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SAN DIEGO'S **MOST INNOVATIVE LAW FIRMS**



## What to Know about Redistricting

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# 74th Pebble Beach Concours d' Elegance

A group of car enthusiasts from San Diego attended the 74th Pebble Beach Concours d' Elegance in August, enjoying great weather, classic cars and hospitality provided by the Pebble Beach staff and Infiniti Motor Cars. The 1934 Packard owned by Gary Marchetti of Vista and restored by Mike Adams Restoration in Escondido missed an opportunity to win due to missing parts. But they are already planning to enter the competition next year.

The Best of Show winner this year was a 1924 Hispano Suiza Nieuport Torpedo. A 1961 Ferrari 250 GT SWB California Spider Competizione was the highest priced car sold at the Gooding Christie's Auction for \$23.5 million.



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# State Leaders Are Scrambling to Lower Gas Prices

By Deborah Sullivan Brennan | Voice of San Diego

The Golden State is taking a new look at “black gold,” amid projections that oil and gas prices are about to spike.

For decades, California has set stricter vehicle emissions standards than the rest of the country, and aimed to phase out sales of gas vehicles entirely by 2035.

But plans to convert California cars to electric have stalled, and Congress revoked the state’s waivers that allowed the transition to electric vehicles. So the demand for gasoline hasn’t slowed as much as state leaders hoped.

Meanwhile two oil refineries are closing over the next year, squeezing California’s supply.

With that crunch taking a toll at the gas pump, state leaders are changing course and looking for ways to boost gas production to curb steep price hikes, CalMatters reported. Gov. Gavin Newsom and Democratic lawmakers are negotiating a plan with the industry to revive oil production in Kern County.

What’s happening with gas prices? On Thursday San Diego gasoline averaged \$4.55 per gallon, while the statewide average was \$4.49 per gallon, according to AAA. That’s down almost \$2 from the peak of \$6.44 a gallon in June 2022.

But that reprieve could be short-lived. Michael A. Mische, a business professor at the University of Southern California, predicted that prices could soar over \$8 per gallon as two of its last refineries prepare to close.

California is the second largest consumer of petroleum in the United States and has the fifth largest oil reserves in the country, Mische wrote. But it produces less than 3 percent of U.S. oil, and instead imports it from Iraq and South America, making it “highly vulnerable...to geopolitical situations that affect crude prices.”

Californians pay about 40 percent more than the rest of the country for gas, the AAA figures show. California requires a low-sulfur gasoline blend that has helped cut toxic air pollution such as ozone and particulates, but also increases the cost of refining.

The state’s cap-and-trade program, designed to fight climate change by limiting total greenhouse gas emissions while allowing polluters to buy credits, also added a fee to gas prices. And there’s something economists call the “mystery gas surcharge,” an unexplained 70 cents-per-gallon premium on California gas.

What San Diego lawmakers’ want to do: Assemblymember David Alvarez introduced a bill he calls the “cleaner, cheaper fuel blend,” that would bump the ethanol content in California gas

from 10 to 15 percent.

Ethanol from corn starch or sugar is added to gasoline, which reduces pollution and cuts the cost to consumers, a fact sheet stated.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved the 15 percent blend, and all other states use it. Alvarez’s bill would make that the standard for California as well, which could save up to 20 cents per gallon. The bill is awaiting votes in the state Senate.

“California drivers cannot wait any longer, and I will continue to explore additional legislative actions that can lower the cost of living,” Alvarez said in an email to Voice of San Diego.

Alvarez was also tapped to co-lead the Assembly Select Committee on the Low Carbon Fuel Standard, which examines the cost of California’s efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Earlier this year Senate Minority Leader Brian Jones announced a suite of actions to tackle gas prices, but none of them have panned out.

The first bill he introduced this year would have voided new “low-carbon fuel standards” rules that the California Air Resources Board adopted in November, arguing that could add 65 cents per gallon to gas prices. He tried to force a floor vote but Democrats rejected it.

He also filed a California Public Records Act Request for internal records on the air board decision, but his spokesperson Nina Fisher said that went nowhere: “We did not receive any records from the PRA and were told everything was confidential.”

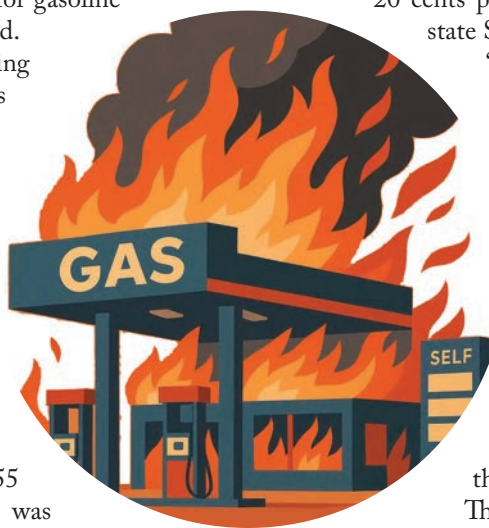
Jones also requested a state audit of the new fuel standards. Fisher said that request is pending.

## Gerrymandering Arms Race Escalates

California lawmakers approved a redistricting measure Thursday designed to temporarily create five Democrat-friendly Congressional districts and counter a Texas map that adds the same number of Republican seats. California’s measure will go to voters in a November special election.

The 48th Congressional District would see major changes under California’s proposed maps. Represented by Republican Rep. Darrell Issa, it’s the sole red-leaning House seat in San Diego, encompassing most of North and East County. Under the new maps it would shift north to include parts of the Coachella Valley, making it slightly favorable to Democrats.

I talked to Assemblymember Chris Ward about the plan. Now that Texas has passed new maps, Ward said California has to





respond. “California can stand on our principles like we live in a vacuum, or we can go toe to toe.”

The new maps heavily favor Democrats, but Ward pointed to nonpartisan issues that have landed in the crosshairs of the battle between California and the Trump administration.

“We’ve had FEMA funding withered, wildfire funding withheld, had rural hospital funding cut, opening the floodgates and messing with our water system, threatening our education system,” Ward said.

If voters approve the maps, Texas and California would cancel each other out. But the fight could escalate to other states. If that happens, Democrats might fall behind. Still, Ward said Democrats will try to wrestle seats away from Republicans in swing districts.

“We would still be at a deficit, but less of a deficit,” Ward said.

Ward and many of his colleagues said they wrestled with the ethics of setting aside the independently drawn maps.

“After weeks of study and debate and philosophy, I very strongly support the proposal coming before us tomorrow,” Ward said. “I had a lot of questions about whether we should be doing this.”

Rep. Scott Peters said on the VOSD podcast that he had reservations about redistricting too but thinks it’s necessary to provide a check on Trump.

“I think it’s a terrible thing to do and we absolutely have to do it,” he said.

He acknowledged that redrawing the seats “is not a slam dunk” for either Texas or California.

“You don’t want to get into something called dummy-mandering where you water it down so much that you lose the seats.”

### Politicians' Privacy Vs. Transparency

A San Diego assemblymember wants to protect political officials and candidates by withholding their personal addresses, phone numbers and emails from the public.

Under current law that information is collected by the Secretary of State and then provided to each county’s Registrar of Voters. A bill by Assemblymember LaShae Sharp-Collins would keep that information private.

The bill wouldn’t affect politicians’ or candidates’ official contact information, or third-party search engines that provide personal information for a fee.

Sharp-Collins said it would protect public officials from violent attacks like the murder of two Minnesota state lawmakers in June. Open government advocates argue it would limit journalists’ ability to confirm that politicians live where they say they do.

Jeff McDonald of the San Diego Union Tribune wrote that it could inhibit investigations like the one that brought down former Rep. Randy “Duke” Cunningham, who went to prison after the UT uncovered corrupt real estate transactions 20 years ago.

Sharp-Collins is negotiating changes to the bill that would let journalists access the information for reporting purposes, while protecting officials against attacks or harassment. The bill is awaiting votes in the state Senate.



Assemblymember David Alvarez at home in Barrio Logan on July 3, 2025. / Ariana Drehsler for Voice of San Diego

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Ronson J. Shamoun, Principal Attorney and CEO of RJS LAW, is an Adjunct Law Professor at the University of San Diego—School of Law where he teaches a Tax Practice and Penalties class. He was recently presented with the following awards:

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- San Diego Magazine- Top Attorney 2016
- San Diego Business Journal- Best of the Bar 2014, 2015 & 2016
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# What to Know About California's Redistricting Ballot Measure

By Joseph Lord | The Epoch Times

On Nov. 4, Californians will go to the polls to vote in a referendum over whether to authorize replacing the state's current congressional map with one designed to favor Democrats—a decision usually made by an independent commission.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill on Aug. 21 to authorize the referendum. Democrats say the measure is meant to “fight fire with fire” after Texas moved forward with redistricting efforts to favor Republicans in the next election.

The California Legislature rushed the bill forward during a special session called by Newsom after Texas Gov. Greg Abbott convened the Texas Legislature to carry out its redistricting efforts.

Critics have condemned the Californian measure as unconstitutional, pointing to a current provision in the state's Constitution that removes districting powers from the Legislature and governor. Here's what to know.

## Bypasses Independent Districting Commission

California's current congressional maps were adopted following the 2020 census. These maps, drawn by the politically neutral California Citizens Redistricting Commission, went into effect in 2022.

In a 2008 referendum, California voters approved a constitutional amendment that moved control of redistricting in the Golden State to the independent commission.

Democrats currently control 43 seats in the U.S. House delegation, and Republicans hold nine.

Under the amendment, the California Legislature and governor are largely written out of the process of redistricting.

To get around that, voters will be asked to give their consent to approve the new maps that will last only for a limited time—dubbed Proposition 50 for the 50 U.S. states.

The maps voters are being asked to approve by Prop 50 would redraw the boundaries for five GOP-controlled districts, moving historically Democratic voters into the districts to increase Democrats' chances of taking the seats.

## How Long Will it Last

The changes to the maps would last through the 2026, 2028, and 2030 election cycles.

At that point, following the 2030 census, control of the process would be returned to the Citizens Redistricting Commission, with new maps going into effect in 2032 and beyond.

The text of the ballot measure cites a goal to “neutralize” efforts by Republicans to redraw congressional maps in their party's favor in Texas.



