



MARIA MERRITT hangs a towel at her home in El Sereno. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a group calling itself “Reclaimers” seized empty, Caltrans-owned homes in the L.A. neighborhood.

COLUMN ONE

After losing a forever home, she reclaimed it years later

A publicly owned house in El Sereno gives Angeleno strength to carry on after addiction, homelessness and other tragedy

BY LIAM DILLON

Every few months after she left the narrow white cottage on Poplar Boulevard, Maria Merritt would slink back to the tree-lined street in El Sereno, find a secluded spot and stare at her old house.

No one had lived there since 2007, when Merritt gave up trying to pay the monthly rent to her landlord, the California Department of Transportation. The state agency had left the house — one of hundreds that Caltrans had acquired for a contentious, on-again, off-again extension of the 710 Freeway — vacant and deteriorating, covering the windows with plywood and “No Trespassing” signs.

Two weeks before Merritt lost her home, she’d lost her job as a secretary in L.A. County’s Department of Mental Health. Once the house was gone, she lost her four children. On and off the streets, suffering from depression and addicted to methamphetamine, Merritt eventually lost her hair when, she suspects, another homeless person poured Nair into her shampoo. [See [Home](#), A9]



MERRITT first moved into the Poplar Boulevard home in 1995. Caltrans acquired it as part of a freeway project.

Newsom’s gun amendment call goes unanswered

In the year since he urged a constitutional convention to address firearms, no other state has stepped up.

BY TARYN LUNA AND LAUREL ROSENHALL

SACRAMENTO — On NBC’s “Today” show last June, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced a proposal that seemed politically impossible from the start: to convince two-thirds of state legislatures in America to officially call for a constitutional convention to adopt national gun safety laws.

Newsom didn’t see it that way.

“It’s possible because their constituency demands it,” Newsom said when the

interviewer pointed out that more than half of the states are controlled by Republicans, who generally oppose gun restrictions.

One year later, no other state has joined Newsom’s fight.

The inability to advance the gun safety proposal beyond California, even in other Democratic-controlled states, suggests that — so far at least — Newsom’s plan was more flash than substance.

The governor’s pitch inspired a round of media coverage last year that elevated his national profile as a Democrat trying to do something about mass shootings and other gun violence. Newsom pointed to a Fox News poll that found overwhelming voter support for such restrictions.

The gun initiative has [See [Gun safety](#), A10]

Israel rescues 4 hostages in heavy assault

A Gaza health official says 210 Palestinians were killed in the operation at Nuseirat.

BY WAFAA SHURAF, SAM MEDNICK AND JACK JEFFREY

DEIR AL BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israel on Saturday carried out its largest hostage rescue operation since the war with Hamas began, taking four to safety out of central Gaza amid the military’s heavy air and ground assault. The bodies of at least 210 Palestinians, including children, were brought to local hospitals, a



FREED HOSTAGE Almog Meir Jan, 21, arrives Saturday at Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, Israel.

health official said.

Israelis were jubilant as the army said it had freed Noa Argamani, 25; Almog Meir Jan, 21; Andrey Kozlov, 27; and Shlomi Ziv, 40, in a daytime operation in the heart of Nuseirat, raiding two locations at once while under fire. The hostages were taken by helicopter for medical checks and reunions with loved ones after 246 days in captivity.

Argamani, one of the most widely recognized hostages, was taken, like the other three, from a music festival in southern Israel. The video of her abduction, among the first to surface, showed her seated between two men on a motorcycle as [See [Hostages](#), A6]

Thailand attracts LGBTQ+ emigres
Nation’s gay-friendly culture has caught the attention of Chinese people facing pressures back home. **WORLD, A4**

Box office wilts on dearth of films
Hollywood’s hollowed-out release schedule is doing the expected damage, with “Furiosa” the latest flop. **BUSINESS, A12**

Dornoch upsets at Belmont Stakes
Racehorse with 17-1 odds holds off Sierra Leone to win Triple Crown finale on a shorter course in upstate N.Y. **SPORTS, D1**

Weather
Low clouds dissipate. L.A. Basin: 75/58. **B10**

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