San Bernardino County Sun (http://www.sbsun.com)

San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors elects new chairman, vice chairman

By Ryan Hagen, The Sun

Tuesday, January 10, 2017

SAN BERNARDINO >> The county Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday, at its first meeting of the year, to elect Robert Lovingood as its chairman and Curt Hagman as vice chairman.

The two-year term follows James Ramos’ time as chairman in 2015 and 2016, during which Lovingood was vice chairman.

“I want to thank my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors for their support in electing me as chairman,” Lovingood said. “We have a strong Board of Supervisors, and I look forward to building on that cooperation with the board, the chief executive officer and county staff.”

Lovingood listed issues each of the four other supervisors have focused on — construction, homelessness, Ontario International Airport — saying he would work with those supervisors to accomplish the goals.

“I look forward to supporting each of these individuals in these endeavors,” said Lovingood, who was first elected in 2012 and re-elected in 2016 to represent a district that includes most of the High Desert, including the cities of Apple Valley, Hesperia, Victorville, Adelanto and Needles. “I’m going to ask for your support in those endeavors, because one person cannot do it all.”

Hagman, whose West End district includes Chino Hills, Chino, Ontario, Montclair and a portion of Upland, was elected in November 2014.

“I am truly honored to have been unanimously selected by my colleagues to serve as vice chairman of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors,” Hagman said. “We have accomplished much during my tenure, but there is still much more to be done to ensure San Bernardino County reaches its full potential for all its residents.”

The voter-approved county charter requires the board to elect a chairman at its first meeting in January following an election of supervisors. According to the charter, the chairman serves as the board’s general executive agent by presiding over its meetings, signing contracts approved by the board, and working with the chief executive officer to set the board’s agenda.


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Third District Supervisor James Ramos served two years as chairperson and has handed the gavel to Supervisor Robert Lovingood. (Contributed Photo)

By Michael P. Neufeld
San Bernardino, CA – For the past two years, Third District Supervisor James Ramos has chaired the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors. On Tuesday, Ramos handed the gavel to First District Supervisor Robert Lovingood. Lovingood has served as vice chairperson during Ramos’ tenure as chair.

Fourth District Supervisor Curt Hagman was selected as vice chairperson during the board’s annual reorganization.

The voter-approved County Charter requires the Board to elect a Chairman at its first meeting in January following an election of supervisors. According to the Charter, the Chairman serves as the Board’s general executive agent by presiding over meetings of the Board, signing contracts approved by the Board, and working with the Chief Executive Officer to set the Board’s agenda.

Robert Lovingood (Contributed Photo)

**CHAIRPERSON ROBERT LOVINGOOD**

“I want to thank my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors for their support in electing me as Chairman,” Lovingood said.

“We have a strong Board of Supervisors and I look forward to building on that cooperation with the Board, the Chief Executive Officer and County staff,” Lovingood added after accepting the gavel from Ramos.

**VICE CHAIRPERSON CURT HAGMAN**
Following his selection as the new vice chairperson, Hagman stated:

“Honored to receive the nomination of Supervisor Josie Gonzales for Vice Chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

“Thank you Board for your faith in me. I promise to lead by example and faithfully serve our wonderful county to the best of my abilities.”

OUTGOING CHAIRPERSON JAMES RAMOS

Supervisor Ramos — who represents the Big Bear area — issued the following statement:

“For two years, I have had the honor to serve the County of San Bernardino as the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

“The County is in a better position than it has been in the past. I feel proud to have chaired a Board that has led with integrity.”

“I wish the very best for our next Chairman, Supervisor Robert Lovingood. I look forward to working with him and the rest of the Board to build upon the progress we have made together.”

Comments are closed.
San Bernardino County Sun (http://www.sbsun.com)

San Bernardino shooter’s brother admits immigration fraud

Syed Raheel Farook pleads guilty to a federal felony charge in a sham-marriage scheme

By Brian Rokos, The Press-Enterprise

Tuesday, January 10, 2017

Syed Raheel Farook, the older brother of one of the San Bernardino terrorist attackers, admitted Tuesday to conspiring to commit immigration fraud by setting up his Russian sister-in-law in a sham marriage.

Farook, 31, of Corona pleaded guilty to one felony charge in U.S. District Court in Riverside, then left the courthouse without commenting. He remains free on bail ahead of his sentencing hearing, which Judge Jesus Bernal scheduled for Nov. 13.

Farook faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison, a $250,000 fine and three years’ supervised release, according to a news release from the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

A federal indictment said Farook knowingly made a false statement in support of an application for permanent residency for Mariya Chernykh, a Russian citizen and the sister of his wife, Tatiana Farook.

