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SANDY HUFFAKER FOR THE U-T

BLINKEN, CIA CHIEF SHUTTLE ACROSS MIDEAST

Secretary of state visits Arab leaders as Israel says Gaza is cut in two

BY MICHAEL BIRNBAUM, SHANE HARRIS, MIRIAM BERGER & WILLIAM BOOTH

TEL AVIV, Israel CIA Director William Burns arrived in Israel on Sunday for talks with intelligence officials there and throughout the region...

Burns landed as Blinken on Sunday met with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah in the West Bank...

"We're working very hard to make sure that the conflict in Gaza does not escalate, does not spread to other places. Whether it's here, whether it's elsewhere in the region," Blinken said Sunday during a news conference in Baghdad.

His remarks came as Israel unleashed a wave of airstrikes in northern and central Gaza on Sunday night, a fiery bombardment that coincided with a near-total communications blackout across the territory.

The fierce fighting and soaring civilian toll underscored the challenges Blinken and Burns face as they seek to balance U.S. commitments to Israel with the growing outrage of some partners in the region over what the United Nations says is a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza...

SEE GAZA • A6

WAVE LOSE HEARTBREAKER

The San Diego Wave's Danielle Colaprico (left) drives the ball against OL Reign's Jess Fishlock during the NWSL semifinal game Sunday night at Snapdragon Stadium in Mission Valley. The Reign won 1-0, advancing to the championship game. Story, D1.

CHULA VISTA POLITICS ROILED BY CHARGES

Elected officials, Democratic Party leaders face questions after allegations against council member, brother

BY TAMMY MURGA & JEFF MCDONALD

The allegations are startling: Two months after Andrea Cardenas was elected to the Chula Vista City Council, she conspired with her brother to defraud the U.S. government of more than \$170,000.

At the same time, prosecutors say, Jesus Cardenas falsely claimed dozens of marijuana dispensary workers as employees of his own consulting firm. He had just been sworn in as chief of staff to newly elected San Diego Councilmember Stephen Whitburn.

Then, according to a six-page criminal complaint filed last week, the brother and sister used the money for personal expenses, credit card bills and even to pay off

campaign debts.

Jesus Cardenas is the political consultant and founder of Grassroots Resources, which he ran even as he served the people of San Diego. He is now due to be arraigned Thursday on five separate criminal charges.

Andrea Cardenas came from nowhere to win her 2020 campaign under her brother's management. She is facing the same charges, and two extra counts of failing to file tax returns. The Chula Vista council member, whose day job is at Grassroots Resources, also is scheduled to appear in court Thursday.

Prosecutors say the Cardenas lied in order to collect \$176,227 from the Paycheck Protection Program, one of the U.S.



Andrea Cardenas

Jesus Cardenas

government's early responses to the nationwide shutdown prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

They told federal officials that Grassroots Resources employed 34 people, qualifying the company for a six-figure loan.

But, according to the District Attorney's Office, the company

did not have 34 employees. Instead, the defendants claimed workers from a San Diego pot dispensary as their own, prosecutors say.

They collected the COVID-19 relief funds by misrepresenting Grassroots Resources to the U.S. Small Business Administration, the complaint asserts. According to prosecutors, others who have not yet been named or charged also were involved in the conspiracy.

The siblings could receive more than five years in state prison if convicted on all charges.

The allegations against the high-profile siblings remain to be proved in court.

In the meantime, the charges SEE CHARGES • A5

POLL: TRUMP AHEAD OF BIDEN IN 5 OF 6 SWING STATES 1 YEAR BEFORE ELECTION

Voters are dissatisfied with how Democrat has handled economy and foreign policy

BY SHANE GOLDMACHER

President Joe Biden is trailing Donald Trump in five of the six most important battleground states one year before the election, suffering from doubts about his age and dissatisfaction over his handling of the economy and a host of other issues, new polls by The New York Times and Siena College have found.

The results show Biden losing to Trump, his likeliest Republican rival, by margins of 4 to 10 percentage points among registered voters in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada and Pennsylvania. Biden is ahead only in Wisconsin, by 2 percentage points, the poll found.

Across the six states — all of which Biden carried in 2020 — the president trails by an average of 48 percent to 44 percent.

Discontent pulses throughout the Times/Siena poll, with a majority of voters saying Biden's policies have personally hurt them. The survey also reveals the extent to which the multiracial and multi-generational coalition that elected Biden is fraying. Demographic groups that SEE POLL • A7



ANA RAMIREZ U-T

Construction continues on a water recycling facility in San Diego that will be part of the city's Pure Water project, which city officials say is about 40 percent complete.

S.D.'S PURE WATER SYSTEM ON TRACK, BUT SOME CHALLENGES STILL REMAIN

BY DAVID GARRICK

Crews building San Diego's Pure Water sewage recycling system continue to pass major milestones, including finishing key stretches of pipeline across the city, tunneling work under Interstate 805 and breaking ground on treatment plants.

