MILLIONS LIVE IN PARTS OF CA THREATENED BY WILDFIRES »

FUSD’S SURPLUS FOOD USED TO GO TO THE DUMP. NOT ANYMORE. »

WIKILEAKS’ ASSANGE ARRESTED IN LONDON; US CHARGE UNVEILED »
Fresno Unified schools used to throw away millions of pounds of leftover food every year that students didn’t eat. Now, much of that surplus is going to food pantries, homeless shelters, and other sites that feed the hungry across Fresno. The shift has been made through the efforts of Fresno Metro Ministry. Every school day, vans from the local non-profit visit 25 Fresno Unified schools to collect fresh and healthy items that are then re-distributed to those facing food insecurity. The surplus includes pre-packaged fruit, vegetables, microwavable lunches, and healthy snacks. In its first year of operation, Food to Share has recovered over 500,000 pounds of food from Fresno Unified schools, said Metro Ministry deputy director Chanel Ruiz-Mendez. She said 10,000 people a year directly benefit from Food to Share’s partnership with over 40 local food distribution organizations. The effort has been so successful that Metro Ministry is looking to expand its Food to Share collection program to 13 additional Fresno Unified campuses by next fall. The program also retrieves surplus food from restaurants, farmers markets, and hospitals among other locations.

**Putting Surplus to Good Use**

Fresno Unified is required by law to provide a certain amount of fruits and vegetables for students. But students often don’t choose these items when they are making their meal and snack selections, said Jose Alvarado, food services director for the district. As a result, schools are left with a large number of extra items. He said a variety of factors affect the choices students make. “As seen at many of our middle schools and high schools, many students prefer to socialize during lunch or hit the basketball courts rather than eat,” Alvarado said. “It’s those unopened food items that we are recovering the most and donating through programs like Food to Share.” Students also play another role. At most campuses, they help collect and sort the unused food for pickup.

**Students Learning Valuable Lessons**

At Susan B. Anthony Elementary School, a group called the Aspire Girls devotes a portion of their lunchtime to separate hot food items from cold ones and organize them into large green crates. Sixth-grader Cecilia Gonzalez hopes her participation will inspire other students. “I wanted to participate because I want to be a role model to other kids,” Gonzalez said. “If they see me doing the right thing, maybe they will too.” Amris Her, also a sixth grader, said she developed a passion for helping others after her parents took her to the Poverello House to serve food to the homeless. “When my teacher asked us if we wanted to volunteer for the Food to Share program, I was just like, yes because I’ve seen someone do that before and I want to help again. It makes me feel good that I am helping people who don’t have food.” Her said. “It makes me feel good that I am helping people who don’t have food.” The school is also creating a group called Young Men of Character to encourage male students to participate.

**Related Story: Fresno Unified, EOC Provide Free Meals Over Winter Break**

“Food to Share fulfills a niche that other companies don’t fill,” Her said. Popular Item: Ready-To-Eat Snacks

Thanks to these efforts, officials at the Poverello House say they are able to feed over 100 people every week just from the program’s food deliveries. “Food to Share fulfills a niche that other companies don’t fill, and...
IS IT TIME TO BAN STUDENT CELLPHONES IN CLASSROOMS?

April 8, 2019 | Jamie Ouverson

When teachers get together, sooner or later, the conversation turns to the cellphone nightmare. So, I decided to talk to teachers, students and the office of a state lawmaker who wants to fix the problem.

Click this link for the video to learn what I found out.

Cellphones in Class Create Conflict

Student use of smartphones at school diverts attention from learning. Kids often are checking out social media instead of focusing on their lessons. In addition, cellphone use creates conflict between teachers and students — and between students. I recently heard a caller who said he was a veteran high school teacher say on a Fresno talk-radio show: “I love my job and I love my students. But if I could change just one thing about my school, it would be to ban cellphones. They create too many problems.”

