
New data pool could make it easier to drive through the region.
A new partnership between San Bernardino County and Waze will give motorists real-time traffic information, such as traffic accidents, road closures and other hazards.

But the new deal might not solve the problem drivers and some residents face when the smartphone app sends travelers to dirt roads when traffic clogs the Cajon Pass.

“It doesn’t solve the (rerouting) problem, but it begins to establish a relationship with Waze that I’m hopeful leads to a solution,” Supervisor Janice Rutherford said Wednesday.

On Tuesday, May 21, the Board of Supervisors, with Rutherford and Supervisor Josie Gonzales absent, approved the county’s participation in the
Waze Connected Citizens Program, a free, two-way data exchange partnership between the company and various government agencies. One goal of the program is to share publicly available incident and road closure data, according to the county staff report. County departments will send information to Waze about county-reported road and traffic conditions. Waze, meanwhile, will aggregate the data with real-time traffic incident and other road hazard information submitted anonymously by Waze users. The combined data pool will allow the app to provide drivers with more precise data on current road conditions.

The partnership lends itself to other benefits, like event planning, reporting potholes and location data on shelters and evacuation center during emergencies, according to the county. Still, the partnership offers no guarantee that Waze will stop directing drivers down dead ends and dirt roads when the Cajon Pass is backed up.

This practice by Waze has led to an increase in traffic in nearby Lytle Creek and other mountain communities near the 15 Freeway. In some cases, motorists hit dead ends, with larger trucks having trouble navigating hairpin turns.

Officials with the county and Forest Service have reached out to Google, which owns Waze, to get the company to remove these roads from the maps. But the company has not complied.
Rutherford said supervisors hope the new partnership will help the county facilitate a conversation between Waze and the Forest Service, which is responsible for some of those alternate roads.

In February, a group of 15 off-roaders and their dogs were rescued north of Green Valley Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains after getting stuck on the fire service roads they were using to get around a road closure on Highway 18, according to the Mountain Reporter.

“They get started down what they think is an alternate route and then they discover Forest Service roads that are dirt… and not passable by most passenger vehicles,” Rutherford said. “They're dangerous and isolated.”

Meg Irvine was among a group of drivers diverted onto dirt roads

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Freeway in November. Irvine, who lives in Los Angeles, was on her way home from Las Vegas when her smartphone GPS notified her she could cut an hour off her trip if she took an alternative route.

“It was a pretty nasty experience and very scary,” Irvine said. “You kind of trust Google, thinking that it’s a safe road. It wasn’t until I was quite far down the road (that) I realized it was actually very unsafe.”

Irvine’s car got stuck and the driver behind her helped pull out her car, which was scratched. Irvine lost trust in the app following the incident.

“Now, I’m a little over cautious,” Irvine said. “I will pull over and have a look at the map if it suggests a different way instead of being able to trust it.”

Tags: government, politics, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories PE, Top Stories RDF, Top Stories Sun
National Geographic Fellow Rue Mapp at the forefront of growing outdoor recreation network

Redlands, CA – The San Bernardino County Museum, the Girl Scouts of San Gorgonio, and the San Bernardino Regional Parks are joining together to host the next Dome Talks featuring Rue Mapp, Founder and CEO of Outdoor Afro, Thursday, May 30 at the San Bernardino County Museum.

Outdoor Afro is a social community reconnecting African Americans with natural spaces through outdoor recreational activities. Mapp oversees a carefully selected and trained
national volunteer leadership team of 65 men and women who represent 30 cities around the U.S. Through Outdoor Afro, her non-profit organization with offices in Oakland, Rue, as CEO, shares opportunities to build a broader community and leadership in nature. Her important work has generated widespread national recognition and support.

Mapp’s work and op-eds have been featured in publications including The Wall Street Journal, Backpacker Magazine, Seattle Times, Los Angeles Times, Ebony Magazine, Outside Magazine, Sunset Magazine, NPR, and many others.

Mapp’s work has also been recognized with numerous awards and distinctions, including: The Root 100 as one of the most influential African Americans in the country (2012 and 2016), Outdoor Industry Inspiration Award, National Wildlife Federation Communication award (received alongside President Bill Clinton), and Family Circle Magazine selected Rue as one of America’s 20 Most Influential Moms. She serves on the Outdoor Industry Association board, the California State Parks Commission, and in 2019 was named a National Geographic fellow.

Cynthia H. Breunig, President and CEO of Girl Scouts of San Gorgonio, said “Girl Scouts of San Gorgonio is thrilled to be partnering with the San Bernardino County Museum for the second year in a row to host this month’s Dome Talk. When I learned Rue Mapp would be the featured speaker, I was delighted. Her passion for the outdoors led her to where she is today and I find that so inspiring. Using technology and social media platforms, Rue Mapp has provided numerous opportunities for communities to enjoy and explore the outdoors, especially African American communities. Girl Scouts of San Gorgonio believes in the importance of getting individuals outdoors and has invested in providing outdoor education programs to communities in Riverside and San Bernardino.
Counties. We hope that bringing Rue Mapp to the San Bernardino County Museum will inspire even more people to go outdoors and reconnect with nature.”

Regional Parks Director Beahta Davis, said “We are truly honored to have this emerging national leader share her story with our county audience. Regional Parks is a treasured resource in our area, and it’s important that we continually connect with new audiences. Outdoor Afro is an initiative that can help us in this effort.”

Museum Director Melissa Russo said “Rue Mapp is one of those rare individuals who confronts head-on an issue that everyone agrees is a problem but no one seems to be able to change. In a very short number of years, she has built a growing network, Outdoor Afro, and is changing behavior on a national scale. The organization’s skillful use of social media to coordinate and promote outdoor experiences is creating a tipping point in encouraging African Americans and others to spend more time recreating in nature.”

The evening will begin with a special pre-reception at 6pm sponsored by the San Bernardino County Museum Association, and Lorenzi Estate Wines. Mapp’s talk starts at 7 p.m.

Tickets for the evening are $25, no discounts apply for this talk. Tickets are subject to availability as the Dome Talks theater has limited seating. Tickets can be purchased online at www.sbcounty.gov/museum or may be purchased at the Museum’s Guest Services Desk.

Girl Scouts of San Gorgonio: Founded in 1912 by Juliette Gordon Low, Girl Scouts sparked a worldwide movement inspiring girls to embrace, together, their individuality, strength, and intellect. The mission is to “build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.” In 2015, Girl Scouts of San Gorgonio Council purchased
Skyland Ranch in the San Jacinto Mountains to provide an outdoor education experience for girls in the Inland Southern California and Greater Los Angeles regions.

San Bernardino County Regional Parks: The department ensures diversified recreational opportunities for the enrichment of county residents and visitors while protecting the county’s natural, cultural, historical and land resources. The department manages and maintains nine Regional Parks throughout San Bernardino County totaling approximately 9,200 acres. Each park offers diverse outdoor recreation opportunities in settings that range from metro, mountain and desert scenery.

The San Bernardino County Museum’s exhibits of regional, cultural and natural history and the Museum’s other exciting events and programs reflect the effort by the Board of Supervisors to achieve the Countywide Vision by celebrating arts, culture, and education in the county, creating quality of life for residents and visitors.

The San Bernardino County Museum is at 2024 Orange Tree Lane, at the California Street exit from Interstate 10 in Redlands. Parking for Dome Talks is free. For more information, visit www.sbcCounty.gov/museum. The museum is accessible to persons with disabilities.

**MUSEUM NEWS**

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Two deputies assigned to the Rancho Cucamonga jail and an inmate housed at the facility have been charged in connection to the assault of another inmate last year, according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

Deputy Luke Van Ginkel, 22, Deputy Arthur Enriquez, 33, and 40-year-old inmate have been charged with assault on an inmate.
old Alex Garcia were all charged Wednesday, May 22. Van Ginkel and Garcia were charged with assault producing great bodily injury. Van Ginkel was also charged with making criminal threats. Enriquez was charged with being an accessory.

The criminal complaint filed against the trio shows that Van Ginkel made threats against an inmate on Dec. 23.

“(A) felony, was committed by Luke Alexander Van Ginkel, who did willfully and unlawfully threaten to commit a crime which would result in death or great bodily injury to (the victim,) with the specific intent that the statement be taken as a threat,” the complaint read.

A few days later, Dec. 31, Van Ginkel and Garcia attacked a different inmate, the complaint shows.

Sheriff’s officials at the jail first received a complaint alleging the assault at the West Valley Detention Center on Dec. 31, 2018, officials said.

“During that same shift, a sergeant received the grievance and began the initial investigation,” according to the sheriff’s department statement. “This initial investigation revealed alleged criminal misconduct involving deputies facilitating an assault on an inmate by another inmate.”

On Jan. 2, the Specialized Investigations Division began a criminal
investigation, which involved interviewing more than 100 witnesses, reviewing video and audio recordings, as well as collecting other evidence, officials said in a statement.

Investigators determined the assault did take place, officials said.

Investigators determined Enriquez had knowledge of the assault committed by Van Ginkel and “did harbor, conceal, or aid Luke Alexander Van Ginkel, with the intent that he might avoid and escape from arrest, trial, conviction, or punishment for said felony,” the complaint said.

Van Ginkel was placed on administrative leave Jan. 3. As of April 1, he was no longer employed by at the sheriff’s department, the sheriff’s statement said, however it wasn’t clear if the former deputy was fired or if he resigned. Van Ginkel was hired on July 8, 2017, and started at the jail on Dec. 16, 2017.

Enriquez was placed on administrative leave on Jan. 5. He was hired on January 7, 2017, and started at the jail on July 22, 2017, sheriff’s officials said.

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Investigators submitted reports to the San Bernardino County District Attorney’s Office for review Jan. 24 and on Wednesday, May 22, the
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DA’s Office filed criminal charges.

“The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department takes allegations of misconduct seriously,” Sheriff John McMahon said in a statement. “The actions of these two individual deputies are disappointing and unacceptable. While this incident is troubling, our system to identify and investigate misconduct worked.”

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.

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By Obsev
Charges filed in deputy-involved West Valley detention center assault

By Garrett Bergthold

Staff Writer

Posted at 1:56 PM
Updated at 2:03 PM

RANCHO CUCAMONGA — Felony charges were filed Wednesday connected to a December 2018 incident at the West Valley Detention Center in which a San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department deputy allegedly assisted an inmate to assault another inmate.

The District Attorney’s Office charged then-deputy Luke Van Ginkel, 22, with assault by means of force likely to produce great bodily injury. Van Ginkel was also charged with another felony, criminal threats, stemming from a separate, earlier incident.

According to a statement issued by the sheriff’s department, Van Ginkel “no longer works for the sheriff’s department” as of April 1, 2019. The statement did not elaborate on whether he quit or was fired.

Van Ginkel was hired as a deputy on July 8, 2017 and started at WVDC on December 16, 2017.

The charges are the result of a nearly five-month investigation involving interviews with more than 100 witnesses, along with extensive video and audio evidence, the sheriff’s department said.

Another deputy, Arthur Enriquez, 33, was charged Wednesday with felony accessory after the fact for his alleged role in helping Van Ginkel “avoid and escape from arrest, trial, conviction, or punishment,” according to the criminal complaint. Enriquez still is on administrative leave.

Officials said that on Dec. 31, 2018, the sheriff’s department received a report of alleged misconduct by deputies at the detention center.
An initial investigation “revealed alleged criminal misconduct involving deputies facilitating an assault on an inmate by another inmate,” according to the statement, which did not include details on the assault.

Further investigation led to both deputies being placed on administrative leave in early January.

An inmate, Alex Garcia, 40, who “assisted Van Ginkel in perpetuating the assault,” was also charged with assault by means of force likely to produce great bodily injury, the sheriff’s department said.

