



WEEKLY UPDATE APRIL 5 - 11, 2020

TEMPORARY REPRIEVE! SLO CITY GAS BAN OFF THE AGENDA OF APRIL 7, 2020

After the COLAB Weekly Update for last week was posted, City staff emailed us as follows:

The April 7, 2020 agenda will be posted [here](#) later today and will not include the Clean Energy Choice Program for New Buildings.

The item will likely be brought back for consideration at a later date, though given the focus on COVID-19 response and recovery at this time, we do not currently know when that will occur, nor what will be included in the item for Council's consideration. Consistent with our standard practices, we will notify the community and stakeholders of the new date well in advance of the public posting of the agenda.

Please let me know if you have any other questions.

Thanks to the City for granting this reprieve and for scheduling the issue at some future time after things return to "normal." The items listed in the highlight box below are not now on the published agenda or included in the agenda packet.

Note that also included in the highlight box below is the statement that they have scaled back some aspects of the program. It will be interesting to see if the Mayor and Council will accept a scaled back program when it is presented. We would hope that the Mayor and Council would schedule a workshop where the economics and physical energy science could be presented to them rather than the formal 3-minute bite process. Trapped between powerful ideological interest groups and their staff, the Council has not had a real chance to come up for air and hear a counter presentation on the gas issue or Monterey Bay Community Power for that matter. Leaders should make room to hear what they don't want to hear. It saves trouble later.



Tens of millions of successful marriages have endured based on the scene above.

Background: Last week the City Manager wrote “*that staff’s recommendation for the April 7 item (Clean Energy Choice Program for New Buildings) will be to adopt several local amendments to the California Energy Code that apply to new buildings only: two of the amendments require new buildings with natural gas to be more efficient than the state minimum, another amendment requires electric appliance outlets in new residential buildings, and a final amendment requires solar energy generating systems to be installed on nonresidential new buildings.* There is no natural gas ban as that has never been the case and remains so and the City’s approach is in-line with two dozen other local governments that have made similar local amendments to the California Energy Code with approval or pending approval from the California Energy Commission. It is expected that staff’s recommendation will also include the approval of an incentive program, which will support builders to select sensible and economically viable options.

“It is important to note that we have pared back staff’s recommendation substantially in light of COVID-19 and have removed the Carbon Offset Program (which included the direct offset and in-lieu fee component) from consideration at this time. It is also important to note that Council has already voted to approve the building code amendments and received substantial public input at the September 3 Public Hearing. This action would reintroduce the amendments for formal approval. The only change proposed since the September 3 Public Hearing is to provide an additional minor exemption to allow for natural gas appliances in new commercial kitchens and removal of the Carbon Offset Program.”

Not a ban but the same difference: They are using the power of the government to favor one energy source over another. Moreover, they are assuming that all the electricity that people use will be generated from non-fossil fuel sources. The people will be using electricity provided by PG&E, notwithstanding paper carbon offsets wielded by Monterey Bay Power. Currently the Diablo Nuclear Power Plant forestalls 8 million metric tonnes of CO₂. This will have to be replaced with largely gas generated electric power.

Finally, this is just the first step. In the end the City Council wishes to ban all fossil fuel power. This item should be removed from the agenda until after the current COVID-19 pandemic is over and its economic wreckage can be fully assessed. Again COLAB, the Central Coast Taxpayers, and people who believe in free markets and free choice ask that this item be taken off calendar.

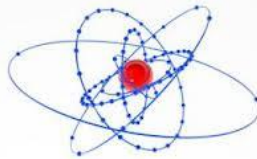
THIS WEEK

BOARD MEETING CANCELED

COVID-19 OPERATIONS DOMINATE WORK

SUPERVISOR HILL MYSTERY DEEPENS
MAYOR HEIDI HARMON FOR 3RD DISTRICT SUPERVISOR?

ECONOMIC RECOVERY EFFORTS BEING PLANNED
AS THE SONG SAYS – “DANCE WITH THE ONE YOU BRUNG”
KEEP DIABLO OPEN



COVID LOCKDOWN WILL SLUG LOCAL REVENUES

LAST WEEK

NO BOS MEETING
NEXT MEETING SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 21ST

APRIL 7, 2020 BOARD MEETING ALSO CANCELED

**SLOCOG ON APRIL 1ST
BRISK MEETING ON PLANS AND GRANTS**

**SLO COLAB IN DEPTH
SEE PAGE 14**

**POST-CORONAPOCALYPSE PENSION REFORM
CHECKLIST FOR CALIFORNIA**

BY EDWARD RING

**THE COMMON ROOTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
AND COVID-19 HYSTERIA**

BY PATRICK WOOD

PLASTIC BAGS & THE RECYCLING AND REUSE SCAM

BY EDWARD RING

**DEMOCRATS SEE THEIR PLASTIC BAG – FREE
WORLD CRUMBLE BEFORE CORONAVIRUS**

BY ANDREA WIDBURG

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

Board meeting of Tuesday, April 7, 2020 (Canceled)

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 21, 2020.

COVID-19 Operations

Absent the presence of Board Chairman Adam Hill, County Administrative Officer Wade Horton and County Health Officer Penny Borenstein have been the face of the County in explaining the planning and operations for COVID-19 AKA Wuhan Flu. At some point someone realized that the peoples' elected leaders were not included, and they have been cycling the other four Supervisors through the daily media briefings. There is a fairly elaborate website dedicated to the operation, which presents statistics, operational developments, preparations in case it develops beyond the ability of the normal hospital system's capacity, and so forth. It is updated daily with statistics and a daily news release that summarizes the County activities.

<https://www.emergencyslo.org/en/covid19.aspx>

From what we can tell, they are doing everything they can to prevent the spread and to provide surge capacity if the infection rate increases very rapidly later in April or beyond.

Separately, Board Vice-Chair Lynn Compton is running a weekday COVID-19 update on her personal FACEBOOK account. It is quite informative and is receiving substantial public comment and approval. From reading the comments, it is clear that the public appreciates the direct communication from their elected representative. An example of one is posted below to provide our readers with a look. These can be accessed at the link below or directly on FACEBOOK for those who are subscribers.

https://business.facebook.com/lynncomptonslo/?ref=py_c

4/2/20 (Thursday) Good afternoon everyone...time for the daily COVID-19 update from Supervisor Lynn Compton's office.

I apologize if this got posted twice...I was told that my original post didn't show.

As always, please share or like/follow this page to get automatic updates...and also please share with those individuals who are not on Facebook as that is an audience I feel like we are missing.

1. Alternate Care Site (ACS) still rapidly progressing....refer to yesterday's update for the most current information on that...I don't want to be redundant. By tomorrow, Phase One will be complete.

2. We have 250 local residents who have signed up in the Medical Reserve Corps. These individuals will be put to work at the ACS which is a "step down" site from our hospitals. They will be caring for COVID-19 positive patients who are not ready to go home yet, and who still need some medical intervention. As I mentioned a few days ago, the State of CA had "taken over" and hijacked our volunteer list from the Medical Reserve Corps website a few days ago. We have worked through some of those issues...and have decided to "go it alone" without depending on the state to provide us volunteers at this point. We have set up our own volunteer lists and will not be relying on the state to provide volunteers to us. Additionally, we are told that people who initially volunteered and put their name on the list, did so to help their local neighbors...not to be reassigned elsewhere.

This means we still need volunteers to assist at the site who have medical experience of any type (dentistry, veterinary, EMT, physician assistant, respiratory technologists, etc.).

To put your name on OUR OWN countywide volunteer Medical Reserve Corp. list, please visit readyslo.org and register. You will then submit your licensing information to us (SLO County human resources department), rather than the state as was previously the process.

We were told today the "state didn't mean to take our list" but we are still having issues getting it back with the original names of those who applied unfortunately (they have blocked our access)! So if you haven't heard back from us (county), and you submitted your name a while ago, you might want to resubmit to us directly for a 2nd time.

