



MARK ZUCKERBERG, shown arriving at court in L.A., testified kids under 13 aren't allowed on Instagram.

## Meta CEO defends app's age policies

Zuckerberg testifies in social media addiction lawsuit. His likability may become a factor.

By SONJA SHARP

Meta Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg made an extended, pugnacious appearance in Los Angeles County Superior Court on Wednesday, defending his company from the witness stand against a lawsuit that alleges social media harm children.

The Meta boss appeared in a dark suit and gray tie, his signature chestnut curls slightly mussed, darting occasional nervous looks at the jury and the 20-year-old plaintiff, who sat in the courtroom gallery.

"I'm not — I think I'm actually sort of well-known to be very bad at this," Zuckerberg told the young woman's attorney, Mark Lanier, when pressed about the professional polish of his testimony.

In a dramatic moment late in the morning, Judge Carolyn B. Kuhl sharply warned anyone in the courtroom against wearing Meta's artificial intelligence glasses.

"If your glasses are recording, you must take them off," the judge said. "It is the order of this court that there must be no facial recognition of the jury. If you have done that, you *must* delete it. This is very serious."

The admonition was met with silence in the courtroom.

Simply getting Zuckerberg on the stand Wednesday was a coup for the plaintiffs and a potential liability for his company's platforms, which must now contend with profound public distaste for the Meta figurehead.

According to a study last year by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center, the overwhelming majority of American adults have an unfavorable view of Zuckerberg.

The percentage of adults who view him very favorably is on par with the share who believe the Earth is flat or that aliens live among us.

"It's a very big deal," said Jenny Kim, an attorney in a related lawsuit. "The whole world is coming to watch him."

Crowds filled the plaza outside the Spring Street courthouse in downtown Los Angeles on Wednesday, with lines stretched out the door to enter the building, where many had waited for hours just for a glimpse of the CEO.

The plaintiff, a Chico, [See Zuckerberg, A7]

## Adding their 2 cents to the Guthrie case

Online sleuths bring up rumors and conspiracies

By Hannah Fry and Richard Winton

The kidnapping of Nancy Guthrie is the subject of a sprawling investigation involving local and federal agents.

But there is a second, shadow effort occurring on podcasts and social media platforms.

Psychics are on the case. Livestreamers are camped out in front of Guthrie's Tucson-area home, waiting for another detail to share.

Online, true crime fanatics have parsed through information about the case — filling in the limited details with rumor, innuendo and sometimes downright conspiracy. On social media, people share videos comparing limited facial details in images of a masked suspect at Guthrie's door the morning of her disappearance to photos of the 84-year-old's relatives or people loosely connected to the family.

This has become a common — and increasingly controversial — side of high-profile crime investigations: armies of amateur sleuths descending into a community and creating friction with police.

In the Guthrie case, Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos felt compelled to issue a statement Monday clearing her family as suspects to tamp down the rampant speculation.

"The family has been nothing but cooperative and gracious and are victims in this case," he said. "To suggest otherwise is not only wrong, it is cruel."

News of Guthrie's abduction 18 days ago has triggered a swell of public interest that has grown as the case goes unsolved. The FBI has received more than 18,000 tips from the public, and the Pima County Sheriff's Department has been flooded with about 50,000 [See Guthrie, A7]

## UCLA fires chief financial officer

The university says he made inaccurate remarks about deficit and mismanagement.

By JAWEED KALEEM

In a rare action against a top administrator, UCLA on Tuesday fired its chief financial officer after officials said he inaccurately described the campus deficit, which has come under scrutiny by

faculty leaders amid growing operation costs, attacks by the Trump administration and weaker-than-promised state funding.

Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer Stephen Agostini, who had overseen UCLA's \$11-billion budget since May 2024, "will no longer serve in his role, effective immediately," Chancellor Julio Frenk wrote in a brief campuswide message, announcing an interim appointment and a national search for a replacement.

The abrupt change came days after Agostini gave an interview to the Daily Bruin student newspaper saying the campus had "financial management flaws and failures" predating his arrival, leading to what he said was a \$425-million deficit. In the interview, Agostini blamed financial woes on faculty and staff raises, academic departments' requests for new positions and expanded programs, and UCLA athletics, which has run in the red for multiple years.

Agostini suggested that UCLA's annual financial reports going back to 2002 were incorrect, saying he saw "very serious errors" — a charge UCLA officials deny. UCLA's last posted financial report covers the 2022-23 fiscal year.

Agostini did not respond to requests for comment from The Times.

In his campus letter, Frenk did not state a reason for Agostini's dismissal.

A source with knowledge [See UCLA, A6]

## Blackjack ban could bust L.A. card clubs

Gambling operators fight new state rules they say would cost jobs and tax revenue.

