

# Opinion

## MY THOUGHTS

# The governor’s budget

Well, Gov. Gavin Newsom has released his initial government budget proposal for the 2025/26 school year.

The governor is proposing a \$322.3 billion fiscal plan that provides for \$228.9 billion in general fund spending and nearly \$17 billion in combined reserves – including nearly \$11 billion in the state’s rainy-day fund and an additional discretionary set-aside of \$4.5 billion in the special fund for economic uncertainties.

Looking at the education portion of it, the governor is proposing \$118.9 billion for the Prop 98



John V. Ciani

guarantee. While it may look good, it represents a \$300 million cut from this fiscal year’s budget.

The proposal also includes full implementation of universal transitional kindergarten (TK), expand-

ed before/after school and summer programs and universal school meals as well as implementation grants that will be fully disbursed in 2025-26 to support the community school model to support improved educational outcomes at more than 2,000 public schools.

According to a Jan. 10 press release, the governor’s budget proposal also projects no deficit and increased revenues. This is very good news.

What will this mean to our local schools? At this point, it is too early to say.

However, I would like to point out that this is only the initial pro-

posal. We still have the May revise which will give us a much clearer picture of what the budget will look like.

This is when the real wrangling begins. It will be interesting to see what the legislature finally approves and the governor signs. Let’s see what happens.

I saw a couple of stories by Andrew L. Bergman on the Daily Independent website concerning the Desert Empire Fair.

I’m glad to see the 2024 fair was successful. According to the story, admissions were up, concessions were up in the carnival Midway show a lot of growth as well.

There was another story that said that there were some improvements on the way for the fairgrounds. This would be a good thing.

During my time in Ridgecrest, the Desert Empire Fair was one thing I have always looked forward to attending. I hope to visit it again one day.

**The opinions expressed by the columnist are theirs and do not necessarily reflect the views of newspaper management or owners.**

## LETTERS TO EDITOR

# Exploring Viable Alternatives: Your Water District is Committed to Affordable, Sustainable Water Solutions

The Indian Wells Valley Water District remains dedicated to providing sustainable, reliable, and cost-effective water solutions to the residents of the Indian Wells Valley. The Water District has pursued a recycled water project for many years now, recognizing that we have a unique opportunity to assess its feasibility and potential impact on the valley’s water supply.

The District embraced this opportunity to explore potential solutions that could ease financial pressures while ensuring the long-term security of the community’s water supply. We recently addressed the Ridgecrest City Council to discuss the recycled water project and its potential benefits. While

the results of the discussion were mixed, we hope that this was the first of many such conversations leading to a win-win solution for both the City and the District.

Recycled water is a proven technology. It presents an effective and affordable alternative for the valley’s water needs than the proposed, cost-prohibitive pipeline to Mojave. Factoring in the difficulty and expense of procuring sufficient water rights from the San Joaquin Valley, where water is in short supply and the competition for those rights is fierce, the argument for a recycled water project becomes even stronger.

Moreover, investing in recycled water offers other long-

term benefits, including resource conservation and reduced reliance on, and even the avoidance of the need for external water sources.

The Water District remains steadfast in its mission to serve the community’s best interests. Exploring all viable solutions is essential to identifying the most practical, affordable, and sustainable path forward.

David Saint-Amand,  
President of the Board,  
Indian Wells Valley Water District

# The first ever Community Scholarship Fair was a resounding success!

Letter to the Editor:

Almost 250 students/parents/community members attended the first Scholarship Fair organized by the Rotary Club of China Lake and the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce. Eighteen organizations were present to talk to everyone in attendance about the scholarships they offered and, in total, there was over \$750,000 worth of scholarship money available to students that evening.

We are proud to report that we saw a strong representation from schools in both Ridgecrest and Trona, in attendance and, due to the great turnout, are looking forward to hosting this event again next year with as many, if not more, organizations there to offer scholarships.

