



## **Weekly Update February 16 - 23, 2026**

### **Supervisor Races Revealed**

In less than four months, we will have a new County Supervisor/Elect in District 2, and the race will be decided in District 4.

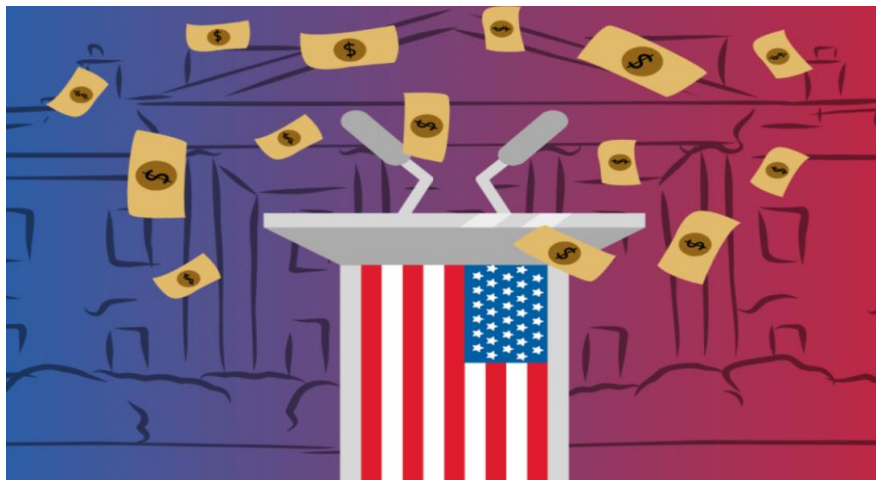
The big news in the Supervisor races is challenger Adam Verdin out raising incumbent Jimmy Paulding in District 4. It's unusual for challengers to outperform incumbents, especially when each one raised a significant sum.

For the reporting period that ended in late January, Verdin reported raising \$164,490 against Paulding's \$142,344. As strong an indication that these figures present, it should be noted that Paulding's cash on hand figures, \$178,275, are higher than Verdin's \$136,921.

The numbers establish this as a serious race. Verdin's success indicates that he will be a contender and if he continues at the same pace, will likely have the resources necessary to get his message out. If Paulding continues at the same pace, he too will have a formidable reelection campaign.

It's not yet clear what the issues will be. Paulding is expected to run on his accomplishments during his first term in office, while Verdin will try to draw a distinction between Paulding's voting record and his stands on issues that might differ from the preferences of the voters.

Paulding did take a jab at Verdin's fundraising by pointing out several contributions from developers, insinuating that Verdin might find himself beholden to builders. However, if he is so worried about that, shouldn't he be resisting his large levels of donations from labor unions? It also seems odd that he would on the one hand present himself as pro housing yet vilify those who actually build housing.



With Supervisor Gibson retiring from the Second District, two candidates have entered the race. Michael Allen Woody, a Civil Engineer, will be running against Jim Dantona, former Chamber of Commerce CEO and current Bruce Gibson staffer. Woody reported raising \$37,550 against Dantona's \$56,630. Much of Woody's funds came from himself. Dantona currently reports \$20,023 cash on hand with Woody reporting \$23,792.

At the moment, the driving issue seems to be offshore wind energy systems and battery storage. Dantona is on the record as being supportive of the concept, while Woody is vocal against any such development on the Central Coast. Woody is well connected with the local group REACT, which has been extremely organized and effective in fighting against wind energy. Dantona has solid support among the

Democrat Party establishment – significant since the district is nearly 2-1 favoring Democrats in registration. Woody is registered as decline to state.



Whatever the outcome of these races, we anticipate a change in the priorities of the Board of Supervisors. Budget challenges will force a critical look at what the County can afford, and where it gets the most value for its limited dollars. A new face or two on the Board will likely bring a fresh approach to meeting those challenges.

The filing deadline for running for the Board of Supervisors isn't until mid-March, so it is conceivable that someone else could enter. However, it would require someone with considerable resources and a very large and generous support network to be taken seriously.

## **Buying a Coastal Commission Permit**

Item 6 on the February 10 Board of Supervisors agenda presented a strange and stinky scenario. The measure called for accepting a \$250,000 contribution from a homeowner as mitigation for building a seawall. The whole scheme was set up between the Coastal Commission and the County Parks Director, which seems like a huge overstep for a state agency to be conspiring with a county agency behind everyone's backs.

For \$250,000, the homeowner got his permit for the seawall, and the county will be on the hook for a \$1.3 million renovation of a stairway for beach access. This lopsided deal was obviously done behind closed doors.



Supervisor Moreno pointed out that the stairway isn't even on county property and that many of our county parks could do well with \$100,000,000 of investment. Unfortunately, it was clear that there were three votes to pass the measure. As the next budget cycle becomes a little tense, we might all think about those million dollars that went away so quickly and so frivolously.

## **PRAGA Meeting Feb 18**

The Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority will be having a Board of Directors meeting on February 18th at 9:00 a.m. at the Centennial Park Norris Room.



### **Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority Notice of Board of Directors Meeting**

To be held at 9:00 a.m. on February 18, 2026  
at the Centennial Park Norris Room

There are two items of particular interest: one is receiving feedback from public workshops that were held on February 10. The other is increasing public involvement with Praga.

The latter is especially important because what we're seeing currently is just constant repetition of the same old points. Groundwater sustainability is important to everyone, but it's a complicated issue. Finding equitable ways to achieve sustainability is difficult, and sourcing the funding to support those methods is daunting. Having fresh eyes and fresh energy involved with the process would go a long way. If you or anyone you know has an interest in getting involved, this would be a tremendous public service. This isn't a black-and-white issue. It requires some diplomacy and creative thought.

The best way to start would be to attend the February 18 meeting and ask as many questions as come to mind. The agenda is listed below.

