

# San Diego Newsline

Downtown San Diego news — the budget, public safety, business, and the civic life of America's Finest City

DOWNTOWN

## Whitburn Reverses on Flock Cameras, Creating Anti-Surveillance Majority on City Council

The councilmember representing downtown San Diego now opposes the automated license plate readers he supported in June, potentially giving critics the votes to cancel the contract.



Illustration from a photo by San Diego Newsline staff

San Diego City Councilmember Stephen Whitburn, who represents downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, announced Tuesday he now opposes the city's network of Flock automated license plate readers — a reversal that could give opponents the votes needed to cancel the \$2 million annual contract.

Whitburn's district hosts the largest concentration of the more than 500 Flock cameras in the city. He was one of five councilmembers who voted in June to keep the contract intact during budget deliberations, when four members sought to redirect the \$2 million to libraries, parks, and arts programs.

"Parents are afraid of what could happen when they take their children to school," Whitburn said during a Tuesday press conference, according to KPBS. "American citizens have been detained. These are our neighbors, and

they deserve to feel safe in their own state."

Whitburn cited the Trump administration's immigration enforcement and last week's reports that ICE is expanding operations in San Diego as factors in his decision. "I want public safety tools that help San Diegans feel safe. If Flock cameras are causing many San Diegans to feel unsafe, then they have lost effectiveness as a public safety tool."

Mayor Todd Gloria swiftly pushed back, issuing a statement Tuesday reaffirming his support for the technology.

"Keeping San Diegans safe is my highest responsibility as Mayor. Automated license plate readers have assisted in nearly 900 criminal investigations and allowed San Diegans to recover over \$8.7 million in stolen property," Gloria said. "San Diego has also set the gold standard for

transparency and oversight of surveillance technology."

San Diego Police Chief Scott Wahl also defended the program, noting in an email that the cameras helped solve a hate-crime spree against the LGBTQ community and located a suspect in an attempted kidnapping of a child — both in Whitburn's own district.

"For nearly three years, SDPD has shown that ALPR technology can help solve serious crimes while protecting people's privacy," Wahl said. "We've followed strict rules, conducted regular audits and helped set a national standard for responsible use."

Whitburn's new position creates at least five votes on the nine-member council potentially ready to cancel the Flock contract. The annual surveillance report is expected to come before the Public Safety Committee in

mid-November, then the full council in December — presenting what Whitburn called an opportunity to end the program.

However, Mayor Gloria retains veto power, which requires a six-vote supermajority to override.

The ACLU Foundation of San Diego & Imperial Counties filed a lawsuit against the city on September 30 seeking to halt the ALPR program, alleging it violates the California Constitution's right to privacy.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

### CITY · DOWNTOWN City Council Introduces Ordinance Giving City Attorney Power to Sue Employers Over Wage Theft

The proposal from Councilmembers von Wilpert and Elo-Rivera would add civil enforcement authority city law currently lacks; sick leave provisions would also align with state requirements. The San Diego City Council

introduced an ordinance Tuesday that would give the City Attorney new power to file civil lawsuits against employers for unpaid wages, overtime, and other wage theft violations — authority the city does not currently hold.

The proposed amendments to the Earned Sick Leave and Minimum Wage Ordinance, sponsored by Councilmembers Marni von Wilpert (District 5) and Sean Elo-Rivera (District 9), were scheduled as Item S502 at the Council's 2 p.m. session. The introduction is a first reading; a final vote would follow at a subsequent meeting.

"Wage theft is a widespread and underreported form of economic harm affecting workers across San Diego, often occurring at a scale that rivals other forms of theft," according to a city staff document accompanying the item. The ordinance would amend six sections of the municipal code to authorize civil enforcement actions to recover wages, overtime, and benefits workers have legally earned.

The proposal also makes technical and conforming amendments to align San

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## City Council Introduces Ordinance Giving City Attorney Power to Sue Employers Over Wage Theft

Diego's earned sick leave provisions with existing California state law.

The push comes as San Diego's minimum wage is set to rise from \$17.75 to \$18.35 per hour on Jan. 1, 2027. Von Wilpert and Elo-Rivera argued the increase will matter only if workers actually receive the wages they are owed.

In July, the U.S. Department of Labor recovered more than \$500,000 in back wages for six workers at a San Diego deli whose employees regularly worked 11-hour days and averaged 55 hours per week while being paid a flat rate of \$100 per day, according to a city document. Each worker received approximately \$83,000.

