COLAB San Luis Obispo County

The Coalition of Labor Agriculture and Business

WEEKLY UPDATE
DECEMBER 22 - 28, 2024

PEACE AND JOY TO EVERYONE, EVEN THE MISTAKEN MISLED LEFT

THE WEEKLY UPDATE WILL RETURN ON JANUARY6, 2025

THIS WEEK
SEE PAGE 4

NO MEETINGS
AGENCIES OFF UNTIL JANUARY 2025

LAST WEEK
SEE PAGE 5

BOS LETS PUBLIC FACILITIES DEV. FEES RISE

WINDFALL FEDERAL GRANT $10 MILLION
FOR PEOPLE WHO LOST HOUSING IN THE 2023 STORMS
***DID ANYONE IN SLO COUNTY ACTUALLY LOSE A HOME*?**

HOMELESS SERVICES FUNDING UPDATE
BUT HOW ARE THEY DOING ON THE FIVE YEAR PLAN TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS BY 50% BY 2028?

EMERGENT ISSUES
SEE PAGE 14

THE DAILY CHART: DEMOGRAPHIC DISASTER
BY STEVEN HAYWARD

CPUC APPROVES $722.6 MILLION RATE HIKE FOR 2025 TO KEEP THE DIABLO CANYON NUCLEAR PLANT OPEN

COLAB IN DEPTH

SEE PAGE 32

THE ALGORITHMS OF ERASURE

The problem with California is that the oligarchy that runs it is committed to turning diverse nations and cultures into totally undifferentiated human matter

BY EDWARD RING

"PERSONNEL IS POLICY" MEANS DEMOCRACY IS DYING

BY VINCENT COOK

SPONSORS

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

No Board of Supervisors' Meetings are scheduled between now and 2025. The other agencies are off as well.

2025 Board of Supervisors Meeting Calendar

January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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February

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June

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September

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October

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December

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28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6				

Board Meetings
CSAC Leg Annual Conference
Swearing in Meeting
Budget Hearings
Board Break
Holidays
CSAC Annual Conference

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (SLOCOG)
SAN LUIS OBISPO REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY (RTA)
2025 MEETING CALENDAR (*Adopted on August 14, 2024*)

