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NO. 6 VOL. 41

AI'S TRUE REVOLUTION

Breaking the elite bureaucrats that rule our lives

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SAN DIEGO'S TOP MARKETING EXECUTIVES

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SAN DIEGO'S TOP MARKETING EXECUTIVEST 2026

San Diego's Most Creative and Innovative Marketing Executives. **PAGE 4**



The loneliest man in american politics has an Army

Carl DeMaio is building a powerful grassroots conservative movement in Democratic-dominated California, using Proposition 39's voter ID initiative to challenge political rivals and reshape the Republican Party's future. **PAGE 8**



How California can do data centers differently and win back community trust

As data center construction accelerates amid public skepticism, tech companies must build trust through transparency, equitable community benefits and clean energy investments to ensure sustainable AI infrastructure development. **PAGE 16**



ENPASA advances digital operations and crew communications with Inmarsat NexusWave deployment

ENPASA, a longstanding Inmarsat customer, selected NexusWave to support digital maritime operations, achieving stable connectivity, faster system updates, and enhanced crew wellbeing through unlimited high-quality internet access at sea. **PAGE 18**



The parasites versus the empiricists: How the political class is taking you for suckers

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AI'S TRUE REVOLUTION: Breaking the elite bureaucrats that rule our lives

The White House AI summit launched America.gov, a tool letting citizens access services directly and exposing bureaucratic opacity and corruption, potentially tipping power from hierarchical experts toward democratic transparency. **PAGE 22**

SDMETRO
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Chairman | CEO

Robert Page
BobPage@sandiegometro.com

Publisher

Rebeca Page
RebecaPage@sandiegometro.com

Associate Editor

Douglas R. Page
dpage@sandiegometro.com

Art Director

Christopher Baker
cbaker@sandiegometro.com

Photography/Illustration

Benjamin Myers
Jim Childers

Sports Editor

Christopher Page

Contributing Writers

Martin Krumming
Michael McHugh
Marsha Sutton
Alexi Koseff
David Rottenberg
Myrna Marston
Marlise Kast-Myers
Andrew Simmerman

Advertising

SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR
Rebeca Page

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P.O. BOX 3679
RANCHO SANTA FE, CA 92067

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ing expectations, and the terms for ending the relationship. Without this agreement, misunderstandings or legal complications can undermine the success of the project. Also, many funders would require a fiscal sponsorship agreement between the project and its sponsor before they provide a grant for a project.

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

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SAN DIEGO'S TOP MARKETING EXECUTIVES



Joice Curry

Joice founded c3 Communications, Inc. (c3) in 2000, believing public relations should be personal, passionate, and impactful, with one clear purpose: to make people's lives better. Now, 30 years later, that belief still guides every client relationship. Her media relations "mad skills" come from genuine relationships with the press, locally and nationally. Joice believes in the word "relations" when working with the media, and it is that authenticity and foundation she works from every day. She has led award-winning campaigns, drawing on her crisis communications expertise as well as her extensive experience in the nonprofit, health and wellness, entertainment, hospitality, retail, and consumer products industries. Some of the recent campaigns Joice enjoys sharing include launching the San Diego Monopoly game; bringing 9/11 Day, the largest community service day in the country, to San Diego; working on the campaign announcing the future San Diego Holocaust Museum; promoting the many national tours and events held each year; and launching fun new brands. Outside the office, she volunteers with the Salvation Army and the Alzheimer's Association. Joice has been a stage performer for decades and still performs in one or two musical productions annually. She's a proud SDSU alumna!



Sue Almon-Pesch

Susan is the principal of Market 4 Profit and brings more than 30 years of marketing and public relations expertise to B2B businesses nationwide. She partners with executives to build visibility, strengthen brands, and drive profitable growth. She also serves as a fractional marketing manager for Quality Tube USA and as publicist for World Amenities, providing senior strategy, brand direction, and executive guidance. Her work supports client achievements, including World Amenities' six consecutive appearances on the Inc. 5000. Previously, she led Almon Associates, an award-winning New York advertising agency recognized as Small Business of the Year. She became the first female president of the Sales and Marketing Executives and was inducted into its Hall of Fame. She is a graduate of the University of Illinois.



Jolyana Jirjees

Jolyana is the executive director of the Chaldean Community Center, where she leads daily operations, oversees community programs, and advocates for refugee and immigrant families in East County. Since assuming this role, she has worked to expand services, strengthen partnerships, and secure funding to support education, housing, and workforce development within her community. In addition to her work at the Council, she is proud to serve as a board member of the Cajon Valley Union School District. She also remains active with St. Joseph Chaldean Catholic Church and regularly collaborates with local leaders to support underserved families. Helping Chaldean refugees integrate and thrive in El Cajon is deeply personal to her, and she has made it her mission to be a voice and resource for her community. She was honored with the Don Parent Award by the San Diego East County Chamber of Commerce and has been a 40 Under 40 honoree of SD METRO Magazine. She is a graduate of San Diego State University.



Aaron Chimenti

Aaron is the manager of digital communications at Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP. Hahn Law is a full-service law firm with nine offices across the country, including San Diego. Hahn has more than 150 attorneys who provide sophisticated and creative counsel to a wide spectrum of clients, both regionally and around the globe. Hahn Law is a highly skilled, solutions-oriented firm that helps grow the businesses of entrepreneurs and family-owned and privately held companies while protecting and defending their business, personal, and generational interests in the U.S. and around the world.



Jean Walcher

Jean founded J. Walcher Communications in 2001, marking 25 years as a San Diego woman-owned business. She has built a respected agency whose work reaches every corner of the San Diego–Tijuana region, with clients nationwide. The agency specializes in public relations, crisis communications, media training, community relations, social and digital media, content creation, search engine optimization (SEO), generative engine optimization (GEO), award and speaking coordination, influencer relations, branding, graphic design, and advertising. She began her career in public relations at the Laura Walcher PR agency before joining the Ruder Finn & Rotman agency in New York. She serves on the San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.



Sandy Young

Sandy has been part of J. Walcher Communications since 2009 and became the agency's owner and CEO in 2025. She oversees the full-service public relations and marketing agency's operations and strategic leadership. The award-winning PR firm is consistently recognized by clients and the media for its responsiveness, execution, and ability to generate measurable and meaningful results. She has spent more than two decades working exclusively for boutique agencies in San Diego. She is known for her strategic mindset, innovative marketing campaigns, and attentive client service. Under her leadership, J. Walcher Communications drives client success in the shifting media landscape and develops strategies that maximize clients' exposure across earned media.



Nathan Schmidt

Nathan is executive vice president, chief experience officer, and digital channels executive for San Diego County Credit Union (SDCCU). With a career spanning more than 25 years in financial services management and marketing, he oversees strategic planning, card and payment processing, operations, digital platforms, marketing, business development, and media relations while championing the end-to-end customer journey at SDCCU, one of the largest credit unions in the country and one of the largest locally owned financial institutions in San Diego. He has a track record of driving successful initiatives and a proven ability to increase revenue and profits through market analysis and planning. He has a bachelor's degree from California State University, Sacramento, and an MBA from Saint Mary's College in Moraga, California. He has also taught various courses at the university level, including marketing, business management, public relations, ethics, and business strategy.



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Local news deserts skyrocket as newspaper closures escalate, even as startups emerge

By Northwestern Nedill

Consolidation in TV news is accelerating, contributing to losses in local coverage

The number of local news desert counties in the U.S. shot up by 26 in the last year, the largest one-year rise in at least five years, according to the Medill State of Local News Report 2026.

There are now 238 news deserts in the U.S., as the pace of newspaper closures hit an average of about three per week. Exacerbating the challenge is a precipitous 50% drop in digital traffic to local newspapers' websites, coinciding with growing consumer use of AI platforms, the study shows.

Despite that, the report tracked the creation of 75 digital-only and print local news startups in the last year, a rise in national local news networks and a small but emerging cohort of content creators producing original local journalism.

For the fifth consecutive year, the Medill Local News Initiative at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications conducted a months-long, county-by-county survey of local news producers to identify trends in this era of transformational change in the local media landscape. Researchers looked at local newspapers, digital-only sites and networks, ethnic media, local commercial TV newsrooms, public broadcasters and content creators. In all, researchers tracked nearly 8,400 professional news producers in America's rapidly changing local news ecosystem.

