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The newspaper of Silicon Valley

The Mercury News

BayArea NewsGroup 111

Volume 172, Issue 335

SATURDAY, MAY 20, 2023

★

24/7 COVERAGE: MERCURYNEWS.COM » \$3.00

CALIFORNIA

Battle over bullfrogs hops up with restrictions considered



CHRIS WEEKS — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Brent Bloom urges on his frog "Jumping Bob" at the Jumping Frog Jubilee in Calaveras County on May 20, 2012. State wildlife officials met to ponder the management of the disease-carrying invasive frog.

Disease-carrying amphibian stars in contests, Asian cuisine and pet stores

By Lisa M. Krieger
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Bullfrogs are the elite athletes of the amphibian world with a thrilling leap that can surpass 21 feet.

But back home in their ponds, they're nothing but trouble.

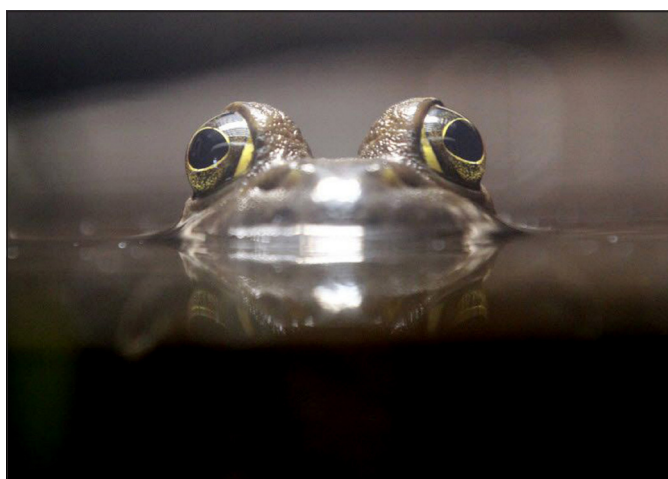
On the eve of this weekend's famed Calaveras Jumping Frog Jubilee, state wildlife officials met to ponder the management of a disease-carrying invasive frog with powerful legs, a dopey smile and a dangerous appetite.

Even as California

spends large sums to help protect populations of threatened native frogs, especially yellow-legged and red-legged species, an estimated 2 million predatory bullfrogs are imported into the state every year.

To tackle the problem, 34 policy proposals are under consideration, some of them aimed directly at the jumping competition itself: Swap the dominant bullfrogs for other species. Monitor the contest to catch any escapees. Restrict the release of contestants. Inglorious execution, post-Jubilee. Perhaps even

BULLFROGS » PAGE 6



MICHAEL AINSWORTH — DALLAS MORNING NEWS/TNS

A bullfrog peers above the water in a display at the Trinity River Audubon Center.

ECONOMY

Bay Area experiences job growth rebound in April despite losses in the tech sector

Region gains 11,200 employees, eclipses pre-pandemic level of February 2020

By George Avalos
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The Bay Area powered to robust job gains in April, an upswing that transcended a fourth consecutive month of net employment losses in the beleaguered tech sector.

The gain of 11,200 jobs overall in the nine-county region in April provided an especially welcome counterpoint to the unsettling loss of 4,400 jobs in the region during March, according to a report released Friday by the state Employment Development Department. California as a whole also made strong gains.

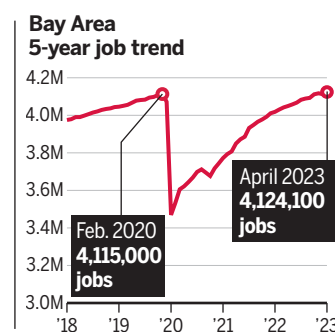
"These are cheery numbers and they confirm that we're generally healthy,"

BAY AREA SHOWS STURDY JOB GROWTH

The Bay Area and California both powered to robust job gains in April.

Jobs gained or lost in April	
East Bay	6,400
S.F.-San Mateo Co.	1,600
Marin County	1,100
Sonoma County	1,000
Solano County	800
South Bay	300
Napa County	-
Bay Area	11,200

*All numbers are seasonally adjusted figures. Sources: State Employment Development Department and BANG staff research



BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Bay Area jobs in each of the first four months of this year.

The April gains in the Bay Area were led primarily by an increase of 6,400 jobs in the East Bay, along with a gain of 300 jobs in the Santa Clara County region and 1,600 jobs in the San Francisco-San Mateo metro area. All of the numbers were adjusted for seasonal volatility.

"Bay Area job growth has been uneven in recent months, but job creation appears to have rebounded solidly in April," said Scott Anderson, chief economist with Bank of the West.

