

LOCAL NEWS • News

New landmark at Redlands museum recognizes Serrano people in San Bernardino County



San Manuel Band of Mission Indians Tribal Chairman Kenneth Ramirez stands before a new entrance display after the unveiling ceremony at the San Bernardino County museum in San Bernardino on Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. The display, which includes a message in Serrano, English and Spanish, marks the first time the Serrano language has been presented in written and spoken word in a public space in San Bernardino County. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

By **BRIAN WHITEHEAD** | bwhitehead@scng.com | The Sun

PUBLISHED: November 17, 2021 at 4:41 p.m. | UPDATED: November 17, 2021 at 8:14 p.m.

San Bernardino County museums in Redlands, Apple Valley and Yucaipa are on the ancestral territory of the Maara'yam, or Serrano, people, and a landmark new entrance display at the facility in Redlands acknowledges as much.

Leaders from the San Manuel and Morongo tribes joined county officials Wednesday, Nov. 17, in unveiling what is believed to be the first permanent, physical native land acknowledgment in county history.

Presented in Serrano, English and Spanish, the proclamation is the latest step toward “being very truthful and accurate about our history and where we come from,” Melissa Russo, county museum director, said. “It’s important for us to tell the full history, part of which is acknowledging the land on which we sit is ancestral land.”

Russo lauded San Manuel and Morongo leadership for their guidance, mentorship and support in crafting more transparent and progressive museum practices.

With so many Serrano collections and collections of other indigenous people, the county intends to honor and celebrate those native to the land, Russo added.



“Their trust allows us to move forward in a way that’s respectful and honors the tribe,” she said. “The museum is just the vehicle for the information we want to present to the public.”

Both tribes’ respective connection to the land goes back generations, Morongo Chairman Charles Martin said.

“The land provided the sustenance to survive; it provided for us and cared for us,” Martin said.

The San Manuel tribe hopes museum visitors educate themselves on the native people, not only of the region, but of California and the country as a whole, Vice Chairman Johnny Hernandez Jr. said.

“We hope people acknowledge the history was atrocious,” Hernandez added, “and that we need to do better in the future to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

Moreover, Hernandez continued, “Us native people, we’re still here, and it’s so important to educate ourselves and educate the community ... on the real history and what we accomplished as a people and what we’ve been through and how we see our future as good stewards of our land.”

The San Bernardino County Museum is at 2024 Orange Tree Lane in Redlands.

Editor’s note: This article has been updated to correct the name of the San Manuel tribe’s vice chairman.

NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Historic announcement acknowledges 3 San Bernardino County museums sit on tribal land

It's the first time that the Serrano language has been given a place of priority in a public space in San Bernardino County.

By [Rob McMillan](#)

Wednesday, November 17, 2021 6:26PM

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MORE VIDEOS

For the first time in the history of the Inland Empire, San Bernardino County officials publicly acknowledged the land on which three of its museums sit is the ancestral territory of the Serrano people.

REDLANDS, Calif. (KABC) -- For the first time in the history of the Inland Empire, San Bernardino County officials publicly acknowledged the land on which three of its museums sit is the ancestral territory of the Serrano people.

The announcement was made during the unveiling of a proclamation at the front entrance of

the San Bernardino County Museum in Redlands that depicts the written and spoken words of the Serrano people in their native language.

"There were 7.4 million acres at one time that our ancestral territory covered," said Ken Ramirez, chairman of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians. "Now we're down to one square mile on the reservation in San Manuel.

Tribal members of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians were joined by members of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians for the announcement at the museum.

"Just to be acknowledged as part of the community, this is great," said one member.

According to a news release, it's the first time in living memory that the Serrano language has been given a place of priority in a public space in San Bernardino County. The acknowledgement covers not only the museum in Redlands, but also the Victor Valley Museum in Apple Valley and the Yucaipa Adobe.

Ramirez said at one point, not long ago, there were only two known fluent speakers of the Serrano's native language in the San Manuel tribe.

He shared a story told by his grandmother when tribal members were sent to boarding schools throughout the county.

But Karina Torres, who's on the business committee for the San Manuel tribe, says times have changed. She's pleased that histories of the county and Serrano people can be shared in a culturally appropriate way.

"For my children, and all the children of this county, I thank everyone involved for making this act of respect and restoration happen," she said.



Supervisor Joe Baca Jr. Introduces the San Bernardino County Sheriff, County Code Enforcement Team, New Vehicles

Posted by: Wallace in Local November 18, 2021 1,300 Views

BLOOMINGTON, CA— San Bernardino County Fifth District Supervisor Joe Baca Jr., in partnership with San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, San Bernardino Code Enforcement and Special Districts invited residents out on Wednesday, November 17 to Kessler Park to see the new vehicles assigned to Bloomington.

By collaborating with the Sheriff's Department and Code Enforcement, this event was aimed to increase the levels of protection and safety in Bloomington with dedicated personnel and specially marked vehicles.

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The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department released this photograph of a greenhouse deputies raided last week.

11 weeks, \$194M in cannabis seized



By Stacy Moore
Hi-Desert Star

Nov 17, 2021 3:35 PM

SAN BERNARDINO — County sheriff's deputies have seized an estimated \$1.9 million in cannabis since Operation Hammer Strike started on Aug. 30, the Sheriff's Department said

Dawn Rowe, the county supervisor who represents the Morongo Basin, said the county is going after property owners and the district attorney is adding more staff specifically to prosecute people accused of running illegal cannabis farms.

In the meantime, the board of supervisors expects to consider an ordinance allowing code enforcement officers to remove items like greenhouses and trailers left behind on properties after Sheriff's Department raids. Rowe said the board may get a first look at the ordinance at its Dec. 7 meeting.

"This has been a team effort," Rowe said at the Homestead Valley Community Council meeting Monday, Nov. 15. She thanked the Sheriff's Department, code enforcement officers, District Attorney Jason Anderson and the many staff members who work together to eradicate cannabis farms.

Audience members at the meeting applauded Rowe and Lt. Mike Walker, who was there representing the local sheriff's station, for their action against cannabis farms.

"We really need to applaud and thank Dawn for what she's done," said Chuck Bell, from Lucerne Valley.

It is a misdemeanor in San Bernardino County to grow cannabis outside or to grow it anywhere
arch for...

Earlier this year, the board of supervisors set aside \$4 million to the Sheriff's Department to allow them to expand from one marijuana enforcement team to five, allowing them to increase their enforcement in an operation dubbed Operation Hammer Strike.

Since the operation began, the Sheriff's Department reported, they have done the following:

- 270 search warrants served.
- 324 suspects arrested.
- 262,398 cannabis plants seized.
- 54,407 pounds of processed marijuana seized.
- 8 grams of concentrated cannabis seized.
- 8 grams of methamphetamine seized.
- 83 firearms seized.
- \$654,449 in cash seized.
- 1,519 greenhouse contents seized.
- Three illegal electrical bypasses removed.
- Four THC extraction labs shut down.
- Total wholesale product value of cannabis seized: \$194,052,220.

The most recent week — week 11 — of Operation Hammer Strike included raids on five Wonder Valley properties.

