

## Winter Mountain Storms Present Overwhelming Challenges To Responders

The brutal storm that hit the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains beginning last week which is now being referred to as the "Blizzard of '23" for more than four days this week caught county officials unprepared to immediately deal with the onslaught of snow drifts in excess of ten feet high, icy conditions, real and potential avalanches, highway and road closures, large numbers

of residents and others stranded up and down the mountains, food and medicine shortages and both fires and explosions that apparently resulted as a consequence of damage to gas lines and meters from the weight burden and temperature shift from mounting snow.

San Bernardino County, California Division of Forestry, California Office of Emergency Services and California

Transportation officials and employees were gamely scrambling to deal with the situation, but were hamstrung by a shortage of equipment and supplies to carry out their assistance efforts and too few arctic condition-capable vehicles to allow them to reach scores of remote locations where the problems were most prevalent.

From the remote and safe position down the mountain the *Sentinel* is

monitoring and reporting from, it is difficult to say which area is hardest hit, but it appears that Twin Peaks, both the county and city areas of Big Bear, Crestline, Cedarpines Park, Valley of Enchantment and Mt. Baldy were dealing with the most onerous circumstances on the ground.

There were a rash of fire reports this week, some inexplicable, at various locations across

the eastern mountaintop, with a concentration of such incidents around Lake Arrowhead. The attributions of cause for these were conflicting, as was the official direction with regard to preventing them. Officials said that at least some of the fires may have been related to natural gas or propane leaks. In at least two cases and possibly four, there were explosions that preceded or accompanied **See P 5**

## Overreaction To Gomez Has Cal AG Examining Her Governmental Conspiracy Claims

By Mark Gutglueck

A week after San Bernardino County's political and social establishment took yet another and what it hoped might be a fatal shot at Victorville Councilwoman Blanca Gomez, she has rebounded and landed, albeit somewhat unsteadily, on her feet, even as those who were celebrating her demise are now scattering for

the tall grass amid rumors and speculation that the California Attorney General's Office now has them fixed within its crosshairs.

In a seemingly perpetual pattern just as the enmity that Victorville/San Bernardino County officialdom harbors toward Gomez at each succeeding junction seems to have hit its apex, events will either transpire or

conspire to create one further apogee in the arc of hate and contempt that the governmental structure and Gomez bear toward one another. So, too is the apparent result of what appears to have been Gomez's arrest on February 21, an arrest which the mayor and at least two members of the city council consider to be not only justified but long past due and which

Gomez's allies and free speech activists consider to be an orchestrated profanation of the law.

In the relatively early going of the February 21 Victorville City Council meeting, Gomez had a run in with Mayor Debra Jones when the former sought to use the public speaking lectern to make a public issue of what Gomez considers the council majority's side-

lining of her suggestions and initiatives and their outright mistreatment of her.

Such uses of the public speaking podium at public hearings is somewhat unconventional but not unheard of. Generally speaking, elected members of a city council, board of supervisors or board for a governmental agency participate in official public **See P 2**

## CVUSD Makes Cryptic Reversal By Rescinding Naming Of School After Former Board President

Inexplicably, the Chino Valley School Board on March 2 rescinded its January 19 vote to name the second school in The Preserve development after the late School Board President and Chino Police Captain Louis Moreno.

Moreno was born in 1935 on his family's farm, Rancho Moreno, located at Pine and Eu-

clid avenues in what was then referred to as Prado City and is now a portion of Prado Regional State Park. He attended segregated Chino schools as a child before graduating from Chino High in the Class of 1953. He subsequently went to work with the Chino Police Department, rising through the ranks to become what was then the

youngest captain in the police department's history.

He served eight years, from 1981 until 1989, on the Chino Valley Unified School District Board and was the founder of both the Chino Youth Boxing Club and the Chino Youth Services organization.

His attachment to the police depart- **See P 4**

## GEO To Shutter Adelanto ICE Processing Center Next Month

The GEO Group, which runs two private prison facilities in Adelanto under contract with the federal government, will shutter one of those in April.

Despite incessant reporting of a wasteful contractual arrangement between the U.S. and GEO, by which the government is squandering millions of dollars every

year and through which indications are that GEO is profiting handsomely, neither side would state definitively whether closing out the now-sparsely occupied Adelanto ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] Processing Center will entail the cancellation of the contract for the illegal/undocumented alien detain- **See P 3**

## Ontario International Marketing Director Gets Upscaled Title & Unspecified Raise

Eren Cello been named Ontario International Airport's chief marketing and communications officer.

Cello, who has served as Ontario International Airport's director of marketing and communications for the past five years, has worked closely with the airport's executive leadership. Global Traveler magazine has ranked Ontario

International Airport as the fastest-growing aviation gateway in the U.S. each of the past five years, although that claim has been brought into question, given the drastic downturn in airline ridership throughout the industry during the 2020-2021 Coronavirus pandemic. Ontario International was among a group of airports in 2022 that exceeded pre-

pandemic passenger volumes.

In 2022, Cello led the airport's rebranding effort. "Not So Fast," a marketing campaign tied to that rebranding effort, helped generate more than \$34 million in ticket sales for Ontario International Airport's airline partners since its launch.

Raised in Ontario, Cello was director of marketing & commu-

nications for two Prime Healthcare hospitals before joining Ontario International Airport. "This is an incredible time for our organization as we continue to build on our success as Southern California's preferred aviation gateway," said Atif Elkadi, chief executive officer for the Ontario International Airport Authority. We have an amazing group

people that work at our airport and Eren has played an integral role in elevating our brand and contributing to our overall success. We are thrilled to promote her to this key position."

Cello holds a master's degree in communication management from the University of Southern California and a bachelor of arts in public relations from **See P 3**

## Assemblyman Ramos Hit With Ethics Violation Complaint Over His Advocacy Of USFS Land Trade With San Manuel

Assemblyman James Ramos is the target of an ethics complaint after he used his authority as a California state legislator to push the United States Forest Service to take action that a number of San Bernardino County residents, including a cross section of Ramos's own constituents, believe will benefit him financially.

On January 24, 2023, Ramos sent a letter to the U.S. Forest Service in support of a proposed land swap between the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation, formerly known as the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, and the United States Forest Service involving 1,533.92 acres now owned by the tribe at various altitudes ranging from approximately 5,200 feet to 7,000 feet in the San Bernardino Mountains for two parcels of federal land consisting of 1,475.90 acres located near the Arrowhead Springs Hotel at the approximate 2,000 foot elevation in the San Bernardino Mountain foothills. If that land trade goes through, it will provide the Yuhaaviatam Nation with land across which and under which a substantial amount of water that originates in the San Bernardino Mountains flows into the Bunker Hill Basin water table, which supplies water to the East Valley Water District, the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District and the **See P 3**

## While In The Victorville City Council Chamber, With Virtually Every Official There Lined Up Against Her, Gomez Consistently Finds Herself In The Figurative Lions' Den

from front page

meetings as the representative of those who elected them and in their capacity as quasi-legislators/decision-makers as the only elements of the body in question – board of supervisors, city council, or school district/water district/fire district/hospital district board – empowered to vote. Most such elected officials consider the time allotted them to speak during the normal course of the meeting when the items to be considered or voted upon are discussed among the decision-makers as well as the opportunity to vote to be an adequate forum for their views to be expressed. In Gomez's case, however, it is her belief that she has been marginalized by her colleagues almost from the inception of her time on the council since shortly after her election in November 2016 and her swearing-in the following month. For that reason, on previous occasions and on February 21 she was availing herself of the public pulpit, on this occasion to express her contention that her input during that evening's closed session had been too glibly disregarded by her colleagues.

Under the Ralph M. Brown Act, California's open public meeting law, actions taken up by an elected governmental body are to be conducted during a meeting open to the public, with those items having been fully identified and disclosed to the public on an agenda that is openly and publicly posted at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting, with only a handful of exceptions. Those exceptions consist of the hiring or firing of personnel, negotiations on contracts or

for the purchase or sale of real estate, pending or ongoing litigation involving the city and the evaluation of city/agency employees' job performances or their disciplining. Discussions in closed sessions, which are carried out behind closed doors and outside the scrutiny or earshot of the public, are considered confidential. Discussions that fall short of producing a decision by the council taken in a vote are legally withheld from public disclosure. It is only after a vote is officially taken that the decision itself – and not the discussions – must be disclosed under the Brown Act.

On February 21, before beginning her intended remarks during the public comment portion of the meeting, Gomez manipulated a handheld smart device/phone/video camera which she was using to livestream the meeting on a social media platform. This earned Gomez a rebuke from Mayor Jones even before she began her remarks. Gomez then referenced that evening's closed session, without mentioning any issues or the substance of what was discussed. Immediately, Jones, who apparently anticipated that Gomez was going to make some unauthorized disclosure from that evening's closed session, ordered the city clerk to mute Gomez's microphone. There followed some contretemps between Gomez and Jones, who then suspended the meeting for more than five minutes while an apparent determination that Gomez was not going to disclose anything material from the closed session was made. The meeting resumed, at which point Jones lectured both Gomez and those assembled in the council chamber about observing the proper protocol in addressing the council. She then called upon Gomez to continue her remarks.

As Councilwoman Liz Becerra used her laptop's built-in video-recording device to vid-

eo-record Gomez's remarks, Gomez launched into a polemic taking the council to task for shutting her off and conspiring against her, thereupon appealing to the crowd present to either monitor what the council was doing to her or otherwise hold it to account, the precise nature of which could not be ascertained because Jones, as the meeting's presiding officer, interrupted Gomez to demand that she not address the public but speak directly to the council. Gomez asserted that her free speech rights permitted her to address the crowd. A further contretemps over this between Jones and Gomez ensued, at which point Jones again had the city clerk mute the podium microphone. At that point, Gomez turned and began to engage with the crowd in the gallery without the benefit of the microphone. Jones, futilely, sought then to reengage with Gomez, having the city clerk reactivate the microphone. When Gomez did not step up to the podium to speak but continued to interact with the crowd, Jones declared that Gomez was disrupting the meeting and verbally vectored San Bernardino County sheriff's deputies who were there in the capacities of sergeants-at-arms to remove her from the council chamber.

