



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

STORMY WEATHER

The second of two storms that dropped record rain in parts of Southern California passes over downtown Los Angeles on Thursday. One man died, and some areas were hit by urban flooding and mudflows. The system finally moved out late Friday. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Outfest future in doubt amid turmoil

Pioneering LGBTQ+ film festival faces financial crisis after leadership clash.

BY WENDY LEE

For more than 40 years, the Los Angeles-based nonprofit Outfest has been a fixture in the indie cinema circuit, elevating LGBTQ+ storytelling across Hollywood.

The operator of L.A.'s oldest film festival became a vital distribution network for movies that struggled to be seen elsewhere, and served as a launching pad for many prominent filmmakers.

Now, Outfest's future is in doubt. The organization hasn't paid vendors and contractors for months and recently laid off virtually all of its staff of about 20 people after many of them decided to form a union. The sole remaining employee is interim executive director Christopher Racster, who started last month.

What happened? Outfest's dramatic reversal of fortune began with a series of clashes between board members and the group's former executive director over spending decisions that allegedly deepened financial woes faced by the organization, according to a Times review of internal emails, board meeting minutes and interviews with people close to the group.

In an email to donors in October, Outfest directors said the financial picture was bleak.

"Outfest is in trouble and we need your help," the board said in its email reviewed by The Times. "Recently the Board of Directors was forced to take over day to day operations of the organization and we discovered huge amounts of undisclosed debt that had been hidden from the Board. This forced the Board to enact a series of extreme measures in an attempt to save the or-

[See **Outfest**, A7]

U.S. workers say this weed killer is giving them Parkinson's disease

Paraquat is banned in 58 countries. Its maker says there's no direct link.

BY HAYLEY SMITH

It was in the late 1980s that Gary Mund felt his pinkie tremble. At first it seemed like a random occurrence, but pretty quickly he realized something was seriously wrong.

Within two years, Mund — a crew worker with the Eastern Municipal Water District in Riverside County — was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. The illness would eventually consume much of his life, clouding his speech, zapping his motor skills and taking away his ability to work and drive. "It sucks," said Mund, 69. He speaks tersely, because every word is a hard-won battle. "I was told the herbicide wouldn't hurt you."

The herbicide is paraquat, an extremely powerful weed killer that Mund sprayed on vegetation as part of his job from about

[See **Paraquat**, A5]



MONIQUE SADY For The Times

TAMMIE MUND helps her husband, Gary, get up from his office chair at their home in Sparks, Nev. He believes his Parkinson's disease was caused by paraquat.

Migrant separations attributed to lack of coordinated policy

Advocates say 1,081 families affected since September at border near San Diego.

BY ANDREA CASTILLO

WASHINGTON — Nearly 1,100 migrant families have been separated while being processed at the U.S.-Mexico border near San Diego since September, immigrant advocacy groups said in a letter sent last week to the Department of Homeland Security that seeks an investigation into the matter.

The separations stem from U.S. Customs and Border Protection's ongoing practice of releasing high volumes of migrants to street locations around San Diego County without coordinated reception plans, ac-

cording to the UCLA Center for Immigration Law and Policy and three other groups that signed the letter. As migrant arrivals at the California-Mexico border have increased, Customs and Border Protection has turned to street releases and holding migrants between border walls to reduce the number of people in its short-term facilities.

According to the letter, immigration law group Al Otro Lado documented 1,081 family separations among the hundreds of migrants it serves each day at a border welcome center in San Diego, where it provides legal aid and translation services. Of that total, there were almost 400 separations of spouses and about 200 separations of adult children from the parents they were traveling with, including 43

[See **Migrants**, A10]

A swift ruling on Trump immunity claim is declined

Supreme Court refuses to decide quickly on his assertion that he can't be prosecuted for the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol. **NATION, A4**

Watered-down resolution OKd

U.N. Security Council adopts plan calling for speeding aid deliveries to Gaza, minus the "urgent suspension of hostilities." **WORLD, A3**

Ohtani deferral bolsters Dodgers

Star's sacrifice allowed the team to pursue and land more reinforcements, Dylan Hernandez writes. **SPORTS, B12**

Weather

Variable clouds. L.A. Basin: 64/51. **B8**

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Who can run to replace McCarthy?

His chosen successor, Vince Fong, is suing the state after being barred from the ballot.

BY LAURA J. NELSON

Months after a humiliating vote by his own party to oust him as speaker of the House, longtime GOP Rep. Kevin McCarthy is days away from exiting Congress on Dec. 31, leaving confusion over who is eligible to run for his seat in a conservative Central Valley district.

A dozen people have jumped into the race, but McCarthy's chosen Republican successor was barred from the ballot and on Friday sued the California secretary of state in an attempt to reverse the decision. Giddy Democrats are sending out fundraising emails saying McCarthy's protegee will "be mired in legal challenges for weeks." Bakers-

State is seeing a rise in COVID cases

A new coronavirus subvariant may be partly to blame for the rise in infections.

BY RONG-GONG LIN II

Coronavirus transmission is once again spiking in California entering the winter holiday season — and a new subvariant may be partly to blame, officials say.

This latest subvariant, JN.1, is now estimated to account for roughly 44% of COVID-19 cases nationally, according to the latest data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That share is twice as high as any other identified subvariant, and a startling rise from the prior estimate of 21% for the two-week period that ended Dec. 9.

"We're also seeing an increasing share of infections caused by JN.1 in travelers, wastewater and most regions around the globe," the CDC said in a statement. "JN.1's continued growth suggests that the variant is either more transmissible or better at evading our immune systems than other circulating variants."

The World Health Organization this week classified JN.1 as a "variant of interest," meaning it has potentially concerning characteristics — such as an ability to more easily infect individuals or avoid the protection afforded by vaccines and therapeutics.

Current vaccines, anti-COVID-19 drugs and tests continue to work well against JN.1, the CDC said.

JN.1 is an offshoot of another Omicron subvariant, BA.2.86, which was unofficially nicknamed Pirola.

Pirola was already deemed worrisome because of its unusually high number of mutations, which might empower it to more easily infect those who haven't received a recent COVID-19 vaccination. JN.1 has an additional mutation.

Experts say all those mu-

[See **COVID-19**, A6]



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE AP



RICH PEDRONCELLI AP

REP. Kevin McCarthy, top, picked Vince Fong to take over his House seat.

field locals are grumbling about the chaos. Political professionals are aghast at the mess.

It's hardly the succession plan expected for McCarthy,

[See **McCarthy**, A7]



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