



COLAB

San Luis Obispo County

The Coalition of Labor Agriculture and Business

Weekly Update

February 2 - 9, 2026

Lots of Anger – Little Resolution

The January 27 Truth Forum may hold the record for one of the longest Board of Supervisors meetings in recent history. The Supervisors' chamber was full, as were two overflow rooms, each seating about 150 people, and the hallways and lobby area were just as full.

Emotions ran deep. Accusations ran wild. And it was clear that this is a big deal in our community. Whatever your feelings on the issue, having this kind of turnout on a Tuesday afternoon is significant.



The Truth Forum began at 1:30 in the afternoon as part of the Board of Supervisors meeting and finished at about 8:40 in the evening. The Sheriff's portion of the presentation ran almost two hours. Sheriff Parkinson and various staff members went into great detail about how the department conforms to state law and how he manages his interactions with ICE.

The sheriff's presentation was comprehensive and left very few questions remaining. However, most of the ICE protesters in the crowd apparently didn't listen or didn't really care about what the Sheriff stated or the facts that he presented.

The two points that did bring questions were related. The first involved an incident where ICE personnel picked up a migrant at the jail. The ICE agents were in the lobby of the jail as the prisoner was being released. When the prisoner was released, they go through what's called a sally port. This involves two doors. They go through the first door, and it closes behind them. Then, they go through the second door into the lobby.

The issue was that the federal agents somehow nabbed the prisoner in between the two doors. The Sheriff's explanation was that the federal agents were expecting the prisoner to exit the second door, but when that prisoner started to exit the second door, they retreated back into the middle of the sally port. The agents then apprehended the prisoner in between the two doors. ICE protesters believed that this somehow showed cooperation between the County Sheriff and ICE agents.

The second issue was that the Sheriff used bodycam footage from one of the ICE agents to illustrate what happened. Apparently, ICE footage should never be seen.

Most of the ICE protesters suggested that the sheriff was lying or that he couldn't be trusted but offered no evidence. Almost all of them called for some sort of ICE-free zone or letting ICE know that they were not welcome in San Luis Obispo County.

This is despite the earlier information provided by County Council that the county really doesn't have any legal ability or authority to create ICE-free zones. The only

thing the county could do is restrict ICE access to non-public county-operated areas and to prohibit ICE from commandeering county properties for uses other than what they were designed for.

The names of the two anti-ICE agitators that recently tragically died while protesting were invoked many times during the meeting. But murder, assault, and rape victims from illegal criminal immigrants were never acknowledged.

In December, ICE protesters made a big fuss before the Board of Supervisors about the Sheriff needing to have a Truth Forum. When they learned that one was already scheduled, they continued to complain that it should have been held earlier. When the Sheriff pointed out that he had to wait till after the end of the year before holding a review of all actions during the year, they had nothing to say.

Ironically, after the Sheriff's detailed January 27 presentation at the BoS meeting, they acted as if they didn't hear a thing he said. Many attempted to completely contradict the facts that the Sheriff detailed. Aside from asking that ICE be prohibited from coming to San Luis Obispo County or creating ICE-free zones, the next most prevalent theme was that there is a lack of trust of the Sheriff Department in the community.

It's easy to understand how that lack of trust might have come to be. With so much drama, political theater, and hyperbole being spread around through the misinformation that many of these protesters whined about, anyone would naturally be fearful. Those protesters making a big fuss about trust seem to have forgotten that trust is a two-way street. If you trust someone, you don't spread vicious lies about them. Certainly, if you're trying to solve problems, you work with facts and avoid distortions or misrepresentations. But really, most protesters didn't seem to be interested in addressing the real issue - rather just making a fuss.

National news is starting to cover the fact that many of the anti-ICE protests around the country are being led by paid organizers and agitators. We have no evidence that this was the case at the board meeting. However, it was obvious that many of the protesters at the board meeting were organized. They had similar signs with similar slogans. Their comments were scripted and all along the same lines. Most of them wore black or orange clothing.

It was not clear exactly who did the organizing, but one of the groups that protesters often cited was 805Undocufund. This organization was founded in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties during the wildfires. Later, it came to San Luis Obispo County as well, to provide assistance to undocumented workers impacted by natural disasters.

According to their websites, they were established through an alliance with “[Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project \(MICOP\), Central Coastal Alliance United for A Sustainable Economy \(CAUSE\) and Future Leaders of America](#). Together, these organizations, alongside philanthropy partners like the [McCune Foundation](#) and the [Ventura County Community Foundation](#), raised, case-managed, and distributed millions of dollars in direct aid to victims of the Thomas, Hill, and Woolsey wildfires; Montecito mudslides; numerous smaller wildfires that afflict the region each year; and now, the prolonged impact of COVID-19.”



From such a benign beginning, the organization has evolved into a network for protesting. In their words, “The **805 Rapid Response Network** is a community-led initiative that provides support and resources to undocumented individuals and families facing immigration enforcement actions across San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties. Our trained volunteers respond to reports of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) activity, offering legal observation, know-your-rights education, and immediate assistance to affected individuals.”

The Know Your Rights category is covered in the card illustrated below, provided by the Rapid Response volunteers to undocumented people that might be facing ICE interaction.

I do not wish to speak with you, answer your questions, or sign or hand you any documents based on my 5th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution.

I do not give you permission to enter my home based on my 4th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution unless you have a warrant to enter, signed by a judge or magistrate with my name on it that you slide under the door.

I do not give you permission to search any of my belongings based on my 4th Amendment rights.

I choose to exercise my constitutional rights.

These cards are available to citizens and noncitizens alike.

It's downright cruel to let immigrants think that by reading these naive statements they'll somehow be protected.

Those legal scholars that are truly concerned about due process need to debate the issue on its merits. But Trump haters just looking to cause trouble for the administration are using immigrants as pawns. The Trump Derangement Syndrome sufferers are having a lot of fun right now. But the more that people learn about what's going on and the criminal actions of the immigrants that are being picked up, the less popular the protesters will be with the general public.

The issue still seems to be gathering momentum. And it's unlikely it will slow down soon. But faced with truth and reality, the protesters are going to reach a point where their credibility completely falls apart.

So, after seven hours of venting from protesters, the Board of Supervisors, needing to bring the meeting to some sort of conclusion, attempted to appear to pass a resounding solution that seemed like a vigorous responsive solution kind of – sort of. They ended the session with a motion to direct staff to explore what can be done to restrict ICE activity on county properties, explore what steps other counties are undertaking and explore social and health related programs supporting migrants that the county could help. They also seemed to call for a reporting cycle to the Board every 90 days. Supervisor Moreno wisely pointed out that such a report should not be turned into a Truth Forum every 3 months.

COLAB's comments at the Board of Supervisors hearing were simple but important. "We thank the Sheriff and his department for their professional approach to protecting public safety. They put their lives on the line every day for all people in this county. They deal with an awful lot - and lately, it seems a lot of awful. We're lucky to have them and thank them for their service." Many other speakers at the hearing made similar comments. We wish there were more, but they were all heartfelt.

One Step Closer to a Tax Measure

In morning business, SLOCOG presented the draft of their half-cent transportation sales tax measure, Local Roads First, to the Board of Supervisors. The Board wasn't slated to make any votes on the tax but rather make recommendations to the SLOCOG board about how the final draft should look.

In the end, the only formal recommendation the BoS made was to have a portion of sales tax revenues split 5 ways evenly between each supervisorial district. Supervisors Peschong and Moreno voiced serious reservations about the tax measure (Peschong stated flat out that he is opposed to the measure), but they supported the basic concept of splitting revenues evenly between the supervisorial districts if the measure were to pass.



Supervisor Gibson tried to engineer the recommendation in such a way that each supervisorial district would get equal amounts over the 30-year period, but not necessarily on an annual basis. However, the "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today" scheme didn't get past Supervisor Moreno who caught the brinksmanship and made sure that each district would receive equal revenues on an annual basis. The recommendation for the district split passed unanimously.

The SLOCOG board will meet on February 4 to finalize language for the measure. After that, they will do one more round with each city council and the Board of Supervisors before requesting that the board put the measure on the ballot. If SLOCOG makes that final request of the board, that will probably happen in late April or May.



In the meantime, the Citizens Initiative that we mentioned last week is moving forward. A committee has been formed, and fundraising is underway. The group of business leaders that is pursuing the Citizens Initiative will be making announcements in the coming week about their plans. We do know that it involves extremely short deadlines for signature gathering and therefore a very expensive budget.

It's not clear whether the Citizens Initiative will have a direct impact on SLOCOG's effort. The Citizens Initiative will use almost the exact language as SLOCOG. The key difference is that the Citizens Initiative needs to gather over 12,400 valid signatures and will only require a simple majority vote. The SLOCOG measure gets put on the ballot by referral from the County Board of Supervisors (by a 4/5 vote of the Board) and requires a two-thirds vote from the electorate. It appears that both efforts will continue to move forward for the next couple of months.

We expect to have more details on the Citizens Initiative in the coming weeks and will follow this issue carefully.

