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smdp
Santa Monica Daily Press

Volume 24 Issue 64 TUESDAY 2/18/25 smdp.com

Wildfire debris build up on our beaches could potentially equate to an ecological disaster



Scott Snowden

RISK: Until officials have a better idea of whether the wildfire debris presents a danger, parents are advised to not let their children play in the ash that's washed up on the beach.

SCOTT SNOWDEN
SMDP Staff Writer

Over the past few days, it's been impossible to avoid seeing the telltale signs of wildfire ash and debris accumulating along the coastline of Santa Monica. At low tide in particular, endless thick lines of ash particles are easily visible against the golden sands that form our big, beautiful beaches.

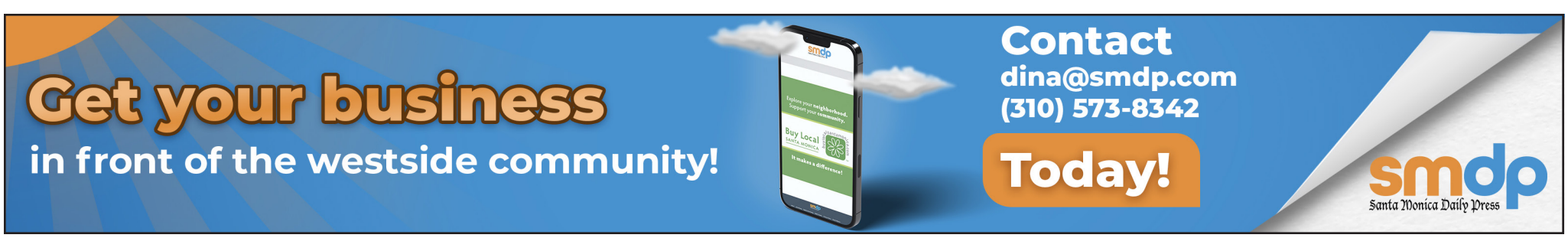
On Friday, as sea level dropped to its lowest point at low tide, across the intertidal zone, vast swathes of black and burnt debris could be seen stretching to the horizon in every direction. And shockingly, despite being right next to the Pacific Ocean, the unique smell of soot and ash was overpowering.

The January wildfires generated 4.5 million tons of waste, or nearly half of the county's typical annual waste total of 11 million tons, according to the Los Angeles County Public Works.

Many items typically found in homes contain chemicals and materials that will produce toxic fumes and residuals when burnt. Televisions, laptops, solar panels and in fact just about anything electronic, batteries, cars and electric vehicles all contain components that are made from materials that present a contamination danger after being utterly incinerated. And then there's the asbestos, which still exists in many houses built between 1930 and 1950.

As of Monday, Heal the Bay's beach report card has general advisory cautions on just about every beach between Marina del Rey and Malibu and several sections of Santa Monica beach currently have a "F rating."

SEE **BEACH** PAGE 4



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Students taking different routes to deal with wildfire stress



Photo by Thomas Leffler

ACTIVISM: Samohi students like Kayman Mangan (second from left) have increased their awareness of climate change due to the Palisades Fire.

DEVYN HAMILTON
SMDP Intern

Still dealing with the stressors brought on by the Palisades Fire, teenagers at Samohi are both looking back on the traumatic events, and becoming more involved in the community through fundraising and activism.

The wildfires that devastated Los Angeles are under control now, but many students who spoke to the Daily Press described the experience as anxiety-inducing and uncomfortably uncertain.

"I evacuated two times and felt the most paranoid I've ever been," said sophomore Allison Kirkpatrick.

Several were put under mandatory evacuation and spent nights in unfamiliar spaces like hotels or AirBnBs. Some even said it was reminiscent of COVID-19 lockdowns.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), it is more common for youth to feel even more stress and to exhibit trauma responses after events like the fire.

This was illustrated by many students who had to be away from their belongings, not knowing whether they were still there. On Jan. 7, the first day of the fires, sophomore Alex Chaiet was unable to return home at any point to collect things from her room.

"At the end of third period I saw 15 texts from our close friends saying we needed to evacuate. A minute later, I was on FaceTime with my dad and he was asking what I wanted from my room," she said.

Alex, like many other students, is in the school production "Chicago," and since the PCH was closed off, stayed after school for hours at rehearsal. She tried to return home before school ended, but could not.

"I actually left at lunch with my family friend Sawyer who is a senior, she lives a mile from me. We couldn't go back because all the roads were closed. We were on Main Street and just seeing the huge cloud of smoke was surreal. We were watching the news and the reporter said it would spread all the way down to the beach… and then at 3:30, I went back to school and showed up for 'Chicago' rehearsals because I had nowhere else to go."

Although these original uncertainties are gone, the stress still lingers, and many who were put in that situation feel a need to help others who lost their homes and items. One of the responses to the disaster was a desire to donate to families in need, as well as to have enhanced awareness of climate change.

Student-run clubs like Baking for Change and ASB facilitated bake sales and toy drives, respectively, to donate to families in need. These students have converted their new stresses and worries into activism, fighting for the things they care about.

Climate change has been a concern for years pertaining to natural disasters. According to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the impact of climate on disasters has already outpaced predictions and groups like the World Wildlife Fund are calling for more action from lawmakers.

"We are standing in the midst of a climate emergency, not a distant threat, not a future crisis," said Kayman Mangan at a Samohi student-led protest of the Donald Trump administration's actions on Feb. 6. "I watched the places I've explored, restaurants I've eaten at, and the houses of people I care about burn down. The window to prevent irreversible damage to our planet is closing."

Suspect in January 15 Broadway homicide is now in custody

SCOTT SNOWDEN
SMDP Staff Writer

On January 15, 2025, at approximately 1:30am, a shooting occurred in the 200 block of Broadway in Santa Monica. Just prior to the incident, an unidentified female was seen arguing with the victim, a male believed to be homeless. The suspect, Fabian Mendez of Inglewood, approached the victim and chased him into the middle of the street, shooting the victim in the back. The suspect was last seen running northbound in alley 2 and out of sight.

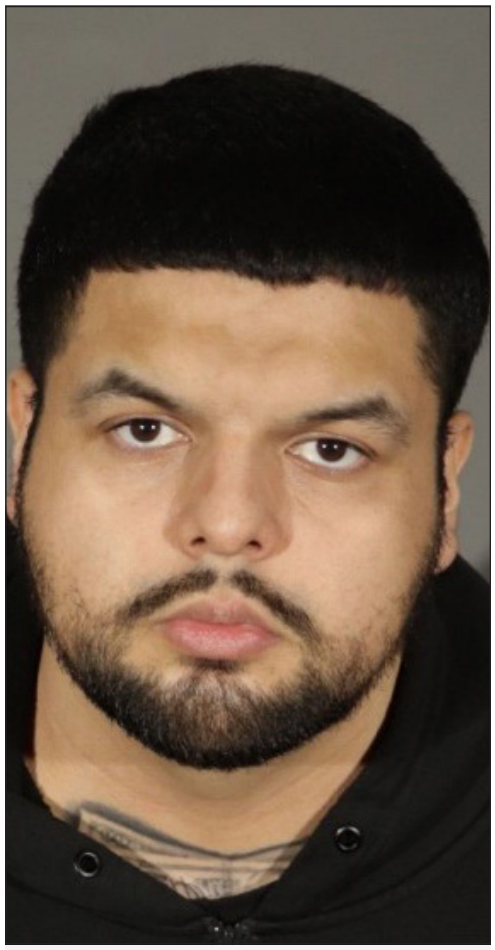
Despite lifesaving efforts by responding officers, the victim succumbed to his injuries.

The Santa Monica Police Department identified Fabian Mendez (Male Hispanic, 6'3" and 280 lbs, tattoos on forearms including "Zamora" in large letters) as the suspect in a the murder.

