COSTA GETS FEISTY ON ELECTION CHALLENGE WHILE HOME FOR HOLIDAY »
CALIFORNIA CAN SOLVE WATER SHORTAGE WITH WATER IT HAS »
TRUMP LASHES OUT AS IMPEACHMENT TRIAL IN LIMBO »
Jim Costa kept his calm while discussing his recent votes on issues that have gripped the country of late. He voted for impeachment, sharing his reasoning in a speech on the House floor. He celebrated legislative victories in his agricultural wheelhouse: the USMCA, and the Farm Worker Modernization Act. But, when asked during a recent interview about his reelection challenge, Costa turned feisty. “No one works harder than me. No one. Period,” an animated Costa said, banging the table for emphasis. It was just one of several topics the Fresno Democrat talked about in a session with the media at his Fresno office.

**On Reelection: No One Works Harder**

Costa said he will ramp up his reelection campaign next month. He faces a March 3 primary challenge not only from Republican Kevin Cookingham, but also Democrats Esmeralda Soria and Kim Williams. Soria has campaigned hard and aggressively, but Costa said so has he. “I expect (Soria) to work hard. But, she won’t work harder than I am. I always put my trust and faith in the voters of the Valley.”

Costa says part of the SEIU dissention came from his support of the Trade Promotion Authority. “Sometimes you get personalities that engage here and they have a difference of opinion. I’m very proud of the labor support that I have. I think after the primary, I’ll reunite this labor thing,” Costa said. He said he has a broader base of support than his challengers, and more fundraising. He’s also leading in Twitter followers (21,000) over main rival Soria (3,300). Gov. Gavin Newsom; U.S. Senators Kamala Harris and Dianne Feinstein have all endorsed Costa, but some Democrats recently took a shot at Costs for attending a White House Christmas party. “It’s a campaign,” Costa said in response to the criticism.

**Costa on Impeachment**

Costa voted in favor of impeachment. “Obviously something that has preoccupied the attention this week is the vote on the articles impeachment,” he said. “It is something that I certainly did not want to do.” he said. Costa said he did his homework before his impeachment vote, reviewing the Federalist papers and rereading the Mueller Report. “I felt the evidence was overwhelming. I have an oath of office that I take to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. I did so realizing that America’s national security is at risk,” Costa said about his vote. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) has not yet transmitted the two articles of impeachment to the Senate for trial. Costa supports Pelosi, thinking she wants to make sure the trial process is fair. “I don’t think she has cold feet,” Costa said. He said he hopes Senate leadership from both parties work on rules for a trial. He pointed to...
Mayor Lee Brand vetoed the Fresno City Council’s plan for recreational cannabis business regulations on Monday. The council long debated the plan, which included several social equity components, for stores to conduct business in Fresno. The final vote took place on Dec. 12, passing 4-3. A veto needs five council votes to overturn. But, councilman Miguel Arias — one of the co-sponsors of the business license plan — does not believe the veto will delay the eventual opening of recreational cannabis shops.

**Related Story: Council Takes Aim at Leakers, Revises Cannabis Store Rules**

**Brand Cites Reasons for Veto**

While I believe that legal adult-use cannabis sales in the city of Fresno are inevitable, I also believe we have a duty to be transparent and open in how that legislation is brought to constituents,” Brand wrote in his veto message.

Among the specific reasons for the veto, Brand cited a desire for a supermajority (five votes) approval; to have locations maintain security video recordings for 90 days (now seven days); for the police department to recommend changes in security language; and opposition to a social equity rule requiring a labor peace agreement. Brand wrote “having a workforce of employees who belong to a labor union are in conflict and could make it more difficult to award social equity licenses to the most deserving applicants.” Responded Arias: “I’m kind of perplexed by his veto message.” Arias said he plans to meet with Brand on Tuesday to learn more about the mayor’s...
December 26, 2019 | CalMatters

California is at a water crossroads. We can continue our costly, 100-year-old pattern of trying to find new water supplies, or we can choose instead to focus on smarter ways of using – and reusing – what we already have. With a population projected to top 50 million by mid-century, a booming economy and a changing climate, there is no question we need to shore up our water systems. But we don’t need an all-of-the-above strategy that sacrifices affordability and environmental health. Just like with energy, we must focus on the solutions that are better for our planet and pocketbooks.

Innovation Is Often Untapped
There are also new, innovative sources of local supply. Less than 20% of urban wastewater is being reused. There are still more than a million acre-feet of treated water we could reclaim to meet local needs. Water reuse opportunities can be found across the state, but are especially important in coastal areas, where wastewater is discharged into and pollutes estuaries and the ocean. Urban runoff is another viable local option. Our cities were designed to remove rainwater to reduce flood risk, literally flushing freshwater down storm drains. Rain gardens, green streets, and parks can help us catch and store more rain.

While gray infrastructure like pipes and pumps will continue to play an important role in our water system, green infrastructure can turn urban spaces into a sponge that allows water to sink into the ground to replenish underground aquifers for later use. Water efficiency, reuse and rainwater capture not only save money compared with costly sources like seawater desalination, they also save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which will be key for avoiding unmanageable climate impacts.

