



The San Diego Union-Tribune

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MARKING TIME



Michael Moreno, 5, looks out toward his grandmother as he poses for a photo in front of a 2025 sign Monday in downtown Tijuana. Many people took photos in front of the sign as the year 2024 draws to a close. ALEJANDRO TAMAYO / U-T

Aiding illegal migrants draws warning

Group threatens county officials with potential legal risks

By Alexandra Mendoza

A conservative group led by a close ally of President-elect Donald Trump recently sent letters to nearly 250 elected officials in so-called sanctuary jurisdictions across the U.S. — including in San Diego County — warning of potential civil and criminal consequences for policies deemed protective of undocumented immigrants.

America First Legal Foundation, which is headed by Stephen Miller, Trump’s announced deputy chief of staff for policy and one of his top advisers, warned officials of what it said could be legal risks for “interfering with or impeding federal immigration law enforcement” and for “concealing, harboring, or shielding illegal aliens.”

The letter came two weeks after the San Diego County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution barring cooperation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, including aiding in the transfer of immigrant jail inmates.

“This resolution clearly violates federal law and subjects those who abide by it to significant risk of criminal and civil liability,” reads the Dec. 23 letter sent to board Chair Nora Vargas. “Accordingly, we are sending this letter to put you on notice of this risk and insist that you comply

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Sheriff’s Office disputes health care study

Women at Las Colinas jail cite lack of privacy, inadequate services

By Kelly Davis FOR THE UNION-TRIBUNE

The San Diego County Sheriff’s Office is pushing back on a recent study that found reproductive health care at the region’s only women’s jail to be lacking.

Conducted by the Urban Institute, a nonpartisan research organization, the study found that women incarcerated at Las Colinas Detention and Reentry Facility in Santee face numerous challenges when trying to access reproductive care, including significant delays in treatment,

deputies being present during examinations, inexperienced staff and what the study describes as “punishment and mistreatment” for seeking care.

“We found one recurrent story across all the types of reproductive health care services examined in this study, whether preventive care or support during pregnancy: that incarcerated people reported experiencing significant barriers in requesting care and lengthy delays in receiving care,” the authors concluded.

The Sheriff’s Office issued a statement in response to the study, arguing that the findings “are not complete or reflective of our standards and practices” and that researchers interviewed only 34 women at the jail, too small of a sample to be significant.

“The findings rely exclusively on subjective accounts that were not corroborated by medical records, staff testimony or independent verification,” the statement said.

The names of the women who participated in the study were not included in the report.

The statement said the department takes the report’s criticisms seriously “and are reviewing our practices to ensure consistent service delivery.”

An Urban Institute spokesperson told the Union-Tribune that the authors stand by their research and believe the women provided valuable insight into how reproductive health services at Las Colinas can be improved.

“We stand by the integrity and

independence of our research and recognize the importance of the perspectives it captures,” Shrita Hernandez said in an email. “Our team followed rigorous research standards and documented all limitations and context in the report.”

Hernandez said researchers were transparent with jail staff and Sheriff’s Office leadership. They had hoped to access medical records to corroborate accounts but failed to reach an agreement with the Sheriff’s Office over access to those records.

“We remain open to continued dialogue with the Las Colinas Detention and Reentry Facility and the San Diego County Sheriff’s Office to ensure the findings

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Residents remember Carter’s friendship, altruism

39th president draws praise for life dedicated to humanitarian works

By Alex Riggins UNION-TRIBUNE

When former Palomar College woodworking instructor Russ Filbeck was writing and researching his book about crafting chairs, he was struck with the idea to interview former President Jimmy Carter, who Filbeck knew was a craftsman himself.

Carol Filbeck teased her husband about the idea. You can’t just call up a former president, she told Filbeck.

But that’s essentially what Filbeck did in 2004, reaching out to the former president, who died Sunday at the age of 100, through The Carter Center, the foundation that he established after his presidency. The Carter Center is focused on promoting peace and human rights and eradicating diseases around the globe.

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Former President Jimmy Carter discusses his cancer diagnosis in Atlanta on Aug. 20, 2015. Carter redefined what an ex-president can do after departing the White House. KEVIN D. LILES / NYT FILE

Carter carved a new mold for former presidents in civilian life

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — President Jimmy Carter had no idea what he was going to do next when he delivered his farewell address to the nation in January 1981. Defeated after a single term by Ronald Reagan, he simply told Americans that he would leave the White House and “take up once more the only title in our democracy superior to that of president — the title of citizen.”

