



THE MS AURORA, a partial inspiration for the television show “The Love Boat,” sank May 22 and was later refloated.

COLUMN ONE

‘The Love Boat’ faces an unhappy ending in a lonely Stockton slough

The MS Aurora, the 70-year-old cruise ship that inspired the TV hit, sits abandoned — breaking the hearts of the men who couldn’t save her

By Jessica Garrison
REPORTING FROM LITTLE POTATO SLOUGH, CALIF.

Under a nearly full moon at the end of May, a 70-year-old cruise ship with a wild and enigmatic history sank in a lonely back channel in California’s Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. In the months since, the recriminations and finger-pointing have risen like an angry tide.

The sad end of the MS Aurora is a familiar story in the Delta’s marshy sloughs. Boats of all kinds routinely get dumped here like so much trash. Battered by time and weather, they seep oil and other hazards, infuriating local officials and jeopardizing wildlife and the tens of millions of people who rely on Delta water for drinking and agriculture.

But the Aurora is no ordinary boat. She was a German liner, then a cruise ship plying the Grecian isles and the West Coast of North America, then an unsanctioned floating homeless shelter and drug den, turning up as a vessel non grata in several of California’s big cities. And, of course, she was a Hollywood star. She appeared in the [See ‘Love Boat,’ A10]



DUST covers the instrument panel on the Aurora’s bridge in 2019. The story of the ship’s ignominious fate is emblematic of California’s Delta.

Hegseth inquiry in 2017 gets new scrutiny

An encounter at a Monterey conference led to sexual assault report focused on Defense nominee.

By Hannah Fry,
Jessica Garrison
and Richard Winton

On the afternoon of Oct. 12, 2017, a nurse at Kaiser Permanente called the Monterey Police Department to report that a patient had come in for a sexual assault exam.

The woman, the nurse told police, said she had been sexually assaulted four days earlier while at a Republican women’s conference at the Hyatt Regency Monterey Hotel & Spa in the coastal California resort town.

The alleged assailant — though his name wouldn’t be revealed immediately — was a popular Fox News Channel host and the keynote speaker at the conference.

The woman, identified only as Jane Doe in police reports, told the nurse she wasn’t sure she wanted to involve authorities and didn’t want to disclose the person’s name at that point. She had been suffering from nightmares and bouts of sobbing after returning home from the conference, but had little memory of the sexual encounter. She feared she had been drugged. The woman, who has not been identified publicly, could not be reached for comment by The Times.

The nurse referred the woman to an emergency room for a sexual assault forensic exam. But the nurse’s call — made as a mandated reporter — triggered a law enforcement investigation that included interviews with hotel staff, a review of surveillance video, [See Hegseth, A7]

When they count ballots, slow and steady wins race

What’s taking so long? Lake County defends its pace

By Mackenzie Mays

LAKEPORT, Calif. — Maria Valadez would like everyone to chill out.

Every election, the prickly Lake County registrar follows California’s litany of voting laws and certifies thousands of ballots by the time she is required to. And every year, people still complain.

“The state gave us a deadline; we meet the deadline,” an exasperated Valadez said from her small office in Lakeport as several staffers sat at computers verifying signatures more than two weeks after election day, when they had tallied fewer than half of the votes. “I just don’t understand — why do we need to rush?” [See Lake County, A7]



MARILYN PIVNISKA processes ballots at the Lake County elections office. The state deadline is Dec. 5.

Expect surprises in U.S. politics

Trump’s second election win is the latest bombshell in David Lauter’s four-decade career. **NATION, A5**

Season of scams is upon us all

Fraud is a year-round enterprise, but the holidays are especially fraught, Steve Lopez writes. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Kid-friendly L.A. adventures

Fantastical play areas, magical brunch and 18 more ways to have fun with the whole family. **WEEKEND, L6**

Weather
Cloudy and cool.
L.A. Basin: 65/50. **B10**

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Pastor says Trump is selected by God

GOP firebrand Kirk’s spiritual leader claims president-elect chosen to lead a sinful nation.

By Hailey Branson-Potts

On election night, a Southern California pastor in a red MAGA hat filmed a message for his Instagram followers, cheering President-elect Donald Trump’s victory.

Rob McCoy thanked God — and Charlie Kirk, one of the Republican Party’s most influential power brokers.

“This is the epicenter of a rebirth of freedom,” McCoy said from the Phoenix headquarters of Kirk’s organization, Turning Point USA.

Kirk, the 31-year-old conservative firebrand, rallied his millions of online followers to support Trump,

prompting conservative podcast host Megyn Kelly to say, “It’s not an understatement to say that this man is responsible for helping the Republicans win back the White House and the U.S. Senate.”

The Atlantic dubbed Kirk “the right’s new king-maker.”

And the man the king-maker calls his pastor is McCoy, of Godspcak Calvary Chapel in Newbury Park.

McCoy gained notoriety during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when he defied public health orders and continued to hold mask-free indoor church services.

He sees in Trump a man persecuted by the left, who, while “flawed like the rest of us,” was chosen by God to lead a sinful nation that, in his opinion, allows too many abortions and is too accepting of transgender rights. [See McCoy, A8]



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