Many Benefits of Water Conservation
Water conservation during California’s last drought saved enough electricity to power the cities of Berkeley, Burbank and Santa Cruz for a year. Less energy use means less power plant pollution, helping California achieve our clean air and climate goals. There are other benefits to consider as well. Reuse reduces the need to divert water from streams already stressed by rising temperatures and shrinking snowpack and can curb ocean pollution associated with sewage outfalls...

Saving and Reusing Water Are Vital
The cheapest water is the water we save. Californians have made real strides to conserve over the past several decades. San Francisco and Los Angeles use the same amount (or less) water today as they did 30 years ago, despite substantial growth. And farmers have dramatically increased economic output over the last 30 years while using the same amount of water — effectively producing more food and income for every drop of water.

On farms, precision irrigation and other water-wise practices could reduce water use by 6 million to 7 million acre-feet annually — enough water to supply more than 13 million families for a year. Farmers have dramatically increased economic output over the last 30 years while using the same amount of water — effectively producing more food and income for every drop of water. Research from the Pacific Institute found that appliance and fixture upgrades, leak repair and landscape changes could reduce urban water use by up to 5 million acre-feet annually — enough water to supply more than 13 million families for a year.

California has a chance to model what a truly resilient water system looks like, combining nature and technology to make the most of every drop and dollar.
A California law that makes it harder for companies to treat workers as independent contractors takes effect next week, forcing small businesses in and outside the state to rethink their staffing.

The law puts tough restrictions on who can be independent contractors or freelancers rather than employees. Supporters say it addresses inequities created by the growth of the gig economy, including the employment practices of ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft that use contractors. Company owners with independent contractors must now decide whether to hire them as employees or look for help in other states. Another alternative: asking these workers to start their own businesses, a setup the law allows.

Tamara Ellison has used independent contractors in both her consulting and construction businesses. She’s expecting to hire five of her consulting contractors as employees to bring her company into compliance with the law. But she’s also thinking she may have to limit the services she offers...
TRUMP LASHES OUT AS IMPEACHMENT TRIAL STUCK IN LIMBO

December 24, 2019 | AP News

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump lashed out Tuesday as his Senate impeachment trial remains at an impasse, with Republican and Democratic leaders at odds over its format and whether witnesses should be called. Speaking at his private club in Palm Beach, Florida, after a teleconference call with troops stationed across the globe, Trump singled out Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is indefinitely holding up sending the articles of impeachment the House passed last week to the Republican-controlled Senate. “She hates the Republican Party. She hates all of the people that voted for me and the Republican Party,” Trump charged on Christmas Eve. “She’s doing a tremendous disservice to the country.”

Trump has long seen a Senate trial, where he is almost certain to be acquitted, as an opportunity for vindication after he became the third president in the nation’s history to be impeached by the House. “We have the majority and now they want McConnell to do wonderful things for them,” Trump complained of Democrats, adding that he will leave it to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to do whatever he thinks best. “He’s very smart guy, a very good guy, a very fair guy. But they treated us very unfairly. And now they want fairness in the Senate,” he said.

Schumer Is Demanding Witnesses Who Refused to Appear During House Committee Hearings

Pelosi has said she is waiting until she receives more clarity from McConnell about what a trial will look like. He has said he has not ruled out calling witnesses, but has also indicated that he is in no hurry to seek new testimony either. Meanwhile, the Senate’s top Democrat, Chuck Schumer of New York, has countered that any trial without witnesses would be “Kafkaesque” and a “sham.” “Let’s put it like this: If there are no documents and no witnesses, it will be very hard to come to an agreement,” Schumer told The Associated Press on Monday. Schumer is demanding witnesses who refused to appear during House committee hearings, including acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton. McConnell, who has all but promised a swift acquittal of the president, has resisted making any guarantees, and has cautioned Trump against seeking the testimony of witnesses for fear of prolonging the trial. Instead, McConnell appears to have secured Republican support for his plans to impose a framework drawn from the 1999 impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton. “We haven’t ruled out witnesses,” McConnell said Monday in an interview with “Fox and Friends.” “We’ve said let’s handle this case just like we did with President Clinton. Fair is fair.” That trial featured a 100-0 vote on arrangements that established two weeks of presentations and argument before a partisan tally in which Republicans, who held the majority, called a limited number of witnesses. But Democrats now would need Republican votes to secure witness testimony — and Republicans believe they have the votes to eventually block those requests.

Pelosi Has Delayed Sending the Articles of Impeachment to the Senate

In a letter Monday to all senators, Schumer argued that the circumstances in the Trump trial are different from those of Clinton’s, who was impeached after a lengthy independent counsel investigation in which witnesses had already testified numerous times under oath. Schumer rejected the Clinton model, saying waiting...
WASHINGTON — U.S. sales of newly built homes increased 1.3% in November from the prior month, a sign that low mortgage rates are pushing up purchases as well as prices. The Commerce Department said Monday that new single-family houses sold at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 719,000 last month.

