



Weekly Update December 7 - 14, 2025

The December 9 San Luis Obispo County Supervisors meeting agenda is made of 44 items. These include five interesting reports under the category of Auditor - Controller - Treasurer - Tax Collector and features subjects such as; the annual fiscal audits of establishments subject to the County Transient Occupancy Tax, a report of the tax compliance audits of operators subject to the County Commercial Cannabis Business Tax, the Annual Treasury Compliance Audit for the Fiscal Year, the CliftonLarsonAllen LLP Independent Accountants' Report on the County Treasury's cash balance, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Fiscal and Procurement Review Monitoring Report for Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Accountants' Report on the County Treasury's cash balance and accountability as well as a request to approve the 2026 County Treasury Investment Policy.

These items provide excellent data points reflecting the fiscal health of our county. We hope whatever their status suggests that they foster greater fiscal restraint.

Diablo Details

Item 12 is a perfect example of how slowly the gears of government can turn. This is a request to “approve a contract for special services with Solestiss in the amount of not to exceed \$15,000 to conduct an economic impact assessment of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, as well as a feasibility overview for the development of a Small Modular Reactor plus reimbursement of all travel expenses authorized/requested by the County not to exceed \$10,000, for a total not to exceed contract compensation of \$25,000”.

It’s a much-needed study that will provide valuable information as policy makers debate the future of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant. When Supervisor Ortiz-Legg first proposed the plan several months ago, it was anticipated that the data would be a factor in the 20-year operating permit application process. It’s a shame that the process from concept to an actual motion took so long.

While the data is still critical, it may be too late to impact the permit extension process. We are hopeful that the California Coastal Commission will move forward with the 20-year operating permit at its meeting on December 11 and look forward to the results of the study offering valuable insights in the future.

Also, as a reminder, please consider sharing your opinion about whether the plant should remain in operation for the next 20 years. The December 11 meeting is open to the public and anyone can participate during public comments. Details can be found at: www.coastal.ca.gov .

Supervisor Races Include an Odd Twist

It must be a difficult time to be a candidate for County Supervisor right now. For incumbents and challengers alike, end of the year campaign finance reports are due

soon, and raising every last dime is crucial. There are lots of holiday gatherings and social events to attend, but nobody wants their Christmas cheer bothered by politicking.

One rather odd political announcement has been made though. Karen Woodruff, District Director to Senator John Laird, has announced she is running against incumbent Supervisor Dawn Ortiz-Legg in 2028.

This is a curious announcement on many fronts besides the (premature?) timing. To begin with, both are Democrats. While Ortiz-Legg might be thought of as a more moderate Democrat than her other two Democrat colleagues on the Board, her voting record aligns pretty well with the two more liberal gents.

It is true that Ortiz-Legg is looked at as more of a consensus builder/solution finder than either Paulding or Gibson, but it's hard to imagine how that earns her a primary challenge – particularly in this purplish county.

One could imagine that Woodruff is just looking for a job. Her position with Senator Laird will end when he is termed out of office at the end of 2028. Known for her activism in land conservancy, Woodruff will certainly want to remain in a role where she can continue those efforts.

Running against incumbents is not a common practice among successful career politicians. We are reminded of the disastrous 2018 primary election where Democrat State Senator Kevin de Leon allowed blind ambition to get in the way of good judgment and ran against US Senator Dianne Feinstein.

Could this announcement signal a rift in the local Democrat Party? Does Woodruff know something about Ortiz-Legg's long-term plans that we do not?

It may also be possible that the liberal wing of the local Democrat Party is looking for a firebrand big government environmental no growther and wants to push out the more common-sense incumbent who is sometimes open to reasonable growth in San Luis Obispo County. The early announcement, as inappropriate as it may be

during the holiday season, could be an attempt to discourage Ortiz-Legg from running for reelection.

It may also be that the local religious sect of anti-nuke crusaders has had enough of Ortiz-Legg's efforts to keep the Diablo Canyon Power Plant operating for another 20 years. Woodruff, in her tenure as a member of the Diablo Canyon Decommissioning Engagement Panel has clearly not been supportive of PG&E's efforts to win an extension to their operating permit. Many believe she is a strong driver in her boss' efforts to demand more land be given away and more endowment (rate payer) cash be promised before the power plant could get the permit.

According to a report in a local newspaper, her priorities are "the high cost of housing, aging infrastructure, homelessness, stressed transit systems, underfunded schools and the challenges that residents face in finding good healthcare, senior care and childcare". She did not mention public safety, fire preparedness, stressed commuters on bad roads or economic development. And she somehow seems to distinguish the high cost of housing from the need to build more housing.

The two Board of Supervisors races currently underway will be making lots of noise and looking for lots of resources from now until the June 2, 2026, elections. We will watch this new development with interest, particularly how it works in competition with the two already underway.

Where is the Value?

The Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority Board of Directors held a Special Meeting on December 1 at 8:30 a.m. at Centennial Park in Paso Robles.

The meeting got off to a rough beginning with locked doors and a late start caused by unknown delays.

The main thrust of the meeting was a review of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and finances.

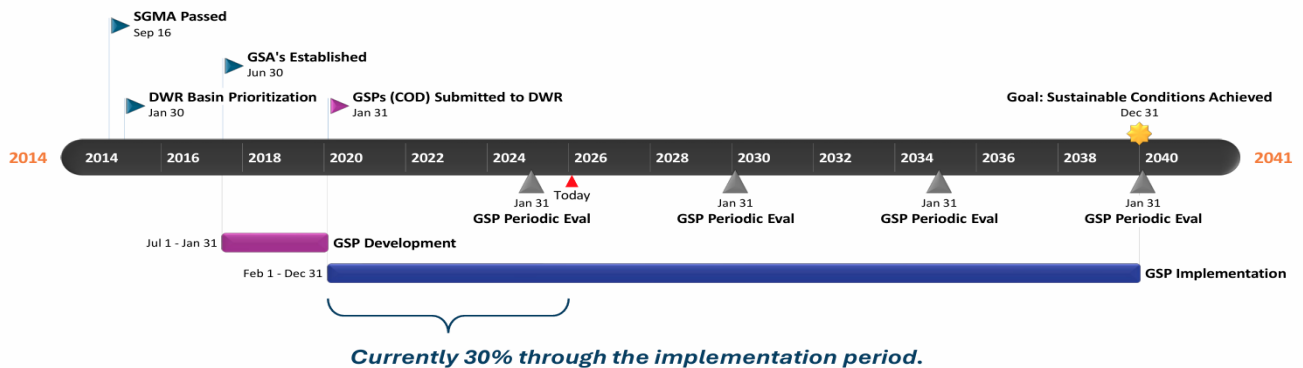
Before getting to the main thrust, the Board needed to approve a continuation of its consulting contract with the Hallmark Group, a firm out of Bakersfield, California. This is the firm that guided the Joint Power Agreement through the proposed JPA rate structure that resulted in a rejected Proposition 218 Vote.

Below is the proposal that was approved with a breakdown of the scope of work included expected. The contract period is January 1 through June 30, 2026.

	TASK	COST
1	Paso Authority Meeting Facilitation	\$59,000.00
2	Outreach	\$3,000.00
3	Authority Administration	\$1,500.00
4	Budget Development	\$5,000.00
5	Financial Services	\$8,500.00
6	Consultant Mgmt. / Procurement	\$5,000.00
7	GSP Implementation Coordination	\$14,000.00
	TOTAL	\$96,000.00

With the contract squared away, business moved along to outlining the expectations set forth by SGMA and the veiled threat of what could possibly happen should the Paso Basin be found to be out of compliance.

