

TWO FULL PAGES OF NEWS OF THE WEIRD BEGINNING ON PAGE 8

AFTER FIVE

THE NORTH STATE MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2022 / 35th Year / No. 4

THE NEWS, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT MONTHLY



ON THE COVER

BATON BRIO

Music director and conductor Scott Seaton leads the North State Symphony, continuing its 'Crescendo' season in February featuring members of the youth orchestras of Chico and Redding. See page 2

BILLIONS OF \$\$\$

Gov. Gavin Newsom wants to use the California budget surplus to confront the crises facing the state, including Covid-19 and climate change. See page 14



BARK RANGERS

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area is offering a series of ranger-led interpretive hikes through February. These hikes are open to the public and dogs (like our friend at left) are allowed and encouraged, provided they're on a leash. The facilitated hikes enable visitors to explore the park's diverse trail system with a park ranger and learn about Whiskeytown's natural and cultural history. For dogs and dog owners, BARK Ranger Activity Books will be available so that you and your faithful companion can become official Whiskeytown National Recreation Area BARK Rangers. See page 5

Symphony 'Finding Inspiration' for February concert

North State Symphony continues its "Crescendo" season in February with "Finding Inspiration," a special concert exploring inspiration and its many forms featuring members of the youth orchestras of Chico and Redding.

"We could all use a little extra inspiration these days" said Scott Seaton, music director and conductor of North State Symphony. "We're certainly always inspired by our wonderful north state audiences and hope very much to see you all in the concert hall".

Concerts are scheduled Feb. 12 at Laxson Auditorium in Chico and Feb. 13 at the Cascade Theatre in Redding.

(Note: For various reasons, the North State Symphony's originally scheduled soloist, double bassist Kurt Muroki, is unable to join them for their February Masterworks concert. Muroki's performance will be replaced by the Symphony's own principal French horn, Robert Fant, performing Alexander Glazunov's "Reverie, Opus 24," and "Hunter's Moon" by Gilbert Vinter.)

Mendelssohn took a trip to Scotland which was his impetus for writing the opening of the Hebrides Overture. In this special opening to the February concerts, North State Symphony musicians will be joined by youth orchestra members from



COVER PHOTO / Main photo by Jason Halley, design by Natsumi Fry. PHOTO ABOVE / Courtesy Robert Fant

North State Symphony's own principal French horn, Robert Fant (above), will replace the symphony's original ly scheduled soloist, double bassist Kurt Muroki, who had to cancel in late January.

the MTAC Youth Orchestra in Chico (Yoshie Muratani, director) and from

the Shasta College Chamber Strings in Redding (Jeff Specht, director).

Jean Sibelius was moved by a play by Maurice Maeterlinck and its themes of forbidden love, subsequently writing some of the most picturesque and charming incidental music. The concert will continue with a performance of Sibelius' Pelleas and Melisande.

The concert concludes with a piece by Maurice Ravel, who served in the French Army in World War I and later wrote Le Tombeau de Couperin as a gentle tribute to the victims of the war.

"Finding Inspiration" performances are scheduled for 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 12, at Laxson Auditorium in Chico. Tickets are available at the University box office or online at chicostatetickets.com; and 2 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 13, at the Cascade Theatre in Redding. Tickets are available at the Cascade

Theatre box office or online at cascadetheatre.org.

A free pre-concert talk is scheduled before each concert and is presented by Seaton beginning one hour before the performances.

Support for "Finding Inspiration" by season sponsors Dignity Health and the Law Offices of Cheryl A. Forbes, and from Nena Perry and Dan Purtzer.

For more information on this concert and other North State Symphony news, visit www.northstatesymphony.org.

Vendor applications being taken for Peddlers' Faire

The Old Lewiston Peddlers' Faire returns June 4 in historic Lewiston and vendor applications are now being accepted. Visit www.lewistonsparkies.com or call (530) 380-2121.