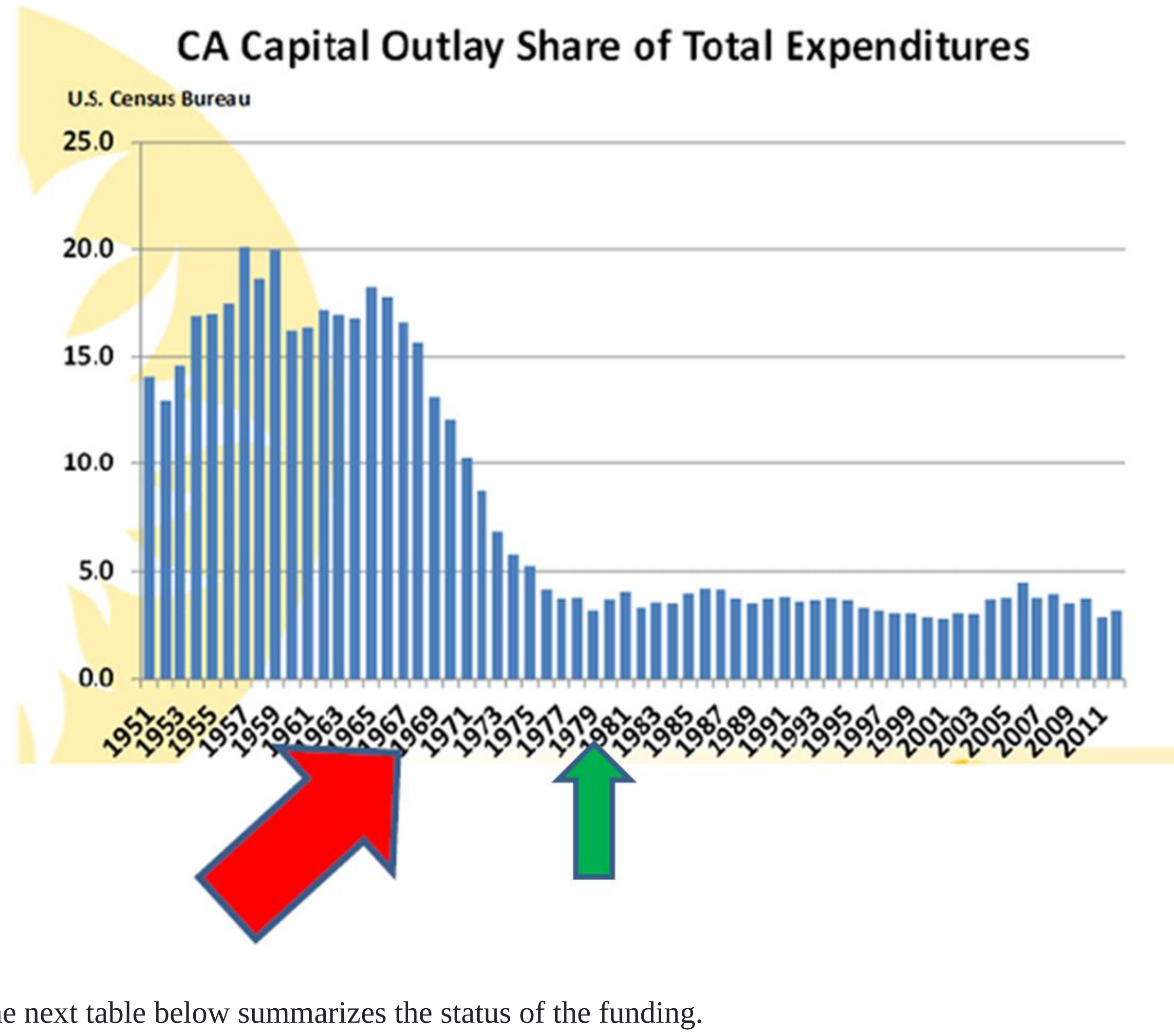
SLOCOG/RTA MEETING DATES	GROUP	AGENDA DIST.	MEETING DATE	KEY TOPICS, ISSUES, DEADLINES
JAN. 8, 2025 RTA & SLOCOG	EXEC COM **RTA & SLOCOG**	12/6/24 **12/18/24**	12/11/24 **1/8/25**	**RTA:** Election of RTA Board Officers (jointly with SLOCOG); Financial audits FY 23/24; Various grant resolutions **SLOCOG:** New Board Orientation, Election - SLOCOG Board Officers (jointly with RTA); Board Member Committee and Interagency assignments; Advisory Committee Election of Officers (SSTAC, TTAC, CTAC); Reappoint SLOCOG At-Large representatives; Employee Recognition for years of service
FEB. 5, 2025 SLOCOG (RTA tentative)	EXEC COM SSTAC TTAC/CTAC **SLOCOG Board**	1/10/25 1/16/25 1/17/25 **1/24/25**	1/15/25 1/22/25 1/22/25 **2/5/25**	**SLOCOG:** Plaque of Appreciation - outgoing President; Resolution of Appreciation - outgoing Board members (if any); Statewide ATP; Draft OWP & Budget Assumptions 2025/2026; Proposed 2025 State and Federal Legislative Programs; Review Caltrans SHOPP; 24/25 Unmet Transit Needs & Bike and Ped. Improvements Hearing; 2026 STIP & SB1 Fund Programs update; Regional Rideshare Biannual Progress Report; Call for Projects: Access for All Program; Federal Performance Measures **RTA:** Tentative
MAR. 5, 2025 RTA (SLOCOG tentative)	EXEC COM (SSTAC) - **V** (TTAC/CTAC) - **V** **RTA Board**	2/7/25 (2/13/25) (2/14/25) **2/21/25**	2/12/25 (2/19/25) (2/19/25) **3/5/25**	**RTA:** RTA Budget Assumptions 2025/2026 **SLOCOG:** Tentative
APR. 2, 2025 SLOCOG (RTA tentative)	EXEC COM SSTAC TTAC/CTAC **SLOCOG Board**	3/7/25 3/13/25 3/14/25 **3/21/25**	3/12/25 3/19/25 3/19/25 **4/2/25**	**SLOCOG:** FY 2025/26 OWP and Budget Adoption; TDA/STA Fund Apportionment for FY 2025/26; Transit Programming; FY 25/26 Rural Transit Fund & State of Good Repair (SGR) Program of Projects; 25/26 Unmet Transit Needs Findings; FY 24/25 Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) programming; Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Goals; Draft Regional Growth Forecast (RGF) **RTA:** Tentative
MAY 7, 2025 RTA (SLOCOG tentative)	EXEC COM (SSTAC) - **V** (TTAC/CTAC) - **V** **RTA Board**	4/4/25 (4/17/25) (4/18/25) **4/25/25**	4/9/25 (4/23/25) (4/23/25) **5/7/25**	**RTA:** Final FY 2025/2026 Operating/Capital Budgets; RTA Budget Adoption **SLOCOG:** Tentative
JUNE 4, 2025 SLOCOG (RTA tentative)	EXEC COM SSTAC TTAC/CTAC **SLOCOG Board**	5/9/25 5/15/25 5/16/25 **5/23/25**	5/14/25 5/21/25 5/21/25 **6/4/25**	**SLOCOG:** Conditional Approval of TDA Claims for FY 2025/26; Triennial Performance Audit presentation; 2026 STIP & SB1 Fund Programs update; Polling Results; State Legislative Update; FY 2025/26 Bike and Ped. Improvements Requests Update; Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) Status Report **RTA:** Tentative
JULY 9, 2025 RTA (SLOCOG tentative)	EXEC COM (SSTAC) - **V** (TTAC/CTAC) - **V** **RTA Board**	6/6/25 (6/12/25) (6/13/25) **6/27/25**	6/11/25 (6/18/25) (6/18/25) **7/9/25**	**RTA:** Tentative **SLOCOG:** Tentative
AUG. 6, 2025 SLOCOG (RTA tentative)	EXEC COM SSTAC TTAC/CTAC **SLOCOG Board**	7/11/25 7/17/25 7/18/25 **7/25/25**	7/16/25 7/23/25 7/23/25 **8/6/25**	**SLOCOG:** Status and Assessment of Programmed Projects; Draft SLOCOG and RTA 2026 Meeting Calendar; Closed Session: Exec. Dir. Performance evaluation; Regional Rideshare Biannual Progress Report; RTP Financial; RGF Adoption **RTA:** Tentative
SEPT. 3, 2025 RTA (SLOCOG tentative)	EXEC COM (SSTAC) - **V** (TTAC/CTAC) - **V** **RTA Board**	8/8/25 (8/14/25) (8/15/25) **8/22/25**	8/13/25 (8/20/25) (8/20/25) **9/3/25**	**RTA:** Tentative **SLOCOG:** Tentative
OCT. 1, 2025 SLOCOG (RTA tentative)	EXEC COM SSTAC TTAC/CTAC **SLOCOG Board**	9/5/25 9/11/25 9/12/25 **9/19/25**	9/10/25 9/17/25 9/17/25 **10/1/25**	**SLOCOG:** Adoption of Unmet Transit Needs Criteria; Rideshare Week & International Walk-to-School Day (in Executive Director's Report); Caltrans Community-Based Transportation Planning Grants; Transit Programming; Adopt POP for 5311 non-urbanized formula funds; Transit Needs Assessment Update; SLOCOG Open House (tentative); 2027 RTP: Transit **RTA:** Tentative
NOV. 5, 2025 RTA (SLOCOG tentative)	EXEC COM (SSTAC) - **V** (TTAC/CTAC) - **V** **RTA Board**	10/3/25 (10/16/25) (10/17/25) **10/24/25**	10/8/25 (10/22/25) (10/22/25) **11/5/25**	**RTA:** RTA Budget Amendment (if necessary) **SLOCOG:** Tentative – SLOCOG Workshop
DEC. 3, 2025 SLOCOG (RTA tentative)	EXEC COM SSTAC TTAC/CTAC **SLOCOG Board**	11/7/25 11/13/25 11/14/25 **11/21/25**	11/12/25 11/19/25 11/19/25 **12/3/25**	**SLOCOG:** Year-end legislative Report; FY 2026/2027 Preliminary Overall Work Program; Recommendations for productivity improvements of operators; SLOCOG Annual Report 2024/25; SLOCOG Financial Audits FY 24/25; SLOCOG Handbook Update **RTA:** Tentative
JAN. 7, 2026 RTA & SLOCOG	EXEC COM **RTA & SLOCOG**	12/5/25 **12/22/25**	12/10/25 **1/7/26**	**RTA:** Election of RTA Board Officers (jointly with SLOCOG); Financial audits FY 24/25; Various grant resolutions **SLOCOG:** New Board Orientation, Election of SLOCOG Board Officers (jointly with RTA); Board Member Committee and Interagency assignments; Advisory Committee Election of Officers (SSTAC, TTAC, CTAC)

* **SSTAC, TTAC and CTAC meet at the SLOCOG Conference Room (1114 Marsh Street, San Luis Obispo, California) or Teleconference: SSTAC @ 12:15 p.m., TTAC @ 2:00 p.m., CTAC @ 4:30 p.m.**
** **SSTAC/TTAC/CTAC meetings in *PARENTHESIS* are *TENTATIVE* and will occur only if issues are to be addressed prior to "Special" SLOCOG Board meetings.**
*** **SLOCOG/SLORTA meetings are normally in the County Board of Supervisors Chambers, Katcho Achadjian Government Center San Luis Obispo County, 1055 Monterey Street, San Luis Obispo, beginning at 9:00 a.m. The shaded portions indicate all scheduled SLOCOG meetings. Alternating months are scheduled RTA meetings.**

LAST WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

Board of Supervisors Meeting of Tuesday, December 17, 2024 (Scheduled) – Last Scheduled Supervisor's Meeting in 2024

Item 8 - Request to receive and file the Annual Report for the Public Facilities Fees Program for FY 2023-24, and provide any direction as deemed necessary. The report is required annually. It covers the use of fees assessed for new development that are used to help offset the cost of new infrastructure for parks, libraries, and other facilities, as listed in the table below. Again, like so many of the fees, the theory is to tax new development was promulgated in the 1970's by academics and government professionals as government costs began to accelerate faster than local economic growth. The cost acceleration coincided with the legalization of state and local employee unions that resulted in a shift in government spending patterns. Sometimes Proposition 13 is blamed for the phenomenon, but as can be seen in the chart, it came well after the shift. The red arrow points to when collective bargaining for government employees in California was legalized. The green arrow points to when Proposition 13 became operational.



