

# Howell: the business climate is what needs to be improved

**Publisher's note:** *Lake Tahoe News is profiling candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council and Douglas County Commission. The stories are being published in the order they were received.*

**Name:** Lawrence Howell

**Age:** 44

**Hometown:** Stateline

**How long have you lived here?:** I have lived in Douglas County for 19 years.

**Job/profession:** Executive director of Rite of Passage (Schools and Mentor Programs for At-Risk Youth)



Lawrence  
Howell

**What would you build or tear down on the South Shore to make it great, as in what Whistler is like?:**

The South Shore of Lake Tahoe needs to be redeveloped in order for any economic revitalization plan to work. All other successful vacation destinations have redeveloped their town "focus" and not relied on what worked in the past. Access to

the area, accommodations in the area, and a climate of invitation are all items that need to be addressed.

**What form of recreation do you participate in? What improvements to recreation would you strive to make throughout Douglas County?:**

I run, hike, bike, ski, and enjoy water sports. Recreation in Douglas County is fantastic and does not need improvement. The business climate is what needs to be improved.

**Recreation tourism is expected to be the driving force of the South Shore economy in the coming years, what do you specifically plan to do to improve bike paths and roads?:**

The South Shore needs an agreement between Douglas and El Dorado County on what the master plan is for bike paths and roads. Once the plan is agreed upon it needs commitment and follow through. Visitors do not understand why bike paths currently start and stop without connecting continuously throughout the community (as they do in other vacation destinations).

**How do you plan to boost revenue in Douglas County?:**

Douglas County needs follow through. In the past 10 years there have been 10 strategic plans that have been "shelved." Douglas County cannot afford "business as usual" because business is on the decline.

**What stands out for you in the 2010-11 budget?:**

The 2010-11 budget appears to have been developed behind closed doors. At the meeting to discuss and possibly adopt the budget the commissioners discussed one proposal and unanimously approved it. Each commissioner has a responsibility to bring proposals, look at all proposals, and develop alternative plans in case "Plan A" does not work.

**What needs to be done to allow businesses to thrive in Douglas**

## **County?:**

Douglas County has a reputation of not being business friendly. The County Commissioners need to work together in building the reputation that Douglas is business friendly. Currently the commission is divided and some have put their own agenda before the needs of the county. Also, county ordinances that do or appear to restrict business need to be eliminated or modified. One example is the current sign ordinance is unenforceable and outdated. Businesses need to apply for a variance in order to install a sign which meets modern day business needs.

## **What are the three major issues facing Douglas County and how to expect in four years to make it so they are not major issues when your tenure is through?:**

1. State budget. Douglas needs to be prepared for the state to push down unfunded mandates and raid county funds. If Douglas is not united at the County Commission level things will be worse in four years.

2. County budget. Douglas needs a plan B and C. The residents need to know what the status of the budget is at all times. The residents need to what the county is doing to adjust with the changing times. The county needs to make prudent business decisions just as private business operators must.

3. Use of county resources (water, land, mountains, Lake Tahoe). We need a balanced approach. Whenever a direction is "No" (growth, building, business, more...) the community loses.

## **What have you done to help Douglas County be a better community?:**

First and foremost I run programs for at-risk youth. My goal is to help youth become productive prosocial members of our community. I have also been active as community volunteer in many areas of our community:

1. Douglas County Planning Commission – current chairperson.
2. Douglas County Search and Rescue – member.
3. Barton Hospital Foundation Board – member.
4. Keep Improving Douglas Schools – vice chair.
5. Douglas County Parks and Recreation Commission – chair and vice chair.
6. China Springs Youth Camp Advisory Board – member.
7. Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association – AAA League President.
8. Leadership Lake Tahoe – chosen by fellow members as spokesperson.
9. Pop Warner Football and AAU Basketball – Coach

**What boards, commissions, or other experience do you have?:**

See Nos. 1,3,4,5,6,7 in previous answer.

**Why should voters vote for you over someone else?:**

My professional work and volunteer work experience has proven my knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead when faced with major challenges. My skills developed as a trained mediator will serve the county well during a time of conflict and challenge. My home is at the lake and my business is in the Carson Valley. This allows me to bring a unique perspective to the District 4 Seat.

**What would you do to make the lake and valley more unified?:**

United we are strong ... divided we lose. With the looming budget issues Douglas County needs to be as united as possible. My skills as a mediator will prove helpful in bringing groups together for a common cause ... maintaining the

community we have decided to live and raise our families in.

**BlueGo, the public transit, is mired in lawsuits and bankruptcy. Do we need public transit on the South Shore? If so, how do you propose to make it functional?:**

The South Shore is in need of a public transit authority. One system is better for the economy, visitors, and the environment. The entire structure of the current system needs to be redeveloped. The current system was not designed to be self sufficient, was not appropriately governed, or effectively managed.

**What is your stance on the 100-room rule for gaming growth in the county?:**

The recent passage of the 100-room rule for gaming growth in Douglas County is an example of economic protectionism. This ordinance restricts business. In order to have 16 gaming machines (instead of 15) a business must build 100 rooms. Why? The current occupancy rate for rooms in Douglas County is 41 percent. If a business must "invest in our local economy" it should be in an area identified as a need such as roads, schools, senior services, social services, law enforcement, etc.

**Consolidation of water agencies is stalled, yet ratepayers are faced with higher bills. What are your thoughts on this issue?:**

The county picked one direction (Plan A) and paid an out of the area consultant a lot of money to develop a plan to consolidate the expenses of operating and maintaining separate systems. There should have been alternative plans developed in case the citizens did not agree with Plan A. Plan A was a bust and the county was left with no alternative but to dramatically raise rates.

1. The USDA Rural Economic Development has grant funding

available for exactly what Douglas County water users are facing. The county has not applied for the funding.

2. Actually consolidating the water systems (not just the ratepayers) will reduce operational expenses.

3. Whenever there is an issue that can financially impact residents alternative plans need to be developed.

**On the November ballot is an ordinance regarding the Minden airport. What is your position on it and why?:**

The proposed airport ordinance is the result of the county, the organized opposition, and those organized in support of the airport operations getting together and working out a compromise that all have agreed to. Furthermore, the local airport is vital to Douglas County being viewed as business friendly. Without airport access businesses like GE and Starbucks would not have moved to our county. For those reasons I agree with the proposed airport ordinance.

**Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?:**

I would not accept campaign money or support from any group that expects me to make decisions based on the level of their contribution. I am not accepting money or support from any group that alienates others or is not willing to listen to both sides of an issue.

**Tell us something about yourself that voters don't already know:**

I was born in a military hospital and, before attending University of California at Davis, I lived in Germany, Japan, Maryland, Arizona, Ohio, Kentucky, and California.