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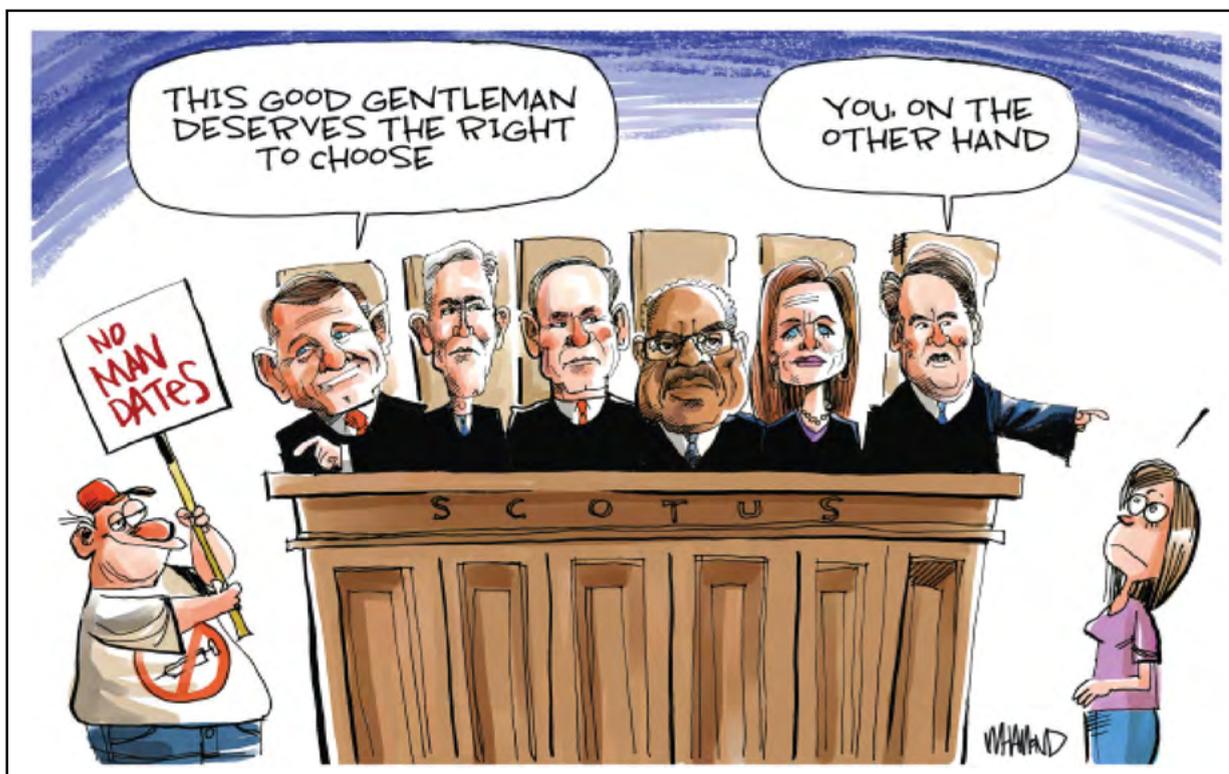
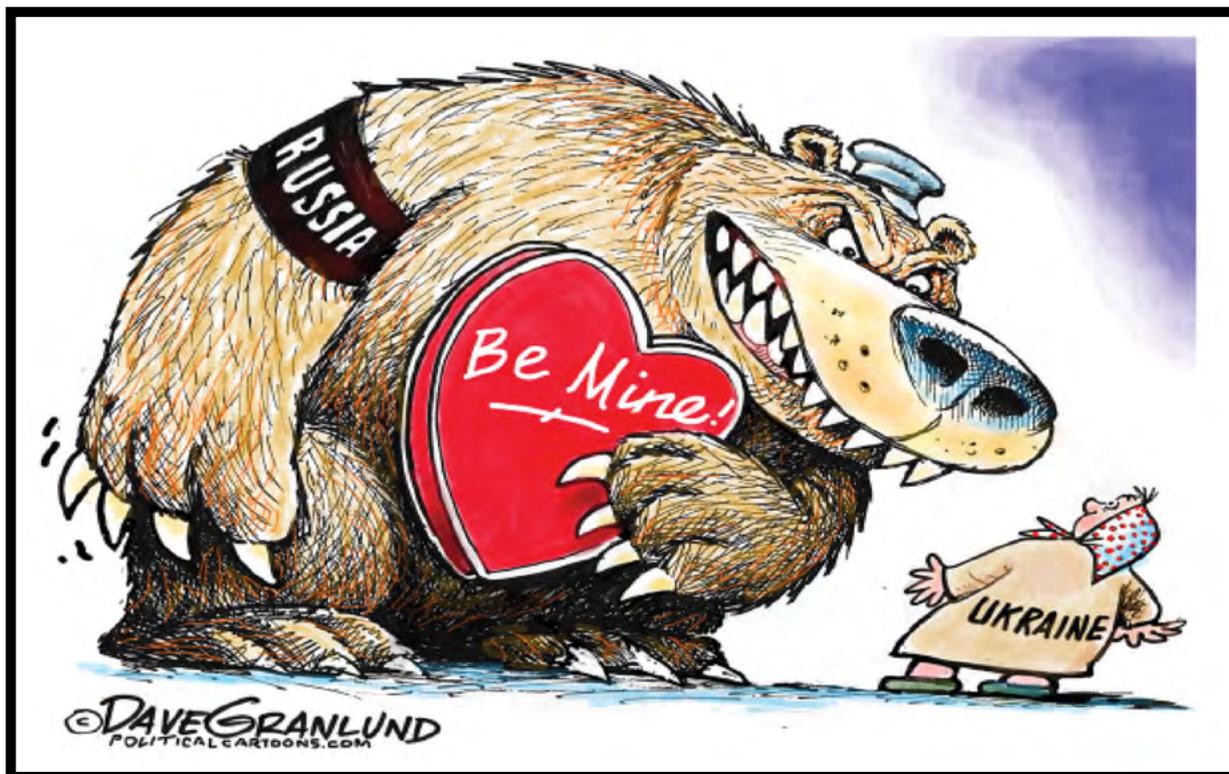
COMMENTS: (HERE OR VIA EMAIL)

HOW TO WIN PRIZES

All participants who complete and check off at least 10 different walks on the Walks Passport are eligible for prizes AND earn a pair of athletic socks (while supplies last). Participants who black out the passport (complete all 25 walks) will also be entered into a separate drawing for a pair of wireless earbuds. Walks cannot be counted twice. All passports must be submitted to admin@healthyshasta.org by midnight or postmarked by March 1, 2022 to Healthy Shasta, 2660 Breslauer Way, Redding, CA 96001. All participants must live or work in Shasta County. Winners will be notified by March 15, 2022.

FOR WALKING CHALLENGES, TRAIL MAPS, AND RESOURCES VISIT HEALTHYSHASTAWALKS.ORG

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Siskiyou artists Marlis Jermutus and Jill Gardner.

'Liquid Reflections' in Dunsmuir

The Siskiyou Arts Museum will present their first 2022 show on Feb. 12 during their Second Saturday Art Opening in their main gallery with a joint show by local Siskiyou County artists, Marlis Jermutus and Jill Gardner. The title of their exhibit is "Liquid Reflections," and features Jermutus' large scale poured acrylic abstract paintings and Gardner's luminescent and iridescent watercolor washes. The show continues through April 2.

Additional art shows in 2022 include a Mt. Shasta High School student show in March, a Tom O'Hara retrospective in May, and a Railroad Days exhibit by the Black Butte Center for RR Culture in June. They're also happy to welcome back the Siskiyou Artists' Association annual show and scholarship auction in September.

The Siskiyou Arts Museum is a member and volunteer supported non-profit art gallery and gift shop, located in the heart of the downtown Dunsmuir Historic District at 5824 Dunsmuir Ave. Business hours are Thursday through Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. On the Second Saturday of each month, they're open until 7 p.m. For updates and more information, visit them on the web at siskiyouartsmuseum.org, follow them on Facebook, or call and leave a message at 530-235-4711.

AFTER FIVE The North State Magazine

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AFTER FIVE

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PHOTO / Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

A Whiskeytown park ranger points out rock formations to visitors on a recent ranger-led hike.

Whiskeytown schedules ranger-led hikes through the end of February

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area is offering a series of ranger-led interpretive hikes through February. These hikes are open to the public and dogs on leash are allowed and encouraged.

The facilitated hikes enable visitors to explore the park's diverse trail system with a park ranger and learn about Whiskeytown's natural and cultural history. For dogs and dog owners, BARK Ranger Activity Books will be available and you and your faithful companion can become official Whiskeytown National Recreation Area BARK Rangers.

While entrance passes are required to recreate in the park, there is no additional fee for the ranger-led hikes. Visitors should bring water and wear close-toed shoes. Programs will be cancelled in the event of inclement weather.

In order to serve as many different hiker skill levels and visitors as possible, the ranger-led hikes vary in length and difficulty. For instance, the Crystal Creek Falls walk is flat, paved and wheelchair accessible, while the geology hike to Whiskeytown Falls is steep, strenuous, and around three-hours in length.

