



**WEEKLY UPDATE
JANUARY 24 - 29, 2021**

THIS WEEK

BOS MEETING

APPOINTMENT OF PAAVO OGREN TO THE WRAC

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS TO BE FUNDED

COVID VACCINE ROLL OUT

**BOARD TO CONSIDER KAREN VELIE HARASSMENT SUIT
(VELIE VS. ADAM HILL & COUNTY –THE GIFT WHICH KEEPS
GIVING)**

**BOARD REVIEW OF 2021 LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM
(PROTECTION OF PROP 13 IS INCLUDED BUT SHOULD DIABLO BE A NATURE
PRESERVE?)**

**DID APCD OVERCHARGE PHILLIPS 66 FOR YEARS?
WHEN IT CLOSES THEY LOSE \$500K PER YEAR & THE WORK DECREASES
BUT THEY SAY THEY HAVE A BUDGET PROBLEM**

**PLANNING COMMISSION
MORE CANNABIS, PLUS SOME OTHER SMALL PROJECTS**

LAST WEEK

NO BOS MEETING

LAFCO MEETING
(ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS)

COLAB IN DEPTH
SEE PAGE 18

**ENVIRONMENTALISTS INCREASE INFLUENCE ON
 LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

BY EDWARD RING

**2024: CALIFORNIA PROVIDES A PEEK AT WHAT'S
 AHEAD FOR U.S. UNDER ONE-PARTY RULE**

BY MARY L. G. THEROUX

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

**San Luis Obispo County Pension Trust Meeting of Monday, January 25, 2021, 9:30 AM
 (Scheduled)**

Item 14 - Monthly Investment Return Report. There is good news for the County pension system. All the losses that occurred in the first quarter have been made up by the robust market growth during the following three quarters.

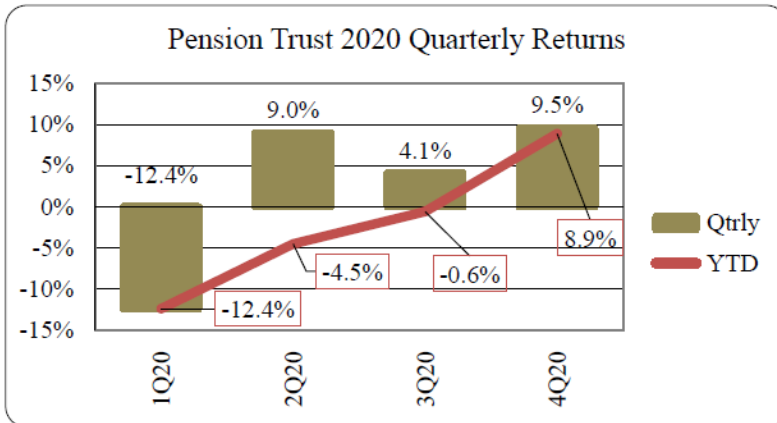
Item 14: Monthly Investment Report for December 2020

	December	Year to Date 2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Total Trust Investments (\$ millions)	\$1,552		\$1,446 year end	\$1,285 year end	\$1,351 year end	\$1,196 year end	\$1,148 year end
Total Fund Return	2.7% Gross	8.9% Gross	16.3 % Gross	-3.2 % Gross	15.5 % Gross	6.6 % Gross	-0.8% Gross
Policy Index Return (r)	1.9%	10.3%	16.4 %	-3.2 %	13.4 %	7.7 %	-0.5 %

(r) Policy index as of April 1, 2020 revision to Strategic Asset Allocation Policy: 21% domestic equity, 21% international equity, 15% core bonds, 6% bank loans, 5% global bonds, 5% emerging market debt, 17% real estate, 0% commodities, 5% private equity, 5% private credit. Pending revision to Revised Investment Policy adopted Sept. 2020 to be effective in 2021.

The quarter-by-quarter total fund returns on the SLOCPT investments illustrated the chaotic nature of the 1st quarter followed by record-setting bounce-backs in equity assets. The strong recovery in equity markets has brought this preliminary estimate of full year 2020 returns to +8.9%. This

should lead to a small actuarial gain as the good investment year is smoothed into the actuarial valuation on a 5-year basis. The long term assumed rate of return on the Plan assets is currently 6.875% which is used as the discount rate for liabilities.



The cumulative gross rate of return on the SLOCPT fund based on these preliminary 2020 total fund return calculations is –

1 year	+8.9%
3 years	+7.0%
5 years	+8.5%
10years	+7.6%

Board of Supervisors Meeting of Tuesday January 26, 2021 (Scheduled)

Item 2 - Develop a new technical training program, with a term of February 1, 2021 through January 31, 2026; (2) SLO Partners in an amount of \$200,000 to expand modern tech entrepreneurship opportunities, with a term of February 1, 2021 through January 31, 2022; and (3) REACH in an amount of \$300,000 to further the REACH 2030 jobs plan, with a term of February 1, 2021 through January 31, 2022. In November the Board reviewed a number of proposals for allocation of economic development funds. It selected the 3 entities noted in the Item title above. The staff is returning with the formal documents to issue the contracts.

The major strategic project in this group is the continuation of the County’s support of REACH, which will prepare an overall County economic strategic plan and provide related analysis and on line resources. The County will pay \$300,000 for this project. The County contributed \$300,000 to REACH last year. Other than a very high level and general REACH goal report, it is not quite clear what the County received for this amount. REACH did help the County mobilize COVID operations.

It is not known from the write-up if other governments in the County such as the cities are contributing anything to the project. It is not known what Reach's private sector partner companies have contributed.

Simultaneously, REACH is entering into a multi-phase contract with Santa Barbara County to develop a master economic development plan related to Vandenberg Air Force Base. Its agenda write-up states in part:

The MOU participants have invited the County to officially join the effort and sign on as a partner on the project through the Addendum Number 1 to the MOU (Attachment D). Additionally, REACH has submitted a cost sharing contribution proposal (Attachment F) where the County is sponsoring the development of the Phase 1 assessment that is needed to qualify for State and federal resources to complete Phase 2 of the Plan. The Master Plan Project aims to facilitate regional economic growth through the addition of high-quality commercial space industry employment by enhancing competitiveness of the region and thus encouraging skilled jobs. Economic enhancement offers local government, the private sector, the nonprofit sectors, and County residents the opportunity to work together to improve the local economy for a public benefit.

The first phase of the project will cost Santa Barbara County \$200,000, which is primarily being funded from cannabis taxes. A large portion of the money will be paid by REACH to the consulting firm Deloitte Touche to do the work. Deloitte Touche has been REACH's consultant in SLO County for the general strategy document produced last year.

As we pointed out in other venues, Santa Barbara County's overall economic development plan is to foster a very robust cannabis industry and tax it to death. If phase I is successful, the County may attract other funding partners such as the State and Feds to develop successive phases.