Below is a timeline that Bakersfield's own Hallmark Group provided to illustrate the steps necessary to remain in compliance and ultimately achieve sustainability:



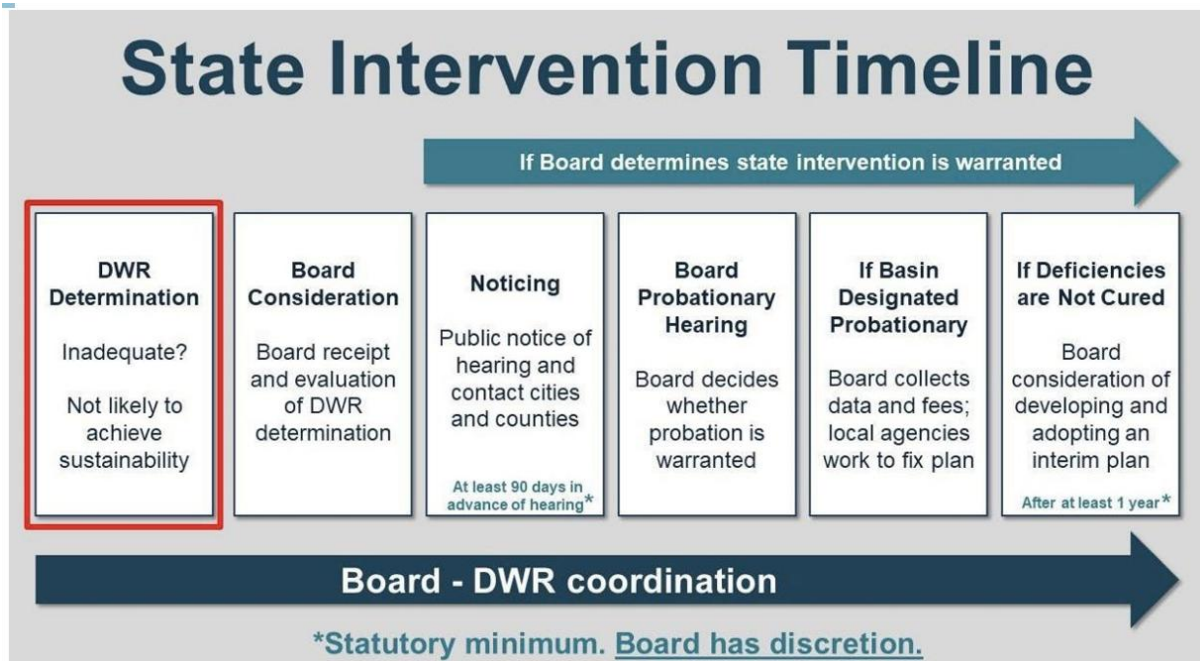
The Hallmark representative explained some of the indicators that they recommend in the effort to achieve sustainability.:

- Roadmap to **ensure sustainability** by avoiding “undesirable results” for the six sustainability indicators.

Sustainability Indicators	Lowering GW Levels	Reduction of Storage	Seawater Intrusion	Degraded Quality	Land Subsidence	Surface Water Depletion
Metric(s) Defined in GSP Regulations	• Groundwater Elevation	• Total Volume	• Chloride concentration isocontour	• Migration of Plumes • Number of supply wells • Volume • Location of isocontour	• Rate and Extent of Land Subsidence	• Volume or rate of surface water depletion
	1	2	3	4	5	6

The “heart” of SGMA and gold standard to achieve sustainability.

The presentation went on to illustrate the potential consequences should the basin plan falter or “undesirable results” occur. The first step is state intervention in the management of the sustainability plan in the basin.



Along with intervention, possible management fees and meter installation costs could be imposed. Here is the scenerio outlined by Hallmark:

Potential Cost Impact to Paso Basin...

Cost Item	Type	Qty.		Cost Per Unit	Total
1 Annual Groundwater Extraction Fee	Annual	75,100	AF (WY 23-24 Annual Report)	\$ 20.00	\$ 1,502,000
2 Annual Well Registration Cost	Annual	5,500	Wells (County Databse)	\$ 300.00	\$ 1,650,000
3 Meter Installation Cost	One-time	515	Wells (Regulatory Lands Database)	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 1,287,500
					\$ 4,439,500

With the gloom and doom clearly established, the question of how to fund a plan going forward was raised. The Board unanimously approved a fiscal year 2025-26 budget of \$944,952 including a \$300,000 shortfall regarding costs anticipated for the first six months of next year.

Here is the budget document as presented:

		Adopted on 5-28-25	Cost Collection Approved on 8-18-25	Costs to be Approved on 12-1-25	Revised FY 25-26 Budget to be Approved on 12-1-25	
Budget Components		Initial Approved Budget	Jul-Dec 2025 (6 months)	Jan-Jun 2026 (6 months)	Revised FY 25-26 Budget	% Change
Program Administration						
SGMA-Required						
1	Annual Report	\$110,000	\$14,000	\$88,000	\$102,000	-7%
2	GSP Fifth Year Evaluation	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
3	GSP Amendment	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
4	Groundwater Model Use/Update	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
5	Basin Monitoring Operations & Maintenance	\$150,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
6	Data Management System (DMS)	\$200,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
7	ET Ag Water Usage Program (LandIQ)	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$0	\$100,000	0%
	SGMA-Required Subtotal	\$560,000	\$114,000	\$88,000	\$202,000	-64%
Administrative						
8	Executive Director & Support Staff	\$234,000	\$157,446	\$96,000	\$253,446	8%
9	Legal Counsel	\$82,500	\$155,471	\$60,000	\$215,471	161%
10	IT-Support	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
11	Insurance and JPA Start-Up	\$50,000	\$15,084	\$6,000	\$21,084	-58%
12	Grant-Development	\$60,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
13	Technical Consultant(s)	\$110,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
14	SCI Prop 218 Development (did not pass on Aug 1st)		\$34,151	\$0	\$34,151	
15	Land IQ Prop 218 Support & On-Call Svcs (did not pass on Aug 1st)		\$35,000		\$35,000	
16	SCI Funding Mechanism Development/Implementation (Planned)		\$0	\$50,000	\$50,000	
17	Public Education and Outreach Program	\$75,000	\$10,000	\$36,000	\$46,000	-39%
18	Website Management	\$6,000	\$2,000	\$4,000	\$6,000	0%
19	GW Fee Billing & Collection	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
	Administrative Subtotal	\$717,500	\$409,152	\$252,000	\$661,152	-8%
	Program Administration Subtotal	\$1,277,500	\$523,152	\$340,000	\$863,152	-32%
Projects and Management Actions						
Regulatory Programs						
20	Domestic Well Impact Mitigation Program	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
21	Address Additional GSP Data Gaps	\$75,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
22	Well Verification & Registration Program	\$25,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
Demand Management Programs						
23	Demand Reduction and Water Supply Programs	\$1,300,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
24	MILR Program (Fallow Only)				\$0	
	Projects and Management Actions Subtotal	\$1,450,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	-100%
	Subtotal	\$2,727,500	\$523,152	\$340,000	\$863,152	-68%
25	Prudent Reserve	\$200,000	\$29,600	\$52,200	\$81,800	-59%
	Total	\$2,927,500	\$552,752	\$392,200	\$944,952	-68%

The big question hanging heavily in the room is where will the money come from? PRAGA seems to think that the four-member water districts will find funding and funnel it to the ongoing costs of consultants and people collecting management fees.

But, with so much consideration for fees and costs, nothing was really laid out about what specific steps will be taken to recharge the basin.

