

A new speaker for the religious right

Mike Johnson’s succeeding McCarthy in the House marks a major shift in GOP.

By Faith E. Pinho

In the early morning hours of Jan. 6, as Rep. Kevin McCarthy prepared to try for the 12th time to win enough votes to become speaker of the House, a little-known Louisiana congressman named Mike Johnson joined a small group of his Republican colleagues in the empty legislative chamber to kneel in prayer.

The lawmakers repented to God for their “individual transgressions, and those collectively as a legislative body, and as a people, as a nation. And we asked for his divine guidance,” Johnson recalled later. “Lord, the House is divided,” he prayed. “We ask you to unite this House.”

Before dawn the next day, McCarthy, a Bakersfield Republican, had been elected speaker.

But the unity Johnson’s group had prayed for did not last. By October, rebel Republicans had ousted McCarthy from GOP leadership and the House had selected a new leader: Johnson.

“I don’t believe there are any coincidences in a matter like this,” Johnson said to his colleagues minutes after being elected. “The Bible is very clear that God is the one that raises up those in authority.”

To those unfamiliar with the varied expressions of American religiosity, the dif

[See Speakers, A7]



WADI AL NAAM, an illegal Bedouin settlement, lacks electricity despite proximity to a power plant.

Bedouins in Israel thrown into double jeopardy by war

Marginalized citizens seek safety from far right and Gaza fire

Story by Nabih Bulos | Photographs by Marcus Yam

REPORTING FROM AL BAT, ISRAEL



AQEL QERAAN, left, and brother Ibrahim in Sawa, a Bedouin village in Israel. Aqel Qeraan lost two children to a Hamas rocket.

Adel abu Sbayeh heard the F-35 long before he saw it brushing a lazy contrail over the Negev desert, turning west toward Gaza, another warplane from the Nevatim air base not far from his Bedouin village. He wondered if the sky would also bring more Hamas rockets, like the one that killed his loved ones and left him injured and grieving.

“Nevatim has protection, of course,” he said. “We don’t.”

Abu Sbayeh said he believes the rocket was meant for Nevatim, five miles south from where he stood. But on the morning of Oct. 7, as Hamas commandos rampaged through southwestern Israel, the rocket sliced through his corrugated metal roof as his family gathered for breakfast.

When Abu Sbayeh came to, his mother, 57-year-old Faiza, and her 13-year-old granddaughter, May,

[See Bedouins, A4]

COLUMN ONE

Inside the last porn theater in Los Angeles

The Tiki Theater, an adult film venue, is run by a Salvadoran immigrant and former battlefield nurse. Patrons call it ‘a refuge.’

By Angie Orellana Hernandez

After a long and tiring day at work, Mark headed to an East Hollywood movie theater that he called “always a fun, chill” time — and bought an eight-hour ticket.

At this cinema house, there were no movie posters touting “Barbie,” no IMAX screens, no buckets of buttery popcorn. This month’s curated selections include “Tiny & Tight Size Queens 2” and “Stepmom Seductions.”

Mark had come to the Tiki Theater: the last porn theater in Los Angeles.

It is a place that has outlasted more vaunted film houses such as the ArcLight Hollywood and its historic Cinerama Dome, which closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I just want to feel free here, watching something very primal,” said Mark, 34, during a recent screening.

“I think sex is beautiful, and I like sharing it with others — whether the energy is weird or not,” said Mark, who described himself as “gay with a side of bi” and declined to share his last name because, well, he had come to watch porn.

The Tiki, a red-tiled storefront theater next to a snack bar selling natural juices, is a Santa Monica Boulevard institution — an X-rated bulwark against online porn, videos that can be watched privately at home, and other factors that have all but rendered adult film theaters obsolete.

Three miles west on Santa [See Tiki Theater, A9]



BRYNN ANDERSON Associated Press

A HIGH-SPEED train rolls through Oakland Park, Fla., in 2019. Brightline has secured a federal grant to construct a line from Rancho Cucamonga to Las Vegas.

Bullet train project linking SoCal to Vegas gets grant

By Rachel Uranga

A high-speed rail project between the Inland Empire and Las Vegas landed a \$3-billion federal grant that sets it on track to be open by 2028, in time for the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, officials said Tuesday.

Brightline, a private company that completed the final phase of the intercity rail line connecting Miami and Orlando, Fla., this year, se-

cured the U.S. Department of Transportation grant as part of the historic infrastructure package, Nevada’s U.S. senators said. The rest of the funds for the \$12-billion project are expected to be raised through private capital and bonds.

The trip on the 218-mile electrified line from Rancho Cucamonga to Las Vegas will take just over two hours, with stops in Hesperia or Apple Valley, according to Brightline. The trains can

reach speeds of 200 miles per hour. The company already has the federal permits, the labor agreements and the land — a swath in the wide median of Interstate 15 — to build the line. Construction is expected to begin early next year.

In Southern California, the line will connect to the Metrolink commuter train system, linking it directly to downtown Los Angeles. In Las Vegas, the terminus will

[See Rail project, A12]

COVID, flu, RSV on the rise in the state

Conditions so far are not nearly as daunting as last fall. But officials urge vaccination.

By Rong-Gong Lin II

Respiratory virus season is ramping up in California, prompting health officials to renew their calls for residents to get vaccinated in hopes of reducing potential pressure on health systems across the state.

While conditions so far are nowhere near as daunting as last autumn — when hospitals labored under the strain of a “tripledemic” spawned by wide simultaneous circulation of COVID-19, flu and respiratory syncytial virus — the transmittable trio is on the rise.

Data show new COVID and flu hospital admissions are increasing in California, and Fresno County was forced to take steps last month to stem a tide of patients arriving in its emergency rooms, instructing ambulances to not transport patients to hospitals if they are stable and not suffering from an emergency.

Nationally, “RSV season is in full swing. The flu season is just beginning across most of the country, though accelerating fast. And while we’re seeing relatively low levels of COVID, COVID is still the primary cause of new respiratory hospitalizations and deaths, with about 15,000 hospitalizations and about 1,000 deaths every single week,” Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told a House of Representatives subcommittee last week.

Of the three viruses, RSV is the most concerning in California in terms of community transmission, said Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, an infectious diseases expert at UC San Francisco. In Los Angeles County, for data released on Thursday, 13% of specimens tested for RSV came back positive, up from 9% two weeks prior.

“It is pretty high [and] hasn’t started to go down yet,” Chin-Hong said.

But despite recent increases, health officials say

[See Infections, A6]

Jewish settlers’ visas are pulled

Dozens of Israelis are barred from traveling to U.S. for involvement in attacks on Palestinians. **WORLD, A3**

A ban on rodeos, with exceptions

L.A. proposal revised to avoid preventing culturally significant events. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

WeHo firms cry foul over wages

With the city’s minimum at \$19.08 an hour, employers say cost of labor is killing them. **BUSINESS, A8**

Weather

Mostly sunny. L.A. Basin: 76/52. **B6**



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