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NO. 6 VOL. XXXIX



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## San Diego's Top Marketing Executives 2024



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# The New T1 Navigator: Construction Alerts



Construction of the New T1 has increased significantly at San Diego International Airport (SAN). There will be ongoing impacts to vehicle and pedestrian access near airport roadways.

On Tuesday, Aug. 27, the New T1 Parking Plaza opens to vehicles. Here's how to get there:

If you're heading west on North Harbor Drive (going towards Point Loma), get in the right lane and follow the big sign for Terminal 1. Then, follow the road until you see signs that direct vehicles to the left for the parking plaza and to the right for arrivals and departures.

If you are traveling east on North Harbor Drive towards downtown, get in the left lane when you first see the Terminal 1 sign, take a left at Harbor Island Drive, and follow the signs to parking.

All vehicles will exit onto Airport Terminal Road, where they can access the Point Loma/Harbor Island or Downtown exit ramps.

Travelers should prepare for traffic congestion and delays when traveling to SAN, especially from 4 a.m. to 6:15 a.m., 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and 8 p.m. to midnight, which are the busiest times curbside. We recommend arriving earlier than usual and using caution when traveling through the work area.

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# San Diego's Top Marketing Executives 2024



## Patrick Ross

Ross has quite a legacy as a marketing and communications professional, continually reinventing himself. He began his career in Washington D.C. as an investigative reporter on Capitol Hill, winning numerous awards. He then transitioned to promoting positive public policy, first as a D.C. think tank vice president of communications and senior fellow, then as a co-founder and CEO of an influential trade association including, among its forty-plus members, Hollywood studios, record labels, software and technology companies, artist guild and unions, and other trade associations. In 2011 he was recruited by the Obama Administration to serve as a senior communications official, eventually becoming the chief communications officer for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, a C-suite position at a federal agency totaling 13,000 employees. He drove into his new community in San Diego within months after moving here in 2017, serving as a founding board member of Free to Thrive. He joined Procopio, the largest law firm in San Diego, in early 2017 as Senior Manager of Marketing and Communications. Procopio has grown and thrived since his arrival, and his achievements in raising the firm's profile have contributed to that growth. He has more than tripled the monthly output of attorney thought leader content. He is a graduate of Pomona College.



## Julie Wright

Wright founded (W)right On Communications, Inc. in 1998 and has consistently grown the agency and its reputation locally, nationally and internationally. This year, Newsweek named (W)right On among the top 150 PR agencies in the country. Previously, Forbes had named the agency among America's best. She attributes the agency's success to the work of its high-caliber team, her partner and CEO Grant Wright and the relationships built with its client partners. Her skills have evolved with the rapidly shifting media and agency landscape allowing her to craft strategies and deliver the messages most likely to reach and resonate with her client partners' audiences. Under her direction, the agency has rolled out a court-authorized national outreach and education program encouraging millions of businesses to claim their share of a landmark \$5.5 billion Visa and MasterCard interchange fee settlement. This integrated PR program has spread the word that the settlement is real. She is on the board of Innovotech, a Canadian publicly-traded contract research organization specializing in biofilms and antimicrobial solutions. She is a board member of the California Travel Association as its communications chair and on the board of the North San Diego Economic Development Council. She is a graduate of both the University of Western Ontario and the University of Southern California.

## Dana Keil



Keil is the marketing manager with Latitude 33 Planning & Engineering. Pushing the limits of what marketing professionals can accomplish, her efforts affected Latitude 33's ability to engage new clients, retain existing partners and improve staff satisfaction. She oversees all of the firm's marketing efforts and manages the firm's brand, well known throughout the region as one of the area's top civil engineering firms. She participates in business development initiatives, providing valuable insights, strategic input, and the winning design to successfully secure new business. She also plays a critical role in Latitude 33's human resources initiatives and talent retention. She organizes Latitude 33's community involvements such as a blood drive with the San Diego Blood Bank, participating in the Walk for Animals, PATH (People Assisting the Homeless) and volunteering with Sharia's Closet. She is an active member of the Society of Marketing Professionals. She handles all branding for the firm, including proposals, newsletters, advertisements, logos, social media, email signatures, and so much more. She has masterminded numerous team-building events that have significantly elevated the company culture and positively affected employee satisfaction. She has a degree in multimedia and fine arts from San Diego State University.

## Denise Nix



Nix is in a marketing class of her own. A former journalist-turned marketer, she has consistently delivered high-impact results, solidifying her reputation as a leader in legal marketing. She began her career as a reporter covering courts and legal issues in Los Angeles for the Daily Breeze, the LA Daily Journal and the

Associated Press's Los Angeles bureau. For nearly a decade she led in-house marketing at two prominent California law firms, excelling in transforming often weighty legal jargon. In 2020, she founded Nix Strategic Communications, a content marketing agency elevating the marketing and public relations strategies for a diverse array of clients, including law firms, educational institutions, nonprofits and water districts throughout California. She also joined TW2 Marketing as a senior consultant, leading the firm's legal content marketing team while also lending her vast skills and strategic thinking to serving clients in the construction, design, financial services and nonprofit fields. She is the communications chair of the Legal Marketing Association's Southern California Local Steering Committee. She is a graduate of San Francisco State University.

## Sarah Austin



Austin is an account manager, videographer, social media specialist, storyteller and content creator for TW2 Marketing. The depth of her role at TW2 cannot be contained by one descriptor. The consensus is that she specializes in "everything!"

She never shies away from a challenge. She has launched, grew and supported countless social media accounts and campaigns for TW2 clients. She launched TW2's video division in 2014 which is now an award-winning operation. She leads the firm's end-to-end video services, managing the concept development, script writing, videography, editing, customized graphics, post-production and promotion of all videos created. She produces engaging and attention-grabbing narratives that create emotional connections and drive client results. But the most important skill she brings to the TW2 team is her ability to build strong relationships with both clients and local media alike. She is a member of the San Diego Press Club's board of directors, and chairs both the publicity and promotion committees. She is an assistant coach for Girls on the Run at her local neighborhood school, South Park's Albert Einstein Elementary. She is a graduate of San Diego State University.



## Ceanne Guerra



Guerra is the media and public relations manager for California for Cox Communications. She manages planning and implementation for the technology company's external communications in San Diego and key statewide initiatives. In her role, she serves as a company spokesperson and liaison with the media and helps public awareness about Cox's products and services, community giving and corporate philanthropy. During her 25-year career at Cox, she has provided strategic direction for internal and external communications and public relations activities around the company's major product launches in San Diego, Orange County and Santa Barbara, including home security/automation, gigabit internet and Panoramic Wi-Fi and mobile services. She was also a key member of the public relations team that launched Connect2Compete, the company's initiative to bridge the digital divide for low-income students and families. She has received various company and industry awards for her media relations, brand management and employee communications campaigns. She has received the East Lake Ostrem Award for her leadership and generosity in the community.

