



WEEKLY UPDATE

Aug 24-31, 2025

The August 19 meeting of the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors was a long and detailed one that didn't adjourn until 4:30 in the afternoon. It was good to see so much public input.

Fire Break

The meeting began with a report from fire officials who shared details on the status of the Gifford Fire. The figures are quite startling. At its highpoint, over 5,000 personnel were involved in the battle. Only six structures were lost, with only one loss of a home. All structure losses were in Santa Barbara County. In all, over 200,000 acres have burned in San Luis Obispo County this year.

We can't express our thanks often enough to the professionals and volunteers who did such a great job of protecting our community.

Controversial Contract Extension

A contract extension with Mott McDonald Group LLC for a study of the potential impacts and opportunities with Morro Bay and Port San Luis as it relates to possible energy business was a hot topic. The extension was for more time, not more money.

The REACT Group was quite vocal in opposition to the extension, citing the many problems that have arisen with the offshore wind industry including loss of subsidies, manufacturers going out of business and lack of federal support. Others

cited opposition due to the industrialization of the ports and shoreline, and others expressed concern for wildlife and the fisheries that would be impacted.

This study had little to do with any of that, and in fact would probably generate useful data for the opponents, but that didn't appear to matter to those opposed to anything to do with offshore wind.

In a sardonic gesture, Supervisor Ortiz-Legg asked a leader of the group about what form of energy generation they preferred. The answer was "not offshore wind".

Offense at a Defense

As predicted, a large number of people took offense to and voiced opposition to the grant application for a Lenco Bearcat referring to it as a militarization of our local law enforcement. Supervisor Gibson couldn't resist bemoaning the sad state affairs in our country, where men wearing masks with no identification and driving un marked cars are terrifying communities across the nation by forcibly kidnapping people. Of course that gratuitous remark had little to do with the grant application for the Bearcat, but it did play into the many commentators who feared that the Bearcat would be used to support ICE.

Others claimed that the armored vehicle would escalate situations making them more dangerous. Comparisons to Nazis and the Gestapo were offered.

All of this concern was put into perspective by Sherriff Parkinson's comments about how this is a vehicle designed and used as a defensive tool that protects officers and civilians from criminal shooters. He described several incidents locally where a Bearcat was used to do just that, and he reminded the passionate anti ICE people in the room that he complies with California law which prohibits him from cooperating with ICE.

Lane Elimination Concept for LOVR

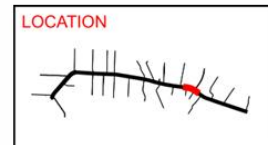
The Los Osos Valley Road improvement concept was reviewed in detail. While the many projects included are all in the conceptual stage, the BoS did accept the plan concept which allows for the various elements to guide changes in the future.

A few community members spoke in favor of some of the improvements for bike lanes. One resident challenged the roundabout concept for the intersection with Foothill, bringing up worries about emergency evacuation from the coast in case of

earthquake, fire or invasion. She didn't say anything about the proposed road diets for lanes running through town that would reduce traffic to one lane each way.

Road Diet is just a marketing term for eliminating road lanes and expanding bicycle and pedestrian lanes. Here are two examples of the proposed lane elimination projects on LOVR:

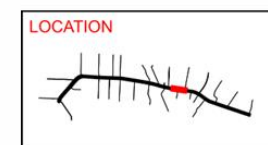
Fairchild Way to S Bay Blvd



Road diet starts here in westbound direction



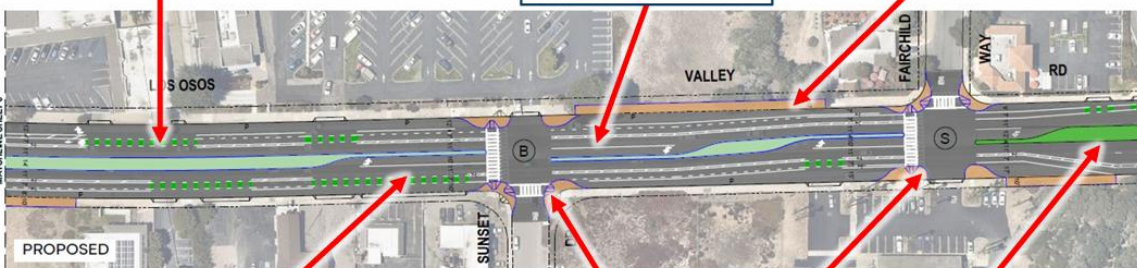
10th St to Fairchild Way



Landsaped median

Continue road diet: Reduce to one through lane in each direction

Close sidewalk gaps



Buffered and green-painted bike lanes

Curb extensions

Road diet ends here in eastbound direction

Property Rights Continued... Again

The Phillips 66 hearing scheduled for this meeting after having been continued from a month earlier was once again continued – this time indefinitely. Apparently both the Sierra Club and Phillips 66 are having a dialogue, which is a good thing. We remain hopeful that an agreement will be reached that preserves the property owners' rights to do with it what is in their (and the public's) best interest.

