

MAD IN NEVADA

Residents of The Silver State feel strongly about the mispronunciation of their state’s name. Presidents and news reporters have been booed when they messed up on the “a” sound—saying Ne-VAH-da (rhymes with ha ha) instead of Ne-VAD-a (rhymes with glad and mad). Recently, Assemblyman Harry Mortenson requested a draft of a concurrent resolution for the 2011 session that calls for acceptance of the “wrong” pronunciation. He told the Nevada News Bureau that he didn’t want to change the pronunciation for Nevadans but was trying to ask them to be more tolerant of others. Mortenson is termed out of office this year and will ask another lawmaker to introduce the resolution on his behalf. No word from Oregon or Missouri...

GOOD, BETTER, BEST

A new California law allows high school students to give their opinions—formally—about their classes and teachers. It assigns student governments the job of developing surveys that teachers may use for feedback on how they’re doing. The survey results are to be shared only with the teacher, not administrators or parents, and are not to go into teachers’ personnel files. Bill sponsor Senator Gloria Romero told the Los Angeles Times that students told her they “want a voice in evaluating the people who teach us.”

IT’S GREEN IN OLYMPIA

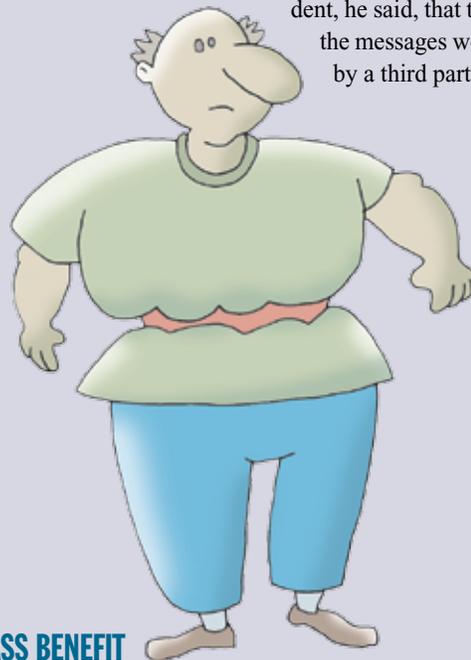
It was a lot quieter around the Washington Capitol this summer. Ground crews switched their 25 gas vehicles to battery-powered ones to save about \$42,000 and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 34 tons a year. “I’m surprised how snappy they are,” Scott Hobbs, a member of the grounds crew, told The Olympian. “And they’re quiet. I have to be more aware of pedestrians because they can’t hear the engine.” Ground crews are also mowing less often, leaving the grass clippings on the lawn, using organic fertilizers and composting more.

SMOOTH SAILING

An annual study by the Reason Foundation finds highways (in 2008) in the best condition in 19 years. Researchers credit the recession, in part, for causing people to cut down on driving, thus decreasing pavement deterioration, traffic congestion and crash fatalities. The study looks at state-owned roads in 11 categories, including unsafe bridges and narrow rural lanes, potholes, traffic conditions and traffic deaths. Researchers also looked at the cost effectiveness of highways. California and Hawaii have the most potholes in cities, while Alaska and Rhode Island hold that distinction for their rural roads. Overall, the most cost-effective state highway systems, according to the study, are in North Dakota, Montana, Kansas, New Mexico and Nebraska.