## Sue Almon-Pesch



Almon-Pesch is best known for her love of helping the region's C-level executives and companies gain visibility and credibility through narrative awards entries and customized public relations services. From SD METRO's 40 Under 40 to Inc.'s 5000, her five decades of experience in the marketing and public relations industry spotlights an executive's or company's winning achievements. With her guidance, Baker Electric Home Energy was the BBB International Torch Awards for Ethics winner. As the former owner of an award-winning Small Business of the Year New York ad agency for 20 years, she was the first woman president of the WNY Sales and Marketing Executives in 1988 and inducted into its Hall of Fame in 1992. The agency's national accounts included food and beverage, hospitality, health care, manufacturing and education. Transitioning to San Diego in the late 1990s was a pivotal choice. She seized the opportunity to become a solopreneur, creating a range of affordable boutique services. Her diverse client base includes real estate, supply chain logistics, accounting, hospitality and professional services. Her pro bono work earned her the President's Award for Michelle's Angels Foundation, is a testament to her altruism. She is a graduate of the University of Illinois.

## Sydnie Moore



With 30 years of writing, media, public relations and marketing experience, Moore currently heads Moore & Moore Communications. With special expertise in media and community relations, she also specializes in social media content development/strategizing/consulting, brand development and website development. She is a skilled writer, and has developed websites, blogs, digital newsletters and has contributed to The San Diego Union Tribune. She has years of experience working with local, regional and national print and online/electronic media. Prior to starting her own business, she worked as an account supervisor for two leading San Diego public relations and advertising firms. She has contributed her time to nonprofits, such as Words Alive, Junior Achievement, the National Conference and the San Diego Council on Literacy. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in telecommunications from San Diego State University, after attending the University of Madrid.

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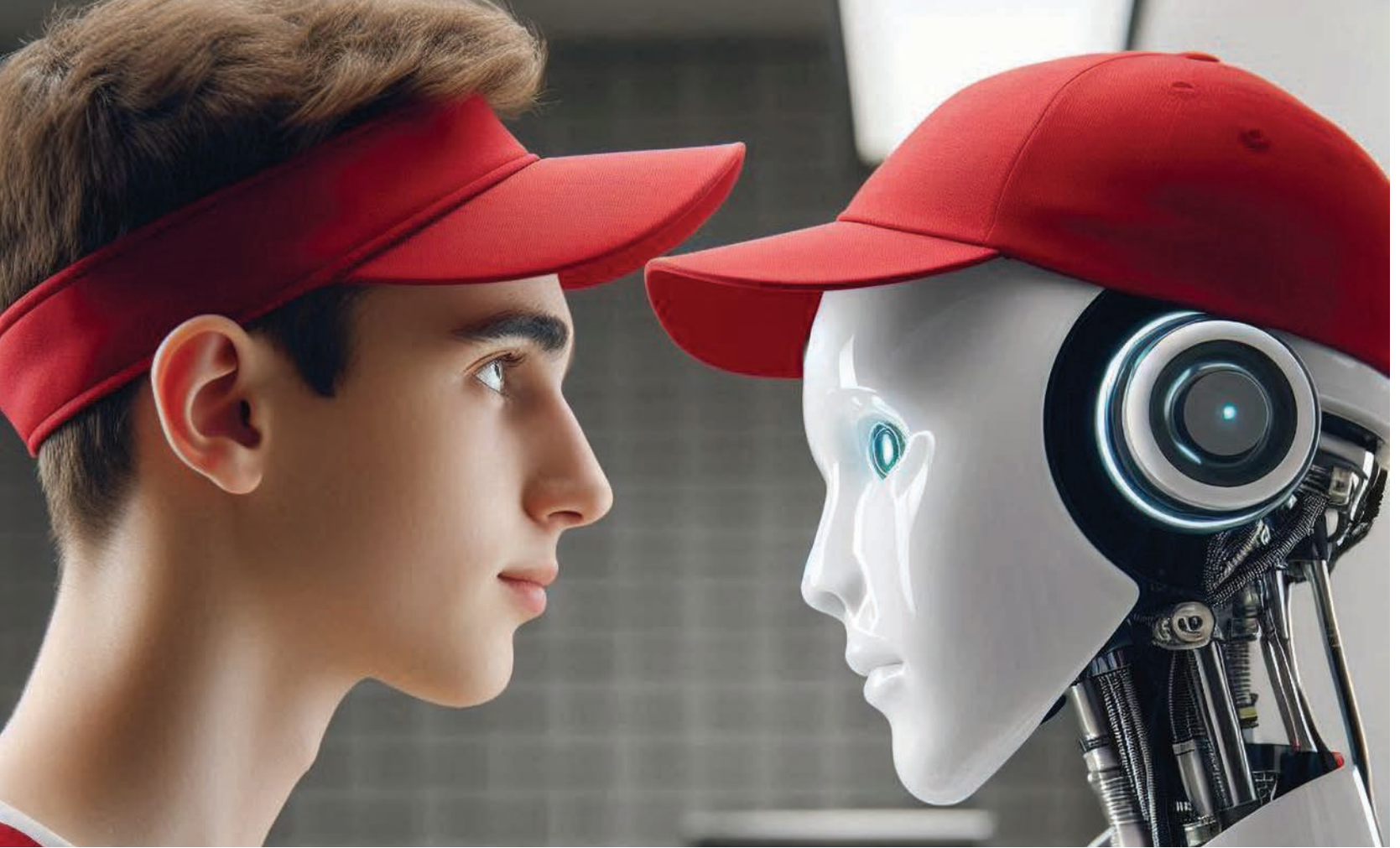


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# WORKERS VS. THE ROBOTS:

## Minimum Wage and California's Fast-Food Offering

By Douglas Page

California's new minimum wage for fast-food restaurant workers – upped April 1st to \$20 an hour – impacts the Golden State's most vulnerable workers, leaving effects that could last well beyond just a missing paycheck.

“The kids are the canaries in the coal mine,” Los Angeles-based economist Christopher Thornberg told SD METRO, referring to teenagers seeking or working summer jobs. “They’re the first to lose their jobs and not have the opportunities in part, because not only are they suffering the impact of reduced labor demand at these higher costs, but of course, equivalently, they’re replaced by adults.

“At \$20 an hour, you want an adult,” he continued, because they’re not leaving to return to school or seek another employer that’s more fun, like Disneyland.

Thornberg runs Beacon Economics, a consultancy.

In a 41-page report, he and another economist, Niree Kodaverdian, write that “the increase in unemployment is almost exclusively a young person phenomenon.

“Of the nearly 130,000 newly unemployed people in the last two years, over 90% were under the age of 35. And within this age group,

the hardest hit subgroup has been teenagers,” they wrote in their report, released in June.

Information from California's Employment Development Department appears, at first, to back up their conclusion, showing the unemployment rate for those 16 and over, both female and male, increased between June 2023 and June 2024.

In June 2023, just over 10 million men over the age of 16 were employed in the Golden State. A year later, says the state's Employment Development Department, the employed in this group dropped by 139,000, to 9,921,000, making for 5.2% unemployment rate in this segment, up from 4.6% a year earlier.

Unemployed women over the age of 16 also increased, from 351,000 in June 2023 to 404,000 a year later, increasing the unemployment rate for this demographic from 4 to 4.6%. The Department's information also showed that the number of women employed in this group increased, from 8.3 million to 8.44 million.

Asked to clarify their numbers, the Department replied to SD METRO with an email from Samantha Leos:

“There is no published data for persons between the ages of 16



and 20,” she wrote. “It is best to keep in mind that not everyone in the state’s population is part of the labor force.