On Tuesday, February 11, 2025, after an extensive and thorough investigation, Mendez was taken into custody by the Santa Monica Police Department. He is charged with homicide under Penal Code 187, with bail set at $3,000,000.

Anyone with information about this incident, please contact Detective Reyes at (310) 458-4852, Detective Sergeant Lozano at 310-458-8774, or the Watch Commander (available 24 hours a day) at 310-458-8427.

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FABIAN MENDEZ

1 dead and 1 hospitalized after stabbing near the Fairmont Hotel

SCOTT SNOWDEN
SMDP Staff Writer

The Santa Monica Police Department (SMPD) have confirmed that one of the victims in a stabbing that occurred in the early hours of Saturday morning at The Bungalow, part of the Fairmont Hotel, has died.

According to a statement issued by the SMPD, on Saturday, February 15, 2025, at approximately 1:50am, officers responded to a report of a stabbing at The Bungalow, located at 101 Wilshire Blvd.

Officers arrived within moments and found two male victims with stab wounds. Personnel from the Santa Monica Fire Department provided medical aid and transported both individuals to a local hospital. One victim — a 31-year-old male from Anaheim — sustained critical injuries and, despite life-saving efforts, later succumbed to his injuries. The second victim suffered non-life-threatening injuries and remains under medical care.

Preliminary findings indicate the incident occurred outside the hotel in the 100 block of Wilshire Blvd. At this time, detectives believe this was an isolated incident and not a random act of violence. There is no indication of an ongoing threat to the public. Detectives are actively investigating and pursuing all available leads.

At this stage, no arrests have been made. Investigators are reviewing video surveillance and gathering witness statements to determine the circumstances surrounding the altercation.

The Santa Monica Police Department is asking anyone with information related to this incident to contact Detective Lucero, Sergeant Cooney or the Watch Commander (available 24 hours) at 310-458-8427.

scott.snowden@smdp.com

To learn how to feature your upcoming event on the SMDP and various digital event calendars

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Surf report

WATER TEMP: **57.2**

TUESDAY
FAIR

SURF: Knee to thigh
1-2FT

More fun surf and light wind for at least the morning. A storm north of Hawaii will deliver another bump of mid to long period WNW swell -- size tops out through the day and hangs around into Wednesday. It'll be smaller than the weekend's surf but still fun for the winter exposures. Average breaks are in the waist-stomach high range and focal points push chest high+. Most size west of Dume but winter points are fun. Expecting light wind/clean conditions in the morning.

Weather

Tuesday: Patchy fog before 10am. Otherwise, mostly sunny, with a high near 64.
Tuesday Night: Patchy fog after 10pm. Otherwise, mostly cloudy, with a low around 50.
Wednesday: Patchy fog. Otherwise, partly sunny, with a high near 68.
Wednesday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 51.

Date	Day	Time (LST/LDT)	Predicted	(ft)High/Low
2025/02/18	Tue	12:02 AM	4.40	H
2025/02/18	Tue	06:54 AM	1.42	L
2025/02/18	Tue	12:28 PM	2.70	H
2025/02/18	Tue	5:25 PM	1.78	L
2025/02/19	Wed	12:35 AM	4.32	H
2025/02/19	Wed	08:33 AM	1.43	L
2025/02/19	Wed	2:41 PM	2.18	H
2025/02/19	Wed	4:51 PM	2.14	L
2025/02/20	Thu	01:25 AM	4.24	H
2025/02/20	Thu	10:43 AM	1.09	L
2025/02/21	Fri	02:55 AM	4.25	H
2025/02/21	Fri	11:53 AM	0.56	L
2025/02/22	Sat	04:24 AM	4.50	H
2025/02/22	Sat	12:35 PM	0.03	L
2025/02/22	Sat	8:02 PM	3.17	H
2025/02/22	Sat	11:09 PM	2.88	L
2025/02/23	Sun	05:28 AM	4.94	H
2025/02/23	Sun	1:09 PM	-0.46	L
2025/02/23	Sun	8:01 PM	3.39	H

Daily Lottery

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the winning number information, mistakes can occur. In the event of any discrepancies, California State laws and California Lottery regulations will prevail. Complete game information and prize claiming instructions are available at California Lottery retailers. Visit the California State Lottery web site at http://www.calottery.com

POWERBALL
Draw Date: 2/15
3 16 45 54 56
Power#: 12
Jackpot: 183 M

Fantasy5
Draw Date: 2/16
4 25 28 31 32

MEGA MILLIONS
Draw Date: 2/14
11 19 31 49 56
Mega#: 16
Jackpot: 145 M

Daily 3
Draw Date: 2/16
EVENING: 1 6 8
Draw Date: 2/16
MIDDAY: 6 6 4

SuperLotto PLUS
Draw Date: 2/15
1 9 26 29 47
Mega#: 20
Jackpot: 26 M

Daily Derby
Draw Date: 2/16
1st: 02 - Lucky Star
2nd: 05 - California Classic
3rd: 09 - Winning Spirit
Race Time: 1:42.01

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The Santa Monica Daily Press publishes Monday - Saturday with a circulation of 8,200 on weekdays and 8,000 on the weekend. The Daily Press is adjudicated as a newspaper of general circulation in the County of Los Angeles and covers news relevant to the City of Santa Monica. The Daily Press is a member of the California Newspaper Publisher's Association, the National Newspaper Association and the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce. The paper you're reading this on is composed of 100% post consumer content and the ink used to print these words is soy based. We are proud recipients of multiple honors for outstanding news coverage from the California Newspaper Publishers Association as well as a Santa Monica Sustainable Quality Award.

PUBLISHED BY NEWLON ROUGE, LLC

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Santa Monica Daily Press

BEACH

FROM PAGE 1

Ashley Oelsen, who serves on the Santa Monica Commission on Sustainability, Environmental Justice, and the Environment, spoke during the last City Council meeting, succinctly summarizing the situation.

"I'm here tonight to bring urgent attention to the alarming amount of soot and ash that is accumulating on our beaches following the Palisades Fire. Every day that passes without immediate action, we lose the opportunity to properly remove and remediate these contaminants before they become a long term environmental hazard. Right now, people are walking barefoot and swimming in water so thick with ash it looks like lava," Oelsen said.

"The crisis is not only environmental, but also [represents] grave danger to public health. The toxins in wildfire ash include heavy metals, asbestos and dioxins, once broken down, they'll mix into the sand and disperse with the ocean currents. Every tide, high tide carries pollutants onto the sand, and every low tide pushes them further into the marine ecosystem.

"Santa Monica takes pride in being a leader in environmental responsibility, and yet we're standing by as toxic debris spreads in our waters. I'm urging the city to take immediate action and deploy clean up crews, conduct water and sand testing and coordinate with environmental experts to ensure this contamination is addressed before it's too late. LA County is not acting on it, and if you think they are, please walk down to Channel Road and look at the storm drain at Will Rogers. The conditions are inexcusable. The window to act is rapidly closing with every wave and every tide and every footstep."

The Daily Press spent Friday afternoon with Oelsen as she collected samples from all along the beach near Parking Lot 8 North and the nearby Montana Ave storm drain. She is sending samples to a number of different laboratories to test for dioxins, heavy metals, asbestos, chemical residue and volatile components extracted from fire debris.

She says that the immediate threat is less connected to the waste processing sites – at Will Rogers and Topanga Creek, for example – and much more to do with the burned out properties that are on the water's edge, all along the Pacific Coast Highway. The debris from countless destroyed structures along that stretch of coastline – along with storm drain runoff – has been washing straight into the ocean since the first rain a week or so ago.

However, Oelsen insists that until the test results are back, there's no cause for panic. "I believe it's important that people lean on the side of caution until more information is available to the public," she said. A sentiment shared by Mayor Lana Negrete.

