

# SDMETRO

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NO. 3 VOL. 40



Perla Cuevas



Jessica Davidson  
- Lujan



Allegra Morabito



Riley Mikayo  
Cutner-Orrantia



Olivia Stafford



Benjamin Schenk

## 40 Under 40



Devon Arabo



Louis Michael



Vincent Magers



Jason Lee



Trevor Tatum



Augustus Holm



Danielle Campbell



Ulrick Matsunaga



Swaprill (Neil)  
Jadhav



Victoria Floyd



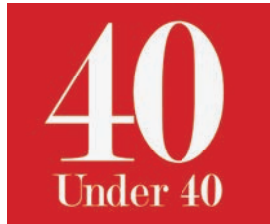
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We've now honored 1,040 outstanding young San Diegans. **PAGE 4**



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Audits find millions in uncollected fees. **PAGE 10**



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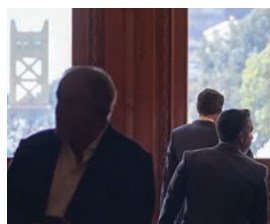
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Lobbying groups spent more than half a billion dollars to influence the state government in 2024, the most ever, according to a CalMatters analysis. **PAGE 28**

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**Jessica Davidson-Lujan**  
PARTNER/ TRIAL ATTORNEY

**Jessica Lujan is a Partner at Gomez Trial Attorneys.**

Jessica's practice at Gomez Trial Attorneys focuses on catastrophic personal injury, civil rights, medical malpractice, premises liability and wrongful death cases. She has extensive litigation experience in both state and federal courts and for both insurance companies and consumers.

**Jessica Lujan grew up in the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border and is a native Spanish-speaker.** She obtained her bachelor's degree from the University of Notre Dame and law degree from the University of San Diego School of Law.

She enjoys spending quality time with her husband and daughter outside of work. Jessica Lujan has been recognized for her contributions to the San Diego Hispanic community.

## **Perla D. Cuevas**

CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER | CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

**The first Latina in the executive suite level at Gomez Trial Attorneys.**

She brings strategic leadership to high-level decisions. Formerly held key operational roles across the legal industry at top trial firms.

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# 2025 40 Under 40

40 Under 40 is San Diego's premier event honoring outstanding young leaders.

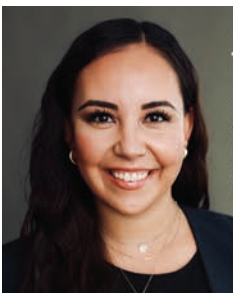
Sponsored by SD METRO Magazine, 40 Under 40 began in 1999, making this the 26th consecutive year.

Over this period of time 1,040 of San Diego's most outstanding young people have been honored.



## PERLA CUEVAS

She is an inspiring leader who excels as both Chief Operations Officer and Chief Marketing Officer at Gomez Trial Attorneys. With a background in legal and business management, she has successfully led teams at prominent firms like Kennedy & Souza APVC and Tyson & Mendes, impacting the Southern California and Nevada regions. She also shares her experience as a professor at San Diego State University, shaping the next generation of legal professionals. She is a member of the executive board of the San Diego County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the board of La Raza Lawyers Association. Additionally, she is a successful entrepreneur in the San Diego real estate market, managing short-term and long-term rental properties. She is a graduate of UC San Diego and the University of Phoenix.



## JESSICA DAVIDSON-LUJAN

She is a partner at Gomez Trial Attorneys, focusing her practice on catastrophic personal injury, civil rights violations, elder abuse, medical malpractice, ADA enforcement, and wrongful death cases. She has significant experience litigating for both injury victims and insurance defendants in state and federal courts. Her extensive knowledge of the insurance industry and the California Tort Claims Act makes her a strong advocate for those she represents. She earned her Juris Doctor from the University of San Diego Law School and her B.A. from the University of Notre Dame. She is president of the San Diego La Raza Lawyers' Association Scholarship Fund and a San Diego Rising Star-Southern California Super Lawyer.



## LOUIS MICHAEL

He is a sergeant in the El Cajon Police Department. He is the recipient of numerous letters of gratitude and appreciation from various businesses and entities throughout San Diego County. He has conducted various trainings on Middle Eastern Cultural Awareness for the San Diego District Attorney's Office, San Miguel Fire & Rescue, LECC, JTTF, Sheriff's Department, and Post Reserve Academy. He was the first Chaldean police officer in El Cajon. He has dedicated 17 years to law enforcement, advocating for a Chaldean voice within the police force. He has been named Detective of the Year for outstanding work in domestic violence cases and won the Anti-Defamation League Award for his dedication to justice and community service.



## DEVON ARABO

He is a dynamic attorney at RJS Law, standing out as a rising star in the legal community and an integral part of the RJS Law team. His track record speaks volumes about his exceptional acumen and unwavering dedication to the community. He has made significant contributions in various realms, including his adept handling of ERTC complexities, working as a lead attorney on tax matters, providing pro bono legal services, and actively participating in speaking engagements. In his role as a tax attorney at RJS Law, he has showcased an impressive grasp of tax law and a knack for untangling convoluted tax dilemmas. He has delved into criminal cases and IRS audits, underscoring his diverse legal expertise and steadfast commitment to ensuring his clients receive the best representation. He is a graduate of the University of San Diego Law School.



## JASON LEE

He is a highly successful real estate broker and the CEO of Nara Advisors, Inc. (formerly JLM Real Estate, Inc.), a commercial brokerage firm specializing in multi-family and all commercial properties nationwide. Under his leadership, NARA's revenues have increased from \$1.8 million in 2023 to \$3.1 million in 2024. His firm has successfully closed over \$500 million in transactions since 2021. He also owns and operates a \$50 million real estate portfolio with more than 150 units in San Diego County. He rebranded the firm to Nara Advisors, expanding into various commercial sectors beyond multi-family real estate and launching its dedicated loan brokerage division, designed to provide seamless access to capital for investment needs. He is a graduate of San Diego State University.



## RILEY MIKAYO CUTNER-ORRANTIA

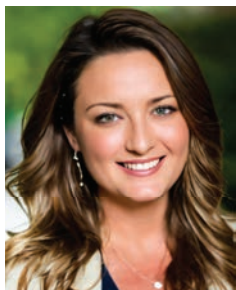
She is a forward-thinking real estate attorney with Crosbie Gliner Schiffman Southard & Swanson LLP (CGS3) who balances pragmatism and thoroughness in every deal. Her versatility and passion add an extra level of service to each transaction. Along with representing developers and investors in all phases of the commercial real estate cycle, her practice skills include her ability to negotiate renewable energy transactions and enhance her clients' efforts to add value to their commercial properties by installing electric vehicle charging stations and sustainable energy systems. With a background in legal issues related to the development, financing, permitting, and operation of renewable energy projects such as solar, wind, and geothermal, she is well-poised to navigate evolving regulations, aligning sustainability principles with corporate values. She is a graduate of UCLA and the University of Colorado School of Law.





## BENJAMIN SCHENK

In January of this year, he joined forces with his father, Frederick Schenk (former letterhead partner at Casey-Gerry), and aunt, Lynn Schenk (a former member of Congress), to launch The Schenk Law Firm, specializing in personal injury, business, and mass tort law. The firm's attorneys practice in numerous areas, including serious personal injury, wrongful death, automobile collisions, product liability, social media addiction, and mass torts. After graduating from Dartmouth College, he worked as a product manager at Bridgewater Associates, the world's largest hedge fund. He later founded and runs the Civic Group LLC, a commercial real estate investment firm. He specializes in the areas of catastrophic personal injury, wrongful death, mass torts, and complex business law. He recently negotiated a \$5 million settlement for his clients in a highly contested wrongful death action. He earned his Juris Doctor at the University of San Diego Law School.



## ALLEGRA MORABITO

She exemplifies leadership and innovation as the Chief Financial Officer of V Group. A visionary in finance, she has propelled the nationwide signage company to continued success, overseeing 1,000% revenue growth through strategic market insights and financing planning. As a result, V Group is now in contention for the prestigious Inc. 5000 list, further underscoring her ability to drive financial performance and industry recognition. Beyond financial success, she is deeply committed to philanthropy as V Group donates signage to nonprofits and startups. In addition, she leads a March of Dimes campaign in memory of her late son, Leo, advocating for neonatal health and inspiring others to contribute to the cause. She is a graduate of the College of Charleston.