“Women 16 years and over refers to all women aged 16 year and over. The same applies to women 20 and over. The higher age limit allows for more accurate estimates by filtering out age groups to which the measure doesn’t apply,” she added.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, part of the U.S. Department of Labor, shows that between June 2023 and June 2024, there were more than 1,000 fewer workers in California’s limited-service restaurants, described as restaurants where guests order, pay and pick up their food from a checkout counter, down to 744,700 from 745,800. It doesn’t break out workers by age groups.

As for why employment at these establishments hasn’t dropped further, due to the increased minimum wage, University of California at San Diego’s Economics Professor Marc Muendler offered this perspective.

“If you go to a restaurant, you want to be treated nicely,” he said. “Therefore, I think the wage is not that sensitive to other market forces.”

Thornberg and Kodaverdian say teen unemployment nearly doubled in two years.

Using numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau, they showed the unemployment rate for California teenagers, those between the ages of 16 – 19, jumped from 10.3% in 2022 to 19% two years later.

The new minimum wage in fast-food restaurants, which increased to \$20 an hour from \$16 on April 1st this year, impacts teenagers in multiple ways, Thornberg says.

“They desperately need to know how to work,” he said. “You’ll see some of the quotes (in the report) where (people) kind of give a nod to the fact that, yeah, teenagers (because of the higher minimum wage) lose jobs, but who cares?”

“I find that to be shockingly short-sighted because there is so much research that shows an early job is a critical component of lifetime success. To deny these kids these opportunities is bad for the state. It’s bad for the efforts to reduce inequality and increasing equity,” Thornberg added.

Nonworking teens, he warns, aren’t learning valuable lessons.

“They don’t understand what it means to be where you need to be when you need to be there, to put your nose down to get it done,” he said. “They don’t understand the function of teamwork because they’ve never had a true teamwork work environment.”

Sarah Archer, a San Diego-based marriage and family therapist, who counsels adolescents, agrees that summer jobs provide teenagers



University of California at San Diego’s  
Economics Professor Marc Muendler



Economist Christopher Thornberg

with many a life lesson.

“It builds mastery of a skill, self-efficacy, grit, learning to do hard things, learning to communicate with any age, any person, and provides added self-esteem,” she said. “It also keeps teenagers off their phone and exposes them to different people, whether it’s by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and, along the way, building empathy for everyone.”

### The New Wage Effect

As one proprietor of a cluster of California fast-food restaurants sees it, the increased hourly wage puts employees in a new perspective.

“At \$20 an hour, you look at your employees, and if there was that one you were thinking is marginal, you might recruit somebody to replace that person,” said Tom Trujillo, who, with his family, owns seven Wienerschnitzels, a fast-food hot dog restaurant started in Los Angeles’s Wilmington section on the Pacific Coast Highway in 1961. “The

one that might’ve been just getting by at \$17.50 or \$18 an hour, they were okay but now I think I can do better recruiting and, maybe, move on.”

Of course, employers can’t just fire someone because they’re not worth the new wage, he explained.

“The laws are tough on that, but some of the people who haven’t been as good, they’re getting less hours,” he said. “They might be taking home less money at \$20 an hour than they were at \$17.”

Trujillo has also cut overtime and reduced the hours at some of his stores, including cutting out breakfast or closing the dining rooms at some locations early.

As for recruiting teenagers, Trujillo said, “We don’t have a lot of entry-level jobs for teenagers.

“Fast food is a grimy business, and if they can work at the mall or at Old Navy or Gap, in an air-conditioned building, they’re doing that,” he added.

His recruiting efforts, which include placing banners on the roofs of his restaurants, have prompted his employees to question why he seeks new people.

“Because \$20 an hour is a lot of money. At \$20 an hour, everyone better step up,” he said.

The new minimum wage, and the subsequent price increases he’s put through to pay for it, reduced transactions by 7%, resulting in revenue being down between 2 to 3%, so far, this year.

As for how customers are reacting to the increased prices, he says, "It's a shrug, like, 'Hey, we know. It's the same at McDonald's and Wendy's and every place else.'"

SD METRO reached out to the corporate headquarters of a number of fast-food restaurants, including McDonald's, Burger King, Chick fil-A, Popeye's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, Wendy's and In-N-Out Burger, inquiring how the increased fast-food minimum wage impacted their operations and bottom line.

Only one responded.

"I can confirm that on April 1st, we raised prices in (our) California restaurants to accompany a raise given to the Associates at those locations on the same day," In-N-Out Burger Chief Operating Officer Denny Warnick said in a statement emailed to SD METRO.

### New Opportunities

With the new minimum wage, Downey, Calif.-based Navia Robotics is seeing an uptick in the number of inquiries it receives from restaurant owners and operators for its products.

Its robots can handle a variety of tasks, including escorting customers to their table, returning dishes to be washed and bringing them to staging areas so a server doesn't have to bring them out from the kitchen.

"As far as inquiries go, we have definitely seen an increase," said the company's chief technology officer, Peter Kim.

But culture sometimes prevents restaurant owners from adopting them.

"The United States is one of the few countries that has gratuities for food service workers," he said. "That's one of the concerns a lot of restaurant workers have when it comes to adopting robots compared to other countries.

"They're worried their income is going to be impacted by these robots," Kim added.

As for fast-food franchise owners looking to add robots, Kim says they've spoken with some but there's a hold up.

"The decision-making is done at the corporate level," he said.

UCSD Economics Professor Muendler views the fast-food industry this way, saying, "If you go to a restaurant, you don't want a robot. There's no easy way to make restaurant workers more productive and more efficient.

Another issue restaurant owners face is managing their youngest workers.

"They don't show up; they don't call in sick," Kim said. "There's a huge issue finding reliable workers, so the robots are a huge draw for restaurant owners."

But sometimes the unexpected occurs with his robots on trial.

"After a week or two, sometimes, the restaurant owner calls, saying, 'We're not interested in moving forward.' When asked why, they say that during the trial their human workers started working harder - because they're worried about being replaced."

## Anxiety & The Phone

The number one worry for today's teenagers is uncertainty.

"The mobile phone gives knowledge-thirsty teens immediate relief," said Sarah Archer, a mom and a San Diego licensed family therapist who counsels adolescents. "If you want to know what your friends are doing, you know - by checking your phone.

"If you want to know what Bora Bora's hotels look like, you can find out - instantly - by checking your phone," she continued.

As relieving as it is to find immediate answers via that cell phone, it comes with a price.

"The number one trigger for anxiety among teenagers is uncertainty," she said.

Teenagers, Archer says, have what she calls "low distress tolerance skills."

"We teach what's called 'Dialectical Behavioral Therapy,'" said Archer. "At the core it is teaching emotion regulation, interpersonal skills, mindfulness and distress tolerance."

Because of that phone, teenagers, she says, don't even know what it's like to wait in line without being able to read something.

"There's a lack of situations to build that muscle," she said.

One way to combat this, she says, is through a summer job.

"I think a good, old manual labor job - while it might not help a college application - is going to have a bigger impact on a teen's ability to do hard things in life and stick them out," she said. "Parents should tell their teenagers to go mow a bunch of lawns, scoop ice cream for seven hours on their feet - not just work at a startup over the summer."

It isn't easy to get the kids off the phone, Archer warns, which often comes with a grip and comfort, too.

"A job that gets kids out of that bubble, where they have to put down the phone, because they're working with customers, doing some kind of manual labor or something that requires using their brains or their hands is a big help," she said. "At first, it's awkward not to be constantly checking their phone and they hate it." But, in time, there's change.