2. We are succeeding in ordering PPE (personal protective equipment) and are lucky to have Mr. Paul Porter doing our ordering from the IT department...he was a captain in the Navy so we are lucky to be able to use his skill set in this area.

3. I am happy that we (Board of Supervisors and those in finance departments) in the county have done a really good job fiscally so we aren't strapped as we go into this crisis.

We have \$15M in contingency funding, and \$13M in reserves. Our financial projections for this situation are now estimated to be \$7.9M, which is a downward projection from earlier estimates. We plan on submitting for reimbursements from both the State and Federal Government for all expenses and hope to receive it.

4. Ventilator situation - We are still tracking the 25 that are to be delivered on April 13th. We confirmed that date of arrival again today (and do so daily)!!! However, as we've learned the hard way...we will believe it when we see it.

We have another 30 ventilators on order (that order is still a few weeks out), and as a backup to that original order another 70 requested through Mutual Aid.

In speaking to our healthcare providers and all four of the local hospitals, they think that the ability to operate 50 additional ventilators is their maximum capacity. Trained healthcare professionals need to be able to operate them, and we will be pretty maxed out at 50 more ventilators. It doesn't do any good to have them "sitting around" if we don't have qualified nurses and professionals to use them.

5. Testing - Tens of thousands of kits have been ordered, none yet received, but we are in the "queue." We have no idea when we will actually see that product in hand. A few days ago I mentioned a new testing product manufactured by Abbott Labs that rapidly tests patients and provides results very quickly. We looked into this machine, and have discovered there are other companies now producing similar technology, so are going to get orders in with any of those available manufacturers.

6. Due to the Shelter at Home Order, there has been "talk" of an uptick in domestic violence issues. At the county, our Social Services Department deals with domestic violence issues and protective services all the time, including now during this crisis.

At this time we are fully staffed in that department, and addressing all calls of that nature. We have not received any additional resource requests through the EOC for additional financial assistance through Stand Strong or RISE.

According to our District Attorney Dan Down, the Christopher G. Money Victim Witness Assistance Center has money to assist survivors of domestic violence. When discussing their cases with law enforcement, the victims need to indicate they have no other place to go, if that is the case, and the DA's program will take it from there, getting help.

7. As of this afternoon we now have 89 confirmed COVID-19 positive cases in SLO County. Our third patient is now in the ICU. Additionally, Santa Barbara County has 12/14 of their COVID-19 patients in the ICU and ventilated. Our numbers seem stable and our hospitals all feel they have a lot of capacity at this point. We will soon start reporting health care worker COVID-19 positive case numbers (positive health care workers), and it now stands at

15 cases. Health care workers include EMS or those working in a healthcare setting...even those having desk jobs in medical offices.

Cases by region:

Coast has 11 cases - Morro Bay 6, Other 5

No. County has 48 - Paso 24, Atascadero 17, Templeton 6

Central has 10 - SLO 9, other 1

so. County has 20 - AG 13, Nipomo 5, and Other 2

Cases continue to be mostly due to travel, secondarily by person to person known contact, thirdly via the community.

Total people tested in our lab - 463, other labs (unknown at this point)

8. Flattening the Curve - We continue to believe that the Shelter at Home Order is keeping our hospitals from becoming overwhelmed at this point. We are looking at our data, and that from the state and other countries to determine the epidemiological curve.

We are now "changing" our message a little, as is the state of CA, regarding the use of face coverings, or masks for non-COVID-19 positive individuals.

Our message now, is that there is no harm in covering your face/mouth with a scarf, etc. if you so choose. We are not sure how effective it is with this virus, but if it can decrease the spread of this virus, we are not opposed to individuals doing this. Prior to this point, we only recommended it for those that are sick. By covering your mouth, it can help prevent putting your hands on your face, mouth, or nose, and transmitting a virus particle into your respiratory system.

9. For small businesses, I was on a call with State Treasurer Fiona Ma earlier today. She indicated that quarterly sales taxes payments have been extended for 90 days from the state, and also the state has postponed sales tax payments for 3 months. For all questions relating to small business tax relief you can visit her website.

10. The state has a Senior Hotline that the Governor has set up, and is supposed to be a "one stop shop". That phone number is 833-544-2374.

11. Continue to mitigate the impact of the Shelter at Home Order by executing Food Drop off Programs for Seniors, augmenting Food Bank capabilities, ensuring sufficient capacity of County Social Services, and Behavioral Health, support homeless shelters, implement safe parking sites, and implementing the Virtual Assistance Center.

12. Continue to maintain public order and prevent situation exploitation through consistent, measured enforcement activity by SLO County Sheriff, City Police Departments and the District Attorney.

13. Continue to develop contingency plan for a transition to a "virtual EOC (emergency operations center)" and be prepared to execute...we don't want any of our decision makers or teams to get sick and transmit to others.

14. Economic recovery is a top priority for us. We have a focused Economic Recovery Team and will partner with REACH and be collaborating with our cities, chamber, and businesses to develop a plan of action. We want to make sure we are doing everything to make sure our workers and business owners experience relief as soon as possible.

15. The Shelter at Home Order has been in place for 14 days as of today (I know...it seems a lot longer!!!). The Governor also has a similar Shelter at Home Order.

16. Over 6000-8000 residents are watching the EOC press briefing daily on the SLO County Facebook Page. We just completed a Public Service Announcement (featured are all elected officials) to encourage people to shelter at

home. It should run on local television stations starting tomorrow. We video'd on our cell phones, and submitted those short videos for the final product.

17. The state of CA website for COVID information is: www.covid19.ca.gov. The website for unemployment is www.EEE.ca.gov.

That is all I have for now. I will be doing a daily update tomorrow (Friday) but will not update over the weekend, as I am not getting updates on many of these things on weekends...so, unless there is something earth shattering...I will update on weekdays only.

As always, call my office with ANY questions at all. That number is (805) 781-4337, or e:mail us at: district4@co.slo.ca.us.

Thank you all for continuing to Shelter at Home. I know how difficult this is on all of you, and how stressful this situation is, and hope it will be over very soon. I know we are all worried about the future uncertainty and all that that brings...however, I do know how resourceful and resilient this community and our residents are, and I have every confidence in the world we will get through this if we all work together and support each other!

Respectfully,

Lynn Compton

This is a good summary which she is sending out Monday through Friday. If she is ultimately elected Board Chair she can formalize this type of leadership work and make it official. A growing segment of the public is asking what you are waiting for.

Supervisor Hill Speculation & Box Score – A Continuing Mystery

This Week: As noted above, this week's Board meeting has been cancelled. The staff has been diverted to managing the COVID-19 problems and are not bringing forward major business items. Hence the Supervisor Hill situation remains in limbo. Vice Chair-Compton is providing leadership beyond the bureaucratic versions.

Last Week: On Monday March 30, 2020 Supervisor Hill issued a news release to the SLO Tribune. Several Tribune articles have since then resulted. According to the articles (so far the actual news release does not seem available generally), Supervisor Hill stated that he did attempt suicide. He also stated that he wishes to return to the job he loves. There is some speculation that his wife Dee Torres actually prepared the release. In that case it is not known if Hill actually authorized it. Some cynics theorized that she wants to keep him employed so that he can keep his County health insurance. In any case, he reportedly indicated that he was depressed because of the stress of the reelection process. This in turn has generated more speculation and questions:

1. Hill seemed ebullient during the Board meeting of March 10th, by which time it was becoming clear that he had eked out a narrow victory over Stacey Korsgaden. He cheerfully presided over the

meeting, glad-handed people in the audience, and was courteous to the other Board members. The next day, after the after the FBI raided his home and office under provisions of a sealed warrant, he attempted suicide because he was “depressed.”

2. The question then arises whether he was actually depressed by the election campaign or the import of the FBI raids. An important underlying question is whether he is a subject or a witness in the FBI investigation.

