



Are immigrant kids safe in S.D.'s schools? Districts look for answers

Trump administration rescinds policy limiting enforcement on campuses

By **Jemma Stephenson**
UNION-TRIBUNE

At a San Diego gathering on immigrant rights Friday, one community leader told California Attorney General Rob Bonta her legal center had gotten a call from a young girl.

When the leader later drove to see the girl's family, a woman opened the door and cried. Her family was in fear, she said in Spanish. She had not gone to work since Election Day. Her kids had not gone to school.

"And for us, Attorney General, these stories hit home every day — because for these farmworkers, if they don't work, they don't eat," recounted Luz Gallegos, the executive director of TODEC Legal Center in Perris, at the event at the Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans in City Heights.

"The kids are not going to school."

Across San Diego County, school leaders are trying to reassure and support immigrant students and families as the Trump administration sends troops to the border and expands immigration enforcement to once-protected locations like schools.

They're also still processing what the new executive orders could mean for their schools, their teachers and their students, and what changes they'll need to make. Experts caution that even the specter of immigration enforcement can have serious impacts on school attendance. And mistaken reports Friday of immigration enforcement at a Chicago school underscore

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The Chula Vista Millenia Library would be a big part of the undertaking of the Chula Vista Entertainment Complex, its founder said. **MEG MCLAUGHLIN / U-T**

He's young. And so's his company. He plans to make a media hub here

Could Chula Vista site, incentives put region back on map as Hollywood 2.0?

By **Tammy Murga**
UNION-TRIBUNE

Scores of local filmmakers, actors, photographers and everyone in-between gathered in Otay Ranch on a recent Sunday to hear about a plan to transform the region into a premier destination for media production.

And a big part of that undertaking stood before them: Chula Vista's newly built, floor-to-ceiling, glass-covered library complex on Millenia Avenue near Stylus Street.

Its top two floors will incubate the future of entertainment — or Hollywood 2.0. It will house post-production facilities, coworking spaces

and education programs. Across the street, a state-of-the-art, multi-stage virtual production studio will be built. The sites will allow major productions and independent creators to coexist and thrive. More than \$500 million will be generated over 10 years. That's all according to the project's visionary, Chula Vista Entertainment Complex.

"We're putting San Diego County back on the map as a powerhouse for media and innovation," said Aaron Roberts, the 31-year-old Scripps Ranch resident who founded CVEC in May.

Some questioned

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BUSINESS

Biotech leader passes his torch

After 25 years of helping to shape the region's life sciences sector, Joe Panetta recently stepped down from leading Biocom California and assumes a new role advocating for the San Diego biotech community. **C1**



NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T

A YEAR AFTER THE SAN DIEGO FLOODS



Vegetation grows in a flood channel on Bonilla Drive near University Avenue. San Diego's stormwater department's unfunded infrastructure needs total more than \$1.6 billion for the next four years. **HOWARD LIPIN / FOR THE U-T**

After disaster, issues with stormwater system persist

Dozens of flood channel segments have not been maintained in at least 14 years

By **Kristen Taketa & Jeff McDonald**
UNION-TRIBUNE

Last January's destructive floods highlighted the many problems that need fixing within San Diego's flood prevention system, problems that the city's stormwater department and residents alike have warned about for years.

But a year later, even after

the hardest-hit flood channels were cleared, many of those infrastructure problems persist and continue to leave San Diego vulnerable to flooding risk, department officials say.

The city's stormwater facilities are still underfunded and outdated, and not all of them are being maintained.

While the stormwater department cleared 18

FLOOD PREVENTION San Diego eyes green spaces to absorb, filter and manage water. Story, **B1**

miles of stormwater channels last year in the flooding aftermath — the most it has cleared in one year in recent history — dozens of channel segments across the city still have not been maintained in at least 14 years, recent city records show.

And the city is still behind on fixing or updating several known deficiencies in other stormwater facilities, such as its levees and drain pipes. Following through with more of the needed repairs and upgrades will prove difficult.

