



Water flows down Chollas Creek on Feb. 6 near National Avenue in San Diego. In the wake of floods on Jan. 22, the city has been working to clear segments of flood channels that have not been maintained in years. **NELVIN C. CEPEDA — U-T PHOTOS**

Dozens of San Diego flood channels behind in upkeep

38 sites get needed maintenance after January deluge — the most in a single year, records show

By Kristen Taketa

San Diego is finally clearing dozens of flood channels that it says have sorely needed maintenance for years, only after the Jan. 22 flooding overwhelmed city channels and destroyed many homes.

But the rare blitz of maintenance still leaves dozens of other channel segments that have not been touched in at least more than a decade, city records show.

San Diego's stormwater department is maintaining 38 out of its more than 120 flood channel segments in the aftermath of the January storm — more than it ever has in a single year, according to city records. "Our focus now is on maintaining channels in advance of the remainder of the rainy season," said Ramon Galindo, spokesperson for the department, in an email.

Among those getting maintenance are most, though not all, of the flood channel segments that make up Chollas Creek and its tributaries.

The degree of emergency maintenance for each segment varies depending on its post-storm condition. The city said it completely cleared some

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The area near Valeta Street and Famosa Boulevard in Point Loma on Wednesday in San Diego is another place where the city is behind in maintenance.

U.S. says Israel has agreed to cease-fire outline

Hamas has not yet committed to deal; airdrops of aid begin

By Wafaa Shurafa & Samy Magdy

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Israel has essentially endorsed the framework of a proposed Gaza cease-fire and hostage release deal, and it is now up to Hamas to agree to it, a senior Biden administration official said Saturday, the same day the U.S. began airdropping humanitarian aid directly into Gaza.

International mediators have been working for weeks to broker a deal to pause the fighting before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins around March 10.

A deal would likely allow aid to reach hundreds of thousands of desperate Palestinians in northern Gaza who aid officials worry are under threat of famine.

The Israelis "have more or less accepted" the proposal, which includes the six-week cease-fire as well as the release by Hamas of hostages considered vulnerable, which includes the sick, the wounded, the elderly and women, said the official.

"Right now, the ball is in the court of Hamas and we are continuing to push this as hard as we possibly can," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House to brief reporters.

Officials from Israel and from Hamas did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

A senior Egyptian official said

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ARTS + CULTURE

This summer at The Shell

As it enters its fourth summer season, the San Diego Symphony's Rady Shell continues to build on its reputation as the perfect Southern California outdoor venue. Need proof? Look no further than this year's lineup, which includes everyone from Audra McDonald to John Legend to the Beach Boys, Jewel and Kool & The Gang. **E1**

Cardenas siblings still may wield influence

Despite felony pleas to theft, brother and sister retain political support

By Jeff McDonald & Tammy Murga

Felony guilty pleas, a state suspension of the company they ran and a pledge by the San Diego County Democratic Party chair to ban the firm from future business might normally spell the end for any political consultant.

But that simple maxim may not apply to Jesus and Andrea

Cardenas, the brother-and-sister co-defendants who admitted in Superior Court last week that they stole more than \$176,000 from state and federal taxpayers.

While a political comeback appears unlikely for Andrea Cardenas, who quit the Chula Vista City Council before pleading guilty to grand theft charges, she and her older brother may still wield influence in elections and public



Jesus Cardenas



Andrea Cardenas

policy behind the scenes.

Even after Andrea Cardenas was charged with seven felonies, for example, a new political committee spent tens of thousands of dollars supporting her re-election and attacking her main rival, campaign disclosures show.

"That's how politics works — on relationships and trust," said Lori Saldana, a retired educator and three-term state legislator who now serves on

the San Diego County Democratic Party Central Committee. "If you break relationships with people, even for good cause, then others don't trust you."

More contributions continue to be made on behalf of incumbent office holders who were clients of Grassroots Resources, Jesus Cardenas' political consulting firm that was suspended by the California Franchise Tax Board two-plus years ago. It is unclear whether Jesus Cardenas is directing political work.

Neither Jesus nor Andrea

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High-speed rail back in San Diego's sights

New push behind system invigorates plans for project that was born here

By David Garrick

New momentum behind California's long-delayed high-speed rail system, including a \$3.1 billion federal grant, has prompted state and local officials to dust off tentative routing maps for San Diego created 13 years ago.