"Very few of us are qualified to present solid, scientific theories and because of that it's really important to not overreact before all the facts are in," Negrete said, adding, "We're actually in a fortunate position, because of an earlier tragedy, but similar in many respects, in Hawaii, we are are several steps ahead of where we might otherwise be. Much of what was learned there, just six months ago, is being applied here.

"We will move forward, without causing unnecessary panic or fear among the community and we will act accordingly, based on what professional scientists and environmental specialists find," Negrete said.

However, both stress that until more is known, it would be prudent for beachgoers to not let their children play in the debris, to wear shoes at all times on the beach and to stay out of the water, for the time being. It is also important to remember that the beaches are not off-limits, but you might want to consider taking a mask with you, should you wish to stroll along the shoreline.

> "We will move forward, without causing unnecessary panic or fear among the community and we will act accordingly, based on what professional scientists and environmental specialists find
>
> - Lana Negrete, Mayor

Unfortunately, the City of Santa Monica doesn't possess the equipment needed for a beach clean up on this scale, so we would very much be reliant on county and federal machine, personnel and logistical assistance, which is where things can get more complicated.

Negrete has organized a virtual town hall on the evening of Tuesday, February 18 at 6 p.m. where members of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and their partners will discuss post-fire air, soil and water assessment, including potential beach contamination. Questions can be submitted at tinyurl.com/post-firetownhall and the conversation will be livestreamed on facebook.com/lapublichealth and youtube.com/lapublichealth. As the flyer states, "Experts will provide initial testing results for completed assessments, explain what they mean, and answer your questions on how you can protect your health and community during recovery."

Results from the first round of testing are in fact expected back sometime on Tuesday, so fingers crossed we'll have a clearer idea of what the City is facing soon.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Pico

Annual Black History Greens Festival celebrates the community legacy of Virginia Avenue Park

The city of Santa Monica and the Black Santa Monica Community Group will host the 10th annual Black History Greens Festival on Saturday, Feb. 22, at Virginia Avenue Park from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The free community celebration is part of the city's Black History Month events, and the theme for 2025 is "Roots and Reflections: Community Legacy of Virginia Avenue Park."

Virginia Avenue Park stands as a beacon of inclusion for providing access to recreational spaces once denied to Black Americans, and this year's event will honor the community heroes and activists who were

pivotal in acquiring and creating the park:

-Mr. Clyde Smith and Mrs. Vabel Reed

-Santa Monica's first Black American Recreation and Parks Commissioner, Mr. Lloyd C. Allen

-Our first Black American Mayor, Nat Trives

-Our second Santa Monica Black American councilmember, Mr. Hilliard Lawson

-And the first Black American teacher hired in the Santa Monica school district, Dr. Alfred T. Quinn

Event attendees can check out greens cooking demonstrations with local chefs, family activities including book readings and giveaways, performances, vendors and wellness information. Special guest KJLH radio's Arron "BOBO" Arnell will return for a second year as the master of ceremonies.

The day's festivities will also include:

-Ms. Robbie Jones, owner, Black Santa Monica Tours and Jus' Family Cafe and Coffee Bar, Santa Monica historian, and our event Legacy moderator

-Greens cooking competition and tastings by Pastor Mossett of Calvary Baptist Church of Santa Monica and Chef Andrena Seals of Black Santa Monica Community Group

-Los Angeles County Supervisors' acknowledgment of Mr. Nat Trives' role as one of the founders of the annual Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2025

-A performance by Calvary Baptist Church of Santa Monica Gospel Choir

-A violin performance by a talented Santa Monica High School senior

-Book reading of "Ice Cream Man," by author Glenda Armand

-DJ Dense spinning music throughout the day

-Live cooking demonstrations with local chefs of family favorite greens recipes

-Book giveaways by the Pico Branch Library

-A wide variety of resource booths and vendors

Guests are encouraged to bring picnic blankets and/or lawn chairs. Walking and biking are encouraged.

For more information call (310) 458-8688 or visit santamonica.gov.

SUBMITTED BY TATI SIMONIAN

SMMUSD

SMMUSD Celebrates Black History Month with JAZZ REACH's 'Stolen Moments'

In honor of Black History Month, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) continued its partnership with JAZZ REACH, a nationally renowned nonprofit music organization from New York, to celebrate the achievements and influence of Black and African American musicians.

"We want to recognize the countless ways in which African Americans have contributed to American culture and how they have led the way in advocating for civil rights, inclusion and racial equity," said SMMUSD Visual and Performing Arts Coordinator, Tom Whaley.

Building on the success of last year's program, JAZZ REACH returned to SMMUSD schools for a series of engaging and interactive assemblies featuring "Stolen Moments: The First 100 Years of Jazz." This captivating and informative program provided an overview of the leading jazz artists and musical movements of the past century. "Stolen Moments" introduced students to jazz's rich history, highlighting the names, faces, and music of its many masters.

This year, the assemblies were attended by Santa Monica middle school students and fifth graders from each elementary school pathway. Through live music, videos, and multimedia presentations, students explored jazz's evolution and its deep connection to American culture. The program emphasized jazz as a unifying force, bridging cultural, ethnic, and economic differences, inspiring new stylistic idioms, and influencing music worldwide.

"The assemblies were more than just educational experiences; they were transformative journeys into the heart and soul of American music," explained Whaley. "By delving into the rich history of jazz, we aim to instill a greater appreciation, awareness and understanding of African American heritage among our students. During the 'Stolen Moments' assembly, students learned how their favorite artists like Elvis Presley, Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, The Beatles and many more were inspired by the influence of the jazz giants over the last 100 years."

Each assembly provided a unique opportunity for students to connect with history, culture, and music in a meaningful way. With a three-pronged approach incorporating multimedia elements and live performances, the presentations captivated audiences and left a lasting impression.

The celebration concluded with JAZZ REACH performing alongside the Samohi Jazz Band during lunch at the Discovery cafeteria. The JAZZ REACH professional combo worked closely with Samohi's advanced jazz combo in rehearsals, sharing techniques on improvisation, ensemble playing, and live performance.

"As we celebrate Black History Month, it is essential that our students not only learn about history but also feel a sense of belonging in the stories that shape our culture," said SMMUSD Superintendent Dr. Antonio Shelton. "JAZZ REACH's assemblies offer a powerful and engaging way for students to connect with the legacy of jazz and its role in American history. These experiences deepen their understanding of Black artists' influence and reinforce the importance of inclusion, representation, and cultural appreciation in our schools."

SUBMITTED BY DIANA BOUCHAAYA

Californians rejected an anti-slavery ballot measure. Lawmakers want to try again

JOE GARCIA
CalMatters



Illustration by Adriana Heldiz, CalMatters; California State Library, California Prison Industry Authority

SLAVERY: California legislators are continuing the fight aimed at abolishing de facto slavery practices in California prisons.

California's Legislative Black Caucus and the Reparations Task Force continue their fight to scrape away at the last vestiges of legalized slavery remaining within the state constitution.

Assemblymember Lori Wilson, a Democrat from Suisun City, this month introduced a new constitutional amendment aimed at abolishing the everyday de facto slavery practices that persist inside California prisons.

Last November, a similar attempt — Proposition 6, failed at the ballot box despite not having any formal opposition. With 47% of California voters in favor of removing language from the state constitution that allows prison administrators to force incarcerated individuals to work under threat of disciplinary consequences, Wilson and a league of co-authors and sponsors hope to get the revised version back in front of voters in 2026.

"We're doing this again and going back because we felt like it was a moral obligation and a righteous thing to do," said Wilson.

The text of the new amendment would focus more narrowly on the word "slavery," avoiding references to "discipline" against prisoners and to "involuntary servitude." Backers of the amendment believe that language left many potential Prop. 6 supporters confused.

California declared itself a free state in 1850, yet slave owners from other states could bring their slaves with them without much consequence — particularly for use in labor endeavors like mining during the gold rush era. When the 13th Amendment abolished slavery but allowed the exception as punishment for convicted crimes, California followed suit and immediately started using prisons like Folsom and San Quentin to exploit mostly Black prisoners for contracted labor and capital gain.

