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

Weekly Update
February 23 - March 2, 2026

Lots Going on for a Quiet Spell

We are entering a four-week period of peace and prosperity while the Board of Supervisors rides through a few meeting-free Tuesdays. The Next San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors meeting takes place on Tuesday, March 10.

The agenda for the March 10 meeting won't be out until a week prior, so it is unclear what will be up for discussion. We do, however, anticipate a couple of big items in the near future.

First, the ambulance service request for proposal finalization should be coming up this spring. It is possible that three proposal bids will be forthcoming. San Luis Ambulance, the current provider and contract holder for several decades, an alliance of municipalities throughout the county operating within fire departments and contracting with an ambulance service and American Medical Response (AMR) who provides service in Santa Barbara. There could be more proposals, but we have not heard of others.

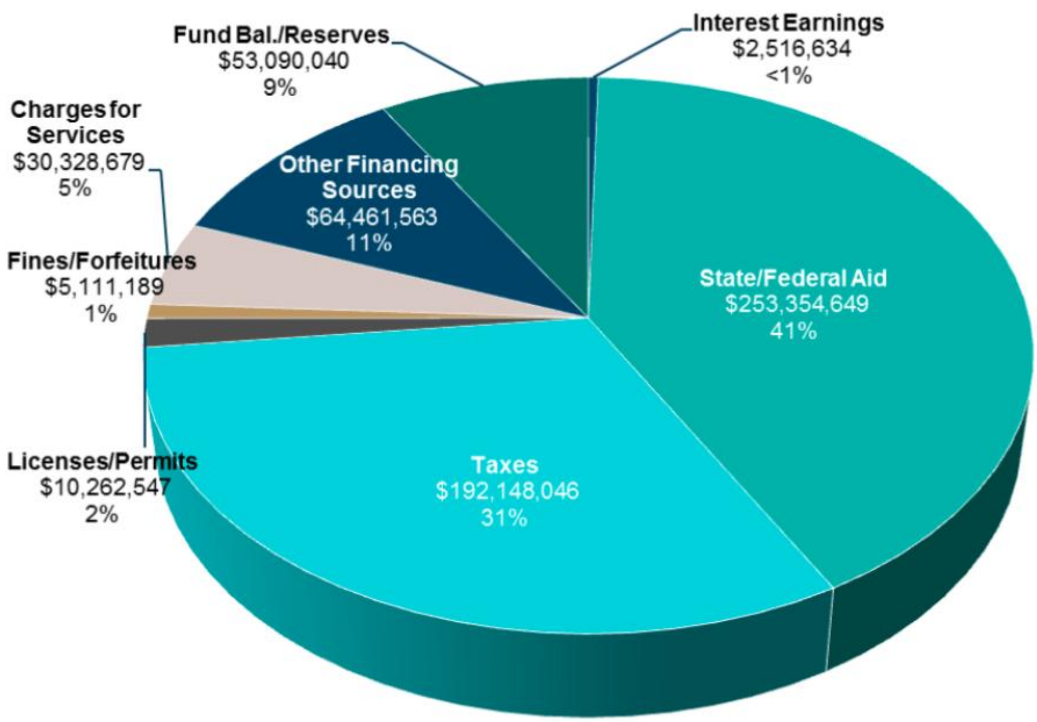
We don’t have specific details yet about the parameters of the RFP but see this as an important item for the Board of Supervisors and for our county residents.

An even more important item will be the beginning of the budget process. The formal budget hearings take place on June 8, 9 and 10, but preparation for those hearings is underway. Already, departments have submitted budget requests to the County Executive office. In April, finalization of budget recommendations will take place with preparation for public review.

One of the biggest issues within the budget process will be the potential impact of both California state funding and the impact of the new federal Medicaid rules.

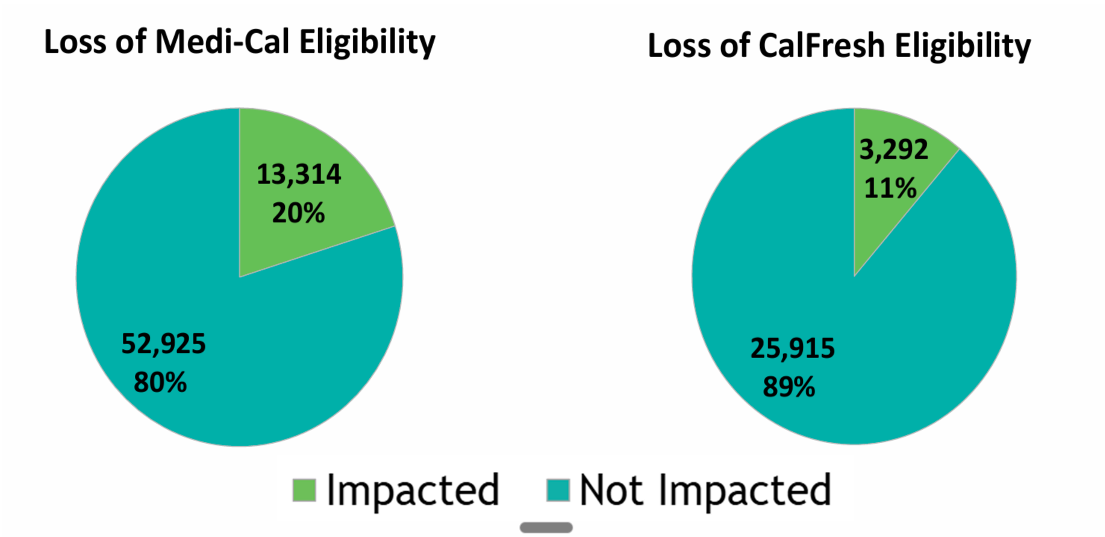
California’s Legislative Analysists Office has warned that the state is $18 billion short. Governor Newsom, however, believes in a different system of math and has proposed a $348.9 billion budget assuming the rosiest of financial predictions. (A key component of his expectation is that the AI industry will flourish despite our high housing costs, unreliable power grid and excessive tax system).