Deputies searched alleged cannabis farms on Amboy, Eddie Albert, Garden, Brown and Marks roads.

DAILY PRESS

NEWS

San Bernardino County COVID-19 vaccine tracker: 51% of people fully vaccinated

Diane Pantaleo, USA TODAY NETWORK

Published 9:46 a.m. PT Nov. 17, 2021

San Bernardino County has administered more than 2,389,170 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, as of Nov. 15, according to data from the California Department of Public Health.

That's up 1.78% from the previous week's tally of 2,347,473 COVID-19 doses administered.

In San Bernardino County, 51% of people living in San Bernardino County are fully vaccinated as of Nov. 15. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers someone fully vaccinated two weeks after they've been given a single-dose shot (Johnson & Johnson) or a second shot (either Pfizer or Moderna).

California reported 5,012,696 total cases of coronavirus, an increase of 0.66% from the week before.

The five counties with the highest percentage of their population fully vaccinated in California as of Nov. 15 are Marin County (79%), San Francisco County (78%), Santa Clara County (77%), Contra Costa County (75%) and San Mateo County (75%).

Here are the latest numbers on COVID-19 vaccinations in San Bernardino County as of Nov. 15:

How many people in San Bernardino County have received a COVID-19 vaccine?

57% of people in San Bernardino County have received at least one dose of the vaccine, for a total of 1,216,816 people

51% of people in San Bernardino County are fully vaccinated, for a total of 1,096,821 people

For a county-by-county look at the vaccination rollout, see our COVID-19 vaccine tracker, which is updated daily.

How many people in California have been vaccinated so far?

77% of people in California have received at least one dose of the vaccine, for a total of 30,330,016 people

63% of people in California are fully vaccinated, for a total of 24,629,034 people

COVID vaccinations for kids and boosters

The percentages in this story reflect the total share of the population that has received vaccines. That now includes people as young as 5 years old, for whom vaccines have been authorized.

These weekly stories will be updated as more data on vaccination rates in children, as well as booster vaccination rates, are released.

We pull data on local vaccine distribution on a weekly basis. Check back for our next weekly update mid-week for the latest numbers.

NEWS • News

LA County nursing homes nearly finished with coronavirus boosters for residents

Another 1,284 cases were also reported, giving the county a cumulative total from throughout the pandemic of 1,514,282.

Los Angeles County Public Health pushed assertively to get vaccines into nursing homes. (AP Photo/Hans Pennink, File)

By **CITY NEWS SERVICE** | news@socalnews.com |

PUBLISHED: November 17, 2021 at 5:40 p.m. | UPDATED: November 17, 2021 at 11:09 p.m.

LOS ANGELES — With the county urging residents to get COVID-19 vaccine booster shots, health officials said on Wednesday, Nov. 17, that skilled nursing facilities have nearly completed administration of boosters to residents.

According to the county Department of Public Health, 97% of skilled nursing homes have reported that they will finish administration of booster shots to residents by Friday. County officials said they are working with the remaining facilities to ensure residents have access to the shots.

“I am grateful that nearly all skilled nursing facilities in the county will complete administering COVID-19 boosters to their eligible residents this week,” county Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said in a statement. “We know from experience that nursing home residents are among our most vulnerable people disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Lives are saved by protecting those at elevated risk with vaccines and boosters, maintaining straightforward safety measures and increasing vaccination coverage countywide.”

According to the county, 96% of skilled nursing facility staffers and 89% of residents are fully vaccinated. All staff are required to be vaccinated, but those with approved exemptions must be tested weekly.

Another 1,284 cases were also reported, giving the county a cumulative total from throughout the pandemic of 1,514,282.

11/18/21, 9:22 AM

LA County nursing homes nearly finished with coronavirus boosters for residents – Daily News

According to state figures, there were 616 COVID-positive patients being treated in county hospitals as of Wednesday, down from 640 on Tuesday. Of those hospitalized, 155 were in intensive care, down from 162.

The daily rolling average rate of people testing positive for the virus was 1.2% as of Wednesday, a number that has generally held steady.

As of last week, 81% of county residents aged 12 and over have received at least one dose of COVID vaccine, and 73% are fully vaccinated. Of the county's overall 10.3 million population, 70% have received at least one dose, and 63% are fully vaccinated.

Of the more than 5.9 million fully vaccinated people in the county, 72,163 have subsequently tested positive, for a rate of 1.22%, according to the county. A total of 2,424 vaccinated people have been hospitalized, for a rate of 0.041%, and 396 have died, a rate of 0.007%.

LOCAL NEWS • News

After backing COVID vaccine, mask mandates, Corona-Norco school trustee faces recall

By **ALLYSON ESCOBAR** | aescobar@scng.com |

PUBLISHED: November 17, 2021 at 6:28 p.m. | UPDATED: November 17, 2021 at 6:32 p.m.

Corona-Norco parents are trying to oust longtime school board member Jose Lalas, citing reasons such as his support of mask and [coronavirus vaccine](#) mandates.





Corona-Norco school board member Jose Lalas, who represents Trustee Area, was served with recall papers at the Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021, meeting. (Courtesy of Jose Lalas)



Lalas, who joined the Corona-Norco Unified School District board in 1990 and has had seven terms, including his current one, was served with recall papers at the [Nov. 9 meeting](#). The 70-year-old trustee was [re-elected in 2020](#) to represent [Area 1](#), which includes west Corona and the adjoining unincorporated county area.

Many Corona-Norco parents, district educators and staff have [protested the state's mask and COVID-19 vaccine mandates](#) during school board meetings and outside district offices. At the meeting, parents took issue with Lalas' support of the mandates and also said he pushes the concept of [critical race theory](#).

Parent Cleveland Carter served Lalas with the notice of intention to recall at the packed meeting.

"Parents want a voice in their kids' education, whether it be masks mandate, whether it be vaccine mandate, whether it be 'CRT' or equity, as you call it, Dr. Lalas," Carter said, addressing Lalas. "When parents don't get a voice in their kids' education, they have to take it to the next level."

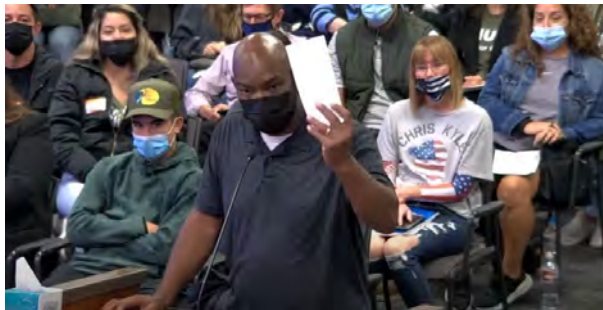
A notice of intent was filed with the Riverside County Registrar of Voters on Friday, Nov. 12, Registrar Rebecca Spencer said. The office is reviewing the document to ensure it complies with the law.

The next major step for recall proponents would be to gather signatures and prepare a recall petition. If there are enough signatures, a recall would be placed on the ballot. It was not clear Wednesday, Nov. 17, how many signatures were needed or by when the petition would need to be filed.

Corona-Norco Superintendent Sam Buenrostro said in a statement that the recall process is overseen by the county registrar and referred questions to that office.