## VINCENT MAGERS

He is a distinguished leader in the maritime and automotive logistics industry. A graduate of the United States Merchant Marine Academy and an eight-year veteran of the U.S. Navy, he has spent over two decades shaping San Diego's maritime sector. He advanced through key roles at General Dynamics, rising from test engineer and onboard manager to docking operations, ensuring the safety of both vessels and personnel. His career is a testament to the power of dedication, an immersive pursuit that has brought him the deep fulfillment of seeing large-scale operations executed with precision. Since joining Pasha Automotive in 2022 as General Manager, he has driven three consecutive years of growth, earning a promotion to Vice President. He is an Eagle Scout and a member of the O'Gara Academic Honor Society.



## OLIVIA STAFFORD

She is an award-winning communications professional who serves as account supervisor at J. Walcher Communications, a full-service, woman-owned communications agency now in its 24th year. Her decade-long career has been entirely in San Diego, where she has been able to tell impactful stories through public relations, marketing, advertising, and community outreach work. Her creativity, mentorship, and inclusionary mindset have helped her become an integral part of the agency. She executed a successful groundbreaking for a \$98 million housing and mixed-use community, "Cuatro at City Heights," providing 117 affordable housing rental units for families and unhoused veterans. She led public relations outreach for the "San Diegans vs Big Tobacco" campaign and coalition. She is a graduate of Point Loma Nazarene University.



## TREVOR TATUM

He holds the distinction of being the youngest Install Manager in the history of Bill Howe Heating & Air Conditioning. His journey in the HVAC trade began in 2016 when he relocated to San Diego with no experience in the industry. His first role was with a small, three-person mom-and-pop HVAC company, where he started at the very bottom, enduring long, hot days in attics and serving as the go-to tool runner. Despite the tough start, he remained committed to the trade, steadily building skills and reputation. Professionally, his proudest moment came when he earned a lead installer position at Bill Howe. Since joining Bill Howe, he has rapidly advanced through the ranks to Install Manager. He is now an accredited instructor for the new Blue Collar Academy, a program dedicated to the next generation of skilled HVAC technicians. Through his leadership and mentorship, he is helping to build a strong foundation for the future of both the industry and Bill Howe Heating & Air Conditioning.



## AUGUSTUS HOLM

He is the founder and chairman of the Youth Philanthropy Council (YPC), established in 2019. YPC has raised over \$3.2 million in donations to support a variety of impactful causes. He is also the founder and CEO of CheckRX, launched in 2023, which has raised \$750,000 and is valued at \$8.8 million at the seed stage. At 19, he became the youngest chair of the San Ysidro Health Gala. He was the youngest invited speaker at the Medicarians Conference, addressing an audience of over 5,000 attendees on healthcare and innovation. At 19, he has been recognized as the youngest recipient of the Outstanding Student Volunteer award by the Association of Fundraising Professionals. He is the youngest individual ever accepted into the prestigious LBAN Startup Accelerator at Stanford University.



## DANIELLE CAMPBELL

She is a fiduciary at Profiduciary. She joined the firm in 2016 as an executive assistant to the legendary fiduciary Tom Thale. Thale unexpectedly passed away from cancer in 2019, leaving the company without its leader. She stepped up and earned her CLPF license. Today, she is one of the youngest and most respected fiduciaries in San Diego. She has become a trusted resource for estate planning attorneys, realtors, CPAs, and families setting up trusts. She is a member of the Estate Planning Council of San Diego, a graduate of San Diego State University, and has completed the UC Fullerton Professional Fiduciary Management certificate.



## ULRICK MATSUNAGA

He is an associate with Crosbie Gliner Schiffman Southard & Swanson (CGS3), where he is a core member of the firm's entity formation and tax practice. He is focused on providing transactional support to solve complex business challenges and enable varied business objectives. He partners with clients to achieve creative, ethical, and balanced solutions. He brings over a decade of a multi-disciplinary approach to his practice. His background at the intersection of law, business, and tax allows him to provide clients with pragmatic and innovative solutions tailored to their unique challenges. Before transitioning to law, he excelled at Deloitte Consulting LLP, where he advised Fortune 100 clients and rapidly advanced from business analyst to manager. He was a senior operations manager at Sonder Holdings, Inc. before joining CGS3. He is a patron of the Oceanside Museum of Art. He is a graduate of Cornell University and the University of San Diego Law School.



### Congratulations to our partner Benjamin Schenk, named one of SD Metro's Top "40 under 40"

Trial lawyer Benjamin Schenk recently teamed with his father, noted attorney Frederick Schenk, and his aunt, former congresswoman Lynn Schenk, to launch The Schenk Law Firm, a full-service personal injury, business law and civil litigation firm. While family bonds are the cornerstone of the firm's practice, collective exceptional experience sets The Schenk Law Firm apart.

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### Congratulations to our attorneys Riley Cutner-Orrantia and Ulrick Matsunaga, lauded as among San Diego's Top "40 under 40"

Accomplished transactional attorneys, both are key members of our talented team of commercial real estate professionals and are well deserving recipients of this latest accolade.



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### SWAPRILL (NEIL) JADHAV

He is the CIO/CTO at the Gemological Institute of America and Chief Digital Officer of Neology, implementing VP and GM Business Transformation and Advanced Analytics. He innovatively aligned with the Department of Transportation to improve the transit landscape associated with the New York Metro, London Underground, San Francisco BART, Chicago Ventra, and many other large cities' transportation projects. He has an MBA in Finance from UCLA's Anderson School of Business and a B.S. in Engineering in Electronics and Telecommunications.



### VICTORIA FLOYD

She is a strategic and solutions-driven government and community relations professional with more than a decade of experience shaping transformative policy across healthcare, housing, public safety, and homelessness in San Diego County. She currently serves as the Assistant Director of Local Government and Community Relations for UCSD Health, where she leads regional engagement efforts and advances high-impact institutional initiatives. In this role, she collaborates with city and county officials, business leaders, and nonprofit partners to advance key health initiatives. Prior to her current role, she served as a senior policy advisor to County Supervisor Joel Anderson. She helped craft the county's Compassionate Emergency Solutions and Pathways to Housing policies. She also played a key role in advancing behavioral health services, including shepherding the opening of a Crisis Stabilization Unit in East County to provide urgent, community-based care for individuals experiencing mental health crises. She is a graduate of UC San Diego.



### HILARY DARGAVELL

She is the Chief of Operations at RJS Law. She is a jack-of-all-trades, tireless executive who is not afraid to roll up her sleeves and tackle any task, ranging from administrative duties to managing multiple properties and orchestrating complex events. She is a strategic thinker who always keeps the big picture in mind while being meticulous in her attention to detail. She does it all with exceptional grace and charm. She is a natural leader who inspires her colleagues to work harder. She is a remarkable young woman who makes an incredible impression. She has streamlined operations and built a culture of collaboration and mutual respect at RJS Law. She received her associate degree in mathematics and science from Cuyamaca College.

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### DR. LEIGH ANN STUTTS-WUELLNER

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Downtown San Diego Sunset. (Photo: Dancestrokes/Shutterstock)

# Signs of San Diego Budget Mismanagement Grow as Audits Find Millions in Uncollected Fees

By Evan Symon | California Globe

Budgetary problems in the city of San Diego have been seemingly endless since last year. In November, San Diego City Schools announced a \$176 million deficit. In February, the city itself was \$258 million in the red. Last month, it grew even worse when it was recalculated to show that they were over \$300 million in debt for the upcoming fiscal year. And that's not even getting into La Jolla currently making a bid to become their own city and taking away a significant amount of tax revenue if they do.

Mayor Todd Gloria and other city officials have scrambled to do anything to fix the problem. They managed to save \$13 million by consolidating office space. The next budget, due in a few months, is expected to have a lot of cuts to make up for it, including to police, homeless services, libraries, and other essential services. City lawmakers and employees, however, aren't getting pay cuts. While other big cities, like Los Angeles and San Francisco, have a lot of sacrifices to cut back on their budgets, including SF Mayor Daniel Lurie not taking a salary and LA Mayor Karen Bass agreeing to a reduced salary, San Diego isn't taking those needed drastic steps. And Councilmembers are getting anxious.

"I'm concerned the that revenue projections in the mayor's proposed budget may be fairly rosy" and that a big change between April and May throws the entire process out of whack," said Councilman Kent Lee. "Council needs to understand what the next potential layers of impact you are anticipating are, because those are going to be part of the discussion that we have to have. I think if we just spent our time discussing what's in this proposal, we're likely going to miss a chunk of things that you'll bring forward in May."

## Problem's in America's Finest City

Others have vowed to fight tooth and nail against some cuts.

"It's unacceptable to me that libraries and rec centers in communities that have been underinvested in for decades are getting the same cuts as in some of our most affluent communities in the city," added Councilman Sean Elo-Rivera. "The across-the-board cuts are simply not something that I will be able to accept, and that's going to be a hard line for me."