“The San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department takes allegations of misconduct seriously,” Sheriff John McMahon said in the statement. “The actions of these two individual deputies are disappointing and unacceptable. While this incident is troubling, our system to identify and investigate misconduct worked.”

Arraignment dates have not yet been set.

Garrett Bergthold can be reached at GBERGTHOLD@VVDAILYPRESS.COM or 760-955-5368. Follow him on Twitter at @DP_Garrett.
Gun buyer in San Bernardino attack wants to pull guilty plea

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAY 23, 2019 | 7:00 AM
The man accused of buying the rifles a husband and wife used to kill 14 people in the San Bernardino terrorist attack in 2015 will ask to withdraw his guilty plea.

Enrique Marquez’s lawyer submitted papers Wednesday with the federal court in Riverside saying his client will file a motion under seal to withdraw a 2017 guilty plea to providing material support to
Prosecutors are expected to challenge the request. It was not immediately possible to determine whether the motion has been filed.

Defense attorney John Aquilina, who previously told the court he expected to file the motion by next Tuesday, didn’t immediately reply to email and phone messages seeking comment.

Authorities say Marquez acknowledged buying the semiautomatic rifles that Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik used to attack a gathering of San Bernardino County employees on Dec. 2, 2015. The couple killed 14 people and wounded 22, then later died in a firefight with authorities.

In court filings in 2015, authorities said Marquez called 911 after the attack and said his neighbor carried out the shooting using a gun he had given him for storage.

Authorities said the FBI interviewed Marquez between Dec. 6 and Dec. 16, 2015, and that he waived his right to a lawyer when speaking with agents.

Marquez would face a potential 25-year prison sentence if the convictions stand.

How The Times covered the San Bernardino terrorist attack »
Plenty of work to be done in San Bernardino

The San Bernardino City Council holds in monthly council meeting at the San Bernardino City Council Chambers in San Bernardino on Wednesday, February 20, 2019. (Photo by Jennifer Cappuccio Maher, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD | opinion@scng.com |
PUBLISHED: May 22, 2019 at 6:43 pm | UPDATED: May 22, 2019 at 6:43 pm
Now that the open seat on the San Bernardino City Council has been filled, city leaders are setting about three key objectives: staying within the budget, enhancing public safety and fueling a long-sought economic revival.

The best place to start: the budget.

Juan Figueroa, the man new Mayor John Valdivia backed politically and financially, won the seat Valdivia vacated when he became mayor late last year. Figueroa says he’s ready to get to work.

He and his colleagues, leading a city that went through a bankruptcy that began with a filing in 2012, already have plenty to keep them busy.

So far this year, the new team has placed City Manager Andrea Miller on administrative leave.

Valdivia criticized a midyear report by Miller, complaining she whiffed on utility users tax revenue projections.

Here’s hoping the action to sideline Miller isn’t just a case of blame-the-messenger.

Next came reorganizing the Police Department — Valdivia says “We have one of the worst public safety records in the country” — and the establishment of Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving.

The department works hard with thin staffing but as the mayor says, public safety is not there yet; the change is worth trying. But leaders have to keep an open mind in case the desired results don’t occur.
Departments also got the call to cut their budget requests by 7 percent for the fiscal year beginning July 1 – a prudent step with shortfalls looming, but a scalpel will serve the city better than a bludgeon.

On the development side, Hillwood Enterprises announced a plan for a 4,000-job warehouse project at San Bernardino International Airport.

That idea ran into opposition from environmental groups and a labor union that said these would not be good jobs, but the idea deserves a full hearing.

And the city is pushing ahead with plans to redevelop the Carousel Mall.

These are get-a-grip steps that should help the mayor and council focus.

San Bernardino has transportation and logistics advantages and human resources that could generate lots of local income.

But it must stay in the black on the budget and be a safer place to live and raise a family.

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**Tags:**  Editorial

**The Editorial Board**

The editorial board and opinion section staff are independent of the news-gathering side of our organization. Through our staff-written editorials, we take positions on important issues affecting our readership, from pension reform to protecting our region's unique natural resources to transportation. The editorials are unsigned because, while written by one or more members of our staff, they represent the point of view of our news organization's management. In order to take informed positions, we meet frequently with government, community and business leaders on important issues affecting our cities, region and state. During elections, we meet with candidates for office and the proponents and opponents of ballot initiatives and then make recommendations to voters.
JOSHUA TREE — A group of homeless advocates, youth advocates and Panorama Heights community members gathered at the former Fire Station 35 Tuesday for a community meeting to discuss the future of the building. Owned by the county, it was recently leased to the Family Assistance Program as a day-use facility for homeless people.

The county board of supervisors last month approved a lease agreement that lasts through April 2024, with the Family Assistance Program paying the county one dollar a year.

The building, located on Sierra Avenue in the Panorama Heights area, covers about 2,760 square feet, including living quarters and a laundry room.

Executive director of the Family Assistance Program, Darryl Evey, said the deal was about two years in the making and was heavily supported by former 3rd District Supervisor James Ramos.

“About two years ago there was a family here that froze to death and James was upset and as you can imagine, everyone was upset,” Evey said.

He said the deaths brought to light some of the needs of the community; these needs might include a warming center, a youth center, a day-use facility for the local homeless population, a day-use facility for mental health services or a combination of these things.

The Family Assistance Program runs facilities across San Bernardino County that primarily work with people ages 14-24 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. They provide the young people with a safe place during the day to study, learn how to get jobs, escape extreme temperatures and more.

Evey said a similar facility was his initial plan for the former firehouse, but after talking with local agencies, he was unsure if youth services were the primary need in the Morongo Basin. The One Stop Transitional Age Youth Center in Yucca Valley and several other places already serve that
population.

The purpose of the meeting this week was to determine some of the biggest needs in the community.

“What I do now is working with young people,” Evey said. “But if there’s a need to work with adults, then we will work with adults.”

‘Put them in Yucca Valley’

Many members of the audience were concerned with the idea of opening the facility to homeless adults and the meeting quickly became heated when they brought up Panorama Ranch, a residential facility that treated substance abuse before it closed in 2012.

Panorama Ranch was a live-in rehabilitation facility that offered a 90-day program for up to 30 residents at a time.

“When Panorama Ranch was here we would find syringes in our yard or their members would end up squatting in our front yards and scaring our kids,” said one audience member, who wanted to remain anonymous.

“I don’t want that back in my neighborhood. Put them in Yucca Valley where there’s buildings and more people.”

Evey assured the audience that the facility he is planning would not be like Panorama Ranch; it is only approved as a day-use facility, it will not be offering food or shelter and his organization will not be moving people into the facility from other communities.

“Right now there’s nothing for homeless people,” said Wayne Hamilton, who helps homeless children for the Morongo Unified School District. “We’re not bringing them anywhere; they’re already out here. They’re across the street.”

It would also not be a drug or alcohol rehabilitation center. Staff members would provide people information and support to get into rehabilitation programs elsewhere in the county, but would not be able to help them detox in-house.
The facility, if it serves the adult homeless population, will be open until 8 p.m. Upon closing, Evey said, people would be provided with bus passes.

Facility could offer laundry, showers

Evey said the facility could offer classes to help individuals get jobs. The facility could also be open for members to do their laundry and shower. It could also be the members’ mailing address, which could help them apply for jobs and get valid IDs.

“One of the main problems with getting a job is having an address,” said Joshua Tree business owner Gayle Austin. “I think that would be really helpful to the homeless population here.”

The meeting ended without a decision on who the facility will serve, but Evey said a second meeting will be scheduled in the next week or two to present a more concrete plan and answers to locals’ questions. The date and time will be announced in the next edition of the Hi-Desert Star.
More violent crime, less property crime reported last year

By Jenna Hunt Hi-Desert Star  13 hrs ago

Morongo Basin Sheriff’s Capt. Trevis Newport, right, introduces the Town Council to detective Manny Popa, assigned to the town thanks to money from the Measure Y half-cent sales tax increase.

Jenna Hunt Hi-Desert Star

YUCCA VALLEY — Sheriff’s Capt. Trevis Newport gave a detailed report on a year’s worth of crime at the Town Council meeting Tuesday.

Violent crime — murder, rape, robbery and assault — increased 23 percent over the last year in Yucca Valley, but Newport said it’s not really a shocking increase, due to changes in how charges are calculated.
In 2018, there were two murders in Yucca Valley, eight reported rapes, 21 robberies, 54 aggravated assaults and 146 simple assaults, according to the report.

In 2017, there were no murders, nine reported rapes, 18 robberies, 38 aggravated assaults and 123 simple assaults.

One item that is way up — by 400 percent: arson cases as a result of honey oil labs where a potent oil is extracted from cannabis plants using flammable solvents. The cases went from one to five, Newport said.

Newport said thanks to how little crime is reported in Yucca Valley, a small increase in the number of violent crimes creates a high percentage difference.

The number of non-violent crimes — burglary, larceny and grand theft auto, have decreased by 23 percent, going from 444 cases in 2017 to 340 last year.

“I wish I had better news for you,” Newport said. “We want to keep this the best living area in the county of San Bernardino.”

The council was also introduced to detective Manny Popa, who was assigned to the town with money from the Measure Y sales tax increase.

Newport also cautioned people to stop giving criminals the chance to take advantage of them. Lock the doors to your homes and vehicles, he said, and keep vigilant about your surroundings.

“Even though you feel you can leave it unlocked — don’t!” Newport said.

Councilman Abel said he was still pleased with the report and asked how Yucca Valley compared with other cities in the region.

“This area has always been low in crime,” Newport replied. “I feel confident that trend will continue. You are still way lower than other cities.”

Newport said his detectives are closing investigations and targeting criminals from outside of the area trying to infiltrate the community.
“They are closing cases; they absolutely are,” Newport said. “We may get that spike every once in a while, but we will be all over it.”

On the horizon, Newport said facial-recognition technology is finding its way into the police departments across the county.

“It works,” he said. “It truly does. That technology is definitely increasing.”
Fontana, Ca. – Just in time for summer, state-of-the-art playground equipment is being installed at Heritage Circle Park, Hunters Ridge Park, San Sevaine Park and Fontana Park.

Crews from the Public Works Department began installing the new playground equipment in April. The playgrounds at San Sevaine and Hunter’s Ridge Park are complete and now open. Heritage Circle Park and Fontana Park are currently under construction and expected to open in June.

Not only an array of colors, the playground upgrades include American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible features, such as play panels at ground level, music and cognitive components. “All structures were designed for a 5-12 age group with the idea that children of all abilities can play,” states a representative from Innovative Playgrounds, whom the
equipment was purchased from.

The new equipment also includes traditional slides and climbing features to encourage physical development and fitness, along with shade coverage to protect children from the sun as they play.

Fontana Park and Heritage Circle Park will feature ADA wheelchair ramps on play structures, a “Cruiser” motion rocker accommodating up to 12 children of all abilities, and the popular “Volta Spinner” which accommodates up to 9 children.

All play areas were finished with appropriate safety surfaces, as well as engineered wood chips and poured-in-place rubber to help protect against injury.

Explore one of the new playgrounds or visit any of the 45 parks throughout the City and enjoy a variety of open play spaces and amenities for all ages and abilities. The City of Fontana is committed to continue maintaining parks as an essential resource and service that are vital to support the community’s quality of life. Parks support the health, safety and wellbeing of Fontana residents as well as making the City and neighborhoods attractive places to live, work and play.

For City of Fontana news and information visit fontana.org.

PARK NEWS

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Close to home: MDLT brings vision for desert conservation to the Victor Valley

By Matthew Cabe
Staff Writer

Posted May 19, 2019 at 6:35 AM

The Joshua Tree-based nonprofit recently acquired almost 600 acres near Apple Valley with plans to preserve it for the environment and the public.

A splintered plywood sign read “KEEP OUT,” but Peter Satin disregarded the faded directive.