In the end, there are 2 major questions for both counties:

1. Where can you locate major commercial and industrial facilities under their respective schemes of land use?
2. How can you attract businesses if land use entitlements take years and millions of dollars to obtain and are then saddled with major exactions?

A summary of the deliverables for the San Luis Obispo project is contained in the table below. You would think that most of the data to be developed on the first page of work tasks already exists in the County's massive Resource Manage System for which they have spent millions in staff time over the decades.

Either they don't remember or it isn't very good. Otherwise, why would they have to pay REACH to pay Deloitte Touche to redo it?

To view the full contract with REACH, control click on the link:

<https://agenda.slocounty.ca.gov/iip/sanluisobispo/file/getfile/129620>

Table 1: Scope of Work

Activity (Name & Description)	County	REACH	REACH Deliverables
Assess impacts, trends, and resources related to COVID	Support	Lead	<p>(1) Analyze COVID impacts and trends including job loss numbers, business closures by industry sectors and geography.</p> <p>(2) Estimate job demand by sector, post COVID lockdown.</p>
Inventory, map, and make publicly available assets and data that support economic expansion	Support	Lead	<p>(1) Host a web-based data tool that details county-specific economic metrics such as demographic data, wage data, workforce data.</p> <p>(2) Develop web-based asset map that showcases physical assets such as airports, broadband, opportunity zones, etc.</p> <p>(3) Maintain an inventory of commercial property by region, county, sub-region, city, and town.</p>

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<p>Development and early implementation of a Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)</p> <p><i>Timeline for the CEDS project contingent on EDA grant schedule.</i></p>	Support	Lead	<p>(1) Develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that is accepted by and follows U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) standards.</p> <p>(2) As part of the final report related to the effort, communicate to the County of San Luis Obispo economic development team policy and investment to be considered for the advancement of the County's economic expansion.</p>

Identify and support industry-specific opportunities for growth	Support	Lead	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Establish industry consortia for technology-related segments in agriculture, renewable energy, aerospace, defense, and precision manufacturing, plus more traditional technology such as software and hardware development. (2) Perform economic impact analyses of targeted industry growth.
			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (3) Identify assets (physical spaces, infrastructure, supply chain gaps, etc.) and challenges (regulatory, policy, etc.) impacting target industries. (4) Compile recommendations from industry leaders in each segment identifying what is needed to drive growth, what county sub-regions can best accommodate that growth, and changes that can practically be made in California and our region. (5) Inventory workforce gaps based on target industries and growth demand.

What about the lack of middle class housing, which the Economic Vitality Corporation has explicated for over a decade?

Represent and promote San Luis Obispo County as a key portion of the Central Coast Super Region	Support	Lead	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Develop a relocation business case (why to grow your business here) for the Central Coast to use to retain and expand identified industries that can create quality jobs in significant quantities. (2) Develop a regional retention and expansion practitioner network that incorporates with local economic development efforts to support the expansion of business on the Central Coast. (3) Promote and represent SLO County with statewide organizations such as GO-Biz, CA Fwd, CA Stewardship Network, REAL Coalition, and the Governor's military council in order to increase competitiveness, foster investment, amplify the region's story beyond our borders and ultimately expand opportunity on the Central Coast.
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The full item can be accessed at the link below:

<https://agenda.slocounty.ca.gov/iip/sanluisobispo/file/getfile/129620>

Item 11 - It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors approve the appointment Paavo Ogren to the Water Resource Advisory Committee as the District 3 representative. This position serves at the pleasure of the Board. Ogren is qualified by education and experience, but was Public Works Director in the Paso Water District days. He was an inside player and provided advice

selectively to Supervisors. (He is not the only one.) One sample is a direct communication from Ogren to Supervisor Gibson. Note that the County Administrator is not copied. Significantly, the then Supervisor from the District, Frank Mecham, is not included. This example has to do with issue of the so-called PRIOR Agreement, which had and has a major bearing in the litigation in which the basin overlies are seeking confirmation of their water rights. (See the actual document on Page 8 below.)

The document is also interesting in that Ogren states that cones of depression ¹ don't necessarily mean a basin is in overdraft. All throughout the Paso Basin Water District formation attempt there were repeated instances where staff played favorites and, we believe, manipulated data. For example, no one has yet explained how or why 1.7 acre-feet of water per acre of grapes was used to project future basin decline. Grapes are rated at about .9 to 1.0 acre-feet of water to 1 acre. No one has yet explained how tens of thousands of acres once listed as in severe decline suddenly were removed from such a designation and tens of thousands of others in turn were placed under such a designation.

The WRAC is dominated by agency bureaucrats and environmentalists. The end game for most of these interested parties is to find problems which can then be used as an excuse to perform expensive consultant studies, hire more staff, and apply for State grants to pay for it all. No one is concerned that much of the State grant money is paid for with debt. The end product is always more regulations and more fees and taxes.

Supervisor Ortiz-Legg may not be familiar with the long and sordid history of the attempts to form the Paso Basin wide District, which began in 2011 and resulted in overwhelming rejection by the voters of the Basin. Gibson, Hill, and Patterson teed it up, and the result has been millions in costs, litigation, and heartbreak for smaller property owners. At the same time, large out-of-County national corporations, including the Harvard Endowment, are pumping water like there is no tomorrow.

A sample insider memo is displayed below.



¹ A cone of depression is an area in a basin which has much more severe decline than the surrounding area. A large cone east of Paso Robles was used to promote the whole theory of Paso Basin overdraft. Now it seems of have “evaporated” to some degree under the new maps. The shell game continues.

{In Archive} Re: Fw: From Paso Robles City Manager Jim App

04/01/2010 09:02 AM

Bruce Gibson
Cc: Paavo Ogren
Cherie Aspuro, "Howard, Courtney"

This message is being viewed in an archive.

Paavo – Yes indeed, this does raise some more questions. I'd be happy to hear from Courtney on Mon, especially as to timing of next steps – clearly there are a lot of threads to consider here and I hope we don't have to do much before we get LO finished.

BG

Paavo Ogren

Bruce A few different issues exist. Enjoy the rea...

03/31/2010 02:51:11 PM

From: Paavo Ogren/PubWorks/COSLO
To: Bruce Gibson/BOS/COSLO@Wings
Cc: Cherie Aspuro/BOS/COSLO@Wings, "Howard, Courtney" <choward@co.slo.ca.us>
Date: 03/31/2010 02:51 PM
Subject: Re: Fw: From Paso Robles City Manager Jim App

Director of Public Works for SLO

Bruce

A few different issues exist. Enjoy the reading and it would be good to discuss since this reply may create additional questions in your mind.

Jim's letter speaks to some recently completed work on the Paso Groundwater Basin. In reality, there have been numerous studies on the Paso basin over the past decade +/- . On that point, Courtney will be preparing a table in the next few weeks that lists the various studies and their purpose(s). We will send you a copy to augment this reply.

