COLAB
San Luis Obispo County
The Coalition of Labor Agriculture and Business

Weekly Update
July 13 – 20, 2026

Flying into the Future

Some say the future of aviation is electric aircraft. If that is the case, San Luis Obispo airport is preparing to be ready.

Item 4 on the July 7 San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors agenda reads Request to 1) amend the fixed asset list for Fund Center (FC) 425 – Airports to add a Mini Cube Charger; 2) waive the invitation to bid process and authorize the Director of Airports to sign a purchase agreement with BETA Technologies, Inc., in an amount not to exceed $70,000; 3) authorize a sole source purchase order to BETA Technologies, Inc. associated with the agreement; and 4) authorize the Director of Airports to apply for and accept rebates and incentives associated with the purchase, and to execute all related documents and agreements necessary to receive them.

The item passed unanimously, but not without some discussion. One public commentor started the discussion by first questioning whether the charger would become obsolete in the near future. And then, if it is something that will last, why is Oceanside airport being ignored? Supervisor Peschong also noted concern about the long-term utility of the charger.

A Typical Electric Air Taxi

County airport staff assured the Board that the technology would be good in the future and explained that they would also like to install a charger at Oceanside airport but needed to navigate the stinking quagmire that is the Coastal Commission. Actually, they phrased it differently, leaving out the olfactory reference.

Supervisor Gibson, a pilot himself, suggested that the charger would be a wise investment and could attract the new generation of air taxis already being deployed in big cities around the world.

3,313 Votes <u>Not</u> Counted

Three thousand three hundred and thirteen votes cast in the recent June elections were disqualified or thrown out in San Luis Obispo County. That's 3,313 voters who believed in the system's claims that all you have to do is fill out your ballot from the comfort of your own home, toss it in the mail and enjoy democracy at its finest. They were all lied to, as are all of us thinking that mail in ballots are fool proof.

Far from it! Most of those ballots were received too late, some were not filled out correctly and at least one was received from a dead person. Those ballots essentially went into the trash can.

Did those uncounted votes make a difference in any elections? It's impossible to say, but we do know of one local fellow who won his re-election to the County Board of Supervisors by just 13 votes. There is no question that 3,313 votes would likely have changed the dynamics of some races.

Where is the outrage, or even a raised eyebrow or two about this very chilling situation? Where are the folks who oppose voter ID for fear of that one voter that doesn't have identification and is thus disenfranchised? Where are all the handwringers worried about the survival of "our democracy"?

Whenever anyone expresses concern about the election process, whether it be non-eligible (or dead) people casting ballots, or the counting process, they are greeted with eye rolls and dismissive impatience. Our system is designed to encourage cheaters and specifically not to catch them. Yet, we hear about improprieties occurring all over the country.

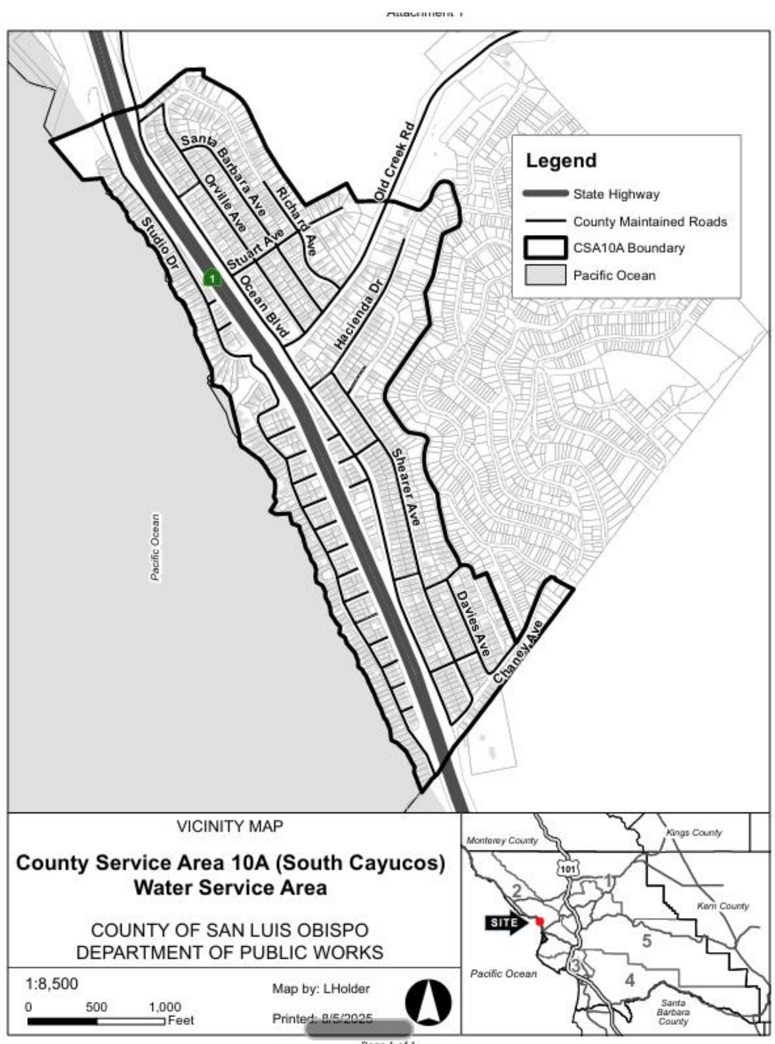
There is really only one way to make elections as fool proof and fair as possible. We need to return to election day in person voting. Accommodation has always been available to those who can't make it to the polls and certainly that should continue. The same with time away from work to vote.

Aside from the more secure process and much stronger likelihood that all votes will be counted, another huge benefit is that results can be counted in hours rather than weeks.

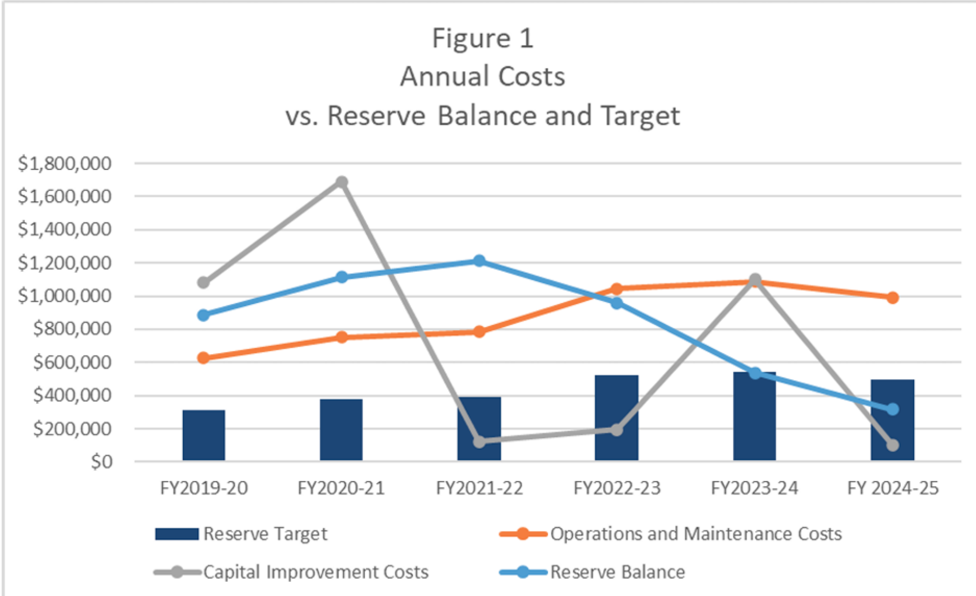
We wonder just how bad the current process needs to get, how many votes need to be disqualified, how many last-minute discoveries of boxes of ballots need to be discovered before people wake up and demand a more accountable system?