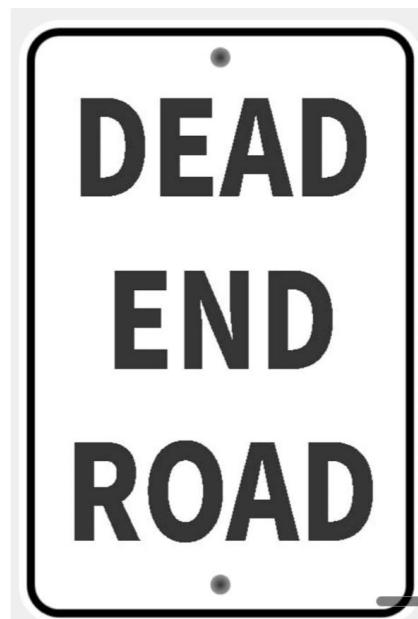
Burning Property Rights

As we reported last week, there was an action item on the agenda that read: Request to: 1) approve the re-establishment and update of the Fire Code Board of Appeals,

and 2) direct the County Clerk to notice any existing vacancies on the Fire Code Board of Appeals in accordance with standard County procedures.

Fortunately, the item was pulled at the last minute by county staff. One of the most serious implications from this item was the impact on properties located on dead-end streets. Apparently, Cal Fire is getting very aggressive about suggesting that new building can't occur on these kinds of streets.

This, of course, would be devastating to people who have made investments and have plans to build on such lots. The way the agenda item was structured it would create a board that would make arbitrary decisions and offer no remediation or appeal to landowners.



We hope that county staff realize the unfair nature of this proposal and have gone back to the drawing board. In the meantime, it would be wise for anyone concerned about property rights and the impact of bureaucracy on the value of private property to express their concerns to each member of the Board of Supervisors. As always, there is a contact list at the end of this newsletter with addresses and phone numbers of each of the county Supervisors.

DA Dan Dow Does Damage

To the fraud industry, that is. On January 29, the District Attorney's office held a seminar on fraud prevention at the County Board of Supervisors chambers in San Luis Obispo.

The seminar was divided into three sections. The first was preventing fraud aimed at the general public. The second was real estate fraud. The last was fraud perpetuated against businesses.

The first session was held to a full house. Topics included AI-generated fraud efforts, as well as a number of online scams that are perpetuated daily in San Luis Obispo County. The second and third presentations were also well attended.



The forum drew a big crowd and offered valuable insights.



District Attorney Dow with his Chief Investigator providing info on fraud prevention.

It was good to see a proactive presentation on prevention rather than hearing about victims that don't know what to do to protect themselves. We encourage the District Attorney's office to continue with these kinds of programs. They are a tremendous public service, and anything we can do to cut down on crime is much appreciated.

Next Week

The Board of Supervisors meeting agenda is a little lopsided for the next few weeks. We had the marathon meeting on January 27. The next two scheduled meetings are February 3 and 10. The March meetings are slated for March 10 and 24. This is out of phase on the regularly scheduled every other week's agenda primarily due to holidays.

The Next Attempt at Paso Groundwater Sustainability

The Paso Groundwater Basin is the gift that just keeps on giving. Items 19 and 20 on the February 3 Board of Supervisors agenda address Paso groundwater issues.

Item 19 reads: “Submittal of a report by the Director of Groundwater Sustainability on the status of compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) implementation status in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin (Basin).”

The supporting presentation is covered by 39 slides, many of which were featured in the PRAGA meeting held in December.

Item 20 reads: “Hearing to consider a resolution establishing the fallowed land registry (Registry) for the Paso Robles Area Groundwater Subbasin Multi-Benefit Irrigated Land Repurposing (MILR) Program and adoption of a related ordinance amending the Inland Land Use Ordinance and resolution amending the Williamson Act Rules of Procedure (exempt from CEQA) (County File Number: LRP2026-00002). (Groundwater Sustainability).”

This presentation only requires 20 slides.

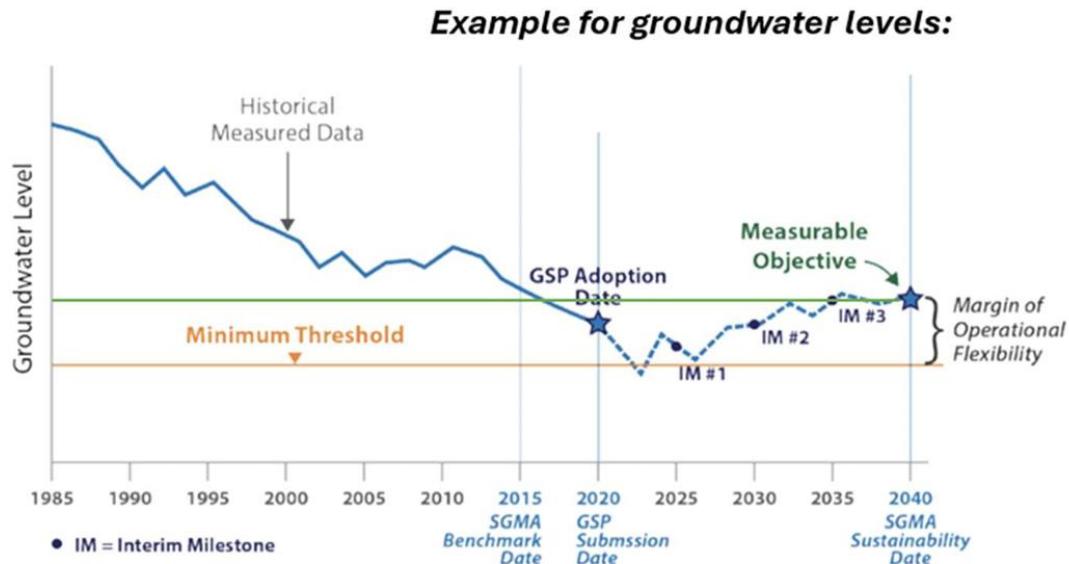
It is refreshing to see a number of project concepts acknowledged in the first presentation. These are projects that could be used to supplement groundwater recharge in the basin. Many of these projects have been proposed by individuals and activists in the community for years. But for unknown reasons, they never seem to get the attention they should.

Project Name	Water Supply	Project Type	Approximate Location	Average Volume (AFY)
City Recycled Water Delivery	RW	Direct Delivery	Near City of Paso Robles	2,200
San Miguel Recycled Water Delivery	RW	Direct Delivery	Near San Miguel	200 ^a
NWP Delivery at Salinas and Estrella River Confluence	NWP	Direct Delivery	Near the confluence of the Salinas and Estrella Rivers	2,800
NWP Delivery North of City of Paso Robles	NWP	Direct Delivery	North of Huer Huer Creek, due west of the airport	1,000
NWP Delivery East of City of Paso Robles	NWP	Direct Delivery	East of the City of Paso Robles	2,000
Expansion of Salinas Dam	Salinas River	River Recharge	Along the Salinas River	1,000

Each of these conceptual projects obviously have drawbacks or challenges, but they should not be dismissed without a thorough exploration.

The driving force for groundwater sustainability, beyond the obvious consequences of running out of water, is that the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) gives the state authority to take over management of the basin if conditions are not met by 2040.

Here are the data points associated with SGMA:



The well measuring measure that was adopted at the January 27 BoS meeting will enhance measuring data for groundwater sustainability in the Paso Basin.

The summary of item 19 is that if the basin doesn't achieve some sort of groundwater sustainability plan and action by 2040, the state may come in and take over the management of the basin.

Item 20 deals with farrowing plans that would hopefully reduce pumping from the basin. The concepts suggested seem to make sense. However, it's absolutely critical that these concepts be developed with the full input and cooperation from the farming community.

We anticipate these two items will take considerable time to discuss and explore by the Supervisors and county staff. They are likely to draw a great deal of public comment as well. We hope that whatever the outcome of these two agenda items, that public trust and participation in developing a commonsense groundwater sustainability plan is the result.

Last Week

The January 27 San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors meeting is expected to be long and complicated. The most intense item on the agenda, the Sheriff's TRUTH Forum, is scheduled to be presented after lunch. The rest of the agenda is filled with important issues as well, so anybody planning to attend will have a lot to take in.

We do hope that supporters of Sheriff Parkinson will be there to balance out what is expected to be a very large contingency of ICE protesters. We also hope that the proceedings remain peaceful and respectful.

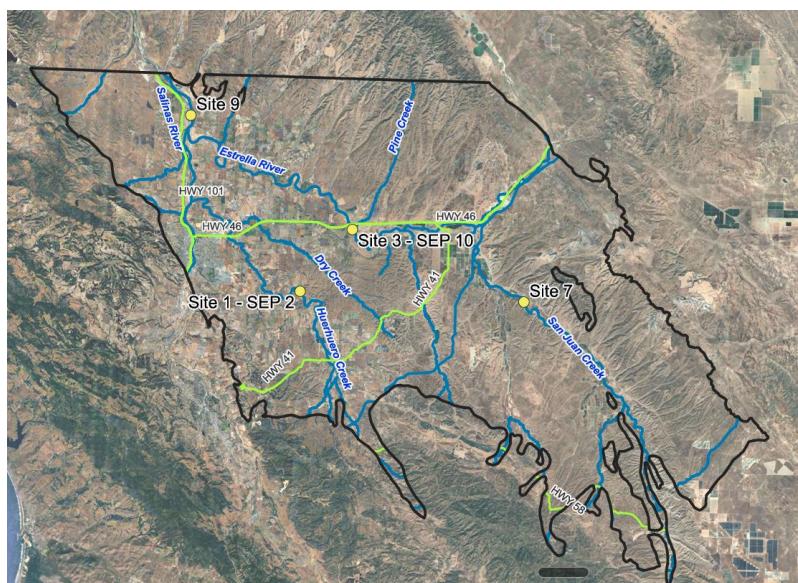
It's worth noting that due to holidays and other schedule complications, the following two Board of Supervisors meetings are set for February 3 and 10, meaning that we are treated with three meetings in a row.

