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REPORTER

Vacaville, California

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Training the body and mind

Local kids learn, get exercise at camp

By **Ryan Chalk**

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Keeping the minds of children sharp and their bodies physically active is the goal of a local nonprofit after-school tutoring and mentoring program for low-income children.

On Thursday, about eight children from The Groves apartment complex on East Tabor Avenue in Fairfield spent the morning kicking a soccer ball around with a handful of Vacaville Christian High School students as part of The Leaven's Summer Success program. Based in the complex and at two additional sites in Fairfield, The Leaven staff, along with help from Vacaville Christian volunteers, spend four days a week working on reading and math while also taking time to get some exercise.

"This program is really important to this complex," said Kara Lugo, site director for The Leaven's program at The Groves. "The management has talked to us about kids getting into trouble when there's nothing to do. We're here to help keep them occupied."

That sentiment is shared among the families and

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Rick Roach/RRoach@TheReporter.com

Enjoying soccer camp provided by The Leaven's Summer Success program, Jose Garrszo (left), 6, Jose Ortega, 6, Jose Botello (center), 8, and Julio Rojas (right), 5, battle for the ball Thursday. The camp offered to low-income youth was taught by Vacaville Christian High School students and held at The Groves apartments in Fairfield.

Teens jailed in Fairfield robbery

By **Catherine Bowen**

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Fairfield police arrested five teenagers in connection with the violent robbery at Travis Dairy market last week that authorities say led to the death of the store's 70-year-old owner.

Chelsea Johnson, 18, and Dezmon Frazier, 17, both of Vacaville, were arrested along with Fairfield residents James P. Young, 17, Osis Smith, 17, and an unidentified 15-year-old, according to court records. According to Smith's Facebook page, he attended Vacaville High School but resides in Fairfield. Said to originally be from Philadelphia, Smith's profile picture shows him throwing gang signs.

Since the June 28 robbery of the East Travis Boulevard store, detectives worked around the clock building their case, including the prepping and serving of search warrants, leading to the

■ See **Robbery**, Page 12A

Budget talk still far apart

By **Jim Kuhnhen**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Under an urgent deadline, President Barack Obama and congressional negotiators set their sights on the nation's tax system and cherished benefit programs Thursday in hopes of striking a massive budget deal to raise the nation's debt ceiling. Obama said the two sides were still far apart and called everyone back to the White House on Sunday.

The president met with the eight top Republican and Democratic congressional leaders for an hour and a half Thursday, hoping to bridge ideas held by the

■ See **Budget**, Page 12A

Lawmakers advance bill on death penalty

By **Don Thompson**

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — A bill that seeks to abolish California's death penalty advanced Thursday after its first legislative hearing with support from the author of the state's death penalty and a former warden who presided over executions.

Sen. Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley, said she introduced the bill because California can no longer afford a capital punishment system that is both expensive and ineffective as it battles persistent multibillion-dollar budget deficits.

If eventually signed into law, the bill would put the question before voters in 2012.

The Assembly Public Safety Committee voted 5-2 along party lines

in favor of Senate Bill 490 after hearing testimony from Sacramento attorney and former prosecutor Donald Heller and former San Quentin State Prison warden Jeanne Woodford.

Heller wrote the proposition approved by state voters in 1978 that restored the death penalty. Woodford oversaw four executions but now heads Death Penalty Focus, which opposes them.

"After each execution, someone on my staff would say, 'Is the world safer because we did our jobs tonight?' We all knew the answer was no," Woodford said.

"Life without possibility of parole is the solution for addressing what opponents and proponents of the death penalty recognize is a broken,

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Jobless pay going onto debit cards

By **Adam Weintraub**

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — The monthly unemployment check is disappearing for the 1.2 million Californians who receive jobless benefits, to be replaced by a state-issued debit card, officials said Thursday.

Starting today, the Employment Development Department will issue about 10,000 debit cards a day as it gradually replaces its check-writing system.