The California Reparations Task Force and Legislative Black Caucus have been trying to repeal the constitutional language that allows forced prison labor for much of this decade. U.S. Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove, at the time a state assemblymember, put forward a proposal in 2021 but it fell short of getting on the ballot because of concerns that it would compel state prisons to pay minimum wage to working prisoners.

Wilson returned in 2023 with the measure that became Prop. 6 and crafted it in a way that lawmakers believed would have allowed voluntary work assignments in prisons and jails for incarcerated people who wanted them.

But, caught in the 2024 political mix alongside tough-on-crime Proposition 36 and the national dynamics of the volatile presidential election, Prop. 6 seemed to leave too many Californians confused and apathetic. The ballot summary's language did not focus on the word slavery; instead it described "involuntary servitude for incarcerated persons."

"What we heard from the voters during that time was a lot of misunderstandings around the bill," explained Wilson. "But when we educated on Prop. 6, they were all behind it. I didn't talk to any person that wasn't behind the bill once they knew what the bill did, but that took a lot of time."

The new version of Prop. 6, now Assembly Constitutional Amendment 6, simply states: "Slavery in all forms is prohibited." It will be up to the Attorney General's Office to write the summary that voters would see if the Legislature places the amendment on the ballot.

Recently in other states, such as Alabama and Nevada, voters approved amendments to remove the allowance of forced prison labor where the ballot language included the word slavery.

The new proposal also differs from Prop. 6 in avoiding previous language which stated, "The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation shall not discipline any incarcerated person for refusing a work assignment."

"That was a hangup for a lot of voters who were supportive about the concept, but were concerned about this language that they can't be disciplined and what does that mean?" said Wilson. "That is a big word to put in a constitution without any definition."

Recent attention and appreciation toward incarcerated firefighters who responded to the Palisades fires may ultimately help the anti-slavery proposal gain momentum with voters.

"Now people understand the role that these incarcerated individuals had in tackling our wildfires,"said Wilson. "We have these people who are on the front line. They have bravery. They're showing commitment."

Advocates and sponsors say they're excited and ready to begin prepping the voting public for 2026 — and to begin building off the lessons they learned from the failed 2024 campaign.

"Last time, we waited 'til this qualified to go to voters before we launched any kind of campaign efforts. We're not gonna make that mistake again this go-round," said Esteban Nunez, a head lobbyist and chief strategy consultant for the Anti-Recidivism Coalition.

Nunez served six years within the California prison system and remembers his own experiences with involuntary servitude. Stuck working a kitchen job, he faced opposition when trying to pursue a college education while incarcerated. And when he asked his correctional supervisor for a bit of time off to

SEE **BALLOT MEASURE** PAGE 11

COMMUNITY NEWS

Citywide

Zbur Introduces Legislation to Tackle Student Housing Insecurity at California Community Colleges

On Feb. 13, Democratic Caucus Chair and Assemblymember Rick Chavez Zbur (D-Hollywood) introduced AB 648, a bill designed to combat housing insecurity and homelessness at California Community Colleges (CCC) by streamlining the development of student and staff housing. Sponsored by Santa Monica College, the bill ensures that CCC districts have the authority to build housing on property they own or lease—just as they do for educational facilities—while eliminating barriers that slow or prevent construction. In addition, this bill would be a significant benefit in addressing our housing crisis by opening up affordable units in communities that students and staff would have otherwise occupied.

"This bill aims to address housing insecurity for our community college students and staff and prevent homelessness. California's community college students face some of the highest rates of housing insecurity and homelessness in the state. By eliminating barriers to the construction of critical housing projects, California will take another bold step toward tackling our affordable housing crisis," said Assemblymember Zbur. "Housing is a fundamental need for community college students and staff. This legislation will cut through red tape and ensure that students can focus on their studies and staff can focus on their work without the stress of not knowing where they will sleep at night."

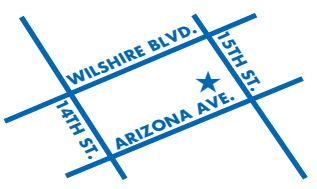
According to a 2024 report by the California Legislative Analyst's Office, more than half of California's community college students faced housing insecurity in 2023, and about a quarter of those nearly 2 million students have experienced homelessness. Additionally, recent findings from a 2023 Basic Needs Survey of over 66,000 students at 88 community colleges found that 3 out of 5 students were housing insecure and 1 in 4 students were homeless.

The University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems already have the authority to build student housing regardless of how their properties are zoned. Despite their past as commuter schools, California Community Colleges have become an integral part of the education system and a key stepping stone in allowing marginalized populations to access higher education. This bill will clarify that the community colleges have the same authority as the UCs and CSUs and allow CCCs to build housing quickly and efficiently without enduring an unnecessary and burdensome rezoning process.

"Without housing for our low-income students, poverty cycles continue in perpetuity," said Donald Girard, a representative of Santa Monica College. "Having practical autonomy to move community college housing projects forward quickly will address the crisis of housing affordability and reduce barriers to student success for current and future generations."

AB 648 will be referred to policy committee in the coming weeks.

SUBMITTED BY VIENNA MONTAGUE

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Should builders permit their own projects? Post-fire LA considers a radical idea

BEN CHRISTOPHER
CalMatters

The speedy processing of building permit applications is not typically considered a popular political cause.

The recent Los Angeles firestorm may have changed that.

Thousands of Angelenos are now desperate to rebuild their homes as quickly as possible. They have the sympathy and focus of elected leaders at every level of state government. And many of them — particularly in well-heeled Pacific Palisades — have pull at city hall.

That's helped bump the otherwise dull-as-drying-paint politics of permitting policy to the top of many lawmakers' agendas.

Exhibit A: The L.A. city council voted unanimously last week to consider a building permit "self-certification" program.

Rather than require architects and engineers working on small residential construction projects to submit their plans to the city's building department and wait — often months, if not years — for the green light, self-certification would allow them to sign off on their own handiwork and start construction immediately. The city would still inspect the projects during and after construction.

Councilmember Nithya Raman, who introduced the motion, said she began looking into the idea well before fires torched thousands of homes around the city. But the politics of permitting has changed in ways that could have effects far beyond the footprints of the fires.

"There is a constituency of people that have been asking for these changes, but now there is an urgency around it that has helped speed this process forward," she said. "We should definitely be focusing on rebuilding the Palisades, but we should also make sure that rebuilding the Palisades doesn't slow down construction in the rest of the city, which is already much lower than it needs to be."

Over the last four years, the median length of time required to get a permit approved to construct a single family home in Los Angeles was nearly eight months, according to real estate data firm ATC Research. For apartment projects, the typical wait was more than 10 months.

The motion the council passed instructed city staff to look into the idea and report back by early March. The council would then have to vote on a specific proposal before anything about the current process changes.

The general concept seems to have at least the interest of Mayor Karen Bass, who asked city staff to look into the idea shortly after the fires started in early January.

The cause of self-certification is the latest, and likely the most radical, example of lawmakers pushing to cut red-tape in the wake of the blazes.

In early January, with the flames still uncontained, Gov. Gavin Newsom directed his own housing department to look into state permitting requirements, building codes and local bureaucratic processes that could be suspended, expedited or removed to speed up reconstruction. Based on those reports, Newsom on Thursday issued an executive order which, among other things, loosened building permit rules to allow homeowners of recently constructed homes to recycle their own plans. The governor's office refused to release a copy of the report itself when CalMatters asked for it.



Photo by Ted Soqui for CalMatters

FIRE: The aftermath of the Palisades Fire, as clean-ups and infrastructure repairs begin, in Pacific Palisades, on Jan. 14, 2025.

