County officials: Former Marine becomes 1,000th homeless veteran to receive permanent housing

By Caleb Aguilera / For the Daily Press
Posted Jun 29, 2018 at 1:21 PM
Updated Jun 29, 2018 at 1:21 PM

The fact that former Marine Quintin Sherard recently received permanent housing shows that San Bernardino is making progress on its pledge to house homeless veterans in the county, officials said.

Sherard became the 1,000th homeless veteran to receive assistance on Tuesday, a milestone in the 2015 strategy approved by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors to reduce the population of homeless veterans.

Sherard first sought help with the United States Veterans Initiative Supportive Services for Veterans Families program in 2017, but they lost track of him after he secured a job as a truck driver. Sherard sought the program's help yet again after his employment ended and he found himself living on the streets.

He's now being housed through the Permanent Supportive Housing Program.

"The County of San Bernardino, in partnership with the community, made a promise three years ago to prioritize homeless veterans for housing," said Philip Mangano, the former homelessness czar who now works in the county CEO's office to help implement the veterans initiative.

"As Mr. Sherard moves into his new home ... he represents the continuing fulfillment of that commitment."

In 2015, the County Board of Supervisors backed the formation of the Homeless Veteran Community Planning Group (HVCPG) — "a group of local agencies that pooled skills and resources to find permanent homes and provide supportive services" for homeless veterans throughout the county.
Some of the agencies involved in the program are LightHouse Social Service Centers, U.S.VETS, and KEYS Nonprofit, as well as the United Way, Inland Housing Solutions and several others.

“Today we celebrate a milestone that exemplifies the success we can achieve through partnerships with a collective and committed focus to house our county’s homeless population,” said San Bernardino County Supervisor Josie Gonzalez, who serves as the chair of the county’s Interagency Council on Homelessness.

The group originally focused on housing the 401 homeless veterans that were identified as living in the county by the Department of Veteran Affairs in 2015, but the number grew after they found more and more veterans — such as Sherard — in need of assistance.

“I am so proud of the life-changing work done by San Bernardino County and our non-profit partners in reducing homelessness among veterans,” said First District Supervisor Robert Lovingood.
Workforce Development Board Helps Army Veteran in Victorville

By Staff - July 1, 2018  
TAGS: EDD  SPOTLIGHT  VICTORVILLE  WDB  WORKFORCE

Victorville, CA – Nick O’Neill started his career in the Army working as a specialist on unmanned aircraft vehicles (UAV) and jumping out of planes. One jump ended it all when he broke his back. O’Neill enjoyed his UAV work and was eager to transition to civilian life once he was healed. Recognizing that aerospace was a strong industry in Southern California, he relocated from Northern California to Victorville in San Bernardino County to enroll in Victor Valley College’s School of Aviation Technology.
During the first week of school, the San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board (WDB) visited the classes to share information on assistance available to students and veterans. It was during that visit that O’Neill was introduced to Workforce Development Specialist Christine Watson. For students such as O’Neill, the WDB can provide career counseling, supportive services such as books, parking permits, transportation assistance and certifications as well as uniforms, or tools if they are required to purchase the items as part of their education.

“Meeting Christine made such a difference,” O’Neill said. “She helped with my transition to a new community, looking for ways to supplement the financial assistance I had from the GI Bill. She connected me to financial support for travel expenses and when I finished my coursework, found the financial aid necessary to pay for my FAA tests, which weren’t covered by the GI Bill.”

O’Neill also took advantage of the opportunity to participate in a WDB Job Fair where he was introduced to General Atomics, a leading designer and manufacturer of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), radars, and electro-optic and other related mission systems. The firm is a major employer in the High Desert with a large facility in Victorville.

“I knew that General Atomics specialized in unmanned aircraft systems, which is what I had worked on during my time in the Army. Thanks to the Job Fair, I was offered a position as an airframe and power plant specialist. I hope to move up the ranks quickly and show them what I can do,” O’Neill said.

According to Christine Watson, to date, the High Desert America’s Job Centers of California (AJCC) in Victorville has put more than 100 veterans back to work with the collaboration of the State of CA Employment Development Department (EDD) Veteran Reps and the WDB.

“The work we do to support our military veterans to transition to civilian life is so important,” said Tony Myrell, WDB Chairman. “Nick is a perfect example of the talent in our military. By stepping in, our WDB team was able to ensure his transition was successful and to the benefit of a strong local employer.”

About the San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board

The San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board (WDB) is comprised of private business representatives and public partners appointed by the San Bernardino County
Board of Supervisors. The WDB strives to strengthen the skills of the County's workforce through partnerships with business, education and community-based organizations. The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors is committed to providing county resources, which generate jobs and investment in line with the Countywide Vision.

The Workforce Development Board, through the San Bernardino County Economic Development Agency and Workforce Development Department, offers a variety of programs designed to help youth and adults identify career pathways and get the appropriate training and skills. Programs funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provide eligible youth, ages 16 to 24, access to a variety of career and educational services designed to help enhance job skills, develop leadership qualities, explore career options, participate in adult and peer mentoring opportunities, and take advantage of work experiences. In addition, the WDB operates San Bernardino County's three America's Job Centers of California (AJCC). The AJCCs provide individuals with job training, placement and the tools to strengthen their skills to achieve a higher quality of life. The AJCCs also support and provide services to the County's businesses, including employee recruitment and business retention programs.

Employers and job seekers who are interested in the Workforce Development Board programs may call: (800) 451-JOBS or visit www.sbcounty.gov/workforce. Also follow us on: Facebook www.facebook.com/SBCountyWDB; Twitter @InlandEmpireJob; LinkedIn https://www.linkedin.com/company/sanbernardinocountywdb; and YouTube https://www.youtube.com/SBCountyWIB.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

UCR Receives $400,000 To Support Women In High-Tech Fields

June 29, 2018

$1 Million for San Bernardino Valley College Workforce Training

June 29, 2018
A wildfire in the San Bernardino National Forest near Running Springs has burned 33 acres of brush and timber and was 75 percent contained Sunday, July 1, the Forest Service said.

The acreage of the Creek fire had not increased since Saturday afternoon; fire officials, in fact, lowered the estimated acreage burned as of late Sunday — from 50 acres to 33 — due to their more precise mapping of the area that has been charred.

No evacuations were ordered and no structures were threatened or damaged.

Forest Road 1N09 remained closed in the fire area, near its intersection with Highway 330.

Two injuries were reported, but the Forest Service gave no details Sunday. Cause of the fire remained under investigation.

About 175 personnel were at the scene of the fire, which was reported at 12:12 p.m. Saturday.

By Sunday morning, firefighters had created a line around the fire with either hand crews or hoselines, they reported.
Yolo County blaze erupts in ‘year-round fire season’ Early wildfires ‘not a good sign’

The countryside wildfire quickly expands to 32,500 acres, forcing hundreds of evacuations as a ‘new normal’ sets in for firefighters.

THE COUNTY FIRE in Yolo County was just 2% contained Sunday night as firefighters faced hot, gusty winds. Above, in a long-exposure image, a meteorite falls from the sky over the blaze as the wildfire burns out of control in Brooks, Calif., at sunset Saturday. (Peter DaSilva EPA/Shutterstock)
GUINDA, Calif. — In California these days, the start — and end — of wildfire season is anyone’s guess.

Not long ago fire officials eyed the autumn months as the time large blazes were most likely to ignite, after hot summer months had left brush and woods primed to burn.

But this year, as in recent years, the fires have come early. And they aren’t likely to end any time soon.

Already this summer, several hundred firefighters have battled the Pawnee fire in Lake County that started June 23 and, so far, has burned more than 14,000 acres and destroyed 22 structures. On Saturday night, the County fire in the Yolo County countryside roared to life as firefighters ordered evacuations and battled to get a toehold on the 32,500-acre blaze in the face of hot, gusty winds. By Sunday night, the fire was 2% contained.

“Fire season doesn’t seem like the right term to use anymore. The new normal for us is nearly a year-round fire season,” said Chris Anthony, a Cal Fire division chief who was
part of the team battling the County fire Sunday. “Twenty-two thousand acres in less than 24 hours at the end of June is not a good sign of things that might come.”

The County fire began Saturday afternoon and, by dusk, had spread to a few thousand acres in and around Guinda, a rural community about 50 miles northwest of Sacramento. Fire officials, however, warned that red flag conditions — a perilous mix of low humidity, strong winds and high temperatures — could fuel the fire overnight.

By dawn it was clear they had been right to worry. The fire had more than quadrupled in size and by noon had surpassed 20,000 acres, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which coordinates responses to wildfires across the state.

Donna Harden, 58, who lives across the street from the Western Yolo Grange hall in Guinda being used as the town evacuation center, said she had been watching the fire’s progression since it started and was prepared to leave town if the flames got closer.

“My stuff is packed,” Harden said. “I’m ready to go at any minute. I think I packed too much but it’s OK.” Her adult daughter, who lives in nearby Esparto, had come to help pack and water the house’s perimeter, which was mostly dirt.

The Grange hall was empty Sunday afternoon except for a bulletin board that displayed the latest news on the fire.

A rush of firefighters and equipment, which Anthony said had been staged in the area because of the nearby Pawnee blaze and red flag conditions, swarmed the area starting around 3:30 p.m. Saturday. The gusty winds, Harden said, made for an unpredictable fire that changed directions several times. Although fires in nearby canyons aren’t uncommon, she said, she couldn’t recall a fire coming so close to her home in the nearly 30 years she lived here.

“It’s scary,” she said. “If you look at it from here, it looks so far away. But, oh my God, it’s really close. It’s really close.”

As the fire continued to spread Sunday, it pushed west into Napa County and authorities significantly increased the area under mandatory evacuations to include a sparsely populated area of rugged terrain from Lake Berryessa to California 89, about 25 miles away. Evacuation orders were expanded late Sunday to include homes along or off California 128 from Monticello Dam to Pleasants Valley Road.

About 300 people fled the area, Anthony said. More than 1,000 firefighters, meanwhile, endured triple-digit temperatures as they worked on the ground to contain the fire as pilots overhead dropped fire retardant from air tankers and helicopters.

Officials said 116 structures were threatened by the fire.

Anthony said crews were making progress as they raced to dig fire breaks along the northern and eastern perimeter of the fire before a forecasted shift in winds, which could reverse the direction of the blaze. A change in wind direction, he said, would also bring
somewhat cooler temperatures and higher humidity, which would help firefighters get control of the fire.

But firefighters were hampered by flying embers that ignited spot fires well ahead of the main fire line. “It takes just the smallest spark or the smallest ember to start more fires,” Anthony said.

Wyatt Cline, 62, held forth on the porch outside the Guinda Corner Store, which he runs, trading rumors with neighbors about what caused the fire and what direction they expected it to go. Guinda is a town of about 500 people, nestled in a valley dotted with orchards growing almonds, walnuts and olives.

Fires in this part of Yolo County aren’t unusual, said Cline, who retired after 31 years with the Woodland Fire Department. “But a fire of this magnitude is unusual.”

The region is painfully familiar with wildfires. In October, on the other side of Lake Berryessa from where the County fire is currently burning, the Atlas fire erupted. It was one of several enormous blazes that burned in and around the state’s famed wine country, killing dozens of people and causing billions of dollars in damage.

Brian Paddock, the owner of a 15-acre organic almond orchard on the edge of the evacuation area, said he and family members watched from the roof of their house Saturday night as a ridge a mile away was engulfed in flames.

“I’d never seen anything like it. It took on a life of its own. Flames were 150 feet in the air,” he said.

Satellite imagery from the National Weather Service and photos posted on social media showed winds had carried the smoke from the fire 75 miles into the Bay Area, blanketing the region in an eerie yellow haze.

The Yolo County fire is one of several burning throughout the state.

Last year’s massive firestorm that swept through Northern California wine country scorched at least 245,000 acres, killing 44 people and destroying roughly 8,400 homes and other buildings.

Cal Fire investigators determined that downed power lines owned by PG&E and falling tree limbs largely were responsible for setting off the fires.

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Mason reported from Guinda and Rubin from Los Angeles. Times staff writer Alene Tchekmedyian contributed to this report.
A fair question

The 125 or so public officials making the decisions about what San Bernardino County will be like to live in tomorrow, serving on our county’s 24 City Councils and County Board of Supervisors, are each felons, according to the United States Code, Title 18, Chapter 13, Section 241.

To be constitutional, opined the California Supreme Court, in re Kay, 1 Cal. 3d 930, a meeting rule setting a time limit of rostrum speakers during a public meeting must contain a “narrow specificity” provision limiting its enforcement to meeting where a time limit is necessary to ensure that all wishing to speak might be heard in the time set aside for the meeting; because “a threat of sanction ... may deter almost as potently as the application of sanctions.”

The website-archived Public Meeting agendas of these 25 Local Government Agencies each contains a meeting rule setting a time limit on rostrum speakers to agenda items lacking a “narrow specificity” provision. And that Section 241 states that “If two or more persons conspire to injure, oppress, threaten, or intimidate any citizen in the free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege secured to him by the Constitution and laws of the United States... they shall be fined not more than $5,000, or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both.”

“Hello free press, where are you?”

Bob Nelson, Hesperia
Black Man Falsely Arrested Multiple Times After Cops Thought He Was A Convicted Felon
Jimmie Williams III is caught in case of mistaken identity.

Another case involving Black people being stopped after being mistaken for other people has happened in California. One man has been repeatedly arrested after police confused him with someone else found guilty of a felony in the town of Victorville, ABC 7 reported.

was falsely arrested this week as well on two prior occasions in 2006 and 2009. The man was treated like a criminal in sharing the same name as another man, Jimmie Antonio Williams Jr., who has a police record and is wanted on a bench warrant for arrest. Oddly enough, the two men also share the same birth date including the same year.

With the similarities, Williams III lives with the added stress of police officers slapping handcuffs on his wrists. The arrests have been particularly scary for him, he explained.

“I've had to be drawn out of my car, felony stops, with my kids at gunpoint,” he said. “It's been a real inconvenience to me.”
This week, Williams III found San Bernardino County sheriff’s deputies at his home responding to a silent alarm. The exchange was relatively normal until they asked for the man's ID.

“I began to explain that there is another gentleman. I’m not the gentleman. I’ve been through this before,” Williams III said.

The cops still took the father into custody based on the warrant for the other Jimmie Williams. He had informed officers that he had surgery on his shoulder, but they still manhandled and handcuffed him behind his back, he said.
The San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department defended its deputies but said it understands Williams III’s frustrations. Yet, no resolution, including the arrest of the right Jimmie Williams, has come to help the father in dealing with the frequent wrongful arrests, which have caused many problems for him.

“I have no control over your system. I don’t feel I should be punished, detained harassed, kidnapped or assaulted based on false identity.”

SEE ALSO:

Capital Gazette Shooting Shows Why Maxine Waters Needs Secret Service Protection

Permit Patty Is The Latest Entitled White Lady To Become A Meme And GIF Sensation
Sheriff’s Department Faces Backlash After Sharing Photo of Deputy Praying Before Shift

By Kim Davis
July 1, 2018 at 7:53am

It was May 1 when Yucaipa Police Department Deputy Wedge prepared for his shift. He took a knee in front of his vehicle and bowed his head, lips moving silently in prayer.

Somebody from the department observed the scene, snapped a photo, and shared it online. “This morning we caught #YucaipaPD Deputy Wedge in the parking lot of the station,” read the photo’s caption on Twitter.

“He was kneeling in front of his PD vehicle,” the caption continued. “Trying not to interrupt we snapped a photo.”
What was on the deputy’s heart that day? The well-being of his community.

“He politely shared that he was praying for his partners safety and the community,” Yucaipa police said.

The majority of viewers loved the image. They responded with support and praise for Deputy Wedge, thanking him for the prayer.

“We need more kneeling like this,” one Twitter user wrote. “It’s about others.”
A handful of commenters, however, felt the post was inappropriate. “I support his right to pray if he wishes, but I also feel this post is inappropriate for a government agency to be making,” wrote one Facebook user.

“You should not be publicly promoting a religion, any religion,” the commenter continued. “This is not about being negative or hateful, it is just a fact.”

Some people agreed, arguing that social media posts by government agencies should reflect the separation of church and state.

But really, folks, most social media users clapped back with support for the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department.

The image is exactly the kind of thing people need to see.