Forty-four years later, there is little question among historians

that Citizen Carter carved a new mold for life after the Oval Office and that his post-presidency was the most consequential in modern history. But his impact was felt more strongly overseas than at home — especially in the realm of public health.

One of Carter’s biggest and most lasting post-presidential accomplishments is also one of the most overlooked: the near total eradication of Guinea worm disease, a painful parasitic infection for which there is no treatment or vaccine. In 1986, it afflicted an estimated 3.5

million people, mostly in Africa and Asia. There were only seven reported cases through the first 10 months of 2024, according to the Carter Center, Carter’s human rights organization.

Carter first saw the devastating effects of the disease in 1988, in two villages near Accra, Ghana. “Once you’ve seen a small child with a 2- or 3-foot-long live Guinea worm protruding from her body, right through her skin, you never forget it,” he later wrote in The Washington Post.

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Social media in middle of speech quandary

President-elect vows to halt censorship that targets conservatives

By Cecilia Kang & Adam Satariano THE NEW YORK TIMES

President-elect Donald Trump and his allies have vowed to squash an online “censorship cartel” of social media firms that they say targets conservatives.

Already, Trump’s newly chosen regulators at the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission have outlined plans to stop social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube from removing content the companies deem offensive — and punish advertisers that leave less restrictive platforms like X in protest of the lack of moderation.

“The censorship and advertising boycott cartel must end now!” Elon Musk, the owner of X, whom Trump has appointed to cut the federal budget, posted on his site last month.

In Europe, social media companies face the opposite problem. There, regulators accuse the platforms of being too lax about the information

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DIGITAL ACTIVATION

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STEVEN P. DINKIN A PATH FORWARD

My gift to you: Tips to calm polarization in 2025

When Merriam-Webster dictionary announced its 2024 word of the year — “polarization” — our team at the National Conflict Resolution Center wasn’t a bit surprised. After all, it’s been a busy year for us: Companies, universities and nonprofit organizations across the U.S. have been in touch, searching for tools and strategies to navigate deepening polarization.

The 2024 presidential election only amplified the polarization phenomenon. As Anna Furman of The Associated Press wrote, many Americans went to the polls fearful of the opposing candidate. According to AP VoteCast (a survey of more than 120,000 voters), roughly 8 in 10 Kamala Harris voters were somewhat or very concerned that Donald Trump’s views were too extreme; 7 in 10 Trump voters felt the same way about Harris.

Merriam-Webster chooses its word of the

year based on page views, tracking a rise in search and usage. It defines polarization as “division into two sharply distinct opposites; especially, a state in which the opinions, beliefs, or interests of a group or society no longer range along a continuum but become concentrated at opposing extremes.”

Historian Heather Cox Richardson wrote last week about the use of polarization as a political tool. In 1970, she said, the Republican Party was worried about voter sentiment, following President Richard Nixon’s decision to send ground troops into Cambodia, rather than end the Vietnam War.

In the protests that followed, members of the Ohio National Guard fired into a crowd at Kent State University, killing four people. According to Cox Richardson, Nixon lost support from middle-class White Americans — a key demographic — when he claimed the protesters were

responsible for the shooting. To get out the vote for Nixon, his advisers used a strategy they called “positive polarization,” calling their opponents “lazy, dangerous and anti-American,” and stoking anger.

We need not succumb to the idea of polarization. It’s not inevitable, historical precedent aside. Each of us has the power to change the dynamic by changing how we act — even just a little bit. Polarization only works when there are enough willing participants.

So, here’s my gift to you: Five ways you can contribute to a less-polarized 2025:

• **Demonstrate “conversational receptiveness.”**

Scientific American coined this phrase to mean the extent to which people who disagree communicate a willingness to engage with each other. It means using language that signals your genuine interest in another’s perspective. Rather than trying to score points or change their mind, seek

understanding. (Perhaps ironically, when you appear more receptive in conversation, you are actually more persuasive, as parents of teenagers know.)

• **Check your bias.** Polarization is fueled by biases, which limit our thinking. Closely held beliefs about people on the “other side” are often wrong. When you overestimate differences — and conclude that your side is better than the other — you only add to the toxic stew, perhaps without realizing it. On the flip side of the bias coin, we naturally favor people who are like us and believe their perspectives. It may be comfortable but it’s imperfect, as each of us is multidimensional.

