City of Santa Barbara Budget Faces Rising Deficits

The total budget for the City of Santa Barbara in 2024-2025 amounts to $667 million, $220 million of which will be allotted to the 2024 General Fund. This means a $1.1 million deficit for the general fund in 2024, as well as a projected $4.8 million shortfall in 2025. The main culprit is pension liability. Unfunded pension liability cost the City $344 million in 2021 and is expected to cost even more in 2024-2025. Two-thirds of the city's General Fund is used to pay city employee salaries and benefits. Each department has been asked to cut spending 2% in 2024 and 3% in 2025 in order to help mitigate the projected deficits.

Homelessness and the Role of Government

Over the last decade, homelessness has been increasing in certain areas of the U.S. even as it has decreased nationwide. In California, for instance, homelessness has increased by more than 40 percent, while homelessness in Texas has decreased nearly 30 percent. These differences in the homeless populations of various states and even cities may be at least partially explained by differences in policy.

image mlf.org

On the outskirts of Austin, at the religious non-profit Loaves and Fishes, have constructed a village of tiny houses called, Community First! Village. These houses, some of which are 3D printed while others are preconstructed, vary in size and amenities and have different rents, but all are constructed with front porches facing each other in an effort to build community connectedness. According to CEO Alan Graham, loss of family and social support networks is often the cause of homelessness, thus Community First! Seeks to remedy this.

Organizations like Community First! Village demonstrate that voluntarism can be extremely effective. The success of the 'housing first' approach points out that regulations and laws can impede solving problems.

Risks Posed by Artificial Intelligence

Experts in the field of computer science are worried by recent advances in artificial intelligence. Over 1,000 leaders in the field signed an open letter calling for a 6-month moratorium on the development of A.I. Geoffrey Hinton, whose machine learning research dating back to 1970's helped make these advances possible, resigned from Google over his concerns. Hinton was a pioneer in the field of machine learning where he designed mathematical systems or 'artificial neural networks'. These algorithms allow machines to 'learn' from analyzing large amounts of data.

According to Hinton, the competition between Google and Microsoft to develop A.I. could lead to dangerous advances that are both poorly understood and capable of being misused. He worries that A.I. could flood the internet with false information that would be very difficult for the average person to recognize as false. The most dangerous situations could arise if A.I. were used by nefarious people in order to destroy or defraud. In order to prevent such catastrophes, Hinton says that global regulation needs to slow down the creation of products based on generative A.I. until we are better able to understand it and its effects.

Biden Administration Proposes To Increase Cost of Electric Power Nationwide

The Biden administration recently proposed more stringent regulations on fuel emissions for electric power generation. These rules include the mandatory addition of carbon capture technology in newly built power plants, as well scheduled retirement of coal plants, among other measures. These changes will be expensive. Studies show that carbon capture technology uses energy and water and would thus add to pollution, and that the added cost will be passed to consumers through their utility bills. Get ready!

State Street Vehicle Closure Effects Retail Sales

According to local business developer, David