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SCALING DOWN BIDEN'S PLAN

FDA panel backs limiting COVID-19 booster shots



Jonelyn Weed, 71, left, and Shirley Pollastrini, 81, wait to receive the COVID-19 vaccine during a clinic at the Stoneridge Creek Retirement Community in Pleasanton in January.

PHOTOS BY ANDA CHU — STAFF ARCHIVES

Extra vaccine dose endorsed only for people 65 and older and those at high risk

By John Woolfolk
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A Food and Drug Administration expert advisory panel Friday called for trimming President Joe Biden's plan to give booster shots to most vaccinated Americans to bolster immunity against COVID-19, instead recommending only those whose age, job or health put them at high risk receive an additional shot.

After rejecting the proposal of a Pfizer booster for everyone over age 16, the committee unanimously recommended emergency use authorization for a third shot to those age 65 and older and health care workers and others with occupational exposure to the virus.

Biden last month had called

for Americans who had the most widely used two-dose Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to get boosters eight months after their last shot, with the rollout to begin as early as Monday. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the president's top medical adviser, cited evidence of waning vaccine protection.

But although federal regulators just weeks ago approved boosters for people with weakened immune systems, medical experts within the administration and around the country, including 16 of Friday's 18 voting panelists, questioned the need for everyone to have them.

"There are a lot of questions to be answered," said Dr. Arnold Monto, professor of public health and epidemiology at the University of Michigan and

BOOSTER SHOT » PAGE 6



An older adult receives a COVID-19 vaccine from a John Muir Health physician at the Viamonte retirement living residence in Walnut Creek in December 2020.

COUNTRIES' CLIMATE PLEDGES FALL SHORT

U.N. warns of 'catastrophic pathway'

By Somini Sengupta
The New York Times

Even if all countries meet the emissions promises that they have made to address climate change, the global average temperature is poised to rise 2.7 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century, a level considered "catastrophic" in a new report from the United Nations climate agency released Friday.

That level of warming is likely to worsen the kinds of extreme wildfires, droughts and floods witnessed in recent months and years, increase the frequency of deadly heat waves around the world, and threaten coastal cities with rising sea levels.

U.N. Secretary-General An-

tónio Guterres called it a "catastrophic pathway." The results represent a country-by-country tally of climate pledges made so far under the Paris Agreement, signed in 2015 and designed to avert the worst consequences of global warming.

The report was released before the annual gathering of presidents and prime ministers for the U.N. General Assembly next week, where climate change is likely to be one of the key global issues, and on the day President Joe Biden gathered several world leaders for a virtual meeting designed to nudge countries to make even more ambitious climate pledges.

Perhaps most starkly, the report displayed the large gap

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MARTIN MEISSNER — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

A ThyssenKrupp coking plant steams around the clock for the nearby steel mill in Duisburg, Germany, in January 2020. The cuts in greenhouse gas emissions pledged by governments around the world aren't enough to achieve the headline goal of the Paris climate accord, according to a United Nations report published Friday.

Q&A



NHAT V. MEYER — STAFF ARCHIVES

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a pair of bills into law this week that allow additional housing on a single-family lot.

What new housing laws mean to cities

Experts: Vast majority of properties, neighborhoods will not be affected

By Maggie Angst
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Gov. Gavin Newsom this week signed a pair of bills into law that effectively put an end to traditional single-family zoning restrictions in most neighborhoods statewide.

Senate Bills 9 and 10, which take effect Jan. 1, 2022, will make it easier for Californians to build more than one housing unit on many properties that for decades have been reserved exclusively for single-family homes and will give cities greater flexibility to place small apartment complexes in neighborhoods near public transit.

Although the laws represent two new approaches toward alleviating the state's housing crisis, experts say neither is likely to produce the number of units needed

HOUSING » PAGE 6

BAY AREA

August job gains are best in 5 months

Increase of nearly 20,000 jobs an 'encouraging' sign

By George Avalos
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The Bay Area in August posted its strongest job gains in five months, adding nearly 20,000 positions and raising hopes that the region might be turning the corner on coronavirus-linked economic woes.

The nine-county area added 19,800 jobs in August, led by big gains in the East Bay and Santa Clara County with sturdy increases in the San Francisco-San Mateo metro area, according to data released Friday by the state Employment Development Department.