Paso Groundwater Measuring Measure

It's not a typo. The first item on the agenda for the January 27th Board of Supervisors meeting is the submittal of a bid opening report for the Paso Robles Groundwater Sub-Basin Alluvial Monitoring Well Network Expansion Project. This seems like a good project because the more data available, the better the decision-making can be about whether the basin is truly in overdraft, and by how much.

As we've said frequently, there's a severe lack of trust between the general public and policymakers in the Paso Basin. Current, clear data that tells the true story will help to define what the real needs are for that region. For too long, arguments about who said what or which figures are accurate have dominated any attempt to come up with reasonable solutions about groundwater sustainability.

Below, a map illustrates the various well sites for this contract. To be certain, some will complain that those sites don't produce accurate data. While others will have full confidence in the numbers that they produce. Either way, there will be fresh data to explore.



Taxpayer Doom and Gloom

Some people claim that property taxes are just a means for the government to take property. Others say that property tax is, in essence, rental, where you're renting your property from the government and paying that rent through your taxes.

Certainly, if you fail to pay your property taxes, there are consequences. Item 5 on the agenda is a submittal of a resolution accepting notice and approval for a sealed bid sale for tax-defaulted properties subject to the tax collector's power to sell.

Below is just the first of three pages listing properties proposed for sale through tax lien collections.

EXHIBIT A - List of Parcels

James W. Hamilton, CPA <i>San Luis Obispo County Auditor • Controller • Treasurer • Tax Collector • Public Administrator</i>				
NOTICE OF INTENT TO SELL TAX-DEFERRED PROPERTY <i>SEALED BID SALE #270 ON MAY 27, 2026</i>				
Item	Assessment Number Last Assessee	Tax Rate Area	Default Number POS Document Number	Minimum Bid
270-001	083,191,006 BRENNERKE JASON K ETAL	054-061	D7457 6/30/2013 2018030616	\$3,400.00
270-002	083,191,013 HUNTSCKER JEF FREY ETAL	054-061	C8748 6/30/2009 20140209155	\$4,900.00
270-003	083,191,018 MCACHEIRN DOROTHY C HEIRS OF ETAL	054-061	B2241 6/30/2005 20100305265	\$5,900.00
270-004	083,191,019 MCACHEIRN DOROTHY C HEIRS OF ETAL	054-061	B2242 6/30/2005 20100305266	\$5,900.00
270-005	083,191,024 BARRIOS ENRIQUE C	054-061	B8772 6/30/2007 2012-0309938	\$6,200.00
270-006	083,191,052 CORREDES STEVE H & GEMMA C	054-061	D0135 6/30/2010 20160304449	\$4,300.00
270-007	083,191,053 FUTURE ESTATES LAND HOLDINGS LLC	054-061	D2842 6/30/2011 20160304448	\$4,000.00
270-008	083,191,060 NESTCROFT BERNARD G	054-061	F2771 6/30/2020 2025-020188	\$1,800.00
270-009	083,331,028 DEMBOVSKI LORIN M	054-061	C2848 6/30/2008 2013030200	\$4,900.00
270-010	083,331,035 CONNER WILLIAM HEIRS OF ETAL	054-061	E7924 6/30/2018 2023-020493	\$2,200.00
270-011	083,331,045 LAND OF FREEDOM LLC	054-061	E1583 6/30/2015 2020-040720	\$2,900.00
270-012	083,331,058 PASTOR MARIA E ETAL	054-061	D5318 6/30/2012 2017030202	\$3,500.00
270-013	083,341,005 YAP PRIMY R & CONNIE V	054-061	C2849 6/30/2008 2013030201	\$4,500.00
270-014	083,341,006 BARAJA JUAN	054-061	D2875 6/30/2011 20160304510	\$3,400.00
270-015	083,341,027 TATE CLARENCE & DONNA M	054-061	C8805 6/30/2009 20140209071	\$5,700.00
270-016	083,341,029 CARDEAU JAMES L HEIRS OF ETAL	054-061	D2877 6/30/2011 20160304508	\$3,800.00

Page 1 of 4 of Exhibit A - List of Parcels

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The only upside when thinking about the impacts of this process on those families affected is to imagine what this list would look like if we didn't have Proposition 13 to protect from such dire circumstances.

The Cost of Gerrymandering

Item 11 on the agenda is a bit of a slap in the face to taxpayers and voters. The item is a request to authorize budget adjustments to the Clerk Recorder's Office in the

amount of \$1.2 million for costs associated with the November 4, 2025, statewide special election. It requires a 4/5 vote.

This, of course, was Proposition 50 - the Democrats' attempt to "save democracy". Gavin Newsom thought that it was brilliant to let politicians draw their own lines. The true cost of the election was obfuscated by the mainstream media. But now we can see what Prop 50 costs San Luis Obispo taxpayers. Statewide estimates run from \$200 - \$300 million.

The rest of the Board resolution calls for an additional amount of \$700,000 for using state voting system replacement contract funds and unanticipated state revenue for the purchase of a vote by mail processing system and the poll book systems. This also requires a 4/5 vote.

Most election reformers are pointing out numerous problems that exist with the vote-by-mail system. The biggest problems are:

1. There is really no verification that the ballots are coming from people who are entitled to vote
2. Ballots are not protected from being fraudulently cast
3. Computerized vote counting could be subject to manipulation

This agenda item might help to put a spotlight on the operations of the San Luis Obispo County Clerk's Office and their vote counting processes.

Hot Topic – Glowing Embers or Disaster?

Item 12 is one of those "under the radar" topics that has the potential to sail through without anybody recognizing the terrible implications. It reads: Request to: 1) approve the re-establishment and update of the Fire Code Board of Appeals, and 2) direct the County Clerk to notice any existing vacancies on the Fire Code Board of Appeals in accordance with standard County procedures.

What isn't spelled out is that this appointed board's decision-making process may be final. It doesn't appear that there is any appeal process.

We have seen countless flawed decisions from similar boards where the appeal process was the only way to protect property owners. The last thing that we need in this county is a board with the authority to make arbitrary decisions that could have enormous impacts on property values.

We hope the Board of Supervisors will take a stand for property rights and protect the public from a board that could impose unreasonable findings with no recourse.

Hope and Accountability

As we've reported in the past, we have high hopes for the success of the new efforts by the Community Foundation in San Luis Obispo County. This highly organized and very accountable private organization is able to match funds from donors and find grants to be paired with government funds for San Luis Obispo County service providers.

Their grants are predicated on very low overhead and efficient workings of non-profit organization grant applicants. They have very high standards but provide a tremendous avenue for help to the various organizations we have around the county offering charitable services.

Item 13 on the agenda is a request to receive a summary report from the Community Foundation regarding the implementation of the county's community resiliency grant funds. Below is a summary of their first report:

Review Committee and Grantmaking Process

The grant review committee met on November 21st 2025, and decided on grant awards totaling \$2,256,080.

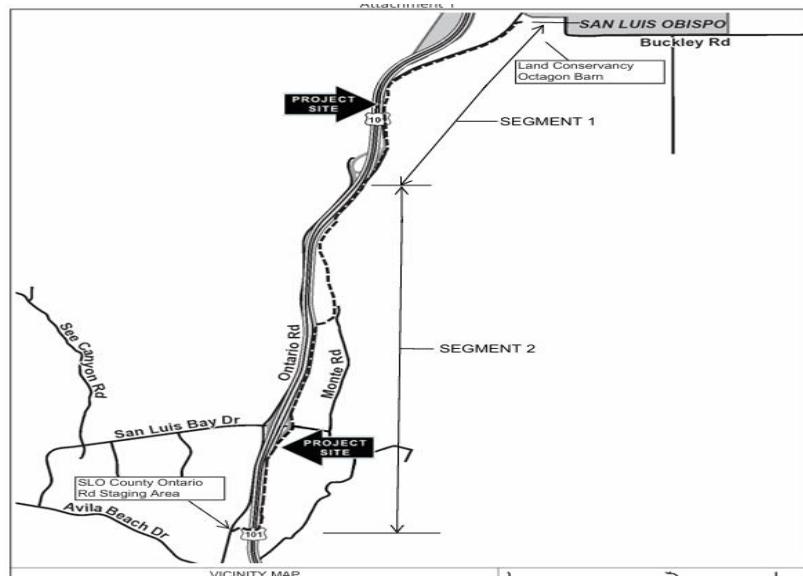
- County Contribution: \$1,200,000
 - CFSLOCO 3% fee: \$36,000
 - Grants: \$1,164,000
- CFSLOCO Grant Dollars Raised: \$1,056,080

Community Foundations in other counties have been successful in making government support go much further with matching support from private sources. It will be great to see such efforts flourish here.