Key findings from the Medill study:

The number of news desert counties, those with no locally based professional news source, jumped by 26 in the last year to 238. Twenty years ago, about 150 of the nation's 3,144 counties were news deserts. This year's increase was the biggest year-over-year spike since Medill began keeping records five years ago.

Another nearly 1,500 counties have just one source of local news remaining, leaving 47 million Americans with limited to no access to local news.

The rise in news deserts coincided with a quickening pace of newspaper closures to about three per week. In all, 170 newspapers shuttered or were merged, most of them in rural areas.

More than 425 local newspapers changed hands in the past year, a 75% rise over the number in the prior year and another indication of the volatile

state of the industry.

Employment at newspapers slid 8%, or by more than 7,500 jobs. Nearly 80% of newspaper jobs have been lost since 2005.

Digital traffic to 100 of the largest local newspapers' websites plummeted 50% in the past four years, putting further pressure on news leaders trying to offset print losses with digital consumers.

For the first time, Medill researchers conducted a census of commercial local television newsrooms. Three quarters of the 678 TV newsrooms are owned by the 10 largest broadcasting chains. The report's addition of TV news newsrooms, most of which are based in large and medium-sized markets, had virtually no impact on the number of news deserts.

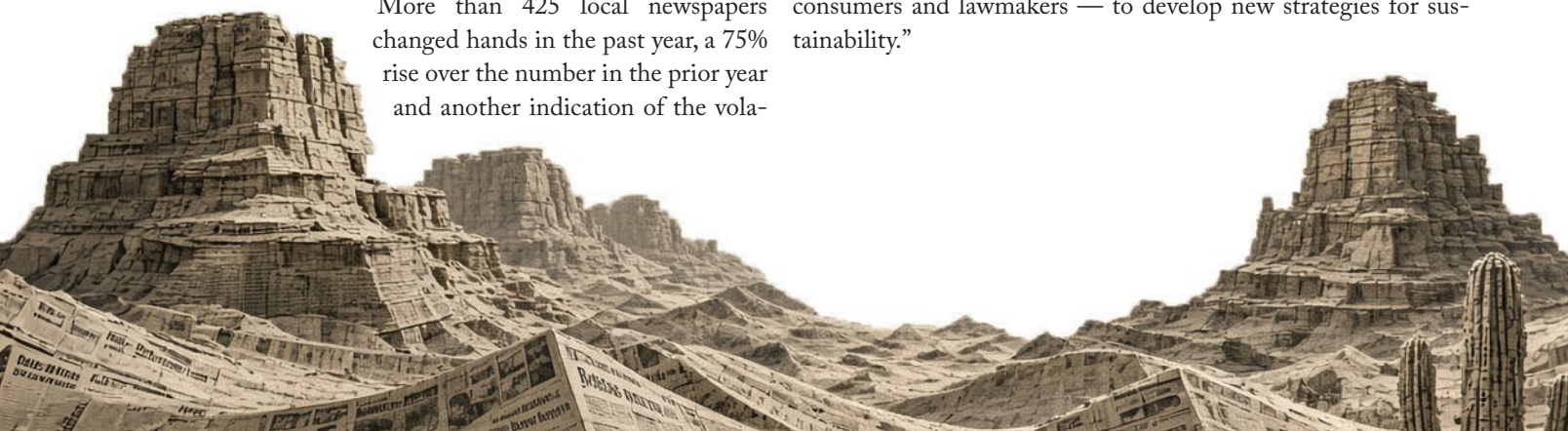
A calamitous wipe out of local public radio outlets resulting from the federal defunding of public broadcasting last year has been averted for now. That's largely because of a surge of giving to public broadcasters and infusions of cash from philanthropies like the Knight Foundation.

The growth of local news startups continued to be strong with 75 in the past year, most of which were digital-only sites. Nearly 300 local startups have been created in the past five years. The overwhelming majority of those, however, are in urban and more affluent areas.

The content creator community is large and growing quickly. But of a list of 1,500 creators across platforms reviewed by Medill, only roughly 7% are covering local issues about their communities, and fewer still are doing original reporting.

"In recent years, we've seen a steady erosion of the local newspaper industry, but that ballooned into a landslide this year," said Tim Franklin, professor and John M. Mutz Chair in Local News at Medill. "We've seen growth in local news startups, and that's great. But their numbers are not coming close to replacing what's being lost."

Said Zachary Metzger, director of the State of Local News Project, "The industry of local news has changed so much in so short a time, and this is forcing everyone — publishers, funders, consumers and lawmakers — to develop new strategies for sustainability."





THE LONELIEST MAN IN AMERICAN POLITICS HAS AN ARMY!

By Joel Kotkin | Politico

In April 2025, Carl DeMaio, just four months into his first term as a California state assemblymember, sat before a panel of his new colleagues in a small, windowless room in downtown Sacramento and told them that they were contributing to a “cancer on democracy.”

It was one of the 52-year-old freshman lawmaker’s first committee hearings, an early chance to pitch peers on one of his top priorities. In opening remarks, the Republican framed his proposal, which would require government-issued identification in order to vote, as a commonsense, non-partisan reform to ensure the integrity of elections. No one, argued DeMaio, should have reason to question the legitimacy of American democracy.

It is an issue that has animated Republicans nationally for the better part of two decades. But in the Democrat-controlled California Legislature, the bill stood little chance of survival. The hearing, perhaps unsurprisingly, did not go well for DeMaio. After listening to his presentation, Gail Pellerin, a Democrat from Santa Cruz, told him that if he didn’t “trust the process that put [him] in this office, perhaps [he] should consider resigning.”

“You’re the minority, you’re the extreme voice,” DeMaio seethed to his Democratic colleagues at the hearing, eyebrows raised and pale eyes growing wider. “Why can’t this broken political system hear that?”

After a brief debate, the elections committee voted not to advance DeMaio’s bill, effectively killing it.

To be a Republican politician in California is largely an experience of watching one’s policymaking ambitions crushed beneath a steamrolling Democratic machine. Dem-

ocrats occupy the governor's office. They have legislative supermajorities, a lock on statewide elected offices and control of the biggest cities. Republicans are left to be bit players in the running of the country's largest state, play-acting opposition to Democrats' plans. But that is not true of DeMaio, who has the potential to deliver one of the country's biggest MAGA victories in what stands to be a dismal 2026 for his party. In the year and a half following the committee hearing, the first-term state lawmaker took it upon himself to develop and qualify a ballot initiative modeled on the same bill that failed in that dingy Sacramento hearing room. Next week, every California voter will be mailed a ballot including Proposition 39, as DeMaio's constitutional amendment is known.

If it passes, the measure would do in California what President Donald Trump has struggled all year to do at the federal level with a Republican-led Congress: require every voter to present identification when casting a ballot. DeMaio has mobilized a conservative grassroots army hungry for victories, bypassed the state's political class and headed straight to voters. Proposition 39 already has California's Democratic establishment reeling, concerned that a strong showing with a left-leaning electorate could change the national conversation about voter ID.

Any path to victory for Proposition 39, now lagging in polls, runs through a thicket of challenges. Voters, including Democrats, are broadly sympathetic to the idea that they should have to confirm their identities at the polls, but many recoil at such a law when it is associated with Trump. DeMaio needs California conservatives who might not have much else to vote for to show up in November, but the unpopular president who could convey to them the stakes needs to stay away to keep it palatable to everyone else. DeMaio finds himself now living a version of the Republican future, one in which the MAGA movement is sustained by bottom-up organizing rather than top-down charisma — closer to a network of local communities than the national cult of personality that currently defines it. A man with few political friends is finding plenty of fellow travelers.

"It's beautiful music you hear being played in California," DeMaio said. "I'm simply there to show up with the sheet music."

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Maio said. "I'm simply there to show up with the sheet music."

Carl DeMaio, by all rights, should not be a power broker in California. A hyperconservative, openly gay, former drive-time radio talk show host, DeMaio is deceptively bookish in appearance, moving through the world with a coiled intensity that can come across as barely restrained rage. One of just 19 Republican lawmakers in an 80-member Assembly, DeMaio has labeled his Democratic colleagues corrupt, Gov. Gavin Newsom a "fraudster" and California Republicans victims of Stockholm syndrome. He has publicly called for the resignation of his own state party chair. A vocal Trump-supporting conservative in a state whose electorate deeply dislikes the sitting president, DeMaio has few natural allies. On the Assembly floor, his microphone is periodically cut off by Democratic leadership. He has been booed by his colleagues on more than one occasion.

