

## SCE To Embark On Its Annual Decimation Of San Bernardino Forest Trees

By Dawn Elizabeth Rose

With the acceleration of the problems in modern cities, population growth, encroachment of green nature areas and frustration over heavy vehicle traffic, etc., it used to be that one could still take time for a break, take a moment to drive up to the mountains to experience the great beauty of the trees and know that

the wooded forests exist there to protect the diversity of our wildlife, birds and most especially Earth's endangered and threatened species. Nonetheless, over recent years we have witnessed a radical shift – and as a forewarning, there are changes afoot and not for the good. So, what has happened? We have witnessed thousands, indeed countless numbers, of formerly majestic and

timeless mature trees in mountain communities placed on a continuous death spiral destined for cutting down by our electrical utilities.

For a while, we wondered: "Who could have done this?" But then we discovered the utility companies with funding from the State of California and their paid vendors have gone on a rampage determined to cause destruction to

our mountain trees. By taking a short drive in the mountains, you can readily see that trees too numerous to count have been topped or had all of the branches taken off their sides. Tree upon tree upon tree has been sliced in half, top off, leaving it to look like a sad bush. And then, there are hundreds of many-years-old growth trees that have been carelessly mangled or cut down

altogether. This destruction has occurred even at the picturesque historic trailheads such as at Rock Creek Trail and Strawberry Peak.

As caretakers of our nature and environment, we should be particularly concerned to hold accountable the persons, organizations and institutions responsible for this wanton disregard of our forest.

All Cali- See P 2

## Tuesday's Vote Fates Three Incumbent SB City Council Members To December Departure

This week's municipal election in the county seat did not resolve who, exactly, will accede to two of the four positions on the city council being contested this year, but nonetheless presages the departure of three incumbents.

As San Bernardino County's largest city population-wise at 218,500, San Bernardino has the most populous

city council as well, with seven elected council members representing seven wards, each answerable to one-seventh of the city's residents, and a mayor elected at large.

In California's gubernatorial election years, the mayor and three members of the council are up for election. In presidential election years such as 2024, four

members of the council or those who aspire to it – in Ward 3, Ward 5, Ward 6 and Ward 7 – face the judgment of the city's voters.

In Ward 3, incumbent Juan Figueroa, who was first elected in a special election to fill in during the final years of John Valdivia's unfinished term after the latter was elected mayor in 2018 and was

reelected to his current term in 2020, successfully stood for reelection against challenger Christian Shaughnessy. Shaughnessy assailed Figueroa throughout the campaign as a vestige of the Valdivia regime. Valdivia lasted only four years as mayor, felled by repetitive reports of misdeeds, malfeasance and graft, which included taking substantial

amounts of money in the form of both political donations and retainers for his services as a consultant. In 2022, in a race that featured seven candidates, Valdivia was shut out in the June primary, finishing third, such that he was not in the November 2022 runoff between the ultimate second place finisher, former City Attorney Jim Penman and the See P 5

## Adelanto Voters Reject Undeveloped Land Parcel Tax

Adelanto's voters on Tuesday gave resounding indication that they considered that city's political leadership to be seeking an "unaffordable, unnecessary, and unfair" tax escalation with Measure U.

With all 25 of the city's precincts having reported and a significant number of the mail-in ballots having been counted as of 4 p.m. Fri-

day, March 8, 1,021 of the total 1,606 votes cast, or 65.24 percent, were lodged against the measure, which called for a parcel tax to be imposed on vacant land. Slightly more than one-third of the city's voters who cast ballots in the election, 544 or 34.76 percent, voted in favor of the initiative.

The San Bernardino County Registrar of Vot-

ers website as of Friday night reflected a discrepancy in that it showed 1,606 votes being cast in Adelanto, with only 1,565 of those voters participating in the vote relating to Measure U. By the time the Sentinel recognized the discrepancy, the office was closed and it could not be determined by press time whether this was a misrecording of the See P 3

## Etiwanda & Fontana School Board Members In AD 50 Electoral Final

A board member with the Etiwanda School District and a board member with the Fontana Unified School District will face one another in a run-off election to determine who will succeed Eloise Gomez Reyes in representing State Assembly District 50 in California's lower legislative house.

