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WEEKLY UPDATE
April 13 - 19, 2025

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BY EDWARD RING

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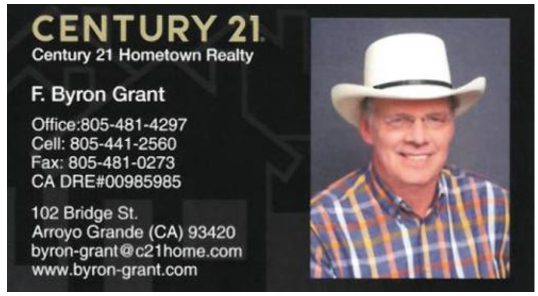

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THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District (APCD) Special Meeting of Monday, April 14, 2025 (Added)

Item a - PUBLIC EMPLOYEE APPOINTMENT (Pursuant to Government Code section 54957) – Consideration of Appointment of Public Employee – Air Pollution Control Officer. The agency's current Executive Director is retiring. Since this is a closed session meeting it is not known if the purpose is the make an appointment, interview candidates, or proceed otherwise. The attitude and beliefs of the new Director will be important with regard to the off road riding in the Oceano Dunes.

Local Agency Formation Commission Meeting of Thursday, April 17, 2025 (Scheduled)

The small agency Board will be considering its work program and Budget ($192,000) for FY 2025-26. It is not known any large scale annexations or dissolutions are planned for FY 2025-26. The trend of some of the smaller agencies going out of business is likely to continue as salaries benefit cost increases continue to outstrip local revenue natural growth. A severe tooth jarring depression would collapse many and might force smaller cities out of business too.

LAST WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

Paso Robles Basin Groundwater Authority Meeting of Monday April 7, 2025, 3PM (Scheduled-First Meeting) City of Paso Robles Council Chambers, 1000 Spring Street (Completed)

The Paso Robles Groundwater Authority held its first meeting on Monday, April 7 in the Paso Robles City Council Chambers. Tensions were high with numerous small well owners upset with the notion that their wells might be metered and that they would be required to pay for their own well water. Others were angry with the formation of a new governmental agency and voiced concern about staffing, equipment, administration, and other costs associated with such an agency. Speakers were limited to 3 minutes.

The meeting started with the announcement that the new agency has legal interpretations that allow them to exempt de minimis users (those using under two-acre feet annually) from mandatory participation. While this news seemed like it would be well received, many remain distrustful and fear that they will be ultimately be required to participate either through litigation or by a re-interpretation of the Prop 218 regulations governing such an agency. Further concern was raised that the de minimis exemption meant small water users would not have a vote in future water district balloting.

Officers elected to the new board are as follows: President: Matt Turentine (Shandon-San Juan WD), Vice President: John Harmon (City of Paso Robles), and Secretary: Jerry Reaugh (Estrella El-Pomar Creston WD). Reaugh will also serve as interim Treasurer/Auditor until an outside firm is selected.

Small water users continue to question several aspects of the new Joint Powers Agreement. Some challenge the validity of the process, since it required all five water agencies in the Paso basin to agree to the formation. Because San Miguel has chosen not to participate, many believe the JPA should not have been formed. Some are looking at the de minimis exemption as a "bait and switch" tactic that will last only long enough for the new agency to become established.

Some suggest that the new agency is there to allow large landholders to "harvest water" and sell their water to others, which could lead to faster depletion and over-drafting of the basin. Many fear that if their wells were monitored and possibly metered, mandatory rationing could be enforced in drought times which could shut down small family farms and even homes. Rate structures sufficient to cover all the necessary expenses are expected to be controversial. While all of these concerns have been voiced, an organized plan to fight the formation does not yet seem to be finalized. We can expect a challenging start up and will follow the continued formation with great interest. Diplomacy, transparency, and accountability will be the driving forces in any successful outcome.

Background: The agenda called for an election of officers, a setting of a 2025 meeting calendar, a report on funding, the formation of a committee to select an Executive Director and a work-around to attempt to legitimize the agency by submitting the 2023-2024 report from the Director of The SLO County Groundwater Sustainability program to the California Department of Water Resources in lieu of having anything to say for themselves.

The big question on everyone's mind was whether this "authority" actually has any, given that the Joint Powers Agreement establishing it was required to have the approval and participation of all five agencies in the Paso Basin. To date, San Miguel has opted to remain out of the JPA, and yet, the other agencies are moving forward without them.

Another big question involves finances and water rate structures. How quickly and how big will this new government agency grow, and how much will it cost those who live off their own private well that they drilled and pay monthly electric bills to keep it functioning.

Will the "Authority" have and exercise the power to limit water usage in drought years? Is the Paso Basin truly over drafted, and by how much? Lastly, the fundamental question is about whether a governmental agency has the right to charge a landowner for the water drawn from their own land.

Stay tuned for a classic government versus people showdown that could become yet another chapter in the long and mysterious tale of California Water Rights.

