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Devastation left in the wake of the Palisades fire along the coast of Malibu. At least 11 people have died in and around Los Angeles.

Fleeing California Inferno, With Nothing to Come Home To

By CORINA KNOLL
LOS ANGELES — There was, at first, not even a whisper of fire. Aurielle Hall had heard about the blaze that had broken out in the coastal neighborhood of Pacific Palisades that morning. But she was in Altadena, a hillside community 40 miles away and outside the eastern edge of Los Angeles.

It was Tuesday evening, and Ms. Hall, 35, figured she would head to bed early. She was exhausted, having spent an hour commuting home from her job with Los Angeles County’s probation department. And she had not gotten much sleep the night before because she was startled awake early by the winds that pounded on her walls.

She had grown accustomed to Altadena, the kind of place where residents raise goats and chickens and pride themselves on rustic living. It is also where high winds, power outages and spotty cell service are not unusual.

The community had a down-to-earth vibe, far from the glamour of Pacific Palisades where nannies driving children to elite private schools was common. Altadena was also more racially diverse. In the 1970s, it had attracted middle-class Black families who saw it as a refuge, and their children and grandchildren often stayed put. One in five households speak Spanish at home.

Just before 7 p.m., Ms. Hall texted her friend. “It’s really bad out here,” referring to the wind. Her daughter, Jade, 12, was taking a nap.

Ms. Hall plugged in her cell-

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ISADORA KOSOFKY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Aurielle Hall and her daughter, Jade, with the belongings they were able to grab before evacuating.

New Fire Plans Couldn’t Mitigate Climate Peril

By CHRISTOPHER FLAVELLE

This week’s fires around Los Angeles present a puzzle: Why is California, the state best equipped to deal with wildfires, seemingly unable to prevent blazes from consuming entire chunks of the country’s second-largest city?

California’s building code for wildfires is among the most protective in the nation. Its local fire departments are backed up by Cal Fire, the state fire agency, which

California Was Ready and Still Failed

has a \$4 billion budget and some of the best-trained firefighters in the world. The state’s huge tax base generates effectively unlimited resources for wildfire protection. And California has mandatory statewide requirements that homeowners in risky areas create

“defensible space” around their property — rules that other Western states would like to apply but can’t because it would anger conservative voters.

Yet the events of this week demonstrate the limits of those efforts, raising questions about whether any part of the United States — even the wealthiest, best prepared and most experienced — can truly adapt to wildfires made worse by a hotter climate.

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With Sentence, Trump Will Now Be First Felon To Occupy Oval Office

Penalty Carries Stigma but No Jail Time

This article is by Ben Protess, Jonathan E. Bromwich and Kate Christobek.

Arms crossed, scowl set, President-elect Donald J. Trump avoided jail, but became a felon.

Mr. Trump appeared virtually at his criminal sentencing on Friday from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, more than 1,000 miles away from the chilly Manhattan courtroom where his case was called for a final time. Projected on a 60-inch screen, his image loomed over the gallery as a prosecutor recounted his crimes and a judge imposed his sentence.

Mr. Trump once faced up to four years in prison for falsifying business records to cover up a sex scandal, but on Friday, he received only a so-called unconditional discharge. The sentence, a rare and lenient alternative to jail or probation, reflected the practical and constitutional impossibility of jailing a president-elect.

It nonetheless carried symbolic significance, capping a yearslong ordeal that consumed Mr. Trump as a weary nation reckoned with the prospect of a criminal president. Once the sentencing concluded, it cemented his status as the first felon to occupy the Oval Office.

“Never before has this court been presented with such a unique and remarkable set of circumstances,” said the trial judge, Juan M. Merchan, who has felt the brunt of Mr. Trump’s rage over the case during the past two years. “This has been a truly extraordinary case.”

It was also “a bit of a paradox,” he said, as the somber ritual of sentencing testified to both the su-

premacy and the limits of presidential power.

The fact the proceeding happened at all — despite Mr. Trump’s frenzied effort to shut it down — showed that the man preparing to reclaim the nation’s highest office was not entirely above the law. The machinery of New York’s justice system briefly brought him low, albeit in the comfort of his Florida mansion.

Yet nearly every detail of the highly scripted session demonstrated the singularity of the de-



POOL PHOTO BY ANGELA WEISS

Donald J. Trump attended his sentencing hearing virtually.

fendant: the months of delays, the virtual appearance and the largely consequence-free sentence. His critics were denied the catharsis of seeing a handcuffed former president heading to Rikers Island.

Explaining the lenience, Justice Merchan acknowledged Mr. Trump’s inauguration 10 days hence, concluding that an unconditional discharge was the only way to avoid “encroaching on the highest office of the land.”