The big problem has been that, with all the talks of budget cuts, San Diego really didn't check the books as hard as they thought. One audit this week found that the city was not collecting millions each year in trash fees from private haulers. In the past fiscal year, San Diego lost out on \$4 million, and since 2010, about \$25 million in total. Compared to a \$300 million deficit, it's not all that big, but it would still nonetheless make a dent and perhaps save some needed police jobs or help keep some more homeless services up and running. And the trash audit is particularly startling considering that residents are seeing trash collection fees skyrocket to help the system keep going.

And that was just one audit of one department.

Like many cities in California, San Diego is in a budget crunch that needs to be solved pretty quickly. And unlike neighboring L.A., which can at least partially blame their high deficit on the January wildfires, San Diego has no real outside blame. This is all on them. And so far, they are not going the distance other Californian cities are going with leaders taking pay cuts to help reduce salary overhead or, say, making sure that all uncollected fees are being paid.

America's Finest City has a long road ahead if they truly want to live up to their city nickname.





Construction works put the finishing touches on the main theater at The Joan. (Photo by Chris Jennewein/Times of San Diego)

# San Diego's latest performing arts venue nearing completion in Liberty Station

By Chris Jennewein | Times of San Diego

Construction crews are putting the finishing touches on The Joan and Irwin Jacobs Performing Arts Center in Liberty Station in preparation for the first theater opening on Sept. 10.

"The Joan," as it will be known, is emerging from what was Building 178, the base exchange built in 1942 in the former Naval training center. The center will be the latest world-class performance space in San Diego.

The project by the NTC Foundation and Cygnet Theatre has transformed the old military building with a bowling alley in the basement into two theaters — seating 277 and 150 people — plus a rehearsal space, open-air lobby, two bars and three landscaped patios.

The two theaters are fully sound-insulated to mask the noise of jetliners taking off nearby. The larger Joseph Claves III Theater is designed for mainstream productions while the smaller Dottie Studio Theater is for what Cygnet Artistic Director Sean Murray calls "small, edgy grownup plays."

The building will be the permanent home of Cygnet Theater

while also providing performance space for numerous other arts organizations.

The first production in The Joan will be Cygnet's biggest ever — the Broadway classic *Follies* with music by Stephen Sondheim.

From the outside, the new center will look much like the original Navy building — down to the same official color. But inside it's completely new, as is a eye-catching video sign at the street corner that will announce the latest performances.



The Dottie Studio Theater.  
(Photo by Chris Jennewein/Times of San Diego)

# California weakens AI and privacy rules, giving tech giants more leeway

By Khari Johnson | CalMatters

California's first-in-the-nation privacy agency is retreating from an attempt to regulate artificial intelligence and other forms of computer automation.

The California Privacy Protection Agency was under pressure to back away from rules it drafted. Business groups, lawmakers, and Gov. Gavin Newsom said they would be costly to businesses, potentially stifle innovation, and usurp the authority of the legislature, where proposed AI regulations have proliferated. In a unanimous vote last week, the agency's board watered down the rules, which impose safeguards on AI-like systems.

Agency staff estimate that the changes reduce the cost for businesses to comply in the first year of enforcement from \$834 million to \$143 million and predict that 90% percent of businesses initially required to comply will no longer have to do so.

The retreat marks an important turn in an ongoing and heated debate over the board's role. Created following the passage of state privacy legislation by lawmakers in 2018 and voters in 2020, the agency is the only body of its kind in the United States.

The draft rules have been in the works for more than three years, but were revisited after a series of changes at the agency in recent months, including the departure of two leaders seen as pro-consumer, including Vinhcent Le, a board member who led the AI rules drafting process, and Ashkan Soltani, the agency's executive director.

Consumer advocacy groups worry that the recent shifts mean the agency is deferring excessively to businesses, particularly tech giants.

The changes approved last week mean the agency's draft rules no longer regulate behavioral advertising, which targets people based on profiles built up from their online activity and personal information. In a prior draft of the rules, businesses would have had to conduct risk assessments before using or implementing such advertising.

Behavioral advertising is used by companies like Google, Meta, and TikTok and their business clients. It can perpetuate inequality, pose a threat to national security, and put children at risk.

The revised draft rules also eliminate use of the phrase "artificial intelligence" and narrow the range of business activity regulated as "automated decisionmaking," which also requires assessments of the risks in processing personal information and the safeguards put in place to mitigate them.

Supporters of stronger rules say the narrower definition of "automated decisionmaking" allows employers and corporations to opt out of the rules by claiming that an algorithmic tool is only advisory to human decision making.

"My one concern is that if we're just calling on industry to iden-

tify what a risk assessment looks like in practice, we could reach a position by which they're writing the exam by which they're graded," said board member Brandie Nonnecke during the meeting.

"The CPPA is charged with protecting the data privacy of Californians, and watering down its proposed rules to benefit Big Tech does nothing to achieve that goal," said Sacha Haworth, executive director of Tech Oversight Project, an advocacy group focused on challenging policy that reinforces Big Tech power, said in a statement to CalMatters. "By the time these rules are published, what will have been the point?"

The draft rules retain some protections for workers and students in instances when a fully automated system determines outcomes in finance and lending services, housing, and health care without a human in the decisionmaking loop.

Businesses and the organizations that represent them made up 90% of comments about the draft rules before the agency held listening sessions across the state last year, Soltani said in a meeting last year.

In April, following pressure from business groups and legislators to weaken the rules, a coalition of nearly 30 unions, digital rights, and privacy groups wrote a letter together urging the agency to continue work to regulate AI and protect consumers, students, and workers.

Roughly a week later, Newsom intervened, sending the agency a letter stating that he agreed with critics that the rules overstepped the agency's authority and supported a proposal to roll them back.

Newsom cited Proposition 24, the 2020 ballot measure that paved the way for the agency. "The agency can fulfill its obligations to issue the regulations called for by Proposition 24 without venturing into areas beyond its mandate," the governor wrote.

The original draft rules were great, said Kara Williams, a law fellow at the advocacy group Electronic Privacy Information Center. On a phone call ahead of the vote, she added that "with each iteration they've gotten weaker and weaker, and that seems to correlate pretty directly with pressure from the tech industry and trade association groups so that these regulations are less and less protective for consumers."

The public has until June 2 to comment on the alteration to draft rules. Companies must comply with automated decision-making rules by 2027.

Prior to voting to water down its own regulation last week, at the same meeting the agency board voted to throw its support behind four draft bills in the California Legislature, including one that protects the privacy of people who connect computing devices to their brain and another that prohibits the collection of location data without permission.



# Finest Community Coalition formed to better combat antisemitism in San Diego

By Brooke Binkowski | Times of San Diego



Torah scrolls at a San Diego synagogue. (File photo by staff/ Times of San Diego)

The Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas-led shock attacks in Israel that killed more than a thousand people was followed by a wave of antisemitism globally — and San Diego was no exception.

The region has experienced a major rise in targeted assaults on Jewish people and bomb threats against Jewish institutions, as well as the distribution of antisemitic flyers and vandalism, including swastikas on private property, in public areas, and at schools.

A group of organizations and leaders have formed a coalition to combat antisemitism and other bigotry locally and build community resilience — together.

The Finest Community Coalition is an independent initiative that is intended to act as a collaborative platform to coordinate strategies, share best practices, map existing efforts and fill gaps, and respond collectively when the organization deems appropriate.

Organizers said that a unified and collective approach is crucial to maintaining safety and resilience in the region.

“San Diego is our home, and I want to do everything in my power to ensure that it remains a place where my children — and all Jewish children — will feel safe, secure, and proud of who they

are,” said Finest Community Coalition director Adam Maslia in a statement.

“These concerns are not theoretical for me; they are deeply personal and reflect the reality we are living in. Antisemitism has deep historical roots, and while its forms may evolve, its impact remains undeniable.”

The coalition engages nearly two dozen partner organizations — including Jewish Federation of San Diego, Leichtag Foundation, Lawrence Family JCC, the Jewish Community Foundation, ADL San Diego and American Jewish Committee — along with community leaders from diverse backgrounds.

“The coalition isn’t only about addressing hate,” said Heidi Gantwerk, president and chief executive officer of Jewish Federation of San Diego.

“It’s about building relationships, fostering hard but necessary conversations, and building a San Diego that is stronger, more connected and united against division.”

The coalition said that it is eager to recruit and engage concerned non-Jewish partners to strengthen and unite the San Diego community’s response to antisemitism.

# California Gas Prices Could Rise 75 Percent by End of 2026: USC Professor

By Brad Jones | The Epoch Times

California gas prices could skyrocket by as much as 75 percent by the end of 2026 with the expected shutdown of oil refineries in the state, according to an analysis released May 5 by a researcher at the University of Southern California (USC).

