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Looking Beyond Local
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The Week of August 21, 2026

Bug Fire Containment Grows, Evacuations Lifted



Bug and Stallion Fires, Photos courtesy of Truckee Meadows Firefighters and Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District

By Sydney Trainor

Fire season is in full swing across Nevada, with several wildfires burning thousands of acres in the northern part of the state. The Bug and Stallion fires remain active, while crews have made significant progress on containment, and investigations have provided new information about how the fires started.

The Bug Fire started on Aug. 8 around 3:30 p.m., north of Reno between Cold Springs and the California state line. On Aug. 10, it was reported at 4% containment with 17,000 acres burned. Since then, as of Aug. 18, the fire has burned 93,733 acres, with containment rising to 87%.

The Fred Mountain Fire started the next day, Aug. 9, off Red Rock Road, northeast of the Bug Fire. On Aug. 10, both fires combined and have since been referred to as just the Bug Fire.

The cause of both fires was identified as human. On Aug. 11, Washoe County Sheriffs arrested Christine Mitchell on suspicion of starting the Fred Mountain Fire. According to the investigation, Mitchell intentionally started several fires after leaving a residence near 1300 block of Fred Mountain Road.

According to the Sheriff's department, Mitchell admitted that she had started the fire to responding crews. In addition to being arrested for third-degree arson, she was also charged with possession of a controlled substance (less than 14 grams).

"I am proud of the work our deputies and detectives put into this investigation and thankful for the coordination with our fire service partners. Starting another fire while crews were already committed to an active wildfire placed additional strain on emergency resources and unnecessarily threatened additional portions of our community. We will continue to thoroughly investigate this incident and hold the individual responsible accountable," said Sheriff Darin Balaam. The investigation remains ongoing.

Nearby, the Stallion Fire started on Aug. 10 near Pyramid Lake. It has since expanded towards Wadsworth and was also identified as human caused. As of Aug. 18, the fire was at 85% containment with 40,691 acres burned.

According to the Aug. 18 update, all evacuations and fire-related road closures have been lifted from the Bug Fire areas, and containment continues to increase. Evacuations have also been lifted for the Stallion Fire, although some road, trail, and other closures in the area are still in effect.

On Aug. 15, the Shoshone Fire started in Churchill County, 58 miles northeast of Fallon. As of Aug. 17, 7,934 acres had burned and the perimeter was 0% contained. According to the Bureau of Land Management, the fire is under a full suppression strategy, with crews actively working and 115 personnel assigned.

Other fires across the state are dying down. The Ward Fire, south of Ely, started on July 31 due to lightning. The last available update reports 8,683 acres burned, with the fire 95% contained. A forest closure is still in effect where the fire burned.

On Aug. 10, the Bureau of Land Management provided a final update on the New Pass Fire, which started July 26 about 30 miles northwest of Austin. The fire was caused by lightning, and roughly 37,899 acres were burned.

For more fire updates and evacuation maps, visit https://inciweb.wildfire.gov/.



Vegas to Reno Race Partners with RennerVation Foundation



Course Map, Courtesy Best in the Desert Racing Association

By Sydney Trainor

The Casey Folks Vegas to Reno off-road race celebrated its 30th anniversary last week, kicking off with the Reno Off-Road Festival on Aug. 12. Academy Award nominee and philanthropist Jeremy Renner served as the grand marshal of the race, leading festivities and waving the green flag. "There's nothing else that makes me feel like a kid than, you know, racing and running around on the desert," said Renner.

The race is the longest point-to-point race in the United States, and covers over 500 miles of backroads and harsh desert terrain. This year marks the 30-year anniversary of the race and features a unique twist. Presented by MagnaFlow, this year's race is called "The Other Way," marking the first time in history that the race ran in reverse, starting in Reno and traveling south instead.

In addition to Jeremy Renner being the Grand Marshal, The RennerVation Foundation was the official charity partner of the off-road event. "We're here to create an awareness, and a lot of people aren't aware of what we're doing," Renner explained, "So, they know about it, and they can see our cause of action, they can come help us help these kids."

The RennerVation Foundation is a local nonprofit dedicated to serving at-risk youth and children in foster care. The organization empowers these children through a combination of programs, support, and mentorship, with a mission to "create a community where all children feel valued, supported and inspired to achieve their dreams."