The Hallmark representative did not get into specifics about raising finances, but presented the following slide:

Funding Mechanism Decision for Fiscal Year 2026-2027

- The Fiscal Year 2025-2026 budget assumes costs for the development of a funding mechanism for Fiscal Year 2026-2027.
- Staff has previously presented information regarding the below funding mechanism options:
 1. Prop 26
 2. Prop 218
 3. Hybrid: Prop 26 for “core activates” and then either a Prop 218 or special activities agreement as future projects are identified.
- To remain on schedule, staff will present these options (with a staff recommendation) and **ask the Board to select one of those options at the January 28th meeting.**

Board member discussion included bringing di minimis users back into the fee structure. That subject received strong push back from members of the public in attendance who noted that such users make up a tiny portion of total water use and often actually recharge groundwater supplies through their septic or small irrigation programs.

Other public comments questioned why south county water districts aren’t included in consideration of funding sources when they do pull water from the basin area. Others questioned why Lake Nacimiento water isn’t used by the city of Paso Robles to offset their groundwater usage.

Supervisor Gibson made comments about possibly seeking an expansion of the PRAGA Board to include overlayers such as large- and small-scale farmers. An oddly good idea that should have been put in place years ago. And while they were at it, perhaps they should have relieved any non-overlays from leadership positions.

As we opined immediately following the August Prop 218 vote, the biggest issue for the Paso Basin isn’t money or even water.

It is lack of trust.

It seems clear that basin overlayers resent the leadership of PRAGA by a County Supervisor who does not live in the basin. His outside residence aside, many oppose his approach to governance which usually involves more regulation, bigger agencies and higher payments to the government. Ironically, Gibson loves to rant about the importance of “local control”. We already know about his hypocrisy regarding housing, but every time he bangs the gavel at a PRAGA meeting, people are reminded of his hypocrisy regarding local control. Also, many are quick to point out the campaign contributions he has received from big donors who coincidentally appear to be among the same group that benefit most from the policies he is pursuing. All of this adds up to an atmosphere of distrust that permeates through any discussion of Paso Water Basin options.

Nobody wants to see groundwater levels drop, and practically everybody supports the idea of a reasonable groundwater sustainability plan. It probably won't be until locals are allowed to come up with a modest common-sense plan in which the entire community had input before we see any sort of practical plan. In the meantime, hold on to your wallet because plans are underway to get your money!

Just Doesn't Seem Right

Speaking of trust, wonder why so many people distrust politicians?

Could part of it be that so many elected officials seem to get special privileges? Rules for thee – not for me? Special deals like Nancy Pelosi making many millions of dollars while serving in Congress? Perhaps the special double-speak language that they use where yes means no except when it might mean maybe? And of course, that smugness that so many of them have where they actually believe they are special...

Well, we have someone special like that on our Board of Supervisors, and it's a shame what his presence seems to do for the image of the entire Board.

If you haven't guessed it yet, we are talking about our very own Bruce Gibson.

What makes him stand out you ask?

Well, one example is a report we see this week from in Cal Coast News that Gibson has hired his wife to work on his County Supervisor staff.

While the County does have a policy that discourages nepotism, it appears that such rules don't apply to the Gibsons, who will be collecting two special meaty paychecks from the very same taxpayers that they constantly suggest aren't paying enough taxes.

Most public agencies have strict anti-nepotism rules that prohibit the boss from hiring or managing someone to whom they are married or are having a sexual/romantic relationship with. The reasons are as obvious as is the potential for such circumstances to go bad. Even if nothing does go wrong, most government agencies go out of their way to avoid the appearance of favoritism.

The San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's office has such a policy as set forth in the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office Policy Manual, Code of Ethics. It reads:

1050.2 RESTRICTED DUTIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Employees are prohibited from directly supervising or being directly supervised by any other employee who is a relative or with whom they are involved in a personal or business relationship.

So apparently things are special for the Gibsons. The rules that apply to most staff in San Luis Obispo County Government don't impact them because... they are special? Their combined special income with benefits will likely exceed \$200,000 annually. Maybe all that jingle in his pocket is what makes Gibson think he is so special?

While it's highly unlikely that anybody who knows Gibson will be surprised, it is still a disappointing development. The public hears about this and just adds it to

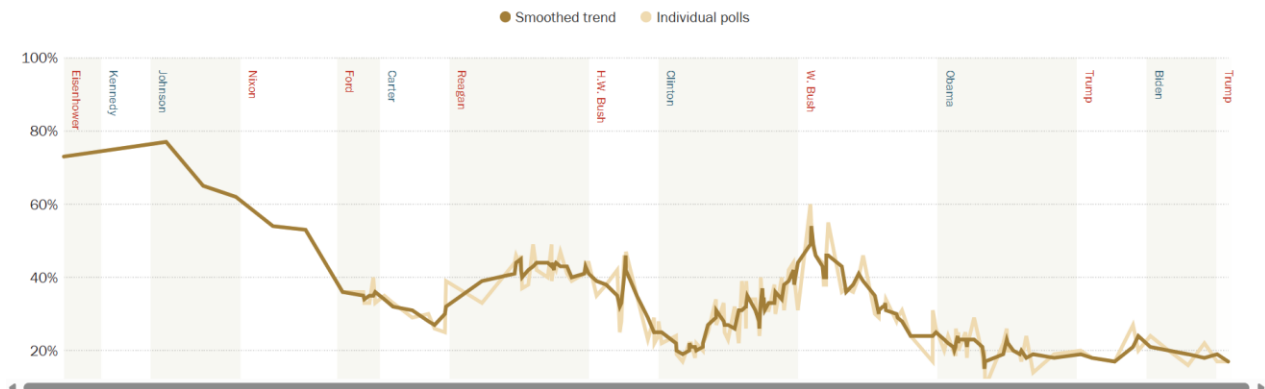
the list of why they deeply dislike and distrust politicians. And the worst part is that Gibson's lack of good judgment reflects on all his colleagues.

The Pew Research Center in Washington DC tracks public opinion on dozens of public interest topics. It has been doing so for 35 years with a reputation for pragmatic reporting. Recent data from Pew illustrates how the public distrusts politicians more now than at any time since the late 1950s.



Public trust in government near historic lows

% who say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right *just about always/most of the time*



It is theoretically possible that Gibson's wife is the most capable person in SLO County to do the job, and that nobody else could possibly fill the position. It's also possible that since Gibson will be leaving office in a little more than a year, he doesn't really care about the appearance of impropriety.

That said, won't it be refreshing to have a new Supervisor who will hopefully have a little more respect for the people of this county, and for the image of elected officials everywhere? How special would that be?

Last Week

Thanksgiving week was predictably quiet. The last Board of Supervisors meeting was held on November 18, and the next is scheduled for December 9. Two important meetings follow the BoS; SLOCOG on December 10 introducing proposed sales tax measure language and the Coastal Commission ostensibly deciding the future of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant on December 11. These are fateful meetings. If you feel strongly about either topic, you should engage. We will, of course, provide details after those meetings, but by then it may be too late for your input.

Lots of Red Ink for the Holidays

'Tis the season for budget deficit projections. We reported a couple weeks ago that SLO County administrative staff has done a budget analysis in preparation for the 2026-27 County Budget. In that work, they came up with a forecast of a \$4 - 11 million shortfall.

Now, we are learning that the State of California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) is forecasting an \$18 billion shortfall for our state government.

We continue to beat this drum mostly because nobody appears to be paying attention to this alarming trend. Nobody wants to discuss it in early stages, but everybody moans and complains when it comes time to make cuts.

Some might say that SLO County's \$1 billion budget can easily overcome a mere \$11 million shortfall, as can the state with only \$18 billion against a \$226 billion budget. Afterall, it's just Other People's Money.

What these projected shortfalls don't reflect, however, is what can easily go wrong to make the shortfalls even worse. The state budget is highly impacted by the performance of the stock market. When taxpayers do well, tax revenues come in strong. When the market falters, revenues take a hit. When the state budget takes a hit, it could impact the funds that the state disperses to the counties for programs. Grants could easily be cut as well as funding for critical elements such as public safety, health and human services and transportation projects.

