

Kings Beach pier replacement moving forward



A new pier at Kings Beach would be designed to be used during high and low water years. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – One person doesn't want a dog use area, another longs for the days of his youth when there was better fish habitat and the beach went up to the road.

Those were the only two public comments during the June 27 Tahoe Regional Planning Agency meeting regarding the Kings Beach General Plan amendment and pier relocation presentation. The bi-state agency later this fall will vote on the pier, while State Parks has oversight on the General Plan.

The pier rebuild is expected to be the first project after the General Plan is approved. The environmental documents are being studied simultaneously. The California Tahoe Conservancy has a role in all of this as well because of land ownership.

The pier falls under TRPA's recreation threshold as well as scenic and fish resources.

"The focus is access to the water and off water to the town center," Tiffany Good, TRPA planner, told the board on Wednesday.

Even though the regulatory agency is also going through the shorezone plan now, staff assured the board the Kings Beach plan has been designed to fit today's standards and the preferred action plan for the new shorezone document.

Three locations were studied for where to put the pier, with the east end being the preferred. In total it will be 488-feet long. Of that, 213 feet will be fixed, with an 80-foot-transition, and then 215 feet of floating pier. Some of it overlaps, which is why the numbers don't add up.

Most of it will be 12-feet-wide, with 36 feet being the widest.

Rails will be put on the fixed portion. The pier will be single pilings.

During high water 18 boats could be tied up to the floating section. At no time will there be overnight mooring.

Overall, State Parks wants to make this hub of Kings Beach more user friendly. Parking will be changed to flow better. According to State Parks, 20 percent of the park is dedicated to parking. That will be reduced by 11 percent. Drop-off areas within the parking area will be added.

The motorized boat ramp will be removed, the basketball court will be relocated, a non-motorized storage area will be added, more picnic facilities are coming.

June 29 is the last day to comment on the pier and General Plan environmental documents. State Parks Commission is expected to vote on the General Plan amendment in October,

with TRPA taking action later in the fall.

Real estate VHR initiative doesn't make ballot

The vacation home rental initiative being backed by the South Lake Tahoe real estate community did not qualify for the ballot.

The effort was an attempt to counter what is a more Draconian measure that has qualified for the November election. That proposal would create a gradual ban on vacation home rentals in the city outside of the tourist core area.

The goal of the real estate group was to continue to allow VHRs in neighborhoods, but with constraints. They also wanted to create a commission that would have some oversight on the industry.

The real estate group submitted more than 1,800 to the county elections office. In the random, fractional count officials found a large number of those who signed were not actually registered voters in South Lake Tahoe. It would take 1,005 signatures to qualify.

Officials with the South Tahoe Association of Realtors could not immediately be reached for comment.

It is not known if they can push the county to count more signatures to see if there is the requisite number.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nevada unions a beacon after Supreme Court ruling

By Ruben J. Garcia, The Conversation

American labor unions have long been bracing for a “post-Janus” future in which collecting dues would be harder than ever.

The Janus case has been moving through the courts for two years and addresses the question of whether a public employee can be forced to pay dues to a union that represents him or her.

On June 27, the Supreme Court said no, which means the much-feared poorer future is now upon organized labor. While some pundits argue that this may “cripple” certain unions across the country, my research in Nevada suggests it doesn’t have to be that way.

Nevada unions have been operating under this very constraint for 65 years and yet have managed to thrive. As such, I believe they offer three important lessons for labor unions in other states as they grapple with an indisputably bleak legal environment.

Janus and right to work

The Supreme Court ruled in *Janus v. State, County and Municipal Employees* that employees who receive the benefits of union representation are not required to pay any fees for those services because that would be “compelled speech” in violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Governments in every state are now constitutionally prevented

from entering into agreements with their workers requiring the employees to pay for union expenses, such as collective bargaining and handling grievances. This creates the risk that more and more employees will become “free riders,” getting the benefits of union representation but bearing none of the costs.

Janus is the latest success of the right-to-work movement, which has been involved in litigation, legislation and public advocacy against what it calls “forced unionism” since the first federal collective bargaining laws were enacted in the 1930s.

Those laws were modeled on the principle that larger units of workers have greater bargaining power than smaller, segmented ones. In addition, the idea was that employees should be required to pay for union representation to maintain collective strength. And that the union in return would owe those who disagreed with it a duty of fair treatment.

In 1947, federal law was changed to allow states to adopt so called right-to-work laws, which, like the Janus ruling, forbid compulsory payment of union dues by workers who are covered under a collective bargaining agreement. Currently, 28 states have right-to-work laws.

