



THE PAPER

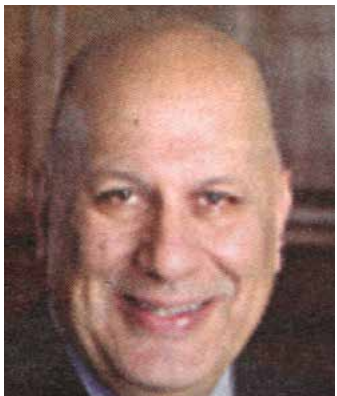
THE VOICE OF THE FOOTHILLS

FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2025

COVERING THE FOOTHILLS REGION FOR OVER 20 YEARS!

VOLUME 18 • NUMBER 72

Special Order 40 Under Fire



Dennis Zine, L.A. City Councilmember, District 3. From The Archives.

By Katharine Russ

Los Angeles Councilmember Dennis Zine, Representative for District 3 in the West Valley, introduced a motion to the City Council on April 11, asking that Special Order 40, (a/k/a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"), be amended

"to allow Officers of the Los Angeles Police Department to notify Federal immigration officials of known gang members who are in the country illegally. Additionally, if a know gang member is arrested by the LAPD, and found to be an undocumented immigrant, an "immigration hold" should be placed on the arrestee by LAPD and only released into the custody of ICE".

Experts from LAPD Manual Section 264.50, "Enforcement of United States Immigration Laws", illustrate the underlying policy direction of the initial issuance of Special Order 40 by former Chief Daryl Gates in 1979: "Officers shall not initiate police action where the objective is to discover the alien status of a person. Officers shall neither arrest nor book persons for violation of Title 8, Section 1325 of the "United States Immigration Code" (Illegal Entry)".

Zine's Motion for an amendment to Special Order 40 came subsequent to the killing of Jamiel Shaw, who was gunned down by gang members three doors from his family home. LAPD called the killing "randome and senseless". Jamiel was the star of his high school football team and was going on to college and planning his future career as a sports agent upon graduation.

Nineteen-year-old Pedro Espinoza was arrested in March for Shaw's murder. Charges included the special circumstance allegation that Espinoza was an active participant of a gang and the murder of Shaw furthered the activities of that gang. Espinoza is a "documented member" of the 18th Street gang. Culver City Police had arrested and jailed Espinoza on a weapons charge in November. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforement (ICE) should have helped Espinzoa pending deportation, but Police Chief William Bratton said Espinoza had been released from jail in an assault case the day before Shaw's killing.

"This case highlights the deficiencies in our Federal immigration system and the inefficient application by local law enforcement", said Councilman Dennis P. Zine, Chair of the Immigration Task Forece for the National League of Cities. "I wholeheartedly support that if a person commits a crime and is in this country illegally, that the individual should be deported to their countru of origin. The fact is that Special Order 40 allows Los Angeles Police Officers to inquire about immigration status if a crime has been committed, and reinforces the effort to deport an illegal immi-

grant if a crime has been committed. We can now take it one step further and say that if an individual is a know gang member and an illegal immigrant, that the LAPD has the responsibility and duty to turn the individual over to federal immigration officials".

In addition to this pending motion, on April 11, Councilman Zine introduced a motion "asking law enforcement agencies who were involved in the Jamiel Shaw, Jr. murder case, to report to the City Council regarding procedures in place to notify the Federal government of a person's immigration status upon released from jail and how there policies were or were not correctly applied in this situation".

But Ernie Norris, A Washington D.C. based Judicial Watch Attorney, says, "Special Order 40 is a barrier to effective policing in Los Angeles. Modifying the rules is not enough. Special Order 40 must be killed".

Norris says street cops must have "the total freedom" to contact federal immigration agents when they come across illegal immigrants. According to lawsuit filed in May, 2006, and scheduled for trial in June, 2008, by Judicial Watch on behalf of Harold P. Sturgeon, a City of Los Angeles taxpayer, "The lawsuit alleges that Special Order 40 violates both federal and California law. It seeks a judgment declaring that Special Order 40 is illegal and an injunction preventing the LAPD from spending any additional taxpayer funds to carry out of enforce the policy".

Please see **Special Order 40 Under Fire** on Page 6

NOT MANY NEIGHBORS ARE SHOWING UP TO VOTE IN NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL ELECTIONS

A neighborhood council is better connected than your average resident.

If you need more public trash cans in your neighborhood, that's the council's job. They also have a direct connection with their City Council representative. They do all sorts of groundwork around the block.

