




**Get Ready
for California's
2026 Primary**
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Gold River Messenger

VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 4 *Serving Gold River and Sacramento County* APRIL 2026

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Blooming Hope and Raising Spirits



Aubrey Aquino, Matthew, Melody Inglett, Lorna Llorera and Morgan Lehman gather flowers for their bouquets at the Olivia Chan Foundation's Blooming Hope event.

**Story and photos
by Stephen B. Clazie**

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - What started as a simple idea, gathering to make bouquets, quickly became something much more meaningful. The Olivia Chan Foundation recently held their March event at a Sacramento church and is preparing to hold their third annual Blooming Hope fundraiser Saturday, April 18 at Movement Brewing in Rancho Cordova.

The foundation is a nonprofit corporation organized by Olivia's parents, Reina and Mel, along with their family, to create a safe environment where families and children feel supported and understood while navigating grief. "We understand that each person experiences grief in their own way, and as a result, families and children often struggle to navigate their loss, feeling alone and isolated," Reina said. "We want to create a supportive

community for individuals on their grief journey through peer-facilitated activities, with the hope that one day they can rediscover small moments of happiness," Mel added. **Blooming Hope and Raising Spirits** Of the annual fundraiser Reina said, "It is more than just a night out; it's a community-powered celebration of healing, hope and compassion." Featuring local craft beer, live *Continued on page 4*

Sacramento County Strengthens Weather Preparedness

**Sacramento County
News Release**

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - Sacramento County is strengthening its commitment to keeping residents safe during severe weather events. The County's Office of Emergency Services (OES) has officially renewed its StormReady designation through September 2030. StormReady is a recognition from the National Weather Service (NWS) that highlights strong emergency preparedness and communication systems.

The StormReady program helps communities build the infrastructure and coordination needed to protect lives and property before, during and after extreme weather. To earn and maintain this designation, agencies must meet criteria that include 24/7 emergency operations and monitoring, established emergency communication systems and ongoing public education and outreach efforts.

Sacramento County OES coordinates closely with regional and federal partners to ensure timely alerts and response strategies. Staff work year-round to prepare for hazards such as flooding, extreme heat and severe storms.

"This recognition reinforces the strength of our emergency systems and our commitment to protecting the community," said Emergency Operations Manager for Sacramento County OES, Jason D'Alessio.

In addition to the StormReady renewal, Sacramento County OES is also recognized as a Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador, a program led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This designation highlights the County's role in promoting weather awareness, safety education and community resilience.

Residents are encouraged to stay connected, sign up for local alerts at <https://www.smart911.com/smart911/ref/login.action?pa=sacoes> and make emergency plans to help keep themselves and their families safe. To learn more about the partnership between Sacramento County and NWS and how its storm ready status aims to keep residents safe visit <https://www.weather.gov/stormready>.

Women's Empowerment Receives \$50,000 from Wells Fargo

**Women's
Empowerment
News Release**

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Wells Fargo recently granted \$50,000 to Women's Empowerment for its housing and workforce development programs for Sacramento women experiencing homelessness.

"Wells Fargo continues to be one of our most steadfast supporters, always prioritizing the women and children in Sacramento who are experiencing homelessness and ensuring they have the tools they need to find jobs with upward mobility and safe homes they can afford," said Lisa Culp, executive director, Women's Empowerment. Grant funds will support Women's Empowerment's initial nine-week employment readiness and empowerment program, as well as paid training programs for its graduates and its Trellis Gardens transitional workforce



Women's Empowerment celebrates the graduation of its quarterly program for women experiencing homelessness in December 2025. The nonprofit recently received a grant from Wells Fargo to continue its work. Photo courtesy of Women's Empowerment

housing program. Women's Empowerment is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year as the most comprehensive job-readiness program in the Sacramento area designed specifically to help women break the generational cycle of homelessness for themselves and their children. Since 2001, more than

