



CALIFORNIA RESOURCES CORP., the state's largest oil and gas company, is seeking permission to pump 1.46 million metric tons of carbon dioxide each year into its depleted Elk Hills oil field near Bakersfield.

# Can old oil fields be used to slow global warming?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has signed off on a California oil company's plans to permanently store carbon emissions deep underground to combat global warming — the first proposal of its kind to be tentatively approved in the state.

California Resources Corp., the state's largest oil and gas company, applied for permission to send 1.46 million metric tons of carbon dioxide each year into the Elk Hills oil field, a depleted oil reservoir about 25 miles outside downtown Bakersfield. The emissions would be collected from several industrial sources nearby, compressed into a liquid-like state and injected into porous

Energy giants think so, and EPA has tentatively OK'd state's first carbon storage project in Kern County

By Tony Briscoe

rock more than a mile underground.

Although this technique has never been performed on a large scale in California, the state's climate plan calls for these operations to be widely deployed across the Central Valley to reduce carbon emissions from industrial facilities. The EPA issued a draft permit for the California Resources project, which is poised to be finalized in March after public comments.

As California transitions away from oil production, a new business model for fossil fuel companies has emerged: carbon management. Oil companies have heavily invested in transforming

# One-two punch of COVID and flu lands hard in L.A. County

International and local health officials continue to call for preventing deaths through vaccination.

By Rong-Gong Lin II

Coronavirus levels are high and rising throughout California amid a post-holiday spike in infections.

The uptick, documented through wastewater surveillance, is coinciding with a sharp rise in flu activity — a one-two punch for what's proving to be a busy respiratory virus season.

"We are certainly in some high levels of viral transmission. Flu is one of the bigger drivers of that right now," state epidemiologist Dr. Erica Pan said in a recent briefing. "We are seeing some increases in COVID-19 activity, especially often after the travel and gatherings of the holiday season."

Around Christmas, flu was responsible for 4% of weekly emergency room vis-

its statewide, up from 1% a month earlier. COVID was responsible for about 2%, up from about 1%.

In L.A. County for the week that ended Dec. 30, the wastewater concentration of SARS-CoV-2 — the virus that causes COVID-19 — reached 60% of last winter's peak, up from the prior week's reading of 49%.

Statewide, the rates at which tests for COVID-19 and flu are coming back positive continue to rise. California continues to show "very high" flu-like activity, which includes non-flu illnesses such as COVID-19, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

While COVID-19 is no longer exerting the dangerous and devastating pressure seen earlier in the pandemic, it has not been defanged. Officials from the World Health Organization noted that 10,000 deaths were reported globally from COVID-19 in December, based on data from fewer than 50 countries, mostly in the Americas and Europe.

[See Viruses, A10]

# Leaving a broken dream in Golden State

In Iowa, the O'Neils wield clout in selection of GOP presidential pick

By Faith E. Pinho

The Barbies lived in California, of course.

On summer days, as Sara O'Neil pranced her dolls along the muddy stream that ran through her family's 168-acre Iowa farm, she could almost see them frolicking along a gleaming, palm-lined Pacific beach.

At 5 years old, she told her mom that she'd live by the ocean someday.

As an adult, she made her dream a reality. Sara joined the Navy, married, had four kids and, for more than two decades, built a life in South-



PANDEMIC rules were a factor in her family's move, said Sara O'Neil, with Johnny, far left, and Christian.

ern California.

Her sons became home-grown grooms, surfing Imperial Beach with their dad and flipping skateboard tricks in downtown San Diego. Sara walked along the ocean every morning.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and with it the realization that the Golden State's liberal politics didn't align with hers. So Sara and her husband, Johnny, a Southland native with a sunny disposition to match, packed up and joined the droves of Californians leaving the state, some for political reasons.

[See O'Neils, A10]



ROUGH LANDING FOR RAMS

The Rams lost their NFC wild-card playoff game to Detroit 24-23 despite the efforts of quarterback Matthew Stafford, being tackled above.

## Making climate a priority

The next big front in the battle for racial justice is the environment, Erika D. Smith writes. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

## Weighing the threat to birds

A study finds fracking is a bigger risk than wind turbines, columnist Sammy Roth writes. **BUSINESS, A7**

## Weather

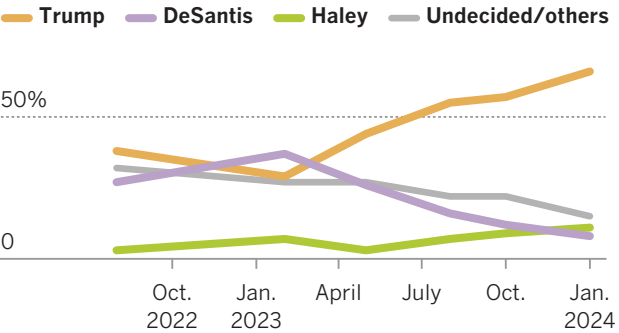
Some sun. L.A. Basin: 66/47. **B6**

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## Trump widens California lead

Two-thirds of likely Republican primary voters in California support former President Trump, as his lead over his rivals continues to grow.



Survey of 1,351 voters considered likely to cast ballots in the Republican primary, conducted online in English and Spanish Jan. 4-8. Estimated margin of error +/- 3.5 percentage points.

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