We certainly don't want to sound like Chicken Little suggesting the sky is falling, but wouldn't it be prudent to practice a little fiscal restraint on both the state and county levels?

Two glaring examples of local largesse in the last couple of weeks are the extra \$200,000 in additional (over budget) funding allocated to the Morro Bay to Cayucos pathway and the diverted funds (over \$400,000) for the temporary Cecchetti crossing that would have otherwise been spent on regularly scheduled road/bridge projects. That the bridge funds were left over from a different project doesn't make the funds surplus. It was still taxpayer money that should have been used for its original budgeted purpose because the next project down the list still needs to be funded.

That's \$600,000 that was not in the current budget. Spent in just a couple of weeks. If the economy doesn't hold, we will be wishing we had that \$600,000 for higher priority projects a year from now.

Compounding the expected state shortfall is what analysts refer to as the “structural deficit”. This shortfall is expected to reach \$35 billion next year. This is the deficit before the various budget “tools” (tricks?) are used to bring it into balance. According to the LAO, “California’s budget is undeniably less prepared for downturns. Many of the tools used to manage previous shortfalls, including withdrawing billions from reserves and using temporary solutions, are largely depleted, leaving fewer options to address future gaps”.

In some ways, our county is more prepared than many due to the leadership of our new CEO Matt Pontes. His “rebalancing” effort is designed to review the budget expenditures department by department seeking efficiencies and elimination of duplicate or unnecessary spending. The current budget was cut by about \$38 million but still grew by 9% over the previous year. Rebalancing will be implemented again in the preparation of the 2026-27 budget.

Despite this effort, our county continues to make expenditures that exceed revenues. Even worse, the majority on the Board of Supervisors don’t seem to exercise constraint. Perhaps they are having stern internal discussions, but there are no public warnings about needing to prepare should more cuts be required. There is no public discussion about what would happen if the state needs to cut funding designated for counties. And certainly there is no effort to cut back – even on the extra unbudgeted expenditures that too often sail through the Board of Supervisors approval process.

ICE Sickies

A local newspaper made a big deal on November 26 about U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) picking up two criminals from the lobby of the SLO county jail as they were released from local custody there.

The article featured details of exactly what time the ICE vehicle arrived, a description of the vehicle, the number of agents, what the agents wore, how long the agents were at the jail and what time they left. The article even gave details about

one agent carrying “what appeared to be bear spray” and witness reports that said spray was pointed a couple times in the direction of some anti-ICE activists.

What the article didn’t bother with was the names of the two people ICE picked up, or what sort of crimes they are accused of committing. The newspaper couldn’t be troubled with providing details of the victims of those two arrestees, or details about what those victims went through because of the actions of the two arrestees. No concern was shown about how those victims are recovering, what long-term impacts they have experienced and nothing about what their friends and family have gone through trying to support a recovery.

No mention was made of the awful treatment ICE agents see on a daily basis from protesters who seem to feel that because they disagree with immigration laws, they can behave in a violent fashion against ICE agents and their families. Absent was any reference to politicians calling for protests that usually lead to such violence.

We can’t help but to be dismayed with the mindset that criminals, regardless of their immigration status, seem to be of greater concern in our society than victims. A murder, assault, robbery or rape victim is just a statistic. But a criminal is somehow seen as a product of our value system and therefore should be afforded every possible opportunity to have a better day or a better life.

To be certain, we believe in due process and civil rights, but we also believe in the rights of the government to enforce all laws, no matter how unhappy a subset of society feels about those laws. Like too many issues, if half the effort protesting was instead spent finding solutions, we would be far better off.

California Dreamin’

The offshore wind power generation concept, at least here on the Central Coast, seems to be floundering amidst many unanswered questions and uncertain direction from investors, lease holders and regulators on every level of government.

We aren't looking to debate the virtues of wind power, but we do see the current status of the industry as emblematic of the future of "green energy" and how it fits into the future of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant.

Those calling for the closure of the plant are quick to suggest that power from the plant won't be needed in the future because we have so much renewable/green energy coming online and the grid will have more power than we will ever need. But when examined closely, such statements are aspirational at best.

The amount of land and habitat required for solar fields along with the complications, expense and environmental disruption with offshore wind and the fire hazards associated with large scale battery storage all make such projects very difficult to complete. Not in my backyard NIMBYism is alive and well. Costs rarely even become a discussion point as most seem to spin out of control far beyond predictability.

The same can be said for build time. Acquiring the rights and the permits takes much longer than one might expect. Garnering local support requires even more time and probably many concessions. Components come from all over, including other countries. Delays are common. There is usually a need for additional support aspects such as transmission lines and the necessary connections to the grid. Then we all wait for the sun to shine or the wind to blow.

It would be great if in four years (the time currently remaining on the Diablo Plant permit) we could have clean, reliable and affordable electricity sufficient to power our growing needs of our grid. But nobody can guarantee that we can even come close to that dream. Not the power providers, the engineers, the Governor, the environmental community, Mothers for Peace or college professors – no one from the anti-nuke side can provide proof that if we shut down the Diablo Plant in 2030 we will have the electricity that we need.

The silly notion that somehow, in the next four years, we will figure out a way is foolish, selfish and extremely dangerous.

The wise move would be to grant the extension and let PG&E continue generating power until 2045. In the unlikely chance that we end up with excess electricity in the Golden State, we can sell it to neighboring states that otherwise might still be relying on coal generated power – a win win for everyone.

Second Round @ Coastal Commission

If you have an opinion on the subject of the Diablo Power Plant, the most impactful thing you can do is participate in the next California Coastal Commission hearing which will be held on Thursday, December 11 at the Pier South Resort, in Imperial Beach. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 9:00 AM, but it is wise to double-check the details at www.coastal.ca.gov. You can participate online or in person. The recent meeting, held on November 6, lasted until 5:00 PM with about 60 people speaking against extending the permit and 40 speaking in favor of a 20-year operating permit. Most speakers are limited to one or two minutes.

We were left with the impression after the last meeting, that Coastal Commissioners were swayed by the requests from people like Senator Laird and Supervisor Gibson that PG&E should be required to give up more land and finance more trail maintenance and habitat renewal endowments before being granted the 20 year operating permit. Neither Laird or Gibson expressed any concern for the costs associated with such requests, nor did they mention affordability while spending ratepayer money for the benefit of their environmental activist friends.

Coastal Commission staff had worked with PG&E for over a year developing a plan that works for both sides. Wouldn't it be nice if Laird spent more attention on balancing the state budget and Gibson worked harder on the SLO County budget? Let the Coastal Commission do its job without running up the bill for ratepayers by squeezing everything you can from PG&E in exchange for a permit to keep supplying electricity.

Taxing Matters

A reader pointed out that in our story about sales taxes a couple of weeks ago that we lumped Pismo Beach in with the rest of the cities in SLO county that have sales taxes totaling 8.50 cents per dollar. In fact, Pismo only charges 8.25 cents on the dollar.

Currently, county staff are working on language for a sales tax measure designed for public safety. It is expected to be a one-cent additional sales tax focused on fire and sheriff services. We do not yet have a status report on the progress of that endeavor.