2,000 women have graduated from the program with their more than 4,000 children. Women's Empowerment is funded through private donations from the community and grants. To make a donation: www.womens-empowerment.org. Wells Fargo is committed to helping communities thrive with financially resilient

families, vibrant small businesses and affordable places to call home. The company's grantmaking focuses on financial mobility, housing access and affordability, and small business growth. Wells Fargo has donated more than \$2 billion over the past five years through its foundation. For more information, visit www.WellsFargo.com. ★



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Queens in Action

Purple Pageant marks a decade of empowering young women on and off stage

By Omella Rossi

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - For a decade, the Purple Pageant has been more than crowns and sashes; it has been a launching pad for leadership, confidence and community service. Since its debut in 2016, the Greater Sacramento-based pageant has nurtured young women and girls to become not just queens on stage, but leaders in their communities.

Lisa D. Taylor, the visionary behind the Purple Pageant, said the inspiration came from her own pageant journey.

"I have run in 13 pageants and won 12 titles, but I didn't see very many young girls or women that looked like me," Taylor said. That absence motivated her to create a space where multiculturalism, mentorship and service could shine alongside talent and grace.

With more than 30 years of community involvement in the Sacramento area, Taylor has built a system where giving back is key.

"What you put into the community is what you get out. You can't build an empire alone," Taylor said.

The pageant emphasizes leadership, confidence and service, and Taylor sees those qualities grow in participants over time. Mentors work closely with each contestant to identify goals, create career development plans and offer constructive guidance.

"The Purple Pageant has been a transformational force in my life, shaping me as a woman, mother, and entrepreneur," said Queen Tamara Johnson. "Through this experience, I found my voice and gained the confidence to step into rooms of influence I once felt unqualified for. The pageant helped me



The pageant emphasizes leadership, confidence and service, and Lisa D. Taylor sees those qualities grow in participants over time. Photo courtesy of Lisa D. Taylor, Purple Pageant

recognize my gifts and turn them into action. It didn't just change my life, it expanded it, positioning me to lead, build and give back in ways I never imagined."

The Purple Pageant's programs start early. Princess and Ambassador programs lay the foundation for participants to develop leadership and community skills before vying for the title of Queen. Beyond stage presence, the pageant incorporates life skills, etiquette and mental health awareness into every aspect of its programming. Contestants attend galas, parades, fashion shows and even golf tournaments, learning to navigate a variety of social and professional settings.

Taylor calls mentorship "a trusted, experienced guide who facilitates personal, professional and emotional growth." She



Purple Pageant, the Greater Sacramento-based pageant, has nurtured young women and girls to become not just queens on stage, but leaders in their communities. Photo courtesy of Lisa D. Taylor, Purple Pageant

says one of the most rewarding moments since launching the pageant has been witnessing her own growth in giving back to others.

"Seeing the growth within myself to give back, that's priceless," Taylor said.

Over the last 10 years, the pageant has helped teens graduate with honors, attend college and

even launch businesses. Adult participants have pursued careers in nursing, the military and writing, often fueled by the skills and confidence gained through the program. Internationally, the Purple Pageant now has queens in Kenya and Nigeria, with plans to expand further.

The pageant's mission is clear: to empower young women

through community service, etiquette, life skills and leadership, all while fostering inclusivity. Taylor hopes the next generation will carry this mission forward by starting new chapters and mentoring future queens.

"Join the Purple Pageant and gain the skills to open a chapter in your own community," Taylor advises aspiring participants.

The 10-year anniversary event is set for April 26 at Granite Bay Country Club, starting at 3 p.m., promising surprises for guests while celebrating a decade of achievements. Those interested in supporting the pageant as volunteers, sponsors or mentors can contact Taylor at 916-856-4536.

As Taylor puts it, the Purple Pageant is not just about who wears the crown, it's about preparing young women to wear it well, on and off the stage. ★

Allergy season is in full bloom.

Find relief with same-day care.

It's that time of year. Runny nose, sore eyes, and—bless you. If you're experiencing the effects of seasonal allergies, we can help. Dignity Health offers convenient same-day care options throughout Greater Sacramento to get you through the season—including Express Primary Care in Elk Grove and Roseville, and Urgent Care in Midtown Sacramento and Woodland. Get in, get seen, and get on with your day. Visit dignityhealth.org/get-care-today to schedule an appointment.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Better Brain Health Seminar | Saturday, April 18 from 2 - 4 p.m.

