

“All the News
That’s Fit to Print”

The New York Times

THE WEATHER
Today, plenty of sunshine, dry, a milder afternoon, high 55. **Tonight**, clear, remaining dry, low 42. **Tomorrow**, partly sunny, remaining mild, high 53. Weather map, Page B12.

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Carrot production in the Cuyama Valley. Groundwater levels in the area are projected to fall by as much as seven feet a year. PHOTOGRAPHS BY NATHAN WEYLAND FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Who Has Rights to California’s Water? Whoever Gets to It First.

By RAYMOND ZHONG and MIRA ROJANASAKUL

TRACY, Calif. — The story of California’s water wars begins, as so many stories do in the Golden State, with gold.

The prospectors who raced westward after 1848 scoured fortunes out of mountainsides using water whisked, manically and in giant quantities, out of rivers. To impose some order on the chaos, the newcomers embedded in the state’s emerging water laws a cherished frontier principle: first come first served. The only requirement for holding on to this privileged status was to keep putting the water to work. In short, use it or lose it.

Their water rights assured, the settlers gobbled up land, laid down dams, ditches, communities. Shrewd barons turned huge estates into jackpots of grain, cattle, vegetables and citrus. California grew and grew and grew, sprouting new engines of wealth along the way: oil, Hollywood, Apple, A.I.

Yet, still today the state is at the mercy of claims to water that were staked more than a century ago, in that cooler, less crowded world. As drought and overuse sap the state’s streams and aquifers, California finds itself haunted by promises, made to generations of farmers and ranchers, of priority access to the West’s most precious resource, with scant oversight, essentially forever.

For many beloved products — nuts and

UNCHARTED WATERS
An Antiquated System

The first water rights document that was issued by California’s water commission.

a cycle that global warming is intensifying at both ends.

With so many people, plants and animals competing for this fickle bounty, water fights have shaped California at every stage of development, all the way back to its infancy as a state, when its abundance seemed limitless and settlers took it as their duty to commandeer it. Now, Californians are being forced to confront the limitations of nature’s endowment in new and urgent ways.

And so, to address this most 21st century of crises, a state that prides itself on creating the future is first reckoning with its past.

In the Central Valley, home to some of the nation’s most productive cropland, officials are taking a hard new look at water rights that date back to the 19th century. They are asking farmers to provide historical records to back their claims and using satellite data to size up who is taking river water and how much. A Times analysis of state data identified many growers who reported their use in questionable ways.

In California’s rugged north, regulators are considering throttling supplies to cattle ranchers and other users who for decades have been siphoning too much from the streams, at times in open disregard of the law, worsening a collapse in salmon populations.

And in desert highlands of the Central Coast, the state’s efforts to stop groundwater

Continued on Page A18

Feud Over War Imperils Future Of Legal Group

Claims of Antisemitism at Bronx Defenders

By SANTUL NERKAR and JONAH E. BROMWICH

Four weeks before Hamas attacked Israel, a group of public defenders packed a bright, airy room in the Bronx for mandatory training on antisemitism.

The hourslong gathering was the consequence of a legal settlement stemming from an ugly dispute that had festered at the Bronx Defenders, one of the country’s most influential organizations providing legal services to those who cannot pay. But many of the lawyers objected to the very notion of the required session.

One interrupted to reject the idea of Jews and Palestinians living side by side in two nations, declaring “No Israel.” After that, a chant broke out, one that pro-Palestinian activists consider a cry for liberation but that many Jews see as calling for Israel’s destruction: “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

That September confrontation was just a prelude. After the Oct. 7 attack, the union representing the Bronx Defenders staff issued a statement. It referred to Israel’s assault on Gaza, which has now killed over 15,000 people, perhaps thousands more, as genocidal, voiced support for “Palestinian liberation and resistance under occupation” and did not mention the 1,200 Israelis killed in the Hamas attack.

The fallout has threatened the future of the publicly funded organization. The fight in the Bronx about a faraway war could have concrete consequences for the nearly 20,000 clients whom the Defenders represent annually in eviction proceedings, child custody matters and criminal cases, among other matters.

The union’s statement has provoked condemnation from the mayor, fury from the lawyers who face the Bronx Defenders in court and an outcry in the broader legal community of New York City, where other public defense organizations have experienced similar upheaval.

The rancorous politics of the Israel-Hamas war have put immense pressure on leaders to issue statements on the conflict, even if such statements have little effect. The conflict has roiled Ivy League universities, forcing the University of Pennsylvania’s president to resign. It has divided Democrats, split Hollywood and caused an uproar at nonprofits

Continued on Page A15

U.S. WANTS ISRAEL TO NARROW SCALE OF ATTACK IN GAZA

TIMELINE IS UNCERTAIN

More Targeted Assault on Hamas Is Advised as Civilian Toll Rises

This article is by Adam Entous, Aaron Boxerman and Thomas Fuller.

WASHINGTON — Biden administration officials want Israel to end its large-scale ground and air campaign in the Gaza Strip within weeks and to transition to a more targeted phase in its war against Hamas, American officials said Thursday.

Jake Sullivan, President Biden’s national security adviser, met with Israeli leaders on Thursday about the direction of the war. Mr. Sullivan did not specify a timetable, but four U.S. officials said Mr. Biden wants Israel to switch to more precise tactics in about three weeks. The officials asked for anonymity to discuss the president’s thinking.

American officials have made that timeline clear to their Israeli counterparts in recent days, the latest step in a gradual move by the administration to communicate that American patience with widespread civilian deaths is running out.

“I want them to be focused on how to save civilian lives — not stop going after Hamas, but be more careful,” Mr. Biden said on Thursday after a speech on prescription drug costs at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md.