In a Wednesday interview, Lalas called the recall effort "democracy in action," but said he did not understand why residents are "singling me out" for following [COVID-19](#) directives that are "consistent with the governor's, state and county public health department mandates."

"I'm only one voice, one vote," said Lalas, an [education professor](#) at the University of Redlands. "Those are not Jose's mandates – but I support because it will keep teachers, students and the community safe. It's not self interest. I love serving this community ... I'm not afraid to ask those hard questions."



Parent Cleveland Carter serves Corona-Norco school board member Jose Lalas with a notice of intention to recall at the Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021, meeting. (Courtesy photo)

Lalas has also advocated for [diversity programs and education in Riverside County's largest school district](#), which he said is "not teaching critical race theory anyway." He said the framework of critical race theory – which examines [the way racism is embedded in America's institutions and laws](#) – has been taught in graduate education for years.

Lalas said that he would "support not to ban" critical race theory in the district, and called it an "analytical tool" to address race and diversity in education.

In the recall notice, Corona-Norco residents wrote that Lalas' interests are not focused on students, but in "furthering self-interests and a personal politically fueled equity agenda." They alleged he displays "poor leadership" and a "level of disrespect for parents, teachers and students," and accused Lalas of "aggressive institution of mask mandates" and "illegally mandating a vaccine which is still in the clinical trial phase."

Parents called for better board representation for their children.



Vanessa Nelson, a recall supporter who pulled her two children from the district, said Wednesday that she “can’t go along with mandating vaccines” or “dividing children as oppressors and the oppressed,” when it comes to critical race theory.

“Of all the board members, Jose Lalas is the only one who continually supports mandates for the students and staff,” Nelson said. “From the parents’ point of view, we see other school boards fighting back against the (governor’s) mandates, but we don’t see our district doing that.”

Recall backer Eric Neff, who has two children at Ronald Reagan Elementary in Eastvale, called Lalas “authoritarian” for supporting vaccine mandates in the district.

“You have four board members saying no and him saying yes,” Neff said. “That right there shows a dictatorship-type action towards children. Board members are not physicians; they shouldn’t choose medication decisions for children.”

Matthew Stringer, who lives in Lalas’ trustee area, said at the meeting that “it’s time for change” and that he “looks forward to seeing Lalas recalled.”

Lalas said that the coronavirus pandemic has “elevated weaknesses and inequality” in the education system.

“If pushing for safety for all teachers, kids, our community, is a personal agenda, sure,” he said. “If I (discuss) issues that are happening in the school district and question our own administrators to make sure that we give everybody equitable solutions and equal opportunities for success, then yes, that’s my goal. So we can include those students who are historically not making it or who are underserved.”

A sweet COVID vaccine deal

LAUSD is offering prizes to students who get immunized ahead of the looming deadline.



ANGEL MACIAS, 12, receives a COVID-19 vaccination. (Mel Melcon Los Angeles Times)

Mary Poppins was a stern nanny, but she knew the value of sweetening the deal. The Banks children in the Disney movie had to take their daily medicine, but with it, they were dosed with “a spoonful of sugar” to make it a more pleasant and far less combative experience.

Almost all students 12 years and older in Los Angeles Unified schools now must take a new version of their medicine: the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against COVID-19. Failure to

do so by Jan. 10 means those students will have to switch to the district's remote-learning program.

District and county health officials believe that slightly more than 70% of students are on track to meet the deadline, but that's hard to know until parents file the necessary paperwork. The number could be higher.

Still, it's hard to stomach the idea that any significant number of students now attending a regular classroom would have to return to the kitchen table for lessons. For most students, in-person education makes a world of difference.

The number of vaccinated could go up dramatically in the next month and a half. After all, the district's mandate for school staff was looking iffy as it neared the deadline. As it turns out, 97% of teachers took the jab or had a legitimate excuse otherwise. But L.A. Unified is smart to leave as little as possible to chance and are spending up to \$5 million on a COVID-19 immunization incentive program. Schools are offering an array of [rewards for a jab](#), including tickets to the musical "Hamilton" and to Disneyland, gift cards, food truck meals and T-shirts.

The chance at a prize can be a real motivator for kids, and if it opens up uncomfortable debates between them and their vaccine-hesitant parents, that's also good. Open discussion of a key medical decision is healthy.

To be clear, the mandate for 12- to 15-year-olds is a mistake because that age group is cleared for the vaccine only under emergency use authorization. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration wants to wait for additional data before granting final approval. There are legal limits — though fuzzy — on mandating use of a pharmaceutical at this stage, and it feeds the perception that the public is being forced to take an "experimental" vaccine. That's not true; the evidence for the vaccine is strong. But LAUSD didn't mandate for people 16 and older until the vaccine had final FDA approval, and the same should be true for younger students.

That said, there is a mandate in place and its failure would help no one. Students should be vaccinated for their own protection and for that of their families, schools and communities.

L.A. Unified should consider a new giveaway next year targeting the 5- to 11-year-olds who became [eligible for the vaccine](#) under the FDA's emergency use authorization in October. The school district has no mandate for them — and shouldn't adopt one until final FDA approval — but that's all the more reason to give kids and families an incentive to do the right thing for their health and everyone else's.

Oh, and about that spoonful of sugar: The writer of the Mary Poppins song [got the idea](#) after kids received an oral polio vaccine in sugar cubes in the early 1960s. Because of vaccination, that crippling disease has been nearly eradicated worldwide.

77 L.A. city employees forfeit pay over shots

They are the first to face consequences for refusing to sign notices that direct them to get COVID-19 vaccines.

BY EMILY ALPERT REYES

Dozens of Los Angeles city employees are now going unpaid after refusing to sign notices that directed them to get COVID-19 vaccines by a December deadline — and the numbers could grow in coming weeks, Mayor Eric Garcetti said Wednesday.

Garcetti addressed the issue at an evening briefing on COVID-19, his first since testing positive for the coronavirus himself in recent weeks and having to isolate while in Scotland for a climate change summit. The mayor said that 77 workers were on unpaid leave as of Wednesday and that roughly 700 more employees were vulnerable to joining them in the next two weeks. The city employs more than 50,000 people.

In his speech, the mayor urged Angelenos to get booster shots, immunize children who are newly eligible for the vaccine, and be tested if they are experiencing any symptoms, emphasizing that lower temperatures and more time spent indoors could make it easier for COVID-19 and the flu to spread.

“We can win this. This victory is here in front of us. But it requires each of us to take action. To do what’s right. And to move this city forward,” he said.

The mayor encouraged all adults to get booster shots if enough time had elapsed since they received the vaccine. “Let me say it simply: If you’re 18 or older and want to get a booster, get it,” Garcetti said.

Breakthrough infections among vaccinated people, like the one he experienced, are the result of waning immunity, he said. Still, he emphasized that the modestness of the illness he experienced — a mild fever and some cold symptoms — was “probably thanks to the vaccine that I got earlier this year.”

The L.A. city workers who refused to sign notices about vaccination requirements are the first to face major consequences for flouting a Los Angeles [ordinance](#) passed in August that requires city employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19 unless they are approved for a medical or religious exemption.