Before the deputies could do so, however, Gomez, having forsaken addressing the council and the public from the public speaker's podium, made her way from in front of the council dais around its end and returned to her position seated behind it. The deputies, who had begun to move toward her to effectuate the mayor's command, retreated. After Jones checked with City Attorney Andre deBortnowsky to determine whether Gomez returning to her place on the dais obviated the earlier removal order and deBortnowsky rendered his conclusion that Gomez had disrupted and was continuing to disrupt the meeting, Jones again called for Gomez's

removal. Two deputies then went behind the dais to either side of Gomez and effectuated her handcuffing, but not before she managed to place her smart device on the dais counter. While the deputies were engaged in securing the handcuffs on the councilwoman, Gomez called upon a young woman in the audience to take up the device and use it to livestream her arrest. What appeared to be a 13-to-14-year-old girl came forward and seized the device, using it to video Gomez being bundled out of the chamber. Meanwhile, Councilwoman Becerra, who had been videotaping Gomez's actions all along, had come out of her place on the dais to get a better videoscope on Gomez's arrest. Councilman Bob Harrington, who was elected to the council in 2022 and in 2018 had spearheaded an ultimately unsuccessful effort to recall Gomez from office, himself stood up, gesturing to other deputies present in the room to get them to seize Gomez's device from the girl who was using it to document Gomez's arrest. Mayor Jones uttered into her microphone, "Ms. Gomez is not being hurt in any manner." The girl ultimately moved out of the field of vision of the camera videorecording the council meeting.

The animus toward Gomez among Victorville city officials first manifested by February 2017, just three months after she was elected to the city council.

A basic tenet of her philosophy is that the Anglo population in California going back seven or more generations has exploited Hispanics and that the political establishment is shot through and through with racism.

Victorville represented a questionable venue for making her case.

In the 24 years before Gomez was first elected, Victorville had demonstrated itself as having a governmental structure that was among the most racially diverse not just in San Bernardino

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County but throughout the state, and a community where the long somnolent Latino political giant had first awoken. During the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – from 1990 to 1999 – and the first 17 years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – from 2000 through 2016 – Victorville was the second most politically stable of the 24 municipalities in San Bernardino County, as there was very little turnover of the members of its city council, with 16 people having served on the council during those 26 years ending in November 2016. Six of those 16 council members were people of color. Five of those – Felix Diaz, Rodolfo Cabriales, Angela Valles, Gloria Garcia and Eric Negrete – were Hispanic. Of those five Hispanic council members, four were Republicans. Roughly 70 percent of California's Hispanic voters identified as Democrats, with another approximate 10 percent registering no political affiliation or membership with the American Independent, Peace & Freedom, Green, Libertarian or other more obscure political parties. Only about 20 percent of California's Latino voting population are Republicans. Nevertheless, in Victorville, a sizable element of the Hispanic community embraced Republicanism and its ideals, reciprocated by the collective community's election of Latinos into positions of municipal governance. With Gomez's election to the council in 2016,

three-fifths of the city council was Hispanic – herself, Mayor Gloria Garcia and Councilman Eric Negrete. In 2018, another Hispanic, Rita Ramirez, would supplant Negrete on the council, such that at that point, seven of the council's members over a period of 26 years had been or were Latino. Two years later, in 2020, when Gomez was reelected, Garcia was voted out of office, replaced by another Latina, Liz Becerra. Also victorious in the 2020 race was Leslie Irving, an African-American. In this way, at that time over the last 30 years, eight of 21 or 38.1 percent of Victorville City Council members had been Hispanic and 10 of 21 or 47.6 percent of the Victorville City Council members over those three decades have been people of color. Those statistics render generally unsupportable Gomez's position that the Hispanic population in Victorville has been disenfranchised. Gomez's persistent accusations that Victorville's political and governmental structure is a hotbed of racism has proven galling to the vast majority of those who have inhabited the city's political and governmental establishment. Moreover, among virtually all of the Latinos who have achieved elective office in Victorville to become part of that establishment, Gomez's public comportment is perceived as embarrassing and counterproductive. Complicating the situa-

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## Fontana Council & City Manager Opt Against Finding An Outsider To Serve As Police Chief

The Fontana City Council and City Manager Matt Ballantyne have elected to forego bringing an outsider in to replace Police Chief Billy Green.

After what was termed an “extensive” search that began immediately after Green made his retirement intention known in November, Ballantyne has recommended and the council endorsed promoting Captain Michael Dorsey to the police chief’s spot.

Dorsey has 29 years of law enforcement ex-



Michael Dorsey

perience, including the last quarter of a century with the Fontana Police Department. Dorsey began with the department in 1998, after four years with the Redlands

Police Department. Because he had not previously worked the streets of Fontana as a patrol officer, he launched right into work as an undercover officer/detective, garnering a reputation, according to an individual familiar with his work, as “an aggressive narcotics officer.” In addition to his role in the department’s narcotics and undercover divisions, he worked in gang enforcement, auto theft, on the special weapons and tactics team (SWAT) and internal affairs.

“The Fontana City Council is pleased to announce that Captain Michael Dorsey has been selected to succeed Chief Green as its next chief of police, effective March 13,” the city put out on its Instagram account. “As chief, Dorsey will direct all police department operations of both sworn and non-sworn staff.”

Dorsey has a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice from California Coast University.

“We’re thrilled to have someone of Mike’s experience and leader-

ship during this exciting time in our city,” said Mayor Acquanetta Warren. “His deep roots in the Inland Empire and his understanding of the community and region will enhance Fontana’s already outstanding reputation for public safety and quality of life.”

“Mike has a proven track record of not accepting the status quo. He relishes in the opportunity to lead and serve with the men and women of our police department,” said Ballantyne. “His perspective will be

a welcomed addition to our innovative executive management team. Within a short period of time, I have enjoyed working with Mike and look forward to partnering with him to support our staff and serve our wonderful community.”

“I am honored by the Council’s and City Manager’s support and confidence,” said Dorsey. “I look forward to helping Fontana to move forward.”

Dorsey will be sworn in at the beginning of the March 14 Fontana City Council meeting.

### GEO To Shutter 2,000-Bed Adelanto Immigration & Customs Enforcement Custody Facility from front page

ee processing and holding center.

There were multiple irregularities or omissions in the communications made between Boca Raton, Florida-based GEO Group, Inc. and the non-federal governmental entities at the state and local level, which under normal pro-

cedure are kept abreast of developments impacting operations at the prison facilities.

What is clear is that a pending layoff of some 112 employees in place at the for-some-time significantly underused and underoccupied 2,000-bed Adelanto ICE Processing Center located at 10400 Rancho Road will take place on or around April 14.

Those to be laid off are employees of the GEO Group subsidiary, GEO Secure Services LLC, which employs, primar-

ily, prison guards and the faculty to support them.

Years ago, Adelanto officials had waded through considerable resident and activist resistance in embarking on a strategy to overcome a situation in which bankruptcy or even municipal disincorporation loomed by welcoming a number of penal institutions into the community, including those operated by GEO and the sheriff’s department’s High Desert Detention Center. The presence of those facilities in Adelanto, officials

said, would economically benefit the community. Those opposed to allowing the prisons and jails to set up operation in the city cited what they said was the obvious threat to the community posed by possible escapes as well as the potential that the city would become known as a penal colony, which might discourage other types of businesses from locating in the city. Concern was expressed, as well, about the prospect that once the facilities were up and running, fluctuations in state and

national policy with regard to the response to criminality and rehabilitation could lead to the institutions being abandoned. That scenario appears to be playing out.

In addition, some have accused GEO of withholding information and now slinking out of town without informing the community or officials of its plans and what the future of the ICE Processing Center and its sister holding facility is to be.

Adelanto municipal, county and state officials did not learn of the pend-

ing closure by post until two days ago, Wednesday March 1. That letter was dated February 15. Identical letters – one

*Continued on Page 7*

### Ontario Airport Agency Promotes Cello To Chief Marketing Officer from front page

California State University, Fullerton. She and her husband have two children and live in Up-

### Assemblyman Ramos’s Advocacy Of Forest Service Land Trade With His Tribe Prompts Ethics Complaint from front page

San Bernardino Municipal Water Department and more than 600,000 downstream users in the Sana Ana River watershed. By taking control of the land in question, the tribe, which is considered a sovereign nation that is not subject to overriding U.S. law, California law and California water law, could dam or otherwise divert water with a future value running into the hundreds of millions of dollars and use it for its own purposes, while simultaneously denying those downstream users in the watershed access to that water.

Ramos is a member of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and was formerly, before he em-

barked on his political career first as a member of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors and now as an assemblyman, the San Manuel tribal leader.

Under Government Code Section 1090, an elected official is prohibited from taking any action in his or her elected capacity in which he or she has a personal financial interest.

On February 28, a complaint in the form of a letter to the Special Committee on Legislative Ethics and its chief counsel, Adam Silver, took issue with Assemblyman Ramos having written his January 24 letter. The complaint alleged ethics violations pursuant to California Government Code Sections 87100 and 87103, specifically that Assemblyman Ramos used his position as a California Assemblyman and official letterhead paper to support the U.S. Forest Service land exchange

proposal with the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation while Mr. Ramos is a member of the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation, which will profit by the trade. In this way, according to the complaint, James Ramos and his family “will directly and indirectly gain valuable property, water resources, and more financial benefit with the potential to greatly expand the tribe reservation in this land exchange, far exceeding \$2,000.”

\$2,000 is the threshold amount of personal profit that a California official must exceed to be considered in violation of ethical constraints.

The complaint further references an active State Water Resource Control Board case involving a draft Cease and Desist Order of BlueTriton Brands, Inc. which, in the words of the complaint, “is intertwined with the lands in the proposed forest land exchange and

the tribe.”

Section 87103 of the California Government Code holds that “A public official has a financial interest in a decision within the meaning of Section 87100 if it is reasonably foreseeable that the decision will have a material financial effect, distinguishable from its effect on the public generally, on the official, a member of the official’s immediate family.”

The Fair Political Practices Commission’s regulations state that the “basic rule” guiding conflicts of interest is that “A public official at any level of state or local government has a prohibited conflict of interest and may not make, participate in making, or in any way use or attempt to use the official’s position to influence a governmental decision when the official knows or has reason to know the official has a disqualifying financial interest. A public official has a disquali-

fying financial interest if the decision will have a reasonably foreseeable material financial effect, distinguishable from the effect on the public generally, directly on the official or the official’s immediate family.”

It is the contention of the complainants that Ramos crossed a legal and ethical line when he utilized his position and State of California Assembly stationery to write a letter of recommendation that, if followed, will reap for him personal financial gain.

The *Sentinel*, through Ramos’s Assembly office communications director, Maria Lopez, asked Assemblyman Ramos for a cogent refutation of what is being alleged in the complaint.

The *Sentinel* asked if Assemblyman Ramos believed that he had crossed any sort of ethical barrier in authoring the January 24 letter and whether the land trade as proposed between

the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation and the United States Forest Service in any fashion benefit him financially.

The *Sentinel* further inquired if there was any order of side arrangements between the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation and Assemblyman Ramos that would make it so that even if the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation benefits financially, Assemblyman Ramos will not partake in that benefit.