Board of Supervisors Meeting of Tuesday, April 8, 2025 (Completed)

In general: The April 8, 2025 meeting of the SLO County Board of Supervisors agenda started out appearing to be a fairly calm and quite session, but as is often the case, looking deep into the details brought about a few zingers. With 23 items listed on the consent agenda, the Board began with the typical proclamations, followed by a few appointments and HR contract approvals.

Budget Challenges Already Showing Up

Throughout the meeting each Supervisor made indirect references to the coming year being a very tough budget time. Current "guesstimates" for budget cuts are ranging from $15 million to more than $40 million. These references were cautionary in nature, letting people know that the coming "rebalancing" will be challenging for everyone.

Item 2 - Introduction of an ordinance amending Chapter 3.21 of Title 3 of the County Code - Low Value Assessments and Property Tax on Such Assessments. The County will exempt "items of low value assessment" from the property tax. This is because it costs more to process and bill them than they pay. This is a good efficiency move.

Item 17 - Submittal of a resolution and tabulation of changes in mileage of maintained County roads as required by the State Department of Transportation. This is an interesting document being proposed to be submitted to the California Department of Transportation (under Section 2121, requiring Counties to submit a declaration of mileage of its county roads). It declares SLO County responsibility for 1,347miles of roadway within its boundaries. There is no mention of how the County arrived at that rather extraordinary figure, nor is there any mention of how many potholes exist over those many miles of County roads.

The write-up stated in part:

The current total maintained County road mileage, as of February 1, 2025, is 1,347.679 miles. This total mileage accounts for an addition of 2.559 miles in the Woodlands Tract, a reduction of 4.293 miles due to the exclusion of three emergency access roads from the County Maintained Road System (CMRS), as well as additional cleanup and reconciliation that has been done to the accepted CMRS network in GIS in the past year (March 2024 through February 2025).

The most troubling paragraph in the report stated:

The financial implication of this action for the County Road Fund is minimal. However, as noted in prior years, gas tax revenues continue to fall short of fully funding the cost to retain the current condition of pavement throughout the county. Since then, inflation has soared and the cost of liability insurance for Roads has skyrocketed from $856,472 in FY 2021-22 to $3,632,873 in FY 2025-26 ($2.7M increase over four years). To absorb these costs, Public Works had no choice but to reduce the amount of funding allocated to the pavement management program, which is further compounded by the increased cost per mile to maintain county roads. In future years, the result of this will likely be reflected in Performance Measures as a decline to the Average Pavement Condition Index (PCI) for County roads; this performance measure is already below the targeted levels with a PCI of 59 vs the target of 65.

What is causing the surge in liability costs? Is the County making large liability suit settlements? Again, and as we pointed out during the prior Budget update, the Board should receive a report on rising liability costs and their causes.

Item 20 - Request to 1) receive and file a report on the grant review process for homeless services funding and provide direction as necessary; 2) approve the process outlined in the guidelines for creation of an Ad Hoc Committee if necessary to resolve differences between the Homeless Services Oversight Council and a County-convened Grant Review Committee and to make recommendations directly to the Board. Competition for funding for homeless projects, (both capital and operating) is hot and heavy among the various governmental and not-for-profit homeless providers. The Board sought to stabilize the situation:

On May 21, 2024, the County Board of Supervisors directed the Homeless Services Oversight Council (HSOC) Executive Committee to develop guidelines for future funding allocations that will include the following:

- *How future funding will be allocated between new project startups such as new shelters, new housing and/or new services and supporting existing shelters and services such as shelter operations, outreach services and day center services. This may include a percentage split between new projects and supporting existing projects or other allocation methodology.*
- *How performance metrics will be weighted when making funding recommendations.*
- *How the cost of services will be weighed when making funding recommendations.*
- *Resolution process for resolving differences between grant review committee recommendations and HSOC adopted recommendations.*

Now it appears that the committees assigned to resolve the issues are fighting. The Board letter states in part:

Approve the process outlined in the guidelines for creation of an Ad Hoc Committee if necessary to resolve differences between the Homeless Services Oversight Council and a County-convened Grant Review Committee and to make recommendations directly to the Board.

Item 25 - Request to consider and approve support and opposition positions on various current State legislation. This was a request to consider and approve support or opposition positions on various current State Legislation. Supervisors Moreno and Peshong voiced concern that each of the nearly 15 bills under review were in early stages, and that they would all likely be amended multiple times, often leading to proposals encompassing entirely different details. Supervisor Ortiz Legg acknowledged the situation, but said that there would be a SLO county delegation doing meetings in Sacramento in the near future, and it would be more productive to have positions around which they could interact. The agenda item passed 3-2.

One bill in particular was that initially left off of the list for approval at the request of Supervisor Gibson, was put back on after a separate motion from Supervisor Ortiz Legg. That bill, AB 305, dealt with encouraging the State to explore new opportunities for nuclear power generation development. Her motion passed 3-2 with Paulding and Gibson voting no.

Background: We know that the state legislature is up to all kinds of outlandish trends and hope that the Board is representative of local voters' preferences, especially when questions of transparency, accountability, and common sense are involved.