As part of the race partnership, the foundation launched its "Miles That Matter" campaign, allowing supporters to sponsor race miles for $20 each. With more than 300 teams expected to travel roughly 500 miles, the foundation set a goal of sponsoring more than 150,000 collective race miles. By Aug. 13, the campaign had raised over $25,000, with proceeds directly supporting RennerVation Foundation programs.

The foundation offers several programs, including Youth on the Move, Foster Fashion, Pave Your Way, Camp RennerVation, and Christmas on the Comstock. These programs provide transportation, clothing, resources for youth aging out of foster care, as well as fun childhood experiences and opportunities for connection.

Renner shared the most rewarding part of working with the foundation, saying, "I think there's two things. Watching a child go from disruptive behavior to leadership…when they feel listened to and witnessed and understood and loved, they become great leaders." He said, "The other great reward is watching how community comes in to help us help these kids."

Putting on these programs requires significant time, funding, and volunteer support. Renner highlighted the role the community and local businesses play in helping the foundation carry out its programs. "Even the smaller businesses, all the volunteers, it's huge. We have to have these volunteers," he said. "These aren't easy programs, because kids have gone through a whole lot. So it takes a little bit extra help."

Ford, a sponsor of the RennerVation Foundation, made its own mark on the race with the racing debut of the Ford Raptor T1+. The off-road vehicle was originally built by Ford Racing and M-Sport specifically for the Dakar Rally, and had never competed in America before. Mitch Guthrie and co-driver Kellon Walch drove the Raptor T1+ to a first-place finish in their class and second place overall.

Eric Hardin secured first place in the overall combined four-wheel results, finishing with a time of 7:37:55.986 in the Unlimited Truck (2WD) division. Guthrie came in second overall just over five minutes later, with a time of 7:43:49.379, competing in the Rally Raid (4WD) class. Third overall was Dave Mason Jr. in the Unlimited Truck (2WD) class, with a time of 7:46:11.606.

All three of the overall moto class winners competed in the Open Pro Motorcycle class. Ciaran Naran came in first place at 7:44:56.755, followed by Preston Campbell at 7:46:30.233. Caiden Fenstermaker secured third place overall with a time of 8:24:28.169.

For more race results, visit unltd.livemotorsports.com/results.

To support the RennerVation foundation, visit rennervationfoundation.org.



Photo Courtesy Shania Brown



Photo Courtesy Shania Brown



Ford Raptor T1+, Photo Courtesy Sydney Trainor

COMMENTARY

Rent Control is a Public Health Issue

By Dr. Traci Biondi

Affordable housing is an issue in Nevada, and in the United States, largely driven by a supply-demand problem. We have seen the price of homes escalate and don't have enough land or developments in the works to meet the growing demand.

We are seeing local officials saying it's time to cut red tape and make building homes easier by loosening zoning laws and burdensome environmental regulations. That seems like a well-reasoned approach to address the crisis.

However, I am very concerned that Nevada legislators will consider bringing back legislation to implement rent control to address the housing issue. This is not only a bad economic decision, but it will also impact the health of our community.

Yes, rent control impacts public health. Numerous studies have shown this. As a doctor, that is a concern to me, as it should be to policymakers.

There are many ways that rent control impacts the health of tenants. First, rent control disincentivizes landlords to make improvements to housing, so renters in price-controlled units may miss out on necessary safety upgrades, like better lighting, smoke and radon detectors, or new appliances. Landlords also defer maintenance to units, which diminishes housing conditions. Poor housing quality has been shown to contribute to higher risks of physical injuries, while outdated infrastructure can increase exposure to environmental hazards.

A 2021 study of rental units in New York found that rent-controlled units had a higher presence of rodents, mold, water leaks, toilet breakdowns, and heating breakdowns than unregulated units.

In a 2011 study in the American Journal of Public Health, researcher Samiya Bashir wrote, "Significant research demonstrates the harmful association of asthma, neurological damage, malnutrition, stunted growth, accidents, and injury with household triggers like poor insulation, combustion appliances, cockroach and rodent infestation, dust mites, hyper- and hypothermia, unaffordable rent, and dangerous levels of lead in soil and household paint. Furthermore, the culture of isolation ensures that the persons who are most vulnerable to these diseases — infants, children, the elderly, the chronically ill, and the immunocompromised — are also those who spend the most time indoors and alone."