Last month, after the vaccination rules officially became a condition of city employment, the City Council [approved a plan](#) that gave unvaccinated employees more time to get the shots. City officials said, however, that there could be swifter consequences for workers who balked at that plan.

Workers who had not been vaccinated against COVID-19 or sought an exemption were sent notices that instruct them to provide proof of vaccination by Dec. 18, which they were supposed to promptly sign. In a memo sent to city departments, Garcetti said that employees who refused to sign those notices would be taken off duty and their pay halted as they await a notice of “proposed separation.”

LAPD Assistant Chief Beatrice Girmala said this week that six unvaccinated employees in the department had been assigned to home for refusing to sign the notices. The group Firefighters 4 Freedom, which is opposing the vaccination requirements, recently posted [an image](#) to its Instagram account of an LAFD employee holding up a city notice to Battalion Chief Robert Kilpatrick informing him that he was being taken off duty, describing him as “the first firefighter the city of Los Angeles has placed off leave no pay.”

The mayor said that covering for missing employees “may cost us some money up front, but it’s cost us a lot of money to lose people to COVID when they’re out.... That has cost us arguably even more.”

The city notices that workers were supposed to sign went to more than 8,000 workers who had not provided proof of vaccination or sought exemptions, according to city officials. A different set of notices went out to more than 5,000 unvaccinated employees who have indicated that they are seeking medical or religious exemptions, but workers did not go unpaid if they refused to sign them.

More than 76% of city employees — not including workers at the Department of Water and Power — are now at least partially vaccinated, according to a Times analysis of city data provided this week.

“The good news is, overwhelmingly, city employees have gotten vaccinated,” Garcetti said Wednesday.

Ahead of the Dec. 18 deadline, the city plan calls for unvaccinated workers to be tested twice a week on their own time. Under the plan, the city will be deducting testing costs of \$65 per test from their paychecks, adding financial pressure to get the shots.

Garcetti said that employee testing was slated to begin Friday. Labor unions have contested the plan: The Los Angeles Police Protective League has [sued the city](#), calling for a court order that would prevent the city from charging employees for testing.

In the suit, the police union argued that the city had engaged in “bad-faith bargaining” by withholding information about the company it contracted for coronavirus testing, which is co-owned by a city commissioner. The union said the testing plan appears to “involve issues of conflicts of interest” and raised suspicions about why the city was requiring testing to be done through one specified company.

The police union also announced this week that it had lodged a complaint with the Ethics Commission, asking it to investigate whether a Board of Fire and Police Pensions commissioner, Pedram Salimpour, failed to fully disclose his income sources on disclosure forms. The complaint revolves around business positions and income other than the city testing contractor, Bluestone.

In reaction, a representative for Salimpour called the allegations “simply false.”

“Commissioner Pedram Salimpour complied with all ethics rules,” said his counsel Stephen Kaufman.

Garcetti said Wednesday that the city was requiring unvaccinated employees to be tested through one contractor so “that we could trust the test.” The selection process was handled by the Personnel Department, he said, and “no elected officials were engaged in that process at all.”

The union that represents Los Angeles city firefighters is also suing the city over its rollout of COVID-19 vaccine requirements, alleging it deprived firefighters of their right to bargain by not giving the union a chance to ask questions about its “last, best and final” proposal for implementing the rules. Last week, a judge turned down the union’s request for a temporary restraining order to halt the city’s plans.

L.A. is also facing lawsuits from groups of Police Department employees and firefighters who are challenging the vaccine mandate. In recent weeks, a federal judge turned down a request from LAPD employees to block some of the requirements, including mandating that employees use a designated form to seek religious exemptions.

At Wednesday’s briefing, the mayor also reminded Angelenos of new requirements to show proof of vaccination before entering indoor restaurants, movie theaters and other venues.

And he encouraged people to reflect on the pandemic at virtual and in-person events that will run from Thursday through Saturday, with nightly activities including evening clapping and candle lighting. An arrangement of 27,000 white flags has also been installed at Griffith Observatory in memory of people who died of COVID-19, Garcetti said.

Times staff writer Kevin Rector contributed to this report.



TRAIN ACCIDENT

6 DONKEYS KILLED AFTER THEY WERE HIT BY TRAIN IN REDLANDS

Animal control crews arrived shortly after to humanely euthanize the animals, which frequent the area, according to the city.

By *Leticia Juarez*

Wednesday, November 17, 2021 5:59PM PT



Six donkeys were killed in Redlands when they were hit by a moving train on Wednesday, and residents believe it's part of an even bigger problem.

REDLANDS, Calif. (KABC) -- A total of six donkeys were killed in Redlands when they were hit by a moving train on Wednesday, and residents believe it's part of an even bigger problem.

The incident happened at around 7 a.m. along San Timoteo Canyon. A herd of donkeys were on the tracks when a Union Pacific train struck and killed several of the animals.

"We're all looking at the donkeys and then I realize, 'Oh my gosh. They are all on the tracks!'" said Christina Bersane, a nearby resident who says she's used to seeing wild donkeys in the area.

She said she and her fiancé along with three young children witnessed the incident. Bersane said she tried to pull over and help the animals.

"As I am running, I couldn't get to them on time and the train tried to stop and it skidded a little bit and it almost stopped, but it was too late," she recalled.

[READ MORE | Video: Hikers come face-to-face with mountain lion on Orange County trail](#)

Animal control crews arrived shortly after to humanely euthanize the animals, which frequent the area, according to the city.

"We have feral donkeys in the canyon here," explained Redlands spokesperson Carl Baker.

"There's a water source on the other side of the tracks that attracts them. So they are either crossing a busy road or railroad tracks."

Meanwhile, Janet O'Connor, who owns the Sundance Ranch on the San Bernardino County line, says more needs to be done to curb the donkey population, which she says is overwhelming the community and making roadways unsafe for drivers and other animals.

"I mean I am an animal lover. I have horses and burros, but something has to be done so this doesn't happen all the time," she said.

Both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties have experienced challenges with wild donkeys.

In response to the latest incident San Bernardino County said in a statement that reads in part, "The [Animals Are First Fund \(ARFF\)](#), San Bernardino County's non-profit charitable organization, is in negotiations with [DonkeyLand Rescue](#) to schedule the next phase of the burro sterilization project."

The county also said 250 male donkeys have already been sterilized and crews are working with DonkeyLand Rescue to establish a long-term sanctuary for the animals.

But for Bersane and her family, Wednesday's experience has left them shaken and wishes more could've be done to save the donkeys.

[Report a correction or typo](#)

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DAILY PRESS

NEWS

Victorville to add 50 more automated license plate readers throughout city

Martin Estacio Victorville Daily Press

Published 4:30 p.m. PT Nov. 17, 2021 | Updated 5:12 p.m. PT Nov. 17, 2021

Victorville will have 50 special cameras that record license plates mounted throughout the city which officials say will aid police after a council decision Tuesday night.

The City Council voted 3-1, with Councilwoman Blanca Gomez voting no, to install the cameras known as Automated License Plate Readers, or ALPRs, at unidentified locations for a cost of roughly \$612,000.