The hiring trends so far in 2023 mean that the Bay Area now has an all-time high number of jobs, totaling slightly more than 4.12 million in April. That also means the region now has 9,100 jobs more than the pre-COVID-19 employment pinnacle in February 2020.

California added 67,000

JOBS » PAGE 6

SANTA CLARA

Documents: City leader admitted to 49ers leak

Witness testified that Becker got married so his husband couldn't testify against him

By Grace Hase
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Santa Clara Councilmember Anthony Becker admitted leaking a confidential grand jury report about the city's cozy relationship with the 49ers and asked a campaign volunteer to blame the leak on Mayor Lisa Gillmor, according to transcripts of the investigation obtained by this news organization.

Becker was indicted by a criminal grand jury last month and has entered a plea of not guilty to allegedly leaking a Santa Clara County civil grand jury report about the council's relationship with the 49ers to the team and to the Silicon Valley Voice and then lying about it.

Becker, through Public Defender Christopher Montoya, has maintained his innocence, with the attorney telling reporters earlier this month that "first-time impressions of a case are often wrong or incomplete."

But transcripts of testimonies given to the criminal grand jury that indicted Becker paint a different picture. The transcripts become public under California law if the grand jury votes to indict and only 10 days after a copy is given to the defendant or their attorney.

During a March 29 grand jury hearing, Santa Clara Councilmember Suds Jain — one of Becker's allies on the council — said that the councilmember had called him two to three weeks earlier and admitted that he had leaked the grand jury report to Carolyn Schuk, an editor at the hyperlocal news outlet the Silicon Valley Voice.

"He was just under a lot of stress," Jain told the grand jury of Becker's disposition. "To be honest, I wish he hadn't told me. But he did, and so I have to report it today."

The report at the center of the leak, titled "Unsportsmanlike Conduct," was highly critical of Becker and four of his colleagues for voting in favor of the 49ers' interests. The NFL team plays at the city-owned Levi's Stadium.

BECKER » PAGE 6

400,000 JOBS PROMISED

Newsom proposes \$180B infrastructure work, imposing time limits on litigation

By Ethan Baron
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Gov. Gavin Newsom on Friday announced plans to accelerate the construction of \$180 billion worth of infrastructure for transportation, water, green energy and broadband internet over the next decade by cutting red tape and slashing the time opponents can fight the government in court.

Newsom promised that the work would create more than 400,000 jobs and assist the state in achieving its climate-protection goals. The infrastructure investments, using federal and state funds, would eclipse those of the 1950s and '60s "that helped build the great middle class in the state of California and America," Newsom said.

His massive spending plan comes as the state faces a projected \$32 billion deficit in its operating budget, mostly separate from capital project spending.

"We've got to do more and we've got to do better," Newsom said, surrounded by union leaders and workers at a news conference in Stanislaus County. "The question is, 'Are we going to screw it up by being consumed by paralysis and process?'"

The governor's plans to expedite certain proj-

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Jobs

FROM PAGE 1

jobs in April, the state Employment Development Department reported. The Golden State has now added jobs over a stretch of four consecutive months. California's last employment setback was a loss of 20,200 jobs in December 2022.

Despite the job gains last month in California, the statewide unemployment rate worsened to 4.5% in April, up from 4.4% in March. The job totals and the unemployment rates are derived from two different government surveys and can at times move in contrasting directions.

"California accounted for roughly one-quarter of the jobs added in the nation during April," said Taner Osman, research manager with Beacon Economics. "The state's econ-



KARL MONDON — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The skyline of downtown San Jose stands against the East Hills on Thursday. The Bay Area and California both powered to robust job gains in April, but the Bay Area's upswing transpired despite losses by the tech sector in region.

omy has had a strong start to the year, adding jobs at a quicker rate than the nation as a whole."

Santa Clara County, with its upswing in April, has now gained jobs for 27 consecutive months. The last time the South Bay lost jobs was in January 2021. However, the increase of 300

positions was the smallest monthly gain during that stretch of more than two years.

The East Bay's April employment upswing more than offset a loss of 4,900 jobs in March for the Alameda County-Contra Costa County metro region.

The San Francisco-San

Mateo County area had suffered losses of 1,000 jobs in February and another 500 in March until achieving the April job gains.

The faltering performance of the tech sector has meant other industries had to come to the forefront.

"The April job gains for the Bay Area were surprising to us, especially given the job loss for March and the continued job-reduction announcements at some of the region's largest tech companies," said Jeff Bellisario, executive director of the Bay Area Council Economic Institute. "Other sectors continue to add jobs."