On March 25, 2025, the Board directed staff to return with an item including recommended County positions on current proposed legislation of special impact or importance to the County, *for Board approval to advocate in support or opposition of each bill. Identified bills and recommended positions are outlined in the table below.*

A number of these are contained within the text of the report.

One that could help the housing situation:

AB 609 (Wicks) California Environmental Quality Act: exemption: housing development projects	Support bill, with recommendation to modify the bill to include areas identified by the local jurisdiction for urban development. It is generally less impactful on the physical environment and natural resources and more financially feasible to build housing in areas [A] in close proximity to jobs, services, and facilities, [B] with existing infrastructure and available utility services, and [C] within a stronger network of emergency and public safety services. These areas are considered more efficient from a housing location standpoint ("housing efficient areas") and are typically urbanized areas. AB 609 would essentially expand the CEQA Residential Infill Exemption to capture a wider range of housing development in urbanized areas, and as a result, would reduce the need for housing projects located within housing efficient areas to undergo unnecessary environmental review.	Trevor Keith, Director, Planning and Building

And another:

AB 1206 (Harabedian) Single-family and multifamily housing units: preapproved plans	Reduces costs by requiring the County to expedite the building permit approval for housing projects whose plans they have previously approved. The County's Building Department has a Plan Check Only process to approve a specific housing project plan. By having a Plan Check Only approval process it ensure that developers can move forward with construction faster, addressing housing shortages and providing more units to meet demand. By having a reduced permitting cost for subsequent individual lot permits on previously approved plan check only projects, will aid in reducing the financial burdens while also allowing counties to allocate resources more efficiently. When builders use pre-approved plans, they are more likely to adhere to consistent, code-compliant designs, reducing the likelihood of plan corrections and inspection delays. Faster approvals mean quicker project starts, leading to job creation in construction and related industries, benefiting the local economy.	Trevor Keith, Director, Planning and Building

Not in my back yard:

AB 303 (Addis) Battery energy storage systems	This bill restores local control over the permitting of large-scale battery energy storage systems (BESS), ensuring that communities have a say in significant energy projects being sited near them. By eliminating the CEC's opt-in authority for BESS projects, this bill returns decision-making power to local governments, allowing them to carefully evaluate projects based on local land use priorities and public input. It is essential that these decisions remain in the hands of the communities most affected, rather than bypassing local government through state-level approvals. AB 303 strikes the right balance between advancing California's clean energy goals and respecting the voices of local residents.	Supervisor Paulding, District 4

Laying the ground work for a half cent sales tax for transportation in 2026:

SB 333 (Laird) San Luis Obispo Council of Governments Sales Tax Exemption	Will provide an exemption, in SLO County, to the current two percent sales tax cap rate. This exemption would enable the potential pursuit of a countywide, transportation-dedicated sales tax measure, providing voters with the choice to invest in much-needed transportation improvements across the region.	Supervisor Ortiz-Legg, District 3 Supervisor Paulding, District 4

Some of the cities are up against the 2% cap on the imposition of local sales taxes.

A vacation rental cop?

SB 346 (Durazo) Local agencies: transient occupancy taxes: short-term rental facilitator	This bill would authorize a local agency to enact an ordinance to require a short-term rental facilitator, to report, in the form and manner prescribed by the local agency, the assessor parcel number of each short-term rental during the reporting period, as well as any additional information necessary to identify the property as may be required by the local agency. The bill would authorize the local agency to impose an administrative fine or penalty for failure to file the report, and would authorize the local agency to initiate an audit of a short-term rental facilitator, as described. The bill would require a short-term rental facilitator, in a jurisdiction that has adopted an ordinance, to include in the listing of a short-term rental any applicable local license number associated with the short-term rental and any transient occupancy tax certification issued by a local agency.	James Hamilton, Director, ACTTCPA

Who understands this?

SB 540 (Becker) Independent System Operator: independent regional organization.	Existing law provides for the establishment of an Independent System Operator (ISO) as a nonprofit public benefit corporation and requires the ISO to ensure efficient use and reliable operation of the electrical transmission grid consistent with achieving planning and operating reserve criteria no less stringent than those established by the Western Electricity Coordinating Council and the North American Electric Reliability Council. Existing law, the Clean Energy and Pollution Reduction Act of 2015, provides for the transformation of the ISO into a regional organization, with the approval of the Legislature, pursuant to a specified process. This bill would delete the existing provisions providing for the transformation of the ISO into a regional organization. The bill would authorize the ISO and the electrical corporations that are participating transmission owners whose transmission systems are operated by the ISO, in lieu of the ISO managing related energy markets, as provided, to use *voluntary* energy markets governed by an independent regional organization, provided that specified requirements are satisfied.	Supervisor Ortiz-Legg, District 3

A good idea:

