

# Opinion

Editorial board:  
**John Watkins** Publisher  
**Aaron Crutchfield** Assistant Publisher/Editorial

## OP ED

# Searles Valley Minerals On What its Recent Settlement with IWVGA Means

Searles Valley Minerals (SVM) has served the Indian Wells Valley for more than a century, supporting nearly 1,200 jobs and contributing \$675 million to the regional economy every year. Our recent settlement with the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (IWVGA) resolves the long-standing disputes over the Replenishment Fee and the GSP, closing that chapter and allowing us to focus on the future.



**Dennis Cruise**  
 President,  
 Searles Valley Minerals

Let me be clear, this settlement does not end SVM's active participation in the comprehensive groundwater adjudication. SVM believes the court should and will determine the basin's safe yield using the best available science, and SVM will remain involved in the June 2026 trial to make sure that happens. The settlement agreement does not address the factual assumptions in the GA's 2020 groundwater sustainability plan, in fact Searles believes the science supports the presence of considerably more groundwater in the basin – the "safe yield" – than the IWVGA claims.

Recent statements suggesting that SVM agreed to support the pipeline are inaccurate. SVM agreed not to oppose the pipeline, but has made no commitment to take water from it. Searles will evaluate imported water only if it becomes available and makes operational sense for Searles.

This settlement is a positive step that removes financial uncertainty and allows for greater use of reclaimed water when available, technically feasible, and to the extent practical. SVM remains engaged in the groundwater adjudication and will continue to defend our rights and advocate for a fair, science-based determination of the basin's safe yield and a fair and equitable physical solution that protects our operations and the valley's water future.

It's important to clarify what the agreement accomplishes and what it doesn't. The settlement resolves all issues related to the Replenishment Fee and prevents any such fee – or similar charges – from being imposed on SVM, from the past or in the future. It also clears the way for SVM to work with the City of Ridgecrest to use up to 2,000 acre-feet of reclaimed water annually, reducing pressure on the basin where feasible.

## MY THOUGHTS

# Vince Fong's new video

Did anyone see Rep. Vince Fong's new video about the 20th Congressional District?

It is slightly more than three minutes long and it paints a very nice picture of the Central Valley in Bakersfield.

Talks about the area's oil industry and agricultural industry, and despite the state of California's penchant for regulation and its anti-business climate, these industries are thriving.

However, he did not talk about the other side of the mountain, but he mentioned the Indian Wells Valley and the China lake Naval Air Weapons Station. It would have been nice if he talked a little bit about the important work that's done there.

Well, we are coming to the end of President Donald Trump's first year of his second term in office and I am asking myself am I better off now than I was under Joe Biden?

I am sorry to say this, but I do not believe that I am. If I recall correctly, he promised to help lower grocery prices.

In terms of what I buy I do not believe I am. In fact, it seems as though I am paying more for groceries than I was a year ago at this time when Biden was still in office.



**John V. Ciani**

However, I have a lot of patience. Will next year be better? Let's see what happens.

Well, we are in what many people call the most wonderful time of the year. It is better known as the Christmas season and that means there is a lot of shopping going on.

Like many people I have a lot of little ones to shop for. They may be a year older, and presents are going to be a little more expensive this year, but it is worth it.

As much as possible I plan to shop at local businesses I would encourage everyone else to do the same. Does that mean we should abandon big box stores like Walmart and so forth? No, it does not but I believe we should spend some of our dollars locally.

Where I live, we had an event called Shopapalooza. It is an event that shows local businesses in an effort to get people to shop locally. Think about it.

## CALMATTERS

# California's new labor law could have unintended and unwanted consequences

The California Legislature has a bad habit of writing new law in the moment and paying little or no attention to its potential consequences.

While legislative history contains many examples, the most spectacular occurred three decades ago when legislators and then-Gov. Pete Wilson massively overhauled how electricity is generated, distributed and priced, telling consumers it would make power more affordable and reliable.

The real world impact was just the opposite. Power became less reliable, prices skyrocketed and the state's investor-owned utilities were pushed into insolvency.

Other examples of unintended consequences in California include launching a bullet train project without comprehensive construction or financial plans, sharply increasing public employee pensions without considering costs and doing the same with unemployment insurance benefits.

One could also add the current practice of draining emergency reserves to cover budget deficits that result from overestimating revenues and underestimating spending, leaving the state's finances vulnerable to an inevitable economic downturn.

Then there is Assembly Bill 288, one of many measures the Legislature dominated by Democrats and Gov. Gavin Newsom have passed in recent years to thwart – or so they hope – President Donald Trump.

AB 288, sponsored by California labor unions and carried by Assemblymember Tina McKinnor, an Inglewood Democrat, expands the authority of California's Public Employment Relations Board – which oversees union-management activities in state and local governments and school districts – to include private sector employment.

The bill aims for the Public Employee Relations Board, or PERB, to step into the role performed for many decades by the National Labor Relations Board because, McKinnor and other advocates maintain, the NLRB is frozen by a dispute over its membership.

Early this year, Trump removed Dwyne Wilcox, the NLRB's chair, leaving the board without a quorum and unable to decide pending cases. Trump's action is being fought in the courts.

Assemblymember Tina McKinnor addresses a speaker during a hearing at the state Capitol in Sacramento on March 12, 2024. Photo by Fred Greaves for CalMatters

"Well, I'll just say that if we have no board, no quorum, no



**Dan Walters**

board, no justice to state workers, for state workers," McKinnor told the state Senate Judiciary Committee just before AB 288 passed. "And so, we need to make sure that, you know, that PERB can hear these cases, because if there's no forum for workers to resolve unfair labor practices, then where do they stand?"

