



**WEEKLY UPDATE  
JANUARY 19 - 26, 2025**

**THIS WEEK  
SEE PAGE 5**

**NO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETING**

**APCD**

**APCO TO RETIRE, NEW BOSS TO BE RECRUITED  
DO WE ACTUALLY NEED AN APCD?**

***WHAT IF WE USED THE MONEY TO BUY MORE FIRE ENGINES?***

**ANNUAL AIR QUALITY REPORT  
*THERE REALLY ISN'T MUCH OF A PROBLEM***

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
*YET ANOTHER PLAN TO PRETEND TO INCREASE HOUSING  
YET ACTUALLY RESTRICT IT***

**LAST WEEK  
SEE PAGE 8**

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**KPMG \$437K ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF  
THE HEALTH AGENCY APPROVED**

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT LISTS DIVERSITY,  
EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING AS ITS  
“FOUNDATIONAL PILLAR”**

***WHO KNEW? WHAT DOES THE BOARD THINK?  
DOES IT AFFECT HIRES, PROMOTIONS, AND CONTRACTOR PICKS?  
APPOINTMENTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBERS  
TO VARIOUS COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONERS  
GIBSON APPOINTED TO PASO BASIN COOPERATIVE  
COMMITTEE YET AGAIN***

**COUNTY’S STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM  
MORE MONEY, MORE PROGRAMS, MORE TAXES**

**FEASIBILITY OF REGIONAL INDUSTRIAL SCALE  
DESALINATION STUDY APPROVED**

**BOB JONES TRAIL TO ULTIMATELY COST \$48 MILLION  
\$43 MILLION EXPENDED OR PLEDGED SO FAR  
BOARD ADDS A NEW \$5 MILLION  
*DOES NOT INCLUDE ANNUAL MAINTENANCE, FIRE CLEARANCE,  
REGULATION OF HOMELESS CAMPING, OR TRASH REMOVAL***



***SLO TRIBUNE PHOTO – BOB JONES TRAIL – WHO WILL CUT BACK THE BRUSH EACH YEAR?***

## **SUPERVISOR NEW REQUESTS**

**AD HOC COMMITTEE ON TRUMP DEPORTATION CREATED**

### **LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION**

**COULD MOVE SANTA MARGARITA RANCH PROJECT FORWARD  
WITH ANNEXATION TO WATER DISTRICT**

## **EMERGENT ISSUES**

**SEE PAGE 19**

**OUT OF CONTROL LA FIRES – IT’S NOT JUST  
INCOMPETENCE, IT’S MALFEASANCE**

**THE DAILY CHART: LOSS DAMAGE WAIVER  
*THE LEFT IS DESPERATE TO DIVERT OUR ATTENTION AWAY  
FROM THE IDEOLOGICALLY-DRIVEN INCOMPETENCE OF  
CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT AT ALL LEVELS***

**DA DOW PROPOSES URGENCY LEGISLATION  
*FOR LOOTING DURING A DISASTER AND IN  
EVACUATION AREAS***

**2024 California Fuel taxes... A DOOSEY**

## **COLAB IN DEPTH**

**SEE PAGE 26**

**THE POLITICIZATION OF WIND AND FIRE**  
*Decades of Santa Ana winds fueling fires show California's failure to  
prioritize land management, instead focusing on politics while  
residents face predictable disasters*  
**BY EDWARD RING**



# WOKE DEI + GREEN NIHILISM = DRESDEN IN CALIFORNIA

*California's DEI "humanism" and Green New Deal environmentalism ensured the cruelest imaginable treatment of thousands of people and unrivaled destruction of the natural ecosystem*

BY VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

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COMPANY

## THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

**No Board of Supervisors Meeting on Tuesday, January 21, 2025 (not scheduled)**

**The next Board Meeting is set for Tuesday, January 28, 2025.**

**San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District (APCD) Meeting of Wednesday, January 22, 2025 (Scheduled)**

**D-1 Selection of an Executive Search Firm to Conduct Recruitment Process for Air Pollution Control Officer and Recommendation to Appoint an Ad Hoc Committee to Assist the Selected Firm.** Air Pollution Control Officer Gary Willey seeks to retire by August 2025. The District will review 4 proposals by executive search firms and select one to conduct the recruitment.

*The Air Pollution Control Officer (APCO) is the Chief Executive Officer of the District under California air pollution control laws. This position is responsible for organizing, coordinating, and directing all District functions and activities, providing policy guidance and strategies regarding air quality management, and fostering cooperative working relationships with various stakeholders<sup>2</sup>. The APCO works under the direction of the Air Pollution Control District Board and is accountable for achieving and maintaining State and federal clean air standards.*

Willey seems to be a reasonable administrator and was never hysterical about the dunes dust. He actually helped to resolve the issue substantially. It is not known if the Coastal Commission will attempt to close the Dunes, even though Willey made good progress in reducing the dust.

Do rural and suburban coastal counties actually need to regulate air quality via a separate agency? Since they have very low pollution, no big industries, and lots of fresh ocean wind, couldn't the counties do it as a part of their normal code enforcement? After all, it's not as if we are in LA, Fresno, or some Chinese coal town.

For example, if the local funeral home's crematorium is out of whack, why couldn't the County cite them? Similarly, why are they regulating the emissions from wine fermentation? It's been happening for thousands of years and smells kind of good.

SLO County has lost all of its large emission generators, including the Morro Bay Power Plant and Phillips 66 Refinery.

What if the State allowed the grants it provides to air districts and the portion of local property tax allocated to them to be reprogrammed to buy fire engines and hire more firefighters - something the County really needs? It is over \$6 million per year. The public needs to understand that it's just like your household. You can't have everything. For example, you can't send Gwen to Stanford for 4 years, take annual cruises, and redo the kitchen.

### **D-3 Report on 2023 Air Quality in San Luis Obispo County (Annual Air Quality Report).**

The County does not have much of a problem with air pollution. The report states in summary:

*Air quality continues to show overall steady long-term trends of decreasing pollutant concentrations and improving air quality with some year-to-year variability.*

*Ozone trends show continued improvements with decreasing design values at all locations except for Red Hills whose design value remained unchanged in 2023. Most stations saw a decrease in the number of days with ozone levels in the Moderate AQI range.*

*PM10 on the Nipomo Mesa continued to show marked improvement relative to 10-year trends. The state 24-hour PM10 standard of 50  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  was exceeded 23 times at CDF and 19 times at Mesa 2, which is the fewest number of exceedances since daily monitoring began in 2010. Similarly, annual averages at all stations decreased with Mesa 2 now attaining the state annual average standard of 20  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .*

*PM2.5 annual averages decreased across the county with many sites near the lowest annual averages they have recorded. Notably at current levels all sites will meet the new more stringent federal PM2.5 annual average standard of 9  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  that was implemented on February 7th, 2024. South County air quality continues to be impacted by dust blown from the Oceano Dunes State Vehicle Recreation Area (ODSVRA) but shows continued improvements.*

Again, it would be great if the resources applied to APCD could be rerouted to the purchase of fire engines and fire staffing. This would require State action.



**AIR POLLUTION CONTROL DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
*County of San Luis Obispo*

**2025 BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE**

Meetings begin at 9:00 a.m. and convene in the County Board of Supervisors Chambers.

Date	Time	Meeting
January 22, 2025	9:00 a.m.	Regular meeting – election of Chair and Vice Chair
May 21, 2025	9:00 a.m.	Regular meeting – first budget hearing
June 18, 2025	9:00 a.m.	Regular meeting – budget adoption
September 17, 2025	9:00 a.m.	Regular meeting
November 12, 2025	9:00 a.m.	Regular meeting
January 28, 2026	9:00 a.m.	Regular meeting – election of Chair and Vice Chair

**Planning Commission Meeting of Thursday, January 23, 2025 (Scheduled)**

**Item 5 - A continued hearing from January 9, 2025 to consider a minor County Code “clean-up”, which includes: 1. Amendment to County Code Title 1 (General Provisions) regarding cannabis violation correction period, 2. Amendment to County Code Title 22 (Land Use Ordinance for inland areas) regarding a Shandon Habitat Buffer, and 3. Amendment to County Code Titles 22 and 23 (Land Use Ordinances for inland areas and Coastal Zone, respectively) regarding limitations on garage sizes for accessory dwellings (LRP2024-00011).** This item is a clean-up ordinance designed to update provisions of various zoning ordinances.

**Part one** reinforces the provision that cannabis grows that are an immediate threat to health and safety must be abated immediately.

*This recommended amendment to County Code Title 1 is intended to update County Code Title 1 to be consistent with the changes to County Code Titles 22 and 23 in accordance with the Board’s action on July 9, 2024. More specifically, the recommended amendment would remove language specifying that the correction period identified in Notice of Violations shall be no less than five (5) calendar days after service of the notice. The purpose in removing this language is to avoid potential confusion, as County Code Titles 22 and 23 allows for immediate abatement of cannabis violations.*

**Part 2** corrects some language about wild life corridors in the Shandon area.



*This recommended amendment would modify County Code Section 22.94.020.D to make the applicability of development restrictions relating to preserving a wildlife corridor consistent with the intent of the Shandon Habitat Buffer Area when it was adopted as part of the Shandon Community Plan.*

**Part 3** restricts the size of garages converted to accessory dwellings to 400 sq. feet. Staff asserts that allowing a larger floor area would discourage the resulting ADUs from being available as affordable housing. This is stupid because it ignores the whole issue of the housing ladder and expanding the number of housing units in general. Again, ideology trumps practicality in the name of social engineering.

