

SBC Schools Chief Alejandro Arranged \$200,000-Plus Annual Contracts For His Wife

By Carlos Avalos

An official complaint submitted to Ensen Mason, the San Bernardino County Controller, Auditor, and Tax Collector, reveals a web of self-dealing, illegal meetings, and potential violations of California's laws regarding the gift of public funds by the office of the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools.

The complaint alleges a culture of insider dealing has flourished for over a decade, enriching friends and family while potentially violating multiple state laws. This complaint alleges to have uncovered a systematic pattern of cronyism, nepotism, and conflicts of interest that may constitute violations of California's Brown Act, constitutional prohibi-

tions on gifts of public funds, and the Political Reform Act.

The scope of misconduct spans from the superintendent's office to school district boardrooms, creating an interconnected web of self-dealing that has cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars while undermining public trust in one of California's largest educa-

tional oversight bodies.

The \$3,000-Per-Hour Consulting Empire: At the center of this web sits Sherman Garnett, a former SBCSS administrator who has transformed his government connections into a lucrative consulting empire. Since 2019, Garnett has secured consulting contracts with SBCSS paying rates exceeding \$3,000 per hour, a fig-

ure that would make him among the highest-paid consultants in public education.

The arrangement began through Garnett's mentorship of Don English, whom he hired at Chaffey West County Community School early in English's career. This relationship has proven extraordinarily profitable: English now serves as Di- See P 2

SBC GOP's Central Committee Endorses Two Outside Legislators, Spurning Locals

California state senators Tony Strickland and Roger Niello State this week were the recipients of a significant unanticipated political benefit from what is or had been an unlikely and unanticipated source: the San Bernardino County Republican Central Committee.

Given that Strickland and Niello are two of the state's foremost members of the Golden State's minority party, the infu-

sion of what is likely to exceed \$100,000 from San Bernardino County's Republican Party into their electioneering funds is not surprising from a political viewpoint. What is eye-opening is that neither Strickland nor Niello represent San Bernardino County and the central committee has not yet moved to make any money in its coffers available to the 3? incumbent Republicans currently representing

San Bernardino County in the California Senate or the 4? incumbent Republicans representing San Bernardino County in the California Assembly.

When party higher ups were queried during the August 11 meeting as to why the county party was committing to concentrating its financial firepower on assisting politicians outside the county, no reason was given. No answers

Central committees are allowed to raise money and support political candidates and are not subject to strict limitations as are individuals and corporations and enjoy even fewer restrictions than political action committees, which as collectives, have fewer restrictions than individual donors.

In this case the central committee, prompted to the action by its leadership, is on a trajectory

to provide funding to the campaigns of two particular state senators. The action taken by a majority vote of the central committee was to endorse Tony Strickland and Roger Niello, both of whom are individuals of uncommon substance and gravitas with dynamic political backgrounds that have pushed them to the front of the Republican Party in a state dominated by Democrats. See P 2

Impact Of Monday's Supreme Court Decision Undoing Roving Undocumented Migrant Raids Yet To Be Felt

Monday's ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court setting aside, at least temporarily, parallel rulings by U.S. District Judge U.S. District Judge Maame Ewusi-Mensah Frimpong and a three judge panel of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeal[s] hobbling the Trump Administration and the U.S. Department of Immigration and

Customs Enforcement in their enforcement of immigration law in seven Southern California counties has not, as of press time today, had any discernible impact on the lull in the arrests of undocumented migrants regionally since July.

Judge Frimpong on July 12 ruled that Immigration and Customs Enforcement's practice

of engaging in "roving patrols" aimed at finding suspected illegal aliens and stopping individuals based on race, language, location and occupation violated the Fourth Amendment's protections against unreasonable searches and seizures and the Fifth Amendment's guarantee of due process. Judge Frimpong or- See P 3

McNiff Replacing Van Helden As Stater Bros. Chief Executive

Having overcome a threatened walkout of its store clerks, warehouse workers and truck drivers, and having survived the first round of layoffs in its 89-year history, San Bernardino-based Stater Bros. Markets is making a change at the top of its administrative and management echelon.

Peter Van Helden is

leaving as the company's CEO to take on the auxiliary title of executive chairman and will be replaced by Greg McNiff. The change was announced on September 10.