Routing for the San Diego leg of the system won't be finalized until construction is complete on the system's first phase, connecting San Francisco and Los Angeles



Work continues in January on building high-speed rail in Fresno County. San Diego's plans for its leg of the project are being revived. **CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY**

— currently slated for sometime in the 2030s. But tentative maps created back in 2011 envision two possible routes through the county that both end at San Diego

International Airport, an idea that could dovetail with more recent plans to bring local mass transit to the airport.

The need to revamp the

coastal rail line linking San Diego to Los Angeles because of eroding bluffs has prompted some to suggest high-speed rail could be a solution — but state officials say that's unlikely.

Interstate 15, not Interstate 5, has long been the preferred path of entry into San Diego County for the state's eventual high-speed rail system, they said last week.

To one local official, known to some colleagues as "the mother of high-speed rail," it's ironic that San Diego is being left out of the first phase of California's high-speed rail construction, since it was

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STEVEN P. DINKIN A PATH FORWARD

Potluck supper: Model of diversity in America

If you grew up in the Midwest, like I did, you know the appeal of a potluck supper. Beyond the scrumptious food, there is a sense of community as people come together to share a meal. Usually, there's someone in charge, lest there be too many Jell-O salads or tater tot hot dishes (both Midwestern favorites).

Eboo Patel, the founder and president of the nonprofit Interfaith America, thinks of America as a potluck nation: a country that thrives when diverse individuals come together, make connections and contribute to the greater good. For a long time (since the 1780s, in fact), we've used the metaphor "melting pot" to describe America; to Patel, it implies that everyone must give up their distinctive identities to achieve a shared ideal. The whole point of a potluck, he says, is the diversity of dishes.

Patel has been chosen by the National Conflict Resolution Center as our 2024 National Peacemaker Award winner. He is the author of the book "We Need to Build: Field Notes for Diverse Democracy." In it, Patel

describes the potluck supper as a "civic space" that embodies and celebrates pluralism: a political philosophy that envisions the peaceful coexistence of people with different interests, beliefs and lifestyles, who engage one another with what Patel calls a "respect/relate/cooperate ethos." They govern together and share power.

Patel is part of a movement called the New Pluralists that believes America is on a precipice. There are people in communities across the country working together to tackle our most vexing issues, yet we are more divided than ever, "with many forces at work to exploit our differences, stoke anxiety, and fuel our worst impulses." Most of us, the New Pluralists believe, are exhausted by the prevailing "us versus them" culture and long for a better path forward.

NCRC's process for choosing a National Peacemaker honoree is painstaking. We look for a person or organization that is working to build bridges, who recognizes that disagreement (and even conflict) can provide opportunities for

greater insight and compassion. We also look for a spirit of optimism – a belief that America's brightest days are ahead.

In Eboo Patel, we found someone who checks these boxes – a builder whose work is grounded in proactive and positive engagement across difference. But Patel wasn't always a builder, as he describes in his book. As a student at the University of Illinois, he was an activist who believed that positive change could only occur by tearing down institutions on behalf of the oppressed.

Through a series of lessons, Patel learned about the importance of creating rather than condemning.

I recently had a chance to speak with our honoree as he was waiting to catch a flight at O'Hare Airport in Chicago. I asked him about the present moment and how it differs from 25 years ago. Patel believes our divisions are sharper today, more pronounced. Whereas in years past it was easy for us to focus on conflict "over there" – Northern Ireland, the Balkans, East Timor, Somalia – today, Americans need to focus

our attention on the divisiveness and conflict here at home.

Patel has written extensively about discord on college campuses. It's a space that NCRC knows well: For nearly two decades, we have worked with student leaders, faculty and administrators, giving them skills and strategies to deal with conflict by embracing difference, communicating with respect, and working collaboratively toward a common goal.

In a recent post that appeared on insidehighered.com, Patel shared his vision: that campuses become laboratories and launch-pads for pluralism. He said, "Even if your campus is not coming apart regarding the Middle East conflict, it may well do so around the politics of abortion or gun control, or events related to the upcoming election. Truth be told, a diverse democracy will have no shortage of issues that divide people."

Patel continued, "We need leaders with the knowledge and skills to make sure that people can disagree on some fundamental things while working together

on other fundamental things. We want students to be protesting respectfully on the quad, but we also need them to be working together to find cures for cancer in our laboratories and collaborating on new technologies in our engineering schools. The urgent need is cooperation across difference."