*This recommended amendment would establish size limitations on garages for accessory dwellings. County Code Titles 22 and 23 currently allow detached garages to be up to 1,000 square feet and attached garages to be unlimited in size. Since accessory dwellings are accessory uses to primary residences and the maximum size of an accessory dwelling is 1,200 square feet, to maintain accessory dwellings as truly accessory uses, it is necessary to limit the size of garages for accessory dwellings. In addition, accessory dwellings are part of the County's affordable housing strategy and oversized garages would reduce the likelihood of accessory dwelling units being affordable to moderate-income and low-income households. **In keeping with the incidental purpose and character of an accessory dwellings, this recommended limitation would apply a 450-square foot maximum for attached and detached garages for accessory units.***

## LAST WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

### Board of Supervisors Meeting of Tuesday, January 14, 2025 (Completed)

**Item 5 - Request to 1) authorize the County Administrative Officer to execute the sole sourced professional services agreement, upon approval by County Counsel as to form, with KPMG LLP, for an assessment and management review of the Health Agency; and 2) approve a corresponding budget adjustment in the amount of \$436,700 from General Fund Talent Development Reserve Designation to FC 104 - Administrative Office for this effort, by 4/5 vote.** The project was approved unanimously on the consent calendar.

The CAO proposes that the County hire the consulting firm KPMG to begin to review the effectiveness of the County Departments. The first Department to be reviewed is the Health Agency. As we have reported in the past, this "agency" consists of 2 departments, the Public Health Department and the Behavioral Health Department. The organization structure and budgets are confusing. The performance measures are scarce and weak. Moreover, since the County does not budget at the program level, they are essentially meaningless.



It is not clear from the write-up if the contract price will cover only the Health Agency in the future or other departments as well.

Santa Barbara County hired KPMG about five years ago to perform the same services. Over the ensuing years, the County has spent millions on KPMG review of all its departments. The CEO has set project timelines for the Departments to adopt the recommendations. Any savings attributable to the project have been diminimus, and the County staffing has grown from 3,800 in 2011 to almost 4,800 today.

With regard to the project, the CEO's FY 2024-25 Budget message stated:

*Operational Performance Reviews. In addition to the four big picture goals above, a key objective of Renew includes the operational performance review of all 21 county departments, which are being conducted over a period of five years, from 2020 through 2024 and have produced a number of evidence-based best practice recommendations related to organizational structure, resource utilization and productivity, demand and workload, and performance. Proposed timelines for implementation of these recommendations are posted to the County's website and progress is tracked on a quarterly basis by each individual department in coordination with the County Executive Office. Budget requests that align with and facilitate the implementation of operational performance review recommendations are given priority consideration in the budget development process.*

We could not find the cited timelines and tracking reports on the Santa Barbara County website.

Of course, neither County is reporting if the hundreds of millions that each spends on Public Health and Behavioral Health and the related programs are working. There are many vignettes of data but no comprehensive reporting. It appears that the number of mentally ill continue to grow inexorably. How many got better? How many more appeared? What is the overall score?

Back in SLO County, whatever happened to the **Six Sigma**<sup>1</sup> organizational development project? It was supposed to kick off in the Planning and Building Department.

We know that SLO County has hundreds of discrete programs. Just look at the list that the Behavioral Health Department posted on its website. A problem is that these are not depicted in the Budget. Instead, they are rolled up into multi-million dollar division summaries. How many FTEs does each program contain? What are the consultant costs for those that are contracted out? What are the relevant performance measures? So far, KPMG has not addressed this problem in Santa Barbara County. The Behavioral Health Department lists its programs on its website, but they are not presented in an organized hierarchical form in the Budget. KPMG has a huge task in disentangling this one.

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<sup>1</sup> Six Sigma is a well-known organizational development and training program that focuses on initiative, complete staff work, and structured project management.

**Separately From the KMPG Study Issue: The County Behavioral Health Department is promoting DEI throughout its structure, operations, and hiring practices. This became apparent from investigating the list above.**

When COLAB presented this factoid, the Board said nothing. How many other departments are infected?

We don't recall that the Board of Supervisors ever adopted such an initiative. How much does the DEI program cost, how many hours per year are devoted to it, who leads it, how many FTEs, how many hours are consumed for training the employees, etc. For example, is some manager tasked with leading this? The write-up on the web site is simply a propaganda piece (wonder if the Board knows they are promoting DEI?).

Is the Human Resources Department supporting this initiative in hiring and promotions? Are Behavioral Health Department employees rated on DEI during their performance evaluations?

Read the program description below:

### *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging*

*The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Program is the embodiment of an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within the Behavioral Health Department. Rooted in the principles of cultural humility and propelled by a steadfast dedication to progress, this program transcends the conventional scope of initiatives. It is the foundational pillar of our mission, intricately woven into the fabric of our operations to foster an environment that is not just inclusive but deeply understanding and welcoming for everyone involved.*

*The program's journey is rooted in the belief that true excellence in healthcare is achieved only when we fully embrace and celebrate the rich diversity of our community. We recognize the myriad dimensions of diversity, including but not limited to culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, sexuality, abilities, veteran status, spiritual beliefs, and language. It is our pledge to not only acknowledge these differences but to honor and elevate them in every aspect of our work.*

Does the Board of Supervisors support this program? Are any other Departments conducting a similar effort?

**Item 16 - Request to: 1) approve and execute a professional consultant services contract with Carollo Engineers, Inc. through January 14, 2027, in an amount not to exceed \$899,957, to develop a Desalination Executable Solution and Logistics Plan; 2) authorize the Director of Public Works, or designee, to approve amendments to the contract in an amount not to exceed a contingency of \$89,995 provided County Counsel approves said amendments as to form and legal effect; and 3) authorize a budget adjustment for Fund Center 450 – San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District Zone General to grant funds for the United States Department of Interior Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART: Water Recycling and Desalination Planning Funding**

**Opportunity Grant and budget Federal Aid Revenue in the amount of \$548,410, by 4/5 vote.** The proposal was approved unanimously on the consent calendar

Hooray! The project to assess the feasibility of industrial scale desalination on the central coast is alive. Credit the County for obtaining a nice big grant to pay for the assessment project.

*On October 18, 2022, the Board authorized staff to proceed with developing a Desalination Executable Solution and Logistics (DESAL) Plan in coordination with other participating agencies and stakeholders and to pursue grants to offset project costs.*

*On April 18, 2023, the Board authorized the Director of Public Works to execute agreements for grant funding under the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) WaterSMART: Water Recycling and Desalination Planning program and directed staff to return with a DESAL Plan consultant contract for Board approval. The grant agreement was finalized in September 2024, and today's recommended Board action is the approval of a DESAL Plan consultant contract to proceed with steps including, but not limited to, establishing a stakeholder engagement process, identifying, vetting, and analyzing project concept alternatives, and ranking and selecting an optimal desalination project, which is Phase 2a of the DESAL project.*

*The DESAL Plan, when complete, will contain balanced recommendations related to responsibly advancing the implementation of a regional desalination project that could serve as a drought-proof solution for current and projected water supply imbalances caused by strained alternative supplies and increased demand.*

Go public works!!!! If the County solves the water problem, it can begin to solve the housing problem.

**Item 26 - It is recommended that the Board approve appointments of the individual Board members to various committees and commissions for the calendar year 2025.** This was the usual collegial process, with the Supervisors deferring to each other's top preferences.

Supervisor Gibson retained his position as the County rep on the Paso Water Basin Cooperative Committee. One theory up north is that so many of the projects are failing that he should continue and take the rap. For example, some of the projects funded by the \$7.6 million State SGMA grant are floundering. Reported, the \$3 million awarded by the County to serve mixed treated with ground water to wineries now has no customers. Similarly the San Miguel Community Service District received a \$1 million grant to serve treated sewer water. Apparently they now are declining to execute the project.

