



THE NUMBER of hydrogen cars in California slid for the first time last year. Above, a hydrogen truck engine.

Hydrogen is losing the state’s clean car fuel race

A decades-old green vision faces a bleak outlook as costs rise and batteries win out.

By BLANCA BEGERT

Hydrogen, viewed by its advocates as a clean fuel and a solution to climate change, is having a “non moment,” but don’t ask anyone in the industry to say that on the record.

Years of market turmoil, federal funding cuts, canceled projects and industry pullback have made it clear: California’s grand vision for fleets of vehicles and heavy industry running on clean hydrogen fuel has stalled.

Yet at a recent gathering in Sacramento, those in the nascent industry continued to tout the potential of a fuel they hope will turn around and thrive. Practically no one wanted to be quoted on the bleak outlook.

“It’s tough,” said Andrew Carman, a hydrogen dealmaker at the conference who said there just aren’t enough buyers to justify much new fuel production.

Hydrogen is an alternative to gasoline, diesel fuel and natural gas that’s part of California’s climate strategy because it doesn’t produce greenhouse gas emissions when used. It can be made cleanly by cleaving the hydrogen out of water using clean electricity.

But that’s not what usually happens. Some 95% of hydrogen used today is made from natural gas. That’s because freeing hydrogen from its bond with oxygen in water requires an extraordinary amount of energy — and expensive equipment — making it cost prohibitive.

Former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger drove a Hummer powered by hydrogen, putting the fuel on the state’s map in 2004 with his vision of a 200-station “hydrogen highway.” But as electric cars dropped in

[See **Hydrogen**, A8]

A senior factor in the California housing crisis

Aging residents stay put in their longtime homes

By GRACE TOOHEY

Marin County has long been one of California’s most expensive places to live.

Its coveted coastal views, proximity to the Bay Area’s tech economy and a formidable resistance to new development have created an extremely tight housing market in an already-pricey region.

But there’s another key factor that’s become increasingly important in conversations about housing here and in many other parts of California: the aging population.

“Household sizes are shrinking as kids move out and as spouses die,” said Jenny Silva, executive director of Call Marin Home, a coalition focused on affordable

and sustainable housing. “What was a household for four or five people is now a household for one.”

Marin County — where more than a third of residents are 60 or older, a share expected to rise to 40% by 2040 — may just be the most extreme example of how California’s ballooning senior population has created another challenge in the state’s housing crisis. As a large share of the state’s population ages, homes increasingly are accommodating fewer people. Even when new housing is built, it’s not having the outcome many expected because of this “spreading-out effect,” as

[See **Housing**, A5]



GODOFREDO A. VASQUEZ Associated Press

IN HIGH-PRICED Marin County, over a third of residents are 60 or older.

Voices PATT MORRISON COLUMNIST

We killed California’s grizzlies. Some want to bring them back

You really do see him everywhere. He’s there on your California driver’s license, on every state flag and on your UC Berkeley merch.

You find him on the official state seal, and if you get nabbed speeding on the freeway, there he is, embroidered on the CHP officer’s uniform patch.

If California ever printed its own money, he would be

on it.

He’s the California grizzly bear, and you see him pretty much everywhere, except for alive and thriving in California.

In the span of a single human lifetime — between the Gold Rush and Prohibition — we killed them all. Killed them? More like we exterminated them. Shot them for fun and for fur. Poisoned them for carrying off a farmer’s pigs or calves,

or because they might try to. Trapped them to chain them up in an arena and gore them to death by bull, to provide an afternoon’s entertainment.

We have a lot to atone for. And maybe that’s one reason that there has been talk of bringing the iconic bear back to the Golden State. More on that later.

The California grizzly is so important to our self-

[See **Morrison**, A6]

State backtracks on policies of good governing

Amid divide in Trump era, ‘top two’ primary reform is among those under severe threat.

By SEEMA MEHTA

Tired of budget stalemates, deficits and continuous acrimony in the state Capitol, California voters in 2010 started taking action to temper political gridlock and loosen the grip of entrenched special interests.

They approved statewide ballot measures to create an independent congressional redistricting commission, taking that power away from self-interested Sacramento lawmakers, as well as a new “top two” primary system intended to stifle the power of the major political parties and provide more representative, less hyperpartisan candidates with a greater chance of victory.