In 2014 — five years after she came to the U.S. on a three-month visa — Chernykh married Farook’s former neighbor, Enrique Marquez Jr.

Marquez is accused of illegally purchasing the weapons that Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, used in the Dec. 2, 2015, shooting at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino that killed 14 people and wounded 22 others. The shooters were killed by police hours later.

In the immigration case, Raheel Farook’s attorney, Ron M. Cordova, said outside court Tuesday that his client deserves less than the maximum punishment.

“This is not a crime of greed, this is not a crime of violence, and it has no relation to the horrific events of Dec. 2,” Cordova said. “What my client did was an act of love. He did it out of love for his wife and she in turn out of love for her sister.”

Cordova declined to say why Farook changed his plea to guilty.

Farook’s wife — who has a different attorney than her husband — and the sister-in-law still face charges in the case. Their trial is scheduled for March. Their attorneys did not return phone and email messages Tuesday.

How cases are connected

No one has been charged with helping Rizwan Farook and Malik plan or carry out the Inland Regional Center attack, but the investigation has uncovered other alleged crimes.

On Dec. 3, 2015, court documents allege, a suicidal Marquez called 911 to say his neighbor had used his gun in the attack. Investigators said Marquez eventually told them he and Rizwan Farook had plotted in 2011 and 2012 to attack Riverside City College and the 91 Freeway, but never carried out those plans.
Weapons Marquez purchased at that time were used on Dec. 2, 2015, authorities say, leading to a charge of conspiring to support terrorists. Marquez also was charged with immigration fraud, which is where Raheel Farook comes in.

Raheel Farook — who was born in Illinois, raised in Riverside, previously served in the U.S. Navy and was described by neighbors as a loan officer with a mail-order bride — married Tatiana Gigliotti in 2013.

Her sister, Chernykh, was in the U.S. illegally, authorities say.

In 2014, according to court documents, Raheel Farook and the Russian sisters arranged a “sham marriage” between Chernykh and Marquez, who was paid $200 a month to go along with the ruse.

Court documents also say the couple did not live together at the Farooks’ Corona home as they claimed; instead, Chernykh allegedly lived with her boyfriend in Ontario, while Marquez lived with his parents in Riverside.

Court documents said Raheel and Tatiana Farook claimed to have witnessed the Marquez-Chernykh wedding, then helped maintain the “illusion” that the two were living as a married couple through other acts of fraud.

Farook and the sisters were indicted in April.

What’s next

Tatiana Farook is charged with the same conspiracy count to which her husband pleaded guilty.

Chernykh also is charged with conspiracy, as well as perjury and making material false statements by stating on an immigration document that she and Marquez lived together.

Their trial is set for March 28, pending a status conference scheduled for March 13.

Marquez is scheduled to go to trial Sept. 28, after a status conference Sept. 11 on his charges of conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists, false statements in the acquisition of firearms, marriage fraud and misuse of visas, permits and other documents.

“Today’s guilty plea is the result of the thorough investigation into the brutal attack in San Bernardino that took the lives of 14 innocent Americans and tragically affected many more shooting victims and family members,” U.S. Attorney Eileen M. Decker said in a news release.

“Law enforcement and prosecutors in my office continue to seek justice for the victims and the entire community of San Bernardino by uncovering and prosecuting all of the criminal activity related to the terrible events of Dec. 2,” Decker said.
Defense attorney begins opening statement in Colonies corruption case

By Joe Nelson, The Sun

Tuesday, January 10, 2017

SAN BERNARDINO >> A $102 million settlement between San Bernardino County and Upland investor group Colonies Partners LP in 2006 was not induced by bribes, but was the result of years of litigation in which Colonies prevailed at every turn and the county faced damages three times the settlement amount, a defense attorney argued Tuesday in San Bernardino Superior Court.

During his opening statement in the Colonies corruption trial, Stephen Larson, who is representing defendant and Rancho Cucamonga developer Jeff Burum, said two Superior Court judges, during the civil litigation that spanned from March 2002 through November 2006, ruled in favor of Colonies Partners in 2003 and 2006, with the latter — now retired Judge Christopher Warner — issuing a scathing statement of intended decision in July 2006.

Warner’s 50-page decision asserted the county acted in bad faith by forcing Colonies Partners to build a 67-acre flood basin on its 434-acre property in Upland where it was building the Colonies Crossroads and Colonies at San Antonio shopping center and residential development, respectively.

The county had flood control easements on Colonies’ property and maintained they were sufficient to collect discharge from a newly built storm drain that channeled water onto Colonies’ property at the capacity of 80 million gallons per hour during a major storm. Colonies sued the county in March 2002 after it refused to make the flood control improvements.