Should the state budget faulter, it is unclear about a potential impact on counties. The graph below illustrates the state and other various funding sources for our own $1 billion annual county budget:



With 41% of our county funds coming from the state, Supervisors and county staff are concerned about potential state cuts.

On top of that, President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill, HR 1, goes into effect this year and includes tougher employment requirements and more frequent eligibility checks for Medicaid assistance. These reforms are designed to reduce fraud and abuse but could increase need for services locally. The following graphs prepared by SLO County Health and Human Services illustrate the anticipated impact in terms of loss of eligibility for Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which is called CalFresh in California:



At this stage, county staff are preparing the budget as if these challenges did not exist. However, they are conducting their planning with an anticipation that, should cuts come from the state or demands from Medicaid and CalFresh dramatically increase, budget revisits may be required by the Board of Supervisors.

Waah-Waah-Waah Oopsie

It would seem that Adam Verdin's success in out-fundraising incumbent Supervisor Jimmy Paulding has hit a nerve. First, Paulding suggested that Verdin was somehow out of line by accepting donations from builders. Now Paulding has filed a Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) complaint against Verdin for accepting campaign donations that follow all of the rules.

The FPPC took very little time to recognize the fact that Verdin complied with all regulations and did nothing wrong. They declined to look at the case beyond recognizing that the contributions were fully legal and reported correctly.

Paulding asserts that donations from Covelop made for both the Spring '26 and the Fall '26 campaigns are somehow illegal or inappropriate. However, the rules are quite clear, and it is obvious that Verdin complied with all such rules.

Verdin's response regarding Paulding's complaint is as follows:

"The Verdin campaign report clearly reflects this allocation of the two Covelop, Inc. contributions on pages 14 and 26 of its year-end 2025 campaign report filed with the County Clerk.

This is perfectly lawful. It is expressly permitted by California Gov. Code 85301, subd.(d) which specifies the contribution limits from a "person" to an applicable local candidate are "per election." "Primary" and "general" elections are considered separate elections under Calif. Gov. Code 85318(a), a long-standing state law mandate required by the federal courts. See SEIU v. FPPC (1990).

So, a local candidate may raise up to $5,900 for the primary election and another $5,900 for the general election (which may be raised before the general election). $5,900 is the current state legislative candidate contribution limit as of 2021, adjusted by a cost-of-living adjustment in Calif. Gov. Code 83124 for 2026 elections."

Paulding told local radio station KCBX "I think the right thing to do would be to play by our rules," Paulding said, adding that he thinks Verdin should "publicly state that he made a mistake and that he's going to give the money back and address the problem."

According to KCBX, "Paulding told KCBX that he stands by his fundraising and supervisors should avoid taking money from real estate developers so their votes on land use projects are not influenced by campaign contributions." We wonder if Paulding feels the same about labor union contributions. After all, the county enters into many millions of dollars of contracting services annually.

An editorial published in a typically left leaning local newspaper called Paulding out for his unfounded accusations and suggested that Paulding is the one who should be making an apology. They pointed out that Paulding is an attorney and should have done his due diligence before filing a formal complaint. Paulding responded by stating that he would not apologize. Despite the fact that he voted for the very same rules he is now complaining about, he still feels that Verdin is in violation.

There is a lot riding on this race – for both candidates personally as well as for the future direction of the Board of Supervisors. Tension and frustration will compete with common sense. It is unusual to see this kind of desperate move so early in a race. We encourage both candidates to think carefully about statements they make about each other.

Diablo Needs Your Help

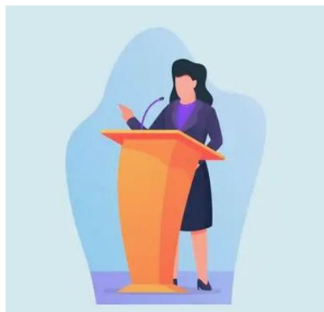
The next regulatory hurdle for the ongoing operation of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant is coming up on February 26 with a meeting of the Central Coast Region of the California Water Boards. Public comments are important. The religious sect of the anti-nuclear aged out hippies will be there in full force dragging out the same old chants about how awful it would be to continue operating the plant.

PG&E is seeking approval of a renewed National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit and a Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification at the RWQCB's upcoming meeting.26. The meeting will begin at 8 am. Item 7 A & B on the agenda pertains to Diablo.

According to PG&E, "The RWQCB meeting will occur with both a physical meeting location at 895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101, in San Luis Obispo, and via a remote format. For those who wish to watch the meeting without speaking, a webcast is available at https://cal-span.org/static/index.php and should be used UNLESS you intend to make comments. If you have difficulties with the webcast, please contact the Clerk to the Board at RB3-CommentLetters@waterboards.ca.gov.

