5,000 JOBS LOST AND FRESNO E-COMMERCE DREAM ON HOLD OVER LAND CONFLICT »

BECERRA’S CHALLENGE: VACCINATING AMERICANS AGAINST VIRUS »

US JOBLESS CLAIMS JUMP TO 853,000 AMID RESURGENCE OF VIRUS »
Five thousand jobs that would have landed in Fresno over the last two years have gone elsewhere because there was nowhere for them to go. That’s according to the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation. Two million square feet of vacant, commercially-zoned land near the Ulta and Amazon e-commerce distribution centers in south Fresno still remains somewhat off limits two years after the Fresno City Council unanimously gave a thumbs up to development there.

Companies could still build warehouses or manufacturing facilities on the site, but they’d be faced with potential litigation from nearby residents and social justice advocates. The area is south of the intersection of Highway 41 and Highway 99 and is referred to as the “reverse triangle.” Mayor Lee Brand once touted the area as the center of Fresno’s e-commerce future and the thousands of jobs it would generate. But, a court battle between the developer and a group of residents called South Central Neighbors United put that vision on hold when the project’s proponent backed down. Opponents said the proposed build-out would cause negative impacts from groundwater depletion and increased daily vehicle traffic. GV Wire℠ reached out to the nonprofit advocacy group Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability (which represented area residents) for comment in this story, but was told they were not making any media statements around this specific issue.

As Brand is about to hand the reigns of the city over to Mayor-elect Jerry Dyer, he’s weighing a big decision. Should he push forward with an environmental impact report for the area in the hopes of getting four council votes at the end? An EIR would clear the deck of potential lawsuits and allow businesses to come in. Getting the ball rolling sooner could save valuable time when a typical EIR takes about 8 months to complete. Or, should Brand leave the situation for the next administration to confront with fresh eyes? Brand’s last official full day in the mayor’s chair is January 4. “I may come up with a plan before this year’s over,” says Brand.

Business Opportunities Lost
“Businesses that want to come in and start building, they don’t want to have to mess with any legal issues,” says Lee Ann Eager, President and CEO of the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation. “Probably a conservative estimate is about 5,000 (jobs that have gone elsewhere).” Eager shared a few recent examples, which include: A Sephora distribution center that went to Reno in the first week of December. Another Amazon (1 million square foot) e-commerce facility that went to Visalia. A UPS distribution center that chose Visalia. “We could not compete, as we had no sites for any of these,” said Eager. “We had a company...
CONFIRMED: GRIZZLIES WILL MOVE TO CAL LEAGUE IN DEAL WITH MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

December 9, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

The Grizzlies will continue as a minor league club for a Major League Baseball team, but it took a proverbial walk-off homer in extra innings to make it happen.

MLB announced its invitations for licensees (the new term for Player Developments Contracts) Wednesday. Fresno will be the Low Single-A team for the Colorado Rockies. The team will move from the Triple-A Pacific Coast League to the California League. The team will have to formally accept. Instead of a two or four-year PDC, this will be a 10-year license. Mayor Lee Brand and City Council President Miguel Arias discussed the new deal at a news conference Wednesday afternoon. “This is, in my view, the best possible agreement that we can reach, given the current conditions of Major League Baseball, professional sports, and the fact that we’re in the middle of a pandemic where most of these kind of activities are shut down and revenue is a significant loss,” Arias said. Brand praised the current Grizzlies ownership group, and is optimistic Triple-A baseball will return one day. "We will keep baseball in Fresno. It may be Single-A, but it will be good baseball. It will be good entertainment. Maybe one day we’ll go back to Triple-A," Brand said. Although the Colorado Rockies have not...
BECERRA’S BIG CHALLENGE: VACCINATING AMERICANS AGAINST VIRUS

December 9, 2020 | AP News

WILMINGTON, Del. — In choosing Xavier Becerra to be his health secretary, President-elect Joe Biden tapped a robust defender of the Affordable Care Act who will face questions about whether he possesses the health care and management experience needed to lead the massive effort to vaccinate a nation against a deadly pandemic.