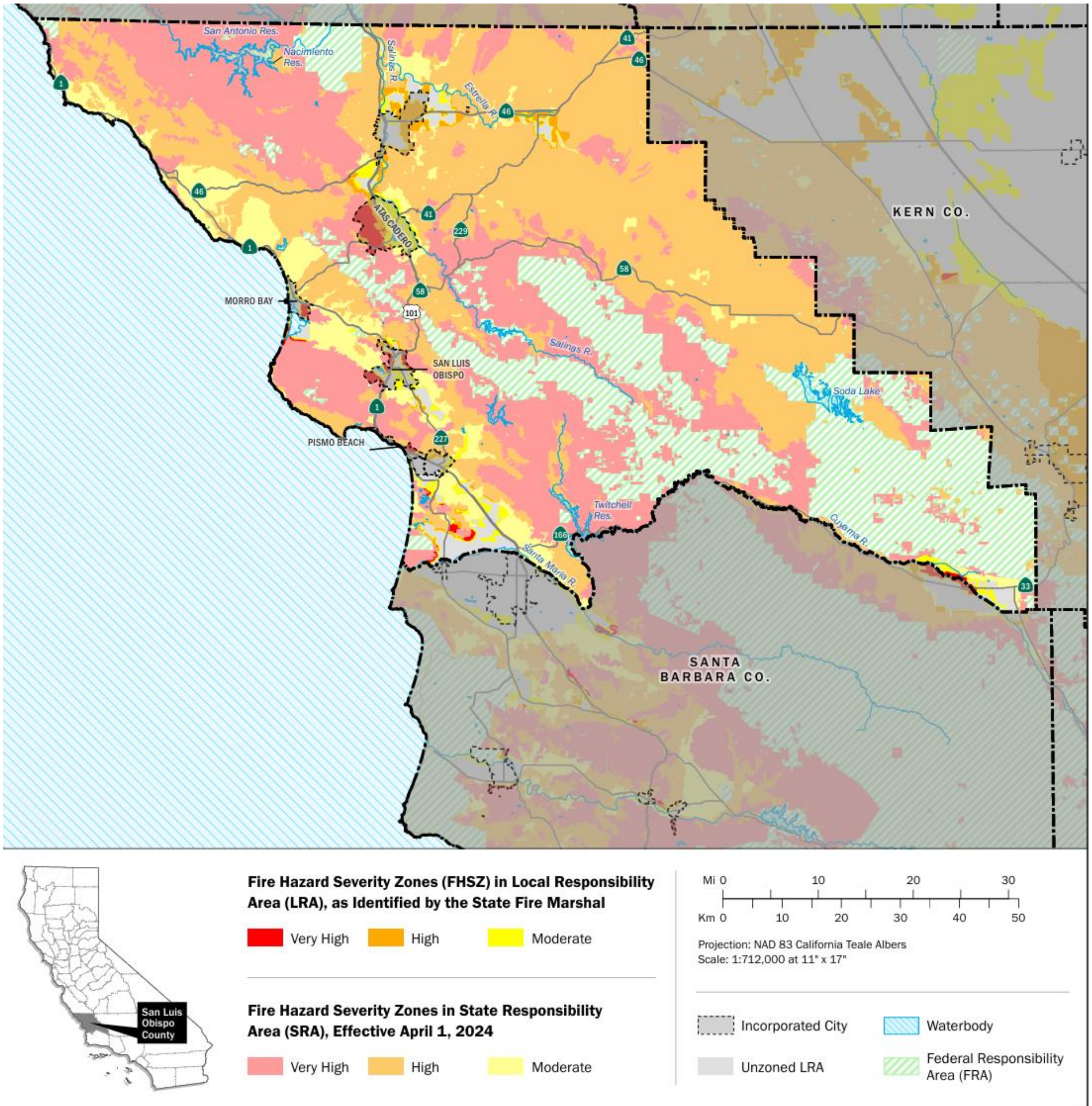
AB 305 (Arambula) Energy: nuclear facilities	Existing law prohibits the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission (Energy Commission) from certifying a nuclear fission thermal powerplant, except for specified powerplants, and provides that a nuclear fission thermal powerplant, except those specified powerplants, is not a permitted land use in California unless certain conditions are met regarding the existence of technology for the construction and operation of nuclear fuel rod processing plants and of demonstrated technology or means for the disposal of high-level nuclear waste, as specified. This bill would exempt small modular reactors, as defined, from those provisions. This bill contains other related provisions and other existing laws.	Supervisor Ortiz-Legg, District 3

Item 26 - Request to introduce an ordinance adopting the Local Responsibility Area (LRA) Fire Hazard Severity Zones as recommended by the Office of the State Fire Marshal (County Fire). The presentation was made by local CalFire leadership, who appeared slightly uncomfortable with the parameters set forth in the report.

The report could not be amended or appealed in any way and could only be adjusted to increase fire hazard zones – not decrease. Further, the report did not make any adjustment or consideration for mitigation efforts such as brush and fuel removal. Several people pointed out odd aspects of the map including sand beaches in high risk zones and leaving out any risk for areas encompassing older wooden structures.

The CalFire rep was unable to explain the methodology used in forming the map except to emphasize that the map attempted to capture zones in risk of flying ember ignition, particularly in windy areas. The Board was only asked to receive the report and will vote on accepting it at the next meeting. Each Board member expressed concern about the arbitrary nature of the report and its potential impact on insurance and suggested that greater communication with communities was needed before springing such a dramatic report on the county.