3. Is he healthy enough to resume his duties as Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, particularly given the COVID-19 operations and major uncertainty about the ultimate rate of infection and ability of the County to deal with the impacts while at the same time running its normal operations? Add an earthquake, public power shutdowns, large conflagration, civil unrest, other Supervisors becoming sick and incapacitated, or a combination of any of these. Should someone who is vulnerable be filling a slot on the Board, let alone serving as the chief elected official? Should he be the spokesperson and leader of the County in a major health/public safety crisis? For example, suppose the County needs to make a special plea for aid to the Governor or another agency, would Hill have the necessary stature and credibility at this point?

4. There is also the issue of the FBI investigation. Hill may not be a suspect, or whatever is alleged may be found to have not happened. He could be a witness or could have been thought to have records or materials pertaining to a suspect. The press release said he was cooperating with the FBI. This could mean anything from helping them on the case or to ratting out accomplices in some alleged illegal activity to obtain a lesser charge.

5. Hill was reportedly on a 5150 psychiatric hold for several days. This is a short-term process to confine patients who are determined to be a danger to themselves and/or others.¹

¹ ARTICLE 1. Detention of Mentally Disordered Persons for Evaluation and Treatment [5150 - 5155]
(*Heading of Article 1 amended by Stats. 1969, Ch. 1472.*)
5150.

(a) When a person, as a result of a mental health disorder, is a danger to others, or to himself or herself, or gravely disabled, a peace officer, professional person in charge of a facility designated by the county for evaluation and treatment, member of the attending staff, as defined by regulation, of a facility designated by the county for evaluation and treatment, designated members of a mobile crisis team, or professional person designated by the county may, upon probable cause, take, or cause to be taken, the person into custody for a period of up to 72 hours for assessment, evaluation, and crisis intervention, or placement for evaluation and treatment in a facility designated by the county for evaluation and treatment and approved by the State Department of Health Care Services. At a minimum, assessment, as defined in Section 5150.4, an evaluation, as defined in subdivision (a) of Section 5008, shall be conducted and provided on an ongoing basis. Crisis intervention, as defined in subdivision (e) of Section 5008, may be provided concurrently with assessment, evaluation, or any other service.

6. If the seat becomes vacant, the Governor appoints the successor. As noted below in the background section, there had been some speculation that Pismo Beach City Councilman and Coastal Commissioner Eric Howell, a Democrat, might be a potential appointee. Alarming, we have heard that SLO Mayor Heidi Harmon might have a shot.

7. All of this combined with Hill's erratic and repeated bullying behavior puts a cloud over the entire Board of Supervisors and senior management. So far and prior to this latest episode, the Board has refused to undertake an investigation of Hill's other repeated irruptions. Even if the FBI investigation evaporates, the basic ongoing problem remains.

Two Weeks Ago: Supervisor Hill did not attend the March 26 Board meeting. Recent news reports indicate that his home was also raided by FBI agents simultaneously with his office back on March 11th. Staffers reportedly attempted to locate him to sign an emergency Declaration as Board Chairman but were unsuccessful.

Three Weeks Ago: As of Saturday, March 21, no new information had been provided. The County's top of the list website public information posting, in addition to COVID-19, concerned an airline that has cancelled service to Las Vegas.

Four Weeks Ago: So far (and as of Saturday, March 14, 2020), the County had provided no official explanation of what happened to its Board Chairman, his medical condition, his whereabouts, when he might return to duty, or anything else. A spokesperson simply stated that he had been released from the hospital and was currently under a physician's care. The County justifies this lack of information on the basis of privacy concerns. This is bizarre, as Hill is the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors (the highest elected local official in the County) and has demonstrated successive episodes of erratic behavior over the years. Once someone takes on the mantle of visible public office, he or she forsakes the usual confidentiality customs. Hill is not exactly a Typist I in a remote office.

As a result there is much speculation.

Background: On March 11 FBI agents arrived at the County Administration building before opening hour and tossed Hills's office. Later that day medical units were dispatched to Hill's residence. It is alleged that the police had to break the door down to enter, and the Hill was found unconscious, a suspected suicide attempt.

You would think that the County would have access to the presenting diagnosis by the paramedics, and, Health Information Privacy Act concerns aside, it would inform the public of the status of its chief elected official.

County leadership and the SLO Tribune (which has gone out of its way to provide air cover for Hill for years) are going along as if he had an appendicitis or wrist fracture.

Meanwhile speculation about a successor has ramped up with the notion that if the position were to become vacant, Pismo City Councilman and Coastal Commissioner Eric Howell would be a likely pick for appointment by Governor Newsom. On the other hand folks could walk into the next Board meeting and find Hill smiling and glad-handing as if nothing had ever happened. It is of course unknown if the FBI will make a case or if arrests and indictments will come down.

Economic Recovery Efforts

As the front line County forces are dealing with the pandemic, the REACH Project (Reach, Recovery, Resilience - the former Hourglass Project) and the Economic Vitality Corporation (EVC) are mobilizing to assist the business community survive and then recover from the COVID-19 lockdown. Details for REACH can be seen at the link: <https://hourglassproject.org/>

Details for the EVC are available at: <http://www.sloevc.org/>

Diablo Nuclear Power Plant Closure

It's now time for a full court press on the Governor to lead an effort with PG&E, the California Public Utilities Commission, State Lands Commission, Federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the State Legislature to keep Diablo open. The Governor should seek the help of President Trump. At this point the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 will burden the region for years, even if it dies out this summer and doesn't come back next winter. Why close the plant and create another huge economic disaster? It is 2200 MGW of carbon free energy, forestalls 8 million metric tonnes of CO₂ every year, employs 2000 local residents, and generates a total economic impact of \$1 billion per year. President Trump would love to announce saving 2000 jobs and \$1 billion in economic activity in California. He could use the threat of the War Powers Act to get everyone moving. If they don't, he has more Marines than the San Francisco based Newsom/Pelosi/Feinstein mafia.

We hear a rumor that even Monterey Bay Community Power (MBCP) may wish to count the energy from Diablo as CO₂-free. Oh my, desperation must be setting in. By the way, while PG&E forces are out in the weather maintaining the system, running Diablo, and actually delivering power, MBCP staff his sitting at home so they don't catch Wuhan Flu. How fair is that?

Lockdown Will Slug Local Revenues

Budget Issues: County staff is working hard on the COVID-19 issue. It is likely that the Budget unit is beginning to work up some preliminary scenarios related to budget gaps that will emerge in the

current FY 2019-20 fiscal year. These could theoretically continue into the new FY 2020-21 fiscal year if the lockdown continues. Even if the COVID-19 subsides in the summer, it might return next fall and winter.

In the meantime, critical County General Fund revenues will decline due to the COVID-19 societal lockdown.

Financing Sources and Uses Summary

Description	2016-17 Actual	2017-18 Actual	2018-19 Final	2019-20 Recommended
Financing Sources				
Taxes	190,477,203	204,280,821	204,966,418	215,322,816
Licenses and Permits	11,349,270	11,154,935	10,679,550	12,370,090
Fines, Forfeitures and Penalties	4,245,881	5,008,443	5,122,351	5,174,734
Revenue from Use of Money & Property	4,789,471	5,846,742	2,585,999	3,443,565
Intergovernmental Revenues	243,182,942	258,580,140	272,009,700	276,944,504
Charges for Services	33,936,446	35,048,698	32,625,695	31,323,821
Other Revenues	37,050,514	41,501,459	31,208,699	28,314,726
Fund Balance	0*	0*	39,697,042	30,080,897
Use of Reserves & Designations	0*	0*	8,202,936	5,241,686
Other Financing Sources	51,426,638	41,081,357	23,988,323	25,155,998
Decreases to Fund Balance	0	0	0	0
*cancellation of reserves and designations and use of fund balance included in Other Financial Sources				
Total Financing Sources	576,458,365	602,502,595	631,096,713	633,372,837

The table above summarizes the general categories of County revenue. Within these are specific revenues which are being negatively impacted by the economic lockdown. Depending on the length of the lockdown, the County will have to consider staffing and service reductions as it did during the 2010 recession. If the COVID-19 pandemic does not ebb and the lockdown is prolonged, the damage will compound. Some specific revenues which will be impacted in the near term include:

Revenue	2020 Budget
Sales Tax	\$11,780,000
TOT Tax	11,181,886
Camping Fees	3,999,052
Building Pmt. fees	1,973,956
Plan Check Fees	1,902,437
Property Trans tax	3,497,500
Land use permits	2,617,494
Prop 172 Sales tax	26,598,563
Traffic School fees	\$1,300,000
Total	\$64, 850,888

A 30% decline in these fees and taxes would necessitate a \$19,455, 266 reduction in the FY 2020 -21 budget for next year when the full impact could be realized. Current year reductions during March and the 4th quarter will be less but will also have an impact. The State is allowing businesses to defer sales taxes.

