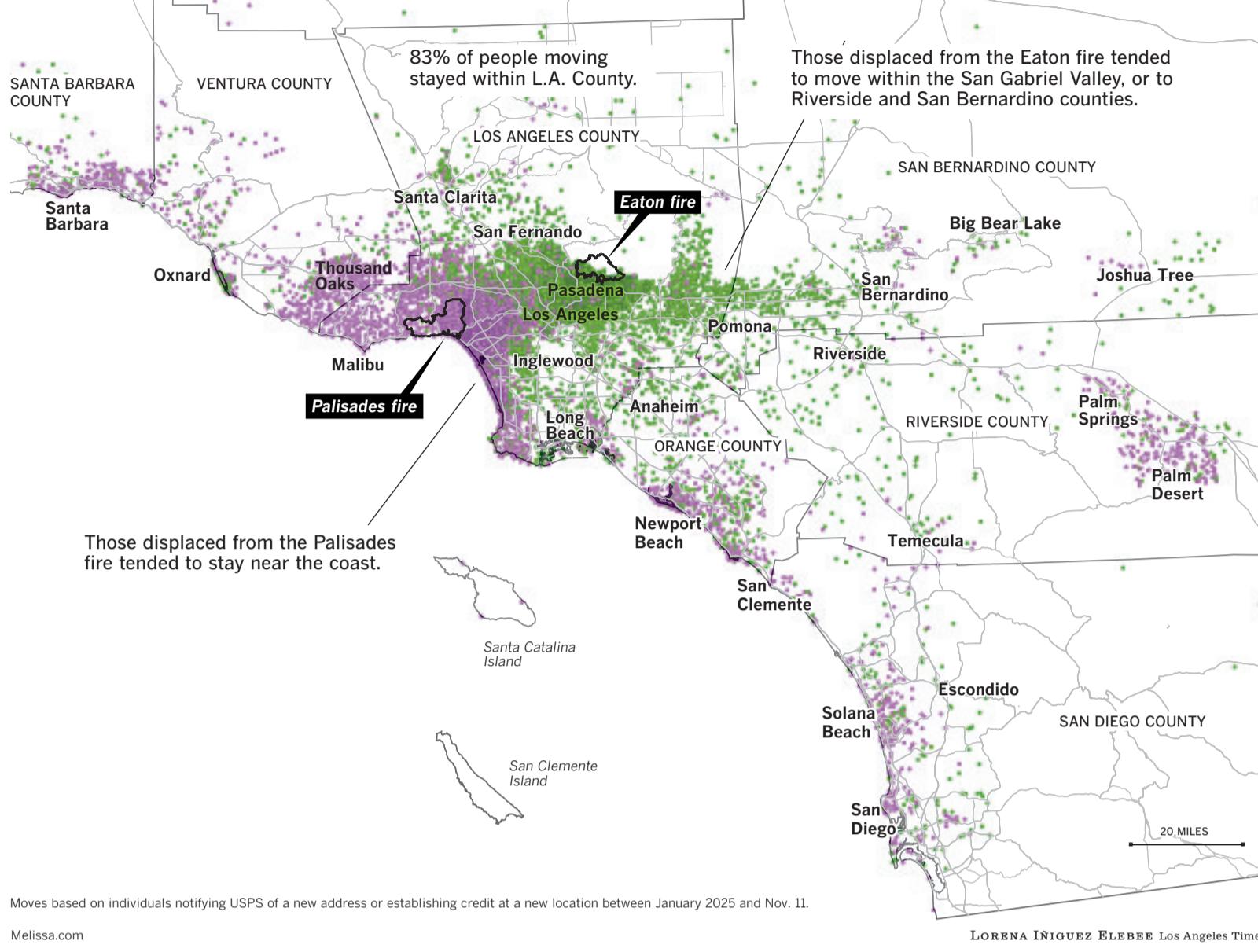


Each dot represents a new address for a person displaced by the Eaton ● and Palisades ● fires.



Moves based on individuals notifying USPS of a new address or establishing credit at a new location between January 2025 and Nov. 11.

Melissa.com

Flood of emails to air board were AI

Pollution authority ended a plan to phase out gas appliances after the comments.

