Heavy equipment destroyed in a gas line explosion that also left a crater near Newberry Springs on Sunday, Oct. 1. (Photo courtesy of San Bernardino County Fire Department)

By GAIL WESSON | gwesson@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: October 4, 2017 at 7:21 pm | UPDATED: October 4, 2017 at 11:18 pm
The cause of a Sunday, Oct. 1, natural gas transmission line explosion and fire near Newberry Springs remains under investigation and customer service has not been affected, according to a Southern California Gas Co. spokeswoman.

The gas company “is working with regulators to investigate the cause of the incident,” spokeswoman Christine Detz wrote in an email.

The pipeline segment crosses federal Bureau of Land Management land about five miles from the desert community of Newberry Springs, off the 40 Freeway east of Barstow.

The 30-inch natural gas line caught fire, exploded, destroyed heavy equipment and left a crater in an incident just before 11 a.m.

Gas company crews were on site at the time performing work on the pipeline. Crews “noticed a release of gas and safely evacuated the area prior to a break” in the line, Detz wrote in an email. No one was injured.

Details, including whether equipment may have had a role in the incident, are part of the investigation.

Valves were closed automatically and remotely to isolate the section of pipeline when a sudden pressure drop was detected.

Tags: accidents, Top Stories Sun

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**I Wore the Same Dress For a Week...And No One Noticed**

By MM.LaFleur

The challenge: wear my favorite dress to work every single day for an entire workweek. Would anyone notice?

Gail Wesson

Gail Wesson has covered news for The Press-Enterprise for decades, mostly in Riverside County, with occasional forays across the county line. Datelines on her stories span the county – from the state agricultural inspection station in Blythe, to the Circle in Corona, the Stringfellow Acid Pits in Mira Loma, Temecula before there were traffic signals and to the highest point in the county, Mount San Jacinto. Most of her time has been spent covering local governments or how county, state or federal government affects communities. Breaking news, from floods to wild land fires and the consequences of disasters, watchdog reporting, criminal courts coverage and environmental explainers on water rights/supply issues and why bald eagles and San Bernardino kangaroo rats should be saved are icing on her news cake.

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OPINION

Too many locally living in “distressed” communities

A former potato processing plant is seen here near railroad tracks where they cross Oakland Avenue early Wednesday, March 14, 2007 in Hemet. A Hemet Transit Village, featuring high-density condos and urban amenities, is envisioned for the area.

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD | opinion@langnews.com |
PUBLISHED: October 5, 2017 at 8:11 am | UPDATED: October 5, 2017 at 8:23 am

Reflecting the vast inequities across the state, 27.8 percent of Californians live in prosperous communities while 11.7 percent of Californians live in “distressed” ZIP codes, according to the Economic Innovation Group’s 2017 Distressed Communities Index.

“America’s elite ZIP codes are home to a spectacular degree of growth and prosperity,” the report explained. “However, outside of those top communities, economic well-being is often tenuous at best.”

To chart the disparity between communities, the think tank assessed communities using the Distressed Communities Index, which incorporates the factors like the percentage of the population 25 and older without a high school diploma or equivalent, housing vacancy and the percentage of unemployed adults between 25-64. Based on these factors, scores were assigned to units, like ZIP codes, with the highest one-fifth of communities considered “prosperous” and the lowest one-fifth deemed “distressed.”
Locally, none of the communities in Orange County were deemed “distressed,” with 38.4 percent of residents living in “prosperous” ZIP codes. Though dealing with significantly lower vacancy rates than the national average, 3.7 percent versus 8.3 percent, by almost all other metrics, Orange County was better off.

In Los Angeles County, 12.8 percent of residents lived in distressed ZIP codes. Despite higher levels of poverty and much lower vacancy rates than the national average, 22.8 percent of county residents lived in prosperous ZIP codes.

The Inland Empire had much higher proportions of people living in distressed areas — 20.6 percent in San Bernardino County and 15.2 percent in Riverside County. Whereas 19.2 percent of Riverside County residents lived in prosperous communities, only 12.6 percent in San Bernardino County did.

Inland residents were noted to have higher obesity rates, lower life expectancy and higher mortality rates associated with substance abuse and mental health disorders compared to people in O.C. and L.A. In the latter category, both Inland counties and O.C. experienced higher mortality rates than the national average.

All four counties had a higher percentage of adults 25 and older without a high school diploma. Three of the four, except O.C., had higher poverty rates than the national average.

Such data are useful in identifying opportunities to improve and should be used to focus attention where it is needed.
San Bernardino County Assistant Fire Chief Tom Marshall had just fallen asleep when he received the call about 11 p.m. Sunday about the mass shooting in Las Vegas and told that some of his fellow firefighters were among the injured.

On call and tasked with responding to any critical incidents that night, Marshall sprung from bed and turned on the television. As he dressed, he watched in horror the chaos unfolding at the Route 91 Harvest country music festival, where gunman Stephen Paddock fired a volley of bullets into the crowd from a 32nd-floor window of the Mandalay Bay hotel, killing 59 people and wounding 527 other concertgoers.

Marshall hopped into his county-issued Ford Explorer and began the 2 1/2-hour drive from his Lake Havasu City home to Vegas.

“While I’m en route, I’m notifying my bosses of the incident and what my intentions were when I got there,” Marshall said in a telephone interview Wednesday. He said he was blasting out 911 texts to fire department personnel to get a read on how many of them were in Las Vegas.
“I’m finding out not only county fire personnel were injured, but family members had been injured, as well as members from other local fire departments who had people at Route 91,” Marshall said.

Among the dead and wounded were six San Bernardino County employees, including Devore firefighter Michael Kordich, who was shot in the right forearm while trying to save the life of a concertgoer standing next to him who was felled by gunfire.

Marshall’s first order of business when he arrived at Las Vegas was locating the roughly 18 to 20 county fire department personnel and their family members, check their conditions and make sure they were provided for. His first stop: Sunrise Hospital & Medical Center, which was closest to where the shooting occurred.

He walked into the ER and was overwhelmed by what he saw.

“The hallways were lined with people. There were no seats. People were sitting on the floors with various wounds,” Marshall said. “That night, I went to all six major hospitals in Las Vegas, and it was a recurring theme at all of them. They were just overwhelmed with patients.”

It took about 10 minutes for Marshall to track down Kordich and observe his injuries. The bullet pierced Kordich’s right forearm, about an inch below the elbow, and exited the opposite side.

“I could see that he obviously had a severe injury to his arm. It would require extensive treatment,” said Marshall. “The bleeding had been controlled by then, but all his clothing, which was lying on the ground, was just saturated with blood.”

Kordich underwent another surgery about 8 a.m. Wednesday and remained hospitalized, Marshall said.

Marshall’s next stop was Desert Springs Hospital Medical Center to check on injured firefighter and Lake Havasu city resident Kurt Fowler of the Desert Hills Fire District in Mohave County, AZ. He was shot in the leg, Marshall said.

After learning Fowler had been stabilized, Marshall said his next stop was University Medical Center to visit the daughter of a county fire engineer who had been injured in the shooting.

“She had eight different wounds that turned out to be shrapnel wounds from fragmented bullets,” Marshall said, adding, “They were all soft tissue injuries, so no surgery.”

From there, Marshall reported to the incident command post near Mandalay Bay to offer any assistance that was needed, but Las Vegas authorities told him they had it handled.

So Marshall made another round at the hospitals, and when he returned to Spring Valley Hospital Medical Center at 6:30 a.m. Monday, he learned that Karen Smerber, the wife of recently retired San Bernardino County Fire Capt. Matt Smerber, had attended the concert with a friend, was injured, and had been admitted.

“She had a through-and-through gunshot in her abdomen. It entered her right side and exited her left,” Marshall said, adding that Matt Smerber, when notified about the incident, “made it in record time from home to Las Vegas.”

As of Wednesday, Smerber remained hospitalized, but was expected to make a full recovery, Marshall said.

Marshall said Sunday’s shooting isn’t going to deter him from doing what he enjoys doing. He refuses to live in fear.

“This is an event I had gone to for the last three years,” he said of the Route 91 Harvest festival. “I had back surgery in June, so we didn’t buy tickets this year. But last year, I was there with my wife, daughter and granddaughter.”

He remains conflicted about his absence from Sunday’s event, or at least prior to his arrival following the shooting.

“The part of me that’s a family man who wants to take care of my family tells me I’m glad I wasn’t there, but the first responder part of me tells me I wish I was there to help,” Marshall said.

He said he and his family plan to attend a Kid Rock concert next month in Laughlin, Nevada, and next April it’s off to the Country Thunder Festival in Florence, Arizona.

But he said he’ll never forget what he encountered Sunday.

“It was very, very dramatic, very disturbing – like nothing I’ve seen in my 27 years as a firefighter,” Marshall said.

Tags: Las Vegas mass shooting, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories PE, Top Stories Sun
My Father Was Killed in a Mass Shooting. Don't Tell Me It's Too Soon To Talk About Gun Violence.
The daughter of a victim of the San Bernardino shooting on why we can't wait to demand action.
By Tina Meins
Oct 4, 2017

I woke up on Monday to the horrific realization that hundreds of families across the country would soon receive news that a loved one had been killed or injured in Las Vegas, after a gunman shot and killed 58 people and injured hundreds more. This is personal for me. I experienced the same heartbreak when my father, Damian Meins, was killed, along with 13 of his co-workers, on December 2, 2015, in San Bernardino, California.