The dishes these student leaders, innovators and civic leaders bring to the potluck may be unique and some flavors may clash at times, but we all need to come to the supper and have space at the table. Patel's words reflect the spirit of a true Potluck Peacemaker.

NCRC's Peacemaker Awards dinner honoring Eboo Patel and other peacemakers will be held on Saturday, April 13, at 5:30 pm. For information, or to register, visit ncrconline.com.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com.

SMOLENS

From Page 1

California put a measure protecting abortion rights on the November ballot, as did other states. This year, more states are following suit in the fall.

As if the presidential election won't provide enough motivation for California voters in November, a measure will be on the ballot to remove language from the state constitution banning same-sex marriage. That prohibition, the result of a voter-approved initiative in 2008, was rendered moot by court decisions, but the language remains.

Critics of the November measure say those rulings have settled any question about whether same-sex marriage is legal. But the specter of a ruling like the Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade abortion protections in 2022 undercuts that argument.

Meanwhile, most incumbents at all levels won't have to break a sweat Tuesday, and some don't even have an opponent.

Arguably, the most competitive local candidate race this year is former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer's challenge of county Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer. But no one else is running, so there's not even a primary.

So it's not surprising a low turnout is expected Tuesday.

Paul Mitchell, vice president of Political Data Inc., studies voting trends and tracks the volume of incoming mail ballots. With caveats that late factors could change the trajectory, he speculated to Politico that only 29 percent of California's registered voters will turn in their ballots, falling below the current record low of 31 percent in the 2012 primary.

In a recent poll by the Public



Voters have plenty to look forward to with Tuesday's primary. **HOWARD LIPIN — U-T FILE**

Policy Institute of California, fewer than 4 in 10 voters said they are "extremely" (23 percent) or "very" (14 percent) enthusiastic about voting for president. That combined number dropped further (28 percent) when it came to voting for Congress.

But the poll suggests it's not so much voter ennui as enthusiasm delayed.

"84 percent say that voting in 2024 is 'very important' (85 percent Democrats, 86 percent Republicans, 78 percent independents)," the pollsters wrote.

For what it's worth, California is not alone. In Michigan's Tuesday primary, only 23 percent of registered voters participated, according to MLive.

Turnout in San Diego County has consistently surpassed the statewide turnout in primaries

for more than a decade. Local elections officials had been leaders in adopting more widespread voting by mail and the use of drop-off ballot boxes, among other innovations.

For Tuesday, the county Registrar of Voters Office is projecting a turnout of between 45 percent and 50 percent, according to spokesperson Antonia Hutzell. Countywide turnout for the 2020 presidential primary was 49.7 percent, owing in large part to the competitive Democratic contest.

Whatever the level of enthusiasm, there are elections of consequence on Tuesday with interesting dynamics. Here's a handful:

- San Diego mayor. This likely will determine whom incumbent Todd Gloria will face in

November. Social justice advocate Geneviève Jones-Wright and police Officer Larry Turner have more support and organization than the other challengers.

An independent committee for Gloria has been sending mailers to GOP voters urging the lone Republican on the ballot, Jane Glasson. The odds would be against whoever advances. But Jones-Wright or Turner could have enough campaign and media presence to force Gloria to respond to their challenges on law enforcement, homelessness, inequity concerns and other issues.

- 49th Congressional District. Similarly, the primary will decide which Republican takes on incumbent Democrat Mike Levin in the fall. The purple district straddling the San Diego-Orange

County line has become a battleground in recent years, but Levin has won three straight elections despite a big GOP push to move him out.

- U.S. Senate. Former Padres and Dodgers baseball icon Steve Garvey has brought Republican star power to what otherwise would have been essentially a Democratic primary. Other than during debates, Rep. Adam Schiff and Garvey are campaigning like they are the only two running, with apparent mutual interest in squeezing out Reps. Katie Porter and Barbara Lee in Tuesday's top-two primary.

- San Diego City Council District 4 special election. This could determine whether the council majority leans toward Gloria or is more likely to challenge the mayor depending on who prevails: Chida Warren-Darby, a Gloria aide, and Henry Foster III, chief of staff to former Councilmember Monica Montgomery Steppe. Steppe's election to the county Board of Supervisors created the vacancy. This one could go to November.

Yes, the primary may be low-key, but it's not insignificant. If you haven't voted yet, cast your ballot by Tuesday and help shape what the November election will look like.

