



A **BATTLE** is brewing over a tribe's casino aspirations. Above, Jody Criner plays in February inside the Rain Rock Casino in Yreka, Calif. Photographs by BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

Casino bid sparks tribal land furor

It was midafternoon at the Rain Rock Casino in this faded Gold Rush town, and Jody Criner had just won \$47 on the Dancing Drums slot machine, a respectable return on her \$5 investment.

“Cha-ching,” Criner said, her black leather jacket reflecting the neon blues, reds and purples flashing from the slots.

Criner is a Rain Rock regular, often making the 20-mile drive from Big Springs with her girlfriends. She once won \$1,200, enough to pay her property taxes for the year, and she dreams of the day she'll need a wheelbarrow to haul out her cash earnings.

“I don't mind not winning if I have a blast,” she said. “Which I usually have a blast.”

Rain Rock's owner, the Karuk Tribe of Siskiyou and Humboldt counties, depends on regulars like Criner to keep the casino afloat. Once the tribe pays off the roughly \$70 million in debt that it took on to build the Rain Rock, tribal leaders plan to funnel the revenue into improving healthcare, education and housing for its member families.

But the Karuk fear that those ambitions are in jeopardy.

The Coquille, a coastal Oregon

The Coquille want to build a facility on California border. Who gets to decide ancestral rights?

By Hannah Wiley | REPORTING FROM YREKA, CALIF.



AT A **MEDFORD** hotel, guests are welcomed with a Coquille phrase inscribed on the floor that means “Greetings, friends.”

tribe, is planning a casino about 50 miles north in Medford, a city of 86,000 in the Rogue Valley. Karuk Tribal Chairman Russell “Buster” Attebery worries that a competing casino so close to the border will cut into Rain Rock's profits, threatening the tribe's investment goals.

“We would be affected the most with the casino that's going in there,” Attebery said.

It's not unusual for casino tribes to fight over territory. But the dispute playing out across state lines over the Coquille's proposal has introduced new dimensions, raising provocative questions about who gets to determine the reaches of a tribe's ancestral homeland and the fairness of the federal process for determining where tribes can build casinos.

The federal government seized the Coquille's land more than 150 years ago, taking more than a million acres. A 1989 compact allowed the tribe to reclaim about 1,000 acres in trust for a reservation and designated a far broader region, crossing five counties, as a “service area” where the tribe could draw on federal funds and other revenue

Water rates to rise, taxes to double

Southland wholesaler MWD cites lower revenue because of conservation efforts as well as higher costs.

By IAN JAMES

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California has announced that it will increase rates and property taxes throughout the region over the next two years as the state grapples with fundamental changes to its water supply and usage.

District leaders said the increases are necessary to cover the costs of importing and treating water, as well as finance climate change adaptations to infrastructure and make up for declines in revenue due to widespread conservation efforts.

“We've been successful in conservation to the point where our sales are declining, and we need to make that up somehow,” MWD Board of Directors Chair Adán Ortega Jr. said. “We've made up the revenue and stabilized the past rates with the reserves, and we can't keep doing that.”

The district's 38-member board voted Tuesday to raise water rates 8.5% in 2025 and an additional 8.5% in 2026. This will increase costs for 26 cities and retail suppliers that receive imported water delivered by the MWD.

The budget adopted by the board also calls for doubling the MWD's property tax assessment in its six-county area — the first such increase to its ad valorem (according to value) tax rate in over 30 years.

For a median-value home in Los Angeles County, the MWD's annual property tax bill will increase to \$56 from \$28; in Orange County, it will rise to \$66 from \$33.

“We understand the impact rate increases can have on businesses and residents, so we have taken great steps to limit our increase as much as possible,” MWD General Manager Adel Hagekhalil



SANTA CLARA County Dist. Atty. Jeff Rosen, center, at a service in Palo Alto. Rosen believes that bias and structural racism play roles in the death sentence.

D.A. wants to take inmates off death row

ANITA CHABRIA

Capital punishment in California exists in law, but in practice ended in 2019 when Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered death row to be dismantled.

Still, 625 men and 20 women remain incarcerated with death sentences, facing

the unlikely but possible prospect that under a different governor, they could be executed. About one-third of the condemned are Black.

In recent months, Santa Clara County Dist. Atty. Jeff Rosen, once a prosecutor who believed in capital punishment and one who rejects association with the progressive prosecutor movement, has been quietly preparing to ask courts to change the penalties of 14 men from his county who

are waiting for that ultimate sentence to be carried out.

In most cases, he wants the court to re-sentence these men (Santa Clara has no women on death row) to serve life without parole. But in a few separate cases, already completed last year, he has requested that they be given the chance of freedom.

Why? An inherent racism in our justice system handed down from slavery to

Arizona's abortion ban challenges Trump's attempt to dodge issue

MARK Z. BARABAK

Donald Trump hoped to sidestep the abortion debate by suggesting he would turn the matter over to individual states, rather than having Congress and the president impose a nationwide ban.

But instead of deflecting, Trump's move tied him even closer to the issue by placing his political fate in the hands of judges and state lawmakers willing to go far beyond where most voters stand.

It didn't take long to see that dynamic, and its consequences, play out.

A day after Trump publicly announced his position, the Arizona Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld a near-total abortion ban, enforcing territorial legislation passed in 1864 — a time women couldn't vote and chattel slavery and racial discrimination were per-

fectly legal in America.

While court proceedings are likely to delay implementation of the ruling, the political impact was immediate, moving the abortion issue to the fore in a key battleground state, reminding voters of Trump's role in overturning Roe vs. Wade and handing a gift to President Biden and fellow Democrats.

“As it is, voters think that Republicans want to take women [backward],” said Christine Matthews, a pollster with moderate GOP clients. “You can just write the commercial: ‘Republicans want to take women back to the ‘60s — the 1860s, that is.’ ... It's just insane.”

On Wednesday, Trump sought to distance himself

Swing state could see a showdown

The abortion ruling puts Arizona at the front of a battle that could sway the election. **NATION, A5**

Westside losing home insurance

State Farm is not renewing thousands of policies in upscale areas because of fire risk. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Dueling plans to fight retail theft

Lawmakers don't want to change Proposition 47, but businesses do. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Investor angst at Paramount

Shares tumble amid talk of the film studio merging with Skydance. **BUSINESS, A8**

Weather

Sunny and very warm. L.A. Basin: 81/55. **B6**

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