The news this week both broke my heart and made me outraged – not just at lawmakers in Washington, who continuously refuse to act, but also at the endless stream of talking heads, who say that the fight to prevent gun violence is a hopeless one. That’s simply not true.

We’ve seen time and again that everyday Americans can make a difference on this issue. It hasn’t been in Congress, but in the states – like what happened Rhode Island just weeks ago, when the legislature passed a bill to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers after years of work from advocates, making it the 24th state to pass legislation to keep guns away from domestic abusers since the Sandy Hook shooting shocked many
Americans into action. No one said this would be easy. But we are making progress.

My father died standing by a Christmas tree. He was on a break from a mandatory work training event when another co-worker and his wife, who had pledged allegiance to the terrorist group ISIS, burst through the doors, and began shooting. In seconds, my dad’s life was over, and the lives of my family members and all his other loved ones changed forever.

Our family was small but extremely close. My dad was an intelligent, funny, kind man, who was always generous with his time. Whether he was mowing a neighbor’s lawn, helping a friend move or taking care of a sick family member, he was always willing to be of service. He was the best person I have ever known, and I miss him every single day.

Tina Mein speaks at a press conference held by Democratic senators calling for action on gun violence on June 16, 2016.

I’ve been living with grief and frustration for nearly two years. Adding insult to injury, I have watched as some of our lawmakers in Congress work to further weaken our nation’s gun laws. Soon after my father’s death, I watched as legislators in the pocket of the gun lobby said it was out of respect for families like mine that we shouldn’t be talking about gun laws yet. My dad was murdered with a gun. Weeks later, my mother and sister and I were walking the halls of Congress, talking to anyone who would listen about gun violence.
There is no such thing as talking about gun violence too soon, there is only too late.

Just this week, Congress had planned to push the SHARE Act – an NRA-backed proposal that could make mass shootings even more deadly by making it easy for anyone, including convicted felons and domestic abusers, to buy a gun silencer without a background check. Imagine how much worse things in Las Vegas could have been if it had been harder for first responders to tell where the gunshots were coming from.

Here’s the thing - if it were true that our voices don’t matter, the SHARE Act would be law by now. The NRA has had the Congress and the president it wants for ten months now, but the American people (including the majority of NRA members) want sensible gun laws. It’s because of constant calls, letters, and social media messages that legislators know that their constituents are watching and care about what they do next.

Soon, the cameras will leave Las Vegas, just like they left San Bernardino. The families, brokenhearted, will be left trying to figure out what comes next, knowing that nothing will ever be the same. And meanwhile, after offering thoughts and prayers, Congress will try to move on – and will likely go back to the NRA’s dangerous agenda. We can’t let them.

This is about the country we want to be – are we comfortable with a gun homicide rate 25 times the average of other developed nations? Are we happy with 93 Americans shot and killed every day? Are we OK with people risking their lives to go to work, or church, or the movies, or a concert? Inaction is a decision. Thoughts and prayers are simply not enough; we need action, and we need it now.

Join your local Moms Demand Action chapters, text REJECT to 64433 to tell your member of Congress to reject the NRA’s agenda, and vote for people who supports commonsense gun laws. Please do not wait until it is your phone that rings with devastating news. One more is too many.

*Tina Meins’s father, Damian Meins, was shot and killed during the San Bernardino mass shooting. She is a member of the Everytown Survivor Network.*
Ontario police officer walks days after being shot in the head in Las Vegas mass shooting

Ontario Police Officer Michael Gracia and his fiancee Summer Clyburn were wounded in the Las Vegas shooting on Sunday. (Courtesy photo)

By BEATRIZ E. VALENZUELA | bvalenzuela@scng.com
PUBLISHED: October 4, 2017 at 1:55 pm | UPDATED: October 4, 2017 at 6:08 pm
Only three days after Ontario police Officer Michael Gracia was shot in the head in the Las Vegas mass shooting Sunday night that left 58 victims dead, a photo posted to Twitter showed the 24-year-old walking down the hallway of a Las Vegas hospital.
“Officer Gracia from Ontario Pd, after being shot in the head, is walking. #VegasStrong #godisgood,” read the post from San Bernardino County sheriff’s legislative liaison, Sgt. Shelisa Williams.

The photo shows him walking hand-in-hand with his fiancee, Summer Clyburn, who was also wounded at the Route 91 Harvest country music festival, confirmed Ontario police Sgt. Jeff Higbee. Her wounds were not life-threatening, he said.

- Related: Full coverage of the Las Vegas mass shooting

“Michael is showing steady signs of improvement as time goes on,” Higbee said in a news release. “He was able to get out of the hospital bed and walk the hallways in the hospital today. Thank you for your continued thoughts and prayers for Michael and his family.”

The Ontario Police Officers’ Association has set up a fund for the couple through the Ontario Public Employees Credit Union, Higbee added. The fund is called “Michael and Summer Gracia Fund.” Account #490244. Checks can be made out to the fund name and dropped off at the credit union, 202 West B St, Ontario, CA.

After Gracia was wounded, Summer tried to cover him and was shot as well, according to Jesse Rivera, a friend of Gracia’s from Bonita High School in La Verne who created a GoFundMe for the young parents.
“The love between those two are real and they are new parents and new parents shouldn’t be going through this,” he said.

Late Tuesday night, Rivera shared that Gracia was improving and he had even had the chance to visit with his longtime friend.

“All I want is time to spend with my buddy,” he said in the latest update on the fundraising site. “Thank you all for the support, I know he's seen it and it means a lot to him and Summer.”

As of early Wednesday afternoon, more than $81,000 had been raised for the couple.

Staff writer Ryan Hagen contributed to this report.

Tags: Las Vegas mass shooting, Top Stories OCR, Top Stories PE

Beatriz E. Valenzuela

Beatriz E. Valenzuela is an award-winning journalist who’s covered breaking news in Southern California since 2006 and has been on the front lines of several national and international news events. She’s worked for media outlets serving Southern California readers covering education, local government, entertainment and all things nerd including comic book culture and video games. She’s an amateur obstacle course racer, constant fact-checker, mother of three and lover of all things adorable.
High Desert survivors of Las Vegas shooting hold vigil

By Rene Ray De La Cruz  
Staff Writer

Posted Oct 4, 2017 at 4:45 PM  
Updated Oct 4, 2017 at 4:45 PM

VICTORVILLE — Prayers and words of comfort were offered up during a candlelight vigil held in honor of those affected by the recent shooting in Las Vegas.

Nearly 75 people attended the assembly on Tuesday night at Victor Valley High School. Many at the vigil also had attended the Route 91 Harvest Festival on Sunday, where a lone gunman shot into the crowd, eventually killing 58 and injuring 530 others in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

The solemn gathering was organized by the Viper Baseball Club’s coaching staff and families, many who attended the outdoor concert across the street from the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas.

“We met on the softball field at the high school where pastor Esteban Vargas spoke and led the vigil,” said Felix, a teacher at VVHS. “It was a moment where we remembered those that lost their lives, the families who are grieving and those touched by the tragedy.”

Esteban told the Daily Press his vigil message included a Bible passage that speaks of “not overcoming evil with evil,” but “overcoming evil with good.”

“It’s easy to be angry and hurt, but we need to focus on praying for others, the love of God and being a light to the world,” said Esteban, who pastors Redemption High Desert in Hesperia.

Members of the Chaos Softball Club were also at the vigil, along with VVHS Principal Nancy Noyer, family members and friends. Many of those associated with the Viper graduated from Victor Valley High School, Felix said.

Felix said she and her husband, Joey, had left the concert early Sunday afternoon, and found out about the shooting when several people messaged her, asking if the couple was safe.

“I switched on the news and was shocked when I saw what had happened at the concert,” Felix said. “I was up all night trying to reach our friends and watching the news.”

Felix said some of her friends were “caught in the lockdown” during the shooting, with other friends heading for their cars, driving straight home and leaving their luggage in their hotel rooms.
“Many of us our still shaken up by what happened in Las Vegas,” Felix said. “Our hearts go out to those that were injured and to the families of those who lost loved ones.”

Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at 760-951-6227, RDeLaCruz@VVDailyPress.com, Twitter @DP_ReneDeLaCruz and Instagram @reneraydelacruz.
California agency urges victims of Las Vegas mass shooting to apply for financial assistance

Tourists and locals pay their respects at a Route 91 Harvest Festival mass shooting memorial site in Las Vegas, Nev. on Tuesday, Oct. 3, 2017. A gunman in the Mandalay Bay Resort opened heavy fire on a crowd of more than 22,000 across the street at the music festival, killing at least 59 people and injuring more than 500, which has become the worst mass shooting in U.S. history. (Photo by Rachel Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By SEAN EMERY | semery@scng.com | Orange County Register
PUBLISHED: October 4, 2017 at 5:12 pm | UPDATED: October 4, 2017 at 7:57 pm
Victim advocates are encouraging survivors of the Las Vegas mass shooting, as well as their family members, to reach out to the California Victim Compensation Board for financial assistance.