Looking out a little bit longer and compounding the problems of declining revenue are impacts on the property taxes especially if people cannot afford to pay them. Lurking beyond these problems is the potential of large pension cost increases if the stock market losses remain or continue downward.

Again, the prime directive should be to keep Diablo open. After all, with companies such as Mindbody laying off or furloughing 700 local employees, the politicians might wake up. How many not-for-profits, churches, small special districts, and cities may simply collapse?



How stupid is the State gig economy attack now. Would the Governor suspend that criminal act? Perhaps when the former government staffers end up like this guy, they will realize that they should have exercised more guts in telling their elected employers how screwed up their policies are.

LAST WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

No Board of Supervisors Meeting of Tuesday, March 31, 2020 (Not Scheduled)

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 21, 2020. The meeting that had been scheduled for Tuesday April 7, 2020 has been canceled.

San Luis Obispo County Council of Governments Meeting of Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Item IV-2: San Luis Obispo Countywide Regional Compact. The SLOCOG Board under the leadership of Chairman Fred Strong conducted a brisk meeting covering many plans and Federal funding programs. The Chairman, Executive Director, Deputy County Counsel, and Clerk were present on the dais. The other members attended by conference call.

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

POST-CORONAPOCALYPSE PENSION REFORM CHECKLIST FOR CALIFORNIA

BY EDWARD RING

In a perfect world, California's state and local public employees would receive exactly the same retirement benefits as [federal employees](#). They would receive a modest defined benefit, a contributory 401K, and they would participate in Social Security.

Unfortunately, in California, while some state and local public employees are offered 401Ks, and many participate in Social Security, *all* of them rely inordinately on a defined benefit pension. Far from being modest, even the most minimal examples of defined benefit plans for California's state and local government workers provide roughly *twice* the value of the typical defined benefit offered federal workers. And where there's twice the value, there's twice the cost.

In reality, however, twice the cost would be a bargain. It's much worse than that, and very little has been done. In 2013, the PEPPRA ([Public Employee Pension Reform Act](#)) legislation lowered pension benefit formulas in an attempt to restore financial sustainability to California's public employee pensions. But these revisions, which resulted in defined benefit formulas only about twice as generous as the federal formulas, only applied to new employees.

California's Pension Systems Were Crashing Before the Coronapocalypse

Two years ago, and after more than eight years of a bull market in the stock market indexes, CalPERS, which is by far the largest pension system in California, had already announced that contributions from participating agencies were going to roughly double. They posted "[Public Agency Actuarial Valuation Reports](#)" that disclosed the details per agency.

At the time, in partnership with researchers at the Reason Foundation, the California Policy Center used these reports from CalPERS to [summarize the impact](#) on 427 cities and 36 counties ([download full spreadsheet](#)). As shown on the table below, two sets of numbers are presented – payments to CalPERS for the 2017-2018 fiscal year, and officially estimated payments to CalPERS in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

The most important distinction one should make when reviewing the above data is the difference between the “normal” and the “catch-up” payments. The so-called “normal contribution” is the amount the employer has to contribute each year to maintain an already fully funded pension system. The “catch-up” or “unfunded contribution” is the additional amount necessary to pay down the unfunded liability of an underfunded pension system.

As can be seen in the example of Millbrae (top row, right), by 2024, the “catch-up” contribution will be nearly six times the amount of the normal contribution. But in the PEPRAs reforms, new employees are only required to contribute via payroll withholding to 50 percent of the “normal” contribution.

A separate [California Policy Center analysis](#), also published two years ago, attempted to estimate how much total payments statewide would increase if all of the major pension systems serving California’s state and local public employees were to require similar levels of payment increases. The analysis extrapolated from the consolidated CalPERS projections for their participating cities and counties and estimated that in sum, California’s state and local government employers would have paid \$31 billion into the 87 various pension systems in 2018, and by 2024 this payment would rise to \$59.1 billion.

As noted at the time, and now more than ever, this was a best case scenario.

A Financial Snapshot of CalPERS Today

The next chart, below, depicts financial highlights for CalPERS – either officially reported or projected – in a format which ought to be publicly disclosed, every quarter, in this format, from every state and local public pension system in California. The first two columns depict data as reported by CalPERS for their [most recent two fiscal years](#), ended 6/30/2018 and 6/30/2019. The final column, which consists of CPC estimates (*not* provided by CalPERS), shows how their financial condition could appear three months from now. The first thing to note from the above chart is the fact that CalPERS was only 70 percent funded (“funded ratio,” bottom line) in June of 2019. The next thing to note, and this is crucial, is that the actuarial estimates of the total pension liability lags behind one year. That is, the \$504.9 billion reported “actuarial accrued liability” is reported as of 6/30/2018, even though that figure is used to report the funded ratio as of 6/30/2019.

Take a deep breath, because the significance of this delay requires further discussion. From page 122 of CalPERS most recent CAFR, here are the trends for the actuarial accrued liability: 6/30/2009 = \$294B, 2010 = \$308B, 2011 = \$328B, 2012 = \$340B, 2013 = \$375B, 2014 = \$394B, 2015 = 413B, 2016 = 436B, 2017 = \$465B, and 6/30/2018 = \$504B. Based purely on the trend, is there any reason to believe this liability will not exceed \$550 billion by June 30, 2020, two years later? Why isn’t that estimate being made?

There’s more. Why are actuaries permitted to have an entire extra year to complete their estimate of the total pension system liability, when changing single variables will cause the estimate to massively

fluctuate? Sure, it is a complex exercise, and at some point an official calculation, based on all known data, should be reported that amends a preliminary estimate. But if, for example, you vary the earnings projection downwards from 7.0 percent to 6.0 percent – which needs to be done sooner not later – using calculations [provided by Moody's Investor Services](#), the amount of the CalPERS liability soars from \$550 billion to \$621 billion. You don't split hairs when you're being scalped.

And what about the employer contribution (second row of data)? Why did it go down from \$20 billion in 2018 to \$15 billion in 2019? From the “Basic Financial Statements” in the CalPERS CAFRs for the last few years, here are the totals for payments by employers: 2015 = \$10.2B, [2016](#) (page 38-39) = \$11.0B, 2017 = \$12.4B, [2018](#) (page 40-41) = \$20.0B. With the payment for FYE [6/30/2019](#) back down to \$15.7B, the trends suggest that the large payment of \$20.0 billion in 2018 was an anomaly. But assume that much money will come again from employers in 2020. But based on historical trends, probably not more than that. Yet.

Where does this put CalPERS?

All of this discussion is to explain the reasoning behind the figures in column three on the above chart. What might be materially different? What estimate isn't best case? Does anyone believe CalPERS will actually break even in the return on their invested assets between 6/30/2019 and 6/30/2020? Does anyone believe the most accurate estimate of the total liability belongs anywhere south of \$550 billion, particularly when they're still using a discount rate that's too high? And yet this puts CalPERS in what is arguably the worst shape it's ever been, at 64 percent funded as of this June.