Water Rate Frustrations

Water customers in South Cayucos are a little steamed about a proposed rate increase slated for their service area.   Several residents spoke out at the July 7 BoS meeting concerned that their rates would go up significantly, while the service area had no plan to address the debt that the district is carrying. Further, they expressed frustration over their inability to access a rate study or to communicate with other rate payers in order to organize a 218 protest vote.



The Service Area impacted by the proposed new rate structure



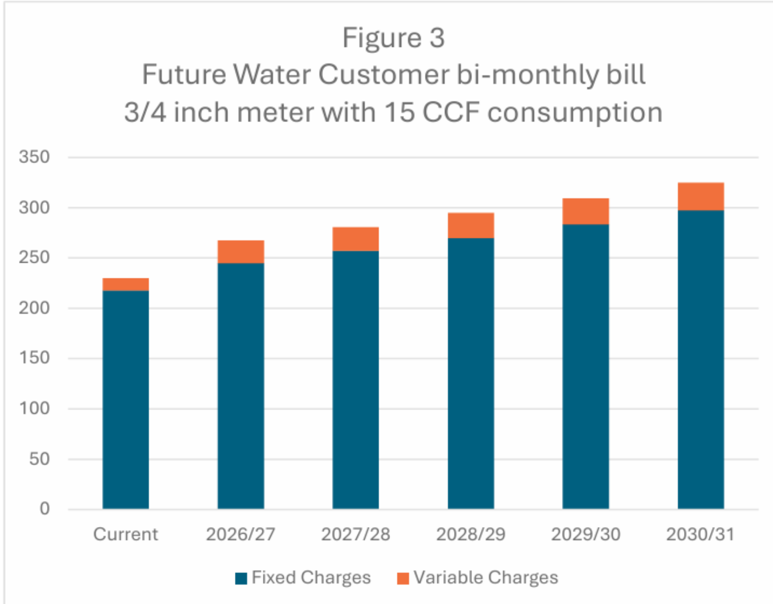
Several speakers expressed frustration over the fiscal management

It is unclear why the residents who spoke complained about the lack of a rate payer study as a detailed 17-page report was included in the staff report for the item. The following graphs illustrate the impact of the new rate structure:

Table 6	
Fixed Costs	
Operations & Maintenance Fixed	$ 1,175,111
Number of Customers	782
Annual Billing Periods	6
Fixed Cost per Customer	$ 250.45

Bi-monthly bills (14 CCF included) increase from $217.79 to $250.45 with variable rate increasing from $12.07 to $13.88 per unit above 14. The proposed adjustments include a 15% increase in Year 1, followed by 5% increases Years 2 through 5, with no additional inflators such as CPI applied.

Usage Level (CCF Bi-Monthly)	Current Bill	Proposed Bill
Low (e.g., up to 14)	$217.79	$250.45
Medium (15)	$229.86	$264.33
High (e.g., 30)	$410.91	$472.53



Supervisor Gibson, employing all the warmth and charm that he could muster, proceeded to ask staff a series of questions that seemed to negate the claims made by the rate payers. That a half dozen residents took the time to drive to San Luis Obispo, pay to park and wait their turn to speak must mean that there are some serious misunderstandings. We are sorry that they had to endure the patronizing distain from their own Supervisor.

Zoom for Increased Participation

Perhaps it is a mere historical footnote, but a new method of addressing the BoS was ushered in at the July 7 meeting. Anyone wishing to share their thoughts (in 3 minutes or less) can now call in via zoom. It is an audio only connection, and all the rules of regular in person speaking applies.

Most fitting, the first two people to utilize this new method of communication and participation were members of the disabled community calling in to comment in support of a submittal of a resolution proclaiming July 2026 as Disability Pride Month in the County of San Luis Obispo to commemorate the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, celebrate disability identity and community, and reaffirm the County's commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and full participation in everyday life.

The County posts the **Zoom meeting link, telephone number, meeting ID, and passcode** in the **meeting agenda** for each session. We have included below the zoom information that was posted on last week's Board Agenda. It is not clear whether the number will change from one meeting to the next or whether it will remain constant.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGENDA

John Peschong *District One*
Bruce Gibson *Vice-Chairperson, District Two*
Dawn Ortiz-Legg *District Three*
Jimmy Paulding *Chairperson, District Four*
Heather Moreno *District Five*

Matthew P. Pontes Chief Executive Officer

AGENDA
Tuesday, July 7, 2026
Katcho Achadjian Government Center
San Luis Obispo County
Board of Supervisors Chambers

Zoom Link:
[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81337909297?pwd=iOf25RJ1noLkZyNxCPPjonKRMRWoAA.4KjL3gg sXPMn-iPJ](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81337909297?pwd=iOf25RJ1noLkZyNxCPPjonKRMRWoAA.4KjL3ggsXPMn-iPJ)

Telephone: +1 786 635 1003
Meeting ID: 813 3790 9297
Passcode: 022980

When the Chair opens public comment, remote participants may request to speak by using the “Raise Hand” feature in the Zoom app or web browser, or by pressing *9 if joining by telephone. When it is your turn to speak, staff will call on you and unmute your microphone. Telephone participants may need to press *6 to begin your comments. Remote speakers will receive the same time allotment as in-person speakers. After the comment period ends, staff will mute the speaker.

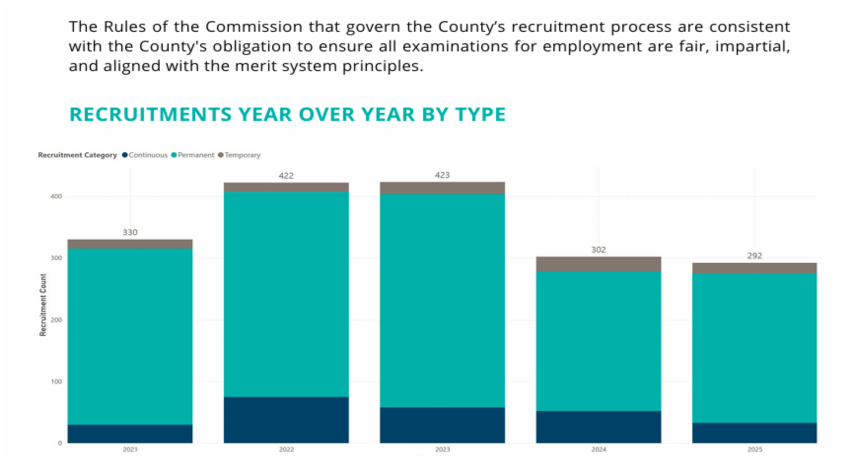
Zoom participants are encouraged to call from locations with strong cell signals as poor connections result in a loss of the messaging.