Regular gasoline prices could rise from an average of \$4.82 in April 2025 to as high as \$8.44 a gallon by the end of next year, according to the report, which was authored by professor Michael Mische at the Marshall School of Business.

Two Phillips 66 refineries in Los Angeles—representing about 8 percent of the state’s oil refining capacity—are slated to close by the end of 2025. Valero Energy Corp. separately announced in April that it will shut down or restructure its Benicia refinery in the San Francisco Bay area—which accounts for about 9 percent of the state’s refining capacity—by April 2026, increasing concerns over gas prices and supply.

The Mische analysis states that based on current demand, consumption, state regulations, and other factors, the refinery closures could result in a potential 21 percent drop in refining capacity from 2023 to April 2026.

This could create a gasoline deficit potentially ranging from 6.6 million to 13.1 million gallons a day, Mische said.

“Reductions in fuel supplies of this magnitude will resonate throughout multiple supply chains affecting production, costs, and prices across many industries such as air travel, food delivery, agricultural production, manufacturing, electrical power generation, distribution, groceries, and healthcare,” he wrote.

Industry experts have also warned that gas prices will spike dramatically when the refineries close.

Phillips 66 said it was shutting down its LA refinery because of the uncertainty surrounding its long-term sustainability, and because of “market dynamics.”

The state of California is currently suing major oil companies over alleged deception regarding the risks of climate change and

fossil fuel combustion.

## Governor Urges Energy Commission to Take Action

In an April 21 letter, Gov. Gavin Newsom directed California Energy Commission (CEC) vice chair Siva Gunda to “redouble” the state’s efforts to work closely with oil companies to ensure a “safe, affordable, and reliable supply of transportation fuels, and that refiners continue to see the value in serving the California market, even as demand for fossil fuels continues its gradual decline over the coming decades.”

Newsom directed Gunda “to reinforce” the state’s “openness to a collaborative relationship and our firm belief that Californians can be protected from price spikes and refiners can profitably operate in California—a market where demand for gasoline will still exist for years to come.”

The governor also referred to the CEC’s Transportation Fuels Assessment report, which lists a state takeover of oil refineries in California as one of several options, and directed Gunda to recommend “any changes in the state’s approach that are needed” by July 1.

Republican state Sen. Brian Jones from San Diego, the Senate minority leader, issued a May 6 statement citing the Mische analysis and calling the refinery closures “a looming energy and economic crisis.”

“If the Governor doesn’t act now, Californians will be blindsided by sticker shock at the pump and skyrocketing prices on everyday goods,” Jones said.

In a May 6 letter to Newsom, Jones called for urgent measures to prevent further refinery closures and support long-term energy stability, such as investment tax credits or other relief from taxes and regulations.

Meanwhile, Republican state Sen. Shannon Grove from Bakersfield urged the governor to increase new drilling permits to support in-state oil production instead of relying on “expensive





foreign imports, often from hostile nations,” she told The Epoch Times.

New permits have plummeted by 97 percent over the past five years, according to data from the California Department of Conservation. New drilling permits in the state dropped from 2,676 in 2019 to 86 in 2024.

“This is catastrophic for every Californian at the gas pump,” Grove said in an April 16 social media post. “Refineries are shutting down or barely hanging on because they can’t get the oil they need to produce the gas used every day by California families.”

#### ‘Controlling the Damage’

Mike Umbro, founder and CEO of Californians for Energy and Science—a nonprofit advocate for energy economics and the environment—and a developer of an oil field project west of Bakersfield, told The Epoch Times that Newsom’s letter appears to be conducting damage control with oil companies.

“He is trying to task Siva Gunda with controlling the damage,” Umbro said.

Umbro urged the governor to take a more direct and deliberate approach by signing an executive order declaring an energy crisis, issuing permits to drill, and allowing refineries to produce gasoline.

He applauded the Mische analysis, saying it and other independent studies are what’s needed to fully evaluate the oil-and-gas supply and ensure there is no shortage of affordable gas at the pumps for consumers.

Daniel Villaseñor, a spokesman for the governor’s office, told The Epoch Times in response to questions that Newsom’s letter to Gunda “speaks for itself.”

Sandy Louey, a CEC spokeswoman, told The Epoch Times in an email that the agency is “committed to working with stakeholders to explore options to ensure an affordable, reliable, and safe transportation fuel supply.”

Louey said the concept of a state-owned refinery is “just one in a list of many potential options for the state to consider” that the CEC proposed as possible solutions to mitigate gas price spikes in a report released last August.

In the report, the CEC identified that a state-owned refinery may provide relief to consumers but recognized many challenges to overcome, including high costs, the expertise necessary to manage refinery operations, and how the refinery would fit into the state’s transition away from petroleum fuels, she said in the email.

The California Air Resources Board is also required to develop and submit a Transportation Fuels Transition Plan to be released by the end of 2025, Louey said.

According to a statement by Valero, a fire broke out at its Benicia refinery on May 5 but was extinguished within hours.

No injuries were reported, and the cause of the fire is under investigation, the oil company said. Valero did not say whether the fire would significantly disrupt production at the refinery.



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# Protecting Female Civil Liberties: It's Non-Negotiable

By Edward Escobar | California Globe

The debate surrounding biological males competing in female sports and accessing women's facilities is not merely about inclusivity—it is about the fundamental protection of female autonomy, dignity, and safety. While inclusivity should be encouraged in society, it must not come at the expense of erasing the rights of women or undermining the integrity of female spaces.

The push for gender inclusivity, while framed as progress, has in some cases disregarded the safety, privacy, and fair competition that women have fought tirelessly to secure. This conversation is not about exclusion or intolerance—it is about ensuring that longstanding protections for women remain intact and respected. The era of disregarding legitimate concerns for the sake of ideological conformity must come to an end.

## The Truth About Fairness in Women's Sports

Competitive sports are built on principles of fairness, integrity, and equal opportunity. The biological differences between men and women—including variations in muscle mass, endurance, and physical strength—create undeniable disparities. Ignoring these disparities leads to unfair advantages for biologically male athletes in female sports and presents significant safety risks in full-contact competitions.

Regulated sports have long enforced strict guidelines to prevent unfair advantages, from prohibiting steroid use to maintaining weight classifications in combat sports. These policies exist to ensure fair competition. Similarly, allowing biological males to compete against females, particularly in contact sports, creates an

imbalance that fundamentally undermines the integrity of women's athletics.

The consequences of these policies are far from theoretical. Cases of female athletes suffering injuries at the hands of biologically male competitors have emerged, yet concerns are often dismissed as intolerant rhetoric rather than valid safety issues. If fairness in sports is truly valued, then transparency and policies that preserve female competition must be prioritized.

## The Erosion of Privacy and Safety in Public Spaces

Beyond athletics, women's rights to privacy in locker rooms, restrooms, and shower facilities must remain protected. These spaces exist to provide safety and dignity, ensuring that women are able to change, clean themselves, and navigate daily life without discomfort or vulnerability. The expectation of privacy in these environments is not a privilege—it is a right.

Policies that allow biological males into female-designated facilities threaten this right. While advocates argue that inclusion is paramount, they fail to consider the impact on the privacy and safety of women. These concerns are often dismissed outright, with those who speak out being accused of bigotry. This deliberate silencing of women's concerns is a dangerous precedent that must be challenged.

Public safety is inseparably linked to civil liberties. If women feel unsafe in spaces designed for them, their ability to fully participate in public life is compromised. The expectation of privacy and security should not be negotiable.



## Individual Rights vs. Established Social Order

Personal freedoms, including self-identification, must coexist with the established legal frameworks that govern society. While individuals have the right to express their gender identity, this right does not override protections afforded to others under long-standing laws. The push to redefine gender classifications based on subjective identity rather than biological distinctions creates a legal and societal dilemma with real consequences.

Women did not create these legal protections—they inherited them as part of their hard-fought battle for rights and recognition. If adjustments to these frameworks are to be considered, they must be made through rational discourse, not ideological imposition.

It is not an act of intolerance to uphold established classifications—it is an effort to maintain order and protect rights that were legally defined for centuries.

## A Sensible Path Forward

Rather than forcing women to relinquish their rights in favor of ideological conformity, society must create balanced solutions that respect everyone's rights. This includes:

- **Creating new athletic divisions** that allow for inclusive competition while preserving fair play for female athletes.
- **Mandating full transparency** regarding biological classifications in competitive sports to maintain integrity.
- **Implementing fair but separate public accommodations** that ensure privacy and safety for all individuals.

These discussions must be approached with honesty, reason, and a commitment to fairness—without permitting one group's freedoms to infringe upon another's.