Attendees wishing to speak in person should join the meeting at the meeting location noted above. To speak in person, you will be asked to complete a physical comment card and turn it into the clerk prior to the item being brought up for hearing. Zoom is the platform being made available for those who wish to comment remotely. Remote participants are requested to complete an electronic comment request card by 8:00 a.m. on the date of the meeting. Virtual speakers will then be sent a special link for their participation. Again, if you have trouble, please contact the Clerk to the Board at RB3-CommentLetters@waterboards.ca.gov. Public comment, either in-person or virtually, is typically limited to three minutes, so please plan your statement accordingly.

Finally, written comments are also accepted. If you cannot make it to the meeting in-person or virtually, please consider submitting a written letter of support. Send written letters to: **centralcoast@waterboards.ca.gov**. Such letters must be received by the RWQCB in advance of the meeting. "



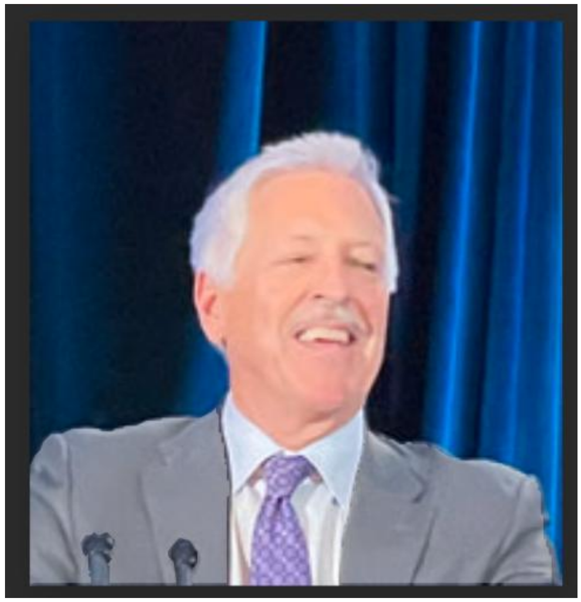
We encourage anyone concerned about the electrical grid, the local economy, the issue of clean energy and/or the nearly 1600 employees of the plant to engage. Attend in person or online if you can or send an email – or both. Do not let the ninnies dominate the dialogue.

Lobbying for SLO County's Future

It seems odd that a county should need to employ a lobbyist to convey its needs and wishes to the state legislature in Sacramento. After all, many of the state and federal legislators came from local government and should be actively engaging in and understanding the needs of their constituent communities without the need for a middleman.

Unfortunately, that's how business is done with Sacramento and Washington DC.

The February 10 meeting of the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors included a report from San Luis Obispo County's lobbyist, Paul Yoder along with an affirmation of the county's legislative platform.



Paul Yoder, San Luis Obispo's contract lobbyist

Yoder is a principal in the firm Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange which lists 15 lobbyists on their team. According to their website:

"Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange (SYASL) offers a wide range of advocacy expertise for our public and private clients from strategic consultation to policy analysis to expert testimony."

Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange

Their client list as posted on their website reads:

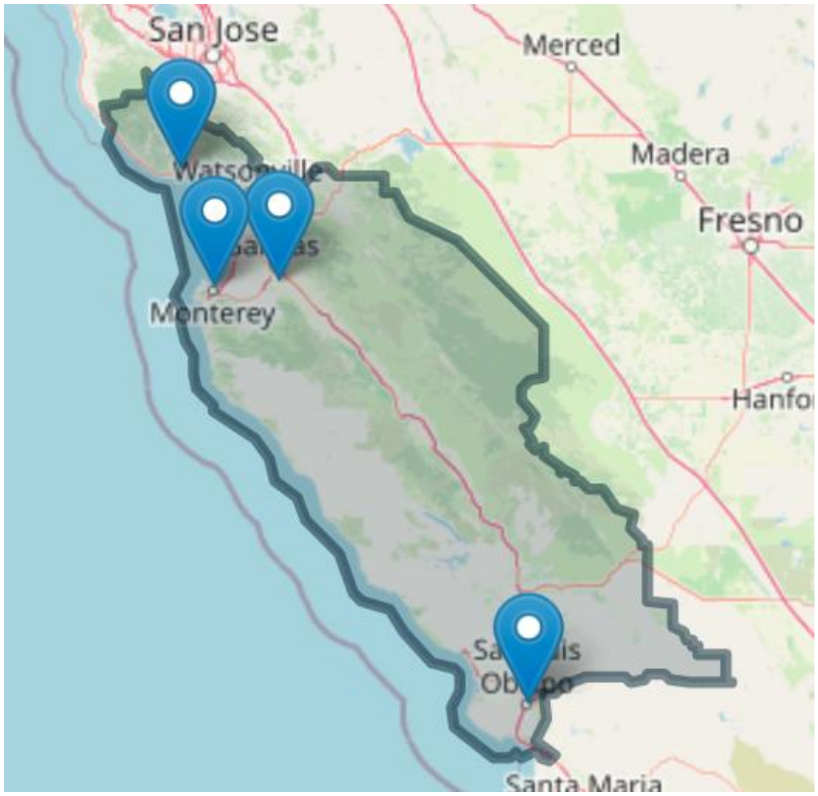
A › Advanced Energy Economy
› Aerial Rapid Transit Technologies
› Alameda County Waste Management Authority
› American Heart Association
B › Beverly Hills, City of
› Boeing Company, The
› Burbank Housing Development Corporation
› Butte County
C › California & Nevada Civil Engineers and Land Surveyors Association, Inc.
› California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
› California Animal Welfare Association
› California Arts Advocates
› California Association of County Treasurers and Tax Collectors
› California City Transportation Initiative
› California Coalition on Workers' Compensation
› California Dental Hygienists' Association
› California Faculty Association
› California Green Business Network
› California Medical Association
› California Moving and Storage Association
› California Product Stewardship Council
› California State Association of Psychiatrists
› California Transit Association
› Center for Employment Opportunities
› City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County
› County Medical Services Program
D › Del Norte County
F › FedEx Corporation
› Food Solutions Action
F › Fountain House
› Fresno County
› Fresno County Transportation Authority
› Goleta, City of
H › Humane Society of the United States
› Humboldt County
K › Kat Taylor, Office of
› Kern County
L › LA 2028
› Los Angeles, City of
› Los Angeles City Attorney's Office
› Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
› Los Angeles, Port of
› Los Angeles World Airports
M › Madera County
› Mendocino County
› Merced County
› Monterey-Salinas Transit District

