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San Luis Obispo County



The Coalition of Labor Agriculture and Business

WEEKLY UPDATE February 23 - March 1, 2025

COLAB

San Luis Obispo County



16TH ANNUAL DINNER & FUNDRAISER

THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2025
MADONNA INN EXPO CENTER

A NEW ERA IN GOVERNMENT

Enjoy a bipartisan dialogue on the opportunities and challenges faced by the County and State as the current revolution in Washington progresses. How can the County and Cities take advantage at the local level by tailoring initiatives and changes to the best interests of our local circumstances and issues? Two of our collaborative and experienced local elected officials will form an enlightening exploratory panel.



Dawn Ortiz-Legg, Board Chair &
District 3 Supervisor

5:00 PM SOCIAL HOUR & OPEN BAR
6:15 PM FILET MIGNON DINNER & WINE

AUCTION WILL BE HELD AFTER DINNER
(AUCTIONEER TODD VENTURA)

\$165/ PERSON
\$1,650/ TABLE (SEATS 10)



Heather Moreno, District 5 Supervisor

For tickets:

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or

On-Line Reservations & Payment can be made at www.colabslo.org/events.asp

Cocktail Attire Optional - More info at (805) 548-0340 or colabslo@gmail.com

**THIS WEEK
SEE PAGE 5**

A MAJOR POLICY WEEK AT THE BOS

SLO COUNTY PENSION TRUST

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

**JON ANSOLABEHERE, ASSISTANT COUNTY COUNSEL,
PROMOTED TO REPLACE RETIRING RITA NEAL**

**FY 2023-24 ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT
*COUNTY RECEIVES CLEAN OUTSIDE AUDIT***

**OFFICE EXPANSION PROJECTS CANCELLED
*PERHAPS THEY WANT FOLKS WORKING AT HOME***

**REVISED BOB JONES TRAIL EASEMENTS
HOW IS THE PROJECT DOING AGAINST DEADLINES?**

**WATER MORATORIUM ON SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTRY
CLUB AREA - FIVE YEARS TO START**

**FUNDING COUNTY FIRE TO ADEQUATE LEVELS
FIRE ENGINES, FIRE HOUSES, AND STAFFING A HUGE CHALLENGE
IS A TAX INCREASE THE ONLY SOLUTION?
*WHY THE COUNTY IS REALLY BROKE IN THE LONG RUN***

**MAJOR WATER POLICY
DELTA CONVEYANCE COSTS & COUNTY FUTURE IN PLAY**

BOARD MEMBER QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS

LAST WEEK

SEE PAGE 18

A VERY LITE WEEK LOCALLY

NO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETING

**LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION
CANCELLED**

OTHER AGENCIES DID NOT MEET

EMERGENT ISSUES

SEE PAGE 18

THE DAILY CHART: SNOW JOB

***BOTH ARCTIC SEA ICE AND NORTHERN HEMISPHERE
SNOW COVER ARE BURSTING ABOVE THE AVERAGE
OF THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES***

**IS CALIFORNIA DRIVING OIL BIZ OUT OF
STATE TO TAKE OVER OIL REFINERIES?**

***Turning California into Venezuela won't improve refinery
capacity – getting out of the way and cutting regulations will***

**US LAUNCHES NUCLEAR MISSILE TO SHOW
'READINESS'**

***VANDENBERG SONIC BOOMS - THE SOUND OF FREEDOM!
AIR FORCE SEEMS TO BE ON COURSE FOR MANY MORE
LAUNCHES***

**COLAB IN DEPTH
SEE PAGE 25**

**TWELVE SCARCITY ENABLING LAWS TO SCRAP
BY EDWARD RING**

REDEFINING ENVIRONMENTALISM

Environmentalists push for denser urban areas and restricted land use, overlooking practical solutions like deregulated fire management and expanded development to address climate risks

BY EDWARD RING

THE CLEANUP CREW

*On the Department of Government Efficiency
BY THE EDITORS OF NEW CRITERION*

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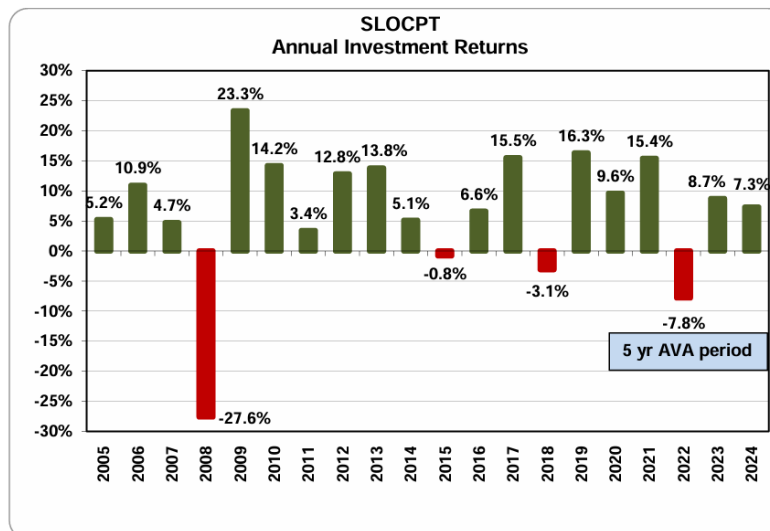


THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

SLO County Pension Trust Meeting of Monday, February 24, 2025 (Scheduled) 9:30 AM

Item 11- Quarterly Investment Report for the 4th Quarter of 2024

For the quarter ending December 31, 2024, SLOCPT's total fund returned 7.3% year-to-date, aligning with long-term investment objectives despite market volatility. U.S. equities outperformed international markets, supported by post-election economic optimism, while inflation and interest rates remained key factors influencing market performance.



Item 12 - January Monthly Investment Report. The Board item stated in part:

In January, the S&P 500 gained 2.8%, with broad market strength as 10 of 11 sectors finished positively, led by communication services, 9.0%. However, the "Magnificent Seven" stocks (0.3%) underperformed, with Nvidia dropping (17%) in a single day following news that Chinese

AI firm, DeepSeek, had developed a competitive model at a lower cost. Large-cap value stocks, 4.6% outperformed large-cap growth, 2.0%, narrowing the valuation gap slightly. Fixed income markets saw positive returns, with 1 Agenda Item #12 high-yield corporate credit, 1.7%, leading. Internationally, the European Central Bank cut rates again, while geopolitical tensions and trade policy uncertainty fueled market volatility. Despite fluctuations, earnings reports remained strong, with 77% of S&P 500 companies beating estimates, supporting continued market resilience.

	1-month	YTD	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Total Fund (%) (Gross)	1.80	1.8	7.0	8.9	(8.0)	15.2	8.9
Policy Index (%)	1.50	1.5	8.5	10.2	(9.7)	12.8	10

	YTD	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Market Value (millions)	\$1,794	\$1,763	\$1,694	\$1,614	\$1,775	\$1,552

Related factoid item: Retiring APCD Director/Air Pollution Control Officer Gary E. Willey will receive a pension of \$19,507 per month or \$234,084 per year. If he has many years of Social Security credits, and depending on his age and when he takes, he could have another \$40,000 on top of the pension.

SLO County Board of Supervisors Meeting of Tuesday, February 25, 2025 (Scheduled)

Item 2 - Request to approve the employment agreement of Jon Ansolabehere to serve as County Counsel for a four-year term beginning March 16, 2025, pursuant to the California Government Code, sections 27640 and 27641. The Board is appointing the current Assistant County Counsel, Jon Ansolabehere, as County Counsel. He will replace Rita Neal, who is retiring in March. The write-up states in part:

The Board of Supervisors is impressed with the outstanding performance of the County Counsel's office and recognizes the exceptional contributions of Assistant County Counsel Jon Ansolabehere. After considering all options and looking at the experience and qualifications of Mr. Ansolabehere, the Board requested staff negotiate an employment agreement. The Board is confident that he possesses the expertise, leadership and vision necessary to continue driving the office forward with excellence. The Board has decided through this action to appoint Jon Ansolabehere as County Counsel for a four-year term pursuant to the California Government Code, sections 27640 and 27641.

Mr. Ansolabehere earned a Juris Doctor from Golden Gate University School of Law, following a Master's degree in Public Policy from Cal Poly. He is also an active member of the California League of Cities Fair Political Practices Commission Advisory Group.

Mr. Ansolabehere has been a member of the County Counsel's office since March 18, 2019, when he joined the department as Chief Deputy County Counsel after practicing at both a private law firm, and a public agency. He was appointed as Assistant County Counsel on

December 21, 2021. During his time with the County Counsel's office, Mr. Ansolabehere has proven his extensive experience in the Subdivision Map Act, CEQA, Affordable Housing Law, Brown Act, and laws relating to homelessness.