"This is encouraging, but I would have expected this to happen sooner," said Patrick Kallerman, vice president of research for the Bay Area Council's Economic Institute. "The Bay Area still has a long way to go to catch up to its peer metro regions in terms of job recovery."

The East Bay added 6,900 jobs in August, while Santa Clara County gained 5,600 positions

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Housing

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to fully resolve it.

Here are answers to some questions you may have about these new laws.

What is Senate Bill 9?

Senate Bill 9 is the most controversial of the two new laws. It allows property owners to split a single-family lot into two lots, add a second home to their lot or split their lot into two and place duplexes on each. The last option would create four housing units on a property currently limited to a single-family house.

The new law will mark a shift from current policies that allow only two large units — a stand-alone house and an accessory dwelling unit — on single-family lots, as well as an attached junior unit no larger than 500 square feet.

Under the new law, cities and counties across California will be required to approve development proposals that meet specified size and design standards.

What are the caveats?

The law is designed to create additional housing while also preserving low-income, affordable units.

A proposed project under this new law cannot result in the demolition or alteration of affordable or rent-controlled housing or market-rate housing that has



JANE TYSKA — STAFF ARCHIVES

A new state housing law will give cities more flexibility to place small apartment complexes in neighborhoods near public transit.

been occupied by a tenant in the past three years. Properties listed as historic landmarks or those located within a historic district are off-limits for new development. Wetlands, farmland and properties at high risk of fire or flooding are also exempt.

If someone chooses to split their property in two, each new lot must be at least 1,200 square feet, according to the new law.

Any unit created as a result of the law cannot be used for short-term rentals.

They must be rented for a term longer than 30 days.

Who can do this?

Homeowners or landlords can apply to upzone their properties through their local jurisdiction, but only if they plan to live on the property for a while.

Property owners must sign an affidavit stating they will occupy one of the housing units as their primary residence for at least three years after splitting their property or adding additional units.

Does this law allow for offices and new housing units on single-family properties?

No. Any new units created under SB 9 must only be used for residential purposes.

Do cities and counties have to abide by this new law?

Under SB 9, local government officials may only deny a development application if they find that the

proposed project would have a “specific, adverse impact” on “public health and safety or the physical environment” and there are no feasible and satisfactory mitigation options.

Will local rules about maximum square footage, building height and parking apply?

Proposals under this new law must adhere to objective zoning and design review standards established by local cities and counties.

Developments must still follow local zoning rules such as those governing height and yard size requirements.

No parking is required for additional units if the property is within a half-mile of a major public transit stop. However, a local agency can require up to one parking space per unit if there are no frequent transit stops nearby.

Will this law put a dent in California's housing shortage?

A recent study by the Terner Center for Housing Innovation at UC Berkeley estimated that just 5.4% of the state's current single-family lots has the potential to be developed under SB 9, making construction of up to 714,000 new housing units financially feasible. That's only a fraction of the 3.5 million new housing units Gov. Newsom wants to see built by 2025.

What is Senate Bill 10?

Senate Bill 10 eases the process for local governments to rezone neighborhoods near mass transit or in urban areas to increase density with apartment complexes of up to 10 units per property. The new legislation also allows cities to bypass lengthy review requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act in an attempt to help reduce costs and the time it takes for projects to be approved.

Climate

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between what the scientific consensus urges world leaders to do and what they have been willing to do so far. Emissions of planet-warming gases are poised to grow by 16% during this decade compared with 2010 levels even though the latest scientific research indicates that they need to decrease by at least a quarter by 2030 to avert the worst impacts of global warming.

“Governments are letting vested interests call the climate shots, rather than serving the global community,” Jennifer Morgan, executive director of Green-



MICHAEL SOHN — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said Friday the world is on a “catastrophic pathway” toward a hotter future unless governments pledge to cut more greenhouse gas emissions.

peace International, said in a statement.

Altogether, nearly 200 countries in the world have made voluntary pledges to

reduce or slow down emissions of planet warming gases in the years since the Paris Agreement was signed. Some countries have

since raised their pledges as outlined under the terms of the agreement, including some of the world's biggest emitters, including the United States, Britain and the European Union.

But still missing are new pledges from China, which currently produces the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as Saudi Arabia and India, both large economies with a significant climate footprint.