But voting for neighborhood council members has been declining over the years.

We've found that about 40% of the neighborhood councils have seen voter participation fall over the last three or four election cycles, and that's been significant enough to bring down the city-wide total, my colleague Brianna Lee reports.

Please see **Not Many Neighbors are Showing Up To Vote** on Page 6



Check out The Foothills Paper interactive website: thefoothillspaper.com



COMMUNITY NEWS

Copper Wire and power theft

Copper wire and power theft (CWPT) is a challenge that has impacted many neighborhoods throughout the City of Los Angeles and the Seventh Council District has been one of the hardest hit areas.

To get our lights back on, I secured overtime funding so the Bureau of Street Lighting

(BSL) could repair, replace and harden the pull boxes to restore lighting in our neighborhoods. Despite staffing shortages and an increase in CWPT, this funding is enabling BSL to address locations as quickly as possible.

I'm proud to share the following update on the work completed throughout the district in the neighborhoods of Pacoima, Sylmar, Mission Hills, North Hills, and Sunland-Tujunga.

- 22 circuits were completely restored
- 6 of the 22 circuits were fortified to prevent future vandalism
- 307 street lights were restored
- 129 of these were fortified to prevent future vandalism
- 154 hand hole doors were welded shut to prevent future vandalism
- 137 pull boxes were fortified to prevent future vandalism
- 43 spans of wire were pulled

As a member of the Budget and Finance Commit-



This was a timely announcement as our local houseless have become more sophisticated in their attempts to steal copper wiring from city conduits. Here we see a copper theft and process operation in our area.

tee, I made continuing these repairs a priority. It's why I advocated for the 2022-2023 budget to include \$12.84 million to combat copper wire theft and repairs to our street lighting infrastructure.

We need your support to continue to protect our street lighting infrastructure. If you observe work being done on street lights in

your neighborhood, make sure the work is being conducted by city employees by checking that the truck has a proper city seal, exempt plates and that the crew is wearing City of Los Angeles attire. Report suspicious activity near street lights by calling 9-1-1 immediately. Also, you can contact LAPD's Foothill Division at

(818) 756-8861 or Mission Division at (818) 838-9800.

My office is also available to help you connect with LAPD, contact my Pacoima office at (818) 485-0600, Sylmar office at (818) 756-8409, or Sunland-Tujunga office at (818) 352-3287. Together we can combat copper wire and power theft. We are ONE LA. ■

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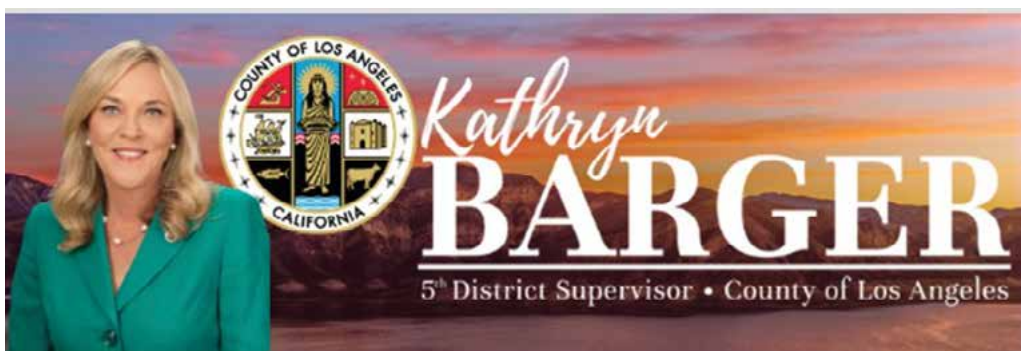
Copper Thieves Continue

(Cops refuse to follow up on reports)

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors today unanimously approved a motion introduced by Board Chair Kathryn Barger in support of Assembly Bill 476 (Gonzalez), legislation aimed at curbing the rising threat of copper and nonferrous metal theft across California.

Supervisor Barger's motion highlights the growing public safety and infrastructure risks posed by thefts that have disabled streetlights, disrupted telecommunications, and impacted critical services like water systems and public transportation—especially in rural areas of the County.

"Copper theft is far from a petty crime, it's a direct threat to the safety and well-being of our communities," said Supervisor Kathryn Barger. "Supporting this bill reflects our



shared commitment to holding perpetrators accountable and supporting stronger enforcement tools that will deter this type of theft. We need clear recordkeeping, tighter restrictions, and better coordination with law enforcement to stop these dangerous crimes."