“It is the intent of the people that California’s temporary maps be designed to neutralize the partisan gerrymandering being threatened by Republican-led states without eroding fair representation for all communities,” it reads.

### Five GOP Seats Threatened

While Republicans are already a minority in the Democrat-dominated state, they could lose as many as five more seats in the high-stakes 2026 midterms if the revised maps in California are approved.

Three California Republicans—U.S. Reps. Kevin Kiley, Doug LaMalfa, and Ken Calvert—are particularly endangered by the map changes, as their districts are on track to be inundated by voters who backed Vice President Kamala Harris in 2024.

Kiley, whose seat is most at risk of being flipped under the redrawn maps, has criticized both California and Texas for their redistricting efforts.

A bill introduced by Kiley would ban mid-decade redistricting entirely.

Two other GOP seats, currently held by U.S. Reps. Darrell Issa and David Valadao, will face tougher reelection bids under the redrawn maps but could still stay under GOP control, according to projections by The Cook Political Report.

### It’s Up to Californian Voters

The 2008 amendment to the state’s constitution has long been popular with voters, and Newsom and other California Democrats will need to campaign for the measure to push Prop 50 over the finish line.

A Politico/Citritin Center/Possibility Lab poll conducted between July 28 and Aug. 12 asked Californians whether they would “support keeping the independent redistricting commission” or “support returning congressional redistricting authority to state legislators.”

It found that 64 percent backed the independent commission, and only 36 percent backed giving authority to state legislators. California Democrats seemed resistant to Newsom’s referendum, with 61 percent still favoring the independent commission. However, when Democratic policy influencers were polled, they were split evenly between the independent commission and state legislators.

Republicans and independent voters backed the independent commission by 66 percent and 72 percent, respectively.

However, the poll didn’t ask voters about the temporary change being proposed under Prop 50.

The text of the ballot measure emphasizes the temporary nature of the changes.

It says that the redrawn maps will “temporarily be used for every congressional election for a term of office commencing on or after the date this subdivision becomes operative and before the certification of new congressional boundary lines drawn by the

Citizens Redistricting Commission.”

It also emphasizes that the Citizens Redistricting Commission “shall continue to adjust the boundary lines” of federal and state-level districts “in 2031, and every 10 years thereafter.”

A more recent poll by UC Berkeley IGS found more favorable signs for Democrats. It found that 48 percent of voters approve of the new map and 32 percent oppose the redistricting effort, with 20 percent undecided.

A Politico/Citron poll found that nationally, 63 percent of Democrats supported California’s redistricting effort, 18 percent supported the independent commission, and 19 percent were undecided.

### Reactions

In both California and nationally, the redistricting efforts have drawn mixed reactions.

Former President Barack Obama expressed support for Newsom’s move.

“I believe that Gov. Newsom’s approach is a responsible approach. He said this is going to be responsible. We’re not going to try to completely maximize it,” he said at an Aug. 19 fundraiser on Martha’s Vineyard in Massachusetts.

“We’re only going to do it if and when Texas and/or other Republican states begin to pull these maneuvers. Otherwise, this doesn’t go into effect.”

In an interview with California Capitol journalist Eytan Wallace, state Assemblyman Carl DeMaio, a Republican from San Diego, described the push as a “corrupt, illegitimate, and illegal effort by politicians to remove citizens from [the process of] drawing the lines and [give] the power back to politicians.”

DeMaio also criticized the Republicans’ bid to increase their hold on the Texas House delegation. “Gerrymandering is wrong no matter who’s doing it, whether it’s done by a red state or a blue state,” he said.

“We want the citizens to be able to draw the lines, not the politicians.”

The National Republican Congressional Committee, the House GOP’s main campaign arm, also accused Newsom of violating the California Constitution.

“Newsom’s made it clear: He’ll shred California’s Constitution and trample over democracy—running a cynical, self-serving playbook where Californians are an afterthought and power is the only priority,” Christian Martinez, a spokesperson for the group, said in a statement.

Republished with permission from The Epoch Times. Jackson Richman contributed to this report.



Jeff Elsasser, 64, at Balboa Park on March 24, 2025. Elsasser has been homeless since July 2024. He stays nearby and goes to the park almost every day. / Ariana Drehsler for Voice of San Diego

# Can We Keep People from Falling into Homelessness?

By Lisa Halverstadt | Voice of San Diego

San Diego's homelessness crisis has spiked over the past decade as hundreds of San Diegans lose their homes each month. The region could step up preventive measures over the next two decades and significantly reduce that suffering.

What the region likely can't do: fully stem the tide of people falling into homelessness without drastic changes to the housing market and federal policies outside the bounds of local control.

The past several years, the city and county of San Diego have ramped up programs that offer subsidies to keep people from losing their homes, collectively serving hundreds of seniors and families each year.

These programs, for example, might pay landlords \$500 a month to keep a vulnerable tenant in their rental and also support that resident with case management and referrals to other programs.

In the process, officials and researchers have gotten a better handle on how prevention programs work and what they cost. Yet, for most of the last three years, the number of newly homeless San Diegans has eclipsed the number of newly housed ones.

To change that trend and visibly reduce homelessness, San Diego would need to keep hundreds more people from falling into homelessness each year. Experts agree that San Diego could do

that — with more money and analysis that helps the region target that money to those most in need.

The Housing Commission projects that it would cost about \$12.8 million a year to help city residents who might otherwise become homeless for the first time avoid that outcome. This total includes both financial support and services.

The team behind the city's homelessness plan, which was updated in 2023, estimated at the time that the city could help a third of newly homeless people avoid homelessness with prevention, which translated to about 1,425 people and 60 families.

In the past couple years, public support for prevention programs — including among politicians and philanthropists — has spiked.

The funding for those programs, however, hasn't kept up.

The city's existing homelessness prevention programs served 740 people and families last year, far shy of what was recommended in the city's homelessness plan.

"I think the political will is very high, but the financial resources aren't there yet," Housing Commission Senior Vice President Casey Snell said.

Most traditional government funding for homelessness pro-



grams don't support prevention ones due to longstanding policies so city and county leaders have looked to philanthropists to help.

The county is doing a deep dive into the results of a county program serving seniors on the brink of homelessness with an eye toward increasing political will and philanthropic support.

The program focused on low-income seniors provides \$500 a month in rental assistance for 18 months and the county estimates it would cost about \$3 million annually to continue.

Spencer Katz, a spokesperson for County Board Chair Terra Lawson-Remer, said county officials are studying how its 382 participants fared compared with a random group of applicants who didn't get subsidies. They are especially focused on whether those who got aid maintained stable housing at higher rate the year after they stopped receiving them.

Katz said Lawson-Remer pushed the study with the hope the results will build support to expand the program. After all, he said, about 2,400 households expressed interest in the program – far more than the 382 who got into it.

"The theory of change here is that we have to be able to demonstrate to potential funders and taxpayers that these are effective solutions," Katz said.

The results could also guide potential adjustments to the program.

Regional Task Force on Homelessness CEO Tamera Kohler, whose organization's monthly reports have highlighted the monthly flow of San Diegans into homeless services, thinks technological advances now and over the next 20 years could supercharge prevention efforts.

A key challenge with existing prevention programs is that it can be difficult to predict who is most in need. Some who seek prevention funds might stabilize on their own while others in dire need might never tap in.

Liz Drapa of the Corporation for Supportive Housing, who worked on the city's homelessness plan, said that's just one dynamic that makes prevention – and meeting the need for it – especially tricky.

"How do you target it? How much actually helps someone get back to a stable landing?" Drapa wrote in an email. "How flexible can the prevention be and what are the market forces that impact how much you need — increasing rents, lack of access to services, health care access, etcetera?"

Drapa argued that resolving these questions and right-sizing prevention and diversion services that help people avoid the homeless service system can help ensure people don't get stuck waiting for housing in shelters and allow regions to better calibrate the number of shelter beds they provide.

More communities are trying to better target and tailor their

resources for all of those reasons.

For example, the California Policy Lab has teamed with Los Angeles County on predictive modeling to identify Angelenos most at risk of homelessness. This approach helps that county's prevention team target its services to people who aren't linked with homeless services and prioritize who is most in need.

Kohler argued that artificial intelligence could supercharge predictive modeling efforts like the Los Angeles one to make prevention programs in San Diego more effective – and more likely to reach people who would otherwise fall through the cracks and into homelessness.

She noted a 2019 2-1-1 San Diego report that showed why more targeted assistance can be important. The study found that just over a quarter of people who reached out to 2-1-1 reporting housing instability were homeless four months later – and that certain characteristics including unemployment and a high school education were correlated with an increased likelihood of homelessness.

Kohler said the San Diego region could "aggressively use AI" to explore these and other dynamics that increase a person's likelihood of homelessness. Doing so could help San Diego cut through bias and data-sharing concerns that have long plagued the service system.

"I do believe that reducing the trauma of homelessness by focusing on prevention in a targeted way could have substantial impact," Kohler said. "We just have not had the tools to know what we're targeting."

But Kohler emphasized that prevention programs likely can't address the root of the state's homelessness crisis – even with 20 years of innovations.

"Our greatest prevention is having more housing stock and will always be," Kohler said.

Dr. Margot Kushel of UC San Francisco, who led a groundbreaking survey of California's homeless population, agreed.

Kushel said dramatically attacking the problem would mean dramatically reducing the housing cost burdens and easing access to housing subsidies and social services that lessen the burden on low-income Californians.

"A program is really important but scale is actually decreasing rental prices at the low end so people aren't on the edge all the time," Kushel said.

Aug. 21 correction: An earlier version of this post misstated the scope of the county's study of its prevention program. The county is assessing how all its 382 prevention program participants fared and comparing their experience with a control group of people who applied but didn't get the subsidy.



Illustration by Sean O'Brien  
for Voice of San Diego

# I'm watching Trump unite Europe while the media pretends it's falling apart

By Mark Penn | Fox News

The headlines were all over the news sites. Trump to push for concessions to the Russians. President Donald Trump got nothing from the Alaska Summit. Trump handing over a win to Putin. European leaders are coming to woo Trump. One headline after another dissing the president and his attempt to bring world powers together for peace in Ukraine. News analysts managed to find a negative angle to every single aspect of the attempted negotiations.