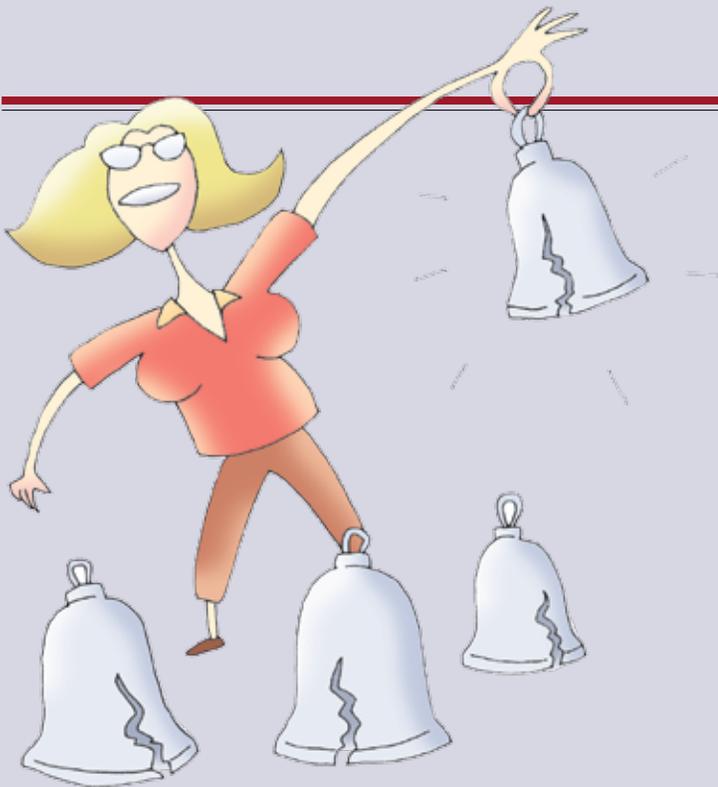
THIRD-PARTY WORDS

A Texas school violated the First Amendment’s free speech clause, a federal district judge ruled recently, when it refused to allow the option of a religious message on any of the holiday greeting cards it was selling to raise money for the arts program. The 2006 fundraiser allowed parents to choose art work created by their child along with a stock message—from an outside vendor—inside the card. Messages offered were, for example, “Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year” “Peace on Earth” and “...she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus.” Judge Lee Rosenthal said, “The fact that the school sent the order form to the parents does not make the contents of the form pure government speech.” It was evident, he said, that the form and the messages were prepared by a third party.



BIG BYPASS BENEFIT

Starting in January, 100 lucky government workers in South Carolina can get gastric-bypass or Lap-Band surgery paid for through the state health plan on a first-come, first-served basis, according to the Associated Press. To qualify, workers must have at least a 40-point body mass index and pass a psychological exam. Lawmakers OK’d the pilot program to address the state’s hefty obesity problem—30 percent of adults are obese and more than 60 percent are overweight. The state health plan covers 394,000 workers, their dependents and retirees. Six other states require insurance companies to cover gastric-bypass surgery.



A BELL FOR ALL

Did you know that each state and territory received a replica of the Liberty Bell in 1950 as part of a savings bond campaign? According to the book “A Celebration of State Capitols” by Richard R. Gibson, most states have chosen to display their bells at the state capitol. The replicas were cast in France. Lots more fun facts and photos can be found in the book, sold on the NCSL bookstore webpage.