An image of fire hydrant damage due to theft in the Antelope Valley (Photo credit: Quartz Hill Water District)

AB 476 would increase regulation of junk dealers and recyclers, requir-

ing transaction documentation, proof of ownership, and licensure for sellers, while also authorizing law enforcement inspections and enabling enforcement actions against violators.

Supervisor Barger's motion also instructs County departments to continue tracking incidents and sharing data with the District Attorney's Office, while urging the District Attorney to prioritize prosecution of copper theft due to its widespread public impact. ■

ROTARY CLUB DESTROYS OUR COMMUNITY!

The last 4th Of July parade was a long-awaited and anticipated event by the S-T Rotary Club. Like previous years, the call went out for clubs, organizations and individuals to participate. It's a fun walk or ride or skate or-or-or..... it had something for everyone. But these last years were different. FIRST, there was absolutely no advertising in any media.

Well, when the 4th came around, The Foothills Paper went to the sign-in table only to find Legion Auxiliary member Joan Slater being told that the Veterans float was not going to be signed in. "You mean that I got up early to be here at 7:30 AM and you're not going to let me sign them in?" demanded Joan, only to be referred to the new Rotary president Roger Klemm.

The Paper was next in line – SURPRISE! The Paper was told "You can't be in the parade this year because we have had issues with you and The Paper!" That's when things started to get interesting. Doc who is the editor and publisher of The Paper stated "I have an email from Rotary president Sabrina Godinez saying that I'm supposed to be in it." Klemm smirked and said "She's not here and my valued volunteers don't want you in the parade!" Hummmm, that meant that the rumors that the now deceased Jean Traubner had made a generous donation to keep The Paper out of the parade might be true. This is the same Traubner that bribed past STNC President Dana Stangel with a \$2,500 "donation" to keep The Paper out of the Summerfest. A Facebook posting by Traubner also stated "There is no way in hell that Doc will be in this parade!"

And the game went on. Moving from a discussion to a confrontation, Doc stood his ground and stated that he had written proof that he was allowed in the parade and that if it didn't happen, that would be a violation of his civil rights.

Klemm immediately took on the stature of a catatonic schizophrenic, which is a defense mechanism of lower grade Scientologists. Klemm's eyes glazed over and he stared out into the distance until Doc clapped his hands and said "You can relax now!"

Doc was allowed to participate in the parade, but his entry was given the almost last position in the parade, #60. Which if you turn it over, read as 09. LOL. And the parade lineup began. As the parade went down Foothill Blvd., past Rotary president Michael Lucas challenged The Paper's entry, but Doc used the "Tujunga Mind Meld" on him and he staggered down Foothill Blvd. Art Miner, owner of the Crow's Nest, wasn't as fortunate. Lucas finally realizing that he had been duped, yelled at Miner that he "Was Banned" from the parade and had his "volunteer" Kurt Koesler block the Crow's Nest entry with their golf carts. No Scientology games for him. Shrugging his massive hairy shoulders, Miner drove his float off Foothill Blvd., down Woodward, and back onto Foothill at a lower opening.

This debacle slowed down the already slow parade by 20 minutes. There was no marching band. There were no children parading in 4th of July costumes, no family groups strutting the strut and there was no patriotic music. In short, it was so sanitized that even a trash truck became an entry.

This poorly attended 4th of July

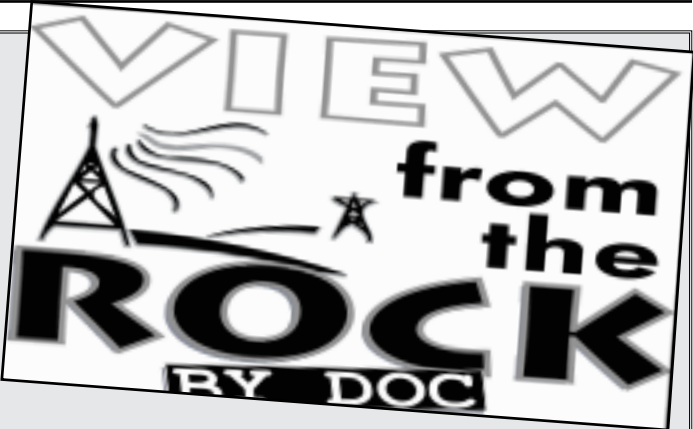
Parade was the worst ever in the history of Sunland-Tujunga. There were less than 60 entries and maybe 700 viewers. But, it did have a whole pot-load of dignitaries surrounded by police officers and police cadets so that they wouldn't be in danger of getting squirted by water guns. They were oblivious to the Rotary Club shenanigans. The Rover-mobile having been in the parades before was "loaded for bear." Anyone that came close the rig with a water balloon or water canon in hand was doused by an array of 2.5 gallon high pressure fire extinguishers. That is, until one of the dignitaries Danny Trejo arrived in his customized lowrider Chevy. And of course some poor fool decided to attack him and his driver. And a fight began in earnest. Danny held his own until he slipped on a water bottle and went down, injuring his arm. This was a lot more dramatic than Curtles Koestler running over a child's foot with his golf cart.