## **AGENDA**

### **February 18, 2026**

*NOTE: The Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority (Paso Authority) reserves the right to limit each speaker to three (3) minutes per subject or topic. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, all possible accommodations will be made for individuals with disabilities, so they may participate in the meeting. Persons who require accommodation for any audio, visual or other disability in order to participate in the meeting of the Paso Authority are encouraged to request such accommodation in advance of the meeting from Taylor Blakslee at (661) 477-3385.*

1. Call to Order ([Turrentine](#))
2. Pledge of Allegiance ([Turrentine](#))
3. Roll Call ([Blakslee](#))
4. Meeting Protocols ([Blakslee](#))
5. Election of Officers ([Turrentine](#))
6. Consent Agenda ([Turrentine](#))
  - a. Approval of December 1, 2025, Meeting Minutes
  - b. Approval of November and December 2025 Financial Report
7. Executive Director Report ([Blakslee](#))
  - a. Report on Public Workshops ([Blakslee](#))
8. Update on Water Year 2025-2026 Annual Report ([Page](#))
9. Action Items
  - a. Direction on Improving Stakeholder Representation at PRAGA ([Blakslee](#))
  - b. Direction on the Draft Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget ([Blakslee](#))
  - c. Approval of a Funding Mechanism for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 ([Blakslee](#))
  - d. Direction on SLO County Request to Administer the Fallowed Land Registry Program ([Blakslee](#))
  - e. Authorize Executive Director to Execute Land IQ Contract Subject to General Counsel's Approval ([Blakslee](#))
  - f. Update on Basin Outreach Strategy ([Blakslee](#))
10. Public Comment – Items not on Agenda ([Turrentine](#)) (3 min/speaker)
11. Director Comments / Future Agenda Items ([Directors](#))
12. Upcoming Meeting(s) ([Blakslee](#))
13. Adjourn

There is never a shortage of things to complain about, and there are plenty of complainers when it comes to Paso Water Basin issues, but there is a severe shortage of community members willing to step up and be part of the solution process.

In the meantime, the Central Coast region of the California Water Boards has scheduled a meeting for Feb 26 – 27. The meeting can be viewed online.



The Central Coast **Water Board** will hold an in-person public meeting in **San Luis Obispo**, with a remote video conference option on **February 26 and February 27, 2026**. The meeting agenda notice can be found on the following website: [View February Board Meeting Agenda](#)

The California Water Boards consist of the **State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB)** and **nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards**. Their primary mission is to **preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California's water resources** and drinking water. They oversee water rights, enforce regulations, and implement programs aimed at sustainable water management.



## **REACH for Economic Development**

County spending is growing, and revenues aren't keeping up. Naturally, this will lead to budget cuts, but it also points out the fact that San Luis Obispo County does very little economic development. With insufficient economic growth, we will always be scrambling to meet the needs of the county budget.

The item on the agenda was a re-up for the annual \$300,000 contribution to REACH, a local economic consortium. The item also included an extra \$200,000 grant to have REACH contract to come up with an economic development assessment for the unincorporated areas of San Luis Obispo. As we understand it, REACH will develop a list of assets throughout the county that could lead to economic development projects. The list will include both possibilities and challenges for each potential project.

The funding inspired some debate among the supervisors. Most agreed that making minor investments to establish a series of priorities and an economic development plan was a worthy expenditure. However, Supervisor Gibson questioned the value of the \$200,000 investment. He said economic development was just a matter of gathering data, improving childcare, and building affordable housing.

That point of view explains a lot about why our economy is essentially stagnant.

While we applaud Gibson's sudden onset thriftiness, it is important to note that if REACH does not undertake this project, it is unlikely to happen by any other means. Listing key assets and quantifying how those assets might achieve full potential by identifying likely interested partners while spelling out the steps needed to achieve full potential is a unique undertaking. Included in the report will be a list of the challenges facing each potential project as well as an accounting of the expected economic multiplier brought about by revenues and jobs.

# **REACH**

Ideas + Action for a Thriving Central Coast

REACH is a non-profit collaborative organization that works within various industries including aerospace, cleantech, energy, precision manufacturers and ag tech to foster connections and build opportunities in a variety of sectors. They also put on several symposiums that highlight needs, goals, challenges and accomplishments in specific categories such as housing and high tech. In their words:

Our economy has too many low-paying jobs. We are growing good-paying jobs by going big on space + aerospace, cleantech + energy, and high tech, and establishing the Central Coast as a place where innovation, startups and homegrown companies flourish.

The REACH website can be found at: <https://reachcentralcoast.org>. They have quite a few specific reports available on their website illustrating what they do.

The measure passed on a 4 – 1 vote with Gibson dissenting.

## **The Other Sales Tax Effort**

In recent weeks, we've made reference to a citizens' initiative for a half-cent sales tax dedicated to transportation, in place of the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) measure that has been under way for many months. We have some details to share about this citizens' effort.

Called “**Better Roads for All**”, the campaign is led by Erik Justensen, George Aguilar and Brad Brechwald. They are working with business and community leaders throughout the county to promote the campaign and raise sufficient resources to qualify for the November ballot.



As we all know, San Luis Obispo County is not eligible for a large number of state grants totaling in the hundreds of millions of dollars because we are not a self-help community. Self-help simply means that we tax ourselves to help contribute towards transportation projects.

SLOCOG has been working on presenting a half-cent sales tax to the voters on the November ballot. This county-wide measure would raise funds and create an eligibility for grants from the state that would be dedicated to transportation projects. Approval of such a tax would require a two-thirds vote from the electorate.

We understand that recent polling has indicated it will be a big challenge to achieve that two-thirds vote. As an alternative, a group of local business leaders have decided to pursue signature gathering to put the same measure on the ballot, but as a citizen's initiative. Such an initiative only requires a simple majority vote.

In order to qualify for the ballot, the initiative must have 12,400 valid signatures. This means that nearly 20,000 signatures will have to be gathered. Professional signature gatherers are currently charging \$14.00 per signature. With consultants, campaign managers and legal fees, the effort is expected to cost nearly \$400,000.

Most of the arguments in favor of the tax are obvious. Our roads are getting worse and the cost of fixing them is increasing dramatically. Even if the majority on the Board of Supervisors were to make a dramatic change and double the \$6 million that they contribute annually to our county road funds, we would still be falling behind in maintenance. So, we absolutely will not be able to catch up with basic maintenance without the tax. Any hope for improvements beyond minimal basic maintenance is folly.