The *Sentinel* asked for Assemblyman Ramos to provide his explanation of how what is to be achieved by all parties from the proposed land trade between the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation and the United States Forest Service will be of such overriding benefit that it justified the contents of his January 23 letter.

As of press time, neither Lopez nor Ramos had responded.

—Mark Gutglueck

## Bad Back Ends Catren's Run As Redlands Chief Of Police 5 Years Early

Redlands Chief of Police Christopher Catren, whose physical mobility has recently been limited as the result of a work-related back injury, has been temporarily replaced as acting police chief by Commander Rachel Tolber.

Tolber is to continue to serve in the role of interim police chief until such time as Catren's disability retirement is fully processed through the California Public Employees Retirement System, and his successor as police chief is installed.

"It has been an honor and privilege to serve the Redlands community for over 28 years including the past five years as chief of police," Catren said Thursday through Redlands official spokesman Carl Baker. "The support I've received

from past and current members of this department, city staff and the community has made this career fulfilling,



**Chris Catren**

fun and impactful. I am incredibly proud of the Redlands Police Department staff and their dedication to the residents and visitors of this city. I am confident the department will continue to grow and thrive while providing top-tier policing services."

"This comes far too soon for me," Redlands City Manager Charles

Duggan said. "I've greatly enjoyed working with Chris and having him be a vital part of our team. I'm grateful to have had the chance to work with him and admire all of the things he has done for Redlands during his very successful career. Chris has been an exceptional chief of police and I was looking forward to working with him for many more years."

Catren was promoted to police chief on December 20, 2017, following the retirement of former Police Chief Mark Garcia.

He began his career in law enforcement with the Redlands Police Department in 1994 as the department's first crime analyst.

According to Baker, Catren in that role learned the value of transforming data into

information to further the department's prevention, intervention and suppression activities.

In 1996, Catren became a sworn police officer and worked his way through the ranks to include assignments as an investigator, training officer, field supervisor, detective and sergeant. His supervisory positions included investigations, patrol, field training coordinator and reserve police officer coordinator.

In 2007, Catren was promoted to lieutenant and managed the Investigative Services Bureau, the Patrol Services Bureau and the Special Operations Bureau during his tenure.

He was promoted to commander in 2013 and oversaw each of the department's divisions before promoting to the po-

sition of chief of police.

Catren earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's in public administration from California State University, San Bernardino. He graduated from the California Police Officers Standards and Training Command College in 2012.

Catren is past president of the San Bernardino County Police Chiefs' Association, a member of the League of California Cities Board of Directors and is current President of the California Police Chiefs Association.

Tolber, who has been with the department since 1998 and currently heads up the department's special services bureau, steps over Deputy Chief Travis Martinez, who has been with

the department since 1994.

Tolber has worked her way up the department's assignment ladder, having worked patrol and as the department's firearms proficiency trainer and armorer, field training officer, detective, patrol supervisor, investigations supervisor, crisis negotiator, and professional standards/internal affairs officer.

As what was the department's then-highest ranking distaff member, Tolber was given the assignment of leading the Redlands Citizen Volunteer Park Rangers squad. She is credited with co-founding the Redlands Police and Corrections Team.

At one point, Tolber did an executive internship in the Redlands city manager's office.

### Gomez's Capacity For Offending & Provoking Her Elected Colleagues Has Proven Boundless *from page 2*

tion in general is that the position to which she was elected – the Victorville City Council – is a panel of relatively modest authority in comparison to Gomez's grand political objectives, one that is dedicated to overseeing municipal government in Victorville, with its most notable reach being the ultimate authority on local land use decisions and having last say with regard to the city's budget. Gomez's focus was

elsewhere, as she was intent on promoting the interests of Hispanics and crusading against the injustices – within the legal system, economically and at large – she was convinced were being perpetrated against disadvantaged minorities by the white establishment. Gloria Garcia was mayor when Gomez first assumed her position on the council. Within the first three months after Gomez was sworn in, both Garcia and Councilman Eric Negrete had repeated confrontations with Gomez on issues of both substance and form. Gomez's lack of knowledge and respect for parliamentary proto-

col formed the basis of multiple heated exchanges with the mayor. There were occasions where Garcia called upon deputies with the sheriff's department, who served in the capacity of sergeants-at-arms during council meetings, to forcibly remove Gomez from the council dais and the meeting chamber, though those did not involve an arrest, booking or criminal charges being leveled against her.

Elected to the Victorville City Council in 2018 along with Rita Ramirez, a Democrat, was Jones, a devout Republican. On some issues, Ramirez was in consonance with Gomez, and Ramirez's

presence on the council to a degree reduced Gomez's isolation. In the 2020 election, in which a total of 22 candidates competed, the voters returned Gomez to office, while turning Garcia out. Also elected in 2020 were Leslie Irving, a Democrat, and Becerra, a Republican. In December 2020, for the first time in more than a generation, the Democrats, after the new members of the council were sworn in, were in ascendancy on the Victorville City Council, holding a 3-to-2 numerical advantage over the rival Republicans. That would have seemed to bode well for Gomez,

who at that point was the senior member of the council in terms of tenure. The tradition in Victorville, which does not have a directly elected mayor, is that the mayoralty is rotated among the council members, with the honorific gravitating to that person with sufficient experience on the panel who has not yet served in the mayoral capacity. Thus, in December 2020 the heir apparent as mayor was Gomez. Nevertheless, Jones was able to capitalize on Gomez's by-then burnished reputation as an establishment outsider to outmaneuver her, garnering the support of her sister Republican

Becerra and brokering a deal with Irving to provide her with the vice mayor's position, known as mayor pro tem, in exchange for her vote to make Jones mayor.

Gomez's antagonistic and contentious style often involves provocative acts, as when she draped herself in a Mexican flag during a council meeting, and this has further alienated her from her elected colleagues. Oftentimes, her and her supporters' use of video-recording devices, which is an essentially legal activity, has exacerbated things. In recent months, her rivals have taken to utilizing that tactic *Continued on Page 6*

### On January 19, CVUSD Board Named Latest Preserve School After Moreno *from front page*

ment and understanding of the dynamics involving residents of the city led to the creation of the Chino Police Community Relations Board. Upon retirement from the police department, he operated his own private investigation firm, Lou Moreno and Associates. In 1990 he resisted an effort to draft him into

a run for San Bernardino County Sheriff. The Preserve is a 1,155-acre planned development project in that portion of the former Chino Agricultural Preserve which was annexed by Chino as opposed to that part of the expanse that was annexed by the City of Ontario. Lewis Homes has an entitlement to build 8,100 homes and apartments units on the Chino portion of the property, accompanied by schools, parks, recreation centers and a 25-acre commercial component.

The Chino Valley Unified School District has now progressed to the point of naming the schools that are to be built within The Preserve.

On November 3, 2022, the district's board of education, in accordance with its policy pertaining to the naming of district facilities, opened a 30-day window to the public to submit names, comments and recommendations on how The Preserve's second school should be branded. The district received multiple

suggestions, most via email through the district website during the 30-day window. On December 15, 2022, the board held a public hearing on the proposed names received and was open to entertain additional public comments, though no speakers or comments came through with further name options at that public hearing. Suggested names were: Louis W. Elementary, Wayne M. Joseph K-8, Lou Moreno, Wayne Joseph Elementary, Louis W. Moreno Elementary School, Abott

Thyme Elementary, Louis W. Moreno School, Preserve Academy, Louis W. Moreno, Alta Dena Elementary, Vander Pol Elementary, Dairy Land, Horus, Dairy Land Preserve, Thoth, Hillside High, Wisdom Thoth, Rincon Elementary, El Prado Preserve Academy, The Preserve, King Tut (Tutankhamun), Schoolie McSchoolFace, Hope, Catamounts, Preserve Hope Academy, Rancho Santa Ana Academy, Yorba Slaughter Elementary, El Prado Academy, Randall Lewis

STEM Academy, Martin A. Silveira Elementary and Kemet.

On January 19, after hearing from four individuals who all recommended that the school be named after Moreno, the board balked at one version containing his name but then considered the variant form of Lewis W. Moreno School, as proposed by School Board Member Don Bridge, seconded by Andrew Cruz. That name was approved by a 3-to-2 margin, with *Continued on Page 9*

## With Thousands Of Mountain Residents Snowed In By The Late February Blizzard, County Sheriff And Fire Departments Being Put To The Test In Seeking To Clear Roads, Dig Them Out & Let Supplies Through *from front page*

the fires. There were reports, as well, of the concentrated artificial odoriferant used to alert consumers of the presence of gas, which in its natural state is odorless. Word was going around that the gas lines present in some locations had been impinged by the freezing ground or the weight of the snow, resulting in gas leaks. The Southern California Gas Company, however, downplayed that, indicating that the excessive snow should not have impacted the integrity of the gas lines. County officials, nonetheless, said that the fires all appeared to be in some fashion related to the snowstorm, and they did not rule out the possibility that the fires were a product of gas leaks, particularly as two of those fires are confirmed to have involved explosions.

“We’ve had more structure fires than normal in the mountains,” said San Bernardino County Fire Chief Dan Munsey. “We believe these are due to natural gas leaks. We’re working with investigators to determine the cause and origin.”

The county fire department has recommended that homeowners clean out their ventilation systems to prevent any obstructions that might lead to gas accumulating, and have said it would be a good idea for them to dig out the snow and ice around the gas pipes at the base of their homes and around the outside meters.

Some Mountain residents and those who were intent on providing them with relief expressed frustration over San Bernardino County officials’ refusal to allow roughly a half-dozen private entities and volunteer groups to utilize helicopters they had at the ready to fly in food, medicine, equipment and other goods that

were in short supply, and to make an effort to reach people stranded in more remote areas of the Mountains where impassible roads likely mean rescuers will not be able to reach them until sometime next week, at the earliest.

While the road clearing equipment, scrapers and snowplows the county normally relies upon to maintain transit access across the mountains were put into action, a number of factors prevented that effort from being fully effective in several areas, particularly in those off the beaten track and along the narrower and lesser-traveled roads in more remote areas. A major issue in this regard was the depth of snow drifts, which in many instances completely covered and obscured vehicles parked along the side of roads, such that there were recurrent instances of the snowplows wallowing them.

Moreover, according to San Bernardino County Fire Chief Dan Munsey, “The front-end plows we’re so used to using became ineffective.”

As of press time, there had been no major avalanches in the San Bernardino Mountains, though officials said there are areas where avalanche-ripe conditions exist. An avalanche on the San Gabriel Mountain side on the western end of the county closed Mt. Baldy Road.