Second, rent control can reduce housing turnover, making it harder for new residents to find rental units in controlled markets. This scarcity may lead to overcrowded living conditions or push people into smaller or shared spaces that are not ideal for long-term living, increasing stress, anxiety, and exposure to illnesses. Overcrowded housing is linked to a higher risk of contagious diseases, mental health issues, family stress, and has a negative impact on children's health, environment and schooling.

Last year, Californians overwhelmingly rejected an initiative (Prop. 33) that was on the November ballot that would have allowed local governments to expand rent control. It lost in all 58 counties, even in San Francisco with its sky-high housing prices. Similar proposals failed in 2018 and 2020.

Prop. 33 would "allow cities and counties to put new restrictions on building new housing; it would take away incentives for people who are trying to build more housing," said Nathan Click, a spokesperson for the "No on 33" campaign. "It would lower the supply of housing, and it would actually drive-up rents across the state."

We often look to California as an example of policy that we should *not* follow. This is the one time I'd say we should follow their example. If given the option, I would bet that Nevada voters would also reject rent-control initiatives. I think it wise that Nevada legislators look West and realize that rent control is not popular with voters and is harmful to the health of Nevada residents.

Traci Biondi, MD, is the Chief Medical Officer for Prominence Health in Reno. She is a board certified anesthesiologist and received her medical degree from University of Nevada Reno School of Medicine.

Benitez-Thompson on the Record

By Rachel Dahl

Democratic congressional candidate Teresa Benitez-Thompson used a recent appearance on *Nevada Newsmakers* to draw contrasts with her Republican opponent on affordability, tariffs, and political independence, while also laying out her position on Israel, Gaza, and U.S. involvement in Iran.

Benitez-Thompson, a former Nevada Assembly majority leader who is running in Congressional District 2, told host Sam Shad that if elected, she would put a heavy emphasis on constituent services, particularly helping Northern Nevada residents, counties, and local governments navigate federal agencies and secure assistance.

"A lot of constituent services," she said when asked what a first-term member of Congress can realistically accomplish. "You can get things done and you can help your local governments, your municipalities, your counties."

Affordability was one of the first issues raised in the interview.

Benitez-Thompson argued that tariffs and other federal policies are contributing to higher household costs, using the price of a Fourth of July hamburger as an example. She said beef, fertilizer, diesel, produce, and transportation costs have all increased, hitting rural producers as well as consumers.

She said a rural Nevada farmer had described sharply higher fertilizer costs and pointed to diesel prices as another factor raising the cost of moving food into Nevada.

Benitez-Thompson blamed the current administration's tariff policy for part of those increases and said Northern Nevada families are increasingly feeling the pressure.

She also cited conversations with the Food Bank of Northern Nevada, saying she had been told the organization is seeing record numbers of people seeking food assistance.

Shad pushed back on assigning responsibility solely to the current administration, arguing that policies under both political parties and federal spending have contributed to inflation.

Benitez-Thompson acknowledged that elected officials cannot control every part of the economy, but said she believes the current round of tariffs is different because the increases are being driven directly by federal policy.

The discussion broadened into the balance of power between Congress and the presidency. Benitez-Thompson argued that Congress has surrendered too much of its authority to the executive branch and said lawmakers need to reassert their constitutional role.

She described herself as pragmatic rather than ideological.

"I'm about getting things done," she said. "I don't believe that you should be elected unless you can go in and actually go back to your community and say, this is a change that I have made for you."

She added that elected officials who fail to accomplish anything are "essentially loitering" on the public's time.

Benitez-Thompson said her record in the Legislature reflected a willingness to work across party lines and said she intends to take the same approach in Congress.

She also said she is willing to debate Republican David Flippo and argued candidates have an obligation to make themselves available to voters.

"If you say you're going to represent this community, the community has to know what you're about," she said.

Shad said *Nevada Newsmakers* has invited Flippo to appear on the program both individually and in a debate with Benitez-Thompson, but said the show was still working to secure his participation.

"We hope that that comes through," Shad said. "We're still working on it."

At the end of the interview, Shad again said Flippo was welcome on the program. Benitez-Thompson said she hoped her opponent would agree to appear and answer the same kinds of questions.

The interview turned to foreign policy late in the program, with Shad questioning positions on Israel and Gaza that Benitez-Thompson has posted publicly.

Benitez-Thompson said her statements were not aimed at appealing to a particular voting bloc. Instead, she said she began addressing the issue after repeatedly being asked about Gaza, humanitarian aid, and civilian rights during campaign forums around the district.