Dressed for the threat of rain and unseasonably cool temperatures on a recent day in May, Satin unlocked the gate next to the sign and pulled it open. Back inside his SUV, he drove through the opening onto a remote section of Rock Springs Ranch.

He wasn’t trespassing, though. The Mojave Desert Land Trust, where Satin works as director of land management, recently purchased the nearly 600-acre property that borders the Juniper Flats National Conservation Lands area.

Sandwiched between Apple Valley’s desert floor and the forested San Bernardino Mountains, Rock Springs Ranch boasts pristine desert, panoramic views, riparian areas, oddly formed boulders, three natural springs and caves where ancient artifacts have been found.

MDLT officials say the purchase strengthens the status of the protected Juniper Flats.

Since 2006, MDLT has conserved nearly 80,000 acres that, in most cases, are later donated to the National Parks Service. The nonprofit’s work has added land to the national parks in Joshua Tree and Death Valley, and to the Mojave National Preserve, among other areas.
But combined with 1,647-acre Palisades Ranch on the Mojave River in Helendale, which Western Rivers Conservancy transferred to MDLT last year, Rock Springs Ranch represents the beginning of the Joshua Tree-based organization’s work in areas closer to the Victor Valley.

“We’re excited about both properties,” Satin said, “because they will provide us the opportunity to start interacting with the folks that live out here, talking about conservation and learning what’s important to the people out here and how they like to use the desert.”

In time, MDLT plans to open Rock Springs Ranch to the public for recreational uses like hiking, according to Satin. A similar plan is in store for Palisades Ranch, which is home to 39 protected wildlife species and within a 30-minute drive for more than 350,000 High Desert residents.

He said MDLT will explore other “low impact” uses and educational opportunities over the next few years to ensure they’re developed properly and balance the public’s interests with that of the environment.

In the interim, a short hike led by Dave Hansen — who writes the Conservation Corner column for the Daily Press and has been involved in the preservation of Rock Springs Ranch since at least 2016 — revealed some of the property’s wonders, including a boulder shaped like a cube.

Hansen didn’t bother to hide his astonishment.

“We can’t figure out how it became such a perfect cube in nature,” he said. “It’s almost like somebody made it and laid it there.”

The landscape is also home to horned lizards, a type of woodpecker called the red-breasted sapsucker, jackrabbits and hawks. Poppies, desert mariposa lilies, desert hyacinths, and other wildflowers bloom in the tranquil, mostly untouched space.

A ranch was built on the southeast corner of the property in the early 1920s. Other structures were added over time, and several people still reside there. Satin said they’re free to “live there as long as they want,” despite the acquisition.
“MDLT is not in the business of kicking people off their property,” he said. “They’re great caretakers, and we’re excited to work with them.”

The $800,000 purchase was made with grant dollars from the California Natural Resources Funding Agency, according to Satin. The acquisition was facilitated by the Trust for Public Land.

Satin said MDLT worked on the Rock Springs Ranch project for at least two years. He said the state’s ability to fund the buying of “very large, ecologically important pieces of land” like the Rock Springs and Palisades ranches are crucial to his organization’s mission.

“What MDLT is trying to do is preserve cultural, recreational and wildlife values, which are all part of the public trust,” Satin said. “So the state has a very vested interest in making sure that those kind of resources remain on site and remain open for the public to enjoy.

“And so the state is actually a very good funding partner. They recognize the value in a lot of these properties and are excited to help us conserve them.”

Matthew Cabe can be reached at MCabe@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-951-6254. Follow him on Twitter @DP_MatthewCabe.
Edison’s fire prevention plan, explained

By Martin Estacio
Staff Writer

Posted at 4:18 PM
Updated at 4:18 PM

OAK HILLS — Southern California Edison is using aircraft equipped with infrared technology, inspections, and a “vegetation management plan” to reduce the risk of wildfires, a utility representative told area residents Tuesday night.

Jennifer Cusack, government relations manager for Edison, presented aspects of her company’s Wildfire Mitigation Plan to a group of about 30 local residents, firefighters, and sheriff’s deputies at a Municipal Advisory Council meeting.

Senate Bill 901, signed last year, requires utility companies to provide these more detailed mitigation plans for California Public Utilities Commission approval.

The plans are designed to reduce the risk of potential wildfire-causing ignitions associated with electrical infrastructure, according to the CPUC website.

“It’s a big deal and we know it,” said Cusack.

One of the state’s largest electricity providers, Pacific Gas & Electric, filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy in January after “facing extraordinary challenges relating to a series of catastrophic wildfires that occurred in Northern California in 2017 and 2018,” according to a company document.

State fire investigators found that PG&E equipment had sparked 13 fires in 2017.

On May 15, officials announced that the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California’s history was also ignited by the company's electrical transmission lines.

November’s Camp Fire killed 86 people and destroyed more than 18,000 structures. The conflagration leveled the communities of Concow and Paradise in Butte County.
Victims of the fires filed multiple lawsuits against PG&E, which saw bankruptcy as necessary due to the potential liability.

Over one-third of Southern California Edison’s 50,000 square mile service zone lies within areas designated as high fire risk, Cusack said.

Since last fall, she said SCE has inspected every piece of equipment within the most-at-risk Tier 3 zones.

Company aircraft equipped with infrared and other visual technologies are being used to spot weak sections in transmission lines.

SCE has instituted a vegetation management plan intended to clear out hazardous trees that may sag or collapse onto nearby lines.

According to an SCE pamphlet, the company inspects 900,000 trees annually and prunes nearly 690,000.

Other improvements include “hardening” infrastructure by covering conductors, constructing fire-resistant poles, and insulating wires.

The company plans to install high-definition cameras and 315 weather stations where a team of meteorologists, fire scientists, GIS specialists and the public can track real-time conditions and prepare for potential contingencies.

One of these contingencies might involve de-energizing lines, or a public safety power shutoff, if extreme weather conditions require it.

Cusack said that this was a “tool of last resort.”

“We don’t want to de-energize you, but if we believed it was to protect the public safety, we would,” she said.

CPUC took issue with aspects of Edison’s mitigation plan.

The commission questioned how the company would complete “enhanced overhead inspections” of approximately 450,000 transmission and distribution lines in the high fire risk areas by the upcoming fire season, according to the CPUC document.
The commission stated that “SCE’s Enhanced Inspection Program should not consist simply of perfunctory ‘drive-by’ patrols.”

CPUC also asked for clarification on the details of the inspections and for the company to report on their effectiveness.

*Martin Estacio may be reached at MEstacio@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-955-5358.*

*Follow him on Twitter @DP_mestacio.*
Redlands has a ‘solid’ budget, but city is looking into a new tax measure

The City Council will likely adopt the budget at its June 4 meeting
Redlands has a ‘solid’ budget, but city is looking into a new tax measure – San Bernardino Sun

By JENNIFER IYER | jiyer@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts
PUBLISHED: May 22, 2019 at 4:30 pm | UPDATED: May 22, 2019 at 4:31 pm

With an estimated $75.4 million for general fund operations for the fiscal year that starts July 1, Redlands leaders say the budget is in “great shape” but they’re looking into a possible new tax measure.

Though officials report Redlands has more than $20 million in reserves, the city was unable to fund about $9 million in requests from departments and some big-ticket items remain on a back burner, such as the construction of a new public safety building and hiring additional public safety employees.

“It would be irresponsible for this council not to consider how to obtain those resources for that purpose,” Mayor Paul Foster said Tuesday, May 21, at the City Council meeting. More information about a possible tax will likely be out around the new year, he said.

As for the proposed 2019-20 budget, maintaining current service levels was important to staff.

“That was our main focus of this budget process,” Assistant City
Manager Janice McConnell said, though some “noteworthy” projects also received funding.

Among them, the city will purchase and install advanced automated license plate reader cameras near the Citrus Plaza shopping center for use in Police Department operations and complete about $4 million in improvements at the wastewater treatment plans.

Revenue-wise, the city says property tax income has a projected 5% growth rate, but sales tax is expected to remain relatively flat.

“Much of this (property tax growth) is due to growth in assessed valuation which has been driven by significant transfers of ownership over the last several years,” said Danielle Garcia, the city’s management services and finance director.

As a result, the end of the year balance is expected to be a surplus of $312 in revenues over expenses.

For the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, projected surplus is on track with mid-year projections, currently estimated at $2,800 over requirements.

“We’re in solid shape when it comes to our reserves, and overall in great shape budget-wise,” said Councilwoman Denise Davis.

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Foster recalled that when he was first elected in 2010 the
Redlands has a ‘solid’ budget, but city is looking into a new tax measure – San Bernardino Sun


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Another budget review is set for 6 p.m. May 28, and the council will likely adopt the budget at its June 4 meeting.

“In those days there were some serious doubts about where we were going to wind up, but through good financial discipline on the part of the staff and the council, we’ve reached a point where we are in a much better place,” he said.

Over that 10-year period, city debt has been reduced by 41%, he added.

Tags: government, Top Stories RDF

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Pole Vaulter Allison Stokke Is Finally Talking About The Photo Changing Her Life

By Obsev

THINGS TO DO › CASINOS

What you need to know about San Manuel Casino’s new smoke-free slots area

The new nonsmoking area at the Highland casino was unveiled earlier this month.

San Manuel Casino in Highland unveiled a new nonsmoking slots area earlier this month (Courtesy of San Manuel Casino)

By ALEX GROVES | agroves@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: May 22, 2019 at 9:51 am | UPDATED: May 22, 2019 at 10:00 am

San Manuel Casino in Highland unveiled a new smoke-free slots area earlier this month with 90 different slot machines, according to casino officials.

Open 24 hours, the upgraded area is located on the first floor between the Club Serrano booth and Lotus 8 Palace (near the casino’s former bus lobby).
Enclosed by glass, the area has two doorways with airflow designed to push air out and not allow outside air in. It also has an ATM and a Club Serrano Kiosk inside.

The new room replaces another smoke-free slots area that was located near the casino's poker room. That area has since been opened up to smoking.

The space's slot machines include Ocean Magic Grand, Golden Egypt Grand, Zeus & Kronos, Wonder 4 & Wonder 4 Jackpots and Hao Yun Dao.

The newly redone smoke-free area follows a series of other changes at the casino including the renovation of the Tukut Lounge earlier this year and the addition of a giant blackjack table in the Rockin’ Casino area in August 2018.

The casino is also in the midst of a $50 million multi-phase expansion that involves the construction of a six-story parking garage scheduled to be completed later this year and an indoor entertainment venue with 3,000 seats by 2021. Casino officials have not yet announced a completion date for the third phase of the construction, a 14-story hotel.

Tags: San Manuel Casino, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories OCR, Top Stories PE, Top Stories RDF,
BUSINESS

Job fair bringing at least 35 employers to San Bernardino
Some employers could conduct interviews on Thursday or offer jobs on the spot

By JACK KATZANEK | jkatzanek@scng.com |
PUBLISHED: May 22, 2019 at 5:07 pm | UPDATED: May 22, 2019 at 5:08 pm

A job fair featuring at least 35 employers is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Thursday, May 23, at the Sandals Church in San Bernardino.

The event is hosted by JobsNow.org. It was scheduled as part of an effort to fill numerous job openings in the region.

Employers scheduled to participate include San Bernardino County, the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department, Youth Action Project, Panda Restaurant Group and World Financial Group.

The jobs that will be discussed are at various skill and pay levels. Anyone attending is urged to dress professionally and bring resumes, as some employers could conduct interviews or offer jobs on the spot.

The church is located at 3701 N. Sierra Way.
Pasco’s Pizza served with eviction notice

By Rene Ray De La Cruz
Staff Writer

Posted May 21, 2019 at 5:11 PM
Updated May 21, 2019 at 5:11 PM

HESPERIA — After years of serving the community while struggling with its finances, the owners of Pasco’s Pizza have been given an eviction notice.