Sales surged in the Northeast and West, but they were flat in the Midwest and fell in the South. New-home sales have increased 9.8% so far this year. The increase largely reflects a steady decline in mortgage rates, which has made borrowing cheaper and brought more people seeking to upgrade their house into the market.

A Steady Decline in Mortgage Rates
Still, prices have moved upward as a result of construction lagging demand. The median new-home sales price was $330,800, up 7.3% from a year ago. Demand has been stoked by a steady decline in mortgage rates over the past 12 months. The typical 30-year mortgage rate has fallen from roughly 4.9% a year ago to 3.8% this November. This decline in mortgage rates reflected the broader global...

December 23, 2019 | AP News

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Yolanda Avila and Andres Pico are friends who sit next to each other on the Colorado Springs’ city council. But politically the two couldn't be further apart — Avila is a durable Democrat and Pico an unflinching Republican.

It’s a split that’s common across the country, as Hispanics are divided along gender lines. Overall, Latinos are far more likely to be Democrats than Republicans, but Hispanic men are more likely than Hispanic women to vote Republican.

Last year, as about two-thirds of Latinos backed Democrats, Hispanic women were 9 percentage points more likely to vote for them than Hispanic men, according to AP VoteCast, a national survey of more than 115,000 midterm voters, including 7,738 Latinos. Though Hispanics started from a more Democratic baseline — 61% of men still backed that party’s...
IRAQ PRESIDENT REJECTS IRAN-BACKED BLOC’S NOMINEE AS PM

December 26, 2019 | AP News

Baghdad — Iraq’s president refused Thursday to designate the Iran-backed parliamentary bloc’s nominee for prime minister after he was rejected by anti-government protesters, saying he was prepared to submit his resignation to Parliament. Barham Saleh said in a statement issued by his office that he would not name the governor of the southern Basra province, Asaad al-Eidani, as the country’s next prime minister “to avoid more bloodshed and in order to safeguard civil peace.”

Al-Eidani’s name was proposed Wednesday by the Fatah bloc, which includes leaders associated with the Iranian-supported paramilitary Popular Mobilization Forces. However, he was promptly rejected by Iraqi protesters, who poured into the streets to denounce his nomination over megaphones, calling for an independent candidate. Saleh, in the statement addressed to the parliament speaker, said his refusal to designate al-Eidani could be construed as a violation of the constitution and said he was therefore putting his resignation at the disposal of Parliament. He stopped short of actually submitting his resignation, leaving it up to the lawmakers to decide “as they see fit.”

The move plunges the war-scarred country into further uncertainty and deepens a political impasse amid unprecedented mass protests that erupted on Oct. 1. The leaderless protesters are calling for the overthrow of Iraq’s entire political class over corruption and mismanagement. The protests, concentrated in Baghdad and the mostly Shiite-inhabited south, have also turned into an uprising against Iran’s political and military influence in the country.

Protesters gathered in Baghdad’s Tahrir Square, which has emerged as a focal point of the protests, celebrated Saleh’s decision. “This is a victory for the demonstrators and a victory for the blood of the martyrs,” said activist Hassanein Gharib. “Because of street pressure, the candidate of the (political) parties was rejected, and we will not accept and we will not return to our homes if the party candidate is nominated.”

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THOUSANDS IN ASIA MARVEL AT ‘RING OF FIRE’ SOLAR ECLIPSE

December 26, 2019 | AP News

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia — People along a swath of southern Asia gazed at the sky in marvel on Thursday at a “ring of fire” solar eclipse. The so-called annular eclipse, in which a thin outer ring of the sun is still visible, could be seen along a path stretching from India and Pakistan to Thailand and Indonesia.

Related Story: Christmas Day Sees The Third, Final And Most Dangerous Solar Eclipse Of 2019

The previous annular solar eclipse in February 2017 authorities in Indonesia provided telescopes and hundreds of special glasses to protect viewers’ eyes. Thousands of people gazed at the sky and cheered and clapped as the sun transformed into a dark orb for more than two minutes, briefly plunging the sky into darkness. Hundreds of others prayed at nearby mosques. “How amazing to see the ring of fire when the sun disappeared slowly,” said Firman Syahrizal, a resident of Sinabang in Indonesia’s Banda Aceh province who witnessed the eclipse with his family.

The previous annular solar eclipse in February 2017 was also visible over a slice of Indonesia.

SAUDIS SENTENCE 5 TO DEATH FOR JAMAL KHASHOGGI’S KILLING

December 23, 2019 | AP News

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — A court in Saudi Arabia sentenced five people to death Monday for the killing of Washington Post columnist and royal family critic Jamal Khashoggi, whose grisly slaying in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul drew international condemnation and cast a cloud of suspicion over Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Three other people were found guilty by Riyadh’s criminal court of covering up the crime and were sentenced to a combined 24 years in prison, according to a statement read by the Saudi attorney general’s office on state TV.

Related Story: Jamal Khashoggi: US Spy Chief Given Deadline to Name Saudi Writer’s ...

In all, 11 people were put on trial in Saudi Arabia over the killing. The names of those found guilty were not made...