**RELATED:** [Police Chief Facing Backlash Over New Cruiser Paint Job. His Response To Detractors Is Epic](https://www.westernjournal.com/l/kim/police-chief-facing-backlash-over-new-cruiser-paint-job-his-response-to-detractors-is-epic/)

“There are not enough prayers to be said for the thankless and dangerous job our men and woman do,” said one Facebook user. “They respond when called, without regard of the political and religious beliefs of those calling.

“And for that, I am so very thankful and appreciative.”

The vast majority of viewers took the image for what it was: one moment in one officer’s life. An officer taking a personal moment to prepare spiritually and emotionally for an unpredictable shift.

The officer’s example ought to be reciprocated, commented one woman on Twitter. “May we all take a knee and pray for our peacekeepers who CHOOSE to protect and serve,” she said.


Facebook has greatly reduced the distribution of our stories in our readers' newsfeeds and is instead promoting mainstream media sources. When you share to your friends, however, you greatly help distribute our content. Please take a moment and consider sharing this article with your friends and family. Thank you.
DA: Deputies justified in fatal stand-off shooting at locked reservoir site

By Shea Johnson
Staff Writer

Posted Jun 29, 2018 at 8:57 AM
Updated Jun 29, 2018 at 8:57 AM

PINON HILLS — Five San Bernardino County Sheriff’s deputies were justified in the October 2015 shooting death of a man who claimed he had a bomb in his BMW inside a locked water reservoir site, prosecutors said Thursday.

William Daniel “Danny” Combs, 38, of Hemet, was pronounced dead at the scene in Pinon Hills after an hours-long standoff.

Authorities say Combs had broken into the facility, was acting erratically when contacted by law enforcement and declared he possessed an explosive device. Based on this information and that Combs was uncooperative with demands to surrender, authorities made the call that Combs could not leave the facility as he posed a risk to the surrounding community.

Combs had revved up his BMW’s engine and tried at least twice to ram an enclosed gate, authorities say, an effort to depart the location that prompted the five deputies to fire several rounds to disable the vehicle.

No weapon or explosive device was ultimately located on Combs or in his vehicle.

Speaking to the Daily Press shortly after the incident, family and friends of Combs told the story of a successful real estate entrepreneur who descended into mental illness — potentially spurred by drug use after personal and professional struggles.

“He was very competent, very smart and very successful,” Andrew Paul, a friend of Combs’ for over 20 years, said at the time. “He knew how to do everything.”
Paul said the burst of the housing market bubble in the mid-2000s crushed Combs’ business and personal lives.

Derek Combs, the older brother of Danny Combs, had said that his brother began acting erratically about six months before his death and even was placed on a 72-hour psychiatric hold for a previous incident.

Methamphetamine and Haloperidol, an antipsychotic medication, were found in Danny Combs’ system, according to the San Bernardino County District Attorney’s report clearing deputies of any wrongdoing.

Both Derek Combs and Paul were unclear how or why Danny Combs had even ended up in Pinon Hills, but Derek Combs had questioned the use of force against his brother.

“I’m very displeased with how authorities handled things,” Derek Combs said. “My brother was mentally ill. He was not a bad person ... I mean, one guy against 50 cops for three hours and there was no other way to detain him? It’s just a horrible situation.”

The District Attorney’s office said belt recordings and interviews with deputies and a witness corroborated the Sheriff’s Department’s earlier version of events.

Danny Combs — who suffered gunshot wounds to his cheek, jaw, chest and left arm and grazes to his head and neck — had presented a serious risk to deputies and others in the area, the DA’s office concluded.

The deputies “honestly and reasonably believed their only way to stop Combs from killing anyone was to fire their weapons at Combs,” the report said. “Given those circumstances, the decision by (the deputies) to use deadly force was justified.”

— Staff writer Paola Baker contributed to this report.

Shea Johnson can be reached at 760-955-5368 or SJohnson@VVDailyPress.com. Follow him on Twitter at @DP_Shea.
Price of public safety explained

By SAUL A. FLORES Needles Desert Star  Jun 29, 2018

NEEDLES — The Needles San Bernardino County Sheriffs Department’s Colorado River Station provided the Needles City Council the law enforcement services contract for the 2018-19 fiscal year. Costs include:

• Lieutenant, $79,558;

• Sergeants $292,528;

• Detectives/corporals, $207,187;

• Deputies (264 hour per week) $1,375,983;

• Office specialists $36,599;

• Each marked unit $46,259;

• Each unmarked unit $7,323;

• Citizen patrol (3) $1,425;

• Dispatch services $119,453;

• Amortization, access and maintenance $14,390;

• Electroshock weapon replacement (amortized over five years) $3,024.

The cost of running the department breaks down to administrative support $11,479; services and supplies $14,958; vehicle insurance $67,770; personnel liability and bonding $67,770; workers’ comp experience modification $8,101; and county administrative cost $85,124; which brings the total to $2,425,933.

The first scheduled payment for the city of Needles is $202,162 on July 15, 2018, and the second through 12th payments are due by the fifth of each month in the amount of $202,161.
Personnel costs (lieutenant, sergeant, detective/corporal, deputy, office specialist, dispatch services) include salary and benefits and are subject to change by Board of Supervisors’ action. Changes in salary and benefit costs will be billed to the city on a quarterly invoice.

Vehicle costs (marked and unmarked cars) do not include fuel and maintenance. The city is responsible for fuel and repair and the county will be bill the city on a quarterly biases.

No replacement cost is included for grant-funded or donated vehicles.
Twin Peaks deputies locate missing girl from Alabama in the forest

Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station  Jun 29, 2018 Updated Jun 29, 2018

Twin Peaks sheriff's deputies have located a 16-year-old girl near Rim Forest reported missing by Alabama authorities.

At about 3 a.m. Wednesday a detective from the Guntersville, Ala., Police Department told Sgt. C. Mulligan at the Twin Peaks Station he had reason to believe the missing female juvenile, Shelby Rae Freeman, was in the area with her 18-year-old boyfriend, Caleb Storm Walker.

An hour later, Deputy K. Gallacher spotted her black, 2017 Toyota Corolla with Alabama license plates on Highway 18.

Freeman was taken to the San Bernardino County Juvenile Hall awaiting her parent's arrival from Alabama. Walker was arrested on a warrant from Alabama and booked at Central Detention Center awaiting extradition to Alabama.
The San Bernardino County civil grand jury released its annual report on Friday, June 29, providing recommendations to Hosperia Unified School District after an investigation into its sexual harassment policies following reports of students slapping each other’s buttocks.

Other recommendations by the grand jury include:
In response to a complaint of nonresponsiveness by San Bernardino City Code Enforcement prior to it being taken over by the Police Department on Jan. 1, the grand jury recommended that a quarterly report be made for the city manager listing all complaints received by code enforcement, investigations conducted, violation notices issued, and the number of violations resolved and unresolved. The grand jury also recommended the city manager present the report to the City Council and mayor on a quarterly basis.

An overhaul of policies and procedures for the the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department's Inmate Welfare Fund, including listing the Inmate Welfare Fund on the department's website and explaining what it is, ensuring a financial report be submitted to the county Board of Supervisors annually, and conducting an assessment of inmate needs to help guide expenditures of the fund. “We understand their findings and concerns regarding the Inmate Welfare Fund,” Sheriff John McMahon said in a statement Friday. “The members of the Sheriff’s Department and I appreciate the time put in by the grand jury in their review. We will make the necessary changes and implement any policy revisions promptly.”

The San Bernardino Municipal Water District should approve and maintain a Memorandum of Understanding, which the grand jury claims is expired, and should also review all department policies and the MOU on an annual basis with employees. The grand jury learned in its investigation that 65 of 79 water district policies had not been updated since 2010, and that its MOU expired on June 30, 2016.

San Bernardino County should create one “exclusive operating area” spanning the entire county for it ambulance services, allowing one provider to service the entire area. The contract should then go out to bid for the county to select its provider.

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**Tags:** courts, government

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By Mercury Insurance

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**Joe Nelson**

Joe Nelson is an award-winning investigative reporter who has worked for The Sun since November 1999. He started as a crime reporter and went on to cover a variety of beats including courts and the cities of Colton, Highland and Grand Terrace. He has covered San Bernardino County since 2009. Nelson is a graduate of California State University Fullerton. In 2014, he completed a fellowship at Loyola Law School’s Journalist Law School program.

Follow Joe Nelson @SBCountyNow
Grand jury: Hesperia Unified improperly responded to butt-slapping

Hesperia Unified didn't respond properly after students slapped each other's buttocks and called it “Slap Ass Friday,” the San Bernardino County civil grand jury said in its annual report released Friday, June 29.

The behavior is sexual battery under California law, a detective in the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department's Crimes Against Children unit told the grand jury. The school district, however, only considers something sexual battery if it involves “skin-to-skin” contact and proof of sexual arousal, according to the report.

Female students subjected to the slapping were interviewed by male police and school officials, and at least one student was told to avoid the person slapping him or her by changing classes and spending free periods in the school office rather than on the outdoors campus, the report said.
Superintendent David Olney and other district officials didn't return phone calls or emails Friday, when district offices are closed during the summer.

According to the report, an unnamed elected official described a slapping incident as “kids being stupid.”

**RELATED:** [Grand jury recommends more oversight for San Bernardino code enforcement](https://www.sbsun.com/2018/06/29/grand-jury-recommends-more-oversight-for-san-bernardino-code-enforcement)

Nicolle Petersen, president of the Hesperia school board, declined to comment on the report or how elected officials planned to respond.

“You need to talk to the superintendent,” she said.

Eric Swanson, the board's vice president, said he hadn’t yet read the report but would seriously consider any recommendations it included.

“Our No. 1 job is to keep kids and staff safe,” Swanson said. “Our teachers can't teach and our students can't learn if they don't feel safe.”

Multiple parents said their child reported being slapped on the buttocks by another student, the report said. A school official allegedly said employees were aware of the incident and that an announcement would be made over the loudspeaker saying such behavior wouldn’t be tolerated.

When they asked why they hadn’t been contacted by the school, parents were told, “Well, you should have been,” the report stated. One parent said a school official referred to the slapping as “kids being kids.”

Schools in Florida and other states have reported students slapping buttocks and excusing it as “Slap Ass Friday” for several years. Urban Dictionary defined the term in 2006.

The grand jury report outlines several ways in which the district allegedly did not follow its own policy.

The policy states that the district will interview anyone who witnessed sexual harassment, but multiple parents said their children witnessed the slapping but hadn’t been interviewed.

The policy also requires the principal to prepare a written report within 30 days. Parents said they never saw any report, which district officials say is because of privacy requirements.

“We do take this stuff seriously, but unfortunately, a lot of times we can't talk about these issues because they're private,” Swanson said. “Parents want to know what you did about the student who did it. I can't talk about that because of privacy issues.”

Further, the policy states, “As appropriate, the superintendent or designee shall notify the parents/guardians of victims and perpetrators.”

The grand jury recommends removing the word “appropriate” so that notifying parents is mandatory.

The district provides school officials sexual harassment training twice a year, but it doesn't include sexual battery or assault.

The grand jury's investigation also discovered that the district has video recordings on campus, but officials don't know how long to keep the tapes. A policy on that must be “buried somewhere,” an official told the grand jury.

Other recommendations from the grand jury include:

- Training for all district employees about sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual battery, including experts such as personnel from the Crimes Against Children Unit, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.
- Develop a checklist of the steps to be taken when a complaint of sexual harassment, discrimination or bullying is received.
- Recruit and hire a female officer for the Hesperia Unified School District police force.
- Give all students age-appropriate training about offensive touching and conduct.

The district's response to the grand jury is due by Sept. 27.
LOCAL NEWS

Triple-digit temps will hit Southern California after Fourth of July

Thousands of beach goers flock to Huntington Beach to escape the heat wave in late July 2017. Expect hot weather after the 4th of July for much of Southern California. (File photo)

By CITY NEWS SERVICE | citynewsservice@scng.com |
PUBLISHED: July 1, 2018 at 11:08 am | UPDATED: July 1, 2018 at 2:52 pm

LOS ANGELES – The Fourth of July will be comfortable, but hot temperatures are expected to arrive afterwards in Southern California.
Record-breaking heat is possible across the region, with temperatures starting to rise Thursday and through the weekend, according to forecasters at the National Weather Service.

**NWS Los Angeles**
@NWSLosAngeles

Much warmer weather on the way for late this coming week! High fire danger likely due to hot, dry and windy conditions starting Thursday. #CAwx #LAheat #SoCal

**NWS San Diego**  @NWSSanDiego

The European model shows a pattern shift over the Western Hemisphere. Here the trough dominates the West Coast through Tue, followed by massive ridging over the West later in the week for much warmer weather. Could the Monsoon be far behind?

**5pm Saturday Forecast**

Independence Day will have highs along the beaches generally in the 70s; in the 80s for Orange and Los Angeles county valleys, and the upper 80s and low 90s for Riverside and San Bernardino County valley areas.

Then highs above 100 are forecast for most of Southern California, except for near the ocean, just as the weekend begins, forecasters said.
Temperatures for Friday and Saturday are predicted to reach from the high 90s into the 103-to-105 degree ranges for the Santa Clarita, San Fernando, and San Gabriel valleys in Los Angeles County.

For Riverside and San Bernardino county valleys, Friday highs of 102 to 108 degrees are forecast, with temperatures at 101 to 107 for Saturday.

Inland Orange County has highs forecast at 96 to 101 degrees for Friday and highs up to 97 for Saturday.

A strong high pressure is expected set up in the Four Corners region late in the week, and will push hot, dry desert air towards Los Angeles, forecasters said. This will combine with surface winds flowing from the north, and may support record heat for portions of the area.

Gusty north winds will scorch the mountains of Los Angeles and Ventura counties and will likely support elevated fire conditions for many areas Thursday through Sunday, forecasters said.

Critical fire weather conditions are held possible at times for the Santa Clarita, Grapevine and Acton areas.

And to the south, increasing tropical activity in the Eastern Pacific may bring high surf and strong rip currents to exposed south-facing beaches as early as Wednesday evening.

High surf may continue through Saturday, the NWS said.

*SCNG writer Richard K. De Atley contributed to this report*
A dark day for the nation’s newspapers

By The Daily Press Editorial Board
Posted Jul 1, 2018 at 12:01 AM

Journalists largely toil in anonymity, despite affixing their names to the bylines that appear on their stories or the credit lines that appear with photo captions.

Yet toil they do, frequently working long or odd hours for pay that rarely affords a comfortable lifestyle, let alone compensates them for their true worth.

On top of that, often they come face to face with the fact that not only are they not appreciated as they should be, but that some regard them with disdain or even hatred.

There is no doubt that journalism can be a dangerous job, and not only for war correspondents. Many journalists have been subjected to threats of one sort or another during their careers, from investigative journalists whose reports lead to criminal prosecutions to sports writers who infuriate immature fans or athletes. However, few journalists fear for their lives in the daily performance of their duties.

That was probably the case with the four journalists and one advertising sales assistant who were killed by a gunman at the Capital Gazette in Annapolis, Maryland on Thursday. They were no doubt going about their days as usual, gearing up for the weekend papers, when authorities said a man who had lost a defamation lawsuit with the newspaper burst into the office and gunned down Robert Hiaasen, Gerald Fischman, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith and Wendi Winters.

The loss to the Capital Gazette, of course, is enormous. But the loss of these five also is being felt across the entire American journalism community, which joins the Annapolis newspaper in mourning these who made a difference in their city on a daily basis.
In the aftermath of this tragedy, most newspapers have begun reassessing security and re-evaluating interactions with certain members of the public.

Journalists have jobs to do, and will continue to do them as well as they can here in the High Desert and across the country. But Thursday's shooting is yet another reminder that really no one anywhere is safe from the plot of a determined madman.

The Daily Press stands with the Capital Gazette staff in honoring the lives and contributions of Hiaasen, Fischman, McNamara, Smith and Winters, and applauds their colleagues who though traumatized somehow found the strength to put aside their grief and produce the Friday newspaper for their readers.

The void in the Gazette newsroom and advertising department may never be filled, but we know their colleagues will make sure the contributions of these five will not be forgotten.
Adelanto passes cash-positive $20.6M spending plan

By Shea Johnson
Staff Writer

Posted Jul 1, 2018 at 7:00 AM

ADELANTO — The City Council last week approved a projected $20.6 million draft spending plan for the new fiscal year — buoyed by the anticipated $1 million sale of its public works yard — that calls for a $1.1 million surplus.