County Employees Profile

Item 17 Submittal of Civil Service Commission Annual Report for Calendar Year 2025. Last week we covered part of the report that gave details about grievances filed within the county employee base.

This week, we are sharing some of the details presented regarding recruitment. With over 2,800 employees, and as our biggest local employer, our county always seems to be in search of talented personnel.

The first graph illustrates the five-year history of recruitment by categories of continues, permanent and temporary:



The next three graphs represent the equal opportunity categories of Race, Gender and Age:

RACE

		WHITE	HISPANIC	BLACK	NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	AMER INDIAN OR ALASKAN NATIVE	ASIAN	TWO OR MORE RACES	OTHER/ BLANK	TOTAL
County Workforce	2024	63.29%	25.84%	1.72%	0.20%	0.68%	3.81%	4.39%	0.07%	3,073
	2025	60.14%	28.02%	1.94%	0.16%	0.68%	3.72%	4.14%	1.20%	3,091
New Hires	2024	63.64%	24.74%	1.48%	0.63%	1.48%	3.17%	4.86%	0.00%	473
	2025	59.13%	29.33%	2.16%	0.24%	0.72%	4.09%	4.33%	0.00%	416
Applications	2024	53.58%	30.44%	3.56%	0.00%	1.32%	8.18%	0.00%	2.92%	9,745
	2025	48.44%	30.36%	3.10%	0.00%	1.18%	9.48%	3.02%	4.42%	11,395
US Census Bureau (County of SLO 2020)		88.80%	22.90%	2.00%	0.20%	1.40%	4.00%	3.6%	N/A	283,111

GENDER

		FEMALE	MALE	NON-BINARY	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
County Workforce	2024	56.04%	43.83%	0.13%	0.00%	3,073
	2025	56.15%	43.78%	0.10%	0.00%	3,091
New Hires	2024	53.07%	46.30%	0.63%	0.00%	473
	2025	50.96%	48.80%	0.24%	0.00%	416
Applications	2024	48.27%	49.40%	0.73%	1.59%	9,745
	2025	46.54%	50.09%	0.34%	3.04%	11,426
US Census Bureau (County of SLO 2020)		49.40%	50.60%	No Data	0.00%	283,111

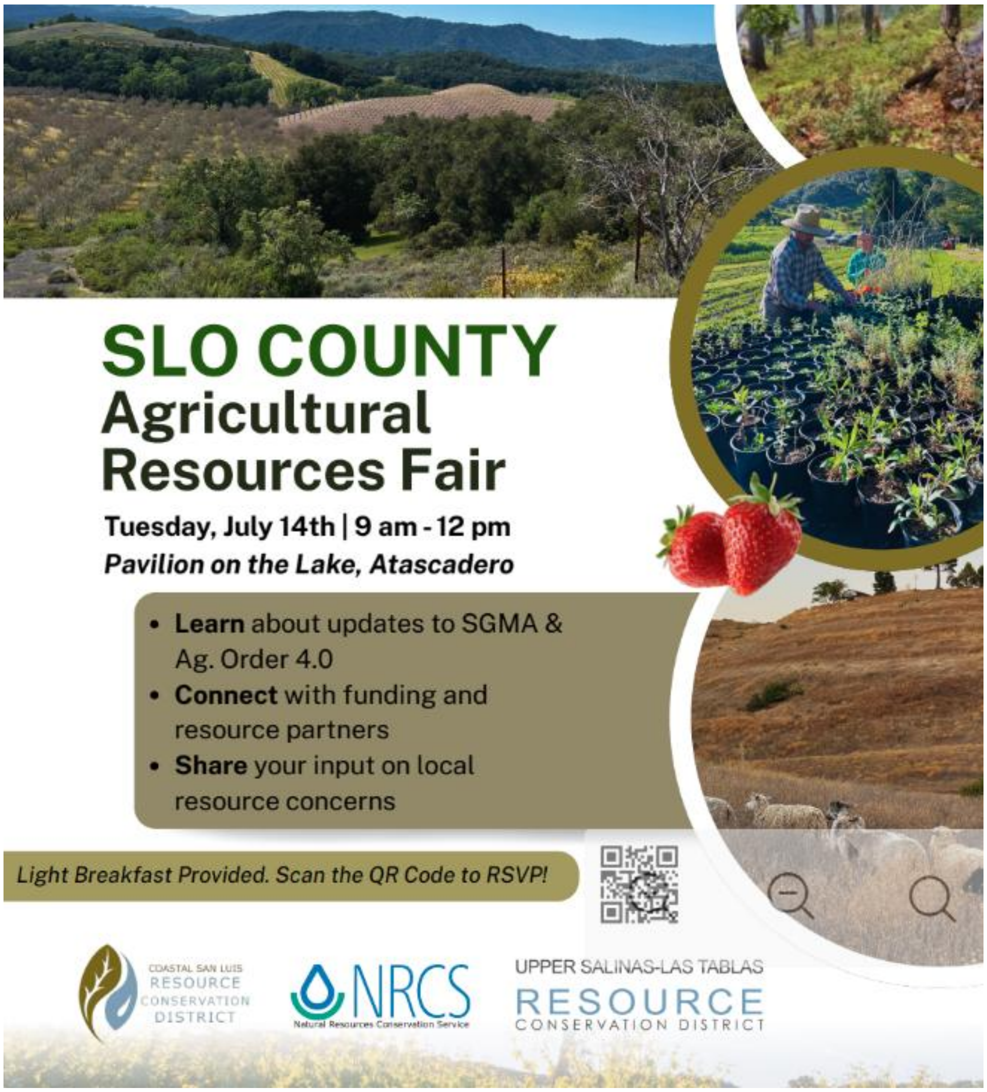
AGE

		UNDER 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 AND OVER	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
County Workforce	2024	15.68%	26.52%	26.59%	19.07%	12.14%	0.00%	3,073
	2025	12.79%	28.87%	29.55%	19.94%	8.85%	0.00%	3,091
New Hires	2024	42.49%	25.16%	15.43%	8.46%	8.46%	0.00%	473
	2025	50.00%	23.56%	13.94%	8.17%	4.33%	0.00%	416
Applications	2024	36.87%	27.26%	17.44%	12.01%	3.46%	2.96%	9,745
	2025	39.47%	24.54%	16.64%	11.29%	2.87%	5.20%	11,426
US Census Bureau (County of SLO 2020)		39.90%	10.70%	12.70%	15.10%	21.50%	0.00%	283,111

The numbers reflected above seem to be roughly representative of our SLO County population. They certainly do not indicate a bias in any particular direction. We hope that newly hired employees are there entirely on their own qualifications and not because they check the box for a certain age. Race or gender.

Ag Knowledge and Opportunity

Agricultural producers in San Luis Obispo County may wish to attend a Resource Fair that promises to be packed with useful information and communication. Here are the details:



Last Week

Our Little Slice of Heaven

As we celebrate our nation's 250 birthday and all the greatness that is the United States of America, it's good to take stock of the greatness of our own community. We live in paradise but sometimes forget how good we have it. We also occasionally forget what it takes to preserve the fantastic community that is San Luis Obispo County.

