



Control of city’s budget shifts toward mayor under revision plan

Gloria presents ‘draft’ strategy but says he may substantially change it after council hearings

By David Garrick
UNION-TRIBUNE

San Diego City Council members are raising concerns about Mayor Todd Gloria calling the spending plan he released April 15 a “draft” budget instead of a full-blown “proposed” budget ready for debate and haggling.

The mayor’s subtle shift in terminology appears to begin the next front in an ongoing war between the mayor and council for control and influence over the city budget.

The new battle comes at a crucial time, with the city facing deep cuts and potentially significant employee layoffs for the first time since the aftermath of the Great Recession 15 years ago.

The council took steps a year ago to consolidate its power by reshaping budget review hearings held each May and by creating new opportunities to debate spending decisions and restore cuts proposed by the mayor.

One year later, the mayor is for the first time characterizing his spending plan as a “draft,” and he’s saying he’s likely to substantially change it with his release of a May 14 document called the “May revise.”

That timing could seriously diminish the

See **BUDGET** on Page A5

Big microscope reveals tiniest threats to the human body

Scripps Research device brings clarity to search for new drugs

By Gary Robbins
UNION-TRIBUNE

What is that? Are those intestines?

You might have wondered that recently if you were looking at the image biologist Andrew Ward had displayed on a screen at Scripps Research in La Jolla.

The reality was more jarring. Ward was showing a tiny piece of the Lassa virus, which can double a person over in pain, make their head swell and, in some cases, quickly result in death.

But that image, created from nearly 70,000 particles, also represented hope.

There’s a technological revolution underway that’s making it faster and easier for scientists to see the molecules that undermine human health — and possibly fight the problem.

The “resolution revolution” involves cryo-electron microscopes, whose ever-improving detectors and software are producing three-dimensional images in unprecedented detail, aiding drugmakers.

They reveal detail so precise that Ward was

See **MICROSCOPE** on Page A6



‘A POPE AMONG THE PEOPLE’ LAID TO REST

Funeral centers on Francis’ inclusive approach, humble style as voice of the voiceless

By Jason Horowitz
THE NEW YORK TIMES

VATICAN CITY — In a solemn and majestic funeral on the steps of St. Peter’s Basilica, the Roman Catholic Church on Saturday laid to rest Pope Francis, the first South American pope, whose simple style, pastoral vision and outsize footprint on the world stage reinvigorated and divided the institution that he led for a dozen years.

Heads of state, royals and religious leaders sat with an array of Catholic prelates in brilliant red robes around a closed cypress coffin holding the body of Francis, who died Monday at 88. Atop his coffin, the pages of an open



A nun holds a photo of Pope Francis while attending his funeral Mass in St. Peter’s Square.

Top: Pallbearers carry the coffin of Pope Francis during his funeral in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican on Saturday. **AP PHOTOS**

book of the Gospels fanned in the breeze.

Hundreds of thousands of faithful filled and spilled out of St. Peter’s Square and streamed down the long avenue to the Tiber River. In the previous days, about 250,000 waited in long lines to say farewell to the pope, whose body was dressed in red vestments and his simple, scuffed black shoes as he lay in state before the basilica’s altar.

“The guiding thread of his mission was also the conviction that the church is a home for all, a home with its doors always open,” Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, dean of the College

See **FRANCIS** on Page A8

Saigon’s fall still shapes S.D. community

50 years on, stories of harrowing escapes, efforts to rebuild lives bond Vietnamese

By Maura Fox
UNION-TRIBUNE

The memory of fleeing Vietnam after Saigon fell 50 years ago this week is never too far removed from the minds of the San Diegans who endured it.

Some, like Tawn Nguyen, were children on April 30, 1975, when the North Vietnamese forces captured the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon, marking the end of the Vietnam War.

Just 9 years old, Nguyen was soon out on the open ocean with her family, fleeing by boat. At sea, they were separated from her 6-year-old sister and only reunited months later at a refugee resettlement camp in Arkansas.