The program will be administered by Bank of America Corp. Funds will be automatically transferred to the cards, and recipients can move the money to their bank accounts, withdraw cash from

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Garamendi's troops plan turned down

By **Reporter Staff**

A proposal by Congressman John Garamendi to reduce troop levels in Afghanistan but cutting defense appropriations died for lack of a majority vote Thursday, despite an impassioned speech by the local representative.

Garamendi, D-Solano, had proposed an amendment to the Defense Appropriations Act that would reduce troop levels in Afghanistan to 25,000 by the end

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Today's forecast

Sunny
High **94°** Low **60°**



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Daily Briefing

Dog found after 7 years, will be reunited with its family

A dog that went missing seven years ago in northwest Arkansas soon will be reunited with her original owner after living under a pseudonym for all that time with another family in the same town.

Andrew Navarette told animal control officers that he let his Shih Tzu, Mimi, out in the backyard of his Rogers home seven years ago but that when he went to retrieve her, she had disappeared. Navarette was unable to track Mimi

down, even though she had a microchip implanted in her neck containing his contact information.

It is not clear what happened to Mimi that day, but some time later, Kim Rafter of Rogers acquired the animal, renamed her Gizmo, and has cared for her since.

— **Associated Press**

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Robbery ...

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 arrest of the first suspect, who was taken into custody Tuesday, according to Fairfield police Officer Cleo Mayoral. The following day, more search warrants led to the arrests of three suspects before the final suspect was taken into custody Thursday afternoon, Mayoral said. All five suspects were booked on suspicion of homicide, robbery and conspiracy, according to police.

Using video surveillance footage from neighboring businesses, along

from information gathered from witnesses in the area, detectives were able to identify a vehicle of interest and, from that lead, determine a person of interest that would serve as the first piece of the puzzle resulting in the arrests, Mayoral said.

According to police, three of the suspects entered the store around 7:50 p.m., while another served as a lookout and Johnson, the alleged getaway driver, waited nearby in a vehicle.

Once inside the store, police said the suspects attacked the store's owner, Ho Kim, pepper-spraying him and knocking him to the ground before allegedly stealing the store's cash register, surveillance camera

and several other items from inside the store before making their escape.

Kim, who suffered a blow to the back of the head during the attack, was able to call 911, saying that he had been injured and needed an ambulance, according to authorities. Police and medical personnel arrived at the store where they found Kim, who briefly told officers about the attack before becoming disoriented, according to Fairfield police Lt. Greg Hurlbut.

Kim was transported to an area hospital, where he went into cardiac arrest and died a short time later, Hurlbut said.

Mayoral said the cash register taken during the robbery was later

found on a rural road between Fairfield and Vacaville.

In the days following the attack, a vigil was set up outside Kim's storefront, with mourners bringing flowers and candles to honor the man who is remembered as someone always willing to lend a helping hand to those in need and always ready with a kind word.

Along with grief over Kim's passing was an outcry from local community members and the hope that those responsible be brought to justice, and, according to police, community participation was key in solving the case and resulted in each of the five arrests for what authorities called a "senseless crime."



Rick Roach/RRoach@TheReporter.com

Vacaville Christian School students (from left) Andrew Grabowski, 14, Jeremy Rico, 16, Matthew Burnett, 15, Scott Gardener, 15, and

John Barum, 16, work with underprivileged youth during soccer camp on Thursday at The Groves apartment complex in Fairfield.

Camp ...

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 apartment managers at The Leaven's two additional sites which are located in the troubled Phoenix Drive neighborhood as well as on Alaska Avenue near Heath Drive in what are deemed Quality Neighborhood Program areas.

Champions for a healthy and active lifestyle, The Leaven's programming places an emphasis on education as well, and before school let out for summer, Lugo made a special trip to Cleo Gordon Elementary School to speak with Principal Cindy Brown to find out what areas she would like The Leaven staff to work

on with the children of The Groves this summer.

"This summer, we're focused on reading and math," Lugo said.