COLAB NOTE: With respect to the section highlighted above, this is not good news, as the County Counsel's advice and opinions on these matters over the past years have been pro-statist, anti-private property, and anti-citizen participation. For example, the County Counsel shucked and jived the creation of the Paso Basin Water Management Joint Powers Authority. The Board joined the authority with a consent calendar vote. There was no hearing. It was not even a business item. County Counsel ruled that a pre-discussing of the matter in December constituted a hearing. Moreover, the Board and County Counsel allowed a substantial staff presentation and introduction of revised governing documents (that no one had seen) after public comment on February 4th. Ansolabehere could start off on the right foot by telling the Board to reprocess the issue correctly.

Similarly, the Planning Department and County Counsel have been inconsistent on antiquated subdivisions. Some are ok and some are not, depending on what the Sierra Club thinks vs. the law.

The salary range for the County Counsel is \$224,848 to \$286,998.40 per year. Mr. Ansolabehere will start at step six of the salary range for this position, which equates to an annual salary of \$286,998 and \$110,785 per year in benefits.

Item 6 - Fiscal Year 2023-24 Annual Financial Report and Independent Auditor's Opinion.

The County received an unqualified opinion that means that after analysis of the books and related files, the independent auditors found no misrepresentations, inaccuracies, or other problems with the County's financial records. Money was expended properly in accordance with law and national accounting standards. Note, this is not an opinion on the policies (what the money is expended for), but on the legality and the accuracy of the presentation and record keeping.

In our opinion, based on our audit and the report of other auditors, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the respective financial position of the governmental activities, the business-type activities, the discretely presented component unit, each major fund, and the aggregate remaining fund information of the County, as of June 30, 2024, and the respective changes in financial position, and where applicable, cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

In addition to the balance sheets, revenue and expenditure comparisons, debt analysis, and explanation of reserves, the report contains many useful tables about the financial status of the County and community.

<https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/auditor-controller-treasurer-tax-collector-public/forms-documents/financial-reports/annual-comprehensive-financial-report/2023-24-slo-county-acfr>

Item 25 - Request to: 1) authorize the cancellation of the following projects in Fund Center (FC) 230 – Capital Projects: WBS 320151 (General Government – SLO – Relocation of Parks Offices to El Choro, PYA11) and WBS 320221 (Parks – El Choro Park – Road and Bike Course, PYA04) in FC 230 – Capital Projects; 2) authorize a modification of the approved scope of work for WBS 320152 (General Government – SLO – Relocate Agricultural Commissioner and UC Cooperative Extension Office to El Chorro Park Area, PYA04), also in FC 230 – Capital Projects; and 3) approve corresponding budget adjustments totaling: \$1,859,183 in remaining General Fund contributions to the Facilities Planning Designation within the Capital Projects Fund, \$2,992,650 to the General Government Building Replacement Designation, \$217,796 to the Parks Public Facility Fees Designation, and \$362,204 of General Fund loans to FC 305 – Parks and Recreation – Regional Parks, by 4/5 vote. The irritating and meandering Board letter seems to request that the Board terminate several projects that would transfer, relocate, and consolidate Parks Department staff to a renovated facility in El Chorro Park. Similarly, it would seem to cancel a project to relocate the Ag. Commissioner’s staff to El Chorro park. The lengthy and confusing tale consists of consultants and staff studying various configurations and use of certain buildings at the Park. In the end, environmental issues seem to have blunted the effort. It is not clear if there is enough money to undertake the projects.

The approved budgets and the amount expended so far are displayed in the table below (assuming estimated project costs means expended to date.)

The bottom half of the table shows the remaining balances, their sources, and their transfer to various designations.

Exhibit A – Funding Summary for WBS 320151, 320152, and 320221

Expenditures:	Approved Budget	Estimated Project Costs	Variance
WBS 320151 – Gen Govt - SLO - Relocation of Parks & Recreation Offices to El Chorro Regional Park, PYA04	\$1,200,000	\$387,294	\$812,706
WBS 320152 – Gen Govt - SLO - Relocate Ag Comm And UC Coop Office to El Chorro Regional Park, PYA04	\$4,250,000	\$375,000	\$3,875,000
WBS 320221 – Parks - SLO - El Chorro Regional Park - Road Realignment and Bike Park PYA04	\$750,000	\$5,873	\$744,127
Total Expenditures:	\$6,200,000	\$768,167	\$5,431,833
Funding Source:	Approved Funding	Proposed Funding	Variance
General Fund	\$2,618,321	\$759,138	\$1,859,183
General Government Building Replacement Designation - Fund Center 267	\$3,001,679	\$9,029	\$2,992,650
Parks Public Facility Fees Designation - Fund Center 247	\$217,796	\$0	\$217,796
Parks General Fund Loan - Fund Center 305	\$362,204	\$0	\$362,204
Total Funding:	\$6,200,000	\$768,167	\$5,431,833

Now What?

The murky write-up is not clear on what happens next. It does mention more study with architects and alludes to continuing the projects in some fashion, but it is unclear.

The bigger issues include:

1. The County is facing an \$8 to \$13 million general fund revenue gap in its next fiscal year. This could be exacerbated by Federal and State funding cuts to counties as the DOGE process proceeds and California maintains its stance to ignore Federal orders.
2. How many of the impacted employees are “working” remotely? (“Working” at home)
3. How many total County employees are working remotely, and how much office space has been freed up?

Item 27 - Request to approve, for necessary right of way and easement access for the Bob Jones Pathway “Gap Closure” Project in San Luis Obispo, the following: 1) amendments to perpetual and temporary construction easement agreement Nos. 22-12.01, 03, 07 with the City of San Luis Obispo in the amount of \$16,000; 2) amendment to perpetual and temporary construction easement agreement No. 22-12.05 with Sarjit S. Malli and Rupinder K. Malli, Trustees of the Malli Family Trust of June 7, 1994, in the amount of \$500; 3) amendment to the perpetual and temporary construction easement agreement Nos. 22-12.15, 06 and 22-12.14,09 with the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo in the amount of \$29,500; 4) amendment to easement agreement No. 22-12.02 with Ronald Rinell in the amount of \$150; and 5) authorize the Director of Public Works, or designee, to execute any remaining escrow and payment-related documents or instructions necessary to close the transactions associated with the acquisition of these real property interests. The write-up states that refinements in the trail design have required some adjustments to the easements previously required.

Real property interests were previously acquired on the subject properties Nos. 1–4 to provide the County and its contractors with the permanent and temporary property rights needed to construct the Project across each of these properties. These interests were accepted by the Board on July 16, 2024. Amendments to the original real property interests are now needed due to the Project’s design being farther along and its schedule better defined from what it was on July 16, 2024. The amended easements were negotiated with affected property owners, and approval of them as recommended herein will make the amended easements effective.

These are a small portion of the overall project:

The Bob Jones Pathway Gap Closure Project (Project) is a multi-year project widely supported by the community and partner agencies (SLOCOG and CalTrans). The proposed 4.5-mile extension of the Bob Jones Pathway is pending approval by the California Transportation Commission to be constructed in two segments, as approved by your Board on January 14, 2025, connecting the Land Conservancy Octagon Barn to the County’s Ontario Road staging area. The County has previously completed the construction of a public parking lot and staging area at the Octagon Barn site located on South Higuera Street to serve the pathway. This pathway fills an essential link in the County’s bicycle transportation network between the five cities area and San Luis Obispo, providing people of all abilities a transportation choice for bicycling and walking

to work/school/community destinations. It also offers access through natural and agricultural areas for recreation and exercise

While this agenda item is focused on these specific transactions, it could have been an opportunity to also report on the status of the major reroute issue:

1. Has the State Transportation Commission approved the route modification?
2. Has the new \$6 million to fund the new route portion that is not allowed by the State been approved?
3. Is the \$6.8 million in County funds, noted below, within the \$46.1 million cost or on top of it?

*The project is funded in part by ATP grant funds administered by the California Transportation Commission (CTC) in the amount of \$18,248,000. Of this \$18.25 million, \$2.3 million has been allocated and authorized to reimburse land acquisition costs and engineering costs associated with planning, design, and right-of way. Another \$15.9 million has been programmed but not yet authorized for the construction phase of the Project. In addition to support from the CTC, **the County has spent \$6.8 million in County funds,** community donations, and State and Federal grants since 2002.*

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

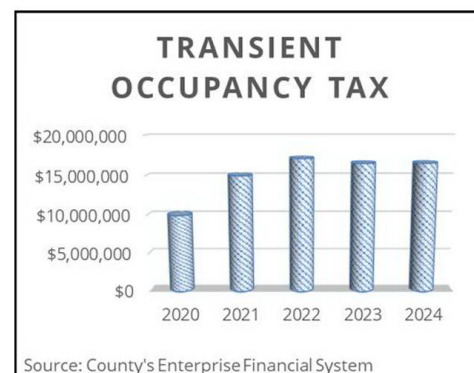
The amendments and agreement provide for the following compensation:

Agency	Amount
City of San Luis Obispo	\$16,000.00
Ronald Rinell	\$150.00
Sarjit S. Malli and Rupinder K. Malli, Trustees of the Malli Family Trust of June 7, 1994	\$500.00
The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo	\$29,500.00
Total:	\$46,150.00

How does this table relate to the overall trail budget? The narrative does not jive with the table.