"There was a lot of concern," she said, adding that she believed she had an obligation to respond to questions voters were raising.

Continue Reading on Page 4.



VA Freedom 250 Virtual Exhibit

Staff Report

Celebrate the nation's 250th birthday by visiting the VA Freedom 250 Virtual Exhibit.

The exhibit ranges across American history, from an 1864 photo collage of the last living Veterans of the Revolution, to some of the medical innovations pioneered by VA researchers in recent decades.

Scan the QR code to see the exhibit.

https://new.express.adobe.com/webpage/P7mZyUBqjbcDx

Nevada Veterans Coalition

Staff Report

Unaccompanied service is open to the public at the Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Fernley on Aug. 27.

The service begins at 9 a.m.

Give Back at Veterans' Home

Staff Report

Are you looking for a meaningful way to give back? Join our team of caring and compassionate volunteers! No experience is needed, just a big heart and a little time. You can make a difference and brighten someone's day when you volunteer at the Northern Nevada State Veteran's Home.

Join our volunteer team. To get started, contact Amy Morley at 775-418-5066 or amy.morley@nnsvh.com or www.veterans.nv.gov; Applicants must pass a Tuberculosis test and background check.

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EVENTS

The Heat's Backing Off, But the Fun is Not

A late-summer trail ride across the Silver State

By Doris Rodriguez

Alright,

The mercury's finally starting to ease off a notch. That midsummer furnace that had us all sweating through our shirts and squinting at the horizon is finally giving way to breezier evenings and mornings.

First spot on the map is Ely for the White Pine County Fair & Horse Races from Aug. 21–23. Out there on the eastern edge of the state, at the White Pine County Fairgrounds, you'll find a proper county fair. There will be horse racing starting at 3 p.m. on Friday, and 1 p.m. both Saturday and Sunday. They've got ranch events too: broncs, barrels, roping, and the little ones getting their shot at mutton bustin'.

Admission is free on Friday.

If you find yourself on the Washoe Valley side of things, swing by the 40th annual Bowers Bluegrass Festival, Aug. 22–23, at Bowers Mansion Regional Park in New Washoe City. Bring a lawn chair or blanket, grab food from the trucks, and let the kids run free. The festival runs Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., with contra dancing and craft vendors in the mix. For kids under 12, admission is free.

Further south, in the heart of the state, Tonopah is throwing its own celebration on Aug. 22. The Crew MC Annual Bike & Car Show rolls into the Joe Friel Sports Complex for classic iron and shining chrome.

Come evening, head over to the Clair Blackburn Memorial Stargazing Park for a free Moon Night Star Party, which starts at dusk. The nights are cooling off just enough that you can sit out there without baking, and those Tonopah skies still put on one of the best shows in the whole country.

There's also a community swap meet on Aug. 22 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. for anyone who likes a little treasure-hunting before the stars take over. Classic Tonopah: shiny chrome by day, big sky by night, and nobody in a hurry.

And don't think about calling it quits after that weekend, because the Fallon Cantaloupe Festival & Country Fair kicks off Aug. 28–30 at the Rafter 3C Arena and Churchill County Fairgrounds. There will be tractor pulls, livestock shows, carnival rides, and plenty of melon to satisfy your sweet tooth. It's agriculture and community all in one happy package.

Then there's another main event: the Elko County Fair, running Aug. 28 through Sept. 7, with horse racing, stock-horse shows, team branding, and all the ranch-country tradition you could ask for.

The heat's backing off, the nights are getting friendlier, and Nevada's full of fun times and folks who know how to put on a proper show. Whether you're headed east to Ely, settling into Washoe Valley for bluegrass, or staring up at the Tonopah sky, there's still plenty of room on the trail.

Safe travels.

Fallon Cantaloupe Festival and Country Fair

Photo Courtesy Fallon Cantaloupe Festival and Country Fair

Staff Report

The Fallon Cantaloupe Festival & Country Fair returns Aug. 28-30, bringing three days of live music, food, vendors, competitions, and plenty of cantaloupe to the Rafter 3C Event Complex in Fallon.

Now in its 41st year, the festival draws visitors from across Nevada and beyond. In 2025, more than 12,000 people attended, including 7,200 visitors from outside Churchill County. Online tickets were purchased from 15 of Nevada's 17 counties and 25 states. A University of Nevada, Reno, study estimated the festival generated $7.08 million in total economic impact.