A Nice Day for a \$40 Million Stroll

As congestion on 101 gets worse, our roads crumble, and we squabble amongst ourselves about whether we should charge ourselves additional taxes, we wonder how many people will be saying to themselves, "thank goodness we put in so much money, time, and effort into the Bob Jones Trail."

The latest chapter in this long and expensive saga comes up as item 22 on the agenda. It's a request to authorize to advertise Bob Jones' Pathway Gap Closure project segment. Illustrated below is a map of the gap that they're trying to close and a chart including the budget so far for the project.



Project Cost Estimate (WBS 320096)

Expenditures:	Amount
Programming	\$250,000
Design	\$5,245,705
Bidding	\$26,307
Construction	\$35,314,270
Close Out	\$100,000
Total Expenditures:	\$40,936,282
Approved Funding Sources:	Amount
Capital Projects Fund Facilities Planning Designation	\$5,000,000
Active Transportation Program (ATP)	\$1,690,855
Regional State Highway Account (RSHA)	\$1,250,000
CA Dept of Fish & Wildlife	\$822,999
Parks - Public Facility Fees (PFF)	\$334,904
CA DOT/Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	\$235,852
PG&E Mitigation	\$145,672
Total:	\$9,480,282
Approved Pending Appropriation Funding Sources:	Amount
Active Transportation Program (ATP)	\$15,953,000
State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP)	\$6,000,000
State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)	\$5,730,000
Senate Bill 125 Formula Funds	\$2,000,000
SLOCOG Local Funds	\$1,773,000
Total:	\$31,456,000
Total Funding:	\$40,936,282

This year will bring some soul-searching questions about our financial priorities as we struggle with a budget that is not keeping up with the county's expenditures. We

wonder if our county leadership won't start looking at things like bicycle paths and quaint walkways as extra goodies we could only afford during the best of times.

Lots to ponder next time you are in heavy traffic or hit a pothole...

Sales Tax – Do We, or Don't We?

Transportation expenses will be a hot topic. The San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) is presenting its Half Cent Sales Tax Measure proposal to the Board. Below are some of the details about the tax measure.

Proponents of the tax will point out that as a self-help county (one that has a local transportation sales tax), we would qualify for millions of dollars of state grants that we don't currently. They'll also point out the fact that our county leadership has dedicated very little priority to funding transportation projects, so if we want to see improvements, we need to find funding.

Opponents of the tax measure will focus on finances and the extra costs involved with this measure. Many will point out that it's already very expensive to live in San Luis Obispo County. And some will complain that if the county doesn't want to invest in transportation, why should the taxpayers kick in extra?

Faith that the funds will go to what is promised is likely to also be a big factor.

Listed below are the distribution priorities for anticipated tax revenues.

Revenue Distribution

Annual revenues shall be allocated as follows:

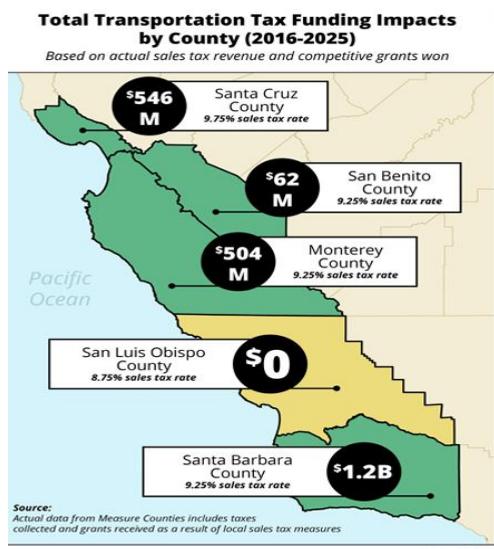
- **55% Local Road Repairs, Safety, and Improvements** distributed by population to cities and the County. (Reviewed every ten years based on census data¹).
- **40% Regional Corridor Improvements** distributed by subregion population within the areas defined as shown.
- **4% Seniors, Veterans, and Mobility Challenged Transportation Services**, regionwide.
- **1% Administration**

The following chart lists the revenues that neighboring counties receive because they are self-help counties.

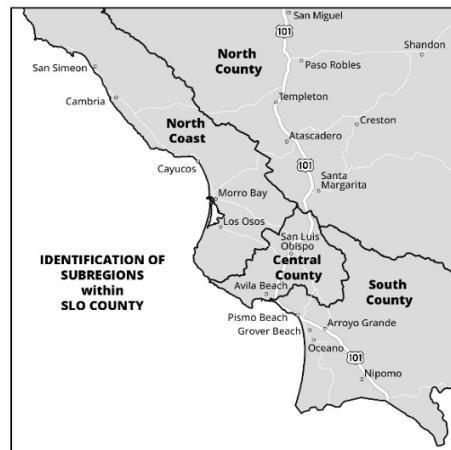
Currently, 25 Counties (89% of Californians) HAVE a Voter-approved Transportation Tax

Region	Collected ('16-pres)	Grants Won
Santa Cruz	\$196M	\$350M
Monterey	\$277M	\$227M
Santa Barbara	\$458M	\$759M
SLO	\$0	\$0
Lost out on	\$270M	\$430M

The map illustrated below shows how neighboring counties' sales tax levels are impacted by being self-help counties.



Below is a map illustrating the regions that the county will be broken into for funding purposes.



The following graph breaks out the anticipated distribution according to those districts illustrated in the map above.

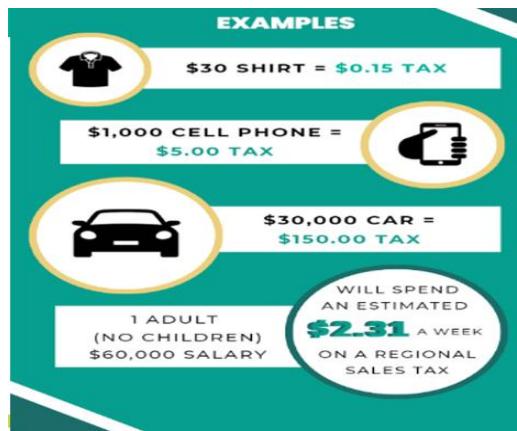
1/2% Sales tax generates ~ \$35,000,000

Distribution of \$35M would be:

55% for Local Road Repairs, Safety and Improvements		\$19,250,000
Arroyo Grande	\$ 1,256,955	
Atascadero	\$ 2,029,354	
Grover Beach	\$ 865,712	
Morro Bay	\$ 733,207	
Paso Robles	\$ 2,146,387	
Pismo Beach	\$ 550,195	
San Luis Obispo	\$ 3,207,856	
Unincorporated*	\$ 8,460,335	
40% for Regional Corridor Improvements		\$14,000,000
North County	\$ 4,923,893	
South County	\$ 4,001,218	
Central County	\$ 3,085,830	
North Coast	\$ 1,989,059	
4% for Senior/Disabled/Veterans' mobility improvements		\$1,400,000
1% Administration Costs (Maximum)		\$350,000

*Unincorporated to be distributed, equally, between five Supervisorial Districts

SLOCOG has been kind enough to make some estimates of what the average person might pay extra in sales taxes if this measure passes. What they leave out is the other 8.5% or so sales taxes that everyone already pays, or all of the other taxes that people must put out on a daily, monthly, and annual basis.



The timeline for taking this measure to the ballot is illustrated below.

- Dec. 10, 2025: **SLOCOG Board** – Reviewed Draft Investment Plan and Guidelines; Sent to Cities/BOS
 - Dec. 2025 - Jan. 2026: 7 Cities and County Review Draft Investment Plan
 - 1-27-26: BOS, review and comment
- Feb. 4, 2026: **SLOCOG Board** – Review/Approve Final Measure Materials, Introduce Ordinance
 - Feb. 2026 – Mar. 2026: 7 Cities and County Consider Approval of Plan
- Apr. 1, 2026: **SLOCOG Board** – Consider Adoption of Ordinance with Measure Materials; Send to Ballot
 - Nov. 3, 2026: **Election Day** / Voter-Consideration of Measure
 - Fail -> No Change
 - Pass -> Delivers Expenditure Plan
 - Other/Future Election

As we mentioned in last week's edition, rumors have the polling results being in the mid-50s for this measure. Since it is a specialized tax, it would require a two-thirds majority to pass. This brings into question whether the county should make the investment required to put it on the ballot.

The possibility of a “citizen’s Initiative” (which would only require a simple majority) remains but would need to fund a signature gathering campaign in order to get it on the ballot. That will be expensive and a challenge given the short time frame.

Truth or Hyperbole?

The afternoon session of the Board of Supervisors meeting will be taken up by Sheriff Parkinson's TRUTH Forum. As required by statute, the Sheriff will disclose all interactions with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Here is the government code that spells out the requirement:

- Government Code 7283.1(d), requires that the Board of Supervisors hold a community forum to provide information to the public about ICE's access to individuals and to receive and consider public comment.
 - The Code also specifies that the Sheriff may provide data to the Board of Supervisors as part of this forum.