As California’s attorney general, Becerra leads the nation’s largest state justice department, an influential perch from which he’s fought Republican efforts to roll back health coverage. But he has been less involved in the day-to-day work to combat the coronavirus, is not a health care expert and has not overseen an office as sprawling as the Department of Health and Human Services. With the U.S. expected to begin vaccine distribution in the coming months, few Cabinet posts will have such influence over the nation’s ability to move past the pandemic, an effort that will likely define the Biden presidency. Allies of Becerra, a former congressman who would be the first Latino HHS secretary at a time when the pandemic is taking a disproportionate toll on people of color, say he’s well suited for the role.

“He has skills that sometimes are beyond expertise,” said Rep. Jimmy Gomez, D-Calif., who represents the Los Angeles-area district near where Becerra served for some two decades. “Leadership skills, management skills, an understanding how the Hill works, how the Senate works.” If confirmed by the Senate, Becerra would lead a $1 trillion-plus agency with 80,000 employees and a portfolio that includes drugs and vaccines, leading-edge medical research and health insurance programs covering more than 130 million Americans. Becerra, 62, tweeted Monday that in Congress he helped pass the Affordable Care Act and as California’s attorney general he has defended it.

“As Secretary of Health and Human Services, I will build on our progress and ensure every American has access to quality, affordable health care — through this pandemic and beyond,” he wrote. Biden was drawn to Becerra’s working-class roots, his longtime effort to increase access to health care, including in communities of color, and his work with Republicans to expand the Affordable Care Act in California and the ability of patients to get coronavirus treatments, according to two officials familiar with his decision-making process who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. Becerra and the rest of Biden’s health team will be unveiled on Tuesday at a moment when...
In one week Fresno County’s COVID-19 positivity rate went from 6.4% up to 11.3%. The San Joaquin Valley region, as defined by Gov. Gavin Newsom, only has 5.6% of its ICU beds available. That’s the lowest of any region in the state. As of Sunday, Fresno County had just 7 ICU beds available.

California Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. Mark Ghaly updated the latest numbers during a midday briefing with reporters. Fresno County Interim Health Officer Dr. Rais Vohra says he witnessed first hand how impacted the ICU is as he completed a shift there this past weekend. "My team is doing the very best they can," says Vohra. "The team is tired and we really do need to support all of the front line workers across the county and state during this very tough time."

Ghaly says COVID-19 hospitalizations have increased 70.8% over the last 14 days, while ICU hospitalizations from the disease have increased 68.7% over the same timeframe. He also says Valley...
WASHINGTON — The number of people applying for unemployment aid jumped last week to 853,000, the most since September, evidence that companies are cutting more jobs as new virus cases spiral higher. The Labor Department said Thursday that the number of applications increased from 716,000 the previous week. Before the coronavirus paralyzed the economy in March, weekly jobless claims typically numbered only about 225,000. The latest figures coincide with a surging viral outbreak that appears to be weakening the job market and the economy and threatening to derail any recovery. Consumers thus far haven’t spent as much this holiday shopping season as they have in previous years, according to credit and debit card data. And in November, employers added jobs at the slowest pace since April. Restaurants, bars and retailers all cut jobs last month.

The increase reflected sharp increases across the country, with new applications for jobless aid jumping more than 47,000 in California, 31,000 in Illinois, 17,000 in New York and 13,000 in Georgia. Many states, particularly California, have adopted sweeping new restrictions on business activity. But even some states that generally haven’t imposed stricter rules on businesses reported sharp increases in jobless claims last week. In Texas, for example, they jumped by nearly 20,000 to 45,000. The worsening figures may partly reflect a rebound after applications for unemployment benefits had fallen during the Thanksgiving holiday week. Still, the increase was much larger than most economists had expected. “It’s evident the labor market is still in crisis,” said AnnElizabeth Konkel, an economist at the Indeed job search website. “The gap between now and when a vaccine is widely distributed looms large. There’s a lot of uncertainty ahead for the labor market going into the new year.”

The total number of people who are receiving state-provided unemployment aid rose for the first time in three months to 5.8 million, the government said, from 5.5 million. That suggests that some companies have sharply pulled back on hiring.