## Holding Firm in Defense of Women's Rights

Women should never be vilified for demanding fairness, safety, and privacy. The attempt to silence these concerns by labeling them as discriminatory is a deliberate effort to suppress legitimate discussions. Upholding female civil liberties is not about rejecting inclusivity—it is about ensuring that fairness, dignity, and security remain intact.

The time for compromise is over. Women must stand firm in asserting their rights, demanding policies that uphold fairness, and rejecting ideological pressures that seek to erase protections. Future generations deserve a society where the rights of women are upheld without compromise.

By taking a firm stand, we ensure that civil liberties remain protected and that fairness, dignity, and respect for women remain uncompromised.



## Congratulations

*Victoria Floyd*

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**On behalf of Vaco & Highspring, we'd like to congratulate Swapnil (Neil) Jadhav on being nominated to SD Metro's 40 under 40 recognition.**

Neil is a forward-thinking technology leader and digital innovator with a passion for transforming industries in San Diego, and we look forward to seeing him continue his accomplishments as the current CIO/CTO of GIA (Gemological Institute of America).



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## *GREAT STRIDES:*

May is Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month & local event supports research

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is a progressive, genetic disease that affects the lungs, pancreas, and other organs. It manifests itself uniquely in those that have CF, and the effects are unique to the individual. It is not uncommon that two children within the same family with CF (and the same genetic mutations) will have different representation of the disease, as do my grandsons.

Today, there are close to 40,000 children and adults living with cystic fibrosis in the United States (and an estimated 105,000 people have been diagnosed with CF across 94 countries), and CF can affect people of every racial and ethnic group. CF used to be known as a pediatric disease, but through the many advancements and therapeutic treatments such as CF Modulators and advanced care techniques, there are now more adults living with CF than children and those numbers keep growing.

Currently, nearly 90 percent of the CF population has a modulator therapy, these modulator therapies have significantly enhanced the lung function, and symptoms of those able to take



them, however they do not fix previous damage caused by lung exacerbations. Modulators are not a cure and do not address the underlying cure of the disease. The CF Foundation is fervent in its drive to bring therapies to all those with CF, We Are NOT Done Yet. Those with Rare and Nonsense mutations and those that have adverse reactions to modulator therapies do not have their life-changing treatments. The CF Foundation will not stop until there are therapies for all with CF and that when we hear "CF" it stands for CURED FOREVER!

For more than 70 years, people with cystic fibrosis and their loved ones have helped raise awareness, support, and understanding of CF in the United States through national recognition and fundraising events. Today, we celebrate CF Awareness Month every May. In 2006, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives passed House Concurrent Resolution 357, recognizing May as National Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month. The campaign was then extended to a month-long event held in conjunction with Great Strides, the CF Foundation's largest national fundraiser.

## At-A-Glance: GREAT STRIDES

Date	June 7, 2025
Check In	8:30 AM
Start Walk	10:00 AM
Distance	3 miles
Location	Liberty Station, NTC Park, 2455 Cushing Rd, San Diego, CA 92106
Event Coordinator	jkalker@cff.org
Phone:	858-452-2873

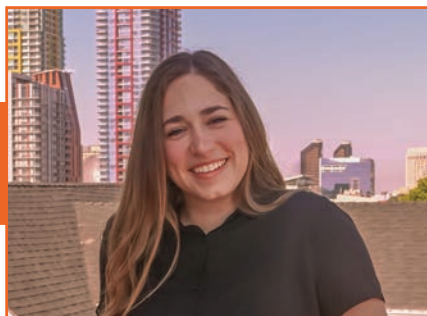
If you would like to participate or donate to the San Diego Great Strides, you can sign up or donate at: [fundraise.cff.org/SanDiego2025](https://fundraise.cff.org/SanDiego2025)

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# UC Berkeley's 2025 Male Supremacism Studies Conference

By Katy Grimes | California Globe

With all of the really serious news in California – Gov. Newsom suing the Trump administration again, Valero closing its Benicia refinery, Kamala Harris will/will not run for governor, high violent crime, \$5.00 a gallon for gas, biological boys in girls' sports, Democrats killing a voter ID bill – we are ready for something a little lighter, news that is cheery or playful, or news to make raging feminists feel good in their REI hiking pants and sun-protective fabric shirts.

We found it. The UC Berkeley “Male Supremacism Studies Conference.”

This inspirational event is Sponsored by the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism. Co-sponsored by: Western States Center and the Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies.

Here's the skinny:

*The Institute for Research on Male Supremacism is hosting an interdisciplinary virtual conference via Zoom from April 24–26, 2025. Our approach is informed by feminist, intersectionality, reproductive justice, social movement, gender/sexuality, and race/ethnicity studies, bringing this interdisciplinary lens to bear on discourses in right-wing, far-right, hate, radicalization, extremism, terrorism, preventing and countering violent extremism, and other related studies. The conference seeks to bring these fields further into conversation with one another and to orient researchers to understanding the shared belief systems of domination, dehumanization, and entitlement that underlie male supremacist and authoritarian projects.*

I never knew that feminist, intersectionality, reproductive justice, social movement, gender/sexuality, and race/ethnicity studies were actual academic disciplines. When did that happen?

Here is an introduction to the Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies, where they have a special article – With change coming to Washington, does higher education face a ‘dystopian’ future? in the Journal of Right-Wing Studies (link is external) about how Donald Trump is signaling disruptive changes for colleges and universities.

Within the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues:

*“The mission of the Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies, which is housed at the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues (ISSI), is two-fold: first, to identify right-wing movements, flesh out their twentieth-century histories (how they aligned and how they survived) while isolating their novel aspects in the 21st century; and second, to develop and apply principles of how right-wing thought, ideology and organizational capacities operate to understand the state of the contemporary Right and identify its likely directions and successes.”*

Here are the Panels at the UC Berkeley “Male Supremacism Studies Conference.”

- Biological Essentialism in Gender, Race, and Sexuality
- The Relationship Between Gender Equity and Democracy or Authoritarianism
- Logics of Masculinity and Violence
- Mapping the Manosphere and Understanding Networked Communities
- Demons, Humor, Disgust: The Many Operations of De-

humanization

- Examining Men's Claims-Making Around Harm and Engagement with Countering Male Supremacism
- Youth Vulnerability and Responses:
- Influencers and Entrepreneurs Paving the Way to Radicalization
- Male Supremacism in Policymaking and Political Discourse
- How Do Male Supremacist Communities Present Themselves? Transmaxxing, NoFap, and More
- Surging Natalism and Nativism in the Shadow of Dobbs

I had to look up “Transmaxxing” and “NoFap”:

Transmaxxing is a controversial internet subculture that misrepresents genuine transgender experiences, often framing transition as a shortcut or “life hack.”

NoFap® is a porn addiction recovery peer-support website.

Lastly, if you are feeling social and brought your Klean Kanteen, and are wearing event-appropriate REI hiking trousers, sandals with socks, and a moisture-wicking Cotopaxi Tech Bucket Hat, these social hours and receptions are for you:

Our conference includes social hours for attendees and panelists to connect and network on each day of the conference.

Day 1 – Virtual Reception suitable for participants in Australasia, East Asia, North and South America.

Day 2 – Social Hour: From Breakfast in Europe, to Dinner in Australia. Suitable for participants in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia.

Day 3 – Social Hour: From Brunch in Argentina, to Dinner in Africa. Suitable for participants in North and South America, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Day 3 – Final networking suitable for participants in Australasia, East Asia, North and South America.

While University of California, Berkeley is a publicly funded university, “the activities and programs of the Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies are supported entirely by private donations. All donations are tax-deductible,” the website says, so it is a 501(C)(3). It is housed at the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues, within the UC Berkeley system.

Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies and The Institute for the Study of Societal Issues “provides an intellectual home for quantitative and qualitative interdisciplinary research on societal issues.”

I'm not sure how intellectual an experience it is dishing on the “Logics of Masculinity and Violence,” or if the “Relationship Between Gender Equity and Democracy or Authoritarianism” is any sort of “interdisciplinary research on societal issues,” but it looks like fun to me. I'll see you at the 2025 Male Supremacism Studies Conference.

And in the meantime, perhaps Donald Trump can send the DOGE team out for more disruptive changes and to fulfill that “dystopian” future on colleges and universities.



# Alaska Airlines continues to grow in San Diego with a 30% increase in flights and three new nonstop destinations



New nonstops from San Diego to Chicago O'Hare, Denver and Phoenix will launch later this year, all with multiple daily departures. We're also significantly expanding the number of frequencies on some of our most popular routes, by 50% or more, to meet growing demand for our premium product.