Saturday, Jan. 29 at 10 a.m. - Clear Creek Canal Trail

1.5 miles roundtrip, mostly flat and dirt trail. Meet at Mt. Shasta Mine Trailhead. The hike will spotlight the story of the Central Valley Project, involving the creation of Whiskeytown Lake and the Clair A. Hill Whiskeytown Dam.

Saturday, Feb. 5 at 10 a.m. - Clear Creek Canal Trail/Mt. Shasta Mine Loop

1.5 miles roundtrip, some elevation

gain. Meet at Mt. Shasta Mine Trailhead. The hike will discuss the human history of this area of the park.

Friday, Feb. 11 at 1 p.m. - Geology Hike to Whiskeytown Falls

3.5 miles roundtrip, trail is steep and strenuous with 700 feet of elevation gain. Meet at the James K. Carr Trailhead on Crystal Creek Road. The hike will focus on park geology and hydrology and the interconnections between the two.

Saturday, Feb. 12 at 10 a.m. - Crystal Creek Falls B.A.R.K. Ranger Walk

1 mile roundtrip on a flat, paved trail. Meet at the Crystal Creek Falls Trailhead. Bring your leashed dog and get them certified as an official Whiskeytown BARK Ranger as you stroll to the picturesque waterfall.

Saturday, Feb. 19 at 10 a.m. - Tower House Historic District Hike

1.5 miles roundtrip on mostly flat, dirt surface. Meet at the Tower House Historic District parking lot. This hike will spotlight the lives of best friends and business partners Charles Camden and Levi Tower.

Saturday, Feb. 26 at 10 a.m. - Crystal Creek Water Ditch

2 miles roundtrip on a flat, dirt trail. Meet at the Crystal Creek Water Ditch Trailhead. This walk will focus on local mining history and the Camdens.

For questions, please email Scott Einberger, interpretation supervisor, at scott_einberger@nps.gov.

To learn more about Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, visit www.nps.gov/whis.

WNRA press release.



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A lifetime case of the girl crazies

By Jase Graves



I was recently invited to speak at a local women's organization meeting in my hometown. Apparently, I was pretty much their last option, right behind the auto-warranty telemarketer and the tax auditor.

Since I couldn't imagine what I would discuss that might interest a women's group, I went for the obvious – my lifelong, chronic case of the girl crazies.

In my younger years, it had always been my dream – even my goal – to be surrounded by women, and now I live in a house with four of them, I work in a department with twenty of them, and there I stood in front of a room full of them – all looking at me. I call that a win.

I've always thought that one of God's greatest creations was women (and Mexican food). In fact, in the book of Genesis, when God looked on his creation and recognized how good it was, I'm pretty sure he was mainly thinking about women. Even better, he made the first woman out of a rib – and ribs are absolutely delicious.

Even as a young dorkling in kindergarten, I managed to land a five-year-old girlfriend who sported the cutest purple polyester pantsuit I had ever seen. I don't know if it was her sparkling personality, her bright smile or her keen wit that attracted me – but I'm pretty sure it was the pantsuit. (Don't judge. It was the 1970s.)

I never had the heart to tell my girlfriend that I was also secretly in love with my kindergarten teacher. She didn't wear enough purple for my taste, but her hand lotion smelled like Twinkies.

In elementary school, I had a fairly steady girlfriend upon whom I could usually rely to accompany me to the latest Disney movie. Apparently, she wasn't bothered by my geek-chic ensemble consisting of Toughskins Jeans, Bionic Man prescription glasses, and Chewbacca necklace with swiveling arms. (How could she resist?) One time on Valentine's Day, she even presented me with a value-size bottle of Jövan Musk cologne, which I'm pretty sure I emptied with one application.

By junior high, the nerd gene had really started to kick in, so finding a girlfriend at that age was a bit more challenging, especially since I only used deodorant sporadically and spent most of my time making rude noises with my armpits. In those days, I had to settle for staring wistfully at the heavily Aqua-Netted hair of the girl sitting in front of me in math class, fantasizing about holding her hand while strolling through the local shopping mall to the rhythmic "swish-swish" of my nylon parachute pants.

In high school, I finally learned to use deodorant properly, started working out, lost my love handles (briefly), and got a used Oldsmobile Cutlass Calais (aka "The Love Machine"). Suddenly, I noticed that girls were smiling at me – and not because my fly was open. It was the greatest thing ever, at least I thought it was at the time.

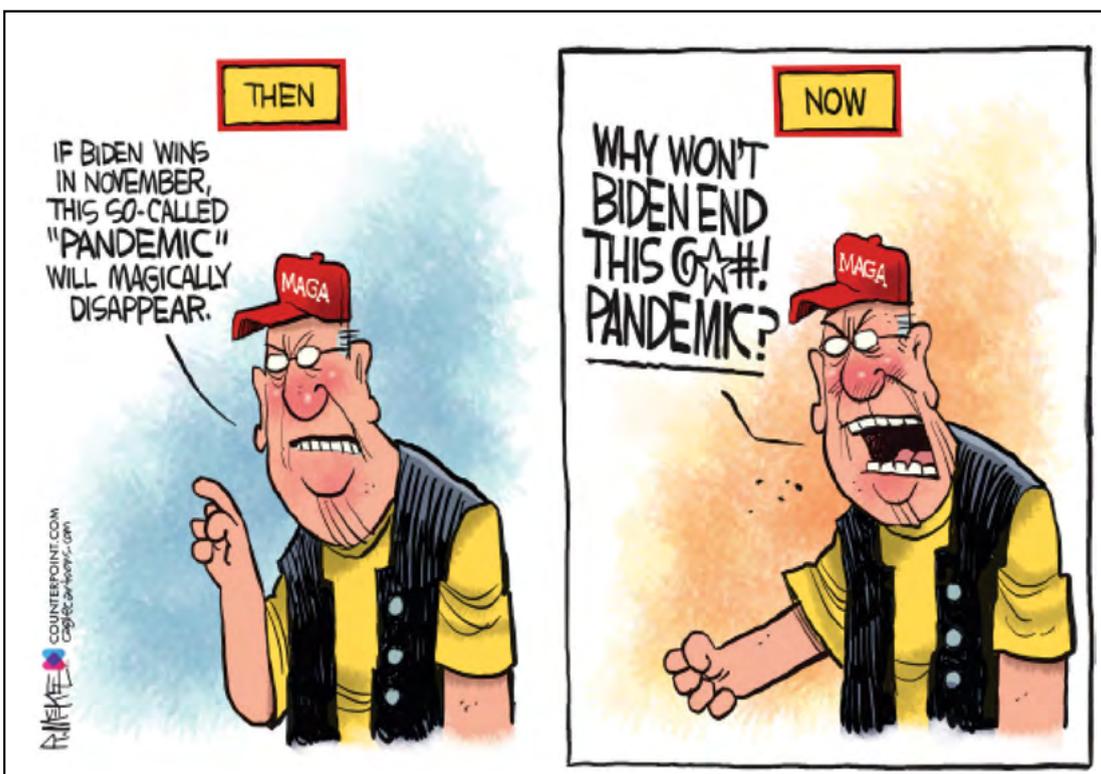
A few months after high school graduation, I met my gorgeous wife in Sunday school. That day, it was definitely good to be in the house of the Lord. She was so far out of my league that I knew I had to act fast before she figured me out, so two years later, I convinced her to settle for me permanently.