"Eventually, it's a relief for them to be off their phone. It comes with a lot of kicking and screaming but once they're off the phone, they're off," Archer continued.



# Will Voters Settle for Joe Biden's Understudy?

By Daniel McCarthy

The celebration of Kamala Harris faces an embarrassing fact: Until now, Democrats thought she was less cut out to be president than Joe Biden.

If voters already had grave misgivings about Biden's job performance before his disastrous debate in June -- and polls show they did -- what can they expect from his understudy?

Harris never received a vote of confidence from her party until it wound up with a self-inflicted crisis thanks to Biden's televised breakdown.

Democratic leaders knew all about his condition before this year's primaries.

Yet they still let him run a second time rather than pushing to replace him with Harris when the party's voters could still have a say.

The most charitable interpretation of that decision is that top Democrats didn't think Harris would be much of an improvement over Biden -- not enough to justify the ordeal of a contested primary or trying to get him to step down.

And indeed, the fact that Democrats are content to let Biden continue serving in the Oval Office, despite his debilities, suggests they don't see a world of difference between him and a President Harris.

Their partisan calculation is that the last thing Harris needs is a track record.

If she became president before the election, voters would hold her to full account for the troubles of the Biden-Harris era, as well as for anything she did in her own right after taking over from Biden.

Harris's greatest electoral advantage is a quality that sets her up for failure if she ever becomes president -- she's untested, and because she's never so much as taken the tests other major-party nominees must pass, she can boast she's never flunked.

Imagine trying that with the SATs!

Actually, there's no need to imagine: In recent years, many prestigious colleges did stop asking prospective students for standardized test scores -- and the result was such a drop in admissions quality that the tests had to be reinstated.

It's not the kind of experiment the country ought to try with the White House.

Normally, presidential primaries are the greatest test of a candidate, forcing a contender to defend his or her policies against competitors and in front of skeptical voters and journalists.

The peculiar way Democratic insiders made Harris the nominee shielded her from the examination that other would-be presidents have undergone.

And the fawning attitude much of the legacy media has

toward Harris spares her from the full measure of press scrutiny a candidate typically receives.

The fact that she became the nominee so late in the season meant the media was already in a general-election mindset -- not at all eager to question a Democrat's qualifications but seeing everything as a horse race, one in which too many journalists have a clear favorite.

Harris's resume is slender. Her highest achievement is serving as an apprentice in the ill-fated Biden administration.

Outsider candidates, running to shake up the system and throw out the bums who've led the country into decline, often have little experience.

But outsider candidates also, by definition, need to oppose whatever the incumbent administration has been up to.

Donald Trump and Barack Obama ran as outsiders when they first won their parties' nominations, and then the presidency.

They were issue candidates -- the issue being that the country was on the wrong track, from foreign policy to the parlous state of the economy.

An incumbent administration, on the other hand, has to run on what it's actually accomplished -- which in Biden's case means nothing good.

Kamala Harris isn't an outsider; she's the junior partner in the incumbent administration, with all the drawbacks of the Biden report card, yet without Joe's decades of testing and experience.

She isn't a change candidate -- she's the status quo candidate.

Yet she represents the status quo minus Biden's strengths, if also without his age-related weakness.

Voters weren't set to reelect Biden even before his infirmity became a national scandal.

His policies and performance in office were scandalous enough.

Now Harris is running on those same policies, which are her policies, and the Democratic Party's, as well.

She's offering America more of what the country is getting with Biden -- but under a younger, more energetic leader who has never shown his degree of competence or won a single presidential primary.

That's a recipe for catastrophe.

Harris is a more viable candidate than Biden was in his final weeks, but she isn't prepared to be a better president -- and Democrats know it.

Daniel McCarthy is the editor of Modern Age: A Conservative Review. To read more by Daniel McCarthy, visit [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).  
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Resident Gene Mabray fills out a ballot at a voting center at the Health and Wellness Center in Fresno on March 5, 2024. Photo by Larry Valenzuela, CalMatters/CatchLight Local

# Want property taxes to go up? Why California should reject ballot measure easing bond votes

By Susan Shelle

In November, California voters will decide the fate of Proposition 5, which would make it easier for local governments to borrow money for housing and various public infrastructure projects. Below, a taxpayer watchdog says Prop. 5 will essentially let governments increase property taxes whenever they want. The opposing view: A local mayor says the measure will help public agencies pursue vital projects that can make California more affordable.

Proposition 5 makes it easier to raise property taxes.

The November ballot measure gets around Proposition 13's limitations on property tax increases by making it easier for local governments to pass bonds, a method of borrowing money that is then paid back — with interest — by adding extra charges

to property tax bills, sometimes for decades.

When property taxes rise, there's little consideration of a homeowner's ability to pay, or any hardship or disability. If people fall behind on their property taxes, their homes can be sold out from under them.

Currently, local bonds require a two-thirds vote of the electorate. This type of taxpayer protection predates the 1879 California Constitution and was first inscribed during the state's inaugural constitutional convention three decades earlier.

The handwritten document from the Gold Rush era states, "It shall be the duty of the legislature to provide for the organization of cities and incorporated villages, and to restrict their power of taxation, assessment, borrowing money,

contracting debts, and loaning their credit, so as to prevent abuses in assessments and in contracting debts by such municipal corporations."

Today's legislature thinks it knows better. Prop. 5 would slash the two-thirds vote requirement down to 55%, allowing cities and other local government entities to pile debt onto residents.

In 2000, voters were persuaded to pass Proposition 39 and cut the vote threshold for school bonds from two-thirds down to 55%. In the years since, that's made it much easier for districts to pass parcel taxes to pay for school buildings. We can see the impact on our tax bills.

Prop. 5 would cut the vote requirement for nearly everything else. If the proposition passes, governments will be able to more



easily borrow money for “public infrastructure,” which includes everything from facilities, parks and emergency services to transit improvements, libraries and ports. The lower vote threshold would also apply to new debt for utilities, disaster protections and home hardening.

It’s not just cities and counties that can take on debt, either. So can “a transit district, a regional transportation commission, and an association of governments.”

That’s not the end of it. There’s also the housing component — everything from affordable housing to homelessness facilities, including for people with mental illnesses.

The lower vote threshold similarly applies to new debt to pay for “down payment assistance programs” and “first-time homebuyer programs.”

Taken altogether, Prop. 5 is worse than a tax increase — it’s a turbo engine to try and raise property taxes whenever government agencies want.

In a sneaky maneuver, the Legislature wrote a provision into Prop. 5 that makes it apply retroactively to any infrastructure and housing bond measure that appears with it on the November ballot. Had Bay Area officials opted to stick with a proposed \$20 billion housing bond instead of withdrawing it, it would have only needed 55% approval if

Prop. 5 passed at the same time.

Higher property taxes generally raise the cost of housing, and not just for homeowners. Tenants will see higher rents as landlords deal with increases to the cost of providing rental housing. Even the smallest businesses will see rent increases as higher property tax bills are passed onto commercial tenants.

Ultimately, Prop. 5 creates a perverse incentive for local governments to misallocate public funds.

When it’s easier to borrow money, some elected officials are likely to spend existing tax revenues on everything except high-priority needs. In future years, municipal budgets could become increasingly strained as more and more revenue gets diverted to repay investors for old debt.

Early Californians had the right idea: The power to incur debt or liability must be tightly controlled to prevent abuses. The two-thirds vote requirement to pass local bonds is a crucial protection for California residents now and in the future.

