

LOCAL NEWS

Federal agencies dropped from lawsuit placing blame for San Bernardino terror attack



A memorial site at the corner of Waterman Ave. and Orange Show Road, just north of the Inland Regional Center Conference Center still exists on Wednesday, May 25, 2016 in San Bernardino. The conference center was the site of the December 2 terrorist attack that occurred in San Bernardino.

By **RICHARD K. DE ATLEY** | rdeatley@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
February 15, 2018 at 3:08 pm



Two federal agencies have been dropped as defendants in a lawsuit that blames the Inland Regional Center and San Bernardino County for not preventing the [Dec. 2, 2015, terrorist attack](#).

The lawsuit was originally filed by relatives of three victims in the county court, but was transferred to U.S. District Court last year. It named as defendants San Bernardino County, the Regional Center, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Justice.

On Thursday, Santa Ana-based U.S. District Judge Andrew J. Guilford granted the federal government's motion to dismiss from the lawsuit the claims against its two departments. Since the federal defendants were the only reason to move the case to U.S. District Court, Guilford ordered the case back to the local court. He declined to rule on other dismissal motions.

Guilford had taken the matter under submission after a Monday hearing.

Plaintiffs include the kin of three [Dec. 2 victims](#): Gregory Clayborn, Kimberly Clayborn and Tamishia Clayborn — respectively, the father, step-mother and half-sister of [Sierra Clayborn](#); Vanessa Nguyen and Trung Do, who are the mother and brother of Dec. 2 victim [Tin Nguyen](#); and James and Jacob Thalasinis, the sons of [Nicholas Thalasinis](#).

They were killed when [Syed Rizwan Farook](#), a restaurant inspector with the county [Division of Environmental Health](#), and wife [Tashfeen Malik](#) [opened fire on a holiday party](#) break from a daylong training session for his co-workers in a rented room at the Regional Center in San Bernardino. Nicholas [Thalasinis](#), [Sierra Clayborn](#) and [Tin Nguyen](#) were [all San Bernardino County employees](#).

Farook and Malik, [of Redlands](#), were killed in a [gunbattle with police](#) later that day. Authorities said their attack was [inspired by Islamic State](#).

The wrongful and negligence lawsuit claims San Bernardino County “knew or should have known that its employee Syed was predisposed to commit acts of violence and thus maintained a hostile work environment;” and that the federal defendants “improperly allowed Syed and Tashfeen to enter the United States” — [Tashfeen lived in Pakistan](#) from 2007 to 2014 before heading to the United States on a [K-1 fiance visa](#) to marry Syed, who was an American.

The IRC, the lawsuit claims, “should have known that such an incident could occur.”

The lawsuit does not make a specific damage amount claim.

The federal government successfully claimed immunity, saying the state court where the suit was originally filed had no jurisdiction regarding the federal agencies, and that lack of jurisdiction continued with the transfer to federal court. Before Guilford's Thursday ruling, three of the plaintiffs had already agreed to voluntarily dismiss their claims against the federal government defendants.



An investigator works the site of a mass shooting at the Inland Regional Center on Monday, Dec. 7, 2015 in San Bernardino, Calif. The FBI said it's investigating the massacre on Wednesday in San Bernardino, Calif., that killed dozens as a terrorist attack. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

The other arguments — which will presumably be taken up when the case resumes in San Bernardino County Superior Court — are:

- San Bernardino County's motion to dismiss asserted there is no county liability for the Dec. 2 attack; and that family for Clayborn, Nguyen and Thalasinis had filed [workers' compensation claims](#) with the county, barring them from taking further legal action.

Attorneys for the county noted that the plaintiffs did not file a response to their dismissal motion by deadline, and urged Guilford to “deem the failure to oppose the motion as Plaintiffs' consent to granting of the motion.”

• Attorneys for the Inland Regional Center said the attack “was not reasonably foreseeable or preventable ... plaintiffs fail to allege any facts that would place (the center) on reasonable notice that a terrorist attack was reasonably likely to occur.”

The defendants also challenged the standing to sue for various plaintiffs.

The plaintiffs in the wrongful death and negligence lawsuit also had filed last year a federal lawsuit [against Twitter, Google and Facebook](#), alleging the social media giants “knowingly and recklessly provided the [terrorist group ISIS](#) with accounts to use its social networks as a tool for spreading extremist propaganda, raising funds, and attracting new recruits.”

Court records show that case late last year was voluntarily dismissed, without prejudice, meaning it could be filed again.

But shortly before that, there was a proposal to voluntarily suspend the case, pending outcome of a similar case before the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

In that matter, the widows of two American law enforcement consultants killed in a November 2015 terrorist attack on a police training center in Amman, Jordan, claimed Twitter had violated the Anti-Terrorism Act by knowingly providing material support to ISIS, which has claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Ninth Circuit on Jan. 31 [upheld a lower court's dismissal](#) of the lawsuit, agreeing that the women had failed to show a direct link between Twitter and the terrorist attack that took their husbands' lives.

Tags: [courts](#), [San Bernardino terror attack](#), [Top Stories IVDB](#), [Top Stories PE](#), [Top Stories RDF](#), [Top Stories Sun](#)



Richard K. De Atley

A journalist since 1975 for City News Service in Los Angeles, The Associated Press in Los Angeles and New York, and The Press-Enterprise, Richard K. De Atley has been Entertainment Editor and a features writer. He has also reported on trials and breaking news. He is currently a business reporter for The P-E. De Atley is a Cal State Long Beach graduate, a lifelong Southern Californian (except for that time in New York -- which was great!) and has been in Riverside since 1992.

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Yucaipa News-Mirror
Feb. 16, 2018

Lazer Broadcasting should reconsider its site plan

The phrase, “your right to throw a punch ends at the proximity of my nose,” is one that I think of when debating Lazer Broadcasting’s proposed radio tower.

Of course, Lazer has the right to build their radio tower to reach more listeners and increase their profit. Just not at the expense of our beloved Wildwood Canyon State Park.

Many moved to Yucaipa to escape the expanding urban sprawl only to see that sprawl make its way to our doorstep. There are few areas of open space left. Because of the scarcity of our natural resources it is vital to protect them.

The Coalition for the Preservation of Rural Living has presented Lazer Broadcasting with seven alternative sites. The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors must listen to Yucaipa residents and tell Lazer to use an alternative location to build their tower and save Wildwood Canyon State Park.

Please come and show your support of our open space.

DeDe Chudy
President,
Yucaipa Valley Conservancy

LOCAL NEWS

Want to get up close and personal with bugs at the San Bernardino County Museum? Here's your chance



Jazmine Vallanan, 7, second from right, reacts to a Madagascar Hissing Cockroach named, "The Godfather" at the San Bernardino County Museum on Thursday, Feb. 15, 2018. The Redlands, Calif. museum hosts a bug fest, Arthropolooza, which kicks off Saturday. (Photo by Cindy Yamanaka, Redlands Daily Facts/SCNG)

By [KRISTINA HERNANDEZ](#) | khernandez@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts

February 15, 2018 at 4:38 pm



Officials at the San Bernardino County Museum know people have a love-hate relationship with bugs.

But curators hope to squash any misconceptions about the creatures during a two-day Arthropolooza, billed as the ultimate bug fest, beginning Saturday, Feb. 17.

From noon to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 18, museum visitors can discover the world of arthropods, insects, arachnids, myriapods and more by taking part in various activities around the Redlands museum.

Symbiotic relationships is the theme of Arthropolooza, which is a re-branding of the museum's successful Insectival, a similar celebration that explored the world of bugs in previous years.

Having a theme allows staff to create learning opportunities that vary from day-to-day experiences at the museum. This weekend's event will be the public debut of one of the museum's newest additions, David, an Arizona blonde tarantula that lives in the Exploration Station.

The event, said Jessika Vasquez, curator of integrated sciences, "is meant to be fun, but it's also one of the ways we further our mission as an institution."

Joining museum staff this weekend will be members of UC Riverside's Entomology Department who will be on hand to answer questions on beneficial insects and talk about the [Asian citrus psyllid pests](#), its associated bacterial disease, and how the public can help the citrus industry.

"We want to change perceptions of animals and bugs we're so prone to being scared of and having a better understanding of what's around us," said Carolina Zataray, the museum's curator of education. "We want to expand that view of what their purpose is."

According to a press release, visitors will have a chance to join a "community caterpillar," enjoy butterfly demonstrations, bug pendants and more.

For those who prefer to bypass the bugs, the museum welcomes them to explore other exhibits, including the Hall of Earth Sciences and its newest art exhibit, "African American Press On Through Arts and Media," which celebrates Black History Month through Feb. 25.

All festival activities are free with paid museum admission, which is \$10 for adults, \$8 for military or seniors, \$7 for students, and \$5 for children ages 5 to 12. Children under 5 and museum association members are free.

To learn more about the festivities or other upcoming museum events, go to www.sbcountymuseum.org or call 909-798-8608.

Tags: [education](#), [science](#), [Top Stories RDF](#)



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By First Republic Bank



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Kristina Hernandez

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

Follow Kristina Hernandez @TheFactsKris

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Multi-vehicle crash jams northbound traffic in the Cajon Pass

By Staff Reports

Posted at 8:50 AM

Updated at 8:50 AM

CAJON PASS — A multi-vehicle crash caused a major traffic jam along northbound Interstate 15 Friday morning.

Reported at 6:35 a.m. as a collision involving a tractor-trailer and two sedans south of Oak Hill Road, the crash spread debris across multiple lanes of traffic, according to California Highway Patrol logs.

A traffic break was requested to clear the debris and a SigAlert was later issued at 7:07 a.m. to shut down the No. 1, 2, and 3 lanes, per CHP logs.

San Bernardino County Fire Department personnel responded to the scene and one person was airlifted to Loma Linda University Medical Center, according to scanner traffic.

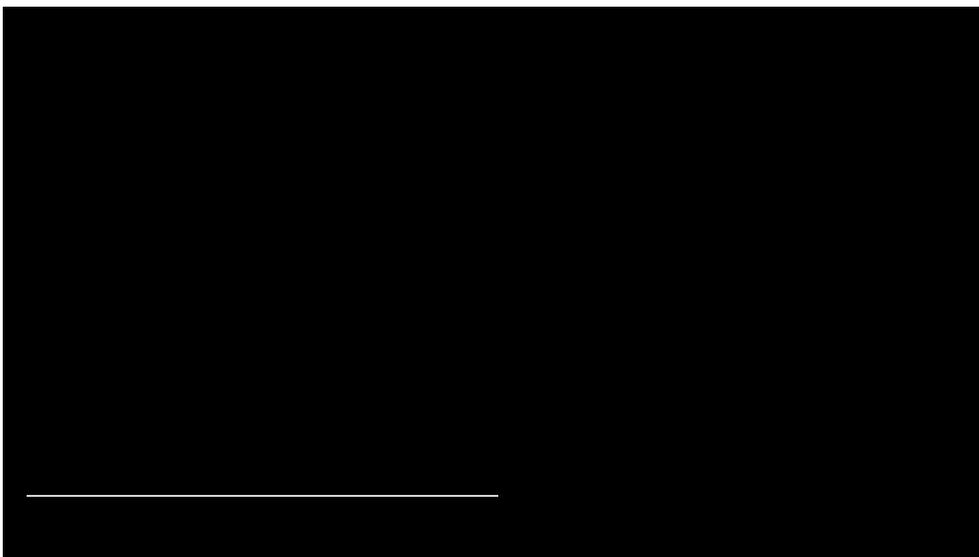
All lanes were reported to be reopened at 7:58 a.m., but traffic was already backing up toward Highway 138. The cause of the crash remains under investigation by the CHP.