We would hope that our state and federal legislators are well aware of our county's needs and wishes, but the sad truth is that San Luis Obispo County got totally shortchanged in the last reapportionment.

We do not have a single legislator exclusively to our county, they all share their representation with larger populations in neighboring counties. Our representatives

to the north cover communities such as Monterey, Salinas and San Jose, while at the south end they cover Santa Barbara and Ventura.

Congressman Carbajal's district map



State Senator Laird's district map

These two maps illustrate the imbalance of all of our state and federal districts.

The frustrating aspect of being a stepchild county is that our interests can sometimes be at odds with our more urban neighbors. Legislators hoping to be reelected typically pay the most attention to their most populist parts of their district.

This unfortunate situation makes having a county lobbyist important. However, we hope that the positions that our county takes, and the requests that it makes of our state and federal institutions are plain, simple and reasonable enough to stand on their own merit regardless of who is presenting them.

Below are the criteria used to establish the county platform:

Advocacy Principles

1. Secure **stable, ongoing funding** for County-administered and County-impacted programs, including adjustments to reflect workload and service demand.

2. **Prevent unfunded** or underfunded **mandates** and cost shifts from the State or Federal government to counties.

3. **Preserve local control**, governance authority, and implementation flexibility in the administration of programs and services.

4. Improve **public safety**, justice system effectiveness, and emergency preparedness, including coordination across County, State, and Federal partners.

5. Strengthen **homelessness response** and behavioral health systems, including prevention, treatment capacity, workforce sustainability, and housing-linked services.

6. Advance **community resilience** to wildfire, flood, drought, climate impacts, and infrastructure failure.

7. Promote **housing production** across income levels while preserving local land use authority and regulatory flexibility.

8. Support **economic and workforce development**, infrastructure investment, and regional economic diversification.

9. Maintain **fiscal stability** by protecting local revenue authority, managing liability and risk exposure, and mitigating adverse fiscal impacts from State and Federal actions.

10. Support **workforce sustainability** across County-administered programs, including recruitment, retention, training, and staffing flexibility.

Below are the major issue areas considered:

Major Issue Areas

- Administration of Justice and Public Safety
- Health and Human Services
- Housing, Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure
- General Government, Finance, and Administration
- Agriculture, Environment, and Natural Resources
- Economic Development and Diablo Canyon

Of the 38 points of the actual legislative platform, most call for sufficient support for local Health and Human Services programs and other social programs. We found the following items to be of particular interest:

- Secure funding and policy support for implementation of Proposition 36, including probation supervision, behavioral health treatment, housing, case management, and court-aligned services. (S)

- Protect County land use authority over planning and zoning, including renewable energy and infrastructure projects. (S/F)

- Transfer of Salinas Dam from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to local control. (S/F)

- Support transparency in State tax actions affecting local governments, including property, unitary, sales, and transient occupancy taxes. (S)

- Support ongoing Williamson Act subventions and agricultural land uses. (S)

- Support authorization of recreational swimming at Santa Margarita Lake, consistent with health, safety, and water quality standards, and protecting drinking water. (S)

- Advocate for energy policies that support reliability, affordability, and low-emission generation, while preserving local flexibility. (S/F)

- Support permitting pathways and infrastructure planning for emerging energy technologies and offshore wind development that provide regional economic benefits. (S/F)

The S or F signifies whether the issue is state or federal.