With the decision, 107 high-speed, computer-controlled cameras operated by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department will run at various intersections and traffic signals, almost triple the number neighboring Hesperia has.

Law enforcement and city officials have praised the cameras as a one-time expense that helps improve public safety and solve crime without more deputies.

Privacy advocates, such as the nonprofit Electronic Frontier Foundation, however, have characterized the systems as a “powerful surveillance technology that can be used to invade the privacy of individuals as well as to violate the rights of entire communities.”

City says ALPRs have been effective

The council first began discussing the use of an ALPR system in 2019 when members approved the yearly budget and allocated \$450,000 for “traffic technology improvements.”

In April 2020, 37 cameras were greenlit using those funds. More than four months later in August, another 20 ALPRs were approved in a contract with Vigilant Solutions.

With its most recent purchase, Victorville has spent roughly \$1.3 million on the system, according to city spokesperson Sue Jones.

The cameras work by automatically scanning and capturing all license plates that come into view, along with information about where the vehicle was spotted and the data and time.

Data can also include photos of the driver and passengers, the EFF wrote an explanation of the technology.

That data is then compared to a “hot list” of license plates law enforcement is looking for that could include stolen vehicles, an outstanding warrant, or if the vehicle is believed to be linked to a crime.

If there’s a “hit” or “tag,” the agency — in this case, the sheriff’s department that contracts with Victorville for police services — will be alerted.

According to the city, the system has resulted in 920 hits that have led to 213 arrests in one year starting from August 2020. Most of the people arrested, or 87%, were for auto theft or possession of a stolen vehicle.

On July 29, though, deputies detained two people who officials believe were linked to a burnt body found in a field earlier that month after cameras captured a vehicle connected to the crime.

“For many years, the citizens of Victorville have expressed their concerns about increasing crime in our City,” spokesperson Jones said. “ALPRs are a tool we are using to solve crime in Victorville, and they have been effective.”

Privacy concerns over camera system

Beryl Lipton, an investigative researcher at EFF, and her colleagues worry, however, about how the technology is used and the amount of information the cameras collect on drivers who aren’t suspected of crimes.

“Taken in the aggregate, ALPR data can paint an intimate portrait of a driver’s life and even chill First Amendment-protected activity. ALPR technology can be used to target drivers who visit sensitive places such as health centers, immigration clinics, gun shops, union halls, protests, or centers of religious worship,” the group has said.

Although she hasn’t studied Victorville specifically, Lipton said EFF’s data shows that the “vast majority of plates that are detected are not hits, compared to an actual list of cars that were involved in crimes.”

“Usually, that number is far less than 1% of the license plates that are actually read,” she said Wednesday. “So it sort of speaks to just the vast dragnet effect that ALPRs, in particular, have.”

Last month, the EFF and American Civil Liberties Union sued Marin County and its sheriff, Bob Doyle, alleging his agency shared “sensitive location information of millions of drivers with out-of-state and federal agencies, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP)” in violation of a 2015 state law.

Victorville Mayor Pro Tem Leslie Irving referenced the lawsuit during Tuesday’s meeting when she asked whether the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s were sharing information with government agencies without notifying people.

Capt. John Wickum, head of the city’s sheriff’s station, said his department didn’t and only shared information with other law enforcement departments in the state.

According to the sheriff’s official ALPR policy, the camera data can only be shared with “law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies.”

Lipton said managing who sees the data could be difficult when using a third-party vendor like Vigilant Solutions who has clients across the country. She compared it to a Google Drive account and someone forgetting about what sharing permissions they have on.

“It’s hard to keep a lock on this sort of thing,” she said.

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DAILY PRESS

NEWS

ACLU calls for investigation into CHP's use of aerial surveillance at racial justice protests

Hannah Wiley TNS

Published 9:29 a.m. PT Nov. 17, 2021 | Updated 9:29 a.m. PT Nov. 17, 2021

California Highway Patrol officers took to the air last year to survey racial justice protests all over the state after George Floyd's death at the hands of a white police officer in Minneapolis.

Their images captured protesters marching through the streets and dancing in parks. CHP videos zoomed in on demonstrators making signs and a jogger running next to the Capitol in Sacramento.

Officers did not employ the same aerial surveillance tactics when right-leaning organizations protested Gov. Gavin Newsom's COVID-19 vaccine mandates in the spring of 2020, according to public records obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California.

Now, the civil rights nonprofit is calling for an independent investigation into how law enforcement uses surveillance tactics during demonstrations. The group also wants lawmakers to step in with stronger rules against recording protesters.

The ACLU said it filed a series of public records requests last year and this spring to determine why helicopters were being used during protests against the murder of Floyd, who was killed by asphyxiation when Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for several minutes.

The organization's public records request asked for recordings, footage and aerial surveillance of protests starting from March 1, 2020.

The California Highway Patrol released 17 videos of racial justice protests and corresponding flight logs from May and June of 2020. The ACLU said it could not find any footage within the records related to protests against COVID-19 regulations.

During the spring of 2020, protesters showed up en masse to the Capitol in opposition to business and school closures amid surging case numbers. Thirty two people were arrested during a May 2020 protest against coronavirus restrictions at the Capitol.

The California Highway Patrol uses air operations for rescue efforts and to monitor “incidents, or occurrences,” according to its website.

But Matt Cagle, a staff attorney for ACLU, Northern California, said the discrepancy in what protests were being recorded last year further raises concerns about racial bias in law enforcement.

“There’s a long history of police agencies fixating on Black movements of justice,” Cagle said. “This footage raises questions of what’s happening here in California.”

The California Highway Patrol did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

CHP flights over Sacramento, Bay Area, Los Angeles

The daytime protests against police brutality were largely peaceful, though, at times, chaotic.

Vandalism and business break-ins at night overshadowed broader efforts to demand an end to over-policing and racist practices in communities of color. Police also responded with tear gas and rubber bullets as dispersion tactics, leading to serious injuries and a new law to crack down on that use of force.

The ACLU found that California Highway Patrol logged flights over several cities, including San Luis Obispo, Berkeley, San Francisco, Oakland, Santa Barbara, San Jose, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Redding, San Diego and Sacramento.

Sometimes the flight crew would label the activity as “civil unrest” or “George Floyd protests.” Another log references “riots,” and a Southern Air Ops crew monitored “looting, arson and destruction in downtown LA.”

One Northern Air Ops log references a “patrol flight over peaceful protest.” Another log from Long Beach indicates the patrol was trying to prevent a “freeway takeover.”

What California police cameras recorded

Often, patrols would circle demonstrators walking through cities or congregating in parks and zoom in on a portion of a group, according to videos reviewed by The Sacramento Bee.

During a May 31, 2020 video from downtown Sacramento, protesters can be seen grabbing water bottles and snacks from a table. Hundreds of protesters dance together in the same location in a video dated June 5.

A June 1 video labeled from Oakland includes extreme closeups of protesters' signs, including one that read: "Police Our Own Hood Killer Cops Out." Other videos seem to catch people who might not be related to the demonstrations. One video recorded an exercising man in Sacramento who ran past a sign sitting against a fence along the Capitol that read "LOVE."