But they've also been faced with some major hurdles and setbacks, including delays caused by lingering supply chain issues and a 2-year-old

flooding problem on Morena Boulevard that still hasn't been fully solved.

City officials say they've softened the impact of the flooding problem by revamping how the system will work short term. But continuing delays could jeopardize a December 2027 deadline to be fully operational.

The city is also failing to meet goals for hiring city residents to work on Pure Water, the largest infrastructure project

in San Diego history. City residents have made up 23 percent of the workforce, while the goal is 35 percent.

In addition, city officials continue to struggle in negotiations with San Diego Gas & Electric to get utilities and gas lines moved to make way for Pure Water pipes.

City officials say design modifications they've agreed to make have reduced SDG&E's overall cost estimate SEE WATER • A7

PSYCHIATRISTS ARE STARTING TO PRESCRIBE WEIGHT-LOSS MEDICATIONS

Ozempic could counter the weight patients gain on psychiatric drugs

BY DANI BLUM

It was Joanna Acevedo's psychiatrist who first raised the idea of a weight-loss drug. Since 2018, Acevedo has relied on antipsychotic medications to manage her bipolar disorder. The drugs kept her paranoia at bay — really, they kept her alive, she said. They also led her to gain 70 pounds. By age 26, she had become prediabetic.

At a routine appointment this winter, Acevedo told her psychiatrist that she just didn't feel comfortable with her body anymore. She had brought it up before, but this time, he made a suggestion that surprised her. Had she heard about the new weight-loss drugs?

He referred her to a weight-loss clinic to get a prescription for Wegovy — an injectable medication that contains the same compound as the sought-after drug Ozempic.

These drugs have transformed how doctors treat diabetes and obesity. Now, some psychiatrists are turning to the drugs to counteract the weight gain that often comes with nearly all antipsychotics and some drugs used to treat depression and anxiety. The New York Times heard from 13 leading mental health facilities and psychiatric departments at major health SEE WEIGHT • A7

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# Local

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## SUIT MAY TARGET PREGNANCY CENTERS

Supervisors to consider action against facilities that discourage abortions

BY PAUL SISSON

County Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer is urging her colleagues to get tough with local crisis pregnancy centers, asking them to consider not just a public education program on their practices but also filing a lawsuit “including but not limited to shutting down such centers.”

The supervisor’s request will be considered at Tuesday’s board meeting and is detailed in a letter included in the board’s agenda, avail-

able at [sandiegocounty.gov](http://sandiegocounty.gov).

Crisis centers have recently been criticized for attempting to pass themselves off as abortion providers, using Internet search engines to reach women considering abortion and attempting to persuade them to reconsider. A lawsuit filed by state Attorney General Rob Bonta last year targets two organizations promoting a practice called “abortion pill reversal,” which the lawsuit called “an unproven and largely experimental procedure.”

A search of online content indexed by Google in 2022 turned up roughly 16 such centers in San Diego County. Local crisis centers listed online did not respond Friday to requests for comment on the proposal.

Lawson-Remer said Thursday that she believes the county can and should follow Bonta’s lead.

“Women can end up in a position where they are trying to go see a doctor, to go see a medical expert, and instead they’re being lied to and misled to the extent where they’re delayed, delayed, delayed until their choice is taken from them,” the supervisor said.

The comment refers to an alleged practice of continuing consultations until a pregnancy is beyond the time limit allowed by state law.

In addition to asking the Board of Supervisors to consider litigation, the agenda item also requests that the county’s chief administrative officer consider what it would take to “create and implement a

public education campaign that potentially include(s) billboards and social media ads” that would educate the public about crisis pregnancy centers and resources available to the public.

Dr. Antoinette Marengo, chief medical officer for Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, said Friday that it is hard to know exactly how many people crisis centers see, though they often set up shop very near clinics where abortions are offered.

Taking action as Lawson-Remer proposes, she said, is supported by many physicians.

“I don’t want to speak for the legal department, but as chief medical officer, I will say that they do not provide qualified medical care and

that they make false claims,” Marengo said. “I think, from a medical standpoint, they should be shut down, they should not be able to advertise as providing medical care.”

The overturn of the Roe v. Wade decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2022 allowed states to individually ban abortion and resulted in a local influx of patients from Arizona last summer.

Marengo said that Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, which saw a rash of additional appointments in the early going, has since seen demand reduce, with appointments about 10 percent greater than was the case before the Roe reversal.

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### SOMEONE SAN DIEGO SHOULD KNOW

## GIVING PATH TO SUCCESS TO KIDS WITH DISABILITIES

BY JAN GOLDSMITH

Toni Kraft is former owner of an award-winning San Diego restaurant who had a practice of training and hiring people with special needs. Today, she is taking that practice to the next level with an innovative Poway Unified School District program for special needs students.

“I’ve always felt comfortable around special needs children,” she explained. “I’m emotionally connected to them and understand how they want to fit in, be part of the community and excel.”

Her connection arises from her own disability and childhood experience.