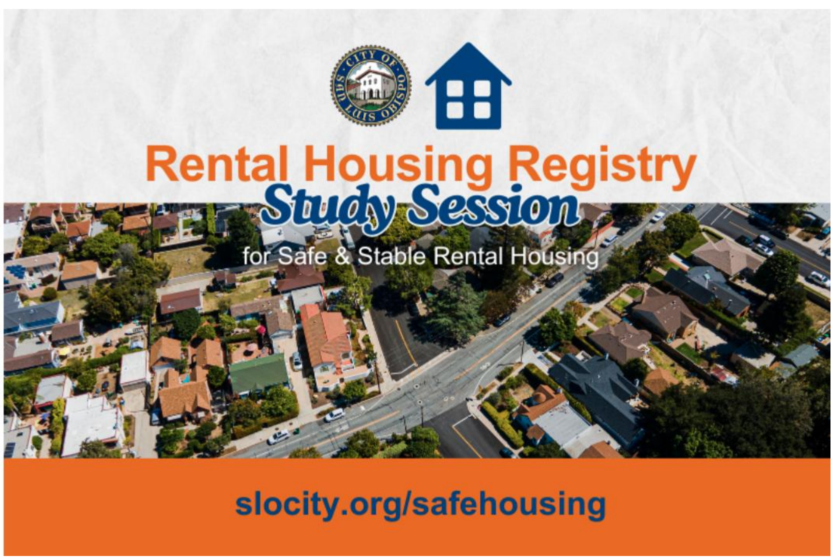
It is worth noting that support for this platform only required three votes.

The lobbyist will report to the county at important points of the legislative process, both on the progress of the points for which they are advocating and the bills or regulations that have been proposed that run counter to the county's interests.

Rent Control on the Way?

We have been following the City of San Luis Obispo's efforts to establish a "Rental Registry" and have been sharing our concern that the plan is the first step towards rent control. Now the concept is becoming a reality (nightmare).

On Tuesday, February 24, the City of San Luis Obispo will be hosting a "study session" on the subject of establishing such a registry.



Upcoming Rental Housing Registry Study Session
Tuesday, February 24, 2026
5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Council Hearing Room, 990 Palm Street, SLO

A reasonable person might ask why such an effort is necessary. Are rental property conditions in SLO really that bad? Is city staff so underutilized that they need another program to manage? Can city regulators truly improve life for renters or landlords? Is this the next step towards rent control?

According to the city, "A rental housing registry would allow the city to collect accurate data on rental units, which can inform future decisions regarding renter protections, safe housing, and long-term planning. "

The impetus for the city's plan is spelled out here:

- Over half of rental households are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of income on housing
- The City's average rent is $3,200 per month – 39% higher than the state average and 59% higher than the national average.
- There are an estimated 12,000-14,000 rental units in the city.

Clearly, city staff are motivated to manipulate rental rates. Of course, such protectionism will naturally come at a cost. What will the "fee" be for registering? Will it lead to annual "inspections"? Will it lead to more "renter rights"? Will they pursue a rent restriction program similar to mobile home parks in the area? Will this lead to diminished interest in offering homes for rent?

Managing such an effort will obviously be expensive. Staff time, IT resources, consultant fees and enforcement costs are just a few of the governmental overhead items that the program will need to cover. Then there are compliance costs and manipulated rent impacts along with losses related to "renter rights".

As we all know, every one of these costs will be borne by landlords. We also know that rent control can be disastrous for a community. If you have any interest in the subject, we encourage you to attend and ask a lot of questions.

The COLAB Annual Dinner is a Month Away!

Get Your Tickets Today.

Last Week

Supervisor Races Revealed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the moment, the driving issue seems to be offshore wind energy systems and battery storage. Dantona is on the record as being supportive of the concept, while Woody is vocal against any such development on the Central Coast. Woody is well connected with the local group REACT, which has been extremely organized and effective in fighting against wind energy. Dantona has solid support among the Democrat Party establishment – significant since the district is nearly 2-1 favoring Democrats in registration. Woody is registered as decline to state.

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

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

Buying a Coastal Commission Permit

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

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

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

PRAGA Meeting Feb 18

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

Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority

Notice of Board of Directors Meeting

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

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

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

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

AGENDA

February 18, 2026

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

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

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

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

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

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

REACH for Economic Development

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

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

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

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

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

REACH

Ideas + Action for a Thriving Central Coast

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

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

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

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

The Other Sales Tax Effort

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Better Roads for All talking points are listed here:

- **Local and reliable funding source:** Better Roads for All is a local self-help solution that generates about $35 million a year to fix and improve our roads, streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, transit system, and emergency access across San Luis Obispo County. The measure will generate revenue (in local dollars) to address local problems.

- **Exclusively for road repairs and improvements**: This measure will fund transportation improvements our county residents rely on every day, including road and pothole repair, safer streets and intersections, reliable 911 and emergency access, bridge maintenance, traffic congestion relief, local transit and trolley services, and pedestrian, bicycle, and sidewalk improvements.

- **Declining State transportation funds:** San Luis Obispo County's transportation funding has dropped by more than 50 percent - from $7.8 million in state funding in 2018 to about $3.6 million today. Without a reliable local funding source, our roads and infrastructure will continue to fall behind as costs rise.

- **We are missing out:** 25 other Counties have one, covering over 90% of California's population. SLO County is one of the last counties without this local funding source. When a similar initiative - Measure J - narrowly failed in 2016, San Luis Obispo County lost access to hundreds of millions of dollars in transportation investment funding that went to neighboring counties. During the past decade, San Luis Obispo County lost $700 million that could have improved our streets, roads, bicycle lanes, and public transportation.

- **Matching leverage:** A half-cent self-help sales tax gives San Luis Obispo County a stable, locally controlled transportation funding source. It allows our county to compete for state and federal transportation dollars that currently bypass our region. With local matching funds, we can leverage hundreds of millions more for high-priority projects. With out a significant local match, we will continue to go without.