Here are some non-tech industries that performed well in the Bay Area during April, according to the seasonally adjusted calculations produced by Beacon. All the numbers are Bay Area-wide:

- Health care organizations added 6,300 posi-

- Hotels, restaurants and drinking establishments increased employment by 2,200.

- Administrative support, which consists primarily of clerical and office staffers, added 1,400 jobs.
- Retailers added 1,300 jobs.

- Construction increased employment by 1,100 positions.

Yet several of these industries — notably retail, construction and administrative support — also depend in part on the strength of core sectors such as tech and manufacturing for their prospects.

If tech or manufacturing workers are losing their jobs, these employees tend to spend less money in stores, restaurants and hotels. If tech companies reduce their appetite for office space and facilities, construction work might wane as well.

Despite the April up-

swing for hiring, the Bay Area could be in for rougher times as 2023 progresses, some economists warn.

"Tech, finance, small businesses and other employers may make selective layoffs and slow their hiring as they prepare for tougher economic and financial times," Anderson said.

Still, it appears that the Bay Area economy has managed to withstand some of the upheaval unleashed by the work-from-home trends that emerged in the wake of the coronavirus-linked business shutdowns, according to Michael Bernick, an employment attorney with law firm Duane Morris and a former director of the state EDD.

"Remote work has fundamentally changed the nature of work here in the Bay Area," Bernick said. "But its impact on the overall job numbers so far has been limited."

Bullfrogs

FROM PAGE 1

ban frog contests — and the bullfrog — altogether.

Such actions would no doubt elicit howls of protests from competitors, but other measures and regulations under consideration are likely to be more sweeping — and in some cases, controversial — such as banning live bullfrog imports, forbidding the sale of live bullfrogs, eradicating non-native frogs in local areas and improving habitat to better accommodate struggling native frogs.

"A package of strategies is really critical, because the frog is already established in California," said ecologist Erika Zavaleta, an ecology professor at UC Santa Cruz and co-chair of the California Fish and Game Commission's Wildlife Resource Committee, which met Wednesday in Monterey.

The size of a potato with a basso "jug-o'-rum" call as unmistakable as its jump, the bullfrog was introduced from the Eastern U.S. in the 1910s. Like so many other newcomers to California, it loved it here and quickly became established.

Now millions of bullfrogs live in ditches, canals and ponds across the state, displacing much smaller native frogs, which the



AL SEIB — LOS ANGELES TIMES

Adam Backlin, field biologist with the United States Geological Survey, inspects a mountain yellow-legged frog while conducting a study of the federally endangered amphibians in the San Gabriel Mountains in 2012.

bullfrog devours. It's as aggressive as the kudzu vine, which is engulfing trees all over the South and the mongoose, which is eating its way through Hawaii's native bird populations.

Bullfrogs also are blamed for the introduction of the most significant infectious diseases — a fungus and a virus — that are contributing to global amphibian declines.

But they're a delicacy in Asian cuisines. In San Francisco's Chinatown, piles of bullfrogs sit in tubs, imported for sale from frog farms in China, Taiwan, Brazil and other countries. They're a tasty treat for urban water birds as well, such as the black-crowned night heron.

They're also beloved pets, sold online as tadpoles for \$3 each.

And they're entertainers. Earlier this month, bullfrogs were invited to the state Capitol for a jovial jump-off, with dozens of lawmakers and staffers hollering and tickling their frogs to leap for victory. The prize went to Assemblymember Phillip Chen's frog named — yep! — Phil, who soared 12 feet, 5 inches.

This weekend, bullfrogs are gathering in Angels Camp — dubbed "Frog-town, USA" — for a competition that started 95 years ago to honor a Mark Twain short story and the paving of the town's Main Street. More than 40,000 visitors are expected to come see its famous frogs.

In Twain's tale "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," a frog named Dan'l Webster

trained to jump higher, faster and farther than any other frog. He beat every challenger until the day that a stranger secretly filled him with lead shot, grounding him.

But Twain's frog — which experts agree was likely the native California red-legged frog, not a bullfrog — bore little resemblance to contemporary competitors. While red-legged frogs are also good jumpers, they're smaller, wary and more discerning in their tastes. Once plentiful, they're now rare.

This weekend's jubilee entrants are the amphibious version of thoroughbreds in horse sports, blue marlin in fishing contests and border collies in Westminster's agility trials.

Last year's winner, a bullfrog named "Old Papa" by owner Nolan Moncrief, 5, of Modesto, thrilled onlookers by leaping 19-0 3/4, longer than the length of a large pickup truck. The record, set in 1986 by "Rosie the Ribeter," is a stunning 21 feet, 5 3/4.