The next table below summarizes the status of the funding.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR FY 2023-24

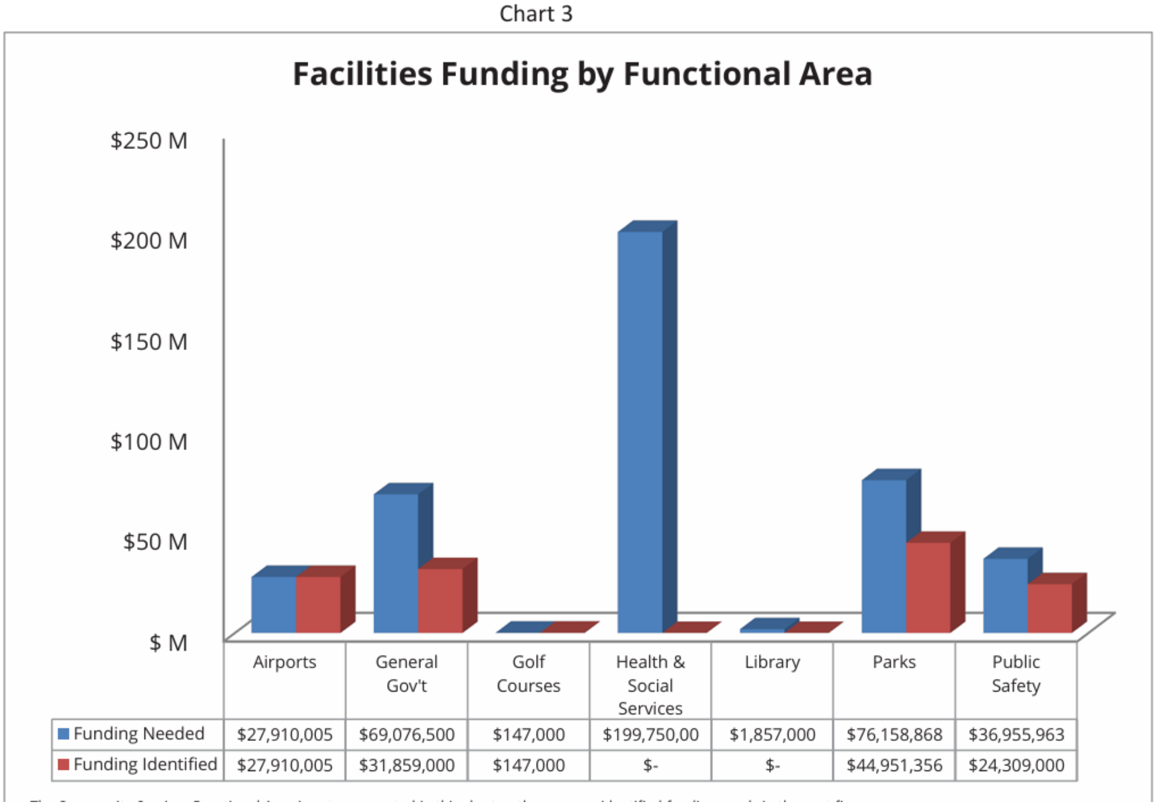
PUBLIC FACILITY FEES

For Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2024

FACILITY FEE TYPE	BEGINNING BALANCE AS OF 7/1/2023	AMOUNT RECEIVED	INTEREST EARNED	EXPENDED	ENDING BALANCE AS OF 6/30/2024
FIRE FACILITIES	9,192,498	397,263	264,399	4,343,659	5,510,501
GENERAL GOVERNMENT	269,679	249,529	3,844	400,000	123,052
LAW ENFORCEMENT	2,004,369	169,908	50,188	1,773,811	450,654
PARKS	1,394,533	406,491	42,984	409,574	1,434,434
LIBRARY FACILITIES	1,377,174	133,614	43,328	32,612	1,521,504
AFFORDABLE HOUSING	-	-	-	-	-
CAYUCOS FIRE	-	-	-	-	-
SAN MIGUEL FIRE	-	13,842	-	13,842	-
SANTA MARGARITA FIRE DISTRICT	-	-	-	-	-
OCEANO FIRE DISTRICT	-	37,829	-	37,829	-
TOTAL	14,238,253	1,408,476	404,743	7,011,327	9,040,145

Note that because there is so little development in the unincorporated county, the amount received (highlighted in yellow) is not very much when compared to the needs.

Chart 3



A significant funding gap in some of the categories for facilities funding is apparent.

The fees levied are outlined in the table below:

Attachment 2, Current Fees

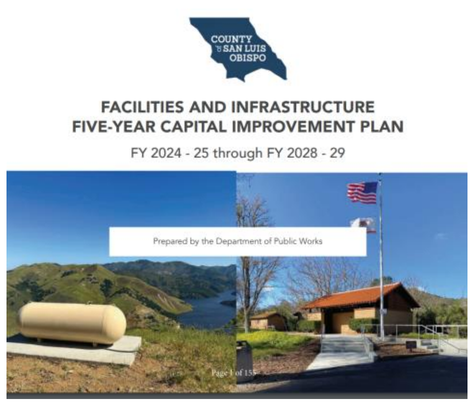
2023 PUBLIC FACILITIES FEES							
CURRENT	**RESIDENTIAL (per unit)**				**NON-RESIDENTIAL (per 1000 Sq')**		
Fee Category	**Single Family**	**Single Family - ADU**	**Multi-Family**	**Multi-Family - ADU**	**Commercial**	**Office**	**Industrial**
Parks	$2,737	$1,212	$1,925	$852	$0	$0	$0
Sheriff	$807	$358	$561	$249	$284	$631	$203
General Gov't	$1,209	$536	$842	$373	$426	$945	$303
Fire	$2,359	$1,045	$1,640	$727	$832	$1,844	$594
Library	$811	$359	$581	$257	$82	$183	$59
Admin Fee 2.0%	$158	$70	$111	$49	$32	$72	$23
Total Fees	**$8,081**	**$3,580**	**$5,660**	**$2,507**	**$1,656**	**$3,675**	**$1,182**

2024 PUBLIC FACILITIES FEES							
ADJUSTED	**RESIDENTIAL (per unit)**				**NON-RESIDENTIAL (per 1000 Sq')**		
Fee Category	**Single Family**		**Multi-Family**		**Commercial**	**Office**	**Industrial**
Parks	$2,778	$1,230	$1,954	$865	$0	$0	$0
Sheriff	$826	$366	$574	$255	$291	$646	$208
General Gov't	$1,238	$549	$862	$382	$436	$967	$310
Fire	$2,415	$1,070	$1,679	$744	$852	$1,888	$608
Library	$830	$368	$595	$263	$84	$187	$60
Admin Fee 2.0%	$162	$72	$113	$50	$33	$74	$24
Total Fees	**$8,249**	**$3,655**	**$5,777**	**$2,559**	**$1,696**	**$3,762**	**$1,210**

Note that this report does not include roads, government utilities, flood works, bridges, transit facilities, public housing, refuse disposal or climate action/CO_2 reduction that are all funded under separate fee and tax programs.

