BOARD FLIP–FLOPS ON RIVER ACCESS PLAN, MORE DELAYS AHEAD »

CALIFORNIA AG BECERRA WANTS TO KEEP POLICE CRIMES HIDDEN »

‘RACIST,’ ‘CONMAN’: COHEN ASSAILS TRUMP BEFORE CONGRESS »
Brett Frazier stormed out of Fresno City Hall chambers, his face as red as his hair. Angry, he didn’t want to talk about the previous five hours chairing the San Joaquin River Conservancy Board meeting. The Madera County supervisor and his colleagues from various local and state agencies endured what one local businessman told them was “Groundhog Day.” The board spent the day deciding how to move forward on a trail access project to the San Joaquin River. Ultimately, the board voted to instruct staff to study a plan through Riverview Drive in the bluff neighborhoods of Fresno. While not completely killing the already-approved option to build a trailhead and parking lot through Spano Park near the intersection of Palm and Nees avenues, it may put it on the backburner. The vote, 8-5 in support, came shortly after the board shot down a plan to approve a compromise plan on both options. That failed, 7-6. John Shelton, the conservancy’s executive officer, said the only thing for sure he could say after the votes is that any construction will be delayed. Again. “Significant time is going to go between now and when we can go to construction,” he said.

Groundhog Day

Wednesday’s meeting was just the next episode in the seemingly never-ending saga for the river board to decide something. In Dec. 2017, the board voted on the Spano Park option, with the condition that certain benchmarks were met. The board could not agree if the owner of the land where the Spano Park lot would be built met such benchmarks. Pete Weber, founder and chairman of the California Bridge Academies and a Spano Park plan proponent, chided the board during public comment. “When you move the goalpost after the game has been played, you are inviting legal challenge. Now, I hate lawsuits, but I do not want to be sitting here two or three years from now experience Groundhog Day all over again,” Weber said, surmising a court would side with the Spano Park supporters. Familiar faces in favor of each plan presented their case to the board. Each made similar arguments regarding access, environment and costs.

Emotions Boil Over

After hearing from staff and the public, the board meandered back on forth on whether to continue supporting Spano Park, Riverview Drive, or some sort of combination. Bryn Forhan, a citizen member appointee, proposed the latter. That board spent almost as much time debating what such a combination meant versus the merits of the idea itself. Steve Brandau, the Fresno City Council representative of the board, expressed his exasperation.

"I won’t be able to take our board very serious if we’re willing to allow this (Spano Park advocate) group to do all this hard work and get that close and, quite frankly, hang them up on a technicality that is beyond their control. I won’t be able to take our work seriously in the future." The board eventually voted against that plan, leading to a vote on moving forward on the Riverview Drive option. Nathan Magsig, the Fresno County supervisor representative, let loose.

"I’m extremely frustrated," Magsig said about the lack of progress. "All of you in this room have been at this for 12 years. This is, in my opinion as we sit here and..."
It’s hard to believe that Dave Stewart never won the Cy Young Award. After all, he won 20 games four years in a row. He was the dominant pitcher during the Oakland A’s championship runs in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But he may have been best known for his stern game face.

Stewart recently appeared at the Fresno Grizzlies Hot Stove event, swapping stories with the likes of former Fresno State star and former National League MVP Terry Pendleton and former All-Star pitcher C.J. Wilson.

GV Wire had a chance to talk to the pitchers, asking them about life in and out of baseball.

Take Five

In this Take Five:

— Stewart talks about his game face. He may have even cracked a smile (watch the video above to know for sure).

— After his playing career, Stewart served as a player agent and worked in the front office. He offers his thoughts on the progress of minorities in leadership positions in baseball.

— During his first year with Oakland, Stewart got into a memorable brawl with Fresno native Pat Corrales, who managed Cleveland in 1986. Stewart says he still is razzed about it today.

— Wilson talks about why he moved to Fresno and opened a car dealership selling Porsche, BMW, and Audi vehicle.

— The former Rangers and Angels pitcher talks about why he left the game, and if he still misses it.

Click here to watch the video.
STATE

CALIFORNIA AG BECERRA WANTS TO KEEP POLICE CRIMES HIDDEN

February 27, 2019 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — California’s attorney general is demanding that a university journalism program return a state list that includes law enforcement officers convicted of crimes in the past decade, saying the information wasn’t meant to be public and shouldn’t have been given out by another agency. Attorney General Xavier Becerra’s office sent reporters from the Investigative Reporting Program at the University of California, Berkeley, a notice that confidential information had been inadvertently released from a confidential database, the program reported Tuesday. The attorney general’s office said possessing the list was a misdemeanor and asked the reporters to destroy it. They received it last month from California’s police training agency through a public records request.

The reporters refused, but so far have released only limited details about the list. They say the list of nearly 12,000 names includes current and former officers and those who applied to be officers. It’s not clear how many are active officers and how many had never been officers. The list outlines crimes including shoplifting, child molestation, embezzlement and murder. It’s not clear how many of the convicted officers remain on the job. In a statement to The Associated Press late Tuesday, Becerra’s office reiterated its position that the information came from a confidential database to which the reporters should not have had access.