We do, however, have some draft proposals on the development of the half-cent measure sponsored by SLOCOG which is expected to appear on the November ballot. The draft outline for the measure says it will do the following:

A San Luis Obispo regional, ½ cent sales tax for transportation would:

- Generate \$35M annually, escalating each year (or \$700M over 20 years without escalations)
- Reclaim \$0.8M to \$1M, annually, from State funds
- Collect a \$3M to \$5M one-time windfall from State funds
- Qualify the region to receive our fair-share of State and Federal funds (our neighboring Central Coast Counties have seen average annual grants that equal or nearly double collected tax amounts)
- Include Investment Guidelines providing safeguards, assurances, and oversight of all funds.
- Guarantee 99% of all funds be for transportation-related improvements within the Expenditure Plan

Draft expenditure or disbursement categories are as follows:

1. 55% for Local Road Repairs, Safety and Improvements (Jurisdictions determined)
 - a. Distribute funds by formula to the jurisdictions based on share of population
 - b. Build in flexibility through local control recognizing that each local agency (and its public) may differ in their transportation funding needs and priorities.
 - c. Assure the public has a voice when each local agency determines its priorities.
 - d. Uses may include (as determined by the local agency): Road and bridge repairs, maintenance, rehabilitation, safety, and congestion relief; pedestrian, bicycle, sidewalks, crosswalks, multiuse path, Safe Routes to School, and community enhancements, Signal improvements/synchronization, local transit or trolley services, and other local transportation priorities.
2. 40% for Regional Corridor Improvements (SLOCOG determined)
 - a. Distribute funds by formula guaranteeing regional improvements based on share of population.
 - b. Assure equitable, guaranteed, distribution by using 4 subregions: North County, North Coast, Central County, and South County
 - c. Build in flexibility to recognize each subregion's priority needs may differ from another.
 - d. Assure the public has a voice when SLOCOG determines priorities.
 - e. Uses can include: Improvements to highways, arterials, interchanges, bridges, van/carpool programs, regional trail corridors, safety/congestion relief, and regional transit.
3. 4% for Senior/Disabled/Veterans' mobility improvements (SLOCOG determined)
 - a. Use a public process in conjunction with current procedures to address and improve mobility of those that are mobility challenged.
 - b. Assure the public has a voice when SLOCOG determines its priorities.
4. 1% for Administration of the Measure Funds
 - a. Tasks include: Developing Implementation Plan, Project Prioritization, Annual Audits, Outreach and Communication, Revenue distributions to jurisdictions, Support for Measure-related Committees and technical assistance.

The draft language will be presented at a December 10 SLOCOG Board meeting and will then be presented to each city council during the month of January, before going before the Board of Supervisors on January 27. Here is the schedule:

Jurisdiction	Council / Board Action item to: Review and provide input into draft plan
SLOCOG	12/10/25
Arroyo Grande	1/13/25
Atascadero	1/13/26
Grover Beach	1/12/26
Morro Bay	1/13/26
Paso Robles	12/16/25
Pismo Beach	12/16/25
SLO City	1/20/26
County BOS	1/27/26

We do not know whether San Luis Obispo County voters have an appetite for a tax increase, and we wonder how the possibility of two increases on the same ballot

might play out. We wonder whether the Board of Supervisors will perceive the two measures as competing against each other.

Will the tax measures become partisan, or do their subjects transcend party lines? If we use the recent special election for Prop 50 as a guide to predict outcomes, things look pretty good for tax increases. Many otherwise high propensity Republican voters didn't bother to vote while the Democrat voter turnout was strong. Will that model change for our general election that includes almost all statewide races including Governor?

As we reported in late summer, SLOCOG held a round of informational/listening sessions around the county to gather feedback and reaction as they developed the language for the measure. Presumably, there is still opportunity for feedback at any of the above-mentioned meetings.

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Ringside: EVs and California's Future

Demand for Electricity

When it comes to electrification, few categories of consumption are likely to outweigh the demands of EVs

By Edward Ring, December 4



When it comes to the achievement of “carbon neutrality” and the requisite energy policies to get there, few choices carry with them more consequences than the planned, nearly total electrification of our economy. And when it comes to electrification, few categories of consumption are likely to outweigh the demands of EVs. With a focus on California, how much demand are we talking about?

When it comes to making an estimate for EVs, we can predict with reasonable accuracy the efficiency of the power use, because EVs use electricity very efficiently. When at least 80 percent of the electrical energy charging the battery then powering the motor is returned as horsepower, which is already true, the theoretical limit of underestimating improvement in battery and motor efficiency is only 20 percent.

With that in mind, we can look up the total miles driven per year in California and divide that by an average kilowatt-hours per mile (the EV equivalent of MPG). According to the US Dept. of Transportation, Californians drove an estimated total of 340 billion miles in 2024. According to the U.S. Dept. of Energy, the average EV gets 3.6 miles per kilowatt-hour. Simple division yields 94.4 billion kilowatt-hours. Since one million kWh equals one gigawatt-hour (GWh), then electrifying California's vehicle fleet would require 94,444 gigawatt-hours per year. This estimate may be lowered by the fact that about five percent of California's vehicle fleet is already EVs, which lowers the mileage represented by gasoline

powered vehicles. According to the U.S. Dept. of Energy, of the 30.8 million cars and light trucks on the road in California, 1.6 million are “BEVs.” Another way to make this estimate is to consider the total gasoline consumption in California, multiply that by the average mileage, then divide the product by the average kWh per mile.

According to the California Energy Commission, in 2024 the state’s refineries produced 13.4 billion gallons of gasoline. They also report that “3% of gasoline in California is used off-road, and an additional small percentage is shipped out of state.” If we assume that lowering 13.4 by five percent will adequately take into account off-road and out-of-state use, we get 12.7 billion gallons.

The next step is to divide estimated gasoline consumption of 12.7 billion gallons by the average mileage for cars in California. A 2024 study by the Union of Concerned Scientists reports a 29.0 MPG average. This seems reasonable. There are way too many big cars, light trucks, and old gas guzzlers still on the road for California’s MPG average to be much higher. Using that figure, the division yields 389 billion miles driven, and based on that estimate, and at 3.6 miles/kWh, we come up with a 107,944 gigawatt-hours per year requirement to convert our vehicles to EVs.

The estimates arrived at using two methods, 94,444 GWh vs 107,944 GWh, differ by 14 percent. That may seem like a lot, but when we are trying to roughly estimate what it’s going to take to convert California’s drivers to all-electric vehicles, it remains a very useful number. And since we arrived at the two calculations using different starting variables, we can feel more comfortable that nothing is way off.

But California’s state legislature doesn’t just want to electrify cars and light trucks. They want to electrify *everything* on the road. So what about diesel fueled vehicles?

According to the California Energy Commission, 3.5 billion gallons of diesel fuel were refined in California in 2024, and according to former CEC Commissioner James Boyd, about 2.6 billion gallons were used for transportation. To translate this into kilowatt-hours requires a few big assumptions, but for making reasonable approximations for these numbers we can assume as follows: The average 18 wheeler heavy truck gets 6 MPG, and a diesel fueled F150 pickup gets 20 MPG. Let’s therefore assume that on average, diesel fuel consumed in California delivers 12 MPG. On that basis we can multiply 2.6 billion miles by 12 MPG and estimate 31.2 billion diesel fueled miles are driven per year in California. But how do you convert that to gigawatt-hours?

A shorthand that will likely yield a plausible estimate is to compare the average 29 MPG of gasoline fueled vehicles to the 12 MPG average we’ve assumed for diesel

fueled vehicles. This ratio, 41 percent, is a basis from which to estimate how much more power is required to move the heavier diesel powered vehicles. Put another way, if we multiply 3.6 miles/kWh by 41 percent, we get a diesel vehicle estimate of 1.5 miles/kWh. Thus, divide 31.2 billion by 1.5 and the result is another 20,900 GWh per year to power California's diesel cars and trucks with electricity.

