

Rent control decision coming to California voters

By Angela Hart, Sacramento Bee

A hotly contested battle over rent control in California just got more explosive.

Tenants rights activists have qualified for the November ballot an initiative that would clear the way for cities and counties across California to pass strong rent control laws, as local and state lawmakers struggle to address a widening housing crisis that has pushed people into homelessness and out of the state in search of cheaper living elsewhere.

The Secretary of State's office reported Friday evening that proponents behind an initiative to repeal a 1995 state law called the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act have gathered enough valid signatures to qualify for the November 6, 2018 ballot. The existing state law sets tight limits on the type and number of housing units that rent control can apply to.

[Read the whole story](#)

Report: No minimum wage worker in U.S. can afford a 2-bedroom rental

By Dakin Andone and Jessica Campisi, CNN

There's not a single state, county or metropolitan area in the

entire United States where a full-time worker earning the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour can afford a modest 2-bedroom apartment.

And if those workers wanted to? They'd have to work 122 hours a week. Every week. All year.

This is according to a report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition, or NLIHC, which found U.S. workers need to earn \$22.10 an hour to afford a "modest" two-bedroom rental. That's about three times the federal minimum wage.

Read the whole story

Calif. better prepared for wildfire season

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

When Anne Faught got a knock on her front gate recently, she was surprised to find two uniformed men at her rural Marin County property, one with a clipboard.

The firefighters had come to her home for an impromptu safety inspection. They were making sure she had cleared hazards like flammable brush and overgrown trees, both common in the small town of Woodacre, where houses like Faught's nestle against a landscape of picturesque but perilous fire-prone hills.

"I just did \$3,000 worth of tree work," Faught said, pointing to two compost bins stuffed with leaves and branches. "We all saw what happened last year."

In the wake of the most destructive fire season in California

history, peaking with the fast-burning Wine Country blazes that killed 41 people and wiped out nearly 9,000 homes and other buildings, pressure to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire has been immense. And in many ways, the response has been proportionate.

Read the whole story

Paid parking possible at Van Sickle in the future

While it's free for now, officials are looking to start charging for parking at Van Sickle Bi-State Park on the South Shore.

"As far as the fees, I would expect Van Sickle will follow along with all the rest of the state parks fees. We have recently gone to a standard entrance price across the board, the entrance fee will probably be \$10. That's the standard we are now charging for entrance only," Mike Shipman, Nevada State Parks law enforcement ranger at Van Sickle, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

For now, a donation tube is near the bathroom on the Nevada side.

The future of paid parking will be part of a broader discussion about the park that borders California and Nevada.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Boomtown may have to pay \$40,000 fine

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The operator of a Northern Nevada casino has settled a state Gaming Control Board complaint that it illegally operated an unlicensed interactive gaming system by linking to websites based in Curacao.

A representatives of BCH Gaming Reno, doing business as Boomtown Reno in Verdi, agreed to pay a \$40,000 fine after the company was caught providing links on its internet site to 15 websites, 11 of which offered options allowing visitors to wager money on various casino games.

Read the whole story

Calif. considers sharing control of power grid

By David R. Baker, San Francisco Chronicle

A web of power lines stretching from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific weaves all the western states and Canadian provinces into one vast electric grid.

But control of that grid is anything but unified.

Thirty-eight separate organizations, known as balancing authorities, run their own portions, some as big as states, others as small as counties. The California Independent System Operator, a nonprofit corporation, controls the grid throughout most of the Golden State, its experts monitoring the flow of electricity from a darkened room in Folsom lit by a wall of data screens.

A bill facing debate Tuesday in a California Senate committee – AB 813 – would make a revolutionary change to that decades-old system.

Read the whole story

Cold front could bring snow to Tahoe's peaks

Sunday is not the day to plan to be outside, at least in Lake Tahoe, according to the National Weather Service in Reno.

That “s” word (snow) is even in the forecast at elevations above 9,500.

For the rest of the basin it could be rain and thunderstorms.

Temperatures are expected to be 10 to 15 degrees cooler than normal. The high on Sunday is expected to be 61 degrees, with it returning to 74 by Tuesday.

Strong winds are expected as the cold front moves in. This will bring 2 to 4 foot waves on the lake.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

McDonald's going to test plastic straw alternative

By Zlati Meyer, USA Today

Under pressure by environmentalists, McDonald's said Friday that it will start testing alternatives to plastic straws at select locations in the U.S. later this year.

The burger giant also announced that it will adopt more eco-friendly paper straws across all its 1,361 restaurants in the United Kingdom and Ireland, a region where the company started testing the alternative to plastic straws earlier this year. The regional rollout begins in September.

Single-use straws are the scourge of the packaging-waste world because they don't easily biodegrade and aren't really necessary for most people when it comes to gulping a soft drink.

[Read the whole story](#)

Growing number of Nev. voters eschews 2-party system

By Yvonne Gonzalez, Las Vegas Sun

Tens of thousands more voters were registered as neither Democrat or Republican this midterm election compared with

2014, with most of that growth coming from Libertarians.

