

Vigilante groups play big role on border

They gain followers and prominence amid right-wing rhetoric on a ‘revolving door.’

By KEEGAN HAMILTON

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, Ariz. — The border wall arches over the steep slopes of the Sonoran Desert, a vast row of brown steel slats jutting up from the rugged terrain, rippling with heat in the afternoon sun. A man dressed head to toe in camouflage and carrying an AR-style rifle huffs and puffs his way up one hill and scans the horizon.

Over the radio, his comrades in Arizona Border Recon, a civilian patrol group, report finding 31 migrants near a spot where the wall abruptly ends. The remote area west of Nogales, Ariz., called California Gulch, is where fencing built during the Trump era gives way to miles of open but unforgiving wilderness.

Half a dozen members of the ragtag patrol have set up camp nearby. Their 64-year-old leader, Tim Foley, says it’s a corridor for smuggling people and drugs, activity he and his group aim to disrupt.

“They got dumped down here by the cartel,” Foley says of the migrants. “They didn’t know where the hell they were at.”

The encounter at the wall reflects the extremes to which perceptions of border insecurity are now driving the actions of both citizens and the government. Fueled by right-wing rhetoric about the border being overrun, long-established groups such as Foley’s are enjoying a resurgence, attracting volunteers from across the

[See Vigilantes, A7]



RAYMOND SARDINA, 75, walks outside his flood-ravaged home in Planada, Calif., last month. Plastic tarps cover his glassless windows. “Before the flood I had it made,” he said. “I’m trying to put it all back together.”

Poor farm towns hit hardest by state’s epic floods this year

Rural communities bore the brunt of damage from the storms

By JESSICA GARRISON

PLANADA, Calif. — It’s been nearly a year since Erica Lopez Bedolla and her children fled their home as dangerous floodwaters rose around them, washing through neighborhood houses, drowning family pets and rendering much of her town of 4,000 uninhabitable.

The Lopez family is back home now, albeit living amid a construction zone, showering at a neighbor’s house and having anxiety attacks at the thought of rain. Up and down the streets of their close-knit community, where more than 80% of residents experienced losses in the floods, the story is the same: houses in various states of disrepair and residents trying to go about their lives without basic comforts such as hot water, drywall or insulation.

The flooding that ravaged Planada, a farm town in eastern Merced County,

[See Floods, A12]



OLGA MANZO of Planada said floodwater damaged the floor and ruined the plumbing inside the home she shared with her mother.



GOV. Gavin Newsom, with Joe Biden in 2021, says he is not running for president. In the Las Vegas area, three dozen voters tell The Times that’s fine with them.

These Nevada Democrats reject a Newsom presidency

MARK Z. BARABAK
REPORTING FROM
HENDERSON, NEV.

When David Mulcrone looks to the 2024 presidential race, he’s filled with a combination of resignation and determination.

Gay and Latino, he no

longer feels comfortable in Donald Trump’s Republican Party. So he’ll vote for President Biden if that’s what it takes to keep Trump out of the White House a second time — even though Mulcrone is not terribly enthused about the prospect.

“Too old,” Mulcrone said of the 81-year-old incumbent. But then again, “Democrats didn’t put themselves in a position to

put anyone else forward.”

In an alternative universe — one where things like money, filing deadlines and other practicalities don’t matter — there is wishful talk of a late entry in the Democratic contest, a savior to swoop in and electrify the party with a jolt of energy and passion.

Someone like, say, Gavin Newsom.

California’s 56-year-old

[See Barabak, A5]

Plastic surgeon put patients at risk, lawsuits say

Malpractice claims focus on O.C. doctor who said he sculpted figures with ‘pop.’

By SALVADOR HERNANDEZ

Dr. Arian Mowlavi promised bigger breasts, hourglass figures and butts with “pop” to tens of thousands of his followers on social media, where the Laguna Beach plastic surgeon would say he alone could perform that “Mowlavi magic.”

What the Instagram posts and YouTube videos didn’t show, dozens of patients now allege in court, is what they endured: botched surgeries, unsightly and unexpected scars, and infections that needed follow-up care.

In a series of malpractice lawsuits filed against Mowlavi, women allege he submitted them to degrading demands, such as making them get completely nude for an examination, then touching their bodies without asking permission. While they were being prepped for the operating

room, multiple patients allege, Mowlavi would try to upsell them on additional procedures just minutes before they went under the knife.

On social media accounts and his websites, Mowlavi branded himself as “Dr. Laguna,” touted himself as a “renowned body sculptor” and charged tens of thousands of dollars for some procedures. He pitched himself as the surgeon who had literally written the book on “High Definition Liposuction” — which he sold for \$49.95.

But former patients and the California Medical Board accuse Mowlavi of not performing some of the surgeries himself. Instead, they allege, Mowlavi had an unlicensed technician do some of the work, such as liposuction procedures, for him.

In one such case, according to the medical board, two unlicensed techs performed liposuction on a patient in 2018 who, hours after the procedure, passed out at home and was taken to the emergency room. She was pronounced dead two days later.

“This case is about a doc-

[See Surgeon, A6]

NEW WATER SOURCE: TREATED SEWAGE

State gets set to adopt rules on transforming waste into drinkable supplies for residents.

By IAN JAMES

California is set to adopt regulations that will allow for sewage to be extensively treated, transformed into pure drinking water and delivered directly to residents’ taps.

The regulations are expected to be approved Tuesday by the State Water Resources Control Board, enabling suppliers to begin building advanced treatment plants that will turn wastewater into a source of clean drinking water.

The new rules represent a milestone in California’s efforts to stretch supplies by recycling more of the water that flows down drains.

“We’re creating a new source of supply that we were previously discharging or thinking of as waste,” said Heather Cooley, director of research at the Pacific Institute, a water think tank in Oakland. “As we look to make our communities more resilient to drought, to climate change, this is really going to be an important part of that solution.”

Water agencies in many areas of California have been treating and reusing wastewater for decades, often piping effluent for outdoor irrigation or to facilities where treated water soaks into the ground to replenish aquifers.

The regulations will enable what’s known as “direct potable reuse,” putting highly treated water straight into the drinking-water system or mixing it with other supplies.

Cooley and other water experts say it’s inaccurate to call this “toilet to tap,” a term that was popularized in the 1990s by opponents of plans to use recycled water for replenishing groundwater in the San Gabriel Valley. The experts say the sewage undergoes an extremely sophisticated treatment process, and scientific research has shown that the highly purified water is safe to drink.

“This is really about re-

[See Water, A9]

Allies press for truce by Israel

Killings of three Israeli hostages by the military prompt European concern and protests at home. **WORLD, A3**

Rams move into last playoff spot

L.A. beats Washington 28-20 for its fourth victory in its last five games and is back to a .500 record. **SPORTS, D1**

Under pressure in junior year

Mary McNamara on surviving 11th grade in the first installment of “Emptying the Nest.” **CALENDAR, E1**

Weather

Clouds and a shower. L.A. Basin: 72/58. **B6**



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