One possibility may be that Jim may be speaking to the recent basin study related to the Atascadero Sub-basin, which was prepared in response to concerns from North County (NC) on the draft Resource Capacity Study. The draft RCS included a recommendations of the nature that would prevent further subdivisions. The NC constituents raised the point that the RCS did not address the fact that Nacimiento was about to go on-line and therefore the draft RCS was flawed. Atascadero Mutual Water Company was especially concerned since they serve properties in the unincorporated area and because they estimated their needs from the Nacimiento Project based on the General Plan, and they also expect development fees to pay for a significant portion of their Naci costs. Other details also existed that identified the need for the Atascadero sub-basin study, but suffice it say that this obvious conflict on the draft RCS had NC constituents concerned and drove part of the need for the Atascadero sub-basin work. Although I am not aware of a specific concern for Paso on this particular work, the WRAC has previously commented on annexations to Paso and so perhaps Jim is concerned about the RCS and whether it will have future implications on annexations.

Another possibility relates to the PRIOR agreement. PRIOR was executed between Paso, the County, the Flood Control District, and Shandon about 5 years ago or so. It was developed to head off groundwater litigation and it essentially provides some protection to agriculture against municipalities developing "prescriptive" rights to the groundwater basin because all parties agreed that the County would need to declare the basin in overdraft before the 5 year period could begin that is required for prescriptive rights to be established. (In order for municipalities to develop groundwater rights... since we are not overlying users of the basin... we need to show that our use corresponded to 5 years while the basin was in overdraft... it's similar to squatters law... i.e the municipalities took the water from the overlying users, overlying users did nothing to stop us, now it's ours). Although this is oversimplified, the point is that our current studies do not indicate that the Paso basin is in overdraft, and perhaps Jim is

posturing in a manner to imply that they are not so sure... not a bad posture for him to take. Since the County is obligated under the PRIOR agreement to make that determination of overdraft when we believe it to be true... Jim may simply be preserving a right to argue if needed in the future. It's interesting because he could theoretically argue in the future that he was damaged (i.e. not able to argue a prescriptive right) because the County failed to declare overdraft. Most likely, he simply sees that we do have some cones of depression (evidence) in the basin and he might generally believe that the basin pumping is already at its safe yield. (As you may know, a cone of depression is not direct evidence of overdraft since all wells create a cone of varying sizes etc... Even issues like well interference do not provide direct evidence of overdraft, and damages do not exist just because someone has to drill deeper to get water because others have installed wells to satisfy their overlying uses).

Since Jim's letter was not argumentative, I'm inclined to believe that they are simply preserving an opinion based on the lack of data. Regarding annexations, he might want to argue that plenty of water exists; regarding water rights, it could be the opposite. In either case, he may also just be pointing to the fact that more data would be better and we agree. In general, we are getting good feedback on the uncertainties that exist relating to agricultural water demand.

Regarding data, Courtney and Syllas (primarily Syllas) completed a data "gap analysis" to determine where we would like more data. Part of upcoming public workshops in NC will include soliciting more data from those who have wells. As a side note, our gap analysis was prepared Countywide, and funded from a State Water Board IRWM grant.

So, I imagine this is a bit of food for thought; since Paso is our largest basin, we have done a lot of work on it. Courtney can attend an upcoming Monday meeting to discuss more. Hope this helps.

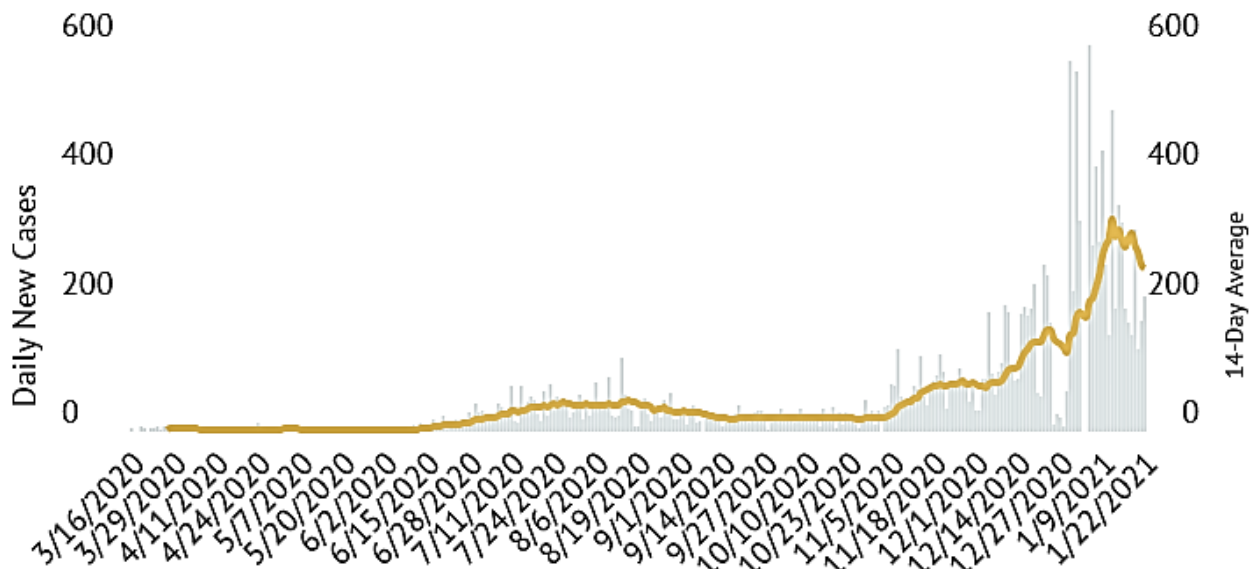
Paavo Ogren
 Director of Public Works
 pogren@co.slo.ca.us
 805-781-5291 (w)
 805-781-1229 (fax)

Bruce Gibson

Courtney -- Can you give me some background...