"What do we do for them? We can't just leave them out in the cold because the NLRB doesn't have a quorum. We also can have loss of union protections, like bargaining rights, organizing protections and reinstatement after retaliation. And so, we can't have our workers unprotected, because employers will take advantage of that."

Private employer groups opposed the measure, contending the existence of the NLRB, even though it's stymied, preempts a state from usurping federal authority.

Generally, states can legislate on labor relations only in economic sectors not covered by federal law. That's why, a half-century ago, California could create the public employment board and the Agricultural Labor Relations Board to oversee employment on farms and in food processing plants.

The NLRB and interests that opposed AB 288 are suing in federal court, contending that the legislation is illegal under federal law.

AB 288 represents a potentially disruptive, even dangerous, precedent. Were it to survive the legal challenge, every state would be free to create its own set of laws governing unionization of workers.

Blue states such as California could virtually mandate unionization of private sector employees, as it already has for public employees and farm workers.

Meanwhile, red states could virtually prohibit unions from organizing workers, to make the states more attractive to industry and insulated from NLRB oversight even if Democrats regain the White House.

Balkanizing labor-management relations would create chaos in the national economy. It also could potentially work to the overall disadvantage of union organizing efforts. Do California's unions and their political allies really want to take that chance?

## OP ED

# Newsom's war on energy is crippling California and undermining our military

As California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom traveled to Brazil touting his failed energy agenda in mid-November, the reality back home is unavoidable: because of his policies, Californians are paying some of the highest gas and electricity prices in the nation. We are being crushed by the Newsom energy affordability crisis – and it's crippling our national security. Since 2018, more than 360 energy companies have left California due to the state's debilitating regulations and new oil drilling permits have fallen by 95% since Newsom assumed office in 2019. As a result, California has produced nearly 128,000 fewer barrels of oil per day over the past five years – despite holding the fifth-largest petroleum reserves in the country. The undeniable consequence of Newsom's refusal to support domestic production is a greater reliance on foreign oil. In 1982, less than 6% of California's crude oil came from outside the United States. Today, according to Newsom's own California Energy Commission, that number has skyrocketed to over 60%. Brazil now accounts for 20% of our imported supply and 21% comes from Iraq.



**Vince Fong**

supplies. But unaffordable prices aren't the only consequence of Newsom's war on oil. His created crisis is also undermining our military readiness.

California is home to dozens of U.S. military installations in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. The brave men and women who serve at our bases are capable of deploying anywhere in the world within a handful of hours, but only if they have the fuel they need to accomplish their mission. Military aviation fuels are highly specialized and of the highest grades, which California's refineries are equipped to process. In 2024, California's military installations consumed approximately 10 million gallons of gasoline. With the two most recent refinery closures, jet fuel production is estimated to decrease by at least 600,000 gallons a day. No amount of Newsom's strategic, political headlines can hide the threat his policies pose to our national security.

One of the most pressing issues in Congress right now is countering the rising threat of China, which requires us to bolster our readiness in the Indo-Pacific region. But instead of working across the aisle to address this threat and strengthen California's role in our national security, Newsom has continued to intentionally reduce California's refinery capacity and in-state oil production, weakening our defense posture in order to appease his far-left base. If California's fuel network continues to be suffocated by a patchwork of underutilized pipelines and overburdened refineries without enough energy supply to operate, the military fuel supply chain supporting the West Coast's military operational capabilities will be harmed.

Newsom's progressive agenda and his presidential ambitions have led him to ignore these stark facts. This is not only incompetent, but irresponsible and dangerous. To revitalize California's energy future and deter our nation's adversaries, our state needs to increase permitting tenfold, expand our drilling capacity and reinstate enhanced oil recovery methods. This is necessary to keep our pipelines operational as we work to expand our refining capabilities.

Sacramento should be working with us in Congress and President Donald Trump to expand domestic energy production – a necessity for meeting California's growing energy demands and strengthening America's national security. Instead, Newsom seems more interested in obstructing these efforts than partnering with us to deliver affordable, reliable energy for Californians. Newsom's poor energy policies are the cause of California's affordability crisis. The choice for Newsom is clear: continue down a path of scarcity and dependence, or reverse course with California's energy producers to restore true energy independence for our state and our nation. The future of California's economy – and America's national security – depends on it.

Meanwhile, California's refining capacity continues to collapse. By early 2026, the state is projected to lose nearly 20% of its remaining refining capacity, and without urgent action, blackouts, price spikes and fuel shortages will become the new normal – not only for Californians, but for millions across the West Coast who depend on our energy supply. This drastically impacts the viability of California's pipelines, most of which require 90,000 barrels a day in production to remain financially solvent and operational. However, due to shortages, they are barely operating at 50,000 barrels a day, causing \$2 million in losses a month for operators.

Currently, Crimson Midstream, the operator of California's largest crude oil pipeline network, cannot sustain its operations because of Sacramento's ineptness. California Democrats' war on domestic energy production has created so much uncertainty that the San Pablo Bay Pipeline is now at risk of shutting down in the new year – further destabilizing California's fragile energy supply chain and jeopardizing refinery capacity already hanging by a thread. These disastrous policies have created a manmade shortage of fuel, increasing prices at the pump exponentially for working families and leading to more gasoline imports. This will likely force California to purchase refined gasoline from oil reserves off its coast, making the state pay a higher price to buy back its own

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