The argument against the tax is just as clear. The majority of the BoS have ignored the problem and put us in this situation. Now they want to keep spending on other projects and let the taxpayer bail them out on this one. The cost of living keeps going up. Taxes keep going up. San Luis Obispo County is one of the most expensive counties in the state already. We must draw the line somewhere.

The very polling that is casting doubt on the SLOCOG measure reaching a two-thirds vote is creating encouragement for the citizens' effort. Rumor has the yes vote reaching mid to high fifty percent. If those numbers are correct, then it's highly likely that a citizen's initiative will pass.

The Better Roads for All talking points are listed here:

- **Local and reliable funding source:** Better Roads for All is a local self-help solution that generates about \$35 million a year to fix and improve our roads, streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, transit system, and emergency access across San Luis Obispo County. The measure will generate revenue (in local dollars) to address local problems.
- **Exclusively for road repairs and improvements:** This measure will fund transportation improvements our county residents rely on every day, including road and pothole repair, safer streets and intersections, reliable 911 and emergency access, bridge maintenance, traffic congestion relief, local transit and trolley services, and pedestrian, bicycle, and sidewalk improvements.
- **Declining State transportation funds:** San Luis Obispo County's transportation funding has dropped by more than 50 percent - from \$7.8 million in state funding in 2018 to about \$3.6 million today. Without a reliable local funding source, our roads and infrastructure will continue to fall behind as costs rise.
- **We are missing out:** 25 other Counties have one, covering over 90% of California's population. SLO County is one of the last counties without this local funding source. When a similar initiative - Measure J - narrowly failed in 2016, San Luis Obispo County lost access to hundreds of millions of dollars in transportation investment funding that went to neighboring counties. During the past decade, San Luis Obispo County lost \$700 million that could have improved our streets, roads, bicycle lanes, and public transportation.
- **Matching leverage:** A half-cent self-help sales tax gives San Luis Obispo County a stable, locally controlled transportation funding source. It allows our county to compete for state and federal transportation dollars that currently bypass our region. With local matching funds, we can leverage hundreds of millions more for high-priority projects. Without a significant local match, we will continue to go without.

- **Distribution:** This measure is structured to ensure fairness and local community benefit. Fifty-five (55%) percent of the revenues will go directly to cities and unincorporated areas of the county for local road repairs and safety improvements. Forty percent (40%) will support larger regional projects across the county, and four percent (4%) is dedicated to improving mobility for seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and others with special transportation needs.
- **All funds stay in SLO County:** Every dollar raised stays in San Luis Obispo County and is invested based on local priorities - not decisions made in Sacramento. Funds will be distributed proportionally and equitably so every community receives its fair share.
- **Accountability:** There's strong accountability built in. Transportation funding cannot be diverted to other uses, and independent audits and public reporting are required annually. A citizens' oversight committee will provide additional oversight.
- **Huge economic benefit:** Better Roads for All will support local, well-paying jobs, businesses, and the economy by funding millions of dollars of construction, engineering, and maintenance projects.
- **Visitors contribute well over half of the total revenue:** Better Roads for All is fair and shared. Essential purchases, such as groceries, healthcare, and housing, are exempt. Plus, the 7.5 million visitors who come to our county each year will pay their fair share of the sales tax when they purchase goods and services. This will reduce the burden on residents while funding needed road improvements.

COLAB SLO has yet to take a position on the tax. Generally opposed to new taxes, the Board of Directors feels much the same way as many people in the community; that the state of California holds counties hostage for grant funds. If we don't vote to tax ourselves to become a "self-help" county, we are not entitled to the state transportation grant dollars - that come from our taxes. In the meantime, our roads are deteriorating with little county effort to make repairs.

It is unlikely that the citizen's effort campaign will have a clear indicator about whether they can gather enough signatures until mid-April. At that point, the fate of the SLOCOG measure and the potential for the citizens measure will be compared. Can they reach the signature goal in time? Can SLOCOG show promising polling results? Will the Board of Supervisors supply the 4/5ths votes to

put the SLOCOG measure on the ballot? So many permutations. Stay tuned as we cover developments as they arise.

## **The Big Event – Barely More Than a Month Away!**

The 17<sup>th</sup> annual COLAB SLO Fundraising Dinner is all set for March 26 at the Madonna Inn Expo Center. One of the biggest events of the year, this excellent fillet mignon dinner is matched with a social gathering featuring dozens of community leaders, elected officials and activists. With an open bar and fine wines on the table, everybody is sure to have a great evening.

Also featured will be an exciting live auction with lots of great items that you can't live without.

To top it off, nationally recognized writer, Katy Grimes will be the Keynote Speaker. Grimes is an investigative reporter primarily covering California politics and is known for diving deep into stories and details that really matter – but are overlooked by mainstream media. She is Editor in Chief for The California Globe and has insights that you won't want to miss.



Katy Grimes: not popular with Gavin Newsom

**Book your tickets today by visiting [COLABSLO.org](http://COLABSLO.org) or by calling 805 548-0340.**

## Last Week

### Anti-ICE Destabilization

Despite nothing on the February 3 Board of Supervisors agenda related to immigration, a few anti-ICE protesters showed up and made statements during the public comment period of the meeting. The main theme of their remarks was that the Sheriff lied during his TRUTH Forum presentation and that while they appreciate the Board's actions on January 27, they still want more.

The contention that Sheriff Parkinson lied was based on his remarks that the US had essentially open borders during the Biden administration (and therefore very little ICE enforcement action took place in areas like SLO County). The ICE protesters were quite insistent that such a comment is not true, with one referring to the term "open borders" as a dog whistle. She wasn't clear about exactly how or why, but she was certain that it was some sort of code.

While Wikipedia is hardly a scholarly site, their definition of the term "open borders" seems reasonable; "An **open border** is a [border](#) that enables [free movement](#) of people and often of goods between jurisdictions with no restrictions on movement and is lacking a [border control](#).<sup>[1][2]</sup> A border may be an open border due to intentional legislation allowing free movement of people across the border (*de jure*), or a border may be an open border due to a lack of legal controls, a lack of adequate enforcement or adequate supervision of the border (*de facto*)."

It's hard to imagine anyone other than Kamala Harris trying to make the case that our southern border was anything but open to millions of migrants for several years.