Low Income Housing Fixes

A marathon hearing designed to address Housing Element Implementation Action to encourage multi-family dwelling development lasting nearly two and a half hours finished out the afternoon. The hearing focused on adopting minor changes to county building codes designed to make affordable housing easier to build and more attractive to developers. Most of the recommended changes were technical in nature such as adjustments to lot line restrictions and ratios of structures or square footage on a lot. One element that seemed popular was a change to allow easier inclusion of housing elements to commercial district buildings.

Supervisor Moreno expressed concern that the result could bring about a hodge podge of mixed use that might destroy the character of the central business districts around the county but was assured that wouldn't happen. Supervisor Paulding requested slightly lower height limitations, also with concern about the character of existing communities.

The recommendations came as a result of a task force which met and studied a variety of suggestions over a six-month period. The problem is simple; housing for lower income earners around SLO County is scarce and expensive. Finding employees in the service industry, hospitality, retail and other lower to moderate paying positions is very difficult because in some cases most of their paycheck just covers housing. Even moderate and higher income earners are often paying more for housing than they really should.

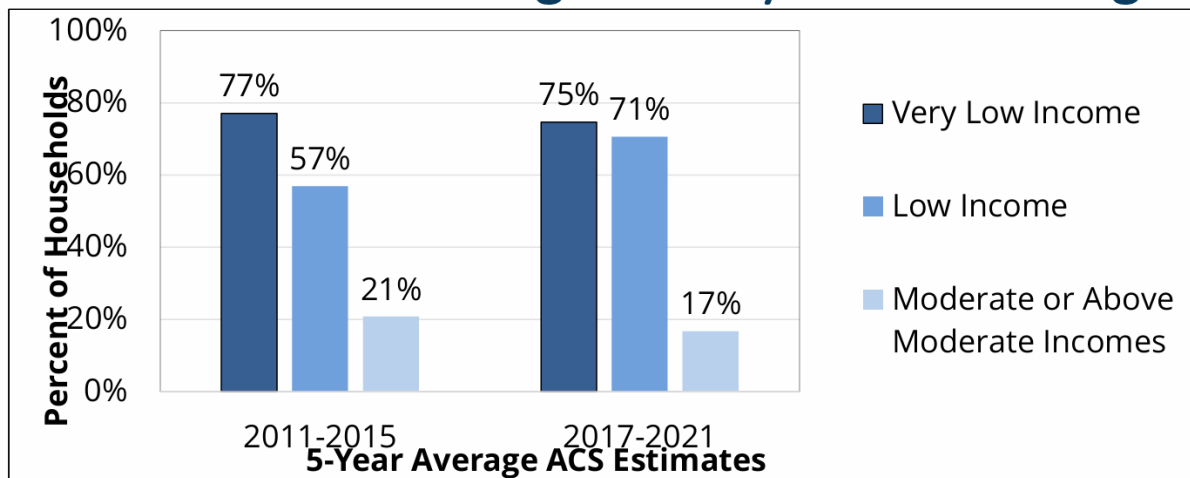
The following graph illustrates newly constructed housing availability by income level:

Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA)

Income Category	Number of Dwelling Units			Percent Completed
	Total Need	Permitted (2019-2024)	Remaining Need	
Very Low-Income	801	7	794	1%
Low-Income	505	226	279	45%
Moderate-Income	585	246	339	42%
Above Moderate-Income	1,365	1,132	233	83%
Total	3,256	1,611	1,645	49%

Here is data illustrating progress made by category:

Unaffordable Housing Costs by Income Category



The following three graphs are a small sample of the many presented during the hearing:

INTENSITY FACTOR	MINIMUM UNITS PER ACRE	MAXIMUM UNITS PER ACRE	MAXIMUM FLOOR AREA ¹	MINIMUM OPEN AREA ²
Low	10	15	55%	40%
Medium	16	30	75%	30%
High	27	42	100%	25%

TABLE 3-A: PERMIT REQUIREMENT				
		PERMIT REQUIREMENT		
LAND USE OR DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTIC	CRITERIA [1]	PLOT PLAN [2]	MINOR USE PERMIT	DEVELOPMENT PLAN
DWELLINGS (these land use permit requirements apply to construction of single- or multi- family dwellings)	Number of dwellings per site [3]	4 or less	5 to 50	51 or more
...

Use Category	Maximum Height
Elsewhere	40 feet
Industrial	45 feet
Office & Professional	40 feet
Open Space	25 feet
Recreation	40 feet
Public Facilities	45 feet
Residential	
Single Family, Rural and Suburban	35 feet
Multi-Family	
Low intensity	40 feet
Medium Intensity	40 feet
High intensity	45 feet

Most of the changes implemented were noncontroversial, but each of the Supervisors expresses questions along the way about how these changes would really result in more construction of affordable housing.