This paints a very grim big picture. CalPERS is on track to collect over \$20 billion from taxpayers in the current fiscal year, and CalPERS, while the biggest pension system, only manages just over 40 percent of the state and local government pension assets in California. This suggests that the total taxpayer contribution to California's state and local government pension systems in 2020 is *already* up to around \$50 billion. And it isn't nearly enough.

Steps to Reform CalPERS and all of California's pension systems

- 1 – Admit the long-term rate of return projection is too high for calculating the value of pension liabilities. Move it down to 6 percent. Increase the required “normal contribution” accordingly, and, in turn, increase the share required from active employees via withholding.
- 2 – Once a more reasonable long term rate of return projection is adopted by the pensions systems, the goal of pension reform should be to stabilize pension system payments at some maximum percent of total personnel costs. With cooperation from union leadership, agree on what that maximum percent should be, then determine how to spread benefit reductions in an equitable manner between new hires, current employees, and retirees.
- 3 – For all state and local government employee pension plans in California, start providing consolidated quarterly financial summaries ([without gimmicks](#)), using the above chart as an example.

Include a footnote indicating how much of the total employer contribution is for the unfunded liability vs the normal contribution.

4 – If a pension system falls below 80 percent funded, agree on an escalating series of remedies to be implemented to bring the funded ratio back up. They would include suspension of COLA, prospective further lowering of the annual multiplier for active workers, retroactive lowering of the annual multiplier for active workers, reduction of the retiree pension payment, and increasing the required payment to the pension plan by active workers via withholding.

5 – Pressure the California State Supreme Court to swiftly hear and rule on the cases [*Alameda County Deputy Sheriff's Ass'n. v. Alameda County Employees Retirement Ass'n*](#) (filed 1/8/2018), and [*Marin Ass'n of Pub. Employees v. Marin Cnty. Employees Retirement Ass'n*](#) (filed 8/17/2016). [These cases may provide clarity](#) on the “California Rule,” which currently is interpreted as prohibiting lower pension benefit accruals, even for future work.

6 – With or without a decisive ruling (or any ruling) on the California Rule, work with government union leadership to revise pension benefits. If union leadership is uncooperative and the courts fail to offer an enabling ruling, than as a last resort, to bring the unions back to the negotiating table, lower salaries, current benefits, and OPEB benefits.

7 – In the long run, move towards a system modeled after the federal system. This would be a logical next step, following in the footsteps of PEPRA. It would create three basic tiers of public sector workers in California, the pre-PEPRA workers (who may submit to lower benefit accruals for future work), the post-2013 hires who are subject to the PEPRA reforms, and new hires starting in, for example, 2021, who would enjoy retirement benefits similar to what Federal employees receive.

The Ripple Effect of Unreformed Pensions

There are two problems with a bullish outlook today. First of all, the great returns of the past few years may have been unsustainable, [a super bubble](#). And then that super bubble was not popped by a pin, but rather by a wrecking ball, the Coronapocalypse. There are tough economic times ahead.

In a severe downturn it is conceivable that annual taxpayer contributions to California’s public employee pensions systems will not merely soar from around \$50 billion in 2020 to \$60 or \$70 billion within a few years. They could go even higher. For example, over the total three year period through June 2020, it is quite possible that CalPERS will collect *more* from taxpayers – \$65 billion – than it will have earned in investment returns – \$52 billion.

This is the new reality of public sector pensions in California. And because taxpayers have been increasingly on the hook to bailout these pensions, taxes have increased, services have been cut, and there has been a gradual wearing a way of trust by citizens in their local governments. This is why, for the first time in decades, more local taxes and bonds were [rejected by voters in March 2020](#) than were approved. Absent pension reform, this backlash has just begun.

So-called “crowding out” of other public services in order to pay for pensions doesn’t just impel an insatiable drive for higher taxes. It also works its way into higher fees, building fees in particular. Infrastructure investments such as connector roads and parks for new housing subdivisions used to come largely out of municipal operating budgets. It was a fair trade – the city builds the roads, the builders sell the homes, and the new residents pay taxes. But now, all of those costs are paid for by the builders and passed on to the home buyers. The rising cost of pensions can be directly tied to the unaffordable cost of homes.

Pensions for state and local government employees in California are literally three to five times as costly as Social Security, and at least twice as costly as the Federal Retirement System. Ultimately, this disparity divides Americans and undermines what it means to be an American citizen. Why should public employees care if Social Security is inadequate, if they don’t depend on it? Why should they care if all public benefits offered private taxpayers is diluted, or if citizenship itself becomes less meaningful, if their membership within the public sector is the primary source of their security?

America is entering difficult economic times. Maybe one good thing to come out of this will be a willingness on the part of public sector union leadership to make common cause with *all* of California’s workers, and agree to reasonable concessions on pensions that will help everyone living in this great state.

This article originally appeared on the website [California Globe](#)

THE COMMON ROOTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND COVID-19 HYSTERIA

PATRICK WOOD MARCH

Introduction

People want to know: just how bad is the COVID-19 virus and is fighting it worth the destruction of the world’s economic and financial system while disrupting the lives of hundreds of millions of people? The story behind the story will make it clear that things are seldom as they seem.

In short and when seen through the lens of Sustainable Development, aka Technocracy, the whole world has just been punked and then panicked into destroying itself over COVID-19.

The culprit? A world-class Technocrat in Britain: Dr. Neil Ferguson, PhD is a professor at Imperial College in London that bills itself as a “global university”. It is thoroughly steeped in Sustainable

Development and more dedicated to social causes than academic achievement. In fact, Imperial is very well-known for its alarmist research reports on climate change, carbon reduction, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, etc.

The problem with the global warming meme is that it is a tired, worn-out racehorse that much of the world simply ignores. Global warming alarmists have tried every trick in the book to stampede the world into Sustainable Development. They have knowingly falsified climate data, flooded the world with inaccurate academic reports, held world meetings like the Paris Accord in France, threatened and bullied their critics, created a global youth movement to shame leaders into action, etc. All of these strategies have failed to usher in the UN's Sustainable Development, aka Technocracy, and show little promise of success in the future.

What the Sustainable Development crowd needed was to put their non-performing racehorse "Global Warming" out to pasture and find a brand new horse that could finally run and win the race to what the UN calls "deep transformation" of the entire global economic system. The new horse is named "COVID-19". Different horse, same jockey, same race, same finish line.

Imperial College

The President of Imperial College is Professor Alice Gast. She considers the college to be part of a "new paradigm of the global university" that promises to be "a contributor to a better future." Gast also notes the three general areas of focus of Imperial are "*epidemics, shortages of natural resources and environmental crises.*" In other words, the environment, natural resources and epidemics are seen as intertwined and inseparable.

The "global university" is indeed a new paradigm, and one that radically transforms the traditional role of education into one of social activism. Success is measured by social impact on society and not according to scholastic achievement.

Furthermore, the global university is invariably framed as a champion of the United Nations' Sustainable Development and Imperial is no exception. The head of Sustainability at Imperial is Professor Paul Lickiss. His web page states, "Sustainability should run through the whole of College thinking and activity at all levels and across all campuses." A casual examination of the various departments at Imperial confirm this statement: sustainability, environmentalism and climate change themes are seen everywhere.

The Work Begins

Once the release of COVID-19 in Wuhan was recognized as a potential pandemic, academic researcher Dr. Neil Ferguson went to work developing a computer model to track and forecast its rapid spread. At the top of his field, Ferguson is a professor of mathematical biology at Imperial College in London, and has had extensive experience in tracking other infectious diseases such as the swine flu in 2009, Dengue in 2015 and Zika in 2016.

Ferguson is a British epidemiologist and a professor of mathematical biology at Imperial College. According to the World Health Organization (WHO),

Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events (including disease), and the application of this study to the control of diseases and other health problems. Various methods can be used to carry out epidemiological investigations: surveillance and descriptive studies can be used to study distribution; analytical studies are used to study determinants.