The natural beauty that surrounds us all is very special. Almost nowhere do we have the blight, urban degradation and decay that so many other communities have. We feel safe without having to install bars across our windows. We smile and say hello to complete strangers. We help each other in times of need.

The residents of San Luis Obispo County are as much a treasure as the landscape. We are people who love where we live. Many of us have arrived here from other places specifically because we appreciate the people and the land so much more than where we escaped from.

The biggest factor that shapes our lives here on the Central Coast is the cost of living. It impacts our jobs, the services we use and especially our homes. The expensive price tag for living here excludes many who simply aren't able to make it work.

Whether renting or buying, housing is the determining factor for practically all of us. At the low end of the wage scale, it is woefully difficult to find a job that pays enough to cover high local rent and still have enough left over for groceries and such. At the middle-class level, being able to afford a modest mortgage is a constant struggle. Upper income earners are competing with retirees in a limited market.

Our elected leaders talk (and talk and talk) a lot about housing costs but seldom have practical answers. Some are only interested in subsidized low-cost housing. Those who prefer cutting the costs of regulation and support a freer market approach find themselves in a minority. Others still would prefer that we keep the status quo and refrain from "urbanizing" our little slice of heaven.

The cost of government is also a huge factor in our cost of living on the Central Coast. Government is by far the biggest employer in our community. Those thousands of jobs are not productive. As important as some are, they don't make or do anything that generates commerce. At times, they facilitate economic growth, but more often than not, they hinder it.

We recently had elections in which voters were offered differing approaches to government from credible candidates. The voters chose the candidates that prefer bigger government. So, we will continue on that path for the foreseeable future.

We are facing a half cent sales tax measure dedicated to transportation on the November ballot. Most people shrug at an extra half cent. Almost everybody agrees that we need to improve the roads and transportation infrastructure of the Central Coast. But few realize that the anticipated $35 million in revenue would otherwise be discretionary money. In other words, that's money that people earn, but don't get to choose how they spend it.

It is concerning how reliant our community is on government. Big government types are worried about not having enough funding to grow government to their satisfaction. Small government advocates worry that too much money is already going to government. Each side has a vastly different opinion about how much each of us is our brother's keeper. Those in the middle seem to be confused.

Another growing divide is the coastal verses inland schism. Mirroring other parts of our state and nation, the two regions seem to clash on many priorities. The reliance that each has on the other is indisputable, yet we sometimes see differences that rise to contempt.

The headline issues like the potential 20-year renewal for the Diablo Canyon Power Plant, the Lopez Lake litigation and the Paso Water Basin will each take huge efforts and a lot of money to resolve. Equally important challenges such as immigration, local health care, property rights, homelessness and public safety are ongoing issues that require a great deal of public involvement and cooperation – two things of which we never seem to have enough.

What we do have is a respect for each other. Unlike other parts of our country violence is becoming a political tool, we find solutions that do not involve rioting and destructive civil disobedience.

Whether despite - or because of - all of these issues, we are a community blessed with greatness. Fourth of July celebrations throughout the county were filled with patriotism. The love for our country and our county was on full display.

Most of us, given the choice, would be hard pressed to list anywhere else we would rather live. Protecting those things most important is a way of life in San Luis Obispo County. There are things in our community that could always be better, but they are already a far bit better than most.

DA Dow Doesn't Give Up

As we saw in the prosecution of the Kristen Smart case, San Luis Obispo County District Attorney Dan Dow doesn't give up.

Frequent readers will recall that District Attorney Dan Dow has been stymied in his efforts to add personnel to his team, including Assistant DAs to prosecute crimes restored by Prop 36 and to prosecute fraud and elder abuse cases.

District Attorney Dan Dow

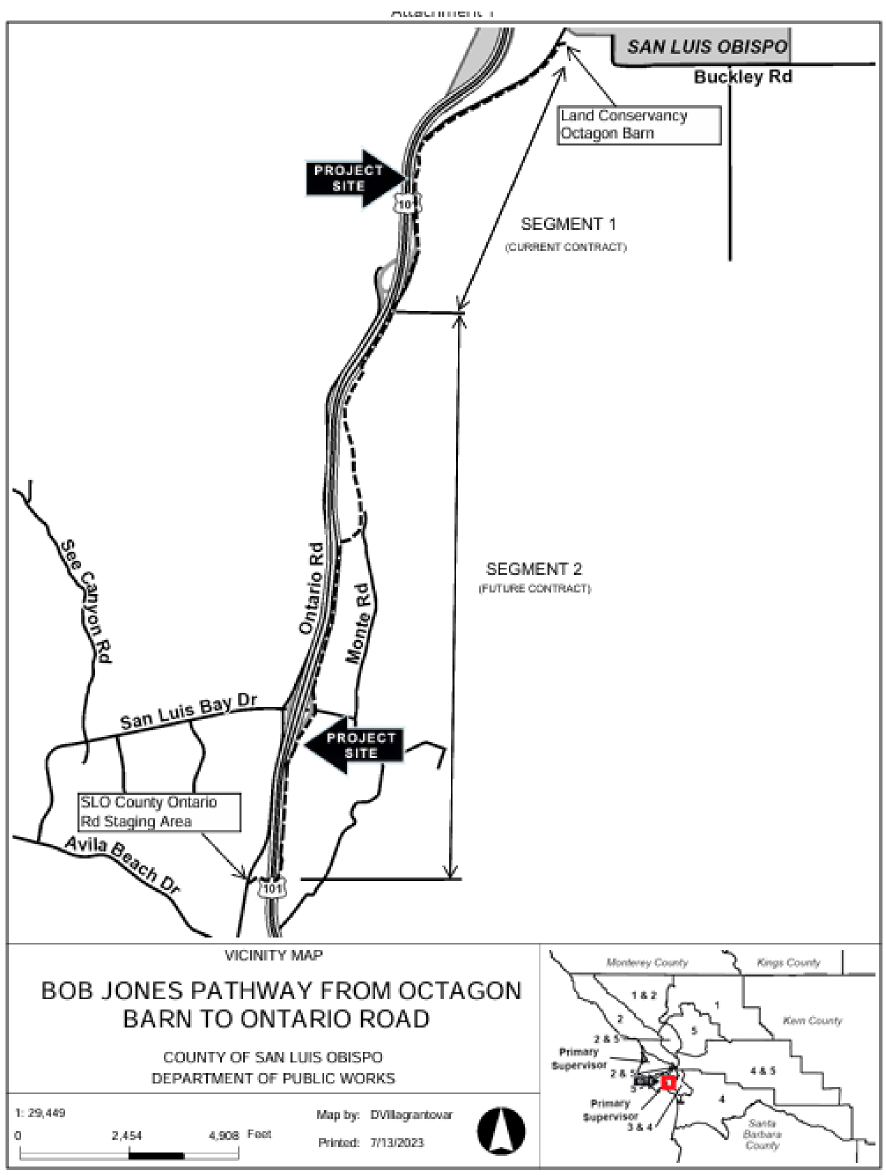
He will continue to try to persuade the Board of Supervisors over the next few months as the Board prepares to make final budget adjustments this fall.

Should you support his efforts, please spread the word and get your friends and neighbors to reach out to Supervisors and ask them to support this critical public safety item. If you know victims of fraud or elder abuse, their voices could be very impactful.