Robert Garcia Garcia

and Adam Perez were the two leading vote-getters in the race for the State Assembly District 50 seat in the primary election on March 5, according to final unofficial election night results released by the San Bernardino County Elections Office.

An unknown number of mail ballots yet remain to be counted, See P 3

## Chino Valley Unified Tweaks Its Parental Notification Policy In Bid To Stymie State Challenge

The Chino Valley Unified School District Board this week made what legal and constitutional experts said is calculated to be an adjustment of a parental notification policy that has been under political attack before it was passed in July and under legal challenge since the California Attorney General's Office took the

district to court in August which will allow it to stand.

The policy originally passed by the school board on a 4-to-1 vote in July was more or less specific to efforts at or toward gender alteration or showings thereof. The action taken on Thursday, March 8 makes the notification requirement more general but yet

inclusive of the circumstances covered by the policy initiated last summer. Unknown at present is whether the change made this week will annul the existing legal challenge or if it will trigger further litigation to prevent the district from engaging in the type of interaction with parents that four-fifths of the school board consid-

ers prudent.

A year ago, Assemblyman Bilal Essayli introduced a bill, AB 1314, which called for imposing statewide a requirement that school officials not keep information pertaining to gender re-identification that students insist upon within a school setting, that being a deviation from the male or female identi-

cation which appears on the student-in-question's birth certificate, from the parents of those children. The Republican Essayli's bill died a quiet legislative procedural death when Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi, a Democrat and the chairman of the Assembly Education Committee, declined to set a hearing date for the bill before See P 5

## Democrats Vote Their Central Committee Chairwoman Out Of Office

By Mark Gutglueck

In a stunning shake-up virtually no one saw coming, the chairwoman of the San Bernardino County Democratic Party failed in her run for election to the central committee on Tuesday.

Kristin Washington has been chairwoman of the Democratic Central Committee since 2020. Her drubbing in Tuesday's election in any other context would be a mindbending development, but in some quarters it is being taken in stride as simply another indicator of the dysfunction within the local Democratic Party. Despite that perception on the part of some, there are indications that under Washington's leadership, the party was beginning to undo at least some of the moves that rival Republicans had made to hold the more numerous Democrats in San Bernardino County in check.

What is unknown for a certainty at this point is whether Washington will be able to remain as a) a member of the Democratic Central Committee as an appointee of someone with standing within the party and b) as chairwoman. Another unknown is whether Washington's possible departure will trigger a comeback by former San Bernardino County Democratic Central Committee Chairman Chris Robles.

Washington's rise into the position of chairwoman nearly four years ago was the outgrowth of several factors, including, it appears, her own ambition See P 4

## Despite Taxpayers' & Ratepayers' Billion Dollar Subsidization Of Fireproof Insulated Wires, SCE Is Still Tearing Out Forest Trees By The Thousands

from front page

fornians have become acutely aware of the increased prevalence of wildfires. The California State Auditor found that 19 percent of the fires during 2016-2020 were caused directly or indirectly by the electrical utility poles and lines owned and maintained by Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas & Electric. These were devastating California fires that burned millions of acres. The wildlife killed numbered in the tens of thousands at the least and very like exceeded a hundred thousand.

Under the classic model of criminal and civil responsibility, those who harm others, those who engage in the disregardful destruction of the environment, those who poison the air, earth and water, those who wreck the valued possessions of others or of the community of which we are all a part are prosecuted.

Are those who commit such hideous acts as knelling the death of our forests or significant swathes thereof, be they individuals or corporations, subject to another set of rules? If so, why?

