



# The San Diego Union-Tribune

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Frank Hatmaker, 17, left, Mannix Gonzalez, 18, and Sadie Mascorro, 18, talk during class at Mountain Empire High School in May in Pine Valley. Gonzalez filmed a documentary about the school's failing facilities in hopes of helping future students. ANA RAMIREZ / U-T PHOTOS

## Asylum limits spark debate, dispute

Critics say policy blocks too many with viable cases

By Hamed Aleaziz  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — In the months since President Joe Biden imposed sweeping restrictions on asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border, the policy appears to be working exactly as he hoped and his critics feared.

The number of people asking for haven in the United States has dropped by 50 percent since June, according to new figures from the Department of Homeland Security. Border agents are operating more efficiently, administration officials say, and many of the hot spots along the border have calmed.

The numbers could provide a powerful counternarrative to what has been one of the Biden administration's biggest political vulnerabilities, particularly as Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, tries to fend off Republican attacks.

But migrant activists say Biden's executive order is weeding out far too many people, including those who should be allowed to have their cases heard, even under the new rules. They say the figures are so low in part because of a little-noticed clause in the new policy, which changed how migrants are treated when

See **ASYLUM** on Page A9

## One rural school district's battle to keep its kids safe

East County's Mountain Empire struggles for funding amid crumbling infrastructure

By Kristen Taketa  
UNION-TRIBUNE

There are certain things Mannix Gonzalez will remember from his four years at Mountain Empire High School.

Rain hitting his head in class. Showering in his shoes because the locker room drains overflowed. School being canceled for water pump failures, drinking water contamination and wildfire evacuations. The wind wearing away the school walls to little more than thin plywood.

All his life, Mannix attended school in the vast Mountain Empire Unified School District in rural East County.

Since he was a toddler, this has been home for the redhead with a black cap and a frankness that makes adults laugh and think.

Both of his parents work for the school district — his mom as an executive assistant, his dad as a maintenance technician. He has friends here; he appreciates his teachers.

But Mountain Empire's facilities  
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The outer layer of Mountain Empire High School's walls has been peeled away by the wind. These walls are supposed to be the school's defense against wind, fire and earthquakes.

## Officials: Ex-C.V. politician faces new scrutiny

Andrea Cardenas set to be sentenced this week for grand theft

By Jeff McDonald & Tammy Murga  
UNION-TRIBUNE

She served less than a single term on the Chula Vista City Council before pleading guilty to stealing more than \$200,000 in state and federal funds and resigning in disgrace.

Now Andrea Cardenas is scheduled to be sentenced this week before a San Diego Superior Court judge who will decide whether the former politician will serve time behind bars or pay her debt to society through a combination of probation and fines.

Earlier this year, Cardenas' brother, political consultant Jesus Cardenas, admitted to the same pair of felonies and was sentenced to 45 nights in a halfway house and two years probation.

Jesus Cardenas was also permitted to continue with his political consulting business, against the recommendation of county prosecutors, who also recommended he spend six months in San Diego County jail.

But several recently released public records raise questions about whether Andrea and Jesus Cardenas may have continued some of the same business practices that jump-started the investigation that led to a dozen felony

See **CARDENAS** on Page A10

## Upheaval from January floods continues

Seven months after disaster, it's unclear how many residents have fallen through the cracks

By Emily Alvarenga  
UNION-TRIBUNE

Seven months after thousands of families were displaced by historic floods, some are back home. Others have become homeless. And nobody's quite sure how many.

City agencies and community organizations have tried to ensure every family is accounted for. But many are certain that hundreds of families have fallen through the cracks.

"There's a lot of legwork that has to be done to case-manage each individual situation," said Azucena Valladolid, the San Diego Housing Commission's executive vice president of rental assistance and workforce development. "These families have a variety of barriers that are making it extremely challenging to secure housing."

Some of those left homeless by the floods are living on the streets. Others are couch-surfing.

