

# Battle is brewing over unique right of workers in state

A ballot measure would replace a law that allows staffers to sue their employers.

By SUHAUNA HUSSAIN

California workers who believe they have been victims of wage theft or other workplace abuses have for more than two decades relied on a unique state law that lets them sue employers not only for themselves but also for other workers.

Now a battle is shaping up over the law, known as the Private Attorneys General Act, or PAGA. An initiative seeking to replace PAGA will appear on the ballot in California in November, the culmination of long-standing efforts by corporate and industry groups to undo the law.

Two reports released last week offer dueling narratives about whether PAGA helps or hurts workers — marking the opening of a potentially expensive fight over the landmark law that relatively few know about.

Labor researchers say that the ballot measure, if approved, would harm employees, particularly people with low-wage jobs, by taking away their ability to file

what are essentially class-action suits against employers that allege labor law violations. The ballot measure also would weaken the state's already strained system for enforcing workplace laws, the researchers say.

But the business coalition backing the ballot initiative, called the Fair Play and Employer Accountability Act, counters that the labor law has resulted in a proliferation of lawsuits that small businesses and non-profits have little ability to fight. Workers end up getting less money after a long legal process than if they had filed complaints through state agencies, the initiative's proponents say.

Worker advocates have long complained that chronic understaffing at state agencies responsible for investigating employee complaints means that allegations about wage theft and other violations can take years to be resolved. So workers turn to the courts.

Luz Perez Bautista and her mother, Maria de la Luz Bautista-Perez, were among three named plaintiffs who sued Juul Labs Inc. in federal court in 2020 for allegedly misclassifying some 450 campaign staffers working on a ballot measure the company was promoting to allow [See Worker suits, A8]



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

**TWO REPORTS** released last week offer dueling narratives about whether a state law helps workers.



Photographs by ANNA TSYHYMA For The Times

**OLENA KOVALYK**, top, walks near the school-turned-prison in Bilyayivka, Ukraine, where Russian soldiers held her husband, Oleh, pictured at left. At right, a calendar in a classroom there.

COLUMN ONE

## A haunting quest in Ukraine

Sometimes, he visits her in dreams. In her waking hours — treading a muddy village byway, casting an eye across a desolate field — hope pulses in her like a beating heart: that she might somehow find him.

As Europe's largest land war since World War II enters its third year on Saturday, Ukraine is full of wounded souls like Olena Kovalyk, caught in the quest for some trace of a lost loved one.

There are tens of thousands of these vanished: soldiers who disappeared into the maw of battle, chil-

Woman only wants to find her husband, missing since Russia invaded

By Sabra Ayres and Laura King  
REPORTING FROM  
MYROLYUBIVKA, UKRAINE

dren spirited away for adoption in Russia, civilian villagers like Olena's husband, Oleh, her childhood sweetheart, who engaged in quixotic acts of defiance against a powerful occupying army.

For those left behind, grief and uncertainty swirl together, muddy rivulets in a vast tributary. The amorphous sense of loss echoes a larger national sense of pervasive not-knowingness: No one can say when, or how, this war might end.

But some, like Olena, have convinced themselves they will find a [See Ukraine, A4]

# Grossman found guilty of murder in brothers' deaths

Her SUV hit 2 boys in a Westlake Village crosswalk

By RICHARD WINTON AND GRACE TOOHEY

A jury on Friday found Rebecca Grossman guilty in the killing of two young brothers who were crossing a street in Westlake Village when her speeding Mercedes hit them.

The verdict caps a legal

drama that generated international attention in part because Grossman is a prominent figure who co-founded the Grossman Burn Foundation with her husband, Dr. Peter Grossman.

The verdict was read in a tense, packed Van Nuys courtroom. The jury of nine men and three women found

Grossman guilty of two counts of murder, two counts of gross vehicular manslaughter and one count of hit and run in the 2020 deaths of Mark and Jacob Iskander, ages 11 and 8. She faces 34 years to life in prison and is scheduled to return to court April 10 for sentencing.

[See Grossman, A6]



ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

**SAG-AFTRA** President Fran Drescher speaks at last year's Screen Actors Guild Awards. The show, formerly on cable, streams live Saturday on a bigger platform.

## Netflix's SAG experiment could change awards season

By JOSH ROTTENBERG AND WENDY LEE

When winners take the stage to deliver their acceptance speeches at the 30th Screen Actors Guild Awards on Saturday, they won't need to worry about being played off the stage to ensure advertisers have time to peddle their wares. Viewers won't have to time their

bathroom breaks and snack runs around the commercials.

Indeed, there won't be any commercials at all: For the first time ever, the show will be streamed live on Netflix.

For the SAG Awards, a key precursor on the road to the Oscars voted on by more than 119,000 members of the actors' union, the move to Netflix, with its 260 million

global subscribers, represents a significant boost after decades of struggling to reach a wide viewership on cable.

"This is a milestone for what started out as the little engine that could 30 shows ago," says actor JoBeth Williams, who serves as chair of SAG's Awards Committee, which is charged with oversight of the show. "It's an ex-

[See SAG Awards, A6]

### Netanyahu issues plan for Gaza

Palestinian leaders reject his postwar vision of Israeli control, and the U.S. signals skepticism. **WORLD, A3**

### Deputy gang 'logo' spotted

Oversight officials say an image seen in a jail parking garage is linked to the Regulators. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

### Weather

Periods of sun. L.A. Basin: 74/53. **B8**



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### ROCKY BUT HISTORIC

The U.S. returns to the moon with a private craft, shown orbiting. It tipped over upon landing, limiting communications. **PERSPECTIVES, A2**



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