The popular restaurant will serve its last pizza on June 1 before the doors to the eatery on the corner of Main Street and “I” Avenue in Hesperia are closed for good, said a Pasco’s employee.

Recent Planning Commission and City Council meetings brought to light a dispute between the owners of Pasco’s Pizza and landlord Westland Real Estate Group, who said the pizzeria was “seriously past due” on its rent.

Westland’s Commercial Asset Manager David Kracoff, who denies a dispute between the two parties, told the Council on May 7 that for years, Pasco’s has been consistently behind on rent payments, and refused to commit to staying at the Hesperia Square shopping center.

Kracoff said Pasco’s financial troubles forced his company to look for a “more stable and better-run operation” such as Round Table Pizza, who recently signed a lease for an 8,000 square-foot space located a few doors down from Pasco’s Pizza.

The new lease between Round Table and Westland includes a provision obligating the landlord to close Pasco’s Pizza, a move that began last week when the eviction notice was served.

Rudy Rocha Jr., the vice president of M.O.R.R Pizza, which owns the new Round Table, told the Daily Press his company was not involved in the dispute between Pasco’s and Westland. He also added that his team sat “patiently on the sidelines” while both parties settled their disagreement.
Kracoff shared the news of Pasco’s financial problems on May 7 when the City Council voted to uphold the Planning Commission’s decision to deny a conditional use permit for the new Round Table Pizza.

Council members voted 3-2 to deny Round Table’s request for a conditional use permit that would have allowed Round Table to obtain a Type 47 alcohol license for the sale of beer, wine and liquor. Council members Rebekah Swanson and Jeremiah Brosowske cast dissenting votes.

The Alcoholic Beverage Control allows for a maximum of six on-sale licenses in the tract associated with the shopping center. Approval of Round Table’s CUP would have exceeded that limit by one license, according to the ABC.

Council members said issues between Westland and Pasco’s were irrelevant when considering whether to approve the restaurant’s conditional use permit.

News of Pasco’s eviction has been met with sadness by many residents including Roxanne Olsen, who told the Daily Press that Pasco’s “deserves a proper farewell” by the community.

“The people that run Pasco’s are amazing, kind and good,” Olsen said. “I dealt with them with Relay for Life for years. They have done so much for this community.”

Little League baseball mom, Liz Roscoe, said over the years, Pasco’s has “probably hosted thousands” of sports, birthday and private parties for individuals from across the High Desert.

“Many of our kids grew up at Pasco’s and later brought their own children here as parents,” Roscoe said. “Losing Pasco’s is like losing a piece of Hesperia.”

A few residents, such as businessman Mark Strauss, said the landlord “should have evicted Pasco’s a long time ago.”

“What other company lets you string them along for years without paying their rent on time?” Strauss asked. “We’d be kicked to the curb if my company didn’t pay their rent on time. I wish Round Table well.”
Hinds promises ‘memorable’ Fair

By Luanne Hunt / For the Daily Press
Posted May 22, 2019 at 1:35 PM
Updated May 22, 2019 at 1:35 PM

CEO of SBC Fair says ‘It’s all about creating memories’

As May winds down, the San Bernardino County Fair is gearing up for its nine-day run, which will bring back everyone’s favorites, well as many new attractions, according to Fair CEO Geoff Hinds.

The event will kick off at noon Saturday and continue through June 2 at the SBC Fairgrounds, 14800 Seventh Street in Victorville. Hinds said this year’s theme is “Create Great Memories.”

“I don’t think there’s anything more relevant about what you do when you come to the fair,” said Hinds. “It’s all about creating memories. We thought it was a great theme and hope everyone comes out and creates their own memories.”

Among the main attractions at this year’s Fair will be rides, games, clowns, jugglers, local bands, exotic animals and all the deep fried treats your heart desires. The Grandstand Stage is set to feature an array of diverse entertainment, including the heavy metal band Skid Row, singer Lance Bass of NSYNC, San Diego-based rock band P.O.D., Pro Bull Riding and Monster Trucks.

All concerts are free with fair admission. To purchase tickets, visit www.sbcfair.com.
The Twentynine Palms Planning Commission approved expansion plans for Theatre 29 at last night’s meeting. Reporter Heather Clisby was there ...

Last night’s meeting of the Twentynine Palms Planning Commission marked a step forward for local theater as designs plans for an upgraded Theatre 29 were narrowly approved by commission.

Representing Mithun Hodgetts and Fung, a design firm that specializes in theaters, Darin Viera, presented the plans to the commission seeking feedback and ultimate approval. The renovation plans focus on upgrading the production potential with additions such as a fly loft, rigging and additional wing space. Other additions include expanded dressing rooms, a larger lobby, relocated concessions and a much-needed stage door. The current theater houses 95 patrons but the new space will accommodate up to 160; an orchestra pit could be used for extra seating.
After some questions from Chair Greg Mendoza and Commissioner Max Walker around sign codes and the design's right-angled style, the commission voted to approve the designs, 3-2, sending the plans to its next stop: city council.
Inland residents’ ideas sought for Southern California transportation, growth plans

The Southern California Association of Governments is hosting meetings across the Inland Empire between now and mid-June.
A planning agency is seeking Inland Empire residents' help as it launches an effort to create a blueprint to guide Southern California transportation investments and growth over the next 25 years.

The Southern California Association of Governments has set several public workshops across Riverside and San Bernardino counties this month and next for Connect SoCal, the name of the regional plan that will cover the years 2020 through 2045.

Southern California counties — Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura — are expected collectively to add 4 million people during the next quarter-century.

Remaining workshops include:

**Wednesday, May 22:** Murrieta Public Library, 8 Town Square, Murrieta, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

**Tuesday, May 28:** Tribal Representatives Workshop, UC Riverside Palm Desert Extension, 75080 Frank Sinatra Drive, Palm Desert, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

**Tuesday, May 28:** UCR Palm Desert Extension,
Region is falling behind on affordable home permits, UCR analysts say

How and why Southern California’s population grew so much in one year

RIVERSIDE COUNTY: $6.4 million spent on lobbyists in past decade

Inland Empire rail, trail, road and bridge projects get millions of gas-tax dollars

Feds step in, make 10 Freeway Express Lanes in San Bernardino County a step closer to reality
Inland residents’ ideas sought for Southern California transportation, growth plans – Daily Bulletin

**Tuesday, June 4:** Victorville City Hall, training rooms 1 and 2, 14343 Civic Drive, Victorville, 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

**Wednesday, June 5:** Historic Santa Fe Depot, Tile Room, 1170 W. Third St., San Bernardino, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

**Tuesday, June 11:** SCAG Riverside office, 3403 10th St., 8th floor, Riverside, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

**Tuesday, June 11:** Corona Public Library, 650 S. Main St., Corona, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Information: www.scag.ca.gov

Tags: Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories PE, Top Stories RDF, Top Stories Sun, transportation
Fires break out as thunderstorms roll into Inland Empire

Cal Fire/Riverside County firefighters responded to small brush fires and a swiftwater rescue Wednesday, May 22, as thunder, lightning and heavy rain moved through the Inland Empire.

Flames burned 13 acres in Perris in a fire that was 75 percent contained as of about 3 p.m. The fire was reported in the 2500 block of North Perris Boulevard about 12:20 p.m. Winds were
Fires break out as thunderstorms roll into Inland Empire – Daily Bulletin

Just before 1 p.m., a fire was reported in the 300 block of Cavaletti Lane in Norco. By 3 p.m., 5 acres had burned, and there was no containment. Corona and Riverside firefighters were assisting.

Then about 1:30 p.m., firefighters received a report of someone swept away in a drainage ditch at San Michele Road and Indian Street in Moreno Valley. The person was rescued and hospitalized.

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Late-spring storm drops snow on Southern California mountains, more on the way

Southern California rain forecast: Drizzle first, more on Sunday

Rare mid-May showers douse Southern California, with more possible this weekend

Rain, high winds expected in Inland Empire; chance of mountain snow

Rain — with possible thunderstorms, hail — coming to Southern California
Deputies seek help finding missing at-risk woman, 83, in Chino Hills

By STAFF REPORT | |
PUBLISHED: May 23, 2019 at 12:40 am | UPDATED: May 23, 2019 at 1:07 am

The San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department late Wednesday said the public's help is needed in finding an elderly woman who went missing in Chino Hills. The agency said Shirley Jefferson, 83, has dementia and needs medication.

Anyone seeing her should call 911, the Sheriff’s Department said.

San Bernardino County Sheriff  @sbcountysheriff · 7h
Chino Hills - The public’s help is needed in locating critical missing person 83yr old Shirley Jefferson. Last seen at Eucalyptus and Ranch Hills wearing blk and white striped shirt, gray sweats, light blue/grey blanket over shoulders
San Bernardino County Sheriff
@sbcountysheriff

She is 5'5" tall, 150 pounds, blue eyes and salt and pepper hair. If seen call 911 immediately. She has dementia and is in need of medication.

13 11:47 PM - May 22, 2019
LA County DCFS failing to protect children from abuse, state auditors find

Social workers completed 72% of safety assessments on time, some without visiting a child's home
The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services allows children to remain in unsafe and abusive situations longer than necessary — sometimes for months — by failing to complete neglect investigations accurately and on time, according to a California State Auditor report released Tuesday.

Auditors determined the department’s social workers completed 72% of safety assessments on time in 2017 and 2018. They also found several instances in which social workers prepared and submitted assessments without actually visiting the child’s home.
“Even if supervisors had identified and corrected many of these issues upon review, we found that they often completed such reviews long after social workers had made decisions regarding children’s safety,” the auditors said in the 43-page report.

The audit’s findings and recommendations will be beneficial in ensuring that children are better protected, said Bobby Cagle, director of the Department of Children and Family Services for the past 18 months.

“We worked very closely with the auditors to make sure they had what they needed to make the findings they needed to make,” Cagle said. “We should be welcoming of anybody who looks at our work with a critical eye.”

The Southern California News Group reached out to several child advocacy organizations regarding the audit but none returned phone calls and emails seeking comment.

The Department of Children and Family Services is the largest child welfare agency in the U.S., with 35,000 open cases at any given time.

137,000 allegations investigated

Last year, 225,000 calls were made to the department’s child protection hotline, resulting in the investigation of 137,000 allegations. Referrals to the hotline are routed by the department to one of its 19 regional offices for in-person investigations and case management.

State law requires the department to initiate investigations within 24 hours or 10 days, depending on the severity or circumstances of the referral. However, auditors found that the department met that requirement in only 19 of the 30 investigations that were reviewed.
151 days to investigate one case

In one instance, a social worker made a single attempt to contact a family within 24 hours, but did not make subsequent attempts.

“Once the department sought and found the family — 151 days after the referral — it removed the children from an unsafe home situation,” the report says.

Complaints that the department has failed to remove children from homes despite reports of abuse have made headlines.

In 2018, the department came under scrutiny after 10-year-old Anthony Avalos of Lancaster died of serious head injuries. Cigarette burns covered the boy’s body.

Law enforcement officers and child protective caseworkers documented years of severe abuse in the Avalos case, sources familiar with cases have told media outlets. They have said that despite the history, the boy was never permanently removed from the home.

Auditors also found the department struggled to complete neglect and abuse investigations within the mandated 30-day time frame.

The department adhered to that time frame for only nine of 30 referrals that were reviewed. Six of the investigations lasted more than 90 days, and one exceeded 400 days, according to the report.

The department’s inability to meet the 30-day timeline for investigations
is often “cyclical’ and frequently at the mercy of school systems, which are the primary reporters for child abuse and neglect cases, Cagle said.

Assessments late, inaccurate

Auditors also found that safety and risk assessments completed by the department’s social workers were frequently late and inaccurate.

Out of 30 safety assessments that were reviewed, five did not accurately identify or attempt to address threats in the home, according to the report. In three instances, social workers filled out safety assessments without actually visiting the children’s homes, but asserted the homes were safe and without hazards, auditors found.