Susan Shelley is vice president of communications for the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

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# Interpersonal Edge: Use humor to break tension

By Dr. Daneen Skube

**Question: We often have stressful meetings. As a manager, I'd like to break the tension without invalidating the concerns. What do you teach your clients on how to calm down intense emotions during a meeting with humor while not being disrespectful?**

**Answer:** There are several guidelines on using humor to break tension. As a manager, you want to walk a middle road of using humor without making fun of anyone or the genuine problems your team is facing.

Here are my top tips:

- 1) Forget about sarcasm. Sarcasm comes across as contemptuous.
- 2) Don't make fun of anyone else, but you can poke fun at yourself.
- 3) Don't use humor to say what you're angry about.
- 4) Read the room because timing is everything.

5) Keep humor respectful of diversity or you'll make an enemy rather than a joke.

Your personality is fair game to joke about. Think of humor as either Frasier (the show) who pokes fun at himself, or Seinfeld (the show) who makes fun of everyone else. Stick to Frasier's humor. When we joke about our own experiences, we show vulnerability and connect with others. It also builds trust and rapport while lightening the mood.

Humor can also be useful during presentations. A surprising source of humor for presentations are the humorous stories and columns in Reader's Digest. You can take any of the stories, personalize them, and make them part of your presentation.

Some physicians say that laughter is the best medicine. I'll tell you as a consultant, laughter is the best way to get a group of people to learn something. If you tell a funny story, pick something with an educational take away.

For example, when I teach listening skills, I say in a conspiratorial tone that I have a secret to share. I then add, "When people talk, they have no idea what they just said so when you repeat it back, it's





the first time they heard it.” Everyone laughs because we can all relate to this experience. And my audience learns the importance of paraphrasing.

If your management has asked you to do the impossible, you might joke about your new “walk on water” project. Then ask about water skiing ideas. By using humor, you lower performance anxiety because you acknowledge walking on water is not possible, but water skiing might get you close.

People at work are often anxious about various topics. Studies show people cannot laugh and feel scared simultaneously. By seeking opportunities to use humor, you help your team gain perspective and be calmer. Your team will improve their productivity and decision making when they’re less scared.

People at work, under pressure, also feel isolated. They think that if they cannot pull rabbits out of hats, they will lose their reputation or job. Humor allows employees to see that most problems are not what I call “cardiac” moments. Few people will die or get fired because a team does not achieve perfection.

There are sociologists and comedians who have pointed out how tragedy and comedy have similar roots. By using humor effectively, you make yourself relatable, increase trust, and can shrink stressful situations down to less scary tasks to handle.

An anonymous but funny person said, “Laugh and the world laughs with you, cackle maniacally and people back away from you slowly.” My point is to use humor to find that middle ground, where people feel safer, not disrespected, and more connected.

## THE LAST WORD(S)

**Question: Customers often criticize me at work. Is there a way to avoid criticism?**

Answer: As Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, said: “There’s only one way to avoid criticism: Do nothing, say nothing, be nothing.” If you want a rich career, take risks, learn from feedback, and lean into criticism.

Daneen Skube, Ph.D., is a Seattle-based executive coach, trainer, therapist and speaker, also appears as the FOX Channel’s “Workplace Guru” each Monday morning. She’s the author of *Interpersonal Edge: Breakthrough Tools for Talking to Anyone, Anywhere, About Anything* (Hay House, 2006). She can be reached at [interpersonaledge@comcast.net](mailto:interpersonaledge@comcast.net)

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# WOMEN IN BUSINESS 2024



SD METRO will be honoring Women In Business in our October issue. Send your nominations to Rebeca Page at either [rebecapage@sandiegometro.com](mailto:rebecapage@sandiegometro.com) or [rebecapage@yahoo.com](mailto:rebecapage@yahoo.com).

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Ronson J. Shamoun, Principal Attorney and CEO of RJS LAW, is an Adjunct Law Professor at the University of San Diego—School of Law where he teaches a Tax Practice and Penalties class. He was recently presented with the following awards:

- San Diego Metro Magazine- Best Attorney 2016
- San Diego Magazine- Top Attorney 2016
- San Diego Business Journal- Best of the Bar 2014, 2015 & 2016
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# Kamala's brother-in-law fleeced taxpayers for billions to give to left-wing groups and lawyers

By Daniel Huff and Clark S. Judge

Joe Biden's son, Hunter, may be the current world-class champ of presidential-family shady dealings, but not for long.

If Kamala Harris wins the White House, her brother-in-law, Tony West, who is married to her sister Maya, is poised to claim the crooked crown.

Like Hunter, West learned his craft in the Obama years.

Then head of the Justice Department's Civil Division, he invented a new form of what 19th-early 20th centuries Tammany boss George Washington Plunkett famously called "Honest Graft."

It was simple.

Until 1977, Congress had to approve any settlement of a civil suit against the Federal government over \$100,000.

This preserved the Constitutional requirement that Congress control the government's purse.

But in that year, seeking relief from the burgeoning volume of suits to review, Congress removed the cap, handing the Justice Department a permanent blank check to pay settlements unilaterally, in any amount, out of an account known as the Judgment Fund.

Run by the Treasury Department, the Judgment Fund's secrecy is so complete that our often-penetrated CIA might study it for lessons.

The limited data released omits recipients, the facts underlying the case, and often the lawyers involved.

By statute, attorneys' fees awarded need not be disclosed.

A Government Accountability Office study concluded that "no one knows the number of claims processed by the federal government each year."

Still, for three decades, the integrity of Justice's officials sufficed to prevent abuse.

Then, in 2009, Tony West took over the department's Civil Division, the division that litigates and settles lawsuits.

Once West arrived, his deputy emailed colleagues asking "can you explain to Tony the best way to allocate some money toward an organization of our choosing?"

Settlements became the vehicle for paying off political allies.

For example, in late 2010, after a Supreme Court victory, DOJ lawyers were on the cusp of winning a decade-long fight against discrimination claims by 91 Hispanic and female farmers.

That's when West intervened and, as The New York Times put it, "engineered a stunning turnabout."

DOJ agreed to a \$1.33 billion settlement which included thousands of farmers who had never claimed bias.

The deal was made over the "vehement objections" of the department's career





lawyers.

The Times's investigative report described West's settlement as a "runaway train, driven by racial politics . . . and law firms that stand to gain more than \$130 million in fees."

The projected settlement size ballooned to over \$4.4 billion as additional plaintiffs were added, including Native American farmers.

The government's statistical expert was appalled: "If they had gone to trial, the government would have prevailed . . . It was just a joke. . . I was so disgusted. It was simply buying the support of the Native Americans."

This dirty deal also inflated the number of claimants, creating a \$60 million windfall for the plaintiff's lead lawyer, a member of the Obama/Biden transition team.

But West did not just bilk taxpayers. He shook down corporations, too.

In a series of bank settlements, his team added increasingly aggressive provisions requiring the institutions to make nearly a billion dollars in mandatory donations to Democrat-supporting activist groups.

Donations were given double credit against required targets, incentivizing these payments over direct relief to victims of the housing crises.

West's team specifically structured the terms to ensure that they would benefit only their political allies while leaving conservative groups ineligible.

An internal email shows West deputies rewording a settlement's donation provisions to ensure the bank could not select a "conservative" property rights organization as a recipient.