The ordinance introduction is the first step in a process that would let San Diego join cities including New York — which announced a \$131.5 million enforcement action against DoorDash in September — in bringing municipal civil actions for wage violations.

Wage theft can include denial of meal and rest breaks, failure to pay overtime, misappropriation of tips, requiring off-the-clock work, failure to provide earned sick leave, unlawful paycheck deductions, and failure to reimburse business expenses.

The Council took no final vote Tuesday; the ordinance now proceeds through the legislative process.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

### DOWNTOWN

## Port of San Diego to Vote on \$1.39 Million Homeless Outreach Contract for Waterfront Tidelines

*The five-year agreement with People Assisting the Homeless would station outreach workers along the Embarcadero and port tidelands starting November 1.*

The Board of Port Commissioners is set to vote Tuesday on a \$1,389,097 contract with People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) to provide homeless outreach services on port tidelands for five years, beginning Nov. 1.

The agreement, listed on the Port's consent agenda, would put outreach workers along the Embarcadero and other waterfront areas under the Port of San Diego's jurisdiction. The contract runs through Oct. 31, 2031, with all funds for future fiscal years subject to board approval during each annual budget cycle.

PATH, a statewide non-profit, would conduct outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness on port property and connect them with shelter, housing, and services. The organization operates similar programs in other California cities.

The contract appears on a consent agenda that also includes a proclamation of local emergency for anticipated El Niño severe weather impacts, a \$728,278 contract for loading dock improvements at the Tenth Avenue Marine Terminal, and a \$779,876 contract for elevator improvements at the B Street

## Cruise Ship Terminal.

Consent agenda items are considered routine and are typically approved in a single vote without separate discussion.

The Port board meets at 1 p.m. at the Don L. Nay Port Administration Building at 3165 Pacific Highway, adjacent to downtown San Diego.

By San Diego Newsline Staff



Illustration from a photo by Bernard Gagnon · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

### BUSINESS

## Chamber Opposes City of SD 92% Increase in User Fee

The Chamber recently led a coalition of business organizations in opposing a proposed 92% increase in San Diego's Minimum Wage Ordinance User Fee, which would raise the annual charge from \$1.47 to \$2.82 per employee. The fee is included in the total amount businesses pay as part of their annual business license or business tax certificate.

Whenever a local government asks businesses to pay higher fees such as a user fee increase, our team closely analyzes the justification for that increase, how the additional revenue will be used, and whether there is a clear benefit to those being asked to pay. In this case, the fee increase funds enforcement of the City's wage ordinances. This is an important regulatory effort, as it helps maintain a level playing field for businesses that are playing

by the rules and ensures violations can be appropriately addressed. However, officials did not make a clear case of why a 92% increase was necessary just one year after its initial adoption. Given the lack of justification and stakeholder engagement, as well as the cumulative impact of rising fees and regulatory costs on local employers, the Chamber and our coalition opposed the proposal.

The item passed the City's Budget Committee and will now head to the City Council for consideration. The Chamber will continue engaging with Councilmembers and the City Attorney's office to better understand the need for the proposed increase and reinforce that new or increased costs on businesses should be clearly justified, thoughtfully considered, and carefully monitored.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Sep 29, 2026

### READER POLL · RESULTS SO FAR

## The City Council delayed its water rate vote to Oct. 27. Should San Diego raise water rates?

Yes, to pay for the system: 0%

No: 0%

Not until the city cuts its own costs: 100%

1 online votes · not a scientific survey · vote at [sandiegonewslines.com/poll](https://sandiegonewslines.com/poll)

### PUBLIC MEETINGS

## Where decisions get made

Mon, Oct 19 — San Diego City Council — Closed Session, City Administration Building, 202 C Street, 12th

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|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2 |                                                                      |                                                                      |                               |
| Public meetings       | Mon, Oct 19 — San Diego                                              | Tue, Oct 20 — San Diego                                              | Agendas and public comment:   |
| Floor                 | City Council, City Administration Building, 202 C Street, 12th Floor | City Council, City Administration Building, 202 C Street, 12th Floor | sandiegonewsline.com/calendar |