The reality is obviously different, and the headlines would have been different with just about any other president. Imagine if Nobel Peace Prize-winning President Barack Obama had pulled off meetings with all the combatants directly and in record time. The headlines would have been fawning in admiration, calling for a second Nobel Prize. But that's not what happened. In fact, President Obama sat idly by while Russia rolled into Crimea in March 2014 – the real beginning of the problem. The Russian reset never happened. The red lines were crossed with impunity as the American deterrence withered.

As President Trump himself has said, these efforts may fail if Putin is unwilling to end the war, but the effort being undertaken at the highest levels is unprecedented. President Joe Biden could barely attend the G7 meetings and was caught wandering off into space during photo opportunities.

The previous president was not capable of the kind of top-to-top diplomacy needed to resolve complex world situations, and the U.S. was at serious risk because of that lapse and the reliance on aides instead. The real danger of the cover-up of the last president's health was not in relation to domestic policy but the way it left the U.S. incapacitated when it came to foreign affairs.

Compare that to the country today. We see Trump taking meetings and initiating discussions that usually take months and years to set up. He's pulled it off in days.

Diplomacy is about getting people to do things they do not want to do without shooting them. And in that vein, Trump is clearly practicing the fine art of diplomacy, and the press and the

country should be rooting for his success, not trying to pick apart everything he does.

European leaders dropped whatever they were doing to show up at the White House on Monday to have the kind of allied meeting we have not seen, ever. And this is with all the talk that Trump had damaged the European alliance.

Donald Trump meets with European leaders at the White House

Yet the president has pulled off both a trade deal and pan-European negotiations in just a few months. When he got to a certain point, he simply called Putin on the phone in a scene that

might have been out of "Dr. Strangelove." Direct conversation, world leader to world leader.

Trump may or may not be successful here but he has all parties talking about how they could end a war that has been at a standstill for years – one that has cost over a million lives and counting. Rather than just throw money at the problem as was done by the last administration, Trump has put his presidency and America behind finding a solution outside the battlefield.

This is in the finest tradition of what America can and

should do as the leader of the free world. America First should never mean allowing the world to spin out of control and become engulfed in endless conflicts.

I always say that diplomacy is about getting people to do things they do not want to do without shooting them. And in that vein, Trump is clearly practicing the fine art of diplomacy, and the press and the country should be rooting for his success, not trying to pick apart everything he does.

This is what is keeping our country more divided than it can or should be – when one side does something that is clearly good, like trying to solve the world's biggest war, the headlines should reflect that effort, regardless of the party.





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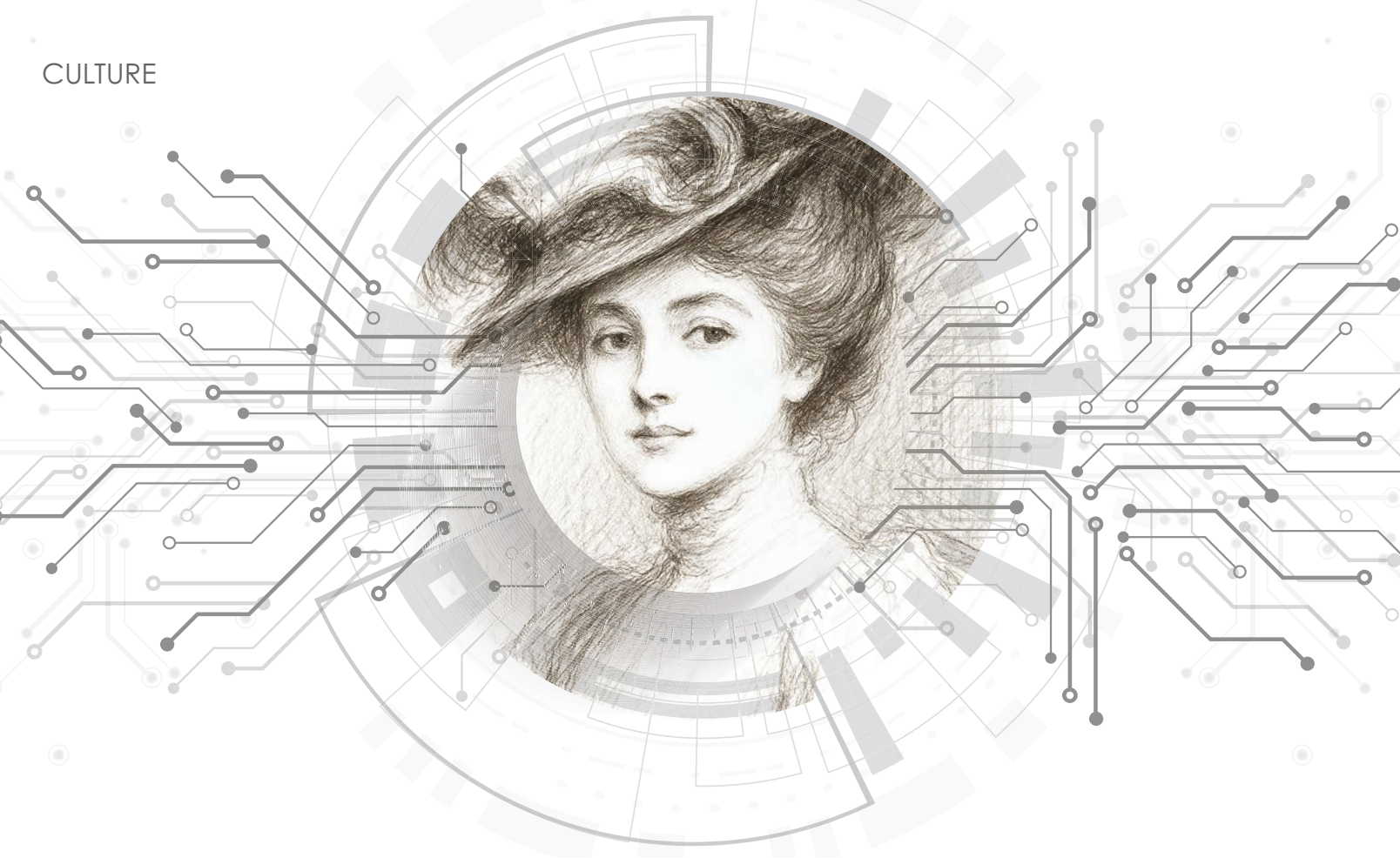


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# OUR OWN GILDED AGE

By Niall Ferguson | The Free Press

**H**istory never repeats itself, but the kaleidoscopic combinations of the pictured present often seem to be constructed out of the broken fragments of antique legends.”The quotation, often given wrongly as “History never repeats itself, but it rhymes,” comes from chapter 47 of *The Gilded Age* by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner. Published in 1873, this seldom-read novel gave its name to an epoch of American history. The current popularity of HBO’s television series of the same title prompts the question: Are we living in a new Gilded Age?

As columnist Peggy Noonan noted last week in *The Wall Street Journal*, HBO’s series has struck a chord. It is not just that it captures “the clang, clash, and fire of industrial America being born and high society being invented.” It’s that it offers a vision of an American elite apparently free of our modern neuroses.

Rather than “the freakish glamour of the Met Gala,” Noonan observed, the show’s creator, Julian Fellowes, gives viewers a costume parade that is “secure in the values it asserts, confident in its definitions.” The talented cast—Christine Baranski as the snobbish Agnes van Rhijn, Carrie Coon as the scheming Bertha Russell—make the best of scripts that sometimes sound like episodes of *Downton Abbey* translated into American English by

ChatGPT.

What Noonan overlooked, though, was that *The Gilded Age* also serves as a mirror in which we can recognize many aspects of our own time. That is of course Fellowes’ intention, which is why the series is riddled with anachronisms—especially in its treatment of racial issues. I would love to believe in the friendship between the white central character, Marian Brook (Louisa Jacobson) and the black would-be writer Peggy Scott (Denée Benton), but it’s a heavy lift.

Which is why, if you’re really interested in what happens to a society as it goes through a wild economic transformation comparable with ours today, it’s more illuminating to read Twain and Warner than to watch HBO’s period drama.

Central to the plot of the novel is speculation in real estate. Si Hawkins, head of a dirt-poor family in the American South, dreams that industrialization will make the 75,000 acres of undeveloped land in East Tennessee he owns worth a thousand dollars an acre. “Steamboats,” he assures his wife, “are going to make a revolution in this world’s affairs that will make men dizzy to contemplate.” In search of any opportunity other than gainful employment, Hawkins and his family sail up the Mississippi to Missouri to join the irrepressibly entrepreneurial and regularly



bankrupt “Colonel” Beriah Sellers, an American Micawber.

Hawkins and Sellers are not wrong that steamships, railroads, and coal mines will transform places like East Tennessee in the years to come. They are just wrong in their timing, as the prosperity of the Industrial Age took several decades to spread across the continent. It was especially slow to reach former Confederate states such as Tennessee.

So the Hawkins family is forced to look elsewhere for their fortune.

Impressed by a visit from Senator Abner Dilworthy, two of Si’s children—his adopted daughter, the beautiful Laura, and her older brother Washington—travel to the capital city of the same name in the belief that they can salvage the family’s fortunes through politics. With Dilworthy’s help, Laura enters Washington society and becomes a skilled coquette and political operator. She and Dilworthy devise a bill to sell the Tennessee land to the government for the foundation of a university for emancipated slaves (“the Knobs Industrial University. . . open to all persons without distinction of sex, color, or religion”).

Twain’s portrayal of Washington, D.C., at the height of its postbellum venality resonates. Modern readers will also appreciate Twain’s ironic explanation of the way the machine politics of the era worked.

Best of all is the novel’s sensational climax. Laura murders her former husband—a bigamous Confederate officer—but is found not guilty of the crime on the grounds of temporary insanity. Dilworthy is found guilty of buying votes, so the Knobs University bill is thrown out, dashing the Hawkins family’s hopes. Washington Hawkins finally gives up ownership of the still-unimproved land parcel when he cannot afford to pay \$180 in taxes.

In short, Twain and Warner’s *Gilded Age* is a very modern tale of get-rich-quick scams on the frontier and nefarious goings-on in the swamp. If it were rewritten today, Washington and Laura Hawkins would be at the Executive Branch club, pitching a Gildeduck meme coin and coalpowered data centers for DrillAI.