The big demand from anti-ICE protesters is that the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors declare the county as an ICE-free zone. This demand continues even though County Council reported that the county has no authority to



make such a proclamation. Perhaps the protesters realize this simple concept but want the symbolic gesture anyway.

Some confusion remains about what the Board of Supervisors actually voted for at the conclusion of the January 27 marathon meeting. In an effort to bring the meeting to a culmination, the board voted unanimously for the establishment of an ad hoc committee, consisting of Supervisors Ortiz-Legg and Paulding. It further directed them to work with staff to explore what other counties are doing, what legal options the county has to address ICE activity and to investigate what social programs might be available that might be supported by the county to assist families of deported migrants. The committee is requested to report back in 60 days.

Given that many ICE protesters seem to be intelligent people and given that most with a basic knowledge of how government works realize that County Boards of Supervisors simply cannot override or subvert federal law, there must be more to the never-ending requests for ICE-free zones.

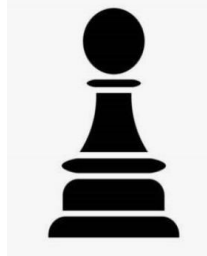
Is it possible that all the ranting and raving has very little to do with immigration, but rather the destabilizing impact on our culture?

ICE protesters are not marching in support of a change in immigration law. Rather, they are marching to make people believe that current immigration rules should be ignored because they find it unjust or inhumane. Obviously, their arguments are registering with some because we see emotionally charged protesters in almost every state. To be clear, they are calling for federal immigration law to be rejected by all local municipalities. They are not working with Congress to change immigration law, and they are not attempting to find reasonable solutions to the problems they demonstrate against. They are simply agitating and making unreasonable demands.

Stuck in the middle of all the shouting and shoving is the immigrant community. Many were misled by the Biden administration to believe that they could freely find refuge in the US, and now they are being led to believe that immigration enforcement is lawless. The insinuation is that the good guys have their back and the bad guys are cruel racist kidnappers and hoodlums. The underlying message is



not just that migrants need to fear “masked men in unmarked cars” randomly grabbing brown people off the streets, it is also an “us against them” mantra.



The media loves such fervor and fear. Reporters gleefully cover protests and secretly hope for some of the best clickbait ever – violence. Left out of their sensational stories are details about the crimes of most of those deported or the victims of those crimes. Important information about paid protesters, trained organizers or professional agitators rarely comes to light. Doxing of federal agents is not of interest to reporters, but the deportation of a violent criminal is huge, just without details about the violent part.

Average people concerned about illegal immigration and/or crime are made out to be racist. Their intolerance is not to be tolerated.



So we have growing pressure to ignore federal immigration law and reject any attempt to enforce it. “Rapid Response Teams” are using surveillance tactics to track federal officers to better obstruct their enforcement actions. Protesters

somehow believe that it's noble to impede law enforcement and to put their own lives at risk while doing so. We have an immigrant community serving as pawns, living in fear and being trained to dread and hate the people trying to enforce the law. We have mainstream media covering one side of the story in great detail while ignoring the other side. We have protests that too often turn into violent riots.

Making matters worse, some of the ICE enforcement efforts seem to be heavy handed by design. Perhaps the aggressive nature is necessary when dealing with violent criminals, or perhaps ICE is trying to make self-deportation more attractive. Either way, it fosters great collaboration between mainstream media and conspiracy theorists. Border Czar Tom Homan can't put out all the fires on his own.

The result of so many mobs of people full of angst and misplaced energy, calling for people and municipalities to disobey the law is destabilization. But to what end?

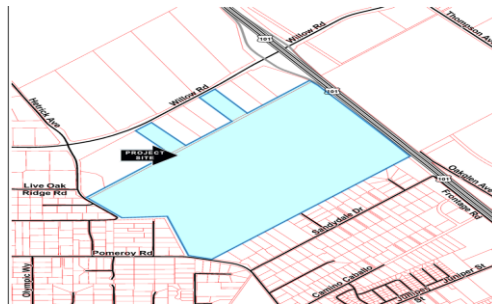
Midterm elections are months away. ICE is almost guaranteed to be a factor in hotly contested races. If the voting public believes that Republicans are violating the law and denying due process, it will be a good year to be a Democrat.

Emotions are too raw to be able to accurately gage the impact that this issue is having at this stage. Certainly, a segment of the public is glad to see ICE enforcement, but how many and how much is hard to track. Some will never admit it publicly but will vote accordingly.

We hope that ICE develops more efficient methods of deporting the violent criminals that they target. We hope the migrant community recognizes some of the hype and realizes that they are becoming nothing more than a useful tool in fomenting fear and anger against the current administration. We hope that both sides can put less effort into the optics of the issue and more effort into reasonable solutions.

## **Support for Housing 4-1 at the BoS**

Item 5 on the Feb 3 Board of Supervisors agenda reads as follows: “Request to approve Tract Map TR 3159 Phase 1, a proposed subdivision resulting in seven (7) lots for the purposes of financing and land conveyance only, by NKT Development, LLC, a California Limited Liability Company and Shea Homes Limited Partnership, a California Limited Partnership. Dana Reserve, located in the community of Nipomo.” The measure passed on a 4-1 vote with Supervisor Paulding casting the lone “no” vote.



The Dana Reserve boundaries in Nipomo.

Thus begins the building phase of the Dana Reserve housing project after nearly eight years of community interaction, planning commission challenges, engineering expenses, design changes, architectural reviews, environmental impact reports, mitigation efforts and sizable check writing. All with the uncertainty surrounding final approval.

The project will bring 1,242 homes to the Nipomo area. The homes will range from rentals, very low income and work force housing to “missing middle” and higher income properties. It will also include retail space, childcare facilities and a south county campus for Cuesta College.

For a county whose leadership purports to be all for housing, this project sure didn’t seem to get a lot of encouragement from some sectors. San Luis Obispo County Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) numbers illustrate a need that may never be fully met. Certainly, our population is not static, so as we make incremental progress against these numbers, it is likely that needs will grow.