One element of the housing cost that never seems to be considered is an introspective look at how the county could cut costs for developers through a review of its own practices. How much do building permits cost and could savings be found there? How much time is involved with the permit process and could that be streamlined? Is the inspection process fair and predictably objective, or is it a confoundingly subjective system that costs time and money?

Our housing challenge is very real and impacts everybody. County staff are to be commended for taking it on, but perhaps bigger, bolder steps are called for.

Last Week

Short and Significant Special Session

In what was possibly the shortest meeting in its history, the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors met in an emergency session on Monday, Aug. 11 to declare an emergency with the Gifford Fire, burning since Aug.1.

The meeting lasted for just a few minutes, with the only remarks coming from Supervisor Paulding – thanks for the good job.

Along with numerous professionals from the National Forrester Service, state officials and Santa Barbara County officials, our own

San Luis Obispo professionals involved include our local CalFire and County Fire Marshall, Office of Emergency Services and Sheriff. Other county staff from a variety of agencies are assisting with wide variety of needs along with countless volunteers.

We offer sincere thanks and appreciation to all the selfless individuals putting our safety as their highest priority.

For an update on the details of the fire, go to: www.emergencyslo.org

Accountability in Action

The number one item on the agenda for the regular August 19 Board of Supervisors meeting is the approval of a contract with KPMG for auditing services of the SLO County Planning Department and the Department of Social Services.

While such audits are expensive on the front end (\$720,000 for this one), the long term savings that they often bring about can make them most worthwhile. Aside from the potential savings derived from honing the operations into much more efficient organizations, the biggest benefit is that taxpayers can be assured that their money isn't being wasted.

It's good news to know that this level of accountability is being pursued. Preliminary results probably won't be available until near the end of the year, with a final report expected in early 2026.

Deceased Equines

Item 9 on the Aug 19 consent agenda offers yet another opportunity to beat what seems to be a very dead horse.... The item reads as follows:

Request to approve a Fiscal Year 2025-26 Option to Renew and Amendment No. 2, with Transitions Mental Health Association in an amount not to exceed \$727,545 to provide specialty mental health services to youth in Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs.

The dead horse referenced is about how we note that almost every other BoS meeting has a consent item for a half million dollars here or a little over a million there, for various programs usually under the Department of Health.

These are likely very good programs run by professionals with high standards. But hardly ever does anyone ask for a few performance measures. Nobody even asks, "How are you doing with that last million we sent over?"

We know the Department of Health recently underwent a thorough KPMG audit, and was given a good report, so there is nothing to suggest that there is anything sub-par with these expensive transactions. But it would make for good governance to ask a few questions from time to time.

SWAT Tool

Item 20 is bound to raise a few eyebrows. It's a request to approve the application for a grant of \$217,438 from the Edard Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant that would fund the purchase of a Lenco Bearcat for county law enforcement. Whether we see more anti-ICE people or just plain folk concerned about "the militarizing" of local law enforcement, it could inspire a few questions. The Bearcat is particularly useful for SWAT operations.



The Lenco Bearcat

Affordable? Housing Report

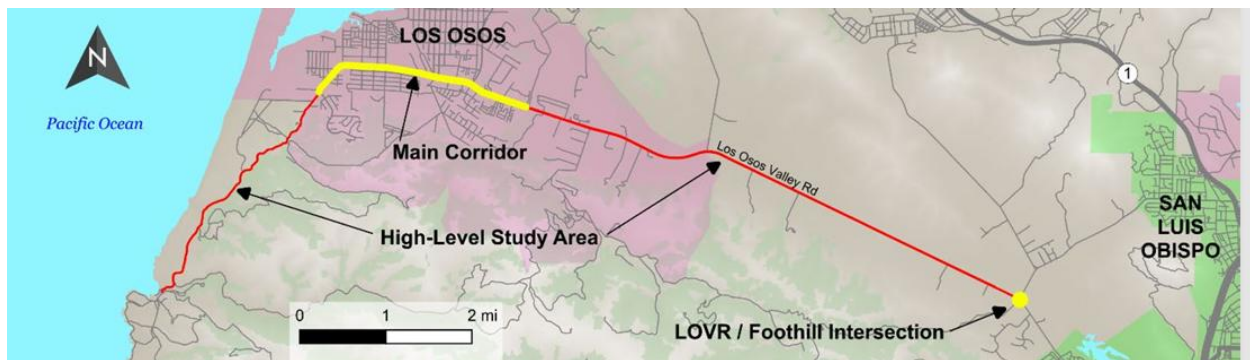
The Department of Social Services Homeless Fund report on affordable housing projects will be presented under item 26. It will feature five recent projects: The Shell Beach Senior Apartments, Vine Street Homes, Rolling Hills 111, Arroyo Terrace Apartments and Bally Ko On Monterey. An accounting of funds spent and funds available will be presented.

We look forward to learning how "affordable " affordable housing really is.