It’s become a cliché to point out that, in our time, inequality, measured by wealth and income, has come close to matching that of the Gilded Age. This is in fact untrue, unless one ignores the redistributive effects of taxes and transfers that certainly did not exist in the late 19th century.

What is true is that, compared with the period from the Great Depression of the 1930s until the Great Inflation of the 1970s, wealth and income are more unequally distributed today—

**It’s become a cliché to point out that, in our time, inequality, measured by wealth and income, has come close to matching that of the Gilded Age. This is in fact untrue, unless one ignores the redistributive effects of taxes and transfers that certainly did not exist in the late 19th century.**

though even this should not be overstated. The best estimates of the share of after-tax income of the top 1 percent of earners suggest that it was about the same in 2019 (8.8 percent) as it was in 1988. If this is a Gilded Age, it has been going strong for nearly 40 years.

Still, ultrahigh net worth individuals and their families are certainly able to match the conspicuous consumption of their Gilded Age predecessors and with a great deal more comfort and convenience, not to mention much better health.

I recently attended a Gilded Age-themed lunch in a palatial private residence, at which the guest of honor was one of the stars of the television series. To round off a sumptuous buffet, Baked Alaska was served—a dish said to have been invented at Delmonico’s in New York to mark the acquisition of Alaska by the United States in 1867. The palace was notable for its owner’s magnificent collection of ancien régime art and furnishings, though the principal topic of conversation was the court of King Donald, not King Louis.

Jeff Bezos’s Venetian wedding in June was another illustration of the point. As in the fin de siècle era, American plutocrats crave Europe’s architecture and art—if only as backdrops for their parties.

Another obvious parallel is the way large-scale migration to the United States has depressed wages at the lower end of the income scale, while boosting corporate profitability. In the Gilded Age, nativists fretted about the huge influx of Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants from Europe’s impoverished periphery. In 1882, Congress passed an act essentially ending migration from China.

Strikingly, the foreign-born share of the U.S. population is now higher than it was at its previous peak in the 1890s. Last year it was 15.6 percent; back in 1890 it was 14.8 percent.

Now as then, the rest of the world marvels at American economic exceptionalism. Economic growth in the last two decades has been significantly more impressive here than in other developed countries, including Germany and Japan, once seen as challengers. Now as then, U.S. growth is driven partly by a technological leap forward that involves eye-popping capital expenditure. In the late 19th century, it was railroads, heavy industry, and electrification. Today, comparable (although not quite as high) shares of GDP are being invested in data centers to satisfy the immense appetite of artificial intelligence models for electricity.

In our time, U.S. politics is in many ways reverting to late

19th-century patterns. The key policy issues of the Gilded Age were: tariffs, immigration restriction, monetary policy (gold vs. bimetallism), trusts, and monopolies. Those issues have returned to the fore since Donald Trump's emergence as a national political figure 10 years ago. It was revealing that last year Trump cited William McKinley—who served as president from 1897 until 1901—as a role model.

At the same time, we have seen a resurgence of machine politics at the state and local level. Far more than was true in the mid-20th century, when voters often split their votes between parties and landslides were quite regular, today, as in the late 19th century, most counties in most states are either red or blue.

Political corruption thrived in the Gilded Age as it does today, in the sense that tariff (or export control) regimes always encourage special interests to seek privileged treatment through access to trade policymakers. Nothing illustrates this better than the way the chief executives of major corporations have been able to exert influence over trade policy to the benefit of their companies. A prime example is the recent deal Trump struck with Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, whereby the U.S. Commerce

Department eased restrictions on the exports of Nvidia's H20 microchips to China after Huang agreed to pay a share of the proceeds to the Treasury.

During the Gilded Age, the New York Democratic political machine siphoned off vast sums from the city and state budgets. Today, California has a budget of \$298 billion but a deficit of \$47 billion in large part because the state's vast wealth—much of it created in Silicon Valley—is siphoned off by a similar Democratic political machine, the Tammany Hall of the teachers unions.

The major reactions to Gilded Age politics were agrarian populism (through the Populist Party) and municipal progressivism—movements that benefited from the role of muckraking journalists in exposing corruption. Also characteristic of the Gilded Age was a trend toward political extremism and political violence. McKinley was himself assassinated by Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist. We have our own versions of these political reactions today. The MAGA movement embodies a significant number of populist leitmotifs. The progressive or “woke” left can be considered the equivalents of the more radical progressives and socialists of the past. And in Luigi Mangione, we have a Leon Czolgosz for our times.

At the same time, the late 1890s saw a surge of geopolitical self-confidence in the United States, illustrated by the territorial acquisitions that followed the Spanish-American War and President Theodore Roosevelt's peacemaking between Russia and Japan in 1905. Trump has supplied his own version of this assertiveness with his threats to make Canada the 51st state, to acquire Greenland, and to reclaim U.S. ownership of the Panama Canal,

as well as his hunger to win the Nobel Peace Prize, as Roosevelt did in 1906.

But there the resemblances to the Gilded Age end. It hardly needs stating that the rights of women and racial minorities were drastically curtailed in the 1890s by the standards of the 2020s. It is also true that social norms are far looser today than they were then. We tolerate all kinds of perverse behavior and petty crime. Future historians will struggle to make sense of the excesses of the transgender mania, which culminated in the mutilation of thousands of American children.

The original Gilded Age had “brute but recognizable rules,” in Noonan's words. “Make a whole pot of money, be generous with it to gain notice but enact modesty when thanked, learn to imitate personal dignity and a little refinement, and you're in. . . . Now it's more just the money, no one has to bow to some phony old

value system, and the money spurts in all directions, creating a themeless chaos, and tech billionaires in sweatshirts give us moral lectures from Jeffrey Epstein's plane.”

Behind such degeneration in elite behavior lies the recent decline of religious belief and observance.

Other differences suggest themselves. The country is

much more urban than it was then. Because of falling fertility and lengthening lifespans, ours is a much more elderly society, whereas theirs was youthful. In 1890, 56 percent of the U.S. population was under 25. Today that share is 31 percent. The share of those 65 and older has more than quadrupled from 3.9 percent to 17 percent.

The networked age has also created an entirely new social order that is globally interconnected as never before. More importantly, the network

structure of our era is different. The Gilded Age was an era of hub-and-spoke connections, typified by the railroads. The global economy today is a far more complex and shape-shifting system, in some respects more distributed, in others more centralized.

Our political order is also radically different. The federal government of the Gilded Age was trivially small. As recently as 1929, federal net outlays were less than 3 percent of GDP, compared with 23 percent last year. There was scarcely any federal debt—less than 20 percent of GDP in the 1880s, falling below 10 percent from 1889 until 1917.

In our time, power over policy has shifted away from Congress to the “administrative state” and the White House—a shift exemplified by Trump's assertion that he has the right to determine tariffs without reference to the legislature, a remarkable violation of the Constitution. (It remains to be seen if the Supreme Court will uphold the president's use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act as the basis for his reciprocal tariffs.) Other examples include the Trump administration's claims that it has

## As in the *fin de siècle* era, American plutocrats crave Europe's architecture and art—if only as backdrops for their parties.



the right to impound funds appropriated by Congress; to extend the deadline for an authorized TikTok sale against the express will of the legislature; and to end birthright citizenship.

Above all, the geopolitical situation of the country has altered beyond all recognition. The United States is no longer a rising power, as it was in the decades after Twain's Gilded Age. It has been the incumbent superpower for 80 years. By contrast, China in the Gilded Age was miserably poor and susceptible to foreign interference. No longer. Now it is America's economic and technological equal, with a chip on its shoulder about a "century of humiliation." Today, it is Americans who are addicted, often lethally, to opioids—a national epidemic that played a vital role in mobilizing middle America behind Trump.

The ghastly possibility cannot be ruled out that today is truly the Gilded Age of Xi Jinping's China—for what other country today is more "secure in the values it asserts, confident in its definitions," and what other region has undergone as rapid an industrial and technological transformation as China after Mao's death? Not the United States, and certainly not Europe. An alternative view is that the United States today is in some respects more like Qing (or perhaps Ottoman) America, a fiscally overstretched system run by a decadent emperor and an ossified bureaucracy, the vulnerabilities of which cannot be cured by attempts at reform, and await only a war (or civil war) to be calamitously exposed.

It is certainly too early to say that the Trump administration will succeed in its efforts to reduce the power of the "deep state." DOGE is not quite dead, but Elon Musk's postelection dream that he could bring Javier Milei's chain saw to Washington proved to be a delusion. Much therefore depends on how much China's leaders are willing to risk in challenging American primacy in the Indo-Pacific region at a time when the reforms of Trump 2.0 are still a work in progress.

It is the elite of the Chinese Communist Party who, in the past 20 years, have enabled their country to overtake the United States as a manufacturing superpower. They are the ones who have been arming China to the teeth in every domain, including space. Like that of Gilded Age America, China's economic rise has been

based partly on real estate development. And the financial problems that have come in the wake of a property bubble faintly echo those of the 1870s and 1890s, even if China's state-run banking system would never allow the kind of financial crisis that struck the United States in 1873 and 1893.

Also familiar to the economic historian is the cutthroat competition that characterizes China's most dynamic manufacturing sectors. What we cannot easily tell is whether these economic pains increase or reduce Xi Jinping's willingness to gamble on confrontation with the United States.

So yes, ours is in some respects a Gilded Age. A period of remarkable economic dynamism, the late 19th century in the United States was characterized by great inequality, mass mobility, unprecedented investment and innovation, crooked politics, ideological polarization, and imperial aspiration. We see similar trends today. Yet the United States today is an aging empire, not a rising power. Its social fabric is torn. Its faiths are weak. Urban, elderly, distracted by a febrile "news" cycle, and addicted to a vile diet of processed foods and pharmaceuticals, American society is decadent by the standards of our great-grandparents. A vast and growing public debt is only the most obvious expression of the incoherent and incontinent desires of the electorate and the feebleness of the legislature. The constitutional order may well be decaying.

Our adversaries observe all this and wonder if the project to Make America Great Again will one day be filed alongside the reforms of the Qing or Ottoman empires as another case of a moribund system seeking to save itself with homeopathic remedies. Twain's "kaleidoscopic combinations of the pictured present" are indeed "constructed out of the broken fragments of antique legends." The challenge is to know which antique legend our era most closely resembles.