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Bid Awarded for Lake Gregory Dam Improvement

San Bernardino County | Posted: Thursday , February 15, 2018 10:29 am

The Lake Gregory Dam Improvement Project took a major step forward on Feb. 14 as the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors unanimously awarded the project contract to RockForce Construction.

A public groundbreaking ceremony will be scheduled to mark the beginning of construction. Work will continue for approximately one year and project completion is expected in the first quarter of 2019.

“This is a big step forward for Lake Gregory and for the Crestline community,” Second District Supervisor Janice Rutherford said. “We will work closely with the contractor to ensure that residents are updated on the progress of the rehabilitation work and to minimize impacts to the community.”

Of the four bids submitted for the project, RockForce presented the lowest qualified bid of \$11.3 million. The contractor understands the importance of the project to the community and is eager to begin work, while being engaged with the community through to project completion.

During construction, all recreational activities will continue at Lake Gregory, including year-round fishing and swimming in the summer.

BACKGROUND

The 80-year-old dam at Lake Gregory Regional Park has been deemed ‘high-hazard’ by the California Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD). To retrofit the existing dam to meet state earthquake safety standards, a 40-foot earthen buttress will be added to the downstream side of the dam and extend 62 feet beyond the toe of the embankment. The Lake Gregory Dam Improvement Project is being overseen by the County of San Bernardino Special Districts Department.



Lake Gregory



Opinion**Breed-specific dog ordinances necessary**

Posted at 3:51 PM

Updated at 3:53 PM

“Vet tech seeks change in pit bull ordinance” (1/26) PETA urges Holcomb City Council to keep the city’s pit bull law — for the sake of both dogs and humans. Pit bulls are the breed of choice for dogfighters and others who keep them perpetually confined to chains or filthy pens, and even beat and starve them. Pit bulls also constitute a disproportionate number of victims in cruelty cases and make up a high percentage of dogs in animal shelters. It is not uncommon for these dogs to lash out — and when they do, the results are often deadly.

According to news reports, in December, two pit bull-type dogs in Virginia killed their owner while she was walking them — authorities found the woman naked except for one boot, and the dogs chewing on her. A Kentucky woman was fatally mauled by her neighbor’s pit bulls on Christmas Eve, and a Louisiana woman died in January after being attacked by a pit bull at a boarding facility that had reportedly never been aggressive toward humans.

Legislation can save lives. In San Francisco, the number of pit bulls euthanized at the city’s animal control facility dropped by 24 percent just 18 months after an ordinance passed requiring that pit bulls be sterilized. **Just one year after San Bernardino County, Calif., passed a breed-specific law, dog bites decreased nearly 10 percent.** Nine years after banning pit bulls, Aurora, Colo., officials reported that bites involving the breed were down 73 percent and euthanasia of pit bulls was down 93 percent.

Pit bulls are bred for aggression, neglected, fought and abused based exclusively on their breed. Breed-specific protections and regulations are vital if we hope to prevent more of them from being abused — and attacking.

TERESA CHAGRIN**Norfolk, Va.***Chagrín is the animal care and control issues manager for PETA.*

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Voting Lines Are Shorter — But Mostly For Whites

Election officials have figured out how to keep voting lines down, but communities of color are still waiting longer to vote.

02/15/2018 10:30 am ET



MATT YORK, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Voters in Phoenix, seen here waiting for polls to open at dawn in November 2016, had to wait as long as four hours to vote during the presidential primary earlier that year. Minority communities have not benefited as much as white communities have from innovations to shorten lines.

By [Matt Vasilogambros](#)

On the day of Arizona's 2016 presidential primary, the line outside the Maryvale Church of the Nazarene, the Maricopa County polling place for 213,000 mostly Latino, low-income people, extended through the parking lot, down busy North 51st Avenue, and into a neighborhood lined with palm and eucalyptus trees on the western edge of Phoenix.

Some voters waited for four hours or more in the 80-degree heat to cast their ballots, according to Martin Quezada, a Democrat who represents the area in the Arizona Senate. Quezada said the long wait time was more than an inconvenience.

Latino voters don't trust the system, Quezada said. "If they don't have a good experience on Election Day when they are casting their ballot, their likelihood of participating in a system they don't trust again in the future becomes that much harder."

Across the country, elections officials are marshaling data on registered voters, historic turnout, parking spaces and other information to reduce wait times at polling places. Also helping to decrease wait times is voting by mail, which is available in 22 states, and early voting, which is now offered in 37 states — though a couple of states have rolled back their early voting.

But white voters are benefiting far more from such innovations than Hispanic or black voters are. As the nation gears up for what is shaping up to be a high-energy midterm election this November, the disparity is likely to loom large.

In the 2016 presidential election, black voters, on average, waited 16 minutes to vote, while Latino voters waited 13 minutes, according to a Massachusetts Institute of Technology survey of voters. In the same election, white voters waited 10 minutes. In 2012, black and Latino voters stood in line for more than 20 minutes to cast their ballot, nearly twice as long as white voters.

Stephen Pettigrew, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, has found if there are two neighborhoods in the same city, and one is majority-white and the other has more blacks and Hispanics, voters in the white neighborhood [have a shorter wait](#).

Voting rights advocates call the disparity a “time tax.” They argue that it violates the fundamental right to vote — and that it is often intentional.

“We are in a state of threat to voting rights,” said Denise Lieberman, co-director of the Power and Democracy program at the Washington, D.C.-based Advancement Project, a civil rights organization. “Some actions, like changing polling places, may seem benign on its face, but they are creating havoc.”

Fewer Resources

In poorer counties and cities, long lines may stem from a lack of resources. But even in wealthier counties, [minority communities tend to get fewer polling places](#), voting machines and poll workers than white neighborhoods in the same county, according to a 2014 study from the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University’s School of Law. “Minority precincts have tended to get the short end of the resource allocation stick,” the study concluded.

Lieberman argues that in many counties, election officials are less inclined to provide minority communities with the resources that can shorten lines.

It’s one of many policies that are “creating a climate of discrimination,” Lieberman said, in the same vein as restrictive voter ID laws, the [slashing of early voting](#) in states like Florida and North Carolina, and the [consolidation of polling places](#), all of which adversely affect communities of color. Local officials and state lawmakers are trying to suppress the minority vote, Lieberman said.

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“None of this is a coincidence,” Lieberman said. “The folks who pass these laws know their impact. ... Communities of color bear the brunt of a lack of legal protection.”

In North Carolina, a federal court agreed in 2016, saying many of the state’s restrictive voting laws, including strict voter ID requirements and a rollback of early voting, “[target African-Americans with almost surgical precision.](#)” North Carolina lawmakers said the laws were passed to protect state elections against fraud and to save counties money.

Cutting Voting Lines

Local election officials know how to keep voting lines short, which makes this time gap so frustrating for voting scholars such as Charles Stewart III, the director of MIT’s Voting Technology Project.

U.S. voters’ wait time shrank to 11 minutes in the 2016 presidential election, down from 14 minutes in 2012, according to MIT’s quadrennial survey. Further, the survey found, fewer voters waited more than an hour to cast their ballot than in the previous election. County officials should be using best-practice tools to decrease wait times in all precincts regardless of their racial makeup, Stewart said.

Many of those tools were implemented after the 2012 presidential election, where hellish voting lines in states such as Florida made national news. (On average, according to MIT’s survey, it took Florida voters 46 minutes to cast their ballots that year.) President Barack Obama took notice, and in 2013 he appointed a bipartisan commission, led by the chief lawyers from his campaign and Republican nominee Mitt Romney’s campaign, [to solve the issues](#) that plagued the country’s electoral system.

One of the commission’s primary recommendations was to use data, such as voter registration numbers and parking availability near polling places, to better manage polling places, which would in turn decrease the size of lines. The commission’s goal was to make sure no American ever waits more than a half-hour to vote.

Tammy Patrick, a senior adviser at the nonprofit [Democracy Fund](#) and a member of the commission, said that because election officials are following its recommendations, “the preponderance of lines is going down.”

Stewart, for his part, launched an online “toolkit,” which he said is now used by a quarter of the country’s local election officials to help them deploy enough poll booths, poll workers and ballot scanners [to handle Election Day voting](#).

“If you’re not gathering that data,” Stewart said, “you’re running blind.”

Michael Scarpello, the registrar of voters in San Bernardino County, California, has embraced that lesson.

To serve the largest geographic county in the contiguous 48 states, Scarpello and his analytics department take a large swath of data — registered voters, historic turnout, parking spaces, voter behavior, capacity of polling places — to assign poll workers, distribute supplies and assign voters to specific polling locations, freeing up busy locations and utilizing underused places. Using this data, Scarpello is able to update polling place capacity by the hour in a county of nearly 900,000 registered voters.

“If there are lines, they are short,” Scarpello said. At most, voters wait five minutes.

The county’s immediate response to Election Day voter behavior lowers the length of lines, the cost of elections, and the time it takes to count ballots. Between 2008 and 2016, the county cut its ballot-counting time nearly in half, from 16 hours to nine, Scarpello said.

“Our job is to make voting as convenient as possible for voters,” Scarpello said. “If voters are motivated, we don’t want to put any barriers in their way.”

Closing the Gap

Voting lines in Orange County, California, never surpass nine minutes, said Neal Kelley, the county's registrar of voters. That's significant because the county is the fifth-largest voting jurisdiction in the country and because a third of the electorate is Latino.

There is no difference in wait times between Orange County's majority-white Newport Beach and majority-Latino Santa Ana, Kelley said. Countywide, the average wait time for voters dropped drastically in recent years after Kelley began using sophisticated data techniques to change how they allocate the county's 11,000 voting booths and 9,000 poll workers among 1,300 polling places.

As the county prepares for [a potentially competitive](#) congressional election for 15-term Republican U.S. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher's seat this November, Kelley said he's relying on data from 2010, the last hotly contested midterm election, to estimate turnout for this one.

Kelley said he will monitor precincts closely on Election Day. "One booth could make all the difference in the world."

In Maricopa County, where Quezada and his neighbors waited so long to vote in 2016, the official in charge of that election has paid a price.

Helen Purcell, then Maricopa County's recorder since 1989, had [reduced the number](#) of polling places for the 2016 primary, recommending 60 polling places in the fourth-largest county in the United States, down from 200 in 2012.

In the aftermath of the election, The Arizona Republic found that low-income, Latino neighborhoods [bore the brunt of the decrease](#). Purcell, a Republican, denied that race was a motivating factor, but she faced widespread criticism and lost her reelection bid to Democrat Adrian Fontes, who became the first Latino elected as Maricopa County recorder.