Officials with the state-run panel are working closely with their counterparts in Nevada to help victims and their families apply for benefits such as funeral expenses, medical bills and mental-health treatment.

“We have a very streamlined application, and it will suffice for both states,” said Julie Nauman, executive officer of the California board. “Our goal is to maximize the help we can provide.”

The California Victim Compensation Board, established in 1965, helps those impacted by violent crimes. It is funded by restitution collected from fines and penalties in state courts, as well as by federal U.S. Department of Justice grants.

Nauman urged victims and their loved ones to apply as soon as they can, even if they don’t yet know the full financial costs they will ultimately face. The board hopes to process each initial application within a week.

The Compensation Board has already begun processing some applications sent to them through victims’ advocates throughout the state, Nauman said.

Officials said victims are eligible for up to $70,000, with income levels not factoring into the application. Last year, the board received 52,000 applications and paid out nearly $53 million.

“We are the payer of last resort,” said Janice Mackey, a board spokeswoman, adding that medical insurance or worker’s compensation would be applied to bills first.

Event those victims or family members who aren’t immediately facing any medical bills should apply, Nauman said, because some impacts, such as mental-health services, may not come up until later.

“Don’t hesitate, please apply,” Nauman said. “Let us try to bring help to you.”

The victims can call the California Victim Compensation Board at 1-800-777-9229 for information. Applications are at victims.ca.gov.

Some local agencies, such as the Riverside County District Attorney’s Office, have also offered to help local residences find out if they are eligible for assistance through the California Victim Compensation Board. The Riverside agency asked Riverside victims to call 951-955-5400, victims in Indio to call 760-863-8216, and victims in Murrieta to call 951-304-5400.
A successful restoration effort means one of the region's oldest homes will reopen for tours this month.

The San Bernardino County Museum and the [Yucaipa Valley Historical Society](http://www.inlandnewspapers.com) are partnering to host guided tours of the Yucaipa Adobe historical site, with plans to open it from 1 to 4 p.m. the third Sunday of each month for the foreseeable future. Tours begin Oct. 15.

The Yucaipa Adobe dates back to the 1800s, according to a news release. Historians believed the site was part of the San Bernardino Rancho, which was established by Antonio Maria Lugo in 1842. Lugo's cousin, Diego Sepulveda, brought a herd of cattle from other ranchos and settled in the Yucaipa Valley.

History attributed the Yucaipa Adobe to Sepulveda, but recent research suggests the site was actually built by James Waters in the late 1850s, according to the release. Waters was a hunter, trapper and mountaineer who became heavily involved in the region as a San Bernardino County supervisor and erected the San Bernardino Opera House, which does not exist anymore.

The adobe property was later purchased by John Dunlap in 1869 and remained in the family until the 1950s. According to the news release, the site was saved from demolition by the Yucaipa Women's Club.

Today, the adobe is one of several historical sites under the care of the county museum. It is recognized by the state as a historical landmark.

Shutting the adobe for the restoration effort was necessary, explained Jennifer Dickerson, the museum's curator of history. Restoration took about two years to complete and included work on the home and its surrounding grounds, she said.

Docents with the Yucaipa Valley Historical Society will lead tours between 1 and 3:30 p.m., the release said. Tours last about 20 minutes. Highlights include a tour of the home's bedroom, parlor area and kitchen. Furnishings inside the home are true to the era and come from the museum's collections, Dickerson said. Self-guided tours of tools and a recreation of an old blacksmith's work space may be taken at any time during hours of operation.

And while the adobe is two stories, the second floor is not accessible to the public. Historians believe the space was accessed by a ladder and served as a room for children who occupied the house.

Having the historical society on board is a benefit for all guests, Dickerson said.

“They’re absolutely wonderful,” she added. “Not only do they know a lot about this area, and of course the adobe as well, they are historically-minded people, so they love this region and they love every historical aspect of this area. As of right now and in the future, I know this will be a wonderful partnership.”

About 10 docents from historical society will lead tours and are excited to do so, said society Vice President Claire Teeters. The adobe is an “important part of history,” she added.

“We are just happy to help,” she continued. “It’s part of our heritage and that’s what we try to foster at the society — being able to enjoy that heritage.”

Dickerson agreed.
After two years shuttered, the Yucaipa Adobe is now open for tours – San Bernardino Sun

“I'm a history nerd and a historian, so I love it when people have a love for history because it shows us our roots,” she said. “I am excited to be able to share this wonderful knowledge in the area.”

The Yucaipa Adobe is at 32183 Kentucky St., Yucaipa. Cost to tour the adobe is $5 for adults, $4 for seniors or military, $2.50 for students and children 5 and up. Cost is free for children under 5 and museum association members.

To learn more, go to www.sbcountymuseum.org or call 909-307-2669.

Tags: community, history, local history, Top Stories RDF

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Kristina Hernandez

Kristina Hernandez is a reporter by day; pop culture addict by night. She has been a journalist for the Southern California News Group since 2005. She likes popcorn.

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LOCAL NEWS

San Bernardino County Museum kicks off Earth Sciences Week

Guests can dig for fossils at the San Bernardino County Museum during Earth Sciences Week at the site starting on Sunday, Oct. 8. (Courtesy photo)

By KRISTINA HERNANDEZ | khernandez@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts
October 5, 2017 at 9:00 am

Learn how to become stewards of the Earth at the San Bernardino County Museum when the site kicks off Earth Sciences Week on Sunday, Oct. 8.
The museum will host activities through Oct. 15 centered around the topic. Programs, which are included with museum admission, challenge guests on geology and paleontology fun facts through hands-on and hands-off activities.

Here's what's in store for guests:

- **Daily:** “Sculpted by Time: Our Mountains, Faults, Lakes and Caves” is the museum’s newly opened gallery in the Hall of Earth Sciences. Guests can pick up ideas and instructions for at-home activities like how to prepare a chemical solution and watch a stalagmite grow, or make an edible geode.
- **11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 8:** Enter the museum’s geode-making contest by making a volcano and “learn what it has to do with ocean acidification,” or try making geological layer candles.
- **11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 11:** For National Fossil Day, guests are invited to search for fossils on museum grounds, make their own fossil to take home.
- **11 a.m to 4 p.m. Oct. 15:** Prepare for the “Big One” with the museum’s annual Great California Shakeout. Learn why earthquakes happen, discover tips on how to prepare and stay safe in an earthquake and more.

Earth Sciences Week is sponsored by the American Geosciences Institute and celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

“This year’s Earth Science Week theme fits perfectly into the work the San Bernardino County Museum is doing to promote public understanding of our environment,” said museum Director Melissa Russo in the release. “Our new exhibits, like ‘Sculpted by Time’ and the Hall of Biodiversity, highlight the interconnectedness and fragility of Earth’s ecosystems and the importance of human stewardship of this precious planet.”

The museum is at 2024 N. Orange Tree Lane. Museum admission is $10 for general admission, $8 for military or senior, $7 for students, $5 for children ages 5 to 12. Admission is free for association members and children under 5.

To learn more, go to [www.sbcounty.gov/museum](http://www.sbcounty.gov/museum) or call 909-307-2669.

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Tags: education, science, science education

Kristina Hernandez
An advanced manufacturer finds a home in the County's business and employment environment.

Santoro: “Companies are attracted to this environment as the County provides both opportunity and affordability for recent college graduates.”

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, CA—CBRE SVP Len Santoro brought a little more “green” to San Bernardino County this August, as he found a home for XT Green's new advanced manufacturing operation. The 126,620-square-foot facility in Rancho Cucamonga, CA—which will double as the company's headquarters—will operate the company's new technology that recovers carpet from landfills. In the process, XT Green is looking to add 60 “green jobs,” including both skilled advanced manufacturing positions and office support.

Santoro shared more on XT Green's site selection process, what tenants are looking for today and what makes the County a strong choice for advanced manufacturing in this EXCLUSIVE interview for GlobeSt.com.

GlobeSt.com: What are the key requirements for companies when considering expansion and relocation?
Santora: In today’s market, business entities that are relocating or expanding consider workforce availability as extremely important for sourcing entry level, fulfillment and technology positions. Within San Bernardino County, there are diverse pockets of talented, experienced labor pools from which companies can draw. Along with surveys of new facilities or about to become available locations, firms require demographic and employment information. Property site selection along with proposed wages and benefits are also under consideration prior to the creation of a tenant's Letter of Intent to Lease.

GlobeSt.com: How important is workforce in site selection and what criteria are important for a company to consider?

Santoro: Diligent site selection is extremely important for a business. Actual real estate rental and operating expenses encompass a small fraction of overall costs to both manufacture and distribute/fulfill. A greater priority is drawing from a diverse/experienced/well trained population. That is critical for a company's success, growth and profits. San Bernardino County encompasses all of the above.

GlobeSt.com: How has San Bernardino County compared as a choice for business expansion?

Santoro: The majority of the new construction of manufacturing and distribution centers in the County began in the early 2000s. Many assume proximity to the ports, existing major distribution centers, new affordable housing options and retail services attract many companies to San Bernardino County. However, the demographic demonstrates a well-trained and well-educated diverse labor base.