At present, somewhat remarkably, there were no reports of deaths, although officials emphasized that the snow blanketing large swathes of territory in the mountains makes it difficult to say with definitude that there have been no fatalities.

An issue has been the challenge presented by the sheer weight of snow on the roofs of structures, particularly those that are flat.

Goodwin and Sons Market, the single grocery store in Crestline, was serving as a critical supplier of food to residents who were snowed in on the western side of the San Bernardino Mountains. While many of those who lived in the area were unable to drive to the store, some, many of them using backpacks, were able to trek as many as three to four miles on foot to retrieve supplies.

Goodwin’s ownership had therefore made a special effort to restock on Tuesday by employing a semi-trailer pulled by a specially outfitted tractor to make its way up icy Highway 138. Late that day and evening, customers who shopped there were able to get fresh meat and produce and other staples, which were as a result of the delivery in plentiful supply. Word spread about the community of the food available at the market but on Wednesday, March 1, sometime between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m., that portion of the store’s roof over the storeroom began to buckle under the weight of snow. The ownership, recognizing that it would be unsafe to allow customers to come into the store given the precarious state of the roof, undertook to remove those foodstuffs most likely to be in demand out of the store to be sold from beneath a roll-up in the parking lot. That effort had only been partially completed when the entire roof collapsed.

County fire personnel, augmented by firefighters with the California Division of Forestry and in some cases San Bernardino County Public Works Department employees and California National Guard soldiers assigned to rescue efforts, using ladders and at first makeshift devices and later specialized equipment designed for the task that had been brought in, began assisting residents in clearing the snow from their roofs, with a priority being given of those with level roofs rather than steep-angled ones.

Despite some major media outlets reporting that the mountain communities were under a near-state of martial law and that armed National Guard foot soldiers were present to prevent looting, the conditions were such that any scenario of civil disorder was unlikely or impossible. A substantial number of residents were at their homes and unable to drive away because of the road conditions, meaning there were few unattended properties to loot. Not only would looters be unable to easily access those locations by vehicle themselves, making a quick getaway would have been impossible as well.

On Wednesday, March 1, the board of supervisors in a specially-called meeting, confirmed County Executive Officer Leonard Hernandez’s declaration of a local emergency, expediting the provision of county resources, services and expenditures to render assistance as needed and ensure the health and welfare of the residents of the impacted areas during the emergency. That included endeavoring to give the public and first responders access to necessary infrastructure such as grocery stores, gas stations, utilities and public infrastructure.

The board found that there is substantial evidence that the current weather emergency, which it stated had begun on February 22, 2023, was an emergency pursuant to Public Contract Code section 22050, requiring immediate action to prevent or mitigate the loss or impairment of life, health, property, and essential public services, which would not permit the delay resulting from a formal competitive solicitation of bids to procure construction services for projects necessary to prevent or address the effects of the storm. In accordance with that finding, the board approved a resolution authorizing the county purchasing agent, subject to Chief Executive Officer Her-

nandez’s approval, to issue purchase orders and/or contracts in a total amount not to exceed \$20 million for any emergency construction and modifications related to the effects of the storm, and find that the issuance of those purchase orders and/or contracts is necessary to respond to the emergency.

At a press conference held this morning, Martha Guzman Hurtado, the chief communications officer for San Bernardino County, introduced Hernandez; Board Chairwoman Dawn Rowe, in whose Third District the San Bernardino Mountain communities are located, Sheriff Shannon Dicus; San Bernardino County Fire Chief Dan Munsey and the county public works director, Brendan Biggs.

Hernandez said “all of our mountain communities are affected by this disaster.”

Rowe said, “We sympathize with our residences and business. We know this is an exceptionally tough time for those who are still stranded on the mountain. Yesterday we were finally able to rescue many from their homes. However, many are still stranded. Residents who are still trapped, if you have food and water, please remain sheltered in place. If you are running low on supplies, we have a phone number for you to call – (909) 387-3911.”

Dicus said, “I want to reassure all the citizens on the mountain that law enforcement services are still continuing and those deputies are responding to those calls in need.”

With regard to questions “related to looting or things of that nature that may be going on in our mountains,” Dicus said, “I want to reassure all the citizens that is not occurring. Early on we had two reports of burglaries, and both of those suspects were taken into custody.”

Rowe, Dicus and Fire Chief Munsey indicated that a report in the Los Angeles Times that the California National

Guard was patrolling the area was in error. Munsey said the National Guard had provided personnel to assist with the efforts to reach trapped residents and to dig the streets and properties out from underneath the snow drifts.

Dicus said the circumstances in many locations ranged from serious to dire. He said there had been 154 calls for assistance from the Big Bear County area and 295 calls from the City of Big Bear Lake, as well as 24 calls from residents in Lytle Creek and Mt Baldy. By far, he said, the greatest number of assistance calls – 786 – came from Twin Peaks.

“These are the folks most affected by the deep snow falls,” he said.

Dicus said that his department had added approximately 15 personnel to the Twin Peaks Station to put his people where they can do the most good.

“We’ve contacted over 100 residents about transportation, particularly in the area of Cedar Pines Park, which was very harshly hit by snow and also in the Valley of Enchantment,” Dicus said. “We had 17 of our citizens that wanted to be removed. They just did not have the supplies to be able to sustain themselves as the clearing efforts continued.”

Wrightwood, Dicus said, had 24 calls for service.

In Wrightwood, which is on the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains and therefore subject to the least degree of cold moderation from the sun, weather conditions were every bit as bad as in the San Bernardino Mountains or on the south side of the San Gabriels, in Mt. Baldy. Still, because Wrightwood deals with such frigid conditions on a yearly basis and has adequate equipment in place, the challenges there were not as pronounced as in other places.

The county’s first responders had problems with transportation in *Continued on Page 20*

## In Addition To Compounding Her Enmity Toward Her Political Rivals, Gomez Has Repeatedly Burned Her Bridges With Her Allies from page 4

against her, videotaping virtually her every move.

In June 2021, less than seven months after her reelection, which had confounded her political opponents, Gomez involved herself in something her enemies thought for sure they would be able to exploit to her detriment.

On June 2, 2021, Gomez and her significant other, Robert Rodriguez, were at the Panera Bread Bakery café in Victorville when Rodriguez, had a confrontation with cafe employees over Rodriguez's insistence on vaping within the establishment. A contretemps between Rodriguez and some of the Panera Bread Bakery café employees ensued, and the sheriff's department, which serves as the police department in Victorville, was summoned. Upon the deputies arrival, Gomez, who were using her cell phones/smart devices to video-record what was occurring, became confrontational, which included one of her patented accusations of racism against the Panera Bread Bakery cafe employees and the responding officers. As a consequence, each of them was charged with one misdemeanor count of PC148(a)1, resisting, obstructing or delaying of a peace officer, Rodriguez was charged with trespassing for vaping inside the establishment and Gomez was charged with a misdemeanor count of PC242 – battery, stemming from her use of the videorecording device in recording the employees.

A little more than a month later, during the Victorville City Council meeting on July 6, 2021, at which Rodriguez was in attendance, he involved himself in activity that Mayor Jones deemed disruptive, which resulted in his being charged with disturbing a public meeting. Two weeks later, at the

July 20, 2021 Victorville City Council meeting, Rodriguez used his cell phone to video the proceedings. Also present at the meeting was Mayor Jones' husband, Gene Jones. Like Rodriguez, Gene Jones was using his cell phone to video the council proceedings. When Mayor Jones demanded that Rodriguez desist in his videotaping without issuing a similar order to her husband and deputies approached Rodriguez to enforce the mayor's order, Gomez came out of her place behind the dais and went into the gallery. A tussle between Rodriguez and Gomez on one end and the deputies on the other ensued, with Rodriguez and Gomez being arrested.

On November 2, 2021, Rodriguez was charged with six misdemeanors alleged to have occurred in connection with the June 2, July 6 and July 20 events. He was nicked with being in violation of PC148(a)1 – misdemeanor or resisting, obstructing or delaying a peace officer and one count of violating PC602(m) – trespassing with regard to the June 2 incident. He was charged with a single count of violating PC403 – misdemeanor disturbance of a public meeting growing out of what occurred at the July 6 meeting. He was further accused of violating PC148(a)1 – resisting, obstructing or delaying a peace officer, violating PC403 – disturbance of a public meeting and violating PC182(a)1 conspiracy to commit a crime in regard to the events of July 20.

The same day, the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office charged Gomez with one misdemeanor count of violating PC148(a)1, resisting, obstructing or delaying of a peace officer and one misdemeanor or count of violating PC242 – battery, both stemming from what happened at the Panera

Bread bakery-café and with a misdemeanor count of violating PC148(a)1 – resisting, obstructing or delaying of a peace officer and one count of PC403 – disturbance of a public meeting and violating PC182(a)1 conspiracy to commit a crime relating to her action on July 20.

Rodriguez, who did not waive his right to a speedy trial, went before a jury in December 2021 on the charges against him. On December 29, 2021, Rodriguez was convicted on the cases pertaining to the June 2 and July 20 incidents but acquitted on the charges relating to the July 6 meeting.

Gomez consented to delays in the trying of the case against her and the case languished throughout 2022.

Meanwhile, Gomez had coordinated with a Northern California attorney, Scott Rafferty, becoming with Neighborhood Elections Now, a front group that is an extension of Rafferty's law firm an applicant and potential lead plaintiff in a lawsuit Rafferty was threatening to file against Victorville under the auspices of the California Voting Rights Act. Alleging that racially-polarized and ethnically polarized voting was occurring in Victorville, Rafferty demanded that the city dispense with the at-large voting system the city has used since its inception as an incorporated municipality in 1962.

The basis of Rafferty's and Gomez's contention was that Victorville had been, with its at-large voting system, "diluting the influence of Latino voters." The cure, the claimed was to adopt a ward or by-district voting map, which would result, they claimed, in more Latinos and Latinas being elected to the city council. Rafferty and Gomez made that charge despite the consideration that three of the city's five most recently elected council members were Latinas, that one of the council members was an African-American woman

and thus a member of another "protected minority" under the California Voting Rights Act and the Federal Voting Rights Act, that a single member of the city council is a Caucasian woman and that all five members of the council were women, what is widely alleged to be an under-represented element of the electorate.

Despite City Attorney Andre deBortnowsky's contention that racially polarized voting had not occurred in Victorville, he recommended that the city simply comply with Rafferty and Gomez's demand, since under the California Voting Rights Act, plaintiff's alleging racially polarized voting are allowed to recover all of their legal costs if they prevail but are not liable for the city's legal costs if they lose. Thus, the City of Victorville transformed its voting process from an at-large system, by which voters voted for candidates for the city council who needed to merely live within the city limits to qualify their candidacy to a district voting system by which the city has now been divided into five districts with approximately the same population which are represented by a councilperson who lives in that district. Victorville residents are allowed to vote only for a candidate representing his or her own district and have no say over the representatives of other districts.