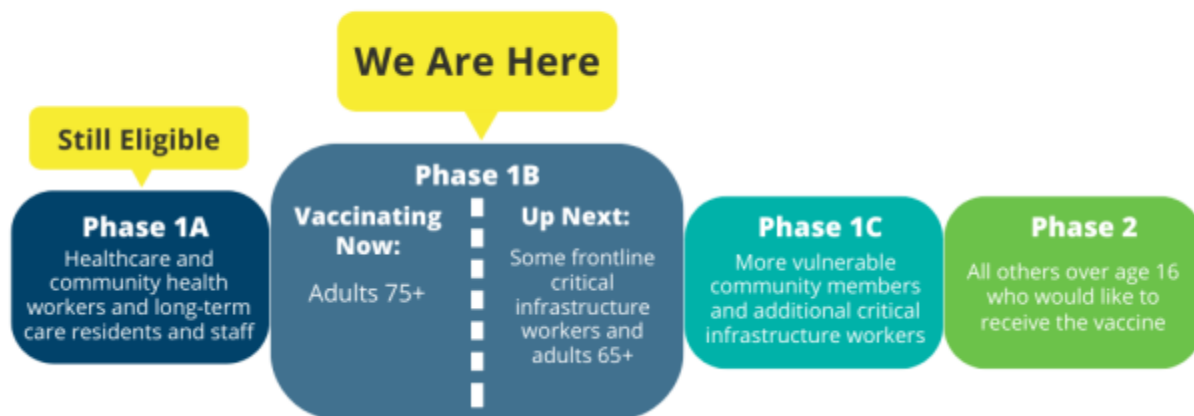
03/31/2010 10:48:47 AM

**Item 24 - COVID Status as of Friday, January 22, 2021
 Daily New Cases (and 14-Day Average)**



52 (12 ICU)**

Vaccine Distribution in SLO County



The vaccine website states in part:

Based on current vaccine supply and risk of serious outcomes from COVID-19, adults 75 years and older can get a COVID-19 vaccination by appointment only at one of [three clinics in SLO County](#) in SLO County as of Monday, Jan. 18, 2021.

Due to limited vaccine supply, the vaccine clinics in San Luis Obispo, Paso Robles and Arroyo Grande currently have a limited number of appointments available each day. Prioritizing vaccination appointments to residents 75 years and older will help prevent serious health outcomes among some of our most vulnerable community members.

While only those age 75 and older will be the first group in Phase 1b of the County's vaccine distribution plan, anyone between the ages of 65 and 74 will be in the second tier of Phase 1b vaccinations. SLO County is home to over 26,000 residents 75 years and older, but currently only has enough vaccine supply to vaccinate roughly 4,000 people each week. [Find out more about when and where the vaccine is being distributed](#)

Accordingly it might take 7 weeks to get all the people over 75 vaccinated. However there may be a portion of the group who do not wish to get vaccinated. Again and as we had recommended in the past, the process can be sped up (as more vaccine flow into the County) utilizing the pneumatic injectors.

Health care workers under Phase 1a are still eligible to be vaccinated and can continue making appointments. Nearly 11,000 people in Phase 1a have been vaccinated locally. [Make a vaccination appointment now.](#)

Item 27 - 2021 State Legislative Program. The County's Federal and State Legislative lobbyists (2 separate firms) will present the results of last year's efforts and update the Board on environments in

both Washington DC and Sacramento. The Board will then consider adding to, deleting from, or otherwise amending their legislative platform documents.

These are then used as guides by lobbyists, legislators, governmental associations, and the departments on how to judge various bills that emerge during the year. The overall thrust is to maintain the County as independent from State and Federal interference and for these higher levels of government not to take any revenues away from the County. Simultaneously, the County seeks expansion of existing funding programs and the creation of new programs. Significantly, the County does not reconcile the conflicting logic of these two overall strategies. Nor does it provide any analysis of ways in which the Feds or State can provide more while dealing with long-term debt.

Some of the Platform positions which COLAB has supported in the past and continues to support include:

15. Oppose any measures or legislation that reduces the super- majority vote required to raise taxes from 2/3rd to 55%.

16. Oppose any legislation or initiative that proposes to modify Proposition 13. Specifically, oppose any legislation or proposal that would establish a so- County of San Luis Obispo 2020 2021 Legislative Platform Page 8 of 43 called "Split Roll" for property tax, which would thereby reduce protections for commercial property owners.. Oppose any legislation that would further the effort to modify Proposition 13 in lieu of the ballot proposition.

20. Support legislation that recognizes hydroelectricity and nuclear power as renewable energy sources.

Several new items for this year include:

12. Seek and support legislation that: 1. Allows local governments to have local control and autonomy in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2. Allows local governments to respond to the pandemic effectively and efficiently. 3. Provides local governments full funding for pandemic emergency response, testing, contact tracing, vaccination, and health care response, including support for local hospitals and alternative care sites. 4. Provides local governments funding to address food and housing insecurity. 5. Addresses issues due to unemployment, under-employment, and other employment related hardships. 6. Provides business relief and supports flexibility in taxes and other business expense payments.

New Item 12 above is fine at the moment. New Item 13 below seems to be biased toward converting the entire Diablo site into some sort of giant passive park which pays no taxes and provides no economic development opportunities.

13. PG&E and Eureka Energy own a significant amount of property at and around Diablo Canyon. This property encompasses thousands of acres and several miles of coastline and extends from Avila Beach in the south to Montana de Oro State Park in the north. Additionally, in 2000, San Luis Obispo County voters endorsed Measure A, which asked the advisory question of: "Shall the County Board of Supervisors recognize the Diablo Canyon Lands as an exceptionally precious coastal resource by adopting policies that promote habitat preservation, sustainable agricultural activities, and public use

and enjoyment consistent with public safety and property rights once the lands are no longer needed as an emergency buffer for the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Plant after its remaining operating life?" The County must have a leading role in any discussions about future uses at and around the property.

Item 29 - Executive Session - In Velie, Karen v. Adam Hill, et. al, Appeal No. B299267. Cal Coast News Investigative News Reporter and Publisher Velie sued former County Supervisor Adam Hill and the County for harassment and attempting to destroy her business. He reportedly threatened her, her advertisers, and others. Apparently the case is now before a Court of Appeals. It is not known what decision is before the Board at this point.

We do know that Hill harassed and threatened many people over the years. The Board has never conducted a full independent investigation of Hill's activities in general. It may be afraid to settle the case lest others come out of the woodwork before the statute of limitation s runs out on whatever Hill did to them.

On the other hand a new Court proceeding could reveal myriad problems, and the Board might be better off providing substantial compensation in the hope that she would settle.

San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District (APCD) Meeting of Wednesday, January 27, 2021 (Scheduled)

The meeting agenda is largely devoted to administrative and organizational matters, including election of a Chair and Vice-Chair. However, **Item D-3** below raises a question about how much the APCD has been charging Phillips 66 over the years.

Item D-3 - Establishment of a Fiscal Study Committee. The agency, which has a total annual budget of \$5.7 million, rakes off about \$500,000 per year from the Phillips 66 Refinery, which will be closing in 2 years. They are going to have to figure out how to survive with less money or raise their fees or persuade the voters to tax themselves. On the other hand, they will not have Phillips to regulate or monitor. Therefore they should have less work and need less staff.