"The frog is an economic engine for our small community," said Laurie Giannini, CEO and manager of the Calaveras County Fair & Jumping Frog Jubilee, which contributes \$5.2 million annually to the region.

Defending the event, "it is our belief that the number of bullfrogs jumped at the Calaveras County Fair & Jumping Frog Jubilee

will neither increase nor decrease the general bullfrog population," she said.

The proposed restrictions "are just another extreme regulatory measure that comes from Sacramento," said Chad Condit, chief of staff for state Sen. Marie Alvarado-Gil, who represents Calaveras County. "A bunch of bureaucrats sitting in a room don't take into account the unintended consequences of what it would do to Calaveras County and other communities."

The Asian Food Association did not respond to a request for comment. But in previous testimony, former state Sen. Leland Yee, who represented parts of San Francisco and the Peninsula, defended importation of bullfrogs for sale.

"For over 5,000 years, it has been the practice of both the Chinese community and the Asian American community to consume these particular animals," he said. "They are part of our staple. They are part of our culture. They are part of our heritage."

Meanwhile, the state is spending money to manage the frogs.

A permit to import frogs is cheap: \$76. But it takes considerable time and effort for the state to issue and track permits, visit bullfrog vendors, do research, hold meetings and conduct other bullfrog business. Money is also spent on protecting belea-

guered native frogs, such as improving habitats, regulating pesticide use and monitoring populations.

"Most bullfrog importation is being subsidized by California's taxpayers," said Kerry Kriger, director of the conservation organization Save The Frogs!, which recently created a Bullfrog Action Group to organize opposition. The group seeks a ban on importing bullfrogs and is also pushing for higher permit fees, better regulation and other steps.

Oregon and Washington ban imports. So do the city and county of Santa Cruz. That ban has educated people about the risks and stopped sales in pet stores, although wild populations continue to grow, said Chris Berry, watershed compliance manager for the City of Santa Cruz.

More than a decade ago, a ban on importation was unanimously passed by the commission, which sets policy for the state's Department of Fish and Game. But the department didn't implement the ban after political resistance.

Now that is again under consideration, along with other control and eviction measures. A formal recommendation is planned for the commission's next meeting on Sept. 23.

"The state has acknowledged the harms," said Kriger. "But it has failed to take action to remedy the issue."

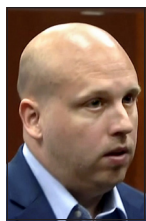
Becker

FROM PAGE 1

The report was supposed to be made public on Oct. 10, but a draft of the report was published in several media outlets, including this one, on Oct. 7.

Former 49ers spokesperson Rahul Chandhok, who was interviewed in front of the grand jury on several occasions and had an immunity agreement, said Becker sent him a copy of the report on Oct. 6 via the encrypted messaging app Signal.

Chandhok said he asked Becker if he had sent the report to anyone else. The councilmember said he had



Becker

already sent it to Angie Tolliver, the editor-in-chief at the Silicon Valley Voice.

The former 49ers spokesperson, who now works for the United States Soccer Federation, said he didn't recall if Becker knew the draft report wasn't public information.

"I don't remember him ever being like fearful about sending it, because he had already sent it to others," Chandhok told the grand jury.

While Becker admitted to Jain that he was the source

of the leak, testimony from a campaign volunteer, David Andre, suggests the councilmember tried to pin the blame on Gillmor, his political rival. Andre had volunteered on several of Becker's campaigns, including his unsuccessful bid for mayor last year.

Andre, who said he has since distanced himself from the councilmember, said he was aware of the grand jury report before it was made public.

"He told me he was concerned about, like, the negative press that it was going to cause," Andre told the jury. "And he said something about wanting to get ahead of the report, or he wanted positive coverage

when it was reported."

On the day Andre was subpoenaed to testify to the grand jury, he said he received a call from Becker, who said his then-boyfriend, Abel Cardona, had been subpoenaed. When Andre confirmed he had been subpoenaed as well, he said Becker told him, "Tell him it was Lisa Gillmor."

Gillmor did not respond to a request for comment.

Andre told Becker not to contact him until the investigation was over, but on the day the district attorney's office seized the councilmember's phones and computers, Becker showed up on his doorstep, Andre said. The campaign volunteer said he was "nervous"

and "disturbed" that Becker showed up unannounced and pressured Becker to answer whether he was behind the leak.

