



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

“THAT SPEED is extraordinary,” an official said of the cleanup in the Palisades, above, and Altadena areas.

Fire cleanup nears the finish line

Army Corps-led federal contractors are months ahead of schedule

By TONY BRISCOE

Less than eight months after the Eaton and Palisades wildfires destroyed 16,000 buildings in Los Angeles County, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced it was preparing to clear wreckage from the final residential parcel that opted into the federal cleanup.

At a news conference Tuesday in Pacific Palisades, U.S. Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Sherman Oaks), L.A. County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath and L.A. City Councilmember Traci Park joined federal disaster agencies in commemorating the federal response to the wildfires as the fastest wildfire recovery in modern history.

2.5 million

Tons of ash, rubble and contaminated soil removed by federal cleanup crews from destroyed properties

10,000

Approximate number of properties cleared by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers since the Eaton and Palisades fires

628

Rebuilding permits issued by local officials

Federal contractors say they have cleared 2.5 million tons of fire debris from nearly 10,000 properties, finishing roughly four months earlier than the Army Corps’ January 2026 goal and well ahead of experts’ and lawmakers’ initial projections.

“What was expected to take more than two years was finished in just seven months,” Horvath said. “That speed is extraordinary, but this milestone is about more than speed. It’s about partnership and compassion and a shared commitment to walk the road of recovery with our community until the very end.”

The debris removal began in late January when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency oversaw the collection and

[See Cleanup, A7]

Epstein scandal awaits Congress’ return from break

Democrats want to keep focus on an issue that has roiled Trump and his MAGA base.

By MICHAEL WILNER

WASHINGTON — The ghost of Jeffrey Epstein is back in Washington as Congress prepares to return from the fall.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson called an early start to summer break in July, attempting to shut down bipartisan clamor for the full release of the Epstein files. But Democrats are eager to launch back into a scandal that has dogged President Trump and divided his MAGA base.

Rep. Ro Khanna, a California Democrat, plans to partner with Republican Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky to quickly force a vote on the House floor ordering the Justice Department to release its entire trove of documents from the investigation of Epstein, a convicted sex offender who abused hundreds of women and girls.

The success of the measure is far from guaranteed. It is unclear whether the Justice Department would even abide by it. But Democrats plan to make sure the issue does not go away, regardless of its outcome, multiple Democratic aides said.

Democratic lawmakers’ focus on Epstein will be “high” out of the gate once Congress returns after Labor

Day, one senior House Democratic staffer told The Times.

Republicans “will not want to be put in a position of voting against disclosure,” said the staffer, who requested anonymity to share internal discussions. “The same thing that tripped up Johnson in July is still there.”

Epstein, a wealthy financier with a deep bench of powerful friends, died in a New York City prison in August 2019 facing federal

[See Congress, A7]

22 TV series to receive tax credit

California more than doubled the cap on its program. Applications jumped nearly 400%.

By SAMANTHA MASUNAGA

Nearly two dozen television shows will receive incentives for shooting in California — including two series that relocated from Texas and Canada — in the first award period since the state bolstered its film and TV tax credit program earlier this summer.

In this round, 22 shows were chosen amid a nearly 400% increase in applications, said Colleen Bell, the California Film Commission’s executive director. The additional shoot days in California are a welcome boost for Hollywood, which has seen a sharp decrease in production after slowdowns from the pandemic, the dual writers’ and actors’ strikes in 2023, cutbacks in spending at the studios and the exodus of filming to locales outside the Golden State.

To address this issue, the California Legislature upped the annual cap for the state’s incentive program to \$750 million, up from \$330 million.

“These enhancements to our program, they’re not just about curbing runaway production,” Bell said in an interview. “We’re building momentum to grow and expand production here in California.”

In total, the 22 shows were allocated \$255.9 million in credits and are expected to generate about \$1.1 billion of economic activity in California

[See Filming, A11]

A wrenching decision for a family torn apart

KINI, Mexico — On a hot June night Jesús Cruz at last returned to Kini, the small town in Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula where he spent the first 17 years of his life.

His sister greeted him with tearful hugs. The next morning she took him to see their infirm mother, who whispered in his ear: “I didn’t think you’d ever come back.”

After decades away, Cruz was finally home.

Yet he was not home.