Alaska Airlines is adding new nonstop routes in San Diego, along with offering additional flights on existing routes and improved flight connectivity – all to give our guests more convenient travel options as San Diego's leading airline. We'll launch three new nonstop routes with year-round service between San Diego and Phoenix beginning on Aug. 20, followed by Chicago O'Hare and Denver on Oct. 4. Each route will be served by three daily flights.

Starting Oct. 26, we'll also add flights to select routes that our guests fly the most from San Diego with an increase in frequencies of 50% or more. That means six daily nonstops to Las Vegas, Sacramento and San Jose, Calif., and three daily flights to Salt Lake City. Tickets for the new routes can be purchased now at [alaskaair.com](http://alaskaair.com), with the flights for the expanded schedule available for purchase beginning this weekend.

Alaska guests in San Diego also benefit from Mileage Plan – our award-winning, industry-leading loyalty program – with the ability to earn and redeem miles on more than 65% of all international flights to Europe and Asia at San Diego International Airport through our oneworld partners.

As the only national airline based on the West Coast, we've proudly served guests throughout California for more than 40 years. With the new routes on the combined Alaska and Hawaiian Airlines network, we'll serve 44 nonstop destinations from San Diego – the most nonstops of any airline serving the airport – along with more than 90 peak-day departures. This includes flights to the East Coast, the Northwest, throughout California, Mexico, Florida and to all four major islands in Hawaii.

*"We're proud to already serve San Diego and the surrounding region with the most nonstop destinations from San Diego. These exciting new additions to our network further expand our ability to take San Diegans directly to where they want to go, better than any other airline, with our premium onboard service and global loyalty program."* – Ben Minicucci CEO at Alaska Air Group

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Ronson J. Shamoun, Principal Attorney and CEO of RJS LAW, is an Adjunct Law Professor at the University of San Diego–School of Law where he teaches a Tax Practice and Penalties class. He was recently presented with the following awards:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • San Diego Metro Magazine-<br>Best Attorney 2016                  | • Martindale Hubbell's-<br>AC Preeminent Rated 2014, 2015 & 2016 |
| • San Diego Magazine-<br>Top Attorney 2016                         | • San Diego Daily Transcript-<br>Top Attorney 2014 & 2015        |
| • San Diego Business Journal-<br>Best of the Bar 2014, 2015 & 2016 | • San Diego Metro Magazine-<br>40 Under 40 - 2015                |

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# From Pandemic Boredom to Luxury Leather Brand

## How Benjamin Myers Turned a Hobby into Hand-stitched Success

By Marlise Kast-Myers | Photos by Benjamin Myers

It's been over five years since the pandemic changed the world, and for some, it catapulted curious creatives toward a talent they never knew existed. Such was the case with Benjamin Myers, a graphic designer by trade who suddenly waved goodbye to his motorbike commute, his workplace community, and his ping-pong sessions with the boss.

While many welcomed the opportunity to work from home during the lockdown,

Benjamin felt his creativity flatlined with little outlet for growth. Just two weeks after he joined a jiu-jitsu gym, the fitness center was forced to close due to pandemic mandates, leaving him restless and searching for something to fill his time.

One evening, while aimlessly browsing YouTube, Benjamin came across a leathercrafter's tutorial on making a simple leather wallet. One video turned into 20, and before he knew it, he was

binge-watching leather classes.

Yet his real motivation wasn't just about learning a new craft, it was about making something personal. For years, he had been eyeing a leather quiver he had seen online, handcrafted by an older gentleman in the Midwest. When Benjamin finally decided to buy one, he discovered that the artisan had passed away. At that moment, Benjamin realized that if he ever wanted to own that quiver, he would



have to make it himself.

Determined, he started small by ordering a beginner's leathercrafting kit and by picking out his very first hide. Instead of the quiver, Benjamin's first project ended up being a knife sheath—and from the moment he finished, he asked himself “okay, what's next?”

What began as a simple experiment quickly turned into an obsession. Benjamin devoured every tutorial he could find, experimenting with different types of leather, stitching techniques, and designs.

Initially, his focus was purely on outdoor gear, such as knife sheaths, quivers, and packs. As his passion evolved, so did his creation of accessories like wallets, bags, belts, leashes, sunglass cases, journal covers, and other leather goods. Each piece became a reflection of his journey and growing skill.

One of the biggest challenges he faced was mastering the art of hand-stitching. Achieving the perfect stitch, one that was both durable and aesthetically flawless, was far more difficult than he expected. Benjamin spent months experimenting, making mistakes, and searching for answers, often feeling like he was chasing perfection without a clear roadmap.

But through relentless practice, trial and error, and learning from experienced artisans, he finally cracked the code. That struggle ultimately made him a better craftsman, reinforcing the importance of patience and precision in everything he creates.

Precision and perfection are nothing new to Benjamin, who has dedicated the past 18 years to navigating the design world of branding, startups, the auto show industry, and now at a tech company. One thing he's realized over time is that he no longer wants to sit in front of a screen all day, but rather create something tangible with his hands.

Beyond leathercrafting, he's passionate about drawing, building, writing music, cooking, and gardening—anything that allows him to bring ideas to life in a physical form. Interior design is

another creative outlet he loves, being fortunate enough to have his home featured in *Home & Garden* magazine.

When it comes to his work, whether he's in the kitchen or in the leather shop, his goal is simple: have fun creating.

“I don't get attached to any one project for too long,” says Benjamin. “I'm usually most proud of my latest creation, until I make something even better.”

That longing to improve has paid off for the talented artisan. Fast forward from the pandemic, and his company, Buckeye Leather, is in full swing, cranking out high-end luxury handmade leather bags, wallets, and other accessories.

Void of machines, each one is crafted by the artist himself out of his San Diego studio, eventually making their way into galleries, shops, and his website. What many admire about Benjamin is his passion to share his skills with others. Having been approached by several friends to commission purses for their wives, or wallets for themselves, Benjamin has encouraged them to “make it together with me”. With Benjamin at the helm, these guided, private sessions have led to finding joy and pride in the work they have created as an apprentice who can take pride in the final product.

Benjamin currently hosts workshops out of his studio, guiding students on how to make wallets and card holders. While leathercrafting hasn't replaced his full-time job, keeping it as a part-time business and passion project has given him the freedom to create on his own terms. He can focus on crafting pieces that truly inspire him, rather than feeling pressured to mass-produce.

“My love for leathercrafting is stronger than ever,” explains Benjamin. “Each piece I create is not just an object, but a story—a testament to patience, craftsmanship, and the beauty of working with my hands.”

You can find Benjamin's work on display at Andrew Myers Art Gallery in Laguna Beach or locally at Brick n Barn in Valley Center. His full portfolio of work is at [buckeyeleather.com](http://buckeyeleather.com).





Photo by Library of Congress on Unsplash

# THE REAL FIRST 100 DAYS

By Victor Davis Hanson | American Greatness

Pundits are confused about what to make of the first 100 days of the second Trump administration.

Supporters talk of “flooding the zone,” believing Trump is making so many changes so quickly that his opposition is reduced to deer-in-the-headlights infancy.

They must be right when the nation suffers daily Democratic pottymouth videos, vandalism of Teslas, infantile meltdowns at congressional witnesses, rioting against federal agents to protect illegal alien felons, protesting on behalf of women beaters, M-13 gangbangers, human traffickers, and assaulters, and visa-holding violent students praising Hamas terrorists.

In contrast, opponents either claim that Trump’s first three months are either directionless chaos or a Hitlerian nightmare or both.

But what is really happening?

One, Trump is finally addressing the problems that proverbially “cannot go on forever, and so they won’t go on.”

When, if ever, would the left have closed the southern border? After 10, 30, 50 million illegal aliens?

How many more criminal illegal entrants was the Biden administration willing to allow into American neighborhoods—500,000? 1 million? 3 million?

How long was the world simply going to ignore the human destruction on the doorstep of Europe?

Would Biden or Harris have sought a ceasefire? Or would it have taken another 1.5, 3, or even 5 million more dead, wounded, and missing Ukrainians and Russians?

Nor did past administrations ever seek a solution to the massive national debt, much less the uncontrollable budget and trade deficits.

All prior presidents passed the day of judgment on to some vague future presidency, assured that their money printing would at least not blow up on their watch.

All moaned that China was piling up huge trade surpluses while denying its own population the usual modern safety net. They knew Beijing’s aim was to use the trillions of dollars in trade surpluses to build a new massive military, a greater arsenal of nuclear bombs, and a new imperial Belt and Road overseas empire.

Yet no administration did anything but greenlight American outsourcing and offshoring while ignoring Chinese trade cheating and technology theft.