Income Category and example occupations	Number of Dwelling Units			Percent Completed
	Total Need	Permitted (2019- 2024)	Remaining Need	
<b>Very Low-Income</b> (e.g., barista, farmworker, childcare employee)	801	7	794	<b>1%</b>
<b>Low-Income</b> (e.g., family social worker, community health advocate, roofer)	505	226	279	<b>45%</b>
<b>Moderate-Income</b> (e.g., occupational health worker, construction cost estimator, electrician)	585	246	339	<b>42%</b>
<b>Above Moderate-Income</b>	1,365	1,132	233	<b>83%</b>
<b>Total</b>	3,256	1,611	1,645	<b>49%</b>

When Supervisors Paulding and Gibson voted against final approval of the project a few months ago, they didn't offer up any sort of alternative that might meet our needs as well or better. They both talk a lot about the need for housing – especially in the very low and low- income categories. Yet when presented with a project that offers strong progress in all housing categories, they did not want it to succeed.

The big concern is that other builders will look at the Dana Reserve project as the example for what it takes to develop large scale projects in our community and decide that the time, hassle and uncertainty outweighs any possible return.



As we have pointed out on numerous occasions, everybody feels the pinch from the housing shortage. We have fewer doctors and medical professionals because housing is so expensive. Business is constantly challenged to find (and bear the cost of) employees that can afford to live in our community. Investors shy away

from doing ventures in SLO County because the workforce can't afford to live here.

All of which contributes to our stagnant economy and aging population.

It does beg the question of how sincere SLO County is about wanting new housing. Is a "Not in My Back Yard" (NIMBY) undercurrent making it difficult to build? Are most of the projects that do move forward destined to be the 5-story stack 'em pack 'em boxes that look so out of place in our neighborhoods? How can we both achieve our housing needs while avoiding tenement style housing?

We congratulate the Dana Reserve project on their success in fighting eight years of red tape. Perhaps the project warrants a study session or two by the various housing related agencies to find ways to streamline the process.

## **Finally – Water Moving in the Right Direction**

Did you know that when it comes to Paso Water Basin issues, the Board of Supervisors conducts a meeting within their meeting? On Paso water Basin issues, the San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors also serves as the County Flood Control District. As such, they are a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) and one of the five GSAs making up the Paso Robles Groundwater Authority (PRAGA).

This information is old news to those activists that engage in water policy in the Paso Basin, but it seems a bit "inside baseball" to the general public. It's not that anybody is trying to hide or obfuscate the proceedings, but it does make it difficult for the general public to track and understand the complicated workings of our County GSA.

With that cleared up, Item 19 on the agenda read: "Submittal of a report on the status of compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) implementation status in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin (Basin)."

The report primarily focused on the threat that basin management could be taken over by the state if the local groundwater agencies do not have a functioning groundwater sustainability plan in place by 2040.

As we reported last week, several possible groundwater recharge concepts were explored, with each presenting almost insurmountable obstacles, mostly cost-related.

The one viable action that is expected to reduce groundwater pumping is the creation of a fallowed Land Registry. Item 20 read: “Hearing to consider a resolution establishing the fallowed land registry (Registry) for the Paso Robles Area Groundwater Subbasin Multi-Benefit Irrigated Land Repurposing (MILR) Program and adoption of a related ordinance amending the Inland Land Use Ordinance and resolution amending the Williamson Act Rules of Procedure (exempt from CEQA) (County File Number: LRP2026-00002). (Groundwater Sustainability).”



Apparently, a lot of thought has gone into establishing a plan that would allow growers to fallow their crop land without risking their Williamson Act status. The concept is especially timely due to the recent downturn in the wine grape business.

It was assuring to hear that the plan was vetted with a large number of ag specialists. Hopefully the result will be a plan that is practical as well as trust building between the growers and the water agencies. The following is a list of the ag partners that were engaged in developing the plan:



- Extensive outreach with agricultural growers in the Basin
- MILR Steering Committee
- Agricultural Preserve Review Committee
- Agricultural Liaison Advisory Board
- Planning Commission

The plan was crafted specifically with benefits to growers in an effort to create a win-win. Those benefits are:

- Exemption from the Agricultural Offset Ordinance “5-year lookback”
- Exemption from Williamson Act contract irrigation requirements
- Access to farming unit-specific satellite-based ET data
- Self-certification of neutral water use per farming unit instead of applying for Agricultural Offset Clearance from the Department of Planning & Building when replanting

Insuring compliance with the Williamson Act will require some minor adjustments to the procedures. The following chart illustrates the standards:

To ensure compliance with the Williamson Act and the Rules of Procedure, staff recommends a minor amendment to the Rules of Procedure to recognize that participation in the MILR Program and Fallowed Land Registry Platform shall not disqualify a property currently under contract. Staff recommends adding Footnote 11 to apply to irrigated land under contract.

TABLE 1 MINIMUM OWNERSHIP SIZES FOR QUALIFICATION AND MINIMUM PARCEL SIZES FOR CONVEYANCE OF LAND & NEW LAND DIVISIONS		
Minimum Acreage <sup>1</sup>		
Natural Resources Conservation Service Land Capability Classification	To Qualify <sup>2</sup>	To Convey Existing Parcels <sup>3</sup> or Create New Parcels
<b>20 or 40-Acre Minimum Preserve Size<sup>4, 11</sup></b>		
Class 1 <sup>5</sup>	10	20
Class 2 <sup>5</sup>	10	40
Irrigated Classes 3, 4, 6, 7 with Orchards or Vineyards <sup>6</sup>	20	40
All Other Irrigated Classes 3 & 4	40	40
Mixed Irrigated & Non- irrigated Use <sup>7</sup>	10/20/40	80/160
<b>160 or 320-Acre Minimum Preserve Size</b>		
Non-Irrigated Classes 3 & 4	160	160
Classes 6 & 7	320 <sup>8</sup>	320
Class 8	NA <sup>9</sup>	320

In order to put the policy into effect, the Director of Groundwater Sustainability requested the following:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Adopt the recommended resolution establishing the Registry and implementing administrative procedures;;
2. Adopt the recommended ordinance amending the Inland Land Use Ordinance to update the agricultural offset regulations relating to the Registry; and
3. Adopt the recommended resolution amending the Williamson Act Rules of Procedure to update regulations relating to the Registry.