The County provides a breadth of training and education resources. The Industrial Technical Learning Center (InTech) in Fontana provides immediate skills training in advanced manufacturing. In addition to a strong community college system, the County benefits from close proximity to UC Riverside and CSU, San Bernardino as well as The Claremont Colleges that include Pomona College, Scripps College, Claremont McKenna College, Harvey Mudd College, and Pitzer College as well as two graduate institutions include Claremont Graduate University and Keck Graduate Institute.

These academic institutions provide millennials with the skill sets that are in high demand. Technology and innovation is the key to both security and business success. Companies are attracted to this environment as the County provides both opportunity and affordability for recent college graduates.

GlobeSt.com: Can you share more on the XT Green transaction and what drove their desire to locate to the County?

Santoro: The latest in green technological companies, XT Green was attracted to both the city of Rancho Cucamonga and San Bernardino County for many reasons. The location is ideally situated to attract experienced and recent graduates for its technical positions. The residential demographic for buyers and growing rental base easily fulfills new employee housing needs. As is typical of San Bernardino County, the city of Rancho Cucamonga is extremely business-friendly with a welcoming attitude and business-friendly leaders. Upon completion of the first phase of manufacturing and the planned expansion of employment, XT Green believes it can attract new employees to capture the growth of its technological process to repurpose formerly-used carpeting.

GlobeSt.com: How is the County positioned for more advanced manufacturing growth?

Santoro: San Bernardino County is well positioned for future growth in technology and the technical advances that have been made since 2000. Our cities and county have embraced technology with a passion and have demonstrated a resolve to attract and position new technological companies in both its large base of industrial and office-zoned properties. With the addition of newly-completed and under-construction homes, rental units and modern retail developments, San Bernardino County has demonstrated a forward-thinking attitude can and will attract more advanced manufacturing.

The San Bernardino Community College District has approved Crafton Hills College's midterm report.

The move allows Crafton to submit the document to the Accrediting Commission for Community Junior Colleges for its review.

ACCJC, said Crafton spokesperson Donna Hoffman, “will consider it at (its) January meeting and I believe we’ll hear any comments (about the report) later that month or in February.”

The document helps Crafton move forward in its accreditation process. Officials began working on the report last fall, months after Crafton and San Bernardino Valley College were given a “warning” by the ACCJC following concerns raised about several issues, including the need to look at student outcomes. Both institutions became fully accredited again in July 2016.

The public was invited to review the document and learn more about it and the process at an open forum held on Sept. 12.

All institutions are required to submit a midterm report between comprehensive evaluation visits. CHC's next evaluation is slated to take place in October 2020.
Ontario’s new city manager Scott Ochoa previously served in Glendale, Monrovia

Scott Ochoa was selected as the new Ontario city manager effective Nov. 20, the Ontario City Council announced Wednesday in a news release.
Councilmembers unanimously approved Ochoa's appointment at their meeting Tuesday. He will replace Al Boling, who asked to return to his former post as assistant city manager so that he could take care of family health issues.

Boling will help Ochoa transition into the city manager role. Ochoa comes to Ontario from Glendale, where he was city manager since January 2012. Ochoa also was city manager in Monrovia for eight years, according to the news release.

Ochoa will receive $310,000 per year under the terms of his contract.
An Arkansas family wins $546,000 over bed bugs at a Rancho Cucamonga hotel

By Hugo Martin

An Arkansas family that complained of bed bug bites while staying at a Rancho Cucamonga hotel has been awarded $546,000, which their lawyer said is the biggest judgment ever in a bed-bug-related case.

A San Bernardino County Superior Court jury unanimously awarded the damages Monday for medical bills and emotional distress from bites and rashes that Martha, Alex and Marcus McKindra said they suffered during a 2013 stay at the Hilton Garden Inn Ontario/Rancho Cucamonga.

“I’m hopeful this verdict will send a message throughout the industry to make sure adequate policies, procedures and protocol are in place so that other people are not needlessly endangered,” said Brian Virag, the
attorney representing the family.

A man who described himself as the general manager of the Hilton Garden Inn but refused to give his name declined to comment, saying he wasn’t in charge of the hotel when the 2013 incident occurred. A spokesperson for the hotel franchise firm, Hilton Worldwide, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Alex McKindra, 63, a retired army colonel, and his wife, Martha, 63, checked into the hotel in March 2013 with their son, Marcus, 34, Virag said. The family was in the area to deliver a car to Marcus, who was serving in the reserves at Vandenberg Air Force Base, near Lompoc, he said.

Only a few hours after going to bed, the family members awoke with bites and rashes and demanded another room, Virag said. The hotel was fully booked, so the family was forced to move to another hotel, he said.

The lawsuit said the manager knew of the bed bugs in the room but “failed to disclose, inspect or warn plaintiffs of the presence of these filthy infestations at the premises.”

Virag, an Encino attorney who calls himself the “preeminent authority on bed bug litigation,” said his biggest bed bug case before the McKindra case was for $463,000 for a client who was attacked by bed bugs in an apartment.

Virag said the problem is widespread in hotels. “It’s inevitable when you have a revolving door of people in a room,” he said.

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To read more about the travel and tourism industries, follow @hugomartin on Twitter.
LOCAL NEWS

New program would put homeless to work cleaning up Moreno Valley

By IMRAN GHORI | ighori@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
October 4, 2017 at 12:47 pm

Moreno Valley is launching a program for the homeless that will offer them temporary jobs cleaning up the community.

The City Council voted Monday, Oct. 2, to spend $120,000 in federal grant funds for the effort, which could begin as early as November.

The Homeless to Work program, which the council initially agreed to pursue in September, is modeled after similar efforts in cities such as Albuquerque and Denver that were aimed at reducing panhandling.

Panhandlers are becoming increasingly visible in Moreno Valley.

Mayor Yxstian Gutierrez said last month that he spoke with Albuquerque Mayor Richard Berry in June at the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Miami Beach about the Albuquerque program.

“It’s been very, very successful,” Gutierrez said.

Riverside started a similar pilot program last year offering five to 10 people landscaping and clean-up jobs and connecting others with job training and placement at local businesses.

Moreno Valley hopes to partner with the Salvation Army, which would also provide funding and oversee the outreach to the homeless, said Marshall Eyerman, chief financial officer for the city.

Participants would work two days a week, five hours per day and be paid $10.50 an hour, according to a staff report. They would be provided with a sack lunch and water. The Salvation Army would transport them in a van.

Participants would pick up litter and debris and clear brush and grass at city parks and other public areas.

They would also be connected with other social service agencies that provide homeless assistance, including food and shelter, city officials say.

A Riverside County Point in Time homeless survey from earlier this year counted 54 homeless residents and observed an additional 19 believed to be homeless in Moreno Valley.

The use of the grant funding still needs to be approved by the federal Housing and Urban Development Department, Eyerman said. A contract with the Salvation Army will go to the council for approval at a future meeting.

HOMELESS PROGRAM

What: Homeless to Work Program

Payment: Participants would be offered two days of work, five hours per day, paying $10.50 an hour.

Work: The workers would pick up litter and debris and clear brush and grass at city parks and other public areas.

Tags: homeless, Top Stories PE
By Z107.7 News, on October 5th, 2017

The annual "Desert Run" fund-raiser to support the Sheriff's Search and Rescue volunteers is planned for Friday through Sunday. Managing editor Tami Roleff tells you how to sign-up...

It's that time of year again when the Morongo Basin Search and Rescue team is holding its family-friendly, off-road fundraiser at Means Dry Lake in Johnson Valley. The fund raiser will be held the weekend of October 6 through October 8, with the actual 20- to 25-mile Desert Run taking place Saturday morning, October 7. You must have a 4-wheel-drive vehicle to participate; runs will be marked as "easy" and "hard" so you can choose which course you want to drive. Registration for the Desert Run is $60 in if you pre-register online at desertrun.org, or $65 at the event, and $30 for active-duty military. Prizes will be awarded.

For more information:
http://www.desertrun.org/home.html
Twin Peaks Sheriff’s Station to Hold Applicant Assistance Workshop

Twin Peaks, CA – The Twin Peaks Sheriff’s Station is presenting a workshop for applicants who are interested in a career with the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department.

The workshop will be Thursday, October 12 at 6 p.m. It will be held at the Sheriff’s Station, located at 26010 State Hwy 189, Twin Peaks. The workshop will cover interview skills, test-taking preparation, hiring process, insight on POST requirements and backgrounds in law enforcement.

The workshop is open to anyone who is interested in any career within the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department or any other law enforcement agency.

The workshop is hosted by the Sheriff’s Recruitment Unit.

(18)
Los Angeles County will be looking for a new leader of its low-income housing programs.

The L.A. County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to dismiss Sean Rogan in a closed meeting Tuesday. Rogan has served as head of the Housing Authority of the County of L.A. and the county's Community Development Commission since 2009.

Members of the board, as well as the county's Chief Executive Office, declined to comment on what they said was a confidential personnel matter.

The move comes at a critical time for the county, which is just beginning its most comprehensive effort to date to tackle homelessness. Measure H, a sales tax hike that kicked in October 1, is expected to provide up to $355 million a year for homeless services in L.A. County.

That voter-approved funding also came with ambitious promises to get 45,000 people off the streets and prevent another 30,000 from becoming homeless in the next five years.

The agencies formerly headed by Rogan are critical to that effort.