From the City to the Sea – Burning Other Peoples' Money all the Way

The ongoing and expensive effort to connect San Luis Obispo city bicyclers with the coast in Avila Beach via a quaint and pleasant path is reaching a new chapter. Item 1 on the July 7 San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors agenda reads: Submittal of a bid opening report for the Bob Jones Trail in San Luis Obispo County near San Luis Obispo from Cloverridge Lane to 0.1 Mile North of Buckley Road, Federal Aid Project No. 5949 (188) (Contract No. 320096) (Clerk's File) to: 1) award the subject contract to Souza Engineering Contracting, the lowest responsive, responsible bidder, in the amount of $10,490,143; 2) authorize the Director of Public Works, or designee, to approve construction contract change orders, if needed, for a contingency amount not to exceed $1,049,014 for a final total construction amount of $11,539,158; 3) approve Amendment No. 4 in the amount of $523,720 to the contract for professional consultant services with Wallace Group to provide design support services during construction; and 4) authorize a budget adjustment in the amount of $15,953,000 to increase appropriations for WBS 320096 with approved funding from the California Transportation Commission Active Transportation Program (ATP), by 4/5 vote.

Below is a site map depicting the subject segment that is yet unbuilt.



When completed, cyclists and hikers will be able to pedal or amble along a nice four(ish) mile pathway at a cost of about $10 million per mile. That's all Other Peoples' Money. Ignoramuses and schemers will claim that much of that funding is from grants, so cost is irrelevant, but they are forgetting or ignoring that those grants ultimately come from tax dollars.

Of course, the trail will be popular with tourists and locals alike. It might even be able to claim that it generates some indirect tourist dollars. But between the cost of construction, the cost of maintenance and the liability coverage, users are getting one giant free ride. And the rest of the community that doesn't cycle or hike is out a very big chunk of change.

Here is the construction budget:

Expenditures:	**Amount**
Programming	$250,000
Design	$5,245,705
Bidding	$26,307
Construction	$35,314,270
Close Out	$100,000
Total Expenditures:	**$40,936,282**
Approved Funding Sources:	**Amount**
Capital Projects Fund Facilities Planning Designation	$5,000,000
Active Transportation Program (ATP)	$1,690,855
Regional State Highway Account (RSHA)	$1,250,000
CA Dept of Fish & Wildlife	$822,999
Parks - Public Facility Fees (PFF)	$334,904
CA DOT/Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	$235,852
PG&E Mitigation	$145,672
Total:	**$9,480,282**
Approved Pending Appropriation Funding Sources:	**Amount**
Active Transportation Program (ATP)	$15,953,000
State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP)	$6,000,000
State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)	$5,730,000
Senate Bill 125 Formula Funds	$2,000,000
SLOCOG Local Funds	$1,773,000
Total:	**$31,456,000**
Total Funding:	**$40,936,282**

In addition to gobs of Other Peoples' Money, our County has spent a great deal of time managing the project contract. Here is the latest amendment:

WHEREAS, on January 27, 2025, the parties entered into Amendment No. 1 to the Contract to increase the scope of work and prior cost proposal of Consultant; and

WHEREAS, on June 24, 2025, the parties entered into Amendment No. 2 to the Contract to extend the time for performance; and

WHEREAS, on August 8, 2025, the parties entered into Amendment No. 3 to the Contract to increase the scope of work and prior cost proposal of Consultant; and

WHEREAS, the County and Consultant desire to modify the Contract in order to increase the scope of work and prior cost proposal of Consultant and extend the time for performance until June 30, 2028, in accordance with the rights previously reserved by the parties under the Contract.

NOW, THEREFORE, for good and valuable consideration, the County and Consultant hereby agree as follows:

1. Exhibit A, "Scope of Work" to the Contractor is hereby amended by incorporating the attached Exhibit A-3, "Consultant Scope of Work." All references to Exhibit A in the Contract shall be deemed to include reference to Exhibit A-3.

2. Exhibit B, "Cost Proposal" to the Contract is hereby amended by incorporating the attached Exhibit B-3, "Cost Proposal." All references to Exhibit B in the Contract shall be deemed to include reference to Exhibit B-3.

3. Under Article 3, "Payment for Services," section A1 is hereby amended to read as follows:

   "County shall pay to Consultant as compensation in full for all Work required by this Contract a sum not to exceed the total Contract amount of one million, seven hundred fifty-six thousand, eight hundred thirty-one dollars ($1,756,831.00)."

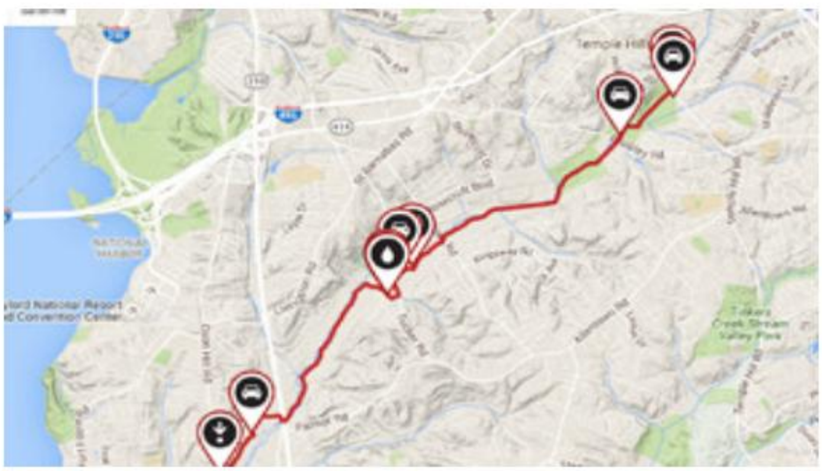
4. The second sentence of Article 2 "Time For Completion of Work" is hereby amended to read as follows:

"All Work shall be completed no later than June 30, 2028, provided, however, that extensions of time may be granted in writing by the County's Director of Public Works, which said extensions of time, if any, shall be granted only for reasons attributable to inclement weather, acts of God, or for other cause determined in the sole discretion of the County's Director of Public Works to be good and sufficient cause for such extensions."

5. All provisions of the Contract not affected by this Amendment No. 4 shall remain unchanged and in full force and effect.

6. This Amendment may be executed in counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original and all of which shall constitute one and the same agreement.

The trail begins at the Octagon Barn in SLO and goes to the beach in Avila.



The trail is listed on several websites. Here is one example:

TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Bob Jones Trail Facts

States: California
Counties: San Luis Obispo
Length: 3.9 miles
Trail end points: Prado Rd (San Luis Obispo) and Avila Beach Park (Avila Beach)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Concrete
Trail category: Rail-Trail
ID: 6433823
Activities:
Bike | Inline Skating | Walking
Wheelchair Accessible

Go Unlimited
Export to Trail Guide
Create Guidebook
Download GPX
Print Friendly Map

We certainly do not begrudge cyclists and hikers enjoying their sport. We recognize the safety concerns that call for separate pathways that keep cyclists and pedestrians out of vehicular traffic.

A Good Idea for Bike Path Users?

What we have a problem with is the enormous cost involved with this project. If it were funded by private foundations and philanthropists, fine. Even if there was some sort of clear return on the investment, that would be good. But imagine the outcry and handwringing that would take place if the County were to charge a nominal fee for use of the trail. Crisis would be declared.


