



RAÚL UREÑA, the first transgender mayor of Calexico, poses at the U.S.-Mexico border. She was elected in 2020, at the age of 23.

Culture wars come to a border town

In Calexico, the city's first out transgender mayor faces a recall. So does another young lawmaker.

By HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS

The LGBTQ+ pride flag had just been hoisted outside Calexico City Hall when a woman in overalls pushed past a police officer, charged through the cheering crowd and lunged at the mayor.

Raúl Ureña, the first out transgender City Council member in the struggling little town on the U.S.-Mexico border, stood quietly as three police officers pulled the profanity-spewing woman away.

She screamed: "He's not a woman! He's not a woman!" Then she kicked the mayor's dad.

Even before Rebecca Lemon made a beeline toward the mayor last June, Ureña was well-acquainted with her.

Lemon was, at that point, the public face of a movement to remove Ureña from office. Lemon had personally served recall papers a month earlier on Ureña, who promptly ripped them in half.

The recall organizers appeared to distance themselves from Lemon after the ugly scene at the pride flag raising. And they succeeded in forcing a recall election targeting Ureña and another young progressive council member, Gilberto Manzanarez. Voters will decide their political fate in a special election on Tuesday.

The recall is about many things — homelessness, economic development, political grudges. But the campaign against Ureña in particular has thrown the alt-

[See Calexico, A8]

A BELOVED EMPIRE, BUILT LESS THAN A BUCK AT A TIME

It was Friday the 13th when the first 99 Cents Only store opened in 1982 on La Tijera Boulevard.

To commemorate the grand opening, founder David Gold sold television sets for 99 cents to the first 13 customers.

He had developed his affinity for the price point while working at a liquor shop at Grand Central Market downtown, when he would put closeout bottles of wine on a table and mark them down to 99 cents.

After that first August morning, the everyday deals at 99 Cents Only weren't television-set levels of spectacular, but the bargains were steep, and the extreme discounter became an essential stop within the community, son Howard Gold recalled in an inter-

99 Cents Only, that distinctly L.A. icon of thriftiness, was a pillar of communities and family pride. What happened?

By Andrea Chang and Laurence Darmiento

view this month.

"We were jam-packed from the beginning," said Howard, who helped set up and manage the fledgling store as a 22-year-old, stocking it with canned and paper goods, candy, mugs, glassware, hair products and cosmetics that his father, who died in 2013, bought in enormous quantities. "It was amazing values — people could go and get like three bags of stuff and spend \$9."

Within two years, the family — all four Gold children eventually worked for 99 Cents Only in some capacity — had opened two more locations. By 1991, there were two dozen.

Business boomed over the next couple of decades. 99 Cents Only had grown to 289 stores in

[See 99 Cents, A12]

COLUMN ONE

L.A. director makes Russian fable into a film, becomes hero



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times
MICHAEL Lockshin, who grew up in Russia, at his home in Los Angeles.

By CHRISTOPHER GOFFARD

Soon after Russian tanks crashed into Ukraine, Michael Lockshin realized he was making a dangerous movie. The director had spent 69 days, and \$15 million, filming "The Master and Margarita" in Russia and Croatia, and now he was in Los Angeles beginning postproduction.

With just one previous feature to his name, Lockshin had been entrusted with a cultural treasure —

[See "The Master," A9]

Safe harbor for trans law in California

A federal judge upholds SB 107 against an attack from a right-wing church, Michael Hiltzik writes. **PERSPECTIVES, A2**

Fast-food wages worry businesses

Progressives cheer \$20 hourly minimum, but small firms fear it's not sustainable, says Frank Shyong. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Weather
Chilly, with showers. L.A. Basin: 60/47. **B10**

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SECTIONS S and U

IRAN FIRES DRONES TOWARD ISRAEL

The retaliatory attack boosts the chances of a broader Middle East conflict. Iranians also seize container ship.

By TRACY WILKINSON

WASHINGTON — Iran launched waves of attack drones toward Israel on Saturday in retaliation for a deadly Israeli airstrike earlier this month, in what may be the start of a broader multi-front reprisal.

A military response from Israel is expected, although it was unclear how robust it would be. Air raid sirens were reported in southern Israel early Sunday. Attacks from Iranian soil to Israel proper would represent a major escalation in regional conflict amid the Israel-Hamas war that has raged for six months in Gaza.

President Biden cut short his weekend in Delaware and rushed back to the White House, where he was joined by a team of national security advisors. They had been bracing for a violent response from Iran after Israeli airstrikes April 1 killed seven senior Iranian officials at an Iranian diplomatic mission in Syria.

[See Iran-Israel, A4]

ANALYSIS

Inflation hurting Biden's gains on economy

By DON LEE

WASHINGTON — As President Biden struggles to sell Bidenomics to skeptical voters, he's facing the all-too-real consequences of stubbornly higher inflation, but he's also battling human psychology.

And both of those factors may be especially strong in California.

Most economists agree that the American economy during Biden's presidency has made a remarkable recovery from the pandemic. And it continues to outperform expectations, even if California isn't doing quite as well. But polls have consistently shown that the public by and large holds a negative view of the economy and, by extension, Biden's handling of it.

While partisan politics, pandemic hangover and other factors have colored people's attitudes, experts say inflation appears to be the single biggest economic albatross for Biden.

He entered office with an approval rating of 57%, but in Gallup's latest poll, in

[See Economy, A7]



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