Is it a Gilded Age? Or, like some Oriental eunuch, a Gelded one?

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# How Americans View Journalists in the Digital Age

By Kirsten Eddy | Pew Research

Americans largely value journalists' role in society but see their influence declining - and often differ over who fits the label



As Americans navigate an often-overwhelming stream of news online – some of it coming from nontraditional news providers – what it means to be a journalist has become increasingly open to interpretation.

That is apparent in several ways in a new Pew Research Center study. Who Americans see as a “journalist” depends on both the individual news provider and the news consumer, similar to the variety of ways people define “news.”

There is a lack of consensus – and perhaps some uncertainty – about whether someone who primarily compiles other people’s reporting or offers opinions on current events is a journalist, according to a new Center survey. Americans are also split over whether people who share news in “new media” spaces like newsletters, podcasts and social media are journalists.

In some ways, Americans’ ideas about journalists are still tied to what the news industry looked like in the 20th century. When asked who comes to mind when they think of a journalist, many everyday Americans who participated in our focus groups said they think of traditional TV newscasters like Walter Cronkite and Tom Brokaw, modern anchors like Lester Holt and Anderson Cooper, and even fictional characters like Clark Kent.

Most Americans say journalists are at least somewhat important to the well-being of society. At the same time, many are critical of journalists’ job performance and say they are declining in

influence, an opinion that follows years of financial and technological turmoil in the news industry. And many views toward journalists continue to be sharply divided by political party, with Republicans taking a more skeptical view of the profession than Democrats.

As part of our broader study of how Americans get news and information nowadays, we wanted to know what people think about the role of journalists in the digital age – including what makes someone a journalist, what Americans think is important for journalists to do in their daily work, and what backgrounds and attributes people are looking for in their news providers broadly (whether they are journalists or not). So earlier this year, we posed these questions in a survey of more than 9,000 Americans and in online focus groups with 45 U.S. adults.

## Americans want honesty, accuracy and topical knowledge from their news providers

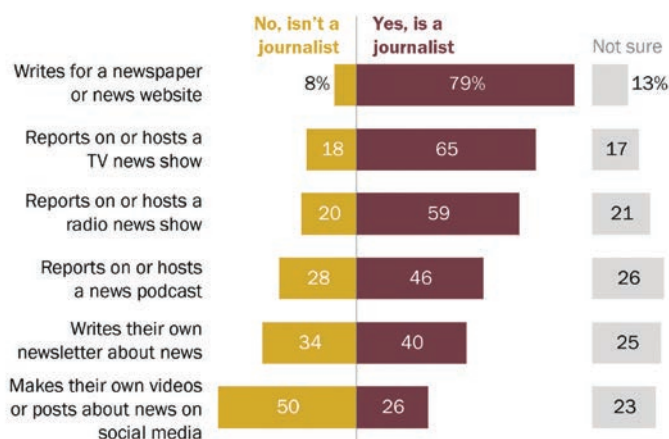
What do people want their news providers to be like, regardless of whether they are journalists? Honesty, intelligence and authenticity are the top three traits in our survey that respondents say are important for the people they get news from to display in their work.

However, as our focus group discussions illustrate, people hold differing views of what the term “authenticity” means when it



## Americans are most likely to consider newspaper writers, TV and radio reporters to be journalists

% of U.S. adults who consider someone who does each of the following to be a journalist

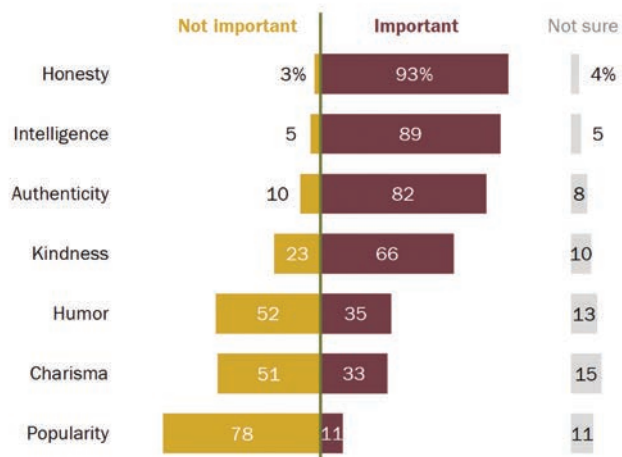


Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 14-20, 2025.  
"How Americans View Journalists in the Digital Age"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Americans value honesty, intelligence, authenticity in the people they get news from – but not popularity

% of U.S. adults who say it is \_\_\_ that the people they get news from display each of these personal traits in their work



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 14-20, 2025.  
"How Americans View Journalists in the Digital Age"

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comes to news providers – and some aren't entirely sure.

Americans also care more that someone they get news from has deep knowledge of the topics they cover than whether they are employed by a news organization or have a university degree in journalism.

Most Americans agree that the people they get news from should definitely report news accurately (84%) and correct false information from public figures (64%) in their daily work. But there is less consensus around several other job functions – and relatively few say their news providers should express personal opinions about current events.

### Who counts as a journalist?

Most Americans (79%) agree that someone who writes for a newspaper or news website is a journalist – higher than the share who say the same about someone who reports on TV (65%), radio (59%) or any other medium.

There is less consensus about whether people who work in newer media are journalists. Fewer than half of U.S. adults say someone who hosts a news podcast (46%), writes their own newsletter about news (40%) or posts about news on social media (26%) is a journalist. In each of these cases, roughly a quarter of Americans say they aren't sure whether these people are journalists.

This pattern aligns somewhat with how long each format has been around: Newspapers were associated with journalism for centuries before any of the more modern media existed.

Young adults are far more likely than older adults to view "new media" news providers as journalists – but are also less likely than their elders to care whether the news they get comes from people

they think are journalists.

As one focus group participant in her 20s said, "I feel like anyone can do it, in a way. There's a lot of people out there just starting their own channels taking a little bit of the importance of somebody who maybe went to school to do that .... It can make it feel like a journalist isn't as important. Although, they are the ones that are really skilled in that job."

### Many Americans think journalists are losing influence in society

A majority of Americans (59%) say journalists are extremely or very important to the well-being of society. An additional 31% say journalists are somewhat important, while just 9% say they are not too or not at all important.

But about half of U.S. adults (49%) say journalists are losing influence in society, compared with 15% who say they are gaining influence. And fewer than half (45%) say they have a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in journalists to act in the best interests of the public.

As one focus group participant in his 30s said, "It's a hit or miss, I guess. There are a handful of journalists, the ones that we say we trust, that I think are doing the right thing, following what the code of journalism should be. But the others in today's world are all about clicks, eyeballs, money, things like that, and they don't necessarily mind tweaking the truth to suit their audience or their advertisers."

While majorities of the public describe most journalists as intelligent (63%) and well-intentioned (58%), more than half also say most journalists are biased (58%).

“There are a handful of journalists, the ones that we say we trust, that I think are doing the right thing, following what the code of journalism should be. But the others in today’s world are all about clicks, eyeballs, money, things like that, and they don’t necessarily mind tweaking the truth to suit their audience or their advertisers.”

Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are far less likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners to express confidence in journalists to act in the public’s best interests and to describe them in positive terms. And Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to say negative words like “elitist” and “dishonest” describe most journalists well.

### Americans hold mixed views on journalists as community advocates

Americans are split over whether it’s acceptable for journalists to advocate for the communities they cover, but more than half agree that journalists publicly expressing their political or religious views is unacceptable when they report on an issue or event.

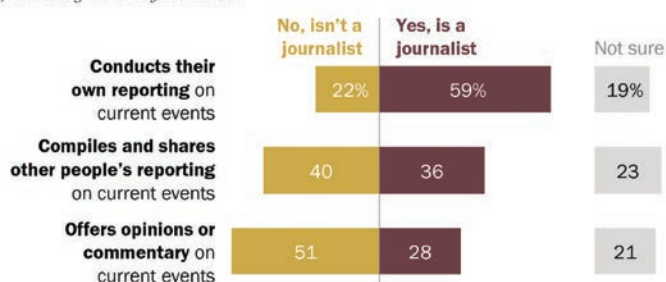
Those who are open to advocacy by journalists described it in focus groups as serving some communities’ needs or speaking for those who don’t have power.

But as one participant in his 30s said, “If you’re a journalist, let’s stick to journalism. And if you want to be an influencer or a social change warrior or whatever, just stick to that.”

At the same time, more than half of U.S. adults (56%) say journalists are largely unable to separate their personal views from what they report on. Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to express this view.

### Mixed views about whether people who produce various types of news content are journalists

% of U.S. adults who consider someone who **primarily** does each of the following to be a journalist

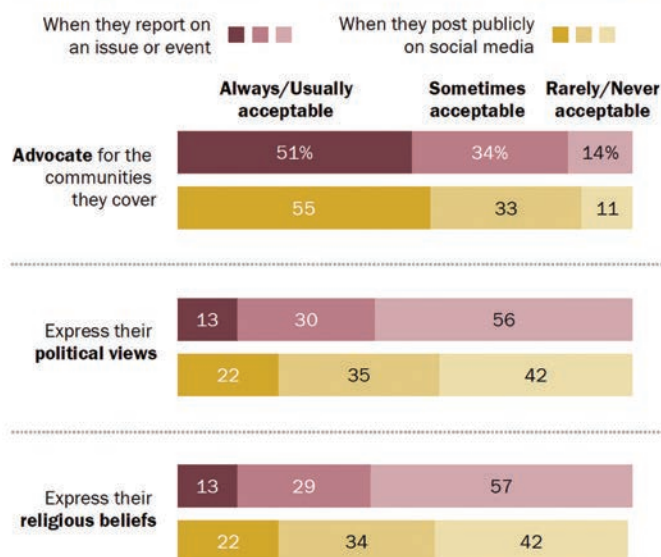


Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 14-20, 2025.  
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### About half of Americans say it’s OK for journalists to advocate for communities, but there is less support for journalists expressing their political or religious views

% of U.S. adults who say it is \_\_\_ for journalists to do each of the following ...



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 14-20, 2025.  
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# Nice Economy – If You Can Keep It

By Jim Hinch | Voice of San Diego



Illustration by Sean O'Brien for Voice of San Diego

San Diego's economy is the size of some small countries. But it's a country under threat.

