



Photos by Scott Strazante/S.F. Chronicle

Rep. Ro Khanna holds a town hall meeting Sunday at MLK Community Center in Bakersfield, the first of three events he was set to hold in Republican-held congressional districts across the state.

‘Leaders don’t hide from people’

Khanna visits red districts, hoping to engage GOP voters

By Maliya Ellis

BAKERSFIELD — Rep. Ro Khanna told hundreds of voters at a town hall Sunday to mobilize against Republican priorities like slashing funding for Medicaid and other federal services.

It was a standard message coming from a Democrat like Khanna, who represents Silicon Valley.

But Khanna was in Kern County, where a majority of voters — and the member of Congress whose district Khanna was speaking in — are Republican.

Khanna, a potential 2028 presidential candidate, was expected to hold similar meetings in red districts in Norco (Riverside County) and Anaheim later Sunday, as part of his three-stop “Benefits over Billionaires” tour. The event series targeted GOP-held districts where Khanna said Republican representatives have refused to hold in-person town hall meetings with constituents.

“In America, leaders don’t hide from people. That’s why I’m here: to listen to you and give voice to your concerns,” Khanna told a crowd of at least 500 people in a Bakersfield community center gymnasium. “Rep. (David) Valadao: Show up here next weekend.”



A sign references Republican U.S. Rep. David Valadao at Khanna’s town hall. GOP lawmakers were told not to hold in-person events.

President Donald Trump trounced then-Vice President Kamala Harris in Kern County in 2024, winning 59% of the vote.

Khanna told reporters he planned the series two weeks ago in response

to House Speaker Mike Johnson’s announcement that he would not hold in-person town hall meetings. Earlier this month, National Republican Congressional Committee Chair Richard Hudson advised GOP lawmakers to interact with constituents via telephone town halls or social

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Bill aims to save public transit

Sales tax measure to fund BART, Muni would go on ballot in 2026

By Rachel Swan

Two state senators have set in motion the Bay Area’s master plan to save public transit, with legislation to authorize a sales tax measure in up to five counties.

The bill that Sens. Scott Wiener and Jesse Arreguin introduced on Monday has sweeping aspirations. By enabling leaders in San Francisco, Alameda and Contra Costa counties to place a measure on the ballot in November 2026 — with options for San Mateo and Santa Clara counties to join in — their Connect Bay Area Act (SB63) aims to prevent the near-total erosion of BART and Muni.

Commuters who regularly depend on these transit systems may have a hard time picturing what would happen if they unravel. The vision that Wiener, a San Francisco Democrat, and Arreguin, a Democrat from Berkeley, present is stark: Without hundreds of millions of dollars in new funding, BART would have to shut down stations and limit train service to once an hour. Muni could face a 50% *Transit continues on A9*

Cut through the ‘chaos’ of capped majors

By Nanette Asimov

The last thing a high school student needs when applying to California’s famously accessible public universities is a huge roadblock that says: *Don’t even think about trying to get accepted here.*

But that’s how it can feel to students hoping to major in the most popular subjects, from computer science to psychology, at University of California or California State University schools.

The problem arises when too many students try to crowd into a program — or even a campus — with too few seats. CSU’s 23 campuses describe these majors as “impacted.” Most UC campuses call them “selective.” UC Berkeley says they are “high demand” majors, while UC San Diego calls them “capped.”

Whatever the terminology, many applicants believe that if they want to study these jam-packed subjects — usually science, technology, engineering and math, known collectively as STEM — they’ll have to go to a different school altogether.

But that’s not true, according to private college counselors and admissions experts at UC and CSU who spoke with the Chronicle. These insiders offered tips and strategies for getting around the roadblock of overcrowded majors — and all agreed that applicants should begin by doing what they do best: homework.

It’s never too early to begin researching majors at California’s public campuses and how to prepare *Majors continues on A7*

Leaving Lake Tahoe amid fire a risk in itself

By Julie Cart

Gary Gerren, the affable fire chief in the community of Fallen Leaf Lake, is serious about protecting the few hundred full-time residents and the thousands of summer daytrippers who descend on his tiny alpine enclave.

His constant concern: How will he keep them all safe from wildfires?

“I burn the place down every few months,” Gerren said, explaining that he regularly runs computerized fire simulations — constructing a virtual wildfire bearing down on his community — to solve the puzzle of how to direct people away from a fire.

The slow and bumpy 5-mile road to Fallen Leaf Lake, southwest of South Lake Tahoe, affords only one way in and one



Alvin A.H. Jornada/For the S.F. Chronicle

People mill around their vehicles while stuck in evacuation traffic as the Caldor Fire approached South Lake Tahoe in August 2021.

way out — a potential death-trap.

“We have probably three or four thousand tourists a day out here (in Fallen Leaf Lake)

during the summer,” Gerren said. “They come in the morning starting at 8 o’clock, and they leave around 6:30 going back to South Lake Tahoe. Dur-

ing the day, it’s bumper-to-bumper. If that happens during a fire ... that’s when people typically get hurt.”

In June 2007, before Gerren was chief, fire experts were taken by surprise when the Angora Fire climbed over granite walls to reach homes tucked into the mountains around Fallen Leaf Lake. When the fire arrived, chaos came with it. The narrow roads clogged with residents and tourists racing to get out, while fire crews with their heavy apparatus raced in.

That glimpse into Tahoe’s fiery future was repeated in August 2021, when the Caldor Fire burned for longer than two months and incinerated more than 1,000 structures, including a ski resort. More than 50,000 residents and summer vacationers at the southern end

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