



DANNY UPSHAW

TEMPEST IN TEMPE

A dust storm that rolled across the Phoenix area caused power outages and disrupted air travel. Heavy rain and wind followed the storm, called a haboob, seen near the Salt River in Tempe, Ariz. **NATION, A6**

Methane leaks at oil sites are toxic

Large emissions of the greenhouse gas also carry a mixture of air pollutants, study finds.

By TONY BRISCOE

Large methane leaks at oil and gas facilities across the United States not only unleash massive plumes of the potent greenhouse gas, but also carry a toxic mix of air pollutants that jeopardize the health of communities nearby, according to new research.

Over the course of 20 years, methane is capable of warming the atmosphere around 80 times more than carbon dioxide. Yet when methane seeps out of fossil-fuel extraction wells or storage tanks, it's almost always commingled with a medley of toxic chemicals, such as cancer-causing benzene, according to a new analysis by PSE Healthy Energy.

A new interactive map launched this week by the Oakland-based nonprofit research institute examines the health risk associated with more than 1,300 large methane releases nationwide, including 32 in California, that occurred from 2016 to 2025. The tool estimates the concentrations of airborne pollutants and outlines at-risk areas.

Researchers say more [See **Methane**, A7]

GOP widens UC investigations

House education panel seeks medical schools' documents related to alleged antisemitism. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

A celebrity love story's new twist

Pop giant Taylor Swift and NFL star Travis Kelce announce that they're engaged. **ENTERTAINMENT, E1**

State is slow to return to office

L.A., San Francisco areas still report some of the lowest attendance in the country. **BUSINESS, A9**

Weather
Partly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 89/68. **B6**

Markets A11
Opinion Voices A12

For the latest news, go to **latimes.com**.



Inside the fight over recycling milk cartons

State goes back and forth over whether they can sport chasing arrows label — key for future sales

By Susanne Rust

LODI, Calif. — A battle has been waging in Sacramento over whether beverage cartons — the ones used for milk, juice, broth, wine, even egg whites — should get the coveted chasing arrows recycling label.

This year, the state agency in charge of recycling, CalRecycle, determined the cartons were probably not eligible, because they weren't being sorted and recycled by the vast majority of the state's waste haulers, a requirement of the state's "Truth in Recycling" law, Senate Bill 54.

Three months later, the agency reversed course.

The label is critical for product and packaging companies to keep selling in California as the state's single-use packaging law goes fully into effect. It calls for all single-use packaging products to be recyclable or compostable by 2032. If they're not, they can't be sold or distributed in the state.

According to internal agency emails, documents and industry news releases, the change was prompted by data from the carton packaging industry's trade group, the Carton Council of North America. The council had also announced it was investing in a carton recycling facility in Lodi.

The waste agency's reversal incensed several waste experts, antiplastic activists and environmentalists, who say cartons have limited, if any, value or recycling potential. They say the new industry-backed facility in Lodi is nothing more than a facade — one of several similar operations that have failed across the country. CalRecycle's revised determination about the recyclability of the material, they say, is based on flawed methods that are easy to exploit.

Some say it's just the latest example of Gov. Gavin Newsom and CalRecycle retreating from the state's landmark single-use plastic [See **Milk**, A7]

One studio is spending big

Paramount regime seals massive deals in a trying time for film and TV. Can that last?

By SAMANTHA MASUNAGA

Shortly after taking over Paramount, new Chief Executive David Ellison threw down the gauntlet — he wanted his studio to be the top destination for the most talented filmmakers and artists in the business.

It wasn't just words. Already, Ellison has made a \$7.7-billion deal for

UFC media rights, closed two massive deals that will pay the creators of "South Park" more than \$1.25 billion over five years to secure streaming rights to the popular cartoon, and lured Matt and Ross Duffer of "Stranger Things" fame away from Netflix with a "wide-ranging" and exclusive four-year television, streaming and film deal.

That spending spree — along with new big-name studio hires — has ignited hope and enthusiasm among Hollywood's creatives, who have weathered the industry's recent downturns, consolidation and Pa-

ramount's own stingy ways. With new, deep-pocketed buyers of film and TV projects taking charge of a major studio, sellers are salivating, even as the company's employees brace for a significant wave of layoffs.

But will the spending onslaught be enough to turn around the storied studio?

"There is a path to achieving what they want to achieve — becoming relevant again, becoming a place for great storytelling, having exciting programming that pumps blood into Paramount+ and helps it to grow," said J. Christopher [See **Paramount**, A11]

In California, a partisan split on a Trump-led U.S.