Or were they overcharging Phillips to float other parts of the agency? This is illegal, as fees are supposed to be in proportion to the actual work and resources necessary. The Board of Supervisors should have the Auditor Controller go in and investigate this one. If the \$500,000 per year has been actually entirely attributable to the Phillips regulatory workload, why will they have a problem? **On the other hand is the admission of a future shortfall actually an admission that they were over charging Phillips?**

Planning Commission Meeting of Thursday, January 28, 2021 (Scheduled)

The Commission will be considering applications for a chiller, a cannabis grow, a cannabis dispensary, a cell tower, and several single or small home developments. There are no large policy projects to change regulations or amend Plan documents.

OTHER ISSUES



San Diego's pension problems are a microcosm of the state: There's a growing public pension storm in San Diego. As reported by the San Diego Union-Tribune this week, the city's pension debt has been revised up from \$3 billion to \$3.3 billion, nearly triple the debt level of 2007. The pension board is demanding a \$50 million increase in the city's annual pension contribution -- \$415 million instead of \$366 million. And this annual contribution will only grow in the coming years as the pension system is only about 70 percent funded.

The proximate causes of city's pressing pension liabilities -- as is the case in municipalities throughout the state -- can be chalked up to three factors:

- 1. City workers are living longer -- into their 80s and 90s.*
- 2. City workers are being paid more -- average salaries increased by 7.5 percent last year, more than double the projected rate.*
- 3. Pension system investments have underperformed the rosy projections.*

Yet the underlying reason for such unsustainable pension liabilities is government unions who have demanded generous payout packages from the politicians they elect.

How can the city pay these increased obligations? Revenues in the tourism-dependent city have been hit hard by Covid-19 business restrictions. Yet tax rates are already high. For instance, the city's hotel tax is 10.5 percent. Raising taxes further will chase away visitors and economic activity. Yet government unions will never agree to pension reform.

So, the likely solution is a further curtailment of services: Fewer potholes fixed. Longer waits for first responders. And fewer social services that are needed now more than ever.

The kicker: San Diego's pension system will likely have to absorb thousands of new members not accounted for in these estimates because a Superior Court judge recently invalidated Prop B, a 2012 municipal ballot measure that moved all city employees hired after that year to a 401k-style

retirement benefit system. This influx of pension obligations may be the wave that destroys the pension sandcastle.

Speaking of America's Finest City: This week, the Biden administration nominated San Diego Unified schools chief Cindy Marten for Deputy Education Secretary. Marten has presided over the district's so-called anti-racism efforts and the watering down of grades. Predictably, because she's an advocate of government unions, she has attacked charter schools – the one bright spot in San Diego's otherwise dismal public school performance where poor kids are concerned. She's "a curious pick for a deputy secretary of education nominee, given the Biden administration's call for unity, racial equity and support for working families," said Nina Rees, president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

There's enough to worry about in California without Washington: In a Sunday op-ed in papers throughout Southern California, CPC President Will Swaim explains how further empowering government unions, as Gov. Newsom's recently announced budget intends to do, will only exacerbate the many problems plaguing the state:

California has the country's seventh-highest unemployment rate, with 1.5 million people looking for work. Poverty, economic opportunity, and income inequality are all among the worst in the nation. The state's strict Covid-19 restrictions have caused immense small business pain for little-to-no apparent gain. Hospitalizations per capita are near the highest in the country, and many ICUs are overrun.

California's tax and regulatory burden are downright European, making it very difficult for small businesses to stay profitable even at the best of times. Californians earning a mere \$59,000 per year face a 9.3 percent tax rate. Yet, Golden State residents get almost nothing in return for their massive tax burdens. Schools are failing (when they're open), homelessness is out of control, infrastructure resembles the Third World, and first responders are slow to arrive, if they come at all. That'll get worse to the extent California communities succeed in defunding police.

Electricity rates are among the highest in the nation, and paying \$4 a gallon gas raises everyone's cost of living. Meanwhile, the green mandates that drive up energy prices haven't helped the environment, as annual forest fires due to a lack of forest management destroy air quality and decimate entire cities. Recurrent blackouts mean Californians don't even get reliable energy in return for their high bills.

Add "failed vaccine rollout" to the long list of California's problems: On the latest episode of National Review's RadioFree California, Will and CPC Board Member David Bahnsen discuss Newsom's catalog of failures, with the bureaucratic and botched vaccine rollout being the latest and greatest. They also consider new state laws, the precarious state of free speech, and Bridget Mason, a real California

hero – even if we don't hear much about the former slave who became a major LA landowner and entrepreneur, founder of the AME Church, and comforter of the homeless.

Green activists disproportionately hurt the poor: *In his latest [analysis](#), CPC contributor Edward Ring explains how Fullerton, Costa Mesa, and Irvine's decision to enter the utilities business will likely further raise electricity prices on beleaguered ratepayers who pay nearly twice as much as their compatriots in other states:*

The problem with newly formed independent, city-owned utilities being “more aggressive than private utilities” in developing clean renewable sources of energy is the existing state mandates are already the most aggressive in the nation, if not the world....

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, California's residential rates for electricity in October 2020 were 20.8 cents per kilowatt-hour, compared to a national average of 13.6 cents per kilowatt-hour. In Texas, residents only pay 11.9 cents/KWh, in Utah, 10.3 cents/KWh. Even progressive Oregon manages to keep rates lower than the national average, at 11.37/KWh.

Teachers unions stonewall school reopening: *In his latest [piece](#), CPC contributor Larry Sand highlights the ridiculous lengths teachers unions are going to keep schools closed:*

With the availability of vaccines, you might think the unions would back off and embrace a full return to in-person instruction after teachers get inoculated, right? Well, no. As reported by the San Francisco Chronicle's Jill Tucker, California's teachers unions maintain that vaccinations alone won't be enough and are “calling for additional measures not endorsed by public health experts as necessary for students and staff to safely return to the classroom.”

For example, the United Educators of San Francisco is insanely demanding that the district install lids on every toilet, even though none of the millions of cases worldwide has been connected to a toilet....

So what will it take for the unions to get their teachers back to school? Money, of course. Lots and lots of money.

Bill Maher goes after California: *When even far-left liberals like comedian Bill Maher start criticizing California's governance, you know it's getting bad. During the editorial [segment](#) on his show last Friday, Maher called on Californians obsessing over Washington D.C. politics to clean up their own room:*

Trump sure didn't drain any swamps, but when it comes to graft, corruption, and everyone wetting his beak, California -- yeah -- that's a swamp too. We can't put up a housing unit for the homeless for less

than 500 grand or build a rail line connecting the state for less than \$200 million a mile. Even in France, with all their socialism, they did it for more like \$15 million.

California is a blue state that's completely held together by red tape. It's no wonder people are leaving in droves. I am in year four of trying to get my solar power hooked up. Just building this shed up to code took three years. We'll all be getting power from dilithium crystals before my solar gets turned on.

How 'bout this: "Will you hook it up if I let the homeless live in it?"

Enjoyed this newsletter? Subscribe [HERE](#). Donate [HERE](#). Please forward this email to your friends.