The stormwater department doesn't get nearly as

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Jose and Martha Navarro move wet furniture out of their Beta Street house after historic floods devastated parts of Southcrest in January 2024. They're home again but have paid a high price. **NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T PHOTOS**

Long after waters ebb, struggle to rebuild lives, homes goes on

Some fled a risky future. Some returned to restored houses. Others are still waiting



Martha Navarro is back home, but her insurance company will no longer offer flood coverage beginning in March. The price under a new plan will rise from about \$1,000 to between \$3,500 and \$5,000, she said.

By **Emily Alvarenga & Maura Fox**
UNION-TRIBUNE

When a fire ravages a community, its impacts are clearly visible. Its billows and haze of smoke are seen for miles, and its flames leave behind only charred hillsides and husks of homes.

The same can't be said of a flood. The water that surges into homes and forces residents onto roofs can just as quickly recede, leaving only mud, muck and trash within hours.

On Wednesday, thousands of San Diegans marked a year since historic floods decimated their communities, and for many of them, the depth of devastation has been mostly unseen. More than a thousand families were forced from their homes Jan. 22, 2024 — one of the city's wettest days on record — when waterways like Chollas Creek in Southcrest overflowed into neighborhoods.

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DIGITAL ACTIVATION

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STEVEN P. DINKIN A PATH FORWARD

As Los Angeles burns, attacks and blame spread

Some behaviors, like yawning and scratching, are socially contagious. If one person does it, others are likely to do likewise. Researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis have found that socially contagious behavior is hardwired in the brain.

In a similar way, San Diego felt terror and disbelief when wildfires began in Los Angeles County on Jan. 7. Not only are we geographically proximate — just 120 miles separate the two cities — we are well experienced in fire devastation.

The Cedar fire of October 2003 burned a staggering 273,246 acres, destroyed 2,820 structures and claimed 15 lives, including one firefighter. It was the largest wildfire in San Diego's history.

Then in October 2007, the Witch Creek and Guejito fires burned 197,990 acres, destroyed 1,711 structures and claimed two lives.

Simultaneously, the Harris fire ignited, burning 90,440 acres and taking five lives. These fires continue to remind us of the risks faced by residents here.

Indeed, fires dotted the county this month as Santa Ana wind events have come and gone.

In L.A. County, the winds stalled containment of the Eaton and Palisades fires, which have burned nearly 40,000 acres. The Hughes fire, which erupted last week, prompted additional evacuations and has charred more than 10,000 acres.

As the fires sprouted and spread, so, too, did the attacks and blame. On Jan. 10, Nellie Bowles of The Free Press enumerated what had gone wrong, saying “the collapse we’re seeing in Los Angeles is every California chicken coming home to every California roost.”

Bowles cited a 2022 decision by the L.A. County Fire Department to send a load of surplus gear to Ukraine. She

took aim at the department's focus on firefighter diversity, calling it their “main priority of late.” Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, Bowles said, made a wrongheaded decision to attend the inauguration of the incoming president of Ghana, ignoring pretrip fire warnings. The mismanagement of state water and fire abatement projects made matters worse, according to Bowles.

She summed it up as “an almost perfect catalog of the failures of progressive policies.”

She may very well be right: The ferocity of the fires demonstrates a need for myriad improvements and honest introspection. Accountability for what happened — from individuals and government agencies — is imperative, to restore the public's confidence in their safety. While this must occur, now is not the time.

Nor is it the time to play politics, by linking federal disaster relief funding to

policy changes, an uncommon practice. Several House Republicans from California — narrow victors in the November election — oppose the idea.

Instead, it's a time to draw on our shared humanity and show compassion — just as the country did in response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene last September. That storm swept through the southeast, taking more than 150 lives and resulting in property losses near \$50 billion.

As it happens, the affected states are Republican-led — but disasters, we have learned, are nonpartisan.

Many of us at the National Conflict Resolution Center have friends and family living in Los Angeles, some in areas directly affected by the fires. They are grieving the loss of life as they knew it, even if their homes still stand. That grief is compounded when they hear outsiders say that Angelenos deserve what

happened because they are godless, superficial, self-absorbed liberals.