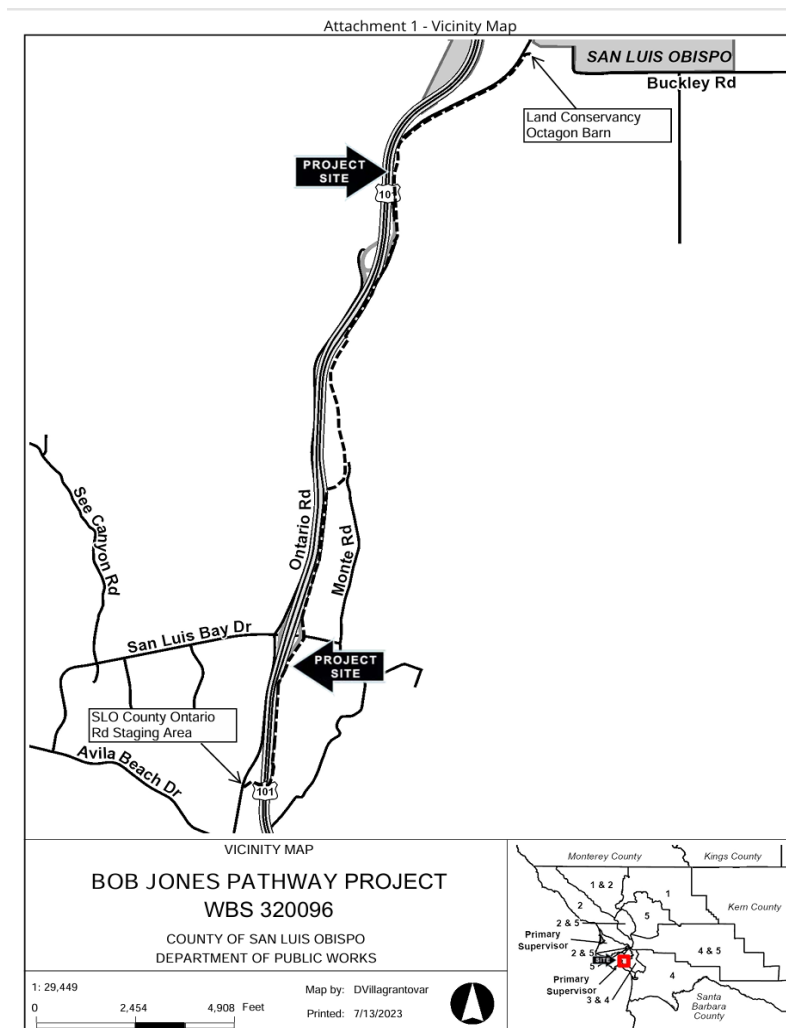
Fairness and policy:

Trails are a nice amenity for people who are young and strong enough to use them. People also need the time. Few people will use the trail as an alternative to cars for commuting. You can't arrive at work sweaty and disheveled and also be ready to go. ed. Meanwhile, your State and local tax dollars are being used to build the thing, while at the same time your gasoline taxes, road fees, and general taxes are rising inexorably each year. It is asserted that the trail will be a boon for the hospitality industry vis a vis the TOT. Note that the TOT is performing weakly. What



exactly is the ROR on a \$50 million trail?

Of course, maintaining the trail will be a major new expenditure, as it becomes a linear homeless camp.



Item 28 - Request to 1) adopt the attached ordinance imposing a moratorium on the issuance of will serve letters for sewer service in County Service Area 18 - San Luis Obispo Country Club; 2) delegate authority to the Director of Public Works or designee to temporarily halt the issuance of will serve letters until the effective date of the ordinance; and 3) authorize the use of Alternate Public Procedures for the subject ordinance. Service Area 18 provides sanitary sewer service to the San Luis Obispo Country Club area. The Board letter states in part:

Approval of the recommendations would result in the introduction of the attached ordinance imposing a moratorium on the issuance of new will serve letters for sewer service in CSA 18 San

Luis Obispo Country Club and temporarily halt issuance of new will serve letters until the effective date of today's final action, thereby serving the County's interest to provide public health and safety, maintain regulatory compliance, and protect environmental resources.

The County and Regional Water Quality Control Board have determined that further development of the area must be pended for at least 5 years, while the various jurisdictions figure out how to comply with stricter state regulations on sewer discharge volumes. The area now generates about 67,000 gallons per day. If the volume increased to 80,000 or more gallons per day, it would be unable to meet State requirements. The issue is further complicated by days when there is heavy rain runoff. Items subject to the moratorium include :

- **New construction on vacant parcels**
- **Accessory dwelling units (ADUs)**
- **Lot splits**
- **Annexations**
- **Connections from residential parcels with abandoned septic systems**

Some related information that should have been detailed in this communication include:

1. Are there any vacant but potential entitlements for dwelling units or lots in Service Area 18? If so, how many?
2. Have the property owners or their association been involved in the discussions on this issue?
3. Are any existing vacant lots counted in the County's Housing Element? If so, how many?
4. When will the County switch to a policy of abundance vs. rationing?
4. Are any vacant?

Item 36 - Request to: 1) receive and file a status update on the County Fire Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan), the Information Technology Component of the Strategic Plan and the Paid Call Firefighter Program (PCF) Review for the San Luis Obispo County Fire Department, and provide direction as deemed necessary; 2) approve a new maintenance project (WBS 350201) in Fund Center 200 – Maintenance Projects to complete a feasibility analysis and conceptual plan for a new fire station in Santa Margarita Ranch; 3) approve a new maintenance project (WBS 350202) in Fund Center 200 – Maintenance Projects to complete a feasibility analysis and conceptual plan for a fire station in Oak Shores; 4) approve a corresponding budget adjustment in the amount of \$250,000 from the Capital Projects Fund Facilities Planning Designation to WBS 350201 in Fund Center 200 – Maintenance Projects, by 4/5 vote; 5) approve a corresponding budget adjustment in the amount of \$250,000 from the Capital Projects Fund Facilities Planning Designation to WBS 350202 in Fund Center 200 – Maintenance Projects, by 4/5 vote. This item contains an update on one of the main challenges facing the County. That is the number of fire stations, the number of firefighters, the number of fire engines, the number of firefighters per engine (in many cases), and other shortfalls in terms of standards needed to be addressed.

As noted further in this article, the fire service issues raise much bigger questions about the survival of the entire County system of government.

Back in January 2023, the Board received a detailed analysis and long range plan to begin to remedy the situation. This report details some of the small steps taken so far and authorizes expenditures for architectural studies for 2 new fire houses.

Of course, the problem is funding. The Study found that the upgrades would cost \$46 million in capital expenditures, \$4.5 million for new equipment, and a new \$19 million per year (and growing) funding for staffing and other annual operations costs.

One proposed solution is asking citizens of the unincorporated area to approve a property tax override or sales tax increase, TOT increase, or special assessment. The report states in part:

As presented on January 24, 2023, for the County to continue its ability to provide and fund County Fire protection at a rate that is needed, based off the recommendations outlined in the Strategic Plan, staff recommended an evaluation of Special Tax or Benefit Assessment. Subsequently, the County engaged a consultant, Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3), to conduct voter polling services to determine the level of voter support for potential revenue sources including a special tax to increase funding for County fire service and changes to the unincorporated county transient occupancy tax (TOT). Currently staff has begun planning efforts to communicate the County Fire Department's needs through outreach to the community. County Fire is working with the Administrative Office to include an initial cost estimate for community outreach efforts in the FY 2025-26 Budget.

This appears to be another case of the government (the County) using the people's tax dollars to "educate" them about the need for even another tax.