• **Remember our shared humanity.** In disagreement, you can find compromise and common ground — even if they seem elusive to start. (That premise is at the core of the mediation work we’ve been doing at NCRC for more than 40 years.) Humility helps, too.

I recall my conversation a few years ago with best-selling author and Harvard professor Arthur Brooks, after publication of his book “Love Your Enemies.” He talked about our “culture of contempt” — the habit of seeing people who disagree with us as worthless and defective, not just incorrect. “More alike than different” thinking can lessen polarization.

• **Curb your social media habit.** Social media has become a polarization accelerator — especially in its ability to stoke animus between people who disagree politically. As Christian Staal Bruun Overgaard and Samuel Woolley of the Brookings Institution wrote, this “affective” polarization, as it’s called, “threatens to undermine democracy itself” and underlies partisan standoffs on everything from vaccine policy to climate change. The average American over age 16 spends two hours a day on social media, yet half of us

feel pressed for time. Curb your social media habit has dual benefits.

• **Get out of your bubble.** These tips only contribute to change if you choose to engage with people whose beliefs and core values differ from your own. Lean into disagreement, which is part of our social fabric. Resolve in 2025 to interact with people who think differently, before the fear of holiday gatherings takes hold once again.

The word of the year is a sign of our times. My wish for the country is less polarization and more “w00t,” the 2007 word of the year. It’s an expression of joy.

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, go to ncrconline.com.

On average, DUI drivers test at least twice the legal limit

By Teri Figueroa
UNION-TRIBUNE

It’s a notable if not surprising statistic: Of the 7,500 blood samples from suspected drunken drivers that the sheriff’s crime lab tested over a recent 12-month stretch, the people who landed in handcuffs had an average blood-alcohol content of more than twice the legal limit of 0.08% for driving.

The crime lab analyzes DUI tests for 30 agencies in the region and processes several thousand cases a year.

It’s a lot. But earlier this week, the San Diego County Sheriff’s Office announced it had secured a nearly \$543,000 grant for its Regional Crime Laboratory,

earmarked toward efforts to fight impaired driving. The money is from the state’s Office of Traffic Safety.

The Sheriff’s Office will use this year’s grant money to fund two full-time criminalists in the lab, and those staffers will specialize in analyzing biological samples for drugs and alcohol.

Some of the grant money will go toward the final steps to bring drug toxicology testing in-house at the sheriff’s crime lab, which is slated to start sometime in January. Drug testing has long been outsourced.

Drugs alone cause impaired driving, but sometimes motorists couple drugs and alcohol. Among the DUI drivers who had at

least one additional impairing substance from October 2023 through September, the Sheriff’s Office said the average amount of alcohol in their blood was 0.14% — approaching double the legal limit. Most commonly detected in those samples were cannabis, cocaine, methamphetamine, alprazolam (often referred to by its brand name Xanax) and fentanyl.

This year’s grant is roughly \$25,000 more than the grant the crime lab received last year from the same source. Prior grants from the Office of Traffic Safety went toward expanding the crime lab’s testing capabilities with new equipment, training and staff.

Agencies to offer free rides on public transit tonight

By Caleb Lunetta
UNION-TRIBUNE

Train, trolley and bus rides throughout San Diego County will be free — and offered later — to riders on New Year’s Eve night, transit officials announced Monday.

In addition to providing rides at no cost, trolleys and trains will provide an extra late-night service, with final trains departing after 2 a.m., officials said. The no-cost services begin running after 6 p.m. today.

The program, offered by the North County Transit District and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System, is designed to encourage safe holiday travel for commuters during a time when impaired driving is relatively high, officials said.

The extended late-night service will affect downtown trolleys and the NCTD Coaster, officials said. There will be extended service between Escondido and Oceanside on the Sprinter, and free rides will be offered through NCTD+ in San Marcos from 6 to 9 p.m. with promo code “NYEFREE.”

“Whether you’re heading out to dinner, to a party or to watch some fireworks, let NCTD be your driver,” NCTD board of directors Chair Jewel Edson said. “We’ll get you to and from your destination, both safely and for free.”

Extra New Year’s Eve services include:

GREEN LINE TROLLEY

• Service will run every 30 minutes after 6 p.m. The last train from downtown San Diego to El Cajon departs at 2:06 a.m.

UC SAN DIEGO

BLUE LINE TROLLEY

• Service will run south to San Ysidro every 15 minutes (until 12:37 a.m.), and then every 30 minutes. Service will run north to UTC every 30 minutes. The last train from downtown San Diego to San Ysidro departs at 2:37 a.m. The last train from downtown San Diego to UTC departs at 2:19 a.m.