San Diego Assemblymember Chris Ward introduced a state bill that would give small building project developers the ability to hire a third-party licensed architect or engineer to sign off on a project's plans if a city's planning department is too slow.

Like Raman in Los Angeles, Ward came up with the idea before the fires. But the drive to bring down construction costs and speed up approval times is a goal that "really needs to apply everywhere all the time," he said in an interview with CalMatters last month. "I don't want you waiting six months to build a home."

From outside the halls of government, developers and pro-housing advocates are hoping that, in the wake of disaster, fast-tracked building approval is an idea whose time has come.

"I do think this is starting to light a fire under folks around bureaucratic streamlining reforms," said Scott Epstein, policy director at the advocacy group Abundant Housing LA.

"PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK"

Los Angeles already allows contractors to go ahead with limited maintenance, heating and air conditioning systems work and roofing without a city-issued go-ahead. Inspections, and any necessary fixes, occur after the fact.

Raman's current proposal would go much further, allowing builders to start work on entire single family homes without having their plans reviewed. It's an unusual idea, but not unprecedented even in Los Angeles County.

The City of Bellflower, packed into just six square miles in southeast L.A. County, has been allowing virtually all construction projects to go ahead self-certified for a decade.

If a project architect or engineer is "willing to put their license and their stamp on a set of plans and say, 'this meets the building code and we're ready to build it,' then let's get out of their way and give them the ability to go start at their own risk," said Ryan Smoot, city manager.

That risk is considerable. If problems emerge after construction begins, the owner is on the hook to fix them. In practice, that has meant that most projects that go the self-certification route are relatively straightforward.

Developers are told to "proceed at your own risk, effectively," said Smoot. Those without the stomach to do so are invited to go through the standard permitting process and then "don't complain about it when it takes a little longer to do those reviews than you like."

In the wake of the fires, Smoot said he welcomes the new attention on Bellflower's permitting process.

"You got 10,000 homes that are going to need to be rebuilt and 10,000 families that just want to get back to normal life and we have an obligation as local governments to get out of the way as much as possible," he said. "It is actually, from our perspective, really exciting to see other local and state agencies starting to think the same way."

"I hate to see it in the context we're in," he added. "But the silver lining is maybe we're rethinking how we do government."

Building departments from Chicago to New York to Dallas allow a degree of self-permitting in construction projects.

But few in California are willing to put quite so much faith in a project's architect or engineer, no matter their license or experience. Even in development-friendly San Diego, which has a self-certification option for solar installations and office remodels, letting a developer start construction on an entire new house without the city's once-over is a bridge too far.

"From my experience, we've never seen a brand new building — from ground up — that is a perfect submittal that did not have any health or safety issues," said Kelly Charles, the city's chief building official.

Imagine an architect messes up and makes the foundation a little too wide, she said. That doesn't just hurt the licensed experts and the developer. "I'm a homeowner. I'm waiting for my house. My whole yard is torn up. And now you have to saw-cut concrete," said Charles. "Taking two feet out of the house is not easy!"

Many builders and architects scoff at the idea that city staff know their trade better than they do.

"Why shouldn't we be able to self-certify if all the liability rests on us and we're only using licensed professionals?" said Tom Grable, former chair of the California Building Industry Association. "When something happens in the field we fix it."

He called the entire pre-construction plan check process "redundant and unnecessary."

Smoot, in Bellflower, said costly re-dos are exceedingly rare, if only because most developers don't actually opt for self-certification. In Phoenix, Arizona — which has a similarly permissive self-certification program — uptake is also on the low-end. Evidently builders often prefer to have someone double-check their work.

Both cities also have an audit system in place to give a sampling of project plans an official review.

"Just because a program goes to self-certification it doesn't necessarily mean that city staff aren't going to be looking at it," Jason Blakely, Phoenix's assistant development director.

HOW TO BEST SPEED UP PERMITTING?

What might work in a sprawling valley like the Phoenix area or a flat suburb like Bellflower may not work so easily across Los Angeles, with its hillside developments facing seismic and wildfire risk, said Steven Somers, the CEO of Crest Real Estate, which consults with developers to navigate the city's lengthy building approval process.

"The solution is maybe simplifying the code or outsourcing more reviews to increase bandwidth and staffing," he said. That's a better solution than handing regulatory oversight to someone working on the project itself and who may have "a financial motivation to make the process go quicker than it should."

Councilmember Raman acknowledges the city of Los Angeles still has plenty of questions to answer about how this program would work. She said beefed up oversight and accountability measures would likely be necessary. But whatever the end result, she said, the city should make the approval process faster — both in and outside the still-smoldering burn scars.

With the fire still raging in January, Bass ordered city staff to blitz through post-fire permit applications within 30 days. This week, the city's Department of Building and Safety turned its West Los Angeles office into a one-stop regulatory shop for rebuilds. What all that extra bureaucratic attention on reconstruction will mean for new proposed housing in other parts of the city is so far unclear.

"What I want to think about as we move forward in Los Angeles," said Raman, "is not just ways to rearrange the queue, but to actually shorten the queue entirely."

Fewer California high school seniors are applying for financial aid. Some blame Trump's immigration policies

MIKHAIL ZINSHTEYN
CalMatters



Photo by Miguel Gutierrez Jr., CalMatters

SCHOOL: Students walk and ride bicycles on campus at the University of California, Davis on Oct. 3, 2023.

Fewer California high school seniors are completing federal financial aid applications than in past years, which some analysts say is a sign that students may fear the Trump administration will use their sensitive data for immigration enforcement.

The number of seniors completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, has dropped by about 48,000 students, or 25%, as of last week, compared to this point last year. In both years, the California deadline for state financial aid — such as waivers to fully cover tuition at public universities plus other awards — is early March.

Also down dramatically is the share of students applying who have at least one parent who's undocumented: That number has plunged 44% so far this year compared to this point last year — from about 30,000 students then to 17,000 now.

The early data comes from the California Student Aid Commission, the state agency that handles financial aid. This morning the commission will hold a webinar with high school counselors regarding the implications of this decline and how to encourage more students to apply for aid.

The Trump administration has not announced plans to use application information to target people for deportation.

"This is very alarming," said Daisy Gonzales, executive director of the commission, in an interview about the application declines. "It's a crisis in the sense that we have a perfect storm." The White House's accelerated deportation campaign, the fires in Southern California that displaced thousands of families and burned down some schools, plus students' ongoing scrutiny of the value of a college education are all forces that Gonzales says may be behind the drop.

If the trend of fewer applications holds, she fears that "we're losing another generation of students who should be enrolling, who should be succeeding."

The commission has extended the deadline for state aid to April 2 for students in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, where much of the destructive winter fires occurred.

CALIFORNIA AND FAFSA ISSUES AREN'T NEW

College aid experts warned last fall that families with undocumented members living in the U.S. were questioning the safety of the data. Leading associations of college advisors told students to consider opting out of FAFSA to protect their loved ones. While current law limits student and family information entered in the application for only financial aid purposes, legal experts told CalMatters those rules could change under a presidency like Donald Trump's. Some students with undocumented parents are specifically suspicious of a line in the application for parents asking them if they have a Social Security number and a prompt to complete an identity verification form.

Gonzales has attended financial aid fairs the commission sponsors and heard from families about their FAFSA fears. "The number one question that they would ask me is, 'Is it safe for me to apply, and what are my options?'" she said.

While the FAFSA is a federal application, California has its own state application that the student aid commission stresses is not shared with federal agencies. It's called the California Dream Act Application, known as CADAA. Legal experts told CalMatters that federal agencies would have to clear a high legal bar to access those state records.

The CADAA gives students access to state tuition waivers and several thousand dollars in other grants, but FAFSA is the only way for students to also receive federal student loans and the Pell grant, which can yield more than $7,000 a year for low-income students.