The Bigger Problem:

1. Any tax increase or new tax for fire and emergency services will probably have to compete with a SLOGC push for a ½ cent increase for regional roads and "transportation," especially "local effort" money to qualify for CAL Trans road grant incentives.
2. There is also the thought of issuing debt and commensurate tax increase for affordable housing.
3. With billions being spent at the State level and millions at the County level on the sick and addicted homeless, there is no end in sight. Until constitutional legal reforms are adopted, requiring the homeless to comply with medical and behavior norms, nothing will work. Thus, there is an endless pit.
4. Local County Roads require more funding. As the current Budget states:

The department uses a pavement condition index (PCI) as a measure to gauge the overall condition of the County's paved roads. As discussed in the performance measures for this fund center, the Board's adopted goal is to maintain a PCI of 65 or better, which is the statewide average. With the recommended level of funding from the General Fund and Senate Bill (SB) 1

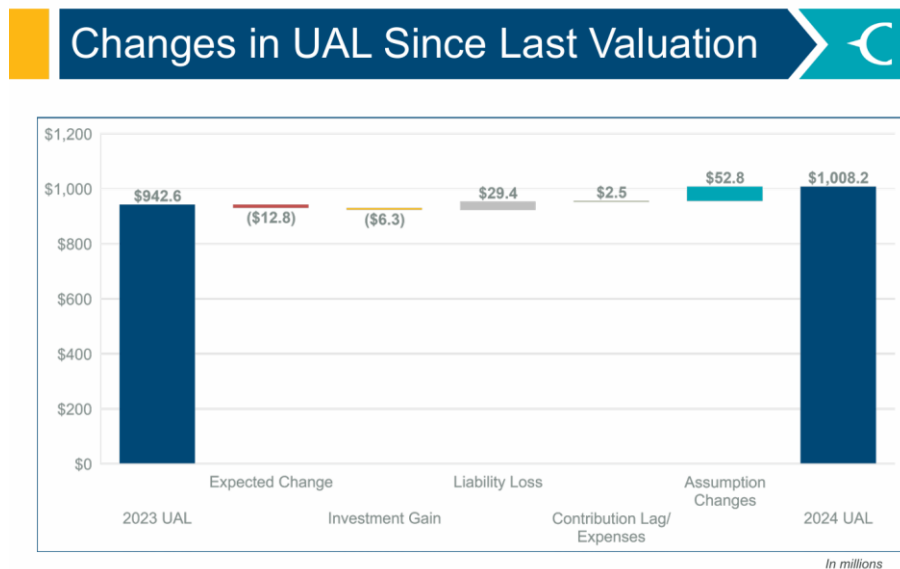
The Road Repair and Accountability Act, the pavement management program is expected to maintain a PCI of 60 through FY 2024-25.

The overall road maintenance deficit is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, with no prospective financial source for remediation.

5. Similar to the roads section, there are large maintenance deficits for the County's public building and parks facilities.

6. County salary costs are rising at about 4.9 % per year, which is more that its stated policy level of about 2.5% per year.

7. The County unfunded pension liability now stands at over \$1 billion, adding pressure to the annual Budget.



8. The County already reduced some reserves and kicked the can down the road for more reductions.

Is the \$7.3 million a portion of the projected FY 2025-26 gap of \$8 to \$13 million, or is it on top of that amount?

The following table shows the short- vs long-term reductions recommended to close the "true" General Fund gap of \$15.6 million for FY 2024-25. Specific details about reductions by Fund Center are included in the 'Departmental Budgets by Service Group' section of this book.

Budget Recommendations to Close the Gap			
	Total Amount	Short-Term	Long-Term
Departmental GFS Reductions	\$8.9M	\$1.6M	\$7.3M
Housing/Homeless ARPA reallocation	\$500K	\$500K	
Defer Amount for Automation Depreciation	\$850K	\$850K	
Lower Contingency to 4.75%	\$1.8M	\$1.8M	
Contingency Adjustment for GFS Reductions and BARs	\$322K	\$42K	\$279K
Designated - Rainy Day Funds	\$1.5M	\$1.5M	
Designated - COVID-19 Funds	\$1.8M	\$1.8M	
Total	\$15.6M	\$8M	\$7.6M
% of Short-Term vs. Long-Term		52%	48%

9. Federal funding of State and county programs is likely to decrease this year and in future years as budgetary reforms are imposed by the President and Congress. The dismantling of the LBJ Great Society and Nixon follow-on could shock blue states like California and their subcomponent local governments.

From the macro perspective, the County's expenditure requirements are outstripping its natural revenue growth. Once again, we plead for a major policy reform that would:

1. Expand nuclear power generation in the County.
2. Proactively promote the development of the County's mineral resources, especially oil and gas.
3. Promote the development of 5-star coastal and wine country resorts.
4. Complete the current feasibility study of industrial scale desalination.
5. Promote the development of large estates, large luxury homes, and luxury ranchettes. These use few government services, often send the children (if any) to private schools, and pay high property taxes. The residents buy expensive vehicles and appliances, enjoy restaurants, and otherwise promote the local economy.
6. Encourage Cal Poly to upgrade its sports to Class IA and become a football powerhouse. A Texas football weekend would generate millions in sales taxes, TOT, and publicity.
7. Examine the feasibility of race track pari-mutual betting, thoroughbred breeding, and sales similar to the Keenland facility in Lexington, Kentucky. Have the County share in a piece of the handle (that is the revenue from the bets laid down).
8. Support legislation and a political movement to abolish CEQA and terminate the Coastal Commission. Return local control to cities and counties.

Over all, the County should develop a long range revenue plan to inform the Board and public of how the macro gap will grow. In the end, the current model of government, a unionized civil service bureaucracy that participates in the political process through campaign financing, campaigning, and endorsements, cannot survive.

MATTERS AFTER 1:30 PM

Item 40 - Submittal of a resolution 1) adopting the California Environmental Quality Act findings of the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) as the Lead Agency for the Delta Conveyance Project, and adopting a Statement of Overriding Considerations regarding the potentially significant impacts that may result from the Pre-Construction Work; and 2) approving and authorizing the Director of Public Works to execute a letter agreement that commits the San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (District) to provide funding to DWR for the District's share of Delta

Conveyance Project planning and Pre-Construction Work in calendar years 2026 and 2027 in an amount not to exceed \$1,860,000. (Public Works). After many years of fiddling around about how to bring more water to the middle and south part of the State, the powers that be determined to build tunnels under the Sacramento River Delta to connect the river to the State Water project.

One question was how to pay for it. In turn, it was determined that the 29 subscribers to the Water Project would pay based on their proportionate share of the water in the project. LA Metro Water is the largest user at about 45%, while SLO County is one of the smaller users at about 1.2%.

The project has been broken up into phases. The County paid \$1.3 million toward the first phase. It is now being requested to pay \$1.86 million for the 2nd phase for pre-construction work planning. It is estimated that the total County share for the project could be about \$125 million out of billions

The County could opt out, but if a subscriber opts out now, it cannot decide to rejoin. Thus, it is prudent for the County to remain in until the final costs and their financing mechanisms are determined.

This is a major policy item for the future of the County. The general scope of the project includes:

- *Two intake facilities along the Sacramento River in the north Delta near the community of Hood with on-bank intake structures that would include fish screens.*
- *A concrete-lined tunnel and associated vertical tunnel shafts to convey flow from the intakes about 45 miles to the south of the Bethany Reservoir Pumping Plant and Surge Basin at a location south of the existing SWP Clifton Court Forebay.*
- *A Bethany Reservoir Pumping Plant to lift the water from inside the tunnel below ground into the Bethany Reservoir Aqueduct for conveyance to the Bethany Reservoir Discharge Structure and into the existing Bethany Reservoir.*
- *Other ancillary facilities to support construction and operation of the conveyance facilities including, but not limited to, access roads, concrete batch plants, fuel stations, and power transmission and/or distribution lines.*
- *Efforts to identify geotechnical, hydrogeologic, agronomic, and other field conditions that will guide appropriate construction methods and monitoring programs for final engineering design and construction data collection and field work investigations, including ground-disturbing geotechnical work, water quality and hydrogeologic investigations, agronomic testing, the installation of monitoring equipment, construction test projects, pre-construction design work, and engineering work (Pre-Construction Work).*

Please see the graphic below that illustrates the scope of the project.

Delta Conveyance Project

Modernizing California's Water Infrastructure | 2024



MAP LEGEND

- Intake
- Launch Shaft
- Reception Shaft
- Maintenance Shaft
- Belowground Tunnel



Item 42 - Any Supervisor may ask a question for clarification, make an announcement, or report briefly on his or her activities. In addition, Supervisors may request staff to report back to the Board at a subsequent meeting concerning any matter or may request that staff place a matter of business on a future agenda. Any request to place a matter of business for consideration on a future agenda requires the majority vote of the Board.

Planning Commission Meeting of Thursday, February 27, 2025 (Scheduled)

The agenda is lite with only a residential grading permit and some cell towers.

LAST WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

No Board of Supervisors Meeting on Tuesday, February 18, 2025 (Not Scheduled)

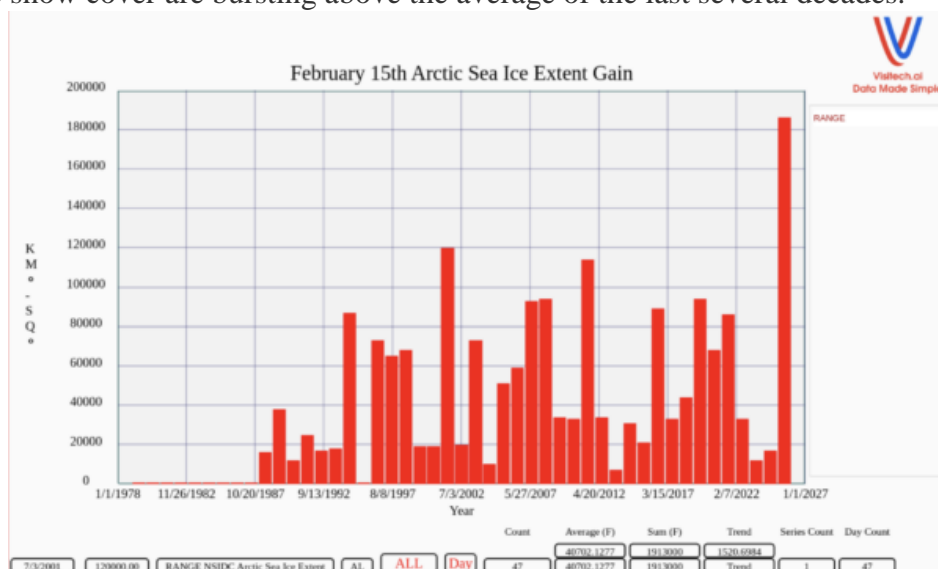
The next meeting was confirmed for Tuesday, February 25, 2025.