LEGAL NOTICES

San Diego County · Case No. 410977

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| <p>San Diego Newsline is adjudicated a newspaper of general circulation for the County of San Diego, Superior Court Case No. 410977. To place a notice: <a href="mailto:legals.sandiegonewsline.com">legals.sandiegonewsline.com</a> · (619) 568-2415.</p> <p><b>NAME CHANGE</b></p> <p><b>ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME</b></p> <p>Case No. 26CU053727C</p> <p>Superior Court of California, County of San Diego</p> <p>Central Courthouse, 330 W. Broadway, San Diego, CA 92101</p> | <p>TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:</p> <p>Petitioner Dafne Sofia Ibanez Munoz and Diego Salvador Cuesta Creel filed a petition with this court for a decree changing names as follows:</p> <p>1. Franco Tomas Cuesta Ibanez to Franco Salvador Cuesta Ibanez</p> <p>THE COURT ORDERS that all persons interested in this matter shall appear before this court at the hearing indicated below to show cause, if any, why the petition for change of name should not be granted. Any person objecting to the name changes</p> | <p>described above must file a written objection that includes the reasons for the objection at least two court days before the matter is scheduled to be heard and must appear at the hearing to show cause why the petition should not be granted. If no written objection is timely filed, the court may grant the petition without a hearing.</p> <p>NOTICE OF HEARING:</p> <p>Date: 11/24/2026 Time: 8:30 a.m.</p> <p>Dept: C-61</p> <p>A copy of this Order to Show Cause</p> | <p>shall be published at least once each week for four successive weeks before the date set for hearing on the petition in the following newspaper of general circulation, printed in this county: SAN DIEGO NEWSLINE.</p> <p>Date: 10/09/2026</p> <p>Michael S. Groch, Judge of the Superior Court</p> <p>Published in San Diego Newsline: 10/15/2026, 10/22/2026, 10/29/2026, 11/05/2026. AFF#ORD-KDFH9QR</p> |
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OPINION

The views of the writers named — not news reporting

**COMMENTARY**

**Microsoft and Adobe got caught chasing cheap labor. Good.**

*The visa system was built to fill jobs Americans can't do. Too often it has been used to replace Americans who can. Washington is finally saying so.*

On Thursday the Trump administration did something I have wanted to see for a long time. It told some of the biggest names in technology that they can no longer use the green-card labor certification program to bring in foreign workers.

Effective immediately, the Department of Labor will not accept new or pending permanent labor certification applications from Microsoft, Adobe, Cognizant, Tata, Infosys, Wipro, HCL and Capgemini. Without that certification, a company can't sponsor a foreign worker for a green card. The door to keeping those workers here permanently is shut, at least for now.

The numbers explain why.

"Since 2009, just these companies alone have requested almost 3 million foreign workers," Labor Secretary Keith Sonderling said. "They've received over 230,000 H-1B visa approvals and over 100,000 permanent labor certifications."

Vice President JD Vance singled out Microsoft, saying the company laid off about 6,000 American workers in the past year while benefiting from about 6,300 H-1B visas and nearly 3,000 green cards. "There has been no company in the United States, unfortunately, that has abused the system more than Microsoft," he said. Microsoft and Adobe did not immediately respond to reporters' requests for comment.

What these visas were supposed to do

I spent years working in technology. I worked alongside a lot of bright, talented people from India and from all over the world, and many of them became friends. This isn't about them.

The H-1B program and the labor certification behind green cards were sold to Americans with a simple promise: when a company truly cannot find a qualified American for a job, it can bring in someone from abroad. That is a reasonable deal. If a company needs a rare specialist, it should be able to hire one.

But that is not how the system has been used. Many of the engineers brought in under these programs were not rare specialists. In my experience, plenty of them were entry level: beginners, still learning the job. Those are positions that could have been filled by Americans, including the young graduates coming out of San Diego State, UC San Diego and colleges across this country every spring.

Why companies did it

The reason isn't complicated. Companies were chasing savings for their shareholders.

I'm a capitalist, and I won't apologize for it. A company's

job is to make as much money as it can for the people who own it. That is how our economy grows.

But a company also does business in a country, and that country has citizens. When a corporation uses a visa program meant for genuine shortages to replace qualified Americans with cheaper labor, it isn't just cutting costs. It is breaking the bargain that let it use the program in the first place. Well-paying jobs in this country should go first to the people who already live here and are ready to do them.