Bike Path Sceptic

Yet, when taxpayers pause at the $10 million per mile costs (plus ongoing costs after completion) they are dismissed as Grinch's. If they point out that there are lots of projects around the county that maybe should have higher priority or would serve a broader range of people, they are looked at with contempt.

The googly monster tells us that we have over 75 miles of bike paths in San Luis Obispo County. We hear of more being on the drawing boards including the Templeton to Atascadero path. When do we decide to hold off and spend the money on more necessary projects – or at least take a critical look at the construction methods to find cost cutting ways to get more path for less money (Other Peoples')?

Personnel Matters that Matter

Item 17 on the July 7 BoS agenda reads: Submittal of Civil Service Commission Annual Report for Calendar Year 2025.

The report lists grievances filed and outlines recruitment activities. Below is a graph illustrating the annual grievances filed by year for each department.

GRIEVANCES, APPEALS, AND LITIGATION

The Commission's rules outline the procedure for resolving employment disputes prior to requesting a hearing.

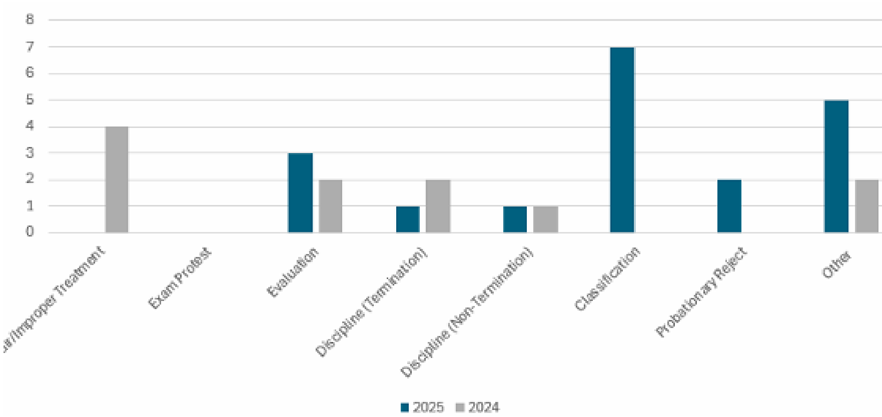
GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS FILED BY DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE					
AIRPORTS			1		
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER					
ASSESSOR					
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER/TREAS TAX					2
CENTRAL SERVICES					1
CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES		1			
CLERK-RECORDER		1			
COUNTY COUNSEL					
DISTRICT ATTORNEY		1	2		
HEALTH AGENCY	3	2	4	2	2
HUMAN RESOURCES					
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY					
LIBRARY		1	1	1	
PARKS AND RECREATION		1			1
PLANNING AND BUILDING	5		1	1	
PROBATION		1	1		
PUBLIC WORKS	3		3		2
SHERIFF-CORONER	5	3	5	2	3
SOCIAL SERVICES	3	1			
VETERANS SERVICES					
TOTAL	**19**	**12**	**18**	**6**	**11**

With about 2,800 employees, the numbers seem small. What is not included in the report is how the grievances were resolved and whether financial settlements were involved. However, we do have details about how many led to litigation:

GRIEVANCES, APPEALS, AND LITIGATION

GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS FILED BY TYPE



GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS FILED BY CALENDAR YEAR

	2025	2024
Filed	19	12
Resolved prior to Commission hearing (Resolved, Withdrawn, Dismissed)	13	9
Heard before the Commission	0	3
Pending Appeals and Grievances	6	2

PENDING LITIGATION

At the end of 2025, there were three litigation matters pending.

We will cover the Commission's reports on recruitment in next week's edition.

Run/Serve to Fix, Prevent or Preserve

Let's get it out of the way first; serving in office can at times be a thankless job. It requires a time commitment and listening to lots of people who have no idea how the system works but are certain that you are doing it all wrong. Running for office requires raising money, going to lots of meetings, knocking on strangers' doors, giving speeches designed to sell yourself to voters and desperately trying to get the word out.

OK, there is that. However, it is also true that your service can make a difference in the community in which you live. You can contribute to solutions that solve real problems. You can prevent dumb decisions that create real problems in your community. You can shift the focus from irrelevance to significance.

Even if you were to run in a race where you are facing headwinds to win, your candidacy can help to shape the narrative and bring important details to the publics attention. Many office holders had to run two or three times before getting elected.

We need more common-sense candidates. It's important and worthwhile.

If you are at all tempted, we encourage you to consider at least talking to friends and neighbors about it. If possible, talk to other elected officials you respect and get their advice.

The filing period for the November election is July 13 to August 7. City Council, School Board and Community Service Districts are some of the races that will be on the ballot. We have already heard of a few local city council members that will not be running for reelection. This means that there will be open seats.

San Luis Obispo County Clerk-Recorder
https://www.slocounty.ca.gov › departments › clerk-recorder
5/5 (3 reviews) · Public service & government in San Luis Obispo, CA
1055 Monterey St, San Luis Obispo, CA 93408 · 14 mi
Closed · Opens Mon 8 AM · More hours
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Specific details about offices that are up for election in your area can be obtained through the County Clerk's office.

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Gavin Newsom Ally Wore FBI Wire in Corruption Probe Targeting Former Chief of Staff

Alexis Podesta secretly wore a FBI wire 'casting a pretty broad net across the Capitol community'

By Megan Barth, July 3, 2026

A longtime Gavin Newsom appointee and Democratic power broker secretly wore an FBI wire and recorded conversations as part of a federal public corruption investigation that began with the governor's inner circle and has since expanded Newsom and his wife, Jennifer Siebel Newsom.

According to an exclusive report in the *New York Post*, Alexis Podesta, 45, a Newsom appointee to the State Compensation Insurance Fund board since January 2020, cooperated with federal investigators by wearing a wire starting as early as June 2024. The recordings captured discussions during the probe into then-Newsom Chief of Staff Dana Williamson. Podesta remains on the State Compensation Insurance Fund board, earning nearly $61,000 annually.

Williamson's attorney McGregor Scott, a former U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of California, confirmed: "Alexis wore a wire, and Dana did not."

The *California Globe* has covered this federal investigation extensively. On November 12, 2025, we reported that the U.S. Department of Justice announced the indictment and FBI arrest of political consultant Dana Williamson, 53, of Carmichael, on charges including conspiracy to commit bank and wire fraud, filing a false tax return, and making false statements to the FBI.

The following day, November 13, 2025, the *Globe* confirmed that Alexis Podesta had been identified in court documents as "Co-Conspirator 2" in the case against Williamson.

Williamson pleaded guilty in May 2026 in federal court in Sacramento to conspiracy to commit bank and wire fraud, subscribing to a false tax return, and making false statements to the FBI. Her sentencing remains pending.

Court filings detail how Williamson, while serving as Newsom's chief of staff from late 2022, allegedly orchestrated a scheme involving a dormant campaign account tied to former Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra. Approximately $225,000 was siphoned from the account and disguised as legitimate consulting fees intended to benefit Sean McCluskie, Becerra's former chief of staff.