ORANGE LINE TROLLEY

• Service will run every 30 minutes after 6 p.m. The last train from downtown San Diego to El Cajon departs at 2:26 a.m.

COPPER LINE TROLLEY

• Service will run every 30 minutes. The last train to El Cajon departs Santee at 2:57 a.m. The last train to Santee departs El Cajon at 3:10 a.m.

COASTER SERVICE TO AND FROM SAN DIEGO

• Extra southbound train to depart Oceanside Transit Center at 10:36 p.m. Last northbound train to depart Santa Fe Depot at 1:20 a.m.

SPRINTER SERVICE BETWEEN OCEANSIDE AND ESCONDIDO

• Extra trips departing Oceanside Transit Center at 12:33 a.m., 1:33 a.m. and 2:33 a.m. Extra trips departing Escondido Transit Center at 11:33 p.m., 12:33 a.m. and 1:33 a.m.

Until 6 p.m. today, the transit agencies will operate a regular weekday service schedule, officials said.

Service hours today will follow a reduced Sunday schedule on all MTS and NCTD services. Regular weekday schedules will resume Thursday.

Holiday transit schedules are available at sdmts.com and GoNCTD.com.

11-year-old boy struck by car in El Cajon taken off life support

By Caleb Lunetta
UNION-TRIBUNE

EL CAJON — An 11-year-old boy struck by a vehicle in El Cajon earlier this month died Sunday after he was pulled off life support, California Highway Patrol officials said.

The boy was struck by a Chevrolet Cobalt around 8:40 a.m. Dec. 21 near North First Street and Sumner Avenue, Officer Jasmine Lopez said in a news release.

The child was identified as Kevin Ouda of El Cajon, who was out jogging with his Muay Thai team, according to a GoFundMe page set up

to support his family.

Investigators said the boy stepped onto the roadway to avoid a dog that had lunged in his direction, and the car — driven by a 74-year-old man from Lakeside — was unable to swerve out of the way, Lopez said.

The boy was transported to Rady’s Children’s Hospital, where he died a week later, Lopez said.

Drugs and alcohol were determined not to be factors in the crash, but the investigation remains ongoing, Lopez said.

On the GoFundMe page, Ouda’s Muay Thai coach James Gregory said the boy

had had emergency surgery to relieve pressure on his brain.

In an Instagram post Sunday, Gregory said the family made the decision to take him off life support so Ouda could “be at peace in heaven with God.”

“I was with him and held his hand, kissed him, told him that we love him,” Gregory said. “His heart kept beating for almost 15 minutes even after life support was removed, a fighter until the very end.”

The page to support Ouda’s family had reached more than \$26,000 in donations by Monday.

Cause of death uncertain for a man who died in Vista jail

By Teri Figueroa
UNION-TRIBUNE

VISTA — Sheriff’s officials Monday released the name of a man who died at the Vista jail over the weekend, days after he’d fallen ill, but said it is not clear what caused his death.

Bobby Ray Patton died Saturday morning after going into medical distress in his cell, sheriff’s homicide Lt. Michael Krugh said in a news release. The Sheriff’s Office runs the jails and its homicide unit investigates all in-custody deaths as a matter of protocol.

Patton, 46, is believed to have lived in Escondido when he was jailed last month. He is at least the ninth person to die in San Diego County custody this year.

Patton was arrested on Nov. 25 on a felony warrant on suspicion of bringing controlled substances into a jail or prison.

On Dec. 24, after he’d been in custody for about a month, Patton told deputies he was suffering from flu-like symptoms. Medical staffers ordered tests and placed him in medical isolation to monitor him and to prevent the

spread of illness.

A few days later, about 8 a.m. Saturday, deputies found him sitting on the floor of his cell, breathing but not responding to them. A nurse came to assist, but moments later he had difficulty breathing and went into medical distress, Krugh said.

Medical staffers provided emergency aid until Vista Fire Department medics arrived and took over, but Patton died at the jail.

The Medical Examiner’s Office performed an autopsy Monday but was unable to determine Patton’s cause and manner of death, Krugh said.

Today in history

TUESDAY, DEC. 31

TODAY’S HIGHLIGHT

On Dec. 31, 1879, Thomas Edison first demonstrated his electric incandescent lights for the public by illuminating some 100 bulbs in and around his lab in Menlo Park, N.J.