Unemployment Benefits to the Self-Employed and Contract Workers

All told, more than 19 million people are still dependent on some type of unemployment benefit. And unless Congress acts soon, nearly half of them will lose that aid in just over two weeks.

Unemployment Benefits to the Self-Employed

All told, more than 19 million people are still dependent on some type of unemployment benefit. And unless Congress acts soon, nearly half of them will lose that aid in just over two weeks. That’s when two jobless aid programs that the federal government created in the spring are set to expire. The first program provides unemployment benefits to the self-employed and...
WASHINGTON — President-elect Joe Biden is naming Susan Rice as director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, giving her broad sway over his administration's approach to immigration, health care and racial inequality and elevating the prominence of the position in the West Wing.

The move marks a surprising shift for Rice, a long-time Democratic foreign policy expert who served as President Barack Obama’s national security adviser and U.N. ambassador. She worked closely with then-Vice President Biden in those roles and was on his short list to become his running mate during the 2020 campaign.

Biden is also nominating Denis McDonough, who was Obama's White House chief of staff, as secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, a sprawling agency that has presented organizational challenges for both parties over the years. But he never...

MINNEAPOLIS APPROVES CUTS TO POLICE BUDGET, NOT STAFFING

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minneapolis City Council unanimously approved a budget early Thursday that will shift about $8 million from the police department toward violence prevention and other programs — but will keep the mayor’s targeted staffing levels for sworn officers intact, averting a possible veto.

Mayor Jacob Frey, who had threatened to veto the entire budget if the council went ahead with its plan to cap police staffing, said the vote was a defining moment for the city, which has experienced soaring crime rates amid calls to defund the police since the May 25 death of George Floyd. "We all share a deep and abiding reverence for the role our local...

SPACEX LAUNCHES STARSHIP ON HIGHEST TEST FLIGHT BEFORE EXPLOSIVE

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — SpaceX launched its shiny, bullet-shaped, straight-out-of-science fiction Starship several miles into the air from a remote corner of Texas on Wednesday, but the 6 1/2-minute test flight ended in an explosive fireball at touchdown.

It was the highest and most elaborate flight yet for the rocketship that Elon Musk says could carry people to Mars in as little as six years.

This latest prototype — the first one equipped with a nose cone, body flaps and three engines — was shooting for an altitude of up to eight miles. That’s almost 100 times higher than previous hops and...
LONDON — A retired British shop clerk received the first shot in the country’s COVID-19 vaccination program Tuesday, the start of an unprecedented global immunization effort intended to offer a route out of a pandemic that has killed 1.5 million. Margaret Keenan, who turns 91 next week, got the shot at 6:31 a.m. on what public health officials have dubbed “V-Day.” She was first in line at University Hospital Coventry, one of several hospitals around the country that are handling the initial phase of the United Kingdom’s program. As luck would have it, the second injection went to a man named William Shakespeare, an 81-year-old who hails from Warwickshire, the county where the bard was born. “I feel so privileged to be the first person vaccinated against COVID-19,” said Keenan, who wore a surgical mask and a blue Merry Christmas T-shirt decorated with a cartoon penguin wearing a Santa hat. “It’s the best early birthday present I could wish for because it means I can finally look forward to spending time with my family and friends in the New Year after being on my own for most of the year.”

The U.K. is the first Western country to start a mass vaccination program after British regulators last week authorized the use of a COVID-19 shot developed by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany’s BioNTech. The first shots will go to people over...
December 7, 2020 | AP News

BRUSSELS — Leaders of Britain and the European Union were holding a high-stakes phone call Monday for the second time in 48 hours, as the two sides sent out gloomy signals about the chances of breaking an impasse and securing a post-Brexit trade deal before the current relationship winds down at the end of the month.

U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen are due to speak by phone at 1600 GMT (11 a.m. EST), to decide whether to pull the plug on talks — a decision that could cost hundreds of thousands of jobs on both sides and disrupt cross-Channel trade for years to come.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier had no news of a breakthrough when he briefed ambassadors of the 27 member states early Monday on the chances of a deal with London before the Dec. 31 deadline. Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said Barnier’s message was “very downbeat.” “I would say he is very gloomy, and obviously very cautious about the...