Altogether, we may estimate with some confidence that it will take somewhere between 115,000 and 130,000 GWh per year to electrify 100 percent of California's wheeled, on-road vehicles. Is that estimate too rough? Too speculative? Perhaps. But I'd be surprised if it differs significantly from what may ultimately be the case.

The big question – along with just how rapidly Californians will be willing to exchange their gas and diesel powered cars and trucks for EVs, or how rapidly the distribution infrastructure could be built – is where all this additional electricity is going to come from. We know that total consumption of electricity in California in 2024 was estimated to be 278,338 gigawatt-hours, so if we convert our cars and trucks to EVs, it could jump to over 400,000 GWh per year.

There will be other surging demands if California electrifies other major sectors of the economy. Can we electrify our locomotives? Will we electrify every cooktop and space heater, every pump, and most commercial and industrial processes? According to the US Energy Information Administration, California's annual consumption of "energy services," that is, end user consumption of energy, is around 2,400 TBTUs (trillion British Thermal Units), with nearly 80 percent of it converted from massive inputs of petroleum and natural gas.

Those 2,400 TBTUs, expressed as units of electricity, are equal to 700,000 gigawatt-hours. We then must account for the fact that even with solar and wind generated electricity sources, significant production percentages are lost in the transmission, storage, and ultimate conversion of generated electricity into light, heat, horsepower, etc. In order to electrify 100 percent of California's economy, annual electricity production would need to exceed one million gigawatt-hours.

That doesn't take into account the latest burgeoning use for electricity, AI, demanded by one of the most powerful special interests in the state, big tech. Over the next several years the tradeoffs our elected officials must negotiate between affordability and adhering to "carbon neutrality" are going to become more challenging than ever.

New Report Warns Consequences of an Oil Pipeline Shutdown Would ‘Cascade Across the State’

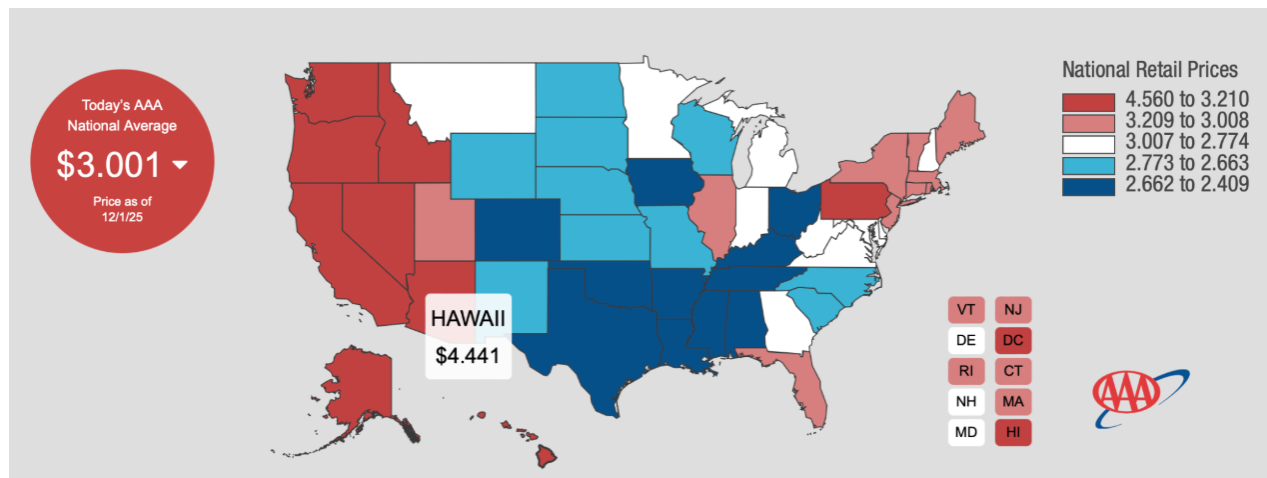
California’s in-state oil production has declined by approximately 65% since 2001, while its dependency on foreign imports has risen by nearly 70%

By Katy Grimes, December 2, 2025

“Has California’s Oil And Gas Industry Hit The Point Of No Return?” the California Globe **asked** Monday, after learning from a long time oil and gas expert that the state may actually have crossed a line too far to claw back the shutdowns of refineries, or those about to shut down.

California’s highest-in-the-nation gas prices are self-inflicted, as is the gasoline crisis in the state. This has subsequently increased dependency on foreign oil suppliers and shippers to supply fuels, and as we **reported** recently, this poses a direct threat to U.S. military force readiness on the West Coast, as California Assemblyman Stan Ellis, USC Professor Professor Michael Mische, and petroleum expert Michael Ariza warned recently in their report, “**CALIFORNIA ENERGY & FUEL POLICIES: A CLEAR AND PRESENT THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY AND FORCE READINESS?**”

On Monday, USC Professor Michael A. Mische, UC Berkeley Professors James W. Rector, and Joseph B. Silvi issued another report on California’s Oil and Gas Conundrum. But this one is a blueprint for recovery.



As we have reported and the professors reiterate, “California faces immediate risks to gasoline supply due to declining in-state production, refinery closures, and an imminent northbound pipeline collapse.”

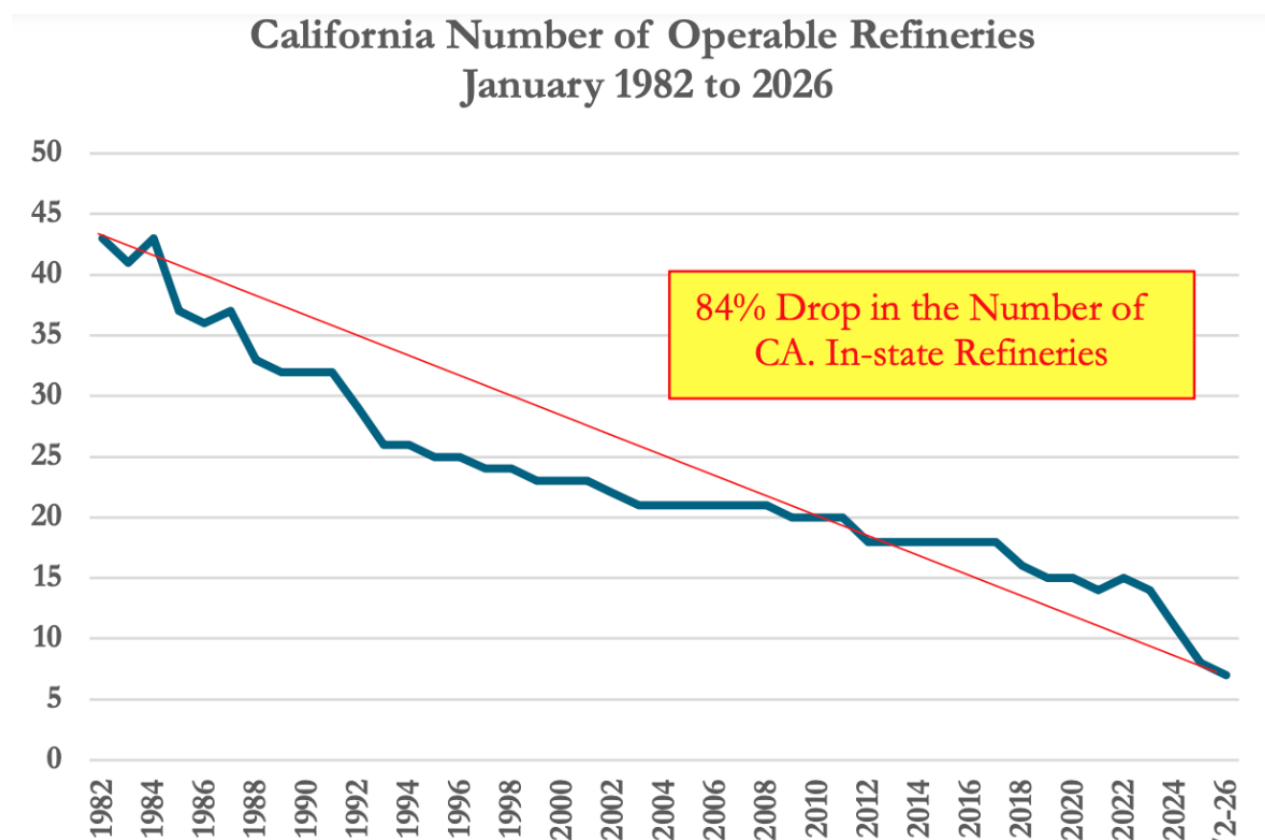
The professors prepared a Policy Brief on Stabilizing California’s Oil Supply Under SB 237 in October, which examined the ability of **Senate Bill 237** to stabilize California’s energy infrastructure and supply, maintain refinery and pipeline operations, and ensure energy security amid refinery closures and increasing foreign dependence.