With a Master of Arts degree in physics, he received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in theoretical physics. He has no medical or related degree, but rather chose to apply his education to use his mathematical skills by modeling the spread of infectious diseases.

In other words, Ferguson is a data-driven Technocrat with direct access to policy-makers around the world. According to the New York Times,

*Imperial College has advised the government on its response to previous epidemics, including SARS, avian flu and swine flu. With **ties to the World Health Organization** and a team of 50 scientists, led by a prominent epidemiologist, Neil Ferguson, Imperial is treated as a sort of gold standard, its mathematical models feeding directly into government policies.*

Ferguson's COVID-19 Study

Early on in the COVID-19 outbreak, Ferguson began to advise officials in Britain and the United States on the spread of the infection as well as ways to fight it. Thus, he served as both researcher and policy advisor at the same time.

Ferguson's conclusion that COVID-19 would kill as many as 500,000 people in Britain and over 1.1 million in the United States, set off a tidal wave of panic that has not subsided. His policy recommendations were just as shocking, namely, that societies must be entirely locked down in order to survive.

On March 16, 2020, Ferguson finally released his formal report, [*Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions \(NPIs\) to reduce COVID19 mortality and healthcare demand.*](#)

Here are some quick observations from reading this report:

- Well before publishing, he advised policy makers. His modeling study “*informed policymaking in the UK and other countries in recent weeks*”
- Comparable to 1918 Spanish flu: “*it represents the most serious seen in a respiratory virus since the 1918 H1N1 influenza pandemic*”
- Applied this and previous model to UK and US: “*we apply a previously published microsimulation model to two countries: the UK (Great Britain specifically) and the US*”
- There are two possible strategies: *Mitigation and Suppression*
- **Mitigation:** This proposed social distancing, home-isolation of sick, home-quarantine of relatives, “*We find that that optimal mitigation policies (combining home isolation of suspect cases, home quarantine of those living in the same household as suspect cases, and social distancing of the elderly and others at most risk of severe disease) might reduce peak healthcare demand by 2/3 and deaths by half*”

- In spite of reducing deaths by half, “*the resulting mitigated epidemic would still likely result in hundreds of thousands of deaths and health systems (most notably intensive care units) being overwhelmed many times over*”
- Thus, he argues that Suppression is the only option
- **Suppression:** Additional measures include social distancing of the entire population, home isolation of infected, household quarantine of family members, school and university closures
- Long term: Suppression “*will need to be maintained until a vaccine becomes available (potentially 18 months or more)*”.

These doomsday predictions, based entirely on computer simulations similar to those used in climate studies, were believable enough that national leaders accepted them at face value. Worse, they also accepted Ferguson’s policy recommendations, which were then implemented with precise detail. Here are some of the more prescient excerpts from the report’s conclusion section:

*Our results demonstrate that it will be necessary to layer multiple interventions, regardless of whether suppression or mitigation is the overarching policy goal. However, **suppression will require the layering of more intensive and socially disruptive measures than mitigation. The choice of interventions ultimately depends on the relative feasibility of their implementation and their likely effectiveness in different social contexts.*** (p. 14)

*Overall, our results suggest that population-wide **social distancing applied to the population as a whole** would have the largest impact; and in combination with other interventions – notably **home isolation of cases and school and university closure** – has the potential to suppress transmission below the threshold of $R=1$ required to rapidly reduce case incidence. **A minimum policy for effective suppression is therefore population-wide social distancing combined with home isolation of cases and school and university closure.*** (p. 14)

*To avoid a rebound in transmission, **these policies will need to be maintained until large stocks of vaccine are available to immunise the population – which could be 18 months or more.*** (p.15)

Technology – such as mobile phone apps that track an individual’s interactions with other people in society – might allow such a policy to be more effective and scalable if the associated privacy concerns can be overcome. (p. 15)

*Perhaps our most significant conclusion is that mitigation is unlikely to be feasible without emergency surge capacity limits of the UK and US healthcare systems being exceeded many times over. In the most effective mitigation strategy examined, which leads to a single, relatively short epidemic (case isolation, household quarantine and social distancing of the elderly), **the surge limits for both general ward and ICU beds would be exceeded by at least 8-fold under the more optimistic scenario for critical care requirements that we examined. In addition, even if all patients were able to be treated, we predict there would still be in the order of 250,000 deaths in GB, and 1.1-1.2 million in the US.*** (p. 16)

The mind of a Technocrat can be clearly seen in this whole package. All of these draconian measures must be maintained until a vaccine is created, which is at least 18 months. The use of mobile phone apps to track the world’s population could be effective if citizens could be railroaded into it. What is

not seen is one word about the destruction of the global economic system that would certainly result from these draconian policy measures.

Climate alarmists who articulated the Green New Deal policies also call for radical measures to transform society and they are likewise silent about the inevitable destructive effects such policies would have on the global economy.

Destroy Capitalism & Free Enterprise

Why do Technocrats not discuss the destruction of Capitalism and Free Enterprise? **Because that is their exact goal.** When Christiana Figueres was head of Climate Change at the United Nations in 2015. She clearly stated:

*“This is probably the most difficult task we have ever given ourselves, which is to **intentionally transform the economic development model**, for the first time in human history. This is the first time in the history of mankind that we are setting ourselves the task of intentionally, within a defined period of time to **change the economic model that has been reigning for at least 150 years, since the industrial revolution**. That will not happen overnight and it will not happen at a single conference on climate change, be it COP 15, 21, 40 – you choose the number. It just does not occur like that. **It is a process, because of the depth of the transformation.**”* (emphasis added)

People argue with me that this cannot be the goal, that it’s just too big to comprehend. My reply is that if a killer points a gun at you and angrily says he is going to kill you, will you take defensive action or just stand there and let him shoot you? Hardly. Direct threats must be taken seriously, especially when the perpetrator has the means to carry out the threat.

In the heat of the Great Depression during the early 1930s, Technocrats were certain that Capitalism and Free Enterprise would be dead within months. Their economic replacement system of Technocracy would not and could not work unless the existing economic system was completely failed. Unfortunately for them, Capitalism recovered and Technocracy withered.

Today, however, the United Nations is clearly articulating the same premise and it is at the ready with its resource-based economic system called Sustainable Development, aka Technocracy. The most clearly articulated example of Sustainable Development is the Green New Deal as recently unveiled by U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA).

The World Panics

Thanks to Neil Ferguson and Imperial College, the entire world has panicked over COVID-19 and worse, leaders have implemented all of their policy recommendations lock, stock and barrel. Meanwhile, the entire global media obediently follows behind, fanning the flames of fear into a raging forest fire.

As a result, the U.S. economy is in a tailspin, the financial system is on the verge of total collapse, stocks have entered a full-blown bear market, some U.S. Treasury notes are trading at negative interest rates and unemployment claims soared to 3.3 million last week as businesses shut their doors.

Employment experts forecast that over 40 million Americans will have lost their jobs by the end of April.

In short, the economy has been dealt a mortal wound. Even if all restrictions were immediately lifted globally, it is highly doubtful that the economy could recover to its former state. Moreover, that doubt is increased for every week that restricted activity continues.

In the United States, the primary agent of panic has been the highly-esteemed Dr. Anthony Fauci who also has close ties to the World Health Organization. According to [National Review](#), Fauci hypothesized in late February in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that the fatality rate of COVID-19 may be “*considerably less than 1% because many people who are infected experience either no symptoms or very mild symptoms and therefore do not report.*” And yet, the media routinely states that the mortality rate is 3.4% or higher. Dr. Fauci himself continues to claim that COVID-19 is 10x as bad as the flu, even though his own estimates of 100K to 200K deaths compares to the CDC’s reported deaths during the 2019-2020 flu season of between 24,000 and 62,000. If Fauci’s 10X figure is accurate, then he should be estimating between 240,000 and 620,000 deaths, which he is not. His numbers simply do not add up!