Others, such as Phong Duong, tried repeatedly to flee over the years. His



At her home in Mira Mesa, Kim-Trang Dang, left, and friend Tawn Nguyen share memories of fleeing Vietnam after the fall of Saigon. **NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T**

See **SAIGON** on Page A11

“ONE OF THE FUNNIEST NEW MUSICALS I’VE SEEN IN YEARS!”
The San Diego Union-Tribune

REGENCY GIRLS

A NEW MUSICAL COMEDY

BOOK BY JENNIFER CRITTENDEN AND GABRIELLE ALLAN
MUSIC BY CURTIS MOORE
LYRICS BY AMANDA GREEN
DIRECTED AND CHOREOGRAPHED BY JOSH RHODES

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(from left) Krystina Alabado, Isabelle McCalla, Ryann Redmond, and Kate Rockwell.
Photo by Jim Cox.

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U-T INDEX

Crossword	F2	Markets	C4	Television	E11
Dear Abby	F3	Obituaries	B6	Travel	E9
Editorial	B9	Opinion	B8	Weather	A10



STEPHEN P. DINKIN A PATH FORWARD

Meeting decorum another victim of COVID-19

I recently read that Sam Liang, CEO of transcription-software company Otter.ai, is using a bot to attend meetings in his place. “Sam-bot” has been trained on thousands of meeting transcripts and internal documents to sound like Liang.

“It has my knowledge, so it knows how I think,” Liang told Bloomberg. “It can infer how I would respond to a new question based on all the past interactions.” He noted that many of his employees are skeptical and wonder why Sam-bot is needed.

If calls to the National Conflict Resolution Center are any indicator, meetings today are more contentious and less productive. As leaders look for ways to change this dynamic, bots could be part of the solution — although the early experience at Otter.ai suggests that employees may not be quite ready to forego human interaction.

Or maybe, meetings will go away altogether, a vestige — like civil discourse — of times past. Some would cheer: According to MeetingScience, a cloud-based application for meeting optimization, 55 million meetings happen in the U.S. daily. They cost \$1.4 trillion in human capital and leave 89% of those humans unhappy.

But government agencies are stuck — subject to sunshine or open meeting laws, which aim to ensure transparency and public access to their decision-making processes. For now, at least, there are humans fielding questions and comments from the public.

Last week, I was contacted by San Diego Union-Tribune reporter Jeff McDonald for his story about uncivil speech at public meetings. He covered a convening of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors earlier this month where some of the remarks were laced with vulgarity and threats.

It’s just one example of a trend toward more hateful public speech. As I told McDonald, NCRC is hearing from organizations, companies and agencies all over the country seeking tools and strategies to de-escalate these very situations.

Here is a sampling of the other calls I’ve taken recently:

■ A solar developer in Colorado is frustrated at being shouted down in public meetings by people who don’t know (or seem to care about) the facts. The company is hoping to bring money-saving solar power to rural communities in Colorado and beyond.

■ A California professional association is unable to conduct meetings with its constituents, thwarted by political pronouncements at the start that derail their agendas.

■ A major university is finding it hard to anticipate and respond to the disagreements that pepper many important discussions. While they recognize

the value of healthy conflict, some exchanges have been disrespectful, heightening emotions.

Meetings have long been saddled with difficult participants: “monopolizers” (who like to hear themselves talk), scrollers (or doodlers, who don’t pay attention), and naysayers (who proclaim, “We’ve tried this before and it doesn’t work”).

Today — no thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic — there is an overhang of anger.

But meetings don’t have to be miserable. With proper planning and effective management, they can be productive and even satisfying.

NCRC is helping organizations shift their meeting dynamics to meet the moment with a new, two-hour training program.

We think about this challenge in two parts, having specific strategies for success: pre-meeting planning and meeting facilitation.

Meeting preparation is most important — specifically, creation of an agenda. While determining the meeting purpose and agenda items are obvious considerations, the order in which items are discussed also matters. Starting with a tough topic can be deflating or set a combative tone. Burying it is also risky: The “elephant in the room” is always noticed. It can be distracting.