LOVR Corridor Concept

A concept for the 'Los Osos Valley Corridor will be presented under item 27. This ambitious concept calls for big changes in street and intersection layout through the center of town. It will enhance bicycle and pedestrian access, along with updating parking and intersection layouts. For our “round about” fans, the concept includes one at the intersection of Foothill and LOVR.

Below is a map of the proposal:



Here is the suggested round about:

LOVR / Foothill Blvd



No mention is made of specific projected costs in the documentation, but possible funding sources are outlined:

Potential Funding Sources

- Federal, State and Regional Grants
 - SLOCOG Community Betterments
 - State; SB1, ATP, LSRP, LPP, OTS, STP
 - Federal; CMAQ, SS4A, RAISE, STBG, SHA
- Road Improvement Fee Capital Projects
- Prioritize Phase 1 Rodman to Doris
 - No current identified funding sources

It seems highly likely that costs will be a discussion point at the conclusion of the presentation. This is simply a highly detailed concept, and not a blueprint or a plan of action. It allows planners to continue with the concept as they address future projects along LOVR. The BoS may receive and file, or may show a stronger level of support for the concept, but it does not create a commitment to put all (or any) of the details into a formal construction project.

The key element to this concept is funding. Total costs and where the funds might come from – but just as important is what this project would compete with for funding. Sadly, due to too many years of deferred maintenance, we have hundreds of miles of roads throughout the county that are in dire need of repair and resurfacing. Putting patches on patches and filling potholes with what seems like powdered pudding mix just kicks the can down the road and makes repairs even more expensive in the long run.

The Phillips 66 Saga Continues

As we have been reporting in recent months, the cleanup/remediation plan by Phillips 66 for their former refinery site in south SLO was approved by the county, but that approval was appealed by the Sierra Club. After a delay of a few weeks (presumably to facilitate discussion amongst the appellant and Phillips 66) the hearing is now set for the BoS meeting on the 19th.

This is a bigger deal than most realize, because it covers many different key aspects including private property rights, possible undue cost burdens to the property owner, the future of a key location along our southern coast and the economic impact of whatever might be established on the site.

All this as a result of the unreasonable resistance to allowing a short railroad spur into the refinery when it was in business supplying needed gasoline and petroleum products, providing over 140 full-time well-paying jobs and contributing a great deal to our local economy and tax base.

We look forward to hearing the details of the appeal and the mitigation possibilities that may have come about in the run up to the hearing.

Another Taxing Question

The question of “when do fees become taxes” is a never-ending debate. That very debate will continue as the BoS wraps up the Aug 19 meeting with its last couple items on the agenda that involve challenges to proposed rate hikes for solid waste collection by two different providers. We will report next week on the details and the resolution – which we hope is fair to the rate payers that are questioning the legality of the increases.

EMERGENT TRENDS - SEE PAGE 14

**Gavin Newsom warms to Big Oil in climate reversal
California's False Promise of a 'Just Transition'**

COLAB IN DEPTH SEE PAGE 26

Newsom won't create an abundance

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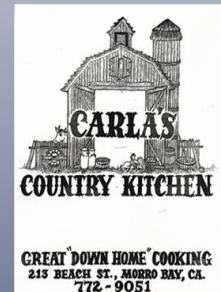
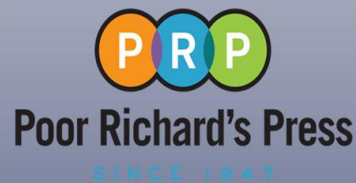
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Gavin Newsom warms to Big Oil in climate reversal



BY ALEXEI KOSEFF, ALEJANDRO LAZO AND MAYA C.

MILLERAUGUST 18, 2025

The oil industry is having an I-told-you-so moment in California.

For decades, the state has raced to end its reliance on fossil fuels and prioritize clean energy. Its relationship with oil companies became particularly contentious in the past two years, as Gov. Gavin Newsom and Democratic legislators held [two special sessions](#) to crack down on alleged price gouging at the pump.

But now two of its last remaining fuel refineries are closing sooner than California expected, tossing a simmering emergency into officials' laps. With [a hotly debated forecast](#) that \$8-per-gallon gasoline might be on the horizon, there has been a remarkable shift at the state Capitol. Led by Newsom, who just last fall was [lambasting oil companies](#) for "screwing" consumers, California may soon let its black gold flow again.

"We are all the beneficiaries of oil and gas. No one's naive about that," Newsom said at a press conference last month. "So it's always been about finding a just transition, a pragmatism in terms of that process."

Newsom and Democratic legislative leaders are now negotiating a plan with the industry to boost stagnating production in California's oil-drilling hub of Kern County — and avert a nightmare scenario for a governor with national ambitions and a party that has [promised to focus on affordability](#). Lawmakers could pass a measure before the end of their annual session in mid-September, though the details remain unsettled and environmental groups are raising alarms.