Local Agency Formation Commission Meeting of Thursday, February, 20, 2025 (Cancelled)

EMERGENT ISSUES

Item 1 - The Daily Chart: Snow Job - By Steve Hayward

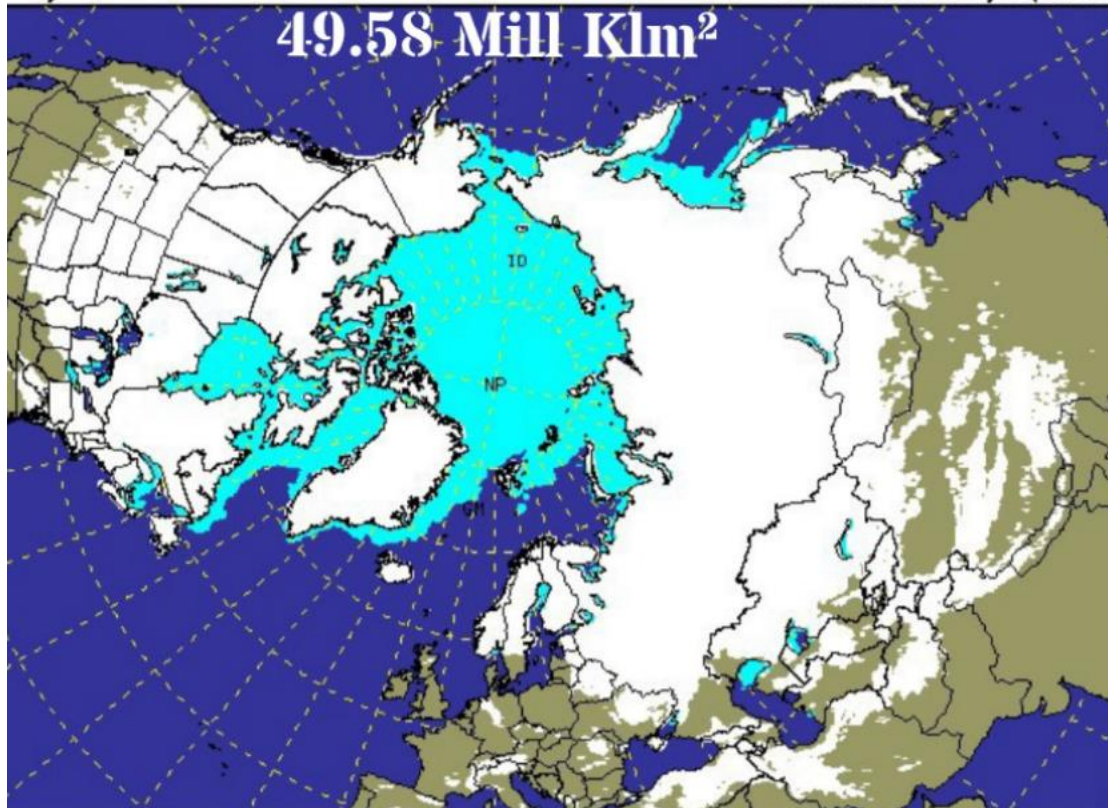
We keep hearing that 2024 was the hottest year on record—a record that extends back, keep in mind, only to about 1850 or so, and there's some doubt about even this short time frame—which, let us recall, many climatologists [predicted](#) would happen after the massive Hunga Tonga volcano eruption in the South Pacific two years ago, and yet both Arctic sea ice and northern hemisphere snow cover are bursting above the average of the last several decades.



Snow cover analysis

Analysis valid 0000 UTC Thu 13 Feb 2025

NOAA-NESDIS Analysis (23.8 km)



Steven Hayward is currently senior resident scholar at the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley, and a visiting lecturer at Berkeley Law School. He was previously the Ronald Reagan Distinguished Visiting Professor at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Public Policy, and was the inaugural visiting scholar in conservative thought and policy at the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2013-14. From 2002 to 2012 he was the F.K Weyerhaeuser Fellow in Law and Economics at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington DC, and has been senior fellow at the Pacific Research Institute in San Francisco since 1991.

He writes frequently for the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, National Review, the Weekly Standard, the Claremont Review of Books, and other publications. The author of six books including a two-volume chronicle of Reagan and his times entitled The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980, and The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counter-Revolution, 1980-1989, and the Almanac of Environmental Trends. His most recent book is Patriotism is Not Enough: Harry Jaffa, Walter Berns, and the Arguments That Redefined American Conservatism.

Steve is a resident of San Luis Obispo County.



Oil pumpjack, San Benito County. (Photo: Katy Grimes for California Globe)

Item 2 - Is California Driving Oil Biz Out of State to Takeover Oil Refineries?

Turning California into Venezuela won't improve refinery capacity – getting out of the way and cutting regulations will – By Katy Grimes.

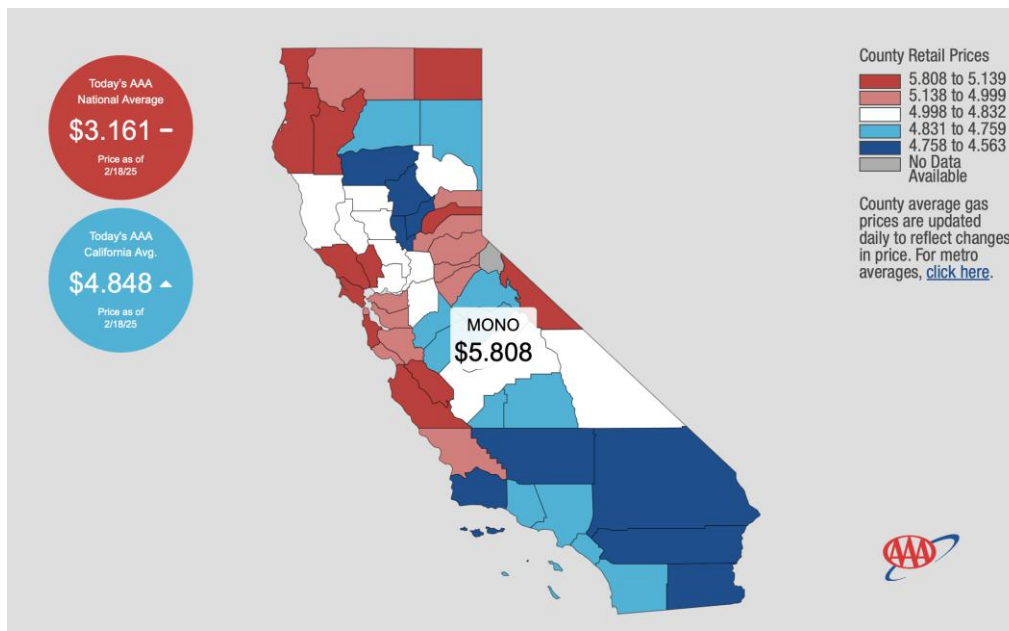
California has highest-in-the-nation gas prices and the highest energy costs, which have increased 50% since 2019 according to the Legislative Analyst's Office. The blame for the 50% increase in energy costs according to the LAO is California's "ambitious climate-related goals," "intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from electricity generation and help the state meet its larger climate goals." This severely affects electricity prices.

And now, with California oil refineries starting their transition to the state's mandated "summer blend fuel," the state's gas prices are going up – again.

The price at the gas pump in the past few weeks has gone up significantly. I just paid \$116 to fill up my tank.

Nationwide, the average price for a gallon of gas is \$3.16 – in California it's \$4.85 per gallon, and as high as \$5.81 per gallon.

In Mississippi, the average price for a gallon of gas is \$2.67 – almost half of California's price.



In January, the Globe reported California's average cost for a gallon of gas was \$4.357.

"Oil is more than just gas stations," Hector Barajas reported at the Globe in January. "It powers transportation, fuels manufacturing, supports agriculture, and keeps supply chains running smoothly. It's found in nearly every product we use, from the food on our tables to the clothes we wear."

"When oil prices increase, those rising costs ripple through every sector of our economy, leaving the public to foot the bill."

Instead of making life more affordable for Californians by producing more of our own energy, and using our own resources to bring down costs and build a more affordable future for everyone, California's lawmakers continue to push for unrealistic "green energy" mandates. They restrict our car choices, and force many people summer and winter to live uncomfortably because of high heating and cooling costs.

"President Trump's policies could threaten many big green energy projects in the coming years," the New York Times reports Tuesday, never acknowledging that big green energy projects are as big of a boondoggle as California's 16-year old High Speed Rail project.