"Early on, I diagnosed that one of the reasons why we can't turn California around is we don't have an opposition party," DeMaio recently said in his office a few blocks from California's Capitol building, enunciating his words with the effort of someone speaking with great purpose. "I have to start by cleaning out the rot."

Yet even as he describes California as a dark, dark place — beset by fraud and terrible policies, led by politicians knowingly running it into the ground — DeMaio doesn't stop at Trumpian I-alone-

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"Barbeque, Beer & Ballots" events at Hatfield Creek Vineyards & Winery in San Marcos

spares no detail. The booklet enumerates exactly how many cans of Coors Light and jars of Sweet Baby Ray's barbecue sauce should be ordered. It specifies the number of people each assigned to set up chairs, put out pens, and prepare napkins, plates and utensils. The arc of the party is disaggregated into quarter-hour intervals, with specific directions for what should occur in each. (Forty minutes before the speaking program begins: "direct guests to food.") The booklet was published by Reform California, the vehicle for DeMaio's ascendance in the state's politics over the past decade. During that time, DeMaio has taken the organization, which began as a regional watchdog in San Diego, and built it into a powerful statewide grassroots army, stoking a conservative political underclass disgusted by decades of Democratic governance. Today, Reform California stands as something akin to a parallel state party. The group has regional operations across the state, maintains near constant communication with its half-million subscribers and last year raised more than \$5 million from nearly 100,000 individual donors. The group distributes hyper-specific "plain English" ballot guides for every county in the state, telling supporters who and what should get their vote from governor down to school

in primaries as insufficiently conservative, while endorsing their primary rivals. Some party officials claim DeMaio does so to serve a self-interested agenda, "bullying candidates into conforming to a personal, politically motivated litmus test just to appear on Reform California's voter guide," as Gustafson put it earlier this year.

"Truthfully we're all getting sick and tired of it," said Anne Dunsmore, a longtime Republican fundraiser and campaign operative. "You mostly have hardworking senior citizens doing his work, which is worth doing, but not for him." (DeMaio said he has credited Reform California's success to their grassroots "time and time again.")

This year, when Reform California released what it called an "official Republican Voter Guide," the state party responded with a cease-and-desist letter, accusing DeMaio of "a calculated deception of California's Republican voters."

"Carl is always going to say and do whatever Carl thinks is best for Carl," said California Republican Party spokesperson Matt Shupe.

Just about any other freshman Republican lawmaker in the country, after watching his voter ID proposal tossed in the trash,

would have begrudgingly moved on to the next issue that riled up his supporters. But with the power of Reform California behind him, California's direct democracy gave DeMaio the option of bypassing the recalcitrant body he had fought so hard to join. After that committee defeat, DeMaio quickly called a press conference and told reporters that "whether the politicians get it done or the voters get it done, it's going to get done in 2026."

It was not an empty threat. Drawing from his bill's language, DeMaio drafted a constitutional amendment that would require voters to present government issued identification in order to vote. Unlike the plan that Trump has proposed nationally as part of the SAVE America Act, DeMaio's measure would not require proof of citizenship to register, only government-issued identification when voting in person and the last four digits of an identification number on a mail ballot. (The California measure also requires the state to create a new voter-identification card and issue one at no cost to any voter who requests it.) To put the issue on the ballot in November 2026, he would have to collect 874,641 signatures — a significant hurdle that those seeking to surpass typically approach with a formidable pile of cash to hire paid petition carriers. (It usually costs around \$10 million to qualify a statewide measure in California.)

DeMaio did not have access to wealthy backers who could bankroll a petition drive, and only about a dozen full-time paid employees. He was left with the least viable route to the ballot; it has been many years since a primarily volunteer-driven effort had qualified a measure in California. DeMaio blasted his subscriber list with the goal of turning supporters into volunteers, and over weekly Zoom briefings, explained how his supporters could get involved and help raise resources. Within two weeks of being cleared by state authorities in October 2025 to gather signatures, Reform California claimed to have trained and mobilized 14,000 volunteers. It added 2,000 more in the subsequent three weeks.

In those Zoom meetings, DeMaio outlined an unconventional approach to collecting signatures. Instead of just assigning canvassers to heavily trafficked sites in strip malls and farmers' markets, the voter-ID campaign would also seek many of its signatures by mail. Areas where volunteer interest ran deep could be used to communicate with far-off areas where Reform California needed to reach voters but had fewer people on the ground: one office in Escondido, near San Diego, was tasked with stuffing 300,000 mailers.

The tactic also shifted responsibility away from volunteers and onto voters, who would have to not only sign a petition but return it by mail to be collated by the campaign and submitted to the secretary of state's office. To remind voters, DeMaio's volunteers sent out 2 million text messages and 1.5 million handwritten letters, personally imploring voters to support the voter ID initiative.

"It's not unprecedented, but it's a little unusual," said Brandon

Castillo, a Sacramento-based ballot-measure specialist who has not been involved in the Proposition 39 campaign. "For control freaks like me, it makes me really nervous."

By early January, boosted by monthly signature rallies in different regions of the state, the campaign announced it had gathered a million signatures, comfortably passing the state's threshold. According to DeMaio, about 45% of the signatures were gathered by volunteers. (A separate group chaired by Julie Luckey, the mother of tech entrepreneur Palmer Luckey, funded a paid petition drive. A Reform California post had previously estimated that the Luckey-led Californians for Voter ID gathered two-thirds of the total signatures.) The initiative reached the ballot without any help from the California Republican Party.

"Too many Republicans have been content to lose quietly," DeMaio said last year. "That's over. We're going to force the fight every chance we get."

Even after the party eventually endorsed Proposition 39, DeMaio has remained the driving force behind the campaign to sell it to voters as the "bipartisan solution" to a widely shared concern about election security. "Can you dislike Donald Trump and still vote yes on Prop 39 for voter ID?" asks a Reform California ad released last week. "Yes, you can!"

Shupe said that state party Chair Corrin Rankin and her staff were organizing election activities at all levels throughout the state every day and that the party would still be "happy to have Carl as part of the team, regardless of what he has to say or do to raise money."

In one version of DeMaio's origin story, he is the technocratic endpoint of a well-trod path to political power. He attended high school at the prestigious Georgetown Preparatory School in Maryland, the alma mater of Supreme Court Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, and Georgetown University in nearby Washington. He leveraged a think-tank internship into his own government-contracting consultancy at the age of 23.

But that image of a business-owning, suit-wearing, prep-school avatar of government efficiency is just a partial picture of Carl DeMaio, who as a teenager saw his life spiral into nightmare. For years, he had been prematurely vaulted into adulthood at rapid speed, contending with growing household responsibilities as his mother battled a terminal cancer diagnosis. DeMaio took initiative where he could, trying to bring some structure to his life by fixing things around the house, cleaning, and helping with the family's finances. Once, he was forced to take the wheel of their car after his mother broke a rib during a coughing fit, safely guiding them to the shoulder. The family had no health insurance and few financial resources.

At 15, after years of watching his mother struggle with her health, he and his siblings gathered around her hospital bedside and promised her that they would be okay. She passed away soon after. Their father had abandoned the family, so Carl's 19-year-



Another large turnout

old older sister applied for custody of him and a younger brother.

"I was just like, okay, I just need to survive," DeMaio said. "I was an angry kid."

The Jesuits took him in, as DeMaio likes to describe his acceptance on scholarship into Georgetown Prep a year before his mother's death. Although he succeeded in school, he was emotionally closed, declining to share with his friends the realities of his family situation. One former teacher described him as 14 going on 40; others recommended spiritual exercises to encourage self-reflection.

He arrived at Georgetown University just as Republicans were gaining a foothold in Congress after four decades out of power. As a college freshman in 1994, DeMaio translated and localized Newt Gingrich's attacks on the federal government, penning an op-ed in the student newspaper that called the college's student association a "corrupt" and "flawed institution" that failed to effectively serve the student body. DeMaio would later refer to a

protest he organized against the student association as his favorite college memory.