Gain actionable tools from geriatric psychologist Dr. Linda Gillman to promote long-term cognitive wellness.

Dementia Support Group | Tuesday, April 21 from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

Our monthly group brings together individuals, caregivers and families to share experiences, find understanding and support one another through the journey.

Dine & Discover: A Culinary Spotlight Event | Wednesday, June 3 at 4 p.m.

Enjoy a complimentary chef-prepared meal while you learn about our community, meet our team and discover the supportive lifestyle our residents enjoy.

***RSVP to Attend!* 916-562-1735 | eskaton.org/gr-events**



PoppTalk

With Mary Jane Popp

Finding Peace

Do you ever wonder, with all that is happening in our country and around the world, if we will ever find peace? According to Susan Allan, “Peace isn’t going to find us; we must find peace”, and that is her mission. I asked her how can we come together when the world is struggling with anger, either their own or someone else’s? All you have to do is look at how many people suffer from PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and they have never even been near a battlefield and they waste their lives on anger and fear. So, we got to the essence of trying to make peace the goal when she was on my POPPTALK Radio Show. It’s chronic anger she told me. She knows because she survived a life-threatening divorce because she knew how to calm herself before she said a word. She realized that the first thing she needed to do was empathize with her former husband’s panic about money, if she planned to survive. In a few minutes, his Vietnam-generated PTSD episode was over, and she calmly and secretly planned her dog’s and her departure, and she is now 28 years later and alive. That’s when she created the 6 Part Conversation for everyone who would need to do what she had done and other dangerous situations. Now she shares how to communicate the skills that transform relationships, careers and so much more.

1. CALM YOURSELF FIRST. Pause before speaking. A few slow conscious breaths can prevent words that escalate a situation.

2. LOWER YOUR TONE OF VOICE. A calm voice signals safety and helps others settle down.

3. START WITH EMPATHY. Saying “I

can hear that you feel worried and need some help” allows people to be heard and diminishes defensiveness.

4. REPLACE DEMANDS WITH REQUESTS. Try asking, “Would you be willing to...?” instead of issuing commands.

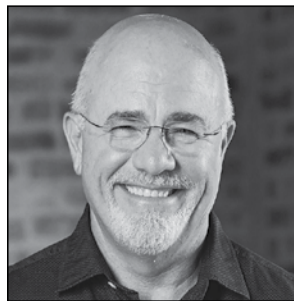
5. TRANSLATE COMPLAINTS INTO NEEDS. Behind most criticism is a deeper need for respect and understanding.

6. REMEMBER THE GOOD MOMENTS. Reminding someone of positive shared experiences after they receive empathy from you softens emotional walls.

7. CREATE SOLUTIONS TOGETHER. Shift the conversation toward making a cooperative and practical plan. **USE A POWERFUL BREATHING SKILL TO RESET YOUR BRAIN.** Emotional regulation, beginning with brain breathing, prevents conflicts from spiraling. **8. CONSIDER THE BEST STRATEGIES TO MEET EVERYONE’S NEEDS, NOT JUST YOUR OWN.**

9. CHOOSE PEACE OVER WINNING. Protecting relationships is more valuable than winning arguments.

Susan Allan is a renowned coach, certified mediator and author of several books. But her heart is in the creation of The Peace Forum and Heart space trainings. For nearly 30 years, millions of people have learned how to create lasting peace, love, and cooperation using her 7 Stages of Peace. If you want to see more of what you can do to make peace a priority in your life, you can go to www.susanallan.org. Life can be super stressful, and we need to have all the tools we can get to survive! **YOU CAN AND YOU WILL!** ★



Dave Ramsey

Dear Dave,

I have two cars. One is paid for, and I owe \$23,000 on the other. These are my only vehicles. I’d like to sell the one I still owe money on, but no one wants to pay enough to cover the balance. I make \$85,000 a year, and I also have enough money in savings, with plenty left over, to cover the difference on one of the offers. Still, I was wondering if there’s a rule of thumb to determine whether or not to sell a car in this kind of situation?