- **Distribution:** This measure is structured to ensure fairness and local community benefit. Fifty-five (55%) percent of the revenues will go directly to cities and unincorporated areas of the county for local road repairs and safety improvements. Forty percent (40%) will support larger regional projects across the county, and four percent (4%) is dedicated to improving mobility for seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and others with special transportation needs.

- **All funds stay in SLO County:** Every dollar raised stays in San Luis Obispo County and is invested based on local priorities - not decisions made in Sacramento. Funds will be distributed proportionally and equitably so every community receives its fair share.

- **Accountability**: There's strong accountability built in. Transportation funding cannot be diverted to other uses, and independent audits and public reporting are required annually. A citizens' oversight committee will provide additional oversight.

- **Huge economic benefit:** Better Roads for All will support local, well-paying jobs, businesses, and the economy by funding millions of dollars of construction, engineering, and maintenance projects.

- **Visitors contribute well over half of the total revenue:** Better Roads for All is fair and shared. Essential purchases, such as groceries, healthcare, and housing, are exempt. Plus, the 7.5 million visitors who come to our county each year will pay their fair share of the sales tax when they purchase goods and services. This will reduce the burden on residents while funding needed road improvements.

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

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

The Big Event – Barely More Than a Month Away!

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

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

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

Katy Grimes: not popular with Gavin Newsom

Book your tickets today by visiting COLABSLO.org or by calling 805 548-0340.

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San Luis Obispo County

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DINNER & FUNDRAISER

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2026
MADONNA INN EXPO CENTER

COME HEAR THE REST OF THE STORY

Mainstream coverage of California Issues is pathetically thin with the legacy media avoiding the tough questions that define life in the Golden State. Katy Grimes, Editor-in-Chief of The California Globe, is known for fact-filled, hard hitting investigative reporting that exposes the real consequences of Sacramento's policy-making.

Join us to hear firsthand from Katy about California's essentially one-party system of governance and the realities most media outlets routinely ignore - along with some good news, too.

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Emergent Trends
Page 33

The Progressive's "Affordability Agenda" is a Fraud.

Gavin Newsom's Hobson's Choice

COLAB in Depth
Page 39

Rep. Kiley Requests GAO Report on Staggering Fraud in California

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The Progressive's "Affordability Agenda" is a Fraud.

EDWARD RING

In the wake of devastating setbacks in the 2024 elections, Progressives are deemphasizing identity politics and instead are prioritizing economic issues. Progressives are now embracing an "abundance movement" and claiming they are the party to deliver abundance to working families. The latest iteration of this new strategy was expressed by progressive activist and pundit Donna Brazile in her recent commentary published by *The Hill*, where in her attempt to project an even more explicit show of solidarity with working families, she augments the concept of "abundance" with its fraternal twin, "affordability." As Brazile recounts, in two races for governor that will be decided this November, the progressive candidates "seek to lower the costs of health care, housing, energy and groceries." Brazile writes:

"Former Rep. Abigail Spanberger, gubernatorial candidate in Virginia, is campaigning on her Affordable Virginia Plan. Similarly, Rep. Mikie Sherrill, candidate for governor in New Jersey, is campaigning on her Affordability Agenda."

This is a rational pivot for progressives, and it could work. Leftist progressives have a natural rhetorical advantage. Leftist messaging relies on nurturing resentment and exploiting envy, while consistently promising to redistribute wealth from rich individuals and corporations to the less fortunate. That's an easier message to sell to the average voter trying to afford rent than the right-wing answer, which is to create equal opportunity through meritocracy, private property incentives, and deregulated competition. Now that pragmatic forces on the left is moving away from nurturing resentment between identity groups, and instead trying to restore a pure economic basis for resentment, they can promise abundance and affordability to *everyone*. It's a smart move.

What may be smart politically, however, in practice can never work. Progressives can promise affordability, throwing open the tent to welcome back all the white working class voters they've turned their backs on ever since 2008, but they can never deliver on their promise. Affordability in the United States has been steadily eroding since the 1970s thanks to policies almost exclusively promoted by progressives. Across the decades in their pursuit of power, leftists wielded rhetorical arguments that voters often were deceived into viewing as morally superior. And in every case where their arguments won, their policies lost.

Evidence of this failure is easily seen in the demographic shift from states controlled by liberals to states controlled by conservatives. A 2030 apportionment forecast shows, without exception, the dramatic shift in population out of blue states and into red states. In the wake of the 2030 census, California is projected to lose one seat in the U.S. Congress, New York will lose two seats, and Oregon, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Pennsylvania will lose one seat each. Meanwhile, Texas and Florida are projected to both gain four seats, with Arizona, Utah, and Idaho gaining one each.

With only four years left in this decade, and migration trends firmly established and unlikely to change, the conclusion one may draw from these projections is unequivocal. People increasingly prefer to live in states ran by conservatives. We may even acknowledge that Pennsylvania and some of the other midwestern states are no longer reliably liberal, but their new status as battlegrounds only reinforces our case. The politicians who once claimed to fight for all working families, and are trying to restore that brand after a nearly two decade excursion into identity politics, have utterly failed their constituents in every state where they have been dominant.