After graduation, DeMaio tied his martinet instinct to the national agenda. While working at the Congressional Institute, where he began as an intern organizing staff retreats for Republican lawmakers, DeMaio encountered the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. The newly enacted law required federal agencies to set regular goals and assess their performance but few people within the government seemed to know exactly how it would be applied. DeMaio says he helped convince House Majority Leader Dick Armey that the law's benchmarks could be used by lawmakers to identify underperforming federal agencies and pull their funding.

DeMaio then turned around and approached those agencies with an offer. His new for-profit consultancy, the Performance Institute, could be hired to help them navigate the new standards. It proved to be a savvy (and lucrative) move in which DeMaio

“He is the Republican Party now. And he’s eliminated anyone who thinks that’s a bad thing,”

- COREY GUSTAFSON

entered an empty field of increasing importance, declared himself an expert, and established a successful enterprise basically from scratch.

In 2002, DeMaio decamped to San Diego — at the time, one of the country’s most conservative big cities — after having discovered the city while hosting Performance Institute conferences there. Shortly after arriving, he presented San Diego with an award as California’s most efficient city on behalf of the libertarian Reason Foundation.

But the businessman’s praise for his new hometown ran out quickly. Following what DeMaio said was a whistleblower tip, the Performance Institute launched an investigation of San Diego’s finances in an effort to identify savings that could cover a \$20 million projected budget shortfall. Working in tandem with city officials, DeMaio said he believed it would be no more than a three-month project.

City officials withdrew their cooperation as the investigation grew adversarial. DeMaio’s researchers found what he claimed was actually a \$100 million deficit along with “evidence of securities fraud, millions in raids on fee-based enterprises in violation of the State Constitution, and programmatic failures.” (Others involved in exposing the city’s financial condition say that many of the issues were already becoming well known and that DeMaio was simply particularly good at leveraging them for his own benefit.)

DeMaio became one of city hall’s biggest critics, a regular speaker at council meetings and source to local reporters about what he described as horrific mismanagement. In 2004, with funding from a prominent local developer, DeMaio formed San Diego Citizens for Accountable Government. DeMaio’s life experiences were shaping something that began to resemble a political manifesto: The people in charge are broken and flawed. The only person I can trust to achieve stability is myself. In 2007, DeMaio sold the Performance Institute, claiming \$2.5 million dollars from the transaction, and sought a seat on the city council.

The 2008 contest pitted the young “firebrand” (as local press referred to him) against a retired fire chief in a part of the city that had been ravaged by fires. DeMaio ran as a Republican in the officially nonpartisan election, and rather than focus on the issues facing his deeply conservative district, he pitched himself instead as a watchdog against citywide corruption. After knock-

ing on over 10,000 doors in an effort to sell his message, DeMaio won the seat with 66% of the vote.

DeMaio kept an outsider’s sensibility even as he became an insider for the first time. He called press conferences to attack the city council’s lack of transparency, challenging proposals publicly before any agreement had been struck among the council. When he realized he was unlikely to get his way, he explored mechanisms to bypass his fellow elected officials altogether. In 2010, he pushed a citizen’s initiative that would have required city government to lead competitive bidding processes for some municipal services. (The initiative ultimately failed to qualify for the ballot.) Two years later, he was the driving force behind a pension reform initiative that succeeded at the polls but was invalidated by a court ruling. That same year, he decided to run for mayor.

San Diego still did not know quite what to make of DeMaio. During the mayoral race, which DeMaio lost to a Democratic congressman, a local TV news crew asked all the candidates to film them doing their primary hobby. The question prompted long deliberation among DeMaio’s staff, who knew DeMaio as someone who would take work-related calls from 4:30 a.m. until deep into the night, without any apparent break for diversions from politics. They ultimately settled on “knocking on doors.”

Intensity is a core part of DeMaio’s political identity, never-say-die outrage part of his appeal. But those who know DeMaio say it also makes him extremely difficult to work with. Ryan Clumpner, who worked as campaign manager on the failed 2012 mayoral run, said DeMaio had a reputation for bullying his underlings, picking on those even more who didn’t fight back and that he was “intensely critical of everything.” Gustafson said that “to disagree with Carl is to have Carl excommunicate you.” (DeMaio characterized Gustafson’s assertion as “sour grapes.” In reference to Clumpner’s assertions, he said that while working on his campaigns is a “fast-paced” environment, he believes the longevity of his staff and its alumni network speak for itself. He noted as well that it has been years since he worked with Clumpner, now a Democratic consultant.)

DeMaio has faced his share of controversies, although thus far none of them have stuck. In 2014, he was accused of sexual misconduct by a former staffer, accusations which DeMaio vociferously denied. (The San Diego district attorney did not file charges due to lack of evidence, and the staffer later pleaded guilty of lying

to the FBI). In 2024, his neighbors in suburban San Diego sought a restraining order against DeMaio for an “escalating pattern of intrusive and threatening behavior” (the order was denied). DeMaio remains under investigation by the state’s campaign-finance monitor for misusing campaign funds, which DeMaio called “frivolous.” He said that he takes compliance “very seriously.”

“He’ll always generate crises around him no matter how high he goes,” Clumpner said. “It’s an extremely high stress environment.”

After spending \$775,000 of his own money on a losing mayoral bid, DeMaio almost immediately began running for a San Diego-area congressional seat. He positioned himself as a “new generation Republican” who wanted to focus on economic reforms and avoid “divisive social issues.” He appeared in a 2014 campaign advertisement with his partner, Jonathan Hale, while holding a pride flag at a parade. DeMaio told reporters that he had wanted to feature Hale in his mayoral campaign, but was advised against it. DeMaio narrowly lost his congressional race in the general election.

There is a version of DeMaio’s story in which, having lost a mayoral and congressional race, he washes out of electoral politics on the beach in San Diego. Instead, work as a conservative radio talk show host helped bring him back to relevance — a platform from which to turn his local watchdog group loose on the state government.

The group, renamed Reform California, found its first major cause in the 2017 increase in the state’s gas tax, passed by the legislature and signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown. DeMaio decided to make an example of one of the Democratic lawmakers who voted for it: state senator Josh Newman, who represented a Republican-leaning southern California district that had just elected him by only a few thousand votes.

DeMaio took the case to conservative media, announcing his plan for the recall on his show, the DeMaio Report. He then spread the plan on The John and Ken Show, a program with a large and devoted listenership that Newman called “ground zero” for his recall. On the show, DeMaio described his “gazelle strategy,” an effort to pick off a vulnerable member of the Democratic herd and break their supermajority. Newman, as he put it, was “the one with a limp.”

Leveraging DeMaio’s radio audience in San Diego and John and Ken’s listeners in Los Angeles and Orange County, DeMaio began soliciting donations and volunteers for the recall effort. Tens of thousands of dollars poured in from small donors to Reform California. As the movement grew, petition gatherers fanned out across Newman’s Los Angeles-area district, often setting up at the gas pump itself. (A lawsuit, which was later dismissed, alleged that recall campaigners deceptively told potential signers that their signature would help repeal the gas tax. DeMaio now calls it a “frivolous lawsuit” and that signature collectors were always honest with voters.)

DeMaio publicly pressured the California Republican Party to get involved, telling one newspaper that “they deserve their super-minority status” if they stayed on the sidelines. The party eventually joined Reform California and another independent group, the Howard Jarvis Tax Association, in backing the recall. The state party contributed more than \$800,000, allowing the recall effort to hire paid signature gatherers and expanding their reach.

As the “gazelle strategy” shifted from petition gathering to campaign, DeMaio continued to criticize the gas tax even as Newman fought the June 2018 recall. The Republican whom Newman barely beat two years earlier chose to run against him, this time besting him by 58% to 42%. It was a major coup, breaking the Democrats’ Senate supermajority with one of the only successful recalls of a state officeholder in 100 years.

DeMaio seized that momentum, using Reform California to lead a ballot measure that would repeal the gas tax Newman had voted for. Behind the strength of thousands of volunteers, the initiative qualified for the ballot and garnered local and national headlines in the process. The gas tax repeal failed, but Carl DeMaio had established himself as a “force of nature,” in the words of state senator Tony Strickland, a Republican from an Orange County district.