It is noteworthy that the electrical lines that run through California's forests have been covered and insulated. I have read articles and official statements from Southern California Edison in which its representatives and corporate officers have been quoted as saying insulated lines, which are referred to as "covered conductors," are 100 percent safe. If these lines are insulated and covered, why are they still cutting trees around them? Doing further research, I called the company Parr, which installed them. I was told that the lines are indeed covered and insulated. Parr would know, since it was paid an astronomical amount of money to install them. The Parr company

spokesman I spoke with said he was surprised that Southern California Edison was still cutting around these lines, as they are 100 percent safe. Even if a tree falls on one of those wire-containing lines, there is no external spark, I was assured. Thus, the electrical lines in Southern California's mountains are covered or insulated with what Southern California Edison, Pacific Gas & Electric and San Diego Gas & Electric have touted as new technology, paid for through the billions of dollars given to Southern California Edison, Pacific Gas & Electric and San Diego Gas & Electric by California's taxpayers. Southern California Edison has reiterated, in a forum no less august than the Mountain News, that the covered conductor is one hundred percent effective even in circumstance in which a tree falls on them. The supervisor at Parr, the company vendor who installed the insulated wire, said there is "no need to cut or trim around these covered conductor lines." The protection of our wildlife is important as the San Bernardino Mountains contain 72 endangered species.

This new technology is important to protect and preserve the forest and natural habitats that exist in the forest. And yet Southern California Edison defies reason by not making any modifications to tree management programs in high fire areas in response to covered lines. Current regulations are for bare wire lines. We also again raise provisions of 14 California Code of Regulation §§ (sections) 1250 et seq., and specifically § 1257(a) that provides property located in state recreation areas are exempt from minimum clearance provisions in Public Resources Code § (section) 4293 when conductors are insulated.

I ask the question: "Why are they still cutting?"

I called The Utility Reform Network, which oversees utility rates and makes sure that Southern California Edison is not ripping people off. I was told by members of The Utility Reform Network

that Southern California Edison is engaged in double dipping as long as it keeps hiring tree trimming service vendors to cut trees while it is raising our electric bills to purchase equipment and materials to protect our trees, which should obviate the need for radical tree cutting and trimming. Through this double dipping Southern California Edison in turn gets millions more, as our rates go higher. The governor gave Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas & Electric billions of dollars to insulate the lines, yet they keep it secret or lie about it. In my own exchanges with the manager of the Southern California Edison operation in the San Bernardino Mountains, I was blatantly lied to. The manager said the lines were covered but not insulated. Parr, which installed these lines, assured me the lines are indeed covered and insulated. The questions thus present themselves: "Why would the manager of Southern California Edison up in the San Bernardino Mountain Communities lie about what the line covering which California's taxpayers and ratepayers have paid over a billion dollars for actually do? What does Southern California Edison have to gain by continuing to destroy the mountains and wildlife habitat?"

Mind you, this destruction comes after the company has already destroyed millions of acres in California and causing destruction to wildlife, including birds in their habitat. When we the taxpayers pay billions to cover these lines, we should also have the right to have our trees saved with this life saving technology not only for humans but for all life and our beautiful trees.

Every year for the past five years, Southern California Edison has brought tree service companies to the mountains, at the very beginning of spring and then having those companies remain through the entire springtime to cut and saw at trees with bird nests falling out of the trees, as they will once again this year. Many residents have seen the

employees of these companies hired by Southern California Edison putting live birds in their grinding machines. They also have been removing dead trees with no scientific proof that dead trees pose any threat at all. In fact, dead trees are vital ecosystems to woodpeckers and our much-needed bees. Southern California Edison has also been removing bees from trees that are pollinating our mountain communities. Woodpeckers are slowly disappearing in our San Bernardino Mountains due to this destruction. One has to ask: "If the governor gives billions to cover these lines and we as taxpayers are paying for this, don't we have the right to have our trees and the wildlife habitat we hold so dear protected?"