The motion passed with a unanimous vote.



# COLAB San Luis Obispo County

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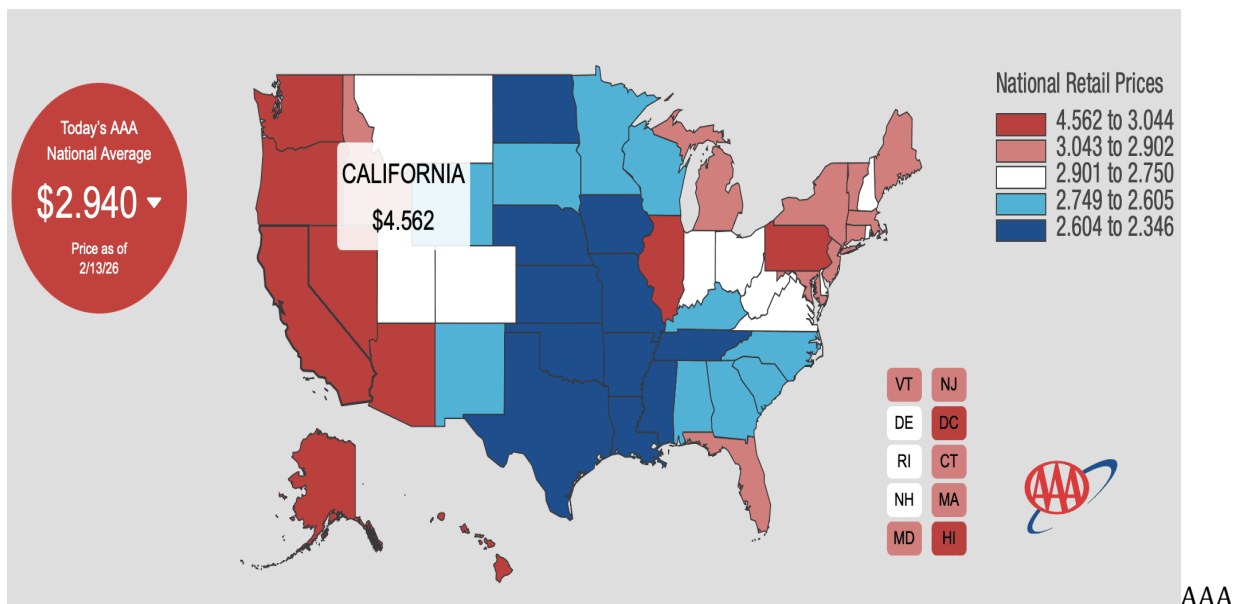


# California's High Gas Prices and Refinery Closures Have Real Consequences

*While Gavin Newsom is playing International Man of Mystery in Germany at a 'high-profile European gathering'*

By Katy Grimes, February 13, 2026

Gasoline prices in California have climbed in the past 14 days, approximately 40 cents per gallon. In the Northern part of the state, farmers and ranchers are feeling the increase in gas and diesel.



gas prices Feb. 13, 2026.

California's average price for a gallon of regular gas today, Feb. 13, 2026, is \$4.56. Ten days ago it was \$4.37.

Petroleum expert Michael Ariza, told the Globe Friday, "I'm afraid Valero will have more of an effect on our region. In the Bay Area we only have two out of five



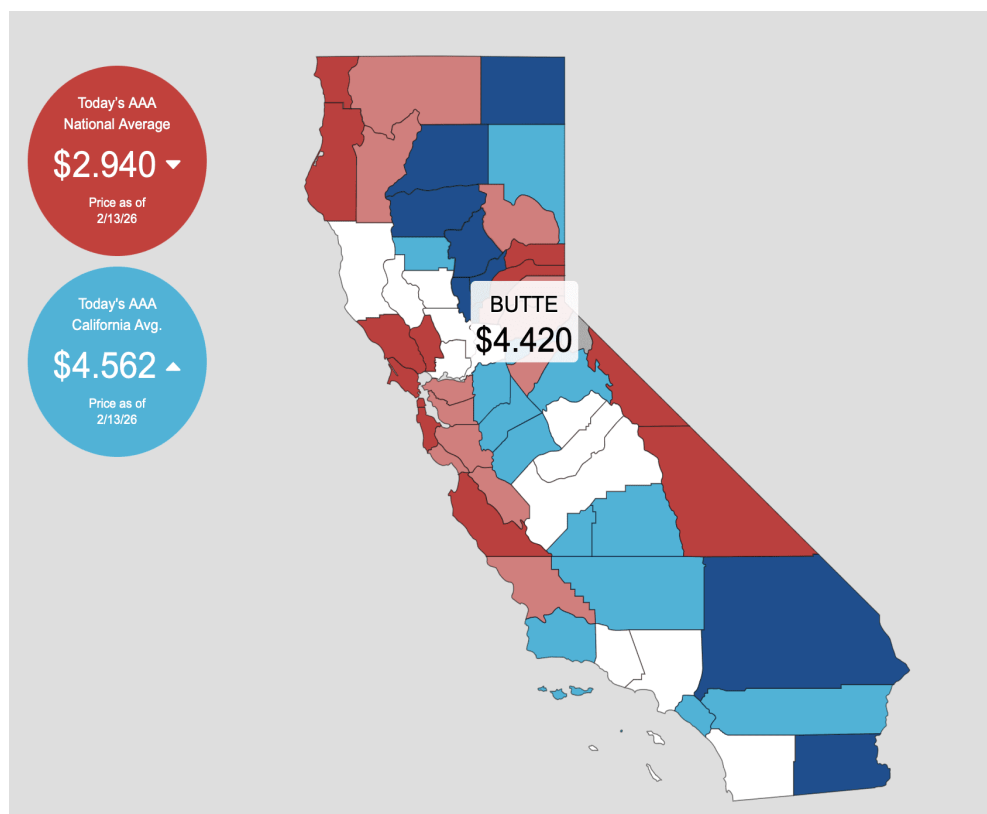
refineries producing gasoline, jet fuel, and propane. Valero is down, Conoco Phillips in Rodeo and Marathon in Martinez are only producing bio diesel!”

