

OPINION

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."



**CalMatters
Commentary**
Dan Walters
Columnist

Logistics industry faces big backlash

A half-century ago, Southern California's financial, political and civic leaders made a fateful decision that the region's economic future could be assured by expanding its nascent logistics industry, centered on the twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Countless billions of public and private dollars went into expanding the ports' cargo-handling capacity, improving transportation corridors and erecting thousands of warehouses in San Bernardino and Riverside counties to receive, store and distribute the torrent of goods from rapidly expanding Asian economies, particularly China.

The explosion of TDL (transportation-distribution-logistics) created hundreds of thousands of jobs, helping the region absorb an influx of immigrants from other countries during the 1980s and 1990s and weather collapse of its aerospace industry after the end of the Cold War.

Most of those TDL jobs, however, were of the relatively low-skill, low-pay variety, unlike the high-technology boom that was happening concurrently in the San Francisco Bay Area and generating a surge of high-income employment. There are some indications that SoCal's TDL sector may have peaked because it is connected to global trends that are evolving, including an erosion of free trade in favor of protectionism, changes in consumer tastes and transportation bottlenecks, such as attacks on Suez Canal-bound container ships in the Red Sea.

For the moment, however, the Inland Empire of San Bernardino and Riverside counties has a billion square feet of warehouse space, more is being proposed and its roadways are packed with trucks. Not surprisingly, its concentration has sparked a backlash in recent years, or rather two backlashes.

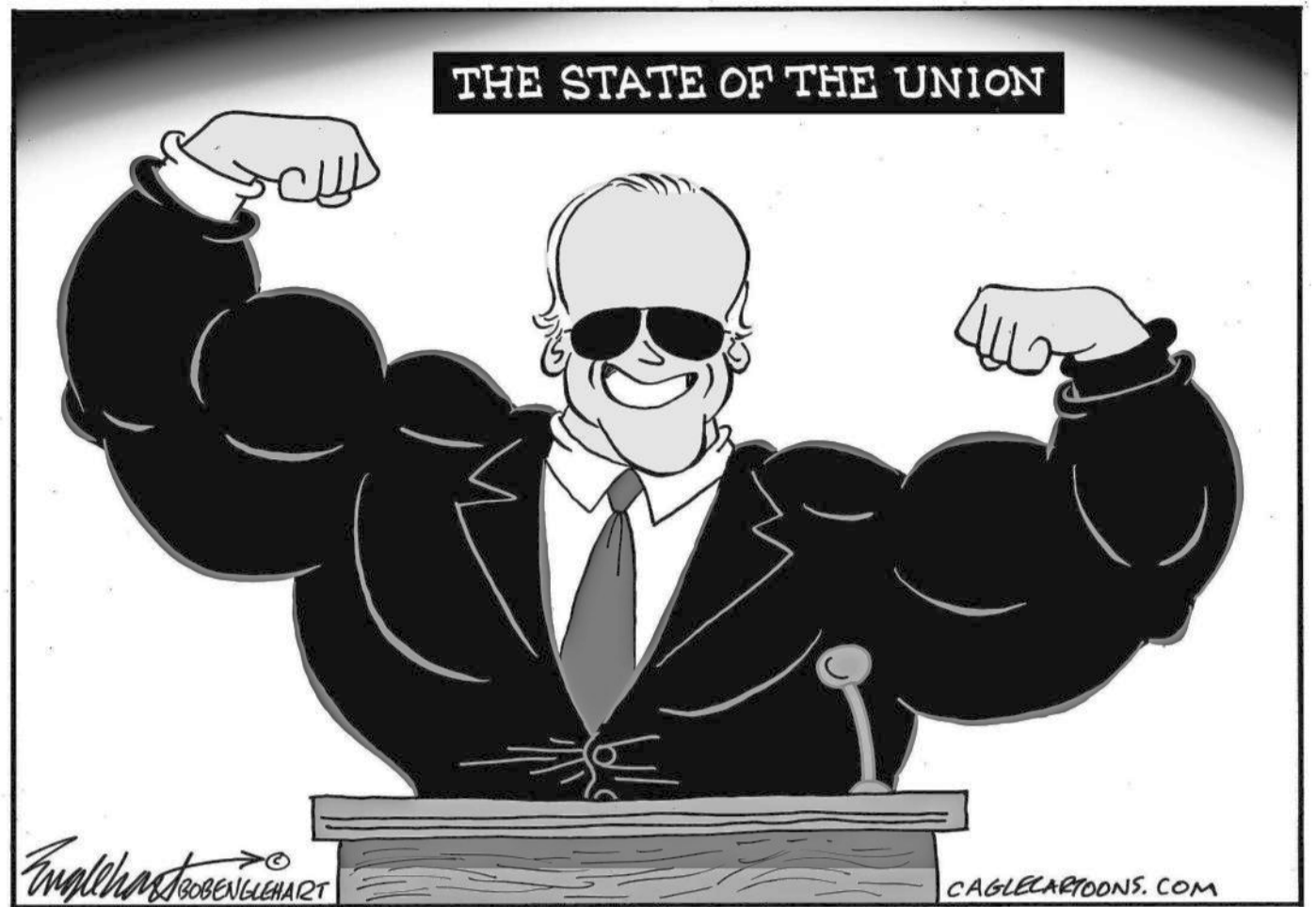
One is the increasing complaints of low-salaried workers that their incomes are not keeping pace with relentless increases in living costs, particularly for housing, while the other is growing criticism of the industry's environmental impacts, particularly emissions from thousands of diesel-powered trucks.