Background: This significant item was a request to introduce an ordinance adopting the Local Responsibility Area (LRA) Fire Hazard Severity Zones as recommended by the Office of the State Fire Marshal. A large area of the county is designated as high or very high risk of fire hazard. CalFire may discuss its methodology for its determination, but we are concerned that they seem to have had very little public input. It is also unclear whether mitigation measures, such as brush clearance and fuel reduction, could change the hazard identifications laid out on the map. We are concerned that this process impacts the ability of property owners within those identified areas to obtain fire insurance, and believe the Board should postpone adoption of the map pending more public input.



Item 27 - Presentation on the successful completion of the Local Aging and Disability Action Planning (LADAP) Grant and the San Luis Obispo County Master Plan on Aging. (Social Services) The next big discussion generator was a Hearing to consider 1) a resolution to approve the 2025-2029 consolidated Plan and the 2025 Action Plan to HUD; a resolution to approve the homeless serving and prevention projects utilizing the Permanent Local Housing Allocation grant funded by the California Department of Housing and Community Development; 3) a resolution approving the 2025 General Fund projects to support homelessness programs and services.

The item inspired a great deal of discussion. Highlights included Supervisor Gibson pointing out that some of the funds from the sources were being used for projects such as ADA work on sidewalks, and might be better spent on efforts directly benefiting the homeless. Supervisor

Moreno commented that such decisions were made at the city or community level, and that the County should not be interfering with local decision making. In all, the request was for $14.9 million in grants and funding, to which Board members replied that they were looking at something more in the $3 million range. The Board took the request under advisement with no financial promises.

County to Track Trump Cuts?

The homeless services discussion inspired Supervisor Gibson to offer a motion to request that staff develop a system for tracking the cuts put forth from the Federal Government that impact local programs. He described the Trump administration as conducting “egregious cuts” and “appalling gutting” of programs impacting non-profit and county efforts throughout the country. Supervisor Peshong requested that the tracking also include cuts from the State, to which Gibson replied that the state cuts go through a legislative process, and were not the same. Motion passed.

Camperland Woes

Supervisor Paulding made a motion to expand camping restrictions currently in place in Pismo and Oceano to be applied also in Nipomo. Supervisor Peshong asked that the same restrictions be applied to the Salinas riverbed. Gibson pointed out that the camping restrictions in this measure only pertained to street camping. Motion passed.

Item 29 - Hearing to consider: 1) a resolution to approve the 2025 – 2029 Consolidated Plan and the 2025 Action Plan including project allocations funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), authorize staff to adjust allocations as Outlined in the recommendation, and authorize the submittal of the 2025 – 2029 Consolidated Plan and the 2025 Action Plan to HUD including any authorized adjustments stated herein, authorize staff to amend the 2025 – 2029 Consolidated Plan and the 2025 Action Plan as outlined in the recommendation; 2) a resolution to approve the homeless-serving and prevention projects utilizing the Permanent Local Housing Allocation (PLHA) grant funded by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD); 3) a resolution approving the 2025 General Fund projects to support homelessness programs and services. (Social Services)

Item 31 - Any Supervisor may ask a question for clarification, make an announcement, or report briefly on his or her activities. In addition, Supervisors may request staff to report back to the Board at a subsequent meeting concerning any matter or may request that staff place a matter of business on a future agenda. Any request to place a matter of business for consideration on a future agenda requires the majority vote of the Board.

EMERGENT TRENDS

Item 1 - Ringside: California’s Refinery Capacity Stretched to the Limit; By [Edward Ring](), April 10, 2025

There is a 16 percent buffer between how much oil we use every day, and how much oil we are capable of refining

According to the California Energy Commission, in 2024 daily oil consumption in California averaged not quite 1.4 million barrels per day. Meanwhile, daily refinery capacity in California is just over 1.6 million barrels per day. There is a 16 percent buffer between how much oil we use every day, and how much oil we are capable of refining. That is changing fast.

If California's refinery capacity is reduced and there's a glitch, options are limited. There are no pipelines linking the state to other crude oil production and refining regions. If refined gasoline had to be imported, it would be impractical due to the need to transport it by ship to coastal terminals or send by rail in tank cars. And there are a limited number of out-of-state refineries equipped to produce the unique formulation required for gasoline sold in California.

It's not easy to extract oil, refine oil, or distribute oil in California's state regulatory environment, despite the fact that we still rely on petroleum for almost half of our total energy supply. For example, the state legislature passed "ABX2-1" on October 14, 2024, which in an effort to prevent "price gouging," requires California's oil refineries to maintain a "minimum inventory of fuel to avoid fuel shortages." Two days later, Phillips 66 announced they would close their refinery in Long Beach by the end of 2025. Officially, the timing of the announcement was coincidental.

Four months later, on February 1, 2025, up in Martinez in the San Francisco Bay Area, an accidental fire damaged a refinery operated by PBF Energy, putting it out of production completely. The company estimates partial restoration of production by June, and back to full production by the end of the year.