Cagle said video surveillance could also have a chilling effect on protests protected by the First Amendment. Cagle said it's unknown how the videos are being used or with whom they're being shared.

"Californians have the right to march, to speak out, to protest without fear of police surveillance," Cagle said. "CHP itself described many of these protests as peaceful...Yet (demonstrators) are being recorded and fixated on by law enforcement."

The ACLU is now calling on Newsom and Attorney General Rob Bonta to investigate the footage and then prohibit police from using surveillance equipment and software during protests. The group also wants lawmakers to expand an existing police body camera law to cover this kind of recording.

Overtime costs associated with the protests cost the California Highway Patrol more than \$38.2 million after it logged 431,454 hours of additional work, according to figures released in June 2020.

Governor Newsom Announces Initial Broadband Projects to Help Bridge Digital Divide

Published: Nov 17, 2021

18 projects in tribal communities, counties and cities across the state mark first step in creating open-access middle-mile network to provide missing broadband infrastructure

Part of state's \$6 billion investment to expand broadband infrastructure and enhance internet access for unserved and underserved communities

SACRAMENTO – Advancing California's commitment to bridge the digital divide, Governor Gavin Newsom today announced that the state has identified 18 projects to begin work on an open-access middle-mile network that will provide missing infrastructure paths to bring broadband to all our communities.

As part of the historic [\\$6 billion broadband investment](#) advanced in partnership with legislative leaders earlier this year, the initial project locations are based on known unserved and underserved areas across the state. The projects will connect to the core of the global internet and interconnect to last-mile infrastructure, which is the final leg that provides internet service to a customer.

“California is committed to taking on the challenges laid bare by the pandemic, including the digital divide holding back too many communities across the state,” said Governor Newsom. “These projects are the first step to delivering on our historic investment that will ensure all Californians have access to high-quality broadband internet, while also creating new jobs to support our nation-leading economic recovery.”

The initial 18 projects represent a range of geographic locations and technical approaches. Projects are being initiated in the following tribal communities, counties and cities: Alpine County; Amador County; Calaveras County; Central Coast; Coachella Valley; Colusa Area; Inyo County; Kern County; Kern/San Luis Obispo Area; Lake County Area; Los Angeles and South Los Angeles; Oakland; Orange County; Plumas Area; Riverside/San Diego Area; San Bernardino County; Siskiyou Area; and West Fresno.

A map and additional information on the initial projects can be found [here](#).

“A reliable broadband connection makes the difference between having access to full-service health care, education and employment or sometimes going without,” said State Chief Information Officer Amy Tong. “Through a historic partnership between our Governor, the Legislature, state agencies and a third-party administrator, we are taking immediate action to improve connectivity for Californians in the northern, central and southern parts of the state.”

Evaluation of project areas included consideration of public comments, prioritization of unserved or underserved areas of the state, and inclusion of tribal communities, cities and counties. An unserved or underserved area has households that do not reliably have download speeds of at least 25 Megabits per second (Mbps) and upload of at least 3 Mbps.

State partners implementing the middle-mile initiative include the California Department of Technology, California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and Caltrans. GoldenStateNet was selected as the Third-Party Administrator (TPA) to manage the development, acquisition, construction, maintenance and operation of the statewide open-access middle-mile broadband network. As the TPA, GoldenStateNet will partner with key stakeholder groups across the state to investigate the best technical, financial and operational models to meet the needs of the project sites.

“Each entity brings a unique perspective and set of skills to the initiative, and we are beginning these initial projects within only three months of the first Middle Mile Advisory Committee Meeting. This is an extraordinary commitment to deliver service throughout the state,” said Gayle Miller, Chief Deputy Director of the Department of Finance and member of the Middle-Mile Advisory Committee.

“These initial routes have been identified to accelerate projects in areas of the state that are unserved because of the lack of open middle mile infrastructure to serve them. We are accelerating the selection of a diverse set of routes — those that are ready to build and those that are not ready to build. This allows the state to partner with locals on these diverse projects and learn by doing, as we concurrently work to finalize all the needed routes in the State. There are many more communities like those in Phase I that will be included in the final map,” said Martha Guzman Aceves, Commissioner at the CPUC.

“Equity remains our highest purpose in expanding the open-access middle-mile network. These initial sites are only the beginning, and I look forward to the tangible improvements this work will deliver to residents of our state,” said Toks Omishakin, Director of Caltrans.

“Core to our success will be the deep partnerships we've built with a diverse set of community organizations and last mile providers. Through many years of engagement with metropolitan planning organizations, CPUC-supported broadband consortia, Tribal organizations, community-based broadband advocacy groups, and organizations like the Rural County Representatives of California, the NAACP, and the California Emerging Technology Fund, we are now ready to take this historic step towards broadband equity for California,” said Louis Fox, Founder and Chair of GoldenStateNet, the state's third-party administrator.

NEWS > CALIFORNIA NEWS

Analyst: California expected to see \$31 billion budget surplus

This would be the fourth year in a row of increasing revenue

California's predicted surplus is so large that California may surge past a constitutional limit on state spending by more than \$14 billion. That could require Gov. Gavin Newsom and state lawmakers to either cut taxes, spend more money on schools and infrastructure or — perhaps the more popular choice in an election year — give rebates to taxpayers. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

By **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS** |

PUBLISHED: November 17, 2021 at 12:31 p.m. | UPDATED: November 17, 2021 at 12:37 p.m.

By Adam Beam | Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — California will have a \$31 billion budget surplus next year as revenues continue to climb despite the pandemic, according to a new forecast from the state's independent Legislative Analyst's Office.

The predicted surplus is so large the office estimates California will surge past a constitutional limit on state spending by more than \$14 billion. That could require Gov. Gavin Newsom and state lawmakers to either cut taxes, spend more money on schools and infrastructure or — perhaps the more popular choice in an election year — give rebates to taxpayers.

California's tax collections have continued to soar despite the pandemic. From April through June of this year, California businesses reported a record high \$216.8 billion in taxable sales — a 38.8% increase over the same period in 2020 and a 17.4% increase over those months in pre-pandemic 2019. Nick Maduros, director of the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration, said it is "a sign that business owners found creative ways to adapt during a difficult year."

California's "budget year" runs from July 1 to June 30. During the first three months of this budget year, California tax collections are more than \$10 billion ahead of projections. The LAO predicts that by June of 2022, California will have collected \$28 billion more in taxes and transfers than they had expected.

This means there will likely be a significant increase in spending on public schools. The state Constitution requires lawmakers to spend about 40% of state tax collections on public education each year. The LAO said Wednesday that means public schools and community colleges could see an \$11 billion increase.

All of this is possible because of a historic surge in tax collections. In September, collections from taxes on income, sales and corporations were 40% higher than September of last year and almost 60% higher than September 2019. That's because retail sales have had double digit-growth this year and stock prices have doubled from their low point last spring at the start of the pandemic.

But the LAO said it's "impossible" to know whether these gains are sustainable. Prices for goods and services are going up because of inflation. In October, the nationwide growth in retail sales of 1.7% was mostly because prices rose 0.9% during that same time period, according to new data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Gas prices grew even faster.

