DACA SUPPORTERS RALLY IN FRESNO AS COURT WEIGHS CASE TO END PROTECTIONS

STATE REGULATORS LAUNCH INVESTIGATION INTO POWER OUTAGES

US BUDGET DEFICIT SURGES TO $134.5 BILLION IN OCTOBER
Hours after the U.S. Supreme Court heard a case on the legality of rescinding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, about 40 DACA supporters held a rally at the federal courthouse in downtown Fresno. DACA gives legal work status — and temporary protection from deportation — for those brought into the United States illegally as children. An estimated 700,000 benefit from DACA. The program was enacted as an executive order by President Barack Obama in 2012 and reversed by Donald Trump five years later. The future of the program now rests with the nine justices of the highest court in the land. A combination of activists and elected leaders hope they rule in DACA’s favor.

Related Story: Court Appears Poised to End DACA Protection

Recipient Wants to Be an American

America Hernandez has become the local face of DACA. The 36-year old Fresno woman came to the United States from Mexico when she was three months old. She is a DACA recipient and works as a social services coordinator for an immigrant rights group. Even if the court rules against DACA, Hernandez says she’s staying. “It means I continue to fight,” Hernandez said. “I’ve been completely without DACA before. It is difficult, but it’s something that I’ve done, and I will figure it out.” While DACA does not change her citizenship status, she wants to be an American. “I would love to not have any fear. I would love to be able to contribute in more significant ways to this country, where I know that it is a permanent thing. Maybe go up and be a representative one day,” Hernandez said.

Issue is ‘Personal’ for Soria

Fresno councilwoman and congressional candidate Esmeralda Soria led cheers among the crowd to support immigrants. She called the issue personal, noting her sister-in-law and some of her staff are DACA recipients. “I have seen it intimately how this issue, and how the uncertainty has impacted the lives of people that continue to be in limbo,” Soria said. She wants Congress, the body she hopes to win an election to join, to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

She supported Obama’s executive order, as a response to what she describes as a broken Congress. “He used his power through the executive order to create a program that would protect thousands of Dreamers that live, that are working in our society,” she said. “You learn from a very early age that there is a right way and there is a wrong way to do things. The federal government tried to terminate DACA the wrong way. Today, we stand here very proud of the arguments that were made on behalf of the 700,000 DACA recipients. We’re here to stand up for the right way to do things. Together, we’re here to say DACA is legal and an American success story,” Becerra said. As to her thoughts whether a president could take DACA away via executive order, Soria says she’ll wait to see how the court rules on that argument. The state of California led the way on many lawsuits against the Trump...
DA SMITTCAMP MAKES ENDORSEMENT IN JUDGE RACE WITH FORMER RIVAL

Given its political logic, Fresno County District Attorney Lisa Smittcamp took little time making her choice official: she is supporting Douglas Treisman for judge. Treisman is a Senior Deputy District Attorney. Smittcamp is his boss. "Doug Treisman is the person everyone in the district attorney's office goes to when they don't know the answer," Smittcamp told Politics 101. "He is one of the most ethical people I've had the pleasure to work with."

Treisman is slated to face former DA Elizabeth Egan for the open seat. The current holder, Alan Simpson, is not seeking re-election and will retire at the end of his term in January 2021. Smittcamp defeated incumbent Egan for the district attorney position in 2014 in a hotly contested race. She calls Treisman "the most experienced candidate in the race." The deadline for any other candidates to enter the race is tomorrow.

Related Story: Former DA Egan Is Running for Judge

County Clerk Takes Long View on Election

County Clerk/Registrar of Voters Brandi Orth has filed to run again, even though her next election isn't until 2022. She filed paperwork with her own office for another term. Orth has served since 2012. She was initially appointed to fill a vacancy, then won election in 2014 and re-election in 2018.

