



Photographs by ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

ENVIRONMENTALISTS say protections for Joshua trees are needed because the succulent is losing habitat.

Protection, or imposition?

Some desert property owners argue that state safeguards for Joshua trees have created an unfair financial burden

By Alex Wigglesworth

Imagine this: After years of toiling in the Southern California rat race, you buy a parcel of land in the high desert. It is here, on a sunny lot thick with Joshua trees, that you plan to build your retirement home.

But before you can get a shovel into the ground, everything changes. Joshua trees become candidates for the state's threatened and endangered species list and are then protected by an unprecedented conservation law. You must now apply for permits and pay fees — not just for removing the plants, but in some cases for disturbing the land around them. You must even get permits to pick up fallen branches.

You have two options: You can pay tens of thousands of dollars and navigate a morass of policies. If you want to someday add a pool or an accessory dwelling unit or even replace a sewage



ALEC MACKIE wants to build a home on his Yucca Valley property.

pipe, you'll have to do the same thing again, potentially paying for work performed near the same trees.

Or you can walk away.

That's the dilemma facing some property owners in desert regions outside Los Angeles, according to Alec Mackie, who bought land in Yucca Valley in 2022. He had planned to build a home that required the removal of eight Joshua trees. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife said his project could affect 63 trees and billed him \$32,961.75.

"Is it worth owning this land, or should we just let it go and go buy some other desert land with no Joshua trees?" Mackie said. "We're seriously leaning toward just giving up because the state will never leave us alone. They will always be there to regulate every

[See Joshua trees, A7]

Rideshare deal to let drivers unionize

By LAURA J. NELSON AND SUHAUNA HUSSAIN

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Gavin Newsom and California lawmakers on Friday announced a landmark deal with Uber and Lyft to allow hundreds of thousands of rideshare drivers to unionize and bargain collectively while still being classified as independent contractors.

The compromise between labor unions and the Silicon Valley companies, backed by Newsom, Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas and Senate Pro Tem Mike McGuire, would advance a collective bargaining bill through the Legislature along with a bill backed by Uber and Lyft that would significantly reduce the companies' insurance requirements.

The deal is a major development in the years-long tussle between organized labor and Silicon Valley over rights for independent contractors.

Labor leaders from Service Employees International Union California, a powerful union that has been working for years to organize app-based drivers, said the deal is the largest expansion of private sector collective bargaining rights in California history.

"Labor and industry sat down together, worked through their differences, and found common ground," Newsom said in a statement. The agreement, he said, will "empower hundreds of thousands of drivers while making rideshare more affordable for millions of Californians."

With support from Rivas and McGuire, both bills are expected to sail through the Legislature before the ses-

[See Legislation, A12]

O.C. rejects voter data request

County leaders refuse a federal demand for registration records, citing privacy and law.

By HANNAH FRY

Orange County leaders are vowing to fight the Trump administration over the release of sensitive voter data to the Department of Justice after the agency sued for the information in June.

The fight marks a test for county leaders, who have been divided over whether to resist demands by the U.S. Justice Department for records related to alleged voting irregularities, an issue

Trump has championed since losing the 2020 election.

Republican Supervisors Don Wagner and Janet Nguyen on Tuesday sought support from the rest of the board to comply with the federal government's request to turn over voter registration records of 17 individuals who were ineligible to cast a ballot but had appeared on the county's voter registration rolls.

Instead, a majority of the board voted against the request, with several noting they preferred to let a judge decide whether the information should ultimately be released.

The vote, county lawyers said, wouldn't be enough to

force the county registrar to turn over any information anyway since the county isn't named in the lawsuit. But experts say the move signals a willingness in this onetime conservative stronghold to push back against the Trump administration's attempts to expand federal power and seek sensitive information on individuals.

"It's a little bit of posturing of whether or not there is allegiance to the Trump administration [by] obeying in advance," said Jodi Balma, a political science professor at Fullerton College. "The reality is, nobody's dying on the hill of 17 voter registrations."

The Trump administration

[See Voter data, A7]

Be prepared for the haboob, the mother of all dust storms

For anyone wondering whether intense dust storms, such as the haboob that enveloped Phoenix this week, are possible in Southern California, the answer is yes.

They've hit in the recent past and are a growing issue over much of Southern California and the Central Valley, thanks to the drying associated with climate change, water overuse, wildfires, off-roading, tractors on dry soil and construction, experts say.

In 2022, for instance, there was a massive haboob in the Salton Sea area. The dust from that nighttime storm — with a 3,000-foot-high wall of dust and 60-mph winds — went all the way to Los Angeles.

