REVENGE OF THE ARAMBULAS? BIG DONATION TO DEFEAT DYER. »
FARMWORKER REFORM BILL PASSES HOUSE. WHAT’S NEXT?»
SANTA, SOLDIERS BRING JOY TO ALASKA TOWN FACING CRISIS »
Last December, then-Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer talked openly about the child abuse accusation against Assemblyman Joaquin Arambula. A jury later acquitted Arambula of the charge, but the residue of that case and Dyer’s words are spilling into the 2020 Fresno mayoral race. Arambula’s parents, Amy and Juan, have contributed $97,900 to an independent expenditure group opposing Dyer’s bid to become mayor. “We made this contribution because of the strong feelings that we have about what is good for the future of Fresno,” said Juan Arambula, a former assemblyman. “We are convinced that (Dyer) is the absolutely wrong person to lead our city.”

Related Story: Dyer Contradicts Arambula’s Statement in Child Cruelty Arrest

Juan Arambula: Straw That Broke the Camel’s Back
Arambula said his family has many motivations for the large contribution. But, when Dyer went on TV and talked about his son’s case, that was too much. “Jerry has had a long history, and the incident … was the straw that broke the camel’s back,” the elder Arambula told GV Wire. Arambula also served last year on the committee to pass Measure P, the Fresno sales tax initiative to benefit local parks. The measure did not receive the required votes to pass. Dyer opposed Measure P. “We believe that Fresno deserves better. Jerry broke his word and lied about the parks measure and actively opposed it,” Arambula said. Arambula also cited Dyer’s “bad management of the police department,” which he said cost the city millions of dollars in lawsuits. “Some people think that they can do anything and get away with it. We don’t believe that’s true for our president and we don’t believe that’s true for Dyer,” Arambula said.

Dyer Response
Dyer responded to the committee’s formation. “I am disappointed to learn about this Political Action Committee established solely to inflict damage on my campaign for Mayor,” Dyer told GV Wire via email. “After 18 years of making tough decisions to keep Fresno safe as your police chief, I knew that some people would oppose me.”

Dyer continued: “But, wouldn’t this money be better spent resolving our community’s challenges rather than waging petty personal vendettas? Instead of raising money to promote division in our community we should be coming together to house our homeless, improve our parks, or provide assistance to our city’s children and seniors. As your Mayor, that’s where my focus will be.”

A Political Hit
Dee Barnes, a civilian employee with the police department and longtime labor leader, organized the independent expenditure committee to defeat Dyer. Called “Rising Together, No on Dyer for Mayor 2020,” the political committee is not subject to the same contribution limits as a candidate. The major rules governing an IE committee are: It must report contributions and meet paperwork deadlines, and it is forbidden from coordinating with a candidate. “It was a political hit job on Joaquin,” Barnes said. She also said Arambula was targeted because of his support of local candidates opposed by the police...
SUNNYSIDE TEACHER SURPRISED WITH TEACHING ‘OSCAR,’ $25,000 PRIZE

December 10, 2019 | Nancy Price

Sunnyside High School teacher Katie McQuone is used to being behind the camera as head of the school’s Video Production Academy. So McQuone was startled Tuesday morning to find cameras suddenly pointing at her during an assembly in the packed school gymnasium, where she was named winner of a $25,000 Milken Educator Award for 2019-20. McQuone, a Sunnyside alum, is one of about 40 winners this year of what is called “the Oscars of teaching.”

She danced in joy after leaving her bleacher seat to accept the award as loud cheers of celebration rang out through the gym. But when it was time to make a speech, she was somewhat at a loss for words, other than to express her thanks.

And how does she plan to use her award money? “Pay off my student loans, yay!” she told reporters with a laugh, adding that she might also use it for a vacation or even Christmas presents. It wasn’t the first time she’d been ambushed in her old high school gym with a surprise announcement, McQuone said. “The last time I was in the gym like this, I got proposed to. There were cameras there for that, and I was sitting in the same spot...”

