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The Desert Sun

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ANTI-MORMON SLURS AND VIOLENCE PERSIST



Members of the Grand Blanc, Michigan, congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints embrace after a meeting with an elder of the church Sept. 30, following a deadly shooting and fire that claimed four lives and injured others. PROVIDED BY INTELLECTUAL RESERVE INC.

Mass killing, other incidents highlight long-standing discrimination

Dinah Voyles Pulver
USA TODAY

A day before a shooter killed four people and set fire to a Michigan church in September, students at a football game in Colorado chanted vulgar slurs against the same religious organization.

The two events spurred sweeping conversations about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and lingering prejudice against its members, often called Mormons.

The University of Colorado's chancellor and athletic director quickly condemned the students' behavior, but it was at least the third time in the past year that chanting by student fans at college games against Brigham Young University took on a darker tone. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints owns and operates BYU.

Less than 24 hours later, on Sept. 28, police say Thomas Jacob Sanford drove his pickup truck into the Michigan meetinghouse where more than 100 members had gathered for Sunday services.

Eyewitnesses told authorities Sanford got out of his truck shooting at church members with an assault rifle, then set off an inferno as terrified congregants rushed to get everyone out of the building. The assault left four members dead and numerous others injured — some from gunshots, others by smoke inhalation and



Flowers sit near the scene of a mass shooting at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Grand Blanc Township, Michigan, on Sept. 29. RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS

still others gashed and bleeding from shrapnel and shards of glass.

Within hours, news emerged that Sanford had previously ranted against the church after a failed relationship with a devout member of the faith in Utah more than a decade earlier.

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LA County investigates State Farm's handling of wildfire claims

Sam Morgen
Palm Springs Desert Sun | USA TODAY NETWORK

Los Angeles County has launched an investigation into State Farm's handling of claims related to the Palisades and Eaton fires that occurred in January 2025.

The county issued a news release on Thursday stating that the investigation would focus on potential violations of California's Unfair Competition Law, follow-

ing growing complaints of delays, underpayments, and denials of legitimate claims.

"Altadena residents have already endured unimaginable loss and they shouldn't have to fight their own insurance company to recover," Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Chair Kathryn Barger said in the release. "The County has heard loud and

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Newsom's former chief of staff charged in fraud case

Paris Barraza
Palm Springs Desert Sun | USA TODAY NETWORK

A former chief of staff to Gov. Gavin Newsom is alleged to have conspired with others to divert thousands of dollars from a political campaign to an associate's personal use, as well as to create false contracts.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of California announced the charges against Dana Williamson, 53, of Carmichael, on Wednesday, Nov. 12.

Here's what to know about Williamson and the charges she faces.

What has Dana Williamson been accused of?

Williamson is alleged to have "conspired with others to divert approximately \$225,000 in funds from a dormant political campaign to an associate's personal use." The 53-year-old was also alleged to have "conspired with a business associate to create false, backdated contracts" after receiving a civil subpoena regarding Paycheck Protection Program loans made to her business.

Williamson did not immediately respond to the Desert Sun's request for comment.

According to the indictment, the money taken from the dormant campaign accounts was funneled through companies controlled by Williamson and two others. It was "disguised as pay" to the spouse of Sean McCluskie, a federal employee — both of which are identified as among the "conspirators" alongside Williamson — "for a 'no-show' job" and "transferred into an account controlled by McCluskie."

McCluskie, according to the Guardian and the San Francisco Chronicle, is the former chief of staff for Xavier Becerra, the former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services. Becerra, according to both news outlets, is the official whose campaign account was targeted by Williamson and others. The Department of Justice did not immediately respond to the Desert Sun's request seeking confirmation about this.

Among the other allegations against Williamson is claiming over \$1 million in business deductions that were actually personal and nondeductible expenses,

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