It doesn't take much to cause a perfect storm. Old timers remember the gas lines back in the 1970s. Those shortages were caused by external factors; an OPEC oil embargo that limited the supply of crude oil imports. But California extracted 61 percent of its crude oil in-state back in the late 1970s, with another third coming from Alaska. Today, California imports 61 percent of its crude from foreign sources, with only another 16 percent coming from Alaska.

Because our in-state crude oil extraction is now down to 23 percent of consumption, we are extremely vulnerable to geopolitical shocks. But internal factors now present an even greater risk to California's energy security.

The Martinez refinery operated by PBF Energy has a capacity of 139,000 barrels per day. With it temporarily down, the margin of refinery capacity over consumption shrinks from 16.3 percent down to 5.1 percent. That's a thin margin. Imagine if this fire happened in 2026 instead of two months ago.

Starting in 2026, with the Phillips 66 refinery shut down, California's total refinery capacity will drop to 1,483,000 barrels per day, against consumption (based on 2024 numbers) of 1,395,000 barrels per day. That will lower the surplus of refinery capacity over demand to 6.3 percent. So what happens if there's a fire such as the one that shut down the refinery in Martinez?

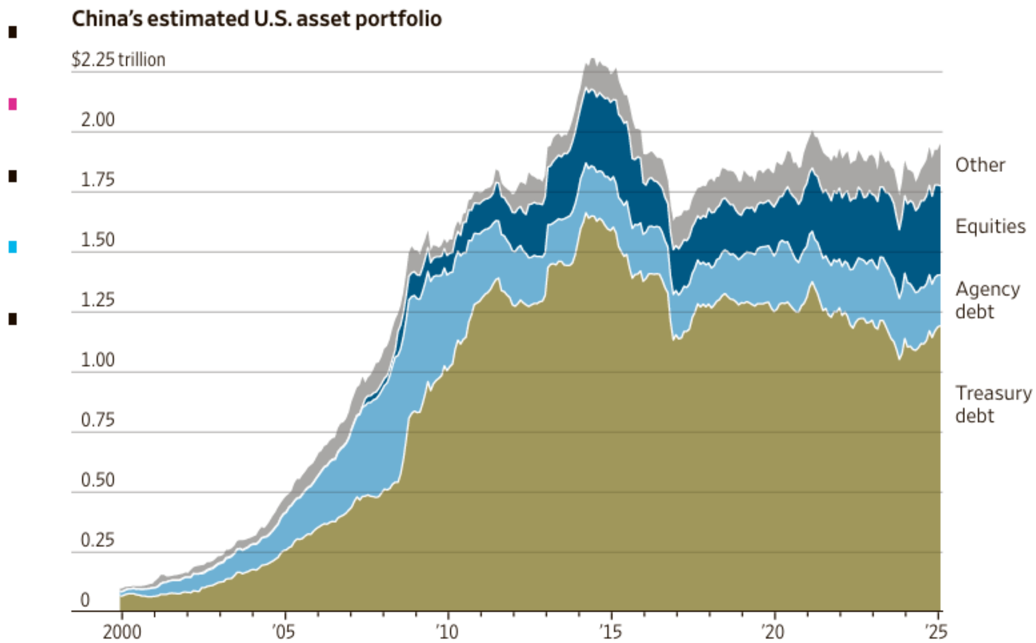
In that case, total refinery capacity would drop to 1,326,000 barrels per day, creating a 68,000 barrel per day shortfall, which is a 4.9 percent deficit. If the shutdown lasts 100 days, which is the currently predicted downtime in Martinez, that would be 6.8 million barrels of oil that will not be available to meet consumer demand. If the restoration to full production takes another 150 days, which is also consistent with reports from Martinez, that would mean for another five months California's refinery capacity only exceeds demand by 1.9 percent.

Corporate strategy is influenced by political choices. Back in October, instead of recognizing the almost perfect correlation between the fluctuating spot price for crude oil and the retail price of gasoline in California, our governor and state legislature decided to impose costly new regulations on refiners. This political grandstanding is divorced from market reality, and the market is implacable.
When the unintended effect of escalating regulations and incessant litigation is scarcity, the capacity to absorb shocks is taken away. This is what has happened in California with gasoline, electricity, and water. Our politicians have left Californians with a resource infrastructure that is one fire or cyber-attack removed from economic and social chaos.

Will gas lines be as peaceful in 2026 as they were in 1979? Maybe not. Because the culprits won't be oceans removed. They'll be down the road, in every culpable district office in the state.

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). California Globe, April 10, 2025

Item 2 - China owns a portion of the US National Debt by the Council of Foreign Relations.