Both of those backlashes are encapsulated in a newly released study by UC Riverside's Inland Empire Labor and Community Center and a coalition of labor union advocates.

The study determined that TDL is now the region's second largest employment sector. Its jobs increased by nearly 90% between 2016 and 2021, but its average monthly wage of \$4,372 is markedly below averages in the rest of Southern California and the state as a whole.

"The expansion of warehouses and consequent pollution of the IE (Inland Empire) is an environmental justice concern that is exacerbating existing social, economic, and health inequities in the region," the report declares. "As of 2023, the IE has 1 billion square feet of warehouse space and is awaiting the approval of an additional 170 million square feet, which will increase the production of emissions in the region by 10%."

The study appears to concentrate its criticism on Amazon, the colossus of logistics, citing its creation of an air freight hub at San Bernardino's airport as an example of industry running roughshod. Ironically, the study was released just days before Amazon's founder, Jeff Bezos, was declared the world's richest man with a \$200 billion fortune, edging past electric car tycoon Elon Musk.



EDITORIAL THE STAR

Shopping for housing in Simi Valley

During its annual conference in Thousand Oaks last month, the California Lutheran University Center for Economic Research and Forecasting highlighted a sobering finding from the National Association of Realtors: Of all the metropolitan areas in the United States, the Oxnard-Thousand Oaks-Ventura market is America's least affordable place to live.

That distinction is not just a function of high housing prices and elevated rents, although those are of course major factors. It's also that wages here are low compared to other markets with high housing costs, such as the San Francisco Bay Area or Seattle.

If any data point ever summed up Ventura County's two most pressing needs, it's that one. Two things are needed here to boost the economy, improve the quality of community life and staunch the population declines of the last eight years: better-paying jobs and more housing options.

As it happens, societal change is forcing local governments here to rethink land-use configurations in a way that could help to address housing needs. The idea is to convert slumping retail venues to apartments, condos or townhouses. There is opportunity — and, importantly, also investor interest — to realize benefit

from what might otherwise be a blight-producing source of community decay.

It's a fact of life that the world of retail shopping has irrevocably changed. Shopping malls struggle to attract tenants and customers. Last month, the inevitable came to pass: Macy's announced it will close 150 of its namesake stores. Among the first to be shuttered will be the one at Simi Valley's Town Center mall.