The prolonged litigation halted development at the Colonies property, resulting in millions of dollars in losses, which became part of the ongoing and escalating damages the county faced — upwards of $300 million, Larson said.

“The county flood control district tried to hold up the Colonies development and make unreasonable demands,” Larson told the jury Tuesday.

The court determined the county’s antiquated easements, which were granted in 1933 and 1939, could not withstand the storm drain’s discharge, and that the county flood control district, not Colonies, was responsible for those regional flood control improvements.

Warner said in his decision that the county put both the public and Colonies’ property at risk of major flooding by not agreeing to build a catch basin to handle discharge from the 20th Street storm drain in Upland, built in conjunction with the extension of the 210 Freeway. The project was managed and overseen by the county flood control district.

The flood control district’s failure to make the flood control improvements essentially forced Colonies Partners to build the basin, which Warner characterized as an act of coercion.

“They were holding up everything, extorting the Colonies Partners,” Larson said of the county. “This was the quid pro quo: build that basin or no development.”
Larson argued the county was dealing with incompetent attorneys who were more concerned about making money than resolving the litigation and wanted the Colonies’ development to fail.

Burum stands accused of bribing former county Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Postmus and three other former top county officials in exchange for facilitating or approving the controversial settlement between the county and Colonies Partners, of which Burum is a co-managing partner.

Also charged in the case are former county Supervisor Paul Biane, former Assistant Assessor Jim Erwin, and Mark Kirk, former chief of staff for former county Supervisor Gary Ovitt.

All four defendants deny any wrongdoing.

The $400,000 in bribes, prosecutors allege, were funneled into five sham political action committees controlled by the supervisors who voted in favor of the settlement or members of their staff.

In March 2011, Postmus, initially a targeted defendant in the case, entered into a plea agreement with prosecutors, pleading guilty to 10 felonies in connection with the Colonies case and a companion corruption case in which he was convicted of abusing his elected position as county assessor for political gain.

Postmus agreed to testify against the four defendants at trial in exchange for all but two of the charges against him being dropped.

Larson said there is no evidence proving that the settlement was induced by bribes.

“There’s simply no quid pro quo,” Larson said.

He said the PAC contributions were neither bribes nor kickbacks, as the prosecution alleges, but totally legal and done to maintain Colonies’ alliances with local, pro-development politicians, whose support it depended on to support future development projects.

“They gave these politicians money with absolutely no strings attached,” Larson said of Colonies’ PAC contributions. “This was trying to repair damaged relations and engender support for future projects.”

Following Warner’s decision and encouraging of both parties to settle the litigation, attorneys for Colonies Partners and the county entered into several months of mediation sessions to try to settle the case, to no avail.

In November 2007, Colonies Partners’ counsel sent a letter to Warner, informing him of the failed negotiations and asking him to issue his permanent ruling in the litigation.

The county immediately responded to Warner, asking he not issue a final ruling and to encourage further settlement negotiations.

Finally, on Nov. 28, 2006, the Board of Supervisors approved the settlement, ending the nearly five years of heated legal battle. The settlement was subsequently validated by Superior Court Judge W. Robert Fawke in March 2007, making the settlement ironclad against any future legal challenge, Larson said.

Larson will conclude his opening statement this morning before Judge Michael A. Smith. The prosecution will begin calling its witnesses following Larson’s opening statement.
Rialto councilman apologizes for aborted Sanctuary City exploratory meeting

By Jim Steinberg, The Sun

Tuesday, January 10, 2017

RIALTO >> Newly elected City Councilman Rafael Trujillo apologized for attempting to hold a meeting at City Hall on Dec. 30 that was listed on Facebook as the first Rialto Sanctuary City Community Meeting.

His remarks were at the start of Tuesday night’s regularly scheduled City Council meeting. And they came prior to more than 20 speakers, most of whom blasted the effort.

In addition to the apology, Trujillo said that the attempted meeting was “a lesson learned.”

At the aborted Dec. 30 meeting, which was to take place inside the city administration building, which is closed on Fridays, were Trujillo and four other people, including newly elected Victorville Councilwoman Blanca Gomez, said Robin Hvidston, California coordinator for The Remembrance Project, a Texas-based organization that is a voice for the victims killed by illegal aliens.

The “sanctuary city” status is a gesture — largely symbolic — to protect immigrants who are in the United States illegally.

The Dec. 30 meeting did not occur, Hvidston said, in an interview outside council chambers Tuesday night.

Hvidston said she was among about 18 people who came to find out what was going to be said and to participate.

Trujillo called police and five officers responded.

“They were very courteous and professional,” Hvidston and others among the 18 said.