As both Rafferty and Gomez contended that the changeover to district voting would raise the prospect of ensuring Hispanic representation on the council, both of them as well as Gomez's supporters celebrated the change as a victory.

Ultimately, however, the switch to district voting proved disastrous insofar as Gomez's hope of creating a political reality that would be more favorable to her. In the 2022 election, Jones, Gomez's chief current rival on the council, was elected to represent the newly formed District 2. In the other council race in newly created District

4, Robert Harrington, who had championed the ultimately failed effort to recall Gomez from office in 2018, scored a come-from-behind victory over Lizet Angulo, a Latina. In this way, the community, quite possibly in reaction to what many of its members saw as Gomez's spurious accusations of racism permeating Victorville, kept in office her primary existing political counterweight and put onto the dais one of her most committed foes. In the same election, using the very electoral system Gomez maintained would undo the domination of the Anglo males who were victimizing the oppressed racial minorities and women of the community, the council saw itself transformed from one entirely composed of women and four-fifths composed of protected minorities to one that involved a man, and a man who was her implacable enemy at that, and is now three-fifths composed of protected minorities.

Gomez had been scheduled to go to trial in January on the matters pertaining to the charges against her stemming from the June 2, 2021 and July 20, 2021 incidents. The trial was delayed, however, first over difficulties in impaneling jury and then as a result of Gomez filing a writ of challenge against Judge Katrina West, who was scheduled to preside over the case, as well as differences that manifested between her and her attorney, Raj Maline, and further difficulties she experienced with the attorney appointed by the court to represent her, David Goldstein. At the time of her arrest in Victorville on February 21, Gomez was next scheduled for a pre-trial court hearing the following morning, February 22, in Rancho Cucamonga, where her trial had been moved to avoid any conflicts that might arise at the Victorville Courthouse because of pre-trial publicity. Gomez, however, was yet in custody in the High Desert Detention Center in Ad-

elanto on the morning of Wednesday February 22.

With Justin Crocker, the deputy district attorney prosecuting Gomez, and Goldstein present, Judge Joseph Widman reset the pre-trial hearing for February 27 in Rancho Cucamonga. Gomez was neither physically present for the hearing nor were arrangements made for her to appear by video link from the jail. The subject of bail or a recognizance release was raised but not resolved.

Two days later, on Friday February 24, a hearing for Gomez was held before Commissioner Arthur Benner II in which she was not physically present but appeared by video from the jail. Deputy District Attorney Linda Metz was present, but there was no legal representative for Gomez. Commissioner Benner vacated the pre-trial hearing that was set for February 27 and reset it as an in-custody pre-trial on March 1 in Victorville to trail the case of MVI23001156, that being the matter relating to Gomez's February 21, 2023 arrest.

Meanwhile, Gomez remained in the custody of the sheriff's department, under a no-bail hold.

Over the less than three days that had elapsed from the time of Gomez's arrest on evening of February 21 until February 24, a strategy for being done with Gomez once and for all as a political entity had emerged. It was recognized that Gomez, who was at that point at odds with her former attorney Raj Maline and even more antagonistic toward her current lawyer David Goldstein, had little in the way of financial means at her disposal and would thus be unable to retain an attorney on her own or post bail. Prosecutors would cite her disruptive behavior at the February 21 meeting, assert that she had engaged in a serial set of disruptions of the public order and was unwilling to change that pattern of behavior and should

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# San Bernardino County **Sentinel**

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## **Over The Last Several Years, The Adelanto ICE Processing Center Has Garnered A Reputation As An Inhospitable Place For The Illegal Immigrants It Has Housed** *from page 3*

to Adelanto Mayor Gabriel Reyes, another to San Bernardino County Workforce Development Director Brad Gates, and a third to California's Employment Development Department – were delivered Wednesday, fully 14 days after GEO claimed the letter was drafted and sent.

According to the letter from CEO Vice President Christopher Ryan, the lion's share of the employees at the Adelanto ICE Processing Center to get pink slips – 96 – are members of the United Government Security Officers of America, meaning they are employed as guards. Nine are represented by Teamsters Local 1932, meaning service workers such as cooks, maintenance workers and janitors. The other seven are nurses, electricians and technicians who are not unionized.

Ryan said circumstances relating to operations had led to the “unfortunate development” that is in the offing, with more than 100 people losing their jobs, despite GEO's “successful performance” in operating the Adelanto ICE Processing Center.

While the closure of the Adelanto ICE Processing Center is troubling to the city as well as to those employed there, a number of others, including immigration reform advocates, those who conversely

support the use of harsh tactics in dealing with undocumented or illegal immigrants but want that activity streamlined and those advocating governmental financial responsibility, hailed the closure.

The privatization of prisons has been a controversial issue for some time.

In the 19th Century, private prisons which involved “convict leasing” to fulfill private sector labor needs were not uncommon. Their existence and use diminished in the early and mid-20th Century, but gathered cachet in the 1980s, when CoreCivic, LaSalle Corrections, Management and Training Corporation and Wackenhut, which later evolved into GEO, began operating, at first in Tennessee and then in Texas, before catching on in other states in response to the rapidly rising prison population during that decade, which was partially an outgrowth of the so-called war on drugs.

Arguments in favor of private prisons include that they can reduce prison overpopulation in state-operated and federally-run institutions, making the facilities safer for inmates and employees, that they can relieve and therefore improve upon what many consider to be a broken government-run prison system and that private prisons can offer innova-

tive programs to lower the rates of re-imprisonment.

At the same time, many oppose privatizing prisons because of the potential exploitation of both prisoners and employees for corporate gain. Moreover, the savings private prisons are supposed to offer can be a chimera, since they are not suited for handling the most hardened of criminals, which leaves the government saddled with incarcerating the most expensive prisoners. Many critics hold that the recidivism rate among those held in private prisons is every bit as bad as those in governmental lockdown.

The Adelanto ICE facility presented difficulty on a number of levels. One issue was that the degree of sociopathy among its inmates varied radically. It was used exclusively by the federal government for housing detained illegal and undocumented immigrants and was the largest of the holding facilities maintained under the auspices of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement division of the Department of Homeland Security in California and one of the largest in the country, with an average detainee population of almost 2,000.

While a good share of those it housed were bona fide criminals, ones who had in-depth criminal histories in their countries of origin, others were guilty of nothing more than having disobeyed U.S. immigration law. The combination of sociopaths and non-criminal sorts in a

dense proximity to one another was a formula for difficulty, if not outright disaster.

Whether many of those previously housed and currently incarcerated at the Adelanto ICE Processing Center should be considered criminal inmates is a matter of definition. Though those there were and are technically in violation of United States immigration law, at least some have legitimate political asylum claims. The number of asylum seekers at Adelanto was previously substantial. According to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as of March 2018, there were 445 detainees who were seeking asylum, or 27 percent of the facility's population. More than 50 percent of the women held at the facility were seeking asylum.

Two such prisoners seeking asylum were a man and wife, previously identified to the *Sentinel* as Sofia and Aleksei.

Sofia sought asylum in the United States due to what she said was persecution she faced in Russia. Her husband was also detained at the Adelanto ICE Processing Center starting in 2017. By 2018, Sofia had been sent to the facility's hospital ward following a failed suicide in which she attempted to cut her wrists. She had largely been denied any sort of physical access to her husband and her consequent requests to send him letters or speak with him by phone were denied. Sofia described feeling anxious and depressed, based on her living conditions and

lack of medical treatment in the Adelanto facility. When she experienced intense headaches, her requests for medical care went unanswered. Other requests for small sources of comfort, such as a book in Russian or a sweater, were also denied. She requested to see mental health staff but told an interviewer that “They make me feel worse.” She said she had been allowed only minimal outdoor recreation time, making it difficult to exercise regularly. Clinical staff also directed Sofia to use ‘religious coping’ even though she is not religious. A review of her medical records showed that the prison's mental health staff persisted with such recommendations even as Sofia reported objective signs of deteriorating mental health, including reports of suicidal thoughts. Despite no history of suicidal tendency or self-harm prior to her detention at Adelanto, roughly four-and-a-half months into her detention, Sofia attempted to foredo herself.

Her husband, Aleksei, had been apprehended by immigration agents along with his wife. He was diagnosed as suffering from pancreatitis and gastroesophageal reflux disease, a condition that causes intense abdominal and chest pain. His medications were discontinued when he arrived at Adelanto. Within a few weeks, his pain had become so severe that he could not walk or stand. Staff provided him ibuprofen repeatedly, which according to Disability Rights Center experts,

is inappropriate for a patient with his condition and could lead to dangerous internal bleeding. After more than a year in detention with worsening symptoms, including symptoms of internal bleeding, Aleksei still had not received a clinically indicated follow-up, such as an endoscopy ordered by medical staff.

Aleksei described staff as “treating us like animals.” He related that GEO staff forced his entire housing unit to get up in the early hours of the morning and stand outside in the cold because some detainees had complained about one officer's behavior towards them. Many of the men housed with him had no shoes and wore only underwear, he said.

In protest against not receiving updates on his immigration case, Aleksei began a hunger strike. He was placed in a suicide watch cell for two days, where he said, the lights were kept on constantly. Leading to him being unable to sleep the entire time he was in the suicide watch cell. He thereafter attempted suicide by lacerating a vein in his arm, using a razor that was too dull to inflict fatal harm. He was therefore consigned to further incarceration in the suicide watch cell. At one point he was baying like an animal, screaming for someone to end his life and to be permitted to see his wife. After he was released from the suicide watch cell, he withdrew entirely from Adelanto ICE Processing Center mental health staff. The description of

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## Gomez's Spurious Charges Of Racism Against Other Politicians & Public Officials Have Goaded Them Into Retaliatory Action & Equally Cheap Shots Against Her

from page 6

therefore be subject to a substantial bail or bond requirement or otherwise be held without bail until her trial was held and concluded. This, it was calculated, would very likely result in her remaining in custody for an interminable duration, as her discomfiture with her legal representatives, as expressed in her filing to recuse Judge West, would lead to further multiple delays in getting the matter before a jury. Upon Gomez missing four consecutive city council meetings from which she would not have been given an official excuse to miss, the mayor and council would declare her position on the council vacant, effectively removing her from office.

It appeared Gomez had no one to intervene in the ineffable process on her behalf, as both Maline and Goldstein were disinclined to do so and were only ethically and legally bound to represent her with regard to the MVI21007253 case and not the MVI23001156 matter. Rafferty, whose reputation had taken a drubbing following the outcome of the 2022 Victorville election and who therefore was anxious to distance himself from Gomez and in any case did not practice criminal law, was unwilling to come to her defense.