By IRIS KWOK

As California is set to ban blackjack, Los Angeles' card clubs and cities that depend on gambling revenue are trying to stop the change.

California's Office of Administrative Law has green-lighted new rules that would ban cardrooms from offering blackjack in April.

Authorities want to close a legal loophole that allowed card clubs to offer blackjack and other banked games in which players play against the house. Those types of games are supposed to be offered only in Indian casinos, but the card clubs were getting around the restriction by using designated outside dealers.

Card club operators see the changes as an existential threat that will lead to job losses and reduced tax reve-

nue for the areas where they operate. They have vowed to pursue legal remedies.

"The proposed regulations destroy the financial viability of the California cardroom industry, jeopardize thousands of working families and harm dozens of California communities," California Gaming Assn. President Kyle Kirkland wrote in a letter to Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta earlier this month.

There are more than 70 cardrooms across California employing about 20,000 workers, according to the group. It estimates that the changes could cut the number of cardroom jobs in half and significantly reduce the industry's positive economic impact.

A 2019 analysis commissioned by the California Gaming Assn. estimated that tax revenue generated by California cardrooms was roughly \$500 million a year, with \$398.8 million in state taxes and \$100.9 million in local jurisdiction gaming taxes. [See Gambling, A10]

## 8 skiers killed in avalanche north of Lake Tahoe

Group set out despite dire forecast. Guide company comes under intense criticism.

By JACK DOLAN AND ANDREA FLORES

On Sunday, as forecasters warned that the biggest winter storm of the season was headed for California's High Sierra, a mountain guide company sent 15 people out for a risky backcountry skiing adventure on the slopes above Donner Pass.

The storm arrived as predicted and by Tuesday morning had dumped several feet of fresh, unstable snow. That's when the group attempted a perilous escape from the remote Frog Lake huts in a blinding blizzard beneath towering, avalanche-prone slopes.

A couple of miles from safety, someone in the group — which included four guides — saw a wall of snow barreling down from above and yelled, "Avalanche!" according to Rusty Greene, operations captain for the Nevada County Sheriff's Office.

In the deadliest avalanche in modern California history, eight of the skiers were killed. One remains un-

accounted for and is presumed dead.

After receiving the initial distress call at 11:30 a.m., dozens of first responders battled through the blizzard on snowcats and skis — there are no roads into the remote site — to reach the six survivors around 5:30 Tuesday evening.

Two were hospitalized and are expected to recover.

The eight bodies were still on the mountain as of Wednesday morning because the continuing storm made removing them too risky, officials said.

Now that the emergency is over and the fates of most of the skiers is known, first responders, professional guides and countless commentators on social media are asking why a guide service — especially one that trains others in avalanche safety — would go ahead with the trip in the face of such daunting weather.

There were "lots of forecasts on this storm," Nevada County Sheriff Shannan Moon said at a news conference Wednesday. "Those are the decisions that the guide company clearly made. We're still in conversation with them on the decision factors."

The company, Blackbird [See Avalanche, A6]



Nevada County Sheriff's Office

**MEMBERS** of a rescue team plow through snow. Six other skiers in the group were saved; one is missing.

## U.S. is seeing 'jobless boom'

Economy expands rapidly, but nation's employment growth is barely budging.

By AUGUSTA SARAIVA AND ENDA CURRAN

The economy is creating plenty of wealth. It's just not creating many jobs.

Forecasters expect Friday's report on gross domestic product to show the economy expanded 2.7% in 2025, a solid pace by any standard for a developed country. But employment barely grew, and the combination is drawing comparisons to the infamous "jobless recovery" of the early 2000s that came after the tech bubble and collapse.

There's one major difference between then and now that makes the current divergence all the more unusual: The 2000s episode kicked off with a recession. This time, the "jobless boom" is happening without one. That marks a first in the postwar era.

"We have never seen anything later in an expansion like what we are seeing today, and that's what makes it so unusual and hard to judge about where we are going," said Diane Swonk, the chief economist at KPMG. "At the end of the day we are sitting on a one-legged stool, which is not the most stable place to be."

President Trump probably will tout strong GDP [See Jobs, A11]

MILAN-CORTINA OLYMPICS

EZRA SHAW Getty Images

SEALED WITH A KISS

Mikaela Shiffrin of Team USA celebrates with her gold medal in the women's slalom on the podium in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. **SPORTS, D1**

ICE detention deaths criticized

Amid soaring fatalities, Senate Democrats question medical care, oversight and facility expansion. **NATION, A5**

Weather

Rain at times; cool. L.A. Basin: 58/42. **B5**

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Billionaires eye friendlier havens

Spielberg, Zuckerberg look outside the state amid wealth-tax proposal. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

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