“I am reasonably sure that it is not the intent of Rialto to pursue being a sanctuary city,” said Hvidston, an Upland resident and executive director of We the People Rising, a Claremont-based group involved with immigration issues.

“But I think Trujillo should be censured. He needs to earn back the trust of Rialto residents,” she said.

There was no motion to pursue a path to censure Trujillo during the council meeting.

Under questioning from Councilman Ed Scott, City Manager Mike Story said that no council member had talked with him about the possibility of Rialto pursuing sanctuary city status, nor had anyone spoken to him about getting meeting space in City Hall for a committee dealing with that issue.

Luis Nolasco, 26, a Rialto resident, said he was among those who asked Trujillo to begin discussions about the possibility of Rialto becoming a sanctuary city.

In remarks to the city council, Nolasco said he was disappointed that the Rialto City Council was “caving in” to comments mostly from people who did not live in the city.
Members of The Remembrance Project came from cities as far away as Torrance, Brea and Orange.

Other people from the organization were at the Victorville City Council meeting, which was also being held Tuesday night, Hvidston said.
Supervisor John Benoit remembered for his humor, dedication to public

By JEFF HORSEMAN
2017-01-10 10:25:24

Speakers at Riverside County Supervisor John Benoit’s funeral Mass Tuesday, Jan. 10, paid tribute to a dedicated public servant who put principle above politics in a tireless desire to help his community.

But they also recalled a man who hawked popcorn at his beloved Angels home games in his youth and loved a good prank, flying and the latest technological gadgets.

More than 1,000 mourners filled the pews of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in La Quinta to say goodbye to Benoit, who died Dec. 26, one day shy of his 65th birthday. He had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer around Thanksgiving.

The 200-plus names on the dignitary list read like a Who’s Who of elected leaders, including Benoit’s fellow supervisors and supervisors from San Bernardino County. Also on the list were: State Sen. Jeff Stone, R-Temecula, Assembly Republican Leader Chad Mayes, of Yucca Valley, state Sen. Richard Roth, D-Riverside, and assembly members Eduardo Garcia, D-Coachella, and Melissa Melendez, R-Lake Elsinore.

RELATED: Before he died, Riverside County Supe John Benoit wrote to governor about possible replacement

Council members from Corona to Coachella also attended, along with UC Riverside Chancellor Kim Wilcox, California Republican Party Chairman Jim Brulte and senior officers with the California Highway Patrol, where Benoit rose to the rank of commander.

After retiring from law enforcement, Benoit embarked on a political career that took him from the Desert Sands school board to Sacramento, where he served as a Republican assemblyman and state senator.

When Supervisor Roy Wilson resigned due to failing health before his death in 2009, he asked that Benoit replace him. Then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed Benoit to serve the remainder of Wilson’s term, and voters elected Benoit to four-year terms in 2010 and 2014.

As supervisor, Benoit represented the Fourth District, which includes more than 400,000 residents and stretches from the Coachella Valley to the Arizona border.

The Rev. Howard Lincoln remembered Benoit as a devoted Catholic who took pride in bringing paved streets to the rural desert community of Mecca and finding new homes for impoverished residents of the dilapidated Duroville mobile home park. Benoit talked about helping people right up to his death, Lincoln said.

John Plocher, Benoit’s friend for 50 years, shared a more personal side of the supervisor, with whom he attended Notre Dame High School in Riverside. Benoit, Plocher said, had world-class speed, as evidenced by how fast he ran away from priests after he toilet-papered their residence as a prank.
Kay Hazen, who knew Benoit for 25 years, described him as a caring, consistent and honorable leader who saw the best in people “even in their worst moments.”

Former Assemblyman Guy Houston, who was Benoit’s roommate for a time in Sacramento, recalled when Benoit learned Spanish to better serve his constituents and joked about his “flying money pit” of a private airplane, which he used to commute to and from the state capital. Houston wore Benoit’s Jerry Garcia tie to the service.

Michelle DeArmond, Benoit’s supervisory chief of staff, recounted a tale from new Supervisor Chuck Washington, who came to the Board of Supervisors in 2015 expecting to dislike Benoit. As a Temecula councilman, Washington opposed a proposed quarry planed for outside the city while Benoit supported the project.

“Much to Chuck Washington’s surprise, he quickly grew to deeply respect and even emulate John Benoit,” who helped acclimate Washington to his new job, DeArmond said. “(Benoit) won over people wherever he went.”

Benoit’s son, Ben, said his father instilled in him the importance of public service. Now a Wildomar councilman, Ben Benoit described growing up with Saturday mornings spent working on fire trucks at the department where his Dad volunteered.

“I knew him as dad,” Ben Benoit said. “But he had so many other titles ... He had many titles and he wanted them for one reason – to give back to his community.”