I sometimes think that when God created Eve, she must have opened her eyes, taken her first look at Adam standing there naked, looked up to God and said, "You're kidding, right?" Because let's face it. Women are superior to men in so many ways. Their brains develop faster than men, they live longer than men, they have far less back hair than men, as children, they're less likely to eat dirt than men, and regardless of how much Jövan Musk cologne men wear, women invariably smell better than men.

So, thank you, God, for creating women – especially that one who settled for a guy like me 31 years ago. I call that a win.

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Graves is an award-winning humor columnist from East Texas. His columns have been featured in Texas Escapes magazine, The Shreveport Times, The Longview News Journal, and The Kilgore News Herald. Contact Graves at susanjase@sbcglobal.net.





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NEWS of the WEIRD

Brit Paul Oldfield, aka Mr. Methane, enjoys the unusual ability to pass gas on command, Oddity Central reported.

He discovered his talent while doing yoga with his sister as a teenager.

And in the entrepreneurial spirit, he's found a way to make money with his gift. Oldfield travels around the world "entertaining" audiences with parodies of songs (he manipulates his buttocks to change the tone and pitch of his farts) and doing rapid-fire releases.

This mystery is also solved: Police in Japan have been working for months to figure out why a light pole in Suzuka suddenly snapped at its base on Feb. 18.

Most light poles in the country last for 50 years or more, but this one was only 23 years old.

NBC New York reported on Oct. 1 that forensic scientists found 40 times more urea at the pole's base than was found on nearby poles.

Yep, dog pee killed the light pole: Urea and sodium in dog urine caused the pole to erode. The new pole is up, but dogs are already marking it with their caustic streams.

Fargo, North Dakota, insurance agent Bill Fischer has a perennial battle with a certain red squirrel, Fox23-TV reported.

Every fall, the animal squirrels away walnuts for the coming winter inside Fischer's pickup truck, then Fischer has to remove them so he can drive the truck.

This year, Fischer has collected almost 350 pounds of walnuts from around the engine, the wheel wells, the front bumper and parts of the doors.

Fischer said he tried spraying the truck with a mixture of Tabasco sauce and cayenne pepper, but now he thinks the squirrel is attracted to the scent.

"I have to have a sense of humor about this after so many years," he said.

Perry County (Arkansas) assistant jail administrator Abby Strange has lost her job and is facing felony criminal charges after she allowed inmate Sandra Rappold to leave her cell and go outside to vape marijuana, Fox16-TV reported.

Investigators said Strange disabled the cell door alarm and gave the keys to Rappold.

A warning system alerted



Signs of the Apocalypse – In Texarkana, on the border of Texas and Arkansas, Dec. 30 brought a new phenomenon: fish falling from the sky. KXXV-TV reported that people found fish on their sidewalks and lawns, but city officials have an explanation: "Animal rain" occurs when small water animals are swept up in waterspouts or drafts. "2021 is pulling out all the tricks," the city posted on Facebook. "While it's uncommon, it happens ... And please, for the sake of everyone, let's tiptoe into 2022 as quietly as possible."

deputies that a door was ajar, and they quickly found both women. Strange also allegedly supplied the vape to Rappold.

Four Italian men, part of a winemaking family in Paola, died at their family vineyard in early October after being overtaken by carbon dioxide in the small shed where they were fermenting the grapes.

The Daily Beast reported that Santino and Massimo Carnevale, 70 and 45, and Giacomo and Valerio Scofano, 70 and 50, were all related.

Police believe one of the men went in to stir the grapes, was overcome, and the next went in to help, one after the other.

One woman who tried to go

in fainted near the entrance, but survived. Paola's mayor said the tragedy brought "pain to the whole community."

Mauro Restrepo was hoping that Palos Verdes Estates, California, psychic Sophia Adams could help him remove a curse that was put on him by his ex-girlfriend, NBC Los Angeles reported.

When he arrived at her business for his first session, Adams read his tarot cards and said he had "mala suerte," or bad luck.

She told Restrepo that the curse could ruin him, his children and his marriage unless he paid her \$5,100 to remove it.

Restrepo paid her \$1,000

as a down payment, but shockingly, she "did not in any way help (Restrepo's) marriage," alleged a lawsuit filed by Restrepo on Oct. 1 in Torrance Superior Court.

He claims he has suffered sleepless nights, anxiety and anguish, and he's seeking at least \$25,000 in compensatory and punitive damages.

Derbyshire (England) police were hunting down a 36-year-old suspect in a string of thefts when they came across him trying unsuccessfully to hide – in a closet, under a blanket ... with his feet sticking out the bottom, the Mirror reported.

The police department posted photos of the incident on Facebook, where Sgt. Tarj

Nizzer quipped: "If you run from ... police, you will only go to jail tired. In this case he had his blanket ready for his sleep in the cell."

Kori Johnson of KSLA-TV was interviewing lottery ticket purchasers about what they'd do with the nearly \$700 million jackpot when she met "James," HuffPost reported, who went into a lot of detail.

"Well, I'm definitely going to get a new supercharged Mustang with dual exhausts, and about 5 kilos of cocaine, and I'll be good to go," he said.

Johnson rolled with the punches: "So you like cars?" she asked.

Police in Madison, Wisconsin, are looking for a sculpture that was stolen from the Art Fair on the Square.

The unique piece, titled "Dumpty Humpty," is a bronze of the nursery rhyme character sitting on a toilet with his pants around his ankles and a book in his hands.

It's worth \$1,400, according to United Press International.

The vendor told police she'd seen two men loitering around her booth, and when she stepped away, they vanished, along with the artwork.

Security camera footage also captured the men leaving with Humpty. Hope they didn't drop him, because, you know...

Red Cross weren't enough to protect an 11-year-old boy at the Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Fairgrounds when a haunted house actor took his role a little too far.

According to The Washington Post, the boy, his sister and some friends were headed to the 7 Floors of Hell haunted house when Christopher Pogozelski, 22, approached them, trying to scare them.