The housing authority runs the county's public housing properties as well as the Section 8 rental assistance program. Section 8, particularly, plays a role in L.A.'s Homeless Initiative, as it is one of the primary sources of rental payments for formerly homeless housed in permanent supportive housing developments.

The Community Development Commission administers the county's Community Development Block Grant, which goes to things like neighborhood improvement, meals programs for seniors, and some homeless programs.
Rogan's dismissal also comes at a time when local housing agencies are anticipating potential cuts in federal funding, which pay for public housing improvements, the Section 8 program, and the Community Development Block Grant.

The Board of Supervisors has not yet said when they'll appoint a replacement for Rogan.

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Social media threat to kill leads to Morongo Valley arrest, deputies say – Daily Bulletin

By GAIL WESSON | gwesson@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: October 4, 2017 at 9:50 pm | UPDATED: October 4, 2017 at 11:16 pm

Robin Lee Rennaker (Photo courtesy of San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department)

http://www.dailybulletin.com/2017/10/04/social-media-threat-to-kill-leads-to-morongo-valley-arrest-deputies-say/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_me...
Threatening posts on a Facebook account, which included a photo of a gun and a threat to kill, prompted public calls to San Bernardino Sheriff’s officials and led to the alleged poster’s arrest Wednesday, Oct. 4, according to a sheriff’s news release.

The first report came in at 10:27 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 3, but deputies were unable to find Robin Lee Rennaker, 21, at his home in the 49700 block of Pioneer Drive in Morongo Valley.

The post included a statement: “ima carry out an attack and kill innocent civilians.”

On Wednesday, detectives contacted Rennaker and served a search warrant at his residence, where they found a sawed-off shotgun, ammunition, methamphetamines and drug paraphernalia, according to the news release.

They also recovered his electronic devices for further investigation.

He was arrested on suspicion of possession of a sawed-off shotgun and violation of probation. He was booked at the Morongo Basin Jail. He was held without bail.

Anyone with information is asked to call Morongo Basin station detectives at 760-366-4175. Callers wishing to remain anonymous may call the WeTip hotline at 800-782-7463 or fill out an online form at www.wetip.com
Charles “Chase” Merritt sits in a San Bernardino courtroom on Thursday, Feb. 19, 2015. His trial in the killing of the McStay family from Fallbrook has been scheduled to begin in September.

By **JOE NELSON** | jnelson@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun

July 21, 2017 at 6:38 pm
A tentative trial date was set Friday in San Bernardino County Superior Court for Charles Ray “Chase” Merritt, charged in the bludgeoning deaths of a San Diego County family of four whose remains were found buried near Victorville in 2013.

Jury selection is scheduled for Sept. 18 and trial is tentatively set for Sept. 25.

Merritt, 60, of Homeland was charged in November 2014 with four counts of first-degree murder for the February 2010 killings of Joseph McStay, 40; his wife, Summer McStay, 43; and their two toddler sons, Gianni, 4, and Joseph Jr., 3.

Sheriff’s crime scene investigators unearthed the family’s remains in two shallow graves in November 2013 after a man riding his dirt bike in the Mojave Desert west of the 15 Freeway and north of Stoddard Wells Road north of Victorville discovered some of the remains and reported it to authorities.

Merritt stands accused of fatally beating the family in their Fallbrook home with a 3-pound sledgehammer, then transporting their bodies 100 miles to the San Bernardino County desert.

Trial was delayed because Merritt’s attorney, Rajan Maline, has been tied up since Jan. 4 with the Colonies public corruption trial, in which he is representing one of four defendants. Closing arguments are scheduled to begin in that trial Aug. 14.

Maline said in a telephone interview Friday he anticipates that jury selection will begin as scheduled but will take some time. He said he doesn't expect opening statements to begin until late October.

Maline expects the trial to last at least three months and probably longer.

The trial will be heard in Judge Michael A. Smith’s courtroom. Smith is the judge presiding over the Colonies trial.

Maline contends the case against Merritt was built solely on circumstantial evidence. Physical evidence presented during Merritt’s preliminary hearing in June 2015 showed that investigators found Merritt’s DNA on the steering wheel and gearshift handle of the McStays’ Isuzu Trooper that was abandoned at the Mexican border in San Ysidro shortly after the family’s disappearance in 2010. Merritt claimed never to have driven the vehicle.

Tags: courts, Echo Code, McStay family
L.A. County to pay $4 million to families of couple killed in 2013 crash with speeding deputy

By James Queally

OCTOBER 4, 2017, 7:15 PM

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has agreed to pay $4 million to settle a wrongful-death lawsuit brought by the families of a couple killed four years ago when a sheriff’s deputy raced into a Palmdale intersection and struck their car, records show.

Sara Paynter and Robert Delgadillo were killed in December 2013 when the Ford Explorer they were riding in was struck by a Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department cruiser that had moments earlier been traveling at about 83 mph, according to a district attorney’s memo. The posted speed limit was 50 mph.

The deputy, Kamal Jannah, was not responding to an emergency call and did not have his lights or siren on at the time of the wreck, according to a report released by the county.
Paynter, 20, of Van Nuys, and Delgadillo, 31, of Palmdale, were ejected from the backseat of the SUV and pronounced dead at the scene. The deputy and two other people riding in the Explorer were injured.

The couple had recently decided to get married and were on their way to their parents’ home to tell them about the engagement, said Arnoldo Casillas, one of the attorneys who sued the county on behalf of the families.

A spokeswoman for the Sheriff’s Department said Jannah “separated” from the agency in September 2016. She declined to comment on the settlement and said she was barred by state law from disclosing whether Jannah had been fired or voluntarily resigned.

Jannah worked for the Sheriff’s Department for about eight years and was reassigned to non-driving duties after the crash, authorities previously said.

Investigators from the California Highway Patrol determined that the deputy’s speed was the primary cause of the crash. The collision would not have occurred if the deputy had obeyed the posted speed limit, the CHP found, according to the county report.

The deputy was responding to a request for assistance at the scene of a fight in progress but failed to turn his lights or sirens on, according to records. As he was driving, a dispatcher clarified that the request was not an emergency, and that there was only a witness to a fight at the scene he was driving toward.

The county’s corrective action plan also placed some blame for the crash on the dispatcher’s initial request for an emergency response. The department has since implemented increased training on proper radio procedures and launched an initiative aimed at reducing deputy-involved traffic collisions at the Palmdale station, according to the county report.

Jannah was writing reports in his cruiser about 4 p.m. on the day of the crash when he heard a dispatcher relay a call for assistance that may have involved a violent clash, according to the district attorney’s memo. After “some confusion” over who was responding to the call, Jannah began traveling at speeds in excess of 55 mph without turning his lights or sirens on, the memo said.

As he approached the intersection of East Avenue R and 17th Street, Jannah noticed the vehicle the victims were riding in, but said it did not have its turn signal activated, according to the memo. When it began to enter his lane of traffic, Jannah forcefully applied his brakes but still collided with the truck. At the moment of collision, Jannah was traveling about 57 mph, the prosecutor’s memo said.

The district attorney’s office considered filing misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter charges against the deputy, but could not, in part, because the case was not presented to prosecutors until February 2015. The one-year legal deadline for filing a misdemeanor charge had expired, according to the memo.

Because the district attorney’s office could not prove the gross negligence required for a felony charge of vehicular manslaughter, it chose not to prosecute, according to the memo. It was not immediately clear why CHP investigators waited until 2015 to present the case to prosecutors.
Los Angeles will pay $7.5 million to settle a lawsuit filed by a severely injured bicyclist, the latest in a string of costly payouts for gruesome crashes on its roads.

The City Council voted Wednesday to approve the payout and end the legal dispute with William Yao, who sued the city after a devastating crash three years ago in Porter Ranch.

Yao was riding south in a bike lane on Reseda Boulevard when the front tire hit a patch of pavement that had been lifted four inches by a tree root, throwing him from his bicycle and onto the pavement, according to his lawsuit. His attorney, David Roark, said Yao was wearing a helmet, but that the severe impact nonetheless left him a quadriplegic.
Roark said that before the crash, the city had gotten repeated complaints about the dangerous condition of the road but had failed to fix it.

The city attorney’s office declined to comment on the settlement Wednesday. A confidential report prepared for council members by city lawyers, obtained by The Times, said that the Bureau of Street Services had inspected the road and noted that it needed to be repaired, but deemed it a “non-emergency.”

The roadway was also inspected by the city immediately before the accident, in preparation for cutting into the street for utilities, but “no inspector reported the substandard bike lane,” the report said.

The report also noted that when the bike lane was put into place, the road surface did not comply with government standards for installing bike lanes: The L.A. Department of Transportation “merely placed the painted white lines, traffic signs and surface arrow markers without examining or repairing the road surface,” according to the report.

Though Roark thought the city might be liable for a much higher amount, “the family felt that accepting the settlement offer without the ordeal and uncertainty of a trial was the wiser decision in order to provide Mr. Yao with financial stability for the rest of his life,” the attorney said.

His life “has been irrevocably impacted by this incident,” Roark said in a written statement. “Mr. Yao would rather have the use of his arms and legs again rather than any amount of money.”