John Benoit, who was a St. Francis parishioner, is survived by Sheryl, his wife of almost 40 years; two children, Sarah and Ben; two grandchildren and two brothers.

By law, Gov. Jerry Brown has the sole authority to appoint someone to serve the remainder of Benoit’s term, which runs through the end of 2018. The governor is under no timetable to make a pick.

RELATED

Riverside County Supervisor John Benoit dies at 64

Local lawmakers react to John Benoit's death
County supervisors create a new office that would help immigrants receive assistance

By Adam Elmahrek, Maya Lau

JANUARY 10, 2017, 9:25 PM

After a public hearing marked by angry clashes between supporters of President-elect Donald Trump and pro-immigrant activists, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Tuesday approved the creation of a new office that would help immigrants receive county assistance.

The Office of Immigrant Affairs would provide a “one-stop shop” for those seeking help, according to a statement released by Supervisor Hilda Solis, who along with Supervisor Sheila Kuehl co-sponsored the motion creating the office.
It hasn’t been determined yet exactly what services the office would offer, but Solis’ office said it would help immigrants find legal representation to fight deportation cases and assist them in identifying other social services. A detailed plan — with a budget and staffing levels — is expected to be proposed later this year.

“I want to remind our communities that the county will continue to stand against hate and provide exceptional aid for our immigrant individuals,” Solis said in a statement. “This is one of the many steps we are taking towards protecting the immigrant communities that are so essential to Los Angeles County.”

Tuesday’s action came weeks after the county set aside $3 million to a legal assistance fund for immigrants facing deportation. That funding is part of a joint effort between the county and L.A. City Hall, where leaders have also vowed to resist any federal plan to deport millions of people. The city is committing $2 million to the fund.

The hearing reflected how divisive the issue is, even in a county with many immigrants and which overwhelming voted against Trump. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that 1 million of the 11 million residing in the country illegally live in L.A. County.

During his presidential campaign, Trump promised to deport millions of immigrants in the country illegally and to erect a border wall thousands of miles long. His populist candidacy energized many from the Republican Party’s base, while inspiring fear and protests from those opposed to his run for the presidency.

His election stunned many, and soon cities, counties and states with largely Democratic voters, including L.A. County, promised to declare their jurisdictions as sanctuaries for immigrants.

At Tuesday’s board meeting, supporters of Trump and those who back immigrant rights shouted complaints from the audience about the failings of county government, though for different reasons. Trump supporters accused supervisors of harboring and abetting people violating federal immigration law, while immigrant rights
activists called repeatedly for the county to end all cooperation with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Some Trump supporters said immigrants had brought drugs and violence into their neighborhoods and should be deported.

“Legal assistance for illegals is one of the most insane statements I can think of,” said Betty Retama, a member of the pro-Trump groups known as We The People Rising and America First Latinos.

Immigration activists praised the county’s move to create an immigration affairs office, calling it an important effort at stopping “Trump’s deportation machine.”

“Despite their being loud, they’re on the wrong side of history,” said Andres Kwon in response to outbursts from Trump supporters. “We need you to be on the right side of history.”

Board chair Mark Ridley-Thomas grew so frustrated by discord in the audience that he ordered every member of the public out of the board chambers, and convened a closed session. “I think we’ve had more than enough,” he said as he had the room cleared.

When supervisors reopened the public session, nearly everyone had left.

The motion passed 4-1.

As part of the motion, the board moved to have the county’s civilian oversight commission oversee the Sheriff’s Department’s interactions with immigrants and make sure the department is adhering to its own immigrant-friendly policies. It also directed the Office of Education to plan for providing bilingual information on resources and rights of immigrant students to a “free public education, regardless of their immigration status.”

Supervisor Kathryn Barger voted against the creation of the Office of Immigrant Affairs and the proposal for the Office of Education.

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California's budget deficit is back, Gov. Jerry Brown says

Unrelenting rain and snow hammer Northern California; death toll rises
L.A. County supervisors vote to expand sheriff's mental health teams

By Maya Lau

JANUARY 11, 2017, 3:00 AM

The Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department has long had specially trained teams to de-escalate confrontations with people who have severe mental illness, but after two decades, the agency has struggled to deploy mental health responders at all times of day or night because of funding and staffing shortages.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors moved to fix that problem on Tuesday, voting unanimously to expand the number of employees assigned to the department’s Mental Evaluation Teams so they can respond 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and to find ways to pay for the mission.
The Sheriff’s Department, which was the first law enforcement agency in the Los Angeles area to create the teams in 1993, plans to add 25 staff members and needs about $4.7 million in funding for the first year, according to a department memo to the Board of Supervisors. The increase would more than double the number of Mental Evaluation Teams from 10 to 23 and create a “triage help desk” for residents to call during a psychological crisis.

