MEASURE P ATTORNEY ASKS CITY TO START COLLECTING FRESNO PARKS TAX »
GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM SEEKS TO TRANSFORM YOUTH PRISONS »
AP–NORC POLL: 6 IN 10 AMERICANS BLAME TRUMP FOR SHUTDOWN »
Measure P, the 2018 sales tax initiative for parks, may not have failed after all. Last November, 52% of Fresno voters favored it. However, voters were told it needed two-thirds approval to pass. Thus, the measure failed.

Or did it?

An attorney, on behalf of Measure P advocate Fresno Building Health Communities, wrote a letter to Mayor Lee Brand, noting that based on a recent court decision, the city should consider Measure P approved.

“...such as parks in the case of Measure P. However, a 2017 state Supreme Court ruling in the Upland case, opened the door to a lower standard for approval if the ballot measure was brought forth by citizen petition. And that’s what happened with Measure P. Backers qualified it for the ballot by collecting 27,623 verified signatures — 4,000 more than legally required.

Attorney Letter

Attorney Lance Olson of Sacramento, sent Brand a letter, dated Jan. 23, reasoning that because of the Upland case and interpretations from other jurisdictions, Measure P should have passed. "We believe this conclusion (of Measure P failing) is based on erroneous interpretation of the law and request that the City declare that Measure P was, in fact, approved by the voters."

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Mayor Reacts

Brand emailed GV Wire his reaction through his communications department. "We received a letter from their attorney late yesterday afternoon and while we are consulting with our legal department to understand our options, it has been and will continue to be our policy not to comment on pending or threatened litigation," Brand said. He is worried this latest action will be divisive.

"However, I believe this action will make it much more difficult, if not impossible, to unify the community in support a balanced measure that not only seeks to remedy our deficiencies in parks, but also in public safety and many other areas where the City does not have sufficient resources to provide the necessary services our residents deserve and need," Brand continued.

Measure P Recap

The three-eighths of a cent sales tax would be dedicated to Fresno parks and related programs. The contentious campaign pitted parks and social justice advocates against Brand, public safety advocates and some in the building development community. Darius Assemi, president of Granville Homes, opposed Measure P. Assemi is the publisher of GV Wire. Despite spending millions, the Yes on P side, headed by former Mayor Ashley Swearengin, fell short of the two-thirds threshold cited by the city and set by Proposition 218, a voter-approved law passed in 1996 that set rules for raising taxes. There was a legal skirmish heading into the election, when Yes on P advocates revealed that the city sent the incorrect ballot language to the county election office. In a settlement, the city agreed to mail postcards...
LAWYER SAYS BULLARD STUDENT DIDN’T THREATEN DISTRICT TRUSTEE

The attorney representing a Bullard High School freshman involved in a physical altercation with a Fresno Unified school board member says his client didn’t trigger the incident. Video of the Jan. 11 incident released by the school district shows Fresno Unified School District trustee Terry Slatic in a physical tussle with the student. Slatic, speaking about the incident to GV Wire last week, said the student threatened to shoot and kill Slatic and his assistant, Michelle Asadoorian.

"The video does not support such an account. My understanding is that Mr. Slatic contends that the threat was why he turned around and approached my client, which is just completely illogical and unsupported by what is depicted in the video," said the student’s attorney, Roger Bonakdar of Fresno. Bonakdar would not confirm the identity of the student, other than he is a freshman at Bullard.

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Slatic, speaking about the incident to GV Wire last week, said the student threatened to shoot and kill Slatic and his assistant, Michelle Asadoorian. "The video does not support such an account. My understanding is that Mr. Slatic contends that the threat was why he turned around and approached my client, which is just completely illogical and unsupported by what is depicted in the video," said the student’s attorney, Roger Bonakdar of Fresno. Bonakdar would not confirm the identity of the student, other than he is a freshman at Bullard. The video — which can be seen at the top of this page — shows Slatic and Asadoorian walking by the student, then Slatic turning around and engaging in a physical confrontation. Slatic forcibly grabbed the student’s backpack and placed it on the ground. The student then took the bag and ran off. The attorney representing a Bullard High School freshman involved in a physical altercation with a Fresno Unified school board member says his client didn’t trigger the incident. Video of the Jan. 11 incident released by the school district shows Fresno Unified School District trustee Terry Slatic in a physical tussle with the student. Slatic, speaking about the incident to GV Wire last week, said the student threatened to shoot and kill Slatic and his assistant, Michelle Asadoorian. "The video does not support such an account. My understanding is that Mr. Slatic contends that the threat was why he turned around and approached my client, which is just completely illogical and unsupported by what is depicted in the video," said the student’s attorney, Roger Bonakdar of Fresno. Bonakdar would not confirm the identity of the student, other than he is a freshman at Bullard. The video — which can be seen at the top of this page — shows Slatic and Asadoorian walking by the student, then Slatic turning around and engaging in a physical confrontation. Slatic forcibly grabbed the student’s backpack and placed it on the ground.