Separately during the meeting, Supervisor Gibson complained that the Legislative Program was too unfocused. We agree. It's a long wish list. Worse yet, it is irresponsible, as it presents no idea of how the State taxpayer would pay for all the programs and facilities on the wish list. Staff was admonished to return with a new format for future years.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>2024 Appointments</b>	<b>2025 Interest</b>
Adult Services Policy Council	John Peschong	
Behavioral Health Advisory Board	Jimmy Paulding	Jimmy Paulding
Cal ID Advisory Board	John Peschong	John Peschong
Carrizo Plain National Monument Advisory Committee	Debbie Arnold	Heather Moreno
Cal Poly Campus Planning Committee	Debbie Arnold	Heather Moreno
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)	Bruce Gibson Alternate – Jimmy Paulding	Bruce Gibson Alternate – Jimmy Paulding
Central Coast Community Energy Board	Dawn Ortiz-Legg Alternate – Jimmy Paulding	Dawn Ortiz-Legg Alternate – Jimmy Paulding
Children's Resource Network of the Central Coast	Dawn Ortiz-Legg	John Peschong

Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo (CAPSLO)	Jimmy Paulding	
REACH (2 Appointees)	Dawn Ortiz-Legg Jimmy Paulding	Dawn Ortiz-Legg Jimmy Paulding
Fire Safe Council	Debbie Arnold	Heather Moreno
First 5 Children & Families Commission	Dawn Ortiz-Legg	Dawn Ortiz-Legg
Golden State Finance Authority	John Peschong No Alternate	John Peschong No Alternate
Golden State Connect Authority	John Peschong No Alternate	John Peschong No Alternate
Homeless Services Oversight Council	Dawn Ortiz-Legg	Bruce Gibson
IWMA	Jimmy Paulding Alternate – Dawn Ortiz-Legg	Jimmy Paulding Alternate – Heather Moreno
Latino Outreach Council	Debbie Arnold	Heather Moreno
Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)	Debbie Arnold Jimmy Paulding Alternate - Dawn Ortiz-Legg	Heather Moreno

Nacimiento Water Project Commission	John Peschong	John Peschong
National Estuary Program Executive Committee	Bruce Gibson	Bruce Gibson
Psychiatric Health Facility Committee	John Peschong	Jimmy Paulding
Rural Counties Representatives of California (RCRC)	John Peschong Alternate – Debbie Arnold	John Peschong No Alternate
SB/SLO Regional Health Authority (CenCal)	Dawn Ortiz-Legg	Jimmy Paulding
Student-Community Liaison Committee	Debbie Arnold	Heather Moreno



Visit SLO Advisory Committee	Dawn Ortiz-Legg	Dawn Ortiz-Legg
Countywide Oversight Board	Debbie Arnold	
SLO Basin Groundwater Sustainability Commission	Dawn Ortiz-Legg Alternate – Jimmy Paulding	Dawn Ortiz-Legg Alternate – Jimmy Paulding
Los Osos Basin Management Committee	Bruce Gibson	Bruce Gibson
Paso Basin Cooperative Committee	Bruce Gibson Staff Alternate – Blaine Reely	Bruce Gibson Alternate – Heather Moreno
Atascadero Basin GSA Exec Committee	Debbie Arnold Alternate – John Peschong	Heather Moreno Alternate – John Peschong
Cuyama Basin JPA Board of Directors	Jimmy Paulding Staff Alternate – Blaine Reely	Jimmy Paulding Alternate – Blaine Reely

Shouldn't John Peschong and Heather Moreno be the two on the Paso Basin Cooperative Committee? The basin is in their districts. Gibson has been an enemy of those poor people still stuck in the 2013 moratorium.

**Item 27 - It is recommended that the Board consider and approve the County's proposed 2025 State and Federal Legislative Platform.** In a surprise move, Supervisor Paulding recanted his prior vote (last year) to weaken the Proposition 13 provision for a 66.7 vote. The Board quickly restored that portion. Paulding cited as his reason, that the voters in his district supported Proposition 13 in its full strength. This opens up speculation about what he really believes personally and professionally about taxation and its limits in general. It also begs the question on his views about limitations on government, as governments' finances are a key to their power. His homework for the next year should include reading F.A. Hayek's The Constitution of Liberty and checking the Mises Institute website weekly at [Mises Institute](https://mises.org/).

**Background:** The 39-page policy document lists scores of programs and projects for which it requests the State and Federal governments to provide continued or additional funding. The power of governments is based on their finances. Thus, the entire focus is on enhancing the power and patronage of the County government. There is really only one plank in the platform oriented toward the poor taxpayer. That is the one that seeks to preserve Proposition 13. Usually Supervisor Gibson attempts to weaken or remove this one. So far, Ortiz-Legg has not gone along.

**Proposition 13** *Oppose any legislation or initiative that proposes to modify Proposition 13. Specifically, oppose any proposal that would weaken the homeowner protections of fortified Proposition 13 by increasing or eliminating the 2% cap on annual property tax increases for homeowners. Oppose any legislation or proposal that would establish a so-called "Split Roll" for property tax, which would thereby reduce protections for commercial property owners.*

There is considerable discussion of Diablo in the Platform. Much of the discussion relates to continuation of property taxes and grants should the NRC approve continuation of the Plant. The County also seeks replacement revenues beyond the first round, should it be closed. The County received tens of millions of dollars under the original closure agreement but has largely frittered that away on inconclusive economic development programs, housing deals, and pet capital projects. There was no real strategic plan. It was simply a general allocation to various functions.

**Diablo Canyon Power Plant Problem:** *The closure of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant (DCPP) will have significant ramifications on the County of San Luis Obispo, school districts, and residents including a significant loss of jobs (anticipated 1,500) and opportunities for jobs in the County. In 2018, Senate Bill 1090 (authored by Senator Monning and Assembly member Cunningham), was signed by former Governor Jerry Brown to ease the transition for the employees, community members, and public services that rely in many ways on the operation of the plant and will be impacted by its closure. The law provides funding for the County to plan for the plant's closure.*

**Some red herrings:** The Platform is chock full of requests for funding for a variety of trendy virtue signaling woke projects. Some examples include:

**Broadband:** *The Loan Loss Reserve Fund provides a credit enhancement related to the financing of local broadband infrastructure development. The reserve fund expands the ability of local governments, tribes and non-profits to secure financing for building last-mile projects, with an emphasis on public broadband networks, by providing collateral to local governments to enable more favorable borrowing rates and terms for bonds issued to deploy broadband infrastructure.*

*In July 2021, Senate Bill (SB) 156 (Stats. 2021, Ch. 84 and 112) and Assembly Bill (AB) 164 (Budget Act of 2021), among other things, created a Broadband Loan Loss Reserve Fund in the California State Treasury. This included plans for up to \$750 million dollars over multiple years to fund costs related to the financing of broadband infrastructure deployment by local government agencies, nonprofit organizations and Tribal governments.*

*As part of the final 2024-25 state budget adopted last June, SB 109 (Chapter 36, Statutes of 24) revised previous appropriations, and specified a significantly reduced Broadband Loan Loss Reserve appropriation to only \$50 million and provided that: "Awards made from the Broadband Loan Loss Reserve program shall be issued by December 31, 2024, irrespective of cycles and tracks."*

*In context, the \$50 million in FY 2024-25 will only cover demand of \$451 million in applications putting many Golden State Connect Authority County Federal Funding Account (FFA) project applications in limbo, including for the County of San Luis Obispo.*

Does government funded fiber optic really promote economic development? Is it now obsolete, given worldwide satellite services such as Starlink? Why should the County need to dig up the streets to run miles fiber or hang wires on polls at huge disruptive taxpayer funded costs? Of course, it's patronage for consultants, engineering firms, and contractors

**Infrastructure, Energy, and Economic Development Projects:** *Support legislative initiatives that provide funding sources or financing tools for programs or projects that enable infrastructure, energy, and economic development projects including but not limited to development of adequate infrastructure; increased energy efficiency; development of renewable energy and energy storage systems; all zero net energy buildings; and, access to energy consumption data to support infrastructure and resiliency planning.*

This one is simply more climate change patronage.

***Climate Change Problem:*** *San Luis Obispo County is experiencing more frequent events of extreme heat, drought, wildfires, smoke, and flooding, with projections showing significant increases in occurrence. These climate-related hazards can contribute to rising cases of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, injuries, food- and water-borne illnesses, and increased risks of vector-borne diseases like Valley Fever. The populations most negatively impacted by these hazards include older adults, farm workers, outdoor workers, and people experiencing homelessness—groups that will struggle to adapt due to limited resources, such as cooling during heatwaves or transportation during disasters. This results in cascading health impacts, including worsened respiratory conditions, heat-related illnesses, delayed healthcare, and mental health strain from displacement and economic loss. Resolution: Support efforts and funding to build climate-resilient communities in San Luis Obispo County, mitigate climate-related hazards, and address their health impacts. Prioritize equitable climate policies, increase healthcare access, and invest in infrastructure that reduces exposure to environmental hazards.*

Is climate change actually causing the problems listed above? Where is the longitudinal data?

***Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Problem:*** *Effective 2035, 100% of the new cars and light trucks that are sold in California will be zero-emission vehicles. The current County electric vehicle infrastructure can support less than 2% of the vehicles currently in service. Resolution: Support legislation that reinforces the County's fleet electrification goals and infrastructure requirements by incentivizing manufacturers to produce a variety of vehicle options and charging capabilities, with emphasis on emergency-related vehicles and the charging infrastructure to support them.*

Are we going to electrify police cars, fire trucks, garbage trucks, earth moving equipment, dump trucks, sewer vac trucks, ambulances, lawn mowers, and other equipment that must run for hours in the field and must be able to run during disasters?