“Hes got a constituency and he’s good at what he does,” Newman said in a recent phone call. “It says something interesting about the extremes of California politics. We might be a solid blue place, but that guy has a following.”

In 2024, after years of criticizing lawmakers from afar, DeMaio ran for the state Assembly. He arrived in Sacramento ready to see both parties as his opponents. Democrats? They’re “kindergarten kids” — corrupt, wasteful and abusive, intent on throwing “temper tantrums” when they don’t get their way. Republicans? “Fucking insane and incompetent,” a “rotting” husk of a party so inured to failure that they believe they can “run a campaign like a one-day bake sale.”

In Sacramento, he found himself more ostracized than ever before — an outcast within a party long since cast out from power. To find sanctuary, on his early morning drives to the airport as he commutes to and from Sacramento from his San Diego home, DeMaio said he returned to the spiritual exercises he learned from the Jesuits decades ago, trying once more to understand the people around him.

“It’s all about finding out what your motivation is, what’s evil and what is good, and what other people’s motivation is,” DeMaio said of the exercises. “What’s driving them to do evil or good? That grounds me.”

On a Saturday morning in August, DeMaio again stood at the front of a cramped Sacramento-area room, proselytizing about the importance of voter identification. But unlike two years earlier, dressed down at a committee hearing in front of his Democratic coworkers, he instead found himself among a likeminded cohort

drawn to his promise of unglamorous work for an urgent cause.

The office park rental 15 minutes east of the Capitol, packed floor to ceiling with mail crates and campaign materials, was just one of 14 Reform California offices hosting mail-stuffing events that day. DeMaio let the approximately 50 volunteers know their work was an important tactic to drive turnout for Proposition 39, but that a shift to in-person canvassing would bring other rewards: Many Republicans will be shocked to see a conservative activist in California after so many years of abdicating the space to liberal control.

"Please keep coming," DeMaio said, amid the continued shuffle of envelopes. "It's not going to be one and done."

DeMaio seemed surprisingly ill at ease at times, more comfortable delivering a stump speech than in the moment-to-moment interactions with people who gave up their Saturday to join him. One volunteer, who said he kept seeing information about Reform California online but was unsure of DeMaio's sincerity, said he had come for the first time to get a sense of the community. A woman who shows up for weekly volunteer shifts ranted to DeMaio about the injustice of a gas-powered leafblower ban enacted by California. He agreed with her and gently tried to disengage.

DeMaio has made a career out of channeling this kind of generalized anger toward the California establishment. While he began as a fiscal conservative fixated on government waste and abuse, he has followed his party's Trump-era drift into the areas of immigration, policing and election integrity. Regardless of the issue, DeMaio is a politician built for the current political environment, a man who was railing against institutions at a time when many Americans still had faith in them.

DeMaio has begun to find allies in the capitol, although they may speak less about why they like him than laud the enemies he has made. Alexandra Macedo, the Assembly's Republican minority leader, said Democrats were "terrified of him in Sacramento." (There are indications that DeMaio may be moderating his approach slightly. During a floor session this summer, he rose to give a short speech in favor of a bipartisan bill to ban social media for minors. The bill, which Newsom has since signed into law, was a template for future collaboration and proof that the legislature could solve problems if "we put aside the partisanship," said DeMaio. "Powerful groups can't stop good ideas if we work together.")

Across the nation, Republicans are describing this as their most challenging election cycle in decades, with Trump, so unpopular across the country, seeking refuge in the reddest states. The fact that DeMaio's measure may still be competitive in deep-blue California — while Republicans give up on Senate contests in Georgia and North Carolina and hunker down to defend Kansas and Alaska — is a testament to the massive organizing machine that he has set into motion.

DeMaio says he would "love to see" other Republicans around the country develop their own Reform Californias, but for now, his

eyes are on California. He is scheduled to attend eight of his carefully choreographed backyard BBQ events in different cities over the coming Columbus Day weekend, among 49 he has scheduled over the month of October. There DeMaio will see how closely his followers hew to the directions in his party manual. After the assembly instructions for pulled-pork sandwiches and potato salad, the final page captures how far DeMaio finds himself from his comfort zone, no longer just mobilizing those who agree with him but having to persuade the ambivalent. The page includes a series of "key centrist message points" that BBQ hosts are advised to share with attendees — among them, that Proposition 39 differs from Trump's SAVE Act and that it will "restore trust and confidence" in elections. DeMaio forced the question, and now he will have to figure out how to put together a coalition large enough to pass it.

"He is the Republican Party now. And he's eliminated anyone who thinks that's a bad thing," Gustafson said. "The wins are his, and the losses are his."

Congratulations Jolyana Jirjees

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How California can do data centers differently and win back community trust

By Allison Agsten | CalMatters

Americans finally found something to agree on: concern about the rapid proliferation of data centers.

A recent Reuters/Ipsos poll found that only 1 in 3 Americans approves of the current pace of data center construction, and most would oppose a facility being built in their own community. That skepticism comes at a time when confidence in Big Tech is at an all-time low, according to Gallup.

These concerns deserve attention, not because the data center boom can be stopped, but because it can't.

More than 800 data centers are under construction across the United States, with the largest technology companies collectively spending hundreds of billions of dollars each year to expand AI infrastructure. McKinsey & Company estimates that the cumulative global investment in data centers could reach nearly \$7 trillion by 2030.

The combination of a once-in-a-generation infrastructure buildout and a public trust deficit poses a defining challenge for the tech industry. If it wants communities to accept the infrastructure powering the AI revolution, Big Tech must

embrace transparent planning, ensure that host communities truly share in the benefits and accelerate clean energy deployment — rather than deepen dependence on fossil fuels.

As my colleague Charles Zukoski, a USC engineer and host of the “Electric Futures” podcast, says, “Social license isn't free.”

In other words, community approval is not a given.

Yet data center developers often spend years planning projects behind closed doors, shielded by nondisclosure agreements, only to face fierce opposition once residents finally learn what's coming.

From the public's perspective, NDA might as well stand for “No data centers allowed.”

Building trust requires meaningful engagement long before permits are filed. Residents deserve honest conversations about electricity demand, water use, traffic, tax revenues and employment opportunities.

Microsoft has already ended its practice of requiring nondisclosure agreements from government officials during

A China Mobile data center in South San Jose on Aug. 31, 2026. Photo by Anna Hoch-Kenney, CalMatters



There is still time to get this right.

Susan Almon Desch

MARKETING MAVEN

ThankYou.

ENPASA advances digital operations and crew communications with Inmarsat NexusWave deployment

ENPASA advances digital operations and crew communications with Inmarsat NexusWave deployment



The Caleta Rosario shipping vessel deploys NexusWave onboard

A longstanding Inmarsat customer since its founding in 2001, ENPASA selected NexusWave as part of its strategy to support the growing digital demands of modern maritime operations. As vessels become increasingly reliant on real-time data, cloud-based applications, and digital workflows, the company sought a connectivity solution to deliver resilient, high-performance communications across entire voyages while providing a consumer-like internet experience for crews at sea.

Following its implementation of NexusWave – carried out by Inmarsat’s local partner Ingenieros Electrónicos Asociados SRL (IEA) – ENPASA has reported permanent and stable connectivity with enhanced ship-to-shore communication throughout its vessels’ voyages. More specifically, the company has observed an increase in the speed of electronic chart display and information system (ECDIS) updates as well as email delivery and receipt.

The upgrade has also significantly enhanced the onboard ex-

perience for seafarers. With unlimited data access and improved network performance, crew members can stay connected with family and friends through high-quality voice and video communications, supporting wellbeing and helping operators meet rising expectations for onboard connectivity.

Sergio Iglesias, Technical Manager, Empresa Naviera Petrolera Atlántica SA, said: “Reliable connectivity has become a critical enabler of safe, efficient, and modern vessel operations. Inmarsat NexusWave has strengthened our ability to maintain seamless communications between ship and shore while providing our crews with the connectivity they need to stay connected with loved ones throughout their time at sea.

“We were equally pleased with the speed of implementation, which benefited from the local availability of equipment and IEA’s installation and deployment expertise.”