The Legislative Analyst's Office says most economic forecasters predict inflation will slow down by next year but conceded that prediction "comes with significant uncertainty."

"Recognizing this, our main revenue forecast takes a middle ground of possibilities, assuming neither that the gains are entirely sustainable nor that they are entirely unsustainable," the LAO wrote in its annual Fiscal Outlook.

The LAO said while they are predicting a \$31 billion surplus, it could be as low as \$10 billion or as high as \$60 billion depending on how much money the state collects from taxes.

If the numbers hold, the LAO says California could have as much as \$21 billion in its main savings account, or about 10% of all general fund revenues and transfers.

How to divvy up \$31 billion in tax surplus

Legal spending limit will test lawmakers crafting new budget next year, analysts say.

BY JOHN MYERS

SACRAMENTO — California lawmakers should take early action next year on how to implement the state's constitutional spending limit, an analysts' report recommended Wednesday, pointing out that the long-standing law will dictate how to divvy up almost all of a towering \$31-billion tax surplus.

The spending limit, approved by voters in 1979, was a key consideration during state budget negotiations last spring after largely lying dormant for the past four decades. Successive years of higher-than-expected tax revenues, even during the economic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, have allowed Gov. Gavin Newsom and Democratic legislative leaders to expand government services while also paying down long-term debts and boosting the state's cash reserves.

When state officials craft a new budget next spring, the independent Legislative Analyst's Office projects, they could find that the spending limit controls the use of all but a few billion dollars of the surplus in a period spanning between now and the early summer of 2023.

"We think it will turn out to be a pretty significant issue for the Legislature to consider in this coming budget process," said Legislative Analyst Gabriel Petek.

In [their annual report released Wednesday](#), Petek and his staff found the surplus tax revenues would be counted toward multiple fiscal years. But most of the windfall — more than \$22 billion — is paid in taxes collected during the current budget year, which began July 1 and runs through June 30 of next year. Substantial portions of the overall budget bonanza will go toward funding K-12 schools and community colleges. The report projects that guaranteed school funding will have increased by some \$11 billion over the period between mid-2020 and next summer, with higher spending required after that.

Petek said California's strong tax revenue collections appear to be broad-based and that its economy has likely been strengthened by the sweeping pandemic assistance efforts of the federal and state governments. Even so, the state budget relies heavily on high-income

earners and the successes or setbacks they experience with their investments in the stock market. The report finds that tax collections from all sectors combined grew at an annual rate of 30% over a 12-month period ending in September — the fastest rate since at least the early 1980s.

The sustained growth in tax revenues gave lawmakers an opportunity this year [to make large investments in a variety of education, healthcare and social services programs](#). One-time decisions to provide [stimulus checks, as well as renter and business relief](#), were also made possible by surplus dollars not otherwise committed to mandatory spending or cash reserve requirements. The state has also made public employee pension payments above minimum levels and committed billions toward new efforts to combat homelessness.

But when lawmakers return to Sacramento in January to consider the budget plan Newsom will propose for the coming year, they will be faced with what the analysts say are new challenges in how to interpret the 1979 spending limit. That law, enacted by voters after implementation of the property tax limitations of Proposition 13, requires some excess tax revenues to either be dedicated to special state expenses or divided between providing additional money for schools and rebates to taxpayers.

Newsom did not directly answer a question about whether he would recommend adopting the spending limit's provisions related to education and tax rebates when asked about the analysts' report at a news conference Wednesday in Los Angeles related to the state's role in easing global supply chain problems.

“I look forward to making the decision that I think is in the best interest of 40 million Californians in January with support, critical support of our legislative leaders,” he said.

Times staff writer Taryn Luna contributed to this report.

LOCAL NEWS • News

Santa Ana to deliver \$300 pre-paid cards to 20,000 households using stimulus money

By **LOU PONSI** |

PUBLISHED: November 17, 2021 at 2:58 p.m. | UPDATED: November 17, 2021 at 3:02 p.m.

Households in Santa Ana's most disadvantaged communities will receive \$300 in the form of pre-paid Visa cards next month as part of the city's Revive Santa Ana stimulus program.

The City Council on Tuesday, Nov. 16, unanimously agreed to the distribution of the cards, which city staff will deliver door-to-door beginning Dec. 4.

The \$6 million program targets 20,000 rental units in census tracts with poverty rates above Santa Ana's median poverty rate of 42%.

The Revive Santa Ana initiative is financed by Santa Ana's allocation of \$128.3 million from the federal American Rescue Plan Act, meant to address some of the hardships created by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Those low-income families are the ones who were mostly hard hit," Mayor Vincente Sarmiento said. "This is pretty incredible and we are blessed, because not many communities that have the need that we have, are able to do this for the residents.

"I don't think I've ever seen this in my 14 years on the council," he said, "that we can directly impact households and people's lives this way."

The card will be usable for purchases anywhere Visa cards are accepted, however officials are encouraging residents to do their spending in Santa Ana.

“Hopefully that money circulates as people use those and they are being used here in town,” Sarmiento said. “It will be like a double injection of stimulus to households, but also those businesses that are going to see those cards being redeemed.”

The city intentionally chose to roll out the \$300 stimulus payments at the start of the holiday season.

“I know it is going to be much needed, these next couple of months,” Councilman David Penalzoza said.

While council members praised the Revive Santa Ana initiative, some stressed the importance of targeting the most vulnerable seniors when the city receives an expected second tranche of federal funding.

“I know that in my ward, and as we’ve seen in previous meetings, there are lot of low-income, fixed-income seniors in mobile home parks,” Councilwoman Thai Viet Phan, who represents Ward 1, said. “And they do pay land leases and are being affected just as much as a typical tenant in an apartment, so I would like for us to look at that.”

The council [has also approved using the federal stimulus money](#) for more rental assistance and grants for businesses and nonprofits, to create new programs for young children and upgrade some community centers and add recreational amenities and parks.

The city is required to spend all of its federal funding by the end of 2026.

Perks escalate as employers hustle to please workers

The Great Resignation has spurred companies to offer big signing bonuses, flexible hours, even vacation money

BY SAMANTHA MASUNAGA

A San Francisco Bay Area firm started a work-from-anywhere program. A learning technology company is offering its own employees free online philosophy classes. In Maryland, a pet care company advertised a signing bonus that could buy a small house in some markets.

Employers are pulling out the stops to keep their employees from joining the exodus known as [the Great Resignation](#), spurred by a pandemic that has changed the way people approach work. Signing bonuses are growing, workweeks are shrinking and the perks keep rolling in.

“In my lifetime, I haven’t seen anything like this before,” Ruhul Dooley, an advisor for the Society for Human Resource Management trade group, said of the voluntary mass move to the exits. “Employers are forced to do things that they haven’t had to do before in the same proportions.”

Although U.S. employers [added 531,000 jobs last month](#), companies are still struggling to fill positions, and employees, ranging from restaurant workers to corporate lawyers, are still headed for the exits. Some 4.4 million people quit their jobs in September, the latest available data and the highest number since the Bureau of Labor Statistics started keeping track in 2000.