Los Angeles faces dozens of lawsuits annually over bicycle crashes on its roads. At least 17 have been filed this year, according to city records.

But a series of multimillion-dollar settlements — each one linked to other grisly incidents — has drawn fresh attention to the dangers of its streets.

Last month, the city agreed to pay $6.5 million to end a lawsuit from another bicyclist who was left with broken bones and a brain injury after his bicycle hit a pothole on Valley Vista Boulevard, according to his suit.

And in the spring, Los Angeles said it would spend $4.5 million in settle the case of Edgardo Gabat, 56, who died after hitting uneven pavement and being thrown from his bicycle in Eagle Rock.

City officials say they are working to address the problem: L.A. has budgeted nearly $25 million this year to reconstruct its very worst streets, according to staffers for Mayor Eric Garcetti. Such streets have historically been neglected because it was too costly to fix them without allowing other streets to slip further into disrepair.

In addition, mayoral officials said that the Bureau of Street Services has surveyed its entire network of marked bike lanes and started some of the needed repairs.

"This was a horrific incident and we are committed to making our streets safer,” L.A. Department of Transportation spokeswoman Patricia Restrepo said in a statement Wednesday. “Our current practice is to
install bike lanes only on road surfaces that are in good condition.”

Restrepo added that the agency was coordinating with the Bureau of Street Services to repair roads before bike lanes are installed, as well as to inspect and fix existing bike lanes.

City lawmakers also proposed new steps meant to protect bicyclists: City Councilman Mitch Englander introduced a proposal Wednesday to stop installing any new bike lanes on streets that are rated lower than an “A” — and close or remove any bike lanes that fall below that level. Councilman Paul Krekorian also introduced a string of new proposals aimed at making sure the city better monitors and addresses its most dangerous streets.

For instance, Krekorian proposed that the Vision Zero program, which sets a goal of eliminating traffic deaths in the city, “prioritize projects that are demonstrably likely to produce the greatest reductions of injuries and fatalities.” He declined to comment specifically on the settlement with Yao, but said he hoped to spur new action at City Hall.

“I have felt a great sense of urgency to address the safety risks that are presented when we don’t adequately maintain our streets,” Krekorian said Wednesday.

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UPDATES:

6:15 p.m.: This article was updated with a response from the city Department of Transportation.

This article was originally published at 12:45 p.m.

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This article is related to: Eric Garcetti
California’s public pension crisis is bad and getting worse

The State Worker
Chronicling civil-service life for California state workers

Pension costs ‘crowding out’ spending on parks, schools and social services, report says

BY ADAM ASHTON
aashton@sacbee.com

OCTOBER 04, 2017 5:00 AM

California governments likely will make do with fewer teachers, parks employees and other public workers while they struggle to absorb fast-rising pension costs in the next few years, a former state lawmaker argues in a study released this week through Stanford University.

Former Democratic Assemblyman Joe Nation projects that many cities, counties and school districts will double their spending on pensions by 2030, “crowding out” their ability to fund public services.

The trend is an acceleration of the swelling pension costs that most California governments have recorded since the dot-com crash in the early 2000s, when pension plans that had been over-funded suddenly had to catch up with investment losses.
“As painful and as steep as these increases have been since 2003, my best estimate is that we are only about half way through these increases,” said Nation, who is now a researcher at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research. “If you’re a public agency and you went from paying $1 million a year to $10 million a year, that’s an enormous increase. You’re likely to go from $10 million to $20 million by the year 2030.”

The new report assesses pension spending for a sampling of 14 California government agencies, including state government. Nation wrote that state spending on pensions is expected to rise from $8.5 billion this year to $17.3 billion in 2029-30.

Nation found pension costs outpacing growth in projected revenues across the board. That leaves government agencies less room for amenities like parks, social services and, in some cases, the ability to hire new employees to replace retiring workers.

For the city of Sacramento, pension costs are expected to climb to $150 million by the 2022-23 budget year, up from $42.4 million in 2008-09 and $88 million this year.

“Our revenues cannot keep pace with these cost increases,” said Sacramento Finance Director Leyne Milstein. So far, she said, the city has not had to leave vacancies open because of the rising retirement expenses.

Nation’s report adds to a drumbeat of recent complaints from local government leaders about rising pension costs. They’ve been more vocal since the California Public Employees’ Retirement System last year lowered its projected investment return rate, a decision that required its member governments to pay more to fund their workers’ pensions.

Last month, representatives from a dozen cities attended a CalPERS board meeting and complained that rising pension costs are becoming a "gradual strangulation" on public services.

“In three to four years our cash flow is going to be gone,” Oroville Finance Director Ruth Wright told the CalPERS board. “We don’t even know how we are going to operate past four years. We have been saying the bankruptcy word, which is not very popular.”

School districts also are ramping their spending on pensions to make up for shortfalls at the California State Teachers’ Retirement System. Both CalPERS and CalSTRS are underfunded, with each holding about 68 percent of the assets they’d need to pay benefits they owe to current workers and retirees.

Visalia Unified School District, an example in Nation’s study, spent $10.8 million on pensions in 2009-10. It’s projected to spend $46 million in 2029-30.

Nation also looked at two California cities that declared bankruptcy during the recession. In Stockton, pension costs are expected to hit $88 million in 2029, up from $41.5 million today. In Vallejo, they’re on track to reach $52 million in 2029, up from today’s $24.7 million.

Nation’s work was funded partly by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, a nonprofit organization created by former hedge-fund manager John Arnold. The organization has funded pension-reform efforts around the country.
How a new California law could eliminate a 30-year-old rule that slowed development in Los Angeles

Thirty years ago, a neighborhood association in Westwood won a lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles over the approval of a 26-story office tower. The project, the group convinced an appellate court, shouldn’t have been permitted without an in-depth environmental review, even though the city said the building had met all its codes and requirements.

Ever since that landmark case, most every housing development in Los Angeles with 50 or more units has undergone a full environmental analysis — no matter whether the city’s zoning would otherwise allow the effort to go forward.
Now, that's likely to change. The author of a new state law says it will eliminate Los Angeles’ rule.

“It would go away,” said state Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco).

Los Angeles’ policy, one of many implemented over decades that aimed to slow the city’s growth, is just one example of similar rules across the state that Wiener’s legislation aims to jettison. In cities such as Los Angeles that haven’t met housing growth targets set by the state, projects that comply with a host of zoning, affordability and labor standards won’t have to go through additional planning and environmental reviews that slow the pace and raise the costs of constructing housing.

Wiener’s legislation, Senate Bill 35, is among 15 bills Gov. Jerry Brown signed last week to address California’s housing problems and is the most prominent attempt in the legislative package to spur more development by clawing power away from cities and counties.

Many local restrictions, Wiener said, are a luxury the state cannot afford when California falls short of the tens of thousands of new homes needed annually to meet demand.

“We’re in a crisis,” he said.

In Los Angeles County, where median home prices have soared to a record $580,000, the new law isn’t likely to lead to a construction boom. But it does chip away at long-standing policies, such as the one inaugurated by the 1987 Westwood court decision, that make it more difficult for developers to build.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, who supported the legislation, said in an interview that SB 35 complements the city’s other efforts, such as relaxing development restrictions near transit lines, to ease production.

“A lot of people don’t want the brain damage or the headache of building affordable homes,” Garcetti said. “This makes it a much less painful process.”

The city’s current policy forces most projects 50 units or larger — regardless of whether they comply with zoning codes — to complete a full analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act, the state’s primary environmental law governing development. These analyses cost Los Angeles developers between $200,000 to $300,000 each and add 18 months to the building process, and that’s before any potential challenge in court, said Jim Ries, a senior vice president at Craig Lawson & Co., a land-use consultant that advises on hundreds of city projects annually.

Wiener’s legislation aims to wipe that process away, but only for projects that meet a substantial number of conditions:

- They can’t be single-family homes and have to meet underlying zoning rules — so no 100-unit condominiums on land now planned for 50.
- They can’t be along the coast.
They can’t replace rent-controlled housing or buildings that have been occupied by tenants in the previous 10 years.

Developers have to pay construction workers union-level wages and abide by union-level hiring rules.

For Los Angeles, the guidelines are even stricter. Generally, Wiener’s legislation allows developers of market-rate homes to take advantage of the streamlined local review process. But because Los Angeles is exceeding its state housing growth targets for those earning higher-than-middle incomes, only projects that reserve at least half of their units for low-income residents will qualify. In Los Angeles, the current standard for low-income is a family of four earning no more than $72,100 a year.

The restrictions over how developers can use SB 35 means that it’s likely to have only a limited effect on housing production, said Joan Ling, a lecturer in urban planning at UCLA and former board member of the city’s redevelopment agency. No developer in Los Angeles has said it plans to use SB 35 once it takes effect Jan. 1, though Wiener said he’s been told a small project in his Bay Area district expects to take advantage.

“It remains to be seen how much it’s going to help,” Ling said.

Still, those who support Los Angeles’ current system believe SB 35 is misplaced. Laura Lake, who founded the Westwood neighborhood association that successfully sued the city in the 1980s and has initiated other high-profile environmental lawsuits, argues that legislators are scapegoating state environmental laws as the cause of the housing crisis. Instead, she said, the focus should be on trying to lower the costs of land, labor and materials.