The boy told Pogozelski he wasn't afraid, that the ghoul's knife was "fake."

"Oh, it's real. Trust me, it's real," Pogozelski replied, then began poking the boy's feet with the weapon until he drew blood.

Reportedly, the actor was using his own Bowie knife rather than a rubber one, believing it wasn't sharp enough to hurt anyone.

Still, he lost his job over the incident.

After getting bandaged up, the boy returned to be spooked again.

In the village of Ust-Tarka in southwestern Siberia, people

–Please See Page 10



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NEWS of the WEIRD

-From Page 8

are wondering what caused several hundred ravens to fall dead out of the sky on Sept. 22, the Mirror reported.

Sergei Kuzlyakin, a veterinarian, said the birds are being tested to see if they were poisoned, but called himself “shocked.”

“I have been working as a doctor since 1975 and this is the first time I’ve seen this,” he said.

A local ornithologist thought the birds might have ingested pesticides, but the mass death event has “caused anxiety among residents,” local officials noted.

Jacob Hansen and his wife, Quinn Kelsey, went looking for a casserole dish at a Goodwill store near their home in Denver, but they discovered a sentimental treasure instead, KUSA-TV reported.

As they browsed, Hansen looked up at a painting displayed in the store and realized he was the artist: He had created the piece 21 years ago as a high school freshman.

His teacher entered the piece in a Jefferson County art show, and it sold at the time for \$150, Hansen said.

“I saw my signature on the bottom and then it was, ‘Wow, this is unbelievable.’ And I immediately FaceTimed my mom.”

The couple bought the painting for \$20 and plan to sell it online, with proceeds going to breast cancer research.

Since 1966, the city of Gavle, Sweden, has erected a huge straw goat in its downtown square at Christmastime.

The goats are pagan symbols that preceded Santa Claus as a bringer of gifts, the Associated Press reported.

But in what has become an adjunct to the town’s tradition, the goats have been torched dozens of times during the past 55 years, including this year.

Police arrested a suspect in his 40s who had soot on his hands and matched a description from witnesses.

At the Imphal Airport in India, Mohammad Sharif of Kerala was arrested for trying to smuggle nearly a kilogram of gold to New Delhi.

The Central Industrial Security Force told IndiaTimes.com that Sharif attracted their attention because of the way he was walking.

When he was examined, officials found more than 900 grams of gold paste, worth roughly \$56,000, in his rectum.

Cases such as this are reportedly common in Kerala.

The CISF watches for people who seem unable to walk properly or are displaying discomfort on their face.

If leaf-peeping is in your plans, you may want to take extra precautions against a fearsome intruder: the spotted lanternfly. According to WLNy-TV,

the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets is warning autumn leaf tourists to beware of the beautiful but highly invasive species from Asia.

“They can hitch rides in vehicles or on outdoor items such as clothing and easily be transported into and throughout New York,” said NYSDAM Director of Plant Industry Chris Logue.

Officials direct people who find one to kill it immediately, then send a photo of it to New York’s Department of Environmental Conservation along with your location.

Looking for a job? David Duffy, co-owner of Duffy’s Circus in Northern Ireland, is encouraging people to become clowns.

According to the BBC, Duffy says the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a shortage of performers; his circus has been shuttered for more than 500 days, but will resume operations soon with looser restrictions.

Duffy’s looking for folks who are “really, really adaptable. ... No matter what sort of mood you’re in, you have to light up that circus ring,” he said.

Beyhan Mutlu, 50, who lives in the Bursa province of Turkey, was reported missing after he wandered away from friends while they were drinking.

Later, a search party was convened to look for Mutlu, and he joined the group as a volunteer, not realizing they were looking for him.

When volunteers began shouting his name, the lightbulb went on. “I am here,” Mutlu told them, according to Fox News. Police gave him a ride home.

James Kertz, 38, placed an ad on social media, hoping to sell a catalytic converter (new in the box!), KTLA-TV reported.

But the Branson, Missouri-area man didn’t realize that his photo of the car part also included a bag of methamphetamine and a syringe.

The Stone County Sheriff’s Office sent detectives to Kertz’s home with a search warrant.

“You can imagine his surprise!” said Sheriff Doug Rader. “He still had 48 grams of meth and a pistol that he is forbidden to own! We now have provided him with a new place to stay.”

Cooler weather is on the way, and Arby’s has an extra-special way for fans to warm up.

The sandwich chain will begin selling “premium” sweatshirts, sweatpants and other items that have been smoked to smell like a smokehouse, MLive reported.

Arby’s collaborated with a Texas smokehouse to create the clothing, which went on sale Oct. 4. (Or you could just huddle around the barbecue grill in your old sweats for free.)

Fritz Turner, 23, returned to his

hometown of Newport, Washington, to find the city’s Christmas tree “em-barrassing.”

The scant trimming comprised a series of vertical rope lights dangling from the top of the tree down the sides, The News Tribune reported.

“This is not gonna do,” he said. So he set up a GoFundMe page on Dec. 2, hoping to raise \$5,000 for better lights and more decorations.

“We can do better. Even Charlie Brown’s Christmas tree looked better than this sad spruce,” he wrote.

The page raised more than \$2,700 for the lights, and the local utility company hung them on the tree. And middle- and high school students donated handmade ornaments for it.

For the first time in many years, the chamber of commerce organized a tree-lighting ceremony on Dec. 11. Turner said he’s been “inspired” by the support. “Together, we’re really powerful.”

Those large inflatable Christmas decorations may fill the hearts of children with holiday cheer, but one young ursid saw a sparring partner and went on the attack in Monrovia, California.

Donna Hargett captured video of a bear cub wrestling with her neighbor’s inflatable reindeer as the ma-ma bear looked on, United Press International reported.

“I looked up and there it was, jumping on the reindeer,” Hargett said. “We see these two around all the time. They’re trouble,” she said. In fact, Hargett said they once broke into her home and left paw prints on the bed. No word on Rudolph’s condition.

Don’t mess with a man’s sprinkles. The owner of a U.K. bakery went viral for ranting about regulations that are cutting into his bread and butter – or rather his cake and frosting.

Rich Myers, 32, of Leeds, can no longer sell his most popular items because they featured “illegal sprinkles” imported from the United States.

The sprinkles contained an additive called E127, which has been linked to “hyperactivity disorders and tumors in rats,” reports the Mirror.

An anonymous customer tipped off West Yorkshire Trading Standards, the local regulatory agency, about the infraction.

Myers swears he won’t switch to the approved sprinkles from his home country, claiming they don’t hold their colors during the baking process.

“If I can’t use (the imported sprinkles), I won’t use any,” he said. “I will be on sprinkle strike and won’t budge for no man.”