Over time, West grew even more brazen.

A 2016 Volkswagen settlement required the company to fund a \$2 billion White House electric car initiative that Congress had specifically rejected.

The largesse delighted liberal groups.

An email circulated saying they ought to build a "statue" to West and "bow down to this statue each day after we receive our \$200,000+."

In this legal shakedown, California's attorney general at the time, Kamala Harris, was an active participant, cosigning the agreements for her state.

The Biden-Harris Administration has continued West's "Honest Graft" tactics to reward political allies on the taxpayers' dime.

In 2021, a billion-dollar settlement with illegal immigrants claiming emotional distress was scotched only after public outcry.

Even then, DOJ quietly agreed to pay attorneys' fees to the ACLU lawyers in the long-running case.

Recently, the Department agreed to pay \$2 million to FBI Agents Peter Strzok and Lisa Page for releasing their anti-Trump texts to Congressional investigators worried about political bias.

The pair claimed a violation of the Privacy Act, but the messages were sent on their government-issue phones which contain clear

banner warnings that users lack any reasonable expectation of privacy.

DOJ had ample basis to litigate this case to completion before surrendering hard earned tax dollars to the disgraced FBI agents.

This form of civic corruption is not bipartisan.

At the start of his administration, President Trump's Attorney General banned settlement slush funds, while one of the early acts of the Biden-Harris DOJ was to rescind that ban.

Democrats have used this year's convention to cry that Donald Trump is in this race only for himself, though not one of their many court cases against him charges misdirected government funds.

Meanwhile, the Tony West-invented, Biden-Harris operated "Honest Graft" machine pours taxpayer billions into left-wing activist groups, and West is said to be Harris's White House counsel-in-waiting.

Hunter Biden step aside.

A new "Big Guy" is coming to town. Kamala, with the help of Tony West and his cronies, will show you how Honest Graft is really done.

Daniel Huff is a former counsel to the Senate and House Judiciary Committees. Clark S. Judge is managing director of the White House Writers Group, Inc.



## NON PROFIT HEROES

SD METRO will be honoring San Diego's Non-Profit Heroes in our October issue. Send your nominations to Rebeca Page at either [rebecapage@sandiegometro.com](mailto:rebecapage@sandiegometro.com) or [rebecapage@yahoo.com](mailto:rebecapage@yahoo.com).

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# California tried to make Google pay news outlets.

The company cut a deal that includes funding AI **By Jeanne Kuang**

California lawmakers are abandoning an ambitious proposal to force Google to pay news companies for using their content, opting instead for a deal in which the tech giant has agreed to pay \$172 million to support local media outlets and start an artificial intelligence program.

The first-in-the-nation agreement, announced today, promises \$175 million for local journalism across California over the next five years, but represents a significant departure from the bill pushed by news publishers and media employee unions earlier this year.

Instead of Google and Meta being forced to negotiate usage fees with news outlets directly, Google would deposit \$55 million over five years into a new fund administered by UC Berkeley to be distributed to local newsrooms — and the state would provide \$70 million over five years. Google would also continue paying \$10 million each year in existing grants to newsrooms.

The Legislature and the governor would still need to approve the state money each year; the source isn't specified yet. Google would also contribute \$12.5 million each year toward an artificial intelligence “accelerator” program, raising labor advocates' anxieties about the threat of job losses.

Publishers who initially pushed for the proposal forcing Google to pay them said the deal was still a win. The UC Berkeley fund will be overseen by news industry groups; the money will be distributed according to the number of journalists employed at each publication, with some reserved for smaller or ethnic media outlets.

“This is a first step toward what we hope will become a comprehensive program to sustain local news in the long term, and we will push to see it grow in future years,” Julie Makinen, board chairperson of the California News Publishers Association, said in a statement.

In an interview, Makinen said that the deal was “not what we had hoped for when set out, but it is a start and it will begin to provide some help to newsrooms across the state.”

“Sometimes, the political realities, they are what they are,” she said. “And there's many of them in this state and in this election year.”

Unions representing media workers accused the news companies and lawmakers of settling for too little.

Senate Democratic leader Mike McGuire, whose chamber earlier this year passed a bill “to hold Big Tech companies accountable for the profits they make off” linking to news articles, also raised concerns. In a statement, he said the deal “lacks sufficient funding for newspapers and local media, and doesn't fully address the inequities facing the industry.”

The agreement replaces two bills lawmakers had pursued the last two years as they tried to secure a cut of tech money to prop up California's struggling local news industry. Following a nationwide

trend, media companies have hemorrhaged jobs over the past two decades as advertisers fled print media for the internet and technological advancements reshaped how readers consume news. The state has lost one-third of its newspapers since 2005 in a trend experts say worsens civic engagement, polarization and misinformation.

To try to keep their readers, publications increasingly rely on social media and online search. Google controls the lion's share of search in a way the U.S. Justice Department and one federal judge have said violates antitrust law.

The proposals to impose fees on Google's use of news content in its search results prompted a flurry of tech company lobbying. In the past 18 months, for instance, Google spent more than \$2.1 million lobbying lawmakers against those bills and others — more than triple what it spent in the same time period two years earlier, according to a CalMatters review.

The first bill, introduced in February 2023 by Oakland Democratic Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, would have required platforms such as Google and Meta to either pay a fee or negotiate with news outlets for using their news content.

It was sponsored by the news publishers association, whose members include major newspapers including the San Francisco Chronicle and the Los Angeles Times. (CalMatters is also a member.) The bill passed the Assembly last year, but Wicks paused it to try to bridge a split among media companies over how the money would be divvied up.

Australia and Canada both passed similar measures in recent years — but the political headwinds were different in the tech companies' home state.

Google has argued the bill would unfairly force it to pay for sending free traffic to news sites, and disadvantage smaller sites. In a legislative hearing in June, the company's vice president of global news partnerships, Jaffer Zaidi, called the proposal “profoundly unconstitutional and problematic” since it could compel platforms to show content that they were forced to pay for.

The second bill, introduced this February by Orinda Democratic Sen. Steve Glazer, would have imposed a fee on major tech platforms to provide news outlets a tax credit to employ local journalists. The measure would have raised \$500 million a year.

In response to the Wicks bill, Google temporarily removed links to California news websites from its search results and in response to the Glazer bill, Google said it might stop funding nonprofit newsrooms nationwide. At the time, McGuire called the threats “an abuse of power.”

Glazer shelved his bill in May, after failing to scrounge up the two-thirds majority he needed, and said he would focus on trying to improve the Wicks bill. He later resurrected it; it passed the

Senate in late June and is in an Assembly committee.

Negotiations ramped up over the summer.

Tech companies doubled down on threats to stop linking to news sites in California if Wicks' bill passed, and publishers had an incentive to support an agreement that would give them the money quicker. In Canada, the government has estimated Google is paying \$73 million a year to news outlets under its new journalism industry law, but proponents of California's deal say the money has been slow to be distributed.

Another factor: Some proponents said it was unlikely Gov. Gavin Newsom, who pledged no tax increases this year, would sign Wicks' bill, which could be seen as a tax on tech companies. Newsom in a press release today praised the deal, though his spokesperson Alex Stack on Tuesday denied the governor was involved or had taken a position on the bill.

"This agreement represents a major breakthrough in ensuring the survival of newsrooms and bolstering local journalism across California — leveraging substantial tech industry resources without imposing new taxes on Californians," Newsom said in a statement.

