Director, Pacific Region, United States
Bureau of Indian Affairs, and DOES 1
through 25,

Defendants.

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INTRODUCTION

- 1. This case is about respecting the history of tribal sovereigns, protecting communities from unchecked casino-style gaming, and preventing federal administrative overreach. The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act ("IGRA"), 25 U.S.C. §§ 2701-2721, 18 U.S.C. §§ 1166-1167, carefully limits the acquisition of new land for casino-style tribal gaming. When such gaming is proposed in new contexts (away from existing tribal reservations), the statute contains safeguards that typically protect state and local interests, including the interests of local tribes. Here, however, the United States Department of the Interior ("Interior") sought to circumvent those safeguards, invoking a narrow statutory exception aimed at restoring a tribe's lost homeland. This invocation of that exception is unsupported by the record, dismissive of state sovereignty, and contrary to federal law.
- 2. Specifically, this case challenges a final decision by Interior to take a parcel of land (the "Shiloh Site") into trust for gaming on behalf of the Koi Nation of Northern California (the "Koi Nation" or the "Tribe"). Interior's decision will allow the Koi Nation to build a casino on the Shiloh Site, despite California's longstanding state interest (reflecting a promise made to the California voters who legalized tribal gaming) in limiting casino-style gaming. Interior's decision will also require Governor Gavin Newsom to negotiate, on the State's behalf, for a tribal-state gaming compact with the Koi Nation regulating casino-style gaming. If such negotiations are unsuccessful, the State may forfeit any regulatory control over casino-style gaming on the Shiloh Site.
- 3. Impacts to the Governor and the State are common in the tribal-gaming context, and Congress has enacted statutory safeguards that protect state sovereignty and local communities. When Interior takes land into trust for gaming, it often does so via a "two-part determination." This process requires the Secretary of the Interior to consult with relevant tribal, state, and local officials, and to determine that gaming on the relevant land "would not be detrimental to the surrounding community." 25 U.S.C. § 2719(b)(1)(A). But the Secretary is not the sole decisionmaker on the matter: if the relevant state's Governor does not concur in that determination, the land will remain ineligible for gaming. 25 U.S.C. § 2719(b)(1)(A).

- 13. Defendant Amy Dutschke is the Regional Director of the Pacific Region of the Bureau of Indian Affairs ("Regional Director"). She is sued in her official capacity.
- 14. Collectively, Interior, the Secretary, the Assistant Secretary, the Education Director, and the Regional Director are referred to in this Complaint as "Defendants."
- 15. The true names and capacities, whether individual, governmental, corporate, associate, or otherwise, of defendants Does 1 through 25, inclusive, are unknown to Plaintiffs, who therefore sue said defendants by such fictitious names. Plaintiffs will seek leave of court to amend this Complaint to show the true names and capacities of each such defendants when the same have been ascertained. Plaintiffs are informed and believe, and thereon allege, that each of the fictitiously named defendants was a legal cause of the injuries suffered and alleged herein, or subject to the jurisdiction of the court herein as necessary parties for the relief requested.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 16. This Court has jurisdiction over this action under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 (action arising under the laws of the United States), 28 U.S.C. § 1346 (United States as defendant), and 5 U.S.C. §§ 701–706 (Administrative Procedure Act). Defendants' actions are subject to review under the Administrative Procedure Act as final agency action for which no other adequate remedy exists. 5 U.S.C. § 704.
- 17. The Court may grant injunctive relief and other relief pursuant to 5 U.S.C. §§ 705–706. An actual controversy exists between the parties within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 2201(a), and this Court may grant declaratory relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201–2202.
- 18. Venue is proper in this Court under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e)(1)(C) because this action seeks relief against federal agencies and officials acting in their official capacities, and the State of California is a plaintiff and (for purposes of venue) resides within every federal judicial district within its borders. *California v. Azar*, 911 F.3d 558, 570 (9th Cir. 2018).