Assemblyman Muratsuchi Proposes Restrictions

In his district echo similar frustrations. Earlier this year, he introduced a bill (AB 272) requiring school districts to prohibit or restrict smartphone use on school grounds during school hours. “Growing evidence shows excessive smartphone use at school interferes with education, encourages cyberbullying, and may have adverse effects on teenage mental health, including increased rates of depression and suicide,” Muratsuchi said in a news release.

“This bill will require school districts to adopt their own policies that strike a balance between allowing appropriate student use of smartphones while making sure that smartphones are not interfering with a student’s educational, social and emotional development.”

Hey, It’s Working for Texas Tech

Just last year, France banned cellphones in schools, kindergarten through ninth grade. And perhaps Muratsuchi’s legislation will get a boost from Texas Tech men’s basketball coach Chris Beard, whose team is playing for the NCAA title tonight.

NEWSOM TEAMS WITH FRESNO ON NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING IDEA

April 12, 2019 | Bill McEwen

Affordable housing developed in partnership with the state will be put on the fast track in Fresno and other cities under a plan unveiled Thursday by Gov. Gavin Newsom. The housing will be built on vacant state-owned properties, many of them belonging to Caltrans. “Housing is a basic human right, and in California, we simply don’t have enough of it.” Gov. Newsom said in a statement. “The cost of housing and rising rents are squeezing family budgets. “My administration is using every tool at our disposal to combat the housing affordability crisis our families face. We’re working hand in hand with local leaders who are stepping up for their communities and pushing for affordability for their residents.”

State Reviewed All Its Vacant Properties

Newsom said that his administration will partner with local cities to release at least three Requests for Proposals for new housing construction on state-owned land, with the first...
April 12, 2019 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — Impoverished towns in the shadow of Mount Shasta. Rustic Gold Rush cities in the Sierra Nevada foothills. High-dollar resort communities on the shores of Lake Tahoe. Ritz-y Los Angeles County suburbs. They all could be the next Paradise.

A McClatchy analysis reveals more than 350,000 Californians live in towns and cities that exist almost entirely within “very high fire hazard severity zones” — Cal Fire’s designation for places highly vulnerable to devastating wildfires. These designations have proven eerily predictive about some of the state’s most destructive wildfires in recent years, including the Camp Fire, the worst in state history. Nearly all of Paradise is colored in bright red on Cal Fire’s map — practically the entire town was at severe risk before the Camp Fire raged through last November, burning the majority of homes in its path and killing 85 people. Malibu, where the Woolsey Fire burned more than 400 homes last year, also falls within very high hazard zones. As does the small Lake County town of Cobb, much of which was destroyed by the Valley Fire in 2015. “There’s a lot of Paradises out there,” said Max Moritz, a fire specialist at UC Santa Barbara.

All told, more than 2.7 million Californians live in very high fire hazard severity zones, from trailers off quiet dirt roads in the forest to mansions in the state’s largest cities, according to the analysis, which is based on 2010 block-level census data. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection says its maps show places where wildfires are likely to be extreme due to factors including vegetation and topography. The maps aren’t perfect in their ability to forecast where a fire will be destructive. For instance, the Coffey Park neighborhood of Santa Rosa isn’t in a very high hazard zone, but powerful winds pushed the Tubbs Fire into that part of the city, largely leveling the neighborhood in October 2017.

Coffey Park was built “with zero consideration for fire,” said Chris Dicus, a forestry and fire expert at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. “Fire was in the mountains — there was no consideration that fire would cross (Highway) 101.” Cal Fire is making new fire hazard maps — ready in a year or so — that will incorporate regional wind patterns and other climate factors. In the meantime, experts say the current maps, created about a decade ago, still provide an important guide to predict where wildfires could do the most damage, in the same way floodplain maps highlight areas that could be hit hardest during severe storms. The at-risk communities identified by McClatchy also should serve as a starting point for prioritizing how California should spend money on retrofits and other fire-safety programs, Moritz said.

California’s state-of-the-art building codes help protect homes from wildfire in the most vulnerable areas, experts say. But the codes only apply to new construction. A bill introduced by Assemblyman Jim Wood would provide cash to help Californians retrofit older homes. “This will go a long way toward helping these different municipalities (in showing) that they deserve funding,” Moritz said. McClatchy identified more than 75 towns and cities with populations over 1,000 where, like...
California prosecutors announced Wednesday they will seek the death penalty if they convict the man suspected of being the notorious “Golden State Killer” who eluded capture for decades.