– Jimmy

Dear Jimmy,

If you really love the car, and by really focusing and saving like crazy you can pay off everything else in your life, except your

Dave Ramsey Says

Time to Sell a Car?

home in 18 to 24 months, I’m okay with you keeping the car. But if you can’t? Sorry, It’s time to sell.

But I want you to hear this next part loud and clear. It also may be time to sell if the if the total value of all your vehicles—I’m talking cars, trucks, boats, jet skis, and their relatives—is equal to half, or more than half, of your annual income. Why? Because these are all things that depreciate quickly. You don’t want half of your income wrapped up in things that are going down in value.

You can probably pay this thing off in less than two years if you really focus on making it happen, and you haven’t got a bunch of other debt. But if you don’t like the car, or you don’t want to work that hard to keep it, then sell the thing and write a check for the difference. I mean, when it’s all said and done,

it’s just a car. And anyway, you said you’d have plenty of cash left over in savings if you went this direction, right?

But remember, if this is your decision, start rebuilding your savings to its previous level right after by putting what would have gone for car payments back into your savings account. You never know when life might throw something unexpected at you!

– Dave

Dave Ramsey is a nine-time national bestselling author, personal finance expert and host of The Ramsey Show. He has appeared on Good Morning America, CBS This Morning, Today, Fox News, CNN, Fox Business and many more. Since 1992, Dave has helped people take control of their money, build wealth and enhance their lives. He also serves as CEO for Ramsey Solutions. ★

Explore Summer Learning Opportunities in San Juan Unified



Summer programs offered by San Juan Unified School District include a specialized summer program for newcomer English learners to boost English language skills and build confidence before the school year. Photo courtesy of San Juan Unified School District

San Juan Unified School District News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Students across San Juan Unified School District will have opportunities to learn, explore and stay engaged this summer through a variety of programs designed to support academic growth and hands-on experiences.

Programs include the Camp Invention Summer Program, where students can explore creativity and problem-solving

through interactive activities, and the Early Learning Academy, which helps young learners build important early skills as they prepare for school.

High school students can also participate in credit recovery opportunities to help them stay on track toward graduation.

Families can learn more about available programs by visiting sanjuan.edu/summer, where information will be updated as additional details and opportunities become available. ★

Blooming Hope and Raising Spirits



Ella and Lauren Madeira thank Reina and Mel Chan for turning a simple bouquet-making gathering into a meaningful day of connection, remembrance, and shared hope.

Continued from page 1

music, a silent auction and inspiring stories, the annual event brings people together to support children and families navigating the pain of grief.

“Every ticket purchased directly funds grief support programs in the Sacramento region,” Mel Chan told guests, inviting the community to come together on April 18 to raise a glass, lift spirits and make a lasting impact.

Reina added, “After discovering the Dougy Center, Mel and I flew to Portland to get trained. They’re an amazing organization and have been a huge support for us.”

Reina and Mel’s goal is to bring the Dougy Center model to Sacramento by training all team members and volunteers in its approach. The Olivia Chan Foundation also aims to establish a grief center.

Mel said it would be “a physical place that children and families can visit, where we can implement all these programs free of charge for the community.”

The Dougy Center is a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon, that offers support groups and services for grieving children and young adults. Its peer-support model made it the first program of its kind in the United States. The organization serves approximately 400 children and 250 adults from the Portland metropolitan area each month, free of charge.

Founded in 1982 in tribute to Dougy Turno, who died of a brain tumor at age 13, the center has supported more than 20,000 children and their family members since its establishment.

“We’re excited to invite you to Brewing Hope 2026 on Saturday, April 18. Doors open at 4:30 p.m. at Movement Brewing, 11151 Trade Center Drive, Suite 104/105, Rancho Cordova,” Reina and Mel said.

Tickets are available at

oliviachanfoundation.org.