ON THIS DATE

1904: New York’s Times Square saw its first New Year’s Eve celebration, with an estimated 200,000

people in attendance.

1985: Singer Rick Nelson, 45, and six others were killed when fire broke out aboard a plane that was taking the group to a New Year’s Eve performance in Dallas.

2019: The health commission in the Chinese city of Wuhan announced that experts were investigating an outbreak of respiratory illness and that most of the victims had visited a seafood market in the city; the statement said

27 people had become ill with a strain of viral pneumonia.

TODAY’S BIRTHDAYS

Actor Anthony Hopkins is 87. Rock musician Andy Summers is 82. Actor Ben Kingsley is 81. Actor Tim Matheson is 77. Actor Bebe Neuwirth is 66. Businessman Donald Trump Jr. is 47. Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Gabby Douglas is 29.

The Associated Press

AGUIRRE

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that we all deserve.”

The county Board of Supervisors must decide whether to fill Vargas’ District 1 seat via appointment or special election. A discussion on the matter is expected at their next scheduled meeting on Jan. 7. Should any of the

three officials who have announced their candidacy be appointed or elected, their departures would leave vacancies on their respective councils, leaving their colleagues to decide how to replace them. All three were elected to their four-year posts in 2022.

Vargas won her reelection for a second, four-year term in November but announced that she would

only finish her current term “due to personal safety and security reasons.” She and her office have declined to comment further.

District 1, with a population of more than 630,000 residents, includes Chula Vista, Imperial Beach, National City, several south San Diego neighborhoods and five unincorporated communities, such as Bonita and Lincoln Acres.

JET

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personal watercraft, city officials say.

The Polidori lawsuit is the second the city is facing over Jet Skis.

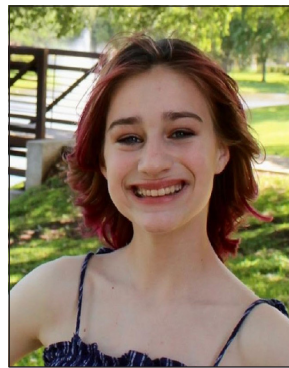
The family of a 12-year-old paddleboarder killed in July 2023 on Mission Bay, Savannah Peterson, has sued the city for damages, contending officials knew of the dangers and didn’t do enough to keep people safe.

Peterson was killed by 18-year-old Arsanyous Refat Ghaly, who pleaded guilty to vehicular manslaughter and was sentenced in the fall to 230 days in custody and two years of probation.

Ali Polidori, 19, survived her December 2023 crash in La Jolla Cove. But she suffered a 5-inch laceration on the back of her head that required seven staples and put her in intensive care for multiple nights.

Her lawsuit, which seeks \$3 million in damages, says she also has suffered a loss of confidence and deteriorating mental health.

A former triathlete and diver who graduated from Torrey Pines High School, Polidori was “a shell of her former student-athlete self” when she returned to the



Savannah Peterson was struck and killed by a man on a personal watercraft in July 2023 in Mission Bay. **PETERSON FAMILY**

U.S. Naval Academy after the crash, the lawsuit says.

“Polidori felt mentally slow from the head trauma, and had to spend additional time studying and preparing for class to maintain her academic standing,” her lawsuit says. “Physically, the injuries prevented Polidori from competing with the Triathlon Team during the 2024 spring semester, which had a detrimental impact on Polidori’s confidence and continued leadership development.”

A key question raised by the lawsuit is whether the lifeguard was justified in moving so quickly through a swimming area where swimmers don’t expect

there to be fast-moving devices of any kind.

The police report seems inconsistent on this issue.

It says traveling at 20 to 25 mph “does not appear to represent reckless or negligent operation,” adding that “the speed was within the act of operating within due regard for the public.”

But the report also says the lifeguard appears to have violated international navigation rules, particularly operating the 800-pound watercraft at a speed greater than her ability to avoid collision and failing to use a proper lookout.

The report says sun glare could have been a factor, noting the incident took place just before 2:30 p.m.

The report says the lifeguard appears to have spotted Polidori, who was wearing a bright yellow cap to make herself more conspicuous, at the last second and turned sharply enough to make the collision somewhat less direct.

Normal protocol is for lifeguards traveling on Jet Skis to remain at least 100 yards from shore, but the lifeguard in this case was responding to another incident where a swimmer was in distress. The lawsuit says the urgency of that incident might have been exaggerated.