As the final chapter on Gomez's political career was about to end, seemingly out of nowhere, David Loy, an attorney with the First Amendment Coalition, on February 24 wrote a letter to Jones and the remainder of the city council, which was electronic carbon copied to San Bernardino County District Attorney Jason Anderson. On behalf of the First Amendment Coalition, Loy asserted that the Go-

mez's removal from the February 21, 2023 council meeting and her arrest violated the Brown Act and federal and state constitutions. Loy noted that Mayor Jones' interruption of Gomez almost from the outset of her attempt to speak constituted prior restraint or a command to prevent speech before it occurs, which Loy said, in citing multiple U.S. Supreme



Blanca Gomez

Court rulings, constituted the "most serious and the least tolerable infringement on First Amendment rights."

In the course of his letter, Loy cited the precedent state and federal cases of *Alexander v. United States*; the *Nebraska Press Association v. Stuart*, *Southeastern Promotions, Ltd. v. Conrad*, *Galbiso v. the Orosi Public Utility District*; *Acosta v. City of Costa Mesa*; *Leventhal v. Vista Unified School District*; *Hamburg v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*; *Lozman v. City of Riviera Beach*; and *Texas v. Johnson*.

Jones' order to have Gomez muzzled which subsequently formed the basis of the councilwoman's removal and arrest was done without requisite legal authority, Loy propounded, as Gomez had not disclosed any confidential information gleaned from the city council's closed session proceedings and was merely expressing an opinion concerning the propriety or legality of actions taken by the council, action which she did not specify and therefore did not disclose.

Gomez had not ventured outside the province of addressing matters that fell under the purview of the city council and was therefore on point in her comments, she did not

meet the description of disrupting, disturbing impeding or obstructing the council meeting as defined in Government Code § 54957.95(b)(1) and Government Code § 54957.95(a)(2). Regardless of any alleged violation of decorum rules, removal is justified only if an individual does "not promptly cease their disruptive behavior," Loy wrote. "Once Council Member Gomez returned to her seat, she had ceased any allegedly disruptive conduct and her removal was not necessarily justified.

Loy cited "serious questions" with regard to Gomez's arrest and booking on Penal Code section 403 charges, which he said "requires that a person 'willfully disturbs or breaks up' a lawful meeting. Such disturbance requires conduct that 'substantially impairs the effective conduct of a meeting,' based on the 'actual impact' on 'the course of the meeting,' not the subjective opinion of 'persons present at the meeting.' To the extent Council Member Gomez remained within her allotted time while protesting interruption of her comments and the events 'continued for only a few minutes,' it is far from clear there was 'substantial impairment of the conduct of the meeting,' as required to support charges under section 403.4."

Loy maintained that "It is also far from clear that arrest was justified under Penal Code section 602.1(b), which applies only to a 'person who intentionally interferes with any lawful business carried on by the employees of a public agency open to the public, by obstructing or intimidating those attempting to carry on business, or those persons there to transact business with the public agency.' By speaking within her allotted time, Council Member Gomez was not interfering with the city council's 'lawful business.' Indeed, she was engaging in 'lawful business' by exercising her right to speak under

the Brown Act, the First Amendment, and its California counterpart."

Loy said Gomez was neither "obstructing [n] or intimidating anyone else from lawfully continuing with the meeting by attempting to exercise her public comment rights within her allotted time."

Loy's four-page letter concluded, "Whatever one might think of Council Member Gomez's views, she had the fundamental right to speak within her allotted time, no matter how objectionable her claims might be. The charges against her should be dismissed immediately."

Faced with the prospect that Gomez would not need to face the weight of the San Bernardino County social, political and legal establishment on her own, she was released from custody on Saturday, February 25.

The worm has turned.

Previously and as recently as February 21, Gomez had maintained that the San Bernardino County and Victorville political and governmental establishments have conspired against her. In December 2020, Gomez filed a federal lawsuit against Victorville, Victorville City Manager Keith Metzler, Jones, former Victorville Mayor Gloria Garcia, former Victorville Councilman Jim Cox, deBortnowsky, City Clerk Charlene Robinson, Assistant City Clerk Marcie Wolters, Deputy City Manager Sophie Smith, Victorville Spokeswoman Sue Jones, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and Hesperia City Manager Nils Bentsen. Gomez, represented by La Jolla-based attorneys Marc Applbaum and Bryan Gonzales, in the lawsuit alleged she had been disenfranchised by current and former city officials "as a result of her alliances with pro-immigration and homeless nonprofit organizations" and her championing of causes on behalf of "homeless, low income, Hispanic, minority individuals and

businesses not popular, or of any interest to" the defendants."

The suit alleged that the city had utilized taxpayer money to hire attorneys to protect the city's establishment politicians from political attacks lodged against them by citizens and that Gomez "is locked out of city council meetings and denied access to city business and documents



Debra Jones

in an arbitrary and capricious manner." The suit alleged the defendants had deceitfully conspired to interfere with her ability to represent her constituents and discredit her, "systematically disrupting her from performing her duties" as a city council member by "physically and electronically blocking access to meetings and to her city government emails for the sole purpose of keeping her silent and for asking questions about the fraud and corruption agenda being systematically and strategically coordinated" by the defendants. In addition, the suit alleged Bentsen had, while she was in the process of assisting Hispanic candidates running for the Hesperia City Council in that year's race, on August 2, 2018 arranged for her to be wrongfully arrested for trespassing while she was at Hesperia City Hall. Bentsen, who had formerly been the Hesperia San Bernardino County Sheriff's Station commander before he was city manager, had used his cell phone to capture images of her arrest which he provided to the media, according to the suit, to discredit her with the public. Though Gomez was arrested on Penal Code § 834 charges at Hesperia City Hall, the district attorney's office declined to file charges

relating to the arrest.

The suit states that "defendant San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department commenced a legal action without probable cause solely to embarrass [Gomez] for political reasons as requested by defendant city manager that is intent on harming [Gomez] in retaliation for being independent and honest."

Gomez's familiar pattern of having a falling out with her legal counsel manifested during the prosecution of that suit, however, and both Applbaum and Gonzales requested that they be dismissed from representing her. Judge Jesus Bernal, who was presiding over the matter, granted their request. Thereafter, Gomez, whose command of legal process lags behind that of her understanding of parliamentary procedure, was left to represent herself. On her own, Gomez was unable to navigate the court system, and was unable to martial evidence in a format acceptable to the court to establish her case. For more than nine months, no documents from the plaintiff beyond the original pleading were seen in the court docket. In January 2022, Judge Bernal Bernal ordered the councilwoman to show, by January 18, 2022, why her action shouldn't be dismissed for lack of prosecution and ordered Gomez to file proof of service to demonstrate she had served the summons and complaint on the defendants within 90 days after the complaint had been filed.

When Gomez made no response, Judge Bernal ruled that Gomez had failed to prosecute her case and the suit was dismissed.

With the events on the evening of February 21 and Gomez's incarceration over most of the next four days, including the no-bail hold on a relatively minor misdemeanor and the court's scheduling of her in-custody pre-trial hearing on misdemeanors that stemmed from her assertion of

*Continued on Page 9*



### Former Police Department Colleague's Intimations About Moreno Apparently Convinced CVUSD Board To Rescind Naming School After Him *from page 6*

Bridge, Cruz and James Na prevailing, and Board President Sonja Shaw and Jonathan Monroe opposed.

That appeared to be that.

At the board's February 2 meeting, Albert vande Steeg, a contractor and novelist who lives in Chino and whose career as a detective, including a stint as an undercover narcotics operative, with the Chino Police Department during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s overlapped with the years

that Moreno was on the force, was scheduled to address the school board. Because he was engaged with work at a food bank he runs, his daughter, Carla vande Steeg filled in for him.

Carla vande Steeg's remarks were brief.

After noting that her father "couldn't be here," she said, "He wanted me to reiterate that the naming, in regards to the new Preserve school, after a person is a mistake. In today's society, peoples' names are being re-

moved from schools and public buildings. A thorough background check should be done prior to selecting a name to prevent embarrassment in the future. So just consider that with the naming of the school."

This week, at its March 2 meeting yesterday, the board abruptly changed direction from what it had done on January 19.

Cruz, who had been so enthusiastic about naming the second school in The Preserve community that is now under construction on East Preserve Loop, south of Pine Avenue and not far from where Moreno was born and raised, in honor

of Moreno, changed his stance in favor of naming the school after Moreno, as did Na. Thus, Cruz, Na, Shaw and Monroe took the rare action of undoing something that had already been approved. Bridge remained true to his vote the first time around, and the rescission was made by a 4-to-1 margin.

Several of the late Moreno's family members were present in the board meeting chamber on Thursday, March 2, just as they had been on January 19. They made clear they were dismayed with the board's action. One of them, Moreno's son, Eric Moreno, decried the vote, questioned

the action and asked for an explanation.

This prompted Shaw, who was running the meeting to say that the board was collectively concerned about something that "had come to our attention" after the January 19 action. She

thereafter declined to go into further detail and as the presiding officer closed off any further discussion of the matter.

Notably, the district has now blocked the video of the March 2 school board meeting.

—Mark Gutglueck

### The Spectacle Of Local Officials Loading The Dice Against Gomez Has Reportedly Garnered The California Attorney General's Attention *from page 8*

her fFirst Amendment rights, the accusations of a conspiracy against her have taken on a renewed

meaning and life.

Reports are that California Attorney General Rob Bonta has taken an interest in the effort to gag Gomez, an elected public official, during the course of a public meeting and the extraordinary move to utilize the court system to extend her incarceration after what in the current post prison

*Continued on Page 15*

### Government's Guaranteed Contract With GEO For Hundreds Of Beds That Are Not Being Used Resulted In The Squandering Of Millions Of Dollars & The Now Pending Closure Of The Adelanto Facility *from page 7*

him given to the *Sentinel* was that he was no longer engaged with the outside world and was lying in bed constantly.

In February 2019, a 64-page report "There Is No Safety Here" prepared for the Disability Rights Center of California by Aaron J. Fischer, litigation counsel; Pilar Gonzalez, supervising attorney; Richard Diaz, staff attorney; and Disability Rights Center subject matter experts Altaf Saadi, M.D., M.S.H.S. and Erica Lubliner, M.D. was published. It stated, "People held at Adelanto are subjected to punitive, prison-like conditions that harm people with disabilities. Adelanto is infused with unnecessarily harsh – and in effect, punitive – conditions, raising questions as to whether Immigration and Customs Enforcement and GEO Group are violating the constitutional rights of the people held there as civil detainees. Adelanto looks, feels and operates like a prison, from the extreme idleness and regimented daily schedule to the use of solitary confinement-type housing. In fact, the east side of the facility was constructed to be and was operated as a prison for many years. Immigration Customs Enforcement is under-

utilizing feasible alternatives to detention for people who can be effectively supervised in the community. The facility's prison-like conditions disproportionately harm people with mental illness and other disabilities."