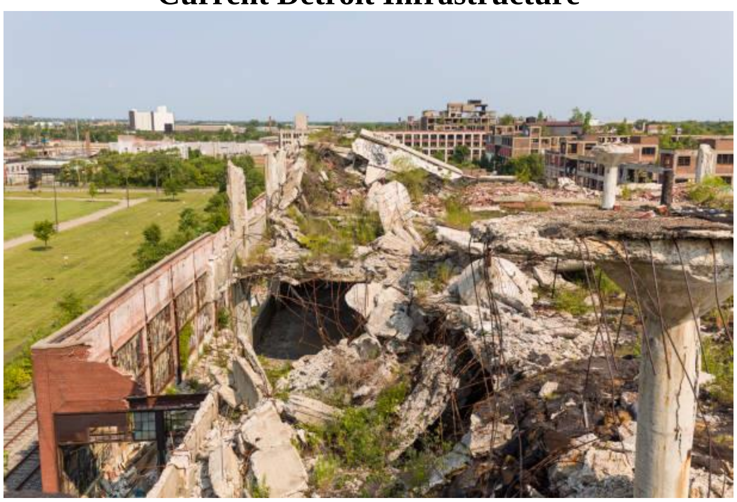
One of the attachments to this item is County's FY 2024-25 – FY2028-29 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The Department of Public Works has improved this document in recent years.

https://agenda.slocounty.ca.gov/iip/sanluisobispo/file/getfile/166357 Control Click. Be patient. It's a big file and will take some time to open.



Ancient Roman Infrastructure

Current Detroit Infrastructure



Item 26 - Request to 1) approve a resolution authorizing the acceptance of the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds from the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) for a total amount not to exceed $10,938,837; 2) delegate authority to the Director of Social Services or designee to execute any agreements, amendments, or related documents for this allocation that do not increase the level of General Fund support required by Social Services; and 3) authorize a corresponding budget adjustment in the amount of $10,938,837 to increase appropriation within Fund Center (FC) 290 – DSS Homeless & Affordable Housing, by 4/5 vote. Receipt grant was approved on the consent calendar. No one asked how the funding was going to be used. The County is receiving a windfall $10.9 million. The write up is a little vague with respect to actual uses but does state in part:

The primary objective of the MHRE Program is the provision of decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the areas impacted by the DR-4683 disaster. Additionally, the Program is designed to ensure that the housing needs of very low, low-, and moderate-income households and vulnerable populations, including individuals who were made homeless as a result of the disaster, are addressed to the greatest extent feasible. Furthermore, the Program will not only address disaster-related damages but also will mitigate potential future damage.

Was anyone in SLO County made homeless by the 2023 rains? In any case, this allocation is a small part of the $6 trillion dollars allocated by the Federal Government in 2021-23. This is entirely new debt and has been the principal driver of inflation. You are paying for it all with your higher grocery bill, higher energy bills, higher housing costs, and stuff like $50,000 Chevrolets. Essentially your money is worth way less than it was even 5 years ago.

Meanwhile the Board of Supervisors can dole it out to non-for-profits and contractors and take credit for the patronage.

Item 31 - It is recommended that the Board receive and file a report on homeless services funding and provide direction as necessary. The verbal staff report was pretty good. The Board ultimately received the item and directed staff to return with alternative solutions to the substantial projected funding gap.

The report contains many numbers covering a variety of subjects, including housing units provided, housing units pending, various social service and medical service clients treated, funds, etc. The problem is that it doesn't tie back to the County's adopted Five Year Plan to cut homelessness by 50% by 2028. At that time the County reported that it had about 1450 homeless people at any given time. The Plan contained specific tasks and metrics for each year from 2023 to 2028 to meet the targets. Since then Social Services has modified the Plan, and it is difficult to determine the outcomes so far.

The author of the Plan, Joe Dvonik, was actually a serious project manager who developed a credible Plan. The Board and the then CAO determined to demote the project from the executive office to the Department of Social Services. We forecast at that time that the action would dilute the effort. Meanwhile, Dvonik resigned and was hired by Santa Barbara County.

The Board should have sent this report back and get a true picture of where we are in terms of the original 1450, (some were sheltered, some were not) and exactly where we are now. The staff understands that the equation is $x = 1450 \sum$ (a sheltered) + (b unsheltered) + (new homeless).

In other words, how are we doing per the adopted plan?

The write up indicates that the County is spending about $26 million per year on the problem.

Table 1. Summary of Total FY 2024-25 County Homelessness Funding

Source	Amount
Annual funding restricted to specific subpopulations (CalWORKs, Bridge, MHSA)	$7,587,529
Annual funding available for wider population of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness and for low-income households (ESG, CoC, CDBG, HOME, PLHA)	$4,932,149
One-time funds (HHAP, SB1090, Opioid Settlement)	$8,307,419
General Funds	$4,926,239
Total	$25,753,336

At 1450 homeless cases, this would be about $18,000 per year per individual or family.

Much of the report indicates that much more funding will be needed.

Table 7 Projected investment needed in affordable housing

Item	Cost	Result
Annual investment through 2028	$5,000,000-$6,000,000	1,819 affordable housing units added if all projects currently planned are awarded tax credit funding
Total	$20,000,000-$24,000,000	

Table 10 Summary of projected annual costs for maintaining system capacity and meeting Five-Year Plan goals

Item	Estimated annual cost
Projected cost to maintain current operational capacity + in process expansions	$15,195,931- $16,029,175
Projected cost to increase operational capacity to meet goals of five-year plan	$5,356,824 - $8,513,390
Annual investment into affordable housing builds	$5M-$6M
General Fund Administrative costs	$ 3,292,338
Total	$28,845,093- $33,834,9031

Table 12 Projected gap at full operational capacity as envisioned in County's Five-Year plan

Item	Projected cost at full operational capacity	Annual funding at current level (state, federal and general fund)	Gap
Operational Support for homeless services	$20,552,755-$24,542,565	$3,263,544	$17,289,211 - $21,279,021
Affordable Housing Infrastructure	$5,000,000-$6,000,000	$2,974,987	$2,025,013 - $3,025,013
Administrative Costs	$3,292,338	$3,292,338	0
Total	$28,845,093 - $33,834,903	$9,530,869	$19,314,224 - $24,304,034

These tables were very confusing as the mix capital costs with operating costs. Staff should inform the Board as to what are the chances of filling a $25 million gap over the next 3 years (the remaining time for the 5 year plan). Given the County's projected FY 2025-26 revenue expenditure gap of $18 million, what are the prospects here?

Item 35 - Any Supervisor may ask a question for clarification, make an announcement, or report briefly on his or her activities. In addition, Supervisors may request staff to report back to the Board at a subsequent meeting concerning any matter or may request that staff Place a matter of business on a future agenda. Any request to place a matter of Business for consideration on a future agenda requires the majority vote of the Board. There were no requests.