It's not complicated. Progressive ran governments in blue states have over-regulated and over-taxed all forms of business including housing construction and small family enterprises. Governments in these states have also over-regulated energy markets in favor of renewables, which can still only compete with conventional energy when renewables are subsidized and conventional energy is crushed by regulations. These states have also under-invested in maintaining their roads, water systems, and all critical infrastructure in order to instead overpay their unionized public workforces and allocate government aid to citizens that can no longer afford the cost-of-living that these government policies created.

That's why blue states are losing population. But they keep on electing the politicians who do this to them. And they do that because these progressive politicians have not only a rhetorical advantage, they have an overwhelming advantage in donations that come from crony corporations and public sector unions that benefit from these policies. What great irony. Progressive policies empower large corporations because they can easily comply with regulatory obstacles that small businesses can't possibly afford to navigate. Blue state policies, in direct conflict with their leftist rhetoric, enable giant corporations to consolidate market power and charge higher prices.

It isn't the rhetoric that attracts families to red states and induces them to vote for conservatives. Telling people they have to succeed on hard work and competence isn't easy, nor is it easy to tell people that the right to private property also comes with some people owning much more property than others. It's also not easy to explain that fewer regulations may result in less official protection for organized labor or endangered species, but only with deregulation can many companies survive and compete in a free market, lowering prices for everything. These are higher level arguments. They require an intellectual leap. They rely on reason instead of emotion. Rhetoric favors the left.

But results matter more than rhetoric. People can afford to live and raise families in Texas and Florida. In California and New York, not so much. There's a reason the median price for a home is $866,000 in California and only $339,000 in Texas, and it isn't based on what parties promise. If it was, those ratios would flip, and California would be the destination state it once was.

Affordability, as implemented by progressives, equates to rent control and other incentive-destroying regulations, paired with high taxes and redistribution of wealth, sold on the rhetoric of resentment. Their so-called abundance agenda equates to a selective and futile version of deregulation, one that is limited to streamlining approvals of high density infill housing and renewable energy, while leaving in place restrictions on open land development and conventional energy investment. All of these policies lead to a higher cost of living.

Even if progressives shed their obsession with identity politics and successfully rebrand themselves as once again committed to the economic interests of all Americans, they are inherently incapable of delivering abundance or affordability. Their policies, and the special interests that support them, are inherently oriented towards the opposite result.

Scarcity, high prices, and hyper regulation is all we can expect from progressives, no matter what Donna Brazile may hope. The question for voters in every state is simple: will they choose rhetoric, or will they choose results.

A version of this article originally appeared in *American Greatness*. *Edward Ring is the Director of Water and Energy Policy at the California Policy Center, which he co-founded in 2013. Ring is the author of Fixing California: Abundance, Pragmatism, Optimism (2021) and The Abundance Choice: Our Fight for More Water in California (2022).*

Gavin Newsom’s Hobson’s Choice

The war on oil will now prove to be a war on consumers

By Andy Caldwell, February 19, 2026

The Climate Change hoax is unraveling… but will it ever unravel in California?

The very liberal Washington Post had this to say in a recent editorial: Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin announced the largest deregulatory action in U.S. history. It’s about time.

Congress passed the Clean Air Act in 1963 to regulate local pollution around the country, and regulators did that for decades. Then, in 2009, the EPA decided it would treat greenhouse gases like other pollutants, despite their damage being global rather than local.

That declaration, called the "endangerment finding," has been used by bureaucrats ever since to dramatically expand the federal government's power over cars. Now, the EPA will rescind it.

The U.S. share of global greenhouse gas emissions has been trending downward since the end of World War II, and the 2009 policy change didn't meaningfully alter its trajectory. Despite the obsession with gas-powered vehicles, light and medium-duty cars and trucks combined to generate just 1.8 percent global greenhouse gas emissions in 2022.

These emissions continue to rise because the atmosphere does not care which country the gases come from. The EPA has no power over China and India, which are increasing their emissions even as they talk a big game at climate conferences.

In 2022, the Supreme Court ruled that bureaucrats couldn't make new rules of "vast economic and political significance" without Congress directly giving away its power.

More than 20 years ago, the EPA admitted that the Clean Air Act did not directly give them this power, and the estimated $1 trillion cost is undeniably significant.

Here are two key take aways: The endangerment finding cost our economy $1 trillion in higher costs to industry, car makers and, of course, consumers while accomplishing absolutely nothing. And that $1 trillion estimate doesn't come close to calculating all the costs, including the loss of jobs in the coal, oil, and gas industries, among others.

And never, in the history of mankind, did we consider carbon dioxide a pollutant.

In fact, every living thing on our planet would die without it.

Of course, all the above is lost on the political and activist classes here in California, including Santa Barbara County.

Santa Barbara County has spent millions on their "Climate Action" plan, including the installation of solar panels, electric vehicles, charging stations, and soon to come, a battery storage energy system behind the county admin building in Santa Barbara at the corner of Anacapa and Anapamu Streets.

And what do they have to show for their efforts to lower emissions in the county?

Well, I witnessed the shortest briefing ever on that very subject a few weeks ago. That is because the news wasn't just bad, it was downright catastrophic for those that believe we have little to no time to save our planet.

Specifically, a report to county supervisors on the lack of progress to reduce emissions during the study period of 2018-2023 demonstrated that this entire program was a colossal waste of time, energy, and money. Here is the truth of the matter:

"Staff and consultants have prepared a 2023 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory to track progress toward achieving 50% reduction by 2030 (below 2018 levels). Overall, community wide emissions in 2023 were 1% higher than they were in 2018."

