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SKIERS MAY GET STRICT RULES

▶ STATE, 8A

DAM PROJECT BRINGS GOVERNOR TO RED BLUFF

▶ LOCAL, 7A



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CUSD welcomes some positive news

Budget status gains ground, for now; unexpected check from state helps

By **ROGER H. AYLWORTH**
Staff Writer

CHICO — With the help of some significant budget cuts and the unexpected payment by the state of a nearly half-million-dollar, 15-year-old bill, the Chico Unified School District will see an official improvement in its budget status, at least until June.

Jan Combes, CUSD assistant superintendent for business, announced Tuesday that \$4.4 million — a combi-

nation of \$1.6 million in ongoing savings and \$2.8 million in one-time dollars — will let the district's 2009-10 budget move from a "negative" to a "qualified" status.

Negative status means the district is not expected to be able to pay its bills in the next fiscal year. The qualified status means the district "may not" be able to meet its financial obligations sometime in the next two years.

Details about the current budget status will be presented during today's meeting of the CUSD board of trustees.

Information released by Combes says the \$1.6 million savings in the next academic year is a result of cuts made earlier this month by the CUSD board of trustees.

The cuts include moving the Academy for Change from a rented facility to the campus of Fair View High School, increasing class size in alternative education programs, eliminat-

PUBLIC MEETING CUSD board of trustees

6 p.m. today

City Council Chambers, 421 Main St.

■ See CUSD, 9A



Bill Husa/Staff Photo

Houseboats are seen on Lake Oroville in this photo taken Tuesday. When it's full, the lake is at 900 feet. As of Tuesday, the lake level was 736.91 feet.

Lake Oroville's up, but it's still down

By **HEATHER HACKING**
Staff Writer

OROVILLE — Lake Oroville has risen a lot in the last few weeks, but after three dry years, it's still the lowest it's been on this date since 1991.

As of Tuesday, the lake level was at 736.91 feet. Full would be 900 feet.

While the snowpack was recently estimated at 101 percent, for the past two

weeks there has been very little rain, explained Oroville Dam Operations Manager Maury Miller.

Releases from the lake remain low, at 1,350 cubic-feet-per-second. The lowest the releases can be is 1,200 cfs, Miller explained.

Releases of water from the lake for irrigation of nearby farmland usually begin the middle of April, but may be a week sooner this year due to the weather,

he said.

There are many factors that play into the lake level. Miller said he won't be surprised if the lake stays under 800 feet through the year.

"We could get a wonderful snowstorm and fill this thing up in a couple of weeks," Miller said, but most people aren't counting on more large storm

■ See LAKE, 9A

The man behind the book

'The Soloist' author speaks in Chico

By **HEATHER HACKING**
Staff Writer



Lopez

CHICO — After two semesters of community and university events based on the Book in Common, "The Soloist," author Steve Lopez came to Chico to share firsthand about his friendship with Nathaniel Anthony Ayers.

Lopez, a Los Angeles Times columnist, spoke at Laxson Auditorium, as well as to two groups of students at Chico State University earlier in the day.

"I'm going to tell you about Mr. Ayers," Lopez said at the beginning of his narrative.

The most frequent question people ask is whether or not he stays in contact with Nathaniel Ayers, Lopez said.

"I spoke to him today from Yuba City all the way to Chico," Lopez said. "He calls every single day."

The two met in Los Angeles just more than five years ago when Lopez happened to hear Ayers playing music within earshot of a subway entrance not far from skid row.

Over time, Lopez found out more about Ayers, including that he studied at Juilliard on a full scholarship before the onset of paranoid schizophrenia.

■ See LOPEZ, 9A

Bangor gunman was enraged over claim of rape by daughter placed in foster care

By **TERRY VAU DELL**
Staff Writer

OROVILLE — A Bangor man ordered Tuesday to stand trial for shooting at police during a 26-hour standoff at his home last month had been angry over the removal of his 10 children and claims by one that she was raped while in foster care.

"He believed the system had failed our children," said the wife of John Lee Hickey, 43.

When officers attempted to search his 202 Grimy Gulch Road trailer for weapons Feb. 9, Hickey barricaded

himself inside and allegedly fired a shotgun and revolver at lawmen outside.

Only one round was returned by an officer during the incident.

Judge Kristen Lucena ruled there was sufficient evidence to hold Hickey for trial on eight felony charges, including three counts of assaulting a peace officer with a firearm, child endangerment and resisting an executive officer.

Hickey could potentially face more than 80 years in prison.

Two of the suspect's children were inside the dilapidated rural

trailer with their mother at the time of the armed standoff, having recently run away from separate foster homes.

Kimberly Hickey, 37, said outside of court that Butte County Children's Services had removed their children Jan. 22, 2009, allegedly for the father "spanking" them and for the mother "not protecting" them, she said.

Several months before the standoff, Mrs. Hickey said her 16-year-old daughter wrote home that she had been raped in the foster home where

■ See STANDOFF, 9A



Barbara Arrigoni/Staff Photo

John Lee Hickey (right) was temporarily represented in Superior Court by attorney Dennis Hoptowitz (left) at a hearing in February.

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LOCAL WEATHER



Partly cloudy.
High: 70
Low: 46
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