Kraft was diagnosed in seventh grade with dyslexia. “Words and numbers would float around the page,” she said. “I was separated and put in remedial classes. I still have nightmares about being pulled from classes.”

“I always had to work twice as hard because of my dyslexia.”

Born in 1959 and raised on the south side of Chicago along with four siblings, her parents divorced when she was 12. Kraft and her younger brother remained with their mother.

The family had 2 acres adjacent to their home where they grew much of their food. “I worked on the farm daily,” Kraft said. “We didn’t have money to buy all our food, so it was work the land or don’t eat well.”

Kraft’s childhood was centered around subsistence farming, cooking for the family and caring for her mother.

Her mother was disabled with a severe brain disorder and would get enraged at times.

“I used nutrition for healing. I would make dinner and calm my

SEE SUCCESS • B4



Artist Helen Utsal of Toronto (right) shows her art piece “The Butterfly Effect” to Christopher Vogelmann and Maggie Unzueta during Art San Diego, an art and design fair, at the San Diego Convention Center on Sunday.

KRISTIAN CARREON FOR THE U-T

## ART FROM NEAR AND FAR

Annual boutique show Art San Diego draws local exhibitors and some from as far away as Canada, Spain

BY ROXANA POPESCU

### SAN DIEGO

Say “contemporary art show” and some people will run the other way.

Not Ngoc Linh Dang. She’s an architectural designer who traveled from Los Angeles specifically for Art San Diego, an annual boutique art show with exhibitors from as near as Spring Valley and as far as Canada and Spain. Her jaunt paid off: An hour after the show’s doors opened Sunday at the San Diego Convention Center, Dang had picked up a collage by San Diego artist J.V. Aranda, who grew up here, studied in London and returned.

“It just stood out to me, graphically,” Dang said. “I was like, ‘Oh, that looks fun.’”

The content and theme spoke to her, too. The image shows a room inside a home in comical disarray. The piece is called “Independence,” she said.

Dang said she found it all very relatable. She recently moved into her own apartment, for the first time. “I’m going through a growth of independence, and so it speaks to me, ‘cause this is how it feels,” she said.

The art show, which ran Friday through Sunday, featured around 100 exhibitors, including artists, galleries and an immersive installation. It also had an artsy scavenger

hunt and works by students at Monarch School, which educates children impacted by homelessness.

Attendees — kids, grown-ups, tourists, other artists — got a window into the works being made by San Diego artists and, through those works, their lives, emotions and concerns. Some were focused on animals, some on pollution, some on storytelling and humor.

For an abstract artist who gave her name as Lisa-E, the show was an opportunity to present her work outside its usual home at Liberty Station.

Lisa-E said her art translates the emotions she felt during her 26-year career as a search and res-

cue pilot for the Coast Guard: both the adrenaline of being a pilot and what she felt while “saving someone’s life on the high seas.”

“That intensity goes into my work,” she said. She won the Best Solo Exhibitor award.

Though her life informs her art, the titles she chooses invite viewers to make their own meaning. “I don’t want to be didactic,” she said. “The viewers are the ones that on a visceral level get something different — each person that looks at something like this.”

One such open-ended title, on an acrylic painting in shades of green: “Halcyon Burst.”

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Country legends June Carter Cash and Johnny Cash are the subjects of a new musical by Des McAnuff and Robert Cary.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

## LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES 2024-25 SEASON

Without Walls Festival, 2 musicals, 4 plays on tap for new round of shows

BY PAM KRAGEN

### LA JOLLA

La Jolla Playhouse has unveiled a 2024-25 season that will include five world premiere plays and musicals that cover subjects as diverse as drag queen Sasha Velour, a musical about Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, a love letter to “A Christmas Carol” shows and a Des McAnuff-led musical about Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash.

The season will begin in April with the annual Without Walls Festival April 4 through 7, which re-

turns to the campus of University of California San Diego, where the fest premiered in 2013.

It will be followed by a season of two musicals and four plays. Playhouse artistic director Christopher Ashley will direct one of the musicals, McAnuff (who ran the Playhouse from 1983 to 1994 and 2001 to 2007) is co-writing the book and directing the other. And Tectonic Theatre Project founder Moisés Kaufman will co-write and direct one of the plays.

Ashley described the diverse season of stories as all being about the individual moments in people’s lives that can have profound effects.

“Each of us can point to moments in our lives that have caused seismic changes. Moments that crack us open and shift our mind-

set, both individually and societally. Moments that have a ripple effect beyond the everyday and influence how we move forward,” Ashley said in a statement.

“The six premieres in our 2024-25 season address these monumental moments through stories that explore the vital things we hold dear, the things that bring us joy and that pierce our daily lives to capture our attention, our hearts and our minds, deepening our understanding of ourselves and our world.”

Here’s a look at the six productions which, with the Without Walls Festival, will make up the 2024-25 season. Exact dates for the season shows have not been announced. Subscriptions are now on sale at [la-jolla.com](http://la-jolla.com)

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