The General Fund budget stands as a more deeply stark contrast than last year, a quite rosy outlook itself, to the city’s historical financial predicament. Only two years ago, the city’s projected revenues topped out at $13.7 million and just a half decade ago, it declared a fiscal emergency.

The projected budget for fiscal year 2018-19, which began Sunday, marks the second-straight year officials are estimating cash left over after expenses. Last year’s spending plan assumed a $400,000 surplus — the first balanced budget in eight years not requiring reserves to back-fill cash shortfalls.

But Lily Fang, the city’s assistant finance director, sought to emphasize that revenue and expense projections were merely that — projections. It could serve as a tempering effect to overly optimistic attitudes, particularly as the city continues to rely on one-time money.

But even if, say, the controversial sale of the public works yard to a commercial marijuana developer falls apart, the city would still maintain a surplus, albeit significantly diminished. It was not the case last year when $1 million in one-time cash, propelling the city out of a deficit, was promised by cannabis companies in exchange for tax discounts.

The Daily Press reported that many of those companies later balked on their pledge.
Yet Mayor Rich Kerr views the sale of the public works yard, property that is located within a cannabis zone, as both a short- and long-term benefit when factoring in future tax revenues from operations.

Fang said the year-over-year budget was “not a significant change,” but it’s worth noting that the city managed to keep projected expenses in check, expected to increase only about $600,000 over last year.

The biggest spending increases were for public safety, personnel costs and the management change at Adelanto Stadium, according to acting City Manager Brad Letner, adding that revenues were mostly remaining flat.

The draft budget incorporated 2 percent cost-of-living salary increases to qualified staff across the board.

Slight bumps are expected to income for sales, property and franchise taxes, according to the city’s budget documents, while Measure R tax — the voter-approved measure to collect from commercial cannabis — is estimated to yield $2 million this coming fiscal year compared to an estimated $2.5 million during FY 2017-18.

“The city continues to make great strides in improving its financial situation compared to prior years,” Letner said in a statement. “We continue to see increased growth in revenues, the bulk being from taxes and assessments, so we have a positive outlook in overall revenues for next fiscal year.”

Beyond the General Fund, the city’s total budget also calls for $5 million in capital improvement projects, bankrolled by special revenue funds, to upgrade pedestrian and motor vehicle pathways throughout the city and water rights purchases to reduce costs in buying from other agencies.

“Compared to where we were when we first got hired on,” Mayor Pro Tem John “Bug” Woodard said Wednesday when the budget was adopted, “I mean we’re looking pretty damn good.”

Kerr, who has called for slight increases to Planning Commission and Council stipends in the near future, reiterated the positive sentiment expressed by others.
“Continued growth in residential property construction as well as increased business growth will contribute to the future fiscal stability and improvement of the city of Adelanto,” he said in a statement.

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After months of cuts, Apple Valley Council adopts budget

By Matthew Cabe
Staff Writer

APPLE VALLEY — A process that started in January and brought multiple cuts to staff reached its end Tuesday when the Town Council unanimously approved a nearly $88.5 million budget that includes a balanced general fund.

On an all-funds basis, Apple Valley's Fiscal Year 2018-19 budget represents a more than 8 percent increase compared to the nearly $81.8 million approved for FY 2017-18. The general fund also increased by 9.7 percent year-over-year, with total resources at more than $31.5 million.

The Capital Improvement budget accounted for a majority of the all-funds increase, according to Finance Director Kofi Antobam, jumping more than 100 percent to $12.1 million, with 27 projects planned for design and construction.

"Some of the projects ... are continuation of projects that currently exist," Antobam said. “Some of them are new projects that are going to be embarked upon in the next fiscal year.”

Among those is the Bear Valley Bridge Rehabilitation, which will expand the bridge west of Jess Ranch Marketplace to six lanes, and introduce a center median and Class I Bikeway when complete. Design is estimated at $600,000, documents show.

During a presentation to the Council, Antobam discussed struggles that led to a roughly $2.6 million shortfall in the general fund that was shored up prior to Tuesday's adoption. He said the town's baseline services have “increased drastically” over the last 10 years while revenues failed to keep pace with expenditures.
“In order to be able to present a balanced budget, we need to either find new revenue sources or find ways in cutting down expenditures,” Antobam said. “But that, coupled with annual inflationary increases in expenditures, cause a few challenges for us.”

State and federal regulations also hampered the town’s ability to generate additional income, according to Antobam, who said the town instituted austerity measures as a result.

“One of the things we’ve been doing over the few years is that we aren’t going to be adding any new programs without identifying a natural revenue source that is going to fund that program,” he said.

In addition, previously approved cuts to long-term employee benefits, which freed up an estimated $455,000, the elimination of two key positions and other staff departures bridged part of the general-fund gap.

Earlier this year, assistant town manager positions held by Marc Puckett and Nikki Salas were eliminated for financial reasons. More recently, Public Works Manager Mike Cady, Assistant Director of Energy and Environmental Services Joseph Moon, Code Enforcement Supervisor Jonathan Wood and Deputy Town Clerk Amber Jones either resigned or retired their positions.

Moon and Wood’s departures were made public with short ceremonies during Tuesday’s meeting. Town spokesperson Orlando Acevedo told the Daily Press on Friday the town is currently recruiting for a new Code Enforcement Manager. Moon’s position, which included oversight of the Apple Valley Choice Energy (AVCE) program, will be eliminated.

“Staff is evaluating options at this time,” Acevedo said. “Duties related to (AVCE) have been absorbed into the Finance Department, and other duties including Solid Waste/Trash/Household Hazardous Waste have been reassigned.”

Suspension of 401 (a) retirement benefits, the closure of Virginia Park and removal of a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) were all approved Tuesday and represent a final round of cuts that helped balance the general fund.

No cuts were proposed to the Council’s budget, which increased by 1.36 percent to $235,298 compared to FY 2017-18, according to documents.
Most other department budgets decreased significantly. Public Information and Human Resources departments fell by 40 and 51 percent, respectively. The Finance Department’s budget dropped by more than 27 percent and the Town Manager’s by 13 percent. Documents show cuts to employee benefits played a large role in bringing down departmental costs.

The Parks and Recreation Department’s budget, which was absorbed into the general fund, decreased by nearly 10 percent.

Meanwhile, the Economic Development and Engineering departments received notable increases to their budgets by more than 53 and 48 percent, respectively. Robertson said the Engineering increase to $535,600 was implemented to reflect actual costs incurred over the last four years.

A contract with the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department jumped by $840,000 to nearly $14.6 million. The contract accounts for nearly 47 percent of general fund expenditures.

“Looking at this increase, if this is to continue, we’ll have to do something in terms of raising additional revenues or finding a way to fund these expenditures,” he said. “Because, if we continue in this light, I don’t believe it’s sustainable in the long run.”

The Town Council has long been complementary of the 51 sworn deputies in Apple Valley, but the cost has increased by more than $4 million over the last eight years while staffing at the local station has not. That said, documents also indicated a 14 percent reduction in crime here in 2017.

Physical copies of the budget remain unavailable. Technical difficulties resulting from a power outage a month ago also delayed the online version, which was posted Monday to the town’s website.

Since then, Antobam’s PowerPoint presentation was added to the site, offering context to the incomplete “Proposed Budget” currently being finalized by staff. Bound copies are expected by July 31 and will be available in the Town Clerk’s office located at 14955 Dale Evans Parkway.

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After Victorville Council declines to act, Chalice organizers must rely on courts

By Shea Johnson
Staff Writer

Posted Jun 29, 2018 at 4:12 PM
Updated Jun 29, 2018 at 5:48 PM

VICTORVILLE — If Chalice Festival organizers wish to hold a full-throttled version of the cannabis-themed arts and music show at the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, they’ll have to rely on court intervention.

That was the message of city officials Thursday, who heard from a large, nearly universally pro-Chalice contingent inside Council chambers. But the special meeting did nothing to influence the city’s refusal to sign off on enabling cannabis sales and on-site consumption during next month’s scheduled festival.

Instead, a recently filed lawsuit against the state Bureau of Cannabis Control and the city will have to be proponents’ recourse. The suit, filed by event organizers, seeks a temporary permit to put on the event as it had been for the past two years.

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Cox confirmed the city had no desire to relax its policy since Jan. 1 that forbids most commercial cannabis activity within city limits, noting that if the state and state-owned fairgrounds could work out an agreement between just those two, “leave us out of it, then I’m all for it.”

But a new rule requires the city, as the local jurisdiction — a notion in dispute — to submit a letter of support to the state to allow such an event to occur as intended.

Without one, organizers suggested Chalice will be watered down much like the High Times Cannabis Cup in San Bernardino had been earlier this year, leading to a half-baked turnout tantamount to a “ghost town.” One organizer said $1.1 million in confirmed contracts were on hold because the city had not blessed the show scheduled for July 13-15.
“This event is not just about potheads getting together,” said Chalice proponent Brian Sweeney, “this is about a community that’s been stuck in the shadows for a very long time.”

Steve Clayton, a festival executive producer, asked city officials if they understood “the power of this in your city” — a global, economic force without any major safety issues reported since it began here in 2016.

“This is a good event,” Clayton said, “and just because it has a cannabis undertone, don’t let it fool you.”

Organizers had claimed temporary victory when the Council reversed its earlier decision to shut off future discussions by re-opening talks with Thursday’s special meeting. Yet even after most who filled out more than 30 speaker cards had pleaded with elected leaders to recognize those behind the event were members of a tight-knit, diverse community — several who are emboldened by safe access to marijuana’s medicinal benefit — the special meeting, and the hopes of proponents, concluded with a fizzle.

Councilwoman Blanca Gomez, who said Council members were advised by legal counsel to remain tight-lipped due to ongoing litigation, had recommended the Planning Commission revisit the city’s policy on commercial cannabis. The motion garnered no support from colleagues.

And no effort was undertaken to vote on whether to issue the all-important letter of support for Chalice.

Geoff Hinds, the CEO/general manager of the fairgrounds, called the Council’s no-decision “a big loss” for the event and the city.

Organizers had sought to convey to city officials that approval of Chalice would not interfere with the city’s strict commercial cannabis policy because the fairgrounds is a state property, but city officials have said the ordinance, beyond prohibiting the activities requested by organizers, acts as a guiding philosophy that will be used to influence all future decisions.

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Assemblyman Obernolte recognizes the Dr. Prem Reddy family

By Rene Ray De La Cruz  
Staff Writer  
Posted Jul 1, 2018 at 7:57 AM  

VICTORVILLE — Assemblyman Jay Obernolte has recognized the Dr. Prem Reddy Family Foundation as the 2018 Nonprofit of the Year for the 33rd Assembly District.

The Foundation that has donated millions of dollars to various charities since it was founded in 1986 was honored at a Dr. Prem Reddy Family Foundation Scholarship dinner held last week in Victorville.

“The Dr. Prem Reddy Family Foundation is a local nonprofit that has done a tremendous job improving access to health care to underserved patients throughout our region,” Obernolte said. “They are also committed to helping students prepare for careers in medical fields as well as providing college scholarships to students who achieve academic excellence.”

The assemblyman commended the Foundation for providing medical services to the local communities and for all of their “good work” both in his district and around the world.

Contributions from the Foundation have included academic scholarships for students in the High Desert who are enrolled in medical-related degree programs.

At the national level, the Foundation assists patients unable to afford treatment by funding free clinics and organizations supporting preventative care. Globally, they donate equipment to clinics located in poverty-stricken regions around the world.
The Foundation also funds clean water initiatives, childhood vaccinations programs, educational grants and clinics that treat blindness and pediatric congenital heart defects.

Dr. Reddy made a commitment of $40 million in 2014 to found the University of Science and Medicine, a nonprofit MD school located in San Bernardino.

Through Prime Healthcare Services facilities and many foundation donations, Dr. Reddy and the Dr. Prem Reddy Family Foundation strive to meet the health care needs of the community, Obernolte said.

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Bank of America Donates to Children’s Fund

By Staff - June 30, 2018  
TAGS: CHILDREN  CHILDREN'S FUND  SAN BERNARDINO

Children’s Fund Receives Grant from Bank of America Charitable Foundation

San Bernardino, Ca – Thanks to a $10,000 grant awarded to Children’s Fund by the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, more children with emergency needs will receive assistance.

Children’s Fund provides emergency assistance to at-risk and impoverished children, providing items such as food, clothing, beds, transportation, rental and utility assistance, shelter, and dental care. Last year, through a collaboration with 52 community partners,
the Children's Fund Emergency Needs Program provided 3,400 points of service to
children.

Children's Fund receives referrals from community partners requesting assistance for
emergency needs such as safe shelter, access to critical food supplies, bunk beds for
children sleeping on the floor, refrigerators and other necessities. The referrals are
vetted by Children's Fund, adhering to rigorous guidelines with the intent to stabilize
families and move them toward self-sustainment. Most requests for aid are fulfilled
within 24 hours, ensuring children's needs are being met as quickly as possible.

“No child should have to go without basic human necessities like shelter, food, clothing or
medical care, but so many of us are one emergency or life event away from needing the
help of supportive services. We're proud to support an organization as crucial to the
community as Children's Fund, who assures that children are living in an environment
conducive to growth and success,” said Al Arguello, Inland Empire Market President for
Bank of America

Recently, the Emergency Needs Program assisted a family of five. A social worker
submitted a request to Children's Fund on behalf of a single mother of four children, ages
5-12 years old. The family had been thrown into a period of despair and instability when
the father, who was the sole provider, unexpectedly moved out of state leaving his family
behind.

The mother did her best to remain positive, but without the viable support, they were
soon evicted from their home. At times they would sleep in a friend's garage but
ultimately, the family's van became their only source of refuge. Despite their
homelessness, the mother tried to maintain a sense of normalcy. The children attended
school, and while they were there, the mother used the local library to search for a job.

Her efforts paid off as she acquired two part-time jobs. Soon she had saved the funds for
a deposit on an apartment. The funds she had saved were sufficient for the deposit but
she found she was unable to pay the first month’s rent. Her case manager submitted a
request to Children's Fund for the first month’s rent and a refrigerator. Until then, the
family had been using an ice chest to keep their food fresh.

Children's Fund approved both requests and the family was able to move into their new
home. The mom said, “Being homeless is something a parent never wants their kids to go
through, but knowing that we had so much help and people that cared made the load on my shoulders so much lighter.”

“This is just one story of Children’s Fund being there at the right time to help a family in great need,” says Dr. Ciriaco “Cid” Pinedo, President & CEO of Children’s Fund. “We’re proud of our ongoing partnership with Bank of America, providing emergency services and helping families prepare for a more financially stable future.” This year alone Children’s Fund has helped more than 62,000 children in the community.

Founded in 1986 by Patrick Morris and the late Jack Brown, Children’s Fund is a nonprofit whose mission is giving our vulnerable children support, opportunity, and hope by breaking destructive cycles through community partnerships. Last year, Children’s Fund provided more than 62,000 services to children in need in San Bernardino County and since its inception has facilitated over 1.5 million points of service to children and families. For more information on Children’s Fund or to learn how you can give a child hope for brighter tomorrows, go to www.childrensfund.org or call 909-379.0000.

CHILDREN’S NEWS

Upland City Council Recognizing Three Teens for Volunteering

June 19, 2018

San Bernardino County Museum opens interactive “Gone Camping”

June 18, 2018

Norco College, $6 Million To Fund Workforce and Early Childhood Education Centers

June 15, 2018
BARSTOW — Agencies from across the High Desert met with inquiring residents during the fifth annual Resource Fair Thursday at the Cora Harper Center.

Hosted by the Barstow Community Coalition, nearly 50 vendors representing health and wellness organizations met with those needing assistance with various issues such as health screenings, vaccinations, domestic violence, employment support, housing, financial aid, mental health and education.

Coalition Secretary Judy Mack told the Daily Press over 400 people attended the resource fair, with many walking away with valuable information, including a homeless veteran and resident seeking a “much-needed doctor’s appointment.”

“One agency had a chance to connect and help a veteran living on the street,” Mack said. “We also helped a volunteer who was dealing with a serious medical issue. We got her an appointment with a doctor after she didn’t have the right medical insurance.”

Mack also spoke with many residents who took advantage of the free Tdap vaccination and breast examination that were offered by Borrego’s Barstow Community Clinic and Mission City Community Network.

“I wasn’t expecting to see so many booths here today,” said Juanita Ramos, 37, who attended the free event with her three children. “I came here to speak with Barstow College about continuing my education.”