Refineries shutting down is a real world problem for many industries, businesses and families in California.

A Northern California farmer near Chico, California told Ariza, “It’s happening big time!! We knew it!! You tried to tell everyone  
We bought a lot of red diesel for the tractors for harvest already.”

“Also, gas prices in Chico are climbing.”

Chico is in Butte County, where a gallon of regular gas averages \$4.42. A gallon of diesel averages \$4.76 in Butte County.



The farmer continued:

“The high price of diesel and gas for our tractors and in our farming almond and apiary operation is going to put a lot of farmers and beekeepers out of business especially during harvest in July thru October for almonds, walnuts and honey production. If there is a shortage we won’t be able to get our crops harvested. The price has already drastically risen and all the farmers are really worried.

Most farmers in our area Northern California use diesel pumps for irrigation and it will be unaffordable.”

The farmer’s son also weighed in, with even more detail:

“The high price for fuel has already taken affect to many farmers. Many have tried to cut back on using larger equipment when they can, but for some things it’s just not possible. We farm almonds and when the trees fall we cut them with a chain saw, which uses gas, and then have to push the brush out of the rows with the tractor, which uses diesel. We also use the tractor to mow the grass in our orchard ever two to three weeks. This is some of just the day to day activities every farmer encounters. Our farm is a special circumstance where we also have a bee apiary that uses equipment as well. In a bee apiary the hives need to be checked weekly if not more often which takes a vehicle to be able to get to them. If you have driven through the Sacramento Valley recently, you have probably seen the almonds blooming and a bunch of white boxes sitting out in these orchards. The hives do not appear there by themselves. Many beekeepers, us included, move the bees into the Orchards at night using one ton, two ton, and semi-trucks along with our forklifts. These trucks all use diesel and so do the forklifts. With the price of fuel increasing due to refineries shutting down, many bee keepers and farmers will not be able to continue to operate the equipment they need on a day to day basis. I have given you examples from our own life living on an almond farm and having a honey bee apiary, but with a fuel shortage and increased pricing it will affect every part of the farming industry: Cattle, vegetables, tree nuts, honey, rice, stone fruits, berries, and even fish. The prices will increase in the store and at local farmers markets, and many smaller family farms will continue to go under due to the inability to pay for the high fuel prices or even the fuel shortages.”

He said, “With the price of fuel increasing due to refineries shutting down, many bee keepers and farmers will not be able to continue to operate the equipment they need on a day to day basis.”

And Gov. Newsom will blame Donald Trump, rather than his own executive orders, bills signed into law and regulatory policies.

So while Gavin Newsom is playing International Man of Mystery in Germany at a “high-profile European gathering,” taking glamour shots and trash talking President Trump, California farmers and ranchers, truckers, manufacturers, and many more industries are suffering. Many say they will not be able to sustain if gas and diesel prices keep rising.



California’s International Man of Mystery Gov. Newsom in a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference. (Photo: Governor’s Press Office)

California today produces less than 23% of its own in-state petroleum needs and imports over 65% of its crude oil from foreign sources, yet the oil and gas industry in California account for nearly 8% of the state’s GDP, even in its diminished capacity.

In 1988, the state of California only imported about 4.5% of all the oil that we consumed in our state. By 2020 we were importing over 70%.

Notably, China is bringing in a lot of our jet fuel and the gasoline their Chinese Costco tankers, Ariza said. Why would Gov. Gavin Newsom allow that? *(she asked tongue-in-cheek).*

## California's very odd election year starts with Republicans possibly leading the governor's race



BY DAN WALTERS



Democratic candidates for governor at an event hosted by labor and building and trade organizations in Sacramento on May 12, 2025. Some on the dais have dropped out and others have joined but aren't there. In attendance were Katie Porter, Eleni Kounalakis, Toni Atkins, Antonio Villaraigosa, Betty Yee, Xavier Becerra and Tony Thurmond.  
Photo by Fred Greaves for CalMatters

The 2026 campaigns for governor, a raft of other statewide offices, 52 congressional seats and 100 slots in the state Legislature officially begin today with the [onset of candidate filing](#). It could be one of the oddest election cycles in California's 175 years as a state, albeit one that puts the state's convoluted politics in the national spotlight.

There are so many Democrats running for governor that it's theoretically possible for a Republican to win the office, despite the state's deeply blue political profile, especially with the possibility of even more Democratic hopefuls jumping into the mob — as a herd of kangaroos is dubbed in Australia.

Meanwhile, both incumbent members of Congress and aspirants will be running in districts that have been radically gerrymandered to shrink Republicans' tiny delegation even more, as Democrats seek to regain control of Congress.

The possibility of a Republican governor, although very scant, stems from the state's top-two primary election system. All candidates, regardless of party, will appear on the same June 2 primary election ballot, and the two with the highest percentages of the vote — no matter how small those shares may be — will face each other in the November election.



Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco addresses supporters of President Donald Trump at a rally in Coachella on Oct. 12, 2024. Photo by Frederic J. Brown, via Getty Images



With upwards of a dozen Democrats now running and the possibility of others, it's possible the two Republicans in the mix so far — Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco and former television commentator Steve Hilton — could theoretically finish one and two with perhaps as few as 10-15% of the votes each.

It's not likely if the Democratic cohort shrinks in the next few months as the weakest contenders drop out, lacking enough money or poll support to continue. However, the lack of a natural Democratic frontrunner and the seeming lack of party leadership strong enough to cull the herd bolster the mathematical possibility of a GOP upset.

Had former Vice President Kamala Harris or U.S. Sen. Alex Padilla decided to run, either would have been the immediate frontrunner. But by opting out, they left a vacuum.

At the moment, former Congresswoman Katie Porter is leading the Democratic pack, albeit with scarcely double-digit support in the polls. She and former Controller Betty Yee are the only two women now running — with Harris, Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis and former state Sen. Toni Atkins out. Porter also gained recognition during her unsuccessful bid for a U.S. Senate seat last year.

Billionaire Tom Steyer is currently the most visible contender, spending some of his immense wealth on television and internet ads to depict himself as a populist who rails against “Sacramento politicians” and promises to reduce electric bills — not unlike how Donald Trump achieved success.