Nevada, the state where I live, adopted its right-to-work law in 1952.

The Nevada paradox

While union membership has declined in many states with right-to-work laws, Nevada is among a few where the labor movement has remained fairly robust. Its union membership rate of 12.7 percent in 2017 was the second-highest among right-to-work states.

That’s one reason Nevada’s unions offer important lessons for the rest of the labor movement on how to succeed in today’s

more legally adverse environment.

My research has focused on private sector labor like the Culinary Workers and Bartenders Unions in Las Vegas, which are separate entities but bargain as one. Known as "the Culinary," together they are the largest union in Nevada, representing nearly 57,000 workers in Southern Nevada and some properties in the Reno area.

Although the Las Vegas hospitality industry is unique in its scale and need for trained workers, the Culinary has thrived for more than 80 years by balancing on three poles: an immigrant-focused organizing ethic, political engagement and delivering services to members both in the workplace and in the community.

Many of the strategies employed to successfully organize the Culinary workers, then, will be key to the survival and success of organized labor across the country in the post-Janus world.

Shoe-leather organizing

Most unions around the country are familiar with the kind of shoe-leather organizing that the Culinary has utilized over its lifetime, such as house visits, worker-to-worker contact and, increasingly, social media strategies. This has led to a nearly 90 percent unionization rate on the famous Las Vegas Strip.

But the Culinary stands out for the success of its efforts, which has included working hard to recruit immigrants and women. For example, it proudly calls itself Nevada's largest immigrant organization, with members from 173 countries, more than half of them Latino.

In addition, about 55 percent of its members are women, which is higher than the national average of about 46 percent.

In a right-to-work world, this kind of contact and engagement with workers – especially those who have not traditionally courted by unions – are essential for the survival of the labor movement.

Political engagement

The political engagement of the union has enhanced its importance among the state's politicians because it supports their candidacies through get-out-the vote campaigns, election monitoring and social media outreach.

The Culinary's endorsement is coveted, and the get-out-the-vote campaigns they engage in have been successful in electing many of their preferred candidates and preventing the rise of some of the conservative candidates that have appeared in other states.

This political engagement can have an impact at the bargaining table, leading to community support for their recently successful efforts to organize new casinos outside of the Las Vegas Strip. This suggests that after Janus, public sector unions will have to get more political, rather than less.

Delivering for the rank and file

Finally, the success of two depend on and contribute to the third lesson: The Culinary is able to deliver the kinds of extra services and benefits for its members that ensure they keep paying their dues.

Others include efforts to help its many immigrant members, such as the Citizenship Project, which has aided in the naturalization of nearly 20,000 Nevadans since its inception in 2001. Another member benefit is the Housing Partnership Program, which the union won from employers to help workers buy their first homes. And the Culinary Training Academy, a nationally recognized joint labor management training program, showcases the union's role in training the workforce to the

benefit of workers and the hospitality industry.

These are all examples of labor-community partnerships that show the importance of unions not just to their own members but to others as well.

Unions across the country will struggle somewhat in the short term to do these kinds of projects due to their diminished resources, but these are the kinds of priorities that will build the labor movement over the long haul.

The road forward

Now that the Janus decision is almost certain to cut into how much money unions can collect from the workers they represent, their survival will depend on how well they can learn from places like Nevada and do more in these three areas.

An unfortunate side effect of the Supreme Court ruling, however, is that “labor peace” – a good working relationship between a union and management, one of the main goals of any union when it makes a contract with a company – will be more elusive than ever. Instead core members are likely to become more energized, as we’ve seen in mass demonstrations by teachers in Arizona, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Arizona – all right-to-work states, in fact.

Without a doubt, Janus marks a milestone in the history of labor unions in the U.S. But to its right-to-work supporters’ chagrin, it might not be the future they wanted.

Ruben J. Garcia professor of law, co-director of UNLV Workplace Law Program, UNLV.

Toddler nearly drowns at Sand Harbor

A toddler is alive thanks to the quick actions of a school resource officer visiting Lake Tahoe on June 27.

Roy Mitchell Jr. with the Baltimore County Police Department said he noticed something unusual in the water approximately 10 feet from shore. Upon closer look, he determined it was a hand. Mitchell lifted a motionless female child, approximately 2 to 3 years old, from the lake at Sand Harbor.

He yelled for help and was met by the child's father, who took the child from Mitchell to the area of the beach where the rest of the family was.

Mitchell then told a lifeguard what happened. Mitchell said lifeguards assessed the child for about 10 minutes, determining no other emergency response was involved.