The teams pair deputies with mental health clinicians and respond to calls that require special handling of mentally ill people who are threatening others or being disruptive. The hope is that by routing those individuals to psychological services rather than jail, patients will get the treatment they need and improve instead of cycling in and out of the criminal justice system.

The expansion comes at a time when mental illness is increasingly seen as a medical issue that shouldn’t be solely the responsibility of law enforcement officers. Sheriff’s Department officials said last year that 911 calls involving people with mental illnesses have grown 55% since 2010.

“It’s not about putting someone away and throwing away the key, it’s about letting someone who’s having a mental health episode who committed a crime get help,” Supervisor Kathryn Barger, who co-sponsored the motion with Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, said after the initiative passed.

Sheriff Jim McDonnell said the Mental Evaluation Teams have diverted 99% of the 1,200 people they encountered away from the criminal justice system over the past year.

“This will cause a reduction in calls for service,” he said. “All in all, this is an opportunity for us to step up, to do what’s right and what’s compassionate. This is a great step forward. The demand outweighs the need.”
Law enforcement officers are often the first to arrive when a mentally ill person is acting disruptively, yet few have formal training in defusing such situations.

The mentally ill are especially at risk for violent encounters with law enforcement. In Los Angeles County in 2014, nearly 30% of the incidents where sheriff’s deputies used physical force while on patrol involved someone with a mental illness.

With so few of the mental health teams on duty at a given time, sheriff’s deputies in the more than 4,000 square miles patrolled by the Sheriff’s Department often didn’t bother to call, because it could take hours for a team to arrive.

The plan approved on Tuesday meets a recommendation made by Los Angeles County Dist. Atty. Jackie Lacey in 2015 that called for the number of Sheriff’s Department Mental Evaluation Teams to grow to 23.

The matter was met with little opposition on Tuesday.

Mental health advocates, such as Brittney Weissman of the National Alliance on Mental Illness’ Los Angeles County Council, praised the move, saying it would make a significant difference for families who are dealing with a mental health crisis.

“The peace of mind, hope for recovery and confidence in the system skyrockets when they see a mental evaluation team arrive as compared to a law-enforcement-only team,” she said.

Tuesday’s motion also called on the county’s chief executive to look for various ways to pay for the initiative.

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For more news on the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, follow me on Twitter:
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This article is related to: Mental Health, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Mark Ridley-Thomas, L.A. County Sheriff's Department
Less than four years after declaring California’s budget was balanced for the foreseeable future, Gov. Jerry Brown on Jan. 10 said the state is now projected to run a $1.6-billion deficit by next summer. (Jan. 10, 2017)

By John Myers

January 10, 2017, 2:50 PM  REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

Less than four years after declaring California’s budget balanced for the foreseeable future, Gov. Jerry Brown on Tuesday said the state is projected to run a $1.6-billion deficit by next summer — a noticeable shift in the state’s fiscal stability that could worsen under federal spending cuts championed by President-elect Donald Trump.

“The trajectory of revenue growth is declining,” Brown said in unveiling his $179.5-billion plan for the fiscal year that begins in July.

The governor’s sober assessment comes on the heels of several months of lagging tax revenue collections, a change in the state’s fortunes that could stifle his fellow Democrats’ call for additional spending and give fuel to
Republican demands for additional cuts.

Brown’s budget advisors lowered the official tax revenue forecast, in part, because of slower than expected growth in wages. They also reduced expectations for sales and corporate taxes because of broader national trends.

Brown proposed to address the deficit primarily by slowing the growth in spending on public schools by $1.7 billion, a change that brings funding down to the minimum required by formulas enshrined in California’s Constitution. The governor also proposed scrapping $1.5 billion worth of spending ideas left over from last year’s budget negotiations, including higher subsidies for child-care programs and awarding new college scholarships to California students from middle-class families.

“To manage unreliability requires prudence,” Brown said of his decisions to address the projected budget shortfall.

The governor’s fiscal blueprint is the ceremonial first pitch in Sacramento’s annual budget writing season, and, as such, the details will shift in coming months to address changing fiscal conditions. That could include any effort by the nation’s ruling Republicans to rethink any of the $105 billion in federal funding promises the state expects to receive for a variety of services.

The most consequential of those is the $16.1-billion subsidy for Medi-Cal, the program offering healthcare to the state’s most needy, provided through the Affordable Care Act. Those funds have helped the state add more than 3.8 million people to the Medi-Cal system, a network of providers that reaches one in every three Californians.