A conditional discharge would

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Drug Company To Compensate Genetic Donors

By BRENDAN BORRELL

When Stephane Castel first met with a group of Maori people and other Pacific Islanders in New Zealand to talk about his drug company’s plans for genetic research, locals worried he might be seeking to profit from the genes of community members without much thought to them.

Instead, Dr. Castel and his colleagues explained, they were aiming to strike an unconventional bargain: In exchange for entrusting them with their genetic heritage, participating communities would receive a share of the company’s revenues. Dr. Castel also vowed not to patent any genes — as many other companies had done — but rather the drugs his company developed from the partnership.

“A lot of people told us this was a crazy idea, and it wouldn’t work,” Dr. Castel said. But five years after that first conversation during an Indigenous health research conference in March 2019, Dr. Castel’s gambit is beginning to pay off for both parties.

On Tuesday, his company, Variant Bio, based in Seattle, announced a \$50 million collaboration with the drugmaker Novo Nordisk to develop drugs for metabolic disorders, including diabetes and obesity, using data collected from Indigenous populations. Variant Bio will distribute a portion of those funds to the communities it worked with in nine countries or territories, including the Maori, and will seek to make any medicines that result from its work available to those communi-

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Justices Appear Poised to Back Ban on TikTok

By ADAM LIPTAK

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court seemed inclined on Friday to uphold a law that could effectively ban TikTok, the wildly popular app used by half of the country.

Even as several justices expressed concerns that the law was in tension with the First Amendment, a majority appeared satisfied that it was aimed not at TikTok’s speech rights but rather at its ownership, which the government says is controlled by China. The law requires the app’s parent company, ByteDance, to sell TikTok by Jan. 19. If it does not, the law requires the app to be shut down.

The government offered two rationales for the law: combating covert disinformation from China and barring it from harvesting private information about Americans. The court was divided over the first justification. But several justices seemed troubled by the possibility that China could use data culled from the app for espionage or blackmail.

“Congress and the president were concerned,” Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh said, “that China was accessing information about millions of Americans, tens of millions of Americans, including teenagers, people in their 20s.”

That data, he added, could be used “over time to develop spies, to turn people, to blackmail people, people who a generation from now will be working in the F.B.I. or the C.I.A. or in the State Department.”

Noel J. Francisco, a lawyer for

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ANITA BRYANT, 1940-2024

Entertainer Whose Opposition To Gay Rights Derailed Career

By ANITA GATES

Anita Bryant, the singer and former beauty queen who had a flourishing music career in the 1960s and ’70s but whose opposition to gay rights — she called homosexuality “an abomination” — virtually destroyed her career, died on Dec. 16 at her home in Edmond, Okla. She was 84.

The cause was cancer, her son William Green said. The family

placed a paid obituary in The Oklahoman, a newspaper in Oklahoma City, on Thursday.

Ms. Bryant was just 18 when she won the Miss Oklahoma beauty title and was named second runner-up in the Miss America pageant. She promptly turned that success into a lucrative show business career.

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KATHY A. WILLENS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Anita Bryant, center, in 1977, when she emerged as an anti-gay activist. “The blacklisting of Anita Bryant has begun,” she said.



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Infiltrating Panama’s Canal

An expansion that helped the canal accommodate large cargo ships is also bringing fish to new habitats. PAGE A6

Venezuela’s Leader Sworn In

President Nicolás Maduro began his third term on Friday, despite evidence that he lost a July election. PAGE A8

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More Evidence in Adams Case

Lawyers for the mayor of New York City disclosed that federal prosecutors had presented additional material to a grand jury. PAGE A16

Illegal Border Crossings Drop

The daily averages of crossers at the U.S.-Mexico border reached the lowest level since summer 2020. PAGE A15

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Conceptual Art Provocateur

Pippa Garner’s often satirical works were driven by her curiosity for the world she lived in. She was 82. PAGE A20



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Intimacy and Engagement

Scott Burton’s performance art of the 1970s and sculptural art of the 1980s are on view at a show in St. Louis. PAGE C1

Two Grand Entrances

The conductors Kevin John Edusei and Daniele Rustioni made their New York Philharmonic debuts. PAGE C4

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Influences in Musk’s Orbit

The billionaire entrepreneur’s associates, investors, longtime friends and family shape how he operates and how he views the world. Sometimes, those boundaries blur. PAGE B6

Job Market on the Rise

A December gain of 256,000 jobs blew past forecasts, and the unemployment rate fell to 4.2 percent. But stock markets recoiled as interest rate cuts now seem more distant. PAGE B1

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Michelle Goldberg

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On a Mission to Win Now

Cameron Heyward, the longest-tenured player on the Steelers, knows that he is running out of shots at a title. PAGE B8