*Jordan Bruneau
Communications Director
jordan@calpolicycenter.org*

LAST WEEKS HIGHLIGHTS

No Board of Supervisors Meeting on Tuesday, January 13, 2021 (Not Scheduled)

The Board does not usually meet on a Tuesday following a Monday National Holiday – in this case Martin Luther King Day.

Issue 1 - COVID STATUS AS OF FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2021:

The County posted the announcement below:

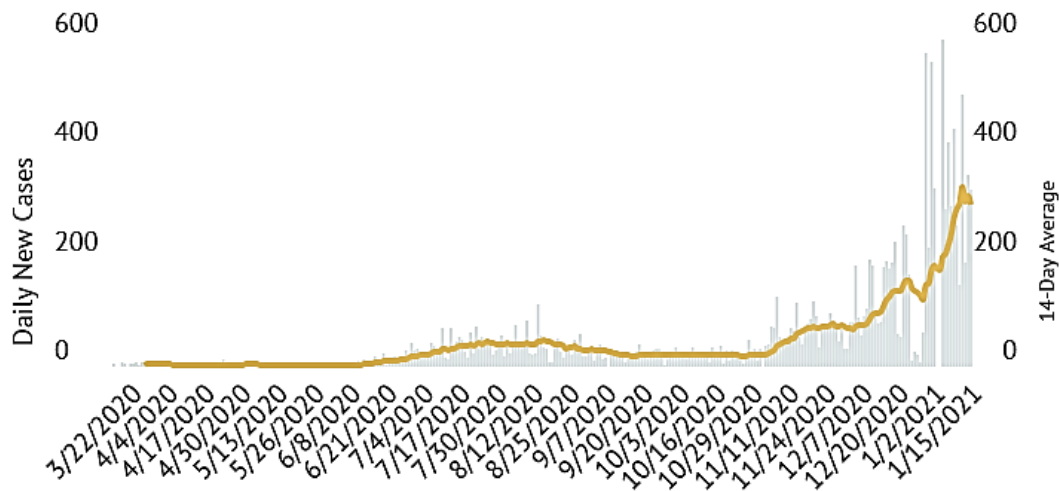
As the County progresses through the first part of Phase 1b (residents over 75), additional groups will be eligible for vaccine. Residents over 75 are first in line in the Phase 1b group because people age 75 and older are at higher risk for serious COVID-19 illness or death than other age groups. Allocating the County's limited vaccine supply to this group will help prevent the most serious outcomes. Only those residing within San Luis Obispo County are eligible.

[Make An Appointment](#)

If you need technical assistance booking an appointment, please call the County Phone Assistance Center at 543-2444. Currently call volume is exceeding capacity; please keep trying if you do not get through on the first call.

As we have been pointing out for weeks, get all us geezers vaccinated and most of the deaths will cease.

Daily New Cases (and 14-Day Average)



50 (9 ICU)**

SLO County Residents with COVID-19 in Hospital

Local Agency Formation Commission Meeting of Thursday, January 15, 2021 (Completed)

Per the agenda below, the meeting was largely devoted to administrative matters. There were no annexations, boundary changes, additions, or deletions to the functions of any special districts. Nevertheless, and if you are dying of curiosity, just control click on any of the items, and they will open up.

January 21, 2021, Agenda

- [Draft November 19, 2020, Minutes](#)
- A-1: [Biennial Update of LAFCO's Conflict of Interest Code \(Recommend Review and Approval\)](#)
- A-2: [Second Quarter Fiscal Year 2020-2021 LAFCO Budget Status Report \(Recommend Review and Direct Executive to submit to the County Auditor\)](#)

A-3: [2020 Annual Report and 2021 Proposed Work Plan-Meeting Schedule \(Recommend Review and Approval\)](#)

A-4: [Process to appoint a Regular and Alternate Public Member LAFCO Commissioner to the Commission \(Recommend Review and Approval\)](#)

A-5: [Consideration of the Recruitment Process and Job Description for the position of LAFCO Executive Officer \(Recommend Review and Approval\)](#)

B-1: Closed session pursuant to Government Code Section 54957 - Public Employee/Employee Appointment – Title: Executive Officer

Pursuant to Government Code Section 54957.6 Conference with

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

ENVIRONMENTALISTS INCREASE INFLUENCE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS BY EDWARD RING

In less than a year, three Orange County cities will be in the utility business. Fullerton, Costa Mesa, and Irvine have created a joint powers authority to purchase and distribute electricity to households and businesses in those cities, under what's known as "community choice aggregation."

It's difficult to imagine how this model will result in lower electricity bills, although that's one of the ways this program was sold to local elected officials who approved the plan. Southern California Edison will still be the primary supplier of electricity and will still manage the distribution. Since SCE only generates 19 percent of the power it distributes to customers, and purchases the other 89 percent, the costs to customers will only go down if this new joint powers authority outperforms SCE in their procurement efforts enough to offset the cost of the new bureaucracy.

As reported by the *Orange County Register*, "Unbound by long-term contracts many utilities hold, they can adjust the mix to take advantage of lower costs or to favor renewable energy — or both. Additionally, they can be more aggressive than private utilities in encouraging and developing clean local power generation and battery storage." But which is it? Saving money? Or going green?

The problem with newly formed independent, city owned utilities being "more aggressive than private utilities" in developing clean renewable sources of energy is the existing state mandates are already the most aggressive in the nation, if not the world. California has mandated that public utilities deliver 100 percent carbon-free power by 2045. And SCE's well on its way. In their 2019 Annual Report they claim they already deliver 48 percent carbon-free power to their customers.

There is a cost for "carbon-free power." According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, California's residential rates for electricity in October 2020 were 20.8 cents per kilowatt-hour, compared to a national average of 13.6 cents per kilowatt-hour. In Texas, residents only pay 11.9 cents/KWh, in Utah, 10.3 cents/KWh. Even progressive Oregon manages to keep rates lower than the national average, at 11.37/KWh.

By now most rational observers realize that even if global warming is caused by anthropogenic CO2 emissions, the U.S. is only responsible for 15 percent of that, and California's share is less than 2 percent. Readers of the latest BP Statistical Review of World Energy know that for everyone on earth to consume *half* as much energy per capita as Americans, global energy production would have to more than *double*, and that renewables in 2020 accounted for less than 4 percent of all global energy production. This is why China, India, and every other rising economy in the world is developing additional sources of gas, oil and coal as fast as they can, and there is nothing anyone can do about it.

So why are California's legislators hell-bent on developing renewables?

The most charitable answer to this question is their desire to make California an example of environmental sustainability for the world to follow, and a belief that innovations pioneered in California will be emulated worldwide, delivering fantastic profits to Californian entrepreneurs at the same time as the planet is saved.