Decision Day for Council

For the last two meetings, the Fresno City Council debated several hot topics. This Thursday, is the day of reckoning with scheduled votes. Among the issues to be decided...
November 4, 2019 | AP News

SAN FRANCISCO — California regulators opened a formal investigation Wednesday into preemptive power outages that blacked out large parts of the state in October, drawing strong rebukes from public officials and residents who said the shut-offs were too broad and poorly executed. The unanimous vote by the California Public Utilities Commission followed testimony from a handful of people who pleaded with the panel for leadership at a time of increased danger from fire and other natural disasters. “Many Californians are debating whether California is still safe. Is this a safe place to live?” said Will Abrams of Santa Rosa, whose house burned down in 2017 in wildfires that roared through Northern California wine country.

The state’s largest utility, Pacific Gas & Electric Co., initiated multiple rounds of shut-offs and plunged nearly 2.5 million people into darkness at one point throughout Northern and Central California. Some of the outages lasted for several days. PG&E officials insisted on the shut-offs for public safety, but infuriated residents and a parade of public officials, including Gov. Gavin Newsom, who said cutting off power should be a last resort and that the company regularly botched communications.

Related Story: Regulators to Open Inquiry Into PG&E Outages

The Outages Raised Concerns

Nevada City Mayor Reinette Senum said Wednesday that her rural community had no working phones or internet. She wants local control over the power grid, which she said could take better care than PG&E, which is a for-profit utility. “Basically, we were sent back into the dark ages,” she said. Southern California Edison Co. and San Diego Gas & Electric Co. are also for-profit utilities that shut off power, but to far fewer people. The outages raised concerns about whether the utilities “properly balanced the need to provide reliable service with public safety,” said the order authorizing the investigation.

Commission President Marybel Batjer requested the broad investigation, saying that widespread outages “cannot be the new normal for California.” Commissioners said Wednesday that they want to know what can be done to improve shut-offs or reduce their scope in the future. Batjer also signed an order Tuesday directing PG&E to show why it should not be fined for other violations related to the shutdowns. Each violation of state requirements involving power shutdowns could carry a $100,000 penalty. Bill Johnson, the chief executive of PG&E, has said the outages kept people safe, although a transmission line in Sonoma County that was not powered off malfunctioned minutes before a wildfire erupted Oct. 23, forcing about 180,000 people to evacuate.

Related Story: Regulators to Open Inquiry Into PG&E Outages

Commissioners Have Been Stewing Over the Outages

Utility spokesman Ari Vanrenen said again Wednesday that the shut-offs were the right call. He said the company continues to improve and has “made every effort” to implement the commission’s requirements when it cuts power. Abrams not only lost his home in the 2017 wildfires, but his children had to endure smoke from a deadly 2018 wildfire in Paradise. Last month, the family evacuated from another Sonoma County wildfire. They were terrified to cross into the San Francisco...
When the state of California licenses professionals, it is telling Californians that they can depend on licensees to perform their services competently, that miscreants will be disciplined and that in serious cases, their licenses will be lifted. For instance, the state bar, which oversees attorneys, publishes all of its disciplinary actions, along with the underlying information that justifies its censures. Alas, it doesn’t always work that way. Licensing agencies are often dominated by the professions they regulate and are reluctant to act on complaints. Moreover, professional trade associations lobby the Legislature for special protections.

Police unions have been especially aggressive in erecting barriers to disciplinary oversight, including a “peace officers bill of rights.” Politicians, from the governor down, have been eager to do their bidding because their campaign endorsements are precious political commodities. Cop unions’ political clout has waned a bit in recent years, most noticeably in failing to block measures that impose stricter standards on use of deadly force and require the release of information on such cases. However, our laws still make it difficult, or even impossible, to discipline rogue cops, and one of those laws is back in the spotlight because of an...
WASHINGTON — The federal government, which ended the 2019 budget year with its largest deficit in seven years, began the new budget year with a deficit in October that was 33.8% bigger than a year ago as spending hit a record. The Treasury Department said Wednesday that the deficit last month totaled $134.5 billion, up from a shortfall in October 2018 of $100.5 billion. The government ran up a deficit of $984.4 billion for the 2019 budget year that ended Sept. 30, 26% larger than in 2018.