We can't take everyone

America is still the shining city on a hill. Hundreds of millions of people around the world would come here to live and work if they could. That says something wonderful about this country.

It also means we can't take them all, and we shouldn't pretend we can. Opening the doors wider every time a corporation wants to lower its

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## Microsoft and Adobe got caught chasing cheap labor. Good.

payroll is not compassion. It's a subsidy for the bottom line, paid for by American workers.

The long-term answer for the rest of the world is not to move here. It is for people to demand better from their own governments: governments that are socialist, corrupt, or so overregulated that talented people can't build a future at home. America became a beacon because Americans built something worth wanting. Others can do the same.

### Hire American

Thursday's suspensions are not the end of the story. Federal investigators say they have more cases underway, and companies that clean up their hiring may eventually win back access. That is how it should work.

The message to corporate America is simple: if you want to do business in the United States, hire Americans first. If you truly can't find one, the program is there for you. If you can, you have no business using it.

Christopher South is the publisher of San Diego Newsline and has worked in the technology industry.

By Christopher South

## COMMENTARY

### Inside Todd Gloria's tent city: what the mayor doesn't want you to see

*Amy Reichert walked into a city-funded homeless camp the press is kept out of. Her video, and the death toll at these sites, should end the mayor's claims that this is working.*

Mayor Todd Gloria likes to call his tent camps "Safe Sleeping." A new video from inside one of them shows what that really means.

On Thursday, Amy Reichert posted what she called an exclusive inside look at "@MayorToddGloria's taxpayer-funded homeless tent city." The video shows rows of red pop-up tents, many patched with blue and camouflage tarps, spread across a dirt lot under the eucalyptus trees.

Reichert says she went in last year looking for a homeless woman whose family had not heard from her. "The nonprofit running the site would not help her family locate her," she wrote. "The media are barred, and even elected officials have reportedly been denied access. I walked right in and spent two hours inside before I was recognized and asked to leave. I complied."

### The deaths

According to Reichert, more than 40 people have died at the tent city. She has been inside the camp herself and has followed these deaths closely, and her count is the one to watch.

Even the lowest count is damning. A 10News investigation in July could document only 19 deaths at the city's two Safe Sleeping sites

since 2023, 15 of them at the O Lot site by the Naval Medical Center, and could not get a cause of death for most of them. When the press is barred and the city won't say who died or how, counts built from what reporters can document will always fall short of the real toll.

The city's answer was a statement that participants' "health, safety, and well-being" remain its "highest priority."

More than 40 people dead in a city program that promised safety is not a priority being met. It is a program failing in plain sight, behind a fence the public isn't allowed past.

The joke is on the taxpayers

Gloria opened O Lot in 2023 with room for up to 400 tents and sold it as a clean, safe step toward housing. San Diegans have paid for the land, the tents, the security, the meals and the nonprofit contracts ever since. In July the city extended its deal to keep feeding the people living there.

What have taxpayers gotten for it? Camps they can't see inside. A death count they have to learn from TV reporters. And a mayor who keeps telling them the system is working.

A federal lawsuit now in court says the camps are "anything but safe." Reichert pointed readers to @eyeoftheSTORMsd, who has been covering that case.

### Open the gates

There is a simple test for any program run with public money: can the public see it? If the Safe Sleeping sites are what the mayor says they

are, he should welcome reporters, council members and families looking for their loved ones. Instead, a citizen with a phone had to walk in on her own to show San Diego what it's paying for.

San Diego deserves to know how many people have died in these camps, how they died, and what the city is spending to keep them running. Until the mayor answers those questions, it's hard to see him as anything but a joker running a very expensive, very deadly act.

Christopher South is the publisher of San Diego Newsline. Video stills courtesy of Amy Reichert (@amyforsandiego) on X.

By Christopher South

## COMMENTARY

### The problem with Full Self-Driving: one Tesla is never enough

*We bought one car with FSD. Within three weeks we bought a second, then our daughter purchased a third. Try it once and you'll understand why.*

Here is the problem with Tesla's Full Self-Driving: once one person in the family has it, everybody else wants it too.

I know, because it happened in my garage.

The white Tesla came first. Within two or three weeks of riding along with Full Self-Driving, I knew I wanted one of my own. That's the black one parked next to it now. It wasn't an impulse buy. It was the most obvious decision I've made in years.