The brief history of the Simi Valley Town Center has been cursed by bad timing. After years of planning, the mall opened in 2005 amid much excitement and anticipation. A year later, the owner of one of its anchor stores, Robinson's-May, ceased to exist. Then the Great Recession hit. And all of this coincided with the rise of Amazon and the worldwide surge in online shopping.

Not even 20 years old, today the Town Center is marked by vacant storefronts and empty parking lots. It is a great disappointment because the mall had only briefly begun to fulfill one of its intended visions as a community gathering place.

There is an understandable reluctance to cede that vision, but change is an unstoppable force.

Discussions are under way — for the second time in recent years — to build apartments or condos on some, or even

most, of the mall property. A formal proposal could come before the City Council within a year or so.

Over in Thousand Oaks, city officials will be facing similar considerations as the owner of Janss Marketplace will be seeking a residential component as part of its expansion plans. The property has already been rezoned for mixed-use development.

In Simi Valley, consideration of housing at the Town Center will be complicated by the remnants of the vision of the property as a true center for public life. As Council member Elaine Litster recently told *The Star*, "We would like to retain its central purpose, which is a shopping and gathering space for the entire community."

That could happen, but it will take some creative thinking. Communal shopping experiences aren't very much a thing these days. Perhaps there is a way to incorporate public attractions such as music venues, activity areas and other entertainment options into the plan, but the city can ill afford to turn its back on an opportunity to convert underused property into a use that can help meet the area's essential need for housing.

"Abandoned shopping center" is not a land use anyone wants to see, especially not here in America's least affordable place to live.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Rancor' over closing justified

Re: Andrea Fuchs Petzi's March 7 letter, "Sisters owed debt of gratitude":

In Ms. Petzi's letter she opines over the negative reaction the Sisters of Notre Dame have received in their decision to close La Reina High School. She urges us to "let the rancor go," emphasizing the school's positive impact on thousands of students.

Nobody is disputing the value of a La Reina education. In fact, it is that very education we are fighting to preserve. I am an alumna of the school (1990) as are both my daughters ('18 and '22). I have also been the school's photographer for more than 12 years. My roots run deep here. I have been beyond grateful to the SND for the education we received. But if La Reina has taught me anything it is these words from our alma mater — "defend all that's good, esteem the right and fair."

Accepting donations and application fees while knowing about the im-

pending closure is unethical at the very least. They have caused a great deal of harm with this decision, leaving beloved teachers unemployed and providing no support or guidance to the current families. And, contrary to Ms. Petzi's claim about private schools closing due to COVID, many, including one I work for, experienced increased enrollment, navigating the pandemic differently from public schools. But this isn't about enrollment.

The bottom line is that if the Sisters wanted to keep this school open, they could. The community is telling them very clearly that they will support its continuance with fundraising. They could pivot and make the school co-institutional and bring in double the enrollment. They could sell part of their land to another entity. The list goes on. The SND are either just done with their mission of education or choosing a payout instead. And for that reason, I won't "let the rancor go."

Lisa Sutton Pollon, Westlake Village

Tired of nonstop construction

Can we please stop building apartments. There has been nonstop construction for at least five years probably more.

The traffic is so bad it takes 15 minutes on Cochran to go from Sycamore to Sequoia. I don't know who makes these decisions, but they must really hate Simi Valley. I feel sick every time I drive by Alamo and Tapo St. and see that big ugly eyesore. It looks like a hospital. I know people fought hard to stop it; nobody listens or cares.

They are turning all the malls into apartments. Is that what their planning for Mountain Gate Plaza? And now the Town Center.

What happens when we run out of mini malls? Are they going to start ripping up the parks? Then what, the cemeteries? It's horrible and disgusting and they need to listen to the people. Enough is enough.

Victoria Garfinkel, Simi Valley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Keep them brief, no more than 300 words. All letters are subject to editing. Give full name, address and telephone number for verification; only name and hometown will be published. **E-mail:** letters@VCStar.com (preferred).

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