The San Bernardino Mountains are home to 72 endangered species. We must ask at what price are we allowing this destruction to happen. We must as a whole do our due diligence for these species and their homes, the trees they reside in. Southern California Edison has gone into creeks and have recently been putting orange tags around oak trees and every kind of tree they can see fit to single out for eventual destruction. These tags contain numbers on them. One must ask: "Why are these trees being labeled for removal, when in fact they are homes to birds and other wildlife, including many endangered species?" Interestingly enough, this has been done in plain sight, yet many are not looking or not doing enough to protect our nature and trees and wildlife habitat. The questions are: "Who are the guardians of our forest? Are they the successive city managers who have turned a blind eye for five years or the guardians of our wildlife fish and wildlife whose jobs are to protect our forest? Is it the environmental protection agency, which needs to tell Southern California Edison to stay out of our spring water creeks?"

Southern California Edison has left thousands of staples in trees, littering them all over our mountains. For the past

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five years, we have had birds killed. One of the workers of a tree service company employed by Southern California Edison said he and his co-workers can knock a nest out of the tree as long as the mother bird is not in it. He is wrong. That is illegal, as the Migratory Bird Act of 1919 protects all migratory birds. The Utility Reform Network said people need to get together to stop Southern California Edison and the destruction to our mountains. The Utility Reform Network has called for protests, to have mountain residents get together as a community to protect our trees from corporate interests.

Wildfire fear has resulted in the creation of a fire mitigation fund, which has led to corruption, as greed always does. We must stand up, because if we do not, the companies that Southern California has contracted with will bring their trucks around in the beginning of spring to saw knock bird nests out of trees and disturb wildlife as they are beginning new life. Southern California Edison has clearly become soulless. The company has, from time to time, hired contractors who refused to carry out the company's destructive instruction. This has happened more than once. But Southern California Edison overcomes this by hiring another contractor and another until it gets a contractor to agree to take down a tree with bees that are going extinct. Bees are not invasive. They are here to pollinate and nurture our trees and flowers and beautiful mountains.

One must ask: "How is it that Southern California Edison can engage in this damage and destruction to our state and wildlife and still be around?" I think I have the answer. Look at the information relating to political donations to elected officials available on the California Secretary of State's website. Southern California Edison has given millions and millions of dollars to the state's lawmakers and our governors going back many many, years. If you give literally millions of dollars in campaign funds to our government officials, does the governor feel he is obliged to return the favor in some way? Southern California Edison has proven its incompetence as a steward of the public trust in our mountains and forest and wildlands, yet it is allowed to come up to our mountains and destroy without limit, regardless of the technology of insulated lines which should render that destruction completely unnecessary. Southern California Edison's stock-in-trade is fooling the public by making people think we are all in danger. Clearly, billions of dollars' worth of covered conductors – insulated lines – have been of no avail. This life saving technology should also be used to save our trees and stop the rate increases and get rid of the destructive tree cutters.

The major factor in the destructive fires in our state going back for some time has been the negligence/irresponsibility of Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas &

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## Democrat Assemblywoman Gómez Reyes Vs. GOP Councilman Garcia In 29<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District Match-Up

Less than four years after offering his then-would-be constituents an assurance he would not use the position of representing the Third District as a stepping stone to higher office, Upland Councilman Carlos Garcia on Tuesday succeeded in qualifying himself as a candidate the California State Senate.

Early last year, Eloise Gómez Reyes, who was first elected to the California Assembly in 2016, representing the 50th Assembly District, announced she would not seek reelection to the State of California's lower legislative house but seek election in the newly-drawn 29th Senate District.

Gómez Reyes, an attorney and longtime Democratic Party activist and fundraiser thought of as a leader within the progressive wing of her party, ran unsuccessfully for Congress in the 31st District in 2014, ultimately losing out to then-Redlands Mayor Pete Aguilar. In 2016, she defeated a sister Democrat, incumbent Cheryl Brown, in the California State Assembly District 47 general election, using a campaign in which she stated that Brown was not progressive enough. In that race, Gómez-Reyes showed a knack for fundraising, bringing in \$766,901 in donations.