Beyond that, Lake said, allowing community members to appeal projects through environmental reviews ensures more support from neighbors and fewer detrimental effects from development.

“Each time there is a constraint on the right to appeal,” Lake said, “to me it’s as chilling on the democratic process as voter suppression.”

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ALSO

Gov. Brown just signed 15 housing bills. Here's how they're supposed to help the affordability crisis

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Shelters, cars and crowded rooms: California’s homeless students

Alison often studies on the bed that she shares with her parents who work in the nearby strawberry fields. (Photo: Iris Schneider, for EdSource)

By EDSOURCE

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BY CAROLYN JONES AND DANIEL J. WILLIS, EDSOURCE

Alison is only 14 but she knows what she wants to be when she grows up: A surgeon. It’s not easy to study, however, when you’re so exhausted and hungry you can barely get through 9th-grade biology.
An immigrant from Colombia, Alison is one of more than 200,000 K-12 students in California considered homeless because they lack stable housing. And like most of those students, she lives with her family in a home shared with other families — in her case, two other families.

“I go to school every day because I like school, but sometimes I can't concentrate,” said the Santa Maria teenager whose district reports nearly a third of its students are homeless. “When you're that tired it affects your personality. You feel like ... not much.”

As California's housing costs continue to soar, more and more children like Alison are suffering the severest of consequences: No place to call home. Since 2014, the number of homeless children in California has jumped 20 percent. In the most recently released data, 202,329 young people are living in cars, motels, shelters, on the street or in crowded homes shared with other families.

That's just over 3 percent of the enrolled K-12 students, more than twice the national rate, but the actual numbers are almost certainly higher. Schools rely on parents to report their housing status, but shame, fear of deportation or the government taking away their children discourage many parents from truthfully answering the housing questionnaire — typically given to all families at the beginning of the school year.
For families like Alison’s, filling out forms and staying on top of school requirements is not always easy. Her family, for example, has moved six times, including a stint in a rented van, since they left Colombia three years ago.

EdSource is not using the students’ last names in this story to protect their privacy.

By law, schools are required to identify and help homeless students, using state and federal funds to provide school supplies, extra tutoring, transportation to school or whatever else students need to succeed. But an EdSource analysis shows that more than a quarter of California schools report no homeless students at all and provide no services — despite the fact that homeless students live in nearly every community of California, experts say.
“The rate of youth homelessness in California is unconscionable,” said Shahera Hyatt, director of the California Homeless Youth Project, a state agency. “Part of it is we've gotten better at counting our homeless students, but there's no question the housing crisis is playing a role. Housing is a fundamental need, and this crisis needs to be taken more seriously. .... The human and economic cost is great.”

Most of California's homeless children, 86 percent in 2015, are not homeless in the traditional sense, state data show. They live with their families and have a roof overhead, but share living quarters with other families because they can't afford their own residence. These families tend to move frequently, and the constant noise hinders attempts to study or sleep. And privacy in the bathroom? Forget it.

“When you're living like that, you're embarrassed to go. So you hold it,” Alison said.

In school, homeless children face daunting challenges and need social services and academic help perhaps more than any other subgroup. Faced with extreme poverty, stress and, like Alison, just plain exhaustion, those children are far more likely to struggle academically and drop out of school than their peers.

“It's a snowball effect,” said Emily Allen, a program director for the United Way of Northern Santa Barbara County, which serves homeless and low-income residents. “They miss school because they're tired, or don't have money for bus fare, or they're ashamed because they have nowhere to take a shower. Or they don't have a quiet place to do homework and the teachers don't understand. And they fall further and further behind.”

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, enacted in 1987, and a state law passed in 2015 require schools to provide services to these students, and money is available through federal grants and the state Local Control Funding Formula.

But the money is not nearly enough, and California does not receive nearly what it’s due, Hyatt said. In California, only 61 of the state's 1,025 school districts received extra funds to support homeless children in the most recent round of grants, in 2016. In all, the state awarded $7.6 million in 2016, with the largest grants — $242,858 — going to districts like Los Angeles Unified, San Diego Unified and Fresno Unified, and grants as small as $15,704 going to 395-student Laytonville Unified in rural Mendocino County.

The distribution of homeless children in California varies widely. An EdSource analysis of state data reveals that while most homeless students live in large cities, some small cities and rural areas show even higher rates of homeless students.
At one extreme is Baker, population 735, an isolated burg along Interstate 15 in the Mojave Desert where 52 percent of the students in the Baker Valley Unified School District are reported homeless. But in Piedmont, an exclusive Bay Area city in the Oakland hills, Piedmont High reported zero homeless students. Los Angeles Unified saw its number of homeless children double last year, to 13,763, or 2.91 percent of the total enrollment, but that’s partly because more families submitted the housing questionnaire, staff said.

Perhaps no place in California bears the extremes of wealth and poverty more acutely than Santa Barbara County. Its rolling coastal bluffs are home to millionaire retirees, while inland schools, amid the broccoli and strawberry fields of the Santa Maria Valley, have some of the highest percentages of homeless children in the state. At Sanchez Elementary in Santa Maria, nearly half the students lack stable housing.

But homeless children are also found in the affluent southern end of the county, forced into living with other families due to the exorbitant cost of housing. That combination of low-paying agricultural and service jobs coupled with high housing costs gives Santa Barbara County the highest rate of children living in poverty in the state, at 30.8 percent, based on local cost of living and federal poverty data, according to the Public Policy Institute of California.

The county is a tale of extremes in another way, as well. Santa Maria-Bonita, where Alison attends high school, is one of the 61 districts statewide to win a grant to serve homeless students. With its $170,000 windfall, the district contracts with a nonprofit called Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley to provide services specially tailored to its 5,272 homeless students.
Lisa Coker works with high school students through Fighting Back Santa Maria, a non-profit agency that provides services to homeless youth and families in Santa Maria. (Photo: Iris Schneider, for EdSource)

But Santa Barbara Unified, 63 miles to the southeast, has 1,287 homeless children but did not receive a grant. For several years the district benefitted from a grant the County Office of Education received, but that grant expired in 2015 and was not renewed. Now, Santa Barbara Unified, as well as other local districts, rely on school staff — who are already swamped with other duties — to identify homeless kids and refer them to services, said Dolores Daniel, program manager for the Santa Barbara County Office of Education’s Transitional Youth Services division.

“I’m sure some students are missed,” she said. “We’d like to provide more support, but this is the best we can do until another grant comes through.”

It’s a different story in Santa Maria-Bonita, which reports 31 percent homeless students. The district and Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley provide homeless students and their families everything from bus passes and clothing to translators who speak indigenous Mexican languages. But the most crucial service, according to Fighting Back executive director Edwin Weaver, is home visits.

Parents are often so busy and exhausted, working in the fields 12-plus hours a day, they don’t have time to attend school meetings or catch up on paperwork. This can be a particular challenge if their English skills are poor. So case workers will visit families at home and ask what they need for their children to succeed.

“They’ll tell you,” said Weaver. “You just need to listen.”
In one case, a 10-year-old boy was an hour late for school every day. A visit to his home revealed that he was late because his parents left for work at 5 a.m. every morning and he had to get his 2-year-old brother to day care, then get himself to school. So the case worker arranged for a neighborhood mom to take the 2-year-old to day care and bought the 10-year-old an alarm clock. Now the child is on time every day.

Sometimes, helping the parents is the best way to help the children, Weaver said. In Santa Maria, most of the parents work in the fields, leaving before dawn and often working until evening. Some get paid minimum wage, which equals $420 a week before taxes, while others get paid by the amount of produce they gather. Strawberry pickers, for example, earn about $1 to $1.50 per box, according to the United Farm Workers union.

Some of the Latin American immigrant parents have been working since they were 8 or 9 years old, have never attended school and can’t read or write, Weaver said. Between 5 and 25 percent don’t speak Spanish — they speak indigenous Mixteco languages from Oaxaca and other southern Mexico states.

They face daunting challenges trying to get by in the U.S., but they’re unequivocal about what they want for their children: an education.

“They say to their kids, ‘Do better than us. You can do better.’ They want their kids to have more choices than they’ve had,” said Moses Hernandez, a program specialist at Fighting Back.
Weaver added, “They put up with a lot — getting up at 4:30 a.m. every day, stooping over in the fields picking strawberries, coming home at 7 p.m. covered in mud and then going out to a parenting class, doing without — just to give their kids a better life. So we do what we can to make that possible.”

Fighting Back case workers help parents understand the basics of American education, such as how to read a report card, how to talk to teachers and how to fill out forms. The district offers adult literacy and parenting classes, and shows parents how to promote literacy for their children even if they themselves don’t speak English or can’t read.

Another nonprofit, Central Coast Future Leaders, helps homeless and immigrant students get to college. Students learn about college admissions, financial aid and choosing a career, and tour nearby college campuses. For many, college dorms are the first place they’ve slept in their own bed, and the most stable, quiet living quarters they’ve experienced, said Patricia Solorio, former Future Leaders executive director.

Alison was among a few dozen immigrant teenagers from Santa Maria who took a Future Leaders field trip to UC Santa Barbara over the summer. The students slept in dorms, met college students who were also immigrants, got a taste of college life, and learned how to apply to school and get financial aid.