***Economic Development Problem:*** *California has set a planning goal of 2-5 GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045. The Morro Bay wind energy Area is one of two federal offshore wind call areas on the West Coast that were auctioned in December 2022. The economic benefits from offshore wind development that could be realized by San Luis Obispo County are dependent in part on development of an operations and maintenance facilities. Resolution: Support Statewide offshore wind development programs and initiatives, as well as funding for Central Coast-specific offshore wind development, including studies aimed at infrastructure, workforce training and development, economic benefits, supply chain development, environmental analyses, permitting, and more. Support initiatives that improve coordination between local, state, and federal agencies as well as with other communities preparing for offshore wind development. Support local hire initiatives to ensure the jobs generated in the building and construction phase of offshore wind development go to local workers.*

Does the Board actually support offshore wind? At this point? What will the power cost the rate payers?

***Single Payer Health Care System Problem:*** In the 2023 legislative session AB 1400 (Kalra, Lee and Santiago) proposed a single-payer health care system. This bill would require the elimination of health care plans throughout the State and require all employees to be covered by a single-payer system (CalCare) run by the State of California. Resolution: Support public health forward policies that focus on providing proactive health care services to reduce costs and complexity of our healthcare system.

Does the Board actually support a single payer system and the abolition of private health insurance? Would such a system actually reduce costs? Ultimately, health care comes down to a patient in a room (office, hospital, ER, OR) with a board certified doctor backed up by some very high tech expensive equipment. Just how would such a system reduce the cost of a Board certified Internist or a \$750,000 cat scan machine?

**Request to:** 1) receive an update on the scope change application for the Bob Jones Pathway Gap Closure Project (Project) and direct staff to advocate for project approval at the January 2025 California Transportation Commission (CTC) hearing; 2) adopt a resolution of support for the Project; and 3) authorize a related budget adjustment in the amount of \$5,000,000 from the Capital Projects Fund Facilities Planning Designation to Fund Center (FC) 230 – Capital Projects WBS 320096 - Bob Jones Pathway Gap Closure Project, by 4/5 vote. The Board voted 4/0 to approve the transfer. Supervisor Peschong was recused due to the potential of the appearance of a conflict of interest. He had received a campaign contribution from an individual who refused to sell right of way necessary for the trail.

It turns out the Bob Jones Trail is a \$48.3 million project when all prior, current, and proposed costs are included. This makes it more expensive than the \$40 million Willow Road/Highway 101 interchange project completed a decade ago.

*The projects are funded through a combination of Federal, State, regional and local funds. The Bob Jones Project is a key component of the corridor plan, with \$43.3 million invested or committed by multiple agencies toward a total estimated cost of \$48.3 million, as shown on the charts below.*

The latest iteration requires an additional \$5 million from the County. The County has petitioned the State Transportation Commission to approve an amended route that does not require condemnation of a segment of right of way. The Commission's determination is scheduled for February. Thus, there is a degree of urgency for the Board to approve this appropriation.

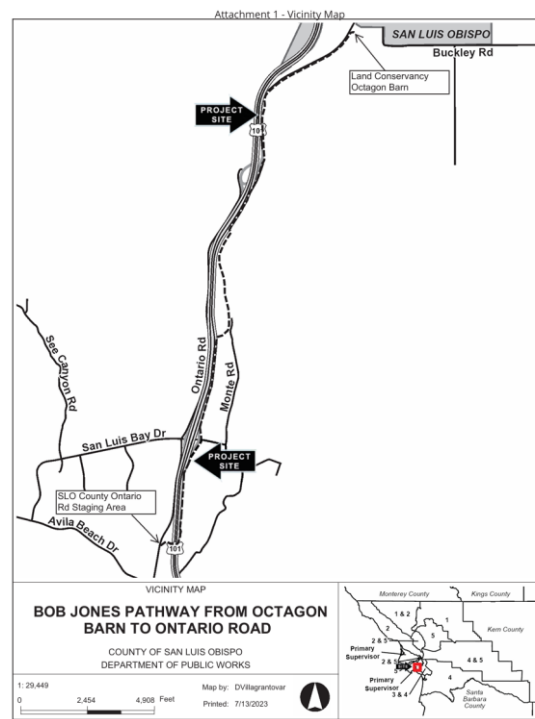
*Staff has submitted the necessary documents to Caltrans and the CTC for placement on the January meeting agenda. At this time, staff believes their response to the recommendation will be positive; however, in discussions with Caltrans and CTC staff, this is dependent on showing a fully funded Project. At the moment, Phase 2 of the Project currently has an approximate \$5 million funding shortfall. Both SLOCOG and Caltrans have increased their contributions to the Project and do not have any other funding available. This means the County will need to allocate the necessary funding for the recommended scope change to feasibly be approved by the CTC at the January hearing. It is recommended that your Board increase the Project budget by \$5 million by moving funds from the Capital Projects Fund Facilities Planning Designation into the Project budget.*



**Several questions not covered in the write-up include:**

- What is the Capital Facilities Fund Balance from which the transfer will be made?
- What portion of that balance is general fund?
- What scheduled projects will be postponed as a result of the transfer?
- The trail is very popular with some segments of the south county community, especially the bike lobby.

The pressure is severe, as over \$18 million of the \$48.3 million is funded by an approved State \$18 million grant, of which millions have already been spent. Should the State not approve the revised plan, the County could lose the entire grant and have to refund the expended portion.



**Item 32 - 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.** Supervisors Peschong and Ortiz-Legg will form an Ad Hoc Committee to work with staff to develop an information program to assure legal immigrants and people here on work visas that they are not the subjects of pending Federal deportation plans. The idea is to reduce fear and confusion. This will be important for the agricultural community and others.

Separately, the State and counties are going to have to decide how to deal with SB 54 (2019), which forbids County Sheriffs from releasing illegals held in their jails to ICE. Only the most violent crimes are exempted.

**SLO County Local Agency Commission meeting of Thursday, January 16, 2025  
(Completed)**

**LAFCO File No 2-R-23: Sphere of Influence Amendment and Annexation No. 1 to County Service Area 23 (111 Residential Lots In Tract 2586) Recommendation:** The Annexation was approved unanimously after an extensive review of a very large analysis and report. The project is designed to have water redundancy. Thus, the conversation spilled over into the LA fire situation, and members presented examples of what the County and cities are doing to eliminate brush.

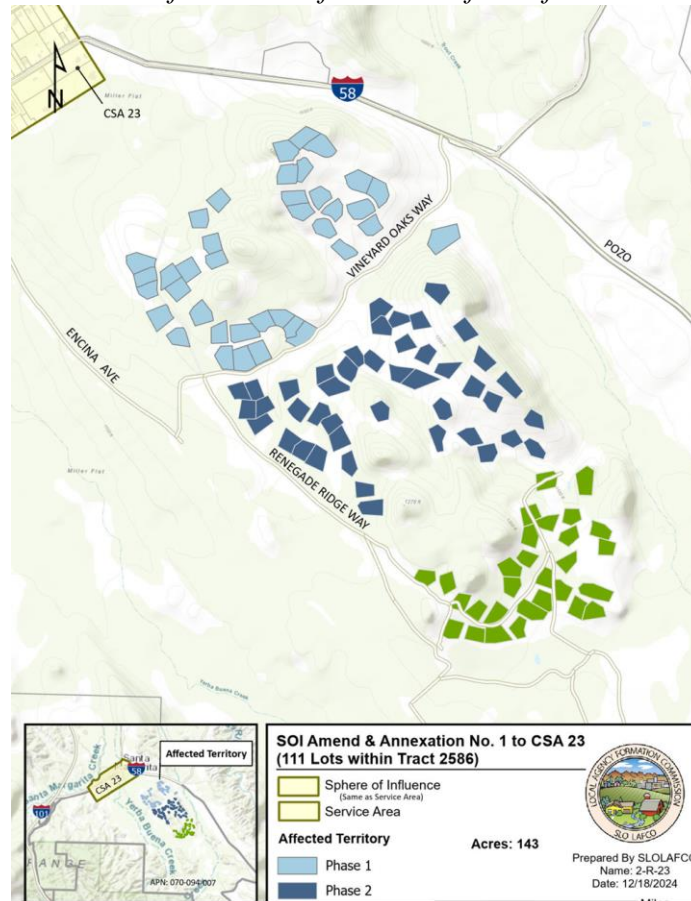
**Action 1: Acting as the Responsible Agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), find by motion, that the Certified Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and EIR Addendum, State Clearinghouse No. 2004111112, adopted by the County of San Luis Obispo, was reviewed, considered, and determined to be adequate for purposes specified in Section 15096 of the CEQA Guidelines and for use in considering approval of the proposed Sphere of Influence amendment and annexation.**

**Action 2: Approve, by resolution, the proposed Sphere of Influence Amendment and Annexation No. 1 to County Service Area 23, as contained in Attachment A, subject to conditions of approval, adopt Findings of Fact and a Statement of Overriding Findings for compliance with CEQA (Attachment A, Exhibit A) and waive protest proceedings pursuant to Government Code Section 56662(a).** The LAFCO will consider approval of the annexation of the long pending Santa Margarita Ranch project to the CSA 23. This will enable the project to obtain water. The Annexation was approved unanimously after an extensive review of a very large analysis and report.