Now, in an era of even more bitter divisions in the state and nation, those reforms face severe threats.

Last month, supporters of a proposal to repeal the state’s current primary system, in which the two candidates in state and congressional elections who receive

the most votes move on to the general election regardless of party affiliation, received permission to gather voter signatures to place the measure on the 2028 ballot.

In November, Californians voted to temporarily scrap the congressional districts that were crafted by a voter-approved independent commission and instead replace them by ones approved by Democratic lawmakers in Sacramento. The move, aimed at giving Democrats an edge in the November midterm election, was in response to President Trump urging GOP state leaders, notably in Texas, to alter their districts to boost Republican numbers in the closely divided U.S. House of Representatives after the 2026 election.

“In the olden times, California liked to see itself as the epicenter of good-government reform,” said Jessica Levinson, an election law professor at Loyola Marymount University.

But the sense of optimism when voters approved these reforms has faded, she said, because of the divisiveness cultivated by Trump but also because of polarization that predates him.

[See **Reform**, A5]

Bulldozers arrive in Big Bend. Why?

Texas park’s terrain is its own barrier, but a border project begins. Bipartisan fury builds.

By ALICIA A. CALDWELL AND JOE LOVINGER

The Trump administration has moved heavy-duty construction equipment into Big Bend National Park and started work on a border security project despite bipartisan concern about damage to the environmentally sensitive area of west Texas.

Bulldozers and other machinery appeared last week in the remote park, which sits about 300 miles southeast of El Paso and includes one of the least crossed stretches of the U.S.-Mexico border, according to Laiken Jordahl, a national public lands advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity, which has sued the Biden and Trump administrations seeking to halt border-wall construction.

Jordahl said he and other activists watching the work have seen bulldozers plowing through vegetation “clearing a path for the bar-

riers, the wall or whatever is going in.”

U.S. Customs and Border Protection “is building an access road, improving existing roads, installing detection technology and placing vehicle barriers in limited, strategic locations,” Commissioner Rodney Scott, the agency’s top official, said in an email Thursday. “We are securing this park to protect its legacy — keeping it safe, secure, and pristine so American families can enjoy the beauty of our country, free from fear of cartel activity.”

The Trump administration is moving ahead with the project over the objections of not just environmental activists and others opposed to the crackdown on immigration, but also residents, many of them Republicans who otherwise support President Trump, as well as retiring GOP Sen. John Cornyn.

They note that the rugged terrain — mostly desert with steep ravines and scrubland covered in creosote bushes and prickly pear cactus — serves as a natural barrier for anyone trying to cross from Mexico, making the infrastructure unnecessary.

[See **Big Bend**, A6]



BRANDON BELL Getty Images

A BULLDOZER sits near Santa Elena Canyon, a popular hiking spot in Texas’ Big Bend National Park.



DAMIAN DOVARGANES AP

CAREER SAVER

As a Dodger, Tommy John underwent the namesake surgery on his left elbow in 1974.

TOMMY JOHN, 1943 – 2026

Pitcher had pioneering operation

By MICHAEL KUPPER

It’s right there in the medical books, along with Belsey fundoplication, Heineke-Mikulicz pyloroplasty and Keller’s excision arthroplasty: Tommy John surgery.

Purists might refer to it as ulnar collateral ligament reconstruction, but the rest of

the world knows it as the career-saving surgery named for a sore-armed left-handed Dodgers pitcher.

Tommy John was facing the bleak reality that his career was likely over when he ruptured a ligament in his left elbow on a summer night in 1974, an injury that had sent so many pitchers into an early retirement. But a then-radical surgery not

only saved but also revived his career, as well as the careers of hundreds of baseball players including Tom Candiotti, John Smoltz and Shohei Ohtani in the 50 years since.

Always more famous for the surgical procedure than his career stats, John died Saturday, the Dodgers announced. He was 83.

[See **John**, A8]

Ukraine takes war to Russia

Drones have struck deep in enemy territory, shifting conflict’s narrative. **WORLD, A2**

Lake Powell, too, at historic low

Record receding there and at Lake Mead amplify Colorado River crisis. **CALIFORNIA, B3**

The sound of a family legacy

The Womack Sisters, steeped in music, have a soul all their own. **ENTERTAINMENT, E1**

Weather

Partly sunny. L.A. Basin: 87/68. **B6**