These programs have been successful in propelling students out of poverty, Solorio said. In the past few years, Future Leaders alumni have gone on to Harvard, Columbia, UC Berkeley, UCLA, Yale and other top universities.

“These young people need to feel like they belong, that there’s a place for them, that they can succeed here,” she said. “Ultimately it comes down to economics. California needs these young people in the workforce. We all need these kids to succeed.”

But the best way to help homeless children does not involve tutoring or free backpacks, said Frank Rodriguez, an organizer at Cause, Central Coast housing nonprofit. It’s to give them a place to live.

California housing costs, even in low-income areas like Santa Maria, are among the highest in the U.S., according to the most recent figures from the Council for Community and Economic Research. A rented bedroom in a house in Santa Maria can cost $800 per month, according to Craigslist, and the county vacancy rate is 1.1 percent.
"People are afraid if they get an eviction notice, they’ll end up living in their car," Rodriguez said. “And the ones who pay the most in those situations, unfortunately, are kids."

Communities need to fight for affordable housing and tenant protections, he said. Schools alone cannot solve the homeless crisis, he said.

But despite the challenges, California’s homeless children can be as idealistic and determined as their peers. They want to go to college and work, and some say they’re highly motivated not to be homeless as adults.

“I want to make a change,” Alison said, when asked of her goals for the next decade. “In 10 years, I’ll still be in college, because I’ll be studying to be a surgeon. I want things to be different.”

Alison’s classmates had similar high hopes. Adriana, 15, wants to go to UC Santa Barbara and study marine biology or English literature. She was born in Michoacan, Mexico and now lives in a house with three other families, and shares a bed with her two little sisters. So when it’s too noisy to study at home, she goes to the library.

“I want to make my parents proud and someday help them with money,” she said. “I also want to show people that Mexicans are meant for a lot more than just working in the fields.”
Rowdy, 17, is from Mexico City and wants to be an artist or musician. Or maybe join
the military, he said. He lives in a home with 22 other people.

“I want to work hard and someday move to a city,” he said. “I want to be someone in
life.”

Fourteen-year-old Fany, who’s from Oaxaca, has only been in the United States a
few months but is excited to learn English and goes to after-school tutoring classes
to catch up academically. To avoid the distractions at her home, which she shares
with three families, she stays late at school to study.

Eventually, she wants to be a social justice attorney.

“I know I’m not in the best situation, but there are some people not as privileged as
me,” she said. “I want to help those people. My parents think it might be dangerous,
but I’m passionate about wanting to help people.”

Alison and her family were not always impoverished. In Colombia, they had their
own home and a middle-class lifestyle. But when local drug dealers threatened her
father after he reported them to the police, the family fled — first to Peru, then
Florida, and finally to California.

On Broadway in Santa Maria, motels line the street. Many house homeless families on an
emergency, or long-term basis. (Photo: Iris Schneider, EdSource)

In Florida, the family lived in a room with no furniture, not even beds. Her parents
and older siblings worked as vegetable packers while Alison went to school. But
after a few months the woman who ran the house, whose name Alison never knew,
evicted them with just a week’s notice and no explanation.
Unable to find new lodgings, the family rented a van and slept there.

“It was so cold, I’d wake up at 4 every morning. Even your bones feel cold. It wasn’t right,” she said. “I went to school but I was sleepless. When it came to food, we didn’t always have any. And with the language — at school, I didn’t even understand when they said my name. I was very shy. I didn’t have any friends. I’d sit in a corner.”

After another few moves, the family settled in Santa Maria, to be near relatives. They now live in a home with her uncle’s family and another family. Alison is working on her English, studying hard and determined to succeed.

“I’m going to go to college,” she said. “I plan on it.”

This story originally appeared on EdSource.org. EdSource is an independent journalism organization that works to engage Californians on key education challenges with the goal of enhancing learning success.
Quake warnings saved thousands in Mexico, but California might need private money to build similar system

By LAUREN WILLIAMS | lawilliams@scng.com | Orange County Register
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When the Big One hits California – and seismologists say it’s not if, but when – there might not be blaring sirens or vibrating phones giving people a precious few seconds to prepare.

At least, those warnings won’t come if a quake hits in the foreseeable future. California’s earthquake warning system, long discussed and partially built, remains incomplete and in limbo. And if the Trump administration has its way, it might be un-funded too.

But the powerful earthquakes that hit Mexico last month serve as a reminder of what’s possible. There, sirens blared between 20 seconds and 60 seconds before the shaking began. Because of that, experts say, the quakes that killed hundreds also provided the latest real-world example of how a warning system can save countless more.

“If you look at the videos of people rushing out of the buildings before the earthquakes, there were lots,” said Peggy Hellweg, the operations manager of the Berkeley Seismological Laboratory, which studies quakes and quake warning systems.

“There were at least thousands of people who were saved.”

But experts say the difference between what happened in Mexico and what’s also happened in Japan in a similar fashion — and what isn’t yet possible in California — is stark.

“We’re behind the curve,” said Doug Given, who works as the earthquake early warning coordinator for the U.S. Geological Survey, which is spearheading a stalled effort to create a system that would touch California, Oregon and Washington.

Given pointed out that Mexico, Japan, Italy and China built functional quake warning systems after suffering huge quake-related losses.

“Many countries have had huge disastrous earthquakes that created the political will to take action,” Given said.

He’s hoping the same cycle won’t happen here.

The latest estimate on the cost of an earthquake warning system in the western United States is about $38 million to complete the one-time start-up costs and another $16.1 million a year to operate it.

Those numbers — which quake experts and economists say are tiny when compared with the human and financial losses associated with quake-related health spending and other preventable costs — are too steep for the federal government. An early draft of the federal budget eliminated the region’s early warning system entirely, though a subcommittee in the House of Representatives later restored $10.2 million to the program.

That still won’t be enough to finance a network of 1675 sensors needed to have a system for the western United States. So far only 740 sensors are operational, and many are concentrated across Southern California.

“We really can’t build the complete system with two-thirds of the funding,” Given said. “It would be imprudent to build a system you can’t maintain.”

The shortfall is prompting agencies to consider seeking private funding, perhaps from utility companies and others that might be vulnerable to quake costs, said Tina Curry, deputy director of planning, preparedness and prevention for the California Office of Emergency Services.

“We’re rapidly trying to get that infrastructure in the ground,” Curry said. “From that, everything else will come.”

But Curry isn’t ruling out a change of heart in Washington, either.
10/5/2017 Quake warnings saved thousands in Mexico, but California might need private money to build similar system – San Bernardino Sun

“We’re hopeful that the federal government will continue to partner as they have.”

The warning system contemplated in the United States relies on a series of underground sensors that would detect quakes as they happen and spread that information to sensors throughout the potential quake zone faster than the shaking itself. Specifically, the detectors would track the less damaging p-waves (or primary waves) that are emitted in a quake’s initial moments, and use that information to tell more distant sensors that the more damaging quake waves (s-waves, or secondary waves) are heading their way.

The system isn’t perfect. Areas close to the epicenter of a quake are so-called blind zones, meaning they get little or no warning before the shaking starts. But areas that are distant to the center of a quake — and quakes can reach hundreds of miles — get some warning, typically between 20 and 60 seconds.

If the warning sounds brief, experts point out there are plenty of ways the warning can save lives, money and inconvenience.

A warning of even 20 seconds is long for a family to get out of a house or apartment, or for a business to evacuate an office. It’s enough time for a doctor to put down a scalpel or a dentist to turn off a drill. In 20 seconds, an elevator can stop and unload passengers.

Transportation experts note a 20-second warning can be enough time for an engineer to stop or at least slow down a train, reducing the odds of derailment. In some cases, vulnerable bridges could be closed to traffic.

A 2016 paper in the journal Seismological Research Letters examined the benefits and cost of an early earthquake warning system found that if people had advanced notice of a temblor, injuries could be reduced by 50 percent.

Even a small increase in the number of lives saved and fires prevented would pay for one year of operating a quake warning system. Saving three lives alone would pay for the cost of operating a West Coast early warning system for a year, as would one train derailment prevented, the paper found.

It’s not a theoretical problem. There is a 99.7 percent chance of a magnitude 6.7 or larger earthquake striking California in the next 30 years, according to a 2014 U.S.G.S. study. In the Pacific Northwest there is a 10 percent chance of a “megathrust” earthquake with a magnitude 8 or 9 along the 700-mile long Cascadia subduction zone that runs from Vancouver Island to central Oregon.

Those quakes — with or without a warning system — probably will cause billions of dollars worth of damage.

The planned system for Washington, Oregon and California would install sensors every six miles in high-density areas with powerful fault lines capable of serious damage. Further afield sensors would be spread out every 12 miles, and in places where damage would be minimal, every 24 miles.

“We have a number of goals, one is to produce the fastest possible alert in populated areas,” Given said. “We’re prioritizing the highest risk targets.”

A pilot system is already up and running with dozens of schools, transit systems, utility companies and cities receiving notices of impending earthquakes, including the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco, and companies like Boeing and Intel. That system has found technical glitches that must be fixed before a broader rollout, but those glitches are surmountable.

People working on the mass notification system don’t want to see the mass casualties that spurred other governments into action.

“I hope the next big one will wait,” Hellweg said.

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