Note: Treasurys includes bills, notes and bonds. Other includes corporate debt, bank deposits and repo agreements. Monthly data, through January 2025
Source: Brad Setser, Council on Foreign Relations

Item 3 -Other states do housing better than California; a new study shows how they do it; By Dan Walters, April 10, 2025

This story is part of California Voices, a commentary forum aiming to broaden our understanding of the state and spotlight Californians directly impacted by policy or its absence. Reprinted from CalMatters.org

Overwhelmingly Californians rate the intertwined issues of housing supply, living costs and homelessness as the state's most pressing issues, as a recent poll by the Public Policy Institute of California confirms.

The terrible trio, as one might term it, also draws constant verbal acknowledgement from the state's politicians, from Gov. Gavin Newsom down, and he and legislators have enacted dozens, perhaps hundreds, of measures to address it.

Nevertheless there's little evidence that their efforts have had material impact. Either the three situations are beyond the capacity of politics to address — a distinct possibility — or the political efforts to date have not been vigorous enough.

Why, one must wonder, is California plagued while residents of other states enjoy lower housing and living costs and experience much lower rates of homelessness? Shouldn't our political and civic leaders be examining what these other states are doing right, or are they so afflicted with self-righteous hubris that they cannot entertain such a thought?

A new and very detailed study of housing policies in the nation's 250 largest metropolitan areas confirms that California is an outlier when it comes to increasing housing supply and moderating its costs.

Titled “BUILD HOMES, EXPAND OPPORTUNITY,” the report is a product of the George W. Bush Institute at Southern Methodist University.
“America’s fastest-growing cities offer lessons on how America can address its housing affordability crisis,” the report declares. “Based on our analysis of the 250 largest metropolitan areas and a deep dive into 25 large metros in the Sun Belt and Mountain states, places scoring best for pro-growth housing and land-use policies are mostly large Sun Belt metros from the Carolinas through Texas to Utah.”

The metros doing the best job of meeting their housing demands, the report says, have policies that make it easy for developers to build. That includes allowing higher-density housing in “substantial fractions of every city,” reducing minimum lot sizes, allowing residential construction in commercial areas, reducing or eliminating parking requirements and embracing innovative technologies such as modular construction and 3D printing.

In addition to adopting specific housing policies that spur development, the report continues, metros that are meeting demand also pursue complementary policies, such as having enough educational and medical services, allowing “fine-grained mixing of land uses and human activities in as many places as possible,” allowing “dynamic changes in land use rather than trying to freeze neighborhoods,” and providing amenities such as “walkability, revitalized live-work-play downtowns” and “great parks and trails.”

So, one might ask, which metro areas are hitting all the right buttons and which are not, as determined in the study?

The 25 top pro-housing metros are all either in the Sun Belt — particularly Texas, California’s arch-rival — or in the mountain states such as Utah and Idaho. No. 1 is Charlotte, NC. and No. 2 is Austin, the Texas capital which is becoming a powerful competitor with California’s Silicon Valley.
Not surprisingly, California metros are heavily represented on the list of the nation’s 25 “most restrictive” metros. While Honolulu is the least accommodating, Oxnard is No. 2.

Nine of the 25 are in California. They include, in order after Oxnard, San Jose, San Diego, Riverside-San Bernardino, San Francisco, Sacramento, Bakersfield, Fresno and Stockton.

It would be tempting to dismiss the Bush Institute’s report as biased because it comes from Texas, but it contains a wealth of detail and explains how the data were evaluated.

A better response from California politicians would be to read the report and determine what more California could do to make the state housing-friendly. The state’s current path on housing, other living costs and homelessness is going in the wrong direction.

Item 4 - Adopting Shared Services Would Drive Efficiency; March 31, 2025 — Sean Kennedy Reprinted from Citizens Against Government Waste - cawg.org

In the current era of prioritizing a more efficiently run federal government, a well-tested and successful proposal should be revisited: consolidating cross-government shared services.
These ideas go back to President Ronald Reagan’s Grace Commission, which recommended that the government increase coordination of automated data processing systems, acquisitions, and establish a software clearing house. Citizens Against Government Waste was founded to follow

up on the commission's recommendations, and applauds the efforts being made by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to make the government more efficient. The sharing of common services should be included in DOGE's mission.
The federal government has tremendous buying power. Unfortunately, as it stands now, each agency has a bespoke procurement system purchasing the same materials and services as other agencies.

The Trump administration signaled its intent to consolidate federal acquisition in a March 20, 2025, Executive Order that will shift more purchasing responsibility to the General Services Administration (GSA). According to GSA Federal Acquisition Service Commissioner Josh Gruenbaum, "Over the coming months, we are going to ingest all domestic, commercial goods and services inside the GSA. We're not going to do all $900 billion, but we will do about $400 billion, so we're going to quadruple our size."

A December 2024 proposal from the Shared Service Leadership Coalition, of which CAGW is a member, laid out a detailed plan to consolidate and modernize government-wide common service operations, including proposed legislation. The plan would increase the efficiency of financial and grants management, reduce improper payments, streamline procurement, and improve other common services. Shared services have a proven track record of success in government, as Australia, Canada, Singapore, and the United Kingdom have implemented such reforms.