Indeed, prior presidencies appeased and enriched China on the foolish belief that such indulgence would lead to Chinese prosperity, and with such Western-style affluence, soon a globalized, democratic, and supposedly friendly China.

In sum, we just witnessed all at once a 100-day, 360-degree effort to address all the existential challenges that we knew were unsustainable but were either afraid or incom-

petent to address.

Second, the administration apparently wants to confront the source of these crises and believes it is the progressive project.

The left maintains real political power not by grass-roots popularity, but rather by unelected institutional clout. The party of democracy uses anti-democratic means to achieve its ends of perpetual control.

It wages lawfare through the weaponization of the state, local, and federal courts.

It exercises executive power through cherry-picked federal district and circuit judges and their state and local counterparts.

The permanent bureaucracies and huge federal workforce are mostly left-wing, unionized, and weaponized by a progressive apparatus. Their supreme directive is to amalgamate legislative, judicial, and executive power into the hands of the unelected Anthony Faucis, Jim Comeys, and Lois Lerner of the world—and thus to override or ignore both popular plebiscites and the work of the elected Congress.

Over ninety percent of the media—legacy, network, social, and state—are left-wing. Their mission is not objectivity but, admittedly, indoctrination.

Academia is the font of the progressive project. Ninety percent of the professoriate are left-wing and activist—explaining why

campuses believe they are above the rules and laws of the Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the U.S. Congress.

Add into the mix the blue-chip Accela corridor law firms and the globalized corporate and revolving-door political elite.

The net result is clear: almost everything the vast majority of Americans and their elected representatives did not want—far-left higher education, a Pravda media, biological men destroying women's sports, an open border, 30 million illegal aliens, massive debt, a weaponized legal system, and a politicized Pentagon—became the new culture of America.

So, Trump is not just confronting unaddressed existential crises but also the root causes of why, when, and how they become inevitable and nearly unsolvable.

His answer is a messy, knock-down-drag-out counterrevolution to reboot the country back to the middle where it once was and where the Founders believed it should remain.

His right and left opponents call such pushback chaotic, disruptive, and out of control.

But the counterrevolution appears disorderly and upsetting, mostly to those who originally birthed the chaos; it certainly does not to the majority of Americans who finally wanted an end to the madness.

## The Spirit of San Diego

### A 1903 Oldsmobile was a specialty class winner at the 19th annual La Jolla Concours d'Elegance

It is nicknamed the Spirit of San Diego is owned by the Deer Park Winery and Auto Museum in Escondido. It had recently returned from London where it competed in the Brighton Veteran Car Run. The restoration of the vintage vehicle was completed by Mike Adams Restoration and Bowden's Autobody of Escondido.

Adams and Bowden are now turning their attention to a 1934 Packard 1108 owned by Gary Marchetti of Vista who will enter it in the 74th Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in C class C2 American Classics Closed, on August 17. Marchetti will attend the Motorlux celebration at the Monterey Jet Center August 13.





Gov. Gavin Newsom unveils his 2025-2026 revised budget on 5/14/25 (Photo: California Governor Gavin Newsom screenshot)

# Gavin Newsom's Wonderland: Hilarious News Fact Check Website

By Katy Grimes | California Globe

Politico describes this as Newsom “escalating a campaign to defend his home state and record against false and misleading information online.”

Pulease. Gavin Newsom has never defended “his home state” – he only defends Gavin Newsom. As for “false and misleading information online,” Gavin Newsom just doesn’t like what news organizations like the Globe report. We go out of our way for the truth, laden with details, facts, data and interviews, “without fear or favor.”

In its quest to defend the Governor, Politico claims, “The governor voraciously consumes conservative media and has adopted creative strategies to counter its influence by appearing on Fox News, deploying staff to counter criticism on X and creating another site to fact check claims about this year’s fires in Los Angeles.”

Those “creative strategies” surely must be patterned after Alice in Wonderland:

“I’m not strange, weird, off, nor crazy, my reality is just different from yours.”

The thin-skinned governor deploys his minions to push back against critics, detractors, and quibblers. Brandon Richards (He/Him), Newsom’s “Deputy Director of Rapid Response” and chief defamer, often replies to news articles with deception and fibs, demanding retractions.

“How fine you look when dressed in rage. Your enemies are fortunate your condition is not permanent. You’re lucky, too. Red eyes suit so few.”

Imagine his rage when Gov. Newsom claims, “No, businesses are NOT fleeing California,” and “No, the \$20 minimum wage for fast food workers did not damage the industry.”

This is the handiwork of Brandon Richards (He/Him).

“Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.”

That sounds like a Kamala Harris speech...

Here are a few more of Newsom’s ludicrous fact checks:

“This site is for everyone sick of the BS about California,” Newsom said sounding like the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland. “We’re done letting the MAGA trolls define the Golden State. We’re going on the offense and fighting back — with facts.”

That should say, We’re fighting back with “our facts.” And isn’t it interesting that Gavin Newsom believes that “MAGA trolls define the Golden State?”

As the Queen of Hearts demands, “Sentence first—verdict afterwards.”



# HUACHICOL USA

## (STOLEN OIL FROM MEXICO)

By LINOTIPIA / Peniley Ramírez | REFORMA

Huachicol is not just a Mexican business. In recent years, a network involving people, companies and facade operations in the US has expanded. Today it generates hundreds of millions of dollars a year for cartels.

The operation is complex. It begins in Mexico, when crude oil is illegally extracted from clandestine shots, or when Pemex employees are bribed to deliver crude oil. In tanker trucks, it is first moved to batch storage areas in places such as Veracruz, Monterrey, Altamira, while the government looks elsewhere.

From there, crude oil is taken to the border. Fake export documents to the US are made. In those documents, it says that there is an exporter in Mexico; an importer in the US, and a final buyer. All are front companies that serve the criminal network.

"Companies" have addresses in houses, on both sides of the border, sometimes only in PO boxes. With this manufactured commercial operation, the export papers are filled.

These documents do not say that there is crude oil crossing the border. They report, instead, that those tanker trucks are used oils or other dangerous materials. In Tamaulipas, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel controls the crude oil that they send through their networks of front companies. The cartel also charges other criminals who want to cross crude, disguising it as another substance.

Already in Texas, tanker trucks carry crude oil to vacant lots. Then they sell it as if it were Texas oil, at a suspiciously cheap price. They sell it to refineries, to buyers in other parts of the US or in other countries, such as India or Japan.

Each shipment from the US to other countries means, authorities say, about five million dollars in profits for US importers. They send it on ships, several every month. Many of those final buyers do not know the origin of the oil they are buying.

When the profits are obtained, the operation to launder the money comes. A plethora of companies, bank accounts and transactions do the work. Payments go through several jurisdic-

tions and countries. Eventually they return to Mexico through the banking system. The volume of the operation is gigantic. It has become, US authorities say, "the most important source of illicit non-drug-related income for cartels."

In Tamaulipas, the control of these operations has been in charge of César Morfín, alias "Primito", a partner of Rubén Osaguera, "El Mencho", whom the DEA knows well.

An official source told me that the Morfín come from Jalisco and made a lot of money with the production of methamphetamines. Currently, they operate the transfer of the huachicol from Tamaulipas.

"They are very bloodthirsty and powerful," this source told me. Now, "Primito" - who, official sources confirmed to me, is not detained - and two relatives were included by the US in their lists of money launderers. With them, this Thursday two companies based in Mexico and operations in Texas were included in these lists. The companies were used to carry the "used oil" across the border, which was actually stolen crude.

The details of how these operations work and their volume were only partially known until now. More was known about how gasoline illegally entered Mexico, without paying oil import taxes, but not how the oil stolen in Mexico ends up in the US.

This Thursday, an alert issued by the US government detailed them, citing government sources and investigations by several agencies.

I checked the corporate records of the companies listed this week by the US as part of this criminal network. I discovered that they have official addresses in Tamaulipas, import permits to the US and addresses in Texas in PO boxes. In those same sections, there are other companies that are also setared in Mexico, especially in Tamaulipas, and that have not yet been mentioned by the authorities.

The oil sewer is huge and, now we know, binational. The still unanswered question is how many officials from both governments, and at what levels, are involved.





Advocates and lobbyists in the Capitol Rotunda, during the final session of the year at the state Capitol in Sacramento on Sept. 14, 2023. Photo by Rahul Lal for CalMatters

# Special interests poured more than half a billion into California lobbying last year

By Jeremia Kimelman | CalMatters

Lobbying groups spent more than half a billion dollars to influence the state government in 2024, the most ever, according to a CalMatters analysis of data recently filed with the secretary of state. Lobbying by Google, oil companies and utilities in the third quarter appeared to drive the sharp spike in spending.