The Congressional Budget Office is forecasting that the deficit for 2020 will hit $1 trillion and will remain over $1 trillion for the next decade. The country has not experienced $1 trillion annual deficits since 2009 through 2012 following the 2008 financial crisis. The projections of trillion-dollar deficits are in contrast to President Donald Trump’s campaign promises in 2016 that even with his proposed tax cuts he would be able to eliminate future deficits with cuts in spending and growth in revenues from a stronger economy.

The government’s budget year runs from Oct. 1 through Sept. 30. For October, the big jump in the deficit reflected a 7.8% rise in spending from a year ago that pushed outlays for the month of October to a record $380 billion.

Revenues in October fell 2.8% to $245.2 billion from the same month a year ago. One revenue category that showed a big increase was tariffs on imports, which totaled $8 billion, up 39% from a year ago. The Trump administration imposed a new round of tariffs on China in September after negotiations between the two nations failed to reach a trade agreement to address American concerns about protection of intellectual property and other issues.

Negotiations with China are ongoing, and Trump said Tuesday that the two countries were close to a partial agreement that would roll back some of the tariffs the two sides have imposed. But the president said, “If we don’t make a deal, we will substantially raise those tariffs.”
RECORD COLD FOLLOWS EARLY SNOWSTORM OVER MUCH OF EASTERN US

November 13, 2019 | AP News

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Snow and cold records fell as an arctic air mass that started in Siberia spilled over a big chunk of the eastern half of the U.S., including the normally mild South, on Tuesday.

The mid-autumn taste of winter brought record single-digit temperatures to Chicago and environs; set snowfall records in Buffalo and Detroit; dusted cars with snow in Memphis, Tennessee; and froze lakes in Minnesota weeks earlier than usual. Wisconsin farmer Bob Grove still has soybeans in the field, 20 miles south of Milwaukee, but said he can’t harvest them because the snow will clog the machinery. “Normally, you don’t see this kind of weather to well into December,” Grove said. “It’s caught us off guard, as far as getting crops harvested. Doing what we can in between snow, rain, mud.”

The roughly 10 inches of snow in Buffalo and Detroit by Tuesday morning was a record depth for the time of year, weather service records show.

Areas of Vermont and Maine saw similar totals as a wintry mix also closed or delayed hundreds of schools in northern New England. “This is an air mass that’s more typical for...”

TASTE FOR MILK SOURS, PUSHING TOP BRAND INTO BANKRUPTCY

November 12, 2019 | AP News

Dean Foods, America’s biggest milk processor, filed for bankruptcy Tuesday amid a decades-long drop-off in U.S. milk consumption blamed on changing trends and a growing variety of alternatives. The Dallas company said it may sell itself to the Dairy Farmers of America, a marketing cooperative owned by thousands of farmers.

"Despite our best efforts to make our business more agile and cost-efficient, we continue to be impacted by a challenging operating environment marked by continuing declines in consumer milk consumption," CEO Eric Berrigause said in a statement. Since 1975, the amount of milk consumed per capita in the U.S. has tumbled more than 40%. Americans consumed around 24 gallons per year in 1996, according to government data. That dropped to 17 gallons in 2018. An increasing variety of beverages, including teas and sodas...

MOST DISTANT WORLD EVER EXPLORED GETS NEW NAME: ARROKOTH

November 13, 2019 | AP News

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — The most distant world ever explored 4 billion miles away finally has an official name: Arrokoth. That means “sky” in the language of the Native American Powhatan people, NASA said Tuesday. NASA’s New Horizons spacecraft flew past the snowman-shaped Arrokoth on New Year’s Day, 3 ½ years after exploring Pluto. At the time, this small icy world 1 billion miles beyond Pluto was nicknamed Ultima Thule given its vast distance from us.