Cristian Troncoso, Operations Manager, Ingenieros Electróni-

cos Asociados SRL, said: “ENPASA’s positive experience with NexusWave demonstrates the value of reliable, high-capacity maritime connectivity for both vessel operations and crew welfare. The customer’s feedback emphasises the importance of permanent and stable connectivity, seamless operational communications, and the ability for crew to maintain consistent contact with family members while at sea.”

Jose Arias, Global Account Manager, Inmarsat Maritime, commented: “As maritime operations become more data-driven, vessel owners need connectivity that can support evolving operational requirements while also meeting the home-like experience demanded by today’s seafarers. ENPASA’s deployment of NexusWave provides a practical example of how the solution can support the evolving connectivity needs of a modern maritime operator. We would like to thank IEA for its contribution to the project as Inmarsat Maritime’s trusted local NexusWave partner.”

About Inmarsat Maritime

Inmarsat is a Viasat company and continues to power the digitalisation of the maritime industry. With over 40 years of experience, Inmarsat Maritime offers reliable and innovative solutions that enable ship owners and operators to stay connected, navigate safely, enhance operational efficiency, and ensure crew welfare.

Viasat is a global communications company that believes everyone and everything in the world can be connected. With offices in 24 countries around the world, our mission shapes how consumers, businesses, governments and militaries around the world communicate and connect. Viasat is developing the ultimate global communications network to power high-quality, reliable, secure, affordable, fast connections to positively impact people’s lives anywhere they are - on the ground, in the air or at sea, while building a sustainable future in space. In May 2023, Viasat completed its acquisition of Inmarsat, combining the teams, technologies and resources of the two companies to create a new global communications partner. Learn more at www.viasat.com,

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THE PARASITES VERSUS THE EMPIRICISTS:

How the political class is taking you for suckers

By Matthew Syed | California Post

I keep hearing that America is polarized. Republicans vs. Democrats. MAGA vs. DSA. Wokesters vs. anti-wokesters. It's true, up to a point. But I believe there is a more consequential divide, one growing wider and more perilous every day.

I am talking about the division between the empiricists and the parasites.

The empiricists are most of you reading these words. Entrepreneurs. Blue-collar workers. Engineers. Scientists. Business people.

An engineer has to be in touch with empirical reality because

if their assumptions about gravity are inaccurate, their bridges will fall down. An entrepreneur has to be in touch with reality because if he can't persuade customers to buy his products, the businesses will go belly up.

America is the undisputed world leader in empiricism: more Nobel prizes than any other nation, dominance in the frontier technologies, an army of highly impressive (and hugely industrious) blue-collar workers, a spirit of enterprise that remains the envy of the world.



When you live here, you probably don't notice what outsiders sense the moment they land. The buzz. The sense of possibility. The American dream is perhaps not what it once was, but it's still alive. Almost two centuries ago, de Tocqueville wrote "No sooner do you set foot upon the American soil than you are stunned by a kind of tumult . . . Everything is in motion around you." The words ring as true today as in the 1830s.

This is a nation that once pushed at geographical boundaries but is now pushing at what the philosopher Sir Karl Popper called "the frontiers of knowledge": quantum, robotics, AI, medicine and the vast array of entertainment products that course through the limbic system of the Republic, even if in the case of social media not always for the better.

Ancient Rome pales by comparison. As do the Abbasids, Persians, Greeks, Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Babylonians.

The American-led global order has incubated more prosperity in the last 80 years than most of the previous 25 centuries combined. America still delivers a quarter of the world's output with only 4% of the population.

But I'm sorry to say that America also plays host to a growing army of parasites: smaller in number, but ever more draining in effect. They exist in one place above all others: Washington. Some are called Republican and others Democrat, but they are vampiric in virtually the same way and for the same reasons.

Debt looms

An empiricist understands that you cannot borrow the moolah indefinitely without paying a huge price. Parasites of both parties borrow and borrow. And borrow some more. Debt has risen to more than 100% of GDP, a scandal overseen by presidents of all colors, stealing from the future to pay for the present in the way that a realist would never countenance.

Only the dynamism of the private sector is keeping this Ponzi scheme afloat, driving growth just about capable of servicing the ever growing interest burden (now measured at almost \$1 trillion).

But for how long? Bond yields are rising, placing an even larger weight on the throats of those paying the bill (not least future generations who didn't even vote for this profligacy) while Washington gets fatter.

That's one thing to understand about an ever expanding state: there are more side alleys in the sprawling labyrinth to be gamed by insiders for their own profit. The Pentagon hasn't passed an audit since they started conducting them in 2018. They can't even account for the cash or where it's going.

Yet the real scandal extends way beyond the debt and waste. Senators get ever richer from "public service" but few ask why. Congressional staffers become lobbyists for industries whose laws they helped to write — a game played by Democrats and Republicans alike.

Aging corporations protect themselves from competition not

through innovation but by erecting barriers to entry with the complicity of the political class.

That is how corruption today drains an economy: not with one spectacular theft, but by the steady diversion of talent and capital away from productive activity and towards political connection. The scale of this extraction is difficult to overstate.

They arrive as a thousand small impediments to enterprise: a permit delayed, a tax loophole preserved, a regulation written by insiders, a subsidy paid to yesterday's technology. American capitalism is now rigged in favor of incumbents: politicians and regulators coining it while competition is throttled. I find it darkly comical to observe MAGA supporters condemning the "corrupt" Democrats — Crooked Joe, Dodgy Hillary — while the Dems hammer Trump for the same reason: memecoins, allegations of front running and more.

It's all a game, folks. A distraction. The partisan hysteria whipped up by each high-profile scandal obscures the deeper truth neither side wants you to grasp.

Looting all over

Both sides are looting the coffers in plain sight in ways that are normalized and often legalized.

In his 18th century work on the fall of Rome, the British historian Edward Gibbon talked of "a slow poison introduced into the vitals of the empire." When I look at Washington today, I see an eerily parallel story unfolding.

Ponder this paradox. In the 20th century, despite two global conflagrations and the Great Depression, economic growth in America averaged almost 3.5%. In this century, despite the internet, Moore's Law and relative peace, it has slumped to 2%.

Some might say we've been here before. Historians talk of the Whiskey Ring, the Keating Five and the 19th century "state of courts and parties." But none of this touches the scale of corruption today. America continues to produce the world's finest entrepreneurs, scientists and blue collar workers but they are like a magnificent thoroughbred sweating under the crippling weight of a burden few even mention.

Yet let me finish with this thought: the answer is not to succumb to the fashionable nihilism of tearing everything down.

The grievance-fueled revolution promised by the Marxist left and extremist right would be no remedy.

The DSA sees corruption and concludes that the system itself is the crime: capitalism, the Constitution, the whole inheritance. They have it precisely backwards. What I've described is not the American system working as designed. It is a betrayal of that design.

No, what this country needs is not a revolt against its founding principles but their restoration: truly competitive capitalism, government constrained by the Constitution, public servants who serve the public rather than themselves.

End the parasitism and America will fly again.

AI'S TRUE REVOLUTION: Breaking the elite bureaucrats that rule our lives

By Martin Gurri | California Post

The recent White House summit on artificial intelligence produced a new voluntary governance “accord” for AI companies, complete with external auditors.

More importantly, from my perspective, the summit launched the federal government’s first AI application for public use, America.gov.

Click on it, and you read: “Hello America. Whatever you need from government, start here.”

It’s a wonderful beginning, an amazing moment — and also a decisive turn in the war between technology and hierarchy.

If we work things right, AI will soon enable us to request and obtain any number of government services directly, with little in the way of human mediation.

Why does that matter? Bear with me... The world is ruled by bureaucracy. That’s true regardless of how the formal government is chosen.

The United States hold elections for president and Congress, but it’s actually run by a vast army of bureaucrats and regulators who the politicians need to fulfill their ambitions.

In the same way, the Communist Party holds absolute, unquestioned power in China, but in that country too hordes of bureaucratic mandarins get to decide everything from the interest rate to the pills allowed in a pharmacy.

The corruption inherent to this system should be obvious to all but is seldom talked about.

If bureaucrats at an agency are accountable only to an internal chain of command, that agency will be managed to the profit of the chain of command and its friends and allies.

You may say you are procuring military equipment or funding infrastructure, but in reality you’re building a clientele and a nest egg for yourself.

Control over the bureaucracy, therefore, is a far more effective means to power and wealth than merely winning an election.