The Sheriff has been very clear at every public forum about how his office handles immigration issues. Here is a summary of how they conduct themselves at the Sheriff's Office.

What we do

- Publicly provide all incarcerated persons release dates via Sheriff's website
- Allow due process rights under CA Law (SB54)
- Comply with CA DOJ Reporting
- Inform of the right to refuse an interview or have an attorney present.
- Jail will provide a copy of ICE's requests to the incarcerated person.
- Any compliance or non-compliance will be provided on the copy of the request.
- Protect public safety
- Help undocumented victims get U-Visas

What we DO NOT do

- Enforce Federal immigration law
- Deport anyone
- Have authority over ICE
- Ask about immigration status (SB54)
- Conduct Immigration Sweeps
- Hold/ Detain anyone in jail for extra time

There will be a lot of second-guessing and accusations of misconduct from the ICE protesters. Below is an explanation from the Sheriff's Department of how they set their priorities.

Why

Our responsibility is to navigate and comply with both federal and California law, even when those laws create narrow requirements for local agencies.

The Sheriff's Office does not invite or facilitate civil immigration enforcement actions in the community.

Our role is to protect the community.

The following chart illustrates the kinds of offenses that the Sheriff's Department's immigrant customers have committed.

Statistics

2024

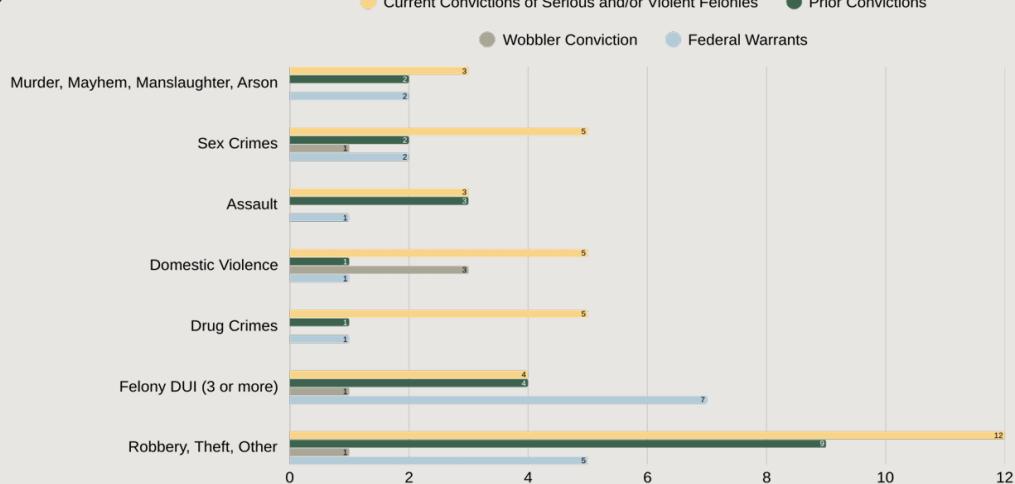
- 111 - Detainer/ Notification Requests from September 2024-December 2024
 - None were complied with
- 1 - US District Court/Federal Warrants (to US Marshal's Office)
- 1 - Releases turned over to ICE (CDCR arranged transfer)
- 4 - Requests for Interviews
 - None were complied with

2025

- 287 - Detainer/ Notification Requests for calendar year 2025
 - 83 were complied with
 - 204 were not complied with
- 19 - US District Court/Federal Warrants
- 69 - Releases turned over to ICE
- 11 - Requests for Interviews
 - None were complied with

Qualifying Charges

2025



It's extremely difficult to understand the passion that some people have to protect these kinds of criminals. It's just as difficult to understand how the protesters can

justify obstructing and committing acts of violence against our federal law enforcement personnel.

We can only hope that they will behave themselves at the January 27 meeting and maybe even listen to some of the compelling facts that the sheriff has to share.

Katy Grimes – Headline Speaker

The question that everybody has been asking – who will be the speaker for the COLAB Annual Dinner on March 26 has finally been answered.

Katy Grimes is a seasoned investigative journalist and the Editor in Chief of California Globe, known for her indepth coverage of California politics and her contributions to various publications.

Her articles are often featured in these pages, and frequent listeners of the Andy Caldwell Show will find her sharing the latest news on the air from time to time.



Look forward to hearing the rest of the story from Katy as she discusses important details about current California issues that you will never hear from mainstream media. Be sure to get your tickets early – this will be a popular event.



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Mainstream coverage of California Issues is pathetically thin with the legacy media avoiding the tough questions that define life in the Golden State.

Katy Grimes, Editor-in-Chief of The California Globe, is known for fact-filled, hard hitting investigative reporting that exposes the real consequences of Sacramento's policy-making.

Join us to hear firsthand from Katy about California's essentially one-party system of governance and the realities most media outlets routinely ignore - along with some good news, too.



Katy Grimes, Editor in Chief of
The California Globe

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The California Left's Nonprofit Funding and Massive Fraud

The LA homeless fraud is just the tip of the iceberg in California

By Katy Grimes, January 26, 2026

The news on Friday stunned many Californians, when California's U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli announced the arrest of Alexander Soofer of Los Angeles, who was charged with wire fraud, and that officials seized his \$125,000 Range Rover and LA mansion, after he was arrested for allegedly stealing millions in taxpayer funds meant to house and feed the homeless in Los Angeles. Soofer was contracted with the city and county of Los Angeles, to house and feed up to 600 homeless people. But instead, spent millions on a luxurious life, the *Globe* reported. Soofer stole approximately \$23 million, *Fox* reported.

Not long after this blockbuster story, Essayli posted to X:

We are working with **@DrOz** to investigate massive healthcare fraud occurring in California.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), said California is one of the epicenters for fraud, waste and abuse in the entire country, and they are probing massive suspected hospice and home-health fraud in Los Angeles. If even a fraction of this is true, elected officials and public employees knew of it, and allowed taxpayers to be robbed blind. Home-health services are government approved.

We have been ringing the alarm bells for many years about dubious non-profits tied to politicians and their families, friends, and associates... non-profits that are untraceable black holes for taxpayer/government funding. And it's been going on a long time. Back when Jerry Brown was California Attorney General, I was reporting on non-profit fraud, and sending the information to the Attorney general's office. But all I got back was crickets.

Surprisingly, we aren't hearing bupkis from Republicans in Sacramento... even after *Globe* contributor Richie Greenberg and I recently **reported on and exposed** some really shady non-profit organizations and NGOs tied to the governor.



Assemblyman David Tangipa (Photo: ad08.asmrc.org)

...Except Assemblyman David Tangipa (R-Fresno). “I think corruption is the number one thing people are thinking about now,” Assemblyman Tangipa told the Globe Monday. “You know your money isn’t going to what you want – especially in California. “I hear from people in my district now who cynically say they should have opened up a daycare – ‘I’d be retired by now’ they tell me.”

Republicans and Democrats tell Assemblyman Tangipa that the system is broken, and it doesn’t work for them when they can’t afford gas and groceries. ““So I voted for Donald Trump to fix this,” constituents tell him. “And liberals say much the same, except they say ‘I’m going to vote for Zohran Mamdani’... for the person they say will break the system,” he said. “I feel the same way – if we are one of the top 10 largest economies in the world, where does it reflect that?” Tangipa asked.

He continued: “If we pay the highest taxes, we should have the best resources – roads, property taxes for schools, should be the best. All 6th graders should be able to read at grade level.”

“But we are getting the worst resources on our investment. Where is that money going?”

When politicians can fly to Davos, but people have to take out a loan to pay utility bills... and our elected officials can go to super fancy bashes, and fly private to brag about... brag about what?” he asked.

“The average Californian is is paying the most and getting the least. And it’s only getting worse. The Governor’s budget office and the Legislative Analyst’s Office both report that California has record high tax revenue -the most tax revenues in history – where is the money going?”

“Who is to blame?” Tangipa asked. “The Billionaires? That explains the billionaire tax. But people are looking at the fraud... looking at daycares that don’t exist... home health care that doesn’t exist?”

“This California corruption... ‘where are my tax dollars going?’ people want to know. We need to be telling everybody that ‘your government doesn’t care about you.’”

He added, “Heads will roll.”

This should be the unifying issue among Conservatives, and moderate Democrats, at the very least. And yes, people want heads to roll.

On Monday, more details came available about massive healthcare fraud occurring in California:

Trump CMS Administrator Dr. Oz is EXPOSING jaw-dropping fraud in Gavin Newsom’s California with US Attorney Bill Essayli.

“We have witnessed a 7-fold INCREASE in hospice in LA County. Seven-fold. That doesn’t happen naturally!”

“\$3.5B just here in Los Angeles County. We think around hospice and home health care. Then you add in all the other things like they have in Minnesota, but in California scale, it’s huge.”

“There are not seven times more deaths in LA County than there were five years ago. These fraudsters, and these do tend to be foreign influences, these are Russian-Armenian gangs, mafia, that are leading a lot of these efforts.”

“A lot of it’s driven by foreigners who came to Los Angeles, very different culture, Russian-Armenian groups, and this mafia seems to have taken over the system.”