"In the best cases, we give them a jump-start on the next school year," she added.

And the Vacaville Christian students, most of whom are on the boys soccer team, are also committed to helping the kids with academics, often staying after soccer practice to help with tutoring.

"Some people might say, 'Oh, that neighborhood is too scary,'" said Mark Lillis, executive director. "But not these students. They really are doing a great service in the name of Christ for this neighborhood and it's really great to watch."

The Leaven's Summer Success program also takes

the children on field trips, including a boating and swimming outing to Lake Berryessa, fishing at Lake Solano, and a tour of the Fairfield-Suisun Wastewater Treatment Plant. These activities are designed to give the children memorable experiences as well as introduce them to public services and resources that make the community vibrant.

"We do it so the kids have a chance to learn more than just what's in their neighborhood," Lillis said.

A 501(c)3 nonprofit, The Leaven operates year-round and is funded entirely by grants and donations from the community. To become a volunteer, sponsor a child or donate to The Leaven, contact Mark Lillis at 422-5439, or go online to www.myleaven.org.

Troops ...

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 of 2012 and to some 10,000 by the end of 2013, which he argued would save taxpayers \$20 billion in the coming year. The amendment failed with 133 House members voting yes and 295 voting no.

"Our brave men and women are doing tremendous work, but they're on the wrong mission in Afghanistan. We need to focus on al-Qaida like a laser wherever they propagate, yes in Afghanistan, but also in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and even the United States," argued Garamendi, who is a member of House Armed Services Committee. "Our overextended troops and their overstressed families deserve a rapid drawdown from Afghanistan so that they can continue their lives without the constant threat of tragedy inherent in engaging

in a five-sided 33-year-old Afghan civil war."

Prior to the vote, Garamendi spoke to his colleagues on the House floor saying current funding of the war in Afghanistan is not sustainable.

"The entire town is caught up in a debate about our deficit and yet we want to continue pouring money into a ... war for which there is no military solution," he said, adding that control of funding for the war rests with the Legislature. "We have the only power to fund the war. If we say no, then this war will cease. ... We need to rebuild America. We need to bring the money and troops home and rebuild this nation."

In a press release, promoting his effort, Garamendi argued that experts have estimated that 25,000 U.S. troops by 2012 in Afghanistan are sufficient to carry out a limited U.S. mission in Afghanistan focused on eliminating remaining al-Qaida. In

particular, he pointed to:

- Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, who has held various senior government posts, including serving as principal adviser to Secretary of State Colin Powell and who suggested transitioning to 10,000 to 25,000 troops by mid-to-late 2012 when he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in May.

- Retired Army Lt. General David W. Barno, and Andrew Exum, former active duty army officer who served in Afghanistan and was an adviser to Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who recommend beginning a phased transition to 25,000 to 35,000 troops in July 2011.

- The Afghanistan Study Group, a nonpartisan group of former government officials, academics, retired military officials, and public policy practitioners, which suggests reducing troops to 30,000 by July 2012 and continuing to draw down further from there.

Cards ...

Continued from Page 1A
 automated teller machines, receive the card balance in cash at various locations, or make purchases at merchants that accept Visa-branded cards.

The average weekly benefit in California is about \$300. The state sent out more than 42 million unemployment checks in 2010 for a total amount of \$22.9 billion.

Officials say the switch will deliver cash faster and save at least \$4 million a year in postage.

Savings are expected to

increase next spring, when the state starts using a paperless system for people to certify every two weeks that they are still eligible for benefits.

"The days of waiting for a check to arrive in the mail are at an end," said Pam Harris, chief deputy director with the state agency.

At least 43 other states use electronic delivery of unemployment benefits, but it was unclear how many use a debit card.

More than 2.1 million Californians are unemployed, yet many who were self-employed or part of a partnership don't receive benefits because they did not pay into

the unemployment insurance program.

Others have exhausted their benefits; normally, the program expires after 26 weeks, but a federal extension allows them to collect for up to 99 weeks. In California, more than 460,000 people have exhausted all unemployment benefits.