The report continues, "Adelanto has an inadequate mental health care and medical care system, made worse by the facility's counter-therapeutic conditions and practices. We identified many people with serious mental health needs who have suffered in detention. They receive inadequate clinical contacts and ineffective, non-individualized treatment. GEO Group fails to provide structured mental health programming to meet Adelanto detainees' clinical treatment needs. GEO Group also restricts people's ability to engage in self-directed activities, including something as simple as reading books that help them cope in detention. Men and women at the facility are further harmed by the facility's harsh and non-therapeutic institutional responses to people in psychiatric crisis. When people are in crisis, they are met with pepper spray and extreme isolation. We also found several examples

of deficient medication management practices that are dangerous and harmful. Overall, conditions at Adelanto are antithetical to the therapeutic, trauma-informed approach to treatment that is recommended by mental health professionals and that many people at the facility need. We found that GEO Group operates administrative and disciplinary segregation units that are extremely restrictive and in some cases reflect solitary confinement-type conditions. These segregation units put people with mental health disabilities at substantial risk of psychological and even physical harm. We found people who had suffered greatly in these units, and even attempted suicide. The specter of being placed in solitary confinement hangs over all Adelanto detainees. More than 50 offenses can result in a detainee's placement in solitary confinement, including minor infractions like 'refusal to clean assigned living area,' 'refusing to obey a staff member officer's order,' 'being in an unauthorized area,' or 'failure to stand [during] count.'"

As part of an effort to hang onto its contract and minimize problems at the Adelanto facility and avoid scrutiny, thus reducing chances of corrective action, the GEO Group hid what was going on at the Adelanto Detention Center, according to the report.

"GEO Group significantly underreports data on the number of suicide attempts that occur at Adelanto, according to Fischer, Gonzalez, Diaz, Saadi and Lubliner. "The frequency with which detainees engage in self-harm or attempt suicide at the facility demands attention. However, we found that GEO Group's reporting practices result in significant underreporting of this information. For example, GEO Group's data, as reported to the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, show zero suicide attempts at the facility for the first ten months of 2018. Our investigation showed this to be demonstrably false."

Meanwhile a number of immigration reform groups, including Freedom for Immigrants and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, together with the American Civil Liberties Union, actively protested conditions at the facility.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, that effort struck paydirt when a federal judge ruled that keeping the prisoners housed in the Adelanto ICE Processing Center bunched together in close proximity to one another represented too great of a danger to them, which necessitated that GEO drastically reduce the number of prisoners housed at the facility.

As of July 2022, the Adelanto ICE Process-

ing Center was housing a mere 49 detainees, despite the more than 2,000-inmate capacity of the facility and the consideration that the federal government was at that time and had previously been consistently paying it to operate 1,455 beds per day.

On one side, immigration reform activists and prison reformers were assailing ICE and GEO for the inhumane conditions at the prison. Suddenly, on the other end of the spectrum, those advocating strict anti-immigration enforcement were up in arms about the manner in which GEO was still profiting, and profiting handsomely, even though it was no longer pulling its weight in the fight against immigration.

In Calendar year 2022, according to GEO's annual report, the company had realized a net profit of \$171.7 million.

A huge part of that profit is derived as a consequence of guaranteed contracts the U.S. government has entered into with GEO. Under those contracts, the government is obliged to defray the cost of a given number of beds, irrespective of whether they are filled. In the case of the Adelanto Ice Processing Center, Uncle Sam is committed to covering the cost of no fewer than 1,455 beds a day for the life of the contract. In its arrangements with GEO and other private prison operators, the govern-

ment is paying to reserve 30,000 beds a year, though fewer than one half of those are utilized both because of court orders relating to the pandemic and other factors.

Those calling for immigration enforcement see that as a squandering of money. In the case of the Adelanto facility, they ask, what was the United States government doing in paying GEO more \$30 million to house a mere 49 illegal immigrants? Why, they asked, was GEO employing 112 people to monitor and guard 49 detainees? They called for the shuttering of GEO's facilities such as those in Adelanto in favor of a more efficient and less costly way of holding illegal immigrants before deporting them to their country of origin.

Consequently, it appears, the Adelanto ICE Processing Center is to be shuttered. The roughly 45 inmates there will be transferred to GEO's other facility located within visual range of the Adelanto ICE Processing Center, the 750-bed Desert View Annex.

Unknown, however, are the terms of the contract between the U.S. Government and GEO with regard to the Adelanto ICE Processing Center. Presumably, the U.S. Government will be off the hook for the roughly \$30 million per year it has been paying to GEO for the use of that facility.

—Mark Gutglueck







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FBN 20230001701 The following person is doing business as: HOLYSMOKES BAR.B.Q.. 3400 COTTAGE WAY STE G2-14377 SACRAMENTO, CA 95825 PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS SAN BERNARDINO BARVAL LLC 3400 COTTAGE WAY STE G2 #14377



## San Bernardino County Coroner Reports

Coroner's Report #702301485: On Sunday, February 26, 2023, at 11:33am, California Highway Patrol San Bernardino Area Officers responded to an embankment below northbound Interstate 15 northeast of Swarthout Canyon Rd. and Cajon Blvd. in Devore for a reported traffic collision. Driver, Richard Ruiz, age 29, resident of Hesperia was pronounced dead on scene 12:05pm. For additional information please contact California Highway Patrol San Bernardino Area.

Coroner's Report #702301385: On Tuesday, February 21, 2023, at 6:18 pm, Ontario Police Department responded to I-10 East bound on ramp and Euclid Ave. for a reported traffic collision. A driver, Sammie Rodriguez, 20-year-old, a resident of Ontario, was pronounced dead on scene, at 6:38 pm. For additional information contact Ontario Police Department. [02232023 0845 SC]

Coroner's Report #702301343: On Tuesday, February 21, 2023, at 12:02 AM, officers from the California Highway Patrol responded to a multi vehicle collision on the westbound 60 freeway at the Grove Avenue off ramp in Ontario. A driver, 78-year-old Edward Garcia Jr. of San Bernardino, was pronounced deceased at the scene at 12:20 AM. For further information please contact the California Highway Patrol. [02232023 0845 SC]

Coroner's Report #702301310: On February 19, 2023, at 6:57 PM San Bernardino Police Department responded to S. Waterman Avenue and E Mill Street in the city of San Bernardino for a reported traffic collision. A pedestrian, Laura Marie Plourde, 48, a resident of San Bernardino, was pronounced dead on scene, at 6:53 PM. For additional information contact San Bernardino Police Department. [02232023 0845 SC]

Coroner's Report #702301311: On Saturday, February 19, 2023, at 7:42 PM, officers with California Highway Patrol responded to eastbound Interstate 40 near mile marker 145 in Needles for a traffic collision. A pedestrian, Francisco Javier Acosta, a 68 year-old resident of Havasu Lake, CA, was struck by a vehicle and pronounced dead at the scene. For additional information, please contact the Needles office of the California Highway Patrol. [02232023 0845 SC]

Coroner's Report #702301146: On Saturday, February 11, 2023, at 6:09 PM, officers with California Highway Patrol-Barstow Division responded to Southbound I-15 north of midway rest area in Barstow for a traffic collision. Passenger, Ariyonne Casey, age 4, a resident of Long Beach, was pronounced deceased at Barstow Community Hospital, Emergency Department on February 11, 2023, at 8:17 PM. For additional information contact California Highway Patrol-Barstow Department.

Coroner's Report #702301136: On Friday, February 10, 2023, at 11:47 PM, officers with San Bernardino Police Department responded to 6227 Cajon Blvd. San Bernardino for a traffic collision. Pedestrian, Mathew Bimbo, age 24, a resident of Fontana was pronounced dead on scene. For additional information contact the San Bernardino Police Department. [02232023 0845 SC]

Coroner's Report #702301169: On Monday, February 13, 2023, at 3:13 AM, Deputies with San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and emergency medical service personnel responded to the intersection of Yucaipa Blvd. and 14th Street in Yucaipa regarding an unresponsive male. Benjamin Salazar, a 30-year-old resident of Yucaipa, was pronounced deceased at the scene at 3:38 AM. For additional information, contact the San Bernardino County Sheriff Department – Yucaipa station. [02232023 0845 SC]

Coroner's Report #702301278: On Friday, February 17, 2023, at 9:21PM, California Highway Patrol (CHP) responded to the intersection of Cherry Avenue and San Bernardino Avenue in Fontana for a reported traffic collision. A driver, 32-year-old Blanca Lage of Fontana, was pronounced deceased at the scene at 9:41PM. For additional information, please contact CHP Inland Division. [02232023 0845 SC]

Coroner's Report #702301241: On Wednesday, February 15, 2023 at 1:20 PM The California Highway Patrol – Barstow responded to the Dumont Dunes Off Highway Recreation Area for an off road vehicle incident. Motorcycle rider Darin Oakford, a 52-year-old resident of Parkland County Alberta Canada, was pronounced dead at the scene at 1:18 PM. For additional information, please contact the Barstow office of the California Highway Patrol. [02232023 0845 SC]

*The Coroner Reports are reproduced in their original format as authored by department personnel.*

### Having Taken Another Shot At Criminalizing Gomez's Idiosyncratic Protest & Failed, Victorville Officials Are Now Unwilling To Discuss The Matter *from page 9*

realignment atmosphere would have been a routine cite release on a minor public disturbance infraction or, at most, misdemeanor.

Mayor Jones, who In public at the February 21 council meeting, Mayor Jones made repeated assertion of needing to ensure a rigid adherence to protocol in her explanations of and justifications of thwarting Gomez's efforts to speak. This week, however, in the aftermath of Gomez's release from jail, the praetorian guard at Victorville City Hall was preventing any efforts by the press and public to have Jones and/or the city to make a response to the substance of Loy's letter, and phone calls to her at City Hall were not patched through to her.

The *Sentinel* submitted to Jones questions in writing relating to the February 21 incident and the strategy she and other city officials have taken in dealing with Gomez.