“They corrupt the doctors, they normalize fraud so that everyone sort of expects it, but the magnitude of it is so great that we have to take it on aggressively.”

“It’s a focus area for CMS, and this administration under President Trump is not going to tolerate taxpayer dollars being stolen because people aren’t paying attention anymore. We’re focused on this.”

Gavin Newsom is furious.

How did this happen? How did public employees and elected politicians allow this to happen? How many are involved?

In March, *Globe* contributor Richie Greenberg and I addressed “**The Left’s Nonprofit Shadow Campaign Fund**,” and explained, “When corporations cozy up to politicians through ‘charity,’ they’re not competing on merit—they’re buying influence.”

Here is the refresher course, and note that the non-profits we name are still out there and still deserve serious scrutiny:

In a nation built on free enterprise and personal responsibility, the abuse of nonprofit organizations and behest contributions by political elites like California Governor Gavin Newsom represents a betrayal of American values.

California’s one-party rule ensures the powerful protect their own.

These mechanisms, intended to foster benevolence, charity and public good, have instead morphed into a taxpayer-subsidized slush fund for the well-connected, allowing politicians across America to enrich their families, reward donors, and dodge accountability—all while cloaking their schemes in the guise of altruism. This is not just unethical; it’s a direct assault on the principles of limited government and fair play. It’s time to expose this racket and demand legislative reform to shut it down.

Non-profit organizations and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become a **shadow government** in the U.S. Despite reporting on blatantly phony non-profit groups to the California Attorney General for many years, nothing ever happened. California’s corruption begins at the top, as does the corruption in the United States.

Think back to Barack Obama and ACORN, a very shady “community activist” organization that helped bring Obama to power. ACORN was a community organizing group that claimed to help poor people with low-income housing issues, but was really registering thousands/millions of people to vote in Democratic districts. Some of these supposed voters reportedly were actually dead, nonexistent, or used shacks and empty buildings as their home addresses.

Sounds just like ACTBlue, the Democratic fundraising platform, now accused of violating federal law in allowing terrorism-linked groups to use its services. ACTBlue is also said to be linked to financing attacks on Tesla showrooms and Elon Musk, among other violent “protests” across the country. Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) has formally requested the Trump administration to open up an investigation into ACTBlue to investigate “credible allegations” that ActBlue, the Democratic fundraising platform, violated federal law in allowing terrorism-linked groups to use its services.

Nonprofits, with their tax-exempt status and loose oversight, have become a playground for political insiders. Take Newsom’s wife, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, and her outfit, The Representation Project. “While her husband attends to state business, Siebel Newsom engages in her passion: advancing ‘gender justice’ through her charitable nonprofit *The Representation Project*, *Open the Books* reported. According to tax documents the organization is ‘committed to building a thriving and inclusive society through films, education, and social activism.’”

Jennifer Siebel Newsom solicited state vendors and the governor’s campaign donors for large gifts to her charity, *The Representation Project*. Since 2011, this supposed gender-justice charity has raked in over \$800,000 from corporate giants like PG&E, AT&T, and Comcast—firms with billions at stake in California’s regulatory landscape. Siebel Newsom pocketed \$2.3 million in salary over those years, pulling six-figure paychecks while her husband climbed from lieutenant governor to governor. These donors aren’t philanthropists; they’re players in a game where cash flows to the governor’s family, and favors—like lax utility oversight or cushy state contracts—flow back. It’s cronyism dressed up as compassion.

Then there’s the behest contribution scam—legalized influence peddling that Newsom has mastered. In 2019, he solicited nearly \$8 million for his inaugural bash and wildfire relief, much of it from corporations with state business. In 2020, he pulled in \$26 million for COVID-19 efforts, with heavy hitters like Blue Shield (\$1 million) and McKinsey & Company (\$250,000) chipping in—only for McKinsey to later snag a \$35 million state contract.

Gov. Gavin Newsom had no-bid contracts with Blue Shield and McKinsey & Company, and outsourced much of California's vaccine rollout during the Covid crisis, the **Globe reported**. "Private contractors cost taxpayers millions of dollars, while demonstrating few clear results and papering over weaknesses in the country's public health system," the **Washington Post even reported**.

Siebel Newsom, through **The Representation Project**, has released four films advocating gender justice. The films are leased for screenings to individuals, corporations, and schools, and come with their own lesson plans. Schools spend between \$49-\$599 to screen these movies to children.

With her **Governor husband**, who would dare deny her solicitations? See just a little conflict of interest?

Interestingly, Gavin Newsom's home town, "San Francisco's nonprofit sector is the largest per capita of any California county – \$9 billion outstanding in federal grants and loans for Bay Area entities, according to **U.S. contract data**. That includes more than \$1 billion earmarked directly for nonprofits, and much more that filters down to organizations across the region through state and local governments and institutions," the **San Francisco Standard** recently **reported**. Naturally, Bay Area nonprofits are dumbfounded from President Trump's "funding cuts and chaos. San Francisco has the largest share of the nonprofit workforce of any California county. Other Bay Area counties, including Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Alameda, follow right behind."

California law, conveniently tightened by a bill Newsom himself signed, requires reporting these donations above \$5,000, but that's just window dressing. The system lets him shake down donors for unlimited sums, funneling cash to pet causes while building a network of indebted allies. It's not charity; it's a shadow campaign fund, free from the caps and scrutiny real candidates face.

This isn't hypothetical—it's happening in plain sight. The California State Protocol Foundation, a nonprofit tied to Newsom, which has only a 56% rating from **Charity Navigator**, handed out cellphones with Newsom's personal number to CEOs in 2024, funded by private donations from businesses he regulates. Meanwhile, The Representation Project went delinquent in 2022 for flouting charitable registration rules yet kept hosting glitzy galas bankrolled by the same corporate cronies. The IRS, gutted by decades of underfunding, does nothing.

California's watchdog **Fair Political Practices Commission**, tasked with policing behest payments, just shrugs, likely because Governor Newsom appointed two of the four commissioners, California's Attorney General Rob Bonta appointed one

and Secretary of State Shirley Weber appointed one. California's Constitutional Officers and governor are all Democrats.

We know this game: the rules only apply to the little guy, while the elite connected and government employees skate free.

This exploitation offends on multiple levels. First, it's a misuse of taxpayer dollars. Nonprofits' tax breaks mean every dollar Siebel Newsom takes home is indirectly subsidized by working Americans, many of whom can't afford California's sky-high taxes—taxes Newsom loves to hike. Second, it erodes trust in free markets. When corporations cozy up to politicians through "charity," they're not competing on merit—they're buying influence, distorting the level playing field we champion. Third, it's a mockery of personal accountability. Newsom preaches equity and justice while his family cashes in, proving once again that progressive elites live by a different set of rules.

The broader nonprofit swamp amplifies the problem. Politicians across the spectrum set up interlocking charities, staffed by relatives and loyalists, to launder donor money into personal wealth. Funds bounce between 501(c)(3)s and 501(c)(4)s, obscuring the trail. Behest contributions supercharge this, letting officials like Newsom solicit millions with no cap, as long as they call it "public good." It's a huge loophole and it's no accident—California's one-party rule ensures the powerful protect their own.

Enough is enough. We must demand reform to dismantle this racket. First, cap behest contributions at a reasonable limit—say, \$10,000 per donor annually—and ban them from entities with state contracts or lobbying interests. Second, mandate real-time public disclosure of all nonprofit donations above \$1,000, stripping away the secrecy that shields these deals. Third, tighten IRS rules: no nonprofit executive tied to an elected official should draw a salary exceeding, say, \$50,000 without proving the group's impact—measured in hard outcomes, not vague platitudes. Fourth, impose stiff penalties—fines, jail time, loss of tax status—for noncompliance, like The Representation Project's delinquency. Finally, fund enforcement. A lean, efficient government doesn't mean a toothless one; give regulators the tools to root out abuse.

Newsom's operation is a poster child for this corruption, but he's not alone. The system itself is rotten, and we hardworking taxpayers—guardians of integrity and small government—must lead the charge to fix it. We need to end the nonprofit

gravy train and restore a system where charity serves the people, not the powerful. Anything less is a surrender to the elitist swamp we've actually sworn to drain.

California's Drought is Over, but we Must Still Invest in Water Supply Projects

EDWARD RING

Director, Water and Energy Policy



Californians for Energy and Water Abundance
January 28, 2026

For the last 25 years, the US Drought Monitor (USDM), a collaborative effort by the University of Nebraska, NOAA, the USDA, and other experts throughout the country, has released a weekly map that shows the location and intensity of drought across the United States.

On January 8, for the first time ever, USDM's weekly map showed the entire State of California to be drought free. The timing of USDM's finding coincides with the release this week of a California Policy Center study, *Statistical Review of United States Drought Monitor*, that calls into question the objectivity of USDM's reports. The USDM's baseline assessment for the 20th century had California in a state of drought about 30 percent of the time, whereas their assessments for the first 25 years of the 21st century had the state experiencing drought more than 60 percent of the time. But our own analysis showed almost no change in drought frequency between this century and the last.