Chris Hernandez, a coalition board member who helped organize the event, told the Daily Press the fair was formed to meet the many needs of the Barstow community.

“It was great to see the community come together to provide valuable resources for each other,” Hernandez said. “Not only was there a lot of information resources, but it was fun too.”

Veteran Ted Peterson, a Peer Support representative with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Redlands, was at the event to provide resources for veterans suffering from PTSD and their families.

Peterson was also making available cable locks for firearms that included instructions for the lock and text that read, “Firearm Safety Matters, for Suicide Prevention.” Contact information for the Veterans Crisis Line and National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 800-273-8255, was also included in the kit.

Vendors donated nearly $1,000 in prizes that were given away via a ticket drawing every 30 minutes. In a special drawing for attendees visiting at least 35 vendor tables, Tammie Forsythe won a Samsung 55-inch HDTV.

During the event, children visited craft tables, took selfies with the “On the Rise Foster Care Bear,” and Unicorn and Panda head made possible by the San Bernardino County Department of Behavioral Health.

The Coalition is a group of nonprofits that come together to provide information regarding resources. The group has held various seminars dealing with issues of suicide awareness, human trafficking, mental health and synthetic drug use.

Barstow Community Coalition meetings are scheduled on the first Wednesday of each month at 220 Buena Vista St. across from the public library.

For more information on the group, email barstowcommunitycoalition@yahoo.com.

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City to spend $1 million to capture license data

By Marianne Napoles | Posted: Saturday, June 30, 2018 4:29 pm

Automatic license plate readers will be mounted on top of streetlight poles at 13 intersections in Chino Hills later this year.

The city council on Tuesday approved the purchase and installation of 81 cameras for a total of $1.1 million, with Vigilant Solutions providing the cameras and Bear Electrical Solutions, Inc. installing the equipment.

The City of Chino purchased 35 automatic license plate readers for 11 intersections from Vigilant last August. Installation was by Convergent, for a total project cost of $922,411, said Chino Police Chief Karen Comstock.

They were installed earlier this year.

Chino Hills City Manager Rad Bartlam said every entry and exit in Chino Hills will be covered.

The cameras take images of vehicle license plates that can be compared against law enforcement data bases for stolen vehicles, stolen plates, and wanted or missing persons.

Automated license plate recognition technology may also be used to gather information related to active warrants, homeland security, electronic surveillance, suspect interdiction, and the recovery of stolen properties, according to a staff report.

Resident Gabriel DeLuna said he believed the cost was too high for a technology that might become obsolete within a couple of years.

He said he recently learned that California will be the first state in the country to introduce a pilot program for digital license plates. He said the digital plates will soon be showing up on vehicles.

“Similar to how flip phones were state of the art in 2006 before iPhones were released, the automatic license plate readers might be a lot of money for something that could be obsolete soon,” Mr. DeLuna said.

Money for the project is coming from the general fund.

Resident Luis Esparza said at the council meeting he was concerned that there was no competitive bid process. Mr. Bartlam said Vigilant is the leader in the field and has been vetted through the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department.

He said the city has a contract with the sheriff’s department, so the city must use the same equipment to receive the benefits.
Mr. Esparza said he was concerned about the type of data obtained by the cameras including pictures of the vehicle and its inhabitants.

He said he doesn’t believe the Vigilant website’s claims that license plate recognition is anonymous data.

According to the website, there is no way of providing the name of the vehicle’s registered owner without violating a Federal law.

The website also states: In addition to license plate recognition being anonymous data, the image capture of a license plate for law enforcement purposes in a public place is fully protected and upheld by numerous courts.

“There is no reasonable expectation of privacy in a public place,” according to the website.

Mr. Bartlam said the city has never suggested complete anonymity. “In fact, I said at the last meeting that if you’re a good citizen and doing good deeds, good for you,” he said. “If you’re bad, hopefully we will catch you. If that disturbs Mr. Esparza, I apologize.”

Chino Hills Police Capt. Darren Goodman said data captured by the camera will be shared only as it relates to criminal activity. He said there will not be a random sharing of non-criminal data if just driving down the street.
Homeland Security buses enter the Federal Correctional facility in Victorville, Calif., on Friday, June 8, 2018. More than 1,600 people arrested at the U.S.-Mexico border, including parents who have been separated from their children, are being transferred to federal prisons, U.S. immigration authorities confirmed Thursday. They said they're running out of room at their own facilities amid President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration. There are 1,000 beds available in this prison. (James Quigg/The Daily Press)

By ROXANA KOPETMAN | rkopetman@scng.com | Orange County Register
PUBLISHED: June 29, 2018 at 6:10 pm | UPDATED: June 29, 2018 at 11:42 pm

A federal penitentiary in Victorville that recently took in some 1,000 immigrant detainees has a second case of chicken pox and the number of people with a highly contagious skin disease has tripled in the past week, prison employees said Friday.

The prison has at least 38 cases of scabies among the new detainees, and staff continues to be concerned for their own safety and the safety of prisoners, said John Kostelnik, a union president who represents about 400 correctional officers and additional prison staff.

“It's gotten out of hand,” Kostelnik said.
Meanwhile, prison officials added a chain link fence around the prison this week to prepare for protesters who plan to rally at the site on Saturday, June 30. The protest is part of a nationwide series of rallies dubbed “Families Belong Together,” which also are taking place in Irvine, Laguna Beach, Long Beach and Los Angeles, among some 600-plus cities.

Earlier this month, immigration authorities moved to federal penitentiaries approximately 1,600 people believed to be living in the country illegally. That group also might include asylum seekers attempting to enter the country legally.

The biggest group were taken to the Federal Correctional Complex Victorville in San Bernardino County. A high number of them are not from Mexico but from counties like India and Afghanistan, creating cultural and language difficulties for the prison staff.

Civil rights advocates argue that the unauthorized immigrants have no place in a federal prison. The Trump administration has said this is a temporary measure until they can be moved to more permanent facilities while waiting to be processed, including for possible deportation.

But the prison union leader, as well as current and former medical personnel, told the Southern California News Group that the Victorville complex is ill-equipped to handle an extra 1,000 detainees to its existing population of about 3,500 prisoners.

The prison was already understaffed and facing more cuts as part of a Trump administration directive to trim federal penitentiaries, they said.

For example, at the Victorville facility, which houses a high-security prison, two-medium security prisons and a low-security prison for women, there are two physicians, one of whom handles the bulk of patient care, according to a medical staff member who asked to not be identified. Federal prisons have a policy of requiring a physician assistant or nurse practitioner for every 330 inmates, which would mean the Victorville complex should have at least 13 such personnel. Instead, it has six physician assistants plus a nurse practitioner at the women's prison, the source said.

With inadequate staffing, contagious diseases like scabies can spread quickly. To prevent that, prison officials in Victorville are considering putting everyone with scabies into a single unit, the source said. Overall, however, the prison “has no strategic plan to address health issues or crises while housing detainees.”

Prison officials declined to comment and referred the matter to immigration authorities, most of whom could not be reached for comment Friday. The only one who was reached did not reply to questions.

Kostelnik said that an inspector with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration agency, OSHA, came out to the prison this past week in response to complaints filed but the meeting was rescheduled to a future date. Late Friday, a spokesperson with the U.S. Dept. of Labor said via email that OSHA has opened an inspection, but the agency could not provide detailed information because the investigation is ongoing.

The immigrant detainees are being held in two-men cells in what are called units, which house about 120 men and have open areas with tables, televisions, computers and phones.

Prison officials originally were not allowing attorneys to speak with the immigrant detainees, which prompted a lawsuit this month from the American Civil Rights Union of Southern California. The organization won a temporary restraining order, and attorneys can now reach the men, but they are still not allowed to contact detainee family members. Also, detainees are being refused pastoral care, according to an ACLU spokesman.

On Saturday, an ACLU SoCal representative will be among the speakers at the rally outside the prison.

RELATED STORIES

Immigrant detainees moved to Victorville prison creates logistics problems, raises civil rights questions
ICE plans to send 1,600 immigrant detainees to federal prisons, including approximately 1,000 to Victorville
Infrastructure upgrades near Adelanto schools begins Monday, set to finish before fall

By Shea Johnson
Staff Writer
Posted Jul 1, 2018 at 7:08 AM

ADELANTO — Construction is scheduled to begin Monday on improvements to pedestrian infrastructure adjacent to three schools in the city: Columbia Middle and Adelanto and Westside elementaries.

Sully-Miller Contracting Company will be installing new ramps, sidewalks and curbs and performing street-striping, including crosswalks, either directly in front of or on nearby streets to the schools, city spokesman Michael Stevens said.

Columbia Middle School will also receive a pedestrian-activated flashing beacon and speed feedback sign, Stevens said.

The upgrades are expected to be complete by the time students return to the schools in early August.

Work is part of the Safe Routes to School Project, a joint effort between Adelanto and Victorville cities that will ultimately bolster infrastructure near 10 total schools sites.

Both cities have scoped their responsibilities and bid out the work separately, and some schools are within the Adelanto Elementary School District (AESD) yet geographically located in Victorville — the lead agency on the project.

For its portion, Stevens said the city will pay the difference between the $876,821 project cost and a $649,000 federal grant awarded to fund a majority of the effort.

“We’re continuing to address a variety of community needs,” Mayor Rich Kerr said in a statement, “and the safety of children has to be top priority.”
Dr. Amy Nguyen-Hernandez, the superintendent of AESD, said school officials were “thrilled” that the project was approved by the Adelanto City Council in April and they appreciated the collaboration between the two cities.

“The families and students who attend Adelanto Elementary, Westside Park and Columbia will be grateful to know that they will be benefiting from upgrades in sidewalks and routes to their school,” she said. “AESD is thankful for our community partnerships.”

The construction will start on Jonathan Street near Adelanto Elementary School. Residents are urged to use caution in work zones around the school sites and to obey traffic control measures including detours and parking restrictions.

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Esteban Guzman was captured on video in a confrontation with a woman while working with his mother in Running Springs a week ago. Guzman, a Culver City resident, said he hopes his experience can help end racism. (Photo by Keith Birmingham, Pasadena Star-News/SCNG)

The Cal Poly Pomona graduate who was confronted by a woman while sprucing up a Running Springs home in a video that went viral hopes the incident and others like it will raise awareness about — and begin to eliminate — racism in the nation.

In the widely-viewed conversation, captured by Esteban Guzman’s mother in a 34-second video, the woman labeled he and his mother “rapists,” “drug dealers” and “animals” because they were “Mexican.” Moments before the filming began, he said, the lady yelled to his mother, “Go back to Mexico.”

President Trump used the same three terms to characterize some immigrants coming across the southern border illegally, though he later said the term “animals” was meant to describe members of a notorious gang.
“My message is not about the lady,” Guzman, 27, said by phone Thursday night, June 28. “My message is not about the president of the United States or what he has said. My message is to everybody who has ever experienced racism: We need to join together to overcome this and end racism.”

Guzman, a native of Lake Arrowhead in the San Bernardino County mountains, was working with his mother on Saturday, June 23, when the video was shot.

“Nobody should ever go through what my mom and I experienced,” he said.
Still, Guzman hopes others subjected to abuse because of their race or religion will respond in a similar, measured way.

“The next time it happens — because it will happen — they can say, ‘There is a better way to do it,’” Guzman said. “‘Hey, Esteban was able to keep his cool, so why can’t I keep my cool and hit them with the facts?’”

Guzman challenged the woman by asking questions. He didn’t lash out.

“It doesn’t matter what they are doing, I’m going to respect them either way,” he said.

Guzman lives in Culver City and works as an information technology systems administrator in that city, having earned a bachelor’s degree last year from Cal Poly Pomona. He works weekdays at his regular job but on weekends helps out with his family’s cleaning and landscaping business in Lake Arrowhead.

“I work every single day of the week and I don’t take any days off,” Guzman said.

And he’s not taking any off now because of what happened last weekend. On Saturday, June 30, he said he plans to head up to the mountains as he normally does to lend a hand.

When the confrontation occurred, Guzman said he and his mother were cleaning a home on a spacious, rural lot in the forest that owners were preparing to advertise on Airbnb.

“That’s the whole reason we were there — to make it look nice so it could be ready for rent,” he said.

Guzman said the woman walked up when his mother was using a leaf blower to disperse pine needles — and might have spilled a few needles onto a neighboring property, though not on the woman’s yard. Guzman said she lives across the street.

“I said, ‘If we did something wrong, we’re going to fix it,’” he said. “‘We weren’t going to leave without finishing our job.’”

And they didn’t, said Guzman, who added that they spent six hours cleaning.
Officials: Hesperia finances are balanced and ‘booming’

By Rene Ray De La Cruz
Staff Writer

Posted Jul 1, 2018 at 6:38 AM

HESPERIA — The Gateway City to the High Desert will begin the fiscal year with an operating budget of just over $74 million that includes a number of infrastructure projects.

The Hesperia City Council put the final touches on next year’s budget Tuesday night when they approved the city’s new 2018/19 Capital Improvement Program budget that includes some $30 million in projects.

A few of the new and continued CIP projects include numerous street improvements, an I Avenue Corridor Enhancement Study in anticipation of the construction of the Tapestry Project and the addition of traffic signals along Ranchero Road at Cottonwood and Maple avenues.

“This year’s budget process is the first completed after Financial Director Brian Johnson retired and handed the reins to Casey Brooksher,” Mayor Bill Holland told the Daily Press. “Casey and his team broke up the budget presentation into two smaller segments, which made it simpler and easier to digest, especially for a city that is booming.”

Revenue

The approved balanced budget includes anticipated revenue for the city to increase overall by 10 percent or $8.7 million, with the General Fund also increasing by 6 percent or $1.7 million to an estimated ending reserve balance of $7.4 million.

The increases are primarily due to Sales and Use Tax increasing by $400,000, Vehicle License Fee increasing by $600,000 and Development-Related Revenue, as 200 building permits are planned to be issued, increasing by $400,000 over last
Water District are revenues are expected to increase by 13 percent over last year’s fiscal budget. The rise in water district revenue is primarily attributable to increases in water sales and water availability charges, as the Hesperia Water District approved a utility rate increase over five years that went into effect in January. That includes an annual 9 percent revenue rate increase for water sales and 6 percent revenue rate increase for sewer.

The largest increase in the city’s revenue by percentage is streets related, which is anticipated to increase by 24 percent or $3.2 million. The primary factor for this increase is the combined $2.6 million increase in Development Impact Fees for streets and storm drainage. This gain is also due to the anticipated continuation of growth in development activity. This increase is conservatively based on DIF rates prior to the City Council-approved revisions that are to take effect on July 16.

**Expenditures**

The new budget proposes expenditures of over $104 million, which is a 10 percent or $9.9 million increase over last year’s budget of $95 million. The proposed budget consists of $30.6 million of Capital Improvement Program projects, $6.4 million of debt service, and $68 million for normal operations.

The new CIP will increase by 30 percent, which is primarily due to the streets, storm drain, and sewer-related projects. The debt service budget will increase 58 percent due to the Ranchero Road Interchange loan. The new operating budget of $68.0 million is considered a “modest increase” of 1 percent or $600,000 from last year’s budget of $67.4 million.

**Capital Improvement Projects highlights**

- Water: $14.2 million
- Reclaimed Water Distribution System
- Interstate 15 corridor water
• Street Improvements: $10.1 million

• Ranchero Road aqueduct crossing

• Ranchero Road from Seventh Avenue to Mariposa Road

• Ranchero Road undercrossing

• Ranchero Road/Interstate 15 Interchange

• Ranchero Road traffic signals

• Main Street traffic signal synchronization

• Sultana and Muscatel streets

• Main Street aqueduct crossing

**Sewer $3.7 million**

• Interstate 15 Corridor

• Maple Avenue line replacement

• Main Street improvements

• Golf course line

**Facilities: $1.3 million**

• Park and Ride Facility

• Animal Control and remodel
Storm Drainage: $1.2 million

- Retention Basins at Temecula and Escondido avenues, and Walnut Street

Full-Time Salary by Department

- San Bernardino County Sheriff: 25 percent
- Fire District: 19 percent
- Water District: 19 Percent
- Public Works: 10 Percent
- Code Compliance: 8 Percent
- Community Development: 5 Percent
- Management Services: 5 Percent
- City Manager: 4 Percent
- Sewer: 3 Percent
- Economic Development: 2 Percent

With a total of nearly $16 million, the city’s contract with the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department takes up a quarter of the yearly budget. The Hesperia Fire Protection District, which is currently being annexed by San Bernardino County, has a budget of $12 million.
“The fire budget was prepared prior to the approval of the Hesperia Fire Protection District’s annexation into county fire,” Holland said. “The annexation process still continues, so we still have that budget on the books, which includes the collection of property taxes, but no additional fire tax to the residents.”