The headspinning realignment potentially heralds a new era in California's transition to a carbon-free future, as high costs, technological impediments and flagging political will force Democrats to recalibrate their ambitious climate goals. President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans are also taking aim at the state's vast powers to regulate its greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, including [revoking California's mandate](#) to phase out gas-powered vehicles and [slashing renewable energy tax credits](#).

"We all need to kind of evolve. Maybe that's just the lesson on climate. There's not really a purity test on this. It's not like civil rights," said state Sen. [Henry Stern](#), a Calabasas Democrat who five years ago was publicly advocating for [keeping more California oil in the ground](#).

As both a staffer and a legislator, Stern worked on major laws to [require buffer zones around oil wells](#) in sensitive areas and restrict the well stimulation technique known as fracking. But he said he does not want California to see the same backlash to climate action as western Europe, where environmentally focused Green parties have recently been crushed electorally by far-right populists.

"We can perform a muscular version of climate policy that doesn't have to be so all-or-nothing," Stern said.

Oil industry forces Newsom's hand

Refinery closures are accelerating the pressure in Sacramento. Two days after Newsom signed a law increasing state oversight of maintenance, Phillips 66 announced in October that it would [shut its Los Angeles facility](#) by the end of 2025 because of concerns over the sustainability of the California market. Then in April, Valero declared it would [close its Benicia refinery](#) next year, citing a challenging regulatory environment.

That would leave only six major facilities to refine crude oil into transportation fuels in a state that remains the country's [second-largest](#)

[gasoline consumer](#) after Texas, as well as a major user of jet fuel, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. A business professor at the University of Southern California projected the loss of refining capacity, which will be offset with more expensive imports of finished fuel, combined with [additional state actions](#), could send gasoline prices [spiraling past \\$8 per gallon](#) by the end of 2026.

Republicans [pounced on that figure](#) to criticize Newsom for fomenting an energy crisis in California, sparking fierce pushback from the governor's office, which has [dismissed the report](#) as an “unscientific analysis” by a professor with close ties to the oil industry. Other experts have estimated a [smaller effect on prices](#), which currently average about \$4.49 per gallon in California, according to AAA, \$1.33 higher than the national average but lower than they've been since January.

The Western States Petroleum Association — the powerful Sacramento-based lobby for the oil and gas industry that has [donated more than \\$330,000](#) to lawmakers in the past decade — blames taxes, fees and regulations for California's high prices. Decades of state rules, including strict emissions targets, a ban on the [additive MTBE](#), and requirements for a [special gasoline blend](#), traditionally make refining more expensive. Drilling in California is also in what the industry calls “terminal decline” as the Newsom administration has [largely stopped issuing new permits](#), forcing a greater reliance on [foreign countries such as Brazil, Iraq, Guyana and Ecuador](#) with looser labor and environmental standards.

“At some point, are you going to have enough supply to meet California's demands?” said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, CEO of the petroleum association, who evoked the fuel shortages and long lines at gas stations that followed a 1973 embargo against the United States by other oil-producing nations. “People's lives were completely disrupted.”

Industry leaders argue pumping more crude oil in California, particularly in Kern County, could help meet demand at a lower cost. But if the state doesn't act quickly, they warn that production could drop so low it would

shut down pipelines between local oil fields and refineries, further exacerbating a crisis of California's own creation.

“For me, I don’t care if the motivation is political or policy. I’m very happy that we’re having a conversation about something that’s really impactful to the consumers of California,” Reheis-Boyd said.

Climate commitment meets reality

After years of making the oil industry into a political boogeyman, Newsom has become surprisingly receptive to its message.

Gone is the bombastic governor who declared to a [United Nations summit in 2023](#) that “this climate crisis is a fossil fuel crisis,” or strong-armed the Legislature that same year into adopting a law that could [penalize oil companies for excessive profits](#).



Gov. Gavin Newsom at a press conference after signing three bills into law that restrict oil and gas operations near schools, daycare centers, and across California communities. Los Angeles on Sept. 25, 2025

In April, after Valero said it would close its Benicia refinery, [Newsom directed Siva Gunda](#), vice chair of the California Energy Commission, to “redouble the state’s efforts to work closely with refiners on short- and long-term planning” and ensure a “reliable supply of transportation fuels.”

Gunda returned a [series of recommendations](#) in June that closely aligned with the industry's wishlist, including stabilizing in-state crude production, rolling back regulations that limit imports and improving investor confidence.

While the commission is exploring delaying implementation of the profit penalty and refinery maintenance oversight laws, Newsom began circulating a draft bill that would provide blanket approval for environmental reviews of Kern County wells to sidestep litigation that has stalled drilling. That proposal is now at the center of negotiations over a legislative package that could simultaneously create new standards for restarting offshore drilling, require the industry to plug more idle wells and end the use of fracking.

“We’re in the ‘how’ business. We move to a low-carbon, green-growth future, change the way we produce and consume energy,” Newsom said at the press conference last month. “At the same time, we have enough available fuel supplies, a stable fuel supply and address the anxieties around cost. Both and.”