After he won, Fontes promised that actions that might limit the Latino vote in future elections will be "very vigilantly avoided."

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Detective was legally justified in fatal shooting which occurred in 2012 in Bloomington, D.A.'s Office says

Feb 15, 2018 Updated 1 hr ago

A San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department detective was legally justified in his actions during a fatal officer-involved shooting that occurred more than five years ago in Bloomington, according to the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office.

Manuel Vizcarra, 18, of Bloomington was shot during a vehicle pursuit following a robbery which took place on Aug. 30, 2012. The name of the detective, who was assigned to the Fontana Station, has been withheld because of safety concerns, the D.A.'s Office said.

"Based on the facts presented in the reports and the applicable law, the detective's use of deadly force was a proper exercise of the detective's right of self-defense and therefore his actions were legally justified," the D.A.'s Office said in a news release.

The shooting was investigated by the Sheriff's Department. Below is information from the official review of the incident:

At about 1:55 p.m., a woman called 9-1-1 to report that she had just been robbed of her purse by a man armed with a gun. The woman gave a description of the robber and said he may be driving a green SUV.

The detective in the case responded to the area to look for the suspect and saw a green SUV pulling out of a gasoline station with a driver and at least one passenger inside. The driver was later identified as Eric Robledo, who was later charged with several crimes in relation to this incident (including the robbery), and the passenger was Vizcarra, who was Robledo's brother.

The detective tried to stop the SUV, which failed to yield. The detective followed the SUV as it turned into Magnolia Street, a dead end street.

The detective stopped his vehicle about 100 to 200 yards from the end of the cul-de-sac. The SUV made a U-turn at the end of the cul-de-sac and drove toward the detective, who put up his hand and yelled for the SUV to stop.



However, the SUV accelerated and continued toward the detective, who fired two rounds at the SUV. The SUV did not slow down and kept coming toward the detective, who fired several more rounds.

The detective moved around to the rear of his vehicle to avoid being hit by the SUV, which struck the driver's door of the detective's unit and then turned west onto San Bernardino Avenue.

Later, after the SUV had been involved in another collision, striking a resident's vehicle and continuing to flee, Robledo drove to his apartment in the 9600 block of Linden Avenue, where he was taken into custody.

Authorities found the SUV, which was parked in a carport next to the residence, and discovered Vizcarra in the passenger seat deceased with a gunshot wound to the head. Authorities noticed a black handgun lying on the floor of the SUV near Vizcarra's feet.

Citizens for Safer Communities aims to empower residents with information to fight crime

By Susan Monaghan / For the Daily Press

Posted at 12:08 PM

Updated at 12:08 PM

VICTORVILLE — A group of High Desert residents have started a coalition to help local law enforcement by teaching citizens throughout the region about crime prevention and doubling down on neighborhood watch programs.

Citizens for Safer Communities held its first meeting in November and another on Feb. 1, with representatives from the Sheriff's Department and District Attorney's Office in attendance.

"The partnerships between the sheriff's department and our community stakeholders are essential to public safety," said Lt. Sarkis Ohannessian, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department Public Affairs Division commander. "It is important that coalitions comprised of community groups, nonprofits, businesses, and private citizens all embrace public safety as a shared responsibility."

The group is developing plans to host a series of "educational sessions" with the help of representatives from the Sheriff's Department, according to Adelanto spokesman Michael Stevens.

The coalition was started by Stevens, who lives in Victorville, after his thoughts on an emergency meeting of city and regional leaders called by a Victor Valley College trustee in June 2017 to address a perceived rise in crime in the High Desert was published in an op-ed piece for the Daily Press.

In the op-ed, titled "Quit Expecting City Leaders to Solve Crime," Stevens pointed to Proposition 47 and 57 as key factors in the increased crime rate, which reduced penalties for specific non-violent crimes and gave early parole opportunities to nonviolent criminals for good behavior.

"We can no longer rely on traditional methods to make our neighborhood safer," Stevens wrote.

The coalition's current make-up includes members Joseph W. Brady, Don Brown, Carolina Gabeldon, Catherine Haney, Frecia Johnson, Michael Stevens, and Diana Carloni-O'Malley.

"I think community education is important, we must focus the efforts of the coalition on a personal level," Carloni-O'Malley said.

"The people want to know what tools they will receive immediately to help themselves or they will not participate. People want impact, action, visual return, not words."

Future dates, times and locations for the coalition's educational sessions are being coordinated with the Sheriff's Department and are set to be announced soon. For more information about Citizens for Safer Communities, email Michael Stevens at

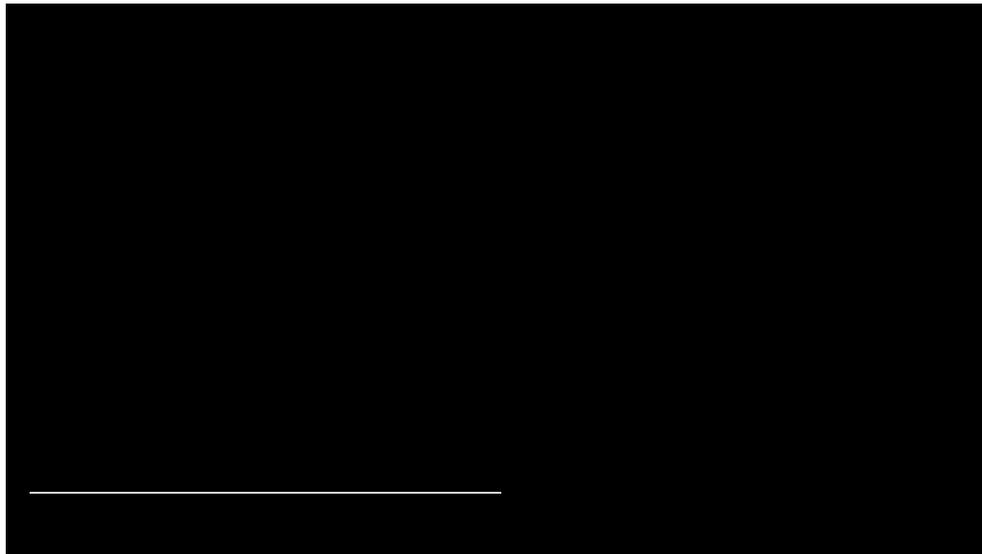
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Adelanto inks six-month deal for stadium management

By Shea Johnson

Staff Writer

Posted Feb 15, 2018 at 6:09 PM

Updated Feb 15, 2018 at 6:15 PM

ADELANTO — The City Council has unanimously approved a six-month contract with a partner in the Adelanto Grand Prix to manage entertainment at Adelanto Stadium, a short-term deal struck on the heels of the city's separation from the San Bernardino County Fair.

Aaron Korn, who acted as a stadium manager under the Fair, also known as the 28th District Agricultural Association during its capacity last year as stadium overseers, was awarded a \$30,000 agreement Wednesday as an independent contractor.

City officials cited Korn's experience as a positive.

"I'm very comfortable in managing and producing different events," Korn said by phone Thursday, although he noted that he and a temporary team will focus on working alongside booking agents and facility managers, while tapping into promoters who have already expressed interest in the stadium.

The city had sent out a request for proposal to manage day-to-day operations, including promotions, but ultimately rejected bids by Korn and the Fair. Later, interim City Manager G. Michael Milhiser approached Korn independently about a mutual interest.

Officials estimated the city-owned stadium will generate \$2,000 in monthly rent revenue over the next six months, meaning \$18,000 of the contract is expected to be bankrolled through the general fund, according to a city staff report.

But officials suggested that additional related revenues will more than cover that upfront cost.

"I have a tough road to hoe. I hope to turn this into a long term. My ultimate goal is to make the stadium completely self-sufficient. We don't want the general fund to have to float the stadium," Korn said, later describing his thinking about the deal's initial hit to

city coffers: “Definitely it is pressure, and that’s why we’ve already hit the ground running.”

Geoff Hinds, CEO and general manager of the Fair, accused the city, however, of “not being factual with their constituency” on the total costs of running the stadium and used the podium at Wednesday’s Council meeting as an opportunity to reiterate that no taxpayer dollars were ever spent during the Fair’s tenure as stadium managers.

Hinds also lauded the choice of Korn, but raised questions about how that represented a departure or change from the Fair, considering they had been the ones to initially hire him.

“The city had an ultimate goal in mind from its inception,” he said.

Without an RFP process, Adelanto entered into a venue lease and management agreement with the Fair in November 2016, a deal marked by early on and

At the time, it was viewed by officials as having the ability to save the city \$500,000 yearly and usher in a new era of post-High Desert Mavericks entertainment, making the stadium a regionally attractive asset.

But city officials later said they preferred to work with a non-state entity and accused the Fair of booking second-tier events and, vaguely, of failing to keep certain promises.

Hinds stood by the Fair’s record for drawing quality entertainment to the 3,800-seat stadium, repeating then and Thursday that he was disappointed in the city’s decision.

Shea Johnson can be reached at 760-955-5368 or

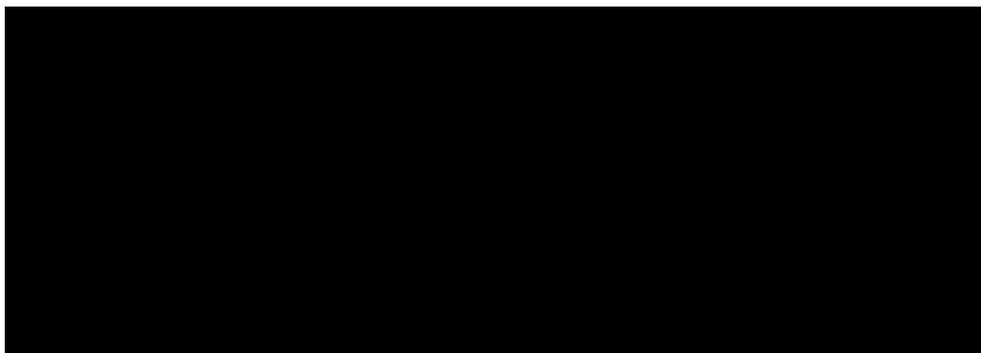
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LOCAL NEWS

Flyers with 'racist tone' delivered on San Bernardino doorsteps have residents 'flooded'

By **BEATRIZ E. VALENZUELA** | bvalenzuela@scng.com and **GAIL**

WESSON | gwesson@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun

PUBLISHED: February 15, 2018 at 11:04 am | UPDATED: February 15, 2018 at 4:08 pm



When Matthew Flanagan went outside his San Bernardino home Valentine's Day morning, he discovered a newsletter in a bright plastic bag in his driveway.

"I didn't think too much of it," he said Thursday. "We sometimes get flyers and newsletters like that and, honestly, a lot of times they just end up in the trash."

But Wednesday morning, Flanagan opened the bag to find a thin newsprint publication, High Mountain TIDBiTS, filled with entertainment events, businesses and local news from the San Bernardino County mountain communities of Rim of the World and Crestline. Wrapped in the newsletter was a flyer that shocked Flanagan.