In the years since, Gómez Reyes has dem-

onstrated herself as a nearly irresistible political force as she garnered both credibility and both legislative and further fundraising leverage, acceding two years ago to the position of majority leader in the Assembly, which lit in some people's minds the idea that she might, before term limits force her to leave the state legislature at the end of 2028, become speaker of the Assembly.

In her journey, however, Gómez Reyes ran headlong into an immovable political object, that being Assemblyman James Ramos, the multimillionaire former chairman of the San Manuel Indian Tribe, who has been her colleague in the

Assembly, representing the 40th and now the 45th districts, which immediately adjoined the 45th and now the 50th districts she previously represented and currently represents. While they are both Democrats and sometimes allies and could not be rightfully considered enemies or opponents, Gómez Reyes and Ramos have had an evolving relationship, such that they are rivals for power, in particular, the now-ended competition for a shot at becoming speaker of the Assembly. While it is by no means certain that Ramos will attain that coveted post, his wealth, which has given him the ability to make hefty donations to other members

of the Assembly and his reputation as more of a Blue Dog Democrat, i.e., a more conservative-leaning politician rather than a liberal or progressive, slung him ahead of Gómez Reyes in the sweepstakes to become Assembly speaker. Moreover, the clock is running on the time both can serve in the legislature, as the term limits rule now in place restricts both to just 12 years in Sacramento in that capacity. Gómez Reyes was first elected to the Assembly two years before Ramos's arrival in 2018, which gives him an extra two years during which to continue his progression toward the top of the California legislative evolutionary

scale. Because Assembly members are elected to two-year terms and state senators are elected to four-year terms, this year represented the last time Gómez Reyes would have a chance to vie for a position in the Golden State's upper legislative chamber. She cast her hat in the ring in the 29th District, a jurisdiction that includes Upland, Rancho Cucamonga, Fontana, Rialto, Bloomington, Colton, San Bernardino, Muscog, Devore, Verdmont, University Heights along with portions of Highland and Redlands, and which has no incumbent.

A multitude of factors give Gómez Reyes a virtually insurmountable

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### Buffeted By The Corruption Of Their Civic Leaders, Adelanto Landowners Were Asked To Tax Themselves To Redress City's Fiscal Shortcomings *from front page*

number of votes relating to Measure U or whether 41 of the residents in Adelanto who voted simply did not vote one way or the other on Measure U.

To pass, Measure U needed a two-thirds assent of those participating in the election.

Turnout in the election was poor. Of the city's 39,477 residents, 15,665 are registered to vote. The 1,606 votes counted so far represent 10.25 percent of the city's registered voters. It is anticipated that by the time of the next tally of votes throughout

the county by the San Bernardino County Registrar of Voters Office tomorrow at 2 p.m. perhaps another few dozen ballots will arrive by post. It does not appear that voter turnout will be much greater than 12 percent, meaning roughly one out of every eight voters in the city participated in Tuesday's California March 5 Primary Election.

Opposition to the measure manifested early on, with major participants in the No on Measure U campaign consisting of developers, real estate in-

terests and the local business community other than those involved in the promotion of commercial marijuana and cannabis products.

It was doubtful, in any event, that the measure would be able to obtain the supermajority support it needed to pass.

Residents in the city have the lowest per capita income among all cities and incorporated towns in San Bernardino County, at \$17,799, although in terms of per household income, there are two cities in the county which rank lower than Adelanto. With 17.9 percent of its population living below the poverty line, Adelanto is second to the City

of San Bernardino within the county in that regard.