The NY Times acknowledges that the November 2024 election has already dealt a big blow to an ambitious California effort to replace thousands of diesel-fueled trucks with battery-powered semi-trucks.

At the same time, the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) is currently hosting an event billed as an effort to "re-lay the foundations of civilization."

President Donald Trump's U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright spoke at the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship conference in London, referred to by the leftist desmog.com as "a right-wing forum run by fierce opponents of climate policies."

They claim as if it's a bad thing that Secretary Wright has vowed to "get out of the way" of coal, oil and gas, and called the UK's 2050 net zero target "a sinister goal" that would "impoverish" people.

He also downplayed the threat from extreme weather, and suggested that climate action is part of a plot to "grow government power" and "shrink human freedom."

How refreshing. Secretary Wright promised that his first order of business will be to make energy affordable, reliable and secure for all Americans first.

"China and India are about as committed to Net Zero as Britain is to investigating the grooming gangs!" said Sir Paul Marshall, comparing UK energy policy to economic suicide.

The ARC conference includes speeches by Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch, Speaker of the US House Mike Johnson, Reform UK leader Nigel Farage, and Canadian psychologist and ARC founder Jordan Peterson.

The timing of this conference is significant. In August I reported that just as Chevron Oil company announced it would move its headquarters to Houston Texas from San Ramon California, California Energy Commission regulators announced proposed government controls of the petroleum industry, ostensibly in order to combat future energy price surges, according to a report released August 1, 2024 by the CEC.

Gov. Newsom threatened to call a special session if lawmakers didn't pass his Venezuela-Like price controls proposal of the oil and gas industry – unless lawmakers passed his latest proposal to control California's petroleum industry.

Here it is February, and once again, there are news stories that the CEC is more aggressively proposing the takeover of the California's refineries. The Los Angeles Times reports:

"Russia. China. Venezuela. Iran. More than a dozen countries make gasoline at state-owned refineries.

Could California be next on the list?"

The LA Times is acknowledging that California policymakers are considering state ownership of one or more oil refineries, as if this is a good idea. The state can't even build a high speed rail system – what makes anyone in government think taking over the oil and gas refineries is a reasonable plan?

The Western States Petroleum Association explained how devastating Newsom's proposal would be:

"There are bad regulations, and then there are regulations so detrimental that industry experts, the California Energy Commission, and anyone with a basic understanding of economics can clearly see the harm they will cause consumers. Governor Newsom's refinery supply mandate will create artificial shortages of fuel in California, Arizona and Nevada by forcing refiners to withhold fuels from the market. Lawmakers who vote for this mandate will be voting to increase gas costs for their constituents."

And now with EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin sending California's vehicle emissions waiver request to Congress for review, which pretty much kills California Governor Gavin Newsom's ban on gas-powered vehicles, common sense may be forced on California.

As the NYTimes reports, California's effort to replace thousands of diesel-fueled trucks with battery-powered semis "sputters under Trump."

"The California plan, which has been closely watched by other states and countries, was meant to take a big leap forward last year, with a requirement that some of the more than 30,000 trucks that move cargo in and out of ports start using semis that don't emit carbon dioxide.

But after Mr. Trump was elected, California regulators withdrew their plan, which required a federal waiver that the new administration, which is closely aligned with the oil industry, would most likely have rejected. That leaves the state unable to force trucking businesses to clean up their fleets. It was a big setback for the state, which has long been allowed to have tailpipe emission rules that are stricter than federal standards because of California's infamous smog."

Apparently Trump's plan also hurts China's efforts to help force the U.S. into electric trucks and autos. The NYT reports:

"Lower prices for electric trucks will also help. Wen Han started an electric truck company, Windrose Technology, in 2022 in China. He aims to start selling his vehicles in the United States this year for around \$250,000 — well below the cost of those sold by more established manufacturers. He said he could make money at that price, even with U.S. tariffs, which are 40 percent for the truck Windrose makes, because of his low manufacturing costs.

"Our job is to make diesel trucks obsolete," he said, "and that happens with or without any sort of subsidies."

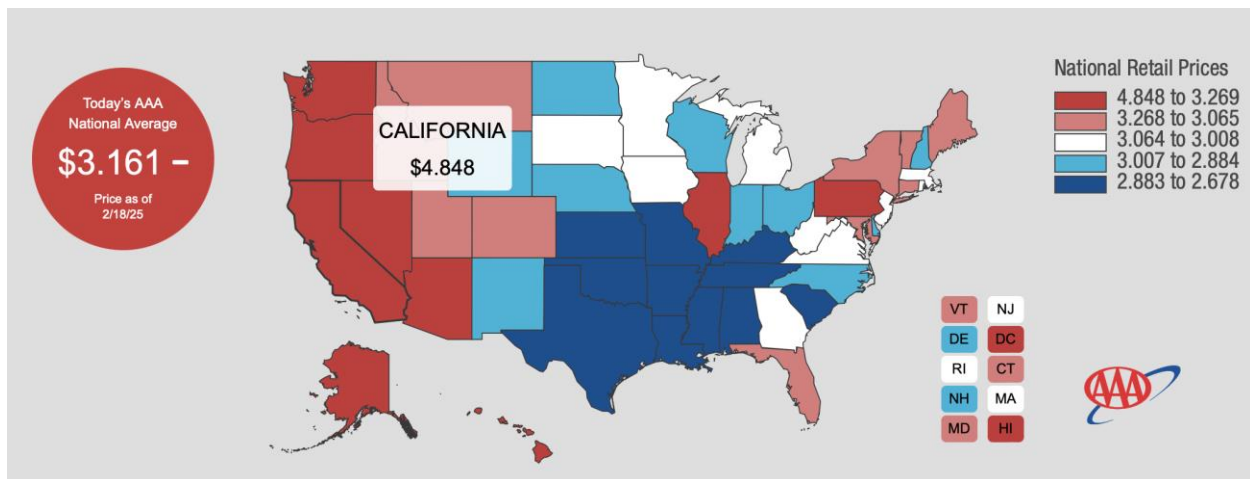
At least he said the quiet part aloud.

"State officials have long considered the rules essential to cleaning up California's severe air pollution and combating climate change," CalMatters reported, obviously upset about the federal waiver forcing big rigs to go all-electric being dropped.

As the Globe asked, "Where is California's severe air pollution? Who in California is experiencing climate change?"

It's probably more important to listen to those in the trucking industry than a reporter paid to write "about the impacts of climate change and air pollution and California's policies to tackle them."

Expect many changes courtesy of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Energy — and to trickle down to California so that the state is no longer living under self-imposed energy scarcity and exorbitant costs to heat and cool homes, or put gas in the car.



AAA gas prices, February 18, 2025. (Photo: gasprices.AAA.com)

Katy Grimes, the Editor in Chief of the California Globe, is a long-time Investigative Journalist covering the California State Capitol, and the co-author of California's War Against Donald Trump: Who Wins? Who Loses? California Globe, February 18, 2025

Item 3 - US launches nuclear missile to show 'readiness' - Sonic Booms – the sound of freedom! The Coastal Commission asserts that the launches create noise and sonic booms that bother the fish, insects, seals, and people. The Commission is using your tax dollars to subvert nation security. Fight the leftist State government that promotes this absurd policy. Remember leftism, is a mental disorder. The Vandenberg media release stated in part:

Col. Dustin Harmon, commander of the 377th Test and Evaluation Group (TEG), said: 'This allows our team to analyze and report accuracy and reliability for the current system while validating projected missile system improvements.' The nuclear missile took off in the dead of night, traveling 15,000 miles per hour to a test range near Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. It completed the 4,200-mile journey in about 22 minutes. The hypersonic weapon was designed to hit any target worldwide in just 30 minutes after launch.



COLAB IN DEPTH

**IN FIGHTING THE TROUBLESOME, LOCAL DAY-TO-DAY ASSAULTS
ON OUR FREEDOM AND PROPERTY, IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO
KEEP IN MIND THE LARGER UNDERLYING IDEOLOGICAL,
POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC CAUSES**

TWELVE SCARCITY ENABLING LAWS TO SCRAP BY EDWARD RING

Last week, as a representative of the California Policy Center, I had the opportunity to testify before a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee at a hearing on the topic of “California Fires and the Consequences of Overregulation.” While my remarks were limited to five minutes, the written testimony that we entered into the Congressional Record was extensive. The policy recommendations we made were gathered from experts throughout the state including attorneys specializing in water rights, property rights, land use, and environmental law, along with representatives from private industry and public agencies, civil engineers, journalists, activists, and politicians.