Beyond Porter, former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and former Attorney General and Biden cabinet member Xavier Becerra appear to be the strongest Democratic strivers. However, everyone is still waiting to see whether Attorney General Rob Bonta or Los Angeles businessman Rick Caruso will opt in.

Having so much uncertainty this late in the game is very unusual. However, at some point, perhaps around February or March, when the Democratic field finally begins to shrink, it will be possible to sort out the truly viable candidates from the wannabes and do some realistic handicapping.



Until then, as Willie Brown, the former state Assembly speaker and San Francisco Mayor and one of the state's most astute politicians, put it to Politico:

“The field is not considered of a quality that you as a Democrat would expect in California. We're still pretty much carried away with stardom, with individuals who have some impact ... We don't have any candidates like that at the moment.”

## **Why Local Government Keeps Running Out of Your Money**

*The exorbitant cost of living in CA is driven by the ever-increasing cost of government*

By Andy Caldwell, February 13, 2026

Two years after San Luis Obispo County Supervisors declared that road maintenance was no longer a priority, the SLO County Association of Governments wants to raise sales taxes to help maintain roads. Talk about mixed signals!

The City of Santa Barbara is also planning to raise taxes. It is considering raising the bed taxes at hotels and motels, and worse, charging people tens of thousands of dollars more when they sell their house via a property transfer tax. How is that going to make housing more affordable?

Santa Barbara County is the worst. The supervisors there are still considering raising the sales tax also. However, what the sups really want the money for is to backfill the cost of services to illegal aliens because President Donald Trump has cut off the proverbial spigot. That is, don't let their \$500 million road, building and parks maintenance deficit fool you into thinking they would use the new tax dollars for anything important to most taxpayers.

Let's discuss the real reason *all* these government entities keep running out of your money. Virtually all local governments are spending over half of all tax dollars on themselves in the form of salaries, benefits, and pensions. Moreover, these personnel costs have been skyrocketing with respect to inflation and population growth.

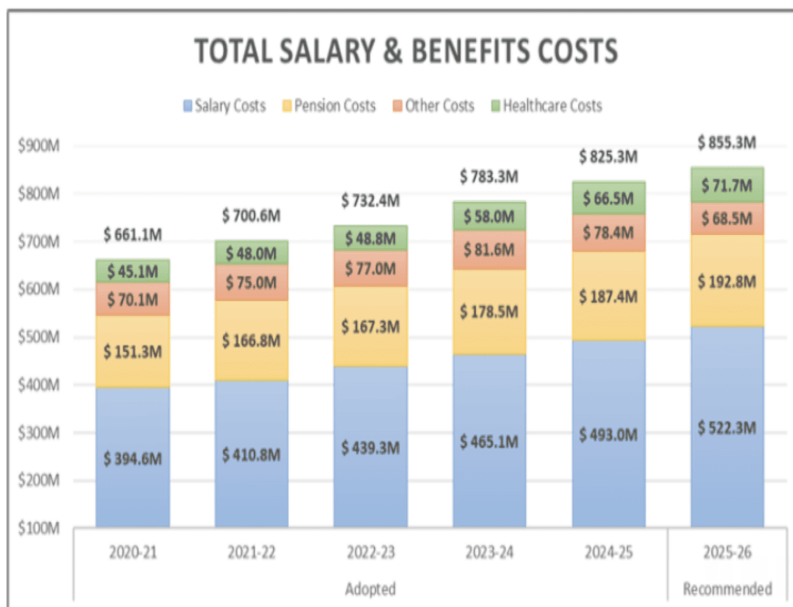
Former County Supervisor Mike Stoker, who now heads up the Santa Barbara County Taxpayer Advocacy Center, gives us an example as it relates to the County of Santa Barbara, the most bloated of all local governments. Between the year 2000 and today, Santa Barbara County's population grew from 399,347 to 441,000—a modest and manageable increase of 10.43%.

Stoker notes, “In a world of responsible governance, one might expect the budget to grow at a similar pace, perhaps slightly higher to account for inflation”.

Instead, the county budget *exploded*.

In 2000, the county operated on approximately \$475 million. Today, that figure has ballooned to a staggering \$1.69 billion. That is a 355.69% increase in spending to serve a population that grew by only 10%.

In that same time period, the *average* fully loaded cost (salary, benefits, and pensions) of each county employee more than doubled to \$177,700! Here is the overall trend going back just five years.



What else doubled?

The county charges various fees for “services.” Some of the highest fees are charged to new construction for so-called traffic impacts (this is on top of all the taxes paid by citizens and businesses to maintain roads). These fees have risen in a proportionate manner as have county salaries, i.e., doubling. Coincidence? I don’t think so. The fact is, while the traffic fees go into a fund to maintain or expand roads, the county reserves the money that *used* to pay for roads for their own inurement.

For example, in the year 2000, the traffic impact fee charged in “Goleta” (before it was incorporated) for a 24-hour, 2,000 square foot convenience store was \$460,000. Today, that same fee is \$1 million in area surrounding Goleta.

To see the current, *shocking* fee schedule, [here is the link](#) as well as the entire document below.

The truth is, the exorbitant cost of living in CA for fuel, water, electricity, housing, and commerce is driven by the ever-increasing cost of government, not the goods themselves. Serving constituents is no longer the highest priority of government. We’re essentially ignored, except when they want to take advantage of us.



**Andy Caldwell**

Andy Caldwell is a government watchdog, business and taxpayer advocate, and a Central Coast opinion leader. Andy is the Executive Director of COLAB (The Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business), a non-profit organization that serves the families, the heritage of, and the Central Coast economy.

##

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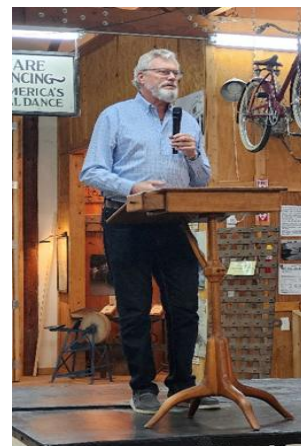
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[hmoreno@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:hmoreno@co.slo.ca.us)

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805-781-5450 District  
[dortizlegg@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:dortizlegg@co.slo.ca.us)

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