The No. 1 method to retain employees is always money, and some firms are giving out raises and bonuses. But companies are also embracing other perks that prove less expensive — especially for bigger businesses — and in some cases highly fulfilling for workers.

More than 60% of small to midsize U.S. employers polled by ADP, an HR management software and services company, said they now have a hybrid work model in place. A separate survey of workforce trends around the world found that about 75% of employees changed, or plan to change, how or where they live, according to ADP. For Generation Z workers, that figure jumps to 85%.

Flexible work schedules and telecommuting are no longer seen as special requests in many U.S. companies. They're now expected from a white-collar workforce accustomed to working from home, with little to no downside to businesses.

Meanwhile, the steep health challenges of a global pandemic highlighted the importance of family care benefits and more paid time off.

In tech and finance jobs, which have long come with sizable bonuses and creative perks, companies are stretching their pocketbooks and imaginations to hire and keep employees. Privileges once reserved for the C-suite are increasingly trickling down.

"In the past, companies would have some general perks for everyone, but they would have more perks for their executives so they can retain and keep them there," said Scott Gregory, Southwest regional president at Gallagher, an insurance, risk management and human resources and benefits consulting company.

"Now what we're seeing is employers are treating all employees like they were the executives."

San Francisco app analytics firm App Annie recently started letting its employees work anywhere in the world for up to three months a year.

"I came up with the idea in my mind that that's kind of how I work," said the company's chief executive, Ted Krantz. "Why can't we trust our employees enough to work wherever they're at?"

Krantz said the initiative, which the company calls the 90-day passport program, was a pivot based on how expectations at work have changed since the pandemic started.

"It's not like some crazy gift or some stretch, from my perspective," he said. "We're going to give you some freedom."

Amanda Ray, a premier client program manager at App Annie, took the company up on its offer and lived in Rome for about six weeks while spending time sightseeing with family and friends who came to visit. Normally based in the Bay Area, she had always wanted to work in Italy but didn't think it would be possible without uprooting herself.

"The idea of the 9 to 5 in the office is gone," she said. "I have my laptop, I've got my notepad and my pen, we've got Zoom and email and internet. You can work from anywhere, and the idea that you have to be in one location your whole life is gone."

Flexibility is high on the list of employee priorities. And if new corporate job titles such as "vice president of flexible working" or "director of remote employee experience" are any indication, the idea might be here to stay, said Ravin Jesuthasan, a leader at Mercer, a benefits consulting and investment firm, who helps companies redesign how they work and advises them on new workforce trends.

"The genie's kind of out of the bottle on flexibility," he said. "Increasingly for organizations, figuring out how do we meet more and more people on their individual terms" will be a significant change from the previous one-size-fits-all approach.

Kate Duchene, chief executive of RGP, a global consulting firm, said some of the company's largest clients are reviewing bonuses more frequently than they used to in order to keep their employees motivated. The Irvine company works with 85% of the Fortune 100 companies.

Other companies are trying a combination of benefits.

A Fortune 100 tech company in Northern California is allowing employees to work permanently from home, raised its paid caregiving leave to 14 weeks from six weeks, upped its paid time off and gave its workers \$1,000 to buy equipment for their home offices. That company reported its lowest attrition rate in a decade, Duchene said.

A large manufacturing organization in California started a vacation savings plan for its employees, in which the employee and employer both contribute, to emphasize the importance of taking time off.

In Boston, a biotech company is offering equity to contractors and consultants, a move that was unheard of five to 10 years ago.

"This is the year of talent," Duchene said. "The pendulum swings back and forth, but it sure seems to us and to many of our clients that really, talent is in the driver's seat right now, and we have to pay attention."

A court reporting agency in the St. Louis area struggling with retention and recruitment recently asked its employees for a list of perks they wanted the company to adopt.

Four of the top suggestions were flexible hours, a four-day workweek, remote or partially remote work and a pay raise. The company granted only flexible hours, an employee said, adding that the move made workers feel like the exercise was a play for morale rather than an extensive addition of benefits.

"This pandemic really opened a lot of people's eyes about how much power we as consumers and workers have," said the employee, who is now looking for another job.

Other companies are sticking to the more traditional playbook: increasing pay, bonuses and equity offerings.

Some tech companies are offering employees faster promotion cycles or more stock, said Peter Leroe-Muñoz, general counsel and senior vice president of tech policy at the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, an advocacy organization.

In the L.A. area, a number of small to midsize Silicon Beach startups are letting employees with incentive stock options cash out earlier than usual, said Arminé Babayan, financial advisor at UBS Wealth Management.

Private companies typically hold these so-called liquidity events about five to 10 years after their founding because doing so is expensive and continuous fundraising dilutes share value. Now, some of these companies are offering this as early as two to three years in.

“This is a really great way for companies to attract talent and retain talent because it gives early-stage startup employees the opportunity to invest in their personal futures in line with their professional [futures],” Babayan said.

She said some of her clients have used the earlier-than-expected cash windfall to buy a house, start a family, pay off their student loans, start their retirement planning or diversify their investments. And they’re choosing to stay with their companies.

The cash payouts are not limited to the tech industry. Heart + Paw, a Philadelphia pet care company with 21 locations in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic states, offered a \$100,000 signing bonus for lead veterinarian positions in Maryland and Rhode Island, states that didn’t have enough vets with leadership experience to meet demand.

“How do you attract somebody ... and entice someone to make a move,” said George Melillo, Heart + Paw’s co-founder and chief veterinary officer. “We’re not the only ones doing this. They’re worth every penny of it to have the right leader come in.”

The pet care chain also recently announced a new doctors rewards program meant to encourage longevity at the company. In addition to their typical salary and bonuses, veterinarians can qualify for a future payout ranging from \$10,000 to \$25,000 per year of service, depending on the person’s role. Employees will remain vested in the rewards until the chain gets acquired.

The pandemic has clarified for some people what they want out of their professional lives beyond money, spurring a range of new employer offerings.

“Companies have really understood that offering more and more and better opportunities ... it’s very important for sustaining and for increasing their competitiveness, in terms of the labor market,” said Dimitris Tsingos, co-founder and president of Epignosis, a learning technology company in Athens. Epignosis is the parent company of TalentLMS, a San Francisco training platform developer.

Tsingos said demand from companies and employers for Epignosis’ learning technology surged in the pandemic’s early months. Epignosis started offering its own employees new online learning courses on topics such as neural networks, quantum computing, blockchain technology and philosophy, which was a huge hit.

Even companies that already offer attractive perks are upping their game.

Rocklin, Calif., solar company Infinity Energy had previously offered all-expenses-paid trips for its sales and operations staff, such as a cruise to Mexico or trips to Bali, Thailand and Costa Rica.

But as the market for solar installers became more competitive, the company began offering referral bonuses ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 and signing bonuses of \$500 to \$2,500. It also created a points-based competition for employees, with prizes such as surfboards.

At a revamped store, they can also use “incentive coins” they earn to buy company swag such as branded hoodies, blankets, phone cases and drones.

“Installers especially, it’s been hard to keep them because they can go to another company and make pretty much the same, if not more,” said Taylor Schattner, vice president of human resources. “We have a really good group of guys that work for us, and we want to make sure they’re happy.”