, at the end of a discussion concerning the water MOU referred to above, that the city was considering a Franchise Ordinance for utilities. The district's only comment at that time was that we questioned its applicability to a "public utility district." The conversation lasted approximately five minutes. The city

indicated that they would provide us with further information on the subject and we indicated that the city's attorney could contact the district's attorney if he had any questions.

No further dialogue concerning franchise agreements occurred between the city and the district until a meeting on Aug. 31. On Aug. 31 the district received a verbal proposal for a 20-year franchise agreement between the city and the district for a 2 percent fee. The 2 percent fee would be applied to the water and sewer service charges for the district's customers located within the city limits. At that rate, that would equate to approximately $300,000 per year, not the $500,000 stated in the article. These types of discrepancies are the basis of why I refrain from speculating on important topics.

At the meeting the city also provided a draft general Franchise Ordinance for all utilities and a copy of a franchise agreement between the city and a private water company from 50 years ago, but nothing specific to the district.

The district's preliminary research, performed in the past few days, indicates that a city cannot impose a franchise fee on a special district for facilities in the public right-of-way. Under the Public Utility Code of California, the publicly owned utility districts are granted the specific right to have their facilities in the public right-of-way. This principle is so universally accepted in California that the district cannot identify a single "publicly owned" utility district that has a franchise agreement with a city, county, or the state of California. This includes the supposed examples offered by the city at our meeting. Even the franchise agreement the city had with a small water company, which was purchased by the district in the 1970s, included language stating that if the water company were purchased by a public entity (state of California, or some municipal or public corporation), that the franchise agreement would expire.

We agree that the city has the right to have a Franchise Ordinance, as you indicated in your article. They have had, and will continue to have, franchise agreements per the ordinance, with all the non-publicly owned utilities – electric, gas, water, etc., as do most other cities and counties in California.

Richard Solbrig is general manager of South Tahoe Public Utility District.

Letter: We are not a Christian Nation

To the community,

A note for Kim Davis and her supporters:

1) Separation of church and state – No government endorsement of any particular religion. This should quiet all of you, but it doesn't.

2) Kim you already compromised your beliefs with:

A) being divorced (multiple times)

B) Being an adulterer

C) Filing divorce papers for people

D) I would also guess that you might wear cotton/poly blends once in a while, eat shellfish and work on the Sabbath. (I could be wrong.)

E) Also, (this is from “your book”) –

1) Punish the sin, not the sinner

2) Let he who is without sin cast the first stone

3) Judge not, lest ye be judged

4) Love your neighbor as you would love yourself.

You need to follow all the rules, not just the ones you like.

3) Nobody is denying you your right to worship. They just want you to do the job you signed up for. A civil job in a civil capacity. If you cannot do the job, please resign. I’m sure God will provide for you if you quit your job. Have some faith.

4) Not everyone believes in your God. Please don’t let this upset you. If he/she/it is real, we are ultimately forgiven. Says so in “your book”.

5) One last note – We are not a “Christian Nation*. Yes, there are Christians here, but ultimately we are a nation of laws. Just because a lot of people here are jerks doesn’t mean we are a jerk nation.

* Some people assume that we are Christian Nation because we were founded by Freemasons. I’ll just mention that the only requirement for becoming a Freemason is that you believe in a “higher power”. They are not exclusively Christian. That could be any higher power – God, Zeus, Allah, Yahweh, Jesus, The FSM, Cthulhu, Beelzebub, Mephistopheles, Illuminati, Reptilian Shapeshifter, etc.

John Spinola, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Medical marijuana docs are heroes, not criminals

By Steve Kubby

California state officials are preparing to approve a broad reaching new medical marijuana bill, SB266.

The proposed bill has passed the California Assembly and is headed for the Senate Rules Committee, with the blessings of Gov. Jerry Brown. The proposed law, which is expected to pass easily this week, was crafted in part by a union official who is now under indictment and partly by the police. Patients are terrified of the proposed new law and see it as a crack down on patients and their doctors.



Steve Kubby

I’m getting calls from frightened patients who fear their own state government is planning on going after cannabis doctors as if they are some sort of dangerous threat that must be carefully supervised. Sick people cannot handle this kind of stress. Thousands of patients will die because of this mean spirited attempt to thwart the will of the people and deprive them of medical cannabis and the doctors who write recommendations to use the healing herb.

David Allen, a retired heart surgeon and expert on cannabinoid

medicine, warns against the passage of the new Medical Marijuana Regulation and Safety Act. According to Allen, the proposed law “will create more crimes of cultivation, processing, storage, transportation, sales, and possession. It will create an army of bureaucrats that will increase the police state and create super drug task force solely for Cannabis and no other drug,”

Members of the American Medical Marijuana Association are offended by the outrageous introduction to this new bill,because it is targeting physicians who allow their patients to use cannabis medically. Here is the introduction to this bill:

“THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS: This act shall be known, and may be cited, as the Medical Marijuana Regulation and Safety Act. SEC. 1. Section 2220.05 of the Business and Professions Code is amended to read: 2220.05. (a) In order to ensure that its resources are maximized for the protection of the public, the Medical Board of California shall prioritize its investigative and prosecutorial resources to ensure that physicians and surgeons representing the greatest threat of harm are identified and disciplined expeditiously.”

Our medical marijuana doctors are heroes, not criminals and this proposed new law is a disgrace.

Steve Kubby is executive director of the American Medical Marijuana Association.

Opinion: Ex-electeds want to stay at public trough

By Larry Weitzman

For the past year and a half I have followed the county government machinations fairly closely, but prior to that time my interactions with the county were somewhat limited. There were a few supervisors who were less than impressive, but there were some good ones. Also impressive were some department heads. When I built a house 10 years ago the building and safety department was very helpful in every respect.