All those pledges, taken together, are far short of what's needed to limit global temperature rise to levels that would avert the worst impacts of warming, the report confirms. When it was reached in 2015, the Paris Agreement set a target of limiting average tem-

perature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius. Since then, because of advances in research, the scientific consensus is that the rise needs to be limited to 1.5 degrees; beyond that threshold, there is a far greater likelihood of devastating consequences, such as widespread crop failures and polar-ice collapse.

The timing of the synthesis report, as it's called, is as important as its content. The next round of international climate talks, scheduled to take place in Glasgow, Scotland, are barely six weeks away and there is still uncertainty around who can attend considering travel restrictions to limit the spread of the coronavirus. It is unclear

if some of the world's biggest economies, including China, Russia, India and Brazil, will announce new climate pledges.

On Monday, Guterres is scheduled to host another meeting, also aimed at encouraging all countries to ratchet up their climate pledges and encouraging rich countries to keep their promise to help poorer countries deal with the impacts of climate change.

A separate analysis released this week, by the Washington-based World Resources Institute, found that actions by the world's 20 largest economies are key to slowing down global climate change. The 20 economies contribute 75% of global emissions.

Jobs

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and the San Francisco-San Mateo region increased its job totals by 4,300, the EDD report shows.

“It was a pretty good month despite the delta variant,” said Jeffrey Michael, executive director of the University of the Pacific's Stockton-based Center for Business and Policy Research. “The August jobs numbers show a big boost from the reopening of schools.”

That reopening could enable additional hiring of on-site staff personnel that wouldn't be needed when students were in remote classes and schools were shuttered. Plus, some workers might be able to return to their jobs now that their children are back in the classroom.

California added 104,300 jobs last month. In contrast to the Bay Area, the state's August pace was slower than its July gains of 113,200 jobs. The statewide and local

BAY AREA JOBS

The Bay Area in August posted its strongest job gains in five months, adding nearly 20,000 positions last month.

| Jobs gained or lost in August | Count |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| East Bay | 6,900 |
| Santa Clara Co. | 5,600 |
| S.F.-San Mateo Co. | 4,300 |
| Sonoma County | 1,200 |
| Solano County | 1,100 |
| Napa County | 400 |
| Marin County | 300 |
| Bay Area* | 19,800 |

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



BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

metro area numbers were all adjusted for seasonal variations.

“California continues to lead the nation's economic recovery, creating 44 percent of the nation's new jobs in August and ranking third in the nation in the rate of job growth this year,” Gov. Gavin Newsom said Friday.

The statewide unemployment rate in August was 7.5%, a slight improvement from 7.6% during July.

“These 104,300 new jobs,

the fifth time this year of six-figure job growth, represent new paychecks for Californians and new employees on payroll for businesses,” Newsom said in a prepared release.

Despite the governor's statements, California and the Bay Area remain mired in a deep employment deficit as a result of catastrophic job losses that occurred early in the pandemic during government-ordered business shutdowns to combat the coronavirus.

The Bay Area lost 638,600 jobs during March 2020 and April 2020 and the nine-county region has recovered slightly more than half — 51.6% — of the jobs lost during those two months.

Among the Bay Area's three main urban centers, Santa Clara County has recovered its lost jobs more quickly than the East Bay and the San Francisco-San Mateo metro area.

Santa Clara County has regained 55.6% of the 153,600 jobs it lost during March 2020 and April 2020, the East Bay has recouped 50.1% of its 196,200 lost jobs and the San Francisco-San Mateo region has recaptured 45% of the 187,500 jobs it lost, this news organization's analysis of EDD figures shows.

California lost 2.71 million jobs during those two months and has recovered 62.1% of the positions that vanished. To erase its initial COVID-linked losses, California's economy needs to regain another 1.03 million jobs. But both California and the Bay

Area trail far behind the United States, which has regained 76.2% of the nation's lost jobs.

“We still have more work to do in regaining those jobs lost to the pandemic, but this is promising progress for California's economic recovery,” Newsom said.

The Bay Area's recent job gains are being fueled by increases in hotels and restaurants, as well as the tech sector, this news organization's analysis of the EDD figures shows.