The report also says some assessments were inaccurate because social workers failed to consider important risk factors such as past domestic violence in homes or the results of previous investigations.

Background checks

The department also failed to consistently perform required home inspections and criminal background checks before placing children with relatives, the auditors found.

Noting one glaring example, the report said: “The department did not complete the required background check for the relatives of one child until we raised the issue in December 2018 — nearly 800 days after placement.”

Auditors also determined the department did not consistently meet requirements for monthly in-home visits to evaluate the well-being of children in its care.

Two social workers were found to have repeatedly used nearly identical narratives to document ongoing visits for months, raising doubts whether visits had actually occurred, the report said.

Recommendations made
To address problems detailed in the report, auditors said the agency should complete the following recommendations by November:

- Establish thresholds for the number of days that will trigger follow-up from the department’s various levels of management.
- Implement a tracking mechanism to monitor and follow up on uncompleted or undocumented initial home inspections and background checks.
- Implement a tracking mechanism to monitor live scan criminal record checks.
- Conduct annual reviews of community organizations that perform home environment assessments to ensure they complete the assessments on schedule.

Cagle said the department is committed to addressing the recommendations and is focused on establishing a smaller ratio of supervisors to staff to better review cases.

“We are making strides in many areas,” he added. “Our concern is that we provide the best quality, timely services.”

Tags: children, crime, Los Angeles County, SoCal Watchdog, Top Stories Breeze, Top Stories LADN, Top Stories LBPT, Top Stories PSN, Top Stories SGVT, Top Stories WDN

Scott Schwebke
Scott Schwebke is an investigative reporter for the Register and the Southern California News Group. A native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., he was previously a breaking news and multimedia reporter for the Ogden, Utah, Standard-Examiner. Scott has also worked at newspapers in Colorado, North Carolina and Virginia. A graduate of Brigham Young University, Scott is the Register's 2014 Beat Reporter of the Year. He has won more than two dozen journalism awards including the N.C. Associated Press News Council’s O. Henry Award for a lengthy narrative on the brutal home invasion slaying of a nurse and a Katie Award from the Dallas Press Club for a feature story on a UFO investigator. Scott has covered everything from methamphetamine trafficking cops to hurricanes and has accompanied police on undercover drug buys. He also provided an award winning, eyewitness account of the execution of a North Carolina death row inmate and obtained an exclusive interview with the ringleader of a brazen escape from the Orange County Jail involving three maximum security inmates. Scott was also part of the Register’s investigative team that produced the year-long, award winning Rehab Riviera series, examining problems in Southern California’s drug rehabilitation industry. Having spent two years living in England including Liverpool, he is an avid
A fight is heating up between California and the Trump administration over the cost of fighting wildfires — and as fire season approaches, state fire officials worry the dispute could slow response times. It comes down to a disagreement over billing and the money state agencies say they're owed.

California firefighters and the federal government have had an agreement for almost 10 years, set to expire on Dec. 31 of this year, that establishes a mutual aid system.

'We have members that haven't been paid back. And the bottom line is we're entering into what could be yet another very critical fire year.'
That means local and state firefighting agencies will respond to a fire even if it's on federal land, knowing they'll be reimbursed for their costs per the contract. Since 60 percent of forested land in California is federal land, there are a lot of federal fires that need to be put out.

"Our role is to protect the citizens that live here, whether it's a federal fire or a state fire or a local fire," said Jeff Meston, president of the California Fire Chiefs Association. "Our mutual aid system is designed to be able to take care of that. Now we're being forced really to look at the dollars."

Meston said the federal government is violating the terms of the longstanding agreement, and that it owes California agencies $9.2 million for the cost of responding to fires last year. But U.S. Forest Service officials claim California is overbilling the federal government.

"The requests for reimbursement were based on an estimate of expenses instead of the actual expenses incurred and the documentation provided did not fully support those actual costs," said Babete Anderson, national press officer with the U.S. Forest Service.

Earlier this year, the Forest Service conducted an audit of the repayment process, and determined California was submitting estimated expenses instead of actual expenses.

"Our intentions are to fully reimburse the state of California for all of their actual expenses. The only payments we have not made are those that do not have documentation that substantiate actual expenses," said Anderson.
Meston said that's not the way it's always been done. Under the existing agreement, California agencies have traditionally submitted the average estimated expenses for fighting a fire. For example, he said, if they sent an engine to a fire and it comes with one captain and three firefighters, then they would bill the average cost of a captain and three firefighters.

Now, he said, the U.S. Forest Service wants additional paperwork and the actual costs of each specific person sent to fight a fire.

In a letter sent to the U.S. Forest Service, a group of agencies — CalChiefs, California Metro Chiefs, Fire Districts Association of California and League of California Cities Fire Chiefs Department — said those kinds of changes should come under a new contract, which is currently being negotiated and would start in 2020.

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**THE COST OF FIGHTING FIRES**

**Wildfires Burning Through Cash, Not Just Landscape**

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**California Spent Nearly $1.8 Billion Fighting Major 2017 Wildfires**

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**After Years of Busting its Firefighting Budget, Should California Get Disaster Insurance?**
The federal government, they argued, shouldn't change the rules and withhold payments to local firefighting agencies.

"I think that that's the crux of the issue right now, is that they are kind of changing the rules in the middle of the season," said Meston.

Meston also said the federal government currently owes $9.2 million in reimbursements that are not being paid in a timely manner and that have already been factored into local budgets.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein agreed, sending her own letter to the feds on May 14, urging them to delay the implementation of recommendations from their audit and to make any changes to reimbursement policies part of the negotiation of a new contract, "Given that California is facing another year of severe risk after two years of devastating wildfire losses," she wrote.

Both Meston and Feinstein said the mutual aid agreement has worked for years, allowing California firefighters to marshal their resources up and down the state no matter what land the fire is on.

"Wildfires don't stop at jurisdictional boundaries, so a unified federal-state approach is the only way to properly protect lives and property," wrote Feinstein. "The state of California has dedicated enormous resources to building and maintaining one of the most professional and well-organized firefighting forces in the world. This force has been a key partner for decades in helping the federal government to fight wildfires on federal land."

Both Meston and Feinstein said the timing of this fight is terrible.

"We have members that haven't been paid back. And the bottom line is we're entering into what could be yet another very critical fire year," Meston said.

If local and state agencies will now have to weigh what land a fire is on and whether or not they can afford to send aid, it could hurt response times and firefighting resources, he said.
Cal OES Fire Chief Brian Marshall echoed that sentiment in an April 24 letter to Randy Moore, the regional forester for the Pacific Southwest Division of the Dept. of Agriculture. Marshall warned that the Forest Service's new reimbursement requirements "would be cumbersome and would severely impact California’s ability to respond to fires."
Lompoc grapples with long-term solutions to its budget shortfalls, burgeoning pension debt

BY ZAC EZZONE

The city of Lompoc is somewhat isolated, located about 20 miles off of Highway 101. This seclusion prevents the city from receiving the same sales tax revenue generated in most other Santa Barbara County cities by traffic passing through.

In addition, Lompoc has the second lowest median home value in the county behind Guadalupe—the only other city in the county that’s also removed from Highway 101. These lower home values make the city more affordable to live in than other cities on the Central Coast, but it limits the city’s property tax base.

These two revenue limitations are compounded by the massive debt the city owes to the California Public Employees’ Retirement System (CalPERS). This burden, along with slow revenue growth, has put the city in a precarious financial situation as it works on its 2019-21 biennial budget, City Manager Jim Throop said. If the city were to fill every position and operate at full capacity, it would face a $3.6 million deficit over the next two years.

“The big heavy boat anchor that has been put around our necks, that’s what is dragging us down into this deficit,” Throop said at the city’s April 17 budget workshop meeting.

These budget limitations come at a time when, during City Council meetings, many residents have expressed concerns about not feeling safe in the community. Police Sgt. Agustin Arias, who is also the president of the Lompoc Police Officers’ Association, said these concerns reflect what he’s seeing in the community, which is experiencing an increase in gang activity.

In March, a stray bullet from a gang-related drive-by shooting killed a 17-year-old girl outside of a convenience store. This is one of two homicides that have occurred in the city so far this year, which is one more than last year.

It’s difficult for the police department, which is underfunded and understaffed, to address these concerns, Arias said. Over the last two years, the police and fire departments have operated with vacancies due to budget constraints.

The lack of funding has also made it difficult for city departments to maintain and update facilities and equipment. For example, the city’s primary fire station has structural deficiencies that could cause it to collapse during an earthquake, according to a 2014 study completed.

To address some of these concerns, Mayor Jenelle Osborne, who was a council member during the last budget cycle, said City Council should approach the upcoming budget differently than in 2017, when council approved minor cuts to balance the budget.

“It’s a bit of the same discussion going on, and unfortunately the same direction,” Osborne told the Sun. “[There’s] not any proactivity to solve the long-term issue.”

Contributing factors

Most of the city’s financial troubles started in 1999 when then Gov. Gray Davis signed Senate Bill 400 into law, which expanded the benefits public workers receive through CalPERS.

Prior to this benefit expansion, the city’s CalPERS obligations were completely funded. Twenty years later, after additional changes to the system and the ebbs and flows of the
Doom and gloom is the order of the day in Lompoc, where the city is struggling to meet its pension obligations, according to a presentation from Lompoc Management Services Director Dean Albro at a budget workshop meeting on April 17.

The city is slowly chipping away at this debt, but it won’t feel any significant relief until around 2032, when people who have previously worked for the city and collect this pension begin dying, Throop said.

“That’s the peak of additional costs for Lompoc, and once it hits 2032, it will slowly come down,” Throop said. “It could be in 2048 or 2050 before most of the problem is gone.”

During a presentation at a March 19 budget workshop meeting, Albro said the city’s annual payment for public safety workers’ pensions increased $371,227 this year, while its debt on the pensions increased $503,991. This means the city continues to accumulate debt as it pays off these pension obligations.

Lompoc is not the only public entity in California that’s feeling the effects of CalPERS on its budget. According to a study completed by Stanford University professor Joe Nation in 2017, employer contributions to CalPERS could double between fiscal years 2017-18 and 2029-30.

The study, which was completed by looking at case studies of the state and 13 cities, also found that between fiscal years 2002-03 and 2017-18, pension contributions have increased at a faster rate than operating expenses. On average, pension payments made up 3.9 percent of all expenses in fiscal year 2002-03, and 11.4 percent in fiscal year 2017-18.

Although CalPERS is an issue for all cities, former Lompoc City Manager Patrick Wiemiller said it’s especially burdensome for a city like Lompoc, which struggles with generating revenue.

“The reason Lompoc is hit harder than others is because it was starting with a tax base that is lower per capita than other cities around,” Wiemiller said.

Cities in California have three primary revenue sources for their general funds: sales tax, property tax, and a transient occupancy tax that guests at hotels pay. Lompoc has experienced increases in these revenue streams, but the city is still behind others on the Central Coast, said Wiemiller, who was with the city for four years.

Homes values in Lompoc are lower than elsewhere—which slows the growth of property tax revenue—and the city’s location away from Highway 101 affects its potential to capture sales tax revenue.

“Six of the eight cities in Santa Barbara County are located on or along the [Highway] 101 corridor,” Wiemiller said. “You can be traveling by happenstance and stop to spend money in a city. For Guadalupe and Lompoc, you have to get off [Highway] 101 and deliberately be going there.”

The combination of the city’s CalPERS obligations and its limited ability to grow revenue has left the city facing an estimated $3.6 million deficit over its 2019-21 biennial budget. This amount is assuming the city fills all of its open staff positions, which it hasn’t done in recent years.