We based our conclusion on a statistical analysis of over a century of climate records from dozens of California-based monitoring stations. Variables we examined included precipitation, snowpack, temperature, relative humidity, dew point, and vapor pressure deficit. The post-2000 climate data show no substantial drying trend compared to prior 25-year periods in the 20th century. This undermines the credibility of USDM's reports that find California to have entered a new, dramatically drier era with sharply heightened drought frequency.

What we observed from actual weather station data is corroborated by research presented at an event attended by water agency executives in Orange County in 2023 by Dr. John Christy, a Ph.D in Atmospheric Science who is a professor and Director of the Earth System Science Center at the University of Alabama. A native of California, Christy assured the audience that he has been giving our state special attention his entire life. He presented a series of slides that contradict the consensus that informs water policy in California. Its message might be summarized as follows: There may be some warming occurring over the past century in California, but it is not extreme, nor is it accompanied by unusually severe anything: droughts, extreme wildfires, heavy rainfall, diminished snowpacks, reduced river volumes, or drier air.

Whether or not the USDM's findings are objective and reproducible, they have exercised enormous influence over water policy in California and throughout the U.S. But when even the USDM, which we allege is overstating the frequency and intensity of drought in California, says, for the first time in their 25-year history, that the entire state is currently drought-free, perhaps we should believe them.

In response to the USDM's findings, UC climate scientist Daniel Swain, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, said "This is certainly a less destructive weather winter than last year was and than many of the drought years were, so it's OK to take that breather and to acknowledge that, right now, things are doing OK. But as we move forward, we do expect to be dealing with increasingly extreme weather swings."

Here's where policies oriented to climate change go sideways. Let's assume this unique moment for California to be completely drought free is not a return to normalcy but just an aberration on the road to a future of worsening weather

whiplash. Let's assume our future involves years of droughts followed by years that are too warm for a snowpack to form, but instead are characterized by torrential rains.

If this is truly what we face, why are water policies oriented to scarcity instead of abundance? Even if there is disagreement over whether or not climate change is a crisis, or whether or not the droughts we've experienced this century are worse than the droughts of the last century, most experts agree that in some form or another, there is going to be plenty of precipitation. Maybe we'll have less snow, but we'll have more rain. Maybe we'll have some drier years, but we will also have wetter years. But policies oriented to scarcity will *not* give us the ability to adapt and prepare.

It may be a 20-year drought, or it may be an earthquake that liquifies the levees in the delta, allowing the Pacific Ocean to pour in and deny fresh water transfers south for years. Pick your disaster. But in a disaster scenario, the often heard refrain that "water conserved is water supplied" will be brutally debunked. Water is life. When there is nothing to conserve, life itself is the victim.

We examined the USDM's methods and turned to core data to reproduce their findings, and we could not. So maybe things aren't so bad, after all. But even if the USDM was *understating* a very real and severe long-term trend toward worsening droughts, the state's policy response would be even more flawed. We should be investing in every possible way to harvest water. Wastewater recycling. Desalination. Urban runoff harvesting. Building better ways to safely remove additional millions of acre feet of water from the delta in wet years, storing it in off-stream reservoirs or underground.

These are the investments we should make. You can't drink conservation. You can't water your crops with conservation.

"Weather whiplash" has been with us in California for a long time. In dry years, around 100 million acre feet of rain fall onto in-state watersheds, and in wet years, the deluges exceed 300 million acre feet. Living with and consuming *surplus* water,

harvested from diverse and decentralized sources, and stored in extreme abundance, is how we should prepare for the next drought or the next disaster.

Edward Ring is the Director of Water and Energy Policy at the California Policy Center, which he co-founded in 2013. Ring is the author of Fixing California: Abundance, Pragmatism, Optimism (2021) and The Abundance Choice: Our Fight for More Water in California (2022).

Judge Glock

The Myth of Easy Infrastructure

What the Golden Gate Bridge teaches us about building big things.

/ Eye on the News / Infrastructure and Energy

Jan 30 2026/

The Golden Gate Bridge is one of the most majestic structures on Earth. Even more impressive, perhaps, is that the bridge was built swiftly and opened in 1937, on time and under budget. This makes it a perennial source of inspiration for engineers and infrastructure mavens alike—especially today, when building major projects seems like a relic of the past.

How was this feat accomplished? It was not, as many assume, thanks merely to a more permissive regulatory environment. The bridge's creation offers two main lessons.

The first is that putting in place the legal and political structures for public works takes time. Though the actual building of the bridge was rapid, the process leading up to it spanned decades.

The second lesson is that an independent and flexible management structure, as well as financing that ties management to results, are essential for successful infrastructure projects.

Modern advocates of “abundance” often take a Pollyannish view of older public works projects, romanticizing a mythical past where it was easy to build things. Yet big public works are contentious by nature; there was no golden age of easy infrastructure.

“Abundance” types are also too optimistic about insulating infrastructure from political machinations. The truth is that independence, while essential, also comes with serious downsides, potentially creating long-term problems and undermining democratic accountability. Believers in good infrastructure need to think about builders’ incentives, both during building and afterward, if that infrastructure is going to work for the public.

The Golden Gate Bridge is often held up as an example of public infrastructure **built** right. Many today **note** that the bridge took just four-and-a-half years to build—far **less** than the average time an environmental-impact review for a comparable project would take today.

But the whole process of building the bridge, from conception to completion, took much longer: 15 years from first public designs to completion. It took so long not because of engineering but because of politics. Before building the bridge, its designers had to create an independent governing “district” focused solely on this project—something then almost unprecedented in America.

The story begins in 1919, when the San Francisco Board of Supervisors asked **noted** engineer Michael O’Shaughnessy to figure out how to bridge the Golden Gate, the span of water that separated the city from Marin County to the north. O’Shaughnessy turned to Joseph Strauss, a less experienced but energetic fellow engineer.

Strauss spent years working on the bridge design. He solicited expert and public feedback and advertised the general idea of the bridge before he finally published the design at the end of 1922. It did not yet feature the famous full suspension across its two towers, instead relying in part on a cantilever that held up suspension wires.

While the designs were in, San Francisco needed to collaborate with Marin and other counties to fund and build the bridge. That meant a governance body that spanned several jurisdictions, and that in turn required a new state law. In 1923, the state legislature passed the Bridge and Highway District Act, allowing counties to

form an independent or “special” district. The district could issue bonds, build a bridge and approach highways, and collect tolls to pay off the bonds.

The law was not wholly unprecedented, as special districts for infrastructure in America date to the late nineteenth century. But these districts had become common nationwide only in the previous decade. For example, 1923 also saw the formation of the East Bay Municipal Utility District, responsible for [constructing](#) a public water system and administering it in and around Oakland. Similarly, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey—originating as a way to unify the area’s ports—would soon take the lead on infrastructure projects like the George Washington Bridge and the Lincoln Tunnel.

Today, many believe that public infrastructure once required little public input and faced little legal opposition. Yet the bridge district was subject to both. Under the Bridge and Highway District Act, the bridge district had to win approval from voters in a referendum in each of the affected counties. That process took two years, including a delay so that San Francisco could secure another legal change to give it more votes on the district’s board.

The formation of the new district also prompted [over 2,300 separate court complaints](#). These came mainly from taxpayers, who would find themselves on the hook if the tolls proved inadequate. These cases, though ultimately ruled meritless, took until the end of 1928 to resolve. The legislature then passed another law to try to protect the district from still more legal objections.

The district also needed approval from the War Department, which had to sign off whenever a bridge crossed navigable waters. Preliminary approval was [provided](#) in 1924 after six months of review. Then, the engineers changed the design to the soon-to-be-famous pure suspension bridge. That pushed final approval from the Department to 1930.

Next, in November 1930, voters in all six counties had to approve bonds to construct the bridge. The vote was contested: steamship lines, worried about navigation, tried to gin up opposition. Even O’Shaughnessy, who thought that the new suspension design would fail, opposed the bond issue. Ultimately, bridge supporters won handily, but not before a drawn-out political fight.

Finally, the district had to sell those bonds. Unsurprisingly, that yielded even more lawsuits, leading to another state law to protect the district. The lawsuits continued until June 1932.

When construction finally began early in 1933, the district had already accumulated \$200,000 in debt, mostly from attorneys' fees. Though originally intended to be funded entirely by bonds and tolls, the district had to impose property taxes to keep itself operating.

Today, we regard the Golden Gate Bridge's construction as miraculously fast. But Joseph Strauss [referred](#) to it as "a thirteen years' war . . . a long and torturous march." He meant the onerous process of approval and funding—always contentious for innovative public works, then and now.

With approval and funding finally squared away, actual construction proceeded quickly. This was possible not only through a laxer regulatory environment but also because of the innovative design of the district's governance, which put engineering ahead of bureaucratic constraint.

While the district had a formal board of directors and manager, the act that formed it provided that "the engineer [Strauss] shall have, under the direction of the general manager, full charge of the constructions and of the works of the district." This independence gave Strauss and his team of engineers primacy over the management.

The district's independence enabled it to attract some of the greatest engineering minds of modern history. Strauss, the chief engineer, was [overseen](#) by a special technical board of what the *San Francisco Chronicle* called "engineers of national and international reputation." Those included Leon Moisseiff and Othmar Ammann, who had built some of the greatest bridges in history, and who pushed for the suspension design.

