FRESNO PD CHIEF WELCOMES FEDERAL SCRUTINY, DEFENDS OFFICERS »
WALTERS: NEWSOM NOW OWNS THE WILDFIRE AND PG&E CRISIS »
DEMOCRATS PUSH IMPEACHMENT RULES PACKAGE THROUGH HOUSE »
October 30, 2019 | David Taub

Fresno Police Chief Andy Hall says he is open to a federal investigation into a 2017 shooting death of a homicide suspect — and his department as a whole. “We want to be as transparent as possible. And, if the FBI or the Department of Justice wants to look into the case, we’ll provide all of our information to whatever agency wants to look into it. We’re going to be as transparent as possible to the public, as well as any other agency,” Hall said in an interview with GV Wire. The department came under renewed scrutiny last week when a video surfaced of the shooting death of 16-year-old Isiah Murrietta-Golding. His mother and father filed a consolidated federal wrongful-death lawsuit scheduled to be heard next year. According to the lawsuit, Murrietta-Golding was stopped by police because he was a suspect in the homicide of Eugenio "Henie" Ybarra the day before. Murrietta-Golding fled the scene, ran into the yard of a closed daycare center, and was shot by police. He died three days later.

Related Story: Activists Call for Federal Investigation into Fresno Police

Activists Want Federal Investigation

On Monday, activist group Fresno Stolen Lives held a protest at the downtown Fresno federal courthouse and urged U.S. Attorney McGregor Scott to conduct a civil rights investigation of the department. The group said there have been 92 officer-involved killings since 1997. “I’m not running away from anything in our past,” said Hall who succeeded Jerry Dyer as police chief on Oct. 16.

“I think all of that information is available and we’ve been very forward in putting out all of our data. So, if any agency wanted to review it, including the (groups) that actually participated in the (protest) who have this data, they’re welcome to it. You know, I believe that police departments and all government agencies should be as transparent as possible to the public.” Hall said that of the nearly 500,000 calls for police service in the last year, only a few hundred resulted in the use of force such as firing lethal or less-than-lethal rounds, deploying a Taser, or using a control hold such as a wrist lock. “When you look at the number of contacts that we have, and the number of times that we are required to use force — it’s very, very small,” Hall said.

Hall Believes in His Officers

Hall said that he stands by the quality of his officers. “I think they would find that we provide first-rate training to our officers,” Hall said. “We work on mental illness prevention as well as diffusing situations. We’re continually training our officers on deescalating the situation.” Hall said that his department has had its fewest officer-involved shootings in 2019 than at any time in the last 20 years. “I think that speaks well, not only to our training but to the equipment that we provide them, as well as the review process,” Hall said. The police chief also cited the role of the city’s independent police auditor, former FBI agent John A. Glatta, in providing recommendations to help improve the organization. There has been community criticism since the release of the Murrietta-Golding video...
Nearly three-fourths of Fresno County students scored above the state average on both English language arts and mathematics standardized tests last year. In fact, the same contingent of Fresno County students tested above the state average in English language arts for the past three years. But when you add in the remaining one-fourth, the county’s test scores dip below the state average for both English and math. Those students who are dragging down the county average? They’re attending Fresno Unified schools.

Fresno Unified Still Lags County, State

The academic performance findings were provided in a recent communication from Fresno Unified staff to district trustees. The report looks at five years of data for meeting or exceeding proficiency standards on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Tests that are administered at the end of the school year to students in grades three through eight and 11. The report found that when Fresno Unified scores are subtracted from Fresno County’s totals, the county outperformed the state average in both English and math last year — for the first time over the past five years. The Fresno County Superintendent of Schools Office did not respond to numerous requests for comment.

District Posts Bigger Gains Than County, State

Katie Russell, Fresno Unified’s instructional superintendent, said the assessment results also show that the district improved at a faster pace than the county or state over the past five years. She noted that Fresno Unified topped both the rest of the county and the state with an 11.7% gain in math...
The careers of political executives — presidents, governors and big-city mayors — are often defined, fairly or not, by how they respond to crises. Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, Franklin Roosevelt and the Great Depression, John Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis and Jimmy Carter and the Iranian hostage seizure are examples. There are also telling examples among California’s recent governors. Pat Brown’s absence from the state when the Watts riots erupted in 1965 doomed his bid for a third term and son Jerry Brown’s clumsy response to a Mediterranean fruit fly infestation in 1980 likewise undermined his hopes for a U.S. Senate seat. Pete Wilson’s decisive management of natural and human-caused calamities in the early 1990s helped him win a second term. But his successor, Gray Davis, fumbled an energy crisis a decade later, and was recalled. When Jerry Brown returned to the governorship in 2011, he was much older and more circumspect. He dealt adroitly with the near-collapse of the Oroville Dam in 2017 — making sure that those managing the dam and the evacuations had ample resources and avoiding grandstanding. He replicated that quiet approach when wildfires erupted, including one that wiped out the town of Paradise last year.

And then there is Gavin Newsom.