And then there are those who never left their destroyed homes. Many people are still living in gutted homes, surrounded by



Paula Silva, 41, gave her El Cajon hotel room one last look before checking out earlier this year. She, her husband and their daughter are now living with their two dogs in a shelter in San Diego, months after they were displaced by the Jan. 22 floods. NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T FILE

construction or mold, simply because they couldn't find anywhere else to go.

A total of 2,400 households — nearly all in communities where flood insurance coverage is low — were impacted by the floods. Nearly 8,000 people were affected, and thousands displaced.

At its peak in March, the county was sheltering 2,600 people across 68 hotels through its temporary lodging program. Even when it ended in June, more than 300 households were still participating.

But it's unclear what has happened to all of them since. Government agencies aren't tracking that data. Homeless services providers may not be, either — most generally do not ask such specific intake questions and rely only on voluntarily shared information.

Of those more than 300 families that were still counting on county housing support when the program ended, most were from the city of San Diego.

The San Diego Housing Commission managed to connect  
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STEVEN P. DINKIN A PATH FORWARD

# Reminiscing about travels as summer comes to an end

The end of summer brings a jumble of emotions. We find ourselves missing the longer, slower days and at the same time filling with back-to-school anticipation — even if it has been a while since our own (or our kids') school days.

Suddenly, too, the Nov. 5 presidential election feels more real.

For most Americans, summer is synonymous with travel. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported that 82 percent of adults in the United States — more than 212 million people — planned a summer getaway this year.

The U.S. is the world's largest travel market at more than \$1 trillion in annual spending. Normally, domestic travel represents 70 percent of that total, but there has been a recent surge in Americans taking international trips delayed by the pandemic.

Not everyone has been happy to see us.

More than 3,000 people demonstrated against tourist overcrowding in Barcelona, Spain, seeking new policies to curb tourism. Among their tactics, protesters wielded water guns, dousing visitors. Signs declared, "Tourists go home. You are not welcome."

In Tokyo, a barrier was erected to block a popular view of Mount Fuji after residents complained about streams of unruly travel-



A tourist walks in a colonnade of Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic. MICHAEL PROST / AP

ers. It came down Aug. 15, ahead of a typhoon.

A recent survey conducted by Pew Research Center found that roughly half of Americans have traveled abroad, visiting between one and four other countries. An additional 26 percent of us are considered globe-trotters who have visited five countries or more.

Nontravelers (23 percent of us) have never left the United States; most of the people in this group said they would travel abroad if the opportunity presented itself.

I was unsurprised by this finding from Pew: Americans who have traveled internationally think differently about the world.

They are more interested in and knowledgeable about foreign affairs; feel closer to other people, from all different cultures; and favor a more active foreign policy.

Beyond the differences Pew cited, foreign experiences have a direct linkage to creativity, says Adam Galinsky, the Paul Calello Professor of Leadership and Ethics at the Columbia Business School. They increase our ability to make deep connections between disparate forms and jump between different ideas, both components of creative thinking.

But there is more to this linkage than simply being abroad, Galinsky says: "The key, critical process is multicultural engagement,

immersion and adaptation. Someone who lives abroad and doesn't engage with the local culture will likely get less of a creative boost than someone who travels abroad and really engages in the local environment."

In 1986, I found myself immersed in the culture of Niger, West Africa, as a Peace Corps volunteer. I was there for two years.

When I first applied to the Peace Corps, I thought it was all about creating sustainable change abroad, in traditional areas like education, health and agriculture. As my experience unfolded, I realized that two other goals were of equal, if not greater importance: to promote a better understanding of other

people on the part of Americans and a better understanding of Americans among the people served.

As a volunteer, I learned about the country and people of Niger. Over the years, I have shared countless stories about my experiences with family, friends and colleagues, shifting their perceptions about what it means to live in a developing world. In a similar way, I know my time in Niger helped cast Americans in a different light.

And apparently, I made a difference in at least one life. Out of the blue, I recently received a message from one of my eighth-grade students in Niger, who found me via Facebook. He must be 50 years old by now. Our reconnection has sparked an ongoing dialogue. We share what's happening in our respective lives. It is very different in Niger now; last summer, the military seized power, disrupting the system of government. His insights give me greater understanding of the situation on the ground.