STANDING

- 19. Interior's decision injures the Governor and the State in at least two respects.
- 20. First, Interior's decision has deprived the Governor and the State of important procedural rights. By concluding that the Shiloh Site was eligible for gaming under the "restored

lands" exception, Interior was able to take the Shiloh Site into trust for gaming without engaging in a two-part determination. Had Interior instead engaged in a two-part determination, it would have been required to consult with "appropriate State and local officials," to determine "that a gaming establishment on newly acquired lands . . . would not be detrimental to the surrounding community," and to obtain the Governor's concurrence in that determination. 25 U.S.C. § 2719(b)(1)(A). By circumventing the two-part determination process, Interior has deprived the Governor and the State of their rights to engage in consultation, to be protected by the Secretary's determination that gaming would not be detrimental to surrounding communities within the State's jurisdiction, and for the Governor to further protect those communities by deciding whether he concurs in the Secretary's determination.

- 21. Second, Interior's decision has imposed a new substantive duty on the Governor and the State. Federal law requires the State to "negotiate with [an] Indian tribe in good faith," upon that tribe's request, "to enter into a [tribal-state gaming] compact" regulating casino-style gaming. 25 U.S.C. § 2710(d)(3)(A). In California, this duty to negotiate falls upon the Governor. Cal. Const. art. IV, § 19(f). Because Interior has taken land into trust for gaming on behalf of the Koi Nation, the Governor (on behalf of the State) is now obliged to conduct these negotiations upon request. And if a court later concludes that the State has not negotiated in good faith, the State may be deprived of any regulatory control over—and any ability to limit the scale of—casino-style gaming at the site. *See* 25 U.S.C. § 2710(d)(7)(B).
- 22. These injuries are heightened by strong public interests at stake for the State and the Governor. For example, California has a longstanding interest in limiting and regulating gaming. *See Hotel Emps. & Rest. Int'l Union v. Davis*, 981 P.2d 990, 996–98 (Cal. 1999). Indeed, the California Constitution long prohibited *all* casino-style gaming. *See* Cal. Const. art. IV, § 19(e). California voters carved out an exception to this prohibition by enacting Proposition 1A in 2000, thereby legalizing tribal gaming. *See id.*, § 19(f). When they did so, however, California voters were promised that tribes' casino-style gaming would remain carefully limited geographically.

¹ Federal law provides that casino-style tribal gaming is legal only if, as relevant here, it is "located in a State that permits such gaming for any purpose by any person, organization, or entity." 25 U.S.C. § 2710(d)(1)(B).

See United Auburn Indian Cmty. of Auburn Rancheria v. Newsom, 472 P.3d 1064, 1090 (Cal. 2020) (Cantil-Sakauye, C.J., dissenting) (collecting statements from materials submitted to California voters). The State and the Governor therefore have important interests in striving to ensure that casino-style gaming is carefully regulated, and that any expansion in the geographic footprint of casino-style gaming occurs in a limited and careful manner that accounts for the interests of the State and its communities.

23. These injuries would be redressed if the court grants the relief prayed in this Complaint.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 24. Federal law authorizes the Secretary to take land into trust for tribal governments.
 25 U.S.C. § 5108. But federal law imposes special restrictions when the Secretary seeks to take land into trust for gaming purposes, specifically.
- 25. The IGRA generally prohibits gaming on lands taken into trust after October 17, 1988. 25 U.S.C. § 2719(a).
- 26. There are limited exceptions to this general prohibition. One often-used exception—which can apply to *any* land-into-trust acquisition, anywhere—applies when the Secretary makes a "two-part determination." This means that "the Secretary, after consultation with the Indian tribe and appropriate State and local officials, including officials of other nearby Indian tribes, determines" two things to be true. First: "that a gaming establishment on newly acquired lands would be in the best interest of the Indian tribe and its members." Second, more relevant here: that such a gaming establishment "would not be detrimental to the surrounding community." 25 U.S.C. § 2719(b)(1)(A).
- 27. Importantly, the Secretary does not have sole authority over this two-part determination: the relevant state's governor also has a role to play. Specifically, the two-part determination allows gaming on the land in question "only if the Governor of the State in which the gaming activity is to be conducted concurs in the Secretary's determination." 25 U.S.C. § 2719(b)(1)(A).