The contraband goodies aren’t exactly hard to come by, he added: “We buy them from a shop in London, so it’s not like we’re getting them from a cocaine haulage in Mexico.”

Forget a “rude” awakening – this one verges closer to “terrifying.”

Ruth Hamilton of Golden, British Columbia, told CBC News that she woke up to her dog barking.

“The next thing was just a huge explosion and debris all over my face,” she said. After realizing something had punched a hole in her ceiling, she called 911.

While answering the operator’s questions, she moved a bed pillow and discovered a “melon-sized space rock” that must have landed inches from her head while she slept.

Peter Brown, a physics and astronomy professor at Western University in London, Ontario, confirmed the rock was “certainly a meteorite,” but will require further study to determine its exact origins.

In what one police officer called a “real-life Lassie situation,” a 1-year-old Shiloh shepherd named Tinsley is being hailed as a hero for saving her owner and another person after a car crash on I-89 in Vermont.

WMUR-TV reported that Cam Laundry and his passenger had been ejected when his truck hit a guardrail and went off the road.

When state troopers and a Lebanon, New Hampshire, police officer found Tinsley on the side of the road, she evaded capture and led them to the scene of the accident.

“We were shaken up, didn’t know what was happening,” Laundry said. “Next thing we know, the cops were there, and it was all because of her.”

Tinsley’s reward? A venison burger. Follow-up: Laundry has a February court date for driving under the influence. At least Tinsley was sober.

In this story, Scrooge is a hyperactive rodent with a bushy tail.

The vendor who usually installs holiday lighting at Mears Park in St. Paul, Minnesota, declined to take the job this year after squirrels chewed through the wires in 2020, Lee Ann LaBore, co-chair of the Friends of Mears Park, told the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

“Our vendor reuses the lights, and they can’t afford to ... have the squirrels destroy them again,” she said.

Instead, this year organizers used a projector with kaleidoscopelike moving images of snowflakes. People “want to see the twinkly lights,” LaBore said. “Well, we can’t have twinkly lights. It was probably this or nothing.”

Pinellas County (Florida) sheriff’s deputies stopped a car at 4 a.m. one morning for driving without its lights on, The Smoking Gun reported.

They arrested the driver, Darius Owens, 27, for DUI and marijuana possession, but the real payoff came when they searched the car and passenger, Patrick Florence, 34.

Under the Florence’s seat, they found a gun. Wrapped around his penis, they discovered baggies holding methamphetamine and cocaine.

Florence, who has many felony convictions, denied that the drugs were his, but he wouldn’t say who they belonged to. So many questions.

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Do I have to file income tax returns this year?

Dear Savvy Senior,
 What is the IRS standard tax deduction for 2021? I didn't file a tax return last tax year (2020) because I lost my job and my income in March due to COVID. But I got a part-time job in 2021 and am wondering if I made enough money that requires me to file this year.
 - Part-Time Retiree



By Jim Miller

Check Your State
 Even if you're not required to file a federal tax return this year, don't assume that you're also excused from filing state income taxes. The rules for your state might be very different. Check with your state tax agency before concluding that you're entirely in the clear. For links to state tax agencies see Taxadmin.org/state-tax-agencies.

Dear Retiree,
 Whether or not you are required to file a federal income tax return this year depends not only on how much you earned last year (in 2021), but also the source of that income, as well as your age and your filing status.

Here's a rundown of this tax season's IRS tax filing requirement thresholds. For most people, this is pretty straightforward. If your 2021 gross income – which includes all taxable income, not counting your Social Security benefits, unless you are married and filing separately – was below the threshold for your filing status and age, you may not have to file. But if it's over, you will.

- Single: \$12,550 (\$14,250 if you're 65 or older by Jan. 1, 2022).
- Married filing jointly: \$25,100 (\$26,450 if you or your spouse is 65 or older; or \$27,800 if you're both over 65).
- Married filing separately: \$5 at any age.
- Head of household: \$18,800

(\$20,500 if 65 or older).

- Qualifying widow(er) with dependent child: \$25,100 (\$26,450 if 65 or older).

To get a detailed breakdown on federal filing requirements, along with information on taxable and nontaxable income, call the IRS at 800-829-3676 and ask them to mail you a free copy of the "1040 and 1040-SR Instructions for Tax Year 2021," or you can get it online at IRS.gov.

Check Here Too

You also need to be aware that there are other financial situations that can require you to file a tax return, even if your gross income falls below the IRS filing requirements.

For example, if you earned more than \$400 from self-employment in 2021, owe any special taxes like an alternative minimum tax, or get premium

tax credits because you, your spouse or a dependent is enrolled in a Health Insurance Marketplace plan, you'll need to file.

You'll also need to file if you're receiving Social Security benefits, and one-half of your benefits plus your other gross income and any tax-exempt interest exceeds \$25,000, or \$32,000 if you're married and filing jointly.

To figure all this out, the IRS offers an online tax tool that asks a series of questions that will help you determine if you're required to file, or if you should file because you're due a refund. It takes approximately 12 minutes to complete.

You can access this tool at IRS.gov/Help/ITA – click on "Do I Need to File a Tax Return?" Or you can get assistance over the phone by calling the IRS helpline at 800-829-1040.

Tax Prep Assistance

If you find that you do need to file a tax return this year, you can free file through the IRS at IRS.gov/FreeFile if your 2021 adjusted gross income was below \$73,000.

Or, if you need some help, contact the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (or TCE) program. Sponsored by the IRS, TCE provides free tax preparation and counseling to middle and low-income taxpayers, age 60 and older. Call 800-906-9887 or visit IRS.treasury.gov/freetaxprep to locate services near you.

You can also get tax preparation assistance through the AARP Foundation Tax-Aide service. Call 888-227-7669 or visit AARP.org/findtaxhelp for more information.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of "The Savvy Senior" book.

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PHOTO / Daniel Hill for Axiom Repertory Theatre

Michaela Duarte plays Viola DeLesseps, a young lady of breeding her dreams of being an actor on the stage, and Sam Read plays William Shakespeare, the romantic playwright in search of his muse, in Axiom Repertory Theatre's production of "Shakespeare in Love."

Axiom's 'Shakespeare in Love' scheduled for Feb. 11-27 run

Just in time for Valentine's, Axiom Repertory Theatre presents "Shakespeare in Love," a play written by Lee Hall and based on the 1998 Academy Award winning film, which won seven Oscars including Best Picture.

"There are some differences but the overall story remains intact," Cassie McEachen, who is directing the Axiom production, said about the play and film. "I personally think the play is much funnier than the movie and many of the supporting characters in the movie get a chance to shine in the stage production."