But, other than that, everybody had a great time. The S-T Rotary Club used to be the most elite service organization in the Foothills, but as members got disenchanted and either moved away or just plain quit, they kept lowering their standards until the Sunland-Tujunga Rotary Club only represented the select, impoverished few.

Not even able to maintain the required membership that Rotary International demands, they had to fill a meeting room with their friends to impress the "District

Governor" that they had enough members to continue their charter. In talking with the Rotary District Director that didn't want her name brought up, replied when asked "How can the Rotary International let this travesty continue?" she replied, "We have to let them skate bye as they are the only chapter that has been sponsoring an event for more than 35 years." That will end soon as more complaints are being filed by disenchanted community members. Rotary volunteer Kurt Koesler threatened Honorary Mayor candidate John Clausen with "I'm going to get a gun and shoot you!" At another incident, community activist Bonnie Corwin was "Flipped the Bone" by "Curtles" Koesler in front of about 35 young kids. Not a good representation of our elite community service club. The S-T 4TH of July Parade is dead and the Rotary Club killed it. The S-T Neighborhood Council asked our councilman Monica Rodriguez for a grant of money to waive the City permit fees and the cost of the police and traffic control, but was denied. The S-T Rotary club is broke and couldn't pay their share of the costs.

Past Rotary president Sabrina Godinez, did not return our calls or emails. She claimed that she was out of town. And yes, it probably was the water!■



PAYDAY LENDING PROVES IT'S EXPENSIVE TO BE POOR IN AMERICA

By Morris Pearl

Each year, 12 million Americans will take out a payday loan, and the majority of them won't be able to afford repayment, trapping them in a vicious debt cycle with sky high, exorbitant annual interest rates of up to 600 percent. If you're asking yourself why someone would voluntarily agree to pay a 600 percent interest rate, it's because it's a bit less voluntary than you think. At this very moment, 40 percent of Americans don't have \$400 on hand in case of an emergency. That's over 130 million people who have nothing when a car accident, a health problem, or a job layoff occurs. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and there's no shortage of lenders willing to make a quick buck off someone with nowhere else to turn. Last week, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders introduced the Loan Shark Prevention Act to offer a better option



to those 12 million. The bill is an ambitious effort to cap consumer loan interest rates at 15 percent and introduce postal banking to ensure that the most vulnerable Americans still have access to credit when they need it most. This is a commendable first step to address a massive, off-ignored credit problem in the American economy. As of 2019, Americans owe over \$1 trillion in credit card debt, with an average debt of around \$4,293 per person. Of all the millions of Americans who owe, only 40 percent make enough monthly to pay off their debt each

month. That means a whopping 60 percent of Americans with credit card debt owe thousands of dollars they can't afford to pay off, with annual interest rates ranging between 15 and 23 percent – but that doesn't even take into account the penalties for late payment, surcharges, and fees common to most credit cards. Crunching the numbers on payday lending presents a similarly bleak portrait of exploitation. Payday lenders offer short-term loans at extremely high interest rates as an alleged quick fix, but 4 out of every 5 loan recipients end up renewing their loans because they can't repay. For too long payday lenders and credit card companies have secured their profit margins by scraping away at the already scant incomes of the poorest working Americans.

Please see **Payday Lending Proves It's Expensive to be poor in America**
on Page 7

Everybody needs a haircut and the only place to go in Tujunga, is at my favorite barber.



