

Bay Area losing its edge as a power broker

Social media, TV and nationalized politics have eroded region's outsize role in state.

MARK Z. BARABAK

For a long time, life in California had certain rhythms. Winter snow in the Sierra. Springtime blooms in the desert. And come election season, a built-in, often insurmountable edge for Bay Area candidates seeking statewide office.

The drifts have piled up, from Tahoe to the Tehachapis. Months of rainfall promise a stunning floral display across the Southland. But that Northern California advantage? It vanished in the U.S. Senate contest on March 5.

Rep. Adam B. Schiff, whose Southern California district lies more than 300 miles away, easily carried the Bay Area on his way to a primary victory over fellow Democrats Katie Porter and the region's own Barbara Lee. He is quite likely to win the Senate seat in November against the opponent he helped push to a November runoff, sacrificial Republican Steve Garvey.

"It's a paradigm shift," Garry South, a longtime Democratic strategist, said [See Barabak, A6]



Alarm at teen use of pot substitute

Study in U.S. finds more than 11% of high school seniors had tried delta-8 THC.

BY EMILY ALPERT REYES

A molecular lookalike of the intoxicating compound found in marijuana has become popular among teens in the United States, especially in areas where marijuana use is illegal, a new study shows.

More than 11% of high school seniors who took part in a national survey last spring said they had used delta-8 THC, a psychoactive compound typically derived from hemp, in the last year.

That figure surprised researchers at USC and the University of Michigan, who published their findings this week in the Journal of the American Medical Assn.

Products containing delta-8 "have really only been on the market since 2018," said study leader Alyssa Harlow, a USC epidemiologist and faculty member of the school's Institute for Addiction Science.

Gummies, vapes and other products containing delta-8 are available online [See THC, A8]



JOHN DARPLI, shown at Civic Center Park in Hanford, Calif., is an alfalfa farmer, softball coach and member of the 1776 Sons of Liberty. The group is more hard-line and politically active than many Republicans.

Trump is king in this rural part of Central California

To the ultraconservative Sons of Liberty, only the ex-president — despite his flaws — can fix what's wrong in the United States

BY JEFFREY FLEISHMAN

HANFORD, Calif. — Before the 1776 Sons of Liberty meeting got underway at the Elks Lodge, Adam Medeiros, a hairdresser for 44 years, sat in a folding chair and referred to the Bible to explain his politics: "I don't think I'd have liked King David," he said. "He was an adulterer and a murderer, but God chose him to rule a nation."

Medeiros paused and added: "I believe Donald Trump was anointed by God to save this country."

The man across the table, Brian Gogue, a pest control advisor for farms in the Central Valley, nodded. "Sometimes," he said, "God uses imperfect people for his perfect work." Both men smiled. It was almost 7 p.m. Men in ball caps and jeans, including veterans and at [See Sons, A6]



ADAM MEDEIROS works on Kathy Drew's hair at his salon in Hanford. "I believe Donald Trump was anointed by God to save this country," he said.

COLUMN ONE

Doubts about a 'million-dollar card'

2 L.A. collectors owned a rare LeBron James item they hoped to sell for big bucks — till the 'King of Collectibles' upended their plan



STEVEN SPIEGEL holds a rare LeBron James rookie card that he co-owns with his brother Alan. It's at the center of a legal fight.

BY DANIEL MILLER

To Steven Spiegel, they were all low-ball offers for the LeBron James rookie card he and his brother Alan bought in 2014 — \$70,000, \$80,000, \$90,000. No matter that they'd purchased it for \$35,000.

Steven had a strong conviction that it was a "million-dollar card." Only 99 had been released, and it boasted James' autograph along with a piece of a jersey he'd worn.

In early 2021, one of them sold for more than \$1.5 million. A month later, a slightly rarer "gold" version fetched \$5.2 million.

The card market, stoked by the cryptocurrency boom and new investors drawn to the hobby amid the COVID-19 pandemic, was on an epic bull run. It seemed like the perfect time to sell the card with the grandiose name: [See Card, A9]

State rethinks rules on saving water

California's new plan would ease previously proposed regulations on urban suppliers.

BY IAN JAMES AND SEAN GREENE

After facing criticism, California water regulators have proposed new conservation rules that would ease requirements for urban suppliers and lead to smaller statewide water savings than originally planned.

An initial proposal from the State Water Resources Control Board ran into strong opposition last year, with managers of water agencies arguing that the large proposed cuts in water use between 2025 and 2035 would be costly and difficult to implement. Those criticisms were echoed in a scathing review by the non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office.

In response, the state water board's staff rewrote its blueprint for regulations, proposing less stringent water saving standards while reducing the number of suppliers that would be required to achieve large cuts of more than 20% and extending the timeline for water reductions an additional five years to 2040.

If approved by the state board later this year, the proposed regulations, dubbed "Making Conservation a California Way of Life," would apply to about 400 urban water suppliers, requiring them to adopt water-use budgets and meet locally tailored conservation goals. The latest changes would bring smaller mandatory reductions for many water agencies than had been expected, and would give them more time to take steps to decrease water usage.

"We've provided additional flexibility that adds to the overall budgets of many of the suppliers," said Eric Oppenheimer, the state water board's executive director. The new proposal, he said, "maintains the state's [See Water, A8]

Schumer calls for vote in Israel

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "has lost his way," the Senate majority leader asserts. **NATION, A5**

Rents in L.A. County fall 2.5%

Despite the February data, some tenants say finding an affordable unit is still a struggle. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

The futility of a TikTok ban

Social platforms all have the same business model — and the same risks, Michael Hiltzik writes. **BUSINESS, A10**

Weather

Mostly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 69/50. **B6**

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