It is not known where the child was from or why she was in the water alone.

Mitchell was visiting the Incline Village park during a break from the National Association of School Resource Officers' (NASRO) School Safety Conference in Reno.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Surf Air in Truckee faces

lawsuit, tax liens

By Hugo Martin, Los Angeles Times

To hear Sudhin Shahani explain the latest turbulence at Surf Air, you would get the impression that all is well with the all-you-can-fly membership airline.

But the chairman and chief executive of Santa Monica-based Surf Air, which operates in Truckee, can't completely dismiss the sense that something is amiss at the 5-year-old carrier.

The trouble came to a head last week, when Encompass Aviation, which has operated Surf Air's planes in California since 2017, filed a lawsuit claiming that Surf Air is financially distressed and owes Encompass \$3.1 million for its services.

Read the whole story

Feds: Americans conserving water like never before

By Christopher Ingraham, Washington Post

Americans are conserving water in their homes like never before, according to a U.S. Geological Survey report released this month.

In per capita terms, domestic water use has plummeted from 112 gallons per day in 1980 to just 82 gallons in 2015, a 27 percent decrease. Take 30 gallon-sized milk jugs, fill them up with water and set them aside – that's how much water you're saving, every day, relative to the average American in 1980.

For a typical family of four that means about a half-ton of water saved, or eight cubic feet, every single day relative to 1980.

For the purposes of the USGS data, domestic water use encompasses everything we do with water at home.

Read the whole story

Union fees struck down, delivering blow to Calif. labor

By Adam Ashton and Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

California's public employee unions were handed a serious blow in a Supreme Court ruling Wednesday that forbids them from collecting fees from workers who benefit from their representation but do not want to join them.

In a 5 to 4 ruling, the court determined that public sector unions' so-called "fair share" fees violate "the free speech rights of nonmembers by compelling them to subsidize private speech on matters of substantial public concern."

The decision in *Janus vs. AFSCME* effectively makes California a "right to work" state, ending a 41-year precedent that allowed public sector unions to levy so-called fair share fees on workers who don't belong to labor organizations.

Read the whole story

Man who impersonated police at Tahoe sentenced

By Associated Press

A man who authorities say claimed to be a police officer and pointed a gun during a road rage encounter near Lake Tahoe has been sentenced to up to four years in prison.

Jared Kaiser, 33, was sentenced Monday after pleading guilty in April to assault with a deadly weapon.

[Read the whole story](#)

Cyclist killed in SLT by hit-and-run driver

A 33-year-old South Lake Tahoe bicyclist was killed early Wednesday morning by a hit-and-run driver.

The man, whose name has not been released, was found by construction workers in the early morning of June 27 when they arrived to work. He was already deceased.

This was on Highway 50 eastbound, west of the Upper Truckee River.

According to the California Highway Patrol, it appears the cyclist was going south across the eastbound lanes when he was

struck by the frontend of an unknown vehicle.

Anyone with information is asked to the CHP at 530.577.1001.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Misinformation and biases infect social media

By Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia and Filippo Menczer, The Conversation

Social media are among the primary sources of news in the U.S. and across the world. Yet users are exposed to content of questionable accuracy, including conspiracy theories, clickbait, hyperpartisan content, pseudo science and even fabricated “fake news” reports.

It’s not surprising that there’s so much disinformation published: Spam and online fraud are lucrative for criminals, and government and political propaganda yield both partisan and financial benefits. But the fact that low-credibility content spreads so quickly and easily suggests that people and the algorithms behind social media platforms are vulnerable to manipulation.

Our research has identified three types of bias that make the social media ecosystem vulnerable to both intentional and accidental misinformation. That is why our Observatory on Social Media at Indiana University is building tools to help people become aware of these biases and protect themselves from outside influences designed to exploit them.

Bias in the brain

Cognitive biases originate in the way the brain processes the information that every person encounters every day. The brain can deal with only a finite amount of information, and too many incoming stimuli can cause information overload. That in itself has serious implications for the quality of information on social media. We have found that steep competition for users' limited attention means that some ideas go viral despite their low quality – even when people prefer to share high-quality content.

To avoid getting overwhelmed, the brain uses a number of tricks. These methods are usually effective, but may also become biases when applied in the wrong contexts.

One cognitive shortcut happens when a person is deciding whether to share a story that appears on their social media feed. People are very affected by the emotional connotations of a headline, even though that's not a good indicator of an article's accuracy. Much more important is who wrote the piece.