Matt Rodriguez, a longtime Democratic consultant who has worked in California and on several presidential campaigns, said Newsom is caught between a commitment to climate action that is important to the left and a substantive problem that could hurt both the economy and individual voters.

“The reality is that gas prices are higher here than the rest of the nation. That’s just undeniable,” he said. “If there are storm clouds on the horizon, you can’t just sit there and ignore it.”

The larger the gap between the price at the pump in California and in other states, Rodriguez said, the greater the liability it poses in a [future presidential campaign](#) for Newsom, who will likely also face criticism for how his own policies contributed to the problem. But Rodriguez said there is a potential upside if the governor can negotiate a solution with the oil

industry, allowing him to tout himself as a pragmatist rather than an ideologue.

“Any way that he can keep gas prices from ballooning, that’s his imperative,” Rodriguez said.

‘We didn’t have a champion’

Environmental groups, meanwhile, are up in arms. More than 120 [signed a letter](#) earlier this month opposing Newsom’s push, which they characterized as an industry giveaway that would “gravely harm the air we breathe and water we drink around the state, but have no impact on refinery closures or gas prices.”

Hollin Kretzmann, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, called the governor’s proposal to streamline approval of new Kern County wells a “drill, baby, drill” plan that would “eviscerate” California’s bedrock environmental review law for one of its core purposes: reining in a polluting industry.

He noted that courts already [struck down earlier versions of the idea](#) when Kern County tried it, because the environmental review was deemed insufficient. Last month, the county passed a [third version of the plan](#), which Newsom’s bill would enshrine into state law.

“It’s a very misguided and ill-conceived proposal,” Kretzmann said.



Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks at a press conference where he signs legislation related to oversight of oil and gas wells, and community protections in Los Angeles on Sept. 25, 2024

Martha Dina Argüello, executive director of the Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles, remembers attending a press conference last September, outside the Inglewood Oil Field, where Newsom signed a trio of new laws [aimed at cleaning up idle wells](#) and restricting oil and gas operations. She said she was “stunned” by the governor’s rapid reversal and warned that it would allow the oil industry to gut public health protections under the guise of affordability, passing the costs on to low-income communities near oil fields and refineries that have higher asthma and cancer risks from exposure to toxic chemicals.

“You don’t often get champions who are consistent — and it’s very sad that we didn’t have a champion that was really going to do the difficult thing and tell us the changes that we need to make to actually address climate change and air pollution,” she said. “That’s what our communities still need.”

Landing a deal will be tricky

The governor’s office is working to find an approach that can get through the Legislature in a short time frame. Lawmakers return from their summer recess on Monday for the final month of session.

That could necessitate making tradeoffs between priorities for environmentally minded lawmakers on the left, such as protecting the buffer zones around oil wells, and moderates more sympathetic to the industry's arguments. It's possible the proposal will be merged with a separate effort to extend California's cap-and-trade system for greenhouse gas emissions, because oil refiners are seeking a more gradual decline in the credits that allow them to emit carbon pollution without paying.

Stern described the mood among lawmakers as "begrudgingly practical," but also grumpy about having to take on yet another fight over oil, "so nothing feels like a win." Given the political sensitivities, he said it was possible the Legislature would pass only the provision to boost drilling in Kern County and carry over the rest of the discussion into next year.

Nevertheless, the boundaries of the debate around domestic oil production have completely shifted in Sacramento, with affordability taking on a more prominent role.

Assemblymember [Cottie Petrie-Norris](#), an Irvine Democrat who chairs the Assembly's utilities and energy committee, said the Legislature could no longer afford to treat California's energy transition like a future aspiration, as previous generations of officials have. Instead, lawmakers must be pragmatic and retain the support of everyday Californians, she said, because without their buy-in, the state will cease to be a climate leader.

"There are some advocates who continue to think that you can somehow just wave a magic wand and end oil production in California without terrible consequences," she said. "We need California to be an inspiration, and not a cautionary tale."

An agreement to expand drilling would be a hard-fought victory for Sen. [Shannon Grove](#), a Bakersfield Republican who has spent the majority of her 10-year legislative career repeatedly warning that cutting oil production in California would only increase reliance on imports from countries with lower environmental and labor standards.

“Do I wish that companies and businesses would not have left my district and taken their jobs with them and created a vast unemployment rate? Do I wish that the people who lost their jobs still had their jobs? Do I wish it would have happened sooner?” Grove said. “Yes. But I’m grateful that it’s happening.”

Grove said Kern County, which also is home to some of the state’s largest solar and wind projects, has the potential to be the “energy capital of the United States.” She argues the county has done its due diligence with environmental reviews to ensure that future drilling projects are more climate conscious than importing oil from other countries.

“If you’re going to do it, you have to do it right,” she said, “and Kern County does it right.”