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Dog attack

Hi to all Wonderful neighbors of Tujunga , we were wondering if any one can identify this person with his Very Large Black Dog , that has tear apart our miniature 2:4 year old Schnauzer ...and bite my husband's hand when jumped over that dog to take our's dog free from it's mouth ... by the

help of neighbors we took our dog to emergency and surgery , but after 5 days he didn't survive the trauma... The owner left without a trace and we're trying to find him to take responsibility... Very Appreciative if any news. Please call 8188131110 Anahid . We need his address to act.■



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	Contact list*	
	Proof of insurance*+	
	Proof of residency*+	
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	Tax return*+	
	Check book ~you will need the routing number for FEMA claims and if power is out	
	Cash* Aim for at least \$200 in small bills	
	Medications and medical devices~ Plan ahead for insulin and other medications needing refrigeration	
	120 hour Kit~ we all know 72 hours is not enough right?	
	Pets and pet 120 hour kit(s)	
	Preparedness binder	
	Warn neighbors ~ check on elderly/disabled	

*Add to your 120-hour kits leaving time to grab more valuable items.
+ Needed for insurance and FEMA claims

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Special Order 40 Under Fire *continued from page 1*

"It cannot be denied that Special Order 40 and the policies, practices, and procedures arising thereunder violate both the letter and spirit of [federal law]. The LAPD has adopted what is in effect a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy with respect to immigration status" according to a legal memorandum filed by Judicial Watch in 2006.

The lawsuit titled Sturgeon v. Bratton, et al., is due to go to trial on June 30, 2008, before Judge Rolf Treu, Dept. 56, and will decide the fate of Special Order 40, regardless of what amendments are attached.

Jamie's Law, drafted by Walter Moore, presently running for the Office of Mayor in Los Angeles, says, in part, "Section 2. No Sanctuary for Gang Members: The policy of this City from this point forward is, and shall be, to deny any "Sanctuary City" protection to illegal aliens in gangs. Neither the Mayor, the Chief of the Police nor any other City employee shall prohibit or inhibit Los Angeles Police Department officers from lawfully investigating possible violations of federal immigration laws by gang members.

Section 3. Mandate To Investigate, Arrest And Assist: The Mayor and

the Chief of Police shall immediately develop and implement a plan for the Los Angeles Police Department, in cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the United States Attorney, to identify, arrest, deport and/or prosecute and imprison gang members who are in the country illegally, without waiting to catch them committing murders or other crimes before enforcing the immigration laws against them.

Section 4. Reporting Requirement: The Mayor shall provide the City Council and the public with quarterly written reports describing in reasonable detail the City's efforts to implement Jamie's Law. The reports will include, at a minimum, the number of persons arrested by the Los Angeles Police Department for violating federal immigration laws, and the number of those persons who are gang members."

In a 2007 radio interview, Police Chief William Bratton said, "We estimate about 70% of the shootings in the City are a result of gang violence." According to the LAPD's website, our city has 41,000 gang members, and only 9,630 police officers.

"As we continue to take our case to City Council, we need to remember why it's necessary," wrote candidate Moore. Write NVR Investigative Reporter: Katharine.Russ@Charter.net■



VOTE 2025



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ANOTHER DAY IN THE HOOD

SPEED HUMPS FOR EVERY L.A. CITY SCHOOL

The Los Angeles City Council has taken another step toward installing speed humps at every public school in Los Angeles, instructing the city's transportation department to report back on how feasible the goal is, including the funding and staffing needs and a timeline to complete the work.

The council's 11-0 vote on Wednesday, May 10, follows two vehicular collisions near schools in April. In one incident, a mom was killed, and her 6-year-old daughter critically injured when a car hit them outside Hancock Park Elementary. In the other incident, a 14-year-old student was struck by a car near Berendo Middle School.

Council President Paul Krekorian had called for a citywide school speed hump program that would expand a pilot program underway in his San Fernando Valley district, which stretches from Sun Valley to Toluca Lake and includes North Hollywood.

Krekorian started the pilot program to install humps at all LAUSD elementary schools in Council District 2 by the start of the next school year in August. Speed humps are installed on an annual cycle that has drawn fierce competition. People apply to the city for humps, but the window closes once the city gets 375 requests – and that happens within just minutes, according to Krekorian's office.

"Since the City's Speed Hump Program began, competition among neighborhoods has increased," Krekorian said in a statement Thursday. "Additionally, there is growing interest from elementary schools that would like to utilize this critical traffic safety tool. To ensure the safety of children and the surrounding school communities, the City should establish a dedicated speed hump program for elementary schools."

Before Wednesday's council vote, the motion was amended to include all public schools, not just elementary campuses, according to the council president's office.

