



BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

MORE EVACUATIONS ORDERED

Carmen Green exercises Thursday at Griffith Observatory. The Bobcat fire continued to affect air quality in the region Thursday and spurred evacuations in parts of the Antelope Valley. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Trapped by 'tsunami of fire'

The 15 killed by North Complex blaze had little chance

By LUKE MONEY AND ANITA CHABRIA

LAKE OROVILLE, Calif. — As a rapidly growing wild-fire barreled toward Lake Oroville, residents of the small mountain communities lying in its path had to decide what to do.

Two told their families they planned to seek shelter at a nearby pond. Another said he would leave only when he could see the fire from his home.

Three others were ready to evacuate, only to hold off based on incorrect information about how much the blaze was contained.

All of those people, along with nine others, ultimately fell victim to the North Complex fire, a massive blaze that exploded last week into one of the deadliest and most expansive conflagrations California has seen.

While crews continue working furiously to contain the blaze — now the fifth-largest and among the deadliest — [See Victims, A12]



CAROLYN COLE Los Angeles Times

MARGARET STEWART, left, Ben Arnold and their dog Veya of the Los Angeles Fire Department search Butte County for North Complex fire victims Thursday.

Changes spur chaos at U.S. post offices

Rules requiring trucks to leave exactly on time had a disastrous ripple effect, Times investigation finds.

By MAYA LAU AND LAURA J. NELSON

For new Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, who wanted the U.S. Postal Service to operate more efficiently, it seemed like an obvious fix: Just run the trucks on time.

So in July he ordered drivers to start leaving post offices and distribution centers exactly on schedule and curtailed extra trips to pick up any mail that missed earlier cutoffs.

The stricter deadlines sparked far less public outcry than the removal of more than 700 high-speed sorting machines at mail processing facilities around the country — but they were far more disruptive to the U.S. mail system, according to a Times investigation.

Weeks-long delays began to ripple through a system already reeling from COVID-19 absences and a surge in package delivery during the pandemic, shaking Americans' faith in one of the country's most popular services and raising concerns about how the Postal Service will handle mail-in ballots in November.

The abrupt scheduling

move also raised more questions about DeJoy's stewardship of the Postal Service, which has been marked by severe delivery snafus and charges by critics that he is working to slow service in order to help President Trump's election bid by making voting by mail more difficult.

Workers who spoke to The Times described troubling details about how the rigid schedules have played out: Some trucks have traveled empty, and mail left behind has accumulated at massive processing centers, creating backlogs in a system that is not designed to store mail. Loading dock managers have falsified records so it appears that trucks are departing earlier, some mail has been sorted twice, and in at least one case, a large shipment from Amazon was turned away because facilities had no space to process it.

At a post office in Carmichael, Calif., near Sacramento, employees ran out of storage space and refused to accept about 1,500 packages from Amazon drivers Aug. 29, said Saintil Perry, president of the local chapter of the American Postal Workers Union.

"That's a no-no. That's revenue, regardless of how heavy the shipment is," Perry said about refusing incoming parcels. "But they literally don't have space. The letter carriers don't have space. If they take on

[See Postal Service, A7]

Details emerge in plan to reduce police in schools

Task force says it will also survey students, parents on divisive proposal for LAUSD.

By HOWARD BLUME

Two months after a divided Los Angeles Unified school board slashed funding for its police department by more than a third, the contours of a dramatically diminished force emerged this week.

Under a plan presented to the board Tuesday, police officers would be removed from school campuses and weekend patrols meant to protect schools from vandalism would be eliminated, among other cuts.

The debate over the proposed cuts, set for later this month, marks a wide split on the board over the role that armed, uniformed officers should play in providing security to hundreds of thousands of students enrolled at more than 900 campuses.

With some on the seven-member board calling for the complete elimination of the police department and others opposed to cuts, the sharply opposing views played out in the streets outside the district's downtown

headquarters this week, where protesters in favor of police reforms sparred verbally with police supporters.

And in a signal of how unresolved the issue remains for many, a district task force said it intends to survey high school students, parents and employees around the district to evaluate opinions on school police.

Embedded in the proposal to cut spending is a recent district effort to rein in the widespread use of overtime in the police department.

The practice has resulted in mid-level supervisors, detectives and rank-and-file officers taking home some of the the highest pay in the nation's second-largest school system, with about two dozen officers earning at least \$190,000 last year.

The board first took up the idea of overhauling its police force this summer amid national protests over killings of Black people by police officers.

Confronted with impassioned demands that they move decisively to rethink policing at schools, board members decided in a 4-3 vote June 30 to cut \$25 million from the police department's \$70-million budget — a 36% reduction.

[See Schools, A12]

ELECTION 2020

ANALYSIS

Biden puts empathy at center of his campaign

Democrat focuses on his life's tragedies, seeking to draw a contrast with Trump.

By MARK Z. BARABAK

Joe Biden grieves. His voice thickens; his eyes mist over.

He recounts his life's many tragedies — death, near-death, crushing political defeat — in a way that makes them seem not only palpable but still raw.

It's not just campaigning-as-therapy, though it sometimes feels that way. Rather, the torment is central to Biden's candidacy, a mix of agony and empathy unlike any since 1992, when the emotive Bill Clinton won the White House telling distressed voters he felt their pain.

The difference is the subtext to Biden's suffering, a message befitting these angst-ridden times: He not only feels America's pain [See Biden, A6]



Associated Press

JOE BIDEN is sworn in as a senator in 1973 at a hospital, with his father, Robert, right, and son Beau, 4.

Cheese rule limits food aid to seniors

End of waiver halted delivery of packages, cutting off assistance to thousands in state.

By SARAH D. WIRE

WASHINGTON — Tens of thousands of low-income California seniors stopped receiving home deliveries of free food just as COVID-19 cases and deaths in the state were peaking, thanks to a century-old federal policy to include surplus cheese in government aid packages.

As the coronavirus began to spread in March and Gov. Gavin Newsom called on millions of seniors to self-isolate, these needy Californians initially were able to have a box of dried food delivered to their homes each month at no cost because federal regulators granted a state request to temporarily waive certain rules governing the Commodity Supplemental Food [See Food, A9]

UC bans quotas based on race

Policy on admissions and hiring underscores regents' intent to revive but limit affirmative action. **CALIFORNIA, B2**

Weather

Partly sunny. L.A. Basin: 91/67. **B12**

Trump throws it back at critics

The president responds to attacks by firing same accusations at his enemies. **PERSPECTIVES, A2**

