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as nearly \$13,000 for a year at the University of California—for needy students who qualify. Smaller state grants help with living expenses for some students.

How's it going here? While California provides more financial aid per low-income student than any other state, gaps in programs and the exorbitant cost of living here still make college unaffordable for many. That free community college plan? It grabbed headlines but actually excludes two-thirds of community college students—those who attend part time.

TAX THE RICH

What they're proposing: Someone has to pay for those ambitious health and education programs so most candidates want to increase taxes on the wealthy. Warren calls for an extra 2% tax on households with a net worth of \$50 million or more and a 6% tax on those worth at least \$1 billion. Sanders takes the idea even further, with rates ranging from 1% on net worth over \$32 million to 8% on worth more than \$10 billion. Buttigieg has said he's open to a wealth tax, but has drawn more attention for his suggestion that the highest income-tax bracket be set at 49.99%.

What California is doing: California does not have a tax on net worth, but it does have the nation's highest income tax rate on high earners—13.3% on those making \$1 million or more. That's partly because California voters have approved a series of tax hikes on those with high incomes. In addition to its progressive income tax, California treats capital gains as any other income.

How's it going here? A popular narrative says California may tax its wealthiest residents into fleeing the state. Data, however, don't back this up—at least not yet. Most people leaving California earn less than \$50,000 a year, and are likely driven out by the high cost of living here.

**TURN GIG
WORKERS INTO
EMPLOYEES**

What they're proposing: Many Democrats argue that gig companies such as Uber and Lyft exploit low-wage workers by classifying them as freelancers instead of employees. Converting their status to employee

would make workers eligible for more job protections and overtime pay. Sanders was the first candidate to call for national legislation to bar gig companies from classifying workers as freelancers. A few months later, Warren announced support for California legislation and pledged to enact a similar federal law. Buttigieg also promises change nationally.

What California is doing: Newsom signed legislation in 2019 requiring many businesses to reclassify inde-

What California is doing: California is one of 11 states that have sanctioned cannabis. Golden State voters made medical marijuana legal in 1996 and approved recreational use in 2016. The law allows adults age 21 and over to possess up to an ounce of marijuana, and grow as many as six plants for personal use. The law also downgraded penalties for nearly every crime involving marijuana, allowing people with



Legal cannabis is one area where Democratic presidential candidates want to extend California policy to the rest of the nation.

PHOTO BY ANNE WEINIKOFF FOR CALMATTERS

pendent contractors as employees. The law is projected to impact 1 million workers, including janitors, manicurists and gig workers. Some industries won exemptions, but many did not.

How's it going here? The new law was being challenged even before it went into effect Jan. 1. Trucking companies won a reprieve from the law during their court challenge, but freelance journalists did not. Meanwhile, gig workers have filed a class-action lawsuit seeking retroactive pay, overtime and benefits. Gig companies such as Uber, Lyft and DoorDash are mounting an expensive campaign in the November election to exempt themselves.

**LEGALIZE
MARIJUANA**

What they're proposing: Most of the candidates want to make recreational as well as medical marijuana legal nationwide, though a few take the more moderate position of wanting to give states the power to decide.

past convictions to petition the court to be resentenced or cleared. **How's it going here?** Creation of a legal marketplace has proved rocky. The black market remains huge—roughly three-quarters of California weed still is being sold illegally. Most cities in the state have banned dispensaries, setting off a legal battle over how much local control the state law provides. Tax revenues from legal sales are coming in below expectations, and producers are pushing back against the state's move to increase tax rates. Marijuana remains an all-cash enterprise because federal law prevents cannabis businesses from using banks. In the first year after legalization, only 10% of eligible people took steps to have their prior cannabis crimes downgraded or cleared. □

CalMatters reporters Felicia Mello and Judy Lin contributed to this report. CalMatters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan media venture explaining California politics and policy. An unabridged version is available at calmatters.org.