*Proposal: The proposal consists of a Sphere of Influence (SOI) Amendment and Annexation into County Service Area (CSA) 23 of 111 residential lots (1.0 to 2.5 acres in size with one single-family home per lot) created by the three-phase Tract Map 2586 for water service. CSA 23 supplies the community of Santa Margarita with water service via two groundwater wells and an emergency water supply intertie with Atascadero Mutual Water Company. The proposal would add two new water supply wells to the CSA 23 system and the intertie with Tract 2586 would increase the water supply, fire flow pressure, available storage, and redundancy in CSA 23. At the request of the County and landowner (Santa Margarita Ranch, LLC), one application is being processed to amend the SOI and annex all three phases into CSA 23. The annexation boundary is proposed to be co-terminus with the lots B-1-1 San Luis Obispo LAFCO January 16, 2025 LAFCO File No. 2-R-23 Page 2 created by the tract map. This approach is being pursued because the need for service is associated with the single-family homes that will be built within each lot and not the remainder of Tract 2586 which will maintain surrounding agricultural land under the Agricultural Open Space Easement.*

*As a result of the proposal for the SOI amendment and annexation into CSA 23, additional infrastructure and capital improvements are necessary. The Plan for Services prepared and submitted by the County, dated March 5, 2024, further elaborates on the required improvements associated with each phase. All costs associated with the design, inspection, plan check, and review and construction inspection by CSA 23 staff will be paid for by the applicant per the*

*terms and conditions of the Engineering Reimbursement Agreement dated May 28, 2020, and Annexation Agreement. The owner would fund a number of major water infrastructure improvements, which are detailed in the Plan for Services and annexation agreement included as Attachments E and G. A zone of benefit will be established for the tract and connection fees will be paid by the owners. CSA 23 intends to initiate proceedings for the formation of a new zone of benefit upon the issuance of the Certificate of Completion for annexation. The capital improvement charge will be implemented through a Proposition 218 protest process, which will take place at the same time as the formation of the zone of benefit.*



## EMERGENT ISSUES

### Item 1 - Nolan: Out of Control LA Fires – It's Not Just Incompetence, It's Malfeasance January 14, 2025 By Pat Nolan

The fires raging in Los Angeles are personal to me. As a native Angeleno and a fifth generation Californian, my heart breaks. Close friends and relatives have lost their homes and businesses, and many others have been evacuated. The toll of these fires is terrible: at least twenty-four have died in the fires, and Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna predicts the death toll is expected to rise as search crews and cadaver dogs comb through the rubble.

In the Eaton Fire in Pasadena and Altadena, whose residents I represented in the California State Assembly for many years, is where the large majority of deaths have occurred and over 7,000 homes and businesses have been destroyed. Reporters have focused on Malibu's wealthy celebrities whose homes have been destroyed. However, the people of Pasadena and Altadena have suffered even more. The residents are average working-class people with modest homes. They live check to check, and they have few resources with which to rebuild. California's leaders have failed these good people miserably.

The highest priority for government is to keep the public safe. The current political leadership in California lost sight of that somehow. When deciding spending priorities, California's politicians chose to cut back fire safety and prevention programs in order to fund their liberal, ideologically driven agendas. Those dreadful decisions left Angelenos unprotected against the raging fires. Don't blame incompetence for this disaster. It is malfeasance pure and simple.

Here is a pared down list of the terrible policies that left Angelenos at the mercy of raging fires:

- To protect a small fish, the Delta Smelt, the state allows over two billion gallons a day to flow into the ocean rather than channeling runoff from the snow pack into basins and reservoirs. Because of a lack of water, fire hydrants ran dry, leaving firefighters unable to battle the flames. "There's no water in the fire hydrants," Rick Caruso, who owns the Palisades Village mall in the heart of the devastated area, fumed to local media. "The firefighters are there, and there's nothing they can do — we've got neighborhoods burning, homes burning, and businesses burning. ... It should never happen."
- California has not built a new major water reservoir since 1979. Over ten years ago in 2014, Californians voted overwhelmingly for a \$7.5 billion bond to construct new water reservoirs and dams. The deadline for completing the dams was three years ago on January 1, 2022. As of today, not a single reservoir has been built.
- In fact, Governor Newsom has added to the lack of water storage by ordering the demolition of several dams. Most recently in October four dams on the Klamath River were destroyed. Newsome's twisted priorities were on display when he bragged, "By taking down these outdated dams, we are giving salmon and other species a chance to thrive once again, while also restoring an essential lifeline for tribal communities who have long depended on the health of the river." He might just as well have said, "People in high fire danger areas be damned."
- L.A. City and County do not enforce laws requiring homeowners to clear brush from around their homes. Dense overgrowth accumulated, providing plenty of fuel for the fires. Officials blame this non-enforcement on a lack of resources. However, Mayor Karen Bass cut the Fire Department's budget by over \$17 million, but she found money to fund \$100,000 for a "Midnight Stroll Transgender Cafe," \$8,670 for the "One Institute the International Gay and Lesbian Archives," and \$170,000 for "Social Justice Art-Worker Investments."
- The LA Fire Department's strategic plan made "DEI" and a "progressive work environment" two of their top three priorities—regarding them as more important than "technological innovations" and "disaster recovery capabilities," which it ranked last.
- Governor Newsom cut \$101M from the Fire Prevention Budget despite severe overgrowth of dead trees and underbrush in State and National Forests, and controlled burns, which are the best way to remove the overgrowth, severely restricted due to the red tape involved in environmental review, which can take from three to seven years. As a result, Southern California was a tinderbox of fuel waiting to be ignited.



- Not to be outdone, the Biden administration last October ordered the U.S. Forest Service to [stop prescribed burning in California.](#)”

City, County, State, and Federal officials were alerted to problems getting water to firefighters just a month ago. In December, the Mountain Fire consumed over 20,000 acres and destroyed [243 structures, many of which were primary residences, and damaged another 127.](#) This tragedy hit close to home – those displaced families lived on land that was part of the ranch where my great grandfather, Pierre Agoure, raised cattle and sheep.

Two water companies’ pumps stopped when they lost power because the power companies shut down power as a safety precaution. The pumps were out of action from 2 p.m. until 11p.m. when a generator was brought to the sites to restore operations. During those nine hours, the fire spread rapidly. The area served by these pumps included some of the worst-hit streets from the fire, where more than twenty homes were destroyed.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) reported that one of the companies “acknowledge(d) that it is best practice for water providers to top off their water tanks, stage backup generators and prepare crews for contingency work during a red flag event or possible fire weather.” Officials had a month before the current fires to preposition generators to keep the pumps running when power companies shut down power. Why didn’t they?

Now the butcher’s bill has come due for the spending on the pie-in-the sky projects of radical environmentalists and social justice warriors. We can see the terrible cost of those misplaced priorities – multiple deaths and thousands of people who have lost their home and all their possessions. It’s time for the voters in California to toss out the radical leftists whose policies allowed this fire to explode, and replace them with conservative leaders such as Ronald Reagan and George Deukmejian who would put common sense policies in place.

*Pat Nolan was a member of the California State Assembly from 1978-1994 and was Republican Leader from 1984-1988. This article first appeared in California Political Review of January 14, 2025..*

## **Item 2 -**

### **THE DAILY CHART: LOSS DAMAGE WAIVER**

The left is desperate to divert our attention away from the ideologically-driven incompetence of California government at all levels, but their favorite ADD squirrel—climate change—isn’t working. CNN’s opinion survey maven Harry Enten notes:



**Eric Daugherty** ✓  
@EricLDaugh

Subscribe



**BREAKING: Americans do not blame wildfires on climate change - CNN**

"The searches for wildfires - up 2,400%. The most ever. Search for climate change? It went down 9%. In California, no increase in the search for climate change."

"Americans don't connect wildfires to climate change."



Meanwhile, you can expect to hear the usual claim that climate change-related weather disaster are soaring in cost. As Roger Pielke Jr. has been pointing out for more than a decade the numbers are never adjusted for inflation, or for population density (when more people live in hurricane zones, of course the losses will go up). Roger [further notes](#) that when you look at weather catastrophe losses as a percent of GDP, they have been steadily falling for decades:

***POSTED ON JANUARY 15, 2025 BY STEVEN HAYWARD IN THE DAILY CHART***

**ITEM 3 - SLO DA Dow Proposes Urgency Legislation for Looting During a Disaster and in Evacuation Areas**

**Today's existing law is insufficient to adequately deter people from committing these crimes**

**By Katy Grimes, January 16, 2025**

San Luis Obispo District Attorney Dan Dow announced Wednesday his proposal for urgency legislation for looting during a disaster and in evacuation areas. This is a great plan, particularly the bigger picture position with statewide legislation... and especially with the overwhelming Proposition 36 win. This plan has teeth.

Here is DA Dow's announcement and plan:

District Attorney Dan Dow announced today an urgency legislative measure to increase penalties for individuals who commit predatory crimes during a disaster and in evacuation areas such as have been widely publicized in Los Angeles County in areas affected by the Palisades Fire and other fires causing evacuation zones to be created for large numbers of families and neighborhoods.

This proposal to provide greater protection for the people during emergencies is consistent with the recent expression of the will of the voters who overwhelmingly passed Proposition 36 on November 5, 2024. Additionally, the current devastation by wildfires in Los Angeles County and subsequent looting crimes being committed reveal that today's existing law is insufficient to adequately deter people from committing these crimes. If this proposal is made law, it will demonstrate to the People of California that our state legislators and Governor have made it a top priority to protect temporarily vulnerable populations by providing tools that law enforcement officials need during large-scale emergencies such as wildfires or other large-scale disasters.