Those question included why Jones cut Councilwoman Gomez off when she first began to speak at the public lectern, she was now prepared to acknowledge that cutting Gomez off the first time was an overreaction and if, she had it to do over again, she would not have cut her off. The *Sentinel* also sought to have Mayor Jones expound upon what her and the City of Victorville's set regulations are as to how someone addressing the council must orient himself/herself and how that

person's comments or questions uttered must be vectored, specifically if there is a requirement that the speaker address the council, exclusively. The *Sentinel* sought from Jones whether she considers those taking part in public comment at Victorville City Council meetings to be addressing merely the council or everyone present and the council and the community at large. The *Sentinel* asked Jones if a speaker using the public forum at a council meeting could do so for the purpose of putting a statement or information on the record for the benefit of the entire community. The *Sentinel* asked Jones about the appearance or common perception that as mayor she had proven less indulgent of Councilwoman Gomez's idiosyncrasies in making her public comment than she was of other members of the public speaking be-

fore, or to, the city council.

The *Sentinel* asked Mayor Jones, in the light of Gomez's arrest for disrupting the February 21 meeting, how she defined disruption, that is what she considered disruption to be. The *Sentinel* asked if Mayor Jones viewed the way Councilwoman Gomez conducted herself to be disruptive; whether she believed being rude was in itself disruptive; if consider a speaker not immediately obeying her command, as the meeting's presiding officer, to be disruptive; if she considered her interruption of Gomez to be disruptive; if she considered someone saying something that is offensive to someone's sensibilities as being disruptive; if she held that someone uttering something that was untrue or disturbing or contentious to be disruptive.

The *Sentinel* sought

to ascertain from Mayor Jones the degree to which she considered her interruption of Gomez during Gomez's effort to address the council to be a contributory factor to the disruption of the meeting. The *Sentinel* asked Jones if the person presiding over a public meeting, as in the case of Victorville the mayor, is the final determiner of what can be discussed or done during a meeting and if someone deviates from what the person presiding over the meeting intends if that person whether that person is being disruptive.

The *Sentinel* inquired of Jones as to the necessity of having Gomez arrested.

The *Sentinel* asked Mayor Jones if, upon reflection, she could not conceive of a better way to deal with Councilwoman Gomez. The *Sentinel* asked Jones why she could not allow Gomez to make her

statements as she chooses and allow whatever she says compete in the marketplace of ideas. The *Sentinel* asked Jones why she was not willing to allow Gomez the opportunity to express herself, leaving all of the idiosyncrasies and the excesses in her mode of expression unfiltered, and let the public and her constituents judge for themselves the quality and integrity of her ideas or lack thereof.

The *Sentinel* asked Mayor Jones about the perception of some in the community that she and the San Bernardino County and Victorville political establishments were involved in an effort to punish Gomez for exercising her freedom speech and how she would respond to those who feel that is the case.

Mayor Jones did not respond to the *Sentinel's* email inquiry by press time.

## Succession Of Storms Caught The County Less Than Fully Prepared, Fire Chief Acknowledges from page 5

the Arctic environment and lacked proper vehicles, Dicus and Munsey acknowledged.

“As the roads are being plowed, we’re not always able to take fire engines,” Munsey said. “To access emergencies, we deployed eight Snow Cats across the mountaintops. Those Snow Cats are those tracked vehicles, and when they can use them, they do, but there are times when they have to walk into those emergencies. Firefighters are responding to structure fires on these track vehicles, not with pumps, not with fire engines. They’re literally showing up with shovels and with hoses. They dig out the fire hydrants. They connect to the municipal water system, which has been well-maintained. We only have eight Snow Cats. We have plenty more on order.

“We have to prioritize these calls for services,” Munsey said. “Every single call is being responded to. We’re not able to respond to every call at once. In California, we’re used to a five minute, maybe in our mountains a 15-minute response time. That is not happening right now. Our Emergency Medical Response calls for service continue to be robust. As our residents don’t have access to normal doctors’ appointments, they are running out of medication or the emergency room is closed, it puts an impact on the 9-1-1 system. We are using the Snow Cats to get to these patients and transport them to our waiting ambulances that are on the road. Our ambulances are using tire chains to get down the hill, where they’re meeting another ambulance that has no tire chains to speed up patient transportation.”

Dicus said, “We were able to use those Snow Cats and remove them [residents under duress

from the blizzard] from the mountain. Deputies continue to work with the fire department in four Snow Cats and we’re also receiving additional Snow Cats coming to our area. We found that vehicle, because it has tracks, to be the most effective at getting us and the fire department to the areas that we need to be.”

Despite the energetic and for the most part well-coordinated response of the county’s public safety officials in conjunction with manpower and resources provided by the state, it was and remains the perception of some residents that county officials were not being sensitive enough and were not acting with sufficient urgency to the circumstance.

In particular, those residents have pointed to county officials spurning offers to provide assistance that the county because of logistical limitations could not provide.

Those offers of help came from volunteers and both San Bernardino County and Los Angeles County residents who had organized an impromptu food gathering effort augmented with stand-by supplies emergency response groups and survivalist networks already had on hand. They had contacted the California Disaster Aerial Response Team, known by its acronym CalDART, to have those supplies, including food, baby formula, propane canisters and blankets, flown to Mountains Community Hospital in Lake Arrowhead or to ad hoc distribution centers in the midst of those places hardest hit by the storm. The pilots with CalDart are licensed, skilled and trained in making emergency landings of helicopters and the craft are well-maintained.

CalDART managed to dispatch four flights with those supplies to the mountains, at which point the sheriff’s department, citing safety concerns, refused to allow CalDART to participate further, leaving

a growing store of foodstuffs and other critical supplies on the grounds of San Bernardino Community Hospital near that facility’s helipad.

Volunteers and mountain residents were critical of Sheriff Dicus and the sheriff’s department for curtailing the effort.

The sheriff’s department said that federal and state law pertaining to declared disaster zones prohibited civilian aircraft from flights in areas of danger.

This prompted some residents to observe that there was less than stellar planning for contingencies such as what those living in the mountains are experiencing and that public safety officials had failed to make arrangement with regard to emergency operations, including obtaining clearance or waivers for such entities as CalDART to participate or otherwise having in place the capability to use the sheriff’s department’s considerable helicopter fleet to make those deliveries.

San Bernardino officials came in for some criticism because of the fashion in which the roads remained impassable and the sheriff’s department was discouraging residents’ attempts to make unaccompanied or unescorted trips either up the mountain or down the mountain, even in those cases where the residents had four-wheel drive vehicles and wheels outfitted with snow chains.

The sheriff’s department in concert with the county public works was conducting occasional convoys of the vehicles up the mountain. Subsequently, with food supplies to the San Bernardino Mountain communities running thin, coordinated efforts were made to escort Stater Brothers Market semi-trucks to Big Bear and Lake Arrowhead.

At this morning’s press conference, Dicus made comments with regard to the food convoys that seemed aimed at allaying the anger of residents who were critical of the department having

curtailed CalDart’s supply efforts.

“Deputies assisted with several convoys in the last couple of days with food and supplies to the local grocery stores up there,” Sheriff Dicus said. “Today, we’ve scheduled a number of food deliveries going into the Lake Arrowhead area in concert with Stater Brothers and we’ll be moving those food deliveries in convoy up there to resupply the Stater Brothers up in Lake Arrowhead. I’ve flown over those areas. I’ve checked the parking lots. They’re clear. We’re able to move trucks and access those places and we’re making sure we’re getting necessary food supplies to the Big Bear area and fuel supplies.”

Just before the *Sentinel’s* deadline, there was further response from the sheriff’s department, saying it would step up efforts to truck supplies to the mountain communities.

Munsey said the fire department and the sheriff’s department had “pre-put” equipment and supplies in place in anticipation of the storm, but that the sheer intensity of Mother Nature had overwhelmed those preparations and those who had made them and relied upon them.

The sheriff’s department, fire department and county public works had positioned “resources prior to this event,” he said. The fire department and sheriff’s department “worked together to make sure we had every available piece of specialized equipment, including Snow Cats for the emergency,” he explained. “As the blizzard was approaching, we were increasing staff. We went to the State of California and asked for prepositioning resources. We were awarded that. The State Office of Emergency Services gave us additional dollars to up staff. There’s one thing we can’t control. We can’t control the weather. The weather came in much worse than it’s ever been anticipated in Southern California, and it severely

impacted our communities. It wasn’t just one weather event. It was several weather events that were stacked on top of each other. Despite our best efforts, we were still immovable in a lot of cases.”

Munsey continued, “The second thing we can’t control is the preparedness level of our citizenry. While we get out there and we educate folks, they need to be prepared in the event of an emergency, especially when they are living in outlying communities. We found out that many of our citizens were not prepared. This put additional strains on the system.”

Munsey reposed a question of him that had been asked during the press conference as “Where can we be better prepared in the future?”

“When it comes to roads and clearing the roads, I think our men and women learned some valuable lessons,” he said. “I would say that our men and women that work for the County of San Bernardino and public works, CalTrans... did their darnedest. They were out there 24 hours a day, just like our firefighters. They were plowing the roads. Unfortunately, the snow came down so quickly and stacked up so quickly, that those front-end plows that we’re so used to using on a routine basis became ineffective. What we found out is you truly need some specialized equipment when you have blizzards coming. The warning we had for the blizzard wasn’t weeks. We only knew 24 hours to 36 hours [ahead of time] that there was a strong potential that this was going to occur and even if the county had gone out and leased the equipment, it would not have been here in time to keep our roads clean. So now we’re left with getting specialized equipment. We can always do better. We need better plans when it comes to severe blizzards. We need to have leases set up that allow us to get the equipment quicker. We need to have agree-

ments set up to allow private contractors to come in. At the end of the day, we’re not going to be able to support the immense population that in some cases are just not prepared for this weather event. Despite our best efforts, we’re lagging behind in meeting their expectations.”

Dicus told the mountain residents that they need to hang in there and have faith.

“You think that you may not see snowplows and a number of other things,” Dicus said. “Folks, we’re here for you. We’re gonna dig you out and we’re coming. We are making tremendous progress. I saw this from the air yesterday. The roads are being cleared. There are snowplows everywhere and you are going to see direct relief coming to your doorsteps shortly.”

Dicus asked for patience, saying, “We have to follow the process. And I like to describe the process as our state highways are like arteries. Then you go down to county roads, which are like veins, and you go to individual services and homes that are like capillaries. Those services and homes that people need to access are blocked by walls of snow. So, even though we’re making progress, we still have to knock down those walls, get peoples’ driveways cleared, get businesses cleared, and a number of things. We’re making huge strides in that area.”

People need act sensibly as well, Dicus said, and not make things worse for themselves and increase the risk of those who are responding with assistance.

“In the Pilot Rock area, we had to rescue a four wheel-drive vehicle that was trying to traverse what we call the backside going into Lake Arrowhead when they got stuck in that effort,” he said, saying that if the road conditions haven’t been cleared in a given area, people there should hunker down in place until responders reach them.

—Mark Gutglueck