Agriculture remains at the heart of the weekend. Nevada residents can enter everything from photography, artwork, and quilts to canned goods, flowers, produce, and other homemade creations. And, of course, there are cantaloupes. The Special Cantaloupe Growing Contest recognizes the largest, roundest, most unusual, and ugliest Hearts of Gold cantaloupes.

Festivalgoers can also explore more than 150 vendors and catch live entertainment throughout the weekend. Austin Mo will perform Friday and Saturday nights, with Nevada country-rock band Left of Centre taking the stage Friday, and '90s country tribute band Nashville 90 performing Saturday.

From fair exhibits and competitions to shopping, food, and live music, the Fallon Cantaloupe Festival & Country Fair offers a weekend full of ways to celebrate Nevada's agricultural roots and rural communities.



File Photo

2026 Summer Soirée

Staff Report

The 2026 Annual Summer Soirée benefiting the Tonopah Historic Mining Park will be held Saturday, August 29, in Tonopah. The free community event will feature guided walking tours, historical reenactments, local industry representatives, food trucks, and live music.

Walking tours will be offered throughout the day with check-in at the Visitors Center. Industry representatives will be available from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., followed by food trucks from 6 to 8 p.m. and live music by Lie For Fun. A cash bar will be available from Tonopah Liquor Co.

Admission is free, and everyone is welcome.

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Junior Livestock Show & Sale

Tricounty Junior Livestock Show

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SEPTEMBER 4th thru 6th, 2026
WINNEMUCCA FAIRGROUNDS

Friday, September 4th
SHOW STARTS AT 4:00 PM

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SHOW STARTS AT 8:00 AM

Sunday, September 6th
BUYER'S BREAKFAST & COFFEE 9:00 AM
Sponsored by the Humboldt County Cattlewomen
LIVE SALE AUCTION 10:00 AM

Humboldt, Lander & Pershing Co. Youth Exhibitors

Individuals: Obtain top-quality beef, lamb, swine and goat at an attractive price. Friends and neighbors may share a purchase, but one individual will be responsible for payment. *Businesses*: Use your purchase to demonstrate your support for the community and the 4-H/FFA Programs. An individual business can make a purchase, or two or more businesses can pool resources and make a purchase. A business can also use purchases for employee barbecues or for goodwill-building gifts. One individual will be responsible for payment. *Organizations:* May auction off wrapped meat as a fundraiser or use the purchase for a club or organizational event.

Add-On Option: If you are unable to purchase an animal, you may still help by doing one of the following:
- Direct donations to exhibitors
- Flat fee donations
- Direct donation to the Cody Louk Memorial Scholarship Fund

Payments may be turned into the TCJLS board in advance of the sale. Payments must be made in the form of cash, check or ONLINE at https://tricojrls.fairwire.com/addon.aspx

Checks payable to TCJLS mail to TCJLS PO BOX 405 WMCA, NV 89446
Payments must be submitted no later than Sept. 30th, 2026

Beef (27)
Daphne Amato, Kress Barton, Lucy Brock, BobiRose Buckingham, Shane Doyle, Rhett Edwards, Addysen Edwards, Aiden Gibson, Taylor Hill, McKenna Hufford, Jocee Johnson, Jace Kimberlin, Kynslie Malay, George Malay, Hadley Nield, Jesse Nield, Averie Paredes, Roan Rianda, Hardy Rianda, Asa Rianda, Leah Silva, Wyatt Thomas, Jase Uhlmann, Bodie Vincent, Jhett Weagant, Eliza Weagant, Zoe Weagant, Chasen Wilkenson

Sheep (35)
Peyton Anguiano, Maddox Anguiano, London Anguiano, Darci Barton, Addison Billingsly, Alexander Brinker, Colton Cambell, Wyatt Douglass, Becky Doyle, Izabellah Foley, Izzah Foley, Rebah Foley, Kelly Friend-Ebar, Paislee Gibson, Matthew Hufford, Kira Hunsaker, David Huttman, Jesse Huttman, Jack Johnson, Tyann Kern, Hadley Knox, Korbin Knox, Alana Koson, Luke Morgan, Arianna Richards, Carson Richards, Evelynn Roysdon, Camdyn Simpson, Daniel Silva, Cole Swensen, Bria Swensen, Patricia Teichert, Tryston Tiechert, Annie Uhart, Adalyn Weatherford, Phoebe Weatherford