The professors note in the first paragraph of the October policy brief:

“California’s in-state oil production has declined by approximately 65% since 2001, while its dependency on foreign imports has risen by nearly 70%. At the same time, refinery capacity has fallen 21% since 2023 and gasoline demand remains largely unchanged at roughly 36–40 million gallons per day. SB 237, designed to permit up to 2,000 new wells annually in Kern County, will add some production but not enough to offset the overall statewide decline and will not adequately stabilize the state’s petroleum infrastructure.”

Governor Gavin Newsom in April **directed state officials** to increase efforts to guarantee reliable fuel supplies for the nation’s biggest auto market, prompting oil companies to blame state policies for difficult business conditions and high pump prices, thus they passed SB 277, and the governor signed it into law in September.

Note their warning: “SB 237 will add some production but not enough to offset the overall statewide decline and will not adequately stabilize the state’s petroleum infrastructure.”



California’s gas prices remain the highest in the country. Today AAA reports the national average cost of a gallon of gas at \$3.01, and California’s average is at \$4.56 per gallon – California’s average is \$1.55 higher than the national average. The highest in California is in Mono County at \$5.90 per gallon – California’s prices are slightly higher today than they were in October. And California’s gas prices remain higher than even Hawaii, at \$4.41 per gallon, which imports all oil and gas.

The professors’ newest study demonstrates that “increasing crude oil production in certain regions in California will preserve and sustain both refineries and pipelines and avert severe price shocks in the consumer fuel market.”

They report that California's gas is 51% higher than the national average.

But this is attributed to the impending loss of two refineries and the collapse of the only remaining northern pipeline, as the *Globe* **reported** Monday. They warn that “together with increasing dependency on non-U.S. gasoline sources to California could drive the price of gasoline to double that of the national average by calendar year end 2026.”

The crux of the matter is this – “After years of tearing down California's in-state oil and gasoline production, Governor Newsom and the California legislature” think that two pieces of legislation will make the course correction needed to save their political careers.

Not so fast... the professors explain:

“SB 237, which allows for up to 2,000 new drilling permits a year in Kern County, and AB 30 that allows for the sale of E15 gasoline, form the centerpieces of Governor Newsom's and the Legislature's plan to alleviate gasoline supply insecurity, moderate consumer prices and stabilize the markets. Unfortunately, SB 237 is too little and too late, and AB 30 is overly optimistic. New Kern production stimulated by SB 237 will not be enough to stem the natural decline of Kern County oil production in the current low crude price and regulatory environment.

Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that AB 30 will universally reduce gasoline prices by \$0.20 a gallon across the state as proclaimed by the Governor. Inevitably, in state crude oil production will continue to decline unabated and lead to further pipeline and refinery shutdowns over the next few years, increasing supply instability and prices.

So what can be done? Professors Mische, Rector and Silvi lay it out:

Our analysis indicates that California can navigate its way out of this government-created crisis and avoid supply vulnerabilities and escalating consumer prices by implementing the following action steps [*emphasis the Globe*]:

1. California's most immediate, viable and sustainable option is to **increase in-state crude oil production**. The best, and essentially only way to achieve and sustain this benefit is to **reopen the Las Flores Canyon pipeline system on the Central Coast and safely increase offshore crude oil production in the Santa Ynez Unit (SYU)**.

2. Restoring production in this region would immediately provide 45,000 barrels per day of clean, low-decline California crude suited for SoCal refinery configurations. Up to 100,000 barrels per day could be produced from the Santa Barbara channel. This oil can be directed south to the Los Angeles area refineries thereby freeing up tens of thousands of barrels of Kern County oil compatible with Northern California refineries to be redirected north to the surviving PBF- Martinez refinery. Additionally, 350,000 barrels of SYU crude oil is currently in onshore storage tanks which could be delivered into the California system within a few days' notice upon reopening the Las Flores Canyon pipeline system.

They warn however:

“Failure to act and failure to increase in-state crude oil production will only accelerate the exit of California refineries from the state, increase global GHG emissions, further California’s contributions to environmental destruction, force greater reliance on foreign suppliers, increase consumer prices, and diminish U.S. national security.”

How did this happen?

At one time **California was home to over 40 operating refineries.** However, due to high operating and regulatory compliance costs, a harsh political environment, conversions to bio and renewable fuels, and **Governor Newsom’s 2020 directive banning the sale of new internal combustion vehicles in the state, the number of refiners has declined by 84% from 43 in 1982 to just seven survivors in 2026** (estimated). As Chevron Upstream President Andy Walz noted, “I think it’s been a tyranny of about 25 years to get the refining business to leave California.” If left uncorrected, more refinery closures are likely to follow for the 2027 to 2031 period.

This graph provides the ghastly visual:

They note:

“California refineries were designed to process the state’s predominantly heavy crude oil and are configured to produce the state-specific CARBOB gasoline and ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel. CARBOB and ultra-low sulfur diesel fuels (CARB

ULSD) are the result of **California's regulatory-mandated air quality mandates, which are the strictest in the world.** Because of their unique formulations **most out- of-state refineries cannot produce CARBOB or CARB ULSD without costly retrofits and retrofits.** Because of California's mandated special gasoline formula, there are only a handful of refineries outside of California in the world that can or will produce it."

California politicians and governor arrogantly advanced "green energy" policies and regulations without a care for the down-range warnings.

In 2013 – twelve years ago – when Jerry Brown was governor, I reported that despite that California's financial house was such a mess even then, with 9.8% unemployment, the Golden State is sitting on a lot more oil and jobs than the state has seen in decades.

Even back in 2013, the warnings and solutions were right in front of everyone, but the "green mafia" was much more sexy to Democrats than boosting California's economy and home grown oil and gas production:

(2013) California sits on two-thirds of America's shale oil reserves. The **Monterey Shale Formation** is four times the size of the **Bakken Shale Reserve** in North Dakota, which is now the largest oil producer in the country behind Texas. Along the Western side of the San Joaquin Valley in the middle of the state, the Monterey Shale Formation encompasses several hundred miles, where water has dried up and unemployment is the highest in the state.

North Dakota has a monthly oil output of nearly 20 million barrels, and accounts for 11 percent of U.S. oil production. But California quickly could produce 15 million barrels a month more using today's technology. Many experts estimate as much as 400 billion barrels of oil are in the Monterey Shale Formation.

The oil boom in North Dakota spurred the state's \$3.8 billion surplus and is responsible for the declining unemployment rate, currently at 3.2 percent, the lowest in the nation (2013).

As I **concluded** then, "California has implemented no real reform policies in recent years to promote jobs. Currently, Brown has not seemed to be interested in making any of these pro-growth economic moves as he pushes high-speed rail and the implementation of AB 32's radical climate change policies."