My time in Niger yielded

other important lessons. I learned how easy it is to mischaracterize different cultures and make assumptions, leading to bias and discrimination, left unchecked. It's informed my work at the National Conflict Resolution Center, where we provide tools and strategies for overcoming bias — starting with a simple acknowledgment that it is part of being human, rooted in our own experiences and upbringing.

In the spirit of back to school, I propose we change the three R's of education (reading, writing, arithmetic) to three R's and one T, for travel. In the words of St. Augustine, "The world is a book, and those who don't travel only read one page."

Steven P. Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based organization that is working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit [ncrconline.com](http://ncrconline.com).

## JAIL

From Page 1

respondent was aware of patient A's withdrawal from those substances, she simply provided absolutely no treatment for the withdrawals as required by the standard of care," the decision says.

"Respondent also failed to provide any evaluation of Patient A with blood tests and EKG to evaluate her or provide any treatment plan for Patient A," it adds. "As a direct result of those failures, Patient A died from a lack of treatment for withdrawal."

Gilmore failed to appear at the hearing and offered no evidence to rebut or explain the accusation, the medical board decision dated Aug. 16 says.

The physician also was ordered to pay just under \$30,000 toward the cost of the investigation.

Two jail healthcare providers were charged criminally in relation to Serna's death, but Gilmore was not one of them.

Dr. Friederike Von Lintig and nurse Danalee Pascua each were charged with a single count of involuntary manslaughter in the aftermath of the death, which was recorded on graphic surveillance video and presented in court as part of the criminal case.

A Superior Court jury acquitted Pascua and could not reach a verdict against Von Lintig. Prosecutors declined to refile charges against the doctor and dismissed the case.

The medical board suspended Von Lintig's license; state nursing regulators filed an accusation against Pascua, but her license remains valid for now, records show.

Even though Gilmore was not charged by the District Attorney's Office, the state medical board saw her actions as detrimental to Serna's well-being. They began investigating and last year filed what's called an accusation against her.

The decision released publicly this week did not surprise Paloma Serna, Elisa's mother.

"Dr. Carol Gilmore had multiple chances to prevent

Elisa's tragic end, as did every other person who interacted with her," Paloma Serna said by email Friday.

"It was within Gilmore's responsibility to initiate the necessary protocols for alcohol and drug withdrawal," she added. "Elisa suffered a painful death that could have been avoided. A simple call to 911 or arranging her transfer to a hospital could have made a difference."

Paloma Serna also said: "My family and I find solace in the fact that Carol Gilmore will no longer be in a position to cause harm or loss of life."

Elisa Serna was 25 years old and five weeks pregnant when she died. Medi-

cal records from the five days she spent in custody before she died in custody show that neither deputies, nurses or doctors properly responded to her symptoms.

She was the 15th person to die in San Diego County jail in 2019.

More than 70 other people have died in Sheriff's Department custody in the years since, making San Diego County one of the deadliest local jail systems in the state.

**Police Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP)**

In 1992, the San Diego Police Department created a volunteer program now known as the "Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol" (RSVP). The focus of this program is to extend community-based services throughout the city.

The R.S.V.P. program helps promote community awareness and helps San Diego citizens feel safe. Volunteers perform vacation house checks, You Are Not Alone (YANA) checks, and other community crime prevention programs.

**Requirements:**

- Interest in working with law enforcement officers.
- Semi or fully retired, 50 years or older.
- Valid California driver's license.
- Available for patrol a minimum of 3 days a month.
- Pass a background check.
- Have no felony convictions.

**TRAINING:**

All Senior Volunteer Patrol applicants approved for the program will attend a formal two-week academy. Some of the training will include Alzheimer's, Safe Return, Crime Prevention, Department Orientation, Ethics and Rules of Conduct, Radio Training, and Traffic Control.

If you're interested in joining, please contact:

**Volunteer Services Unit**  
**Officer Mariam Sadri**  
 Email: [msadri@pd.sandiego.gov](mailto:msadri@pd.sandiego.gov)  
 Phone number: (619) 446-1016

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