28. The Secretary did not make this two-part determination here, and did not seek or receive the Governor's concurrence.

- 29. Instead, Interior purported to rely on a different exception that allows gaming on lands taken into trust if—and only if—the lands are taken into trust as part of "the restoration of lands for an Indian tribe that is restored to Federal recognition." 25 U.S.C. § 2719(b)(1)(B)(iii). This is called the "restored lands' exception."
- 30. Interior has interpreted the "restored lands" exception to require, among other things, that the tribe "demonstrate a significant historical connection to the land." 25 C.F.R. § 292.12(b). Interior has interpreted "significant historical connection" to mean that "the land is located within the boundaries of the tribe's last reservation under a ratified or unratified treaty," or that the tribe "can demonstrate by historical documentation the existence of the tribe's villages, burial grounds, occupancy or subsistence use in the vicinity of the land." 25 C.F.R. § 292.2. Interior has in the past clarified that, in its view, this "require[s] something more than evidence that a tribe merely passed through a particular area." 73 Fed. Reg. 29,366 (May 20, 2008). On the contrary, Interior has confirmed—consistent with a straightforward understanding of what it means to restore a tribe's lost lands—that "documentation of the tribe's villages and burial grounds, occupancy or subsistence use in the vicinity of the land" should be understood to demonstrate something "akin to the aboriginal use and occupancy of a tribe."²

FACTS

The Shiloh Site and Casino Project

- 31. The Shiloh Site is located immediately adjacent to the Town of Windsor in Sonoma County, California, at the intersection of Shiloh Road and Old Redwood Highway. Consisting of approximately 68.6 acres, it is bound by Shiloh Road to the north, by Old Redwood Highway to the west, and by other properties to the south and east.
- 32. The Koi Nation intends to build a casino-style gaming facility on the Shiloh Site. Public plans for this facility describe a large casino with 2,750 slot machines, 105 table games,

² Letter from Larry Echo Hawk, Assistant Sec'y – Indian Affairs, U.S. Dep't of the Interior, to Merlene Sanchez, Chairperson, Guidiville Band of Pomo Indians (Sept. 1, 2011), at 10, available at https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/public/pdf/idc015051.pdf.

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and a capacity of over 10,000 people. They also describe additional buildings associated with the casino, such as a 400-room hotel, a ballroom/meeting space, an event center, and other infrastructure.

33. By a direct line, it is approximately 30 miles from the Shiloh Site to the southern shores of Clear Lake. In practical terms, it is farther: there are large mountains between Clear Lake and the Shiloh Site, and the journey between them covers approximately fifty miles over winding mountain roads.

The Koi Nation and its Clear Lake Homeland

- The Koi Nation is a federally recognized tribe.³ According to the Koi Nation, "the Koi Nation's ancestors had villages and sacred sites along the shores of Clearlake since time immemorial." Koi Nation's Opening Br. at 11, Koi Nation of Northern California v. City of Clearlake, No. A169438 (Cal. Ct. App. Apr. 30, 2024). The Koi Nation was formerly known as the Lower Lake Rancheria; the Tribe changed its name in 2012. The name "Koi" refers to a village located on an island in Clear Lake.
- The Koi Nation has asserted strong connections to its Clear Lake homeland. The Tribe has recently engaged in successful litigation against the City of Clearlake, identifying ways in which "the City's projects have damaged the Koi Nation." *Id.* As part of that litigation, the Koi Nation has identified extensive evidence of its enduring, collective presence in the Clear Lake region—including evidence of "dense historic Indigenous habitation" (id. at 12), the locations of ancestral villages (id. at 52), burial sites and human remains (id. at 18, 20, 52, 57), and the location of the Koi Nation Rancheria itself (id. at 20). The Koi Nation links these Clear Lake sites with 'significant historical events," including "the original indigenous community structure and the Rancheria era of California history." *Id.* at 20.

³ "Starting in approximately 1956, the United States improperly ignored and mistakenly treated as terminated the Koi Nation's status as a federally recognized tribe." Koi Nation of Northern California v. U.S. Dep't of the Interior, 361 F. Supp. 3d 14, 21 (D.D.C. 2019). Interior reaffirmed in 2000 that the Koi Nation is a federally recognized tribe. A federal court has held "that the Koi Nation is a tribe 'restored to Federal recognition' within the meaning of IGRA's . . . restored lands exception." *Id.* at 48. Plaintiffs do not contend otherwise.