In 12 years, not only has Governor Newsom also pushed the deadbeat High Speed Rail scheme and radical climate change policies, he has nearly killed off the oil industry in the state.

The professors said:

“Collectively, inclusive of refineries that have converted to renewable fuels and with the loss of the Phillips 66 and Valero refineries, California will have lost close to 21% or 6.2 million gallons a day of its in-state gasoline production capacity since 2023. Based on current projections, California could possibly lose more refineries between 2027 and 2032, resulting in further substantial reductions in in- state gasoline production and further price increases.”

And:

“Gasoline demand in the Golden State has not declined anywhere near the rate anticipated by state agencies such as the CEC and CARB. Rather than the steep annual declines originally forecasted by the CEC and CARB under overly optimistic electrification scenarios, real-world demand for gasoline in California is falling at less than 2% per year. In fact, since the low point in 2020 due to the pandemic, gasoline demand in California has increased by 7.5%. Jet fuel consumption, which is the fastest growing fuel segment in California is expected to increase over 25% by 2040 to 125,000,000 barrels per year.”

The report is detailed and provides in-depth analysis of the consequences of losing refineries and pipelines, and warns:

As a result of California’s policies, refiners and pipeline operators have exited the state or are considering exiting the state. From 2023, and because of refinery conversions to renewable fuels and the loss of two refineries, California’s in-state gasoline production will have dropped by 6.2 million gallons a day. Other than SB 237 and AB 30, which are insufficient, the only public plan to replace the self-inflicted loss is of in-state crude oil and fuel supply to import gasoline and more crude oil from non-U.S. sources using foreign flagged tanker vessels.

And:

“If the SPB pipeline shuts down, the consequences cascade across the state. Northern California would lose its only pipeline access to California-produced crude.

One of their recommendations is Presidential Intervention. “California’s policies and actions affect the U.S. we are already seeing the impact of more maritime tankers being diverted to California from east coast states and the need to import considerably more jet fuel from China and India to sustain commercial air operations in the Golden State.”

The concede:

“Reopening the Las Flores Canyon pipeline system is the only immediately reasonably viable, abundantly obvious, long-term solution to California’s gasoline supplies insecurities. Increasing in- state production keeps refineries running, preserves the San Pablo Bay Pipeline, strengthens energy security, mitigates port pollution near minority communities, reduces tanker traffic, and lessens dependence on foreign oil. At the same time, it would potentially reduce natural seep emissions, providing a real environmental benefit. This approach makes California’s oil infrastructure more practical, reliable and resilient as the state moves through the multi-decade energy transition.”

The California Governor’s Race is Wide-Open and Everyone is Jumping In

To separate themselves a candidate will need policy, personality and prominence

By Joel Fox, November 29, 2025

Two more notable candidates entered the California governor’s race last week. That brings the total number of candidates with some recognition to about a dozen.

And who's the front runner? Nobody.

A recent UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll said 44% of California voters are undecided on who to vote for. The highest percentage of any candidate was 13%. While some reports declared this low percentage candidate as the front runner, no one at this stage of the campaign more than six months before the primary with less than 20% of the vote should be considered a front runner. The candidates hope to gain notice and separate from the pack. Unfortunately, some of the candidates have gained notice in a negative way. Film clips of former Congresswoman Katie Porter showing her refusing to answer questions from a reporter or bullying a staffer have reduced her poll numbers. Former Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra has been touched by scandal when the FBI arrested top Sacramento consultants, including Becerra's former chief-of-staff, and a lobbyist for draining one of Becerra's campaign accounts unbeknownst to him.

The two recent additions to the field tried to make a splash using their strengths. Hedge fund founder and climate activist Tom Steyer showed off financial strength with millions of dollars in support ads featuring himself for the successful Proposition 50 campaign. He followed that with his video announcement that he was running for governor. His video ads tried to portray a fighter, but it seemed more like he was projecting himself as the angry candidate.

Congressman Eric Swalwell, a constant Trump critic on cable news, announced his candidacy on the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* show highlighting his friendship with Kimmel and his support of him when President Donald Trump tried to have him removed from the airwaves.

Of course, this was not the first time a California gubernatorial candidate announced his candidacy on a late-night talk show. Arnold Schwarzenegger famously told *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno that he decided to run for governor in the Gray Davis recall election.

That announcement took many by surprise including Schwarzenegger staffers who had accompanied him to the *Tonight Show* carrying press releases claiming Schwarzenegger was *not* going to run.

A quick aside from my memory file. I had agreed to work for Schwarzenegger on the campaign. But like others who prepared to be part of the campaign, at the time of his appearance on Leno's show, I believed he was not going to run. I had latched onto the nascent campaign of former Major League Baseball commissioner Peter

Ueberroth with the understanding that in the unlikely event that Schwarzenegger did run I would keep my commitment to him. I was actually in a meeting in Ueberroth's office in Orange County when Ueberroth's secretary called Peter out for a phone call. While the Leno show was not broadcast until 11:30 p.m., the show was taped hours earlier and Ueberroth was called and told what Arnold declared. When Peter came back into the meeting room and told us, he lived up to our agreement and asked me to leave the meeting. I was as shocked as everyone else.

I doubt Swalwell's announcement on Jimmy Kimmel's show will have the same impact as the Schwarzenegger announcement simply because of Schwarzenegger's celebrity and the context of an extraordinary gubernatorial recall election.

Swalwell will work off the same playbook as Steyer and all the other Democratic candidates – GOP candidates need not apply—who will be the toughest Trump opponent. That is a lesson learned in the Proposition 50 campaign where the anti-Trump rhetoric piled up the votes in favor of Prop. 50.

But that won't be nearly enough. With all the Democrats covering the same anti-Trump territory they will need to find something to gain the voters' attention. Policy platforms could score. Sure, all candidates will talk about homelessness and affordability but to what degree? Platitudes won't cut it. What remedies will convince the voters that the plans are realistic?

Remember Governor Gavin Newsom pledged when running for his first term as governor in 2018 to build 3.5 million homes by 2025 to escape the homeless crisis. A report in the San Francisco Chronicle placed the number of home units at 650,000 added through 2023. Considering an average of 110,000 permits a year adding that number for 2024 and 2025 means we haven't reached one million homes yet. Don't buy every plan proposed by candidates who claim they can solve a problem. Yet, seeing how they plan to attack problems specifically can tell you about a candidate. Expect some gubernatorial candidates to follow the New York City mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani's model of presenting an agenda to solve problems whether they are realistic or not. Already gubernatorial candidate and School Superintendent Tony Thurman is following the Mamdani plan specifically by proposing tax increases on corporations and the wealthy. Thurmond has become the tax candidate.

The gubernatorial field may not be complete even yet. Rumors are that state Attorney General Rob Bonta might change his mind about not running. Wealthy Los Angeles developer and one time L.A. mayoral candidate Rick Caruso is another possibility. A celebrity with great name recognition could sense an opportunity. And California has never been short of wealthy candidates who think they can buy themselves the seat in the governor's mansion.

This race is far from over and it can be channeled and re-channeled by circumstances ahead from scandal to a dramatic public event and how candidates react. Good strategy and campaigns matter, too.

Candidates who gain attention through policy, personality, and prominence will have a leg up.

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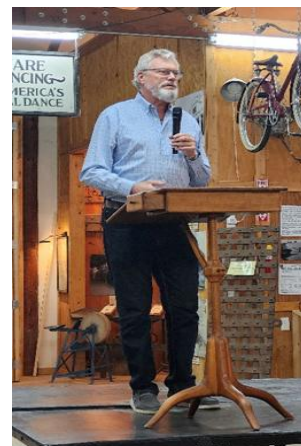
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