In addition, successful meeting organizers give careful thought to who should participate and what they can be expected to contribute.

Having the right people in the room (or on the screen) can increase satisfaction and the likelihood that meeting objectives will be met. (Government agencies, of course, don’t have this luxury.)

When it comes to effective facilitation, communication skills are key — regardless of sector.

Our training builds these skills under an umbrella we refer to as ART: Active Awareness, Respond Respectfully, and Troubleshoot Together.

There are many components to a respectful response. As I told Jeff McDonald, people on the receiving end of crude or heated criticism should neither dismiss nor push back, but instead be mindful of how their response might affect the behavior and make it harder to move a meeting forward.

Our tendency is to fight in the face of a perceived threat. But it’s most effective to step aside and not take the bait, which puts the other person off balance.

It’s an empowering skill for those challenging moments.

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

Southwestern College’s student newspaper wins national honor

By Linda McIntosh
UNION-TRIBUNE

CHULA VISTA — Southwestern College journalism students took home the Gold Crown — the highest award — from Columbia University Scholastic Press Association for being the top collegiate newspaper in North America.

The Southwestern College Sun was picked out of hundreds of student newspapers at four-year universities and two-year colleges across the country and Canada based on reporting, writing, editing, design and production.

The award, which recognizes “overall excellence,” was announced recently at Columbia University in New York City.

“It is a rare triumph for a community college to win the prestigious award that usually goes to elite university journalism programs,” said Max Branscomb, longtime professor of Journalism at Southwestern College and faculty advisor.

The Sun has a record of awards, but this is the first time receiving the Gold



From left, Max Branscomb, professor of journalism at Southwestern College, with student journalists Zeke Watson, Liliana Anguiano, Dira Wong, Alexa Lima, Julio Rodriguez and Baron Castaneras at the Associated Collegiate Press National Student Media Convention in Long Beach in March. **COURTESY PHOTO**

Crown. The Sun was named 2024-25 national champion by the National Newspaper Association as well as state champion by the Society of Professional Journalists and California Newspaper Publishers Association.

“Our staff comes from many cultures and speaks many languages. That gives us the power to speak to the people from all over

the world who have settled here,” said Alexa Lima, the Sun’s editor-in-chief.

Southwestern’s El Sol Magazine won the Gold Crown in 2023. The Sun’s website won in 2012.

The Sun and El Sol Magazine earned a number of national awards in 2024, including the Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker, considered the Pulitzer Prize

of college student newspapers. Both publications also won the College Media Association Pinnacle Award. El Sol was selected as National College Magazine of the Year by the American Educators of Journalism and Mass Communication, American Scholastic Press Association, Society of Professional Journalists and California College Media Association.



Kindergartners Nicholas Jimenez, left, and Hendrix Parks feed a chicken held by eighth grader Ben Chandler, who oversees the birds, in the garden at Bella Mente Montessori Academy on Friday. **CHARLIE NEUMAN / PHOTOS FOR THE U-T**

GARDEN

From Page 1

Bella Mente’s energy action plan promotes energy efficiency with student-led projects and infrastructure upgrades, which have included improved HVAC systems, solar panels and LED lighting.

The school has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions, energy costs and water use, thanks to conservation efforts such as xeriscaping, low-flow fixtures, and stormwater management.

The school also promotes more environmentally friendly transportation with its bike racks and carpool incentives, emphasizes environmental literacy and encourages physical and mental health through wellness initiatives, farm-to-table programs and Fit Fridays.

Feeley said the student-led nature of the projects is part of the school’s Montessori philosophy.

But she recommends other traditional schools consider partnerships and



Kindergartner Stella Margonar tastes a blueberry from the garden’s blueberry bush. The school won an award for its eco-friendly initiatives.

more modest focuses.

For instance, students can start by working on one garden bed. “Because if you start in a manageable way, you can start to see who’s

interested,” she said.