"I was flooded," he said.

The publisher was not connected to the distribution, said Eileen Hards, spokeswoman for the San Bernardino Police Department.

The black-and-white flyer had the profile of a white woman, looking upward with flowing blond hair below large block letters seeming to shout, "Love Your Race." Underneath the photo was the logo and website address for the National Alliance.





San Bernardino PD
@SanBernardinoPD

Attention Community Members! We wanted to let you know we are aware of the inappropriate flyers being distributed in the 3000-3700 block of Parkside and Broadmore. 46 were collected today and the all relevant authorities have been notified. Please destroy or throw away if found.

4:47 PM - Feb 14, 2018

13 17 people are talking about this

Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at Cal State San Bernardino, described the alliance as a neo-Nazi group whose flyers have turned up nationwide.

He said it is “not too unusual for members of these groups to put these kinds of messages inside other publications.”

Flanagan photographed the flyer and newsletter and posted them to the neighborhood social media site, NextDoor, with the question, “Anyone else get this white supremacy trash on your driveway?”

The San Bernardino Police Department confiscated about 46 flyers they labeled as “inappropriate” from Flanagan’s neighborhood in the 3000-3700 block of Parkside Drive and Broadmore Boulevard North near Arrowhead Country Club. The streets are east of Waterman Avenue and north of the 210 Freeway.

The department tweeted that others found should be thrown away.

The date on the newsletter shows it was distributed Feb. 2 and the publication's website indicated that while it's mostly sent to residences in the mountain communities, there are some locations, including coffee shops and restaurants in San Bernardino, Highland, Mentone and Lucerne Valley, where the paper can be found.

Hards said it was unclear whether the flyers were thrown from a vehicle or dropped off.

A Police Department tweet purposely did not include the bottom of the flyer, because it mentioned the name of the group, Hards said.

"We're not going to advertise the group," she said. The issue, she said, was that the flyers "had a racist tone."

Police received a couple calls Wednesday afternoon about the flyers and investigated. Hards said police also notified some local and federal public safety partners that work with the city on terrorism and hate crime issues.

The National Alliance nearly collapsed in 2013 when the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) reported the organization stopped accepting membership. It's unclear if the dissemination of the flyers is evidence the group is looking to again attract members to its ranks.

Flanagan and this publication reached out to TIDBiTS, but as of Thursday morning, they had not responded.

"I honestly didn't expect that here," Flanagan said. "Although I know we have pockets of very conservative people in the area, I never for once suspected to see this show up on my doorstep. To get it hand delivered to us was sad and upsetting."

Previously:

- [Latest 'Hate Map' shows 30 groups in Southern California](#)
- [Parent, bus drivers outraged after black baby doll is mock-lynched at Rim of the World Unified transit office](#)
- [Rim of the World district rejects racism in aftermath of lynched baby doll photo](#)
- [Heated debate, backlash erupt over display of Confederate flags in Lake Arrowhead](#)
- [Confederate flags fly on vehicles at Lake Arrowhead high school](#)
- ['Hate Map' shows 2016 was 'an unprecedented year for hate'](#)

http://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/opinion/nonprofit-group-connects-mentors-with-young-people/article_a7599d56-1273-11e8-a705-3bc5170c1c95.html

Nonprofit group connects mentors with young people

By JANICE RUTHERFORD Feb 15, 2018 Updated 6 hrs ago

When J.R. Harrison of Upland wanted to be a volunteer mentor for a young person in need, he reached out to the oldest and largest youth mentoring organization in the nation -- Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"It was one of those things in the back of my mind that I always thought would be neat to do," Harrison said.

Big Brothers Big Sisters connects boys and girls -- known affectionately as Littles -- between the ages of 6 and 18 with adult mentors who are called Bigs. Volunteers commit to spending a couple of hours two times a month with their Little, and they also agree to spend at least a year in the program.

The organization traces its roots back to 1904, when a New York City court clerk set out to find mentors for the youth going through the New York Children's Court.

The non-profit's local affiliate, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Inland Empire, interviewed Harrison, explained the mentorship program, and ran a background check on him as is standard procedure for all the group's volunteers.

"It's an interesting experience," Harrison said. "They analyze the person who wants to be a Big and try to match them with the needs and interest of the kids "

Eventually, Harrison was paired with a 12-year-old boy named Victor.

"It was a little difficult to draw out what excited him," Harrison said. "He's a shy kid."

Harrison told Victor he worked as an airplane mechanic after discovering the boy was interested in cars, and pretty soon the two were chatting away about automobiles and engines.

"It just kind of tied things together and gave us something to talk about," he said.



He took Victor go-carting on their first outing. Since then, they have visited the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles, went to the movies, and watched airplanes land while eating In-N-Out burgers near LAX.

When Victor confided he was having trouble in math class, Harrison gave him some tips, and since then, the boy's math grade has improved.

Victor has also helped Harrison, who is admittedly a little loquacious, look at life and relationships a little differently.

"I've learned to sit back and observe a little more," he said. "He opens my eyes on how to handle things."

Learn more about Big Brothers Big Sisters by visiting www.iebigs.org.

http://www.highlandnews.net/opinion/everybody-matters/article_dac2e972-126e-11e8-9b1e-d7c2473b1874.html

Everybody matters

James Folmer, editor 7 hrs ago

Everybody matters

It's sad, but necessary, that the homeless count has become an annual tradition.

As part of the nationwide Point-in-Time Count of People Experiencing Homelessness, 32 homeless people were counted in Highland on Jan. 25.



For a city of more than 54,000, you might say that's not bad. But to have anyone living on the streets is a tragedy.

This year's count was a slight improvement over last year, when 35 homeless people were counted here. In 2016 only six were counted. In 2015, there were 24 and in 2013, 25.

Until 2015, the homeless count was held every other year. But in 2015, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development made it an annual event.

Brandy Littleton, Highland's administrative assistant for community development, organized this year's homeless count. Teams of two canvassed each of Highland's five voting districts from 6 to 10 a.m.

Of course, it's far from scientific, but the count can reveal trends, which can be useful.

Fortunately, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department has HOPE — the Homeless Outreach and Proactive Enforcement team. It launched the "Positive Change not Spare Change" community awareness campaign. The goal of this campaign is to educate the public.

Statistics show that more than a third of panhandlers are not homeless. When you give money to a panhandler you could be supporting a drug habit or alcohol addiction.

A few years ago, The Desert Sun in the Coachella Valley reported that panhandlers in front of Palm Springs grocery stores were bused out from Los Angeles to beg for pocket change.

The sheriff's website says, "We all want to help. The question is 'How can I give in a way that will truly help?'"

The answers: Know before you give. Support solutions, not panhandling.

The HOPE team encourages compassionate residents with the means to help to

Donate to organizations that help homeless. Promotional materials are available through HOPE at (909) 387-0623 or toll free (844) 811-HOPE (4673) or via email at HOPE@sbcscd.org.

Most panhandlers are not homeless and most homeless do not panhandle.

Highland's most recently reported unemployment rate was 3.4 percent, which some economists regard as full employment. It seems that anybody who wants a job should be able to find one.

But, as the Bible says, the poor ye shall always have with you.

Fines won't end homelessness

Repeatedly citing street people for violating quality-of-life ordinances may just trap them in squalor.

As the number of homeless people has risen dramatically in Los Angeles, so has the tension between those living in squalor on the sidewalks and the residents who have to walk past their encampments, the smell of urine in the air. City officials struggle to balance the rights of homeless people with the rights of everyone else. The region clearly needs to create more housing, but that has been a maddeningly slow process in a city with 34,000 homeless people.

In the meantime, homeless people are vulnerable to being cited by police for breaking any of a passel of the city's so-called quality-of-life ordinances, which forbid activities such as sleeping on the sidewalk, urinating in public or possessing a shopping cart. A citation can carry a \$300 fine — an unaffordable sum for a destitute homeless person. If it's not paid or if the person cited fails to appear in court, a bench warrant is automatically issued. That can lead to the homeless person getting arrested and in some cases jailed, then returning to the street, locked into an absurd cycle of debt-driven citations, arrests and homelessness.

If you have no home or place to store your belongings, then you carry around your possessions and rest on the sidewalk during the day. If there are no bathrooms for you to use, then you urinate and defecate wherever you happen to be. If anyone thinks citing and arresting people for doing these things means they won't do them any longer, they're crazy.

Officials note that the increase in arrests parallels the growth in the local homeless population. But reflecting the trap set by high fines, more homeless people got arrested in 2016 for failure to appear in court for an unpaid citation than for any other reason.

City Atty. Mike Feuer already runs a series of citation clinics at which lawyers work with homeless people to resolve the tickets on their records that can reduce their eligibility for housing and jobs. That's great and should continue. But that's on the back end. We need a better approach on the front end. Police need a more productive way of interacting with homeless people on the streets.

For starters, officers need to have the resources to offer a homeless person an alternative to a citation or arrest on the spot. If they're not accompanied by an outreach worker to

help persuade a homeless person to accept services and temporary housing, they need to have a phone number for one.

LAPD Chief Charlie Beck insists that his department's goal is to get homeless people the services they need, and that officers make arrests as a last resort to stop someone who repeatedly breaks the law. There are already teams of police officers in different parts of the city that go out to encampments along with professional outreach workers. But not every police officer on the street encountering a homeless person has an outreach worker at his or her side. When that help isn't available, police should be instructed that the preferable way to deal with homeless people is to offer them a choice: Get cited and possibly arrested, or agree to work with a service provider.

Granted, this is not the ideal way to get homeless people linked up with counseling and case management and shelter beds. Even when there is a professional outreach worker at the officer's side, the homeless person is still agreeing to services at the threat of being cited or arrested by someone with a badge and a gun. In general, homeless people who voluntarily accept help are more successful at working with service providers. Among other things, that means we need more outreach workers on the streets — and more temporary housing that they can offer quickly to homeless people.

But here is what we know does not work: charging people money they don't have; telling people not to go to the bathroom on the sidewalk without offering them public toilets; putting people in jail for being homeless. Let's stop telling ourselves that arresting homeless people in encampments is actually cleaning up the streets. It's not.

Orange County leaders OK aid Emergency aid for homeless is OKd

Food and temporary housing are approved for homeless living near Santa Ana River.

BY HANNAH FRY

Orange County leaders Thursday approved a plan to provide motel vouchers, food and other services for about 400 homeless people [living in encampments](#) along the Santa Ana River trail.

The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously during a special meeting to fund the emergency aid package as part of an agreement hammered out over several days among attorneys representing homeless people, the county and three cities named in [a federal lawsuit](#).

The suit, filed Jan. 29, sought to halt the county's ongoing effort to clear the homeless from the river trail and prevent Anaheim, Costa Mesa and Orange from enforcing anti-camping, trespassing and loitering laws.

The approved package includes motel vouchers that can be renewed on a week-by-week basis for a minimum of 30 days, food vouchers for those who move to motels and 90-day storage of personal belongings. The county will complete an assessment of homeless people housed in motels during the 30 days to pair them with appropriate support services, including a shelter or housing, according to the signed document filed in court.