Republican leaders in Congress and the president-elect have vowed to repeal the law championed by President Obama, though they have yet to identify when or how that will happen. That uncertainty is why Brown’s new budget plan does not officially lay out a path forward, though the governor made it clear on Tuesday that he thinks GOP leaders should rethink their political promises in regard to Obamacare.

“That’s very bold and, I think, a move that isn’t very consistent with decency,” the governor said Tuesday.

He also offered national leaders some advice as they weigh the merits of various federal subsidies.

“I don’t think this country needs any more divisive kinds of moves that divide the poor and the rich, split the middle class and all those other things that will be the result if the rhetorical thrust, as suggested in the last few weeks, becomes the operational reality in Washington,” Brown said.

Gov. Jerry Brown often gets his way when it comes to tax revenue forecasts, and that's a big deal »

But the governor offered a dash of his own brand of raw politics Tuesday by asking legislators to approve an extension of California’s system for buying and trading greenhouse gas pollution credits. That cap-and-trade
program faces an uncertain future beyond 2020, as business groups have challenged its legality in court.

On Tuesday, Brown proposed that the Legislature officially reauthorize the program — which would require a supermajority vote in both houses — and hinted that he might otherwise block the spending of $2.2 billion in proceeds from the auctions of those credits.

"Given the fact that the federal government is going in the opposite direction," Brown said of the climate change debate, “I would think that Californians want to strengthen their own commitment.”

Advocates for social services, though, saw the budget plan as lacking any new strength for the state’s most needy.

"This is just a very conservative budget that really doesn't do anything to reduce poverty in the state of California,” said Mike Herald of the Western Center on Law and Poverty, who pointed to a lack of new money for welfare assistance efforts or affordable housing.

The governor's budget also offers less than expected for backers of Proposition 56, last year’s tobacco tax increase earmarked to boost healthcare funding. While Brown pegs the tax’s infusion of new money at $1.2 billion, it is offset by overall sagging tax revenues, and therefore, unlikely to boost the reimbursement rates sought by doctors who treat Medi-Cal patients.

Democrats, in general, sounded positive notes about the governor’s proposal. One key source of early criticism, though, was his plan to phase out the scholarships offered to middle-class students attending University of California and Cal State campuses. The budget proposes to renew scholarships for 37,000 current recipients but offers no new assistance beyond that.

Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon (D-Paramount) said the plan, coupled with proposed tuition increases, would be unfair.

“We must work to keep college affordable for California students,” he said, “and I will not support burdening them with higher fees and greater student debt.”

In all, Brown’s budget continues a long trend toward allowing additional spending while restraining the political desires of Democrats to do more. And while it doesn’t spell out a specific need to respond to changes pushed by Trump and congressional Republicans that are on the horizon, the governor made clear that all budget decisions in Sacramento are in some way subject to the national debate.

“That’s why we’re going to have to hold on to our hat here,” he said. “It’s going to be a rough ride.”

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State government

JAN. 10, 2017, 5:05 P.M.

California counties will get stuck with a $622-million bill as the governor cancels a healthcare pilot program

John Myers

County officials across the state on Tuesday criticized Gov. Jerry Brown’s move to cancel a program that attempted to streamline health services for seniors and low-income families, a decision that will hit locals with a $622.6-million price tag beginning this summer.
The plan, unveiled as part of Brown’s state budget, seeks to cancel a 2012 program called the Coordinated Care Initiative. The effort allowed Medi-Cal, Medicare and the state's in-home support services to be offered through a single delivery system in hopes of reducing costs.

But the program required a finding by the governor's finance officials that it was cost-effective, which Brown's new budget said did not turn out to be the case.

A key part of the program was that the state, not locals, bargained with labor unions over wages for in-home care workers. The budget proposal cancels the state's role in those wage negotiations and also shifts other costs back to counties.

"This would be devastating to counties all over the state," said Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson, president of the California State Assn. of Counties executive committee. "We undoubtedly would have to make cuts in other vital social services to cover these costs."

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See The List
Majority of police in the U.S. say their jobs have gotten harder

By Nina Agrawal

January 11, 2017, 12:05 AM

Police officers in the U.S. think their job has gotten harder of late, according to a new report by the Pew Research Center.

The public outcry over high-profile police shootings of black Americans, coupled with a recent uptick in fatal shootings of police, has left the majority of officers feeling more concerned for their personal safety and more reluctant to carry out some of their duties, according to the report, titled “Behind the Badge.”
“The fact that these incidents have brought so much attention to their job has actually made it harder to execute in certain circumstances,” said Kim Parker, director of social trends research at Pew and a lead author on the report, which drew its conclusions from a survey of a nationally representative sample of 8,000 policemen and women.

Over the last few years, police killings of black men have given rise to protests across the country — the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., Freddie Gray in Baltimore and Eric Garner in New York, to name a few.