Winning the award at her alma mater is especially thrilling, McQuone said. “It’s really exciting to come here, and now work here with the kids, and show them you can be from southeast Fresno and love your job, and enjoy what you do, and have fun — and win awards!” School and district staff needed to keep McQuone’s award a secret until it was announced, so they told students and teachers that the assembly would recognize the school’s educational gains. Fresno...
The Republican-controlled U.S. Senate — and potentially President Donald Trump — is about to learn what it’s like to take on America’s farmers. The bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act passed the House of Representatives, 260-165, on Wednesday. Ag groups immediately celebrated and then quickly pivoted to the challenges ahead. “Another hurdle in the race to save America’s family farms has been cleared. Western Growers is grateful for the leadership exhibited by Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren and Congressman Dan Newhouse, and the statesmanship demonstrated by the bipartisan group of legislators who sponsored and voted for the bill,” said Western Growers, an Irvine-based group representing farmers throughout the west. “But the race is far from over. Both the Senate and President Trump must be willing to take the political stand that is required to ensure the continued production of an abundant, safe and affordable domestic food supply. Our farmers are depending on the present actions of Congress and the Administration to make possible the future viability of the agriculture industry.”

Reliable Ag Labor Supply, Legal Status for Workers
In a nutshell, the legislation would provide a reliable supply of workers for farmers while establishing a path for undocumented ag workers to earn legal status through continued employment in the industry. It is the first farm labor reform bill passed by the House since 1986.

So, what’s the rub? Critics call H.R. 5038 an illegal immigration bill. And Fox News is stoking nativists with headlines such as “Farm bill panned as mass amnesty for illegal immigrants heads to vote in House.” Indicative of the tensions accompanying this bill, Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Tulare) split from his party leadership to back the bill. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield voted against it, as did Tom McClintock of Elk Grove, who represents some foothill and mountain regions of the central San Joaquin Valley. You can see how the House voted at this link.

Opponents Paint the Bill as ‘Amnesty’
One question is whether Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is willing to anger Republican senators from farming states by refusing to bring the legislation to a vote. The other question: Who does Trump want to make happy? His base of anti-immigrant voters or farmers? Meanwhile, lawmakers from America’s ag states are pretty happy with what they accomplished Wednesday.

December 11, 2019 | Bill McEwen

READ MORE »
RUPAUL, TONY HAWK, MAYA ANGELOU JOIN CALIFORNIA HALL OF FAME

SACRAMENTO — Drag queen and TV star RuPaul, late poet Maya Angelou and skateboarding legend Tony Hawk were among 10 people inducted Tuesday night into the California Hall of Fame.

The others were Brandi Chastain, two-time Women’s World Cup soccer champion and Olympic gold medalist; astrophysicist and National Science Foundation Director France A. Cordova; writer Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston; actor and comedian George Lopez; restaurateur and chef Wolfgang Puck; wine-maker Helen M. Turley and the Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr., a civil rights activist. Hawk did a few turns on his skateboard on a half-pipe erected outside the California Museum, where the event was held. “It’s a huge honor,” Hawk said. “When I started skating a long time ago, it was the furthest thing from cool. It was not something you chose as a career.” “I’m a very proud Californian. All my dreams were born here, they were fulfilled here,” Chastain said, noting that she used to drive two hours each way from San Jose to play for the Sacramento Storm women’s soccer team.

Cordova’s brother accepted her medal. She offered her thanks in a video from Antarctica, where she was preparing to head to the South Pole. Gov. Gavin Newsom and his....

CALIFORNIA CONSIDERS CALLING THC IN POT A RISK TO MOMS-TO-BE

LOS ANGELES — More than three years after California voters broadly legalized marijuana, a state panel is considering if its potent, high-inducing chemical — THC — should be declared a risk to pregnant women and require warnings. Studies have indicated that a rising number of mothers-to-be have turned to marijuana products for relief from morning sickness and headaches, though it’s effectiveness has not been backed by science.

Cannabis industry officials say too little sound research is available on THC to support such a move and warn that it could make marijuana companies a target for lawsuits with unverified claims of injuries from pot use during pregnancy. “That seems like an open-ended checkbook. How do we defend ourselves?” said Los Angeles dispensary owner Jerred Kiloh, who heads the United Cannabis Business Association, an industry group. Lawyers looking for a quick buck will say...

FRESNO BISHOP: AG’S REVIEW OF SEXUAL ABUSE BY PRIESTS ‘WELCOMED’

Fresno is among six Catholic dioceses expecting to be subpoenaed by the state attorney general as part of a probe into whether they’ve properly handled sexual abuse allegations against priests. All of the dioceses have been providing documents since May, church spokesman Kevin Eckery said Tuesday. The others are the archdioceses of Los Angeles and San Francisco, and the dioceses of Sacramento, San Jose, and Orange.

