



A burned boat on the Guajira Peninsula in Colombia seemed linked to the Trump administration’s campaign against “narco-terrorists.”

## California’s Right Fears Losing Voice in House

By KELLEN BROWNING

RICHVALE, Calif. — A dozen rice farmers ate chili and munched on sandwiches on a recent afternoon at the Richvale Cafe, a lunch spot that was bustling by local standards and brought more people face to face in one sitting than each might see in an entire week.

Richvale, population 234, has a cluster of ranch-style homes surrounded by a flat expanse of furrowed plots and flooded rice fields. It sits hundreds of miles north of the tech hubs and balmy beaches many Americans envision when they think of California.

### Conservatives in Rural North Dread Result of Gerrymander

The almond growers and cattle ranchers here take turns volunteering as firefighters and make sure to remember their neighbors’ birthdays. (If they forget, a whiteboard next to the cafe’s kitchen offers a handy reminder.)

For decades, residents in the rural north have longed for a political earthquake that would cleave their region out of California and

allow them to create their own fabled “State of Jefferson” with conservatives in Southern Oregon. They have increasingly felt underappreciated and misunderstood by the liberal Democrats who run California and dominate the congressional delegation — who, in their telling, siphon away their water and prioritize environmental regulations that undercut farmers’ livelihoods.

Now, they not only lack a conservative State of Jefferson, but their entire region is also likely to lose its Republican congressman and have him replaced by a Democrat after next year’s midterm

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## Trump Faces Slow Grind On Ukraine

By DAVID E. SANGER

A few hours before President Trump welcomed President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine to his Mar-a-Lago resort on Sunday for lunch and a detailed discussion of an emerging peace plan to end a nearly four-year-long war, Russia’s foreign minister suggested that the two men might have saved themselves the effort.

Sergey V. Lavrov, the Kremlin’s pugnacious top diplomat, reiterated that Moscow would never agree to any deal that allowed European forces to be based in Ukraine. Placing European troops inside Ukraine is a key element of the security plan Mr. Zelensky has been fashioning in negotiations with the Trump administration. Their presence would be intended to prevent future invasions and to monitor a proposed “demilitarized zone” in territory that Russia has insisted must be turned over to its full control.

Should the Europeans show up, Mr. Lavrov told reporters, they would be a “legitimate target” for Russian forces. He never even got as far as another extraordinary provision in the peace proposal — at least, as described by Mr. Zelensky last week — that would appear to obligate the United States to come to Ukraine’s defense if Russia attacked again.

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Richvale Cafe is a prime gathering spot for farmers in a conservative town in Northern California.

## Trump Says D.C. Is Free of Murder. Victims’ Families Feel Ignored.

By ZOLAN KANNO-YOUNGS and ERICA L. GREEN

WASHINGTON — On a warm Saturday afternoon in November, the 17-year-old Tristan Johnson grabbed his black puffer jacket and headed out to rent a scooter.

He was walking a few blocks from the D.C. Armory, the staging area for the hundreds of National Guard troops who had been patrolling Washington as part of President Trump’s crackdown on crime in the nation’s capital.

But not long after Tristan

walked out of his grandmother’s front door, he was shot dead in the street. The police told Tristan’s mother that the suspects might have been trying to steal his jacket, which was one of his favorites.

In the days that followed, Tristan’s family found some solace in honoring his memory: his love of football and TikTok, his dreams of starting a truck driving business. But then, a little more than two weeks later, they watched as Mr. Trump seemed to erase his story altogether.

### No End to Bitter Toll for Communities of Color

“We haven’t had a murder in six months,” Mr. Trump said of Washington.

It was the kind of glaringly false claim about crime in the capital that Mr. Trump has made repeatedly since August, when he deployed the National Guard and took federal control of the police force, the Metropolitan Police De-

partment. While crime is dropping in Washington — homicides are down by 31 percent compared with the same time last year — the city’s police recorded 127 murders through Dec. 26, including 28 since Mr. Trump announced his federal takeover.