"This is a new era, a new period in our county's history," Board of Supervisors Chairman Andrew Do said. "I think there's a level of comfort and trust that we can work together and put together a system ... that will take care of people."

The board directed county staff to expand the shelter capacity at Bridges at Kraemer Place in Anaheim and negotiate an agreement with WISEPlace, a women's shelter in Santa Ana, to provide 100 beds.

County officials also have ordered pop-up tents and are working to retrofit two county-owned properties in Orange and Santa Ana that could provide temporary housing after motel vouchers expire.

Supervisor Todd Spitzer called the agreement a “handshake, good-faith deal.”

During court hearings this week, U.S. District Judge David Carter pressed the sides to negotiate an agreement that would move people from the flood control channel and provide them a place to go. [Carter has said](#)

he doesn't want homeless people who leave to be cited by cities, put in jail for a day and then sent back to the streets, only to be cited again.

“I'm tired of the paperwork and the ‘we can't get it done’ nonsense,” Carter said Tuesday. “I'm looking for solutions now.”

Based on the board's vote, Carter is expected to set an expiration date of 9 a.m. Tuesday for a temporary restraining order he approved last week that barred county sheriff's deputies from arresting homeless people who refuse to leave the encampments. That means the camps between Taft Avenue/Ball Road and Memory Lane will probably begin being dismantled Tuesday, an effort expected to take several days.

Costa Mesa spokesman Tony Dodero said the board's vote does not affect the status of the lawsuit from the city's perspective. Carter has not made any ruling that would prohibit individual cities from enforcing anti-camping laws.

Lou Noble, a homeless advocate, said the agreement is a step forward but that more work is needed to help the county's homeless population.

“It's not just giving them free housing but developing them to be part of society again,” he told the supervisors Thursday.

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Fry writes for Times Community News.

Car Ownership Puts a Dent in SoCal Transit Ridership

BY: [Skip Descant](#) | February 15, 2018

Despite adding hundreds of miles of transit service across Southern California in the last 25 years, the region continues to see ridership slip, and the reason may have a lot to do with cars.

Car ownership across the region — a six-county swath home to 18.8 million people — increased significantly among residents who have traditionally been frequent users of public transit, according to the study [Falling Transit Ridership: California and Southern California](#). The study was commissioned by the Southern California Association of Governments, which includes Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura, Orange and Imperial counties. It did not include San Diego County.

The number of households in the region without a car — generally regarded as low-income families — fell 30 percent from 2000 to 2015, according to the study, conducted by the University of California Los Angeles Institute of Transportation Studies. Meanwhile, car ownership among immigrant households from Mexico, another traditional user of mass transit, increased. The number of immigrant families without a car in Southern California dropped 66 percent from 2000 to 2015.

The rise of car-ownership — particularly among populations that have not always had access to a vehicle — is what Hasan Ikhata, executive director of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), calls “the smoking gun.”

“The ‘smoking gun’ is between 2000 and 2015 we grew as a region by 2.3 million people. And in the same period we added 2.1 million cars. That’s four times the rate from the 1990s.” Ikhata pointed out.

Since 1990, the SCAG region added more than 530 miles of commuter rail and more than 100 miles of light and heavy rail. Despite this significant buildout of transit service, the region actually lost 72 million transit rides annually between 2012 to 2016.

At L.A. Metro, the region’s largest provider of mass transit, bus ridership fell 23 percent between 2009 to 2017, according to L.A. Metro ridership statistics. Meanwhile ridership on Metro’s light rail network increased 22 percent during the same period, a result partly due to expansions in the network. However, ridership was still down 14.2 percent systemwide during this period because buses remained the “workhorses” of Los Angeles mass transit.

Passenger miles on the rail system — an indication of distance traveled and trains in operation — grew to more than 700 million miles in 2017, a 28 percent increase over 2009. Passenger miles on the L.A. Metro bus system grew to more than 1.5 billion in 2012. By 2017, passenger miles were down to 1.2 billion.

L.A. Metro makes service adjustments twice a year “to improve existing bus service and to take a look at non-productive bus lines and service,” said Rick Jager, a spokesman for L.A. Metro. Also, as new light rail lines are added, Metro pulls back bus service that may be duplicative.

MetroLink, a commuter rail service linking Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, has seen annual ridership dip and rise over the last decade. In the 2007-08 fiscal year ridership reached nearly 12.7 million passengers. By the 2015-16 fiscal year, the number of annual passengers had slipped to 11.5 million, while total train miles increased 10.7 percent during this period, according to MetroLink statistics.

Granted, transit agencies would like to turn these statistics around. And the solution, researchers say, lies in getting more residents to choose transit, even if it’s only a few rides a month. The SCAG study found that 77 percent of residents — roughly 14.5 million people — “ride transit rarely or never.”

Only about 2 percent of the population in the SCAG region rides transit often, averaging 45 trips per month. While 20 percent of the residents ride occasionally, averaging 20 trips a month.

“If one out of every four of those people replaced a single driving trip with a transit trip once every two weeks, annual ridership would grow by 96 million — more than compensating for the losses of recent years,” reads the report. “The future of public transit in the SCAG region, then, will be shaped less by the mobility needs of people who do not own vehicles, and more by policy decisions that encourage vehicle-owning households to drive less and use transit more.”

The new information relating to increase car ownership did not come as a huge surprise to Jager, who added that Metro is currently in the process of “reimagining and restructuring our bus system to better meet the needs of current and future riders.” And the agency is receiving feedback from residents related to any number of route and other service changes.

Adjustments to transit service and system operations are likely needed, said Ikhata.

As an example, Ikhata pointed to the more than 100 different operators of transit systems across the six county region, adding that ridership across these systems should be more seamless with one mobile ticketing app.

“That’s the kind of thing where you deploy technology and innovation to make sure that transit works,” he remarked.

For its part, Metrolink made changes to its mobile ticketing app to allow users to transfer to L.A. Metro Rail lines by scanning their phones at the rail gates thanks to new optic readers. Nearly a third of Metrolink riders are commuters transferring onto Metro Rail in Los Angeles.

Aside from technology, the time is also right to have some larger conversations about land-use and all forms of public policy around mobility, said Ikhata. The most urban and transit-friendly areas in the six-county SCAG region make up less than 1 percent of the land area, home to 17 percent of the region’s population, according to the study. However, these neighborhoods are also home to 45 percent of the transit commuters.

“This [study] is also telling us that if you want transit ridership to go up, you have to tackle land-use and development patterns,” he said. “Obviously, SCAG has no authority, or desire, to tell cities what to do, but cities need to pay attention to development patterns. And so therefore, the last question to ask is, how do we have a transportation system that works for us?”

If you want to change behavior — getting commuters to leave behind the car and take transit a few times a month — money can be a motivator.

“If you want those choice riders to take transit once in a while, you’re going to have to charge the right price for driving,” said Ikhata.

“So if you can come to downtown Los Angeles and park for \$5 or \$10 a day, that’s not going to be an incentive for you to take transit,” he added. “But in cities like Manhattan where you pay \$100 a day, you’ll think — maybe once in a while, you’ll take transit.”

Back at L.A. Metro, the bus system review — the first systemwide review since the 1990s — is set to be complete by April 2019. Officials say they plan to share the SCAG report with Metro’s own consultants, as they explore ideas related to getting car owners — both those new to ownership and longtime drivers — to choose transit.

“Metro believes it’s important to attract riders away from the automobile, if only to have them use the system once a week or once a month in our efforts to ease traffic congestion and improve the regions mobility,” Jager said.

With transit ridership dropping across the region — and [many cities](#) dealing with similar trends — even as hundreds of miles of service are added, it’s enough to have some wondering if it’s all worth the cost.

“Some reporter said, ‘Well, should we stop investing in transit?’” Ikhata recalled. “That’s absolutely the wrong strategy. But we should be smart about how we invest in transit. We should use technology and innovation.

“We should take this as an opportunity say, ‘OK, ridership is declining. People are owning more vehicles. How can we make the transportation work for everybody,’” he added. “That is really the question to ask.”



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Commentary: Gov. Brown's Parole Measure Hits Big Legal Snag

POSTED BY : CALMATTERS FEBRUARY 15, 2018

By Dan Walters.

When Gov. Jerry Brown was promoting [Proposition 57](#) to voters in 2016, he characterized it as a common sense criminal law reform that would give nonviolent felons a better chance at rehabilitation by allowing them to earn earlier releases on parole.

However, it did not specify which felonies would be deemed nonviolent. Rather, Brown's campaign confirmed that it would be every felony not included on a [specific Penal Code list](#) of 23 violent crimes – and that lack of specificity is now backfiring.

Indirectly, leniency would be allowed for quite a few felonies, such as sex crimes, that most of us would deem to be violent – and, in fact, are counted as violent offenses in crime data provided by the state Department of Justice.

Critics of Brown's measure – the state's prosecutors, particularly – pointed out the anomaly, and complained that if passed, it could allow some vicious predators to once again range freely.

In response, Brown publicly promised that by regulation, state prison officials would make sure that sex criminals would not benefit from Proposition 57's new leniency and voters apparently believed him, because they passed the measure.

The promised regulations restricting parole for some sex crimes were, in fact, published by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

However, attorneys for the Alliance for Constitutional Sex Offense Laws and one "John Doe," who had been imprisoned for lewd acts with a 14-year-old, challenged the rules, saying they violated Proposition 57's more lenient parole opportunities.

Proposition 57's ban on early parole, they contended, was implicitly limited to 23 violent felonies of Penal Code Section 667.5, but the department's new rules extended the ban to sex offenses under PC Section 290, thereby violating the measure.

Last week, Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Allen Sumner declared his intention to rule for the plaintiffs and overturn the rules.

"The court agrees the challenged regulations are overbroad and must be set aside," Sumner wrote. "But the court does not direct CDCR to adopt any particular replacement regulations. Instead, the court remands this case to CDCR to adopt new regulations defining the term 'nonviolent felony offense' consistent with this ruling."

In essence, Sumner is not only agreeing with John Doe, but also with the prosecutors who opposed Brown's measure in 2016, arguing that as written, it could require granting lenience to those who commit serious sex crimes.

While the measure gives CDCR authority to issue implementing regulations, Sumner wrote, "CDCR's definition must comport with some colorable meaning of the term 'non-violent felony.' It does not."

Brown's prison agency must now either rewrite the regulations, presumably to provide more leniency to John Doe and other sex criminals, or try to overturn Sumner's ruling on appeal.

The latter course is more likely, because rewriting the rules would, in effect, concede the issue to the prosecutors who criticized Proposition 57 as too vaguely drafted and too broad.

"We repeatedly warned prior to the election that the ambiguities of language in Prop 57 would allow sex offenders to be released early from prison," the Association of Deputy District Attorneys said after Sumner's ruling. "The proponents realized the public wouldn't support that, so led by Gov. Jerry Brown they responded by promising that CDCR would write regulations to make sure sex-offenders weren't released early."