Podesta, who inherited oversight of aspects of the account, received payments through her company from Becerra's committee, often in $10,000 monthly installments in 2023 and 2024. Podesta has stated she was unaware the payments were improper. Her attorney, Bill Portanova, confirmed her cooperation with investigators. Podesta has not been charged.

One specific example captured in the investigation: Williamson and Podesta exchanged text messages and participated in a recorded call strategizing how to respond to a Public Records Act request concerning California's litigation against Activision Blizzard, a corporate client. Williamson allegedly shared confidential state government information with Podesta about the matter.

The *California Globe* previously reported on Williamson's role as Newsom's "enforcer" and key liaison to labor unions and business interests before her replacement in December 2024 by Nathan Barankin, a former top aide to then-Vice President Kamala Harris.

The investigation, which sources indicate has been active for years (with roots traced back as early as 2022 in some reporting), has broadened significantly. FBI letters sent last fall notified numerous Sacramento insiders and lobbyists, including Republican Assemblyman Josh Hoover, that their phone calls had been intercepted during the probe. Hoover, who had no connection to Williamson or Podesta, described it as casting "a pretty broad net across the Capitol community."

On June 15, Governor Newsom announced he and his wife (First Partner) Jennifer Siebel Newsom were under federal investigation, framing the probe as as political retaliation orchestrated by President Trump ahead of Newsom's anticipated 2028 presidential run, citing Trump's past comments calling for his arrest.

"They have not found a crime — they are simply trying to find one," Newsom stated. "We have nothing to hide. Mr. President, come after me. I am not going anywhere. The country is watching."

In his formal statement, Newsom elaborated: "In recent days, federal agents have knocked on the doors of family friends and former employees. Not because they found a crime. Because they are simply trying to find one. They are demanding records. They are abusing the grand jury process. Digging through years and years of random documents."

Newsom continued, "Donald Trump isn't just coming after me because of my mean tweets. He's coming after me because I am considering running for President. Because he hates that I've consistently called him out – over and over again – for his lies and deceit. Donald Trump is simply the most corrupt President in American history. He has turned the levers of government into his own personal power ministries to reward cronies and to try to jail his opponents… One by one, anyone who has challenged Donald Trump has ended up on his hit list. And today, I proudly join that list… If they can't intimidate me, they'll go after the mother of our children."

Siebel Newsom has similarly accused Trump of having "no boundaries."

Our reporting has consistently highlighted how vendors and donors connected to the Newsom orbit have profited handsomely while the First Partner's nonprofit extracted millions through salaries and licensing fees from an organization she controls.

Jennifer Siebel Newsom solicited state vendors and the governor's campaign donors for large gifts to her charity, The Representation Project. Since 2011, this supposed gender-justice charity has raked in over $800,000 from corporate giants like PG&E, AT&T, and Comcast—firms with billions at stake in California's regulatory landscape.

In August and September 2022, the Globe shared a report by Open the Books, which sued, and then had to file 442 California Public Record Act requests – one with each state agency – in order to obtain California's line-by-line spending by state agencies. California's Controller, Betty Yee, rejected their sunshine request for state spending, claiming she "couldn't locate" any of the nearly 50 million bills she paid in 2019.

What Open the Books auditors found in California's state spending was "979 state vendors who gave $10,561,828 in political donations to Gavin Newsom during his 2010, 2018, recall election, and 2022 election cycles. Meanwhile, these companies reaped $6,201,978,173 in state payments."

That's a $10.6 million investment for a $6.3 billion return.

The current charity revelations follow Governor Newsom's $13,000 fine from the Fair Political Practices Commission in November 2025 for failing to timely disclose more than $14.3 million in behested payments between 2019 and 2024. The FPPC classified the violation as negligent rather than willful, but watchdog groups argue the lapse underscores persistent transparency concerns.

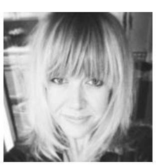
Republican critics, including Assemblyman Carl DeMaio, have called for investigations into Newsom's use of taxpayer funds for personal defense related to the DOJ probe.

The revelation that a Newsom appointee and insider wore an FBI wire underscores the depth of the federal investigation into California's Democratic political machine. While Williamson declined to cooperate, Podesta's assistance has provided investigators with direct recordings from within the governor's orbit.

As the *California Globe* has noted in its ongoing coverage, the case raises serious questions about governance, ethics, and accountability in Sacramento. With Williamson's guilty plea secured and the probe now touching the governor's family and closest advisors, further developments could have significant political repercussions, particularly as Newsom eyes a national stage.

The governor's office and involved parties have yet to provide additional public comment on the latest FBI wire revelations.

The *California Globe* will continue following this investigation closely.



Megan Barth
Megan Barth is the Executive Editor of The California Globe and former, founding editor of the Nevada Globe. Specializing in investigative reporting, her work has appeared in national and local news. The highlights of her career include interviewing President Donald Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance, and FBI Director Kash Patel. When she isn't editing, writing, or talking, you can find her hiking and relaxing in Northern Nevada.

Ringside: Choosing the Right Infrastructure Projects Can Deliver Affordable Abundance

Investing in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta holds the potential to deliver millions of acre feet of additional water per year

By Edward Ring, July 2, 2026

The reason to socialize a portion of the cost of major infrastructure is so the ratepayer doesn't have to bear an unaffordable share of the construction financing payments. The broader benefit to society is to achieve greater affordability for what constitutes raw materials for prosperity; transportation, water, and energy.

Whether or not they are ever completed, there are three megaprojects that California's taxpayers are being asked to subsidize that will never deliver prosperity or affordability. They are High Speed Rail, the Delta Conveyance, and floating offshore wind. In each case, tens, if not hundreds of billions will be spent on their construction. The financing charges, stretched over decades, will far outweigh any operating benefits.

Maybe there are reasons we should build these projects anyway. That is a separate and worthy discussion. But before we go any further down the half-*trillion* dollar (or more) path of building them, it's worth thinking about alternative uses for all that money. Here are some ideas.

With the advent of autonomous vehicles, smart cars, and, soon, long-range, fast-charging EVs, the common road becomes the future of transportation, not just a relic of the past. Let's repair and upgrade our roads and freeways. Let's develop smart lanes where next-generation cars can travel at much higher speeds. At the same time, let's upgrade existing rail, especially our freight corridors. And while we're at it, let's triage our failing urban light rail systems. They're broke, ridership never recovered after COVID, and in most cases advanced vehicles can now deliver far more cost-effective point-to-point services than trains on tracks. And let's make sure California is at the forefront of mass adoption of quiet, insanely convenient passenger drones. Buckle up. They're almost here.

Investing in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta holds the potential to deliver millions of acre feet of additional water per year to California's farms and cities. On average, our state and federal aqueducts together transported 4.2 million acre feet per year over the past 3.5 years. Over that same period of time, on average, 19.2 million acre feet per year flowed into San Francisco Bay. What if during these recent wet winters we could have safely diverted an additional 4 million acre feet per year from the delta? Wouldn't the remaining 15 million acre feet that still would have poured into the ocean have been enough to protect the ecosystem? Yet we would have doubled our water diversions.