But things have gone downhill since then and it's due to poor county leadership, starting right at the top. In February termed out BOS member **Ron Briggs** filed a claim for "back wages," saying he wasn't paid the correct amount of salary as a member of the BOS by $178,333. Briggs has gone through some rough times, with personal foreclosures and with only a high school diploma and being nearly 58 years old his after government employment prospects don't look very good. On top of that recent domestic issues haven't helped. The filing of this bogus claim could be evidence of his desperate situation. Briggs was foreclosed out of his home and is renting a home near El Dorado Hills. Is he planning a run for supervisor in another district?



Larry Weitzman

In his quest to be elected county treasurer, a position according to Government Code Section 27000.7 he was statutorily unqualified for, never mind being qualified to collect and invest a billion dollars for the county and local agencies. One of Briggs' moves as a supervisor was to create county salary levels for the elected department heads and in doing so remove incentive pay, like for being a CPA. It wouldn't affect Briggs if he won the office of county treasurer as he doesn't have such a professional license, but it would have hurt the then county treasurer who won re-election. But in doing so (the resolution was later repealed) he created another county snafu by adding out-of-county work credit toward salary and longevity pay for county employees. The correction was supposed to be made by HR (whose director benefits from this uncorrected snafu) several months ago, but is now two months overdue. Without the correction, it could cost the county hundreds of thousand dollars.

Because of the Briggs claim, it was recently reported that **Norma Santiago**, ex-District 5 supervisor, has filed an identical claim. During her tenure on the board Santiago supported ex- spendthrift CAO Terri Day through Daly's hiring binge, series of expensive raises (15 percent) and some of the worst hiring decisions in county history, all done without proper background checks. Daly hired high level department people who were basically unemployable elsewhere all with the transparency of a brick wall lined with krypton. Santiago supported Daly to the end, saying on her dismissal that Daly was the "loyal champion of EDC employees. " Daly was supposed to work for the taxpayers and citizens of EDC.

By the way, in my several columns on the budget this year's closing numbers were worse than I predicted for salary and benefits by $3 million at $144.7 million or almost $27 million more than the average salaries and benefits paid ($118 million) for the FY 2010 to 2013. Next fiscal year when the full effect of the 15 percent raise kicks in, salaries and

benefits will have climbed to over $150 million. Santiago did a great job along with the allegedly conservative Briggs in giving away other people's money.

Santiago and Briggs are currently understood to be unemployed.

As to their bogus claims, they are meritless as all the county raises they are referring to were the result of county resolutions. But the California Constitution in Article II, Section 4(b) requires "that all legislative action taken with regard to a board member's salary must be adopted via a duly noticed ordinance." That quote was from a county counsel letter dated July 30 to Briggs' attorney.

Santiago's claim was also denied, but an email inquiry by Santiago could lead one to believe perhaps there might have been a quid pro quo between certain county employees and Santiago to the effect that if you file a claim, there would be a quick settlement. The email was to County Counsel Robyn Drivon. It stated, "This is just a quick follow up on that claim. Additionally, I would like to know how close you are to a resolution as we are quickly approaching the 30 days you had hoped this would be cleared up. Live long and prosper. May the force be with you! Take care, Norma." A "resolution in 30 days?" Sounds like a deal to me.

And if that don't beat all, the infamous Ray Nutting filed a claim for damages against EDC for "malicious prosecution/abuse of process" and other torts because was acquitted by a jury on some charges brought by a criminal grand jury and filed jointly by the state Attorney General's Office and the EDC District Attorney. Although Nutting was acquitted of some of the charges, had a hung jury on a felony and was found guilty on some misdemeanors, the criminal grand jury indictment creates probable cause and bars the filing of a civil suit. There is more to this story and that will come later.

When you have politicians who had real jobs before election

and being a politician isn’t their only job or source of income, it makes for politicians that have limited or no self-interest. The founding fathers envisioned our republic in the same fashion, part-time legislators with real jobs on the outside, not politicians who become dependent on being politicians.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: How the 1% hijacked the news business

By Jack Mirkinson, Salon

Ah, Labor Day. A time to kick back, put your white clothes away, eat burned meat products and, if you really love to have fun, reflect on why it is that labor issues get such short shrift in our mainstream media. (See what I did there?) But really, the point of Labor Day is in the title, so, just for a second, let’s talk about how we talk about labor.

Or, rather, how we don’t talk about labor. Our media is filled to the brim with stories of, by and for the wealthy. We have three separate television channels focused solely on business. Newspapers come stuffed with sections devoted to real estate, fine dining and high fashion. When the public editor of the *New York Times* asked the paper’s executive editor, Dean Baquet, why he was launching a new “anthropological” beat focused on the “superrich,” he replied, “The *New York Times* does enough about poverty and the middle class.”

Working people, meanwhile, find themselves lavished with much less attention. And forget about unions, which, even in their

diminished state, still represent millions and millions of people. The number of outlets with reporters dedicated to covering labor issues has steadily shrunk in recent years, even as the technological revolution makes an examination of modern-day labor practices more important than ever. (To be fair to the Times, it is one of the few newspapers to maintain a labor beat, though that is dwarfed by the paper’s coverage of high finance and technology.)

On TV, meanwhile, unions might as well not exist. A 2014 study by the stalwart media watchdog FAIR found that, over an eight-month period, exactly zero representatives of labor unions appeared on any of the five main Sunday talk shows. Billionaire CEOs, meanwhile, got lots of chances to put forward their vision of the American economy.

Read the whole story