



LIGHTNING strikes Mt. St. Helena in Napa County in 2021. Bolts on a high mountain can surround a hiker.

Hikers face California’s peaks, then the storms that rule them

Megan Eskew did everything right before she climbed Mt. Whitney last month. She got in top physical shape, carefully checked the weather and, noticing a chance of thunderstorms, heeded expert advice to start very early — a few minutes after midnight.

Moving quickly up the 11-mile trail, she climbed out of the trees and onto bare granite — which conducts electricity — long before sunrise. She reached the 14,500-foot summit at 7:45 a.m. and, after snapping a few photos, hightailed it down. She knew she had to get back to the safety of the trees before the thunder and lightning struck.

Then she felt a sprinkle.

“Before you could even process the thought, ‘Oh, that’s rain,’ thunder boomed,” Eskew said. She picked up the

A late-summer monsoon has delivered hundreds of thousands of lightning strikes across the state

By Jack Dolan

pace, and then the thunder — which sounds like artillery at that altitude, where you’re essentially inside the storm — boomed again.

Everyone around her started running downhill, so Eskew ran too.

“The storm just didn’t let up,” she said.

It got so cold that the wind-driven rain turned to hail and started pelting her from behind, stinging her neck and ears. But what worried her most, as she raced for the trees still thousands of feet below, was lightning.

At that altitude, the bolts don’t just come down in single strikes; they can surround a hiker. Hair can suddenly stand on end, metal hiking poles can start to buzz, and a direct hit can be fatal.

[See **Lightning**, A7]

How will Kirk’s slaying alter security?

Some say drones will increasingly be used to protect public figures

By JAMES QUEALLY, RICHARD WINTON AND SANDRA McDONALD

Less than 24 hours after a bullet whizzed across a Utah college campus and claimed the life of conservative activist Charlie Kirk, polarizing figures from across the polit-

ical spectrum swiftly canceled public events.

Rep. Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) decided to postpone a North Carolina stop on the “Fighting Oligarchy” tour over the weekend, while Trump allies Stephen K. Bannon and Rudolph W. Giuliani reportedly nixed plans for a New

York gathering due to “increased security concerns.”

Popular leftist Twitch streamer Hasan Piker, who was set to debate Kirk at Dartmouth College later this month, told Politico he would “wait for the temperature to lower” before holding in-person events again.

Kirk’s killing came amid a

spate of attacks on high-profile political figures — including two assassination attempts on President Trump — that security experts say will change the way large-scale political events are held, with open-air venues increasingly seen as risky.

[See **Security**, A6]

CONCERNS OF CIVIL WAR: Some scholars worry that history is at risk of repeating itself. **PERSPECTIVES**, A2



IN THE COACHELLA Valley, workers toil in the fields during the evening in August to avoid the heat.

Gold rush seen in these California desert towns

The Coachella Valley has several top areas for income growth, a Times analysis finds.

By Terry Castleman

Jessica Bond, 31, owns a roofing company servicing the Coachella Valley with her husband. They live in a small unincorporated town called Thousand Palms.

They bought their home in 2018. Things have changed a lot in the seven years since, thanks to a housing market that is almost as hot as a September day in the valley.

“It’s ridiculous, it’s crazy,” she said. “The same house that was on the market five years ago has doubled in price.”

All around, she says, are signs of an influx of wealth: “You see what kind of cars are in people’s driveways, you start to see motor homes and boats,” she said.

She can see a \$100,000 pontoon boat in a neighbor’s driveway, whereas two doors down there’s a Honda in the front yard on cinder blocks, Bond said.

As skyrocketing home prices push more and more Californians from cities to suburbs, exurbs and even other states, some so-called secondary cities are seeing an influx of new wealth.

Though not traditionally viewed as fancy enclaves, these smaller cities are booming as urbanites flee major metropolitan centers in search of increased living space or telecommuting op-

[See **Growth**, A7]

Edison’s rate hike of nearly 10% might be just the beginning

By Melody Petersen

The California Public Utilities Commission is expected to allow Southern California Edison to raise customer bills by nearly 10% next month, and there may be more increases to come.

Edison’s plan would boost the average residential bill by \$17 a month or about \$200 a year, the commission said. The monthly bill for a customer using 500

kilowatts would jump from \$171 to \$188 on Oct. 1.

The five commissioners are scheduled to vote Thursday on the PUC administrative law judge’s proposal. It’s just one of multiple rate hikes Edison has asked the commission to approve in the coming year.