The on-the-ground reality is very different. We are hearing stories of unity — neighbors helping neighbors, however they can and without conditions. One person told us about her frantic search for temporary housing when her family of four was evacuated from the fire zone. After finding a place, she reflected on her experience: How she voted in the last election didn't matter to the owner. It never came up in their conversation.

Aisha Counts at Bloomberg wrote last week about the outpouring of support for those impacted by the wildfires. More than \$200 million has been raised on GoFundMe, a crowdfunding website. FireAid, a benefit concert for fire victims, will take place Thursday, with musical performances at two L.A. venues. It will be broadcast

globally. Venture capitalists across California are also stepping up to raise funds.

Meanwhile, more than 1,000 people have volunteered to foster animals displaced by the fires. Julie Castle, the chief executive of Best Friends Animal Society (the nonprofit that coordinated efforts to clear local shelters to accommodate the surge in animals), said the response was nearly unprecedented. She told The Guardian, “It's been really sad and heartbreaking, but at the same time, it really does bring out the best in humanity.”

Let's hope the compassion is contagious — and enduring.

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.

COOKING

From Page 1

“I'm competing about myself in my last run, and that's it,” she said. “I have been training for this for a long time — without even knowing it — to reach the top of the podium in Lyon, and that's all I'm focused on. That's the biggest part of the competition, for me.”

De Palma grew up in the San Gabriel Valley city of Arcadia and attended Le Cordon Bleu cooking school in Pasadena.

After a three-month cooking internship in Italy, she moved to San Diego in 2007 and applied to Bradley for a pastry position at the recently opened Addison.

She gradually rose through the ranks of chef de partie, chef tournant, pastry sous-chef and sous-chef at Addison. In 2016, at age 27, she was promoted to chef de cuisine, the No. 2 position below Bradley.

She was by his side when the restaurant earned its first Michelin star in 2019, its second in 2021 and its third in 2022.

But even before Addison received its third star, De Palma had decided in early 2022 she was ready for a new challenge. A few months after she left the restaurant in 2023, she applied, and was accepted, to train with other aspiring American chefs for the Bocuse d'Or.

To help improve Team USA's chances in the global contest, the Ment'Or Foundation was formed in 2008 by chefs Jerome Bocuse, Daniel Boulud and Thomas Keller.

It provides professional mentorship and training to American chefs year-round, and it select and supports the Team USA competitors.

De Palma and Waddle have been tutored by head coach Sebastian Gibrand, who won a silver medal for Sweden in 2019. Team USA president is Gavin Kaysen. From 2004 to 2007, Kaysen was the executive chef at the



Team USA celebrates winning a gold medal at the Bocuse d'Or Americas competition last June in New Orleans. **KEN GOODMAN**

former El Bizcocho restaurant at the Rancho Bernardo Inn. In 2007, he competed for Team USA at the Bocuse D'Or and made it to the finals. Kaysen now lives with his family in Minneapolis, where he owns multiple restaurants.

In a recent interview on Instagram, coach Gibrand spoke about De Palma's competitive edge, saying: “Chef Stefani De Palma is supercommitted. She has the eye on the prize and she is so determined and knows exactly every inch of what she's doing.”

Ment'Or Executive Director Yong Jun said of De Palma: “She's extremely organized, she's very focused, she's, of course, talented, and when she's

focused she has her goal and she knows what she needs to do.”

Bocuse d'Or judges score the teams in the areas of tasting and cooking.

The tasting jury rates the candidates' creations based on criteria such as presentation, taste, cooking techniques, hygiene, respect for the products and the originality of the recipes.

And the kitchen jury examines the technical details as well as compliance with the rules.

Bradley, who will be watching the competition via livestream today and tomorrow, said he believes De Palma's intensive training in Napa and the many years she spent in multiple kitchen positions at Addi-

son have prepared her for the “uncharted waters” of competition.



Chef Stefani De Palma works side by side with the restaurant Addison's chef-director, William Bradley. **U-T FILE**

“I think they should do quite well,” he said of De Palma and Waddle. “Expectations are always high, as they are at every Bocuse d'Or, but overall, her family

at Addison are extremely proud of her and no matter what the outcome, she should hold her head up high. She has made us all proud.”

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