Democrats say nation is headed on wrong path; Republicans see opposite, poll finds.

By KEVIN RECTOR

California voters are heavily divided along partisan lines when it comes to President Trump, with large majorities of Democrats and unaffiliated voters disapproving of him and believing the country is headed in the wrong direction under his leadership, and many Republicans feeling the opposite, according to a new poll conducted for The Times.

The findings are remarkably consistent with past polling on the Republican president in the nation's most populous blue state, said Mark DiCamillo, director of the UC Berkeley Insti-

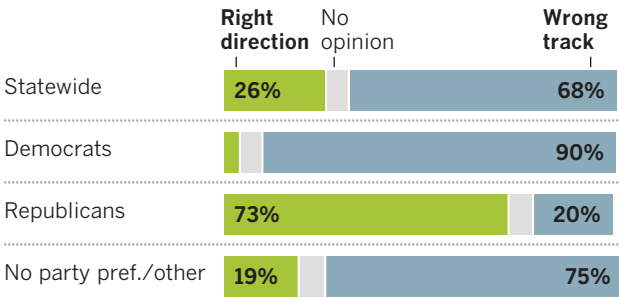
tute of Governmental Studies Poll.

"If you look at all the job ratings we've done about President Trump — and this carries back all the way through his first term — voters have pretty much maintained the same posture," DiCamillo said. "Voters know who he is."

The same partisan divide also showed up in the poll on a number of hot-button issues, such as Medicaid cuts and tariffs, DiCamillo said — with Democrats "almost uniformly" opposed to Trump's agenda and Republicans "pretty much on board with what Trump is doing."

Asked whether the sweeping tariffs that Trump has imposed on international trading partners have had a "noticeable negative impact" on their family spending, 71% of Democrats [See **Poll**, A8]

Is the country headed in the right direction or on the wrong track?



Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies

LORENA INIGUEZ ELEBEE Los Angeles Times

Donor is behind loan allegations

Fraud claims against 3 Trump foes were referred by Bill Pulte, now a top regulator.

By MICHAEL WILNER

WASHINGTON — Behind a White House effort to saddle President Trump's political foes with accusations of mortgage fraud is a 37-year-old home construction executive with a deep partisan past.

Bill Pulte, a Florida native, rose in Trump's orbit toward the end of his first term. After courting Trump for years on social media and through generous donations, he now runs the Federal Housing Finance Agency — a perch that has allowed him to target prominent figures who have crossed the president.

In the last five months, Pulte has referred three claims of mortgage fraud against Trump's foes to the Justice Department, leveled against Letitia James, the attorney general of New York; Adam Schiff, the

Democratic senator from California; and this week, Lisa Cook, a governor on the board of the Federal Reserve.

Each has denied wrongdoing. Trump announced on Monday night that he was moving to fire Cook.

It is an unusual role for a director of the FHFA, which regulates Fannie Mae — the nation's largest company by assets — and Freddie Mac. The two mortgage financing organizations, which support nearly half of the U.S. residential mortgage market, were taken over by the FHFA during the 2008 economic crisis.

The grandson of one of Michigan's wealthiest and most prolific home builders, Pulte made a name for himself on Twitter in 2019 with public cash giveaways to individuals in need. He dubbed himself the "inventor of Twitter philanthropy," vowing to give two cars away in exchange for a Trump retweet that year, which he received. He subsequently built a following of over 3 million.

Records show Pulte do- [See **Pulte**, A10]

Fountain has fame but can't avoid misfortune

By HANNAH FRY

Old Towne Orange — with its neat row of vintage shops and Victorian houses built around a grand town square and landmark fountain — looks so Americana that Hollywood studios have flocked there for generations to use as backdrops for small-town America.

It was the stand-in for a Midwestern town in Tom Hanks' "That Thing You Do" and for a Southern burg in "Big Mama's House," among many others.

But increasingly, the peace — and safety of its landmark fountain — has come under threat from a far more modern culprit.

Time and time again, speeding cars have plowed

through Plaza Park's grassy expanses and vibrant rosebushes, demolishing wood benches and slamming into the beloved 88-year-old fountain.

"The whole plaza — people consider that the jewel of Orange," said Jeff Frankel, a resident of the Old Towne neighborhood in the Orange County city. "Now is it treated that way? Sometimes I don't think so."

The water feature has suffered its share of abuse over the decades, but the crashes in the last few years have been particularly damaging. They've left officials and residents puzzling over an intractable question: What can be done to stop people from crashing into the fountain?

[See **Fountain**, A8]



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

THIS FOUNTAIN, a film favorite, has repeatedly been the victim of bad drivers.