“This is good news,” said Fresno County Farm Bureau CEO Ryan Jacobsen. “It’s historic, especially when you consider that the three districts literally touch each other. Having three voices and, more importantly, three votes on issues affecting Valley agriculture is significant.” Agriculture is the heart and soul of the Central Valley, and the 21st Congressional District is the most agriculturally productive in California. I’m honored to be named to this critical committee and ready to get to work...

AREA COLLEGES PROMISE BIG RESULTS FROM HALF BILLION IN SPENDING

A large crowd gathered in October for the groundbreaking of a $5 million Agriculture and Technology building at Madera Community College Center. It was the first project to emerge from a nearly half-billion-dollar bond measure, approved by voters, benefiting State Center Community College District. “We have the honor of breaking ground here, but you’re going to see projects in west Fresno, you’re going to see projects on all of our campuses … you’re going to see a new campus up in Oakhurst,” said Trustee Bobby Kahn. “There are going to be an array of projects … going on in the next couple of years.” That may be a bit of an understatement.

Taxpayer Investment Totals Nearly Half-Billion Dollars

Voters approved SCCCD’s $485 million bond, known as Measure C, in June 2016. Two-and-half years later, the sprawling district has $75 million worth of projects in the pipeline and many more on the drawing board. Officials say a plethora of...
many are transferred to an adult prison when they turn 18. The remaining juvenile facilities are operating at about a third of their design capacity, the San Francisco-based Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice calculated. High fixed costs with fewer juveniles "are always the big burden," Newsom said. "That's why it's right to talk about closing facilities if it's possible, if it's doable. But you've got to protect the workers. That's something that's sacrosanct to me.”

The influential prison guards union, a Newsom ally, said it will fight to keep the same employees with the same peace officer status. Newsom said any closures would be worked out within 12 to 18 months. The governor said he’s finding broad consensus among legislators to move juvenile lockups from under the adult system.

Some critics said Newsom’s plan, first mentioned in his state budget, goes too far, others not far enough to dismantle the state-run juvenile justice system. Maureen Washburn of the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice called Newsom’s proposal “an important recognition of the failure of the state’s current approach. … To be successful, this reform must end our reliance on large, costly, and remote facilities and bring young people closer to home where rehabilitation can happen most effectively.”

Advocate: ‘Different Way of Thinking’

Nearly 4,500 other juvenile offenders are in county detention facilities. But lawmakers have rejected previous attempts to send all the remaining state-held juvenile offenders to county lockups, with local officials saying they may be ill-equipped to handle the most violent or sexually predatory youth. Stephanie James, probation chief in San Joaquin County and president of the Chief Probation Officers of California, said Newsom may wind up interfering with a decade of...
SAN FRANCISCO — Proposals by a U.S. judge to prevent Pacific Gas & Electric Co. equipment from causing more wildfires would endanger lives, could cost as much as $150 billion and would interfere with the work of federal and state regulators, the utility said Wednesday in a court filing urging the judge not to impose the measures.

PG&E said it’s committed to system upgrades and wildfire prevention but contended that a criminal case being handled by U.S. District Judge William Alsup was not the right forum to address such measures. Earlier this month, Alsup proposed ordering PG&E to remove or trim all trees that could fall onto its power lines, poles or equipment in high-wind conditions and to document its inspections and work. He also proposed ordering PG&E to reinspect its entire electric grid and to cut off power during certain wind conditions regardless of the inconvenience to customers or loss of profit.

The legal arguments came as PG&E is facing hundreds of lawsuits from wildfire victims over catastrophic California wildfires in the past two years that killed scores of people and destroyed thousands of homes. The utility announced on Jan. 14 that it will file for bankruptcy protection in the face of at least $30 billion in potential liability from the fires... READ MORE »
WASHINGTON — A strong majority of Americans blame President Donald Trump for the record-long government shutdown and reject his primary rationale for a border wall, according to a new poll that shows the turmoil in Washington is dragging his approval rating to its lowest level in more than a year.

Overall, 34 percent of Americans approve of Trump’s job performance in a survey conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That’s down from 42 percent a month earlier and nears the lowest mark of his two-year presidency. The president’s approval among Republicans remains close to 80 percent, but his standing with independents is at among its lowest points of his time in office. “Trump is responsible for this,” said poll respondent Lloyd Rabalais, a federal contractor from Slidell, Louisiana, who’s not affiliated with either political party. The 47-year-old has been furloughed for more than a month. He said he’d need to start drawing on his retirement savings next week to pay his bills if the shutdown continues. “I do support a wall, but not the way he’s handling it. Trump guaranteed everybody that Mexico would pay for the wall. Now he’s holding American workers like me hostage.” — Lloyd Rabalais, a federal contractor from Slidell, Louisiana

Most Americans See the Shutdown as a Major Problem

Compared with earlier presidents, Trump’s approval rating has been relatively stable over the course of his presidency, ranging from the mid-30s to the mid-40s. By contrast, President Barack Obama never fell below 40 percent in polling by Gallup. Still, five presidents since Gallup began measuring presidential approval have had their rating fall into the 20s at least once, including Harry S. Truman, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush. Trump has never fallen into that range of historical lows, but he’s also the only president never to have reached 50 percent in Gallup’s polling.