Bishop Brennan’s Statement
“I am committed to fully cooperating with the attorney general’s examination to the best of our ability in accordance with the law,” said Fresno Bishop Joseph V. Brennan in a statement released Tuesday. “To now undergo a review by the Attorney General’s Office is a welcomed process that will help us to advance efforts towards greater transparency; to further learn from our past, scrutinize our current performance in...
NAPAKIAK, Alaska — A school employee wearing a traditional pink Alaska Native smock called a kuspuk breezed through the hubbub in the cafeteria adorned with murals of purely Alaska scenes, zigzagging through children clutching presents and past uniformed soldiers wearing Santa caps. “Napakiak is happy today,” she proclaimed to principal Sally Benedict. That’s a rare emotion of late for the 300 or so residents of this western Alaska community. “We’re falling into the Kuskokwim River,” Benedict explains, because of erosion that is forcing everyone to move their town further inland. But for one day earlier this month, the Alaska National Guard gave folks a reason to smile, thanks to its “Operation Santa Claus” program, which featured the jolly old elf himself distributing gifts to the children.

“This lightens the load,” said Benedict, a former Detroit educator who arrived last summer. “This is sunshine for us, it’s a brightening of our day.” Now in its 63rd year, Operation Santa Claus has become a rarity among National Guard units. Defense officials have shut down the program everywhere but Alaska, where the mission survives because the state is so large and some communities are so remote.

The Guard Isn’t the Only Santa’s Helper

They’ve been to remote burgs with names like Koyukuk, Savoonga, Illiamna, Kuvshuk and Tuntulik. The visit to Napakiak involved two aircraft: a 400-mile trip in a small airplane from Anchorage, then a five-minute helicopter ride to the village. “We love this, we truly love coming here,” said Maj. Gen. Torrence Saxe, the adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard who found himself topping ice cream sundaes with cherries for the revelers in Napakiak. “This is a proud tradition.” The Guard isn’t the only Santa’s helper in the nation’s largest state. The Salvation Army is celebrating its 50th year of helping the Guard, collecting gifts, book bags and other items to be distributed. Major corporate sponsors like Costco and Walmart contribute to the program, and Rich Owens for years has provided the ice cream from his Tastee Freez restaurant in Anchorage. “It’s a labor of love,” said John Brackenbury, the Alaska divisional commander of The Salvation Army.

Erosion caused by the Kuskokwim, a 700 miles-long river that becomes an ice highway for travelers in the winter, has been an ongoing problem in Napakiak, but the pace has accelerated in the past few years.

At Least for One Day, Residents of Napakiak Didn’t Have to Worry About the Erosion

But at least for one day, the residents of Napakiak didn’t have to worry about the erosion creeping ever closer to their homes, and instead could focus on the smiles or even smudges of chocolate from the ice cream sundaes on their children’s faces.
Washington – Donald Trump wants more than acquittal. He wants vindication. With impeachment by the House appearing certain, the president has made clear that he views the next step, a trial in the GOP-controlled Senate, as his focus.

The president sees the senators not just as a jury deciding his fate, but as partners in a campaign to discredit and punish his Democratic opponents. His Senate allies aren’t so sure that’s a good idea. In recent weeks, Trump has devised a wish list of witnesses for the Senate trial, relishing the opportunity for his lawyers to finally cross-examine his accusers and argue the case that his actions toward Ukraine, including the July 25 call when he asked for a favor, were “perfect.” Trump and his allies have been building up the likely Senate trial, an effort to delegitimize the Democratic-controlled House’s impeachment process by contrast.

In the Senate, the Trump team has argued, the president would get the opportunity to challenge witnesses and call some of his own, such as House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, the still-anonymous intelligence community whistleblower, or even Joe Biden and Hunter Biden...

PELOSI ANNOUNCES AGREEMENT ON NORTH AMERICAN TRADE PACT

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Tuesday announced agreement on a modified North American trade pact, handing President Donald Trump a major Capitol Hill win on the same day that Democrats announced their impeachment charges against him. The California Democrat said the revamped U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement is a significant improvement over the original North American Free Trade Agreement, crediting Democratic negotiators for winning stronger provisions on enforcing the agreement.