"We knew that approach would fail," the ADDA continued, "because a regulation cannot expand the scope of the law that it purports to implement. Now, the completely foreseeable result of this poor drafting has occurred."

Were John Doe and several thousand other predatory sex criminals to waltz free despite Brown's campaign assurances, it also would put a stain on what he clearly hopes will be a legacy of criminal justice reform.

Originally posted at CALmatters.

Comments

comments

OPINION

The SCAQMD wants to raise your taxes



Photo by Robert Casillas, Daily Breeze/SCNG

Siemens Corp and the South Coast Air Quality Management District demonstrated the country's first electrified highway in Carson, CA Wednesday November 8, 2017. The one-mile stretch of overhead catenary power system was installed on South Alameda St. to show the potential of zero-emission technology that could be used to transport containers from Ports of LA and Long Beach. Trucks using pantograph system to draw power to electric drivetrain on trucks.

By **THE EDITORIAL BOARD** | opinion@scng.com |

February 16, 2018 at 6:30 am



In what appears to be the very definition of an out-of-control government agency, the staff of the South Coast Air Quality Management District has decided to pursue its own plan for raising the sales tax in four counties by a quarter-percent.

The SCAQMD doesn't have the authority to put tax-increase proposals on the ballot, but on Monday, the staff revealed a new strategy: Conduct a poll to see if voters would be willing to pay the higher tax, then quickly get a bill introduced in Sacramento to give the agency the power to put the tax increase before the voters.

Orange County Supervisor Shawn Nelson and San Bernardino County Supervisor Janice Rutherford said they were blindsided by the staff's plan to move forward and pursue legislation without first bringing the poll results to the board for consideration of next steps.

The SCAQMD is governed by a 13-member board comprised of 10 elected officials – four county supervisors and six city council members – and three people appointed by state elected officials. The agency is extraordinarily powerful. By issuing and enforcing regulations designed to meet ever-tightening federal and state air quality goals, the regulators hold vast power over business enterprises from refineries to dry cleaners.

However, the SCAQMD has authority only over stationary sources of pollution, not mobile sources like cars and trucks, which are regulated primarily by the state and federal governments. The agency acknowledges that even the complete shutdown of all stationary sources would not be enough to meet the region's air quality targets.

Still, the law requires that the agency come up with a plan to explain how it will reach "attainment" of federal and state standards. The 2016 Air Quality Management Plan calls for offering about \$14 billion in incentives to businesses to convert from diesel to electric vehicles over the next 15 years.

Where will the money come from? That was never in the plan.

The SCAQMD has received hundreds of millions of dollars from the state in cap-and-trade funds, money collected from fees charged to businesses that emit greenhouse gases. That's not enough to fund the incentive plan, which calls for \$1 billion per year. Rutherford said she would like to see the state do more, and opposes a regressive new tax that would "let the state off the hook." Nelson said there is no emergency and taxes should be "absolutely the last resort."

But Nelson and Rutherford were outvoted 3-2 at a special meeting of the legislative committee on Monday, and the staff's plan squeaked through. The full governing board, which meets on March 2, will have the option to pull the report from the agency's agenda and stop the staff from finding a legislator in Sacramento to sponsor the tax-authorization bill.

That's exactly what the board should do. A powerful regulatory agency should not have the additional power to go directly to the voters to ask for tax increases, or the implied power to coerce regulated businesses into paying for campaign advertising to get the tax approved.

It's the SCAQMD's job to control air pollution. It's everybody else's job to control the SCAQMD.

Tags: **editorials**



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Water use climbs in California enclaves as drought returns

By Ellen Knickmeyer and Amy Taxin / Associated Press

Posted Feb 15, 2018 at 1:19 PM

Updated Feb 15, 2018 at 1:19 PM

TUSTIN — Overall water use is climbing in Southern California as that part of the state plunges back into drought, driving state and regional water managers as they consider permanently reinstating some watering bans and conservation programs.

Gov. Jerry Brown lifted California's drought emergency status a year ago, after a wet winter that snapped a historic 2013-2017 drought, and the state ended his 25 percent mandatory conservation order.

Water use has been moving steadily upward since then, especially in a six-county area of Southern California that includes the biggest chunk of the state's nearly 40 million people.

Water use there was up 3 percent in December, the last month for which figures are available, compared to the same month in 2013 before mandatory conservation.

Many of the biggest offenders are well-off communities, with sweeping lawns to keep alive. The average residential user in one Malibu water district, for instance, used 255 gallons a day, according to the state water board — three times the U.S. average of 83 gallons per person per day. It's also up 7 percent from the same month in 2013, before Brown ordered the 25 percent conservation by cities and towns in 2015.

The water district for an enclave north of Pasadena, La Canada Flintridge, hit 270 gallons per person, per day water use that month. Residents of an east Orange County water district used 203 gallons a day.

Despite a fall and winter that have brought Los Angeles less than one-fourth of normal rainfall, "you still see thick green lawns" in some communities, said Conner Everts, a Los Angeles-based conservation specialist who works with nonprofits and government agencies.

Wendy Silva, a 57-year-old homemaker from the Orange County city of Santa Ana, wasn't lured by multimillion-dollar rebate programs during the drought that paid homeowners to remove thirsty lawns, and admits to her husband giving their lawn extra water since conservation orders eased.

Silva said she's glad to have her green grass back after seeing it turn brown during the drought. She doesn't plan to swap it out for drought-tolerant landscaping as some of her neighbors in arid Southern California have done.

"I like the lawn," she said. "I don't like the desert look."

Many other Southern California communities have winnowed water use to well below the national average over successive droughts, water officials say. Residents of lower-income communities — with much less lawn — are some of the heroes when it comes to keeping water use down. That includes residents of East Los Angeles, who used an average of 42 gallons a day, and people in Huntington Park, who got by on just 34 gallons.

U.S. drought monitors this month declared parts of Southern California back in severe drought, just months after the state emerged from that category of drought.

A winter of shorts and T-shirts, record warm days, and growing worry over water supply in Southern California are leading California's Water Resources Control Board to consider next week whether to permanently reinstate some bans on water use that were imposed during the drought state of emergency.

If board members say yes, a handful of old-style water practices including using a hose to wash down sidewalks, and leaving automatic sprinklers on during and just after a rain, would be specifically outlawed statewide and could draw \$500 fines.

Pending state legislation, meanwhile, would also give local water districts that kind of enforcement power over wasteful water use.

Board members of the Los Angeles-area Metropolitan Water District, the nation's largest urban water wholesaler, also are looking this winter and spring at making drought-style public-education conservation campaigns on social and news media permanent, along with programs encouraging homeowners to replace lawns. More than two-thirds of the water households consume is used outdoors, chiefly for lawns.

The permanent water restrictions that the state is looking at acknowledge that what California is facing now is growing extremes in wet spells and dry spells, not just the occasional drought.

The measures are about “transforming the relationship we have with water, which is increasingly scarce due to climate change,” said Max Gomberg, a leader of water conservation programs at the state water agency.

California, the country’s top state economy and agricultural producer, depends on 700 miles of canals and pipelines and a concrete network of dams, reservoirs and pumps to pipe water from the wetter north to Silicon Valley and the farms and population centers of the Central Valley and Southern California.

Weather trends are undermining the state’s complex water system, however. Rising temperatures and changing storm patterns mean less snow is falling in the Sierra Nevada. Much of what snow does fall melts in place before spring runoff ever reaches the reservoirs that depend on it.

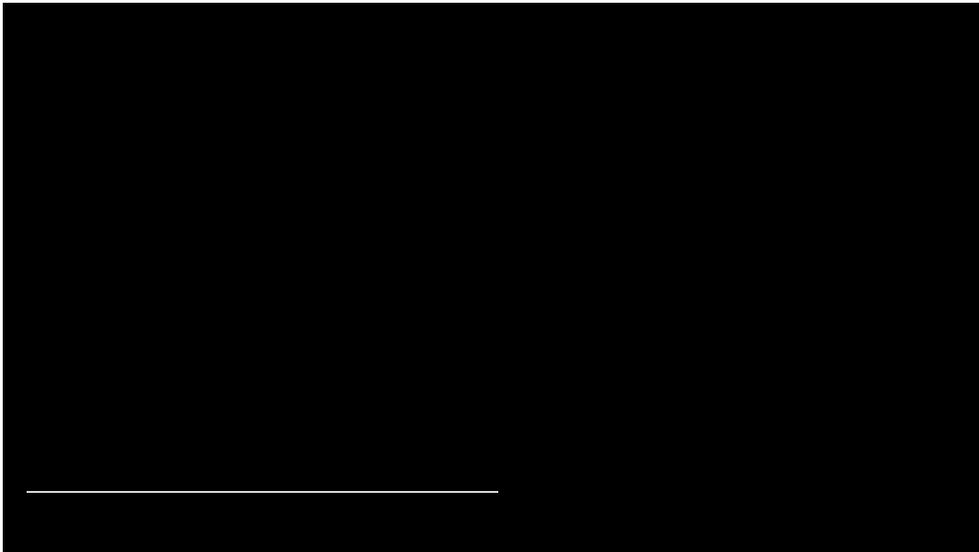
Water reservoirs are full from last winter’s welcome, near-record rain. But if Californians draw them down over a dry year, and “we head back into next winter and it’s really dry, we’re right back in emergency this time next year,” Gomberg said.



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LOCAL

Developer sues former Sacramento official for calling him ‘mentally ill’

BY TONY BIZJAK
tbizjak@sacbee.com

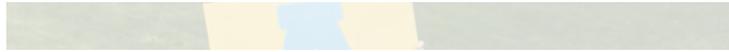
February 12, 2018 05:53 PM
Updated February 13, 2018 07:54 AM

Developer Paul Petrovich is suing a former Sacramento city manager for calling him “mentally ill” in a text message weeks before the city rejected Petrovich’s request to build a gas station at his Crocker Village development.

Petrovich says in the Sacramento Superior Court lawsuit that he suffered damage to his reputation when the text became public.

Since-retired City Manager John Shirey sent the text to Councilman Jay Schenirer in late 2015 after Petrovich had sent several angry emails to city officials and others. The developer in those messages accused Schenirer of trying to start a race war and appeared to reference Schenirer’s Jewish faith.

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“I have read all of Paul’s blasts to us today,” Shirey texted. “I have concluded he is mentally ill and is in serious need of psychiatric treatment.”

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Petrovich’s legal team unearthed the text during a lawsuit the developer filed to challenge the city’s denial of his gas station request. The Petrovich legal team introduced the text in court filings, citing it to support their argument that city officials held “personal animus” toward Petrovich. The Sacramento Bee later published the quote in a story about the lawsuit.

Petrovich initially filed a claim with the city in August against Shirey and the city, contending the text caused him harm. The city rejected the claim.

Shirey declined comment on the new lawsuit.

Petrovich scored a partial victory in court last month. Superior Court Judge Michael Kenny overturned the city’s permit denial and ordered the city to reconsider Petrovich’s gas station request. Kenny said he concluded that Schenirer, who represents the project area, was probably biased and failed to act in an open-minded manner in the weeks leading up to the council vote.

City officials say they will appeal that decision.