Newsom Loves the Limelight

Just months into his governorship, he was confronted with still another spate of fierce wildfires and the bankruptcy of the nation’s largest investor-owned utility, Pacific Gas and Electric. PG&E’s wind-blown transmission lines apparently caused some of the biggest fires, leading to enormous damage claims. Newsom has rejected Brown’s diffident example in favor of a high-profile commander-in-chief approach, with personal appearances at command centers and fire refugee sites and multiple news conferences and media interviews. “I own this,” Newsom told Capital Public Radio. “I’ve been in office now nine months. My Public Utilities Commission, which has new leadership as of a few weeks ago, owns this.”

Changing Ownership Does Not Change the Essential Conflict

Politicians criticize PG&E for shutting off service when fire danger rises, causing inconvenience to customers, but then denounce the company for not acting sooner when fire erupts — all the while ignoring the fact that their laws and Public Utilities Commission decrees dictate much of what the utility does. When PG&E shut down service in fire-prone areas earlier in the month, Newsom was quick to complain. “What has occurred in the last 48 hours is unacceptable,” Newsom said. “We are seeing the scale and scope of something that no state in the 21st Century should experience.”

Af-ter fire broke out in Sonoma County, perhaps due to a PG&E line downed by very high winds, Newsom again denounced the company. “I have a message for PG&E: Your years and years of greed. Years and years of...”
Twitter Bans All Political Advertisements

SAN FRANCISCO — Twitter is banning all political advertising from its service, saying social media companies give advertisers an unfair advantage in proliferating highly targeted, misleading messages.

"While internet advertising is incredibly powerful and very effective for commercial advertisers, that power brings significant risks to politics, where it can be used to influence votes to affect the lives of millions," Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey said Wednesday in a series of tweets announcing the new policy.

Facebook has taken fire since it disclosed earlier in October that it will not fact-check ads by politicians or their campaigns, which could allow them to lie freely. CEO Mark Zuckerberg told Congress last week that politicians have the right to free speech on Facebook. The issue suddenly arose in September when Twitter, along with Facebook and Google, refused to remove a misleading video ad from President Donald Trump's campaign that targeted former Vice President Joe Biden, a leading Democratic presidential candidate.

In response, Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren, another presidential hopeful, ran her own ad on Facebook taking aim at Zuckerberg. The ad falsely claimed that Zuckerberg endorsed President Donald Trump for re-election.

Lyft, Uber Will Ask California Voters to Block New Law

SACRAMENTO — Some of the country's largest ride-sharing companies announced a ballot initiative Tuesday that would let them continue to treat drivers as independent contractors while also guaranteeing them a minimum wage and money for health insurance. The Legislature enacted AB 5 this year requiring ride-sharing companies to treat drivers as employees, which would let them form a union and entitle them to benefits like a minimum wage and workers' compensation.

But the initiative proposed Tuesday would exempt ride-sharing companies from the law. If passed by voters, it would supersede the Legislature's action and any similar ordinances passed by local governments. It also prevents lawmakers from passing another law to block it. The proposal will only get on the ballot in November 2020 if supporters can gather roughly 660,000 signatures from registered voters. Uber...

Congresswoman's Exit Prompts Question of Equity Amid Scandal

The resignation of a female Democratic congresswoman over a consensual, sexual relationship with a campaign aide has sparked questions about whether women are held to higher standards in public life. At the center of the controversy is Katie Hill, a first-term lawmaker from California and a rising Democratic Party star. In a video released Monday, Hill said she was stepping down because she was "fearful of what might come next" following the online publication of explicit pictures that outed her relationship with a female staffer.

Sex scandals are nothing new in national politics and have mostly centered on men, some of whom have weathered the controversy and gone on to have successful careers. One of Hill's congressional colleagues, Republican Rep. Duncan Hunter of California, is running for reelection despite being...
WASHINGTON — Democrats rammed a package of ground rules for their impeachment inquiry of President Donald Trump through a sharply divided House Thursday, the chamber’s first formal vote in a fight that could stretch into the 2020 election year. The vote was 232-196, with all Republicans against the resolution and two Democratic defectors joining them. The vote laid down the rules as lawmakers transition from weeks of closed-door interviews with witnesses to public hearings and ultimately to possible votes on whether to recommend Trump’s removal from office. The action also took on more than technical meaning, with each party aware that the impeachment effort looms as a defining issue for next year’s presidential and congressional campaigns.

Democrats spoke of lawmakers’ duty to defend the Constitution, while Republicans cast the process as a skewed attempt to railroad a president whom Democrats have detested since before he took office. “What is at stake in all this is nothing less than our democracy,” said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. Underscoring her point, she addressed the House with a poster of the American flag beside her and began her remarks by reading the opening lines of the preamble to the Constitution.