The rate of homicides has dropped from an average of more than 12 a month since the National Guard was deployed, but still stood at seven per month over the closing four months of the year.

While Mr. Trump’s claim was

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## Remnants of U.S. Strikes: Bodies and a Singed Boat

### First Physical Evidence of Trump Operation Appears to Reach Colombian Shore

This article is by Max Bearak, Simón Posada and Christiaan Triebert.

GUAJIRA PENINSULA, Colombia — A thunderous boom rang out through the windless late-afternoon air. Seconds later, smoke began rising out of the sea as if the horizon were on fire.

Watching from the shore on Nov. 6, Erika Palacio Fernández whipped out her phone, she said, unwittingly recording the only verified and independent video known to date of the aftermath of an airstrike in the Trump administration’s campaign against what it calls “narco-terrorists.”

Two days later, on that same shore, a scorched 30-foot-long boat itself would wash up. Then, two mangled bodies. Then charred jerrycans, life jackets and dozens of packets that were observed by The New York Times and were similar to others that have been found after anti-narcotics operations in the region. Most packets were empty, though traces of a substance that looked and smelled like marijuana were found in the lining of a few.

The assortment of singed flotsam appears to be the first physical evidence of the U.S. campaign, which has destroyed 29 vessels and killed more than 100 people in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. Every other struck boat is presumed to have sunk along with its crew and cargo. The U.S. military has offered no evidence that the boats it has destroyed were transporting illicit substances or belong to criminal networks.

A Times analysis matched the wreckage of the boat to the one in a video posted by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on the night of Nov. 6, hours after Ms. Palacio took her video. Mr. Hegseth described the strike as having targeted a vessel in the Caribbean operated by an unnamed “desig-

nated terrorist organization.” He said the strike killed three people and took place in international waters.

The Times analysis of Ms. Palacio’s video indicates the strike took place in the Gulf of Venezuela, where Colombia and Venezuela have long disputed their maritime boundary. The analysis could not determine the exact location of the strike.

The shape of the wreckage, a slender design typical of speedboats, matches that of the boat targeted in the video shared by the Defense Department, the Times analysis found, and shows damage to the boat’s hull and interior structure consistent with the impact of an airstrike. The military video shows the boat exploding and on fire beneath a large plume of smoke.

That such rare, tangible evidence is coming to light nearly two months after the early November strike is a testament both to the remoteness of the Guajira Peninsula, where the wreckage was found, and the lack of a sizable presence of the Colombian state in the area. The region is governed semiautonomously by an Indigenous community, the Wayuu, whose more than half a million people straddle the border between Colombia and Venezuela.

The U.S. military’s campaign against boats that the Trump administration claims are smuggling drugs has shifted largely to the Pacific since November. The Nov. 6 strike off the Guajira Peninsula took place during an earlier phase, when the campaign seemed to be aimed at Venezuela, rather than Colombian, vessels.

A wide range of legal experts say the U.S. strikes are illegal because the military is prohibited from deliberately targeting civil-

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The Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly is critically endangered, with the last known larva hibernating in a lab.

## Caterpillar, a Sleeping Beauty, Awaits a Suitor or Extinction

By CATRIN EINHORN

Despite the high stakes, the tiny caterpillar in the Albuquerque lab was not given a name.

It’s the last known individual of its kind, the critically endangered Sacramento Mountains checkerspot. If the caterpillar survives, it will transform into a butterfly with wings of stenciled orange, black and cream. Scientists hope to breed it by finding and capturing another from the wild, if any are left.

But last summer, as researchers prepared for weeks of searching for the subspecies in the only place on earth it might be found, the Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico, they knew that their chances of finding any were low. Despite annual surveys, it

hadn’t been seen in the wild since 2022. Climate change and too much grazing have wreaked havoc on the plants that the insects need for food.

Back in 2022, four butterflies were found and collected. They bred and produced more than 160 caterpillars, but almost all died before becoming butterflies. Among the few that did transform, there was never a male-female pair alive at the same time. All died without the opportunity to breed.

By this spring, only one caterpillar was left, still in larval form three years later.

“It’s really best not to name

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