Item 36 - Added item #36 - Request to: 1) approve a Funding Agreement with Southern California Edison (SCE) in the amount of $36,339,000 from 2024-2027 to fund the Central California Rural Regional Energy Network (CCR-REN) and authorize the Director of Planning and Building or designee to execute the Funding Agreement as well as any future agreements and amendments that do not result in unbudgeted costs to the General Fund of the County of San Luis Obispo; 2) approve a Resolution amending the Position Allocation List (PAL) for Fund Center (FC) 142- Planning and Building to add 1.00 FTE Limited-Term (LT) Administrative Services Manager through December 31, 2027; 3) approve contracts for professional services with Willdan Energy Solutions for $320,000; Brandt Energy Opportunity for $205,000; Willdan Energy Solutions for $5,700,000 and Rising Sun Center for Opportunity for $13,700,000 over the specified terms for the detailed program services, respectively, and; authorize the Director of Planning and Building or designee to approve any amendments to these contracts provided the costs for such amendments do not increase the level of General Fund Support; and 4) approve a related budget adjustment in the amount of $36,339,000 for FC 142 – Planning and Building to provide necessary authority to support the CCR-REN Programs and the County's role as the Portfolio Administrator, by 4/5 vote. This item will be heard following item #30, Public

Comment Period. (Planning and Building). The Item was carried over from last week, as the write-up really didn't explain the purpose and services of the program.

The additional information provided this week comes in the form of a PowerPoint. The phrasing is all about "collaboration, equity, and pragmatic responses to community needs."

During your Board's consideration of ***Item 15*** *relating to CCR-REN on December 10, 2024, Board members requested that the item be brought back at this meeting with a brief presentation to clarify program structure and offerings. Attachment 1 of this item provides a summary presentation of the proposed CCR-REN.*

Another slide suggests that the program provide assistance to isolated communities and tradesmen but never explains what the services are:

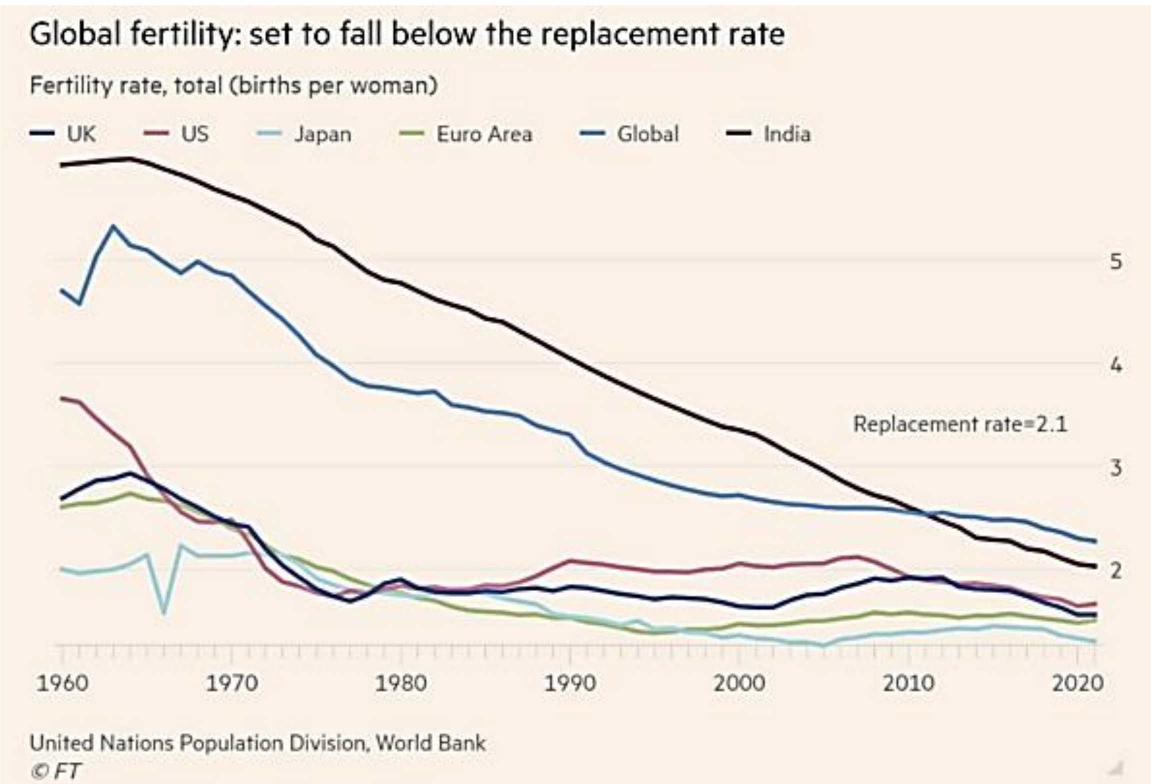
- **Commercial** – A direct install program for energy efficiency measures for small to medium and hard to reach customers
- **Workforces, Education and Training (WE&T)/Residential** – A training and job creation program for hard-to-reach and underprivileged youth, as well as energy efficiency home visits and kits for residential customers
- **Codes and Standards (C&S)**– A program dedicated to offering compliance and comprehension support for public and private sector building professionals
- **Public** – A program to provide energy efficiency project support for jurisdictions
- **Finance** – A concierge service to support customers with guidance on existing financial offerings for energy efficiency projects

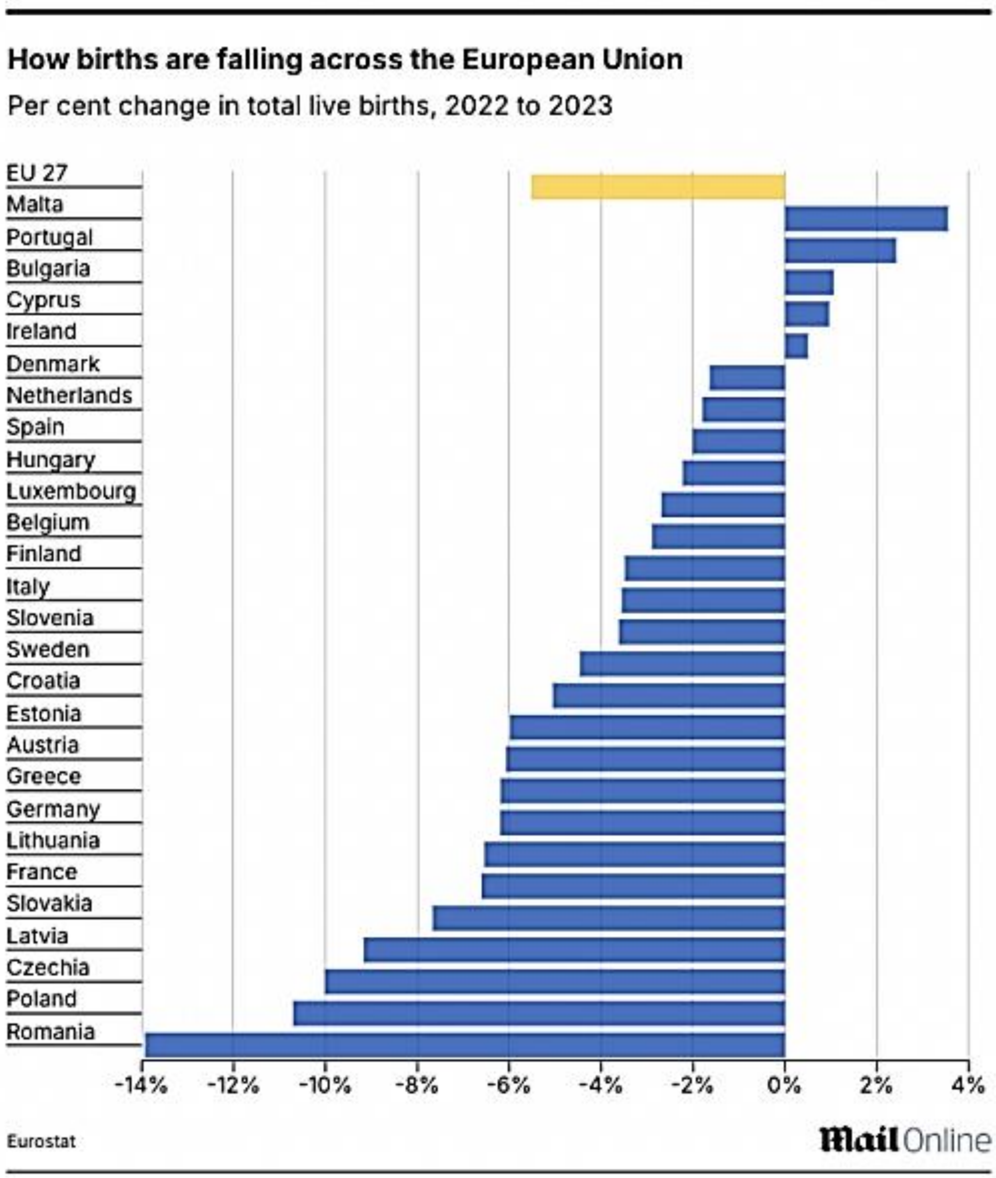
It is all still pretty vague for a $36 million rake off of your utility payments.

