

# Biden, party do damage control

After his ‘bad’ debate, insiders consider how he can recover and bring fight to Trump.

By Benjamin Oreskes

President Biden’s widely panned debate performance Thursday night in Atlanta has many prominent Democrats asking a simple question: What do we do now?

Swapping out Biden for someone else is likely not possible — unless he quits the race himself. He’s won the requisite number of delegates to capture the Democratic nomination, and Biden said at a rally Friday that he was in the race to win. So now strategists and donors are mulling how the 81-year-old can reset his campaign and take the fight to former President Trump.

Some said the president needed to take a moment to survey the damage. Others said it was important that he increase his campaign travel schedule, do more media availabilities and emphasize how he’s always been an underdog. Some added that he needed to acknowledge his years and what Father Time has wrought rather than act as though age weren’t an issue.

Finally, there was broad agreement that Biden needs to home in on a message that contrasts his values and those of Trump, whom they describe as vain and vindictive.

“Bad debate nights happen,” former President Obama wrote on X. “Trust me, I know. But this election is still a choice between someone who has fought for ordinary folks his entire life and someone who only cares about himself.”

Biden missed a chance to hit that note Thursday, several strategists said. They had wanted him to pick an issue such as reproductive rights or the economy, for example, and stay far more focused on how Americans would be worse off if Trump

[See Biden, A9]



# FALSE CONFESSION, AND A BID TO CLEAR MOM’S NAME

Decades after a shocking murder, two sons open up about how their mother’s time behind bars in California derailed their lives

By Anita Chabria and Jessica Garrison | REPORTING FROM PLACERVILLE, CALIF.

The dead body in the bedroom told a story of savagery and rage.

Twenty-nine stab wounds, including some through the skull — one so vicious the tip of the knife broke off. Blood soaked her slashed floral nightgown, drenched the rug, splattered the walls. A bite mark pierced the back of her shoulder, teeth sunk into flesh as she tried to flee.

In the early hours of July 7, 1985, Connie Dahl and her boyfriend called police in a panic after they returned to his house following a long night of partying and discovered the murder of a houseguest. They had no idea what had happened, Dahl told detectives. Only that they had walked in on this scene.

The El Dorado County sheriff’s deputies quickly began to question that story. Dahl, 19, and her boyfriend, 20-year-old Ricky Davis, became suspects instead of witnesses.

For the next 29 years, Dahl’s life was slowly crushed by the body in the bedroom — first by the trauma of finding the mutilated woman, then by the accusations that Dahl was involved.

More than a decade later, Dahl would crumble under the relentless questioning of detectives who made false statements about the evidence, and the tricks of her own mind that left her believing that she was involved in the killing — that she was, in fact, the biter whose teeth had sunk into the woman’s back.

After a series of manipulative interrogations over a period of years, Dahl falsely confessed that she had participated in the murder.

She told that same false story in court, identifying her ex-boyfriend, Davis, as the killer and sending him away for 16 years to life. She was jailed for four years, before returning home to try to pick up life with her young children.

But she could not escape that terrible image of herself, the consequence of a method of policing that allows detectives to deceive and threaten in pursuit of a confession. And she passed that scar onto her sons, who lived with her addictions and chaos, but still could never quite believe their mother was a killer.

[See Dahl, A6]

Los Angeles Times photo illustration; photo by ISAAC WASSERMAN For The Times

# Officer absences rise at juvenile halls

As the lockups become more violent, many probation workers are routinely skipping work.

By Rebecca Ellis

On the night that a young person stole a key, scaled a wall and briefly escaped, 100 probation officers were scheduled to work at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall.

About 60 of them never showed up.

Even after two dozen additional officers arrived, the staffing remained “dangerously low,” enabling the chaotic escape on Nov. 4, according to a report by the Los Angeles County inspector general’s office.

That Saturday wasn’t an outlier.

Across the three shifts at Los Padrinos that day, 103 probation officers — including the 60 or so on the “p.m.” shift — called out, meaning they were scheduled to work but never showed up. The next day, 101 officers called out, according to numbers released by the L.A. County Probation Department to The Times last month.

Callouts at the Downey facility surged past 100 for the next two weekends — and most holidays, according to the department records. On Thanksgiving, 112 probation officers skipped their shifts, while 113 called out on Christmas Eve. On New Year’s Eve, 117 didn’t show up — same with New Year’s Day.

The Probation Department did not say how many were scheduled to work each of those days. But a staffing analysis by the department at the start of this year suggests that the callouts represented a significant chunk.

Generally about 250 officers, distributed among the three shifts, are needed to safely staff Los Padrinos at a

[See Absences, A8]

# College graduates in China find joy in return to farming

By Stephanie Yang and Xin-Yun Wu

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Growing up in one of China’s biggest cities, it never occurred to Liang Yu that she might one day toil in the fields.

In college, she majored in broadcast television, planning a career in film or advertising.

She began to reconsider after she tried growing tomatoes with other students and found they were sweeter than anything available in stores.

“The first time I ate something that I planted myself, I was amazed,” said the 24-year-old from Guangzhou, a city of nearly 19 million.

After graduating, she and her boyfriend rented two acres an hour outside Shanghai, put up a green-

[See China, A4]



Courtesy of Liang Yu

LIANG YU works in the greenhouse at her farm outside Shanghai. Liang began farming after college.

## U.S., Europe warn Hezbollah

Mediators tell the Lebanese militants to ease strikes on Israel to avoid an “apocalyptic” war. **WORLD, A3**

## DMV makes renewal easier

Some dumb questions are dumped, but virtual assistant needs work, Steve Lopez writes. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

## Castoffs solidify Dodgers bullpen

Ability to unlock the potential of pitchers who struggled elsewhere has contributed to success. **SPORTS, D1**

**Weather**  
Sunny, very warm.  
L.A. Basin: 88/65. **B9**

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# Can bird flu among cows be stopped?

Some experts doubt officials’ assurances that H5N1 won’t keep spreading in dairy cattle, other animals.

By Susanne Rust

Despite assurances from the federal government that bird flu will be eradicated from the nation’s dairy cows, some experts worry the disease is here to stay.

Recently, Eric Deeble, acting senior advisor for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s H5N1 response, said that the federal government hoped to “eliminate the disease from the dairy herd” without requiring vaccines.

Since the disease was first publicly identified in dairy cattle on March 25, there have been 129 reports of infected herds in 12 states.

In recent weeks, there has been a surge — from 68 confirmed cases May 28 to nearly twice that many as of Tuesday. There are no cases in California.

So far, the dairy industry has proved reluctant to work with state and federal governments to allow for widespread testing of herds.

To some epidemiologists, this lack of close herd surveillance is a problem. They worry that the virus could be spreading unchecked among dairy cows and other animals, and that it may have taken up permanent residence on farms.

David Topham, a professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of Rochester’s Center for Vaccine Biology and Immunology, said he considers H5N1 to be “endemic in animals in North America” — citing its prevalence in wild bird populations as well as

[See Bird flu, A16]



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