It changes how you drive, and how you feel

People ask what's so special about it. The honest answer is that it changes your

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## The problem with Full Self-Driving: one Tesla is never enough life.

San Diego traffic stops being something you dread. The car handles the stop-and-go on the 5 and the 805, the merges and the lane changes, while you sit back and watch the road. You arrive at your meeting, or back home at the end of the day, with a clear head instead of a knot in your stomach. Your mind isn't worn out from an hour of fighting other drivers.

That clear head is the part nobody tells you about. You don't realize how much driving was taking out of you until something else is doing most of the work.

Then came Quicksilver

The FSD addiction took over the family. After the white car and the black car, a third Tesla joined us: the silver one, in the color Tesla calls Quicksilver, purchased by our grown daughter.

That one wasn't about convenience. It was about safety.

Our daughter is a grown woman with children of her own, and a capable driver. But no parent ever really stops worrying when their kids are on the road, especially with the grandkids in the back seat. With Full Self-Driving, she has a system watching the road in every direction at once, one that doesn't get tired, doesn't check a phone and doesn't get distracted. If you can afford it, I'd go further: ask yourself whether you can afford not to. For our family, that peace of mind is priceless.

Try it yourself

Tesla's system is called Full Self-Driving (Supervised) for a reason. The driver still has to stay alert, keep watching the road and be ready to take over, and the law still holds the driver responsible. It doesn't replace good judgment. What it does is take the strain out of driving, and that turns out to be a very big deal.

So here is my challenge to every San Diego driver who has doubts: go to a Tesla store and ask for a test drive with Full Self-Driving. Let it take you through real traffic.

I guarantee that within a few hours you'll be seriously thinking about buying one. Just don't blame me when the rest of your family wants one too.

Christopher South is the publisher of San Diego Newsline. His family owns three Teslas, and he owns Tesla stock. Tesla did not pay for or review this column.

By Christopher South

### COMMENTARY

## What Trump actually said about Los Angeles and San Diego: the full, uncut remarks

*Newsom, Becerra and other California Democrats called the president's Nebraska rally comments a threat to two cities. The unedited transcript shows he was arguing that higher gas prices from the Iran war are a small price to pay for stopping a nuclear Iran.*

Gov. Gavin Newsom says President Donald Trump wants America's enemies to "take out" Los Angeles and San Diego. Xavier Becerra says the president called 13 million Californians "a small price to pay." Their posts

spread fast this week.

The full, unedited recording of the speech tells a different story than the 10-second clip.

Where it happened

Trump spoke Monday, Oct. 5, at a midterm rally at the Pinnacle Bank Expo Center in Grand Island, Nebraska. The full speech is on video from Rural Radio Network and in a time-stamped transcript from Roll Call Factbase. The passage in question runs from about 11:55 to 12:40 into the speech.

What came first

About eight minutes earlier, Trump set up the topic he kept coming back to: the war with Iran and what it is costing at the pump.

"We're saving the world from what could be one of the worst tragedies ever," he said. "We're not gonna let them have it and they won't have. That's, that's decided. They will not have a nuclear weapon."

A minute later: "We have to stop them from having a nuclear weapon." He then talked about gas prices he had seen in Iowa, \$1.95 and \$1.85 a gallon, and promised prices would fall further once the war ends.

The full passage, word for word

Here is the complete passage from the transcript, including the sentences the viral clips leave out. ("Word" in the transcript is how the transcriber heard "war.")

"And again, remember, with the word, it's just artificial, it's a little bit high. It's a small price to pay for keeping the world safe, keeping our country safe. They can take out a city. Let them take,

let it, let them take out Los Angeles. Let them take out San Diego. That's, this is a very small price to pay, and it's gonna be over very soon. It's essentially almost over with. And they might keep going a little long, you know? They always say they have a big threshold for pain. They need it, let me tell you. They need it. But it's gonna end very soon, and it'll end one way or the other, and your gas and your gasoline and all of the things."

What the context shows

The "small price to pay" in that passage is the temporary rise in fuel prices from the war, which Trump calls "artificial" and "a little bit high." He comes back to it at the end of the same passage: "your gas and your gasoline and all of the things." It is the same thing he was talking about minutes earlier, when he said prices "are gonna come tumbling" once the war is over.

"They can take out a city" follows directly from his earlier point: Iran must never get a nuclear weapon, because a nuclear Iran could destroy an American city. Read that way, Los Angeles and San Diego are the cities a nuclear Iran could hit, and a few months of higher gas prices are the cost of making sure it never happens.