Beginning with the 2019/20 budget, the fire budget will only see two entries, including its pension obligation and funds coming from county fire to over the pension liability, Councilman Paul Russ said.

For more information, visit www.cityofhesperia.us or call 760-947-1000.

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Residents in northern Fontana express concerns about coyotes

Jun 30, 2018 Updated Jun 30, 2018

Residents talk to representatives of the Fontana Police Department and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife following a special meeting about coyotes at Koehler Park in Fontana.

Some residents of the northern area of Fontana have become increasingly concerned about coyotes prowling in local neighborhoods, threatening and sometimes attacking small dogs and cats -- and even confronting humans.

With coyote season now under way, representatives of the Fontana Police Department and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife held a special meeting at Koehler Park on June 30 to discuss the situation.
"We've received several calls regarding an increase of coyote sightings in Fontana," said a message on the Fontana P.D. Facebook page. "Over the past three years we averaged approximately 150 calls related to coyote sightings. During this coyote season, we saw an increase of calls in the north end of Fontana, possibly due to the newer homes being built, thereby giving the coyotes less areas to conceal themselves from public view."

During the meeting, authorities informed the attendees about how to "haze," or scare away, the coyotes, which are primarily nocturnal but can be observed roaming during the daytime.

"We often advise residents/pet owners to bring in their pets after the sun goes down, especially small breed dogs and cats," police said.

In addition, residents can help by keeping parks and neighborhoods clean, making sure all unused food is put in trash containers where the coyotes cannot reach it. If coyotes cannot find food, they will eventually retreat out of the area, Fish and Wildlife personnel said.

The Fontana Animal Services Team (FAST) does not trap coyotes, but does respond to the following types of coyote calls: removing deceased coyotes in the roadway, following up on reports of coyotes observed in the daytime near or in a residential area or school zones, or dealing with injured coyotes.

FAST members haze coyotes but do not capture or relocate them. It is a felony animal cruelty offense for a person to intentionally cause injury or bodily harm to any animal.

The San Bernardino County Animal Control Department has a contract with Animal Pest Management for removal of problem coyotes, for which the owners of the pets or livestock can have the coyotes trapped if deemed necessary. The phone number for San Bernardino County Animal Control is 1-800-472-5609.

Residents who observe coyotes acting aggressively toward humans or making human contact should report this to the Fontana P.D. dispatch so that the agency will respond.

----- COYOTE HAZING TECHNIQUES were provided by the Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Q: What is hazing?
A: Hazing is a process designed to scare wild animals away and to instill in them a fear of humans. This is done for both public safety and the wellbeing of the animal. Wild animals that get too comfortable around humans can become dangerous and must be killed.

Q: What should I do if I encounter a coyote?

A: First, immediately pick up children and pets. Then implement the hazing strategies introduced below. Once you start hazing do not stop until the coyote has left the area. Never turn your back or run from a coyote.

Q: When should I haze a coyote?

A: Anytime you are confronted by one. Consistency is important. Everyone in the community must work together to make coyotes feel unwelcome in urban settings.

Q: When should I not haze a coyote?

A: Do not haze a coyote if it is cornered, injured or has pups. In the event you encounter a coyote under these circumstances, maintain eye contact with the coyote and slowly back away.

Q: How do I haze a coyote?

A: There are a variety of hazing strategies:

• Make yourself as large as possible. Stand up straight and wave your arms over your head.
• Make loud noises. Scream, yell or whistle.

• Be forceful and direct your voice at the coyote.

• Be animated.

• Throw rocks, sticks, anything you can pick up.

• Take steps toward the coyote. Be aggressive.

• Always look directly at the coyote. Never turn your back to it or run away.

• When walking, carry an item like a stick, golf club, water gun or air horn.
A Riverside County corrections deputy has been charged with six child abuse charges following an investigation that started when a 3-month-old baby girl was brought to Loma Linda University Medical Center June 25 with a skull fracture, authorities said.

Jason Gordon Wenker, 30, of Loma Linda, was charged with the felony child abuse charges after a review by the San Bernardino County District Attorney’s Office. Each charge also carries an enhancement of great bodily injury on a child under 5 years of age, court records show.

Wenker was initially arrested on suspicion of one charge of willful cruelty to a child on Tuesday, June 26. He posted bond on $100,000 bail and was released.

The subsequent charges were filed Friday, June 29, after further investigation, and a warrant was issued for Wenker. He was arrested that day without incident by a Sheriff’s Specialized Enforcement Detail at a relative's home in Perris, a Saturday news release said.

Bail was set at $750,000. It was not clear if he posted bond.

Wenker’s newly filed court record did not name an attorney for him.

The Riverside County Sheriff’s Department said last week that Wenker had been placed on administrative leave.

After the baby arrived at Loma Linda University Medical Center, forensic pediatricians found she had numerous other injuries, many of them in different stages of healing. All of the victim’s injuries were consistent with suspected child abuse, authorities said.

Anyone with information about the investigation can contact deputy Brian Arias in the sheriff’s Specialized Investigation Division, Crimes Against Children Detail, at 909-387-3615. To remain anonymous, call the WeTip Hotline at 800-78-CRIME (27463) or visit the website at www.wetip.com.
Did the 'system' fail mentally ill man who shot 2 San Diego police officers? Some think so

By Lyndsay Winkley

While San Diego police investigate the College Area shooting a week ago that left two officers injured and the suspect dead, many questions remain about the man they say opened fire that night.

Residents in the sprawling Tuscany Place condo complex knew Joe Darwish, 28, as someone with a penchant for violent outbursts. He could be heard screaming profanity and threats, throwing himself against walls and breaking things inside his home at all hours, prompting neighbors to call police.

They called them often, they said.

Neighbors’ accounts and court records indicate that Darwish had mental health and behavioral issues, but it’s unclear whether he had a specific diagnosis or whether he had been under treatment at the time of the shooting.
Still, some people who came in contact with him over the past year – including a woman who was assaulted by Darwish, her landlord and two lawyers who represented Darwish in his criminal cases – saw him as someone who desperately needed help.

Somewhere along the line, they all agreed, the system that is supposed to identify and assist those with mental illness seemed to have failed Darwish and those around him, they said.

Howard McManus owns the building where Darwish lived and where the shooting occurred after 10 p.m. on June 23. McManus said he almost dropped the phone when he was first told what happened.

“I was surprised he was armed, that he actually tried to kill police officers,” McManus said. “I knew he was potentially dangerous, but I had no idea it was this bad.

“I knew he had deep issues,” he continued. “The whole situation was very frustrating. I feel like the whole system, and everyone in the chain, failed. It failed not only us as homeowners, but they failed Joe.”

Attorney Nancy Olsen, who was handling Darwish’s appeal of two misdemeanor convictions for assault and battery, was also shocked by the news. She saw Darwish as a tormented individual who was struggling, largely on his own, with mental illness.

“I know when I got that call, my heart sunk. My gut instinct said the system failed Joe,” Olsen said. “He was someone who needed help. … My sense was he was totally isolated.”

Noting that there are likely many others like Darwish in San Diego County, she said she hoped that if the community can learn ways to better help people in similar situations, “maybe his death won’t be in vain.”

Few new details have been released about the shooting.

Homicide investigators said they finished processing the scene for evidence on Wednesday, but remained tight-lipped about the case.

Darwish is suspected of firing at officers who were sent to investigate a report of a violent disturbance at the condo complex on Rolando Court.

When they arrived, the officers smelled smoke coming from the residence. After calling for firefighters, they forced their way inside and were immediately met by gunfire. Two officers — Francisco Roman and Dan Bihum — were shot, but are expected to make full recoveries, police had said.

Darwish’s body was found inside the condo. It’s unclear if he took his own life or was fatally shot by police.

Neighbors said it wasn’t the first time the police had been called about Darwish. It also wasn’t the first time he had exhibited violent behavior.
McManus first heard of Darwish’s behavior from Heather Dumitru — his tenant — in January 2017. She said Darwish could be heard screaming and breaking things. (Court records would later show the damage Darwish had apparently caused inside his own home. Mirrors were shattered and drywall was ripped from the studs.)

McManus and Dumitru tried everything they could think of to address Darwish’s behavior, they said. They called police, who were sometimes accompanied by Psychiatric Emergency Response Team clinicians. They emailed the homeowners’ association that oversaw the property. They attended homeowners’ association meetings. They spoke to Darwish’s mother.

The homeowners association told McManus that because Darwish owned the condo he was living in, there was little they could do about the situation, he said.

Police — who were called so frequently they knew Darwish by name — often said their hands were tied, according to Dumitru. On several occasions, she said, Darwish had quieted down by the time officers arrived, leaving police with no reason to take him away.

That changed on Jan. 25, 2017, when Darwish assaulted her.

According to Dumitru, she was walking past Darwish’s condominium when he ran outside shouting that he was going to kill her. She said she called 911 as she fled to a nearby Starbucks.

Once there, she met with McManus, who was her landlord, and Darwish’s mother, and the three returned to the complex together, according to Dumitru and court documents.

Police responded, but when Darwish refused to come out of his condo, they left the situation in the hands of his mother, who was trying to talk to him through the door.

Dumitru said she was standing nearby, armed with a baseball bat because she was worried for the mother’s safety, when Darwish came out.

What happened next is a matter of debate. Dumitru said that when Darwish saw her, he charged at her, punched her and slammed her head against the ground.

She said the attack left her with a traumatic brain injury that she lives with every day.

Lawyers representing Darwish paint a different picture of the incident. They said testimony presented in trial suggested he initially approached Dumitru with a cellphone to document the interaction, and that it was Dumitru who escalated the situation by swinging her bat at Darwish.

While the two did get into a scuffle, there was never medical evidence presented that proved Dumitru suffered a serious injury, Darwish’s lawyers said.

McManus was hit by Darwish while trying to break up the altercation, according to court records.
After the fight, Dumitru said she crawled back to her condo and called 911 and her then-boyfriend. Darwish also called police at some point during the altercation.

Dumitru’s boyfriend and his father arrived before police, and a second altercation occurred, court documents said. According to witness testimony, Darwish confronted the men before retreating into his condominium.

Darwish’s mother testified that Dumitru’s boyfriend followed Darwish into his condominium where he allegedly hit Darwish with a bat “lots of times.”

The mother testified that she thought the boyfriend was going to kill Darwish. Efforts to reach the mother for this story were unsuccessful.

Darwish, who suffered a broken arm, was jailed on suspicion of felony assault and other misdemeanor charges.

Attorney Charles Millioen, who represented Darwish in trial, said the witnesses the prosecution presented in court gave conflicting and inconsistent testimony about the incident. He said it was clear that Dumitru, McManus and likely others who lived at the complex had had enough of Darwish’s behavior.

“In closing (arguments), I said we were dealing with a group of people who, yes, had reached their breaking point with Joe,” Millioen said. “And you can’t necessarily blame them for reaching that breaking point.

“But what they saw as a solution did end up turning into vigilante justice,” he said.

Darwish was acquitted of felony assault and making a criminal threat but was found guilty of two misdemeanor crimes, simple assault and battery.

“Twelve people who are not neighbors of Joe Darwish got to hear all the evidence and decide that case, decide what really happened,” Millioen said. “And without that personal animosity — which you have to somewhat understand where they were coming from, you really do — but without that personal animosity, (the jurors) were really able to see the truth.”

Dumitru and McManus still disagree with the jury’s verdict.

“Almost everyone in the whole chain — the police, the PERT unit, the HOA, his mom, the judge, the jurors — they didn’t do their job,” McManus said. “The only person who did his job was (Darwish’s) defense attorney. And in the end, he didn’t help him either, because they put (Darwish) back on the street, and that was ultimately his demise.”

Little is known publicly about Darwish’s mental health history. Court records show he has two mental health cases filed in San Diego Superior Court, but they remain sealed. In a 2016 criminal case, Darwish was found mentally incompetent to stand trial — meaning he was unable, at the time, to understand the charges against him and/or assist in his defense.
Per a judge’s order, Darwish was sent to Patton State Hospital in San Bernardino County, a psychiatric facility, for about three months. His court case resumed when it was determined that his mental competency was restored.

He later pleaded guilty to a vandalism charge.

It’s unclear what kind of treatment, if any, Darwish received for his mental health condition or if he was ever contacted by the county’s In-Home Outreach Team program, or IHOT.

The outreach team provides assistance to adults with serious mental illness who are reluctant or resistant to receiving mental health services. Those services include behavioral health screening, outreach and engagement, crisis intervention and short term case management.

It’s possible that he could have benefitted from Laura’s Law, a statewide ordinance that allows the court to order psychiatric treatment for people with mental illness who have been resistant to treatment in the past. But as of January – three years after the county Board of Supervisors voted to implement it here – Laura’s Law was still unused in San Diego County.

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This article is related to: Shootings, Crime, Mental Health, San Diego Police Department, College Area
The Kern County Homeless Collaborative has adopted a new 10-year plan to end homelessness in the county, and the Kern County Board of Supervisors has assigned a new coordinator to help get the job done.

At a meeting Tuesday, Jose Gonzalez was introduced to the board as the new coordinator of homelessness in the county for the countywide homeless initiative. He started his new position Monday, moving from his previous position as the county’s fair housing coordinator.
“I’ve worked with the homeless population in the past in Chico, where I used to live,” Gonzalez said after the meeting.

Throughout his career, he has worked with the homeless, but he said he would start his new position with some homework.

“First, I’m going to learn the 10-year plan and get to know the Kern County Homeless Collaborative,” he said. “I’ll get familiar with the goals of the plan and then see how I can improve and make suggestions and work within the structure that is already here.”

With multiple departments all putting forward efforts to address homelessness, the county felt it necessary to create a position that links those efforts together, said County Administrative Officer Ryan Alsop.

Gonzalez will work as the hub of the county’s homeless outreach programs in an attempt to connect the county’s efforts with the Homeless Collaborative and other agencies within the community.

“If Jose's on it, then I have every reason to believe it will be done,” said Supervisor Mike Gleason during the meeting.

The new position will mainly support the Homeless Collaborative, and not create a separate endeavor.

In 2017, Kern County saw a 9 percent increase in homelessness compared to a 13 percent increase statewide, Alsop told the Board of Supervisors at the meeting, using statistics provided by the Homeless Collaborative.

He said the county also experienced a 38 percent increase in unsheltered homeless, compared to a 68 percent increase statewide.

The per capita homeless population for Kern County stands at 1.02 homeless per 1,000 residents, compared to 3.4 per 1,000 in California and 1.7 nationwide.

Despite the year-over-year increase, Alsop reported that homelessness has actually decreased in Kern County by 40 percent since 2007.
“Kern County, with the KCHC as lead, has worked hard to address the homelessness issue and a 40 percent reduction is an accomplishment,” Alsop said. “However, more work is to be done.”

The board is expected to hear a more extended update on the county’s efforts to fight homelessness during a July meeting.

Sam Morgen can be reached at 661-395-7415 or smorgen@bakersfield.com. You can also follow him on Twitter @smorgenTBC
Poop. Needles. Rats. Homeless camp pushes SF neighborhood to the edge

One awful experience on one unremarkable city block represent the hellscape that has infuriated many San Francisco residents

By Heather Knight

The Chronicle receives a deluge of email every day, but one message sent to the news desk on a Saturday evening in April was particularly memorable.

“There is a suitcase full of human s— on the corner of Isis and 13th,” the email read.

“Last night, I had to threaten violence to a man smoking crystal meth on my front porch.
“Things have been getting worse and worse on my block since 2010, and the city does NOTHING to fix it,” the angry email continued.

I replied, saying I’d be happy to talk to the man who sent the message and giving him my phone number. I expected to hear from a crank, but that wasn’t who was on the other end of the line when the phone rang.

A pleasant, soft-spoken man said he was the one who’d e-mailed “about a suitcase full of poop.”

“That’s a good way to start a conversation,” he added with a laugh.

He was Ernst Schoen-Rene, a 46-year-old computer programmer who invited me to his home to see the misery for myself. He lives on Isis Street, which stretches just a block from 12th to 13th streets on the edge of South of Market near the Mission District border.