EMERGENT ISSUES

Item 1 - THE DAILY CHART: DEMOGRAPHIC DISASTER - POSTED ON DECEMBER 20, 2024 BY STEVEN HAYWARD IN THE DAILY CHART

I'm so old I remember when everyone believed the "population bomb" nonsense, so it is with no small sense of irony that among demographers the hot topic of the moment is rapidly falling fertility rates, to sub-replacement levels in most advanced industrialized nations. As I put it in my recent article for Civitas Outlook, it is possible that the last South Korean will be born sometime late in this century. Here's the latest from the world the last year in the EU:





Meanwhile, amidst these aggregate headline numbers, just which subgroups have the highest fertility rates in the EU? Here's one hint:

Item 2 - CPUC Approves $722.6 million Rate Hike for 2025 To Keep the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Plant Open

Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant. (Photo: slocounty.ca.gov)

CPUC Approves $722.6 million Rate Hike For 2025 To Keep The Diablo Canyon Nuclear Plant Open *'Diablo Canyon gives a steady stream of clean energy'* By Evan Symon, December 20, 2024

In a 4-1 vote on Thursday, the California Public Utilities Commission approved $722.6 million in additional ratepayer costs to pay for extended operations at both units of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant through the end of 2025 – a final part of the needed funding to keep the plant itself open through 2030.

The debate over extending the life of the Diablo Canyon Plant has been ongoing since 2018, when concerns over earthquakes, nuclear waste pollution, and other factors convinced the CPUC to close the plant by 2025. Proponents of the plant moved to try and extend the life of the plant, with concerns over state energy production bringing more support in their favor. Many were attracted to the fact that keeping the plant open for a decade or two more would save the state $21 billion in systems costs, while others, concerned about large gaps in California's energy production while transitioning into the 100% renewable energy power by 2045 goal, signaled support as a power source to help bridge the gap. The fact that Diablo Canyon provides 9% of California's total energy production, and is a clean source of energy, has also convinced many people of keeping the plant open.

While several bills in the 2010's and early 2020's failed to keep the plant open, one, SB 846, was finally passed by both houses in the state legislature last year. At the same time, Governor Gavin Newsom put out a proposal to keep the plant running for another 5-10 years, outlining how state and federal support would be needed. Despite signing the bill into law, over $1 billion in funding was still needed to make the extension feasible, as well as final approvals from multiple state and federal agencies, such as approval of a new license by the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

In November of 2022, the Department of Energy awarded $1.1 billion to extend the life of the plant, signaling federal support for the plant for both clean energy and to help avert a power crisis in California in the next decade while green energy production gradually replaces fossil fuel energy. This led to the NRC deciding in March 2023 to keep the plant open while license renewal is being considered. With the clock temporarily suspended, final extensions to at least 2030 now came down to license renewal from both CPUC and the NRC.

Environmental groups continued to challenge the plant and PG&E to close it by 2025. However, despite numerous lawsuits, all of their attempts failed. This included a state court rejecting a lawsuit by an environmental group to close the plant in August of last year and the NRC rejecting a request from several environmental groups to shut down one of the reactors in October 2023. Subsequently, the CPUC voted to keep the plant running through 2030 in November 2023 and the Biden administration finalized the $1.1 billion in January. In total, the cost came out to $8.9 billion to keep the plant open through 2030, but has been offset by not only the federal funding, but by $5 billion in expected revenue and $6 billion in savings for the state for having a reliable energy source. Lawsuits from environmental groups this year failed to block any of the funding.

CPUC approval

However, extended operations were needed in 2025. In total, another $722.6 million would be needed for the plant to get through the year. After months of debate, the CPUC approved the needed funds on Thursday, keeping the plan to keep Diablo Canyon open through 2030 on track.

While the funding was a relief to the state and energy providers because of the needed nuclear power stopgap, other groups condemned the rate hike on Thursday and Friday, pointing out that it was the fifth such hike this year. According to the major power providers in the state, the Diablo Canyon hike only amounts to only about $2 added onto each bill. However, advocates say that all the hikes have added up and that companies like PG&E should pay for them At the CPUC meeting on Thursday, multiple speakers during public comment noted that PG&E posted a $2.2 billion profit last year.

Jessica Tovar, Executive Director of the Local Clean Energy Alliance said during the meeting that “One fifth of Californians are already behind on their bills, totaling over $2.2 Billion in arrearages. The longer CPUC allows Diablo Canyon to stay open, the higher our PG&E bills will cost. California deserves local clean energy and affordability. PG&E is a criminal enterprise and must be held accountable.”

“It’s unprecedented for the state to allow one utility to collect the costs of its generating resources from the customers of all three of the major utilities,” Utility Reform Network lawyer Matthew Freedman added.

In response, PG&E noted that "Every day, Diablo Canyon produces enough safe, reliable, and affordable clean electricity to meet the energy needs of more than three million Californians, all while producing zero greenhouse gas emissions."

The passage by CPUC now means the Diablo Canyon will continue on through the decade, with energy experts projecting that the state will generate enough extra power by then to allow the shutdown to occur around 2030.

"California doesn't have many options left when it comes to power," Sal Braith, a nuclear engineer who has worked at multiple nuclear plants in the U.S., told the Globe Friday. "Oil and gas, you know, any new plant there will raise hell. Plus many are being shut down. Solar and wind and other renewables? Those are on the rise, but energy storage is still a huge issue since those only generate electricity intermittent. Hydro power has environmentalist problems in many areas. Diablo Canyon gives a steady stream of clean energy, but as you've seen, it is nuclear and you have all the crazies protesting it being open.

"For California, keeping Diablo Canyon open gives the state time to work on their energy problems and keeps enough power being generated in the state. That's why they got the extension last year, that's why we got the rate hike yesterday, and that's why these environmental groups are never going to win. There's too much riding here."