The White House gave the same explanation. "He was clearly stating U.S. cities would have been threatened if a nuclear Iran hadn't been stopped," Communications Director Steven Cheung said. The administration's Rapid Response account on X put it more bluntly: Trump "was saying the U.S. is fighting to STOP Iran from having the

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## What Trump actually said about Los Angeles and San Diego: the full, uncut remarks

ability to take out LA and San Diego with a nuclear weapon."

Nothing in the speech says Trump wants either city harmed. Anyone can check by watching the full recording.

What California Democrats said

Newsom, who has spent the year fighting the president over the National Guard deployment to Los Angeles, posted: "After sending the National Guard and Marines to occupy California, Donald Trump is now saying our foreign enemies should 'take out' Los Angeles and San Diego. He is deranged and dangerous."

Becerra, the former California attorney general and U.S. health secretary, posted: "Thirteen million Californians call LA and San Diego counties home. Their lives are not a 'small price to pay' or a punchline for Donald Trump."

San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria said, "San Diego is not collateral damage. We are not expendable." Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said the president "suggested that a foreign government attack Los Angeles."

None of those statements quoted the sentence about gas prices that comes just before the line they objected to, or the president's earlier remarks about keeping a nuclear weapon out of Iran's hands.

Not everyone read it the White House's way

Trump's phrasing was

clumsy, and the words "let them take out Los Angeles" are hard to hear for anyone who lives here. Some Republicans said so. County Supervisor Jim Desmond, a Republican, said he "vehemently" disagreed with the comments.

Still, there is a difference between saying a president chose his words badly and telling millions of Californians that he wants their cities destroyed. Newsom and Becerra said the second thing. The full recording does not back them up.

San Diego Newsline reviewed the complete transcript and the full video of the speech. Readers can do the same using the links below.

By Christopher South

### COMMENTARY

## California's Scarcity Coalition: How Special Interests Profit From High Costs, Argues Edward Ring

*Edward Ring argues that progressive policies in California have perpetuated scarcity to benefit a coalition of unions, environmentalists, lawyers, accountants, utilities and tech companies.*

Edward Ring, director of water and energy policy at the California Policy Center, argues that much of the nation's political unrest flows from unaffordability, particularly soaring housing costs. He writes that the median home price is now five times median household income, double the ratio seen in the 1980s.

While both parties share blame for some cost-of-living increases, Ring contends that

in California, where progressives have held power for a generation, the problem stems from a coalition of special interests united by one principle: the more scarcity exists, the more we thrive.

This coalition, according to Ring, explains why Californians can no longer build cost-effectively. The state's population has grown to nearly 40 million while relying on infrastructure designed for roughly 20 million people. Regulations have halted progress on water, energy, land development and more.

Ring identifies public sector unions as the most powerful player, with more than a million members and roughly \$1 billion in annual dues. He writes that for these unions, "societal failure is union success." Failing schools lead to higher taxes and more hires; rising prices create demand for expanded government benefits and administrators.

This focus, Ring argues, diverts funds from maintaining California's once-magnificent physical infrastructure to pay and benefits, accelerating decay. The result is higher costs for energy, water, shipping and construction that ripple through the entire economy.

Private-sector trade unions, particularly in construction, also wield influence but must align with the scarcity agenda to secure long-term projects. Ring points to the bullet train and floating offshore wind projects, which he says will cost a combined half-trillion dollars, take decades and become permanent drains on taxpayers.

Environmentalists provide the moral justification for the coalition, Ring writes. Some genuinely believe any resource consumption beyond bare subsistence is unsustainable, while others use environmental rules to block population growth and suburban expansion. As a result, he notes, "95 percent of the population lives on 5 percent of the land," producing urban densities of nearly 5,000 people per square mile.

The legal profession, accountants and financial firms profit handsomely from this framework, according to Ring. Trillions have been spent on "carbon accounting" and "carbon trading," practices he describes as complex and prone to corruption. Litigation-friendly rules allow opponents to tie up practical energy, water and housing projects in court.

Only the largest developers and corporations can navigate this thicket of rules, Ring argues. Giant homebuilders thrive by constructing high-density planned communities at a pace that never meets demand, sustaining elevated prices and profits. Regulated utilities, which earn a fixed percentage over costs, benefit from California's electricity rates of \$0.34 per kilowatt-hour—nearly double the national average of \$0.18.