To counter this bias, and help people pay more attention to the source of a claim before sharing it, we developed Fakey, a mobile news literacy game (free on Android and iOS) simulating a typical social media news feed, with a mix of news articles from mainstream and low-credibility sources. Players get more points for sharing news from reliable sources and flagging suspicious content for fact-checking. In the process, they learn to recognize signals of source credibility, such as hyperpartisan claims and emotionally charged headlines.

Bias in society

Another source of bias comes from society. When people connect directly with their peers, the social biases that guide their selection of friends come to influence the information they see.

In fact, in our research we have found that it is possible to

determine the political leanings of a Twitter user by simply looking at the partisan preferences of their friends. Our analysis of the structure of these partisan communication networks found social networks are particularly efficient at disseminating information – accurate or not – when they are closely tied together and disconnected from other parts of society.

The tendency to evaluate information more favorably if it comes from within their own social circles creates “echo chambers” that are ripe for manipulation, either consciously or unintentionally. This helps explain why so many online conversations devolve into “us versus them” confrontations.

To study how the structure of online social networks makes users vulnerable to disinformation, we built Hoaxy, a system that tracks and visualizes the spread of content from low-credibility sources, and how it competes with fact-checking content. Our analysis of the data collected by Hoaxy during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections shows that Twitter accounts that shared misinformation were almost completely cut off from the corrections made by the fact-checkers.

When we drilled down on the misinformation-spreading accounts, we found a very dense core group of accounts retweeting each other almost exclusively – including several bots. The only times that fact-checking organizations were ever quoted or mentioned by the users in the misinformed group were when questioning their legitimacy or claiming the opposite of what they wrote.

Bias in the machine

The third group of biases arises directly from the algorithms used to determine what people see online. Both social media platforms and search engines employ them. These personalization technologies are designed to select only the most engaging and relevant content for each individual user.

But in doing so, it may end up reinforcing the cognitive and social biases of users, thus making them even more vulnerable to manipulation.

For instance, the detailed advertising tools built into many social media platforms let disinformation campaigners exploit confirmation bias by tailoring messages to people who are already inclined to believe them.

Also, if a user often clicks on Facebook links from a particular news source, Facebook will tend to show that person more of that site's content. This so-called "filter bubble" effect may isolate people from diverse perspectives, strengthening confirmation bias.

Our own research shows that social media platforms expose users to a less diverse set of sources than do non-social media sites like Wikipedia. Because this is at the level of a whole platform, not of a single user, we call this the homogeneity bias.

Another important ingredient of social media is information that is trending on the platform, according to what is getting the most clicks. We call this popularity bias, because we have found that an algorithm designed to promote popular content may negatively affect the overall quality of information on the platform. This also feeds into existing cognitive bias, reinforcing what appears to be popular irrespective of its quality.

All these algorithmic biases can be manipulated by social bots, computer programs that interact with humans through social media accounts. Most social bots, like Twitter's Big Ben, are harmless. However, some conceal their real nature and are used for malicious intents, such as boosting disinformation or falsely creating the appearance of a grassroots movement, also called "astroturfing." We found evidence of this type of manipulation in the run-up to the

2010 U.S. midterm election.

To study these manipulation strategies, we developed a tool to detect social bots called Botometer. Botometer uses machine learning to detect bot accounts, by inspecting thousands of different features of Twitter accounts, like the times of its posts, how often it tweets, and the accounts it follows and retweets. It is not perfect, but it has revealed that as many as 15 percent of Twitter accounts show signs of being bots.

Using Botometer in conjunction with Hoaxy, we analyzed the core of the misinformation network during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. We found many bots exploiting both the cognitive, confirmation and popularity biases of their victims and Twitter's algorithmic biases.

These bots are able to construct filter bubbles around vulnerable users, feeding them false claims and misinformation. First, they can attract the attention of human users who support a particular candidate by tweeting that candidate's hashtags or by mentioning and retweeting the person. Then the bots can amplify false claims smearing opponents by retweeting articles from low-credibility sources that match certain keywords. This activity also makes the algorithm highlight for other users false stories that are being shared widely.

Understanding complex vulnerabilities

Even as our research, and others', shows how individuals, institutions and even entire societies can be manipulated on social media, there are many questions left to answer. It's especially important to discover how these different biases interact with each other, potentially creating more complex vulnerabilities.

Tools like ours offer internet users more information about disinformation, and therefore some degree of protection from its harms. The solutions will not likely be only

technological, though there will probably be some technical aspects to them. But they must take into account the cognitive and social aspects of the problem.

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