On paper, San Diego County is a picture of prosperity. If the county were its own nation, its \$315 billion gross domestic product would rank among the world's 50 largest economies.

Yet, across the region, businesses are putting on the brakes and worried about the future.

The reason? New federal trade and immigration policies threaten to choke off what once seemed like San Diego's unique competitive advantage: Its intertwined economic relationship with its southern neighbor, Mexico.

Pillars of the local economy, including biotech companies, medical device manufacturers, the port, auto dealers and warehouse and shipping companies, all depend on the \$80 billion worth of goods that pass back and forth across the San Diego region's border with Mexico each year, said Alan Gin, a University of San Diego economist who studies the cross-border economy.

Just as crucially, many companies, including some of the region's most advanced research and design hubs, could not function without easy access to the high-tech manufacturing centers across the border in Tijuana.

And many San Diego businesses rely on the roughly 60,000 workers – some of them American citizens – who live in Mexico but cross the border each day to work or attend school in the United States.

The symbiotic relationship between San Diego and its southern neighbor has produced what Gin and other researchers describe as a sprawling economic "mega-region" whose seven million residents together produce \$350 billion in economic output per year.

It's a mega-region at a sudden and unexpected crossroads.

President Donald Trump's America-first immigration crack-downs and punishingly high tariffs strike at the heart of San Diego's unique economic relationship with Mexico.

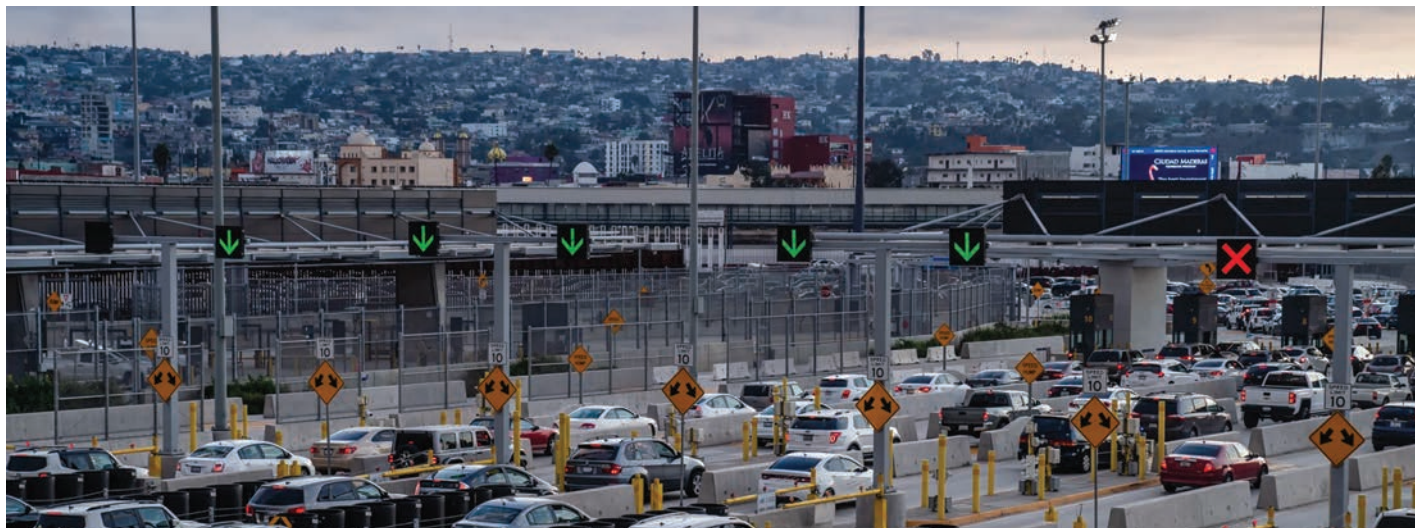
As border crossings slow and shipping costs rise, business leaders increasingly wonder whether San Diego can maintain its binational advantage in an era of economic nationalism.

Looking ahead to San Diego's next two decades, regional leaders will have to decide whether to wait and hope the current America-first trend fades – or begin restructuring local businesses and schools to forge a new economy that preserves what it can of its binational ties while bringing back to the United States much of the work currently outsourced to Mexico.

Federal policy "puts a target on the San Diego economy's back," said Gin "There would be some severe damage if that trade relationship [with Mexico] was compromised...[The current factory system] has built up over years in Mexico and it would take a long time to replicate that in San Diego...We're doing things we haven't done before."

A single tiny component illustrates just how dependent on





Dozens of drivers in San Ysidro wait to enter Tijuana on Oct. 26, 2023. / Photo by Ariana Drehsler

Mexico the San Diego economy is.

Five years ago, when then-President Trump closed the U.S.-Mexico border to stop the spread of Covid-19, medical device manufacturers immediately alerted U.S. authorities to a problem, said Kenia Zamarripa, vice president of international and public affairs for the San Diego Chamber of Commerce.

“A bunch of businesses shut down, and we learned [there’s] this little metal piece [made] in Tijuana that’s a key component in respirators or defibrillators,” Zamarripa said.

“We had to bring together business organizations and discuss this... We re-opened 80 percent of these [cross-border] businesses within a week. We said [to federal authorities], we need you to open these businesses. We need these businesses to continue operating.”

Zamarripa cited another, more readily visible, example of the mega-region’s intertwined economy.

“People can see [Toyota] Tacomas on the freeway,” she said. “That product crossed the border five or six times [during assembly]. Assembly lines on the Mexico side [build the car] and San Diego adds the software telling the car what to do. Then it goes back to the assembly line and eventually we have a full Tacoma.”

Zamarripa said companies send products back and forth across the border like that because even highly skilled workers in Mexico earn a fraction of what their American counterparts are paid. And, unlike in Mexico, she said, San Diego’s educational system simply is not designed to train workers for high-tech factory jobs.

“Automobiles and medical devices are [just] two [of the] things we assemble together,” Zamarripa said. “A lot of people don’t understand that.”

Business leaders do. And they are not happy with the current federal threat to the economic system they have spent decades putting together.

“A lot of companies are in a holding pattern,” said Jim O’Callaghan, president and CEO of the South County Economic Development Council, which advises and supports businesses in

San Diego County’s border-adjacent southern half. “It’s difficult to plan when you don’t know what you’re doing.”

This week, San Diego recorded the nation’s highest rate of inflation – 4 percent, compared to 2.7 percent in the United States as a whole.

Gin said labor shortages caused in part by an immigration slowdown, along with the increased cost of moving goods across the U.S.-Mexico border, likely played a role in rising prices.

David Wick, whose National Enterprises logistics company owns and operates a network of warehouses and storage yards

## COMING NEXT ISSUE: SAN DIEGO'S TOP MARKETING EXECUTIVES 2025







People wait in a long line border crossing to enter the United States from Tijuana on Dec. 21, 2022. / Photo by Ariana Drehsler

just aren't there to occupy those 100,000-square-foot spaces."

Gin and other business experts interviewed for this story all agreed that San Diego's economy has structured itself so thoroughly around its relationship with Mexico, it would take years to unwind the relationship and reestablish the county's manufacturing capacity.

"I don't think there's the infrastructure to create that educational pipeline [to train skilled factory workers]," Gin said. "To develop that would take a long time, many years. So, it's tough for businesses to make that commitment given that the policy could change with the administration."

Zamarripa said Mexico has invested heavily in technical skills training in recent years, to the point that universities in Baja California now produce more engineering graduates each year than their San Diego counterparts.

"They are investing in the workforce development part and gaining ground on that," Zamarripa said. "We [in the U.S.] have been training our younger generations to go into STEM and highly specialized fields and get their MBAs. But we haven't been promoting the trades. If we tried to bring assembly work and manufacturing [back to San Diego], I'm not sure we have the workforce or even interest in the workforce for that."

Wick was more blunt.

"I don't see manufacturers coming here to build a plant," he said. "Land and labor are just too expensive."

As they scramble to respond to Trump's policy upheaval, San Diego leaders face some difficult choices.

They can do what they're doing right now, which mostly amounts to voicing outrage, suing the Trump administration and hoping the whole thing goes away.

Or they can undertake the slow, painstaking work of adapting to a new reality.

That process would take years, if not decades, according to experts interviewed for this story. Which means the next 20 years could bring profound changes to San Diego's economic relationship with Mexico.

People wait in a long line border crossing to enter the United States from Tijuana on Dec. 21, 2022.

People wait in a long line border crossing to enter the United

States from Tijuana on Dec. 21, 2022. / Photo by Ariana Drehsler

For starters, experts agreed that San Diego's educational system must revamp itself to train more skilled workers who don't necessarily have four-year college degrees.

If San Diego hopes to claim a share of high-tech manufacturing work now mostly done in Mexico, it will have to train a workforce that doesn't currently exist.

Wick said the county also would need to make it much easier to build factories.

"In states that are having economic challenges, they help a [manufacturing] applicant get the project up and running as quick as possible," Wick said. "That doesn't occur here in California. People say, 'Why am I here butting my head against the wall when I don't get help from the city with permits?'"

In the near term, Zamarripa said, federal and local officials could speed up efforts to reduce the amount of time it takes to cross the border and complete a newly redesigned commercial border crossing in Otay Mesa.

More efficient border crossings would make it easier for workers to move back and forth and increase possibilities for cross-border cooperation that don't necessarily involve shipping goods subject to tariffs, she said.

Above all, Zamarripa said, the future success of San Diego's cross-border economy depends on certainty in federal policy.

"Right now it's been several months of uncertainty," she said. "It's getting to the point where some [business leaders] are saying, 'Just tell me how much it's going to be.' It doesn't mean all businesses can absorb it. They just want to know what it's going to be for the next four years so they can plan."

San Diego's binational economy has worked well for many people, especially the highly compensated leaders of biotech and other advanced companies who enjoy a best-of-both-worlds abundance of university-trained researchers in the United States and skilled but low-paid factory workers across the border.

Looking forward to the next 20 years, policymakers now must decide how to keep the momentum going. Or change course entirely.