The original play premiered at London's West End in July 2014 and had its first U.S. performance up the road at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon, in February 2017.

For those unfamiliar with the movie or play, McEachen said it's a fictional depiction of a love story between Shakespeare and Viola De Lesseps. Viola (played by Michaela Duarte) darily pursues a role in Shakespeare's newest play ("Romeo and Juliet") disguised as a man since women are forbidden to appear on stage. Viola's ruse is soon discovered by Shakespeare (played by Sam Read) and the charming playwright finds his captivating muse. While their personal destinies will not allow them to be together forever, their

brief encounter is a true love story for the ages.

"This will be a fantastic Valentine's production as it has all the wonderful romantic and comedic elements to make for a delightful night out," said McEachen, who teaches English and theatre at a local charter school. Among the recent Axiom shows she has directed include "I Got Sick Then I Got Better," "Harold and Maude," and this summer's upcoming ACT production of "The Little Mermaid" (with registration opening in February).

In addition to Duarte and Read, the cast includes Axiom alums Erin Rice Berenger, Rebecca Baldocchi, Gabe Newman, Trenton Eide, Mike Spence, Don Potter and Caz Crozier. Others in the production are Nick Meyer, David Rutherford, Nick Benton, Johnni Benton, Ernest Tanare, Joy Lawler, Ruby Carter, Miles Carter, Lucy Carter, Debbie Burkett, Mike Cummings, Callum McEachen and Juandre Kleynhans.

Performances are scheduled from Feb. 11-27 on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday matinees at 2 p.m.; a Saturday, Feb. 26 matinee at 2 p.m.; and, of course, a special Valentine's Day performance at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 14.

For tickets and more information, visit axreptheatre.com.

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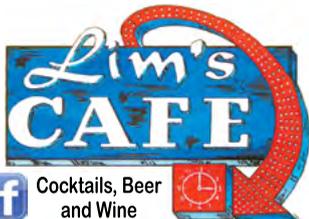
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What to know about Newsom's budget blueprint

Gov. Gavin Newsom wants to use the California budget surplus to confront the crises facing the state, including Covid-19 and climate change.

By Alexei Koseff
CalMatters.org

It's been a tumultuous few years in California, with record wildfire seasons, a worsening drought and a wave of smash-and-grab retail theft amid a coronavirus pandemic that just won't seem to end.

But when it comes to the state's finances, things are looking up. Way up. Tens of billions of dollars up.

On Jan. 9, Gov. Gavin Newsom unveiled a \$286.4 billion budget proposal, 9% bigger than last year's record state spending plan. Buoyed by a strong economic recovery and tax revenues that continue to roll in even higher than anticipated, his administration projects a \$21 billion discretionary surplus for 2022-23, plus tens of billions more in extra cash for schools, pension payments and reserve accounts.

As he enters a reelection campaign, Newsom is taking advantage of California's unprecedented fiscal health to shift into crisis management mode. At a nearly three-hour press conference, he emphasized an agenda tackling what he characterized as the "greatest existential threats" facing the state — Covid-19, climate change and homelessness among them — while also sprinkling in some priorities, including an expansion of health care for undocumented immigrants, long sought by liberal supporters.

"This proposal will be considered in light of the challenges today, and we will back in light of the challenges that present themselves tomorrow," Newsom said.

The governor's framework is just the opening bid in negotiations with the Legislature, which must pass a budget by June 15 in order to get paid — though the details are not worked out until well into the summer some years. A final deal could look significantly different from Newsom's proposal once lawmakers have their say, but the early response from the Democratic majority was largely positive. Senate leader Toni Atkins said the governor's plan aligned with her goal of helping the neediest Californians.

Revenue projections, which administration officials said were calculated in December before the omicron variant sent Covid-19 cases surging again, could also change dramatically by May, when Newsom must submit a revised budget proposal.

Some pieces of his plan, including money to combat retail theft, were unveiled early as Newsom tried to stay on top of mounting political pressure. Following a series of brazen group robberies at malls and stores in numerous California cities last fall, Newsom announced in December that he would propose more than \$300 million in funding to put police outside businesses and to investigate

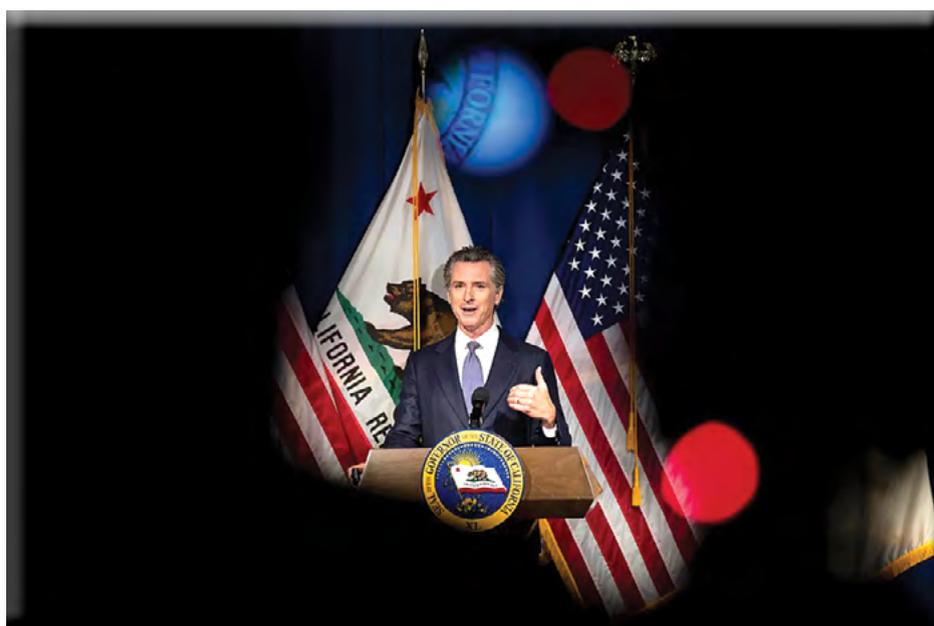


PHOTO / Miguel Gutierrez Jr., CalMatters

Gov. Gavin Newsom holds a nearly three-hour press conference to unveil his budget proposal for 2022-23 in Sacramento on Jan. 10, 2022.

and prosecute organized crime rings.

Here are other key areas from the governor's budget proposal:

Covid-19 returns to the forefront

That latest pandemic surge was top of mind in Newsom's spending plan. Administration officials rolled out a \$2.7 billion proposal for pandemic response the weekend ahead of the official announcement on Jan. 9.