This little block turned out to represent the hellscape that some neighborhoods in San Francisco have become — and then, within weeks, became part of a crackdown on tent
clearings to cautious relief and uneasiness about the homeless campers’ unclear fate afterward.

But right after the suitcase-full-of-poop email, it was just sheer frustration.

“I don’t mind a reasonable amount of urban grit,” explained Schoen-Rene, a native of Chico who’s lived in San Francisco since 1994, always opting for edgy neighborhoods.

He and his wife bought their Isis Street condo in 2010 for $748,000, and by the time he sent the email, he had come to regret it. He felt stuck, unable to afford anything else in today’s nutty housing market or the far higher property taxes that would come with a new purchase.
“Some days, I want to burn this all down with a flamethrower,” he sighed in exasperation.

Some of the city’s biggest names — from San Francisco Travel to the Chamber of Commerce to the Hotel Council — have loudly protested the disastrous conditions on San Francisco’s sidewalks in recent months, and regularly get meetings with City Hall politicians, but the voices of everyday residents aren’t always heard.

The ones just trying to raise kids, work and, well, live. The ones with so little power, they can’t get their supervisors to respond to their requests for help. The ones with the misery literally on their front doorsteps.

Those are the people who live on Isis Street, which should be everything that’s good about San Francisco. Funky flats. A group of progressive neighbors, many of whom are artists, writers and other creative types. A walkable neighborhood where you can get to Rainbow Grocery and a host of bars and restaurants in a flash. There are about 30 units of housing on the block, and six kids younger than 5 are growing up there.
It should have been the best of San Francisco, but by April, it had become the worst.

Schoen-Rene’s 2½-year-old son, Laszlo, invented a game called “jumping over the poop.” Another kid across the street collected syringe caps and floated them down the stream of dirty gutter water for fun. People “as high as a kite” hopped Schoen-Rene’s 10-foot fence. He once tried to pick up a pile of cardboard somebody had ditched on the sidewalk to recycle it. But it was much heavier than he expected. There was a person passed out inside.

Homeless campers cooking over open flames on the sidewalk have started fires. They’ve partied and injected drugs on Schoen-Rene’s front steps, one time repeatedly throwing trash at his door, alarming the family inside with the thumping sound.
But the breaking point for him came when neighbors found a black suitcase with wheels on the corner that had clearly been used as a toilet by homeless people.

“I actually started crying, I got so frustrated,” Schoen-Rene said. “I flipped out. I started writing to everybody.”

He wasn’t the only one who’d reached his limit. For Neker Ortiz, who works at Giannini’s Auto Body, which backs up onto Isis Street, that moment came when he saw one too many vagrants breaking the windows of cars parked in the neighborhood and stealing items from inside. He said he chased one thief down.

“He was crazy, but I was more crazy than him,” Ortiz said. “I was so pissed.”
Much of the problem has stemmed from the fact that Isis Street sits near a Highway 101 overpass, which in the winter of 2015-16 became a magnet for homeless people in tents seeking shelter from the cold and rain. At its high point, 350 people lived in tents sprawling under the overpass, creating a shameful shantytown in the middle of one of the world’s richest cities.

The late Mayor Ed Lee directed the clearing of the tents in February 2016, but they never fully went away. This April, there were dozens of tents dotting the blocks around Isis Street.

The neighbors sought help again and again. Records from the city’s 311 call center show that this year, from January through May, residents on the small block made 158 calls requesting assistance. Seventy-seven calls related to encampments, and 26 calls were about human waste.

That’s 158 calls in the first five months of this year, compared with 159 calls in all of 2017 and 63 calls in 2016. In 2013, just 13 calls to 311 came from Isis Street.

The residents also called police again and again. They emailed politicians at City Hall again and again.

“I don’t feel like anything ever happens,” Schoen-Rene said in early April.
The people who have homes on Isis aren’t get-off-my-lawn types. The neighbors I met seemed very progressive and genuinely heartsick that other people were living in these filthy conditions on sidewalks.

“I really strongly believe San Francisco is for everybody, not just us, but the community should be livable for everybody,” said Schoen-Rene’s wife, Jill, an attorney and children’s book author. “The suitcase is a symbol. Nobody should have to poop in a suitcase, and nobody should have to find a suitcase full of poop.”

Annie Whiteside, who’s lived in an apartment on Isis Street for 27 years, is well known in the city’s punk scene and used to run Annie’s Social Club and Annie’s Cocktail Lounge.
She said it’s scary walking by herself or riding the bus late at night after work, so she has
to pay for car service. She can’t wear shoes inside anymore because the bottoms became
so disgusting from walking on her sidewalk. She has struggled to sleep at night because
of the tortuous sounds of screaming and fighting wafting up from the street below.

In the middle of the night not long ago, a man rolled around in the middle of the street
“acting like a wild beast — just screaming,” she said. She called 911. She often refrains
from calling police if black men are involved, not confident officers would treat them
fairly.

She’s certain that if the same scene played out on Telegraph Hill or in St. Francis Wood,
the city’s reaction would have been swift and decisive. She likens City Hall to “a snail
climbing up Twin Peaks.” She thinks the city should build many more Navigation
Centers and install many more public toilets and garbage cans.

“We have all this wealth in the city, and then we have this huge homeless problem,” she
said. “It’s so uneven. It’s so unbalanced. They shouldn’t have to live like that, and we
shouldn’t have to live like that.”
Karen Koltonow, an artist who’s lived in an Isis Street apartment since 1984, agreed that what’s most devastating is the huge influx of wealth into the city juxtaposed with extreme poverty on the sidewalks.

“It builds a rift and a resentment among people,” she said. “I just try to be kind, as kind as I can.”

But remaining calm can be hard at night, when the same noises keeping her neighbor, Whiteside, awake jolt her out of bed, too.

“I listen. I try to make sure nobody’s getting killed. I don’t like to hear female voices,” she said. “I feel kind of powerless and helpless. It kind of gets to me.”
“Artists’ lives matter.” She gave me a pin reading “Words matter.”

ON SAN FRANCISCO
Catching up with SF Mayor-elect London Breed
June 22, 2018

Now that she’s clinched the race for the city’s top job, San Francisco Mayor-elect London Breed is getting ready to bear down on the city’s most pressing problems. After her July 11 inauguration, Bree...

Schoen-Rene wears a safety pin as an earring and has a painting of a skull above his fireplace. Shortly before the mayoral election, he said he’d vote for “anybody but London Breed probably,” referring to the supervisor with the most moderate political viewpoints, who did go on to win. Other neighbors said they’d vote for Breed over Supervisor Jane Kim, who has represented their neighborhood during its decline.

On one of my visits to Isis Street in early April, the sidewalks at the end of the block underneath the freeway were teeming with homeless people. One woman leaned against a wall with drug paraphernalia spread around her. She alternately cried, gave huge clownish smiles and screamed profanities.

A man with a pile of belongings and a dog nestled in an open suitcase stood nearby. He said his name is just Roni and he’s been homeless for eight years. He said he’s addicted to meth. His teeth seemed to be disintegrating.

“It’s a hard way to live. There’s a lot of stress,” he said, talking loudly over the sound of whizzing traffic above. “I just want to be somewhere where I can relax. Sleep maybe.”
remaining tents in the area, emphasizing that those living inside had been offered services and shelter repeatedly and had declined.

“This is just the beginning,” Farrell said. “Tents should not be part of the permanent landscape in San Francisco.”

Whiteside said she was glad for “a little reprieve” but wondered why the sudden change after so many calls for help. And what happened to all those people in tents who are now gone.

“For months and months and months, nothing happens, and then they clean,” she said shortly after Farrell’s move. “Now my street’s clean this week, but those people aren’t trash. It’s a double-edged sword.”

Would it hold? Would Isis Street remain clear? So far, so good.

Schoen-Rene called the changed landscape “almost uncanny.” He’s happy and relieved, but also confused. He doesn’t know where those who didn’t accept shelter went — and the Farrell administration hasn’t bothered to track them.

“It’s as if they all got raptured,” Schoen-Rene said.

It’s far from perfect. On a recent day, he saw a tent on his corner with four people inside “with needles hanging out of their feet.” Police came and whisked them out of the neighborhood, signaling Farrell’s determination to keep the area clear. There’s still
“Still, it’s amazing to have the street clean,” Schoen-Rene said. “It’s clean. It’s nuts.”

Chronicle staff writer Joaquin Palomino contributed to this report.

San Francisco Chronicle columnist Heather Knight appears Sundays and Tuesdays. Email: hknightsf

SF Homeless Project: More Coverage

SF’s homeless navigation centers seem to be working. Here’s how they save lives

Guide: Helping hands for people on streets

Poop. Needles. Rats. Homeless camp pushes SF neighborhood to the edge
One-quarter of homeless people in the U.S. live in California, despite Californians making up only 12 per cent of the population.

Not only is homelessness more common on the West Coast: it is also more visible, because a higher proportion of homeless people are unsheltered. In the U.S., 24 per cent of homeless people sleep outside, in vehicles or somewhere
else not meant for human habitation. But that varies greatly from place to place: in California, 68 per cent of homeless people are unsheltered, compared to just 5 per cent in New York.

Visitors to the West Coast may be shocked to find the tents that line cities from San Diego to Seattle. Like a modern-day “Grapes of Wrath,” the tents are a stark reminder of the suffering of the thousands living outside, homeless.

**Homelessness**

On a given night in 2017, the majority of homeless Americans can be found in California and New York.


What’s to blame for such high numbers of unsheltered homeless on the West Coast? The reason isn’t drug use, mental health problems or weather. Rather, it is due to the extreme shortage of affordable housing.

**Life unsheltered**

As a physician and researcher who provides medical care for people experiencing homelessness, I have seen firsthand how devastating homelessness is to health.

Being unsheltered is terrifying, humiliating and isolating. People living without shelter lack access to toileting facilities, sinks and showers. They have no way to store or prepare food and no protection from the elements. Hunger is common.

Sleeping in makeshift beds or on the ground, they get little sleep. They must contend with having their possessions stolen. They face frequent forced moves, which disrupt relationships and make it difficult for family, friends or service providers to find them.

People who are unsheltered are at high risk of physical and sexual abuse. If they struggle with substance use disorders, their use of drugs and alcohol occurs in public, leaving them open to arrest. There are no places to refrigerate or store medicines, no place to receive mailed appointment reminders or a visit from a visiting nurse, no place to dress a wound or plug in medical equipment like oxygen. Without access to hygiene facilities, they are at high risk for communicable diseases like hepatitis A.

**Unaffordable housing**

Some assume that homelessness is so common on the West Coast because people move here when they become homeless, but the data does not support this. Most people experience homelessness close to where they lost their
My team’s research in Oakland found that 81 per cent of older adults who are homeless became homeless in the Bay Area. Only 10 per cent had lost their housing outside of California.

Instead, the high rate of homelessness can be attributed to the lack of affordable housing in these regions. The West Coast suffers from rising costs of rental housing, stagnant incomes for low-wage workers and a decline in federal support for affordable housing. For example, California has gained 900,000 renter households since 2005, but lost $1.7bn in state and federal funding for affordable housing.

Extremely low-income households – defined as those with income less than 30 per cent of the area median income – are at the highest risk of homelessness. Nationally, there are only 35 units available for every 100 extremely low-income households.

In the West, these shortages are more severe: Nevada has 15 units available for every 100 extremely low-income households; California has 21.

In 2017, for the first time in 13 years, Los Angeles opened its wait list for housing choice vouchers. These vouchers allow households to pay 30 per cent of their income in rent, with the rest paid by the government. There were 600,000 applicants for just 20,000 spots on the list, highlighting the enormous unmet need.

Unsheltered homeless

On a given night in 2017, an estimated 553,742 people in the U.S. were homeless, about one-quarter to one-third of them unsheltered.

Who pays for homeless services

Why are people on the West Coast so much more likely to be unsheltered than homeless people in other parts of the country? It reflects differing government priorities.

New York City, where there is a legal right to shelter, spends approximately $17,000 per homeless person per year on homeless services. Massachusetts spends approximately $14,000 per year. Los Angeles, by contrast, spends approximately $5,000.

With enormous numbers of people living outside, West Coast cities are scrambling for solutions. Some cities, like Seattle, have created sanctioned homeless encampments, bringing hygiene facilities and other services. However, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homeless cautions that this approach is costly and doesn’t provide a solution to homelessness.
Other cities are following San Francisco’s example and creating navigation centres, homeless shelters with added services. Unlike typical shelters, these centres allow people to come in groups, bring pets and belongings and stay all day.

Many areas have passed tax increases to fund new housing and services. These efforts show modest success but continue to struggle against the unfavorable housing conditions that lead people to become homeless in the first place.

So where can we go from here? There are solutions to homelessness, but, in my view, these will not succeed without solving the affordable housing crisis that is the underlying cause of homelessness.

For people who are chronically homeless and have disabling conditions, permanent supportive housing is highly effective. This type of subsidised housing offers supportive services, without the requirement that people be sober or engaged in medical care. Studies show that expanding permanent supportive housing has reduced the number of people experiencing homelessness in many parts of the country.

The success of permanent supportive housing has been overshadowed by increases in people becoming newly homeless due to the lack of affordable housing. In my view, preventing and ending homelessness will require a commitment to creating housing that is affordable to all.

Margot Kushel, Professor of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco.

This article was originally published on The Conversation. Read the original article.

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Here’s everything we learned from this list of alternative names considered for London’s boroughs

By Jonn Elledge

The LCC Municipal blog – which publishes all sorts of fascinating stuff about the history of London government – has just begun a new series on the naming of the London boroughs. The first instalment is online here, and if you’re reading this, you’ll probably enjoy it.

But wait! Don’t click away yet, because the article includes an extensive round-up of the borough names that never were, and I’ve written a round-up of the best ones, and what I learned from them. Here it is now.

Only seven boroughs were always certain of their names

They were: Croydon, Ealing, Haringey, Harrow, Lambeth, Tower Hamlets and the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

With some of these, the reasons why are obvious. Harrow, the only borough that didn’t change its boundaries in 1965, was already called Harrow. Why change it?

With others, the reasons are not obvious. The borough name “Haringey” is a typo for the area around the district of Harringay, and has been confusing Londoners for 50 years. God knows why they were so attached to it.
Three different boroughs could have been called Riverside

They were Hammersmith & Fulham, Barking & Dagenham and – leftfield choice this – Waltham Forest. Which isn't on the Thames. It did also consider Leaside and Lea Valley, though.

Barking, incidentally, also considered Thameside. Which makes sense, given it was one of only 15 boroughs which border the Thames.

The City of Westminster briefly considered Maryminston

No. The logic here presumably is that it was formed from Westminster, Marylebone, and Paddington, but all the same: no.

By the same logic, Camden considered St Holstead, St Bornstead and St Hamborn; Merton considered Wimmercham; Fordingham and Barham were possible names for Barking; and Sutton briefly discussed Carwalton. Lucky escapes all round, there.

Enfield seems to have considered having a number rather than a name

To quote the blog:

> Enfield Chace, Edmonton, North Middlesex, Northborough, Edengate, St Andrews, Thirty Two (and variants)

Once upon a time I wanted to call CityMetric Three53, you know. Perhaps Enfield was desperately searching for a unique URL, too.

Several boroughs considered names based on counties

Bromley, which has still not come to terms with being in Greater London even now, considered West Kent, Nort West Kent and Kentgate, as well as Ravensbourne (it's a river). Waltham Forest considered Wessex – an in no way confusing name that was presumably intended to reflect the way it was previously in West Essex.

And no fewer than four boroughs considered names that included Middlesex: Enfield ("North Middlesex"), Barnet ("North Middlesex" again, plus "Central Middlesex & Barnet"), Hillingdon ("West Middlesex") and Hounslow ("South Middlesex"). It's all very reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's attempt to rename most of the counties of southern England to be variants on Wessex.

But no borough wanted Surrey in its name

Proof, if proof be needed, that Surrey is the worst home county.

Barnet was particularly indecisive

I quote:

> Barnet

> The large number of suggestions is on account of a detailed memo by RH Williams, the Town Clerk of Hendon which presented all of the options considered by the five authorities concerned.

> Hendon, Hendon & Barnet, Northgate or Northgates, North Hills, Northern Heights, Northiam, Finchenbarne, Finchley Whetstone, Barfindon, Dollis, Grimsdyke, Norbrook, Norgate, Noresex, Northsex, Northlands, Norlon, Dollis Bar,
Dolbrook, Finchenbar, Finbardon, Finchendon, Finchelee, Brent/Braynte, Brentlea, Brent Bar, North Ridges, Great North, Great Northern, Brookways, Ossulton Gore, Central Middlesex & Barnet, Greater Hendon, Brent Valley, Henbarnley, North Middlesex, Hendon with Finchley, Norborough, Templewood

By my count, that's 42 different options. That seems to be asking for trouble, to me.