Originally meant for undocumented students, the state application last year was expanded to permit students with a parent who wasn't a citizen to apply for state aid. The student aid commission took that step because of massive technological issues with the revamped FAFSA last year. But a senior

SEE SCHOOL PAGE 11



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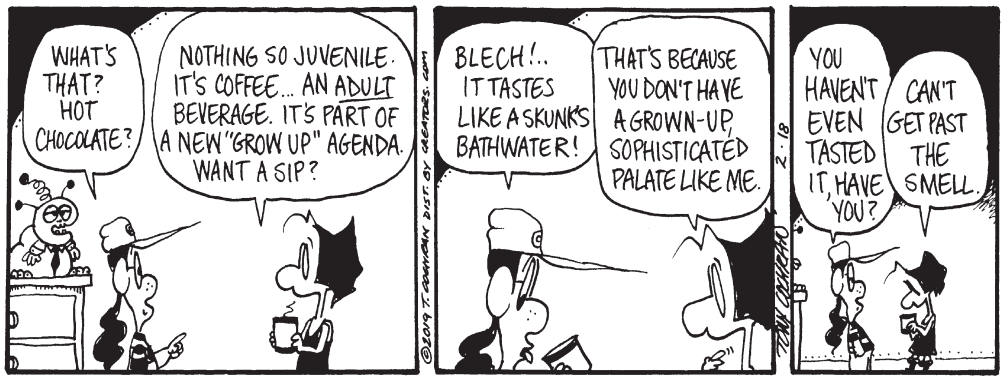
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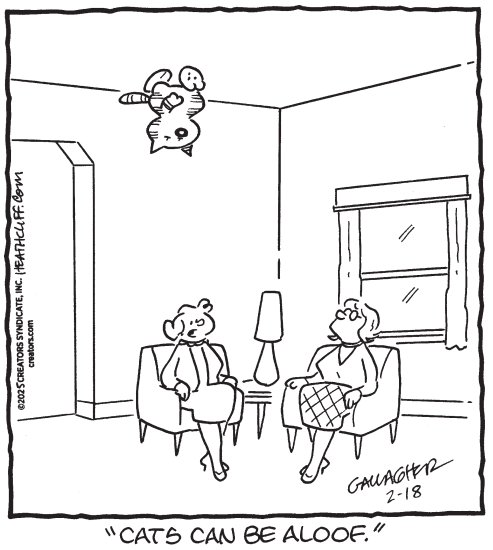
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"CATS CAN BE ALOOF."

Strange Brew

By JOHN DEERING



FIND THE WORDS

This is a theme puzzle with the subject stated below. Find the listed words in the grid. (They may run in any direction but always in a straight line. Some letters are used more than once.) Ring each word as you find it and when you have completed the puzzle, there will be 22 letters left over. They spell out the alternative theme of the puzzle. © australianwordgames.com.au 6490

Riding the waves

B	O	N	D	I	R	E	E	F	A	C	K	N	A	P
K	E	S	N	U	G	P	Y	H	G	N	O	O	N	M
A	S	T	I	E	C	L	O	N	P	I	I	S	U	U
E	U	E	W	A	N	L	A	H	S	Z	F	E	H	D
R	R	S	R	A	A	R	T	I	C	O	N	G	A	U
B	F	V	M	T	L	S	L	I	A	R	R	I	K	D
Y	E	F	U	Y	I	L	E	M	D	T	U	R	N	E
A	L	L	U	N	O	R	C	V	I	E	K	C	E	D
R	N	L	L	C	D	T	G	U	I	A	S	X	E	R
P	O	L	T	S	O	E	S	N	R	D	D	O	B	E
S	O	I	A	H	B	O	R	P	A	L	A	N	O	M
H	S	K	E	G	V	E	G	F	I	N	S	N	A	O
R	A	S	H	I	E	V	A	E	W	R	W	E	R	O
I	T	N	I	O	P	M	A	C	E	N	I	L	D	B
G	A	G	G	R	O	K	R	A	H	S	M	F	U	N

Aggro	Deck	Kirra	Skeg
Aloha	Dive	Kneeboard	Skill
Bells Beach	Dude	Lennox	Spray
Bondi	Dump	Manly	Surf
Boomer	Fads	Noosa	Swim
Break	Fins	Nose	Tides
Camp	Foam	Point	Turn
Carve	Gnarly	Rails	Under
Chop	Grit	Rashie	Wall
Collision	Guns	Reef	Weave
Coogee	Hang	Rips	Wind
Cronulla	Heat	Sets	Zinc
Curl	Kahuna	Shark	

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TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (Feb. 18)

You'll go soaring into the year with moments that lift you high above your life, offering a bird's-eye view of possibilities you didn't know were there. A major project will hone your talents. Seize advancement opportunities. More highlights: A revelation opens your heart and improves your personal life; new communication styles; and an investment in three adventurous events. Taurus and Sagittarius adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 7, 19, 10, 3 and 30.

HOROSCOPES

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Overwhelming moments are a normal part of a busy life - a message to slow down. You don't have to do everything at once, and you don't have to be perfect. You can keep going, one little thing at a time. That's enough.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). You deserve a love that is warm and fun - a love that matches the care you bring. Treat yourself with the kindness you crave from others. You'll sharpen your boundaries and align with a love that matches your tenderness.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). It's OK if some piece of past pain lingers. It's a sign of your depth. Bad feelings will fade, making room for better connections. You're building a world where people get you and show up for you, just as you deserve.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). Certainty is overrated. A mind filled with certainty about how the world works cannot readily absorb how things might, could or will work. You're open to the possibility that reality is often something other than our experience of it.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Losses have a way of developing character, whereas wins can be harder to navigate with grace. But you're certainly more than capable of staying grounded if you maintain self-awareness. Whichever way it goes, you'll find gold in it.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). You'll go to great lengths to avoid hurting someone's feelings. You might sidestep delicate topics, leave out certain details or carefully choose the timing of your words. You'll have success maintaining the harmony.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Applause is a kind of gift, a way to show appreciation and encouragement that lifts others up. You'll be a generous giver in this regard, investing your energy to cheer for the people you love and celebrate their efforts.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). In the middle of an interaction, pause to ask yourself, "Am I responding because of my feelings, or because of the other person's expectations?" It benefits you to distinguish between authentic reactions and those shaped by the dynamic.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You're not looking to inconvenience anyone, but you should also take this into consideration: Sometimes being inconvenienced is the highlight of a person's day. Who are you to deprive them of having a little problem to solve?

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). People like what they can be involved in. You may start out alone, but don't finish it all by yourself, too. What you're working on is an opportunity to create more than the project. It's about creating a network, too.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You've been constant, true and strong, even when faced with someone who couldn't match you in those ways. That says so much about the kind of person you are. Love that's reciprocal, kind and steady is coming your way.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). You keep reminding yourself of the good you have, the good you've created and the good you're capable of building. The life you're envisioning is already within your reach. Piece by piece, you're building it.

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

S	P	A	T			B	R	O		C	L	A	S	S
C	O	L	A		L	I	E	S		H	I	R	E	E
A	L	E	S		O	R	A	L		I	M	E	A	N
R	O	C	K	A	N	D	R	O	L	L	B	A	N	D
				L	E	I			E	L	S			
M	E	T	A	L		E	S	S	A	Y		O	F	F
E	X	I	L	E			Y	E	S			P	O	E
S	T	R	I	N	G	O	R	C	H	E	S	T	R	A
A	R	E			E	L	I			E	R	E	C	T
S	A	D		S	E	D	A	N		R	I	D	E	S
			A	A	S			I	I	I				
C	H	A	M	B	E	R	E	N	S	E	M	B	L	E
L	A	T	T	E		O	V	E	N		A	R	I	D
A	R	M	O	R		M	E	A	T		R	A	N	G
P	E	S	O	S		A	R	M			K	N	E	E

Sudoku

Fill in the blank cells using numbers 1 to 9. Each number can appear only once in each row, column, and 3x3 block. Use logic and process of elimination to solve the puzzle.