California’s False Promise of a ‘Just Transition’

California now imports more oil from the Amazon rainforest than it produces at home

By **Hector Barajas**, August 18, 2025

I grew up in a union household. My father was a Teamster who worked in the downtown Los Angeles produce markets for 41 years, alongside many coworkers who barely had a high school diploma. We were a blue-collar family, and by the time I entered the fourth grade, I had the highest level of education in my home.

It was my father’s job, not a college degree, that paid the bills, kept medical insurance in place, put food on the table, and gave my parents a secure retirement. That job offered dignity, stability, and a middle-class life.

Today, California’s oil industry offers that same pathway to the middle class. Many of its workers, even those with only a high school diploma, earn an average of \$123,000 a year. This industry also opens the door for second-chancers, people who have rebuilt their lives after incarceration. It’s one of the few industries left where a person’s background doesn’t define their future.

But that future is under direct attack. Environmental activists, some Hollywood celebrities, regulators, and legislators talk about a “just transition” away from these jobs. They speak as though there’s a plan—some mystical orderly path from good-

paying oil and gas jobs into equally good-paying “clean energy” jobs. But here’s the truth: there is no such thing as a “just transition” when all you’re doing is shutting down local oil production and replacing it with foreign oil imports.

Where are the \$123,000-a-year jobs these 55,000 workers will walk into?

Show us the postings. Show us the career ladders. Show us the benefits and the retirement plans. If any did exist, they are few and far between. Most “just transition” talk boils down to: we are going to shut down your industry, take your job, maybe train you for something else that pays less than half of your current salary, and then you’re on your own.

And here’s what makes it worse: California’s demand for oil hasn’t dropped, but our willingness to produce our own energy has.

California’s oil demand has remained steady in the past decade. Californians still consume roughly 1.8 million barrels of oil every day. But instead of producing more of it here, under the strictest environmental, health, and labor standards in the world, we import it.

California now imports more oil from the Amazon rainforest than it produces at home. The oil this state imports comes from countries where environmental protections are weak or nonexistent, where drilling destroys ecosystems and displaces communities, and where spills are rarely cleaned up.

Worse still, we import oil from nations that execute LGBTQ+ people, deny women basic rights, and exploit workers.

In the name of “climate justice,” we’re putting our own people out of work while paying \$25 billion a year to foreign countries, many of whom don’t share our values.

That \$25 billion should stay here, supporting California families, strengthening our tax base, and helping cities and counties that are struggling with deficits. Instead, it leaves our state while we lose good-paying jobs, weaken our energy security, and pretend we’re leading on climate.

If that’s a “just transition,” then words have lost their meaning.

To the legislators and their staff, especially those representing working-class and minority communities, look closely at what’s being done in your name. This is not a transition. It’s a trade: California jobs for foreign oil.

California's 55,000 oil workers aren't asking for handouts. They're asking for the chance to keep earning an honest living, providing for their families, and retiring with dignity.

Show them the "just" part of this transition, because right now, all we see is the injustice. And if you're going to take their jobs away, have the courage to tell them what comes next.

ewsom wont create an abundance

EDWARD RING

Director, Water and Energy Policy



Environment & Wildfires
August 1, 2025

With great fanfare, California Governor Gavin Newsom recently signed "historic" legislative package designed to "advance an abundance agenda." It's a nod to the recent (and fashionable) book *Abundance* by the liberal bloggers Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson, and it's supposed to reform a state best known for a punitive cost of living and chronic shortages of everything essential – including housing, water, and energy.

Passed in 1970, CEQA required any project developer applying for a building permit to submit an environmental impact statement, along with a plan to mitigate any "significant" harm that the project might inflict on the environment. Over the decades, CEQA metastasized from 4500 words to nearly half a million as California's state legislature turned the law into a notorious procedural obstacle to any new construction in the state. For major projects, whether it's housing, infrastructure, or commercial and retail developments, CEQA has become a weapon used by dozens of state, regional, and local agencies and outside litigants to punish developers with years of delays and millions in additional expenses.

CEQA reform is an important test for Newsom and the Democrats: can the American left make a sufficient break with the NGOs and activist lawyers to generate growth? Don't hold your breath. In signing these two latest bills, Newsom and the State Legislature have only streamlined the CEQA process for their favored projects, while failing to provide relief to everyone else. Significantly, California's Legislature is exempting from the excesses of CEQA only those projects having to do with "water, transportation, clean energy and housing." It's easy enough to read between the lines: "transportation" means more money for light-rail projects, "clean" energy means more utility-scale solar, wind and battery farms, and "housing," of course, means more high-density infill.

The fundamental, across-the-board reforms that CEQA really needs are, unsurprisingly, off the table for this governor and this legislature. They aren't restricting the right to litigate under CEQA to district attorneys, aren't ending the opportunistic lawsuits by extortionate third parties, or requiring the loser to pay legal fees in frivolous lawsuits. Nor are they limiting for others the time periods allowed for permit processing and appeals. These steps would rectify CEQA for everyone, but everyone is not a concern.