Olivia’s Story

We always wanted a family, but after four years of heartbreak, disappointment and failed IVF attempts, we knew having children naturally wasn’t in the cards. So, we began the adoption process. In 2008, we brought home our son, Nicholas. In 2012, we welcomed his sister, Olivia.

She weighed just 5.5 pounds but made her presence known from day one. We had nine precious years with her before a rare and aggressive cancer took her from us. “Your daughter is the 1%,” the doctors said.

Olivia was joy in human form. She was fun-loving, spunky and quick to laugh; a girly girl and a tomboy all at once. She loved rainbows, unicorns, mermaids and dresses, but also wrestled with her brother and played tackle football with her dad. She loved dancing, hugging and playing everything, bike riding, soccer, Uno, arts and crafts, and video games with Nic. She even taught herself to beatbox and was amazing at it.

Olivia loved making people laugh. She wanted every night to be family night, especially if it meant board games where her competitive spirit could shine. She loved fiercely and deeply, and that love made her a healer, even at nine. She stood up for others, championed the underdog, and offered comfort with a hug and a kind word. She never wanted anyone to hurt. She wrote notes to lift people’s spirits, even the mailman’s.

She simply wanted everyone to be happy.

In her spirit, we created this foundation; to help others in their time of need, to lift them when life feels darkest, and to guide them when the world no longer makes sense.

Olivia was everything; tender, sweet and full of spunk...just like a sprinkle cookie. ★

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Paul V. Scholl**

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Gold River Messenger

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Get Ready for California's 2026 Primary

Your Questions About Voting, Answered

By CalMatters Staff
CalMatters.org

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Where do I vote? Am I registered to vote? Does everyone get a ballot in the mail? Get the answers to your election day questions ahead of California's June 2 primary election.

How do I vote? Does everyone get a ballot in the mail? Yes. Under state law, vote-by-mail ballots are sent to every active registered voter.

When will I receive my mail-in-ballot? Counties will begin mailing ballots May 4.

How do I return my mail-in ballot? Mail it to your county elections office; to be counted, ballots have to be postmarked on or before June 2 and received by election offices by June 9. Drop it off at a ballot drop box, vote center or polling location anywhere in the state. Ask someone you trust to do it for you, but that person can't receive payment for doing it.

Can I vote in person? Where is my polling place or vote center? Yes, although mailing your ballot as soon as possible is the best way to get your vote counted fast. You can find out where to vote in the following ways. Visit <https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>, text "VOTE" to GOVOTE (468-8683), call the secretary of state's hotline at (800) 345-VOTE, check your county Voter Information Guide or contact your county elections office

If you live in one of 30 counties, you'll have increased options, including as many as 10 days of in-person early voting.

How do I register to vote? Am I registered to vote? You can check the secretary of state's website (<https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>). You'll need to enter your name, date of birth and either your California driver license, identification card number or the last four digits of your Social Security number. If you don't have those available, contact your county elections office or the secretary of state via email or phone at 800-345-8683.

If you've changed your name since the last time you voted, or if you moved and didn't notify the Department of Motor Vehicles or U.S. Postal Service, you may have to register again. If you haven't voted in several consecutive general elections, your registration may have been canceled.

How do I register? Visit <https://registertovote.ca.gov/>. You'll need the same information as above.



Where do I vote? Am I registered to vote? Does everyone get a ballot in the mail? Get the answers to your election day questions ahead of California's June 2 primary election. Photo courtesy Freepik

If the DMV has your signature on file, you'll be able to complete the process online. If not, you'll need to print, sign and mail your completed application to your county elections office. You can also pick up a paper application at elections offices, any DMV office and at many post offices, public libraries and government offices. You'll be contacted when your application is approved, or if you need to provide more information.

What happens if I miss the voter registration deadline? The last day to register online for the primary election is May 18. If you are registering or re-registering less than 15 days before May 18, you must complete same-day voter registration and request your ballot in person at your county elections office or polling location.

How do I change my political party if I'm already registered? You'll need to re-register to vote.