The new phase that the Americans envision would involve smaller groups of elite forces that would move in and out of population centers in Gaza, carrying out more precise missions to find and kill Hamas leaders, rescue hostages and destroy tunnels, the officials said.

The moment appeared to be the most definitive effort yet by the United States to restrain Israel in its campaign against Hamas for the devastating attacks it led on Oct. 7, particularly as the conditions in Gaza turn catastrophic.

After wholeheartedly embracing Israel even as the Palestinian death toll mounted, the Biden administration has found itself under pressure at home and abroad to rein in the assault. The challenge has been preserving the president’s determination to let Israel eliminate Hamas while at

Continued on Page A6

Losing His Hair but Winning TikTok Followers

By CALLIE HOLTERMANN

Zeph Sanders was 20 when his hair began to fall out. As it thinned from the density of AstroTurf to spare wisps, he hid his head under a beanie before logging on to play video games on the livestreaming platform Twitch.

“I started getting people in the comments like, ‘Bro, where’s your hair?’” Mr. Sanders, now 27, said on a recent video call from his home in Orange County, Calif. “I felt a little bit more insecure as the days went on.”

Last year Mr. Sanders allowed a glimpse of his bare scalp in a video he posted to TikTok. It took off, eventually passing four million views. Hundreds of commenters suggested supposedly miraculous regrowth methods, which Mr. Sanders began trying out in his windowless bathroom, with his iPhone camera rolling.

A year later, he has sprouted a fine fuzz across his crown and 600,000 new followers on TikTok. His haters haven’t gone anywhere: “bro give up,” one wrote on



JENNELLE FONG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Zeph Sanders has promoted dubious hair-growth treatments.

a recent video, adding the crying-laughing emoji.

Mr. Sanders is among a crop of influencers who have built devoted online platforms around losing their hair — or, more to the point, trying not to. They have left the word “balding” to their parents’ generation, instead discussing “hair loss” and self-confidence, “thinning” and vulnerabil-

ity. (Their commenters are not always so gentle.)

As they discuss the emotional toll of losing hair, many of the genre’s stars promote prescription medications with evidence of effectiveness alongside oils and medieval-looking tools that dermatologists consider dubious at best.

Mr. Sanders is paid for referring

Continued on Page A17

On Inflation, Fed Seems About to Surprise Itself

By JEANNA SMIALEK

The Federal Reserve appears to be creeping closer to an outcome that its own staff economists viewed as unlikely just six months ago: lowering inflation back to a normal range without plunging the economy into a recession.

Plenty could still go wrong. But inflation has come down notably in recent months — it is running at 3.1 percent on a yearly basis, down from a 9.1 percent peak in 2022. At the same time, growth is solid, consumers are spending, and employers continue to hire.

That combination has come as a surprise to economists. Many had predicted that cooling a red-hot job market with far more job openings than available workers would be a painful process. Instead, workers returned from the labor market sidelines to fill open spots, helping along a relatively painless rebalancing. At the same time, healing supply chains have helped to boost inventories and ease shortages. Goods prices have stopped pushing inflation higher,



PETE MAROVICH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jerome H. Powell, the Federal Reserve chair, on Wednesday.

and have even begun to pull it down.

The Fed is hoping for “a continuation of what we have seen, which is the labor market coming into better balance without a significant increase in unemployment, inflation coming down without a significant increase in unemployment, and growth moderating without a significant increase in

unemployment,” Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, said Wednesday.

As Fed policymakers look ahead to 2024, they are aiming squarely for a soft landing: Officials are trying to assess how long they need to keep interest rates high to ensure that inflation is fully under control without grinding economic growth to an un-

Continued on Page A16

BUSINESS B1-5 Scrutiny for Energy Credits The Treasury Department pledged to carefully examine foreign investments for national security threats. PAGE B4 Barely Limping Along Channels once full of new scripted programs are now overflowing with reruns, and just generally zombified. PAGE B1	INTERNATIONAL A4-12 Putin’s Yearly News Conference The Russian leader said he was open to peace talks with Ukraine but offered no hint of compromise: “Peace will come when we achieve our goals.” PAGE A10 Seeing Forests From Space A NASA program calculates how much planet-warming carbon trees keep out of Earth’s atmosphere. PAGE A12	NATIONAL A13-21 Defense Bill Heads to Biden Republicans and Democrats in the House banded together to push through the legislation over the objections of right-wing lawmakers. PAGE A16 Offbeat Judge in Trump Case He used humor to defuse tension, but his decisions in the civil fraud trial are facing scrutiny as the former president counts on an appeal. PAGE A20 Oakland’s Plentiful Problems The city’s woes, including crime, are as bad as San Francisco’s but haven’t been getting the same attention. PAGE A13	WEEKEND ARTS C1-14 Younger and Sweeter ‘Wonka’ Timothée Chalamet is cast as the chocolatier in this musical origin story. Manohla Dargis has the review. PAGE C6 An Old Album Brought to Life A show with, below, Mel Semé, Natalie Belcon and Renesito Avich, delivers the thrill of popular Cuban songs. PAGE C1	SPORTS B6-9, 12 Mysteries of Hiring a Manager A peek at a process in baseball that’s at best a good guess and at worst the start of an intramural war. PAGE B6 She’s Got a Ticket to Paris Susannah Scaroni hopes to enter five events in the Paralympics. PAGE B9
	OBITUARIES B10-11 ‘LeBron Before LeBron’ George McGinnis, 73, won two A.B.A. titles with the Pacers and played with Julius Erving in the N.B.A. PAGE B11		OPINION A22-23 Pamela Paul PAGE A23	