The new AP-NORC poll shows most Americans see the shutdown as a major problem, and they blame Trump far more than congressional Democrats for the mess that has ensnared the lives of roughly 800,000 government workers who are going without pay. Sixty percent of Americans say Trump bears a great deal of responsibility for the shutdown. About a third place the same amount of blame on congressional Democrats (31 percent) or Republicans (36 percent).

Sixty-five percent of Americans, including 86 percent of Democrats, 69 percent of independents and 33 percent of Republicans, call the shutdown a major problem. Trump may be popular overall with Republicans, but a sizable share holds him responsible for the current situation. Almost 3 in 10 Republicans think Trump bears a great deal of responsibility, while 73 percent of his party says he’s at least partly responsible. “The large part of the responsibility belongs to the president because he made the decision,” said poll respondent Sandra Olson, of Northwood, Iowa. The 76-year-old registered Republican said she voted for Trump once and likely will again.

Skepticism That a Wall Would Reduce Crime

“We have never in my lifetime seen a president who...
CATHOLIC STUDENT SAYS HE DIDN’T DISRESPECT NATIVE AMERICAN

PARK HILLS, Ky. — A Catholic high school student whose close encounter with a Native American activist and a black religious sect was captured on video in Washington, D.C. says he has nothing to apologize for. Nick Sandmann told NBC’s “Today” show on Wednesday that he had every right to be there, as did the others who gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial.

He said he wasn’t disrespectful and was trying to stay calm under the circumstances. Videos posted of Sandmann and his classmates wearing “Make America Great Again” hats facing off against Omaha Nation elder Nathan Phillips have sparked widespread criticism. But the various sides say they’ve been misunderstood and that snippets of video were taken out of context. Many saw the white teenagers, who had traveled to Washington for an anti-abortion rally, appearing to mock the Native Americans.

Others interpreted Phillips’ drumming and singing as a hostile act. Phillips has since explained that he was trying to intervene between the boys and a group of black street preachers who were shouting racist insults at both the...
JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said its jets struck Iranian military targets in Syria early Monday, an announcement that marked a rare departure from Israel’s years-long policy of ambiguity regarding activities in neighboring Syria. The military said the targets included munition storage facilities, an intelligence site and a military training camp. The strikes were in response to a surface-to-surface rocket that Iranian forces fired toward Israel on Sunday that was intercepted by Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system over a ski resort in the Golan Heights. That launch followed a rare Israeli daylight air raid near the Damascus International Airport. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Monday’s pre-dawn strikes lasted for nearly an hour and were the most intense Israeli attacks since May. It said 11 were killed in the strikes. The Russian military said four Syrian troops were among those killed in airstrikes that targeted three different locations and damaged unspecified infrastructure at Damascus airport. There were no further details on the casualties or their nationalities.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, an Israeli military spokesman, said the Iranian missile attack that prompted the Israeli response was “premeditated.” Iranian forces in Syria fired the mid-range missile toward Israel from the Damascus area — a missile he said had been smuggled into Syria specifically for that purpose. Conricus declined to further identify the type of missile but said it hadn’t been used in any of the internal fighting of the civil war and had “no business” being in Syria. The chief of Iran’s air force, Gen. Aziz Nassirzadeh, meanwhile said his forces are “impatient and ready for a fight against the Zionist regime to wipe it off the Earth,” according to a news website affiliated with Iran’s state television.

Hundreds of Strikes Against Hezbollah Targets
Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel “pounded” the Iranian sites in response to the missile attack and would not hesitate to respond again. “We don’t allow such acts of aggression to go unanswered as Iran attempts to establish itself militarily in Syria and in the face of Iran’s explicit statements that it intends to destroy Israel. Whoever tries to harm us, we will harm them. Whoever threatens to destroy us will bear the full responsibility.” — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
DAVOS, Switzerland — The world economy absorbed more bad news Monday: The International Monetary Fund cut its growth forecast for 2019. And China, the world’s second-biggest economy, said it had slowed to its weakest pace since 1990.

The IMF cut its estimate for global growth this year to 3.5 percent, from the 3.7 percent it had predicted in October and down from 2018’s 3.7 percent. The fund cited heightened trade tensions and rising interest rates. “After two years of solid expansion, the world economy is growing more slowly than expected and risks are rising,” said IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde as she presented the forecasts at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The IMF is not alone in its pessimism. The World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and other forecasters have also downgraded their world growth estimates.

Among the key concerns is the Chinese economy. The country is slowing just as its leadership tries to turn it into a more modern economy by reducing its reliance on manufacturing and exports and increasing consumer spending. The country reported Monday growth of 6.6 percent in 2018, the weakest since 1990. Demand for Chinese exports weakened last...