There are multiple indicators, beyond the low turnout in this year's election, that Adelanto residents in general have lost faith in their municipal leadership. Beginning in 2015, three of the city's then-elected leaders – Mayor Rich Kerr, Councilman Jermaine Wright and Councilman John Woodard – embarked on what they insisted was a sound plan to pursue economic development and enhance the city government's finances, given that City Hall was teetering on the brink of insolvency. That strategy consisted of breaking with what was generally

throughout the county a policy against allowing marijuana and cannabis products to be available commercially in the city under what was then the auspices of 1996's Proposition 215, the Compassionate Use of Marijuana Act, to allow for the cultivation of medical marijuana within a part of the city's industrial zone. In 2016, with the State of California trending toward the eventual approval of Proposition 64, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act, Kerr, Wright and Woodard transitioned to permitting marijuana and cannabis product sales of all types – for both medicinal effect and for intoxicative purposes – to take

place throughout the city, well beyond the confines of the city's industrial parks. Indeed, Kerr vowed to make Adelanto the "marijuana capital of California," in so doing, promising to alleviate all fiscal concerns the city once had by the imposition of a modest tax on marijuana and cannabis products. In pursuing this goal, Kerr hired Jessie Flores to serve as the city's contract economic development director, under a contract that allowed him to work out deals on the side for himself. That arrangement allowed Flores to receive payments from the businesses that he induced

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### It Is Garcia Vs. Perez In The 50<sup>th</sup> Assembly District *from front page*

but the difference between Perez, in second, and the third place finisher renders the Garcia-Perez match-up an inevitability.

As of 4 p.m. on Friday March 8, with all 6,905 votes from the 50th District's 358 precincts counted and 30,798 mail-in ballots which had come in so far and were counted, Garcia had 11,709 total votes, equal to 42.35 percent of the total, compared to Perez's 8,309 votes or 30.06 percent. A third candidate, DeJonaé Shaw, had collected 7,386 votes or 26.72 percent.

Garcia outperformed Perez both at the polls and with mail-in ballots, with 1,681 votes at the district's polling places and 10,028 votes cast by mail, to Perez's 1,439 votes and 6,870 votes, respectively.

Of note is that all three of the candidates, Garcia, Perez and Shaw, are, at least ostensibly and officially, Democrats. That this is the case and that the Republicans did not field any competitors in the 50th Assembly District is entirely logical given the voter registration numbers in the jurisdiction. The district, which covers all of Bloomington, Colton and Loma Linda along with parts of Fontana, Ontario, Redlands, Ri-

alto, Rancho Cucamonga and San Bernardino, has 254,975 voters, 115,918 or 45.5 percent of whom are registered Democrats, in contrast to the 62,417 or 24.5 percent who are registered Republicans. Of the remaining voters in the district, 55,580 or 21.8 percent are unaligned with any political party and 8.2 percent are members of the American Independent, Green, Libertarian, Peace and Freedom or more obscure parties.

Republicans thus deemed running a candidate from their party to be futile. Rather, the GOP has coalesced around Perez in an effort to get him into office, out of the perception that he more than

the others is in line with their philosophy. He was endorsed by Republican officeholders in the local area, including Fontana Mayor Acquannetta Warren, San Bernardino City Councilman Ted Sanchez and Mt. San Jacinto Community College Trustee Brian Sylva. Accordingly, many Democrats consider him to be a closeted Republican and he has been referred to as DINO – a Democrat in Name Only – and a wolf among the sheep, a Republican in Democrat's clothing.

Looking toward November, there has been hope expressed by some that Perez can overcome the advantage Garcia was able to demonstrate over Perez on Tuesday in

which he outgunned him with voters by a better than ten to seven margin by having several deep-pocketed donors support an aggressive campaign by which Perez will emphasize with the 50th District's high propensity Democrats that he is a registered Democrat, while simultaneously, an independent expenditure committee with no ostensible ties to Perez carries out an attack campaign against Garcia targeting Democrats and independents and a Perez promotional campaign with Republicans. This would replicate in precise detail the handiwork of Warren's machine's political operatives in the past. Meanwhile, Warren, who

over the course of two decades built up her reputation as San Bernardino County's leading African American Republican, has found herself in the GOP doghouse. Last September, after members of the Republican Central Committee raised her support of several Democrats, including Congresswoman Norma Torres and her son, Robert Torres, who this week vied unsuccessfully for the California legislature in the 53rd Assembly District, Parliamentarian Ben Lopez offered his assurance that Warren would no longer be active within the San Bernardino County Republican Central Committee.