In order to bridge any gap between the city’s revenue and its expenses, it would have to dip into its reserves, which are already lower than city policy deems appropriate. Throop said the city should have about 25 percent of what it needs to operate in a year in its reserves at all times, which is about $8 million. Currently, the city has about $2 million in its reserves, which wouldn’t last long if the city were to operate at full capacity.

“If we’re running $1.8 million short per year, that is not a good sign,” Throop said. “That will eat the rest of the reserves quickly.”

Searching for solutions
Addressing these budget shortfalls requires the city to bring in new revenue or drastically reduce its spending. During the April 17 budget workshop meeting, Throop presented the council with the option of either holding an election for a 1 percent sales tax increase, or slashing 8.7 percent from every city department’s budget—although the latter was less of a suggestion and more of a warning.

“I knew the cut couldn’t be across the board [because of city policy], but I was trying to show the magnitude of what that would be,” Throop said.

City Council pushed back on both options. Members weren’t supportive of balancing a budget based on a tax increase or cutting funding from the police and fire departments’ budgets. Throop said that, without new revenue, it’s difficult to reduce the city’s funding enough to cover the deficit while avoiding cuts to fire and police because the departments make up almost 75 percent of the city’s operating expenses.

City Council made similar demands when drafting the 2017-19 biennial budget, said Wiemiller, who left Lompoc in early 2018 to become Santa Maria’s assistant city manager. Although he primarily left because of the opportunity in Santa Maria, his philosophical differences with City Council also played a factor, he said. He still lives in Lompoc, and as a resident, he believes voters should be able to weigh in on the sales tax issue.

“I can’t understand not being willing to even have the people decide,” Wiemiller said, “because this becomes an issue not about the budget, not about taxation. It becomes an issue about who’s in charge, and I think the citizens ultimately are.”

Over the last few months, many residents have spoken in favor of supporting a sales tax measure during City Council meetings, while some have also voiced opposition to the proposal. Councilmember Jim Mosby said he believes the number of people expressing support for a sales tax increase during council meetings is not representative of how most residents feel.

“I’ve had many, many more people contact me and say, ‘No new taxes, Jim. I’m on a fixed income, and I can’t afford any more,’” Mosby said.

Mosby and other council members have expressed concerns that a tax increase would be difficult for families living in Lompoc, where the annual per capita income is close to $20,000. However, voters in Santa Maria, which has a similar per capita income, passed a 1 percent sales tax increase with a 74 percent majority in November 2018.

According to a staff report from a Santa Maria City Council meeting on March 5, this sales tax increase is estimated to generate about $18 million in revenue for the city’s 2019-20 fiscal year. Most of the funds generated through this tax are dedicated to public safety improvements.

The same sales tax increase in Lompoc wouldn’t generate as much revenue—primarily because the city has less than half the population of Santa Maria. However, according to a presentation from Albro, the increase would generate an estimated $4.9 million in revenue per year, while costing the average family in Lompoc about $123 annually.

Mosby disagrees with this math. He said he believes it will cost families about five times that amount.

“If you have 10,000 families … of four—because there’s about 40,000 people [in Lompoc]—it will cost about $500,” Mosby said.

Instead of increasing the tax rate, Mosby believes there are other ways the city can avoid a deficit while growing its revenues. He said the city should focus on annexing land to open up space for new housing, which would allow the city to grow its population.

The city is working with Santa Barbara County’s Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to annex new land and expand the city’s boundaries for the first time since 1999.

Because it’s been 20 years since it last annexed land, the city’s housing supply has remained stagnant for years. Last year, one new home was built in the city, but two were torn down. Throop said a developer is building 44 homes on a small plot of land annexed in
1999, but the city needs thousands of more homes to make up for the years when no homes were built.

Working with LAFCO to annex land is a slow process and doesn’t solve the city’s short-term revenue needs. The city could see some relief through a cannabis tax that voters approved in November 2018, but Throop said it’s too soon to tell how much revenue this will generate.

The city has received 26 applications for cannabis business, but so far, only two retail stores have opened. The applications include a mix of retail and manufacturing establishments that could create new jobs in addition to revenue. Mosby said the city needs to work through these applications quicker to establish this revenue stream.

Resident Joe Garcia argued this same point during the public comment period of the May 7 City Council meeting. He said that rather than asking voters to approve a new tax rate, the city should maximize the cannabis tax voters already approved.

“Here we are, 14 months after accepting cannabis applications, and one business is open collecting taxes,” Garcia said. “You have a source of revenue; you have a way to pay off some of these things. But your focus is continuing to … ask us to give you more money.”

Public safety concerns

Many of the residents who’ve spoken in favor of a sales tax increase during City Council meetings cite the city’s need to improve public safety as their primary reason for supporting the proposal.

During a March 9 meeting, D.A. Taylor, who was born in Lompoc, told the City Council that she’s considering leaving the city due to recent crime that’s taken place. Taylor said public safety should be the city’s top priority when drafting the 2019-21 budget.

“Before we can do economic development, before we can do the parks, before we can do anything, we have to have a community that is safe, and we don’t have that,” Taylor said.

In addition to the two homicides this year, there have been a number of shootings and an increase in aggravated assault, Police Sgt. Arias said.

Mosby said most of the concerns over public safety are overblown and perpetuated by fear mongering in the media and residents during City Council meetings. He cites the police department's calls for service as proof of no significant increase in crime.

According to the city’s 2018 comprehensive annual financial report, the police department’s calls for service fluctuated between 26,000 and 33,000 from 2010 to 2017.

However, looking at the department’s calls for service isn’t representative of the amount of crime occurring in the city, Arias said.

“You get politicians that want to say our calls for service are down right now,” Arias said. “That’s because during the day we’re using one dispatcher, and we’re running skeleton crews with not a lot of presence in the community.”

Over the past two years, the city’s police and fire departments haven’t operated at full staff levels because vacancies have been held open to offset a shortage in city revenue and turnover in staff. Additionally, the police officers association agreed to hold three officer positions open to secure raises during the last budget cycle.

Excluding the three open officer positions, the department is authorized to fill 44 positions, of which 39 are filled. The department is also authorized to fill eight dispatcher positions, only half of which are filled. In April, the city hired two firefighters, which fully staffed the department.

Aside from the vacancies, both departments have retention issues that have made it difficult to stay fully staffed. City Council approved $2 million in raises during the last budget cycle to try to improve retention, which helped but hasn’t solved the problem, Arias said.
Southern California housing creation trails national construction, local hiring pace

Last year's housing growth of 0.7% trailed 0.92% rate of the other 200 largest U.S. counties.
Southern California’s best year for housing creation since the Great Recession left the region trailing the national growth pace and a local hiring spree.

Fresh Census Bureau statistics detail the slow pace of adding new housing to the region. The number of housing units — owned or rented — in the four counties covered by the Southern California News Group grew last year by 43,207. That’s up from 39,756 in 2017 and 41,002 in 2016. And it’s the largest housing increase since the downturn ended in 2010.

Still, my trusty spreadsheet tells me that last year’s new housing is below par.

For starters, bosses in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties added 143,408 jobs in 2018. That’s 100,000 more hires than the housing units created.

And last year’s housing creation equals 0.7% growth. That trails the 0.92% combined building pace in the other 200 largest U.S. counties.

So when housing’s a family’s biggest expense, having an ample supply can be key to a region’s economic success. And Southern California struggles to keep housing costs in check.

For example, only 51% of Southern California households can “afford” an entry-level home even using a mortgage with generous financing terms. Meanwhile, rent inflation in Los Angeles and Orange counties is at a 12-year high.

ICYMI: Southern California ranked as second-worst ‘mega city’ to live in

Sadly, below-average construction is nothing new for the region’s housing market. Since 2010, Southern California’s housing growth rate every year has trailed the other large U.S. counties. And those new local housing units ran well short of what’s required for the 1.2 million jobs created locally in the same period.

Yes, 249,125 housing units were added in the region since the recession ended. But that equals a 4.15% eight-year growth rate, below the other Top 200 counties’ 5.55% combined pace.

Here’s how housing creation fared in each Southern California county and how they ranked among the 200 largest counties:

Sign up for The Home Stretch newsletter. Get weekly housing news on affordability, renting, buying, selling and more. Subscribe here.
**Los Angeles County:** Added 18,733 housing units last year, No. 3 nationally. It was 0.53% growth, ranking No. 125 among the Top 200. Since 2010, the county added 114,636 units, No. 3 nationally, and 3.33% growth, ranking it No. 125. Not enough for the 600,000 jobs added in eight years.

**Orange County:** Added 9,251 units last year, No. 16 nationally. It was 0.84% growth, No. 91. Since ’10, 61,865 units added, No. 13 nationally, and 5.9% growth, ranking it No. 74. And it looks even smaller when O.C. bosses hired 272,000 in these eight years.

**Riverside County:** Added 8,478 units in ’18, No. 19 nationally. It was 1.01% growth, No. 71. Since ’10, 46,873 units added, No. 19. It was 5.85% growth, ranked No. 75.

**San Bernardino County:** Added 6,745 units last year, No. 29 nationally. It was 0.94% growth, No. 76. Since ’10, 25,751 units added, No. 43. It was 3.68% growth, ranked No. 116.

And to think, the Inland Empire has added 369,000 more workers since 2010.

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**Jonathan Lansner**
California’s jails are so bad some inmates beg to go to prison instead

By ABBIE VANSICKLE and MANUEL VILLA

MAY 23, 2019 | 6:10 AM
| SACRAMENTO
An inmate peeks through the bars at the restrictive housing unit, also known as solitary confinement, at the Men's Central Jail in Los Angeles. (Wally Skalij / Los Angeles Times)

Ever since he stole his first car at age 10, Cody Garland has spent much of his life behind bars. Now 35, he has served time at eight different California prisons.

But the hardest stint, he says, was not in a state penitentiary. It was in a Sacramento County jail, where in 2016 he was sentenced to serve eight years for burglary, identity theft and other charges.
Medical care at the jail was even worse than in prison; untreated glaucoma left him legally blind, he says.

Solitary confinement — in a windowless room — was a common punishment; Garland says he lost track of whether it was day or night during a spell in solitary and began to hear voices.

Mental-health help was hard to get, he alleged, even after he started swallowing shards of metal and tried to hang himself. He detailed the treatment in a lawsuit accusing the county of subjecting inmates to inhumane conditions — a claim the county denies.

“I’ve done a lot of prison time,” he says, “and this was the worst time I’d ever done.”
Garland is one of more than 175,000 people sentenced to county jails instead of state prisons in the last eight years because of sweeping changes to California’s justice system, according to an analysis of state data by The Marshall Project. The reforms were intended to ease prison overcrowding — and they have.

But the changes were also supposed to help people convicted of nonviolent crimes, by letting them serve their sentences close to home in county jails with lots of education and training programs.
It hasn’t worked out that way in some urban counties. Jails built to hold people for days or weeks — awaiting trial or serving short sentences for petty crimes — have strained to handle long-term inmates, many with chronic medical and mental-health problems and histories of violence.

Statewide, assaults on jailers increased almost 90% from 2010, the year before prison downsizing began, to 2017, the most recent year for which there is complete data. Mental-health cases, which had been declining in jails, have risen. County spending on medicine for inmates has jumped (to almost $64 million in 2017 from $38 million in 2010), and the cost of psychotropic medication has recently surged. Legal challenges over inmate treatment have expanded to about a dozen county lockups.

Deaths in California jails jumped by 26% in the years after they started receiving long-term inmates, peaking at 153 in 2014 before falling to 133 in 2017. That year, California had 17.7 deaths per 10,000 inmates; Texas, which has the second largest jail population, had 13.2.
Problems have been particularly acute in counties with old facilities, tight budgets and a lot of long-term inmates, including Sacramento, San Bernardino, Fresno and San Diego, which had a spate of suicides this spring. Los Angeles County has had to deal with the largest number of these inmates: 45,000, or about a quarter of the total since 2010.