Scores of angry customers have written to the commission since Edison proposed the hike, asking the panel to deny it.

Some customers have

pointed out that even as Edison has charged more for tree trimming and equipment upgrades meant to make its system safer and more reliable, its electric lines continue to spark fires.

The company now faces dozens of lawsuits from victims of the Jan. 7 Eaton fire, which killed at least 19 people and destroyed thousands of homes in Altadena. Video captured the fire igniting under an Edison trans-

[See **Edison**, A10]

Bruins ax Foster after a poor start

UCLA fires the football coach in the wake of a 35-10 loss to New Mexico that sent team to 0-3 on season. **SPORTS**, D1

Child’s death tied to measles

Case of youngster infected as an infant may signal worrying breakdown in herd immunity. **CALIFORNIA**, B1

Weather
Sunny and warm.
L.A. Basin: 88/67. **B5**

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MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

THE EMMYS

Seth Rogen, the star and co-creator of “The Studio,” won for lead actor in a comedy series. Scan the code to read our coverage of the ceremony.



Justice Dept. demands a shift in UCLA values

Administration seeks changes in hiring, admissions, gender policies and more.

By Jaweed Kaleem

The Trump administration’s settlement proposal to UCLA — which includes a nearly \$1.2-billion fine over allegations of antisemitism and civil rights violations — seeks to drastically overhaul campus practices on hiring, admissions, sports, scholarships, discrimination and gender identity, a Times review of the document shows.

The 28-page letter — whose full contents have not been made public — also lays out in sweeping detail how it wants the university to enforce new policies that adhere to the president’s conservative agenda.

The Department of Justice’s August demands reach into numerous aspects of campus life and call for the university to make public declarations that it has agreed to significant elements of President Trump’s vision of higher education.

In exchange, the government will release roughly half a billion dollars in suspended research grants from the National Institutes of Health and Department of Energy to UCLA.

The letter has launched ongoing negotiations between University of California leaders and the Department of Justice.

UC has not publicly agreed to the stipulations — which have been broadly summarized in reporting from The Times. In statements, leaders have scoffed at the exorbitant fine. Privately, they’ve said many other requests would violate UCLA’s mission and values.

The more than 7,300-word proposal outlines a three-year agreement that calls on UCLA to:

- Make five years of payments — \$200,000 annually — and set up a \$172,000 fund for people with claims of civil rights violations.
- Ensure foreign students who are “anti-Western” will not be admitted.

- Pay for all costs of the settlement, including the fee for an outside monitor.
 - Annually release demographic data for hires as well as students who have applied or have been admitted, broken down by “race, color, grade-point average, and performance on standardized tests.”
 - Make a public statement declaring that transgender people’s identities are no longer recognized.
 - End gender-affirming care for minors at medical facilities.
 - Give the government access to “all UCLA staff, employees, facilities, documents, and data related to the agreement” not pro-
- [See **UCLA**, A5]

Going its own way on COVID vaccines

California pushes back against restrictive new federal guidelines that it says can’t be trusted.

By Rong-Gong Lin II

California’s late summer COVID surge is showing signs of peaking, but the state’s war with the Trump administration over vaccines is just beginning.

Coronavirus levels in California’s wastewater remain “very high,” according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as they are in much of the country. But some other COVID indicators are starting to fall in the Golden State.

The shift comes as California state officials and mainstream medical organizations are breaking from the Trump administration’s recent revisions to federal vaccine guidelines.

The changes, made under the leadership of vaccine-skeptic Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., have been so dramatic that a number of medical experts and officials now express little to no confidence in two key agencies within that department: the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration.

A key turning point came in June, when Kennedy ousted everyone on the CDC’s respected Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which issues recommendations on who should receive various types of vaccines.

Their replacements — some of whom have criticized vaccines and spread misinformation, according to the Associated Press — have led officials and other experts in some states to doubt or dismiss the latest CDC guidance.

The CDC’s immunization committee “is no longer a trusted source for vaccine guidance,” Dr. Matt Willis, the former public health officer for Marin County, wrote on the blog Your Local Epidemiologist in California.

In the past, medical and scientific groups were confident in the CDC’s data analysis and trusted the agency’s vaccine guidelines. And so that guidance informed key matters including which vaccines should be covered by insurance, and professional medical societies were aligned on immunization recommendations, according to Dr. Erica Pan, the director of the California De-

[See **COVID**, A8]