Bexley could have been greater

The name Greater Bexley was considered, presumably to reflect the fact that Bexley was one of just four councils that went into the new borough. (Bexley, Erith, Crayford and part of Chislehurst & Sidcup.)

The public aren't funny

The entries listed for Newham – result of merger between the county boroughs of East Ham and West Ham – included Hamstrung, Hamsandwich, Smoked Ham and Hamsweetham. “It will come as no surprise to learn that items marked (b) were not official suggestions,” writes LCC Municipal. I assume this means that these were the Boaty McBoatface of their day.

Some of the names are just lovely

I don’t really have a joke to make about these ones, I just really like them. So here they are as a map:

![Map of London with various alternative names](image)

Honestly, I really think my life would have been improved loads if I’d grown up not in Havering but in Liberty.

Some of them really aren't

One of the names listed for Waltham Forest is “Sorensen Spread”. The mind boggles.


Jonn Elledge is the editor of CityMetric. He is on Twitter as [@jonnelledge](https://twitter.com/jonnelledge) and on Facebook as JonnElledgeWrites.

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Voters spared 3 ballot battles Slowly, reforms paying off

GEORGE SKELTON IN SACRAMENTO

Californians won’t vote on the nation’s toughest privacy protections after all — because the Legislature did its job and handled the matter.

That’s one less confusing ballot proposition and hundreds fewer annoying TV ads that voters will be pestered with in November.

Same with a complex local tax measure.

The soft drink industry was scared of local governments slapping taxes on sugary soda. So soda makers qualified a ballot initiative making it harder to increase local taxes period. But they withdrew the measure last week after the Legislature passed a bill to ban new soda taxes for 12 years.

There also won’t be a squirrely ballot measure sponsored by paint manufacturers asking taxpayers to subsidize their lead paint cleanup. Outraged legislators responded to the initiative by introducing bills to penalize the companies. In the end, everyone holstered their weapons and agreed to negotiate.

Those three initiatives were pulled off the ballot on the last day possible because of a reform that was passed four years ago, but largely ignored. This year the reform finally was used as intended.

Under the system, the Legislature and an initiative sponsor can negotiate a compromise. If the two sides work out a deal, the measure can be pulled off the ballot even after it has qualified with enough voter signatures.

The idea is that public policy is usually best decided by elected representatives holding public hearings with rigorous debate, aided by staff expertise. Of course, that’s the textbook, idealistic notion. There’ll always be mushroom bills — they grow in the dark.

This new reform is actually very old. Called an “indirect initiative,” it was pioneered more than a century ago by California’s original reformer, Gov. Hiram Johnson. He championed citizen democracy to counter the special interests — mainly railroads — that dominated Sacramento. The initiative, referendum and recall were his babies.
The indirect initiative was never used, mainly because back then we had a part-time Legislature and few initiatives. Foolishly, it was scuttled in the mid-’60s during a misguided constitutional revision.

It was resurrected in 2014, one of several major reforms adopted in recent years by voters and the Legislature in an attempt to make the state more governable. The result has been a lot less gridlock.

Step by step we’ve installed these reforms:

Budget passage: The legislative vote requirement was lowered from two-thirds to a simple majority. That has made budgeting much easier for Gov. Jerry Brown.

Gerrymandering: Honest redistricting of congressional and legislative seats was mandated. The chore was stripped from the Legislature and handed to an nonpartisan citizens’ commission.

Open primaries: Every voter has the same ballot and can choose any candidate, regardless of party. This tends to force candidates to moderate their views and appeal to the center. At least that’s the theory.

Time in office: Term limits have been loosened, offering lawmakers more years in one house — so they don’t immediately look for their next gig after being sworn in.

Transparency: Starting with this legislative session, bills must be in print 72 hours before a final vote. This is herbicide for mushroom bills.

“The secret to reforming is understanding incrementalism,” state Sen. Bob Hertzberg (D-Van Nuys), a former Assembly speaker, once told me. Incrementalism works. It’s not as scary to people as volcanic reform.

Hertzberg and two other legislators, Assemblyman Ed Chau (D-Arcadia) and state Sen. Bill Dodd (D-Napa), teamed with real estate developer Alastair Mactaggart to negotiate a deal on the consumer privacy initiative.

Mactaggart got riled up about privacy after chatting with a Google engineer at a cocktail party. The engineer candidly told him, “If people only knew how much we know about them, they’d really freak out.”

So Mactaggart created a ballot initiative and spent $3 million-plus gathering signatures. But he was facing a tough, $100-million fall opposition campaign from the likes of Google, AT&T and other tech giants. He was open to legislative compromise.

Chau is a former IBM engineer who learned enough about misuse of personal data that it scared him. “It’s like they’re setting a camera over you,” he told me.

Dodd, who owned some Culligan water franchises, once had his identity stolen.

“It was an absolute nightmare for 16 months,” he said. That made him a crusader for consumer protection.
Hertzberg is a buzz saw, constantly on the move to get something done. “A force of nature,” Mactaggart called him.

The four settled on a bill similar to the initiative.

“If you came from Mars, it’s the difference between a Ford F-150 and a Chevy Silverado,” Mactaggart said. And it was patterned after a recently enacted European law.

Starting in 2020, consumers can find out what personal information a business has about them and prevent it from being sold. They also can order it deleted. And if the companies don’t comply, they can be sued.

Unlike the initiative, the bill can later be easily tweaked by the Legislature to fix flaws.

“Never in my wildest dreams did I think the Legislature would produce something as good as this,” a thrilled Mactaggart told me. “It’s the most far-reaching privacy legislation ever passed in this country.”

The bill passed without a “no” vote in either house and was immediately signed by Brown.

But for proposition lovers, there’ll still be 12 to fight over in November, including whether to extend daylight saving time all year and kill the gas tax increase.

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Anti-union effort is launched

Group funded by conservative billionaires pledges to build on ruling on workers’ dues

ACTIVISTS hold a protest near the Manhattan apartment of billionaire and Republican financier David Koch over campaign contributions in New York City in 2014. (Spencer Platt Getty Images)
Following a U.S. Supreme Court decision that millions of public sector workers can stop paying union fees, a group tied to Republican billionaires long opposed to organized labor — and its support of the Democratic Party — has pledged to build on the landmark ruling to further marginalize employee representation.

The conservative Freedom Foundation said that it has launched a campaign in a trio of West Coast union bastions — California, Oregon and its home state of Washington — aimed at shrinking union ranks by 127,000 members. The group wants the campaign to serve as an example for similar efforts around the country.

“Their employer isn’t going to tell them, and the union isn’t going to tell them, so it falls to organizations like the Freedom Foundation to take up that mantle and make sure that public employees are informed of their constitutional rights,” said the anti-union group’s labor policy director, Maxford Nelsen.

The group hired 80 canvassers in March and trained them last month, according to internal documents reviewed by Bloomberg News.
The 5-4 Supreme Court ruling, with a majority of all-Republican appointees, threatens one of the last strongholds of the United States’ vanishing labor movement, a reliable source of support for Democrats. Before Wednesday’s decision, public sector unions could require nonmembers to pay “agency fees” to fund collective bargaining efforts on behalf of all employees, since they benefit equally from representation.

Writing for the majority, Justice Samuel A. Alito — appointed by President George W. Bush — said such a requirement violated employees’ rights under the 1st Amendment. The majority held that workers must affirmatively opt-in to pay any fees, making it more likely that unions will lose funding and thus the ability to negotiate wages and benefits on behalf of workers.

The Freedom Foundation has been waiting for this moment. In February, it began acquiring lists of workers and identifying public employees to feature in anti-union videos. Last month, it assembled materials to provide to sympathetic local-government human resources departments and readying a toll-free call center.

Now that the ruling has come to pass, the group plans a flood of social media, mail, email, cable television ads, op-eds and phone calls to spread the news about employees’ opportunity to cease paying union fees. Along with going door to door, the anti-union activists plan to visit government buildings where public employees work.

Labor leaders said their members are ready to withstand the barrage.

“They’re really not advocating for the employees at all — they’re advocating for unions to lose their power,” said Bob Schoonover, a heavy equipment mechanic for the city of Los Angeles and president of the Service Employees International Union Local 721.

“They want to silence the working class. It just so happens that unions are the ones that stick up for the working class — whether we represent them or not,” said Schoonover, who added that his union has been planning for the possibility of the anti-union ruling for years. “We feel that we’re as prepared as we can be.”

Led by a former executive of the Building Industry Assn. of Washington lobbying group, the Freedom Foundation reported a 2016 budget of $4 million. Its current assault on unions is modeled on past efforts that targeted home health aides, who in 2014 were given the option of not paying fees, and other government workers, who had a choice of paying full dues or smaller representation fees.

Nelsen declined to identify any of the group’s donors, which he said include businesses, foundations and individuals “from all different walks of life.” All donations are “made by those who believe in our mission,” he said.

However, tax filings reveal a who’s-who of wealthy conservative groups.

Among them are the Sarah Scaife Foundation, backed by the estate of right-wing billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife; Donors Trust, which has gotten millions of dollars from a charity backed by conservative billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch; from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, backed by the family of U.S. Secretary of
Education Betsy DeVos; and the State Policy Network, which has received funding from Donors Trust and is chaired by a vice president of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation.

Meredith Turney, a spokeswoman for the State Policy Network, along with Lawson Bader, chief executive and president of Donors Trust, and Liz Hill, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, all declined to comment on fundraising or donations. Scaife and Koch representatives didn’t return requests for comment.

In records obtained by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the Bradley Foundation reported having given the Freedom Foundation $1.5 million in 2015 “to expand its union transparency & reform project,” including by opening a Portland, Ore., office.

In Bradley Foundation records obtained by the nonprofit Center for Media and Democracy, the foundation’s staff recommended providing funds to the Freedom Foundation because West Coast union money “is used to subsidize the left’s national agenda and obstruct the mission and program interests of the Bradley Foundation and its allies.”

The Bradley Foundation praised the Supreme Court ruling while declining to comment on the Freedom Foundation.

Past Freedom Foundation literature seeks to turn workers against unions by highlighting six-figure salaries allegedly paid to union executives, as well as sending out postcards with images of a dingy hotel and a warning echoing the Eagles’ iconic hit, “Hotel California”: “You can sign up anytime you like but you can never leave!”

According to the group’s documents, targets for its new “insurgency” campaign include corrections officers and teachers, who will be out of school for the summer and thus “have no interaction with their union.” Because the Oregon chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, or AFSCME, has been preparing members by “aggressively messaging” them, the anti-union group’s documents state, taking a more patient, less-aggressive approach with those workers will help to “demonize” the union.

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy is a Michigan-based nonprofit that, like the Freedom Foundation, is a member of the State Policy Network and has received funding from Donors Trust. It has launched a “My Pay, My Say” website that by Wednesday afternoon was informing public employees of their rights under the Supreme Court decision.

The website offers an automated system for workers to generate letters to their unions opting out of paying fees or dues. Prior to Wednesday’s ruling, the Americans for Prosperity Foundation, the 501(c)3 organization tied to the Koch-backed Americans for Prosperity, had already launched paid Facebook ads announcing that “Workers’ rights may soon be restored” and promoting the mypaymysay.com website.

AFSCME, which in 2015 privately estimated that half the workers it represents could be “on the fence” about whether to pay dues, said it has trained 25,000 members who have had 800,000 face-to-face conversations with co-workers on the topic.
The American Federation of Teachers said that more than 500,000 of its members in the 10 states most affected by the ruling have recommitted to their union over the past six months, and that educators won’t be swayed by anti-union ads or canvassers funded by right-wing groups.

“When members find out who’s pulling the strings, they get pissed, because they don’t want outsiders to hurt their freedom to earn a better life,” AFT President Randi Weingarten said in an email. “We are confident that when members start getting harassed by these outside groups, they’ll be ready — not only to reject their assault but to become more active in their union.”

Other union supporters are looking to a range of strategies — including aggressive activism such as successful teacher strikes that roiled so-called right-to-work states this year, enticing members with exclusive benefits such as tuition discounts, and getting state laws passed that ease the organizing process.

But while such groups as Nevada’s casino workers union have flourished in the absence of mandatory fees, the big picture for organized labor is bleak following the high court’s ruling. In states with right-to-work laws, where it’s illegal to require workers to fund unions that are required to represent them, employees are already only half as likely to have union representation — or less.

Such laws, and the Supreme Court opinion, have significant electoral consequences.

Right-to-work laws already reduce the Democratic Party’s share of a state’s presidential vote by 3.5% and cut turnout by 2% to 3%, according to a working paper published this year by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Those policies, often put in place by Republican-controlled state legislatures, help dampen union political participation — the ultimate goal of anti-union initiatives at all levels of government, labor supporters said.

In a 2016 speech to Americans for Prosperity, the advocacy group backed by the Koch brothers, the Freedom Foundation’s then-Oregon coordinator Anne Marie Gurney said, “Our No. 1 stated focus is to defund the political left,” the Guardian reported. The prior year, Freedom Foundation CEO Tom McCabe authored a fundraising letter touting its “proven plan for bankrupting and defeating government unions” and addressing “a broken political culture” fueled by union dues.
How The Opioid Crisis Is Depressing America's Labor Force

By SAMANTHA RAPHELSON (PEOPLE/SAMANTHA-RAPHELSON) • JUN 18, 2018


Email (mailto?:subject=How%20The%20Opioid%20Crisis%20Is%20Depressing%20America%27s%20Labor%20Force&body=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fyd27684b)

An arrangement of pills of the opioid oxycodone-acetaminophen, also known as Percocet, in New York. A new report finds a link between workforce participation and the prescription rate of opioids in the U.S.

PATRICK SISON / AP
It's been a decade since the financial crisis drove up the unemployment rate in the U.S. and forced people in the prime of their careers to give up looking for work.

Even today, as employers add jobs at a furious pace, the workforce participation rate still hasn't recovered. And now researchers think they know one reason why: the opioid crisis.

According to a report (http://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/Overview-United-States-2018-OECD.pdf) by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the percentage of people of prime working age – between 25 and 54 – who are employed or looking for work is well below the rate of other developed countries.

The labor force participation rate has been climbing back up since the Great Recession, and among prime workers it reached a low (https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS11300060) of 80.6 percent in 2015, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The last jobs report in May of this year marked the lowest unemployment rate (https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/06/01/615917917/unemployment-rate-drops-to-3-8-percent-lowest-since-2000) since 2000 at 3.8 percent, but the workforce participation rate of prime-age workers only rose by about 1 percentage point. In 2016, Italy was the only OECD member country with a lower workforce participation rate (https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2017/09/07/how-the-opioid-epidemic-has-affected-the-u-s-labor-force-county-by-county/) of prime-age men than the U.S.

The OECD report also states that opioid prescription rates tend to be higher in areas where labor force participation is lower. Princeton University economist Alan Krueger found (https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/1_krueger.pdf) that the increase in opioid prescribing can account for 20 to 25 percent of the decline in the number of people who are employed or looking for jobs.

While there are a variety of factors contributing to the decline, Krueger tells (http://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2018/06/18/opioid-crisis-labor-force) Here & Now's Robin Young that "the opioid crisis has compounded the problem." Krueger, who also served as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Obama, conducted a county-by-county study of the link between the depressed workforce and the opioid crisis.

"There are enormous differences across counties in the U.S. in the amount of opioid medication that doctors are prescribing," he says.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the amount of opioids prescribed per person in the U.S. was three times higher (https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/opioids/) in 2015 than in 1999. In 2016, the overdose rate (https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/overdose.html) from prescription opioids was highest among those ages 25 to 54.
The OECD report states that the opioid prescription rate per capita is "significantly higher" in the U.S. than in the organization's other member nations, which include the U.S, most of the European Union, Canada and Japan.

Here's what all this suggests: the U.S. lags behind other countries in workforce participation because more opioids are prescribed in this country. The report notes that people who are prescribed opioids are more likely to get addicted, and those who are addicted are less likely to participate in the economy by looking for jobs.

Krueger says the U.S. counties that had the lowest rates of labor participation have less in common that one might expect.