About 400,000 Californians who receive state disability payments have already been switched from checks to the debit card system this year, EDD officials said.

For more, go online to www.thereporter.com.

Budget ...

Continued from Page 1A
 two sides — each considered untenable by the other. On Capitol Hill, Democrats appeared especially rattled that the discussions included proposals to cut spending for Social Security as well as Medicare and Medicaid.

High-level talks, after dragging on for weeks, have entered a suspenseful endgame. The shape of an agreement is still in doubt as the nation moves ever closer to an Aug. 2 deadline to raise the government's debt ceiling.

Obama pushed for an ambitious deficit reduction plan of roughly \$4 trillion, the biggest of three options he laid on the table. It would require sizable tax revenues, which many Republicans oppose, and spending reductions for entitlement programs, opposed by many Democrats. But the idea of a potentially historic deal was well received by the meeting participants, officials said later, even though the details remained in dispute.

After the 90-minute session, Obama said Democrats and Republicans should be prepared to show their bottom-line demands when they return to the bargaining table for the rare Sunday session.

The negotiating stakes are high. Without a deal on deficit reduction, Republican leaders say they don't have enough GOP votes to increase the nation's borrowing authority, raising the danger of the first ever U.S. default on its debts when the current

\$14.3 trillion debt ceiling is tapped out.

"Everybody acknowledged that we have to get this done before the hard deadline of Aug. 2 to make sure that America does not default for the first time on its obligations," Obama said. "And everybody acknowledged that there's going to be pain involved politically on all sides."

That leaves little time to agree on 10-year deficit reductions of \$2 trillion to \$4 trillion.

The major clash centers on how to reduce spending on major entitlement programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, all prized by Democrats, and on tax changes that would close loopholes and end certain corporate breaks.

Republicans insist that any tax changes be used to lower rates on corporations and individuals; Obama wants them also to generate more tax revenue.

Increasing the debt ceiling through the end of 2012 — a date favored by the White House — would require authorizing about \$2.4 trillion in additional borrowing. House Speaker John Boehner has insisted on a 10-year deficit reduction figure that, at a minimum, matches the amount of additional borrowing. One aide to a lawmaker in Thursday's meeting said Obama made it clear he wouldn't sign a budget and debt agreement that didn't extend the debt ceiling until after the November 2012 presidential election.

For more, go online to www.thereporter.com.

Death ...

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 costly, failed system that does not provide meaningful public safety or justice to our families despite the billions of dollars spent by the state of California," she said.

She and Heller cited a recent study by a federal appellate judge and a university law professor that found California taxpayers spend \$184 million annually to try death penalty cases, defend the state through appeals and incarcerate condemned inmates.

Most of the 714 condemned inmates on the nation's most populous Death Row are more likely to die of old age than lethal injection, the study found.

"I fervently believe that capital punishment should be abolished," Heller said. "It's costing the state a huge amount of money."

The researchers, 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Arthur L. Alarcon and Loyola Law School Professor Paula M. Mitchell, calculated that capital punishment has cost California \$4 billion since it was reinstated 34 years ago, yet just 13 inmates have been executed — none in the past five years.

Hancock's bill would amend state law to require

life in prison without parole for those convicted of what are now capital crimes, including people currently on death row. It would put the question before voters on the November 2012 ballot.

Hancock's bill was opposed by prosecutors, victims' rights groups and associations representing police and sheriffs.

It now goes to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

In March, Illinois became the 16th state to abolish the death penalty. Hancock argued California should become the 17th.

"At a time when there is no money to meet the basic needs of our people, we can't afford a punishment that Judge Alarcon calls a punishment in theory only," Hancock said. "It is not helping to protect our people — it is helping to bankrupt us."

California sent four murderers to death row in the first six months of this year, compared with 13 in the same period last year and 21 in the second half of 2010, according to state attorney general's office, which handles death penalty appeals. In an average year, 30 people are sentenced to die.

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