The Koi Nation's Third Attempt at a Bay Area Casino

- 36. The proposed casino on the Shiloh Site is not the first time the Koi Nation has pursued a casino in the Bay Area. The Koi Nation has previously pursued two other casino projects in the region.
- 37. In 2005, the Koi Nation announced plans to open a casino near Oakland International Airport—approximately 120 miles from the City of Clearlake.
- 38. In 2014, the Koi Nation sought to move forward with a casino in Vallejo—more than 70 miles from the City of Clearlake.
 - 39. The Koi Nation was ultimately unable to build a casino in Oakland or Vallejo.
- 40. In 2021, the Koi Nation applied to Interior for a "fee-to-trust transfer" of the Shiloh Site—that is, an application for Interior to take the Shiloh Site into trust on behalf of the Koi Nation. The Koi Nation simultaneously submitted a "Request for Restored Land Opinion," asking Interior to determine that the Shiloh Site would be "Indian lands" eligible for gaming under the "restored lands" exception pursuant to IGRA.

Interior's Decision, and Insufficiency of the Record

- 41. On January 13, 2025, in the last week of the Biden Administration, Interior granted the Koi Nation's requests. Specifically, Interior issued (1) a Record of Decision, analyzing and approving the proposed project under the National Environmental Policy Act and in other respects, and (2) an accompanying Decision Letter. The Decision Letter, signed by the Education Director, concluded that the "restored lands" exception applied: "the Shiloh Site will be acquired in trust for the Tribe as a restoration of land for a restored tribe." Decision Letter at 29.
- 42. The Decision Letter spends just over two pages discussing the Koi Nation's historical connection to the Shiloh Site for purposes of the "restored lands" exception. Decision Letter at 18–20.
- 43. The Decision Letter states that "perceived gaps or inconsistencies" in the historical record "must, "where possible," "be . . . resolved in favor of the applicant tribe." Decision Letter at 19. Without citation to authority, the Decision Letter asserts that "[t]his is consistent with

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27 28 caselaw, the Indian canons of statutory interpretation, and Congress's intent." Decision Letter at 19.

- The specific facts in the record on which the Decision Letter relies for its "significant historical connection" analysis (i.e., to assess the Koi Nation's historical connection to the Shiloh Site) can be summarized as follows:
 - The Koi Nation had "extensive trade routes and trade networks a. throughout the California coastal region including the area of the Shiloh Site." Decision Letter at 20. Specifically, the Koi Nation "sourced, manufactured, and traded clamshell beads and magnesite that were geographically specific to the region of the Shiloh Site." *Id.*
 - "[M]ultiple census reports indicate the presence of tribal ancestors b. near the Shiloh Site." Id. In particular, "Captain Tom Johnson, a tribal ancestor, occupied the area of the Shiloh Site with his family and established tribal political headquarters there." Id. According to the Decision Letter, Tom Johnson and his family moved to Sebastopol—apparently from the Clear Lake region—in 1918. *Id.* at 8. Thereafter, according to the Decision Letter, "[b]oth Santa Rosa and Sebastopol served as the Tribe's political headquarters from the 1920s to the 1940s." *Id*.
 - "The Tribe's history reflects both forced labor and, later, voluntary c. labor and occupancy in what became Sonoma County." *Id.* at 20. In support, the Decision Letter points to Captain Johnson: "Captain Johnson's documented presence along with documented presence of other Tribal ancestors, many of whom acted as farm laborers, and the establishment of orchards establishes a pattern of occupancy and subsistence-like migratory and seasonal labor in and around the Shiloh Site." Id.