Donald Trump’s first term was largely neutered because of his failure to understand this simple political equation.

His second-term decimation of a relentlessly hostile federal workforce is a rational move under the circumstances. Trump will never win over the bureaucrats, so he must terrify them into sub-

mission.

Because a powerful and unaccountable hierarchy can’t be squared with the principles of democracy, bureaucrats tend to justify themselves by claiming superior knowledge and technical expertise.

The modern world, they tell us, is too complex for amateurs. We wouldn’t want Joe Sixpack to fly us to Los Angeles — or to manage the details of a treaty with China.

As Walter Lippmann maintained, any democracy that depended on the “omniscient citizen” would be doomed, because no such person existed.

The average citizen, wrote Lippmann, was incompetent and distracted, and should be firmly nudged out of the way to let “specially trained” people take care of business.

Beyond the fact that most bureaucrats adhere to routine as mindlessly as trained seals, this argument on behalf of the rule of experts is a tangle of fallacies and false assumptions.

Let me touch on two of them.

One — contemporary crises are so massively random, so interconnected with a huge range of factors, that no one could possibly be “specially trained” for them.

Dealing with these crises is nothing like piloting a plane. It’s more like stumbling at speed through a house of mirrors, where the worst damage will be suffered by those who believe that they know where they are going.

I’ll just note the farcical performance of our health bureaucracy during the COVID pandemic and let it go at that.

Two — if it’s true that bureaucracies are in business for themselves, the only crises they will perceive are those that affect their clientele.

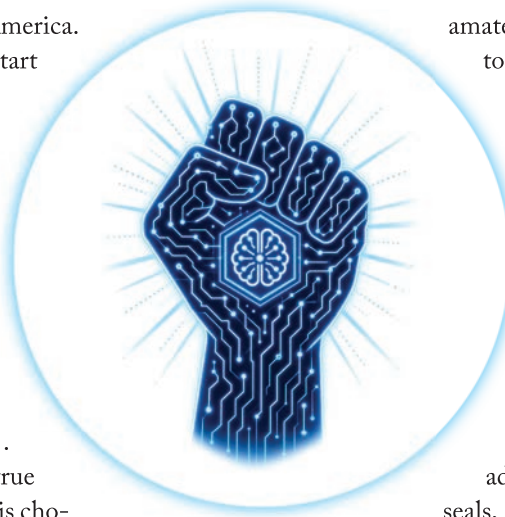
For the public, the sudden arrival of millions of illegal immigrants is a crisis.

For the bureaucrat, on the other hand, it’s an opportunity to get more funding and acquire a new class of dependents.

Bureaucracies hide behind the pretense of immutability, but if we look to history we’ll find occasions in which they were substantially transformed.

The surest driver of change has been revolution.

The French Revolution’s most permanent achievement, Alexis



de Tocqueville observed, had nothing to do with liberty or equality — it was the establishment of a republican administrative state that outlasted the return of the monarchy, the rise of Napoleon and empire, and five iterations of parliamentary democracy.

The revolutionary fire thus endured in the cold hearts of French functionaries.

Political revolutions have gone out of style, and we should be thankful for that — more people died in France during the one year of the Terror than in the four centuries of the Spanish Inquisition.

But today we confront a revolution of a far more thorough-going kind, driven by digital and AI technologies.

The web connects us all. AI connects all human knowledge. The combination is explosive and threatens to blow away the old hierarchies that benefited from parochialism and information monopolies.

The laptop class — the experts and the bureaucrats — can see the edge of the abyss from where they stand, and are in a panic.

They hate the untamed internet and have tried to domesticate it through censorship and the criminalization of speech.

The elites who run Europe, for example, having failed to understand the new dispensation since days of web 1.0, now aim their declining energies at attempts to control the information sphere through the brute force of the state.

Individual rights are sacrificed without qualms — Great Britain, birthplace of the Bill of Rights, has more citizens arrested for online crimes than any country on earth.

This caste loathes AI with equal passion, and dreams of pausing or freezing its development, and of hyper-training the AI platforms until they sound less like repositories of knowledge and more like — well, like their right-thinking selves.

Super intelligence is to be replaced with the regulatory version of senile dementia.

If these emergency measures aren't carried out, the experts have warned, there's a 99.9% chance that AI will somehow annihilate the human race.

In truth, the bureaucrats are confusing their own inexorable fate with that of humanity.

U.S. President Donald Trump listens as Elon Musk speaks to reporters, with Mark Zuckerberg and other tech executives standing behind them. 4

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk speaking during the AI gathering with Trump and other top tech company executives. Tierney L Cross/POOL/EPA/Shutterstock

And this neatly brings us back to that White House summit on AI.

On the subject of artificial intelligence, President Trump said we were “in the earliest days of one of the most important technological revolutions in the history of the world,” one that “will determine so much about the future of civilization itself.”

For once, the president's talent for exaggeration helped him de-

scribe the present moment accurately.

Trump isn't a visionary. He sees the world in terms of competition between nations, and he clearly intends to maintain or increase our country's AI advantage over the rest of the world, particularly China.

That competition obviously matters.

But as we have seen, there's another contest, just as global and even more consequential, pitting bureaucracy against democracy — and the president's AI initiative could tip the balance in favor of the latter.

Here's one last fact to keep in mind about bureaucracy: its power doesn't derive from expertise but from opaqueness.

If you need a permit, a passport, or anything at all from the government, only the bureaucrat knows the right words, the proper forms, the exact statutory subtitle that will get it done.

Between you and success stands an absolute stranger with a head full of arbitrary rules enthroned behind a government-issue desk (“bureau” is French for desk).

Every bureaucracy, in other words, should be conceived of as a liminal monster at the center of a dark and unwholesome labyrinth.

AI turns on the lights.

It will make the walls of the labyrinth transparent, so that its layout is legible to the ordinary citizen and the transactions within are apparent to all.

Not only will the need for human mediation be diminished to a minimum — the corruption generated by the system will be immediately exposed.

AI will track how every penny allocated to build a bridge is spent.

It will reveal the salaries and bonuses of federal contractors and consultants, and their past relationship to their paymasters — all it will take is a simple query.

The link between money and power that will inevitably emerge will shake the bureaucratic regime to its foundations, and may well ignite a structural revolution — that is, a radical rethinking about the way governments are organized.

Of course, none of this is fated — and, realistically, hierarchy can't be entirely banished from the management of human affairs.

Sometimes, you really need a licensed pilot to fly you to L.A.

The road to flattening the bureaucracy will be long and winding, from the humble beginnings of America.gov.

But there can be no question that AI, if extensively applied, can get us there.

The bureaucrats and the expert class will keep trying to shove the genie back in the bottle, but the natural evolution of new technology works against them — and the Trump people deserve some credit for recognizing that the future lies in the opposite direction.



Finland Brings Christmas Tidings

The traveling couple of Marlise Kast Myers and Benjamin Myers

By Marlise Kast-Myers | Photos by Benjamin Myers

As a child, I never believed in Santa. My parents never left out milk and cookies for the man in a red suit, or signed Christmas cards from Old Saint Nick. Instead, we made a birthday cake for baby Jesus, delivered meals to the homeless, and opened gifts at night. It was an atypical childhood built on realism and sacrifice.

When friends spoke of Santa, I stayed silent, never wanting to puncture their inflated hope in a man who sprinkled magic around the world. Yet, between his flying caribou and ability to slide down a chimney without third-degree burns, I just couldn't comprehend how anyone, at any age, could believe in Santa Claus.

And then, I went to Finland.

Bordering Sweden, Norway and Russia, this Northern European nation had been approaching the "it's time" spot on my bucket list. My husband Benjamin and I set aside one week to cover two regions: Lahti in western Lakeland, and Rovaniemi on the Arctic Circle.

Direct flights from LAX to Helsinki set us back 11 hours and \$650 on Finnair. It was our first exposure to the airline, named the best in Northern Europe and the safest and most sustainable in the world.

Getting around Finland is easy, with options by air, rail, road, and water. Timetables are Swiss-standard, and routes lit by the midnight sun make for dreamy exploration.

By car, we drove to the countryside village of Artjärvi, one hour from Helsinki and 30 minutes from Lahti. The star of this mid-way farm town is Töyrylä Manor, a 7-room bed-and-breakfast built in 1879.