According to a March 2015 Partnership for Public Service report, utilizing shared services at the federal level would save between $21 billion and $47.2 billion over 10 years. This figure rises to up to $74.2 billion when accounting for inflation. Most of the savings would be achieved by consolidating the government's buying power, increasing the use of new technologies, reducing duplication, and increasing mobile and paperless transactions.

Moreover, 85 percent of Fortune 500 companies use the model for common services, resulting in average savings of between 15 percent and 40 percent. Johnson and Johnson, with 150,000 employees, a miniscule workforce compared to the federal government, saved $2 billion in its first two years after applying the model.

Federal acquisition is inherently inefficient, which was noted by the Grace Commission and has since been revealed in dozens of reports from government agencies and congressional hearings. The shared services model should be adopted as soon as possible to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and effectively provide needed services to taxpayers. It fits perfectly into DOGE's mission and President Trump's call for consolidating federal acquisition.

The WasteWatcher is the staff blog of Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) and the Council for Citizens Against Government Waste (CCAGW). For questions, contact blog@cagw.org.

COLAB IN DEPTH

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

REBUILDING REQUIRES REIMAGINING ENVIRONMENTALISM

BY EDWARD RING

Helping thousands of victims of the wildfires in Los Angeles rebuild is an urgent concern, prompting, among other things, efforts to streamline the building permit process and expedite insurance claims. But this disaster and its aftermath must also prompt us to question environmental policies we've accepted as beyond debate, policies that have effectively rationed the supply and inflated the cost of land, water, energy, and building materials. While motivated by environmentalist values, they disproportionately harm low and middle income Californians, and in many cases don't help the environment.

For decades, state and local laws and ordinances have promoted "infill" and discouraged suburban "sprawl." But the construction cost per square foot for multistory, multifamily dwellings exceeds the cost to build single family detached homes, as is the cost per acre to build on urban land. And in a stark contradiction of the conventional wisdom, there is no shortage of land. California is only 5 percent urbanized, and that is where 94 percent of our state's population lives. We have the most densely populated urban areas of any state in America. We could build homes for 10 million people, four per household, on quarter-acre lots, with an equal amount of land utilized for roads, parks, schools, and commercial use, and it would only increase California's urban footprint from 5 percent to 6.2 percent. There are hundreds of square miles of open land along Highway 101 and along Interstate 5 that could be developed.

Chronic water shortages in California's cities are also the result of policy, not reality. Urban water use in California only accounts for a small fraction of total water diversions per year. Agriculture consumes between 30-35 million acre feet annually, and releases to maintain ecosystem health average about the same as agricultural use. California's cities consumed 7.5 million acre feet per year in the 1980s, the same amount they consume today despite our population increasing by 65 percent. What if instead of clamping down further on water use, we rehydrated our cities? The prospects are tantalizing.

The original California Water Plan, written in 1957, called for 50 million acre feet of deliverable water per year, with most of it, 40 MAF, for farms. That would have left 10 million acre feet per year for urban areas. We may be thankful some of the more grandiose elements of that plan never got built, but we now have new ways to supply water. We have desalination, wastewater reuse, and runoff capture. We have new designs to safely withdraw millions of acre feet from the

Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta during major storms, and new ways to cost-effectively bank millions of acre feet underground.

Why not turn Los Angeles back into a Garden City? Why not rehydrate the city by replacing "xeriscapes" with more lawn and trees? Instead of banning these cooling and percolating amenities, why not just ban the overused herbicides and pesticides applied to lawn, and discourage highly flammable trees? Imagine a greener and cooler city with abundant water, and a revitalized Los Angeles River flowing through its heart.

These proposals underscore a fact that is often lost on environmentalist planners. Los Angeles, like the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, like the Santa Monica Mountains, will never return to its primeval state. That is obviously true for a metropolitan area. But it is equally true for the Delta, channelized by levees, or for the mountains surrounding Los Angeles, where fire suppression and nonnative grass have altered them forever. The only relevant debate is over how we manage these altered environments.

Which begs the question: Why are the hills on the perimeter of a megacity with over 10 million residents off limits to further development? Why not permit *more* low density housing throughout these hills and canyons, so private landowners can engage in grazing, controlled burns, and thinning? While some parkland should be preserved for public use, why not permit new and fire hardened neighborhoods to spread further into the hills, and require owners with a stake in the outcome to keep adjacent land clear of dead brush? And why, if 94 percent of California remains rural, should we impose greenbelts around all of our cities, denying any expansion?

Our shortages and high prices are a choice. We are on the cusp of abundant cheap electricity, more than enough to desalinate seawater and purify wastewater. We are developing new construction techniques and materials to greatly reduce the cost and the footprint of new homes. Every day we have new transportation and communications innovations that will make driving either unnecessary or make smarter use of our roads.

Expanding our cities and revising our policies to encourage abundant water and energy can be done while still preserving the vast majority of our unspoiled wildland. Striking this balance will make California affordable for everyone, including those who want to rebuild their homes.

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. He is also a senior fellow with the Center for American Greatness, and a regular contributor to the California Globe. His work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Economist, National Review, City Journal, and other media outlets. California Policy Center , April 8, 2025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