

Rivals’ mental acuity in debate

Both Biden, Trump dogged by questions about their sharpness of mind ahead of their first 2024 showdown.

By Benjamin Oreskes and Faith E. Pinho

For those with questions about the leading 2024 presidential candidates’ mental acuity, or those involved in stoking the increasingly heated spin online around such questions, the evening of June 15 was a bonanza.

President Biden appeared to “freeze up,” as the New York Post put it, as he walked offstage at a downtown Los Angeles fundraising appearance with former President Obama and late-night host Jimmy Kimmel.

“A scene right out of ‘Weekend at Bernie’s,’” Chris LaCivita, senior Trump campaign advisor and chief operating officer of the Republican National Committee, told The Times.

The Biden campaign and its allies in the Democratic Party accused the Post and others who circulated the “freeze” meme of misrepresenting the footage. In other cases they went further, attacking media outlets and Republicans for sharing doctored video of the president.

“Rupert Murdoch’s sad little Super Pac, the New York Post, is back to disrespecting its readers and itself once again by pretending the President taking in an applauding crowd for a few seconds is somehow wrong,” White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said on X.

And the same evening, former President Trump called for his 2024 rival to take a “cognitive test,” claiming he himself had “aced” one while in office — then botching the name of the doctor who administered it. “Ronny Johnson. Does everybody know Ronny Johnson?” Trump said, meaning Dr. Ronny Jackson, who is now a Texas [See Debate, A6]

CNN is hoping to shine in spotlight

The network anticipates a stature-building moment with the highly anticipated presidential debate. **BUSINESS, A8**



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

CARGO SHIPS wait offshore to enter the Port of Los Angeles. Researchers say a drop in ships’ sulfur dioxide emissions has lessened the amount of cloud cover, allowing more sunlight to bake the Earth.

How did cutting pollution stoke global warming?

A major shift in global shipping regulations intended to improve air quality may have temporarily — and inadvertently — set off a geoengineering reaction that is warming the planet, new research has found.

In January 2020, the International Maritime Organization substantially reduced the amount of harmful sulfur dioxide content allowed in shipping fuel. The move was part of a broad strategy to improve public health.

By reducing sulfur dioxide and fine particulate matter spewed by ships, the change would help reduce strokes,

A major shift in ship fuel regulations seems to have inadvertently caused a heat burst

By Hayley Smith

asthma, lung cancer and other diseases suffered by people who live in and around ports.

But the change also had an unexpected consequence: In the past, dirtier ship emissions contributed to the creation of bright clouds over the ocean. These bright clouds helped to reflect some of the sun’s light and energy back into space. When sulfur dioxides were reduced, however, it resulted in fewer bright clouds, so more of the sun’s heat and energy were able to reach Earth’s surface, contributing to global warming.

The added energy gain from [See Particulates, A6]

Assange on his way to freedom in Australia

The WikiLeaks founder pleads guilty in a deal at a hearing in the Northern Mariana Islands.

By Mari Yamaguchi, Kimberly Esmores, Alanna Durkin Richer and Eric Tucker

SAIPAN, Northern Mariana Islands — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has pleaded guilty to a single felony charge for publishing

U.S. military secrets in a deal with Justice Department prosecutors that secures his freedom and concludes a drawn-out legal saga that raised divisive questions about press freedom and national security.

The plea was entered Wednesday morning in federal court in Saipan, the capital of the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth in the Pacific. He arrived at court shortly before the hearing was to begin, wearing a dark suit with a tie loosened at the collar, and entered the building without taking questions.



WikiLeaks

JULIAN ASSANGE stares out at the sky on board a flight to Bangkok in an image from X.

Though the deal with prosecutors required him to admit guilt to a single felony count, it would also permit him to return to his native Australia without spending any time in an American prison. He had been jailed in the United Kingdom for the last five years, fighting extradition to the United States on an Espionage Act indictment that could have carried a lengthy prison sentence in the event of a conviction.

The hearing is the stunning culmination of the U.S. government’s yearslong pursuit. [See Assange, A4]

Email at root of O.C. bishop’s pricey suit against parishioner

Kevin Vann’s years-long libel case has come with steep financial and emotional costs

By Harriet Ryan

Suzanne Nunn prays the rosary with friends each morning in her Mission Viejo home. From St. Timothy’s Catholic Church in Laguna Niguel, she brings Communion to the sick and homebound. She drives parishioners without transportation to Sunday Mass, decorates the altar for holidays and instructs adult converts in the tenets of the faith.

One observing the 68-year-old in her church volunteer work or at prayer in her regular pew might struggle to comprehend another role she plays in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange: the target of a protracted and expensive legal crusade by the bishop.

For more than three and a half years, Bishop Kevin Vann



GINA FERAZZI Los Angeles Times

BISHOP Kevin Vann, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Orange County, conducts a blessing in May at Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove.

has pursued a libel lawsuit against Nunn over an email she sent to 47 people in 2020 about what she saw as his improper meddling in the finances of a Catholic foundation where she worked.

Vann, the leader of Orange County’s 1.3 million Catholics, has persisted in the litigation despite court defeats, including a stinging January ruling in which a Superior Court judge threw out his entire suit against Nunn and voiced support for her criticism of the bishop. The decision means that, unless an appellate court intervenes, the bishop will be responsible for Nunn’s legal bills, calculated at nearly \$2 million by her attorneys in court filings requesting repayment.

Where that money would come from is unclear. So is the [See Lawsuit, A7]

Forget graffiti. There’s a bigger problem

A conundrum awaits future buyer of L.A.’s Oceanwide Plaza: Is the costly skyscraper project salvageable?

By Roger Vincent

It was the graffiti that made the abandoned skyscrapers of Oceanwide Plaza in downtown Los Angeles infamous.

But the illicit work is low on the list of problems facing the bankrupt, billion-dollar development. With a potential fire sale of the residential, hotel and retail project approaching, a far more complex and expensive question looms over one of the region’s all-time real estate catastrophes: Can it be saved from the wrecking ball?

The fastest path forward for a new owner would be to complete the original plans for the three-tower development that ground to a halt in 2019 and stands about 60% finished. But some potential buyers and construction experts say that doing so is financially untenable, in large part because tenants would be scarce for the expansive retail space on the project’s bottom floors and a redesign would be very difficult for the oversized residential spaces in the towers above.

Instead, they say, the structures should be torn down to make way for something new.

“Believe me, somebody would have jumped forward with a viable plan if there really was one,” said developer Bill Witte, chief executive of Related California. Witte said he believes Oceanwide has “negative value because of the scale and the indeterminate amount of work that would have to be done to complete it.”

In other words, he believes it’s not worth the risk to try to fix Oceanwide Plaza.

And yet an unfinished complex in a prime location [See Skyscraper, A9]

Ultra-Orthodox Jews face draft

Israel’s Supreme Court rules that the military must force formerly exempt men to serve. **WORLD, A3**

L.A. weighs mask limits

Violent synagogue protest spurs mayor to urge a look into face coverings and permits. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Different paths in NBA draft

With two first-round picks, Lakers can retool roster, while Clippers’ focus is on a key veteran. **SPORTS, B10**

Weather

Mostly sunny. L.A. Basin: 84/64. **B6**

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