The move comes less than a month after Gov. Gavin Newsom announced a moratorium on executing any of the 737 inmates on the nation’s largest death row. Newsom’s reprieve lasts only so long as he is governor and does not prevent prosecutors from seeking nor judges and juries from imposing death sentences. Prosecutors from four counties briefly announced their decision during a short court hearing for Joseph DeAngelo.

He was arrested a year ago based on DNA evidence linking him to at least 13 murders and more than 50 rapes across California in the 1970s and ’80s.

He stood expressionless in an orange jail uniform, staring forward from a courtroom cage, as prosecutors from Sacramento, Santa Barbara, Orange and Ventura spoke. Although prosecutors from six counties were in court for the four-minute hearing, charges in those four counties include the special circumstances that could merit execution for 12 of the 13 murders under California law. His attorney, public defender Diane Howard, criticized seeking the death penalty...
LONDON — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was forcibly bundled out of the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and into a British police van on Thursday, setting up a potential court battle over attempts to extradite him to the U.S. to face charges related to the publication of tens of thousands of secret government documents. Police arrested Assange after the South American nation decided to revoke the political asylum that had given him sanctuary for almost seven years.

Ecuador’s President Lenin Moreno said he took the action due to “repeated violations to international conventions and daily life.” In Washington, the U.S. Justice Department accused Assange with conspiring with Chelsea Manning to break into a classified government computer at the Pentagon. The charge was announced after Assange was taken into custody. His lawyer has previously said that Assange planned to fight any U.S. charges against him. Assange took refuge in the embassy in 2012 after he was released on bail in Britain while facing extradition to Sweden on sexual assault allegations that have since been dropped. He refused to leave the embassy, fearing arrest and extradition to the U.S. for publishing classified military and diplomatic cables through WikiLeaks.

Assange Used the Embassy as a Staging Post

Over the years, Assange used the embassy as a staging post to keep his name before the public, frequently making appearances on its tiny balcony, posing for pictures and reading statements. Even his cat became well-known. But his presence was an embarrassment to U.K. authorities, who for years kept a police presence around the clock outside the embassy, costing taxpayers millions in police overtime. Such surveillance was removed years ago, but the embassy remained a vocal point for his activities. Video posted online by Ruptly, a news service of Russia Today, showed several men in suits pulling Assange out of the embassy and loading him into a police van while uniformed British police formed a passageway. Assange sported a full beard and slicked-back gray hair. He later appeared in Westminster Magistrates’ Court, where District Judge Michael Snow wasted no time in finding him guilty of breaching his bail conditions, flatly rejecting his assertion that he had not had a fair hearing and a reasonable excuse for not appearing.

“Mr. Assange’s behavior is that of a narcissist who cannot get beyond his own selfish interests. He hasn’t come close to establishing ‘reasonable excuse.’” — District Judge Michael Snow

“Mr. Assange’s behavior is that of a narcissist who cannot get beyond his own selfish interests.” Snow said. “He hasn’t come close to establishing ‘reasonable excuse.’” Assange waved to the packed public gallery as he was taken away to the cells. His next appearance was set for May 2 via prison video-link in relation to the extradition case. Speaking in Parliament, British Prime Minister Theresa May said the arrest shows that “no one is above the law.”

Assange Has Been Under U.S. Justice Department Scrutiny for Years

Moreno said in a video posted on Twitter that Ecuador was no longer willing to give Assange protection. Other Ecuadorian officials in Quito accused supporters of WikiLeaks and two Russian hackers of trying to destabilize the country. “The discourteous and aggressive behavior of Mr. Julian Assange, the hostile and threatening declarations of its allied organization, against Ecuador, and especially the transgression of international treaties, have led the situation to a point where the asylum of Mr. Assange is unsustainable and no longer...
WASHINGTON — Attorney General William Barr declared Wednesday he believes “spying did occur” on Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, suggesting the origins of the Russia investigation may have been mishandled and aligning himself with the president at a time when Barr’s independence is under scrutiny.