By HAYLEY SMITH

The opposition appeared overwhelming: Tens of thousands of emails poured into Southern California's top air pollution authority as its board weighed a June proposal to phase out gas-powered appliances. But in reality, many of the messages that may have swayed the powerful regulatory agency to scrap the plan were generated by a platform that is powered by artificial intelligence.

Public records requests reviewed by The Times and corroborated by staff members at the South Coast Air Quality Management District confirm that more than 20,000 public comments submitted in opposition to last year's proposal were generated by a Washington, D.C.-based company called CiviClick, which bills itself as "the first and best AI-powered grassroots advocacy platform."

A Southern California-based public affairs consultant, Matt Klink, has taken credit for using CiviClick to wage the opposition campaign, including in a sponsored article on the website Campaigns & Elections. The campaign "left the staff of the Southern California Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) reeling," the article says.

It is unclear how AI was deployed in the campaign, and officials at CiviClick did not respond to repeated requests for comment. But their website boasts several tools including "state of the art technology and artificial intelligence message assistance" that can be used to create custom advocacy letters, as opposed to repetitive form letters or petitions often used in similar campaigns.

When staffers at the air district reached out to a small sample of people to verify their comments, at least three said they had not written to the agency and were not aware of any such messages, records show.

But the email onslaught almost certainly influenced the board's June decision, according to agency insid-

[See AI, A5]

Eaton and Palisades fire refugees moved near and far — and often

By DOUG SMITH

With fire pits on the beach, showers and a front-row view of the sun sinking into the Pacific, Mike and Nicole Wirth had no complaint about their \$45 overnights at Dockweiler Beach.

But neither was their three-night stay there last April a quaint camping experience. Dockweiler RV Park was No. 13 of the 15 places they've bedded down since the Eaton fire destroyed their Altadena home last year.

Among their other sleepovers — from one night to four months — were two hotels, an Airbnb, a church parking lot, another campground, a townhome rental

and three tiny guest houses — one at a co-worker's boyfriend's house. In between were three stays with Nicole's parents where their precious Australian cattle dog Goose succumbed, they believe, to accumulated trauma.

They were not alone. The Eaton and Palisades fires left an urban population of tens of thousands homeless in a single day. They moved in every direction, some near, some far, some — the lucky ones — only once. For many, home became an improvisation.

Sometimes Nicole stayed with her parents while Mike stayed alone at Dockweiler to be near his work in Hawthorne. It had a subtle reassuring effect.

"The van felt like the only

room from our house that survived," Mike said.

The Wirths, who are rebuilding their home and expect to move back in April, reflect the frenetic side of the complicated quest for shelter for tens of thousands whose homes were destroyed in the Eaton and Palisades fires.

Their orbit, compact but intense, was dictated by their decision to stay near their job and to oversee the reconstruction of their home.

Others moved less frequently, but often went much farther, to stabilize their lives.

Christie and Michael McIntire were grasping for anything in the San Gabriel Valley and coming up short.

"Won't take cats. Price

really high. Extremely far.

Somebody got to it first," Christie McIntire said in a phone interview.

After spending several months in two seedy rentals, the McIntires pulled the trigger on a longtime fantasy. They found a rental in Nashville. Christie flew with her two girls and the cats, and Michael drove with the dog. They've purchased a 3,600-square-foot suburban house to replace their 1,400-square-foot Altadena bungalow. They will move in April 1 when their current lease expires.

The lease was the first step in a multistage recovery.

"We didn't feel homeless anymore," Christie said. "When we found the house to buy is when we began to feel

[See Home, A6]

WEIGHING COST OF BURIED LINES IN ALTADENA

Fire survivors would have to pay thousands to link to Edison's new underground grid.

By MELODY PETERSEN

Connor Cipolla, an Eaton wildfire survivor, last year praised Southern California Edison's plan of burying more than 60 miles of electric lines in Altadena as it rebuilds to reduce the risk of fire.

Then he learned he would have to pay \$20,000 to \$40,000 to connect his home, which was damaged by smoke and ash, to Edison's new underground line. A nearby neighbor received an estimate for \$30,000, he said.

