

Politicians harp on private partnerships at Lake Tahoe without providing a vision

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Based on the title of the 16th annual Lake Tahoe Environment Summit – Public-Private Partnerships-Investing in the Future of Lake Tahoe – a huge component was missing. That component is the private entities that are going to do the work and pony up the money.

No one who has tried (successfully or unsuccessfully) to bring the economic and environmental change that was touted by politician after politician as being so critical to the survival of the Lake Tahoe Basin spoke at the Aug. 13 event.

Real life stories of why people and/or corporations are or are not coming to Tahoe were not delivered. And yet, the politicians went on ad nauseam about the private component being the key.



Sens. Dean Heller, R-Nev., and Dianne

Feinstein, D-Calif.,
talk at the Aug. 13
Lake Tahoe
Environmental Summit.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

Without knowing what is or isn't working for the private sector, encouraging the positives and fixing the negatives are not possible.

Summit host Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., and Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, touched on how the process for how projects get off the ground needs to change.

Heller said he has heard from the private sector that it needs the approval process to be streamlined in order for capital to come in.

"Last year we talked about collaboration and needing to do more with less," Heller said. "We have made progress and we have more to do."

McClintock pointed to how a constituent wanted to fix a dock and the permits cost more than the project. He talked about how Homewood has been a ski resort for 40 years, but a long-term use permit has been stalled by environmental litigation. He spoke of an economic report just released to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors that talked about people leaving Lake Tahoe in droves. (A county official later told *Lake Tahoe News* she didn't know what report McClintock was talking about.)

"Decisions are being made by regulatory boards they can't even elect," McClintock said of his constituents. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Board are the entities he was referring to.

California Gov. Jerry Brown in talking about collaborating said, "It's time to rise out of our comfort zones."

“We need to transcend our small parochial views.”

Three non-elected persons did speak:

- Sudeep Chandra, an associate professor at UNR in the Natural Resources and Environmental Science Department, touched on aquatic invasive species, just as the politicians had. He said in the last year no new species have been discovered in Lake Tahoe, but that for every native species there two non-natives.
- Allen Biaggi, former director of Nevada’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and a former TRPA board member, spoke as vice chairman of the Tahoe Fund. He talked about the nonprofit coming out with an app for phones in the next couple weeks for beaches at Lake Tahoe. This was after Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., had earlier touted how the preceding night \$150,000 was raised in one dinner for this group. (She has attended every summit.)
- Mike Brown, chief of the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District, talked about the need for continued awareness of the threat of wildfires. From Edgewood Tahoe, where the summit was, it is possible to see the scar of the 2002 Gondola Fire and 2007 Angora Fire.

Money is a large reason the private sector is now needed to be a major player in restoring Lake Tahoe – which includes the lake, the infrastructure and the economy. Gone is the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, even though Feinstein said she and Heller are reintroducing it.



This is the second year in a row Govs. Brian Sandoval (Nevada) and Jerry Brown (California) have attended the summit.

Gone is the cash from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act. This brought in \$300 million of the \$521 million the federal government has spent on environmental improvement at Lake Tahoe since the inaugural summit of 1997.

Of the \$1.62 billion spent at Lake Tahoe on environment upgrades in the last 16 years, \$299 million has come from the private sector.

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval summed up the current state of Lake Tahoe: "While the basin's economy is largely dependent on the environmental health, the environmental health is dependent on the economy."

Other than needing cooperation and money from the private sector, the public officials provided no path to truly improve the environment or stimulate the economy.