"I look forward to working with my colleagues across California and legislators in Sacramento to immediately address this important issue of public safety as urgency legislation," said District Attorney Dan Dow. "Those of us in positions of leadership who are charged with protecting the People of California must act quickly and decisively to provide better protections through appropriately tough laws that hold exploiters accountable for their predatory acts during the fires that are devastating Los Angeles County. Law enforcement and prosecutors need these additional tools to be implemented immediately."



## OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

DAN DOW  
District Attorney

January 15, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ERIC J. DOBROTH  
Assistant District Attorney

JERRET C. GRAN  
Chief Deputy District Attorney

SHERYL M. WOLCOTT  
Chief Deputy District Attorney

LISA B. MUSCARI  
Chief Deputy District Attorney

TERRY O'FARRELL  
Chief, Bureau of Investigation

# Urgency Legislative Proposal to Address Looting During a Disaster and in Evacuation Areas

District Attorney Dan Dow announced today his proposal for an urgency legislative measure to increase penalties for individuals who commit predatory crimes during a disaster and in evacuation areas such as have been widely publicized now in Los Angeles County in areas affected by the Palisades Fire and the other fires causing evacuation zones to be created for large numbers of families and neighborhoods.

This proposal to provide greater protection for the people during emergencies is consistent with the recent expression of the will of the voters who overwhelmingly passed Proposition 36 on November 5, 2024. Additionally, the current devastation by wildfires in Los Angeles County and subsequent looting crimes being committed reveal that today's existing law is insufficient to adequately deter people from committing these crimes. If this proposal is made law, it will demonstrate to the People of California that our state legislators and Governor have made it a top priority to protect temporarily vulnerable populations by providing tools that law enforcement officials need during large-scale emergencies such as wildfires or other large-scale disasters.

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## Item 4 - 2024 California Fuel taxes... A DOOSEY

California has collected record gasoline tax revenue in 2024 according to data released by the U.S Census Bureau in December. If Californians buy as much gasoline and diesel as they did the last quarter of 2023, the state will rake in over \$10 billion for the year. The final number will not

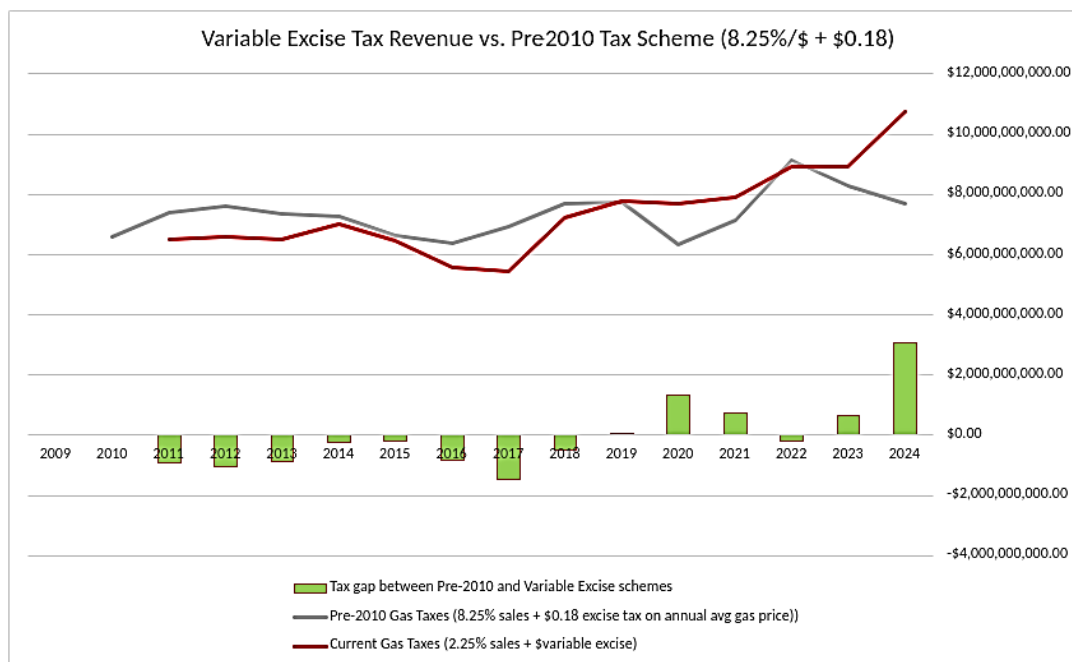


be released for several more months, but it is unlikely Californians will buy less gasoline and diesel given fuel prices have come down since the summer months.

Californians pay the highest fuel taxes in the United States: 60 cents per gallon, plus another 2.25 cents per dollar. The scheme was implemented in 2010 as way to ensure fuel tax revenue would be exclusively spent on roads and bridges. Lawmakers assured voters that the scheme would be equalized to the pre-2010 sales tax method. That promise was kept during the Brown administration, but since 2019 the excise tax revenues have exceeded those of the old sales tax and now has totally diverged from it.

Had the old sale tax been retained, California would have collected less than \$8 billion in 2024\* (see chart below).

The current per-gallon fuel tax ensure the state government will always have a steady flow of revenue no matter how low the price at the pump. Governor Newsom certainly has an incentive keep fuel prices low by law and administrative harassment and also to keep the public ire directed at companies instead of himself and a cruel tax scheme that only punishes average Californians



*Authored by Truman Angell, oil industry expert. California policy center, January 17, 2025*

## COLAB IN DEPTH

IN FIGHTING THE TROUBLESOME, LOCAL DAY-TO-DAY ASSAULTS ON OUR FREEDOM AND PROPERTY, IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND THE LARGER UNDERLYING IDEOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC CAUSES

### THE POLITICIZATION OF WIND AND FIRE

*Decades of Santa Ana winds fueling fires show California's failure to prioritize land management, instead focusing on politics while residents face predictable disasters*

BY EDWARD RING

The first time I'd ever heard of the Santa Ana wind was while reading an essay famed author Joan Didion wrote, "Los Angeles Notebook," which is included in her book Slouching Towards Bethlehem. Writing in 1968, Didion describes what had happened just a decade earlier.

*The longest single Santa Ana period in recent years was in 1957," Didion writes, "and it lasted not the usual three or four days but fourteen days, from November 21 until December 4. On the first day, 25,000 acres of the San Gabriel Mountains were burning, with gusts reaching 100 miles per hour. In town, the wind reached Force 12, or hurricane force, on the Beaufort Scale... On November 30 the San Gabriel fire was still out of control, and the wind in town was blowing eighty miles an hour.*

This conflagration, nearly 70 years ago, involved a weather event that was easily a match for what Angelenos are enduring today. That hasn't stopped the climate crisis industry from pouncing on this tragedy to score political points. From the Sierra Club on January 8, "Time and again, we are witnessing climate change heighten extreme weather, making wildfires increasingly common and increasingly destructive." From the BBC, "Climate 'whiplash' linked to raging LA fires."

We will hear more of this agenda-driven, politically motivated hectoring, even though according to at least some climate experts, including John Christy, professor of Atmospheric Science at the University of Alabama and originally a California native, over a century of climate data in California refutes the climate crisis narrative.

But what if the climate crisis narrative is valid? So what? If our climate is turning against us, doesn't that mean we have to be even more prepared to cope with what nature's going to throw at us, starting with the Santa Ana winds?

Rather than look in the mirror, environmentalists claim these fires are being exploited for political gain by their critics. For example, Steve Lopez, a regular columnist for the Los Angeles Times, accuses president-elect Trump of "using the fires as a political piñata." But it's the people

running California, the Democrats that Trump and other critics are now holding accountable, who have politicized the management of everything. Not just land use and climate science, but entire industries and every category of infrastructure. Nothing has escaped their reach.

After California's devastating fires in the summer of 2020, Newsom issued an executive order to ban the sale of gasoline-powered cars starting in 2035. After another round of fires in 2023, California Attorney General Rob Bonta filed a lawsuit against five major oil companies, accusing them of knowingly misleading the public regarding the harm that fossil fuels would inflict on the climate.

This is pure political theater. What California's forests need, along with the chaparral currently being immolated in the Santa Monica and San Gabriel mountains surrounding the Los Angeles Basin, is responsible land management. Before having any discussion, even of firefighting response, much less the "climate crisis," California's governor, supported by the state legislature, needs to enact sweeping reforms that, among other things, radically deregulate the activities of timber harvesting, mechanical thinning, grazing, and controlled burns.

As it is, the canyons between the neighborhoods on the hills and ridges surrounding Los Angeles are dangerously overgrown, along with the adjacent state parks and open space. There's no way to completely stop a wildfire when the Santa Ana winds turn Los Angeles County into a blast furnace. But if the state and county had managed their open space, and private property owners had been not merely permitted but required to clear overgrown brush around their homes, these fires would not have had enough fuel to become the catastrophes we're witnessing today.