Tech oligopolies round out the coalition, Ring states. These firms and their partisan workforces support the regulatory environment because scarcity and complexity create demand for surveillance, management and reporting technologies. The market for "smart" energy-

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## California's Scarcity Coalition: How Special Interests Profit From High Costs, Argues Edward Ring

and water-saving devices represents trillions in potential revenue.

Ring points to near-unanimous legislative votes as evidence of this lockstep power. A recent pension increase for state workers passed with only two no votes in both houses. Legislation forcing local governments to allow multifamily housing in single-family neighborhoods drew just four no votes out of 120 legislators.

Ring warns that this "sham democracy" reflects government by special interests that no longer compete, all benefiting from engineered scarcity. While national debates focus on federal policy, he concludes that California's model may ultimately exert greater lasting impact as the scarcity coalition advances across the country.

The bottom line, Ring

writes, is that abundant and practical infrastructure is the key to lowering prices, yet California's ruling coalition has chosen the opposite path.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Oct 14, 2026

### ABOUT THIS PAPER

San Diego Newsline covers downtown San Diego first — City Hall, the Gaslamp Quarter, East Village, Little Italy, Barrio Logan and the waterfront — and the county around it. Every item names its source; read the originals and our standards at [sandiegonewsline.com](http://sandiegonewsline.com).

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### CITY · DOWNTOWN

#### City Auditor: 110 Audit Recommendations Past Due, Including Brush Management and Code Enforcement

*The semi-annual follow-up report shows more than half of outstanding audit recommendations remain unimplemented past their deadlines.*

More than half of the City of San Diego's outstanding audit recommendations are past their implementation deadlines, according to a report presented to the City Council's Audit Committee on Wednesday.

The Office of the City Auditor's semi-annual Recommendation Follow-Up Report found that 110 of 185 open audit recommendations are classified as "In Process – Past Due," meaning the target implementation date has passed without full compliance. Only 19 recommendations were newly implemented in the reporting period, while 52 remain in process but within their deadlines.

Among the past-due items, four of seven recommendations for brush management on city-owned land are overdue, as are six of ten recommendations for Development Services code enforcement,

according to the city auditor's dashboard.

The 110 past-due figure represents a slight increase from the 107 that the report itself notes were overdue as of the report date.

The Audit Committee, which met Oct. 7 at 9 a.m., also heard a report on the effectiveness of the city's Unsafe Camping ordinance, according to the agenda published by Council President Joe LaCava's office.

City Auditor Andy Hanau's office conducts independent audits of city operations and reports to the Audit Committee. The office tracks implementation of its recommendations semi-annually for periods ending around June 30 and Dec. 31.

The Audit Committee meets at City Hall, 202 C Street in downtown San Diego.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

### CITY · DOWNTOWN

#### San Diego City Council Delays Water Rate Restructuring Vote After Three Members Absent

*The proposal to replace tiered water rates with a single unitary rate drew 3,644 written protests; the matter was continued to October 27.*

The San Diego City Council

delayed a vote Tuesday on a proposed restructuring of city water rates after three council members were absent and it was unclear whether the council had the votes to comply with a court order requiring the change.

The proposal, Item 330 on the Oct. 6 City Council agenda, would replace San Diego's current seven-tiered water rate structure with a single unitary rate of \$11.09 per hundred cubic feet — about 748 gallons — for all customers. The change is intended to bring the city into compliance with Proposition 218, the 1996 voter initiative that requires water agencies to charge customers no more than their proportional cost of service.

The courts sided with a group of water customers who sued the city in 2015, finding San Diego had failed to present enough evidence to justify charging higher rates to heavier water users as a conservation incentive.

The City Clerk reported 3,644 written protests during the 45-day comment period — far short of the 132,968 required to block the proposal under Proposition 218 rules, according to a meeting summary by Citizen Portal.

Under the proposed unitary rate, single-family homes in the lowest usage

tier would see their water bills increase by about 7.1 percent, while apartment buildings would save between 2.2 and 2.6 percent, according to city estimates. Single-family homes in the heaviest usage tier would see savings of about 5.9 percent.

KPBS reported that with three council members absent, it was not clear the city had the votes to comply with the court order. The matter was continued to October 27.