For these counties, California’s prison changes have been “a budget buster,” said Mike Brady, a former
official with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation who now works as a consultant. The jails now “have serious mental illnesses, violence. They’ve got gang issues. They’ve got developmental disabilities. They’ve got physical disabilities. They’ve got to change their whole physical plant. It’s a phenomenal expense.”

California’s experiment in prison downsizing has implications for states across the country as they try to cut the size of their prison systems. Some, like Texas, are tackling the issue because of the high cost of locking people up, while others, like Alabama, are under pressure to relieve overcrowding and violence. And in many regions, voters are concluding that prison populations, which include disproportionate numbers of people of color, reflect outdated “tough-on-crime” policies.

For such states, “California is a pretty remarkable study,” says James Austin, a corrections expert who has examined California prisons and jails. “The whole system has dropped about 220,000 people” without the surge in crime many critics feared.

Some counties have coped well with the changes. In wealthy Silicon Valley, governments have poured cash into fixing up their jails. They have also spent a lot on programs to keep people out of jail in the first place, and to help those who are incarcerated make a successful return to their communities.

Others, like Humboldt County, a rural area along the rugged coastline about 300 miles north of San Francisco, say they have relatively few long-term inmates because judges and prosecutors have changed their sentencing practices to allow people to serve more of their time in the community.

“One of the things that made us successful is we’ve been fortunate not to have some of the longer sentences that some other counties have had,” said Capt. Duane Christian, who leads the Humboldt County Correctional Facility.

Overall, the consequences for county jails aren’t easy to measure. No state agency collects data that could answer important questions, like what percentage of a county’s inmates are there because of the new measures and whether some jails hold an outsized number of inmates with long sentences.

The state does track the size of the overall jail population, which increased briefly after a 2011 U.S. Supreme Court decision required California to downsize the prisons, climbing to an average of 82,000 people in 2013. But the number of people in county lockups began to drop after 2014, when state voters approved a measure to cut the length of some sentences. Last year, county jails held 72,500 people.
A line forms inside the general area at the Men's Central Jail in Los Angeles. (Maria Alejandra Cardona / Los Angeles Times)

L.A. County still holds a lot of long-term inmates — almost 2,700 on average, as of the third quarter of 2018. That might not seem like a huge number in a giant jail system that generally housed about 16,500 people last year.

But like other counties, L.A. says it is having problems associated with this different population. The number of mental-health cases L.A. jails are reporting to the state has doubled since 2010, to 24,400 last
year. And reported assaults on guards and other jail workers are double what they were before prison downsizing, at about 550 per year, though critics have questioned both the validity of the data and the county’s assertion that violence is rising in its jails.

The state allocated $440 million to Los Angeles in the last fiscal year to offset the costs of the new measures, including staffing, treatment programs and court hearings for people who violate the terms of their community-based sentences.

Sacramento County, for one, continues to struggle with adapting local jails to house long-term inmates.

The county has about 1.5 million residents and has received about 8,000 long-term inmates since 2011, according to the Marshall Project’s analysis. The data do not show how many of those people are still in the county’s jails, which generally house 3,500 to 4,000 people.

Most people waiting for trial are housed in the Sacramento County Main Jail, a series of six slender concrete towers a few blocks from the Capitol downtown. Built in 1989, the jail can hold up to 2,380 people.
The county’s other jail, the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center, sprawls across a 140-acre campus south of the city and can hold 1,625 people in buildings and dorms, some of which date to the late 1950s. It’s here that Garland tried to end his life.

The number of Sacramento inmates with psychological problems has soared. Last year, its jails reported about 8,800 new mental-health cases, up from around 4,100 in 2010 before the prison reform efforts
Violence at the jails has also increased. While the county does not report how often inmates attack one another, assaults on staff have almost doubled, to 111 last year from 58 in 2010.

“One of the things that we’ve gotten from this is a more sophisticated offender — people that have done prior prison sentences,” said Lt. Brad Rose of the county Sheriff’s Department, which runs the jails. “It’s the state prison mentality and sophistication. They make weapons out of anything.”

On the positive side, he said, the county has used state funding to increase the programs it offers inmates to help them prepare to return to their communities.

Sacramento County receives millions of dollars from the state each year to help offset the costs of the new measures, money which covers drug court, public defenders and prosecutors as well as jails. In 2018-19, those payments amounted to $320 million, according to the county budget.

Those funds are not enough to pay for fixes to the jail or the additional staff needed, county officials contend. They declined to provide specifics, citing pending litigation.

In August 2015, the nonprofit Disability Rights California published a scathing report about Sacramento jail conditions. The group found the county held disabled inmates in excessive solitary confinement and provided inadequate mental health care; in one unit, inmates spent nearly 24 hours a day in bare cells, released only once or twice a week into a dayroom that smelled of feces.

The group, together with the Prison Law Office, which has successfully sued the state prison system over the treatment of inmates, threatened to file a suit against Sacramento. In January 2016, the county began to negotiate and hired some experts of its own to evaluate its jails.
Their findings were bleak:

- They confirmed that the main jail put people in solitary confinement for 23½ hours a day, in conditions that were “very stark and unlikely to meet constitutional standards,” and found the jails’ use of segregation “dramatically out of step” with emerging national standards on the dangers of solitary confinement for mentally ill prisoners.
- The medical screening process was “wholly inadequate” to identify inmates with disabilities, and inmates deemed suicide risks spent weeks locked alone in empty classrooms without toilets.
- The number of staff members in both county jails was “startlingly and dangerously low,” leaving them to “operate in a state of near perpetual emergency.”

In settlement negotiations, Disability Rights asked that inmates be given more time out of their cells, more services for the nearly 40% with mental illnesses and better medical care for those serving longer sentences under the new measures.

After 2½ years, negotiations broke down.

In July 2018, Garland and five other inmates sued Sacramento County, accusing it of housing about 3,800 people in “overcrowded and understaffed jails,” subjecting people to “dangerous, inhumane and degrading conditions.”

The county denied providing inhumane treatment or inadequate care but did not address specific claims by Garland or the other inmates.

Other counties, such as Santa Clara, have reached settlements in similar suits. But Sacramento officials said the plaintiffs’ proposal would cost too much and happen too fast. The plan would require an additional $50 million a year to operate the jails, they said, and $160 million for renovation. To cover these costs, the county said, it would have to gut programs for community mental health and homelessness.

“It is unfortunate that once again California county governments are being asked to solve the state’s correctional issues,” said a statement issued last summer by Susan Peters, a county supervisor. She called on the state to “provide the full funding necessary to responsibly shift the state’s prison population to county jails.”

The Sheriff’s Department had been making improvements to the jails even before the lawsuit was filed, said county spokeswoman Kim Nava. She said the county added 72 new positions for jail staff in the last year, including 12 health workers, and increased its contract for psychiatric services. In March 2017, the county built a 20-bed mental health unit at the Main Jail.

The lawsuit is before a federal judge in Sacramento. The county and the plaintiffs’ lawyers are in settlement talks.

Garland no longer spends his days in the Sacramento jail. Since December, he has been living in a prison medical facility in San Luis Obispo, where he says his health problems have improved.

How did he get transferred? In 2018, he hit a sheriff’s deputy in the jail. Garland did not contest charges of resisting an officer and assault likely to produce great bodily injury, a felony.

He begged his public defender to make sure that this time, he went to prison.

“They wanted to give me six months in jail,” he recalled recently. “I said I’d take two years if you’d just let me go to prison.”
Legal experts: California reporter did not commit crime

By JANIE HAR  an hour ago
SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Media law experts have criticized a claim by San Francisco’s police chief that a freelance journalist allegedly conspired to steal a police report, saying that it is not a crime to disclose a public record.

San Francisco attorney Duffy Carolan, who represents several media organizations siding with the independent reporter, said the public has constitutional rights to public records.

“The impact of trying to criminalize disclosure of public records, whether or not it violated internal policy or practice, will have a
profound effect on public employees’ willingness to disclose public records,” she said. “It would have a chilling effect.”

A battle between the press and police is playing out in politically liberal San Francisco after police raided the home and office of Bryan Carmody earlier this month in an effort to uncover the source of a leaked police report into the unexpected death of the city’s former elected public defender.

A journalist who actively and meaningfully participated in unlawfully acquiring information could be successfully prosecuted for a crime, said David Snyder, executive director of the First Amendment Coalition. Hypothetical examples include a reporter providing passwords or hacking instructions to allow someone on the inside to unlawfully access a database.

But Snyder emphasized that a police report is “not a confidential, legally protected document” and its disclosure and publication is lawful.

San Francisco Sgt. Michael Andraychak said Wednesday that the report was not a public record and that state law protects crime reports when “disclosure would endanger the successful completion of the investigation or a related investigation.”

But media experts said although the law allows police to keep reports secret, it does not require police to do so and it is perfectly lawful to release the information. Police also did not raid the office of a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle who obtained the same report independently of Carmody. The newspaper has said it did not pay for the report.

Police used a sledgehammer to try to get into Carmody’s home and office and cuffed him for hours as they searched and subsequently removed dozens of cameras, cellphones, computers and other equipment used to gather news.

San Francisco Police Chief William Scott acknowledged at a press conference Tuesday that the raids looked bad. It was his first full remarks more than week after the May 10 raids.

“We believe that that contact and that interaction went across the line,” Scott said Tuesday, referring to Carmody’s efforts to acquire the report. “It went past just doing your job as a journalist.”
Reporters and other First Amendment organizations are asking a San Francisco judge to revoke search warrants that authorized the raids and to unseal the materials submitted in support of them. Because the warrants are under seal, it’s not known what information police provided to support the search warrants, or whether they disclosed to the judges that Carmody is a journalist.

Carmody said he passively received the report from a source and that he did not pay for the report — though doing so would not have been a crime, the experts said. Still, Scott said the journalist “crossed the line,” motivated by profit or animosity toward the late public defender, Jeff Adachi. An autopsy found Adachi died Feb. 22 of a mixture of cocaine and alcohol, compromising an already bad heart.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that journalists are free to report on newsworthy information contained in stolen documents or illegally intercepted telephone communications obtained from a third party who violated the law, said Carolan, the attorney.

The court may have ruled differently had the journalists encouraged or aided in the unlawful interception of the call, she said. But that has nothing to do with a reporter who encourages a public official or public employee to provide a public record.

“That is what reporters do every day,” Carolan said.

Snyder, of the First Amendment Coalition, said the police chief’s comments suggest the police employee may have accessed an unauthorized system to obtain the report.

“Would an offer by the journalist to pay the source to break the law be enough? Maybe. It would depend on the circumstances,” he said.

“I don’t think it matters what Carmody’s motivations were. The question is: Was his conduct protected by the First Amendment? And all the facts I’ve seen thus far show it was,” he said.

Scott has not provided details of the investigation other than to say that Carmody was an active participant in acquiring a police record, which the reporter then sold to three television news outlets as part of a news package that included information obtained from interviews and video footage from the scene of Adachi’s death.

Carmody has not responded to requests for comment, although he posted on Twitter on Wednesday the hashtag #journalismisnotacrime. A GoFundMe campaign has raised more than $15,000 for the veteran reporter to replace his equipment.

California’s shield law specifically protects journalists from search warrants. The Associated Press is among dozens of news organizations siding with Carmody and seeking to submit a friend-of-the-court brief.
OPINION

For California, Census case is Supremes’ biggest
For California, there is no doubt the most important case the U.S. Supreme Court will decide this year is the legal challenge to the Trump administration’s plan for adding a citizenship question to next year’s federal Census.

Political reality is that Donald Trump’s plan, carried out by the Census Bureau answering to Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, has become one front in the president’s long campaign to punish California for giving his 2016 Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton enough votes for a national popular vote victory over Trump.

He has acted against California wherever he could since then, attempting, among other things, to eliminate the state’s authority to regulate smog and threatening to cut emergency services after major
fires and floods.