By committing to pay into the new UC Berkeley fund, tech companies succeeded in killing the bills they opposed while appeasing both legacy print media and some digital-only news outlets with five years of support. The agreement is similar to a deal Google cut in France more than a decade ago, creating a "digital publishing innovation fund" when publishers there pushed for regulations.

"This public-private partnership builds on our long history of working with journalism and the local news ecosystem in our home state," Kent Walker, an executive at Google's parent company Alphabet, said in the press release announcing the agreement.

Wicks called it "a cross-sector commitment to supporting a free and vibrant press." In contrast, Glazer said it was "completely inadequate and massively short" of what Google is paying in Canada, and "seriously undercuts our work toward a long-term solution to rescue independent journalism."

The Media Guild of the West, which represents reporters in Southern California, slammed the agreement and accused publishers and lawmakers of folding to Google's threats.

"Google won, a monopoly won," said Matt Pearce, the group's president. "This is dramatically worse than what Australia and Canada got ... I don't know of any journalist that asked for this."

The guild said it was particularly concerned the deal involved a program promoting artificial intelligence technology, which it saw as a concession to the tech industry that could result in a further loss of reporting jobs. The Pacific Media Workers Guild, which represents journalists in Northern California, also opposes the deal.

The AI program appears to only be partly related to journalism: In its announcement, Wicks' office said the program will give businesses, nonprofits and researchers "financial resources and other support to experiment with AI to assist them in their work" addressing challenges such as environmental issues and racial inequities. OpenAI will contribute tech services, said former lawmaker Bob Hertzberg, who helped negotiate the deal, and proponents expect other tech companies to join in.

The AI accelerator would also create "new tools to help journalists access and analyze public information." Makinen, of the news publishers association, said more details of the program "need to be made public as soon as possible," and said she wants to see "more of those resources directed toward publishers."

Others, including an association of mostly smaller, digital news outlets, said the threat of tech platforms refusing to link to news articles would have been devastating.

Chris Krewson, president of Local Independent Online News Publishers, pointed to Canada, where Facebook no longer links to Canadian media in response to the new law there. That caused readership and ad revenue to plummet for small news outlets, Krewson said.

The organization's major funders include Google and Meta; CalMatters CEO Neil Chase, an association board member, last weekend urged member publications to support the deal.

"I just don't know that this industry should be in the position of saying no to any help it can get," Krewson said. "And I don't think it makes us more or less reliant (on tech platforms) than we already have been."



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# Papers Please!

Learn German, travel often to Switzerland and with a little luck you'll get a Swiss Passport!

By Marlise Kast-Myers

It was a check-the-box trip, one intended to fill our quota to earn my husband possible Swiss citizenship. With dual nationality, I'm fortunate enough to hold the coveted red passport due to my family bloodline.

Having spent my mid-twenties in the Alps, I tucked the notion in my mind, that perhaps one day, my husband could also carry one of the world's most powerful passports.

Easier said than done. After 12 years of marriage, we started with the initial paperwork, followed by an essay (in German) as to why he wanted to become a Swiss citizen. During the process, we delivered a library's worth of documents, ranging from financial reports to letters of recommendation. Next were in-person interviews at the nearest Swiss consulate, which happened to be in San Francisco. Thus, we flew from our home in San Diego for verbal tests—again, in German. After hours of studying, plus spending thousands in application fees, there was no turning back.

The good news was we passed almost every phase; the bad news was that we hadn't visited Switzerland enough to prove our allegiance. The fact that the pandemic had closed travel didn't matter. We still had to make three trips over five years. This meant we were one trip short of hopefully waving the white-cross flag.

And so, we packed our bags, adopting the mindset that this trip would double as a spring-skiing getaway during our qualifying trial. Seven days would introduce us to the French municipality of Crans-Montana in Valais, and reconnect us with our familiar friend, Zermatt in the German-speaking district of Visp.

At 4,478 meters (14,691 ft), the Matterhorn is one of the most famous mountains in Europe





SWISS airlines landed us in Zurich, where we caught a train to our first destination at Crans-Montana. The Swiss Travel System (STS) left little need to rent a car since a Swiss Travel Pass granted us unlimited travel by train, bus, and boat.

I had once lived just two hours away in the village of Gstaad, yet there wasn't too much I knew about Crans-Montana. Now some 20 years later, I returned as the prodigal child, clinging to my roots so I could build new ones.

Although my family tree had branched from Swiss heritage, there still was something purely impartial about the culture. Locals had a deep love for nature, family, and order. There was rarely conflict because frankly, there was nothing to argue about.

Switzerland was a harmonious nation, clichéd for chocolate, cowbells, and cheese. Those lures aside, there was a respect for the land and one's neighbor. We felt it in Crans-Montana, where four municipalities joined forces to unveil a twin-town nirvana in 2017. As recent as it was, the verdant magic started back in 1893 with two besties, Louis Antille and Michel Zufferey.

Together, they climbed from the valley to the mountaintop to open the area's first hotel, Hôtel du Parc. The region soon gained notoriety from doctors who prescribed patients the area's air quality, and later from the world's best golfers during the 1983 European Masters.

While it was the sunshine and sky that lured these pioneers, it was the 1987 World Ski Championships that officially put the destination on the map. And now, we were on that map, tracking it with apps wide open for everything it had to offer . . . starting with Hostellerie du Pas de l'Ours.

This Relais & Châteaux property had me at sheepskin rugs. I'm a sucker for refined coziness, and this boutique hotel nailed it with in-room fireplaces, heated floors, private Jacuzzis, stone walls, and timber-beamed ceilings. Sinking my jetlagged feet into plush slippers, I exhaled and asked my husband the inevitable question.

"I wonder what property costs here?"

We often do that; escape to a land void of troubles, tasks, and to-dos, and wonder if it's "the place." Without answering, my husband pulled back the curtains to unveil the moon-lit peaks.

He nodded. "I think our dogs would love it here."

What was not to love?

Within walking distance of our chalet, the ski resort boasted 87 miles of trails, a 10,000 ft summit, and \$50 lift tickets. From the top, a chain of peaks pierced through a duvet of clouds, revealing the Valais Alps from the Matterhorn to Mont Blanc.

To get a lay of the land, we hired a ski guide who took us on wide, carving pistes, down untouched bowls, and along 7-mile runs that made our thighs burn. In rudimentary French, I asked him why there were no people on the mountain. He explained that lift lines and swarmed slopes were basically nonexistent, especially come spring when locals traded skis for hiking boots and snowboards for bikes.



At 4,478 meters (14,691 ft), the Matterhorn is one of the most famous mountains in Europe

With nearly the whole mountain to ourselves, we pushed pause for lunch at La Cabane des Violettes. This stone mountain hut takes gourmet cuisine to the next level, literally. At 7,000 feet, the restaurant serves traditional temptations like croûte au fromage (bubbling cheese toast) and rösti (grated potato cake) with sausage and white asparagus.

Between breakfast croissants and a hearty lunch, you'd think we'd have had our fill of food for the day, but low and behold, we were in wine country. For an introduction to the blends of Valais, we went straight to the source, Cave le Tambourin Winery.

Run by second generation wine makers, Ishmaël and Madeleine Bonvin, the winery popped the cork in 1987. Today it's producing over 30,000 bottles of 20 award-winning wines. From the cellar, Madeleine dusted off six bottles, pairing them with platters of local cheeses, cured meats, and artisan chocolate to boot.