What if I need help with voting? What if I need voter information in a language other than English? The secretary of state's office has voter instructions in the following languages: Spanish, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai and Vietnamese. Your county elections office may offer additional languages.

When will I receive my voter guide? The statewide voter

information guide will be available online by April and will be mailed to voters later that month.

What am I voting on? The June primary election is the first opportunity for Californians to choose which candidates will appear on the general election ballot in November. Unlike some other states, California's primaries are nonpartisan, so the top two vote-getters in each race will advance to the November election, regardless of political party.

The ballot is packed with state and federal races, most notably the race to succeed Gov. Gavin Newsom, who is term-limited and cannot run for reelection. In addition to the governor's race, voters will be asked to choose candidates for Congress, the state Legislature and a slate of statewide offices including insurance commissioner and treasurer.

Can I leave work to vote? Yes. California requires time off for voting if employees don't have enough time outside work hours. You can take as much time as you need, but employers are only required to pay for a maximum of two hours. Employers may require advance notice. The time off must be at the beginning or the end of your shift. Employers are required to post a notice about this 10 days before a statewide election.

How can I track my ballot?

Visit california.ballottrax.net/voter/ to register for California's BallotTrax tool, where you can check your ballot status and opt in to receive email or text notifications.

Is my ballot safe? Yes, voting by mail or dropping your ballot in an approved drop box is a safe and efficient way to vote. Fraudulent voting is uncommon and incredibly difficult given California's strict voter verification procedures. Mail-in ballots will only be sent to voters whose address and identity have been verified by county election officials. Their vote will only be counted once those officials verify that the voter's signature on the envelope matches the one on file.

You can find more information about California's election and voting process on the secretary of state's website. The office takes any allegations of election fraud seriously. Anyone can submit a complaint using the following form sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/voter-complaint.

What if I have special circumstances? What should I do if I marked my ballot wrong, or otherwise messed it up? If you haven't turned it in yet, you can exchange your mail ballot for a new one at an elections office, ask an election official at the polling place for a new ballot, or

vote using a provisional ballot. If you have mailed or turned in your ballot, there's no way to fix it. Contact your county elections office for a new ballot.

What if the signature on my ballot doesn't match the one on file? County election officials check the signatures on the return envelope against signatures on your voter registration card to make sure no one tries to improperly cast your ballot. It still remains confidential; the ballot is separated from the envelope before it is counted.

Voters with ballots with missing signatures or ones that don't match are notified and given an opportunity to correct the problem before the election is certified.

What happens if I don't receive my ballot? Contact your county elections office.

Help! I dropped off my ballot to a drop box in the wrong county. Don't worry – the county will pass it on to the correct elections office.

I forgot to detach the stub from my ballot. Can I open the sealed envelope and reseal it myself? You can, but the secretary of state's office recommends contacting your local county elections office. They'll ultimately be processing your ballot, and they can offer the best guidance on whether you should reopen it or just leave the stub attached. ★



Election Information

June 2, 2026, Statewide Direct Primary Election

Vote Early and Vote by Mail



May 4 Ballots begin to arrive by mail. Official Ballot Drop Boxes are now open.



May 18 Close of registration. Register today!



May 23 11-Day Vote Centers open through Election Day.



May 30 All Vote Centers open through Election Day.



June 2 Election Day! Last day to turn in your ballot.

Vote Early! Don't wait for Election Day.

Take advantage of early voting and avoid the lines! You can return your ballot in the mail, at any Official Ballot Drop Box, or at any Vote Center. No postage is necessary.

Track your Ballot!

Sign up for "Where's My Ballot?" with BallotTrax, a free ballot-tracking and alert system. It is available to all voters who wish to track the status of their Vote by Mail ballot from printed to accepted. Scan the QR code or visit www.wheresmyballot.com



Vote Early! Vote by Mail.

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MEALS ON WHEELS SACRAMENTO COUNTY

San Juan Unified Employees of the Year Recognized

San Juan Unified School District News Release

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - San Juan Unified School District is honored to announce the 2026 Classified Employees of the Year. These outstanding staff members were nominated by our San Juan Unified community for their incredible contributions in supporting the success of our students.