Evan V. Symon is the Senior Editor for the California Globe. Prior to the Globe, he reported for the Pasadena Independent, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, and was head of the Personal Experiences section at Cracked. He can be reached at evan@californiaglobe.com.

COLAB IN DEPTH

IN FIGHTING THE TROUBLESOME LOCAL DAY-TO-DAY ASSAULTS ON OUR FREEDOM AND UNDERLYING IDEOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC CAUSES

THE ALGORITHMS OF ERASURE

The problem with California is that the oligarchy that runs it is committed to turning diverse nations and cultures into totally undifferentiated human matter

BY EDWARD RING

The broad definition of the word algorithm is "a step-by-step procedure for solving a problem or accomplishing some end." This term is a perfect metaphor for the process unfolding around the world wherein, step by step, national identity and individual competence are being erased in a process that is implacable and relentless. In some cases, this algorithmic erasure is literal, expressed in every microtargeted image that hits our ubiquitous screens. But whether it's literal metaphor to describe the culture being imposed upon us, our erasure is happening as if it were driven by an algorithm without a soul.

The primary source for the implementation of our erasure is California's progressive elites. Well before Nvidia took off in Santa Clara and OpenAI opened its doors in San Francisco, California's influencers, from Hollywood to Silicon Valley, have defined the message and controlled the conduits of communication. From legacy entertainment powerhouses like Disney, Universal, Warner, Paramount, and Columbia to modern communications monopolies like Google, Apple, and Meta, the reach of California's technology-enabled cultural influence has no precedent and no equal. And the way California is managing it is shameful and dangerous. The consensus among California's elites, almost all of them progressive liberal Democrats, is to destroy a culture that has inspired individual excellence throughout history.

From the rhetoric of California's politicians and the agenda-driven, formulaic output of California's entertainment industry to the biased algorithms informing California's ubiquitous search engine and social media products, a divisive message is perpetually broadcast to the world. And there is no way to accurately express the foundational essence of that message without being embarrassingly candid. The distilled and unvarnished version goes like this: Straight white men are responsible for the problems of the world, and their power and their culture must be erased.

In many respects, this isn't news. Since the 1980s, discrimination against white men has been institutionalized in America, with California in the vanguard. But in the 1980s, proportional representation was possible without major disruptions to productivity. Today the population of white males in California entering the workforce is reduced to around 20 percent, turning "proportional representation" into a beast that sacrifices competence for inclusion. Worse, what was once blandly referred to as "affirmative action" has morphed into the far more expansive ideology known as "diversity, equity, and inclusion."

How the toxicity of DEI in all of its woke permutations has alienated capable white men was captured for me in an email I received from a younger friend who, despite being a California native, has permanently left the state and has no regrets about his decision. He writes:

"*Could I succeed there? As much as any white male, which means never escaping being a second-class citizen with a weaker set of rights. I don't participate in that because I have ideals, like not discriminating on gender except for recognizing natural biological differences, not discriminating on ethnic background besides recognizing the inherent value of cultural continuity, rewarding hard work and competence in competitive open economy, the value of strong cohesive societies. I would sleep on the street before I would be a slave to a system that hates me.*"

"A system that hates me." That's what we've allowed to be inflicted on our native sons.

But to emphasize the marginalization of white men is to overlook the algorithm's primary objective, which is to eliminate *all* national identities and *all* individual competence. It's not personal. It's not even racist in its intent, even if it is racist in its application. Elevating people in precise proportion to the percentage at which the group they're part of appears in the general population, at the same time as the population itself is being demographically transformed to have no dominant group, accomplishes both of these goals. In fact, it makes them necessary.

Once you have an undifferentiated mass of humans reduced to placeholders in every institution of society, AI algorithms must step in to replace competence, at the same time as cultural algorithms must replace what was once authentic and unique with a Disneylandified, lowest common denominator culture designed to enervate and captivate humans who have devolved into Pavlovian automatons. In this sense, for all of its revolutionary potential, AI is just the natural extension of a process that has been underway for decades.

California's threat to the world isn't that it is the epicenter of cultural power and computational innovation. The problem with California is that the oligarchy that runs it is committed to turning diverse nations and cultures, exhibiting vastly differing capacities for individual and collective excellence, into totally undifferentiated human matter.

The algorithms of erasure may most explicitly target white men, but all manifestations of excellence are swept up in the purge. Asians, heterosexuals, and biological women are obvious additional targets, but the "disadvantaged" beneficiaries of the algorithms are also destined for erasure. The algorithm seeks to destroy every shred of diversity, whether based on gender, ethnicity, or expressions of individuality and excellence. Whether they are deemed privileged or disadvantaged, they shall be assimilated.

This is what California's "progressive liberals" seek to impose on the entire world. With cultural imperatives oriented to the "climate crisis" and the "equity" crisis designed to brainwash us into compliance, we are being herded into smaller and smaller pens. To be sure, the algorithms of erasure festoon the pens of our confinement with immersive AI-driven engagement. They deliver perpetual bursts of dopamine while simultaneously destroying our capacity for independent thought or sustained concentration. We are being programmed to be childless, owning nothing, and part of nothing.

The alternative to algorithms is to preserve differentiated cultures and accept individual inequality—not of opportunity, as we must constantly clarify, but of outcome. And there are glimmers of hope. Promoting this alternative are a handful of Californian billionaires who have decided to reject the algorithms of erasure. Notable among them is Elon Musk, but he's not alone. He is joined by a powerful set of individuals with names that resonate with anyone familiar with the meteoric rise of Silicon Valley power. A partial list includes Mark Andreessen, David Sacks, Joe Lonsdale, Doug Leone, Ben Horowitz, Peter Thiel, and Chamath Palihapitiya; even Mark Zuckerberg is displaying signs of breaking away from the algorithm.

We may hope there is an inherent conflict here that cannot be sustained; the idea that Silicon Valley, where ambitious, ingenious individuals risked everything to turn start-up companies into global behemoths, could align itself with woke Hollywood and, more alarmingly, with a globalist oligarchy bent on conquering the world and crushing the individuality that made them who they are. Perhaps California's elites have only begun to fracture; perhaps a preference cascade is imminent; perhaps realignment is coming. If so, it will alter the momentum of history in the place where such a tectonic shift might make the most difference.

Things may get very interesting over the next few years. A handful of powerful Silicon Valley billionaires have decided to challenge the algorithms of erasure. For that reason, there is hope.

Edward Ring is a senior fellow of the Center for American Greatness. He is also the director of water and energy policy for the California Policy Center, which he co-founded in 2013 and served as its first president. Ring is the author of Fixing California: Abundance, Pragmatism, Optimism (2021) and The Abundance Choice: Our Fight for More Water in California (2022).This article first appeared in American Greatness on December 18, 2024.

“PERSONNEL IS POLICY” MEANS DEMOCRACY IS DYING

BY VINCENT COOK

President-elect Donald Trump’s announced cabinet and White House staff appointments for his next administration have attracted praise from supporters, outrage from opponents, and even criticism from libertarian podcasters like Ron Paul and *Radio Rothbard* hosts Ryan McMaken and Tho Bishop regarding Trump’s hawkish national security picks. Everyone agrees that “personnel is policy” though, meaning that the outspoken policy preferences of many of Trump’s appointees marks a sharp departure from the status quo in Washington DC.