So much of what he loved was 3,000 miles away in Southern California, where he resided for 33 years until immigration agents swarmed the car wash where he worked and hauled him away in handcuffs.

Cruz missed his friends and Booka, his little white dog. His missed his house, his car, his job.

But most of all, he missed his wife, Noemi Ciau, and their four children. Ciau worked nights, so Cruz was in charge of getting the kids fed, clothed and to and from school and music lessons, a

In U.S for 33 years, he was deported after a raid. Would his wife and kids join him in Mexico?

By Kate Linthicum



JUAN PABLO AMPUDIA For The Times

JESÚS CRUZ, who was detained in a car wash raid, hugs his wife, Noemi Ciau.

chaotic routine that he relished because he knew he was helping them get ahead.

“I want them to have a better life,” he said. “Not the one I had.”

Now that he was back in Mexico, living alone in an empty house that belonged to his in-laws, he and Ciau, who is a U.S. permanent resident, faced an impossible decision.

Should she and the children join Cruz in Mexico? Or stay in Inglewood?

Cruz and Ciau both had families that had been broken by the border, and they didn’t want that for their kids. In the months since Cruz had been detained, his eldest daughter, 16-year-old Dhelainy, had barely slept and had stopped playing her beloved piano, and his youngest son, 5-year-old Gabriel, had started acting out. Esther, 14, and Angel, 10, were hurting too.

But bringing four American kids to Mexico didn’t seem fair, either. None of them spoke Spanish, and

[See Family, A4]

School board votes to display Israeli flag

Debate is heated over heritage month plan for all Beverly Hills Unified campuses.

By CLARA HARTER

The Beverly Hills Unified School District’s Board of Education approved a proposal Tuesday night to display the Israeli flag on all campuses and district facilities in recognition of Jewish American Heritage Month in May.

The proposal is part of a resolution to combat antisemitism that also calls for educating students about Jewish history and commemorating Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah), International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and Oct. 7 as a Day of

Remembrance of the 2023 Hamas-led attack on Israel.

The resolution passed in a 3-2 vote, with board President Rachelle Marcus voting no due to fears that displaying the Israeli flag would make schools a target. Board member Amanda Stern voted no because she does not believe “partisan material” such as a national flag belongs in a public school resolution.

The resolution was introduced earlier this month and sparked fierce debate over whether it is appropriate to dedicate so much time and so many resources to recognizing a specific ethnic and religious group in a public school setting.

It has also raised concerns that displaying the Israeli flag doesn’t simply signal support for the Jewish people but also represents

[See Flags, A7]



LUKE JOHNSON Los Angeles Times

.300 HITTER DISAPPEARING

Freddie Freeman’s a rarity: a hitter batting above the .300 mark, Bill Shaikin writes. **B10**

Updated COVID shots approved
In a policy change for this season, FDA limits access by some minors and young adults. **PERSPECTIVES, A2**

Weather
Clouds clearing. L.A. Basin: 87/67. **B6**

Markets **A11**
Opinion Voices **A12**

Home Depot hit by crime ring
Nine are charged in more than 600 thefts at the chain’s Southland stores. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

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2 killed in shooting at Catholic school

Along with the slain children, 17 people are injured during Mass at Minneapolis church.

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, MARK VANCELEAVE AND GIOVANNA DELL’ORTO

MINNEAPOLIS — A shooter opened fire with a rifle Wednesday through the windows of a Catholic church in Minneapolis and struck children celebrating Mass during the first week of school, killing two and wounding 17 people in an act of violence the police chief called “absolutely incomprehensible.”

Armed with a rifle, shotgun and pistol, 23-year-old Robin Westman approached the side of the church and shot dozens of

rounds through the windows toward the children sitting in the pews during Mass at the Annunciation Catholic School just before 8:30 a.m., Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O’Hara said at news conferences. He said the shooter then died by suicide.

The children who died were 8 and 10. Fourteen other kids and three octogenarian parishioners were wounded but expected to survive, the chief said.

Fifth-grader Weston Hallsne told reporters he ducked for the pews, covering his head, shielded by a friend who was lying on top of him. His friend was hit, he said.

“I was super scared for him, but I think now he’s OK,” the 10-year-old said, adding that he was praying for the other hospitalized children and adults.

[See Shooting, A14]