TRASH GETS TRASHED

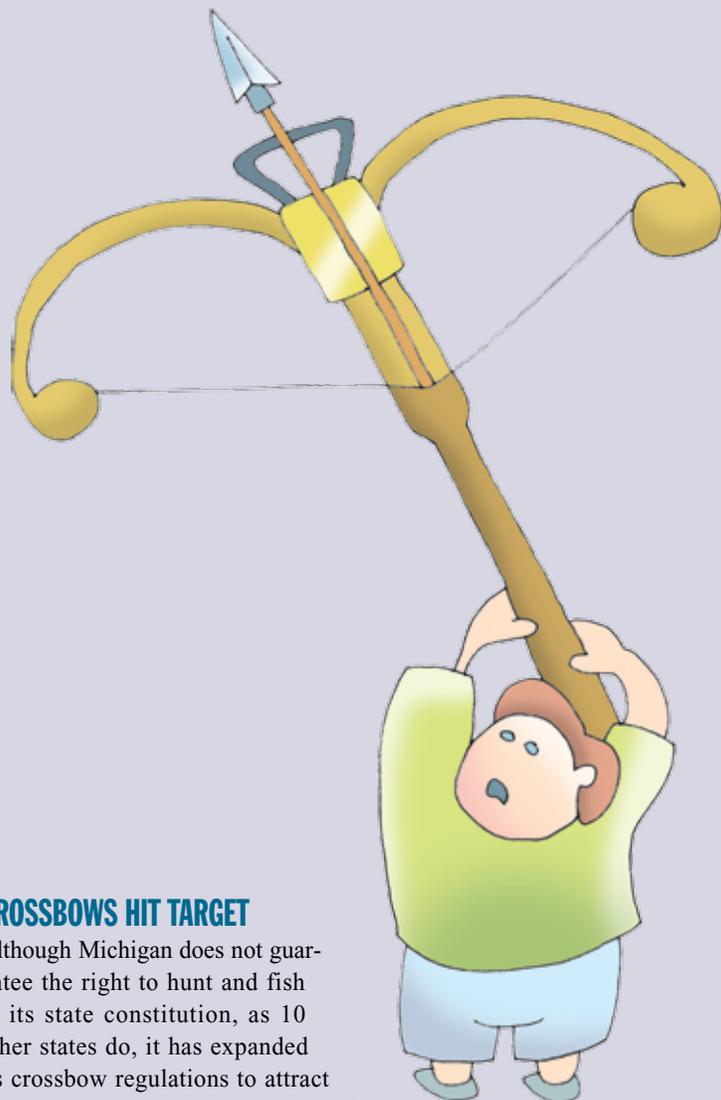
Washington state is going to have to wait a little longer before it can start receiving garbage from Hawaii. The U.S. Department of Agriculture told a federal judge that it canceled a Seattle contractor’s compliance agreement with Hawaiian Waste Systems but will conduct further analysis on the issue. According to The Oregonian, the agreement was to ship 150,000 tons of garbage a year from Honolulu up the Columbia Gorge about 250 miles to Roosevelt Regional Landfill. It’s the largest private landfill in the state, at 2,545 acres, and has a 120 million ton capacity. It is expected to be able to handle 40 years’ worth of trash. The Yakama Nation and Friends of the Columbia Gorge oppose the shipments, citing concern about invasive insects and plants.

EAT, PRAY, HERE

Arizona legislators passed a law this year prohibiting cities from restricting the location of religious facilities such as churches, synagogues and mosques through the use of land use regulations. The religious community can build wherever it wants, as long as it complies with local zoning and building requirements. According to the Arizona Republic, the law is the first of its kind. Opponents argued it will give authority to religious communities over cities and citizens. Under the law, cities must treat churches or mosques on equal terms with commercial enterprises. “The basic goal was to see that churches were not discriminated against,” said Representative Steve Yarbrough, who sponsored the bill, “but treated similarly to other land users.”

IT’S HEATING UP IN TEXAS

The Texas Facilities Commission is looking at producing electricity at the Capitol complex by building a facility with natural gas generators and waste heat capability (cogeneration) to save \$4 million to \$6 million a year. “It would be green, it would be cheaper, and it would be post-9/11 secure,” Terry Keel, executive director for state facilities, told the American Statesman. “And it would pay for itself in 10 years.” It would also provide backup power for the Capitol. According to the newspaper, a similar system exists at the California Capitol. The Legislature must give final approval next year.



CROSSBOWS HIT TARGET

Although Michigan does not guarantee the right to hunt and fish in its state constitution, as 10 other states do, it has expanded its crossbow regulations to attract more hunters. Crossbows are especially good for children, women, seniors and disabled people who have difficulty drawing a regular bow. The new regulations lower the minimum age for crossbow use from 12 to 10 years; allow their use by all legal hunters during all archery and firearm seasons, except in the Upper Peninsula; and remove the maximum bolt velocity limit for crossbows. Sportsmen spend more than \$2 billion a year in the state and generate \$130 million in tax revenue, according to the NRA’s Institute for Legislative Action.