“There is no question of course that this trade agreement is much better than NAFTA,” Pelosi said in announcing the agreement, saying the pact is “infinitely better than what was initially proposed by the administration.” Trump said the revamped trade pact will “be great” for the United States. “It will be the best and most important trade deal ever made by the USA. Good for everybody – Farmers, Manufacturers...
RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabian oil company Aramco surpassed Apple as the world’s most valuable public company Wednesday when its shares made their debut on the Saudi stock exchange, part of an ambitious shift away from the very fossil fuels the country’s economy depends on. The shares’ 10% rally brought state-owned Aramco’s value to $1.88 trillion. The 1.5% of the company that is listed has raised $25.6 billion, a record for an initial public offering. As of Tuesday’s close in the U.S., Apple was valued at $1.19 trillion.

Related Story: Saudi Aramco Gains 10% in Debut to Clinch Top Seat at $1.8T

Despite the success of the sale, the kingdom’s decision not to list the company on a larger foreign exchange points to concerns that a global flotation would raise. Listing shares outside Saudi Arabia would open up the company to greater disclosure rules and expose it to foreign laws at a time when the country is under scrutiny for its role in regional conflicts as well as for the killing of a dissident journalist. “A local Saudi offering is, by all accounts, a friendly audience of Saudi investors,” said Gianna Bern, the author of “Investing in Energy” and lecturer at the University of Notre Dame.

“A lot of international investors have felt that there should be a discount to Aramco shares due to perceived geopolitical risk. We actually believe geopolitical risk in Aramco is overstated and that the recent Sept. 14 attacks actually demonstrated Aramco’s resilience.” — Zachary Cefaratti, chief executive officer of Dalma Capital, which manages Saudi equity funds that invested in Aramco

She said the real test for Aramco will be a global offering, in another jurisdiction, such as London or Asia. Aramco, however, has said it will not sell more shares for at least another year. Wednesday’s shares were sold mainly to investors in the region: a 0.5% stake to individual retail investors in Gulf Arab states and 1% to institutional investors. Non-Saudi investors contributed just 23% of the institutional investment generated in the IPO, according to lead adviser Samba Capital. Saudi companies and government institutions raised 51% of the overall demand, Samba Capital said.

The Sale Raises Capital for the Public Investment Fund

Some analysts said that the surge on the first day of trading suggests heavy buying from investors close to the crown prince to make the operation a hit. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman plans to use the money raised from the sale of a sliver of the kingdom’s crown jewel to diversify the country’s economy and fund major national projects that create jobs for millions of young Saudis entering the workforce. The sale raises capital for the Public Investment Fund overseen by Prince Mohammed, but it is only part of a much larger transformation program to move the economy away from reliance on oil exports for revenue.

The share sale also has been an exercise in national prestige, with the 34-year-old crown prince looking for the flotation to value Aramco at $2 trillion. Zachary Cefaratti, chief executive officer of Dalma Capital, which manages Saudi equity funds that invested in Aramco, said the company could on day two of trading become the first in the world valued at over $2 trillion if the stock gains another 10%. The shares rose sharply in the first moment of trading Wednesday to hit the 10% limit on stock price fluctuation allowed by Saudi regulators. That pushed the price to 35.2 riyals, or $9.39 a share, where it held until closing at 3 p.m. The $2 trillion value was considered too...
**NOBEL WINNER’S ARMY DEFENSE BLASTED IN MYANMAR GENOCIDE CASE**

**December 12, 2019 | AP News**

The Hague, Netherlands — Lawyers seeking to halt what they allege is ongoing genocide in Myanmar have slammed leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s defense of her country’s armed forces, saying Thursday that the Nobel Peace Prize winner and former pro-democracy icon chose to ignore “unspeakable” crimes targeting Muslim civilians.

The United Nations’ top court is conducting emergency legal proceedings to determine if military personnel committed genocide against Myanmar’s Rohingya minority in 2017. The African nation of Gambia, acting on behalf of a large group of Muslim countries, requested the International Court of Justice hearings and alleges that human rights violations against the Rohingya continue. With maps, satellite imagery and graphic photos, Myanmar’s accusers have detailed what they insist is a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide — including the killing of civilians, raping of women and torching of houses — that forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh.

Gambia wants the U.N. court to take “all measures within its power to prevent all acts that amount to or contribute to the crime of genocide.” The U.N. court proceedings in The Hague produced the astonishing spectacle on Wednesday of Suu...