Krekorian used District 2 funds to pay for the pilot program in neighborhoods he represents.

Since then, he has asked that funding be expanded citywide in the city's upcoming fiscal year's budget, now under review by the City Council. The council has until the end of May to send a budget to the mayor for her signature.

Traffic safety near schools has been a prominent topic, especially since the accidents near campuses last month.

Officials from the city and Los Angeles Unified School District have also talked about expediting the hiring of more school crossing guards.

LAUSD Superintendent Alberto Carvalho commended city officials for addressing traffic incidents near schools and said the school district is ready to partner on such efforts.

"We cannot let this issue of safety go unaddressed any longer — every possible solution must be considered and implemented as quickly as possible," Carvalho said in a statement.

"Schools should be assessed for their individual conditions to determine what safety mechanism is best suited to address their needs; whether this is a speed hump, a crossing guard, appropriate signage, slower speeds in school zones, other traffic calming methods or a combination of any of these," he added.

Councilmember Heather Hutt, who chairs the council's Transportation Committee and is one of two councilmembers to second Krekorian's motion, said last month that traffic-related violence and death shouldn't be the status quo. ■

Not Many Neighbors are Showing Up To Vote *continued from page 1*

For example, the Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council election had a total of 47 voters this year.

Many neighborhood council members say this year's drop is due to in-person voting being cut from the election administration budget. And the voting process isn't necessarily a walk in the park. This is how the process works: you create an account on the City Clerk's website, request a ballot, wait for it to arrive, fill it out and then return it by the deadline.

So why is this important to know about? Voting participation matters because the neighborhood council is the group that takes up issues – or solutions – in neighborhoods.

Kay Hartman, president of the Palms Neighborhood Council, thinks the city should do more to get the word out there and support.

"They talk about how this is an exercise in grassroots democracy, but they don't treat it as such," she said. "The funding to make this happen rests with the mayor and City Council. They don't think this is important enough to fund it."

• What it looks like when the government clears debris from lots. The L.A. fires that killed 30 people in January also destroyed more than 16,000 buildings, and most of them are eligible for government cleanup. The Army Corps and L.A. County estimate that up to 4.5 million tons of debris need to be removed in this phase of recovery. (LAist)

• Homeland Security agents attempted to enter two LAUSD schools. Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said that the Department of Homeland Security's presence sowed fear among educators and the surrounding community. Here's how LAUSD handles concerns with immigrant students. (LAist)

• L.A. County taxpayers have until October to file most taxes. The deadline was extended for L.A. County because FEMA declared a disaster in the wake of the deadly January fires. The extension applies to individual and business returns, estimated payments and more. (LAist)

• L.A. Philharmonic at Coachella.

It's conductor Gustavo Dudamel's last year as music and artistic director at the Phil and he will be leading the group's first Coachella performance. Guests will include Zedd and Laufey, an Icelandic singer. You can watch it here. (LAist)

• \$10,000 grant available for restaurants affected by L.A. fires. The program is being put together by the California Restaurant Foundation, which aims to disperse almost \$2.5 million to help more than 200 restaurants. (LAist)

• Free prom outfits for teens affected by the fires. High school seniors who were affected by January's firestorm are invited to stop by The Paseo in Pasadena this weekend for a full — and completely free — prom shopping experience. (LAist)

• 4 a.m. last call? Legislation is back in Sacramento that would extend drinking time at some bars and restaurants two more hours during the weekend and holidays. AB 342,

spearheaded by California Sen. Scott Wiener and Assembly member Matt Haney, would allow local leaders to decide what businesses could extend their last call and for how long. (LAist video)

• Survey:

How is your community coming together to feel joy? Wherever you fall on the political spectrum, 2025 has been a year of rapid change. That might be leaving you tired, stressed, exhilarated or wanting to just tune out. So we want to know: How is your community coming together to experience joy? What activities with family and friends are helping you navigate 2025? Take our joy survey!

BOB BAKER DAY 2025

Sunday, April 13, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Los Angeles State Historic Park
1245 N. Spring St. Downtown L.A.

Bob Baker Day is back for the 11th year in a row at the L.A. State Historic Park as the marionettes take the stage. Fun for all ages, the day kicks off with a parade led by none other than Grand Marshalls Sponge Bob SquarePants and Patrick Star at 10 a.m., plus there are arts and crafts activities for kids, David Arquette playing Bozo the Clown, a kids talent show and much more. ■

Many neighborhood council members say this year's drop is due to in-person voting being cut from the election administration budget



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ASK RUSTY

By AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor Russell Gloor, Association of Mature American Citizens.