Voters outside the Democratic and Republican primaries had a limited ballot of nonpartisan candidates in their jurisdiction to choose from. A slew of ideological differences separate candidates and voters outside the two-party system, but in the November general election, those ballots could tip the scales for Republican or Democratic candidates.

Read the whole story

West Coast a haven for unsheltered homeless

By Margot Kushel, The Conversation

One-quarter of homeless people in the U.S. live in California, despite Californians making up only 12 percent of the population.

Not only is homelessness more common on the West Coast, but it is also more visible because a higher proportion of homeless people are unsheltered. In the U.S., 24 percent of homeless people sleep outside, in vehicles or somewhere else not meant for human habitation. But that varies greatly from place to place: In California, 68 percent of homeless people are unsheltered, compared to just 5 percent in New York.

Visitors to the West Coast may be shocked to find the tents that line cities from San Diego to Seattle. Like a modern-day “Grapes of Wrath,” the tents are a stark reminder of the suffering of the thousands living outside, homeless.

What’s to blame for such high numbers of unsheltered homeless

on the West Coast? The reason isn't drug use, mental health problems or weather. Rather, it is due to the extreme shortage of affordable housing.

Life unsheltered

As a physician and researcher who provides medical care for people experiencing homelessness, I have seen firsthand how devastating homelessness is to health.

Being unsheltered is terrifying, humiliating and isolating. People living without shelter lack access to toileting facilities, sinks and showers. They have no way to store or prepare food and no protection from the elements. Hunger is common.

Sleeping in makeshift beds or on the ground, they get little sleep. They must contend with having their possessions stolen. They face frequent forced moves, which disrupt relationships and make it difficult for family, friends or service providers to find them.

People who are unsheltered are at high risk of physical and sexual abuse. If they struggle with substance use disorders, their use of drugs and alcohol occurs in public, leaving them open to arrest. There are no places to refrigerate or store medicines, no place to receive mailed appointment reminders or a visit from a visiting nurse, no place to dress a wound or plug in medical equipment like oxygen. Without access to hygiene facilities, they are at high risk for communicable diseases like hepatitis A.

Unaffordable housing

Some assume that homelessness is so common on the West Coast because people move here when they become homeless, but data do not support this. Most people experience homelessness close to where they lost their housing. My team's research in Oakland found that 81 percent of older adults who are homeless

became homeless in the Bay Area. Only 10 percent had lost their housing outside of California.

Instead, the high rate of homelessness can be attributed to the lack of affordable housing in these regions. The West Coast suffers from rising costs of rental housing, stagnant incomes for low-wage workers and a decline in federal support for affordable housing. For example, California has gained 900,000 renter households since 2005, but lost \$1.7 billion in state and federal funding for affordable housing.

Extremely low-income households – defined as those with income less than 30 percent of the area median income – are at the highest risk of homelessness. Nationally, there are only 35 units available for every 100 extremely low-income households.

In the West, these shortages are more severe: Nevada has 15 units available for every 100 extremely low-income households; California has 21.

In 2017, for the first time in 13 years, Los Angeles opened its wait list for housing choice vouchers. These vouchers allow households to pay 30 percent of their income in rent, with the rest paid by the government. There were 600,000 applicants for just 20,000 spots on the list, highlighting the enormous unmet need.

Who pays for homeless services

Why are people on the West Coast so much more likely to be unsheltered than homeless people in other parts of the country? It reflects differing government priorities .

New York City, where there is a legal right to shelter, spends approximately \$17,000 per homeless person per year on homeless services. Massachusetts spends approximately \$14,000 per year. Los Angeles, by contrast, spends approximately \$5,000.

With enormous numbers of people living outside, West Coast

cities are scrambling for solutions. Some cities, like Seattle, have created sanctioned homeless encampments, bringing hygiene facilities and other services. However, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homeless cautions that this approach is costly and doesn't provide a solution to homelessness.

Other cities are following San Francisco's example and creating navigation centers, homeless shelters with added services. Unlike typical shelters, these centers allow people to come in groups, bring pets and belongings and stay all day.

Many areas have passed tax increases to fund new housing and services. These efforts show modest success but continue to struggle against the unfavorable housing conditions that lead people to become homeless in the first place.

So where can we go from here? There are solutions to homelessness, but, in my view, these will not succeed without solving the affordable housing crisis that is the underlying cause of homelessness.

For people who are chronically homeless and have disabling conditions, permanent supportive housing is highly effective. This type of subsidized housing offers supportive services, without the requirement that people be sober or engaged in medical care. Studies show that expanding permanent supportive housing has reduced the number of people experiencing homelessness in many parts of the country.

The success of permanent supportive housing has been overshadowed by increases in people becoming newly homeless due to the lack of affordable housing. In my view, preventing and ending homelessness will require a commitment to creating housing that is affordable to all.

Margot Kushel is professor of medicine, UC San Francisco.