Two weeks ago some of these recommendations were summarized on the topic “Ten State Water Laws to Scrap,” and, one week ago, “Conditions to put on Federal Relief Funds.” This week, drawing further from our written testimony submitted to Congress, are twelve more laws we recommend for repeal. Each of these flawed pieces of legislation play a role in stifling economic development. More specifically, they stifle healthy capitalist competition, which is the only practical way to deliver affordability, abundance, resilience, sustainability, and even in many respects the goals of equity and environmental protection in California. In short, these laws are doing far more harm than good. Let’s get rid of them all. Here they are:

Twelve Scarcity Enabling Laws to Scrap

1 – Repeal the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, 1970), or, limit standing for lawsuits to elected law enforcement officials, and waive CEQA for housing, manufacturing and other employment projects, forest management, and infrastructure/utility and public service projects.

2 – Repeal the California Endangered Species Act (Fish and Game Code Section 2050 et. Seq) and the Fully Protected Species statutes (Fish and Game Code §§ 3511, 4700, 505, 5515) that duplicate and go far beyond the federal ESA.

3 – Repeal SB 1137 (2022) that requires 3,200 foot setbacks of oil wells from “sensitive receptors.” This bill puts California’s oil extraction and distribution industry at risk of collapse, risking in-state distribution capacity and only increasing imports of foreign oil.

4 – Permanently waive the California Air Resources Board (CARB) restrictions on prescribed burns that reduce fuel loads and fire risk in California’s forests and chaparral.

5 – Repeal AB 32 (Health and Safety Code § 38500 et seq.) and associated Executive Orders (S-3-05, B-16-12, B-18-12, B-30,15, B-55-18) that empower the Air Resources Board to regulate and reorder the entire California economy under the guise of climate change and reducing GHG emissions.

6 – Repeal SB 350, the Clean Energy and Pollution Reduction Act of 2015, that requires an increasing percent of California’s energy to come from non-fossil fuel sources.

7 – Repeal Public Resources Code 25402 that requires the California Energy Commission to adopt energy efficiency standards for residential and non-residential buildings. While there were no national energy standards in the 1970s and most of the 1980s, a national energy code (ICC IECC) is now updated every 3 years.

8 – Repeal SB 391 that requires statewide transportation investment and planning to be dictated by climate change/GHG reduction mandates resulting in blocking new highway investments and congestion relief.

9 – Repeal SB 375 (Gov’t Code Section 65080 (b)(2)) that subordinates all land use and housing development policy to government-created Greenhouse Gas Reduction (GHG) and Vehicle Miles Traveled Reduction (VMT) reduction targets.

10 – Repeal AB 686 that mandates “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing” obligations on local governments that duplicate and exceed the federal Fair Housing Act and require suburban cities and counties to develop high density affordable housing in existing neighborhoods.

11 – Repeal Labor Code Section 1720 et seq. that duplicates and goes beyond federal Davis Bacon requirements for public works projects adding huge costs to housing and infrastructure.

12 – The labor force is restricted right now due to AB 5. Rescinding AB 5 (2019) will allow small business architects, engineers and contractors to supplement their staff. There are not enough of these technical staff in the region so rescinding this bill would have a major impact on the speed of new construction including rebuilding in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

There is so much more, but we are going to have to move on. To view all of these recommendations, the [entire written testimony can be found here](#).

Over the next several weeks, we look forward to refocusing on solutions. In particular, we will return to reviewing proposed projects and emerging technologies that will deliver cost-effective energy, water, transportation and housing innovations. Whether based on breakthrough technology, or simply adhering to practical common sense, these innovations will expose as obsolete the mandated remedies that our State Legislature feverishly seeks to impose.

It was fascinating while in Washington, DC to hear first-hand the impressions people from the other 49 states have of California. Without exception, they characterized our state as the most beautiful place on earth. No argument there! But otherwise, and also without exception, we were criticized as having strayed from our roots. We have lost the practical vision that informed our leaders in the 1950s and 1960s when they built the infrastructure that even now, stretched to the limit through subsequent neglect, sustains our population.

We have also, in a curiously selective manner, lost faith in the ability of our otherwise peerless high-tech innovators to come up with new technologies to deliver energy and water abundance at affordable prices. Why is it that the Silicon Valley mantra of “better, faster, cheaper” applies to everything else, but not to these essentials of civilization? Our legislature attempts instead to destroy our legacy producers – think reservoirs and oil refineries – while mandating and subsidizing half-developed technologies that are not yet commercially competitive.

We can do so much better. Throw away the subsidies. Scrap the mandates. End the war on legacy producers. Encourage research into leapfrog technologies. Set our builders and innovators free, and make California affordable again.

Edward Ring is the director of water and energy policy for the California Policy Center, which he co-founded in 2013 and served as its first president. He is also a senior fellow with the Center for American Greatness, and a regular contributor to the California Globe. His work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Economist, National Review, City Journal, and other media outlets. Ring’s undergraduate degree is in Political Science from UC Davis, and he has an MBA in Finance from USC. Ring is the author of several books, including “Fixing California – Abundance, Pragmatism, Optimism” (2021), “The Abundance Choice – Our Fight for More Water in California” (2022), and “Solutions – Innovative Public Policy for California” (2024). February 14, 2025. California policy Center



REDEFINING ENVIRONMENTALISM

Environmentalists push for denser urban areas and restricted land use, overlooking practical solutions like deregulated fire management and expanded development to address climate risks.

BY EDWARD RING

“I think what we can learn here is that we are guests in this landscape.”
– Marissa Christiansen, Executive Director of the Climate and Wildfire Institute, Los Angeles

If you’re looking for one sentence that encapsulates the mentality and premise that underlines mainstream environmentalism in America today, these words from Marissa Christiansen, quoted in the closing paragraphs of a recent article “[The Lost City](#)” in [New York Magazine](#), are a top candidate.

To be fair, nothing on Christiansen’s Climate and Wildfire Institute [website](#) is overtly calling for every wildland environment to be depopulated, or for “climate refugees” to then be relocated into mid-rise apartments where street parking has given way to bike lanes, or for every human being to have their “carbon footprint” remotely monitored in order to ration their consumption of water and energy. Much of this organization’s work appears to be focused on how to reduce the severity of wildfires by making greater use of prescribed burns.

But Christiansen stayed firmly within conventional environmentalist orthodoxy in the rest of what she told New York Magazine, saying that “the city has an unprecedented opportunity to rebuild in a more resilient manner with denser urban housing and wide firebreaks abutting the mountains.”

Denser urban housing. Wide firebreaks abutting the mountains. God help us if environmentalist bureaucrats are allowed to implement that vision. California is [only 5 percent urbanized](#), and that is where 94 percent of the state’s population lives. California has the most densely populated

urban areas of any state in America. So let's make it even denser. The skeptics call that "stack and pack." The environmentalists call it "smart cities."

Redefining environmentalism must begin by changing the premises. We are not "guests" on any landscape. If you accept the premise that we are only "guests," where do you draw the line? According to its [annual report](#), Christiansen's organization "received \$7 million in startup funding from the state of California in 2022." When it comes to land use, it is therefore unlikely their ultimate policy recommendations will deviate significantly from the priorities set by the state legislature. This means that an average population density for California's urban areas of nearly 5,000 people per square mile is not enough. We need to bring everyone off those flammable hillsides and turn the state's scattered forest communities into ghost towns. The "guests" have worn out their welcome.

Meanwhile, California's state government has enacted regulations and enabled litigation against new housing that rewards special interests while costing taxpayers literally hundreds of billions of dollars. These policies have made housing unaffordable, leaving subsidized developers to inadequately fulfill a mission that the private sector used to do abundantly and affordably. So by all means, let's pack the cities even more so that politically connected developers, generous with their contributions to politicians and donations to aligned NGOs, can collect additional billions in subsidies.

The logic of considering humans "guests in this landscape" invites a rather urgent question: What landscape qualifies for this designation? Landscape at risk of fire? Then why not log, graze, burn, and thin the vegetation, the way natural fires did for millennia? Shoreline at risk of storm surges? Then invest in resilient architecture and adapt. But that would be too easy. Bring on the regulations and the litigation. Permanent evacuation becomes the only option.

If humans are only "guests" on the sacred earth, why stop at canyons and coastlines? What business does the City of Los Angeles have to even exist? It used to be an [Arcadian paradise](#), a wildlife haven, routinely flooding when atmospheric rivers collided with the San Gabriel Mountains and sent cascades of runoff pouring across a verdant alluvial plain. Why not restore this natural wonderland? Depopulate Los Angeles! Evict the unwanted guests, all ten million of them!

This is preposterous hyperbole, but only slightly less preposterous is the notion that California should absorb its entire population into the footprint of existing cities, in the case of Los Angeles, surrounded by "wide firebreaks." Urban containment, which is clearly a priority for California's state legislature, is an extremist, special interest-driven set of policies, continuously being strengthened, that have lowered the standard of living and diminished the quality of life for every Californian that doesn't happen to be wealthy enough to be indifferent to the consequences.

There is an alternative that might be considered common sense if, for decades, voters hadn't been conditioned to believe that the climate is in "crisis" and that every scrap of wilderness in the entire state is in imminent threat of destruction from urban "sprawl." Rejecting both of these premises is where sanity is restored to policy.