She credited the Rhône Valley's Mediterranean climate for part of their success, in this sun-drenched region of 300 wineries producing robust reds, aromatic whites, and fruity rosés.

Believe it or not, we had fondue that night, but the fact we had to work for it justified the glutenous consumption. At full moon,



Hostellerie du Pas de l'Ours, a Relais & Châteaux in the heart of Crans-Montana.

hiking from the neighboring village of Aminona to Colombire Hamlet is a must. It was our guide, Marlène Galletti who greeted us with snowshoes, hiking poles, headlamps, and a Blue Heeler ready to rumble.

A former thriving ski town, Aminona seemed frozen in time, a ghostly relic of its thriving past dating back to 1968. Development plans have waivered, and it currently serves as a gateway for hiking, cross country skiing, and mountain biking.

From the muddy trailhead, we learned of Marlène's background as a cheese maker and herbologist. She had traveled the world, sharing homesteading secrets with communities seeking to live off the land. Naturally, I asked her about everything from homemade sunscreen to longevity tinctures, that is, until she pointed toward the horizon.

That single moment silenced us all. A full moon overshadowed the mountains, so pink you'd swear they were blushing. We continued to climb, the quiet only broken by the sound of the snow crunching beneath our crampons.

And then, there it was, Colombire le Hameau—a "Hamlet" of clustered mayens. These traditional stone-and-wooden chalets function as summer homes for farmers who reside upstairs and keep livestock below.

With keys to the kingdom, Marlène opened the door to a mayen

and put us to work. Together, the three of us cooked cheese fondue with boiled potatoes, pearl onions, and cornichons. After a meal like that, we wished we had selected the "return sledding" option. Instead, we hiked under the moonlight, stopping only once to admire a yellow coltsfoot flower pushing through the snow in determination.

Puncturing the surrounding crust with her pole, Marlène scraped away a layer of snow as if giving the flower space to breathe. There was something remarkable about that moment, a hint of spring beckoning the sprouting seeds to burst forth in a mighty super bloom.

The next two days we hit the slopes, catching first chair and maximizing our time as if someone might shake us from our dream. Population in Crans-Montana supposedly triples from 15,000 come ski season. We didn't notice. Instead, we picked our lines, marveling that we were making tracks in April.

As much as I'd like to talk about the shopping, it was only while walking along Rue du Prado that I noticed boutiques selling luxury brands like Hermès, Montblanc, and Chopard. There are nearly 200 shops rounding out the local attractions of 200+ miles of hiking/biking trails, 7 lakes, 4 golf courses, 3 museums, 130 restaurants, 12 historical villages, and 4 waterfalls. But who's counting numbers—or calories—when you can eat at mountain



huts and Michelin-starred restaurants?

Alas, we indulged again, this time at Le Bistrot des Ours in the “cellar” of our hotel. With a mountain-inspired menu courtesy of Franck Reynaud, the Michelin-starred chef uses only Swiss ingredients in his French-Mediterranean cuisine.

If time allowed, we would have dined there again . . . with a smattering of paragliding, dog sledding, chocolate tasting, yak hiking, and maybe even heliskiing. Needless to say, we weren’t ready to leave Crans-Montana, but Zermatt (and budget) had us locked in for Part 2 of the trip.

From our hotel, we caught a morning bus to Sion, followed by a train to Visp. Peppering a patchwork of fields and vineyards were darling chalets, as perfect as if God had sprinkled Cuckoo clocks from heaven.

Going from French to German required some brain activation. Suddenly with that first greeting of “Grüezi,” I felt like I was home. It was my fourth trip to Zermatt, but still, the fact that village travel was by foot, bike, or electric taxi was remarkable. Until the 1980s, the vehicle-free village of Zermatt relied on horse-drawn carriages. Despite these changes, the sound of clapping on cobblestone could still be heard echoing through the narrow streets of “Hinterdorf.”

Dating back to the 16th century, this historic zone has barns and stables constructed from larch trees in the traditional style, balancing on stilts with slate roofs, rickety stepladders, and timber-cornered notching. At its center is a memorial fountain paying tribute to Ulrich Inderbinen who climbed the Matterhorn 370 times.

We too would be approaching that mountain, or rather, its base via the comfort of a chairlift. Getting there was easy, with direct access to the slopes from Hotel CERVO. What Pas de l’Ours was to elegance, CERVO was to design.

Remodeled in 2020, the stylish property has just 54 rooms housed within seven chalets. With tweed, wool, and leather textiles, our room teased hipster-huntsman-meets-polished-mountaineer. Private ski lockers, an “honesty bar,” live DJ, and a climbing wall checked all the boxes.

Beauty was in the details, with medicine bottles filled with dried flowers below deer mounts reminding us where we were. Oh, and the ice bath helped solidify that fact—a chilly awakening after the sauna, steam bath, and relaxation yurt. This mountain ashram was the main draw for my husband, while its proximity to the slopes had me on speed dial.

From our hotel, an elevator took us through the mountain to the starting point of Europe’s highest ski resort. Rails, escalators, gondolas, and chairlifts revealed a mind-blowing feat of engineering and infrastructure that covered 324 miles across two countries. As we skied our way toward Italy, I asked my husband if we needed our passports.

With that question, it became obvious I had fallen madly in love with Switzerland. Our romance blossomed that afternoon as we zipped through Alpine villages toward Chez Vrony—a restaurant we now consider among our “Top Five.”



An indoor-outdoor pool round out the amenities at Hostellerie du Pas de l’Ours.

With a front row seat to the Matterhorn, Chez Vrony came from humble beginnings as a family farmhouse. Over the past century, traditional recipes have been passed down for generations. Each dish is prepared with organic products including the dried meats, house sausage, and Alpine cheese. Withstanding the test of time, the family eventually turned their farmhouse into one of the area’s best restaurants, one so beautiful I almost cried.

For me, these were life-giving moments, where I would smile at no one in particular, but rather at the fact Switzerland had my heart. Actually, it had the heart of many with its 110 hotels, 365 days of snow, 100 restaurants, 50 bars, and unlimited winter and summer activities. It had me with 300+ days of sunshine, a constant wink from the Matterhorn, and ski-in-ski-out everything.

Unclicking our bindings, we sauna-fied our bodies and ate local with back-to-back dinners at CERVO. With five dining options, our hotel hooked us with the Middle Eastern menu at Bazaar, and later with homemade pasta at Madre Nostre.

Walking back to our room, I turned toward my husband and asked if he noticed we had spoken four languages with the staff in two hours. He hadn’t, because that’s just the way things are in Switzerland—in a country that leaves me longing to be more. Where pyramid-shaped mountains are so magnificent, I feel I can reach out and touch them.

Where loving my neighbor holds true meaning, because I know they would toil with me when the soil is dry; Where I can take pride in my name because it has Swiss significance; Where an army of citizens could rise up, but instead choose peace; Where eating is an experience and nature is a habit; Where the air literally has the power to heal.

This was my country—a place where I can bloom, regardless of the cold and bareness; Where clouds live in the valley and sunshine rises on the mountaintop; Where traditions are held close, and family is held closer.

Looking back on my husband’s two-year citizenship process, one might ask if the journey was really worth the destination? Considering I’m now officially married to a Swiss man, I’d say so.



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