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- d. "[T]he Koi Nation has used the area around the Shiloh Site as burial grounds for over a century." *Id.* By this, the Decision Letter appears to mean that individual members of the Koi Nation were buried in public cemeteries across Lake, Napa, and Sonoma Counties:

 "Sonoma Coast/Goat Rock in Sonoma County; Shiloh Cemetery in Windsor, Sonoma County; St. Mary's Cemetery, Lakeport, Lake County; Calvary Cemetery, Santa Rosa, Sonoma County; Rural Cemetery, Santa Rosa, Sonoma County; Pioneer Cemetery, Calistoga, Napa County." *Id.* These public cemeteries were in addition to "the traditional cemetery near Lower Lake." *Id.*
- 45. The record is insufficient to demonstrate that acquisition of the Shiloh Site represents a "restoration" of the Koi Nation's lands within the meaning of the statute. The record is also insufficient to demonstrate the "significant historical connection" between the Koi Nation and the Shiloh Site that Interior, through its regulations, has historically understood the statute to require. For instance,
 - a. "[T]rade routes and trade networks throughout the California coastal region" do not represent the kind of enduring tribal presence that would be necessary for acquisition of the Shiloh Site to represent "restoration" of that land to the Tribe. Trade is a transitory activity that necessarily involves other communities; it does not imply an enduring tribal presence comparable to the exercise of tribal sovereignty or control (as necessary to support the view that extending tribal sovereignty and control over the Shiloh Site represents a "restoration"). Indeed, evidence that a tribe engaged in trade throughout an area may amount to nothing more than "evidence that a tribe merely passed through [that] particular area"—which Interior has historically correctly rejected as insufficient to justify the "restored lands" exception. See 73 Fed. Reg. 29,366 (May 20, 2008).

- b. The presence of individual tribal ancestors, during the twentieth century, is not the same thing as the collective presence of the Tribe itself. Moreover, it does not establish that the Tribe exercised sovereignty or control over its land—as necessary to support the view that extending tribal sovereignty and control over the Shiloh Site represents a "restoration." The presence of individual tribe members during the twentieth century cannot be sufficient to justify the "restored lands" exception: otherwise, that "exception" could swallow the rule.
- c. "[S]ubsistence-like migratory and seasonal labor," like trade, is an inherently transitory activity: it does not imply a tribal presence comparable to the exercise of tribal sovereignty. And to the extent the Decision Letter invokes "occupancy" as something distinct from migratory and seasonal labor (which the Decision Letter itself does not make clear), the Decision Letter appears to mean the twentieth-century presence of individual tribal ancestors like Captain Johnson and his family—which, as just discussed, is insufficient to justify the "restored lands" exception.
- d. Likewise, the presence of individual tribal members in public cemeteries across Lake, Napa, and Sonoma Counties is insufficient to demonstrate that acquisition of the Shiloh Site represents a "restoration" of that site to the Koi Nation. Indeed, it appears that Interior may have determined that any cemetery where a Koi Nation member is buried is a tribal burial ground for purposes of establishing a significant historical connection—even if those individuals died in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries.
- 46. The lack of evidence in the record for the Koi Nation's enduring, collective presence on the Shiloh Site stands in contrast to the extensive evidence that the Koi Nation itself has

articulated its enduring, collective presence in its Clear Lake homeland. In its litigation against the City of Clearlake, the Koi Nation has put forth evidence of "dense historic Indigenous habitation" in the Clear Lake region, including ancestral villages; a multitude of burial sites and human remains; and the location of the Koi Nation Rancheria itself. *See* Koi Nation's Opening Br. at 11-12, 18, 20, 52, 57, *Koi Nation of Northern California v. City of Clearlake*, No. A169438 (Cal. Ct. App. Apr. 30, 2024). The Koi Nation has asserted that its ancestral homeland lies in the Clear Lake region: "Settlers occupied and established the City [of Clearlake] where the Koi Nation's ancestors had villages and sacred sites along the shores of Clearlake since time immemorial." *Id.* at 11. The record before Interior evidenced that the Koi Nation's relationship to the Shiloh Site is qualitatively different from its relationship to its homeland around Clear Lake.