McNiff's advancement is the second consecutive time that Stater Bros. has tapped a former Albertson's executive managerial See P 3

State H₂O Resources And Fish & Game Find Invasive Golden Mussel At Lake Silverwood

Invasive Golden Mussel Detected at Silverwood Lake and Pyramid Lake

New Boating Protocols Implemented and Effective Immediately at Silverwood Lake

The Department of Water Resources (DWR), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and California State Parks

have confirmed presence of the invasive golden mussel at Pyramid Lake in Los Angeles County and Silverwood Lake in San Bernardino County. These lakes are the southernmost State Water Project (SWP) reservoirs where golden mussels have been detected. The invasive species was recently discovered during a routine water test

by DWR; in response, State Parks has updated Silverwood Lake's boat inspection protocols, effective immediately. Pyramid Lake, which is managed by DWR, implemented exit inspections following the discovery of quagga mussels in 2016.

The golden mussel, native to China and Southeast Asia, was

initially detected in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and O'Neill Forebay in October 2024 and has subsequently spread south. This small freshwater bivalve is known for its rapid reproduction and ability to clog water infrastructures, disrupt ecosystems, and out-compete native species. These invasive mussels can also cause signifi-

cant damage to boats by attaching to hulls and clogging engines, leading to increased costs for boaters and other motorized vessel owners. Currently, there are no effective methods to treat or eliminate the golden mussel from infested waterways, making prevention of further spread to non-infested waterways a top priority. See P 3

California's Top Minority Party Lawmaker Proposes Plan Like Burum's To Neutralize Newsom's Gerrymander

SACRAMENTO, California —The evolving reaction of the contingent of outnumbered Republican officeholders in the state's capital to Governor Gavin Newsom's plan to gerrymander the California's political map now includes a proposal to split the state in two.

The concept, to a certain extent, revives a now discarded move by San Bernardino County to break off from California, which the county's voters narrowly approved almost three years ago, but which the politicians who sponsored it subsequently rejected as both politically and financially unfeasible when they examined what secession would actually entail.

bifurcate the state into two, creating Am-ristateatvreaction top Republican in the California Assembly will propose splitting the state in two amid the state's feud over redistricting, calling his proposal a "two state solution."

Assemblymember James Gallagher plans on Wednesday to brief reporters on legislation that would create a new state in response to Democrats' efforts to redraw congressional maps in California — a measure designed to counter a Republican-led redistricting effort in Texas.

"The people of inland California have been overlooked for too long," he said in a See P 2

Allegations Of A Melange Of Conflicts Within The County Superintendent Of Schools Office *from front page*

rector of the Children Deserve Success Branch at the office of the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, the very position that approves Garnett's consulting contracts.

According to internal documents reviewed in this formal complaint, Garnett's contracts contain unusual "per attendee" fee structures, with revenue splits between Garnett and English's department. Even more troubling, the contracts require San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools employees to handle all marketing and recruitment for Garnett's private workshops – a potential violation of California Constitution Article XVI, Section 6, which prohibits gifts of public funds.

Upcoming Garnett Workshops (2025-2026) are as follows: September 25, 2025: Discipline Training, February 5, 2026: Student Records, and March 19, 2026: Discipline Training. Registration materials

Some GOP Central Committee Members Detect Quid Pro Quos In The Strickland & Niello Endorsement Arrangements *from front page*

Strickland is a prolific lobbyist and political consultant. Niello is a fabulously wealthy entrepreneur with an expertise and considerable reach in financing. Consequently, there is a perception among members of the San Bernardino County Central Committee that the so-far exclusive arrangements to have the San Bernardino County Republican Central Committee back them is part of a quid pro quo involving the central committee's chairman, Phil Cothran Sr, that might prove problematic for the central committee down the road if the actual terms of the trade-

show these workshops are promoted through official SBCSS channels, with public employees dedicating work time to marketing Garnett's private business.

The insider advantage extends to the next generation. Sherman Garnett Jr. secured a \$900-per-hour consulting contract with Upland Unified School District, where his father serves as a board trustee, a clear conflict of interest that raises serious ethical and legal questions. The arrangement began with a September 25, 2023, email from Garnett Jr. to Shinay Bowman, Upland's Chief Academic Officer, soliciting consulting services. In the email, Garnett Jr. explicitly references working with his father, stating: "For the last couple of years now, I have been working with my father, as we have been doing training for School Staff Administration/Teachers and School Security Officers."

Notably, Bowman's own \$250,000 salary contract had been unanimously approved by the Upland board just months earlier, with Sherman Garnett Sr. casting a supporting vote. This created

off, which are currently unknown, are revealed and become subject to wider scrutiny. Cothran in the past has utilized his control over the party apparatus to selectively fund campaigns that were not always in line with what a substantial number or, in some case, what a majority of the central committee's members, favored.

Speculation is rampant at present as to what Cothran is seeking in return for the endorsements and pledging of money to Strickland and Niello.

Some central committee members suggested that what Cothran might be up to is a stroke of political genius. One benefit of the action taken by the central committee at its September 11 meeting, some suggested, was that Cothran might be

an environment where Bowman may have felt pressured to approve the consulting arrangement with the trustee's son.