Likely to Take Weeks Before the House Decides Whether to Vote on Impeaching Trump

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said Trump had done nothing impeachable and accused Democrats of trying to remove him “because they are scared they cannot defeat him at the ballot box.” Nothing that elections are just a year away, he added, “Why do you not trust the people?” No. 3 House GOP leader Steve Scalise, R-La., accused Democrats of imposing “Soviet-style rules,” speaking in front of a bright red poster depicting the Kremlin. The investigation is focused on Trump’s efforts to push Ukraine to investigate his Democratic political opponents by withholding military aid and an Oval Office meeting craved by the country’s new president. Democrats said the procedures — which give them the ability to curb the president’s lawyers from calling witnesses — are similar to rules used during the impeachment proceedings of Presidents Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton. Republicans complained they were skewed against Trump. It is likely to take weeks or more before the House decides whether to vote on actually impeaching Trump. If the House does vote for impeachment, the Senate would hold a trial to decide whether to remove the president from office. Both parties’ leaders were rounding up votes as Thursday’s roll call approached, with each side eager to come as close to unanimity as possible. Republicans said a solid GOP “no” vote would signal to the Senate that the Democratic push is a partisan crusade against a president they have never liked.

Republicans Said They’d Use the Vote to Target Freshman Democrats

Democrats were also hoping to demonstrate solidarity from their most liberal elements to their most moderate members. They argued that GOP cohesion against the measure would show that Republicans are blindly defending Trump, whatever facts emerge. “It will show the other party has become the party of Trump. It’s really not the Republican Party any longer,” said Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich. Republicans said they’d use the vote to target freshman Democrats and those from districts Trump carried in 2016. They said they would contrast those Democrats’ support for the rules with campaign promises to focus on issues voters want to address, not on impeaching Trump. The House GOP’s campaign arm sent emails to reporters...
WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve cut its benchmark interest rate Wednesday for the third time this year to try to sustain the economic expansion in the face of global threats. But it hinted that it won't likely cut again this year.

The Fed's move reduces the short-term rate it controls — which influences many consumer and business loans — to a range between 1.5% and 1.75%. A statement the Fed released after its latest policy meeting removed a key phrase that it has used since June to indicate a future rate cut is likely. This could mean that Fed officials will prefer to leave rates alone while they assess how the economy fares in the months ahead. The economy is in its 11th year of expansion, fueled by consumer spending and a solid if slightly weakened job market. By cutting rates, the Fed has tried to counter uncertainties heightened by President Donald Trump's trade conflicts, a weaker global economy and a decline in U.S. manufacturing.

The third rate cut of the year has partly reversed the four hikes that the Fed made last year in response to a strengthening economy. That was before rising global risks led the...
BEIRUT — The Islamic State group declared a new leader Thursday after it confirmed the death of its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi days earlier in a U.S. raid in Syria.

In its audio release by the IS central media arm, al-Furqan Foundation, a new spokesman for IS identifies the successor as Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi — tracing his lineage, like al-Baghdadi, to the Prophet Muhammad’s Quraysh tribe. It provided no other details about al-Qurayshi and it was not immediately clear who the name was in reference to. The group typically identifies its leaders using noms de guerre that refer to their tribal affiliation and lineage.

Those names often change. The speaker in the audio also confirmed the death of Abu Hassan al-Muhajir, a close aide of al-Baghdadi and a spokesman for the group since 2016. Al-Muhajir was killed in a joint U.S. operation with Kurdish forces in Jarablus in northern Syria on Sunday, hours after al-Baghdadi blew himself up during a U.S. raid in Syria’s northwestern Idlib province.

The New Caliph Is Identified as a Scholar

The killings were a double blow to the extremist group, nearly seven months after its territorial defeat in Syria. The new spokesman, named Abu Hamza al-Qurayshi, urged followers to pledge allegiance to the new Caliph and addressed the Americans, saying: "Don't rejoice."

"The Shura Council met immediately after confirming the martyrdom of Sheik Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The leaders of the Mujahedeen agreed after consultation with their brethren and acting according to the will (of al-Baghdadi) they pledged allegiance to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi as the new leader of the Believers."

The new Caliph is identified as a scholar, a well-known warrior and "emir of war" who has battled American forces and knows "its wars." "So don't rejoice America for the death of Sheik al-Baghdadi," the speaker said. "Don't you know America that the state (IS) today is at the doorstep of Europe and is in Central Africa? It is also expanding and remaining from east to west." The speaker was referencing the slogan IS used at the height of its successes: "Remaining and expanding."

October 31, 2019 | AP News

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LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER QUITS AMID ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS

October 29, 2019 | AP News

BEIRUT — Lebanon’s prime minister resigned Tuesday, bowing to one of the central demands of anti-government demonstrators shortly after baton-wielding Hezbollah supporters rampaged through the main protest camp in Beirut, torching tents, smashing plastic chairs and chasing away protesters.

The demonstrators later returned to the camp in time to hear the news that Prime Minister Saad Hariri said he was stepping down after hitting a “dead end” in trying to resolve the crisis, which has paralyzed the country for nearly two weeks. The protesters erupted in cheers at the news. The Hezbollah rampage marked a violent turning point in Lebanon’s protests, which have called for the resignation of the government and the overthrow of the political class that has dominated the country since the 1975-1990 civil war. The government is dominated by factions allied with Hezbollah, the most powerful armed group in the country.

Hariri had reluctantly worked with those factions as part of a national unity government that had failed to address an increasingly severe economic and fiscal crisis. “I tried all this time to find an exit and listen to the voice of the people and protect the country from the security and economic dangers,” Hariri said. “Today, to be honest with you, I have hit...