Swine (33)
Emilio Arteaga, Cain Arteaga, Cael Brooks, Aleiyah Dodson, Tinsley Harvey, Natalie Iwen, Brent Kenison, Dexton Kenison, Kaylem Kenison, Aaliyah Kersey, AyyDenn Kersey, Cade Liebsack, Hadlie Malay, Hank Malay, Joshua Malay, Kaydence Malay, Odessa Malay, Kendal Mills, Jordyn Nachiondo, Gemma Nuffer, Ruby Nuffer, Ian Paredes, Blayke Revak, Ian Revak, Jayla Schrempp, Bailey Sevy, Brock Staley, Cole Thayer, Chance Thomas, Adalysia Thompson, Lee Toland, Vynessa Toland, Gracie Wells, Penny Woytowicz

Goat (10)
Kloe Ball, Riley Ball, Abbigale Combes, Lynette Draper, Piper Linnenbringer, Eli Long, Bailey Miller, Naomi Miller, Jory Stockton-Boneck, Addison Tregellas

LEGISLATIVE

Nevada's Natural Resources Agenda Takes Shape



File Photo

By Rachel Dahl

Nevada lawmakers wrapped up two years of interim natural resources work Aug. 12 by advancing a broad package of proposals addressing water planning, groundwater, agriculture, wildfire, wildlife crossings, and pesticide use ahead of the 2027 legislative session.

The Joint Interim Standing Committee on Natural Resources held its sixth and final meeting of the 2025-26 interim in Carson City, approving bill draft requests and recommendations that could become legislation when lawmakers return to session next year.

Water dominated much of the meeting, beginning with a discussion of how a 2023 U.S. Supreme Court ruling has narrowed federal protection of wetlands, followed by presentations on restoring Walker Lake and Nevada's long-term water planning.

Lawmakers also took the unusual step of adding two bill draft requests during the meeting that were not included in the committee's original work session document, one addressing long-term statewide water planning and another dealing with the herbicide paraquat.

Nevada Forum co-chair Greg Baylor told lawmakers Nevada has not completed a comprehensive statewide water plan since 1999.

The Nevada Division of Water Resources is currently working on the first comprehensive update since then, with a tentative schedule calling for a full draft in winter 2027 and publication in winter 2028, ahead of the 2029 legislative session.

Baylor said Nevada law gives the state's water planning section responsibilities for water planning, data, conservation, drought, and coordination, but no longer requires completion of a comprehensive statewide water plan or establishes a schedule for future updates.

"The last comprehensive state water plan was published in 1999," Baylor told the committee, emphasizing the length of time since the state last completed such a plan.

He suggested lawmakers consider whether water planning should remain an occasional state project or become an ongoing responsibility with regular updates and accountability.

Chair Natha Anderson proposed that the committee request legislation addressing long-term water planning.

"Quite frankly, not having a water plan since the last century is a little bit alarming," Anderson said.

Assemblyman Ken Gray moved to advance the proposal, which passed with Assemblyman Reuben D'Silva Dong voting no. Dong said he supported water planning but believed the proposal had come before the committee too late for adequate consideration and that lawmakers had heard only one perspective.

The legislation has not yet been drafted, and committee members will have another opportunity to consider its details during the 2027 session.

Peter Stanton, chief executive of the Walker Basin Conservancy, told lawmakers Walker Lake has lost roughly 90% of its historic volume and about half of its surface area since the 1850s.

Declining inflows have increased salinity in the terminal lake, contributing to the collapse of its fishery. Stanton said the last Lahontan cutthroat trout was caught in Walker Lake in 2009 and the last fish of any species in 2015.

Since Congress created the Walker Basin Restoration Program in 2009, the conservancy has worked with 158 farmers and ranchers and acquired nearly 30,000 acre-feet of annual surface water rights for environmental purposes, about 60% of the program's long-term goal.

The organization has also retired more than 13,000 acre-feet of groundwater rights and opened more than 33 miles of the Walker River to public access.

Stanton said more than $100 million in federal funding has been invested in water-right acquisitions in the basin, along with more than $28 million for revegetation and water administration.

He warned, however, that the work remains heavily dependent on federal money and asked lawmakers to consider stable state funding that could be used both to administer water and to provide matching funds for federal grants.