Conclusion

We are all rightfully saddened for anyone who loses their life to COVID-19, but we are going to be a lot more sorry for having trusted a Technocrat to tell us how to deal with the pandemic. The destruction of the economy will result in many more deaths and hardships than COVID-19 could ever imagine.

There is much more to be written on this topic. The main point of this article is to establish the “panic of 2020” as a Technocrat operation so that Sustainable Development, aka Technocracy, can be quickly moved forward if not completely ushered in. Furthermore, it is a replacement strategy for global warming to induce panic. As stated above, different horse, same jockey, same race, same finish line.

For full documentation and further explanations on Technocracy, please see my books [Technocracy: The Hard Road to World Order](#). Both are also available at [Technocracy.news](#).

PLASTIC BAGS AND THE RECYCLING AND REUSE SCAM

BY EDWARD RING

Back in 2014, the California Legislature passed [Senate Bill 207](#), which banned grocery stores from offering customers “single use” carryout bags. Permanent implementation was delayed by a November 2016 voter referendum, [Prop. 67](#), that unsuccessfully attempted to repeal the measure. Today it is well established law.

The only way SB 207 was sold to the grocery industry was through an incentive that permitted them to [keep the ten cents](#) per “reusable” bag that they would be required to charge customers.

California’s pioneering ban is touted by environmentalists as an example for the nation, and progressive cities and states have [enacted similar laws](#). But in reality, it is misguided policy that does more harm than good.

Today, instead reusing the free single-use bags to line their trash cans and dispose of their cat litter, Californians now pay ten cents every time they exercise that privilege. And how does this help the **environment, when reusable plastic bags** have [11 to 14 times the mass](#) of disposable plastic bags, and hardly anyone reuses them that many times?

Further evidence of the absurdity of laws banning single-use plastic bags is found in a study commissioned by the United Kingdom’s Environmental Agency, which estimated reusable grocery bags made of cotton fabric to have [131 times greater](#) “global warming potential” than conventional disposable plastic bags.

And now consumers have less reason than ever to reuse their reusable bags, because they’re germ carriers.

This isn’t new information. Common sense would dictate that when consumers purchase grocery items, and allow them to knock around inside a plastic bag, pathogens will be transferred from the surfaces of the grocery items onto the surface of the bag.

Similarly, when consumers set those bags down, such as on the seat or floor of a bus or subway car, or in a shopping cart that someone else is about to use, any pathogens on that surface or on that bag will transfer back and forth – presumably over and over. And even among those who reuse these bags more than 11 times, or 14 times, or 131 times, how many people disinfect them, every single time?

A recent article entitled “Greening Our Way to Infection” appearing in *City Journal*, provides an [excellent summary of the disease risks](#) attendant to reusable grocery bags. Author John Tierney exposes the absurd denial of public health authorities, both before and since the Covid-19 outbreak, to the risks of using reusable grocery bags. He writes:

“A headline on the website of the New York Department of Health calls reusable grocery bags a [“Smart Choice”](#)—bizarre advice, considering all the elaborate cautions underneath that headline. The department advises grocery shoppers to segregate different foods in different bags; to package meat and fish and poultry in small disposable plastic bags inside their tote bags; to wash and dry their tote bags carefully; to store the tote bags in a cool, dry place; and never to reuse the grocery tote bags for anything but food.”

This is the world the green extremists want us to live in. Not only shall we reuse our reusable plastic bags more than eleven times, just to break even on the “carbon footprint” vs. a disposable plastic bag, but we shall “segregate different foods in different bags; to package meat and fish and poultry in small disposable plastic bags inside the tote bags; to wash and dry tote bags carefully; to store tote bags in a cool, dry place; and never to reuse tote bags for anything but food.” And cat litter.

The Irrational Extremes of Recycling and Reuse

While recycling is both profitable and green in certain cases such as with newsprint and aluminum, for most garbage it is neither. Plastics, bags and all, are a compelling example of this. For starters, there is no factual basis for the argument that plastic must be recycled because we may eventually run out of petroleum. This is easily documented.

According to the energy news site OilPrice.com, in 2012 [“plastics production](#) accounted for about 4 percent of global oil production.” *Four percent*. According to the BP Statistical Review of Global Energy, over the past twenty years, proven oil reserves increased faster than consumption. In 2018 there were [1.7 trillion barrels of proven oil reserves](#) worldwide, up from 1.1 trillion barrels in 1998. Plastic, which can also be [made out of natural gas or coal](#), will never run out of the raw materials required for its manufacture.

As for plastics accumulating in the environment, the ocean in particular, much of it comes from fishing nets. One of the largest accumulations of ocean plastic is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a collection of [concentrations of marine debris](#) in the North Pacific Ocean created by ocean currents. According to Sea Shepherd Global, nearly half of the plastic in these areas come from [discarded fishing nets](#), and “more than 70% of marine animal entanglements involve abandoned plastic fishing nets.”

As for the source of ocean plastic coming from sources on land, [a report](#) in *USA Today* cites a study published in the journal *Science* that estimates [242 million pounds of plastic waste](#) are discharged by Americans into the oceans each year, and that the total discharge of plastic waste into the oceans, worldwide, is between 8 to 12 million tons. A quick, somewhat innumerate read of those numbers might incline one to believe that America is the prime offender, but that would be wrong. Once pounds are converted into tons, it turns out that plastic waste from America, at most, constitutes only 1.5 percent of the plastic trash currently going into the world’s oceans.

This is where it becomes problematic to focus on recycling and reuse, rather than containment in landfills. Because even in America, it is a costly indulgence to recycle most of the waste stream. To emphasize recycling in developing nations, it is futility. The scarce economic resources of developing nations in Africa and Asia would instead be much better used to develop landfills.

There is No Shortage of Landfill Capacity, and There Never Will Be

One of the earliest serious intellectual revolts against the modern recycling industry came in [an in-depth 1996 essay](#) in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled “Recycling is Garbage.” Authored by the same John Tierney who recently joined *City Journal* after more than two decades as a reporter and columnist with the *New York Times*, it exposes how misguided environmentalism and government subsidies corrupted the waste management industry.

In his 1996 essay, Tierney described how environmentalist journalists and activists convinced the nation that if something wasn’t done, and soon, Americans were destined to be “buried alive” under the mountain of trash they were creating. He explained that most materials in garbage are not worth recycling, but that politicians are now afraid to oppose recycling. He explained that modern landfills are now required by federal law to be “lined with clay and plastic, equipped with drainage and gas-collection systems, covered daily with soil and monitored regularly for underground leaks,” but the perception remains that opening new landfills will poison the local populace.

Nearly 25 years later, for most Americans, all of these misconceptions still constitute conventional wisdom. The biggest misconception of all is the claim that there is no room left in America’s landfills. Today more than ever, there are plenty of alarmist reports making that claim.

From *Waste Business Journal*: “Time is Running Out: The [U.S. Landfill Capacity Crisis](#).” From *Global Citizen*: “Where Will The Trash Go When [All the US Landfills Are Full?](#)” Perhaps the biggest scare story of all appears on the website “How Stuff Works,” where they visualize what America’s roughly 258 million tons of municipal solid waste each year would look like, [if it was dumped onto one pile, year after year for 100 years](#). The estimate takes into account a doubling of the U.S. population over this hypothetical century, apparently assuming the annual waste flow would also double during that period as well.

“If you keep filling up this landfill for 100 years, and if you assume that during this time the populations of the United States doubles, then the landfill will cover about 160,000 acres, or 250 or so square miles, with trash 400 feet deep. Here’s another way to think about it. The Great Pyramid in Egypt is 756 feet by 756 feet at the base and is 481 feet tall, and anyone who has seen it in real life knows that it’s a huge thing — one of the biggest things ever built by man. If you took all the trash that the United States would generate in 100 years and piled it up in the shape of the Great Pyramid, it would be about 32 times bigger. So the

base of this trash pyramid would be about 4.5 miles by 4.5 miles, and the pyramid would rise almost 3 miles high.”