When it comes to politics, exposing DEI-driven incompetence is also touted by defenders of the bureaucracy as another example of how this conflagration is being politicized by its critics. But there is nothing about DEI that is not political, so critics are politicizing something that is already explicitly political. To put this as delicately as possible, thanks to DEI, the chief of the Los Angeles Fire Department, the assistant chief of the Los Angeles Fire Department, the Los Angeles Fire Department's first "Equity Bureau Chief," and the CEO of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power are all political appointees who check two diversity boxes.

Let's be clear. Nobody wants to discriminate against anyone based on their sexuality or ethnicity. Those days are long gone. In California of all places, those days are ancient history. But were these people selected based on how many boxes they checked relating to their sex, sexuality, or ethnicity, instead of based on their qualifications? The laws of probability suggest that DEI was the prevailing criteria. Up and down the chain of command, from top to bottom, this is happening all the time, everywhere, in every institution that matters. Instead of merit, we are hiring people based on how many diversity boxes they check.

And if these women, the chief in particular, are not the most qualified individuals for the job, what are the consequences of that fact? At a time when leadership was desperately needed, LAFD Chief Kristin Crowley—who, according to Transparent California, made \$654,951 in 2023—was scoring points in the liberal press for excluding white men from hiring and promotion opportunities in the name of diversity and irrespective of their qualifications. This sort of discrimination not only deprives fire teams of the most capable potential members, something

that I've personally been told by current and retired California firefighters. Worse still, and most pertinent to the tragedies citizens are suffering today, Kristin Crowley was not using 100 percent of her leadership capital to demand the reforms to land management and upgrades to firefighting resources that could have prevented this disaster from getting out of control.

Every press conference and interview Kristin Crowley gave on “diversity”—for example, last winter—was time she should have spent publicly demanding the state, county, and cities immediately send crews into the canyons and finally engage in fuel reduction projects. Everyone knew this was a disaster waiting to happen. And more recently, once she knew the Santa Ana winds were forecast, she could have already been prepositioning tankers and engines and if the resources weren't there, she could have already been urgently requesting help in advance from other jurisdictions. And why, in a city as big as Los Angeles, in a state as innovative and wealthy as California, wasn't LAFD exploring and deploying new technologies, such as nontoxic fire retardants or, heck, machine learning chaparral robots to cut, clear and chip overgrown grass, brush, and fallen limbs? Why didn't Crowley demand the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power trim the trees around power lines, or better yet, move them underground in fire-prone neighborhoods, and demand the state find the funds to help pay for it? And why, if we are to get to what everyone knows is the root of these policy failures, didn't Crowley publicly expose the environmentalist extremists, the NGOs, and agency activists who have litigated and regulated practical land management to a standstill?

Why didn't Kristin Crowley hold press conferences, over and over, to demand all of these steps immediately to avoid catastrophe, instead of grandstanding about diversity?

That would take a leader, not a placeholder.

There is so much that could have been done if there had been courageous leadership at the top of the LAFD hierarchy, focused on the department's primary mission. And why, for that matter, aren't the California Professional Firefighters, one of the most powerful unions in the state, joining with Crowley to demand all of the above? Why not? If anyone has the political clout to move Newsom and the state legislature to take preventive action that is more than symbolic blather about the “climate crisis,” it's them.

Once the fires are out, the suffering will go on, because the aftermath of these fires will reveal still more of California's dysfunction. Families burned out of their homes will face a hostile bureaucracy, populated with environmentalist fanatics who have been trained since kindergarten to resent the privilege and deplore the unsustainability of homes that not only commit the green crime of being detached single-family dwellings but are situated in what is charmingly referred to these days as the “wildland-urban interface.” According to these folks, when “wildland” and “urban” face off in California, “wildland” wins. Give the land back to the mountain lions. It's their land. Go away.

And even if that bias weren't present, even if their homes were down in the heart of Los Angeles in fully urbanized settings, they'd face an insurance nightmare. California's FAIR plan, set up after insurance companies started pulling out of California one after another in response to financially ignorant regulators preventing them from charging rates sufficient to pay claims

without going bankrupt, is itself on the brink of bankruptcy. According to a January 10 report in the San Francisco Chronicle, FAIR's reserves are reportedly around \$385 million. Estimated damages so far to residential and commercial property within the ZIP codes in and around the fire perimeters is already \$24 billion. FAIR's share of those claims is easily going to exceed their reserves. Federal bailout, here we come.

And let's suppose these homeowners finally get the money to rebuild. They'll have to get building permits. In Texas, that might take three days. In Los Angeles, California, if you're very, very lucky and very, very diligent, you will have acquired the requisite stack of permits from a bewildering assortment of state, regional, county, city, and various other agencies in around three years. The cost for all these permits and fees will be equal to what construction costs would be in a normal state. Which brings us to California's abnormal construction costs.

Thanks to absurd building codes baked into state law, new homes have to have solar panels, interior fire sprinklers, and an EV charger circuit. The "building envelope," the water heater, HVAC, and lighting all have to comply with ridiculously detailed requirements that are set forth in California's wonderful "Single Family Residential Compliance Manual," courtesy of the California Energy Commission. And just around the corner, there are the state's mandatory new building standards to limit water use. Ask anyone still trying to build new homes in California today about the code requirements they have to navigate, or else, and they will launch into a stupefying recitation of just how much BS the idiots in Sacramento are forcing down everyone's throats. And none of these bureaucrats ever get their fingernails dirty doing real work in the real world. These same Sacramento bureaucrats killed California's timber industry, which is not only a primary reason for superfires in the overgrown forests, but also the reason lumber costs so much. Victims of this fire may expect construction costs to rebuild—not including permits and fees—to top \$500 per square foot.

Such is the disaster that's befallen some of the wealthiest and most progressive households in America. Such is the nature of the multi-year train wreck they face going forward. Will it change their worldview? Will it change their politics? If it doesn't, nothing will.

*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). American Greatness, January 15, 2025.*



# WOKE DEI + GREEN NIHILISM = DRESDEN IN CALIFORNIA

*California's DEI "humanism" and Green New Deal environmentalism ensured the cruelest imaginable treatment of thousands of people and unrivaled destruction of the natural ecosystem.*

BY VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

## **Firebombing on the Pacific**

Over 25,000 acres are ablaze in Los Angeles in the Pacific Palisades fire, a veritable living hell.

Some 12,000-plus structures were incinerated. More than 250,000 souls have been evacuated and are in need of shelter.

No one has really taken charge yet. And now even the woke culprits for the catastrophe are blame-gaming each other to determine who was the more incompetent, which in this case translates to the most woke.

No one knows how many have died; all know the number will escalate in the next few days.

The eventual price tag of the ruin will exceed \$200-300 billion and outstrip the billions of dollars given to Ukraine.

And there are still some fires that are completely uncontained.

The Los Angeles apocalypse was a multisystem, green-woke collapse—and a disastrous reminder that when Soviet-style, anti-meritocratic ideology permeates all aspects of modern life in California, disaster is inevitable.

First, note that the culprit of the catastrophe is not climate change; it is not Donald Trump. Those are excuses for arrogant incompetency and disdain for the public. And it is not racism or homophobia to fault those who paraded and virtue signaled their tribal identities so extraneous to their actual responsibilities for public safety.

Note that all California statewide officeholders are left-wing. The California left holds supermajorities in both houses of the state legislature. Only 17 percent of California's huge congressional delegation of 52 seats is Republican. California's judiciary is the most left-wing in the country. There is not a single Republican on the 15-member Los Angeles City Council.

Add it all up, and the woke socialist state has been eagerly deindustrializing, decivilizing, and retribalizing its way into what is now a veritable peacetime Dresden on the Pacific.

Again, there is no one else to blame, because California is one of those rare states in which Republicans have de facto zero political power. All the state media, the legacy newspapers, the Silicon Valley daily online news sites, the Bay Area-based Apple, Google, and Facebook monopolies, and the local news outlets are parrots of the woke-green mindset.

To the degree that anything still works in California, it predates 2000. The core of the ossified Central Valley Water Project and the California Water Project remain—though they are in need of massive maintenance, like almost all the infrastructure the current generation of politicians inherited and largely ignored.

Now crowded and obsolete highways that were once the nation's best still function—but barely. And there are a few remnants of sanity in what is left of the pre-woke and once-great universities of Berkeley, Caltech, Stanford, UCLA, and USC, founded by a now despised but far wiser and more competent long-dead generation of visionaries.

### **The Real 'Basket of Deplorables'**

Los Angeles brags about its new \$50 billion budget and trumpets how it expanded “Care First” programs. Indeed, the mayor's budget claims it created a new “451 positions”—highlighting its investments in “growing the department of youth development.”

It boasts it is adding positions to the “Justice, Care, and Opportunities Department,” “reducing our jail population,” and expanding “voting solutions for all people.” There is not much about fire, policing, or water—apparently now the low priorities that prior sexist, racist, and homophobic generations once worried about.

The role of DEI? Mayor Karen Bass was warned of the current danger of dry hillsides of chaparral buffeted by record-high, 100-mph Santa Ana winds. Her response?