Newsom wants the Legislature to act quickly to approve about half of the money as emergency assistance in the current fiscal year, to help overloaded hospitals hire additional staff and to expand testing and vaccination capacity. He also said he is in discussion with legislative leaders to bring back a supplemental paid sick leave program for workers who test positive for Covid-19, after allowing a previous version to expire last fall.

Potentially fulfilling a nearly decade-long push by activists, Newsom said he is ready to expand access to Medi-Cal, the state's health insurance program for the poor, to all California residents regardless of immigration status. The state has already opened Medi-Cal to undocumented residents until they turn 26 and once they turn 50, but making the program universally available would be a first nationwide. The expansion would take effect in 2024 and cover about 700,000 more people, at a cost of about \$2.2 billion per year.

Though he campaigned on the issue in 2018, Newsom was less willing to discuss a measure introduced in the Legislature in early January that would transition California to a single-payer health care system, entirely publicly-funded and managed by the government.

"I have not had the opportunity to read that plan and no one has presented it to me," he said.

Will taxpayers get some money back?

State tax collection has been so robust that California may, for the first time

in decades, exceed a constitutionally-mandated spending cap, above which any remaining money is split between schools and taxpayer rebates.

Newsom said his administration currently estimates the budget will be about \$2.6 billion higher than that limit in the coming fiscal year, though the number is expected to change when revised revenue projections are released in May. As a result, the governor held off on any proposals similar to the stimulus checks that the state sent to low- and middle-income households last year, though he said: "There likely will be substantial contributions back to the taxpayers."

More immediate relief may come this summer at the pump. With gas prices climbing, Newsom proposed to forgo the annual increase to a fuel excise tax that would take effect in July, potentially lowering costs for drivers. That money — an estimated \$523 million to fund state and local road repairs and other transportation projects — could be replaced from another source.

Natural disasters fuel more spending on climate change

After another devastating year left millions of acres scorched across California, Newsom is again proposing to scale up the response to what has become one of the most vexing products of climate change for the state: a nearly year-round wildfire season.

The governor's spending plan includes an additional \$1.2 billion over two years for programs to increase forest thinning, build fuel breaks, and help homeowners and fire-prone communities retrofit structures and improve defensible space. CalFire — whose budget has grown by more than \$1.5 billion over the past three years — would receive another \$248 million for new planes, crews and equipment.

The state has already committed to spending \$5.2 billion over three years to deal with the ongoing drought. But

after some major reservoirs dropped to their lowest levels ever last fall, Newsom is seeking to add \$750 million more for water conservation programs, financial assistance for water agencies and grants for farmers to modify their operations.

Looking for climate solutions in a state where the transportation sector is now the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, the governor has gone all-in on zero-emission vehicles. Newsom signed an executive order in 2020 to phase out the sale of new gas-powered cars and passenger trucks by 2035. His budget proposal on Monday included nearly \$6.1 billion to accelerate the transition to cleaner vehicles, with a focus on school buses and commercial trucks.

"We believe this is the future," he said. "If we don't invest in the future, we're not going to do very well there."

Clearing 'unacceptable' homeless encampments

Though Newsom has made homelessness a central focus of his first three years in office, the entrenched and growing crisis — more visible than ever after the pandemic pushed many Californians into housing instability — is a frequent source of criticism for his opponents. Those who tried unsuccessfully last year to recall the governor pointed to it as one of his greatest failures, while Republican lawmakers have urged him to call a special session to directly confront the issue.

Newsom's budget proposal on Jan. 9 included another \$2 billion to build on what has been one of his most notable recent policy successes: distributing grants to local governments to quickly convert vacant hotels, motels and other buildings into thousands of units of supportive housing for homeless people. His plan would spend \$1.5 billion over the next two years to provide tiny homes and other interim housing as a bridge while more of the permanent units are completed, plus \$500 million to help local officials clear encampments.

"What's happening on the streets and sidewalks in our state is unacceptable," said Newsom, who hinted that he would also pursue legislation this year to strengthen a law that allows officials to force people into treatment if they cannot care for themselves. While these conservatorships are a controversial approach among advocates, Newsom said they can be necessary in cases of severe mental health or substance abuse problems.

"We're not satisfied with the status quo, in terms of the tools in our tool kit to help people that are struggling and are putting themselves in harm's way," he said. "I don't want to see any more people die on the streets and call that compassion."

Averting a funding crisis for local schools

Newsom's proposed spending includes a record \$119 billion for K-12

Budget proposal

schools — nearly the size of the entire state budget a decade ago — but some local districts are still sounding the alarm about a looming fiscal cliff stemming from plummeting enrollment and attendance.

The governor aims to avert this potential calamity by giving districts more flexibility in how they report their average daily attendance, which the state uses to determine their funding. Under Newsom's proposal, schools could use whatever is highest among the previous year's attendance, the current year's or an average of the three most recent years.

"It's a better option than the sudden drop," said Harold Sullins, an associate superintendent at San Bernardino City Unified. "The only challenge I see with averaging it is you're still going to see a very significant decline in funding."

The budget would also provide \$54 million to help districts recruit teachers, including by waiving examination and credentialing fees. Amid the spread of the omicron variant, staffing shortages across the state threaten school closures in some districts.

More in-state students and equity at colleges

With a new goal of ensuring 70% of working-age adults receive some type of college credential by 2030 — up from 52% in 2019, according to one measure

— Newsom's budget proposal envisions a five-year plan to dramatically expand in-state enrollment at the University of California and California State University.

The state would provide money this year to add room for 9,400 more California students at CSU and 7,100 at UC, where some would take slots normally reserved for out-of-state applicants.

Then over the next four years, each system would get a 5% annual funding increase if they meet key targets, including expanding in-state enrollment by another 1%, increasing graduation rates and closing student equity gaps across racial and economic groups. By the 2026-27 academic year, that would mean another 7,000 California students at UC and 14,000 at CSU.

Assemblymember Phil Ting, a San Francisco Democrat who leads the Assembly budget committee, said he welcomes tying increased funding to even greater California enrollment, which has been a major priority for Democrats in the Legislature.

CalMatters reporters Julie Cart, Joe Hong, Ana B. Ibarra, Sameea Kamal, and Mikhail Zinshetyn contributed to this story.

CalMatters.org is a nonprofit, nonpartisan media organization explaining California policies and politics. Read more at calmatters.org.

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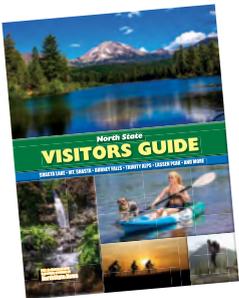
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