On October 24, 2023, the Upland board approved Garnett Jr.'s contract during a routine meeting, with the agreement buried in "Certificated Personnel Reports." The contract details were not provided to the board or public; only a brief description of \$1,800 for two one-hour training sessions. Sherman Garnett Sr. abstained from the vote without explanation but did not properly recuse himself from the discussion, a potential violation of conflict-of-interest laws. Less than a week later, Garnett Jr. was featured as a speaker for "Upland University," the district's professional development program.

The October 24, 2023, Upland board meeting revealed another troubling pattern. From his position as board president, Sherman Garnett Sr. used the public forum to promote his private business while publicly thanking two principals who had attended his workshops. According to meeting minutes, Garnett stated, "I run a training academy for student

securing the services of Strickland's political machine, which includes his Strong America organization, a super political action committee, of which he is president and CEO, to assist a whole host of San Bernardino County's Republican candidates. Cothran might also, some hoped, have been arranging for Niello, whose company, the Niello Company operates multiple dealerships that specialize in high end brands such as Audi, Acura, Jaguar and Porsche, to open his checkbook in the future to the campaigns of San Bernardino County's Republican incumbent officeholders and hopefuls.

There was a countervailing view, nonetheless, that the endorsement of two particular candidates, in particular ones who are not voted

services administrators, and he extended an invitation for individuals to attend. He was thankful that Mr. Beeson and Mr. McCanne attended." Within months, both principals received coveted administrative promotions.

Chris Beeson was promoted to principal on special assignment/director of purchasing, and Jerry McCanne was promoted to director of human resources.

This mirrors the career trajectory of Don English, who rose to power as a San Bernardino County Superintendent of School division administrator after Garnett's mentorship, ultimately positioning him to approve Garnett's lucrative consulting contracts. The pattern suggests Garnett has systematically created a network of indebted administrators who may feel obligated to provide future favors.

Perhaps the most egregious violation of public transparency laws involves the San Bernardino Countywide Gangs & Drugs Task Force, a San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools-affiliated entity that appears to be operating in direct

upon by San Bernardino County voters and who do not represent San Bernardino County, was a misuse of the central committee's authority and discretion. Some suggested that the deal was one that was worked out by Cothran for his personal benefit or to advance the fortunes of an isolated set or subset of politicians, including incumbents or hopefuls, he is on good terms with but who are not necessarily favored by the central committee as a whole or officially. There was suspicion among some that the endorsement was part of a quid pro quo, the details of which Cothran and his closely-knit group of supporters were knowledgeable about but which was being kept from the committee's membership. They wondered out loud why the central committee was

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violation of California's Brown Act. The Task Force, which has operated for over two decades, maintains a website listing only its executive team with no posted agendas, public meeting notices, or opportunities for public comment. This lack of transparency violates California Government Code 54950 et seq., which guarantees the public's right to attend and participate in meetings of local legislative bodies.

The organization's composition reveals multiple conflicts of interest and Leadership Conflicts: Don English: Executive Director (also SBCSS Director approving Garnett contracts),

Sherman Garnett, listed as "community member" with his business name prominently displayed, Dr. Gwen Dowdy-Rodgers, Chair (also President of San Bernardino County Board of Education). Brenda Dowdy, identified as Dowdy-Rodgers' relative, serves as a "citizen-at-large" representative despite being a former San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools employee who worked for over two decades in Don English's division.

Brown Act Violations, Closed Meetings, and Restricted Access: Registration documents for the Task Force's October 1, 2025, meeting, discov-

Continued on Page 4

not simply endorsing all of the incumbent Republicans holding state office throughout California or, in the alternative, extending an invitation to those Republicans inclined to address the central committee to assess their positions and vote on whether to endorse them and actively support their candidacies, be they for election or reelection. Some expressed approval of both Strickland and Niello, but questioned by the committee was limiting its endorsement to just them.

A handful of those critical of the proposal by Higgins and Lopez expressed concern that the way in which the endorsement was being limited to Strickland and Niello raised a red flag, indicating that some hidden incentive was buried in the arrangement for

the endorsement. Taken together with Strickland's long-established reputation for political horsetrading and the multiple examples of Cothran's wheeling and dealing that have proven beneficial to his enclave of political associates and to the detriment of others, including Republicans who were vying for local or state office that were denied GOP support on Cothran's say-so alone, some central committee members expressed the belief that the secrecy/lack of transparency over the motive meant there was certainly something ethically questionable about the endorsements and that the deals in question might have involved something legally questionable as well. This was exacerbated, the Sentinel was told, when

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