The problem with this noble explanation is that to accomplish these high minded objectives, California has been turned into an expensive laboratory, with 40 million captive subjects. While policies that elevate costs for electricity benefit public utilities and tech entrepreneurs, millions of ordinary Californians are driven into poverty. And this ideal, to make California a green beacon for humanity, finds expensive expression in far more than just electricity.

The green lobby in California has not only made electricity barely affordable for low and middle income households, but they have declared war on natural gas. In a state where electricity is four times as expensive as natural gas on an energy-equivalent basis, and in a nation where natural gas has never been as cheap or abundant as it is today, the movement to ban natural gas quietly gathers momentum.

As of November 2020, thirty-nine California cities have already enacted new ordinances limiting natural gas in new construction. The California Energy Commission is considering enacting a statewide ban effective in 2022. With a mandate already in place that requires new vehicle sales to be all-electric by 2035, it is clear that policymakers are determined to turn California into an all-electric, carbon-free state before anyone else, no matter what the cost.

This goal of a carbon-free society in California is also evident in housing policies, based on the theory that the denser California's urban areas become, the less need for energy to be spent on transportation. While this theory rests on dubious foundations, it is already the primary rationale for countless local and state restrictions on development, which in turn is the primary reason housing is unaffordable in California.

Open land along freeway corridors is plentiful in California, but when attempts to develop it are mired in prohibitively expensive regulations and endless litigation, the only logical place to increase housing stock is within existing cities. The efforts in Orange County by local activists to advocate for this are typical. One such

activist organization, People for Housing, announces on their website “Cities that are now on a new path.” They claim recent victories for their city council candidates in Costa Mesa, Huntington Beach, Garden Grove, Santa Ana, and Tustin.

One of the goals of these local housing advocates, echoed in pending state legislation such as Assembly Bill 68, passed in 2019, is to stimulate a “backyard building boom,” whereby homeowners can build new smaller homes in their backyards. Additional state legislation abounds, all of it designed to densify neighborhoods, and absolutely none of it designed to facilitate construction of new single family neighborhoods on open land. Meanwhile, residents who relied on zoning laws to preserve the spacious ambience of their suburbs are stigmatized as NIMBYs, racists, and “deniers.”

There is no effective opposition to California’s drive to confine its residents to existing cities, nor to challenge the move to a carbon-free, all-electric society. Both goals are impractical and extremely expensive. Shorn of the supposedly enlightened motivations behind these goals, their impact is explicitly misanthropic, and it hurts *everyone*.

The influence of environmental activists is the reason for California’s unaffordable cost-of-living. It is a form of economic oppression, justified on environmental grounds, but also a convenient cover for opportunistic special interests. Along with the high tech industry, the clean power industry, public utilities, real estate investors, and subsidized housing developers, California’s powerful public sector unions are big winners.

With every new regulation, and every time a private enterprise is coopted by a new government agency, more jobs are created in the public sector. This translates into more dues paying union members which results in more political spending by union leadership on the candidates of their choice. At the same time, whenever environmentalist activists block public spending on new infrastructure that might enable more suburban development, that money is redirected to pay and benefit increases for public sector workers.

There is a tremendous symbiosis between California’s economic elite, its environmentalist activists and their allies in the social justice movement, and the unionized public sector. But despite all the rhetoric about helping the disadvantaged, the biggest victims are those Californians who can least afford to fund the bleeding edge. *This article originally appeared on the website California Globe. Edward Ring is the founder of the California Policy Center and his articles appear in many publications throughout the State and nation.*

2024: CALIFORNIA PROVIDES A PEEK AT WHAT’S AHEAD FOR U.S. UNDER ONE-PARTY RULE BY MARY L. G. THEROUX

Americans who may be curious about what life under Democratic party control will bring don't need a crystal ball. Having lived under 1-party progressive rule for years, California can provide them a full picture—but they may not like what they see:

The End of the Middle Class

California is home mostly to the very rich and the poor. The primary cause of its high inequality is the cost of housing, according to *The Economist*: California's inequality problem is not "the stagnation of low incomes per se. It is stagnation relative to costs—in particular, the cost of housing." According to the California Legislative Analyst's Office, the gap between California's home prices and those in the rest of the country started to widen in the 1970s, going from 30 percent above U.S. levels to more than 80 percent by 1980. The LAO blames public policies that suppressed construction when the rest of the country underwent a housing boom. Today, it's virtually impossible to build new construction in California, as, thanks to regulations like the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), literally anyone can challenge any development, anonymously, with no legitimate cause. As if housing weren't prohibitively expensive enough, the legislature's solar mandate passed last year adds another \$20,000 or so to each unit's cost.

But it's not just housing that feeds inequality. California boasts some of the highest and most regressive taxes in the country. We bear a top income tax of 12.3%, but it's the everyday taxes like high sales taxes that really hit lower earners. Plus, on top of the most expensive gasoline in the country, thanks to mandates on its composition that require specialized refineries, gas taxes running 50+¢ per gallon bring the cost of gasoline 50% above the national average—which disproportionately hurts poorer workers who live farther from their jobs.

"Sin" taxes on soda, alcohol, tobacco, vaping, and more are the most regressive, with such taxes depriving the poor of money they could have spent towards bettering their lives: healthcare, better food, and life's little pleasures that take the sting out of daily struggles.

The list goes on and on: high minimum wage laws cut off entry-level opportunities, while licensing requirements and their costs block other paths to a better life.

Unlivable Cities

California's cities, from San Francisco, Oakland and Sacramento, to L.A. and even formerly-pretty Orange County, now teem with thousands of people living in their streets. Many drug-addicted and/or mentally ill, these individuals pose hazards to themselves and those around them. Yet rather than providing recovery services or pathways to helping them achieve their full potentials, billions of taxpayer dollars are directed to *stasis*, including delivering drug paraphernalia and other support that keeps people on the street and away from real help. San Francisco's Tenderloin is a blocks-long open-air fentanyl market, and drug overdoses have exploded, especially during the COVID shutdowns.

Having destroyed cheap housing through urban renewal and regulations that removed low-cost options from the market, government now mandates “affordable housing” that costs \$500,000 or more per unit, and, not surprisingly, has been produced at a trickle, providing *no* relief from the crisis.

Having also destroyed their mid- and downtowns with anti-enterprise policies, cities offer special favors to their favored cronies of the day: San Francisco famously offered Twitter tax exemptions to locate in the depressed mid-Market area. The city of Oakland decided its salvation lay in becoming a marijuana center, providing start-up funds for new dispensaries under its “cannabis equity program.” (While I am a proponent of drug legalization, the *caveat* is that it be offset by community standards and education—not subsidized as a celebrated lifestyle.) Needless to say, neither approach has resulted in revitalization.

Basic Services No Longer Provided

The traditional/conservative view of legitimate government-provided services includes such basics as streets, schools, and police. California has a bad habit of directing funding to favored projects, with automobile taxes, for example, going to high-speed rail. Decades of neglect of our streets and highways has left them in a shambles: a recent study shows California as the state with the worst roads in the country, despite the highest gas taxes.