Companies and organizations reported roughly \$540 million in lobbying expenses to push their point of view to California officials, including legislators, on hundreds of bills between January and December of last year — and that's up by more than 10% from \$485 million in 2023.

Perhaps that isn't so surprising in a state with a full-time Legislature and one of the largest economies in the world, said Francesco Trebbi, an economics professor at UC Berkeley who studies political influence and lobbying.

"Half a billion is kind of normal," he said. "If California is about 14% of U.S. GDP and federal lobbying is about \$4 billion, \$500 million is about 13% of that. So it would be in line with the size of the California economy."

Thomas Holyoke, a professor of political science at Fresno State University, said that the spending increase might reflect not only corporations' desire for more influence but also the growing influence of California policy itself.

As long as California maintains its prominence, "more and

more interest groups and lobbyists are going to take what Sacramento does very, very seriously," he said.

## Major players driving the lobbying boom

The Western States Petroleum Association reported more than \$17.3 million dollars in advocacy costs over the year, more than \$10 million of which was spent last summer, and more than double the total bill of the previous year.

The organization took public positions on 18 bills last session and got its desired outcome two-thirds of the time, according to a CalMatters analysis of data from Digital Democracy, our platform to track state lawmakers and legislation.

In part, the trade group's spending more than doubled because of increased proposed regulations on oil and gas, including a special session focused on gas prices.

The largest non-oil spender was PacifiCorp, which reported spending more than \$13.4 million to influence California officials last year, 30 times the yearly average for the company over the last two decades. The investor-owned utility lobbied for a rate hike but didn't take a public position on any bills in 2024.

Pacific Gas & Electric, one of the largest utilities in the state, reported nearly \$3.6 million on lobbying last year. Over the two-year legislative session, the company took a public position on



**In 2024, Google spent nearly double what it did over the past 18 years**

Total reported lobbying expenses by year

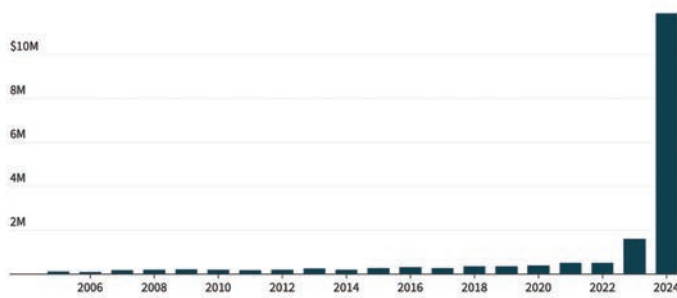
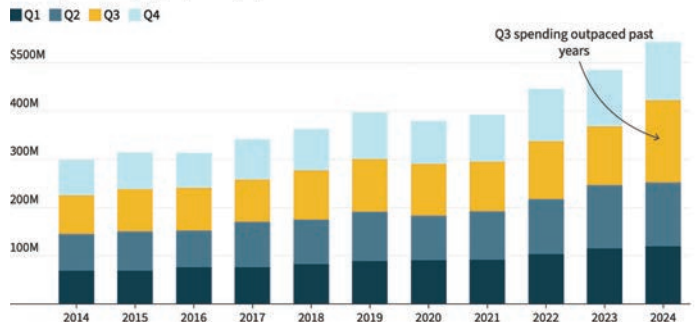


Chart: Jeremia Kimelman,  
CalMatters Source: California Secretary of State

**Lobbying California officials topped half a billion dollars in 2024**

Total reported lobbying expenses by quarter



Note: Due to limitations in the state-provided data, amounts may be reported more than once. Chart: Jeremia Kimelman, CalMatters Source: California Secretary of State.

45 bills and also got its way on roughly two-thirds of them, or 31 bills.

Google doesn't usually spend much on state-level lobbying efforts but spent more in 2024 than the last 20 years combined.

The company reported one of the largest totals for state advocacy last year, driven primarily by a spending spree in the third quarter of the year when the tech giant was fighting a media bill and AI regulations. The company got its way in both cases.

Much of its advocacy went through the Computer & Communications Industry Association, which reported spending nearly \$7.4 million, \$7 million of which came from the Mountain View behemoth.

Only two labor groups spent more than \$1 million on lobbying last year: the Service Employees International Union and the California Teachers Association.

SEIU reported spending nearly \$3.4 million and the California Teachers Association, another powerful union in the state, spent more than \$3.1 million. Both unions took public positions on hundreds of bills and got their way nearly 70% of the time.

**How CalMatters analyzed the data**

Organizations that hire lobbyists to influence state policy are required to disclose how much money was spent in a quarterly report to the secretary of state, who makes the data and filings available online. For example, the page for the Western States Petroleum Association shows that the industry group spent roughly \$1.7 million on advocacy in the second quarter of last year and more than \$10.1 million in the following quarter.

CalMatters added quarterly reported expenses to calculate the total annual lobbying bill for each organization, then added every organization's yearly sum to determine the aggregate amount spent on lobbying California officials per year.

Sometimes, organizations give money to industry groups to lobby on their behalf, such as the \$7 million Google paid to the Computer & Communications Industry Association, and both

organizations must report that money: Google, when it buys advocacy services from the association; the trade group, when it actually spends the money on grassroots organizing or direct lobbying. Because there's no way to determine if a payment is to another "lobbyist employer" or to a political or media consulting firm, there are amounts reported more than once in our data.

CalMatters determined the success rate of each organization by comparing organizations' public positions taken on bills in the last legislative session (2023–2024) as recorded in Digital Democracy to the ultimate outcome of that legislation. Lobbying efforts were considered successful if either of the following were true:

- The organization opposed a bill that failed the Legislature.
- The organization supported a bill that passed through the Legislature (even if it was vetoed by the Governor).
- It's difficult to get a more detailed picture of lobbying because of what isn't reported in the data. California does not require disclosure of either the offices or staff members who meet with lobbyists or the connections between individual lobbyists and specific bills.

Our analysis found that corporate lobbying efforts were successful about 60% of the time. This is likely an undercount because it can take more than one year to successfully pass a bill.

Chris Micheli, a longtime lobbyist and professor at McGeorge School of Law, said that sometimes a bill can even take more than one two-year legislative session.

"After six or seven years on a really tough bill, you finally get it enacted. Leading up to it, you could say you failed every year," he said. "But then eventually, you get a seismic change in the law."

For the record: Lobbying by Google, oil companies and utilities in the third quarter appeared to drive the sharp spike in spending. It occurred in both general and special sessions, not only in special sessions. The story has also been updated to include the full name of a lobbyist.



(Photo: Stacy A. Korsgaden)

# CA Department of Insurance: A Warning Shot to Every Free Market Believer

By Stacy Korsgaden, | California Globe

Californians are waking up to a hard truth: the Department of Insurance, bloated and broken, has become a hostile force in the state's economy. Under the failed leadership of Commissioner Ricardo Lara, this out-of-control bureaucracy has devastated the insurance market and driven the state to the edge of collapse.

What was once a department designed to foster fairness and oversight has morphed into a political weapon: slow-moving, expensive, and utterly disconnected from reality. It no longer serves consumers. It punishes businesses, bullies carriers, and micromanages private industry into submission. The result is chaos, uncertainty, and a chilling message to every company watching from the sidelines: stay out of California.

After the worst wildfire disaster in our nation's history, State Farm, the largest insurer in America, requested a 22% rate increase to cover unprecedented risk and surging reinsurance costs. The Department said no. Why? Because optics and politics matter more than solvency. When a watered-down 17% was finally approved, it was too little, too late. And when State Farm asked for another 30% in 2024, the Department brushed it aside, promising to "review it" sometime in 2025. They still haven't.

Meanwhile, the financial bleeding continues. In Q1 of 2025, State Farm reported a \$5.1 billion underwriting loss, which is their worst in at least 20 years. State Farm General, their Cal-

ifornia subsidiary, lost \$600 million. Their reinsurance arm lost \$1.1 billion. A judge overseeing the rate case said what the Department refused to acknowledge: State Farm is no longer profitable in California. The judge even recommended a \$400 million capital injection from the parent company just to keep the doors open.

And what if that capital doesn't come? What if they walk away?

The market craters. Coverage vanishes. The Department of Insurance shrugs. And the same machine that created this crisis moves on, unaccountable and unchanged.

This is not leadership. This is government at its worst: bloated, arrogant, and actively harmful to the people and companies it was created to serve.

California doesn't need more regulation. It needs reform. Real reform. It needs leaders willing to take on the Department itself and restore a functioning, competitive marketplace built on transparency, innovation, and economic common sense.

If no one steps up to clean house, there won't be a house left standing. It's time for someone with vision and backbone to step in.



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