“The name ‘Arrokoth’ reflects the inspiration of looking to the skies,” lead scientist Alan Stern of Southwest Research Institute said in a statement, “and wondering about the stars and worlds beyond our own.” The name was picked because of the Powhatan’s ties to the Chesapeake Bay region. New Horizons is operated from Johns Hopkins University’s Applied Physics Lab in Laurel, Maryland. The Hubble Space Telescope — which discovered Arrokoth in 2014 — has its...
COMAYAGUA, Honduras — The 3-year-old girl traveled for weeks cradled in her father’s arms, as he set out to seek asylum in the United States. Now she won’t even look at him. After being forcibly separated at the border by government officials, sexually abused in U.S. foster care and deported, the once bright and beaming girl arrived back in Honduras withdrawn, anxious and angry, convinced her father abandoned her. He fears their bond is forever broken. “I think about this trauma staying with her too, because the trauma has remained with me and still hasn’t faded,” he said, days after their reunion.

This month, new government data shows the little girl is one of an unprecedented 69,550 migrant children held in U.S. government custody over the past year, enough infants, toddlers, kids and teens to overflow the typical NFL stadium. That’s more children detained away from their parents than any other country, according to United Nations researchers. And it’s happening even though the U.S. government has acknowledged that being held in detention can be traumatic for children, putting them at risk of long-term physical and emotional damage.

Some of these migrant children who were in government custody this year have already been deported. Some have reunited with family in the U.S., where they’re trying to go to school and piece their lives back together. About 4,000 are still in government custody, some in large, impersonal shelters. And more arrive every week. This story is part of an ongoing joint investigation between The Associated Press and the PBS series FRONTLINE on the treatment of migrant children, which includes the film “Kids Caught in the Crackdown” premiering on PBS and online Nov. 12 at 10 p.m. EST/9 p.m. CST.

Younger Children Are at Greater Risk
The nearly 70,000 migrant children who were held in government custody this year — up 42 percent in fiscal year 2019 from 2018 — spent more time in shelters and away from their families than in prior years. The Trump administration’s series of strict immigration policies has increased the time children spend in detention, despite the government’s own acknowledgment that it does them harm. In 2013, Australia detained 2,000 children during a surge of maritime arrivals. In Canada, immigrant children are separated from their parents only as a last resort; 155 were detained in 2018. In the United Kingdom, 42 migrant children were put in shelters in 2017, according to officials in those countries.

“Early experiences are literally built into our brains and bodies,” said Dr. Jack Shonkoff, who directs Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child. Earlier this year, he told Congress that “decades of peer-reviewed research” show that detaining kids away from parents or primary caregivers is bad for their health. It’s a brain-wiring issue, he said. “Stable and responsive relationships promote healthy brain architecture,” Shonkoff said. “If these relationships are disrupted, young children are hit by the double whammy of a brain that is deprived of the positive stimulation it needs, and assaulted by a stress response that disrupts its developing circuitry.” Younger children are at greater risk, because their biological systems are less developed, he said. Previous harm and the duration of separation are also more likely to lead to trauma. One Honduran teen who was held in a large detention...
Iran discovers new oil field with over 50 billion barrels

**November 11, 2019 | AP News**

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran has discovered a new oil field in the country’s south with over 50 billion barrels of crude, its president said Sunday, a find that could boost the country’s proven reserves by a third as it struggles to sell energy abroad over U.S. sanctions.

The announcement by Hassan Rouhani comes as Iran faces crushing American sanctions after the U.S. pulled out of its nuclear deal with world powers last year. Rouhani made the announcement in a speech in the desert city of Yazd. He said the field was located in Iran’s southern Khuzestan province, home to its crucial oil industry.

Some 53 billion barrels would be added to Iran’s proven reserves of roughly 150 billion, he said. “I am telling the White House that in the days when you sanctioned the sale of Iranian oil and pressured our nation, the country’s dear workers and engineers were able to discover 53 billion barrels of oil in a big field,” Rouhani said.

Oil reserves refer to crude that’s economically feasible to extract. Figures can vary wildly by country due to differing standards, though it remains a yardstick of comparison among oil-producing nations. Iran currently has the world’s fourth-largest proven deposits of crude oil and the world’s...