In other words, zero, zilch, nada progress. In fact, we are going in the opposite direction as emissions increased!

Meanwhile, California has now lost more than 20% of its gasoline refinery capacity. Expect prices to explode at the pump. Yet, again, however, the rules, regs, and fines that caused the refiners to leave California at great cost to them (Valero gladly lost $1 billion to get out as fast as they could) will accomplish nothing for the environment as we begin to import gasoline from half-way around the world (South Korea and India!).

The war on oil will now prove to be a war on consumers. The political and activist class couldn't be happier however, as they have always sought this type of financial leverage on consumers to force them into electric vehicles, which of course they won't be able to afford either.

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

Rep. Kiley Requests GAO Report on Staggering Fraud in California

'Newsom knows if the true scale of CA fraud comes to light, his presidential campaign is over'

By Katy Grimes, February 17, 2026

California Governor Newsom, our own International Man of Mystery has been focused on anything but California as he gallivants around the world – first to Davos, then Germany last week where he threatened "climate deniers."

Today he is in London signing a climate agreement with the UK. I'm sure Californians are relieved that Gov. Newsom is single handedly saving us from climate change.

While he gallivants, California's climate is normal, but the state of the state is a hot mess. Another $370 million in fraud was uncovered.
Naturally Newsom's PR kids ran cover for the errant governor putting out a press statement claiming the governor running for President has been "Fighting fraud, saving time, cutting costs: Governor Newsom's efficiency strategies are improving state government."

The lies got even more bold in the statement as it appears Newsom's PR team is running his presidential campaign:

"Through Governor Newsom's efficiency strategies, California continues to make the state work better for Californians by fighting fraud, building affordable housing faster, streamlining cumbersome state procurement methods, and modernizing workflows using cutting-edge technology."

CAL DOGE, created by gubernatorial candidate Steve Hilton, which announced the $370 million in fraud, untangled a web of funding from the Prop 64 authorized California Cannabis Tax Fund (CCTF) – supposed to be used for substance abuse prevention – that instead is building the Democrat political machine in California.

Here's a short list of California's fraud that the Globe has covered:

- Cannabis tax Fraud
- $450 Million spent on a "Next Generation" 911 system that didn't work
- **$55 billion** in unemployment fraud was sent to prison inmates in California's county jails, and state and federal prisons, out of state, and even out of the country
- $37 billion spent on homelessness with 337,000 homeless now living on California streets
- damning state audits exposing high risk agencies' waste, fraud abuse and mismanagement including Newsom's own Finance department and the California State Controller's Office
- $16 billion spent on the High Speed Rail train to nowhere
- another $8.6 billion in fraud in COVID-era relief lending in California
- billions of dollars in fraudulent unemployment insurance claims, hospice and home-health fraud
- millions of crooks and bots using stolen identities to collect fraudulent federal and state financial aid in California Community Colleges

There's no getting around the fact that California has been a focal point in recent fraud investigations, so much so that a new anti-fraud task force targeting welfare abuse in California and other states has been announced, led by Vice President J.D. Vance, Andrew Ferguson of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and Attorney General Pam Bondi.

California Congressman Kevin Kiley has his own strategy to get to the bottom of the fraud – he has requested a full GAO audit of California's fraud to get a comprehensive picture of just how large the fraud is.

"Newsom is also now saying I shouldn't criticize him for California's rampant fraud because he somehow 'stopped' $125 billion in fraud," Kiley posted to X.

"That, of course, is a made-up number. Newsom knows if the true scale of CA fraud comes to light, his presidential campaign is over. That's why he's terrified of the full GAO audit I've ordered and is surely alarmed I just told AG Bondi to make CA the focus of anti-fraud efforts."

"We're also about to see a state and federal investigation of Newsom's 'Next Generation 911 System' after I exposed the scandal in a Floor speech," Kiley said. "Newsom charged us fees on our phone bill for six years, spent $450 million, then scrapped the project because the technology didn't work.

Kiley included in his request additional fraud:

The state's homelessness programs have faced similar failures. Between 2019 and 2024, California spent **$24 billion** on homelessness initiatives, yet the homeless population grew by about **30,000**, with state audits finding no meaningful metrics to show results.

Recent prosecutions – including nonprofit fraud in San Francisco, a **$50 million** homelessness funding scheme in Los Angeles, and the conviction of an Orange County judge for workers' compensation fraud – underscore the scope of the problem.

Congressman Kiley's request asks the GAO to examine:

- The total amount of publicly reported waste, fraud, and abuse in California since 2016
- A breakdown of fraud by economic sector, including housing, healthcare, transportation, and law enforcement
- The types of perpetrators involved, including grantees and subgrantees
- How stolen public funds are ultimately used
- Lessons from California that can inform federal efforts to prevent fraud nationwide

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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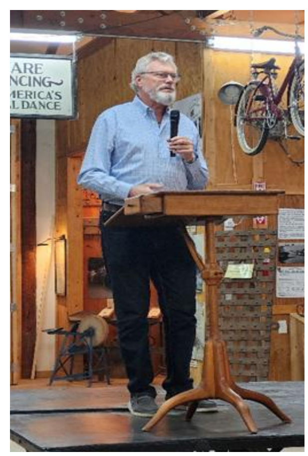

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