Should Octogenarians tell Social Security they married?



Dear Rusty: We were married two years ago at age 78 and 81. Do we need to do anything with Social Security? **Signed: Blissfully Happy**

Dear Blissfully Happy: Congratulations on your fairly recent marriage and, yes, there are some things you should do. Specifically, you should contact Social Security to inform them of your marriage, see whether any additional benefits are available, and to make any changes needed to your contact information. Here are some things to consider:

- If a name change has occurred for one of you, that person should contact Social Security to report the change. A copy of your marriage certificate (and other ID) will be required, and a new Social Security card will be issued.
- If a change of address has also occurred for one or both of you, that must be reported. It's important that Social Security has the correct mailing address, email, and contact phone number for every beneficiary.
- If there are any other changes to the contact Information on file with

the Social Security Administration for either of you (e.g., your banking information), the affected person should inform Social Security of the changes needed.

- Social Security will evaluate whether any benefit increase is available as a result of your marriage, which may be the case if one of you is entitled to a "spousal boost" (an additional amount from the other now that you're married). A spousal boost may be available if one has a monthly Social Security payment which is more than twice the other's benefit. Social Security can answer that question for you when you call.

You can contact either your local Social Security office (find the number at www.ssa.gov/locator) or call the national number at 1.800.772.1213 and tell them you need to inform them of your marriage and update your contact information. If you have (or if you create) an online "my Social Security" account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount, you can initiate changes to your contact information online, but you will need to call Social Security di-

rectly via phone to record your marriage and see if any changes to monthly benefits are available. All of this can likely be done without requiring a visit to your local SS office.

It is very important that Social Security be made aware of your new marital status and to ensure that they have the correct contact information for both of you. Even if the contact information is unchanged for one of you, the other should contact Social Security as described above to update their contact information and to determine if any changes to monthly benefits are appropriate as a result of your marriage. Doing so now will avoid future issues and will make sure you are both getting the correct monthly Social Security payments as a married couple. And if one of you is entitled to a higher spousal amount, you should ask for the increase to be applied retroactively (SS will pay up to 6 months retroactively). I suggest you call Social Security as soon as possible to inform them of your marriage and make any necessary changes to your contact information.■

Payday Lending Proves It's Expensive to Be Poor
continued from page 3

These companies have trapped millions in a vicious cycle of debt and minimal repayments at the same time that the majority of these loan-seekers struggle under rising costs of living and stagnant wages. The Loan Shark Prevention Act doesn't tackle those root causes of desperation, but it does take the crucial step of stopping lenders from making a bad situation immeasurably worse for an American worker.

Clearly, we need a better option to ensure millions of Americans have safe and secure access to credit. The bill proposes basic postal banking and short-term, government-guaranteed loans at the nation's 31,000 post offices, an idea short listed by several Democratic 2020 candidates as well.

This idea is one of several possible options to extend credit, and I welcome the dialogue.

At the core of the issue, however, is an inconvenient truth - it's expensive to be poor in America. Payday lenders prosper because millions among us can't afford the dignity of a basic lifestyle amid low wages, rising housing costs, and surging consumer debt. The most-vulnerable people in this country are often one emergency away from financial ruin, and each and every time a payday lender profits off that precariousness, it deepens our already vast inequality divide. If we have any chance of fixing our rigged economy, then Congress must offer real, substantive, and immediate solutions to the millions of Americans who are crushed under the weight of that inequality. The American worker - quite literally - cannot afford to wait.■

CA Palisades and Eaton Firefighters Show Elevated Blood Levels of Mercury and Lead

As if they didn't have enough to worry about — The immediate risks faced by the firefighters who were on the front lines battling the Palisades and Eaton fires that tore through Los Angeles County may have abated, but long-term health concerns remain.

A team of researchers tested the blood of a group of 20 firefighters who were called to duty when the wildfires hit Los Angeles County communities, and found that they had levels of lead and mercury in their blood that was significantly higher than what health experts consider to be safe — and also higher than firefighters exposed to a forest fire.

The results are part of the longer-term LA Fire Health Study, which is investigating the health impacts of the January fires on those exposed to the toxins it released into the environment. The team includes researchers from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, UC Davis, the University of Texas at Austin, and the USC Keck School of Medicine.