She went junketing a continent away to the inauguration festivities of the president of Ghana—a strange way to prepare for a possible inferno to come. Does Ghana have firefighting expertise to share with Bass? In damage-control mode, Bass flew back only to be confronted at the airport by a now rare honest—and thus foreign—reporter.

He asked her why she cut over \$17.6 million from the LA fire service budget—itsself just 65% of the city's homelessness expenditures. (She had planned to cut millions of dollars more). And why, he asked, was she in Africa at all in her city's hour of need?

Bass stood mute—shamed into silence.

I think Los Angelenos needed no answer since it was obvious to them: she went to Ghana because she could and wanted to—since identity chauvinism is what ensured she was elected, reelected, and immune from criticism. Look at her appointments and budget, and it is clear public safety, fires, and water are most certainly not her priorities.

Bass was confident that if LA went up in smoke as she pursued her African agendas, the woke megaphones would silence critics as “racist” or “homophobic” or “sexist” in the way Soviet commissars used to send to Siberia any “ideological enemies of the state” who complained that the farms, industries, and trains of Russia no longer worked. And on spec, we now hear it is now racist to criticize a black woman incompetent mayor.

How about the Bass-appointed DEI “deputy mayor for safety,” Brian Williams?

Surely, he stepped up in the mayor’s absence, given his purview of the city’s “safety?” Nope.

You see, he is currently under suspension for suspicion of phoning in a bomb threat to Los Angeles City Hall.

Well, how about the DEI- and the much-acclaimed “first Latina” director of Los Angeles’s vast waterworks? Bass recruited such talent by nearly doubling the job’s normal salary to \$750,000 per year.

What did she accomplish on her over \$2,000-a-day salary? Did Janisse Quiñones, “the new Chief Executive Officer and Chief Engineer of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) and the “first Latina woman to lead the organization,” leap into action?

Well, the water very quickly ran out in Pacific Palisades, and the hydrants went dry—as many had been for months prior.

Quiñones claimed that “three million gallons” in tanks above the suburb were mysteriously not up to the task of quenching the LA Dresden. You think?

She apparently gauges disaster preparation by the number of gallons of water available in tanks, not the number of gallons needed to save thousands of homes and lives. And she forgot to tell the public that in fact there is a 117-million-gallon water reservoir atop Pacific Palisades built for some purpose unknown to her.

Yet it was empty and “under repair” for months because of a mere damaged cover. Consider that: a dry autumn, the onset of the usual Santa Ana winds, a recent plague of hilltop wildfires, and Quiñones shuts down the linchpin of a prior generation’s plan to save the Palisades.

Note Quiñones was supposed to be the professional replacement for a retired director of water and power, who himself had been a replacement for another director who was found guilty of bribery and is currently in federal prison.

So goes the agency created by water wizard William Mulholland, who once created the 18-million-person Los Angeles megapolis by tapping every river and reservoir he could to feed the city’s unquenchable thirst for water.

How about fire chief Kristen Crowley? She now blames the mayor for dry hydrants. But in doing so, she pleaded that her job starts only after water flows out of them—as if their inert condition is not really her concern.

The self-celebrity, nonbinary fire chief Kristen Crowley has talked nonstop for the last two years about “diversity, equity, and inclusion” and the “LGBTQ community.” Less was said about the need to ensure the most meritocratic force possible, unmatched equipment, and long preplanned measures to prevent conflagrations—and screaming to high heaven that fire hydrants were either being stolen or bone dry.

Instead, like Bass, Crowley was mostly mute about the lack of preparation or the absence of sufficient warning to those about to be engulfed.

How about her deputy Kristine Lawson, who claimed people in need want to see fire officers arrive who look like they do? And if they don’t?

She is also on record with this: “Am I able to carry your husband out of a fire? He got himself in the wrong place if I have to carry him out.” Consider that helpful LAFD logic: So, if you are a man who suffers cardiac arrest and collapses on your kitchen floor, it is your fault that you died without medical attention, not Kristine’s, who apparently either would not or could not carry you out the door.

How about morally bankrupt politicians?

The speaker of the California Assembly, Robert Rivas, along with Governor Gavin Newsom, had just called a special session of the legislature to “Trump-proof” California. He wished to allot millions of dollars in state funds—in a year of massive deficits—to sue and impede the federal government.

Will Rivas’s Trump “resistance” session include canceling California’s simultaneous request for hundreds of billions of federal dollars for Los Angeles from the Trump administration? When asked whether it was wise to borrow millions to sue Trump while Los Angeles was burning, Rivas mumbled, stuttered, and revealed himself to be little more than a caricature of an incompetent.

Governor Gavin “Nero” Newsom made his usual performance art, virtual-signaling appearance. When asked why the hydrants were dry, he batted it off as a “local problem.” He now uses his own campaign website, linked to Democratic fundraising efforts, to warn the fire-struck public about supposed “misinformation.”

But what could Newsom do or say? His entire tenure is synonymous with too many catastrophic forest fires and too little water.

He did nothing after the catastrophic Aspen and Paradise fires to revive the timber industry to glean and clean the forests. He never allowed much new grazing on fuel-rich hills or sent crews in to cut back the chaparral.

He never reconsidered his policies of diverting precious snowmelt from the Sacramento River tributaries to flow into the sea to help the delta smelt rather than to ensure that farmers could irrigate their crops or that Los Angeles County reservoirs were fully banked.

Despite an approved 2014 \$7.5 billion bond to build three huge dams and reservoirs, Newsom ensured that we built none: not the easily constructed Sites reservoir, not Temperance Flat, and not Los Banos Grandes, all tertiary foothill reservoirs that could have given California by now nearly five million additional acre-feet of storage.

### **Or is it worse than that?**

Governor Dam-Buster still brags about how he greenlit blowing up four dams on the Klamath River—the largest dam removal in American history. The dams provided 80,000 homes with clean hydroelectric power, farmers with irrigation water, and the public with recreation and flood control.

Instead of following the voters' bond to build reservoirs and dams, Newsom preferred to dynamite them. The ensuing muddy deluge wiped out the surrounding riparian ecosystem.

Joe Biden, now in the last days of his disastrous tenure, was in the LA area by chance to boast that he had put thousands of valuable federal square miles off limits.

Instead, he mumbled about his new great-grandson and relief that his kid's house was saved, as the fire was engulfing 12,000 homes of others. Then Biden unceremoniously left, heartbroken that his last junket to Italy might have to be canceled as Los Angeles continued to burn. Later he too grumbled about "misinformation," which is his synonym for telling the truth about the Los Angeles green woke bomb.

Kamala Harris? Was the vice president perhaps marshaling federal money and assets to stop the fires in her last weeks in office? After all, we remember from her 2024 campaign Harris's frenzied efforts to help out during national disasters, as she scolded the capable Florida governor Ron DeSantis that he was not partnering enough with her to mitigate the effects of flooding.

She too proved invisible other than remarking the fire was "apocalyptic." Instead, Harris was too busy planning a multimillion-dollar junket in her last week in office and of free royal travel.

Insurance? Is there some plan to rebuild these suburbs as they were, to ensure there are some \$300 billion to pay out claims? Well, no again. The state is broke and is driving out insurance companies, not enticing them in. Its public "Fair" unfair insurance plan of last resort is underfunded and will go insolvent once a week or two of claims flows in.



California's failure to effectively prevent and put out fires—along with hyper-regulation and failure to combat an epidemic of insurance fraud—has destroyed the state's insurance industry. Given the prior inability of homeowners to buy credible fire insurance at any cost, there are thousands of now-homeless who had no insurance at all.

How about the region's large homeless population that camps out on the streets and in the tinderbox chaparral above the suburbs? Did the city investigate arson or detain, arrest, charge, and jail those rounded up with incendiary devices or seen lighting fires? Of course not. They vetoed any notion long ago of an anti-camping ordinance.

### **Collective Suicide**

Add it all up. The California nihilist green ethos and the left-wing politicians who run the madhouse ensured there is no effort to glean the forests and hills of combustible fuel.

There is not enough water for hydrants, not enough to deliver to Los Angeles, and when it arrives, there is too much incompetence to know how to use it.

There were no real warnings to residents that they had mere minutes to flee for their lives. Or was it worse still? As the fires wore on, continuous false alarms of new fires sparked unnecessary and dangerous mass evacuations citywide, destroying what, if any, trust was left in the fire department.

There is no reason to believe that such derelict politicians during the next fire will not again be AWOL on DEI junkets, boasting of their genders, their race, and their sexual orientation, but not of their duties to those whose lives they are sworn to protect.

### **The final tragic irony?**

California's DEI "humanism" and Green New Deal environmentalism ensured the cruelest imaginable treatment of thousands of people and unrivaled destruction of the natural ecosystem.

No one in the government dares to guess about what might have caused the fires, even as they cry "climate change"—as if to do so would expose their own incompetency or confirm rumors of sporadic homeless arsonists.

The California green utopians, by their very ideological zealotry, ensured their fires likely will have released into the atmosphere several weeks' worth of the entire state's collective auto emissions.

The fires will have wiped out thousands of protected flora and fauna, will have released toxic fumes into the air, and will have destroyed the lives of thousands of Los Angeles residents for years to come.

To paraphrase a 1960s California left-wing slogan—green-woke is not healthy for children and other living things.

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