But the Census question he wants to add, not asked for 70 years – “Is this person a citizen of the United States?” – is his most insidious anti-California move.

The Census Bureau long ago abandoned the question for two reasons: One was that the Constitution requires no such query, but just an “enumeration” of the “whole number of free persons” every 10 years. The second was that even with primitive polling methods available in the late 1940s, the bureau determined that asking this question would drive hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of people to do whatever they could to avoid being counted.

The writers of the Constitution weren’t concerned about how many undocumented immigrants were in the country, just how many people. They mandated that the Census measure actual population of the entire country and each state and hamlet in it in order to apportion Congressional representation for the next decade. That’s the sole use the Constitution lists for Census information. But over more than two centuries, other laws have required using the same data to dole out federal money for everything from highways and sewers to medical care for indigents.

In California, federal money funds local government nutrition programs, public schools, highways, housing assistance and much more.
“We’re talking about a lot of money,” says Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis, a former congresswoman. “We’re talking about vital services.” The state Department of Finance concluded California will lose $1,950 for every person not counted.

This means the amount at stake here could total billions of dollars now used for vital services, if this one question scares even close to 1 million undocumented immigrants away from getting counted. A low count could also cost the state at least one seat in Congress, another outcome Trump would enjoy.

But Trump’s aides insist the question aims to get valuable information, nothing more.

That’s a subterfuge, said one court which ruled the query unconstitutional because it would prevent the required accurate enumeration of free people.

U.S. District Judge George J. Hazel of Maryland, a Barack Obama appointee, concluded the government added the question “to depress the count of immigrant communities of color, thereby decreasing this population’s impact on and benefit from apportioned political power,” and that Ross (and Trump) “engineered the…rationale to cloak (its) true purpose.” Another federal judge held that Ross “made misleading statements” about the reasons for the question.

Those strong statements can be overruled by the Supreme Court, which fast-tracked the case because of a June 30 deadline for getting Census forms to the Government Printing Office and will rule before its term ends in mid-June.

One argument the government makes is that a
How far can the supermajority go to appease its activist base? A similar question has been asked of some people during the last 70 years, so why not everyone? During that time, the query went only to relatively small groups in an effort to get information about specific population segments. The question, in fact, has never been asked of all Census respondents.

That's part of a Census tradition of getting only a few facts from every person surveyed, while using more detailed questionnaires on smaller, but representative, groups.

The upshot is that if this question survives at the Supreme Court, as appears likely with the court's political makeup, it could be problematic for everyone in California. And while state Attorney General Xavier Becerra has fervently fought its inclusion, once the court rules, he can do nothing more.

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Tags: Opinion Columns
America’s Cities Are Unlivable. Blame Wealthy Liberals.

The demise of a California housing measure shows how progressives abandon progressive values in their own backyards.

By Farhad Manjoo
Opinion Columnist

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To live in California at this time is to experience every day the cryptic phrase that George W. Bush once used to describe the invasion of Iraq: “Catastrophic success.” The economy here is booming, but no one feels especially good about it. When the cost of living is taken into account, billionaire-brimming California ranks as the most poverty-stricken state, with a fifth of the population struggling to get by. Since 2010, migration out of California has surged.

The basic problem is the steady collapse of livability. Across my home state, traffic and transportation is a developing-world nightmare. Child care and education seem impossible for all but the wealthiest. The problems of affordable housing and homelessness have surpassed all superlatives — what was a crisis is now an emergency that feels like a dystopian showcase of American inequality.

Just look at San Francisco, Nancy Pelosi’s city. One of every 11,600 residents is a billionaire, and the annual household income necessary to buy a median-priced home now tops $320,000. Yet the streets there are a plague of garbage and needles and feces, and every morning brings fresh horror stories from a “Black Mirror” hell: Homeless veterans are surviving on an economy of trash from billionaires' mansions. Wealthy homeowners are crowdfunding a legal effort arguing that a proposed homeless shelter is an environmental hazard. A public-school teacher suffering from cancer is forced to pay for her own substitute.
In March, teachers went on strike for seven days in Oakland, Calif., arguing that their salaries were not keeping up with the region's soaring cost of living.
Ben Margot/Associated Press

And there is no end in sight to such crushing success. At every level of government, our representatives, nearly all of them Democrats, prove inadequate and unresponsive to the challenges at hand. Witness last week’s embarrassment, when California lawmakers used a sketchy parliamentary maneuver to knife Senate Bill 50, an ambitious effort to undo restrictive local zoning rules and increase the supply of housing.

It was another chapter in a dismal saga of Nimbyist urban mismanagement that is crushing American cities. Not-in-my-backyardism is a bipartisan sentiment, but because the largest American cities are populated and run by Democrats — many in states under complete Democratic control — this sort of nakedly exclusionary urban restrictionism is a particular shame of the left.

There are many threads in the story of America's increasingly unlivable cities. One continuing tragedy is the decimation of local media and the rise of nationalized politics in its place. In America the “local” problems plaguing cities are systematically sidelined by the structure of the national media and government, in which the presidency, the Senate and the Supreme Court are all constitutionally tilted in favor of places where no one lives. (There are more than twice as many people in my midsize suburban county, Santa Clara, as there are in the entire state of North Dakota, with its two United States senators.)
That’s why, aside from Elizabeth Warren — who has a plan for housing, as she has a plan for everything — Democrats on the 2020 presidential trail rarely mention their ideas for housing affordability, an issue eating American cities alive. I watched Joe Biden’s campaign kick off the other day; the only house he mentioned was the White House.

Then there is the refusal on the part of wealthy progressives to live by the values they profess to support at the national level. Creating dense, economically and socially diverse urban environments ought to be a paramount goal of progressivism. Cities are the standard geographical unit of the global economy. Dense urban areas are quite literally the “real America” — the cities are where two-thirds of Americans live, and they account for almost all national economic output. Urban areas are the most environmentally friendly way we know of housing lots of people. We can’t solve the climate crisis without vastly improving public transportation and increasing urban density. More than that, metropolises are good for the psyche and the soul; density fosters tolerance, diversity, creativity and progress.

Yet where progressives argue for openness and inclusion as a cudgel against President Trump, they abandon it on Nob Hill and in Beverly Hills. This explains the opposition to SB 50, which aimed to address the housing shortage in a very straightforward way: by building more housing. The bill would have erased single-family zoning in populous areas near transit locations. Areas zoned for homes housing a handful of people could have been redeveloped to include duplexes and apartment buildings that housed hundreds.
State Senator Scott Wiener, center, introduced a bill, later shelved, that would have allowed higher-density housing in areas close to transit and jobs.

Rich Pedroncelli/Associated Press

The bill had garnered support from a diverse coalition of business and advocacy groups, and its sponsor, State Senator Scott Wiener, had negotiated a series of compromises with some of its fiercest opponents. Polls showed the measure to be widely popular. For the first time, something extraordinary looked possible: California’s wealthy homeowners would abandon their restrictionist attitudes and let us build some new housing.

Related

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Is California a Good Role Model?  Sept. 13, 2018

Nope. Instead, Anthony Portantino, a Democratic state senator whose district includes the posh city of La Cañada Flintridge and who heads the appropriations committee, announced that he’d be shelving the bill until next year. In an interview with The Los Angeles Times, he worried that the law would spur lots of people to move near residential bus routes, which he suggested would alter the character of enclaves like his.

And? Why is that so bad?

Reading opposition to SB 50 and other efforts at increasing density, I’m struck by an unsettling thought: What Republicans want to do with I.C.E. and border walls, wealthy progressive Democrats are doing with zoning and Nimbyism. Preserving “local character,” maintaining “local control,” keeping housing scarce and inaccessible — the goals of both sides are really the same: to keep people out.

“We’re saying we welcome immigration, we welcome refugees, we welcome outsiders — but you’ve got to have a $2 million entrance fee to live here, otherwise you can use this part of a sidewalk for a tent,” said Brian Hanlon, president of the pro-density group California Yimby. “That to me is not being very welcoming. It’s not being very neighborly.”

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A decade ago I pointed out that public pension funds were $2 trillion underfunded and getting worse. More than one person told me that couldn’t be right.

They were correct: It was actually much worse. It has gotten to $2 trillion and much worse in just a few years.
Note that we are talking here about a specific kind of pension: defined benefit plans. They are usually sponsored by state and local governments, labor unions, and a number of private businesses.

Many sponsors haven’t set aside the assets needed to pay the benefits they’ve promised to current and future retirees. They can delay the inevitable for a long time but not forever. And “forever” is just around the corner.

The numbers are large enough to make this a problem for everyone, even those without affected pensions. The underfunded pensions could also be one of the triggers to the unprecedented credit crisis I see coming in the next five years.

The problem is “solvable”... but the solutions will be problems in themselves.

The Funding Gap Is Actually Much Bigger than Reported

A defined benefit pension plan knows it owes a certain number of retirees certain monthly benefits for life. Their lifespans are quite predictable when the pool is large enough.

From that, it’s simple math to calculate how much money the plan should have right now in order to pay those benefits when they are due. But then the assumptions start.

The plan must presume a future rate of return on the invested portfolio, an inflation rate, and in some cases future health care costs (medical benefits are part of many plans).

So, when we say a plan is “fully funded,” it may not be so if the assumptions are wrong.

Almost all public pension funds assume investment returns somewhere around 7% (and some as high as 8%+). That’s highly unlikely due to the debt we’ve accumulated, and debt is a drag on future growth.

If you make more realistic assumptions on future returns the unfunded liability becomes $6 trillion according to the American Legislative Exchange Council.
A more conservative and realistic approach would force the state and local governments to fund those pension plans at a much higher level. They have only two ways to do that: either raise taxes or reduce services.

That may be the reason policymakers have turned a blind eye to this.

**Pension Fund Underfunding Is Also a Local Problem**

Another problem is that the taxpayers who might have to cover these amounts are mobile. They can move to other states with lower tax burdens.

And to make it even more interesting, the beneficiaries often no longer live in the states that pay them. Retired public employees from the Northeast might live in Florida now, for instance. They can’t even vote for the people who govern their incomes.

The broader point: As with the federal debt, some portion of this unfunded pension debt is going to get liquidated in some way. Any way we do it will hurt either the pensioners or taxpayers.

**The Future Looks Grim**

The most common solution to this problem so far has been cutting services in the hope no one notices.

It is happening nationwide but California takes the lead, thanks to its massive pension debt. This is from a recent Brookings Institution note.

>Pension and health-benefit costs are bending education finances in California to their will. The sheer magnitude of the rising costs is staggering. Large numbers of school board officials who participated in our survey indicate that the rising costs are meaningfully affecting educational services. For example, many report making cost-saving changes to district budgets that include deferred maintenance, larger class sizes, and fewer enrichment opportunities for students in response to rising pension and health benefit costs.
So in effect, today’s students are paying to keep benefits flowing to retired teachers and administrators.

Meanwhile, the Berkeley city council is taking criticism for prioritizing pension payments ahead of public works projects.

Voters approved bond issues supposedly dedicated to infrastructure but the city is apparently not doing the work.

Nor is it just California.

Bank of America analysts found an inverse relationship between infrastructure investment and pension fund contributions. Each additional $1 billion in plan contributions takes away about $2.5 billion from state and local government investment.

We have multiple parties fighting over pieces of the same pie, all hoping that Uncle Sam will step in and save them. Uncle Sam may well do it, too, but it won’t remove the pain.

It will just redistribute the burden, perhaps more widely, but the aggregate amount won’t change.

I see this leading to some kind of Japan-like deflationary recession or debt monetization. If we’re lucky, it will be mild and long. It won’t be fun but the alternatives would be worse.

_I predict an unprecedented crisis that will lead to the biggest wipeout of wealth in history. And most investors are completely unaware of the pressure building right now._ Learn more here.