- 47. It was legal error for Interior to conclude that it should fill evidentiary gaps or resolve factual inconsistencies in the Koi Nation's favor. *See* Decision Letter at 19. Even if the so-called "Indian canon" (a canon of statutory construction) could somehow bear on the resolution of disputed facts, that canon has no application where "all tribal interests are not aligned." *Redding Rancheria v. Jewell*, 776 F.3d 706, 713 (9th Cir. 2015). Such is the case here, where other local tribes—including the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, the Lytton Rancheria of California, the Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, and the Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians—are aligned with the Governor and the State in their opposition to the Koi Nation's casino project.
- 48. The "restored lands" exception must not be construed so broadly as to "give restored tribes an open-ended license to game on newly acquired lands." *Redding Rancheria*, 776 F.3d at 711. On the contrary: "In administering the restored lands exception, the Secretary needs to ensure that tribes do not take advantage of the exception to expand gaming operations unduly and to the detriment of other tribes' gaming operations." *Id.* By applying the "restored lands" exception to the record before it, outside of where the Koi Nation has previously asserted to be its ancestral homeland, Interior has departed from that mandate here.

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FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF

(Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. §§ 701-706)) (Against All Defendants)

- 49. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate each and every allegation in paragraph 1 through 48 inclusive of their Complaint with the same force and effect as though fully set forth herein.
- 50. Defendants' invocation of IGRA's "restored lands" exception in the context of the Shiloh Site is contrary to the statute.
- 51. Defendants' invocation of IGRA's "restored lands" exception in the context of the Shiloh Site is contrary to Interior's own prior understanding of the statute, including Interior's own regulations, and is therefore arbitrary and capricious.
- 52. Defendants' decision to take the Shiloh Site into trust for gaming under IGRA's "restored lands" exception is not in accordance with law, and is arbitrary, capricious and an abuse of discretion, unsupported by substantial evidence, and exceeds the jurisdiction and authority of Defendants.
- 53. No adequate remedy other than those sought by this Complaint are afforded by law.

SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF

(Declaratory Judgment (28 U.S.C. § 2201(a)) (Against All Defendants)

- 54. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate each and every allegation in paragraphs 1 through 53 inclusive of their Complaint with the same force and effect as though fully set forth herein.
- 55. An actual controversy between Plaintiffs and Defendants exists within the jurisdiction of this Court upon the matters stated herein.
- 56. Plaintiffs assert that the Shiloh Site is not eligible for gaming under IGRA's "restored lands" exception.

1	57. Defendants have determined that the Shiloh Site is eligible for gaming under	
2	IGRA's "restored lands" exception.	
3	58. The controversy between Plaintiffs and Defendants is ripe and justiciable and	
4	Plaintiffs are entitled to declaratory judgment under 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201 and 2202.	
5	59. Accordingly, relief is prayed as hereafter set forth.	
6	PRAYER	
7	Plaintiffs respectfully pray:	
8	1. That the Court enter an order vacating and setting aside Defendants' decision to take	
9	the Shiloh Site into trust for gaming, under IGRA's "restored lands" exception, as arbitrary,	
10	capricious, unsupported by substantial evidence, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in	
11	accordance with law, or in excess of the statutory jurisdiction and authority of Defendants.	
12	2. That the Court issue injunctive relief and any other orders necessary to reverse the	
13	Defendants' decision to take the Shiloh Site into trust for gaming under IGRA's "restored lands"	
14	exception.	
15	3. That the Court enter a declaratory judgment declaring that the Shiloh Site is not	
16	eligible for gaming under IGRA's "restored lands" exception.	
17	4. For such further other relief as the Court may deem proper, just and appropriate,	
18	including but not limited to recovery of Plaintiffs' costs of suit herein.	
19	D . 1 M . 2 2025	
20	Dated: May 2, 2025 Respectfully submitted,	
21	ROB BONTA Attorney General of California	
22	Noel A. Fischer Acting Senior Assistant Attorney General	
23	CHRISTINE E. GARSKE Supervising Deputy Attorney General	
24	LISA L. FREUND Deputy Attorney General	
25	/s/ Jeremy Stevens	
26	JEREMY STEVENS Doputy Attorney General	
27	Deputy Attorney General Attorneys for Plaintiffs State of California and Gavin Newsom, Governor of California	
28	Gavin Newsom, Governor of California	