That sounds like an awful lot of garbage, and an awful burden on the land and the people. But it’s not. Compared to the size of the lower 48 states, compared to the size of America’s urban areas, compared to the area of America’s reservoirs, or mines, or the footprint of its freeways; compared to pretty much any other major category of American infrastructure, it is negligible. To counter the scope insensitivity of the average American journalist, here are some calculations:

A “trash pyramid” 4.5 miles by 4.5 miles, rising 3 miles high, if it were to be poured into America’s roughly 2,000 active landfills, would require each of those landfills to accommodate 100 vertical feet of garbage, over a surface area of 1,024 acres. Altogether, this would consume about 3,200 square miles of land. Notwithstanding the fact that some landfills are designed to [accommodate up to 500 vertical feet of trash](#), or the fact that parks and other amenities are often [built on the top of landfills](#) once they reach capacity, 3,200 miles is a trivial amount of land compared to other facts of human civilization.

For example, America’s lower 48 states [occupy 3.1 million square miles](#). This means that if by 2120, 650 million Americans were still producing the same per-capita quantities of garbage that they produce in today’s throw-away society, those 3,200 square miles of landfills would only occupy one-tenth of one percent of the available land. America’s urban areas consume [just over 100,000 square miles](#); these hypothetical landfills only increase that by 3 percent.

Just America’s ten largest reservoirs [occupy 2,670 square miles](#); the entirety of America’s reservoir inventory would occupy a far larger area. America’s open pit and surface mines [occupy thousands of square miles](#) as well, and if America is to innovate its way into the electric age, rare earth mining will increase that footprint. As for America’s [46,000 miles of interstate highways](#), even at a conservative estimated average width of 300 feet, taking into account all interchanges and not counting all the other national and local roads, these interstates consume 2,600 square miles.

Civilization Requires Tough Choices

The evidence supporting containment in landfills vs recycling is unambiguous. Earlier this month, writing for *National Review*, Kyle Smith pointed out not only the excessive cost of recycling, but reminded us that it’s a good time for a [fundamental reassessment](#) of our waste management policies. He writes, “it costs \$300 more to recycle a ton of trash than it would to put it in a landfill. When the next budget crunch hits New York – and that’s due approximately ten seconds after the next stock-market crash – recycling would be an excellent program to cut.”

That budget crunch has arrived. And even if the markets and the economy come roaring back, New York City taxpayers have better ways to spend their money than supporting a parasitic industry that does nothing, absolutely nothing, to help the environment.

But the moral argument doesn't end there. Americans who support environmentalist policies need to think about the example they're setting for the rest of the world. The message that needs to go out to developing nations – along with “develop clean fossil fuel and quit poisoning your air with genuinely harmful pollutants” – is build landfills and sequester your solid waste. Americans need to show by example how modern landfills are built, not how to painstakingly “recycle” everything regardless of its utility or affordability.

Eventually, just as eventually American innovators will commercialize fusion power, someday American innovators will commercialize [plasma waste converters](#), turning solid waste into valuable feedstock to generate energy and building materials. When that day comes, not only will waste management no longer leave an expanding footprint, however trivial it may be, but we can mine the landfills if we wish.

Back in 1996, [in his essay](#) for the *New York Times* about recycling, Tierney arrived at the ultimate reason for its persistence as policy despite its negative economic impact and despite being of dubious environmental benefit. He writes:

“The leaders of the recycling movement derive psychic and financial rewards from recycling. Environmental groups raise money and attract new members through their campaigns to outlaw ‘waste’ and prevent landfills from opening. They get financing from public and private sources (including the recycling industry) to research and promote recycling. By turning garbage into a political issue, environmentalists have created jobs for themselves as lawyers, lobbyists, researchers, educators and moral guardians.”

Doesn't that sound familiar? It's as true today as it was in 1996, and it applies to so many issues of public policy where environmentalists have formed an alliance with powerful financial special interests. It is wonderful when one may reward their psyche and their pocketbook at the same time, but when delusion and corruption is the prerequisite for such rewards, society loses.

Americans are correct to recognize the perils of reusable grocery “tote bags” during this time of heightened disease risk. May they also realize the entire concept of reusable grocery bags is flawed, along with most recycling programs, and adapt accordingly.

* * *

Edward Ring is a co-founder of the California Policy Center and served as its first president. This article originally appeared on the website [American Greatness](#).

DEMOCRATS SEE THEIR PLASTIC BAG-FREE WORLD CRUMBLE BEFORE CORONAVIRUS

BY ANDREA WIDBURG

When I grew up, and for most of my life after that, at a grocery store, the clerk would ring up my groceries and put them in a useful paper or plastic bag emblazoned with the store's motto. I'd take the bag home and use it again. If it was paper, I used it for book covers, storing annual tax-relevant documents, wrapping packages destined for UPS, and holding recycling. If it was plastic, I used it for bathroom garbage bags, packing school lunches, padding breakables for shipping, etc.

All that changed when California decided to "ban the bag." The reason given was that paper and plastic bags destroyed the environment. Paper bags were guilty because they killed trees. Plastic bags were guilty because they polluted waterways.

It didn't matter that the trees came from carefully replenished trees, rather than from virgin forests. Nor did it matter that the bags polluting waterways didn't come from America; they came [from Asia and Africa](#). Facts didn't matter. Gaia was hurting, and we had to suffer.

One of the most irritating things about the ban was that, while stores could still provide bags, consumers had to pay a dime per bag if they wanted them. In other words, consumers were suddenly being taxed for a harmless product they once received for free. At the same time, the bags we were now forced to pay for also became more fragile and, therefore, were harder to put to secondary uses. They usually ripped by the time they entered the house.

The real problem, though, was that the reusable bags that replaced plastic and paper were disease vectors — something that all the politicians banning them knew or should have known. San Francisco (of course) was the American city that led the way on plastic bag bans in 2007. Not long afterward, a study revealed that the bans [increased by 50% the number of deaths](#) from food-borne illnesses:

Researchers in America found that a ban on plastic bags in San Francisco in 2007 may have increased deaths from food poisoning by over 50 per cent in a year.

Economists at the University of Pennsylvania investigated deaths and emergency admissions to hospital from "intestinal infectious diseases" in the wake of a ban on bags. It concluded that, as a

result of the ban, San Francisco saw between 5.4 and 15.8 additional fatalities in a year from illnesses caused by food bugs.

"We find that both deaths and emergency room visits spiked as soon as the ban went into effect, Professors Jonathan Klick and Joshua Wright concluded. "Relative to other counties, deaths in San Francisco increased by 50 to 100 per cent, and ER visits increased by a comparable amount."

They added: "Subsequent bans by other cities in California appear to be associated with similar effects. This suggests that the plastic bag ban generated serious public health problems."

The obvious answer to the salmonella and E. coli problem would be to wash the bags with bleach after every use. However, doing so would raise to such a high level the inconvenience from schlepping reusable bags that few people would make the effort. Moreover, in chronically drought-ridden California, there was minimal incentive to run more laundry loads.

With the coronavirus, though, the risks associated with reusable shopping bags have escalated to a whole new level, [causing stores to ban their use](#):

Safeway and Albertsons [two California grocery chains] say if you bring your own bag, employees will not be able to touch them or fill them, so you'll have to do your own bagging. Some stores, like the Safeway at 6310 College Ave. in Oakland, have a large sign informing customers of the policy change. At others, you might not learn about it until the cashier rings you up.

The policy is not unique to supermarkets. Trader Joe's, Total Wine and More, Target and dollar stores are reportedly following similar procedures.

Some stores also are reserving the right to decline customers' reusable bags and give them paper or plastic bags at no charge.

Now stores are worried that reusable bags might endanger both employees and customers because they could potentially transmit SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The coronavirus is causing leftist shibboleths to collapse as easily as those ten-cent paper bags. Densely populated cities, public transportation, reusable bags — all of them are proving to be harbingers of disease and death.



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(Revised 2/2017)