# Waves Of Hope, Ripples Of Change

Boys to Men Mentoring (B2M) is gearing up for its 16th Annual 100 Wave Challenge at Mission Beach on September 27. This event celebrates over a decade and a half of empowering young men in San Diego County. As the organization prepares for its annual surf-a-thon, participants and supporters eagerly anticipate a day of surfing, camaraderie, and fundraising for a vital cause.

Founded in 2009 by Joe Sigurdson and Craig McClain, the 100 Wave Challenge was born from a vision to create a unique event that combines the exhilaration of surfing with the opportunity to support B2M's mission. Each surfer pledges to catch 100 waves in a single day and raises funds to benefit B2M's mentoring programs. Participants not only push their physical limits but also contribute to a cause that strengthens the community by supporting mentorship and guidance for young men facing challenges in their lives.

"Our vision for B2M is clearer than ever: to expand our in-school mentoring programs to every middle and high school in San Diego County within 5 years," said Co-Founder Joe Sigurdson. "By participating in this year's 100 Wave Challenge, you're not just surfing; you're providing a solution to the boys' crisis in our country and making a lasting impact on the lives of future generations of men," he added.

In preparation for the 100 Wave Challenge, B2M hosts summer surf nights for program participants. During these events,

staff, mentors, and community supporters, such as Pacific Beach Surf Shop, help equip the boys with the skills needed for the event. Beyond surfing techniques, these sessions offer numerous mental health and physical benefits. The experience of riding the waves serves as a therapeutic and empowering way for the boys to move through their traumas and fears, providing both healing and personal growth.

Over the years, the event has grown into a community-wide effort, attracting surfers of all levels, from amateurs to surfing legends like Shaun Tomson and Damien Hobgood. Local surf brands and sponsors have aligned with the cause, including Dr. Bronner's, Degree 33 Surfboards, Bird's Surf Shed, Salty Crew, O'Neill, and more.

"The 100 Wave Challenge is more than just a surf-a-thon; it's a powerful demonstration of community and compassion," said Shaun Tomson, World Surfing Champion and longtime supporter of Boys to Men Mentoring. "Surfing has the ability to transform lives, and through this event, we're able to support B2M in their mission to mentor and guide young men toward a brighter future," he added.

B2M invites surfers and supporters to join their cause and make a difference. Whether it's catching waves or cheering from the shore, everyone will play a crucial role in supporting the growth and expansion of Boys to Men Mentoring's impactful programs.



For more information on how to participate or support the 16th Annual 100 Wave Challenge, visit [100wave.org](http://100wave.org)





# Survey Reveal Tariff Uncertainty and Rising Costs are Stalling Over a Third of California CRE Projects

By Allen Matkins | UCLA Anderson Forecast

With tariff uncertainty reshaping global trade, the Summer 2025 Allen Matkins/UCLA Anderson Forecast California Commercial Real Estate Survey reveals ripple effects cascading throughout California's commercial real estate (CRE) landscape. According to the latest survey results, more than a third (36%) of developers are delaying or canceling CRE projects, citing increased construction costs and global trade tensions as key concerns.

Additionally, 85% of respondents now hold a more cautious outlook on new California developments due to tariffs and sup-

ply chain disruptions and 44% of developers expect distress levels in CRE capital markets to rise over the next year. These findings underscore how developers, investors, and tenants are recalibrating in the face of escalating costs, geopolitical uncertainty, and evolving demand patterns.

"Tariffs and lack of clarity on trade policies are certainly top of mind for real estate investors and developers as we head into the second half of the year," said Spencer B. Kallick, partner at Allen Matkins. "This uncertainty is leading real estate developers and investors to think long-term about their development plans





and shift their focus to opportunities and sectors that show resilience, particularly those aligned with e-commerce, logistics, and residential.”

### **Industrial Moves Forward Driven By E-Commerce**

Despite market volatility and rising construction costs, the industrial sector remains resilient. Market sentiment in Northern California continues to improve, with 60% of respondents expecting industrial demand to outpace supply. E-commerce has re-emerged as the primary driver of industrial development, with 41% of respondents citing it as their top growth driver, overtaking demand for data centers, AI and digital infrastructure.

However, the pace of new construction paints a mixed picture. Only 19% of respondents expect more than one new industrial development project in the region over the next year, a significant decline from 50% in the Winter Survey. In Southern California, similar sentiments are shared, with just 31% of respondents expecting more than one project to break ground, down from 54% previously. These findings reflect how land scarcity in Southern California and regulatory challenges such as zoning regulations can impact the development pipeline, making long-term planning essential for development and investment opportunities.

“The industrial market is holding strong with a particular focus on non-infill areas, such as Banning/Beaumont and the high and low desert areas in the Inland Empire, as well as the Santa Clarita Valley and east Ventura County,” said Paige Gosney, partner, Allen Matkins. “There is a level of price discrepancy between buyers and sellers as the parties try to determine the market’s ‘sweet spot’ but reason for optimism is — and remains — high.”

### **Multifamily Holds Steady**

Multifamily development, while slowing, remains marked by steady demand and declining vacancies across key California markets. In San Francisco, 86% of respondents expect vacancies to decline, up significantly from 58% in the last survey while 60% of respondents in San Diego and 53% in Los Angeles foresee further tightening in rental supply driven by a number of factors, including continued AI growth, tight housing inventory, and the Los Angeles wildfires.

“Obviously, the biggest question in multifamily housing is how to take advantage of the recent CEQA reform bills — the response to the state’s efforts should start showing up in future surveys,” said Heather Riley, partner Allen Matkins. “In the meantime, and as the housing crisis continues, our clients are looking for any solutions that will help them bring units online as quickly as possible. Demand continues to outpace supply across the state, especially for highly amenitized rental product that offers work from home space. Despite rising costs, our clients are actively looking to build at a rate we have not seen in years.”

### **Office Recovery Continues Amid Shifting Demand**

In the office sector, sentiment continues to vary by region. Northern California is showing signs of recovery, driven by the gradual return-to-office trends and renewed leasing activity in central tech hubs. Developer interest in new office space has climbed to 17%, up significantly from just 5% in the Summer 2024 forecast.

Additionally, 61% of respondents in Northern California believe demand will outpace supply. San Francisco and Silicon Valley are seeing improvements in vacancy rates, with 85% and 65% of respondents, respectively, expecting continued declines, pointing to increased leasing momentum in prime, well-located properties.

Southern California’s office market, on the other hand, continues to face uncertainty. Forty-five percent of respondents believe supply will exceed demand, though 42% remain optimistic that demand could still grow faster, particularly as return-to-office trends and tech sector expansion regain momentum.

New office development remains limited, with only 4% of Northern California respondents and 5% of Southern California respondents expecting new office projects this year.

“After a prolonged period of uncertainty, the office market sentiment is starting to turn a corner — albeit slowly,” said Julie Hoffman, partner, Allen Matkins. “Developers are testing the waters again, especially in Northern California, where vacancy rates and rental rates seem to have stabilized. But broad-based recovery is still a few years out.”

### **Retail Marked by Resiliency and Adaptability**

The retail sector continues to demonstrate resilience and adaptability, with demand being driven by mixed-use and community-focused development projects.

Specialty retail within existing districts is now the top driver of new development, cited by 38% of respondents, while just 7.5% pointed to stand-alone, big-box retail as a leading factor.

Vacancy rates are stabilizing across major metros. In San Francisco, 78% of respondents expect retail vacancies to either stay the same or decrease, while 74% expect the same in Los Angeles.

While rental growth remains positive overall, the pace varies across different regions. Markets such as San Francisco, Silicon Valley, and Sacramento are projected to see stronger-than-expected rent growth, while areas like Los Angeles, Orange County, and the Inland Empire are seeing more modest projections, with Los Angeles expected to lag below inflation level.

“The retail outlook continues to remain stable as a whole, with San Diego, Orange County, the Inland Empire, parts of Los Angeles, Silicon Valley, and the East Bay expected to outperform San Francisco and Sacramento,” said Brian Michel, partner, Allen Matkins.

# Meta Announces Launch of California Super PAC Backing AI-Friendly Candidates

By Jacob Burg | The Epoch Times



Facebook's parent company, Meta Platforms, announced on Aug. 26 that it would launch a new political action committee (PAC) in California to endorse candidates, regardless of party affiliation, who support artificial intelligence (AI) innovation and a more lenient stance on regulation.

The tech giant is launching the Mobilizing Economic Transformation Across (Meta) California super-PAC, which will back candidates for state offices who favor AI development over strict regulation, a Meta spokesperson told The Epoch Times.

"As home to many of the world's leading AI companies, California's innovation economy has an outsized impact on America's economic growth, job creation, and global competitiveness. But Sacramento's regulatory environment could stifle innovation, block AI progress, and put California's technology leadership at risk," Meta Vice President of Public Policy Brian Rice said in a statement.

"This is why we are launching a California super-PAC ... dedicated to backing candidates regardless of party who recognize California's vital role in AI development and embrace policies that will keep the state at the forefront of the global tech ecosystem."

The super-PAC will also finance candidates who "support and defend the American tech industry both domestically and internationally," the spokesperson said, adding that "American innovation is under threat from a growing number of poorly crafted state-level technology proposals that impact every level of operation while in the midst of a global AI race against China."

Meta noted that the California Legislature has already introduced more than 50 AI-related bills so far this year.

State Sen. Steve Padilla, a Democrat, sponsored a bill in February that aims to require AI companies to implement critical safeguards in their products to protect "children and other impressionable users from the addictive, isolating, and influential aspects of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots."

"Our children are not lab rats for tech companies to experiment on at the cost of their mental health," Padilla said in a statement.

The Meta spokesperson said the super-PAC would support candidates aligned with the company's key tech policy issues, including "Promoting & Defending U.S. Technology Companies & Leadership, Advocating for AI Progress, and Putting Parents in Charge."

The project is similar to a super-PAC network launched on Monday by several titans in the AI industry to support "the creation of enduring infrastructure and momentum that ensures AI leadership remains a central focus in U.S. politics to advance good AI policy."

Backed by venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, OpenAI President Greg Brockman and his wife Anna, and veteran angel investor Ron Conway, the Leading the Future super-PAC network will actively oppose policies that they said limit innovation, "enable China to gain global AI superiority," or make it harder to "bring AI's benefits to the world."

Andreessen Horowitz's head of government affairs, Collin McCune, said the firm is becoming "more active in supporting pro-technology candidates across the country."