Crocker Village is a planned community of homes, apartments and stores under development in the former railyard next to Curtis Park and north of Sutterville Road.

Tony Bizjak: 916-321-1059, @TonyBizjak

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Dilemma of the Month: Speaking Freely on Social Media

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FEB 8, 2018

By Suzanne Lucas

I have a client who recently threatened to quit working with us after seeing politically-charged posts she deemed offensive on one of my account manager's social media accounts. I've asked the employee not to let this happen again, but he countered that we have no policy in place (which is true), and furthermore, these are his personal accounts and he is entitled to free speech. How can I deal with this situation and prevent another incident from happening in the future?

First of all, unless you work for a state-sponsored organization (like a university), your employees don't have free speech rights when it comes to their jobs. The First Amendment applies to governments, not individuals. Typically, a company can place limits on what employees do or say.

However, there are some things employees do have the right to talk about – working conditions and wages, for instance. You'll run into trouble if you try to punish an employee for sharing her salary with a coworker, for instance, or if you try to tell employees to stop talking about starting a union. In most states, that's about it.

Politics, however, have special status in California – the law protects individuals' rights to political free speech. You can't fire someone for expressing his or her political views. So, do you have to let your manager post politically-charged statements online, which may threaten your business? It's a difficult situation for California businesses – you clearly don't want clients driven away, but you also need to protect your employees' rights to speak (and post on social media) about their political views.

Related: Don't Wait to Create Social Media Guidelines

Related: Dilemma of the Month: Retracting a Job Offer

I spoke with California employment lawyer Ann Fromholz, owner and principal at Fromholz Law Firm, who explained there are some things you can do to prevent damage from your employee's controversial views. First and foremost, you need a social media policy, as soon as possible. You can't, of course, apply it retroactively, but you certainly can get one written and apply it going forward. While you should definitely have an employment attorney (not a general attorney) review your final policy, Fromholz recommends you consider the following points.

No personal social media on company time or company equipment.
When employees are on the clock (or on your equipment), it's perfectly

reasonable to say employees can't use their own social media. However, Fromholz cautions the need for consistency here. If you say no social media from work equipment, but then allow people to post pictures of their pets on Instagram or tweet about the latest movie, you can't turn around and say, "but Jim, you have to be quiet on this political issue!" It's all or nothing.

Require a company disclaimer . If the employee mentions he works for your company, then he needs to have a disclaimer that these views are his and his alone, and do not reflect the company views. Remember, platforms like Facebook encourage people to identify their company in their profile, so this may be more important than you think.

All confidentiality rules still apply. Fromholz points out even if social media is being shared only with "friends," that doesn't mean it remains confidential. Only authorized people can release certain information about the company.

If it's against company rules or the law in real life, it's against the rules for social media. So, if your employee is talking about robbing a bank, that is not protected free speech. Additionally, you can prohibit employees from posting things that discriminate, retaliate and/or harass based on age, race, sex, religion, national origin or ancestry, as well as other protected categories, like pregnancy, sexual orientation and whistle blowers.

Employees can't use the company logo in social media, nor can they use any other things that represent the company. If employees aren't official representatives of the company, they shouldn't give any indication that might lead someone to believe they are. Some people are proud of their job, and may display a logo or have a picture of themselves in a company-branded shirt. While this seems harmless, it can give the impression they speak for the company.

Of course, all of this doesn't solve your immediate problem of an employee who has publicly posted his views that are vastly different than those of your client.

It's tempting to say to everyone, "Can we just for one minute forget about politics? We sell widgets here and they are decidedly apolitical, so who cares?" But, your client won't like that and you could be violating the law by asking your employee to shut up on his own social media.

But, you can say nicely to your client, "California law requires us to respect our employees' right to free speech about political views. I'm sure you understand, as your company has the same obligations." It might solve the problem.

But do get a social media policy in place as soon as possible. The last thing you want is an employee posting political or other unsavory things online and clients thinking these views represent the company's views.

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Opinion

School shootings demand new prevention strategies

By The Daily Press Editorial Board

Posted Feb 15, 2018 at 11:01 PM

Year after year, in cities all over America, school children are targeted by gunmen, often their own classmates or former classmates.

Wednesday's shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., added to the long and growing list. A 19-year-old former student fired his AR-15 semi-automatic on the campus, killing 17 people, many of them students.

Almost immediately all over the country, people offered their condolences, thoughts and prayers. While appropriate, these measures simply aren't enough.

It is going to take much more to end this violence and to make our schools safe for students and teachers again.

It should start with a frank conversation in homes and schools all over America. Bullying is a national problem and even here in the High Desert we see little evidence that our school administrators or school boards are taking this problem seriously enough.

We continue to get calls and emails from parents and grandparents complaining that their children or grandchildren are being bullied and school administrators refuse to do anything to protect them. We have heard the same from employees and former employees too.

There appears to be a strong correlation between bullying and school shootings, too. Many of those who have shot up schools in recent years were themselves bullied at school. If our school districts cannot keep students safe from bullies, how do we expect them to keep students safe from shootings?

Solving the bullying problem will go a long way toward solving the school shooting problem.

It will take more than that, however. There are other factors that must be considered, including mental health issues, inconsistent gun buying laws from state to state and weak background check procedures in some areas.

We don't agree with liberals who would try to convince us that all guns should be banned in America. We support the Second Amendment and believe Americans do have the right to own guns. However, individual states would be wise to reconsider their gun laws and many should toughen them. California has some of the toughest gun laws in the nation and yet it is far from impossible to buy a gun here. However, the testing requirement before you do so encourages responsible ownership. The background check requirement also prevents many who could be a danger to themselves or others from being able to purchase a gun legally.

Florida's lax gun laws could have contributed to Wednesday's tragedy. Should an 18- or 19-year-old be able to legally buy an AR-15? In Florida they can. In fact, Floridians don't need a permit or a license to buy a gun, and don't have to register it, either. Although there is a three-day waiting period before you buy a handgun, there is no waiting period before you buy a rifle or long gun. Likewise, no permit is needed to conceal and carry a rifle or shotgun.

Also, you can buy as many guns as you want at one time and Florida does not regulate AR-15 or other semi-automatic weapons or high-capacity magazines.

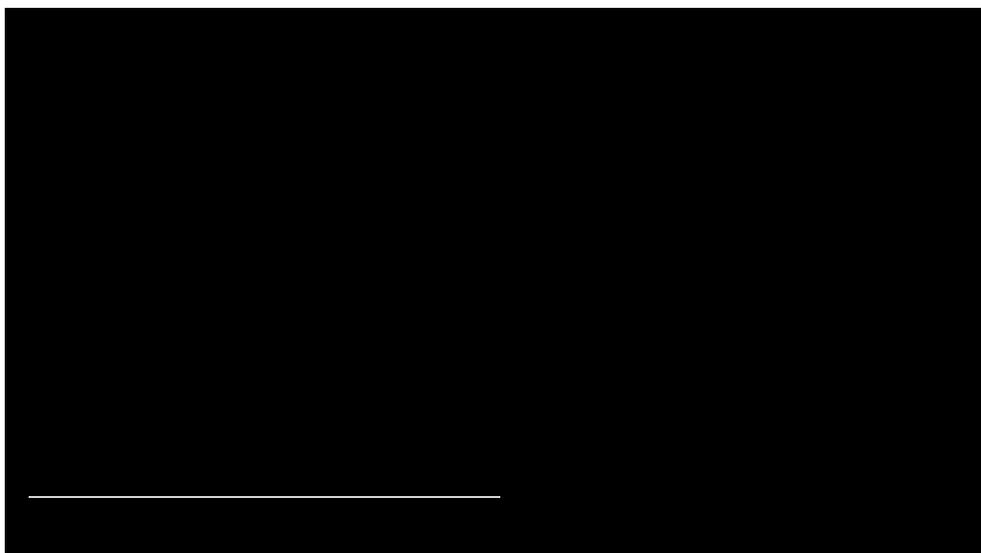
If states aren't going to toughen gun-buying requirements and ensure suitable background checks are conducted before purchases are allowed, then it will fall upon schools to increase security at all campuses. At least here in California, given the billions of dollars the state devotes to K-12 education, there would seem to be ample funds to hire security guards and add security cameras at all public schools.



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NATIONAL REVIEW

New Gun Policies Won't Stop Mass Shootings, but People Can

It is the responsibility of a free people to be aware, to have courage, and to care for one another.

By David French — February 15, 2018

The United States is facing a puzzling paradox. Even as gun crime has plunged precipitously from the terrible highs of the early 1990s, mass shootings have increased. Consider this: 15 of the 20 worst mass shootings in U.S. history have occurred since the Columbine school shooting in 1999. The five worst have all occurred since 2007, and three of those five were in 2016 and 2017.

It's horrifying, and governmental solutions are hard to find. Twitter's fondest wishes to the contrary, the unique characteristics of mass shootings mean that they often escape the reach of public policy. The Washington Post's Glenn Kessler (hardly an NRA apologist) famously fact-checked Marco Rubio's assertion that new gun laws wouldn't have prevented any recent mass shootings and declared it true. Time and again, existing laws failed, or no proposed new gun-control law would have prevented the purchase.

The reason is obvious. Mass shootings are among the most premeditated of crimes, often planned months in advance. The shooter at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School reportedly wore a gas mask, carried smoke grenades, and set off the fire alarm so that students would pour out into the hallways. Though we'll obviously learn more in the coming days, each of these things suggests careful preparation. A man who is determined to kill and who is proactive in finding the means to kill will find guns. He can modify guns. He can find magazines.

But that doesn't mean there's nothing we can do. When policies fail, people can and should rise to the occasion. Looking at the deadliest mass shootings since Columbine, we see that the warning signs were there, time and again. People could have made a difference.

Syed Farook and Tashfeen Malik spent at least a year preparing for their attack in San Bernardino, Calif. Farook may have even discussed the attack three years before the murders. A neighbor reportedly witnessed suspicious activity at the the shooters' home, but was afraid to report what she saw.

The story of Devin Patrick Kelley — the church shooter in Sutherland Springs, Texas — is full of warning signs, acts of aggression, and missed opportunities. He was violent, he never should have passed a background check, and he “displayed a fascination with mass murders.”

Adam Lanza’s family struggled with him for years before he committed mass murder at Sandy Hook. His mother was “overwhelmed” by his behavior, and he lived in deep isolation — blocking anyone from entering his room and even covering his windows with black plastic bags.

Seung-Hui Cho, the Virginia Tech killer, was known to be profoundly troubled. He stalked and threatened female schoolmates. In 2005, a court ruled that he was “an imminent danger to others,” but he was released for outpatient care.

The FBI twice investigated Omar Mateen, the Orlando nightclub shooter, and he once claimed that he was affiliated with al-Qaeda and Hezbollah.

The list could go on and on. In fact, evidence of extended mental-health problems, aberrant behavior, or political radicalization is so common that the absence of such evidence in the Las Vegas shooting renders it the mysterious black swan of mass killings.