I’d like to thank the following organizations for their attendance in this year’s Scholarship Fair:

AltaOne Federal Credit Union; Altrusa of the Indian Wells Valley; Cerro Coso Community College Foundation;

CSEA; Daughters of the American Revolution - Panamint Springs Chapter; Desert Area Teachers Association; Indian Wells Valley Republican Club; Kern Community Foundation; Kiwanis Club of Ridgecrest; Ridge Writers; Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce; Ridgecrest Elks Lodge 1913; Ridgecrest Lions Club; Ridgecrest Regional Hospital Foundation; Roadrunner Ridge Community Foundation; Rotary Club of China Lake; Searles Valley Minerals; and Sierra Sands Unified School District for sharing their scholarships

Additional thanks to:

SpringHill Suites and Ridgecrest Regional Hospital for the venue; Cero Coso Foundation’s sponsorship of our event through the Swap Sheet; Cerro Coso’s Financial Aid Team and the college’s support with bilingual assistance for the event; SSUSD’s for the use of their videographer who captured the scholarship information from every organization and their Community Schools Coordinator for use of Chrome

books to support onsite student applications; the principals and guidance counselors from both Ridgecrest and Trona schools for their support promoting this event and for those who stopped by the fair to visit; Mayor Travis Endicott for his time meeting and talking with all of us that evening; Gina Noble and the Salvation Army for the snacks and water; and last but not least, my fellow Rotarians and members of the Chamber of Commerce who helped us through it all.

Thank you, also, to everyone in this community for making this new event a success by showing your support and attending the Scholarship Fair. We hope that this fair was, and continues to be, financially rewarding for students across our community.

Stephanie Hudson  
Community Services Director  
Rotary Club of China Lake

## CALMATTERS

# Trump, Newsom play high-stakes game over billions in federal wildfire aid

After voters shunned Kamala Harris and sent Donald Trump back to the White House, California Gov. Gavin Newsom immediately positioned himself as the leader of the opposition.

Newsom called a special legislative session, seeking money for lawsuits to “safeguard California values.”

“The freedoms we hold dear in California are under attack – and we won’t sit idle,” Newsom said in a statement. His office declared that “This is the first of several actions by the Newsom administration, in partnership with the Legislature, as the governor begins shoring up California’s defenses against an incoming federal administration that has threatened the state on multiple fronts.”

Trump responded with a post on his Truth Social website, saying, “Governor Gavin Newsom is trying to KILL our Nation’s beautiful California” and “stopping all of the



Dan Walters

GREAT things that can be done to ‘Make California Great Again.’”

Two months later, Newsom’s tune began to change as horrendous wildfires erupted in Los Angeles and it became evident that California would need many billions of dollars in federal aid.

Outgoing President Joe Biden promised help but Trump, visiting the state just four days after his inauguration, said aid could hinge on California changing some policies. Newsom wasn’t invited to greet Trump but showed up anyway to make nice with the man he had

denounced so many times as evil incarnate.

He later signed bills to finance anti-Trump litigation and aid to immigrants while publicly praising Trump for considering a wildfire aid package.

Last Friday, Newsom dispatched a letter seeking \$39.7 billion from Congress, saying, “We are eternally grateful and we are confident that if we work together, Los Angeles will continue to serve as a beacon to the world and securely place the city on solid ground in the coming years as it hosts the FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympics – and thrive for the century to come.”

Trump must be laughing about Newsom’s obviously insincere flattery and being able to make the governor jump through his hoops.

So what is Trump demanding in return for federal aid? On his way to California on Jan. 24, Trump stopped in North Carolina, where reporters asked that question.

“I want to see two things in

Los Angeles: Voter ID, so that the people can have a chance to vote,” Trump replied, “and I want to see the water released, so that it can come down into Los Angeles and throughout the state.”

The first mirrors Trump’s oft-expressed but unproven allegation that blue states such as California tolerate voting by undocumented immigrants and other ineligible persons. The second continues his insistence that California is denying farmers the water they need for crops and Southern California the water it needs to fight fires.

The voter thing is silly and so is Trump’s fact-free obsession that availability of water was a factor in the Los Angeles fires. However, there is a genuine conflict between Newsom’s administration and San Joaquin farmers over how much water they can divert from rivers and how much is needed to protect fish and other wildlife.

Those aren’t the only potential conditions that Trump or Repub-

licans in Congress may impose on federal aid.