Becker at first said no but then later told him that Cardona had leaked the report, according to Andre. Becker and Cardona were married in January, according to testimony from Becker's mother, Virginia Goncalves. Andre told the grand jury that Becker said he and Cardona were getting married so Cardona wouldn't have to testify against him.

The councilmember is being charged with a misdemeanor for the leak, as well as felony perjury and could face up to four years in county jail if convicted on

the latter charge.

The grand jury interviewed more than 20 individuals, including 49ers executives and consultants, current and former city staff, civil grand jurors, people associated with Becker's mayoral bid and his mother.

The indictment has sparked controversy in the Mission City, with Gillmor and some residents calling on the councilmember to resign. Several of his colleagues, however, have defended him, saying they should let the legal process play out.

Becker and his attorney did not respond to a request for comment.

His next court date is set for Aug. 2.

Newsom

FROM PAGE 1

ects drew immediate blowback, including from the Sierra Club, which said they wouldn't solve California's persistent water-management issues.

Newsom signed an executive order that creates an interagency "infrastructure strike team" charged with maximizing "federal and state funding opportunities." State Department of Finance documents cite potential federal funding sources along with state funds reflected in Newsom's latest proposed budget. He said 11 state bills would play vital roles in accomplishing his goals.

A key part of the plan, which would require legislative approval, is a nine-month time limit on lawsuits by opponents wielding the contentious California Environmental Quality Act — best known as a flashpoint in statewide battles

over housing development — that mandates detailed environmental reviews. CEQA, which also is given credit for helping preserve California's natural beauty, has proven stubbornly resistant to change since it became law in 1970.

The CEQA-litigation cap would be public-infrastructure specific and only apply to projects relating to "water, clean transportation, clean energy, and semiconductor or microelectronic research and development facilities," according to Newsom's proposed legislation. A fact sheet issued by the state finance department said the proposal would not change CEQA requirements for public engagement, consideration of alternatives or imposition of mitigation measures.

"We're not looking to roll over anybody," Newsom said. "We're not looking to roll over local communities. We're not looking to roll over environmental stewardship and those that are out there as fierce cham-

pions."

Exactly what infrastructure could be built is not fully clear. Newsom referred to roads, bridges, high-speed rail and the proposed multibillion-dollar Sites Reservoir in Colusa County northeast of Clear Lake. The executive order highlights clean energy, modernizing the power grid, providing broadband to those without it, job training, domestic computer-chip manufacturing, mass transit, electric-car supports and permanently strengthening "California's water resiliency."

The fact sheet issued Friday by Newsom's office, also mentions wildlife crossings. It says the plan includes streamlining regulation and reviews to hasten construction of the Delta Conveyance, a long-planned, much-debated multibillion-dollar tunnel project to make it easier to move water from Northern to Southern California.

Laura Deehan, the director of nonprofit Environ-

ment California, took the podium before Newsom and said the environmental community was "ready to work with the governor and the legislature" on speeding the transition to clean energy.

But the director of the Sierra Club of California, Brandon Dawson, on Friday described both the Delta Conveyance and Sites Reservoir plans as "bad for the environment."

Dawson said the developments would not "solve California's long-term water management issues" and would have "significant environmental consequences for their surrounding communities."

Dawson said there was "no doubt" California needs more clean energy and transportation and increased water resiliency. His organization noted that Newsom's plan could create "environmentally friendly" solar, wind, battery storage, clean transportation and wildlife crossing projects. However, Dawson said

"that infrastructure can't be built without the input of the communities it will exist in."

Restore the Delta, a Stockton-based nonprofit that advocates for keeping water in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and has long fought state tunnel plans for water movement from north to south, immediately attacked Newsom over the proposal to limit CEQA litigation.

"He has no real water-management plan to deal with extended drought and flood extremes to meet our climate reality, but instead is choosing to continue with failed ideas from the past to appease his big-dollar agriculture donors," said Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, a committee member for the group, who accused the governor of "destroying protective standards by executive order and legislative fiat."

State Water Contractors, a group of cities and water districts that receive Delta water, applauded what it be-

lieves Newsom's plans will deliver.

"Completing the projects that will ensure our ability to responsibly capture, store, release, deliver, recycle and desalinate water throughout California isn't just smart planning, it is a climate-change imperative," organization General Manager Jennifer Pierre said.

Newsom's "infrastructure strike team" will coordinate and facilitate projects and operate public "dashboards" for tracking progress, according to his executive order. The potential federal funding includes money from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act.

Regarding California's underfunded and politically divisive high-speed rail project, Newsom said, "What if we had these principles before we laid out that project? I may not have had to drive down here today."