In 2015 Malcolm Gladwell wrote an extended essay in the New Yorker about school shootings and offered a provocative thesis:

What if the way to explain the school-shooting epidemic is . . . to think of it as a slow-motion, ever-evolving riot, in which each new participant’s action makes sense in reaction to and in combination with those who came before?

Gladwell argues that each new shooting lowers the threshold for the shooters to come. Each new shooting makes it easier for the next shooter to pick up his gun.

Others have used the term “contagion” to describe the wave of copycat killers. Again, each killing inspires the next, and as the killings increase so does the inspiration.

What does this mean? It means that Americans need to be aware that this contagion exists, that this “ever-evolving riot” is under way. We can’t deflect responsibility upwards, to Washington. We’re still the first line of defense in our own communities. We cannot simply assume that the kid filling his social-media feed with menacing pictures is just in “a phase” or that strange obsessions with murder or mass death are morbid, but harmless.

We’ve trained ourselves to mind our own business, to delegate interventions to professionals, and to “judge not” the actions of others. But in a real way, we are our brother’s keeper; and an

ethic of “see something, say something” is a vital part of community life.

Instead, we all too often retreat into our lives — either afraid that intervention carries risks or falsely comforted by the belief that surely someone else will do the right thing. We’ve seen this dynamic in other crimes. The worst of the sexual predators revealed (so far) by the #MeToo movement, Harvey Weinstein and Larry Nassar, could have been stopped so much earlier if the people around them had shown just an ounce more courage in the face of known complaints and known misconduct. We didn’t need better laws to stop rape. We needed better people.

One of the greatest challenges for any society is stopping a man who is determined to commit murder, and we’ll never fully succeed. Even the most vigilant community will still suffer at the hands of evil men. But it’s days like these, when children lay dead in school, that we must remind ourselves that we’re all in this together. We have responsibilities, not just to mourn and comfort the families of the lost, but to think carefully about our own communities and the circle of people in our lives — and to take action to guard our own children and our own schools.

It is the duty of a free people to be aware, to have courage, and to care for one another. For me, that’s a reminder that I can’t consider a troubled person someone else’s problem. I can’t assume it won’t happen in my school or in my town. Rather than tweet impotently, I’ve armed myself to protect my family and my neighbors; in my past role as a member of a school board, I’ve worked to better secure my kids’ school; and I’ve vowed that if — God forbid — I ever see evidence or warning signs of the darkness of a killer’s heart, I’ll have the courage to seek the intervention that can save lives.

That’s not public policy. It’s personal responsibility. It’s also the best way to confine the contagion that’s killing our kids.

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—David French is a senior writer for NATIONAL REVIEW, a senior fellow at the National Review Institute, and an attorney.

OPINION

If You Don't Vote, You Can't Talk Gun Control

By [Cliston Brown](#) • 02/16/18 9:30am



Four guns near the site of a shootout between police and suspects in the San Bernardino shootings, December 4, 2015 in San Bernardino, California. San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department via Getty Images

The agonized social media posts started again on Wednesday after the 18th mass shooting in America in 2018.

“This has to stop.”

“How many more will it take?”

And on it goes, the endless cascade of people crying out for a solution, for

Here's the truth: It's never going to stop until we make it stop. And that means ousting the politicians who won't do anything about it.

Judging by the available polling data, most Americans support some level of gun control. A comprehensive NPR/Ipsos poll taken last October found broad bipartisan agreement on gun control, with majorities of Democrats, Republicans and independents all supporting various types of legislation to reduce the availability of the most dangerous firearms. Eighty percent of those surveyed said they favor bans on assault weapons, high-capacity ammunition magazines and “bump stocks.”

And yet, the Republicans who control all the levers of government in Washington and more than half of the states remain unmoved. And they remain unmoved because voters aren't doing their jobs.

It's time to call a spade a spade and put the blame where it belongs. Every gun massacre that happens is collectively our fault.

government that won't lift a finger to stop America's ongoing slaughter. Those of us who continue to vote for politicians who refuse to take action on guns, or the majority of Americans who don't even bother to vote at all in most elections—if you want to know who's responsible, take a long, hard look in the nearest mirror.

Action, or lack thereof, speaks louder than words, and our lack of action demonstrates that we don't really care. Because if we did, we'd do something.

And do you know why we don't really care? Because we don't think it's going to happen to us. And for most of us, that's true. After all, the lifetime odds of dying in a mass shooting are one in 15,325.

But what ought to get your attention is the fact that it can happen to anybody. It happened to a classroom full of seven-year-olds at Sandy Hook. It happened to a crowd of concert-goers in Las Vegas. It happened at a gay nightclub in Orlando. It happens all the time. In 2017 alone, mass shootings happened 345 times.

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PROSPER

And enough already with this garbage about how guns aren't the problem. We know better than that. The world is replet with scores of modern, democratic countries that have gun control and, unlike America, don't have fresh gun massacres all the time.

Australia banned certain classes of high-kill-count weapons, and now its homicide rate is at a 25-year low. It isn't rocket science. The real problem with gun massacres is that there are too many guns, they're too easy to get, and rapid-fire, high-kill-count weapons that no civilian should have are legal. In a country where there are more guns than people, it's inevitable that guns will fall into the wrong hands.

America, you know what the problem really is. It isn't the "mental health issues" that Republicans like to trot out to divert attention from guns. And you know how to fix it: elect a Congress that

legislation and appoint Supreme Court justices who will back it up.

If you won't do those things, then finally admit it: you really don't care.

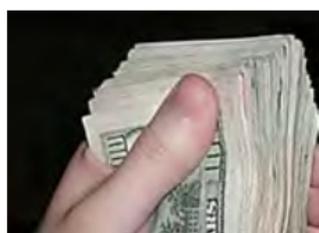
Cliston Brown is a political analyst who previously served as director of communications to a longtime Democratic Representative in Washington, D.C.

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ERIN GRIFFITH SECURITY 02.15.18 02:00 PM

PRO-GUN RUSSIAN BOTS FLOOD TWITTER AFTER PARKLAND SHOOTING



Students are led out of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in the aftermath of the shooting.

JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

EACH NEW BREAKING news situation is an opportunity for trolls to grab attention, provoke emotions, and spread propaganda. The Russian government knows this. Fake-news manufacturing teenagers in Macedonia know this. Twitter bot creators know this. And thanks to data-gathering operations from groups like the Alliance for Securing Democracy and RoBhat Labs, the world knows this.

In the wake of Wednesday's Parkland, Florida school shooting, which resulted in 17 deaths, troll and bot-tracking sites reported an immediate uptick in related tweets from

created by Alliance for Securing Democracy, tracks Twitter activity from accounts it has identified as linked to Russian influence campaigns. As of morning, shooting-related terms dominated the site's trending hashtags and topics, including Parkland, guncontrolnow, Florida, guncontrol, and Nikolas Cruz, the name of the alleged shooter. Popular trending topics among the bot network include shooter, NRA, shooting, Nikolas, Florida, and teacher.

On RoBhat Labs' [Botcheck.me](#), a website created by two Berkeley students to track 1500 political propaganda bots, all of the top two-word phrases used in the last 24 hours—excluding President Trump's name—are related to the tragedy: School shooting, gun control, high school, Florida school. The top hashtags from the last 24 hours include Parkland, guncontrol, and guncontrolnow.

Ash Bhat, one of the project's creators, says the bots are able to respond quickly to breaking news because they're ultimately controlled by humans. In contrast to the Russia-affiliated Hamilton 68 bots, Bhat would not speculate on who is behind the bots that RoBhat Labs tracks. In some cases, the bot creators come up with hashtags, and use their bots to amplify them until they're adopted by human users. "Over time the hashtag moves out of the bot network to the general public," he says. Once a hashtag is widely adopted by real users, it's difficult for Twitter to police, Bhat says. RoBhat Labs' data shows this happened with the hashtag [MemoDay](#), which bubbled up when House Intelligence Chairman [Devin Nunes' controversial memo](#) was released.

In other cases, the bots jump on existing hashtags to take control of the conversation and amplify a message. That's likely what is happening with the Parkland shooting and the hashtag [guncontrolnow](#), Bhat says.

While RoBhat Labs tracks general political bots, Hamilton 68 focuses specifically on those linked to the Russian government. According to the group's data, the top link shared by Russia-linked accounts in the last 48 hours is a 2014 [Politifact article](#) that looks critically at a statistic cited by pro-gun control group Everytown for Gun Safety. Twitter accounts tracked by the group have used the old link to try to debunk today's stats about the frequency of school shootings.

Another top link shared by the network covers the "deranged" Instagram account of the shooter, showing images of him holding guns and knives, wearing army hats, and a screenshot of a Google search of the phrase "Allahu Akbar." Characterizing shooters as deranged lone wolves with potential terrorist connections is a popular strategy of pro-gun groups because of the implication that new gun laws could not have prevented their

shooter was mentally disturbed, even expelled from school for bad and erratic behavior.

Meanwhile, some accounts with large bot followings are already spreading misinformation about the shooter's ties to [far-left group Antifa](#), even though the [Associated Press reported](#) that he was a member of a local white nationalist group. The Twitter account Education4Libs, which RoBhat Labs shows is one among the top accounts tweeted at by bots, is among the prominent disseminators of that idea:

<https://twitter.com/Education4Libs/status/963983055156256768>

Bret Schafer, a research analyst with the Alliance for Securing Democracy, says the spike in shooting-related posts from Russia-linked bots is in line with what his group observed after last year's shootings in Las Vegas and Texas. The Russia-linked bots weigh in on any attention-grabbing news event, but seize on shootings particularly. "Because of the politicized nature of them, they are perfect fodder to take an extreme position and start spreading memes that have a very distinct political position on gun control," he says.

The use of pro-gun control hashtags like [#guncontrolnow](#), along with the spread of anti-gun control links like the Politifact article, appear at first to show the Russian strategy of [promoting discord on both sides of a debate](#). Russian-linked Twitter accounts have attempted to spread confusion and angst on topics ranging from police violence against black people, to NFL player protests, to Al Franken's sexual misconduct accusations. (On other topics, like [special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation of Russia's attempts to influence the 2016 election](#), the [bots have worked in concert to further the Kremlin's agenda](#).)

But in this case, Schafer suspects the use of pro-gun control hashtags like [#guncontrolnow](#) are being used sarcastically, particularly since they're often paired with the anti-gun control links. Since the Twitter accounts Hamilton 68 tracks often target right-wing audiences, Schafer believes the trolls are using the message to attract more eyeballs. "That allows them to then push content that is more directly related to the Kremlin's geopolitical agenda," such as [the Nunes memo](#), he says. "I don't think the Kremlin cares one way or another whether we enact stricter gun control laws," he adds. "It's just being used as bait, basically."

Public awareness that antagonistic bots flood the Twitter debate hasn't stopped them from achieving their goals of ratcheting up the vitriol—even amid a live tragedy like the Parkland shooting. The goal, after all, isn't to help one side or the other of the gun control

between us.

Troll Takeover

- Recently, the Hamilton 68 network also surged to push for Robert Mueller's ouster
- And they helped amplify the Devin Nunes #ReleaseTheMemo campaign to the point that the memo was released