Much like the former Cold War sport of “Kremlinology”—where pundits and academics claimed to discern shifts in Soviet policy by observing which personalities were standing closest to the Great Leader during Red Square military parades or by reading between the lines of whatever banal statements *Pravda* and *Izvestia* were publishing about them—contemporary observers of American politics now attempt to do the same thing based on which personalities are being trotted out at Trump’s rallies and what Trump writes about them on his Truth Social posts. A number of news outlets have even started excitedly parsing Trump’s statements to speculate about the current status of what they call Trump’s “bromance” with Elon Musk and its possible policy implications.

Some credit the phrase “personnel is policy” to Ronald Reagan’s Director of Personnel, Scott Faulkner, who used it to argue for the appointment of hard-line conservatives during Reagan’s 1980 transition. Think tank wonks and pundits have since widely adopted it as a truism for every presidential transition, without paying much attention to what such a phrase implies about the nature of America’s political system. So how do we reconcile this phrase with the old-fashioned notion that America is a republic governed by elected office-holders whose powers are constitutionally limited and separated from one another?

To bring this question into sharper focus, we can turn to Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises’s description of the relationship between elected office-holders and bureaucrats:

The two pillars of democratic government are the primacy of the law and the budget.

Primacy of the law means that no judge or office-holder has the right to interfere with any individual's affairs or conditions unless a valid law requires or empowers him to do so....

The administration, in a democratic community, is not only bound by law but by the budget. Democratic control is budgetary control. The people's representatives have the keys of the treasury. Not a penny must be spent without the consent of parliament. It is illegal to use public funds for any expenditures other than those for which parliament has allocated them.

Bureaucratic management means, under democracy, management in strict accordance with the law and the budget. It is not for the personnel of the administration and for the judges to inquire what should be done for the public welfare and how public funds should be spent. This is the task of the sovereign, the people, and their representatives. The courts, various branches of the administration, the army, and the navy execute what the law and the budget order them to do. Not they but the sovereign is policy-making.

In the absence of objective market tests of profit-and-loss (such as exists in private businesses in a free society, but not in any government), subordinates *always* have to be bound by detailed rules to prevent them from abusing their discretion to act contrary to the goals of their superiors. In other words, to the extent that the phrase "personnel is policy" is true, voters do not have the power to determine policy. Democracy and bureaucratic policy-making are mutually exclusive. Red tape is, in fact, a good thing when it is used to tie up bureaucrats, not businesses.

It might be argued that the discretion of subordinates can be limited if their superior keeps a sufficiently close eye on all of them and promptly fires anyone who defies his will. Presumably, Trump could make his will known to his appointees easily enough without having to publish it as formal regulations in the *Federal Register*, and Trump is world-famous for not being shy about firing subordinates. However, a single office-holder can't closely monitor the activities of hundreds of appointees continuously, nor can these appointees, in turn, control the behavior of the thousands of tenured civil servants beneath them without a credible threat of detecting and dismissing them whenever they violate published regulations.

Controlling tenured bureaucrats requires auditors from the General Accounting Office checking the books, vigorous scrutiny of bureaucratic behavior by Inspectors-General, and outsiders interested in extracting information from the bureaucracy and publicizing it with the aid of whistle-blowers, Congressional investigations, and Freedom of Information Act requests to pressure and empower office-holders to enforce bureaucratic discipline.

Though Trump himself is an elected official, under the American Constitution, the task of his office is merely to execute laws and not to promulgate them. In theory, Congress is supposed to make the laws and the budgets that govern the bureaucracy, not delegate such powers to the president or his subordinates. Not only does the "personnel is policy" premise imply that the American government is becoming undemocratic, it also implies that Congress has been giving up its role as a serious policy-making body, and that its elected members are becoming superfluous.

So what put American democracy and its constitutional separation of powers in such distress? Another Austrian economist, Friedrich von Hayek, explained in *The Road to Serfdom* how a democratic rule of law is incompatible with collectivist economic planning:

It is important clearly to see the causes of this admitted ineffectiveness of parliaments when it comes to a detailed administration of the economic affairs of a nation. The fault is neither with the individual representatives nor with parliamentary institutions as such but with the contradictions inherent in the task with which they are charged. They are not asked to act where they can agree, but to produce agreement on everything—the whole direction of the resources of the nation. For such a task the system of majority decision, is, however, not suited. Majorities will be found where it is a choice between limited alternatives; but it is a superstition to believe that there must be a majority view on everything.

Since majorities can't agree on the totality of the ends to be pursued, another path must be taken:

It is the essence of the economic problem that the making of an economic plan involves the choice between conflicting or competing ends—different needs of different people. But which ends do so conflict, which will have to be sacrificed if we want to achieve certain others, in short, which are the alternatives between which we must choose, can only be known to those who know all the facts; and only they, the experts, are in a position to decide which of the different ends are to be given preference. It is inevitable that they should impose their scale of preferences on the community for which they plan.

In other words, government economic planning requires bureaucratic specialists who are not bound by majority opinion. Every step taken in the direction of substituting government planning for private profit-seeking plans creates an impetus towards bureaucratizing policy-making, and taken far enough necessitates the installation of an economic dictator to oversee and coordinate planning.

There is another phenomena that has empowered bureaucracies at the expense of the voters, namely, the use of "national security" in the post-World War II period as a pretext to exempt certain bureaucrats from administrative and budgetary oversight and effectively placing them outside the rule of law. University of California, Berkeley Professor Emeritus Peter Dale Scott popularized the phrase "Deep State" to characterize how elements of an intelligence community—capable of executing covert operations under cover of plausible deniability—can exploit secrecy, black budgets, penetration of private and governmental institutions, and informal networking with special interests, organized crime, and foreign intelligence agencies to exercise power independently of the democratically-elected officials they nominally serve, even to sometimes turn against these officials.

Set in the context of Mises's analysis of what is required to keep bureaucrats subordinated to office-holders, Scott's warnings about the emergence of the Deep State constituting a standing threat to democracy makes perfect sense, as does Senator Charles Schumer's ominous 2017 warning that the intelligence community was upset with President Trump and had "six ways from Sunday" of getting back at him.

History has since vindicated Schumer's judgment. Trump's political survival up to now, in the face of determined Deep State opposition, has been even more wildly improbable than his head having been merely grazed instead of blown apart by a would-be assassin's bullet. However, saving democracy from the Deep State and from rogue bureaucrats will require much more than just a turnover of personnel. It is essential to restore the primacy of law and budgetary control over bureaucratic discretion, and that, in turn, requires a retreat from government economic planning and from the delegation of Congressional powers to the executive.

Vincent Cook has a MA in Biophysics from the University of California, Berkeley. He worked as an analyst for thirty years in the University of California's Office of the President, reporting statistics concerning technology transfers, research grants and expenditures, and faculty salaries on behalf of the ten campus UC system. He has been a supporter of the Mises Institute since its founding in 1982 and has hosted the Epicurus & Epicurean Philosophy website since 1996. Vincent is also a practitioner of the Filipino martial arts; in 2002 he competed in world championship matches, earning medals in sparring and forms divisions. This article first appeared in the Mises Wire of December 16, 2024.

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