As Newsom was delivering his request to Washington, Trump advisor Ric Grenell was telling a conservative political gathering that “there will be conditions” on aid, specifically mentioning reducing or eliminating the California Coastal Commission’s power over development in the coastal zone.

The situation is a high-stakes poker game between two ego-centric politicians and a reminder that while Newsom often refers to California as a “nation-state” with global influence, it’s still very dependent on Washington when disaster strikes.

**The opinions expressed by the columnist are theirs and do not necessarily reflect the views of newspaper management or owners.**

## SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FOCUS

# Question For Newsom Recall Backers: Why Bother?

Gov. Gavin Newsom has a bit less than two years left on his second term and cannot run for another. That’s a central difference between today’s political reality and the scene that faced organizers of the Newsom recall campaign that failed by a wide margin to oust him in 2021.

Here’s some further reality: The current recall effort, which must gather more than 1.31 million valid voter signatures within 160 days of starting circulation on Jan. 23, would see a replacement governor guaranteed only a year or less in office. No one can do much in that short time.

This does not daunt organizers of the current recall, the eighth attempt to oust Newsom since his election in 2018. The 2021 effort is the only one to reach a vote so far, and Newsom slapped it down by a 3 million vote margin, a complete reversal of what happened when ex-Gov. Gray Davis was dumped in 2003.

Davis faced the famed muscleman



Thomas Elias

actor Arnold Schwarzenegger in that vote, with just one significant Democrat on the list of potential replacements. That was then-Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante, who had nothing like Schwarzenegger’s star power.

By contrast, there were no major celebrities among possible Newsom replacements in 2021, when ultra-conservative pundit and talk show host Larry Elder took 48 percent of replacement votes.

None of this daunts the current organizers. They want Newsom out, the sooner the better, and they hope to bludgeon him with his alleged poor leadership before, during and after the January firestorms in Los Angeles County.

They’ve also said they want to prevent him from using his current office to set up a 2028 run for president. They’re heartened by needing about 400,000 fewer voter signatures than in 2021 because of a low 2022 general election turnout.

Newsom, as he has done with most recall efforts, is so far ignoring this one. Organizers say they will try to hold him responsible for crime, homelessness, cost of living increases and supposedly excessive business regulation.

Those complaints are essentially the same used in 2021, and they didn’t succeed then.

In any case, the actual stakes are much smaller in this recall. If its petition circulation effort succeeds, signatures will be submitted to county officials around the state in mid-summer. It will then take about two months to verify that enough are genuine to qualify the recall for the ballot.

If the timetable matches 2021, when signature verification ended April 29 and the vote came Sept. 14, the new vote would likely take place

sometime in late October or early November, the intervening time used for replacement candidates to sign up and campaign a bit. At the end, any potential new governor would have only about one year before the 2026 general election. Would that be enough time to become an established incumbent?

If such a recall were successful, it would surely eliminate Newsom from running for president, which he’s thought to be planning after he’s termed out in early 2027.

But if Newsom fends off a recall vote, he could enter the 2028 race on a roll, perhaps even as a national Democratic hero. Meanwhile, the recall would need to raise at least \$15 million to have any chance.

Should Newsom lose, he would not be the first Californian whose political career was essentially ended by a crisis. One example was then-Gov. Pat Brown, vacationing in Greece and unable to respond promptly when the Watts riot broke out in 1965. He lost his reelection bid the next year. So did then-Lt. Gov. Glenn Anderson, in charge while

Brown was gone and criticized for being slow to call out the National Guard. Both were Democrats.

Today’s organizers are heartened by the success of two recall ousters in recent years, campaigns that toppled San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin in 2022 and axed Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao last fall.

All of which means that even if he won’t formally acknowledge this recall bid until and unless it qualifies for a vote, Newsom would be wise to take it seriously and perhaps even exploit it.

Email Thomas Elias at [tdelias@aol.com](mailto:tdelias@aol.com). His book, “The Burzynski Breakthrough: The Most Promising Cancer Treatment and the Government’s Campaign to Squelch It,” is now available in a soft cover fourth edition. For more Elias columns, visit [www.californiafocus.net](http://www.californiafocus.net)

**The opinions expressed by the columnist are theirs and do not necessarily reflect the views of newspaper management or owners.**