Barr, appearing before a Senate panel, did not say what “spying” had taken place. He later said he wasn’t sure there had been improper surveillance but wanted to make sure proper procedures were followed. Still his remarks give a boost to President Trump and his supporters who insist his campaign was unfairly targeted by the FBI. Barr was testifying for a second day at a congressional budget hearing that was dominated by questions about special counsel Robert Mueller’s Trump-Russia investigation.

Barr said he expects to release a redacted copy of Mueller’s report next week, and Democrats have repeatedly expressed concern that his version will conceal wrongdoing by the president.

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WELLINGTON, New Zealand — New Zealand’s governor general on Thursday formally signed into effect sweeping gun laws outlawing military style weapons, less than a month after a man used such guns to kill 50 people and wound dozens at two mosques in Christchurch. Governor General Patsy Reddy signed the bill as police said a gun buyback program will be announced to collect the now-banned weapons. The weapons will be illegal starting at midnight, but police said a brief amnesty program will be in effect until details of the buyback are announced. "For people who find themselves now in possession of a prohibited firearm, we ask you to please notify us," Police Deputy Commissioner Michael Clement said. "The collection of firearms will occur at a later stage." He added that “for now, there is an amnesty in place and we ask people to please notify us,” he added.

Related Story: New Zealand Bans ‘Military-Style’ Guns After Mosque Attacks

Anyone who retains such a weapon now faces a penalty of up to five years in prison. Exemptions allow heirloom weapons held by collectors or weapons used for professional pest control. The House of Representatives on Wednesday passed by a final vote of 119 to 1 legislation banning the weapons after an accelerated process of debate and public submission.

Prime Minister Emotional During Bill’s Final Reading

“The Government acted quickly to change New Zealand’s firearms laws and Police is now responsible for implementing and enforcing these new laws,” Clement said. Australian Brenton Harrison Tarrant, 28, was charged with 50 counts of murder and 39 counts of attempted murder. The royal commission set up to investigate issues surrounding the massacre is examining how he obtained a gun license in New Zealand and purchased weapons and ammunition. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern spoke emotionally during the bill’s final reading of the traumatic injuries suffered by victims of the March 15 attack, whom she visited in Christchurch Hospital after the shootings.

“I struggle to recall any single gunshot wounds,” Ardern said. “In every case they spoke of multiple injuries, multiple debilitating injuries that deemed it impossible for them to recover in days, let alone weeks. They will carry disabilities for a lifetime, and that’s before you consider the psychological impact. We are here for them.”

“I could not fathom how weapons that could cause such destruction and large-scale death could be obtained legally in this country,” she said. Ardern, who has won international praise for her compassion and leadership since the shootings, was able to win rare bipartisan support for a bill that makes it illegal to own a military-style semi-automatic rifle. The only dissent was from the libertarian ACT Party’s lone lawmaker in Parliament.
PANCHIMALCO, El Salvador — David Escobar Fuentes fled El Salvador because gangs were extorting his ranching family, while Bryon Melgar Menjivar wanted to escape the pressure to join a gang that started when he was 15. Sandra Monroy headed north for a good job.

They told Gov. Gavin Newsom their stories Monday, the second day of his visit to El Salvador. He met them at the country’s only processing center for migrants who are deported from Mexico or the United States. It was his first opportunity to interact directly with people who have left the small Central American country because of poverty and violence.

er, he traveled to the small mountain town of Panchimalco, the home of indigenous Salvadorans, for a cultural demonstration and conversation on human rights abuses.

15,000 Salvadorans Have Entered US Since October
California has more Salvadorans than any other state, and Newsom is in the country to learn more about why thousands are fleeing for the U.S. About 3,000 unaccompanied Salvadoran children and 12,000 family members have entered the United States since October, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. Fuentes and Monroy, his aunt, left for the U.S. in a caravan last October. Both...