Just how dense the Legislature will require housing to get in order to be exempt from CEQA provisions is found in the State Government Code Title 7, Division 1, Chapter 3, Article 10.6 "Housing Elements," where the "lowest" permissible density is 10 units per acre. That would only be allowable, however, in an "unincorporated area of a nonmetropolitan county." If the area is incorporated, it's 15 units per acre. If the site is in a "suburban jurisdiction," 20 units per acre, and if that suburban jurisdiction is in a "metropolitan county," 30 units per acre.

This is not a solution that will lower the cost of housing in California. It is a "reform" that is only supported by land developers who feed on subsidies and tax incentives. The deceptive excuse used to justify this selective, non-solution to CEQA's ongoing suppression of new housing is to prioritize "infill," that moral imperative that deems any development outside of existing urban boundaries to be a crime against the planet. But why?

Contrary to popular belief, California's urban density is the highest in America, with just over 94% of the population living on only 5 per cent of the land. California's urban areas have an average of nearly 4,800 people per square mile, also the nation's highest.

The implications of this reveal the cruelty of streamlining CEQA merely to further densify California's urban areas. Forcing development into limited geographic areas, confined within "urban containment boundaries" is a large part of the reason housing is so expensive in California. This politically contrived shortage of available land for building causes the value of eligible land to rise well beyond what it would be worth if land could be developed outside existing urban areas.

Moreover, when developers build high density housing that has four or more floors, the cost per square foot increases compared to one- and two-story wood framed homes. These factors, all the result of political choices, are the reason housing is scarce and overpriced in California.

The greatest irony is that there is no need to limit the land where new housing projects are permitted. For example, if you built 2.5-million new homes on quarter acre lots, with an equal amount of land set aside for streets, parks, schools and commercial and industrial centers, and if each of these homes were occupied by four people, you could fit a population of 10 million into an area under 2,000 square miles. That ultra low density development would only increase California's urban footprint from 5 per cent to 6.2 per cent of its total land. There is plenty of room.

Instead of recognizing this gift, and permitting practical water, energy and transportation infrastructure to realize it, California's lawmakers prefer a hyper-regulated housing environment. That favors the wealthy, the politically connected and the subsidy hounds. But it denies private sector builders a chance to make a profit, without subsidies, building homes people want to buy, at a price they can afford.

But the central premise of Newsom's purported CEQA reform is this concept of "Abundance," something only belatedly adopted by Democrats in an attempt to restore mainstream appeal to their discredited party. Democrats will never accept reforms that might facilitate affordable abundance. The Democratic Party – both its leadership and its voters – is comprised of special interests and factions that have little regard for each other, and each has a specific niche that is served by the status quo.

Take these interests in turn and it soon becomes clear that there is, practically speaking, no coalition for any kind of abundance agenda. Will, for example, the

heavily subsidized developers of affordable housing consent to a deregulated environment where they would have to compete with private and unsubsidized builders that could again construct and sell single-family homes that people could afford to buy?

Will environmentalist NGOs, conservancies, and real estate speculators that profit from artificial scarcity permit new homes to be built on inexpensive land outside the packed cities? Will public employees and their unions permit government budgets to again prioritize the enabling infrastructure that might bring roads and utility services to new housing developments on raw land, when they want all that money for their pay and pensions?

I could certainly go on. Will the renewables industry, the climate zealots, and the network of consultants, brokers, traders, investors, and public utilities permit the price of energy to dramatically fall thanks to a resurgence of conventional fuels? Will the Homeless Industrial Complex support new laws and programs that actually solve the homeless problem?

Will “equity” entrepreneurs and trial lawyers ever agree to a rollback of all the mandates that have made them prosper? Will unions consent to projects that aren’t subject to project labor agreements?

These powerful special interests *are* the Democratic Party. They bankroll the political campaigns of Newsom and his allies who control California’s state legislature, and they control what laws are enacted and what agency appointments are made. These special interests thrive on scarcity, and while they recognize the rhetorical power of an “abundance movement” led by Democrats, they will make absolutely certain it never crosses the line from rhetoric to action. Governor Newsom – and the Democratic Party writ large – are now being forced to choose between economic growth and these interests, and they’re coming down on the side of the latter.

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805-546-6348 District

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831-424-2229 District

panetta.house.gov/contact

State Senator John Laird
916-651-4017 Sacramento
805-549-3784 District
senator.laird@senate.ca.gov

State Assembly Member Dawn Addis
916-319-2030 Sacramento
805-549-3001 District
assemblymember.addis@assembly.ca.gov

SLO County Supervisor Bruce Gibson
805-781-4338 District
bgibson@co.slo.ca.us

SLO County Supervisor Heather Moreno
805-781-4339 District
hmoreno@co.slo.ca.us

SLO County Supervisor Dawn Ortiz-Legg
805-781-5450 District
dortizlegg@co.slo.ca.us

SLO County Supervisor Jimmy Paulding
805-781-4337 District
district4@co.slo.ca.us

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