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S SUDOKU

1	9	4	8	7	3	2	6	5
3	7	5	9	2	6	4	1	8
2	6	8	5	1	4	3	7	9
6	4	3	1	9	2	5	8	7
7	5	9	6	4	8	1	3	2
8	1	2	7	3	5	6	9	4
4	3	6	2	8	9	7	5	1
5	8	7	4	6	1	9	2	3
9	2	1	3	5	7	8	4	6

	2	8		7			4	
		7			2	8		9
		3		6			5	
	7	9						
	6	5	3		8	9	7	
						2	3	
	8			5		4		
5		6	7			1		
	3			2		5	8	

Newsday Crossword

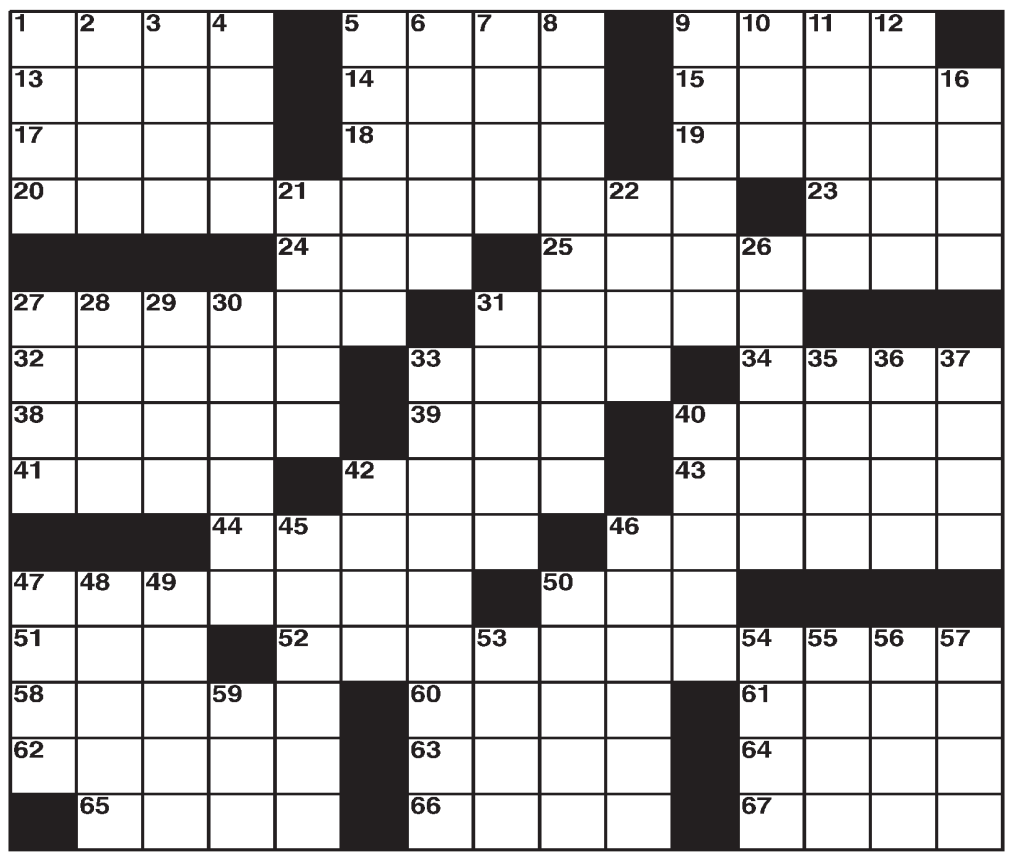
SEIZE YOUR FOOD by Sally R. Stein
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ACROSS

1 Karate move
5 Blend together
9 Beach surface
13 Tailor's borders
14 Above
15 Boy Scout group
17 Part of the eye with color
18 Assistant
19 Make amends
20 Fluffy circus snack
23 At this very moment
24 Encountered
25 Lunar surface features
27 Gadget
31 Snow's color
32 All gone, as a meal
33 Ocean liner
34 Close to
38 With 39- and 40-Across, Tex-Mex stew
39 See 38-Across
40 See 38-Across
41 Banish
42 Naval lockup
43 Pungent burger topping
44 Neighborhoods
46 Totally focused (on)
47 Cake beside a sink
50 Envelope insert: Abbr.
51 Earth-friendly prefix
52 Spread for a bagel
58 Spare-tire locale
60 Triple-decker cookie
61 Sword fight
62 Smooth transition
63 Locate
64 Chapters of history
65 Mailed away
66 Gradually vanish
67 Aroma detector

DOWN

1 Stylish
2 Long sandwich
3 Don't include
4 Soft "Hey you!"
5 __ and groaned
6 Expel from a residence
7 __ charmed life (was very fortunate)
8 Making thoroughly wet
9 Patronize, as a hotel
10 With 27-Down, retro design style
11 Nary a soul
12 Charity contributor
16 Church seats
21 Middle Easterner from Muscat
22 Faucet flaw
26 Apartment dweller
27 See 10-Down
28 Honolulu's island
29 Big name in elevators
30 River-mouth formations
31 Start of many *Jeopardy!* answers
33 Remove, as windshield ice
35 A Great Lake
36 Author unknown: Abbr.
37 Apartment payment
40 Spiral-shaped beach shell
42 Beast seen by Goldilocks
45 NASA launch
46 Written __ (encrypted, as a message)
47 Wagers
48 Land measures
49 Red cosmetic
50 Make corrections to
53 Operatic solo
54 Genesis garden
55 Money in Spain
56 Caribbean and Mediterranean
57 "If all __ fails..."
59 Woman in a convent



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BALLOT MEASURE

FROM PAGE 5

communicate with his family during a sister's health crisis emergency, Nunez found himself threatened with a write-up for failing to report to work.

Nunez said he looks forward to a grassroots approach with heightened focus on educating constituents in smaller counties across the state. "I think it really comes down to having people within proximity to those areas and having them really do local education with city council members, with board of supervisors, and trying to see if we can get them in support early."

Another advocate, Sam Brown of the emotional skills nonprofit 10P Program, served 25 years of an indeterminate life sentence and worked as a health care facilities maintenance technician inside Lancaster prison in 2020. At the very onset of COVID outbreaks, Brown's supervisors pushed him to clean infected cells without any personal protective equipment or understanding of the disease's prolific viral spread.

When he tried to refuse for his own safety, Brown says they threatened to write him up with a rules violation report — documentation that would have directly derailed his hopes to gain parole. He worked against his will rather than suffer the consequences of potentially extending his incarceration for years.

"Those rules violations reports are the modern day whip," said Brown. "As of right now, it's like California elected to keep slavery on the books. Some people did it intentionally. Some people didn't do it intentionally — because, you know, the law was muddled in obscurity or vagueness, so to speak, and it confused them."

Just like Nunez, Brown also said he's eager to see the revised proposal move forward to overcome the obstacles that arose in 2024, including the well-funded crime measure Prop. 36 that overshadowed the anti-slavery proposal.

"We didn't have the finances nor the celebrity power to raise a lot of awareness," he said. "I also feel like there was a silent strong opposition because Prop. 36 and Prop. 6 kind of got conflated. There was so much big money from Home Depot, Walmart, Target, the whole Republican Party, the correctional officers' union… Everybody supported Prop. 36."

Looking ahead, Wilson says she's optimistic that California's political environment will be more favorable in two years.

"In 2026, we're on the gubernatorial election — so it is very California focused." she said. "It's not nationally focused but very focused on what is best for California. So at the same time we're talking about 'What is best in California leadership?' Well, what is best for it in policies and our constitution? Do we wanna be anti-racism, anti-slavery?"

Joe Garcia is a California Local News fellow.

SCHOOL

FROM PAGE 7

staffer at the student aid commission told California lawmakers last year that the state application may need to take a larger role in handling student financial aid if the federal immigration climate changes — a subtle nod to Trump.