Oakland voters by an 87% majority approved a bond measure for road improvement, with funds languishing for years as the city pondered how to direct them, finally settling on an “equity” allocation: first identifying the worst streets near schools, then dividing the city up to weigh (1) the proportion of poor-condition local streets each area contains, and (2) the proportion of Oakland’s historically underserved communities that live in each area. Not surprisingly, this methodology has left many if not most streets potholed. In the tradition of the “invisible hand,” a pair of “Pothole Vigilantes” came to the rescue, clandestinely filling potholes in the dead of night. Oakland’s mayor’s response to this threat on her DOT’s monopoly: “Thanks, PVs,” she Tweeted. “This job will be for in-house union pros.”

Similarly, long before “defund the police” became a national movement, Californians had a first-hand taste of rationed policing. After Oakland defunded its force by 10% in 2010, its police department released a list of 44 crimes to which it would no longer respond. Not surprisingly, crime rocketed, and those who could afford to responded by making private security a high-growth industry. USA Today has ranked California as having the highest murder rate in the country—and that’s before the COVID shutdowns. Since then, violent crime has exploded, with children as young as 11 now among its perpetrators.

K – 12 education tops California’s budget spending, with an average per-student cost of \$12,000. Yet California ranks among the bottom states in the nation for student achievement in reading, math, and science, with just 30% of 8th graders testing proficient in reading, 29% in math, and an abysmal 24% in science. However, California is in the forefront in teaching students about sex, gender and, if the state Education Department gets its way, soon in “critical” ethnic studies that teaches that capitalism is racist; African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans and American Indians are victims; and that Jews and Irish in America have secured white “racial privilege.” Hardly an education preparing a generation to succeed in meeting 21st century challenges.

The End of Independent Contracting; Power to Unions

In 2019, California passed AB5, ostensibly an anti-“gig” worker law to “protect” Uber and Lyft drivers, but in practice shutting down independent contract work for freelance writers, photographers, journalists, DoorDash drivers, and including medical professionals like certified registered nurse anesthesiologists. It impacted an estimated 2 million workers in California, in a period in which COVID shutdowns put millions out of work, and made delivery Apps the lifelines of millions of others sheltering in place. Joe Biden has promised to extend the law nationwide, where it’s estimated to harm 57 million Americans—a sop to his union backers looking forward to a “Great Awakening” under his presidency.

Green Policies’ Real Outcomes: A Degraded Environment, Blackouts, High Utility Costs

California’s “green” energy mandates have resulted in its neglect of public lands. The federal government is responsible for land and fire management on more than 40 percent of California land, while the state is responsible for fire prevention, suppression, and safety in a little over 30% of lands. Shifting land management from responsible maintenance, including forest management tactics of controlled burns, targeted tree-harvesting and -thinning, and brush clearing, the federal and state governments now oversee lands that are tinderboxes for our growing out-of-control wildfires. Smoke from the fires results in a worst-in-the-nation air quality, entirely offsetting gains made from mandated reductions in “greenhouse gases” from power plants and other regulations. California’s politicians are protected from accountability for these unintended consequences of their policies, however: “California tracks wildfire emissions separately from fossil fuel emissions, so the wildfires won’t impact the progress the state makes toward its climate goals on paper.”

California’s black-outs result from two state government-originated causes:

1) California’s mandates for “green” energy production have resulted in utilities shifting resources to building solar and wind at the expense of maintaining its equipment, undergrounding lines, and other fire-prevention measures. As a result, when there is a perceived threat of wildfires—e.g., it’s *windy*—large swaths of people have their power shut off as a preventative measure.

2) Solar doesn’t work at night, nor do solar and wind produce enough energy to meet high demand, e.g., when it’s *hot*.

The result of both are massive black-outs, leaving thousands of people at risk from heat with no air conditioning, poor air quality with no power to run air purifiers, loss of life-saving devices, fire from candles, and other hazards of being without power for days on end. No one has explained how this already overtaxed grid is going to handle the increased demand from Gov. Newsom’s ban of gas-fired cars effective in 2035.

And to add insult to injury, Californians bear the highest utility costs in the country: 40% above the national average, and double our neighboring states of Oregon and Washington.

Reasons for Optimism

There are plenty of Californians who understand and appreciate free markets, freedom of speech, and personal and property rights, and we're not quiet in sharing information of its benefits to others. Fortunately, many Californians are starting to wake up to the causes behind the destruction of this once Golden State, and a backlash is afoot. Republicans flipped four congressional seats in the 2020 election, and younger folks who consider themselves progressives are starting to Tweet such sentiments as that "homelessness in San Francisco is enough to turn you alt-right."

And thanks to his ineptitude in dealing with wildfires, massive unemployment fraud and general dysfunction of state government, his draconian shutdown of the state for the past 9 months (which hasn't prevented "surges" far worse than elsewhere), and especially his own blatant disregard of his own stay at home order, Governor Newsom is now facing a very real recall threat. Despite the MSM's reporting it as "Recall effort against California governor an attempt to 'destabilize the political system,' analysts say." organizers of the recall point out: "We wouldn't have been as successful as we've been if it weren't for Gavin Newsom."

Americans who would rather forestall the "Californication" of the country under the Biden-Harris/Biden-Sanders platforms would do well to get up to speed with good, alternative information to share with friends, associates, and neighbors.

It's been said before, but bears repeating: information is Leviathan's enemy. Arm yourself. We at Independent are here to help.

Mary L. G. Theroux is Senior Vice President of the Independent Institute.

Posts by Mary L. G. Theroux **Mary L. G. Theroux** is Senior Vice President of the Independent Institute. Having received her A.B. in economics from Stanford University, Ms. Theroux is Managing Director of Lightning Ventures, L.P., a San Francisco Bay Area investment firm, and Vice President of the C.S. Lewis Society of California. She is former Chairman of the Advisory Board for the Alameda County Salvation Army; former Chairman and current member of the San Francisco Salvation Army Advisory Board, and also serves on the National Advisory Board of The Salvation Army.

Having been a director of nine corporations and three foundations, Ms. Theroux was also Chairman of Garvey International, Inc., and Co-Founder, President, and CEO of San Francisco Grocery Express, Ltd. Articles on Ms. Theroux have appeared in Business Week, Forbes, Savvy, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle, and other publications.

Her articles have appeared in Forbes, Huffington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco Examiner, Visión Hispana, Houston Business Journal, Washington Examiner, San Francisco Business Times, Providence Journal, Tallahassee Democrat, Gallipolis Daily Tribune, San Marcos Daily Record, Union Daily Times, Daily Sentinel, and Point Pleasant Register.



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(Revised 2/2017)