To begin with, if the climate is in “crisis,” then allowing logging, grazing, burning, and thinning should be a more urgent priority and not instead nearly impossible propositions thanks to layers of bureaucracy, regulations, litigation, and inflated costs that are all the result of misguided political choices and special interest corruption that feeds on obstruction and scarcity. Deregulate all four of these practices and allow the private sector to get busy. Most of these efforts would create jobs and generate tax revenue.

Prevailing environmentalist mentalities, however, prevent the deregulation that might allow this, and they are encouraged by the bureaucrats and billionaires who amass power and profit, respectively, from anything that obstructs decentralized acquisition and enterprise. Environmentalist policies centralize political power and private wealth, which is one of many compelling reasons it must be completely redefined. Which brings us to sprawl.

Current official state policy is to designate 30 percent of the state’s land area off-limits to development. Notwithstanding the fact that publicly managed land is far worse off ecologically in California than privately managed land—compare our national forests to the private timberland in the state for proof of this—why not at the least offer some reciprocity against this law? Why not remove all constraints to private development of urban adjacent areas so that the urban footprint of California is permitted to double? Why is this so unthinkable?

If this were done, the numbers do not point to an environmentally apocalyptic outcome. If California is only 5 percent urbanized, doubling would only incorporate another 5 percent of this vast state. And even developing much less would still offer a transformative improvement to our quality of life. For example, you could move ten million people onto quarter-acre lots, four people per home, allowing equal area for roads, parks, schools, retail and commercial centers, etc., and that would consume 2,000 square miles. This supposedly abominable new sprawl would only increase California’s urban footprint by 1.2 percent, from 5.0 to 6.2 percent. That’s how much room we’ve got.

Environmentalists claim we are “guests” on this land. No. We are not “guests.” And putting every single subspecies of plant and animal onto a list of threatened species to block logging, grazing, burning, and thinning, along with all suburban and exurban development, is a special interest-driven scam.

The Santa Monica Mountains, along with the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and, for that matter, every bit of the more than 30 million acres of forest where we have now suppressed fires for over a century, are no longer historically natural environments. It is impossible to restore most of it to what it once was, nor, if you absolve yourself of the nihilistic idea that we are only “guests” on this landscape, is it even desirable to try.

What is needed in Los Angeles County is more development into the ridges and canyons surrounding the existing city, not less. This brings us to another piety of environmentalists that must be overcome, the goal of so-called “equity.” The new homes that can and should arise as Angelenos expand their urban footprint further into the Santa Monica Mountains will need to be hardened against fire, with swimming pools hooked to curbside hydrants and fire retardant stockpiled in every neighborhood, among other things. And the residents will be not only

permitted but encouraged to engage in mechanical thinning and grazing on the open land around their neighborhoods.

All of this will cost money, meaning people of modest means will not be able to afford to live in these areas. But “equity” in the form of mandated “affordable housing” is not a preferable remedy. Regulations to harden homes in fire-prone canyons—while deregulating homebuilding elsewhere—are not incompatible concepts. But they do mean communities end up stratified by income. That ought to be a natural outcome in a healthy meritocratic society, but environmentalists fiercely deny its utility in providing incentives for everyone to achieve their dreams.

What well-intentioned environmentalists ought to consider is the possibility that they are behaving as [useful idiots](#) not for communists but for monopolistic capitalists and self-serving bureaucracies. We are not guests on this earth. We are of the earth and have every right to occupy it. There is a healthy version of environmentalism that recognizes this and strikes a reasonable balance between the aspirations of humans and the preservation of ecosystems.

The disaster in Los Angeles is indeed a clarifying moment. The leaders running California today can allow a deregulated private sector to create millions of good jobs delivering abundant energy, water, lumber, and housing—including rebuilding the lost homes in Los Angeles—at a price normal people can afford, or we can ration our water and energy and land, expecting the government to subsidize millions of households that can no longer afford the essentials. We can manage our environment and expand our suburbs, redefining what constitutes a reasonable environmental impact, or we can retreat into high-density urban cores and pretend the entire earth should be turned back over to nature.

Edward Ring is a senior fellow of the Center for American Greatness. He is also the director of water and energy policy for the California Policy Center, which he co-founded in 2013 and served as its first president. Ring is the author of Fixing California: Abundance, Pragmatism, Optimism (2021) and The Abundance Choice: Our Fight for More Water in California (2022). American Greatness, February 19, 2025.

THE CLEANUP CREW

On the Department of Government Efficiency

BY THE EDITORS OF NEW CRITERION

As we write, the United States is awash in a torrent of executive orders about everything from plastic straws (they are OK again) to so-called DEI initiatives (definitely not OK) and the fate of some of the many acronymic agencies that populate Washington like gigantic sponges sucking up taxpayers’ money. In response to these executive-branch initiatives, lawsuits and judicial restraining orders have been hastily cobbled together in an effort to retrieve the status quo ante for various progressive causes.

This dialectic is partly a partisan political drama, partly an economic salvage effort, partly a chapter in that long-running conflict often aggregated under the rubric “the culture wars.” The three rings of this circus overlap with one another, and it is often impossible to say exactly where one domain ends and its neighbor begins. Different emphases and areas of concentration can nevertheless be discerned and distinguished. With that in mind, we propose to leave the politics mostly to one side while saying a few words about the economic and, especially, the cultural aspects of these post-inauguration developments.

By early in February, the work of DOGE, the ad hoc “Department of Government Efficiency,” began making headlines. The organization is set to expire on July 4, 2026, just in time for America’s two-hundred-fiftieth birthday celebration. By that time, DOGE hopes to have trimmed government expenditures by up to \$2 trillion, to have shrunk the government workforce (currently about three million souls) by hundreds of thousands, and to have exposed many examples of waste, fraud, and abuse in the way the U.S. government does business with the rest of the world and, tellingly, with itself. Superintended by Elon Musk and staffed largely by young coders, DOGE came to town with a simple set of questions. For example, when you write a check, to whom is the money going? What is the money for? What safeguards are there against redundant payments?

You might think these rudimentary questions are eminently reasonable. We do. But when it came to the U.S. Treasury, just such questions prompted Paul Engelmayer, a district judge appointed by Barack Obama, to issue a temporary restraining order to halt the inquires and prohibit all non-Treasury officials from accessing the department’s records. Perhaps the issue of overeager district judges attempting to direct the executive branch as well as their own bailiwicks will be settled by the time you read this. In the meantime, it may be worth noting the mot propounded by some wag that bureaucrats (and some judges) cannot bear very much transparency. Like vampires, they expire in the sunshine.

Then there was the case of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This noble-sounding initiative was created by President Kennedy in 1961 to do what its name implies: spread America’s largesse and humanitarian aid to needy elements in the international community. A collateral benefit was the dissemination of U.S. “soft power” and influence: difficult to quantify but unmistakable in its effects.

Over time, however, the agency—it has in recent years presided over a budget of perhaps some \$40 billion—became captive of what has been called the administrative state. Some observers say that it evolved into a CIA front and money-laundering operation. Elon Musk went so far as to describe USAID as “a criminal organization.” “Time for it to die,” he posted on X. President Trump seems to have been listening, for the once-independent agency was shuttered last month and its legacy were operations folded into the State Department.

Concern over malfeasance at USAID is not entirely new. Last year, the historian Mark Moyar published *Masters of Corruption: How the Federal Bureaucracy Sabotaged the Trump Presidency* with our sister organization, Encounter Books. It attracted little attention when first published. Now it is everywhere. DOGE has shed light on exactly what USAID has been funding. The public is partly shocked, partly outraged. People in North Carolina devastated by Hurricane Helene have until recently been ignored by their government. Yet that same

government, through the spigot operated by USAID and the State Department, could spend \$15 million on condoms in Afghanistan, \$1 million to boost French-speaking LGBTQ groups in West and Central Africa, \$14 million on cash vouchers for migrants at the southern border, \$3,315,446 for “being LGBTQ in the Caribbean,” \$7,071.58 for a BIPOC speaker series in Canada, \$1.5 million to promote job opportunities for LGBTQ individuals in Serbia, and \$425,622 to help Indonesian coffee companies become more climate- and gender-friendly.

It may go without saying that this is but a small sampling of what American taxpayers have been unwittingly paying for. It is notable, we think, how prominent a place sexually exotic items occupy on USAID’s roster of grants. Indeed, a large portion of the billions it spends in so-called humanitarian aid is indistinguishable from the list of priorities you might find at a tony college or university in the United States. Climate change, gender, race, DEI, the entire LGBTQWERTY agenda: it’s all there, and that is just about all that is there. As our Marxist friends are fond of saying: that is no accident.

*This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 43 Number 7, on page 1
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<https://newcriterion.com/article/the-cleanup-crew/>*



ANNOUNCEMENTS

ANDY CALDWELL SHOW NOW LOCAL IN SLO COUTY

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We are pleased to announce that The Andy Caldwell Show is now
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SLO County Supervisor Bruce Gibson
805-781-4338 District
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SLO County Supervisor Heather Moreno
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hmoreno@co.slo.ca.us

SLO County Supervisor Dawn Ortiz-Legg
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