“What you need to worry about is some of these metals that, when they get burned, they get up in the air,” said Dr. Kari Nadeau, chair of the Department of Environmental Health at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and one of the researchers working on the project. “They can get into your lungs, and they can get into your skin, and they get can absorbed and get into your blood.”

The group of 20 firefighters — who had come from Northern California to assist in the efforts — were tested just days after the fires were contained. They had toiled for long hours as the two fires razed entire communities, burning homes, cars, businesses, and a still unknown list of chemicals and metals. Combined, the fires killed 29 people and destroyed more than 16,000 structures.

On average, said Nadeau, the firefighters had lead and mercury levels three and five times higher, respectively, than a control group of firefighters who fought a forest fire alone. According to the California Department of Public Health, the average blood lead level for adults in the United States is less than 1 microgram per deciliter.

Researchers are still looking to expand the number of firefighters in the study, as well as the range of tox-



Hazmat Contractors Taking Soil Samples. / Photo by David “Doc” De Mulle’.

ins they may have been exposed to. Nevertheless, even these limited and preliminary findings bolster a growing worry among firefighters that the L.A. fires may have exposed them to metals and chemicals with long-term health effects.

“The results are pretty alarming,” said Dave Gillotte, a captain with the Los Angeles County Fire Department and president of the Los Angeles County Firefighters Local 1014. “We don’t just fear, but we’re quite confident that we’re going to see health impacts with our firefighters who fought these fires on the front lines.”

Firefighters regularly risk exposure to chemicals and metals — including lead and mercury — when respond-

ing to house and commercial fires in an urban setting, Gillotte said. But response to a single house fire, for example, would likely last a few hours, not the days on end of the Palisades and Eaton fires. Firefighters also typically face prolonged exposure to the particulate matter in smoke when fighting wildfires in rural areas — but not the chemicals of an urban setting. The Eaton and Palisades fires presented a combined risk: a wildfire-like blaze with firefighters on the ground for extended periods in an urban setting, with electric vehicles, batteries, chemicals and metals burning in high heat, mixing and spreading with the same wind that was spreading the flames.

Already, officials from the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District, the Sacramento Fire Department, and Los Angeles County have begun to test their firefighters for metal and chemical exposure, Gillotte said.

Meanwhile, as part of a separate study, Los Angeles city fire officials have also been looking at the health effects on its firefighters. “We are very concerned and worried,” said Los Angeles Fire Department Capt.

contribute to worse long-term health outcomes.

Firefighters already face higher levels of some illnesses, such as autoimmune diseases, asthma and some cancers, she said. Fire officials said the life expectancy of a firefighter is about 10 years lower than that of the average person. The LA Fire Health study is still in its early stages. Nadeau says she and her colleagues plan to look for evidence of exposure to other heavy metals in addition to mercury and lead. “We’re going to be studying toxins that haven’t been studied” in firefighters before, she said.

Typically, the results of studies like these are not made public until they have been peer-reviewed and published by a scientific journal. Nadeau said the consortium decided to share some of the preliminary data early, hoping to help residents, civic leaders and first responders understand the impacts of the fires.

“You really want to know: ‘What’s in the air, what’s in the water, what’s in the ash that blew into my kitchen cabinet? Do I let my dog outside?’” she said. “All these questions were coming up and we thought, ‘We really need to serve the community.’” Indeed, while the initial findings will be focused on firefighters’ exposure, the team is also looking into residents’ exposure to heavy metals and chemicals. Nadeau is also looking ahead: The information, she says, could help fire officials as they face the possibility of another similar fire by helping them better understand the source of the chemicals, how safety equipment was used during the fires, and the efficacy of that gear. “I’d like to say this is the last of its kind, but we know it won’t be,” she said. “It’s not a matter of if, but a matter of when people will undergo a fire like that again in L.A.” ■

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“It was a more intense exposure as a result of the wind driving those

Kevin Frank. The LAFD has so far taken blood and urine samples of about 350 of its firefighters, as part of an ongoing nationwide study, funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, to look at firefighters’ biomarkers and exposure to cancer-causing substances. That study — which is different than the LA Fire Health Study and the one mentioned by Gillotte — includes more than 7,000 firefighters from across the country.

After the fires, Frank said, several firefighters who reported to Altadena and Pacific Palisades reported health issues, such as trouble breathing. Nadeau, who is working on the LA Fire Health Study, but not the FEMA-funded national study, noted that exposure to heavy metals can