What they said

Matthew Fowle of the University of Pennsylvania, who authored a study that concluded the mortality rate for unhoused Americans tripled over 10 years, via CalMatters.

"It's unlike any other mortality trend that we really see in demography. It's comparable to something like a natural disaster or war."

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SCENE



Albert and Armi Williams and Rockette and Rob Ewell at the fundraising gala on Jan. 27. **BRIAN KENT — ABM PHOTOGRAPHY**

San Diego Opera Ball for All

By U-T Staff

The San Diego Opera held its annual fundraising gala, Opera Ball for All, at the Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine on Jan. 27.

The evening was themed Wonders of the World. It began with a cocktail reception, followed by a dinner catered by Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine.

Performances of musical theater and opera arias were presented by tenor Dongwhi Tony Baek, accompanied by Bruce Stasyna, the opera's conductor in residence and chorus master. Attendees also danced to the music of NRG.

The event raised nearly \$650,000 for future productions and education and community programs of the San Diego Opera.

If your organization has held an event, you're welcome to email a high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduniontribune.com.

Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer's name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.

KERBER

From Page 1

Furthering women's rights, diversity, and inclusion are top priority — a focus she made clear in her first public statement. "All programs and services offered by (the consulate) will aim to place women at the center of decisions, promoting their independence, autonomy, and empowerment," she said in the message Monday.

Kerber, a lawyer from Mexico's Universidad Iberoamericana with a master's degree and doctorate in international law from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, began her foreign service career in 1991.

Since then, she has worked on the issue of women's rights, both in diplomacy and for immigrant women. Kerber was also part of the team that started Mexico's Human Rights Commission in 1992.

She praised Mexico's recent attention to women's issues — in 2020, Mexico's Foreign Ministry announced that Mexico would become the first Latin American country to adopt a "feminist foreign policy" to accelerate efforts toward gender equality.

'An obstacle course'

Still, she acknowledged that promotion within the Foreign Ministry is not easy for women. "It's an obstacle course for everyone," she said "But it's one that we women run backwards and in our heels."

Kerber recalled that in her early days, women were asked to assist at international meetings, but mostly as hostesses, while men performed more important duties.

She said she is part of a genera-

tion that wanted to remove barriers for the women who came after. "Without knowing what the concept of sorority was, we started working with an eagerness to really support each other, but also, to push for the new generations."

Kerber, who reached the rank of ambassador in 2022, was nominated for the post by Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in April 2023.

She left her previous post as Mexican consul general in Houston in June — she was the first woman to lead that office in 100 years — and, pending confirmation in the six months that followed, began a collaboration with Rice University on a study of women in diplomacy, Kerber said.

Among the findings in the report, which she said is nearing completion, is evidence that women continue to lag behind in the foreign service. In Mexico, 24 percent of ambassadors are women, versus nearly 31 percent in the U.S. and 46 percent in Canada, according to the preliminary report.

In 2018, during her time as Mexican consul in Kansas City, she created the first Women's Comprehensive Care Window — Ventanilla de Atención Integral a la Mujer — to provide specialized assistance to migrant women. The program offers legal advice and information about health and education services, among other assistance.

The program later expanded to all 53 Mexican consulates in the U.S., as well as Mexican embassies around the world.

Kerber said the consulate will continue to be a voice and advocate for border issues, including pollution and border-crossing

times. "There's a lot we can do," she said. "We have all the tools, contacts, direct communication with officials, and that's why we want to make ourselves available to the community."

In January, Mexico started construction of a much-needed treatment plant in San Antonio de los Buenos, just south of the San Diego-Tijuana border, which officials said will reduce sewage discharges. But there is still work to be done.

"It is certainly a situation that concerns both governments," said Kerber, who vowed constant communication with the federal government on the issue.

She said she would also keep an eye on border crossings, both northbound and southbound, as it is one of the main issues on the binational agenda. Late last year, border commuters going into Mexico started reporting longer-than-expected delays.

Kerber highlighted the work of two of her predecessors — Ambassadors Marcela Celorio, who served from 2016 to 2019, and Carlos González Gutiérrez, who just started his new role as consul general in Los Angeles — and said she was lucky to call them friends and ask for their advice.

"This binational region between Tijuana and San Diego is a small laboratory of what should be, or is, the U.S.-Mexico relationship," she said. "We can implement small-scale programs here that can be successful and be replicated on a bilateral level."

Kerber will be the fourth woman to lead the Mexican Consulate in San Diego, according to the consulate.

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