"Policymakers in Washington and our state capitals are weighing thousands of proposals right now that could make it impossible to build. The only way to counter entrenched interests and outdated thinking is to make sure builders have a voice at the table," McCune wrote on X.

Leading the Future's efforts also seek to counter an influential coalition in the tech community that has been advocating for strict AI regulation from Congress to counteract potential harms from generative AI chatbots and the existential threat of a super-AI that breaks from human control.

Earlier this month, two Republican senators called for a congressional investigation into Meta after a Reuters report revealed a Meta policy document detailing policies on chatbot behavior that permitted the technology to "engage a child in conversations that are romantic or sensual," generate incorrect medical information, and assist users in arguing that black people are "dumber than white people."

# Hahn Loeser Adds the Walters Levine & DeGrave Law Firm in Tampa and Sarasota; Expands Presence in Growing West Coast of Florida



Stuart Jay Levine, Joel W. Walters and Heather A. DeGrave

Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP is pleased to announce that the Walters Levine & DeGrave law firm, with its eight attorneys and 11 staff members, has joined the Firm as of August 15. Walters Levine & DeGrave with offices in Tampa and Sarasota focuses on civil litigation, construction and real estate and estate planning law. With this addition, Hahn Loeser now has four offices in Florida, including its existing offices in Fort Myers and Naples. The Firm also has offices in Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, and San Diego.

“We are excited to expand our footprint in Florida, deepening our presence in this growing market,” stated Hahn Loeser’s CEO and Managing Partner Stanley R. Gorom III. “Walters Levine has a strong reputation for creatively and efficiently helping its clients achieve their objectives, and for providing outstanding client service. For 105 years, these have been the hallmarks of Hahn Loeser’s service to its clients.”

## The Tampa and Sarasota Team

Walters Levine’s Managing Shareholders Stuart Jay Levine, Joel W. Walters and Heather A. DeGrave have joined Hahn Loeser as Partners. Mr. Levine concentrates his practice in the areas of business litigation with an emphasis in construction and commercial litigation, and consumer debt collections. He will serve as Partner-in-Charge of the Tampa office. Mr. Walters is Board Certified in Business Litigation in Florida and focuses his practice in the areas of business litigation, including health care, construction, insurance, real property disputes and construction defects. He will serve as Partner-in-Charge of the Sarasota office. Ms. DeGrave focuses her practice in the areas of construction, commercial collections and business litigation.

Also joining Hahn Loeser are Attorneys Paul Fischel, Alan Gonzalez, Robert Pretschner, Warren R. Ross and Mishka Gar-

cia. Mr. Fischel practices in the areas of construction litigation, business law and commercial collections. Mr. Gonzalez practices in the areas of estate planning, taxation and probate. Mr. Pretschner concentrates his practice in the areas of commercial and residential real estate. Mr. Ross practices in the areas of marital law, construction and litigation. Ms. Garcia concentrates her practice on construction, commercial collections and business litigation.

“This is a tremendous addition to our firm and enhances our presence in Florida,” explained Robert A. Cooper, Partner-in-Charge of Hahn Loeser’s Fort Myers office and part of the recruitment effort with Walters Levine. “We anticipate that our existing clients will find value in our having business, real estate, construction, and litigation legal resources now available throughout the Florida Gulf Coast. In addition, having four offices in Florida gives us the critical mass we need to enhance service offerings to clients and continue to grow Hahn Loeser.”

Rob Remington, National Chair of Hahn Loeser’s Litigation group, Chair of the Construction Law group and a member of the recruitment team, added, “The demand in Florida for construction law services is substantial. Adding the caliber of attorneys and depth of experience represented by Stuart, Joel, Heather and their team will provide enhanced services to our clients and attract other attorneys in Florida interested in joining a growing, dynamic law firm.”

Messrs. Levine and Walters echoed Hahn Loeser’s sentiments, “Hahn Loeser’s platform allows us to deliver a broader slate of services to our clients and to create growth opportunities for both our clients and our attorneys,” Stuart Jay Levine stated.

“We are joining a great firm that allows us to grow as individuals and as a firm,” explained Joel Walters.





# California Energy Utilities Value Human Life Too Much, Regulators Believe

By MacKenzie Elmer | Voice of San Diego

A Californian's life was worth \$100 million to certain investor-owned utilities. That is, until state regulators ordered them to drop the price.

The dollar figure is called the value of a statistical life. In this case, it's worth spending \$100 million to prevent a death according to San Diego Gas and Electric and Pacific Gas and Electric which helps utilities justify certain investments – namely, wildfire prevention.

While a morbid exercise, putting a value on human life or in other words, picking a limit to spending on avoiding death, is a practice common for businesses and governments.

But \$100 million is a lot, way more than the U.S. government is willing to spend on the average American.

The U.S. Department of Transportation, which makes federal transportation rules and builds highways for the country, says life is worth spending \$13.7 million. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which tries to regulate and protect people from pollution, has said it's more like \$7.4 million. The lower the value of human life, the less the government may make someone spend

to avoid losing it.

The difference is: When an investor-owned utility spends money to build things that make the energy grid safer, they also make a profit. The higher the value of human life, the more the utility can justify spending and the more they will want to spend, causing ratepayer bills to go up – the thinking goes.

Californians already face some of the highest energy prices in the country and millions are struggling to pay their bills. There's a lot of pressure on the state to do something about the mounting energy affordability crisis and lawmakers recently proposed sweeping changes like replacing private grid investments with cheaper public financing, according to reporting by Canary Media.

The California Public Utilities Commission recently ordered both PG&E and SDG&E to cut the number of miles of electrical wire the company wanted to bury underground – a move that eliminates almost all the risk their equipment starts a fire but is also the most expensive thing the company does in the name of safety.

When state regulators discovered the value of a statistical life SDG&E and PG&E's plans produced, they ordered them to pick a lower, more reasonable one.

"An overestimated (value of a statistical life) could be used as a means to justify investments in more expensive, capital-intensive risk mitigations, making them appear more cost efficient," wrote Terrie Prosper, a spokesperson for the California Public Utilities Commission or CPUC, in an email.

Translation: A high value makes it look like building more expensive projects to avoid wildfires is cheaper than it actually is.

### What the Hell Is VSL?

"We make all kinds of regulations to make people a little bit safer, like installing safety features on cars or regulating how much pollution power plants can emit," says Judson Boomhower, who teaches economics at the University of California-San Diego. "The tradeoff there is, it's expensive to do that."

Enter the value of a statistical life. Think of it this way: We can't expect limitless spending to keep ourselves safe. We are, in fact, the people paying the taxes or, in this case, the energy bills that then fund the burial of powerlines.

"There's a normal human reaction to this. It's like, what? You're going to put a dollar value on human life? That's crazy. And I get it," Boomhower said. "But as a human who thinks about public policy, the alternative is we don't accept any risk of death ever and then you never leave your house and we all drive tanks."

And, we all go broke.

The utility companies' huge value on life is another way of saying these companies are willing to spend a ton to keep Californians safe. In other words, they're willing to let you, the customer, spend a ton to keep yourself safe.

"It's called goldplating," said Tom Long, now retired, who worked for the Utility Reform Network called TURN. "Utilities skew spending proposals toward capital (building) projects because they make a profit on top."

TURN pointed out the high price SDG&E ascribes to preserving one human life in something called a "protest" filed against the company at the CPUC in 2021. Later CPUC staff noted PG&E had a similar dollar value.

SDG&E and PG&E didn't come right out and say their value of a statistical life was \$100 million, like the DOT or EPA publish publicly. Staff and watchdogs said it was buried in the math behind how the utilities justified their spending to reduce wildfire risk in something called the Risk Assessment Mitigation Phase Application.

In it, utilities are allowed to come up with their own formula that ascribes value to different things they do for customers, like providing safety and reliability. SDG&E had inflated the way they valued safety which spit out this high statistical life number, watchdog groups said.

SDG&E's math described a catastrophic or worst-case wildfire as one that killed 20 people, Long argued in TURN's protest. The CPUC and watchdogs said what's considered catastrophic in terms of wildfire would be one that kills 200 people. Make

that change and the company's value of a statistical life would drop by a factor of 10, TURN wrote.

In December of 2022, the CPUC agreed and said, OK everybody get on the same page here. The commission ordered the investor-owned utilities to use whatever the Department of Transportation's statistical life value is.

Most of the utilities said, fine. Southern California Edison was the only company opposed to the idea saying "placing a specific value on life brings up ethical issues." The CPUC disagreed, saying utilities were doing it anyway just not explicitly. Better everybody use the same number and publish it publicly.

"Its use here benefits risk assessment processes by promoting transparency and consistency across utilities," the CPUC wrote.

In response to questions from Voice of San Diego, SDG&E spokesman Anthony Wagner sent a statement:

"SDG&E builds infrastructure based on need, guided by data science, advance modeling, and a deep commitment to protecting our communities from extreme threats like wildfires," Wagner wrote. "The safety of the communities we serve is our top priority. We don't view safety through a financial lens. We view it as a responsibility. Our planning is rooted in evidence, not assumptions, and our goal is always to safeguard lives and strengthen resilience."

PG&E didn't return request for comment for this article.

### A Means to An Undergrounding

"What's at stake here is the balance between safety and affordability," said Joseph Mitchell, an expert on wildfires caused by utility infrastructure, who works for the San Diego-based utility watchdog group Mussey Grade Road Alliance.

Mitchell along with Long from TURN believe it's profit that's motivating these utilities to inflate things like the value of a human life. And there's nothing more profitable to California's investor-owned utilities than burying the state's electrical grid underground to prevent their assets from sparking a wildfire.

"The utilities for the last few years have been very eager to increase their undergrounding programs because it checks all the boxes: It prevents wildfire, liability, commission finger pointing and they get paid for it," Mitchell said.

Sempre, the company that owns SDG&E, asked the CPUC in 2024 for the OK to spend \$1.9 billion to underground 605 miles of electric wire over four years. It's the most expensive thing utilities can do to prevent wildfire – and it's the most effective. But it costs just over \$3.1 million per mile to do.

For the first time, the CPUC said no. You can do \$618 million worth of work and underground more like 140 miles. The commission said they didn't find the proposed amount of spending "reasonable" when "wildfire risk has decreased considerably in the last 15 years."



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