"It's not just Appalachia. It's not just the Rust Belt," Krueger says. "If you look at western Nevada, where the economy has been booming, we see very high rates of opioid prescription and also relatively low labor force participation."

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Racial disparities in drug arrests have decreased significantly since the passage of Proposition 47, the 2014 ballot measure that reclassified nonviolent drug and property offenses from felonies to misdemeanors, according to new research published by the American Journal of Public Health.

After the passage of Proposition 47, the number of drug arrests dropped dramatically for all racial groups. Beyond the overall drop in arrests, researchers found a drop in the percentage of black people being arrested for drug offenses compared to those who were white.
In just the first month following the measure’s passage, for every 100,000 Californians, 66 more black people than white people were arrested on drug charges. If the measure had not gone into effect, the study estimates that number would have been 95.

"The changes to patterns of drug arrests as a result of the offense reclassifications were not only substantial, but happened immediately after Prop. 47 was passed," said Alyssa Mooney, a doctoral student at UC San Francisco and one of the authors of the study.

Racial disparities in drug arrests increased dramatically during the "war on drugs," which began in 1971. Now, as drug law enforcement changes, researchers like Mooney are investigating how this changes the data.

The study comes on the heels of a report by the Public Policy Institute of California that reported that the measure also led to lower rates of recidivism and a decline in jail population. For proponents of Proposition 47, these studies indicate that the measure is working as intended.

"I’m glad to learn of this study and of these findings," said Lenore Anderson, the co-author of Proposition 47 and executive director of Californians for Safety and Justice. "We have a criminal justice system that has seen racial disparities at every stage of the process."
According to Anderson, a large part of the measure’s goal was to positively impact communities of color and reverse the racial disparities that often go hand-in-hand with the justice system.

**FELONY DRUG ARREST RATES BEFORE AND AFTER PASSAGE OF PROP. 47**

Proposition 47 was a referendum passed by California voters reducing penalties for certain drug possession felonies and misdemeanors. Shown are felony arrest rates per 100,000 population in the months before passage on November 4, 2014 and the months after.

"Our motivation around advocating to replace over-incarceration with a balanced approach to public safety ... is part of a broader goal of advancing racial equity," Anderson said.

But California law enforcement and victims' rights organizations think Proposition 47 created overly lax criminal justice laws, and they are pushing an initiative measure that aims to reverse parts of the measure.

Ron Hernandez, president of the Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs and a prominent voice against Proposition 47, said lowering the number of arrests doesn’t necessarily lead to safer communities.

"As a result (of Proposition 47), law enforcement across California has realized that there is little point in arresting somebody for possession of narcotics," he said. "This study confirms those facts."

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For Hernandez, incarceration is a "hammer" hanging over drug addicts' heads that can force them into treatment programs. When incarceration declines, "people who need help will continue to victimize the community as they steal to support their habits."

To address the substance abuse many of these addicts face, part of Proposition 47 mandated that the money saved by reducing incarceration levels be funneled into public agencies that provide mental health and substance use treatment. In 2017, the first year those funds were allocated, over $100 million was awarded to various agencies. The hope of Proposition 47 advocates is that the treatment programs are more effective than incarceration, but no research has been done on how effective that money will be.

"I think it will also be valuable to find ways of understanding how individuals, families and communities are affected longer term, given the reduction in arrests and incarceration," said Mooney, the UCSF researcher.

And even with the new research on the measure, there's still a long way to go when it comes to evaluating the net impact of Proposition 47.

Who will make that judgment? "It's up to policymakers and the public," Mooney said.
Under ‘Iron Lady of Water,’ San Diego Secured Its Own Supply – at a Price

POSTED BY: PUBLICCEO JUNE 29, 2018

Maureen Stapleton, the longtime leader of the San Diego County Water Authority, helped the region secure its own supplies of water. But amid a water war she helped launch and the bitter, personal disputes it’s set off, it’s now an open question whether Stapleton will be able to end her career on a good note.

By Ry Rivard.
For 22 years, Maureen Stapleton has led the San Diego County Water Authority.

In just two decades, the agency’s first female general manager accomplished what generations of men had not: Under her leadership, San Diego acquired its own supplies of water.

For a while, people have speculated about when Stapleton would retire. Anne Evans, a founder of Evans Hotels who knows Stapleton professionally and socially, said Stapleton will be remembered as a “city father.”

Now, though, amid a water war her work has inflamed, she is accused of leading the agency into the gutter.

In May, one of the Water Authority's board members said an intoxicated Stapleton came up to him at an industry event and accused him of sleeping with an employee at a rival water agency. There’s no evidence such an affair happened. An investigation of Stapleton's behavior is ongoing.
Several other people have since come forward to say that incident wasn’t the first time the Water Authority has become bitter and personal under Stapleton’s leadership.

However she is remembered, the string of water projects Stapleton worked on – from a new desalination plant to new dams – will be affixed to San Diego’s landscape and economy for decades to come.

A New Deal

In the mid-1990s, Stapleton was an assistant city manager in San Diego. She had a good shot at becoming city manager, then the most powerful position in city government.

At the same time, the Water Authority was looking for a new leader and a new direction. A drought in 1991 had left the whole region reeling.

For years, the Water Authority had been a sleepy little agency, created as a middleman between the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and local water agencies in San Diego.

Metropolitan gathers water from the Colorado River and the rivers of Northern California and resells it across Southern California.

The Water Authority would buy water from Metropolitan and resell it to smaller agencies in San Diego, like city water departments.

But when the early-1990s drought came, there wasn’t enough Metropolitan water to go around. San Diego was on the brink of being forced to cut its water use in half, a move that could devastate farmers, businesses and risk the entire region’s way of life.

When business leaders realized 95 percent of San Diego’s water came from one agency that San Diegans didn’t control, they were shocked.

“If that were your investment portfolio, you would shoot your investment portfolio adviser,” said Tom Wornham, a banker who served as chairman of the Water Authority’s board.

Stapleton was brought in to help change things.

Mark Watton, the chairman of the Water Authority board who hired Stapleton, had already begun entertaining offers to buy water from Imperial County.

Imperial has just 5 percent of San Diego County’s population but has rights to more Colorado River water than anybody else. Almost all of that water goes to farming.

For years, California had also been using Colorado River water that belonged to Arizona. That had to stop, but California water agencies disagreed about how to share less water. By putting money on the table, the Water Authority made it easier for Imperial to agree to limit its use. Eventually, some 30 different agreements had to be signed among water agencies and the federal government. Those agreements were key to preparing the river, which 40 million people depend on, for drought.

Stapleton is among the officials credited with helping keep that process on track.

Bob Johnson, the former head of the Bureau of Reclamation, the federal agency that oversees the Colorado River, called Stapleton “one of the iron ladies of water.”

In the middle of those negotiations, Jack McGrory, the departing San Diego city manager, called Stapleton to see if she wanted to quit water and manage the city.

“I tried to encourage her to come back and compete for that job, but she decided to stay with the Water Authority,” he said.
The choice seemed to have paid off.

By the end of negotiations in 2003, the Water Authority had signed long-term deals to get enough water to serve over 2 million people – water earmarked for San Diego alone.

‘But Who Will Pay?’

While most of the San Diego establishment favors the deal with Imperial, it has come at a cost. Not only is the water more expensive, but the political machinations necessary to secure the water set off a war between the Water Authority and Metropolitan.

A few dissenters within San Diego have even said dealing on its own with Imperial is among the biggest mistakes the Water Authority ever made.

Metropolitan had the chance to buy some of Imperial’s water, but passed. Metropolitan officials argue that was strategic – the farmers would have to come back later with a better offer.

Metropolitan owns the only aqueduct to bring water into urban Southern California from the Colorado River. The farmers might have been boxed in – if all the other Southern California water agencies had refused to negotiate.

Instead, the Water Authority broke ranks and negotiated its own deal, seizing on a chance to get water that it could call its own. On top of the high price it paid for Imperial’s water, the Water Authority also agreed to pay Metropolitan a fee to transport that water to San Diego. Fighting over that fee continues to this day, though the courts have said Metropolitan’s price is, by and large, fair.

For a while, though, part of the Water Authority’s board agreed the Imperial deal didn’t make sense and went into full-on rebellion. If Metropolitan got a good deal for the water, it would then share that water with San Diego. By buying the water itself, the Water Authority might have been driving up the price.

“To me it never made sense for the Water Authority to essentially go out and negotiate against itself,” said Byron Buck, a former Water Authority staffer.

Shortly after Stapleton started, Gregory Quist, a Water Authority board member from the Rincon del Diablo Municipal Water District in Escondido, produced a pamphlet about the deal called “But Who Will Pay? A Faerie Tale.” In it, a desperate village knight (the Water Authority) is seduced by a sage businessman (Imperial farmers). As a result, the villagers (San Diego water customers) end up paying too much for water.

Water Authority board members who represented farmers led a walkout to protest the deal with Imperial.

Years later, Quist stands by his take on the deal.

“I don’t believe it’s logical,” he said. “A lot of it is emotional and driven by a few people.”

Though a variety of factors are involved, the farmers’ fears were largely correct. In the years since the Imperial deal, soaring water rates have driven San Diego farmers out of business.

‘It’s Just Open Warfare’

Pat Mulroy, the former head of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, remembers interviewing for the Water Authority job in the mid-1990s that eventually went to Stapleton. Now retired after a career as one of the most powerful players in western water, Mulroy does consulting work for Metropolitan on Colorado River issues.
When the Water Authority job opened up, Mulroy had also been at odds with Metropolitan, so she was an obvious candidate to lead the Water Authority. But her assessment was the Water Authority wanted a “hit person” to wage war on Metropolitan, so she took herself out of the running.

“I was taken aback by what they were looking for, because I had a different vision of what a general manager should be,” Mulroy said.

The question now facing Stapleton and the Water Authority is just how hard the agency has been hitting.

In 1995, Annette Hubbell took a job working as Metropolitan’s liaison in San Diego. That meant trying to get the Water Authority to see eye to eye with Metropolitan – a close to impossible job then and now.

Not long after she started, Hubbell received a call at home. As Hubbell recalls, a woman on the other end asked to speak with her husband. The woman then accused Hubbell of having an affair with someone else within the water industry. Hubbell says she did not have such an affair and that her husband did not believe the allegations either.

“I was certain it was someone from the Water Authority,” she said.

It’s not clear if the call came before or after Stapleton started as general manager in January 1996, but over two decades later, Hubbell decided to talk about the call because of what happened to Meena Westford, a former Water Authority employee who now has Hubbell’s old job at Metropolitan.

Stapleton spread rumors about Westford, according to a letter calling for an investigation into Stapleton’s conduct written by Tom Kennedy, a Water Authority board member from the Rainbow Municipal Water District in Fallbrook.

At a water industry event in May, an intoxicated Stapleton took out her phone to pull up a salacious website, Kennedy wrote. The site allows people to anonymously post unconfirmed allegations of adultery. A post about Westford was on the site. According to Kennedy’s account, Stapleton also suggested Kennedy was having an affair with Westford. Kennedy and Westford both deny an affair took place, and no evidence has surfaced to show it did.

“They are trying the same tactics with Meena as they did with me,” Hubbell said. “I felt that when they couldn’t find fault with the work product, they went after me personally.”

Mark Hattam, the Water Authority’s general counsel, said the agency had no knowledge of Hubbell’s claims, which are from a quarter century ago.

Metropolitan, the Water Authority and their allies have a history of being at one another’s throats.

Most famously, to try to stop the deal between the Water Authority and Imperial, Metropolitan and its allies launched an ethically questionable public relations campaign. The centerpiece was a report that looked into potential conflicts of interests on all sides of the deal. Some of the potential conflicts were absurd – the report noted, for instance, that some major Imperial landowners and a Water Authority board member both owned stocks in Disney.

Because the research also targeted members of the state Legislature, lawmakers were quick to punish Metropolitan. In 1999, they made Metropolitan create an ethics office to try to police itself.

But in recent years, the Water Authority has tried its own envelope-pushing tactics.

Last year, for instance, the Water Authority paid for a political-style poll designed to test the public’s response to negative information about Metropolitan.
Andrew Poat, a longtime aide to Gov. Pete Wilson who now does public affairs work, was hired a few years ago to do outreach for the twin tunnels project, which is Gov. Jerry Brown's attempt to improve the flow of water from Northern California to Southern California. The Water Authority has been a leading critic of the project.

Once Poat started, he said he began hearing about rumors that he was working for Metropolitan, which is akin to a scarlet letter for San Diego consultants.

“When [Stapleton] decides you’re not on the team, it's just open warfare,” he said. “If you're not in alignment with her, it appears she considers all available options.”

He said that becomes dangerous for a public agency when other voices are not considered authentic or properly motivated if they disagree.

“I used to be one of the [Water Authority] apostles, now I read every piece of information and then I wonder if that information is as complete as I once thought,” he said.

Hattam said the Water Authority did not start rumors about Poat.

The Water Authority has also gone to questionable lengths to get information.

In 2014, a Water Authority staffer called into a conference call that the agency was not invited to, without announcing her presence on the call, as others had.

The conference call was intended for water agencies that would be asked to pay directly for the tunnels project; San Diego will pay indirectly, so it wasn't included.

Later, records released by the Water Authority in response to a public records request from a pro-tunnels attorney showed that the Water Authority had been sharing information about the calls with an anti-tunnels group.

The staffer was "un-invited" from the calls, she said in an email to a leading critic of the tunnels. Hattam said when the staffer's activity was brought to the Water Authority management's attention, “the matter was addressed internally.”

Wins and Losses

The Water Authority declined to make Stapleton available for comment but offered up a host of San Diego leaders to vouch for her.

Rep. Scott Peters, a former city councilman, said he's not sure anyone else could have helped San Diego get the new water supplies it has now.

“People are not interchangeable, she's had a lot of success, there's been a lot of progress on diversifying water supply here,” he said.

Julie Meier Wright, the former head of the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation, highlighted Stapleton's “can-do” attitude.

“She was able to attract talented, busy executives and I think that is because of who she is,” she said.

Water Authority board members, for their part, seem to like her. Both Mel Katz, a new board member, and Mark Weston, a former board chairman, said during her recent performance review that Stapleton's got high marks from board members. She is paid over $300,000 a year.

Few people shed much light on the woman herself.
"I think she only works," said Watton, the chairman of the Water Authority board when Stapleton was hired.

Wornham, another former chairman, said after the Water Authority approved the deal to help build a desalination plant to make ocean water drinkable, he urged Stapleton to take credit during a press conference, even though she was trying to stand off to the side. The plant can provide about a tenth of the region’s water – another major new supply of water added under Stapleton's watch.

"I had to force Maureen to take that moment," he said. "She's not out there for the fame and the glory."

Stapleton is married to Frank Gehrke, the chief of snow surveys for the state Department of Water Resources. Many people may remember him from a series of famous photographs taken in 2015, when he and Gov. Jerry Brown stood in a snowless meadow and the governor ordered emergency water cutbacks across the state.

In 2010, when things were a bit snowier, Stapleton helped Gehrke with his work. Photographs of the event show the couple trouncing around in the snow and working together to measure its depth with a series of unwieldy instruments.

It's now an open question whether Stapleton will be able to end her years at the Water Authority on a good note.

Last year, the Water Authority largely lost a long-running lawsuit against Metropolitan. The Water Authority had argued the fees Metropolitan was charging to deliver the Imperial water to San Diego were unfair and illegal.

It won a few hundred million dollars. But it lost the main argument, which amounts to about $6 billion over the life of the deal.

But the loss didn’t affect the Water Authority's interest in continuing to buy Imperial's water, even though it had the chance to exit the 75-year deal early, in 2037.

Instead, after about only two hours of public discussions throughout the course of 2017, the Water Authority voted in December to keep going with the deal. Indeed, at the meeting where the deal was extended, Stapleton spoke about it publicly for only 10 minutes, even though the decision will cost ratepayers a billion dollars or more.

Dennis Cushman, the Water Authority's assistant general manager, said there were more discussions held behind closed doors, because of legal issues involved.

In a sign of how much things have changed under Stapleton's tenure, extending the deal was taken as a given. One of the most controversial water deals in decades was extended without any public controversy.

Metropolitan, whose allies had swung into action to try to stop the Imperial deal two decades ago, barely lifted a finger.

Nobody testified for or against the plan, and only one question was asked by a Water Authority board member. Then, the agency's board members voted unanimously to support the deal and went home for the holidays.

*Originally posted at Voice of San Diego.*

**Comments**

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