Also important was the nature of these engineers' employment. The boundaries between in-government and out-of-government were more fluid in this period, with no fine distinction between salaried civil servants and contract workers. This enabled the district to recruit more easily, since it could craft an array of employment and contracting options.

The fluid employment structure extended to Strauss. Later histories characterize him as an engineer directly employed by the district. But Strauss's term and pay were the result of what a judge later described as "an elaborate written contract." Instead of working as a salaried civil servant, Strauss's contract fixed his base compensation at 4 percent of the estimated \$27 million cost of construction—over \$1 million, out of which he had to pay for some of his own assistants.

Strauss refused to be a civil servant because he feared that a change in the district's board could lead to his ouster. The board itself wanted him to be independent so that he could not resign without financial penalty. The resultant contract gave both sides the continuance in office necessary for success.

As chief engineer, Strauss had enormous discretion, and he exercised it. He awarded [eight](#) main contracts for the bridge's construction and oversaw the day-to-day integration of the contracts, generally with success. He also helped install an innovative safety net under the bridge during construction. The net saved the lives of 19 men.

When the bridge [opened](#) on May 27, 1937, it was under-budget and early. Its tolls soon proved more than sufficient to pay down the bonds. And it was already apparent that the bridge would be a powerful symbol of the West Coast.

This success was driven by the fact that the bridge was to be funded entirely by tolls, and that its bonding power was limited. This gave Strauss and his team a strong incentive to stay under budget and on time. The district's independence, in other words, was mediated by strict monetary constraints.

Yet the independence of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District created problems after the bridge was completed. As Louise Nelson Dyble explains in *Paying the Toll: Local Power, Regional Politics, and the Golden Gate Bridge*, the bridge's success meant that it was generating more revenue than the district needed to pay off its bonds. Its independence also meant it faced little check on its spending habits.

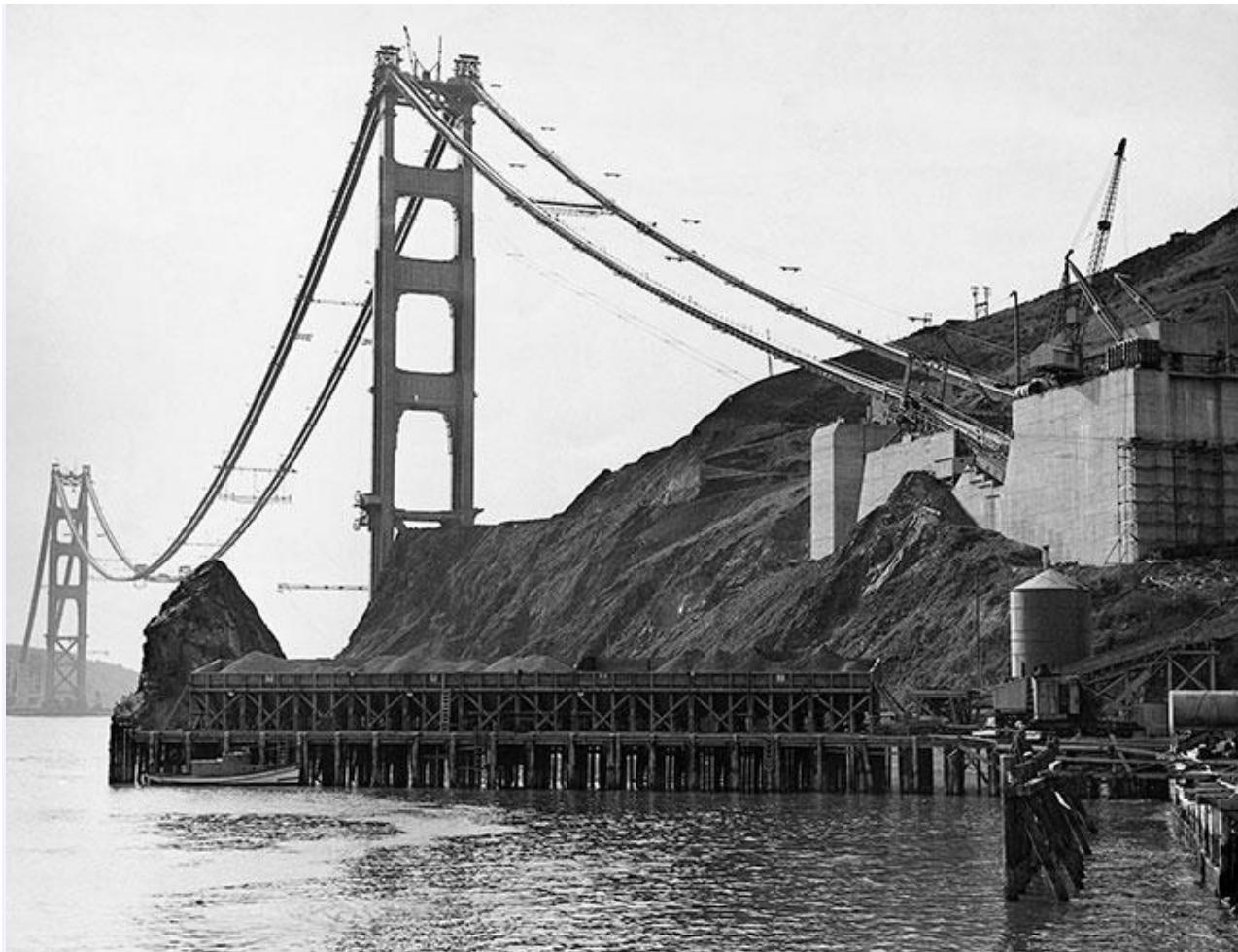
Predictably, outlays soared. A report by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce published not long after opening claimed that the bridge "operated on an extravagant scale" compared with the nearby Bay Bridge. An early 1950s state audit showed that operating expenses could be reduced by as much as 10 percent.

Despite this waste, by the 1960s, the Bridge District was projected to garner enough tolls to pay off all of its bonds by 1971. In the eyes of the district's directors and employees, that was a problem—because after the bonds were paid off, the bridge was supposed to go toll-free. The district would then have no income.

To resolve this dilemma, the district's directors absorbed loss-making ferry and bus companies. Paying for these required levying indefinite tolls on the bridge.

Today, the district is part of the larger Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District. More than half a century after it was supposed to dissolve, it is still collecting tolls.

It has also fallen prey to the same bloat that afflicts many other public projects. In 2024, the district finished the first phase of constructing suicide-deterrant nets—an echo of Strauss's safety nets. Unlike Strauss's, though, these nets took six years to build, longer than the construction of the bridge itself. The nets [cost](#) over \$300 million—more than a third of the bridge's original real cost.



The Golden Gate Bridge under construction (Photo by George Rinhart/Corbis via Getty Images)

The story of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District demonstrates the promises and perils of public works. To be successful, such projects require independence and flexibility on the part of government managers. They also need concrete funding schemes that reward success. But the long-term effects of creating such independence can be deleterious in the extreme.

This dynamic can be seen in other infrastructure projects erected by public authorities, including, most famously, the many projects of New York's Robert Moses. Moses's good characteristics (his rapid construction of public works) and bad ones (his lust for unaccountable power) sprang from his control of special districts. Moses's empire at the Triborough Bridge Authority gave him

independence from political branches. Many focus their attention on Moses the man, but the structure that enabled and empowered him is just as important.

Institutions like Triborough or the Golden Gate District have their merits; they also have accountability problems that can't be wished away. In their classic [article](#) "When Governments Regulate Governments," David Konisky and Manuel Teodoro argue that governments often have a harder time regulating other government agencies than they do regulating businesses or people. The Tennessee Valley Authority, for example, tended to violate the Clean Air Act and Safe Drinking Water Act far more often than private-sector groups did.

This counterintuitive result obtains because governments can't identify residual claimants or clear malefactors to punish if the entire body refuses to cooperate. Instead, tax- or toll-payers end up footing the bill.

These days, the United States has 38,000 special districts—double the number of its municipalities. Another classic political-science [article](#) shows that layering these districts on top of municipalities leads to higher government spending. More independence and less accountability encourage "overfishing" of tax dollars from a common pool.

The Golden Gate Bridge was an obvious success at construction. Yet few then thought about the dangers of creating such an independent structure over the long term. Today's supporters of public works need to ponder not only short-term flexibility but also how a project will meet the needs of citizens after it is completed. Political accountability can be stifling, but it's necessary.

Public construction has always required the delicate balancing of efficiency with accountability. We cannot get around this tradeoff; it is a feature of how governments build things. What we can do is try to make sure that the incentives for public works managers are as aligned as possible with the public interest—both before and after construction.

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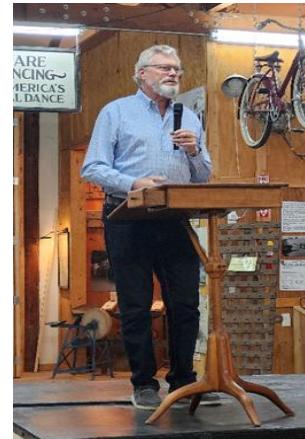
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