“State law protects the records of all Californians in this database by prohibiting the possession and use of this information by anyone not identified by statute,” his office said. The report comes as he is also refusing to release old records of serious misconduct by his own justice department agents under a new law that requires the release. Becerra is citing conflicting court decisions on whether records should be made public for incidents that happened before the disclosure law took effect Jan. 1.

Includes Current, Former or Prospective Officers

In a letter to reporter Robert Lewis with the reporting program’s production arm, Investigative Studios, Deputy Attorney General Michelle Mitchell said the criminal history information was taken from a confidential law enforcement database where “access to information is restricted by law.”

“You are hereby on notice that the unauthorized receipt or possession...is a misdemeanor,” she wrote, threatening unspecified legal action. First Amendment Coalition executive director David Snyder told the reporting program that, “It’s disheartening and ominous that the highest law enforcement officer in the state is threatening legal action over some thing the First Amendment makes clear can’t give rise to criminal action against a reporter.”

Without providing many details, the reporting program said the list came after a law last year allowed the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training to keep records of when current or former officers are convicted of felonies or other crimes that would disqualify them from law enforcement.

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READ MORE »
RUSSIAN RIVER FLOODS GUERNEVILLE. IT’S ‘OFFICIALLY AN ISLAND.’

GUERNEVILLE — A California town north of San Francisco is accessible only by boat after the rain-swollen Russian River overflowed its banks and inundated it overnight, authorities said Wednesday.

“Guerneville is officially an island,” the Sonoma Sheriff’s Office said in a statement, adding that all roads leading to it are covered by water from the Russian River, which was forecast to swell more throughout the day. The river topped 32 feet Tuesday evening and it could crest at more than 46 feet by Wednesday night, which would be the highest level in about a quarter-century. About 4,000 residents of Guerneville and two dozen other communities along the river were ordered to evacuate Tuesday evening. There also was concern about potential mudslides in hillside areas saturated from days of downpours, and in areas scarred by 2017 wildfires.

A mudslide Tuesday near the community of Monte Rio near Guerneville trapped a man and a woman before they were rescued, messy but unharmed. “I fell into the mud when the tree fell over the top of me. It happened so fast you don’t even know, you know?” Kear Koch told KGO-TV. Elsewhere in the area, several people had to be rescued from cars stranded while motorists tried to drive through flooded...
WASHINGTON — In a damning depiction of Donald Trump, the president’s former lawyer on Wednesday cast him as a racist and conman who used his inner circle to cover up politically damaging allegations about sex and lied about his business interests in Russia throughout the campaign that sent him to the White House.

Cohen, who pleaded guilty last year to lying to Congress, testified that Trump had advance knowledge and embraced the news that emails damaging to Hillary Clinton would be released. But he also said he has no “direct evidence” that the Trump presidential campaign colluded with Russia. Shaking off incessant criticism from Republicans anxious to paint him as a felon and liar, Cohen became the first Trump insider to pull back the curtain on his version of the inner workings of Trump’s political and business operations. He likened the president to a “mobster” who demands blind loyalty from underlings and expects them to lie on his behalf to conceal information and protect him — even if it means breaking the law.

“I am ashamed of my weakness and misplaced loyalty, of the things I did for Mr. Trump in an effort to protect and promote him. I am ashamed that I chose to take part in concealing Mr. Trump’s illicit acts rather than listening to my own conscience. I am ashamed because I know what Mr. Trump is.” — Michael Cohen

“I am not protecting Mr. Trump anymore,” he declared. In one revelation, Cohen said that prosecutors in New York are investigating conversations Trump or his advisers had with him after his hotel room was raided by the FBI last April. He was asked by a Democratic congressman about the last contact he had with Trump or any agent representing the president.

Hush Money Payments and Furtive Russian Meetings
Cohen said that happened about two months after his hotel room was raided by the FBI. But he declined to provide more specific details on grounds that the matter was under current investigation by federal prosecutors. His appearance marked the latest step in Cohen’s evolution from legal fixer for the president — he once boasted he’d “take a bullet” for Trump — to a foe who has implicated him in federal campaign finance violations. The matter-of-fact testimony about hush money payments and furtive Russian meetings unfolded as Trump met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, offering stark TV counterprogramming to the president’s official duties. At a Vietnam hotel and unable to ignore the drama thousands of miles away, Trump lashed out on Twitter, saying Cohen “did bad things unrelated to Trump” and “is lying in order to reduce his prison time.”

Cohen will soon report to prison for a three-year sentence. At the same time, he is seen as a vital witness for federal prosecutors because of his proximity to the president during key episodes under investigation. He is the first of six Trump aides charged in special counsel Robert Mueller’s Trump-Russia investigation to testify publicly about crimes committed during the 2016 campaign and in the months that followed.