"Residents are so angry," Cipolla said. "We were completely blindsided."

Other residents have tracked the wooden stakes Edison workers put up, showing where crews will dig. They've found dozens of places where deep trenches are planned under oak and pine trees that survived the fire. In addition to the added costs they face, they fear many trees will die as crews cut their roots.

"The damage is being done now and it's irreversible," Robert Steller said last week, pointing up Maiden Lane to where an Edison crew was working.

For a week, Steller, who lost his home in the fire, has parked his Toyota 4Runner over a recently dug trench. He said he was trying to block Edison's crew from burying a large transformer between two towering dead cedar trees. The work would be "downright fatal" to the decades-old trees, he said.

Edison says the buried lines are an upgrade that will make Altadena's electrical grid safer and more reliable. It will also lower the risk that the company would have to black out Altadena neighborhoods during dangerous

[See Altadena, A12]

ROBERT DUVALL, 1931 – 2026



JAY L. CLENDENIN Los Angeles Times

BRINGING DEPTH TO ACTING

Robert Duvall, shown in 2018, was known for his work in "The Godfather" and "Apocalypse Now."

Actor renowned for intense roles

By STEVE CHAWKINS

When Robert Duvall was floundering around in college, his father, a career Navy man who retired with the rank of rear admiral, told him to shape up — and start acting.

"I wasn't pushed into it but suggested into it," Duvall once told an interviewer. "They figured I did skits around the house. They figured I had a calling, or whatever, in that line."

They figured correctly. With his weathered face and receding hairline, he did not stand out for his movie star looks but for the intensity and depth he brought to his craft. New York Times film critic Vincent Canby in 1980 called him "the best we have, the American Olivier."

Duvall, a veteran of many leading roles but best known for his sharp portrayal of supporting characters such as "The Godfather's" Irish American consigliere and the unhinged Army colonel who loved the smell of napalm in the morning, died at 95 on Sun-

As sex offender was trying to rehabilitate his image, he gave the \$15,000 donation.

By AUGUST BROWN

In February 2013, the Motion Picture & Television Fund hosted its splashy fundraising gala "The Night Before" at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Held each Oscar season to support the fund's hospital and senior-care facilities,

including the Wasserman Campus in Woodland Hills, the gala attracts A-list actors and top entertainment executives.

One ticket buyer for that year's gala did not attract much scrutiny at the time: Jeffrey Epstein.

The disgraced financier had arranged, through a shell firm, to purchase a \$15,000 ticket for Hollywood publicist Peggy Siegal to attend the 2013 event, according to bank statements and emails between Epstein's team and the MPTF reviewed by The Times.

The Feb. 28 check for the fundraising gala was described in emails as a tax-deductible donation to the century-old Hollywood charity founded by Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin and others. Although the ticket was in Siegal's name, key MPTF staffers were aware Epstein paid for it, according to the emails.

The publicist's participation in the gala came at a pivotal time for Epstein, who was seeking to rehabilitate his image, which had been badly damaged by his 2008 [See Epstein, A5]

Domination in the hockey rink

U.S. women are again untouchable, blanking Sweden to set up gold-medal game against Canada. SPORTS, D1

Downpour soaks the Southland

Rain and wind hit the region on Presidents Day. More storms are expected this week.

CALIFORNIA, B1

Weather

A shower or two. L.A. Basin: 61/48. B5

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LAUSD board faces new deficit, layoffs

By HOWARD BLUME

More than 3,200 Los Angeles Unified School District employees would receive a notice of a possible layoff under a proposal to be considered at Tuesday's Board of Education meeting, while union leaders call to pause the decision until the state revenue forecast becomes clearer.

The number of workers who are likely to lose their jobs is expected to be much lower, but still could be significant. Other workers would face demotion, pay

cuts and new jobs in different places.

The proposed action is part of a plan to close what officials describe as an ongoing structural deficit — meaning that the nation's second-largest school system is spending more annually than it is receiving. Layoffs have been avoided for more than five years largely because of one-time, accumulated relief aid related to COVID-19.

In a December budget filing, the district projected deficits of \$877 million, or 14%, for the 2026-27 school [See LAUSD, A6]