



BOYS ride bikes on Main Street near a data center in Santa Clara, where more than 50 such facilities consume 60% of the city’s electricity.

Photographs by PAUL KURODA For The Times

# Power demands of AI data centers raise concerns over cost, blackouts

Experts warn construction frenzy could delay state’s transition away from fossil fuels

By MELODY PETERSEN

Near the Salton Sea, a company plans to build a data center to support artificial intelligence that would cover land the size of 15 football fields and require power that could support 425,000 homes.

In Santa Clara — the heart of Silicon Valley — electric rates are rising as the municipal utility spends heavily on transmission lines and other infrastructure to accommodate the voracious power demand from more than 50 data centers, which now consume 60% of the city’s electricity.

And earlier this year, Pacific Gas & Electric told investors that its customers have proposed more than two dozen data centers, requiring 3.5 gigawatts of power — the output of three new nuclear

reactors.

While the benefits and risks of AI continue to be debated, one thing is clear: The technology is rapacious for power. Experts warn that the frenzy of data center construction could delay California’s transition away from fossil fuels and raise electric bills for everyone else. The data centers’ insatiable appetite for electricity, they say, also increases the risk of blackouts.

Even now, California is on the verge of not having enough power. An analysis of public data by the nonprofit GridClue ranks California 49th of the 50 states in resilience — or the ability to avoid blackouts by having more electricity available than homes and businesses need at peak hours.

“California is working itself into

[See Data centers, A12]



A LARGE NTT data center rises in a Santa Clara neighborhood. An association of locally run electricity providers has called on state officials to analyze how quickly demand is increasing.

## Trump targets U.S. civil service system

Vow to fire thousands and hire only loyalists alarms proponents of good government.

By JAMES RAINEY

After one term as president in which his promise to remake the massive federal government mostly came up short, Donald Trump again is raining fury on the “deep state,” pledging if elected in November to replace career civil servants with his like-minded allies.

If Trump and Republican vice presidential nominee JD Vance were to succeed in remaking the federal workforce in the way they have described, it would be the most radical reconfiguration of the U.S. government in 140 years.

Critics, including non-partisan analysts, fear Trump’s proposal to replace thousands of civil servants with his loyalists would resurrect something like the 19th century “spoils” system, which Congress scrapped in the late 1800s due to rampant incompetence and cronyism.

The U.S. operated for much of the 1800s on the understanding that individuals won jobs with the government not by proving their expertise, but by having connections to presidents and their parties.

Congress moved to eliminate the spoils system in 1883, about 18 months after a disgruntled job-seeker assassinated the man he believed owed him a government appointment — James A. Garfield, the 20th president of the United States.

“You’re now talking about 140 years of presidential administrations — Republicans and Democrats — who all supported the proposition that the best way to get an effective government was to have a career, professional, merit-based civil service,” said Max Stier, president of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonprofit that analyzes federal agencies and their employees. “So the idea that we would convert that, or

[See Trump, A6]

## Some workers still swelter, despite new indoor heat rules

Compliance varies, and many don’t know of new state standards.

By REBECCA PLEVIN AND SUHAUNA HUSSAIN

Alexia Rangel recalled sweating as she rang up customer orders at a Taco Bell in Alhambra during an early

August heat wave. The air conditioning wasn’t working, she and fellow workers said, and heat radiated from the grills in the kitchen.

She remembers feeling dizzy a few hours into her shift, then her vision shifting to black and white. The color drained from her face, she said, and her lips turned purple.

“I ... almost passed out,”

recounted Rangel, 20.

Despite new state regulations requiring workplaces to cool indoor climates when they reach unsafe levels, the temperature in the restaurant’s kitchen that day registered 104 degrees, according to a hand-held thermometer that Rangel said a co-worker showed her. Workers would include a photo of the temperature reading in a com-

plaint filed with state regulators.

After years of delays, California’s new rule regulating heat in indoor workplaces took effect in late July. The rule, adopted by the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, lays out heat illness prevention measures for indoor workplaces. It requires employers to provide easy access to clean

drinking water and cooling areas, and to monitor workers for signs of heat illness whenever work site temperatures reach or exceed 82 degrees.

If temperatures climb to 87 degrees, or employees are required to work near hot equipment, employers must cool the work site or rotate workers out of hot environments.

[See Heat, A8]



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times

BRANDON GUERRERO, 34, of Compton receives both a flu and COVID-19 vaccine at a CVS pharmacy in Huntington Park. A new COVID strain is emerging.

## Here comes another COVID subvariant

Doctors and scientists warn of the highly infectious XEC, ‘just getting started now.’

By RONG-GONG LIN II

The summer surge of the coronavirus subvariants nicknamed FLIRT has given way to ever more contagious strains, a key reason behind

the current high levels of COVID in California and nationwide.

And doctors and scientists are keeping an eye on yet another subvariant — XEC — that could surpass the latest hyperinfectious subvariant, KP.3.1.1, now thought to be the most common nationwide. XEC was first detected in Germany and has since seized the attention of doctors and scientists.

[See XEC, A8]

### The best time to get the new vaccine

Hurry in or hold off? The CDC says it’s good to aim for September or October. CALIFORNIA, B1

### Harris-Walz interview upshot

Five takeaways from the Democratic presidential ticket’s joint televised sit-down chat with CNN. NATION, A5

### Yelp vs. Google in antitrust suit

Firm known for customer reviews alleges tech giant prioritizes own products in search results. BUSINESS, A9

### Legislature OKs IVF coverage

Bill that would expand health insurance to include in vitro fertilization is sent to governor. CALIFORNIA, B1

**Weather**  
Mostly sunny.  
L.A. Basin: 85/64. B8

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