Perched on 5 acres, the manor gushes golden era elegance, complete with crystal chandeliers and antiques from England and France. Considered the finest mansion in Finland, Töyrylä warmed our bellies with cognac-pork filet, honey marinated root vegetables, and limoncello-lingonberry-semifreddo.

Rich linens and elaborate breakfast felt as if we had broken tradition by not saving the best for last. But Finland delivered Nordic gifts by the day, starting with the landscape.

Emerald forests and glittering lakes welcomed us to Lahti, the gateway to Lakeland. This region is freckled with crystal waters that make up Finland's 188,000 lakes. Interwoven are rivers and islands where summer cottages are perched for retreat.

No wonder Finns are the happiest in the world. From outdoor adventures to purifying saunas, their nature-reigns mindset not only frees them from societal norms, but shields them from the grind. They prioritize silence, relaxation, and mental health. In a

country of 5.3 million people, they average one sauna per household.

We were hooked, starting with our hike at Lanu Sculpture Park. This protected forest doubles as a gallery with moss-covered works by environmental artist, Olavi Lanu. We plucked berries trailside, a common practice thanks to "Everyman's Right." This code allows all to roam freely (and forage) without permission.

At the base of the park sits Lahti Harbor, the former hub of the lumber industry until 1980. Today, the Vesijärvi waterfront serves as an urban center with cafes, restaurants, and the Sibelius Concert Hall — an architectural masterpiece of wood and industrial design.

Across the square, we perused Finnish carpentry at Pro Puu Gallery, lunched on arctic char at Restaurant Casseli, and embraced the local lifestyle of sport and leisure by paddleboarding Lake Vesijärvi and biking Salpausselkä ridge.

Mid-week locals were out and about, jogging, biking, kayaking, or chatting porch-side over coffee and butter-eye-buns at Kahvila Kariranta. This former railway station-turned-bakery was like a boardwalk magnet, luring us from fitness toward cinnamon buns and flaky croissants.

That evening we checked into Solo Sokos Hotel Lahden Seuraahuone on Lahti's main street. This city hotel is within walking distance of the train station and Ravintola Roux. Delivering our favorite meal of the trip, Chef Häkkinen creates Finnish and Nordic dishes with local ingredients inspired by the seasons. Beef brisket pastrami, fried pikeperch, poached leek-and-butter-sauce, all crescendo-ed with white chocolate mousse and celery sorbet. Ironically, my weakness fell on the sourdough rye and the hanging question: "Can we make this at home?"

Our answer came the following day during a stop at Kinnarin Tila — a 350-year-old grain farm and café. After a tour through the mill, we baked gingerbread cookies, shared blueberry pie, and purchased oat, barley, rye, and wheat to knead Finland into our SoCal lives.

If only we could have packaged the cottage verve that soaked into our souls at Päijänne National Park. Deep in the forest at the water's edge lies Lehmonkärki Resort, our launching point to some-50 islands scattered across Päijänne Lake.

Cutting through 6 miles of the world's cleanest water landed us at Kelvenne, an island blanketed in cinnamon rose and mezereon shrubs. After a micro-hike, we sat by the campfire and savored salmon-coconut soup, hot sourdough, and Karl Fazer chocolate.



It wasn't until we returned to Lehmonkärki Resort that we truly appreciated the Finnish lifestyle. Roosting on a ridge-framed cape are 17 log cabins, each with a private sauna and full kitchen where meals of pork loin and a dozen sides are served.

In addition to three waterfront saunas, guests can steam in private cabins and request the Herbal Sauna Experience. This life-giving treatment begins with herb hunting alongside Folk Healer, Maaria Alén.

With a heart of quietude, Maaria practices traditional cures based on Finnish tradition. For our footbath, she waltzed us through the forest to collect juniper, oak, and alder. Then, she smothered our skin in honey and made whisks out of silver birch wrapped in twine. With these mini-brooms, we were encouraged to rhythmically whisk our partner's back to relax the muscles and activate the nervous system. As our sauna guru sang a melodic folk song, Benjamin reminded me it was a whisk, not a whip.

Part Two of our Finnish feat started with a train ride to Helsinki, a \$150 flight to Rovaniemi, and a taxi to Arctic Light Hotel. Smack in the heart of Lapland, this urban hideaway is where Lappish heritage meets contemporary style, complete with reindeer pelts on every bed.

It's within walking distance of our favorite finds, including Frans&Chérie (where Benjamin reveled in reindeer filet), and the Arktikum museum where we learned the history and culture of Lapland.

Within that history are the endangered Sámi people — reindeer herders in Lapland's frontier who have dwindled to 8,000 — clinging onto their language and culture.

Museum exhibits opened our eyes to the story behind Santa, and how he settled in the capital of Lapland. During World War II, Germans demolished Rovaniemi, and out of the rubble came restoration and a post-war visit by Eleanor Roosevelt.

Nearly two decades earlier, Finnish radio host Markus Rautio claimed that Santa's home was at the Arctic Circle. As part of the First Lady's visit, she requested to see Santa's abode. A cabin was quickly constructed, which today is dwarfed by an entire village attracting 500,000 visitors annually.

But it's not just about Santa in Rovaniemi. It's about the taste of northern Lapland and trying new experiences. From reindeer pâté at Arctic Restaurant, to photo expeditions in search of Northern Lights, we went full Fin-ahead, capitalizing on every local discovery we could find.

Dogsledding was one of them. By 9 AM, we were at Bearhill Husky, home to 113 Alaskan huskies. For a glimpse of the off-season training, we played with pups and hopped aboard wheeled-sleds pulled by the pack. In winter, they sleigh across frozen lakes and snowy savannas at 20 mph.

After cocktails and waffles at Café Bar 21, we went floating with Safartica. Bobbing on a lake was never an aspiration, but I spent that night Googling pricing on 8 mm dry suits. Zipped head-to-toe, we drifted around the lake like aquatic astronauts. The sensation was a cross between an air mattress and compression blanket, as we made snow angels on the water.

For our last night, we checked into Santa's Igloos Arctic Circle, offering views of the Northern Lights and Midnight Sun from our bed. Opened in 2017, these glass-roofed igloos are within walking distance of Nova Skyland Restaurant where we shared morel soup, escargot, and reindeer sausages.

In Lapland, reindeer are like cattle, with over 200,000 roaming free, and many grazing the perimeter of Santa's Village. Ironically, no one acknowledged that Santa was fictitious.

My curiosity got the best of me, prodding workshop elves with, "So how many Santas do you have on the roster?" or "What's damage control like when someone yanks his beard?"

They wouldn't budge. So, after our visit to Santa's post office, we waited in line, wondering why he hadn't upgraded to email. It would certainly cut down on paper and postage on the half million letters he receives annually.

Benjamin and I rounded the corner, and there he was, in his red suit and bearded glory. Something came over me, and suddenly I was a bit star struck.

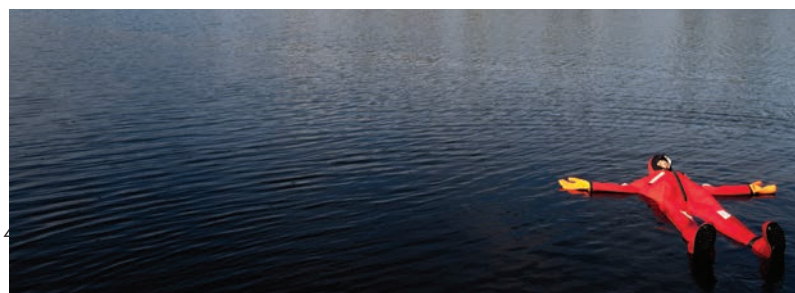
"Hello my dear," he patted a chair. "Have a seat."

We spoke of my home in San Diego, and the fact I hadn't sent him a wish list. He laughed, gently held my hand, and told me about the power of hope. What seemed like hours passed, as Santa shared stories of believers who had traveled across the world to ask for toys, love, healing, and peace.

There was a twinkle in his eye and an authenticity I couldn't ignore. We said our goodbyes and embarrassingly, I got a little choked up.

Brushing off the emotion, I turned toward Benjamin and mumbled, "Wow, they really nailed the casting. He's like the perfect Santa Claus."

In complete sincerity, an elf responded. "He is Santa Claus."



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