Cohen gave lawmakers his first-person account of how he arranged hush money payments to a porn actress and a Playboy model who said they had sex with the president. He testified that he was present for conversations in which Trump denigrated blacks as “too stupid” to vote for him. And he said he overheard Trump confidant Roger Stone telling the candidate that WikiLeaks would dump damaging information about Clinton. “I am ashamed of my weakness and misplaced...
WASHINGTON — Democrats ignored a veto threat and rammed legislation through the House Tuesday that would stymie President Donald Trump’s bid for billions of extra dollars for his border wall, escalating a clash over whether he was abusing his powers to advance his paramount campaign pledge.

The House’s 245-182 vote to block Trump’s national emergency declaration throws the political hot potato to the Republican-run Senate, where there were already enough GOP defections to edge it to the cusp of passage. Vice President Mike Pence used a lunch with Republican senators at the Capitol to try keeping them aboard, citing a dangerous crisis at the border, but there were no signs he’d succeeded. “I personally couldn’t handicap the outcome at this point,” said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who’s planning a vote within the next three weeks.

Senate Passage Would Prompt Veto

Senate passage would force Trump’s first veto, which Congress would surely lack the votes to override. But the showdown was forcing Republicans to cast uncomfortable votes...

As Walmart moves to phase out its familiar “greeters” at some 1,000 stores nationwide, disabled workers who fill many of those jobs say they’re being unfairly targeted. Walmart told greeters around the country last week that their positions would be eliminated on April 26 in favor of an expanded, more physically demanding “customer host” role. To qualify, they will need to be able to lift heavy objects and perform other physical tasks.

That comes as a heavy blow to greeters with cerebral palsy, spina bifida and other disabilities. Now Walmart, America’s largest private employer, is facing a backlash as customers rally around some of the chain’s most highly visible employees. Walmart says it is striving to place greeters in other jobs at the company, but workers with disabilities are worried.

Donny Fagnano, 56, who has worked at Walmart for more than 21 years, said he cried when a manager at the store in...
HANOI, Vietnam — Talks between President Donald Trump and North Korea’s Kim Jong Un collapsed Thursday after the two sides failed to bridge a standoff over U.S. sanctions, a dispiriting end to high-stakes meetings meant to disarm a global nuclear threat. Trump blamed the breakdown on North Korea’s insistence that all the punishing sanctions the U.S. has imposed on Pyongyang be lifted without the North committing to eliminate its nuclear arsenal.

“Sometimes you have to walk,” Trump explained at a closing news conference after the summit was abruptly cut short. He said there had been a proposed agreement that was “ready to be signed.” “I’d much rather do it right than do it fast,” Trump said. “We’re in position to do something very special.” Mere hours after both nations had seemed hopeful of a deal, the two leaders’ motorcades roared away from the downtown Hanoi summit site within minutes of each other, their lunch canceled and a signing ceremony scuttled. The president’s closing news conference was hurriedly moved up, and he departed for Washington more than two hours ahead of schedule. The disintegration of talks came after Trump and Kim had appeared to be ready to inch toward ending a nuclear program that Pyongyang likely sees as its strongest security guarantee.

White House aides stressed that Trump stood strong, and some observers evoked the 1987 Reykjavík summit between Ronald Reagan and the Soviet Union’s Mikhail Gorbachev, a meeting over nuclear weapons that ended without a deal but laid the groundwork for a future agreement.

February 28, 2019 | AP News

TRUMP, KIM END SUMMIT WITH STANDOFF OVER EASING US SANCTIONS

White House Aides Stressed That Trump Stood Strong

“Basically, they wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety, and we couldn’t do that,” Trump told reporters. Kim, he explained, appeared willing to close his country’s main nuclear facility, the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center, if the sanctions were lifted. That would leave him with missiles, warheads and weapons systems, Pompeo said. There are also suspected hidden nuclear fuel production sites around the country. “We couldn’t quite get there today,” Pompeo said, minimizing what seemed to be a chasm between the two...
ISRAEL FLYING TO MOON AFTER SPACEX LAUNCH

February 22, 2019 | AP News

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — An Israeli spacecraft rocketed toward the moon for the country’s first attempted lunar landing, following a launch Thursday night by SpaceX. A communications satellite for Indonesia was the main cargo aboard the Falcon 9 rocket, which illuminated the sky as it took flight. But Israel’s privately funded lunar lander — a first not just for Israel but commercial space — generated the buzz.

Israel seeks to become only the fourth country to successfully land on the moon, after Russia, the U.S. and China. The spacecraft — called Beresheet, Hebrew for Genesis or “In The Beginning” — will take nearly two months to reach the moon.

“We thought it’s about time for a change, and we want to get little Israel all the way to the moon,” said Yonatan Winetraub, co-founder of Israel’s Spacell, a nonprofit organization behind the effort.

The moon, nearly full and glowing brightly, beckoned as it rose in the eastern sky. Within an hour after liftoff, Beresheet was already sending back data and had successfully deployed its landing legs, according to SpaceIL. “We’ll keep analyzing the data, but bottom line is we entered the very exclusive group of countries that have launched a spacecraft to the moon,” said Yigal Harel, head of SpaceIL’s spacecraft...