During questioning, Stanton said groundwater rights retired through the program have been agricultural rights. Some formerly irrigated lands have been converted to wildlife habitat or dryland grazing, while other water has shifted toward more productive farmland.

Nevada environmental officials also briefed lawmakers on the effects of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 decision in *Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency*, which narrowed the wetlands covered under the federal Clean Water Act.

State officials said the ruling limits federal jurisdiction largely to wetlands with a continuous surface connection to relatively permanent federally protected waters.

That change could remove federal protection from some seasonal wetlands and floodplain areas in Nevada.

However, Nevada Division of Environmental Protection officials stressed that the change does not eliminate state authority.

Nevada's definition of "waters of the state" remains broader than the federal definition of "waters of the United States," meaning waters that fall outside federal Clean Water Act jurisdiction can still be regulated under state law.

Lawmakers questioned how federal jurisdiction applies to the Humboldt River and Rye Patch Reservoir, including intermittent and ephemeral tributaries. Officials said perennial waters flowing into the Humboldt remain clearly within federal jurisdiction, while intermittent or ephemeral drainages may shift in and out of federal jurisdiction as federal definitions change.

During its formal work session, the committee approved several additional recommendations.

One of the most extensive is an omnibus water bill developed through a stakeholder working group. The proposal includes changes to water grant programs, groundwater-right retirement, vested water-right claims, groundwater management plans, local groundwater boards, and special assessments.

Several rural lawmakers supported moving the proposal forward while reserving judgment until they can review the drafted bill.

The committee also approved recommendations to:

Establish a Healthy Soils Initiative modeled on legislation considered in 2025, including $100,000 in competitive funding for conservation districts.

Clarify enforcement authority over certain hemp and synthetic cannabinoid products.

Ask federal officials to address the exclusion of alfalfa growers from some federal agricultural regulations and relief programs.

Support continued discussion over participation in the Home Feeds Nevada program.

Request $1.5 million for Desert Research Institute cloud-seeding efforts.

Request $3 million for groundwater-right retirement.

Seek funding for the ALERTWest wildfire early-detection camera system and Nevada's Shared Stewardship program.

Develop additional funding sources for wildlife crossings.

Support efforts to improve outdoor recreation infrastructure and reduce visitor-related impacts.

The wildlife crossing proposal would consider funding mechanisms including tire-recycling fees, voluntary contributions during vehicle registration, and insurance premium taxes.

Ellison voted against that proposal, questioning whether motorists should face another charge and asking whether existing wildlife funding could cover the projects. Other lawmakers said they wanted specific funding amounts before making a final decision.

In public comment at the end of the meeting, Nevada Farm Bureau representative Bevan Lister urged lawmakers to include agricultural interests as the bills move forward and strongly opposed one provision of the water proposal that would exempt federal agencies from certain deadlines involving vested water-right claims.

Lister also questioned whether Nevada needs a statewide water plan at all, arguing that existing state water law already establishes how water should be appropriated and used.

Continued from Page 2- Benitez-Thompson

Benitez-Thompson said she continues to support a two-state solution and does not want Hamas to regain power or rebuild its military strength.

"In no way do we want to see a resurgence of Hamas," she said.

At the same time, she said rebuilding Gaza must include basic humanitarian needs such as food, clothing, shelter, clean water, and places for civilians to live.

On U.S. military support for Israel, Benitez-Thompson drew a distinction between defensive aid and what she described as unconditional support.

She said the United States should continue supporting defensive systems such as Iron Dome as part of its strategic relationship with Israel.

"But what it doesn't mean is just an unconditional check," she said, arguing that the relationship should be "changed and recalibrated."

Benitez-Thompson also described Iran as a longtime adversary and sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East.

"Iran is not our friend," she said.

Her criticism centered instead on the justification for recent U.S. military action involving Iran. She questioned what had changed to create an emergency requiring military involvement and said the administration had moved away from diplomacy too quickly.

Benitez-Thompson said concerns over Iran's nuclear program and missile capability are longstanding, but argued those concerns alone do not answer why military action was necessary at this particular moment.

She also separated that issue from Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, while acknowledging Israel's campaign against Hamas and saying too many civilians had been killed in the process.

Throughout the interview, Benitez-Thompson returned to the same theme: voters should know where candidates stand, even on difficult issues.

"We've got to be willing to have tough conversations," she said.

The entire show can be viewed by scanning the QR code:

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