There are ways to safely move more water out of the delta. A combination of dredging the silted up interior channels and constructing fish friendly water diversion basins could potentially deliver millions of additional acre feet to the delta pumps. At the same time we should invest in dredging our major reservoirs to restore their storage capacity. We should fast-track permitting for downstream percolation basins on privately owned farmland. We should build more gates in the delta to better manage salinity. And we should demand the cities surrounding the San Francisco Bay upgrade their water treatment plants so we don't have to send millions of acre feet into the bay every year just to flush out the excess nitrogen discharge.

Finally, acknowledging an ongoing role for oil and gas is not a troglodytic rejection of modernity. It is recognition that fossil fuel still contributes over 80 percent of all energy consumption, both worldwide and in California. And even if consumption of crude oil were to be phased out completely by 2045, which is probably impossibly fast, we are still going to consume at least another 5 billion barrels of oil. In a great irony, drilling for oil in California would *improve* air quality, because the only way to stop natural seeps of methane in our seismically active state is to deplete the underlying reservoirs.

As for natural gas, it still delivered 40 percent of the state's electricity in 2024. Shutting down another one of these plants every time another PV/battery farm goes up is why we're paying $.30 per kilowatt-hour for electricity. If we must, let's just pump underground the CO2 emissions from these power plants. That is far, far less expensive than building floating offshore wind farms 20 miles off the California coast in 4,000 feet of water. When it comes to oil and gas, we should be setting an example of clean use for the world.

Two variables determine whether spending government funds on infrastructure is going to yield long-term economic dividends to society. The first is to choose good projects. The second is to do so in a regulatory environment that doesn't elevate costs way beyond that of the actual construction. In both cases, California urgently needs a reset.

If the state deregulated its building environment, lowering costs, more private investment would be attracted to infrastructure investments, and the publicly funded share would go a lot further. With the right choice of projects to develop, overall economic benefits are enormous. People who today collect state-funded benefits could instead be offered high-paying jobs in construction. Californians would not only make more money, but everything they purchased would cost less.

Edward Ring

Edward Ring is the director of water and energy policy for the California Policy Center, which he co-founded in 2013 and served as its first president. The California Policy Center is an educational non-profit focused on public policies that aim to improve California's democracy and economy. He is also a senior fellow of the Center for American Greatness. Ring is the author of two books: "Fixing California - Abundance, Pragmatism, Optimism" (2021), and "The Abundance Choice - Our Fight for More Water in California" (2022).

Governor Newsom Signs 'Historic Balanced State Budget' with Structural Deficit

A structural deficit like California's occurs when ongoing revenues are consistently insufficient to cover ongoing spending commitments at current service levels

By Katy Grimes, July 1, 2026

On June 29, 2026, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the 2026-2027 state budget. Before your eyes glaze over, here is how the governor characterized it:

"Governor Newsom signs historic balanced state budget, cementing California's fiscal strength and investing in the state's future."

His press release added this little gem:

What you need to know: Governor Gavin Newsom today signed California's 2026–27 state budget, delivering a balanced budget with no deficit this year or next while preserving historic reserves, investing in working families, protecting the rights of Californians, and leaving California on its strongest fiscal footing in generations. In a video released today, the Governor reflects on how California proved that fiscal discipline and ambitious public investment are the foundation of the state's success.

A balanced California budget with no deficit? Are you kidding me? Leaving California on its strongest fiscal footing in generations? Fiscal discipline and ambitious public investment are the foundation of the state's success?

Call the vomitorium, *stat*.

The Legislative Analyst's Office disagrees. The LAO says:

$18 Billion Budget Problem in 2026-27

2025-26 Budget Act Anticipated Deficits Through the Multiyear

2026-27 Budget Problem Now Larger Than Anticipated

Budget Position Is Weak

Who are you going to believe? Governor Newsom or the non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office?

California has a structural deficit.

A structural deficit like California's occurs when ongoing revenues are consistently insufficient to cover ongoing spending commitments at current service levels – independent of short-term economic fluctuations (cyclical factors). It is a long-term mismatch: even when the economy performs well and revenues grow, *spending grows faster or stays elevated at a level that revenues cannot sustainably support*. This contrasts with a cyclical deficit, which arises temporarily during recessions when revenues drop due to weaker economic activity.

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, key drivers include:

- **Spending growth outpacing revenue growth**: During surplus years, like the post-COVID boom with record revenues, the state expanded programs and commitments. When revenues normalized and dipped, as in 2022–2023 due to market declines, spending levels remained high.
- **Constitutional requirements**: Propositions like 98 (education minimums) and 2 (rainy-day fund deposits) automatically direct a large share of any revenue gains to specific areas, leaving less flexibility.
- **One-time fixes and borrowing**: Recent budgets used reserves, delays, borrowing, and temporary measures to plug gaps. These don't address the underlying imbalance and often create future repayment pressures.
- **Program costs:** Rapid growth in areas like Medi-Cal, child care, housing, and corrections, plus external factors like federal policy changes.

As a result, deficits have become "chronic" rather than temporary, the Legislative Analyst's Office says.

In May "Governor Gavin Newsom unleashed his Trump Derangement Syndrome during his May budget revise press conference for the first 10 full minutes, blaming the President's policies–especially tariffs– for contributing to a worsened budget outlook," the Globe reported.

"But hey! Gov. Gavin Newsom's final May budget revise is 'miraculously balanced,' he says.

Gov. Newsom said he was not only handing off a balanced budget for next year to a new governor, his two-year budget will be balanced in 2028 as well.

Pardon my snicker.

Newsom proposed roughly $322 billion in total spending and about $226 billion General Fund spending. His budget revise projected a $12 billion deficit for 2025-26.

It is important to note that the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) warns, 'deficits have persisted even as the state's economy and revenues have grown, underscoring that the problem is structural rather than cyclical.'"

Why California Has a Structural Deficit
California's budget is heavily reliant on volatile revenues, and in particular, personal income taxes from high earners and capital gains taxes. And as the LAO noted, mandatory funding programs eat up large chunks of the budget, like education funding through Proposition 98, and Medi-Cal healthcare for low-income individuals, with growing caseloads due to adding illegal aliens onto Medi-Cal coverage, nearly bankrupting the system.

CalMatters even reported that Newsom's budget "also means that for the fourth year in a row in his tenure, California is projected to have a deficit despite revenue growth."

"But state Sen. Roger Niello of Roseville, the Republican vice chair of the Senate Budget Committee, attributed the structural deficit to Democrats' 'unstoppable spending problems." 'The state must assess the effectiveness and sustainability of the programs that were created during the surplus and make necessary corrections,' he said in a statement."

California's structural deficit reflects a baseline where the "new normal" of spending exceeds what the tax system reliably produces over time. Addressing it typically requires multiyear realignment—either reining in automatic spending growth or broadening/reforming revenues—rather than one-off patches.

The California budget is not balanced, and does present future deficits.

I almost expected to see Gavin Newsom shimmying his shoulders again and emoting with jazz hands. It's his tell.

Katy Grimes

Katy Grimes, the Editor in Chief of the California Globe, is a long-time Investigative Journalist covering the California State Capitol, the co-author of California's War Against Donald Trump: Who Wins? Who Loses? and a contributor to "Taxifornia 2016."
A California native and Navy mom, Katy lives in Sacramento, CA.

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