The rate restructuring is separate from the across-the-board water rate increases of 14.7 percent in 2026 and 14.5 percent in 2027 that the council approved last year to cover rising water purchasing costs and the Pure Water recycling infrastructure program.

The City Council meets at 202 C Street in downtown San Diego.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

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## PUBLIC SAFETY

**Inmate, 34, Dies by Apparent Suicide at George Bailey Detention Facility; Eighth In-Custody Death This Year**

*Brian Andrew Holmes had been jailed since May on sexual assault charges and was scheduled to appear in court next week, the Sheriff's Office said.*

A 34-year-old man died by an apparent suicide at the George Bailey Detention Facility in Otay Mesa last week, the San Diego County Sheriff's Office reported Tuesday in what marks the eighth in-custody death countywide this year.

Brian Andrew Holmes was found hanging in his solo cell at approximately 3:20 p.m. on Thursday, October 8, during a routine security check, according to a Sheriff's news release. Deputies activated 9-1-1, requested on-site medical staff, and began life-saving measures. CAL FIRE and paramedics continued resuscitation upon arrival, but Holmes was pronounced dead at 4:05 p.m.

Holmes had been arrested by the San Diego Police Department on May 13, 2026, on multiple sexual assault-related charges, including assault with intent to commit rape, sexual penetration with a foreign object, preventing a person from reporting a crime by force, and resisting arrest. He was scheduled to

appear in court on October 19.

The Citizens' Law Enforcement Review Board (CLERB) was notified. The Sheriff's Homicide Unit is conducting an investigation, and the Medical Examiner's Office will determine cause and manner of death.

"The San Diego County Sheriff's Office extends its sympathies to the Holmes family and all those affected by this loss," the department said in its statement, adding that a family liaison officer has been assigned.

Holmes is the eighth person to die in San Diego County jail custody this year. The seventh death, reported in late September, involved a 62-year-old inmate at the San Diego Central Jail downtown who died after experiencing medical distress.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

## CITY

**City Council Drops October Budget Priority Memos, Reducing Own Input Into \$6 Billion Spending Plan**

*The council is eliminating the early wave of priority requests it sends the mayor each fall, shrinking members' annual budget memos from three rounds to two.*

The San Diego City Council is retreating from a four-year-old policy that gave members an earlier say in shaping the mayor's annual budget, eliminating the October

priority memos each councilmember has submitted since 2022.

The change, outlined in the Independent Budget Analyst's key dates report issued September 11, reduces the number of annual budget priority submissions per councilmember from three to two. Councilmembers will now submit one round of priorities in January — instead of the previous practice of an early round each September followed by updates in January — plus final modification memos in May.

"One round of Council Budget Priority Memoranda is proposed, instead of two rounds. This streamlines the process while still giving Councilmembers an important opportunity to share their priorities for the FY 2028 Proposed and Adopted Budgets," the IBA report states. The report explicitly notes that "the Budget Priorities Memoranda that were submitted to the IBA's Office in September are removed."

Budget Committee Chair Henry Foster told the San Diego Union-Tribune that the change reflects the city's volatile financial picture. "This was done just because of how volatile our finances have been and to make sure we allowed staff some greater opportunity to really hone in," Foster said.

The early October memos were created in 2022 under then-Budget Committee Chair Chris Cate to amplify

council input before the mayor's finance team began drafting the proposed budget each April. Former Councilmember Monica Montgomery Steppe, now a county supervisor, told constituents at the time that the memos ensured council priorities were "highlighted during the budget-crafting process."

But councilmembers have acknowledged the early memos lost impact as the city grappled with deficits and revenue uncertainty. Councilmember Kent Lee, a former budget committee chair, submitted just four paragraphs last fall instead of detailed requests. "In light of the many unknowns from economic impacts on revenues, more time is necessary in order to identify our budget priorities and mitigation strategies to achieve a balanced budget," Lee wrote.

The city faces persistent structural deficits. The council approved a \$6 billion budget in June after contentious debate over cuts to libraries, recreation centers, and arts programs. The city's five-year financial outlook released each November has repeatedly projected shortfalls.

Under the new schedule, the call memorandum for councilmembers' FY 2028 budget priorities goes out in December, with memos due to the IBA by January 8, 2027.

By San Diego Newsline Staff



*Another tide of port cash heads for the waterfront*

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