Two new state bills may help, Gonzales and other commission officials said. One would extend the state aid deadline to April 3. Another would allow more Californians to use the CADAA. Both bills are in their early stages, though the extension legislation could move quickly: Lawmakers last March rushed to extend the deadline for state grants to address that year's tech-related federal application mishaps.

"We have examples of families who actually have chosen not to submit the FAFSA application, and have opted instead for the CADAA," said Marcos Montes, policy director for Southern California College Attainment Network, a coalition of nonprofits that helps students apply for college and financial aid. He said that's what counselors in the network told him who specifically work with families living in public housing.

Montes said most mixed-status families he's encountered who are foregoing FAFSA are those applying for financial aid for the first time. They're less familiar with the process and are more hesitant to share information with the federal government, especially if they've submitted few, if any, personal records to federal authorities.

"They do realize that they're leaving financial aid money on the table," he said.

FEDERAL ROLE UNCLEAR, LOSS OF MONEY COULD BE STEEP

There are many unknowns about Trump's plans for student financial aid data, but Montes listed several new developments that he and his college access colleagues find concerning. One is billionaire Elon Musk's group, called Department of Government Efficiency, that reportedly gained access to student loan records. Last week the undergraduate student association of the University of California sued the Trump administration to halt Musk's group's access to student financial aid files. In response, the U.S. Department of Education on Wednesday said it would temporarily block Musk's group from accessing those files, a move the federal judge overseeing the case approved. That deal will last until at least Feb. 17. Another worry is that the federal Department of Homeland Security, which includes immigration enforcement agencies, has asked officials at the Internal Revenue Service for help removing individuals who are in the country illegally, The Washington Post reported this week. It's another indication of how immigration enforcement is pairing with outside agencies, Montes said. For students who've already applied for federal financial aid in past years or whose parents have submitted tax returns, the federal government already has their information. That's what the University of California is explaining to students. "If your family has submitted this information in the past, it may continue to be accessible to those same government agencies," the university wrote on a page for students. "Submission of a FAFSA, in this case, may not increase the amount of information about your family that is already accessible to the federal government. However, if your family has not had any data exchanged in these or other spaces, then submission of a FAFSA may present new information on the status of your family." A UC advisory group in December calculated that if every student with undocumented family members opted out of federal aid by only completing the state application, $85 million in grants alone would go unused. "The University of California does not have the resources to backfill for $85 million in missing federal Pell Grants, much less any lost access to federal student loans or work-study," wrote Stett Holbrook, a UC spokesperson, in a statement to CalMatters.



TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 18

SOCIAL SERVICE ASSISTANCE

9:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. Virginia Avenue Park, 2200 Virginia Ave. Trained community health workers with Providence St. John's Community Health Program can assist with enrollment in CalFresh, the state of California's food subsidy program created to improve the nutrition of families through access to healthy foods. Staff can also help navigate enrollment or questions for MediCal or Medicare. You can make an appointment by calling 310-458-8688, drop-ins are also welcome.

TUESDAY TALES

10:30 - 11 a.m. The Annex, Pico Branch Library, 2201 Pico Blvd. This fun and engaging weekly series features stories, songs and rhymes, traveling to a different library location each week. Free tickets are available at 10:15 a.m. For ages 2-5.

COMMUNITY GARDEN VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

3:30 - 5 p.m. Civic Center Parking Structure, 333 Civic Center Dr. Come join volunteer efforts with the Santa Monica Community Garden Program. From navigating the online registration and other requirements, to identifying opportunities and accessing your account to track your service, to figuring out when and where you would like to best serve. For questions. Contact Isabel Filson at Isabel.Filson@santamonica.gov.

ART & THE FEMININE GAZE

6:30 - 9:30 p.m. NeueHouse Venice Beach, 73 Market St., Venice. Pioneering feminist surrealist Penny Slinger will explore her revolutionary artistic vision, and an intergenerational panel of women artists will discuss the feminine perspective in contemporary art, followed by a cocktail reception and raga performance by Liberate Elemental Forces. Free for Frieze Pass Holders and NeueHouse Members. For more information, email lailani@pr-dept.com.

MYSTERY & THRILLER BOOK GROUP

7 - 8 p.m. Virtual. This community-led, monthly book discussion group meets virtually to discuss domestic and international titles in the mystery and thriller genres. To register, email library@santamonica.gov. This month's selection is "Harlem Shuffle" by Colson Whitehead.

AN EVENING WITH KRISTIN HANNAH

8 - 9:15 p.m. John Adams Middle School Performing Arts Center, 1630 Pearl St. Kristin Hannah will discuss her writing life and the occasion of the 10th anniversary of her novel "The Nightingale." Ticket plus signed copy of the book $55. To purchase, visit: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/kristin-hannah-with-brooke-baldwin-tickets-1012431890037.

WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 19

BOBA WITH BADGES

4 - 6 p.m. Dr. T House, 1709 Pico Blvd. Join SMPD at Dr. T House for bubble tea with the police. No agenda or speeches, just an informal opportunity to ask questions, discuss public safety concerns and get to know the officers and neighbors in your community.

FREE WALK-IN LEGAL CLINIC

4:30 - 7 p.m. Virginia Avenue Park, 2200 Virginia Ave. Santa Monica residents can meet one on one with a lawyer from Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles for help with housing issues. Immediate assistance is available by calling LAFLA directly at 800-399-4529 or visit lafla.org/gethelp.

PLANNING COMMISSION

6 p.m. City Council Chambers, Santa Monica City Hall, 1685 Main St. Established in 1946, the Planning Commission envisions Santa Monica as a city of wellbeing, sustainability, and equity, and seeks to balance the many needs and priorities within our community in accordance with the City's General Plan and Specific Plans. The Commission acts through open and civil discourse that is informed by public input, impartial analysis, and best practices in land use and planning.

THURSDAY | FEBRUARY 20

POST-FAIR 2025

11 a.m. - 8 p.m. 1248 5th St. Post-Fair is the pilot edition of an alternative three-day art fair. The fair will feature 29 local, national and international galleries and project spaces. Also takes place Feb. 21 and 22 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tickets $10, to purchase visit: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/post-fair-2025-tickets-1127982970429.

LEGO CLUB

4 - 5 p.m. Youth Activity Room, Santa Monica Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd. Join in the popular LEGO club, explore the limits of your building imagination or try out one of the suggested builds. All materials provided. For ages 18 months - 11 years old.

LIBRARY LOVERS' MONTH

4 - 5 p.m. Santa Monica Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd. Stop by one of these pop-ups and write al love letter to the library and receive a special Library Lovers' Month token of appreciation, while supplies last.

RECREATION AND PARKS COMMISSION

6 - 8 p.m. City Council Chambers, Santa Monica City Hall, 1685 Main St. The Commission shall act in an advisory capacity to the City Council and Director of Community Services in all matters pertaining to public recreation including playgrounds, music and entertainment. The Commission will consider the budget of the Community and Cultural Services Department and make recommendations to the City Manager and the City Council.

MONTANA BRANCH BOOK GROUP

6 - 7:30 p.m. Montana Branch Library, 1704 Montana Ave. This community-led monthly discussion group meets in person at the Montana Branch to discuss a mix of fiction and nonfiction titles, often on topics chosen from current events. To register, email library@santamonica.gov. This month's title is "Master Slave Husband Wife" by Ilyon Woo.

AUSTIN NASSO'S COMEDY METAVERSE

8 - 9:30 p.m. Illusion Magic Lounge, 1418 4th St. Austin Nasso, a former Microsoft software engineer turned full-time comedian and impressionist, bringing a fresh perspective to the comedy world with his tech-savvy humor and impeccable impressions. Tickets $34, to purchase visit: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/austin-nassos-comedy-metaverse-tickets-1226944346569.

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