There was also a surge in fatal shootings of police in 2016 compared with the previous year. In July, five police officers were shot and killed in an ambush in Dallas and three officers were killed in Baton Rouge, La.

About a year and a half earlier, two New York Police Department officers were shot and killed while parked in a patrol car in Brooklyn.

On Monday, an officer in Orlando, Fla., was shot dead after she attempted to chase down a murder suspect at a Wal-Mart; a second officer died in a motorcycle crash in the manhunt that ensued.

Though research has been conducted on the public’s attitude toward police in the wake of these events, showing decreased confidence and racial divides, less attention has been devoted to the attitudes of police officers themselves, said Parker — a deficiency she and her team set out to correct.
What they found was that three-quarters of officers said that relations with the black community had become more tense and they were now less willing to stop and question suspects and to use force when necessary. More than 90% of officers said their colleagues worried more about their personal safety, with that trend having begun even before the July incidents in Dallas and Baton Rouge.

“Those are really high percentages that you don’t always see in opinion surveys,” Parker said.

But experts who study policing and race say they aren’t surprised.

“Police officers are under greater scrutiny — the public is paying more attention,” said Jack Glaser, a social psychologist and professor of public policy at UC Berkeley. He said ubiquitous recording devices and social media had increased the public’s awareness of such shootings in recent years.

Similarly, while officer fatalities were slightly up in 2016, they remained far below record highs set in the 1970s. “For the average officer their job has not gotten categorically more dangerous in the last year or two, but it has gotten incrementally more dangerous,” Glaser said, and “it’s very likely that it is a real result of this tension that has occurred.”

In addition to real and perceived threats and public perception, there’s also rising awareness among officers themselves of their own biases and a desire to combat those. “That’s an extra load on them that makes the job all the more difficult,” Glaser said. “It’s appropriate, but it is an additional challenge.”

If the outcome is fewer police stops, Glaser said that could be a good thing.

“These suspicion-based stops and searches ... are very high discretion events. In most of the data on policing they are overwhelmingly not fruitful,” he said.

Delores Jones-Brown, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, said “suspicious” had too often become code language for “black” or “minority.”

“There is a subtext that says [police officers are] less willing to stop a suspicious black person,” Jones-Brown said of the report’s findings.

“If I’m a person who lives in a high-crime community, then I’m going to be annoyed and elated,” she said. “I’m going to be annoyed that the failure of the police to stop a suspicious person who might in fact be a serious violent offender ... leaves me at risk for harm from that person.”

“Black officers recognize that while they are police officers some hours of the day, they are black people 24 hours a day.
Jones-Brown said police needed to be more discerning in communities of color, rather than blanketing them with stops and searches or categorically avoiding stops and searches out of fear of public criticism.

Pew also found that there are significant disparities between white and black officers in their attitudes and experience on the job. About half as many black officers as white and Latino officers characterize police relations with the black community as excellent or good, and black officers are much less likely to say the country has made sufficient progress on racial equality. They also tend to worry that officers won’t deliberate long enough before taking action in a tense moment and are less likely to have discharged a firearm during their service.

“Black officers recognize that while they are police officers some hours of the day, they are black people 24 hours a day, and they and their families are at greater risk,” Jones-Brown said.

Glaser agreed, noting that he knows many black officers who give their teenage sons the same talk black civilians give theirs. “It’s ‘be careful with the police,’” Glaser said.

He added that social psychology predicts that members of a particular group are more likely to relate to that group, see other members as individuals and be less threatened by them.

Pew researchers also found a significant divergence between police officers’ attitudes and those of the public with regard to fatal police-citizen encounters.

For example, most U.S. adults (60%) believe that the deaths of black Americans at the hands of police in recent years are symptomatic of a broader societal problem, while two-thirds of police officers view those deaths as isolated incidents. Similarly, about two-thirds of the public believes that the protests that have followed these incidents arose out of a genuine desire to hold the police accountable, but 9 in 10 officers believed they arose out of anti-police bias.

“They’re both right and they’re both wrong,” Glaser said. “There is discrimination in American policing and there are going to be biases in how people perceive things.”

He added, “What’s a more critical concern is whether there’s an absence of trust.”

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If a 2016 Pew survey of public attitudes toward police is any guide, the outlook isn’t very good. Only about half of all black adults say local police do an excellent or good job combating crime, compared with 80% of all white adults. And even fewer black adults — 1 in 3 — say police in their communities do an excellent or good job of using appropriate force on suspects, treating all racial and ethnic minorities equally and holding officers accountable when misconduct occurs.
“Where we are today is a place where we can’t reach consensus on what is and is not acceptable police behavior,” Jones-Brown said.

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