Over the one-year period ended in August, tech companies added 12,300 jobs in Santa Clara County, 8,600 jobs in the East Bay and 20,400 jobs in the San Francisco-San Mateo region. The hotel and restaurant sectors added 6,300 jobs in Santa Clara County, 11,000 in the East Bay and 8,600 in the San Francisco-San Mateo metro area during that same period.

Multiple factors could help buoy the Bay Area's job market and economy in the coming months, said Stephen Levy, di-

rector and senior economist with the Palo Alto-based Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy.

“Positive forces for continued job growth are record levels of venture capital funding, high vaccination rates and low COVID per capita cases that are allowing people resume more normal activities,” Levy said.

Kallerman agrees that progress against the coronavirus could enable the job market to gain some long-term traction.

“We may be finally turning the corner,” Kallerman said. Despite the pattern of improved hiring in recent months, a full rebound remains distant, warned Scott Anderson, chief economist with Bank of the West.

“California and the Bay Area job recovery continued at a better than expected clip last month,” Anderson said. “It's a step in the right direction, but there is still a long road ahead to a full jobs recovery from this pandemic.”

Booster shot

FROM PAGE 1

chairman of the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, comprised of medical experts outside the agency.

The committee's vote was the first key test of Biden's booster plan, which he said was contingent on regulatory approval by both the FDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who are expected to make decisions next week. The committee on Friday was asked only if Pfizer's vaccine approval should be modified to allow for a third booster shot at least six months after the first two given three weeks apart for those ages 16 and older.

Booster consideration for the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines wasn't up for debate.

Though the committee vote isn't binding, the FDA was ex-

pected to follow the panel's advice, which also was expected to shape the CDC's expert vaccine panel discussion next week.

The booster question comes as the more contagious delta variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 spawned mass outbreaks this summer across the U.S. and other countries, dimming hopes that vaccines would quickly end the pandemic that continues to ravage the world. Biden, who campaigned on promises to better manage the U.S. response, has seen his approval ratings sag as infections spread.

The U.S. last month authorized third shots for organ transplant recipients, cancer patients and others with weakened immunity who are age 12 and up and received the Pfizer shots, or at least 18 and got Moderna's vaccine. Israel began offering third shots to residents 60 and older in July and lowered the age to 12 late last month. Canada, France and Germany also have discussed booster

plans.

But those decisions have been controversial. World Health Organization Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has asked wealthy industrial nations like the U.S. with higher vaccination rates to delay booster shots until at least the end of the year and help poorer countries with little access to the shots catch up. Otherwise, he said, the virus will continue to spread, mutate, and eventually evade the current vaccines' protection.

Many medical experts in the U.S. and abroad have echoed WHO's call. But Biden's boosters-for-all plan also drew fire on procedural and scientific grounds.

Critics called it inappropriate for the White House to trumpet a booster plan before federal regulators weighed the evidence it's needed, drawing parallels to similar meddling complaints leveled at the Trump administration.

Two top FDA vaccine regulators, Marion Gruber and Philip

Krause, announced they will leave the agency this fall, reportedly in frustration over White House interference on boosters. In a Sept. 13 article they co-signed with 16 other health experts in the medical journal The Lancet, they argued that “current evidence does not ... appear to show a need for boosting in the general population, in which efficacy against severe disease remains high.”

Friday's panel heard presentations from Pfizer and from health scientists in Israel showing evidence of waning vaccine protection over time, significant restoration after a third shot and no serious indications of worrisome side effects, including rare but concerning heart inflammation seen mostly in boys and young men.

“There is real erosion of vaccine protection over time,” said Dr. William C. Gruber, a Pfizer senior vice president.

The panel also heard from FDA

and CDC staff and a British scientist suggesting the evidence of a need for boosters is less clear.

“COVID-19 vaccines continue to maintain high protection against severe disease, hospitalization and death,” said Dr. Sarah Oliver of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. She added that while protection against infection appears lower in recent months, it's unclear whether that's due to the more transmissible delta variant or waning vaccine potency over time.

Committee members said they were uncomfortable with the lack of clear evidence and the small sample sizes of studies demonstrating the need and safety of boosters for all.

“There are too many questions,” said Dr. Oveta A. Fuller, an associate professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of Michigan, “for me to feel comfortable to say yes to this.”