"It was insane," said Amato Evan, a climate researcher at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography. It was so thick that cameras picked it up in Riverside, he said. More sensitive instruments

[See Haboobs, A14]

Climate change has increased heat and dryness in the Central Valley and SoCal, adding to health risks

By Susanne Rust



City of Phoenix / Associated Press

A TOWERING cloud of dust engulfs part of Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport on Monday.

The new math in LAUSD: Too many schools

Campus closures and staff cuts haven't kept pace with the district's declining enrollment.

By HOWARD BLUME

A steep drop in Los Angeles Unified student enrollment — 27% over about 10 years and 44% over about 20 — has not been matched by a proportionate drop in the number of campuses or employees, one of several markers indicating difficult decisions ahead for the nation's second-largest school system, a report released Thursday shows.

The contrast is creating a math problem for Los Angeles Unified: how to cut costs while also preserving what's most important for students — and also best for employees.

The challenge ahead is laid out in a study by the local nonprofit Great Public Schools NOW that acknowledges there are neither perfect nor easy answers.

The loss of students has

"profound implications for the district's finances and operations, as fewer students mean less state and federal funding at the district level, resulting in reduced staffing, limited program offerings, and underutilized facilities," the report states.

At the same time, despite LAUSD losing more than 300,000 students since its peak enrollment 23 years ago, the number of operating schools has declined only slightly, less than 5%, the report says, adding: "This mismatch contributes to underutilized campuses and thinly spread district resources."

Confronting the enrollment decline also plays out in staffing levels, employee pay and retiree health benefits, among other considerations.

The new report echoes concerns raised by L.A. schools Supt. Alberto Carvalho, although he has yet to fully address the financial implications. In budget presentations over the last few months, he has repeatedly

[See Schools, A9]

Rental subsidies for L.A. homeless vets often unused

Bureaucracy has left more than 4,000 vouchers for housing gathering dust.

By DOUG SMITH

Over the last decade, Los Angeles County housing authorities have received nearly 4,500 rental vouchers to get homeless veterans into permanent housing.

If all of those vouchers had been put to use, veteran homelessness would be a thing of the past.

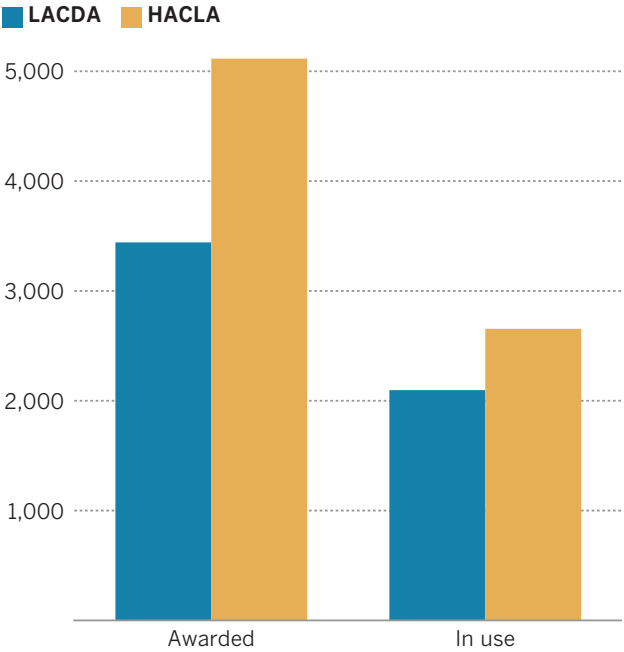
"There are certainly enough available vouchers to eliminate veteran homelessness in Los Angeles County," said Emilio Salas, executive director of the county housing authority.

Instead, chronic failures in a complicated system of referral, leasing and support services have left those housing authorities treading water. About 4,000 vouchers are gathering dust while an estimated 3,400 veterans remain on the county's streets or in its shelters.

The county's 11 housing agencies that receive vouchers through the federal HUD-VASH program have obtained leases for only 59% of them, a rate 20 percentage points below the na-

[See Subsidies, A14]

Vouchers by housing authority



2025 data are cumulative through June for LACDA and mid-August for HACLA. Los Angeles County Development Authority and Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles

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Trump's tariffs illegal, court says
But 7-4 decision doesn't immediately nullify the duties, giving him time to appeal to Supreme Court. **NATION, A9**

Missouri joins gerrymander war
As the GOP-led state calls a special session, Texas' maps are signed into law. **NATION, A6**

Weather
Mostly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 91/67. **B8**

Harris' security detail is canceled
President Trump revokes former vice president's Secret Service protection. **NATION, A5**

Public defenders want Essayli out
A filing argues the acting U.S. attorney is unlawfully occupying his post. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

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