Bella Mente wasn’t the only local school or district honored by the state last year with a Green Ribbon Award for its efforts on

environmental sustainability. National School District received a gold award, and Community Montessori in Escondido got a bronze award.

TRIAL

From Page 1

after resigning in 2019 and eventually set up shop as an executive chef in a private castle for rent in rural North Carolina.

All the while, El Cajon code-enforcement officers demanded repairs and upgrades to what they said was an illegal attic dwelling and rental, including unpermitted stairs, decking, electrical and plumbing work throughout the four-story A-frame.

But the upgrades and inspections demanded by the city went unaddressed for years, and El Cajon officials began issuing fines.

The penalties began at \$100 a day but were successively raised to thousands of dollars a day as Kalasho failed to respond, the city said. They now exceed \$2.5 million,

more than twice the value of the home.

Kalasho insists he never received the many notices mailed to the Fletcher Hills home or posted on the front door. He said he is being singled out for persecution due to an uncivil relationship with his former council colleagues.

“This is all political,” Kalasho said in his closing statement to the court. “They keep coming at me with different things. It will never end. They’re going to be coming after me for years.”

Lawyers representing the city said Kalasho ignored and avoided the code-enforcement demands for years, placed his property into a trust controlled by a fictitious person and shielded it through at least two other companies.

They said Kalasho and his wife Jessica rented out the property — and still do —

despite conditions that present a serious public-safety hazard.

“Mr. and Mrs. Kalasho are benefiting from the tenancy,” said Steven Boehmer, one of the lawyers representing El Cajon in the three-day trial. “They are putting people potentially at risk. We have no idea of the quality of work that’s been done.”

The city wants the fines paid in full and the property placed into receivership so it can be inspected and repaired as needed. Officials also want Kalasho to pay their attorney fees, investigative costs and other expenses.

Kalasho had a contentious two-plus years on the City Council. He clashed regularly with the council majority and was criticized for tending to his cellphone during public meetings.

More than once he openly bickered with other elected officials. The council also had

to revote on several matters that Kalasho voted on due to his accepting payments from companies with business interests before the city.

This week, in a case that even Judge Joel Wohlfeil said was atypical, lawyers for El Cajon said Kalasho deeded part of the home to a trust controlled by Maximilian Von Ayers — a person they said did not exist and is actually Kalasho.

They called a former tenant to testify, among other things, that he previously had spoken to Von Ayers over the phone and the voice on the other end of the line sounded just like Kalasho did in court.

Kalasho, meanwhile, exercised his constitutional right against self-incrimination by refusing to say even that he knew or had ever spoken to Von Ayers. He also declined to answer questions about Israel Moses Seiff LLC and Navy Federal Credit Union,

which own part of the house.

“I am going to invoke my Fifth Amendment privilege,” he testified.

Kalasho and his wife have been unrelaxed.

In an unrelated 2017 civil case alleging fraud, defamation and other claims, they were accused of rigging a beauty pageant sponsored by Kalasho through his for-profit chamber of commerce, creating fake social media accounts to criticize rivals and pasting faces of others onto photos of nude women before posting those online.

One of the plaintiffs’ lawyers, who won a \$300,000 judgment but has been unable to collect, accused Kalasho of hiding his assets by filing false records with the county assessor.

Another secured bench warrants for the Kalashos’ arrest after showing they were in San Diego despite their claim they could not

attend court in person.

Ben and Jessica Kalasho in 2023 were sentenced to eight days in jail for contempt of court, but both the warrants and jail terms were stayed during this week’s code-enforcement trial so they could defend themselves in court.

The trial, begun Monday, was held without the benefit of a jury, meaning Wohlfeil will determine how to resolve it.

The judge directed each side to submit a final brief next month and said he would issue a ruling soon after reviewing them.

He also indicated he was likely to order the home brought into compliance and to reduce the penalties assessed.

“You may have been a lightning rod at city hall, no question,” Wohlfeil told Kalasho at the end of the trial. “But there does appear to be substantial evidence of violations.”