Debbie Armstrong, Nutrition Services Cook at Del Campo High School: Armstrong's dedication to student wellness and nutrition at Del Campo High School is seen in everything she does. As a cook, she consistently finds ways to improve and innovate, ensuring students have access to meals that support their health and success. Her genuine care for students shines through in the pride she takes in her work each day.

William Dreifus, Technology Support Specialist for Technology Services: Since 2017, Dreifus has played an integral role in supporting requests submitted to Technology Services. His consistent reliability and responsiveness have earned the trust of San Juan Unified staff, who often refer to him as their "go-to" resource for technical support.

Joseph Lausmann, Operations Technician for Transportation: Lausmann's commitment to service during these past nine years has made a lasting impact across San Juan Unified. As his nominator shared, "When he first started at transportation, he was outstanding when caring for students with special needs, not just driving them, but truly taking care of them."

Cortney Lloret, Instructional Assistant, Alternative Learning Center at Meraki High School: Lloret brings professionalism, positivity and exceptional skill to her role as an instructional



The San Juan Unified 2026 Classified Employees of the Year pose with their certificates of recognition. Photo courtesy of San Juan Unified School District

assistant at Meraki High School. Widely recognized as the organizational backbone of the school, she keeps complex projects, calendars and daily logistics running smoothly while anticipating the needs of both students and staff.

Mikalai Lutsyk, Lead Custodian at Grand Oaks Elementary School: Lutsyk has served as lead custodian for seven years and is widely recognized for his strong work ethic, professionalism and deep pride in his school community. Known for his kindness and steady presence, he manages daily requests with efficiency, a positive

attitude and a gentle sense of humor, even during unexpected challenges.

Omar Marroquin, School Community Specialist at Encina High School: For nearly a decade at Encina High School, Marroquin has served as a dedicated school community specialist, building strong, meaningful relationships with students, staff and families. In addition to his role supporting the school community, he coaches five different sports throughout the year, further deepening his connection with students both in and out of the classroom.

Peter McGuinness, Lead Electrician for Maintenance and Operations: For more than 16 years, McGuinness has been a dependable and highly skilled member of San Juan Unified's Maintenance and Operations team. As lead electrician, he brings deep technical expertise, steady leadership and a consistent positive attitude to his work each day.

Joanne McLaughlin Strauch, Site Secretary at Earl LeGette Elementary School, Jamileh Piran, Health Instructional Assistant for Health Services: Strauch is a valued member of the Earl LeGette Elementary

School community, known for her exceptional work performance, leadership and dedication to students, families and staff. Her contributions have made a meaningful impact at her school site and across San Juan Unified.

Jamileh Piran, Health Instructional Assistant for Health Services: Each day, Piran makes a meaningful difference in the lives of students and families at the Ralph Richardson Center. Her dedication and compassion are especially impactful for families of students with severe disabilities who are new to the school and often new to the country. ★

Social Security Matters I'll Be 65 Soon and am Working. Must I enroll in Medicare?



By Russell Gloor, AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor

Dear Rusty: I will be 65 in October and I am working full-time. My goal is to work until age 67, which is my full retirement age, or until age 70. I heard I have to apply for Medicare Part A only. Is this true or will I be penalized? And do I have to go to the Social Security office to do this, or can I do it online? And then will they be still giving me my Medicare through the next five years of working, or do I have to pay for something? I will have my own healthcare insurance. Thank you for your help. **Signed: Confused**

Dear Confused: There are two things you should be aware of:

1. You do not need to claim Social Security benefits when you enroll in Medicare
 2. You do not need to enroll in Medicare at age 65 if you have "creditable" healthcare coverage from your employer ("creditable" is a group plan with at least 20 participants)
- Thus, it is perfectly okay for you to delay taking your Social Security benefits until age 67 (your SS full retirement age), or even until age 70 when you will get the maximum SS benefit you are entitled to. And if you now have "creditable" healthcare coverage from your employer,

you can delay enrolling in Medicare until such time as your employer's healthcare coverage ends. When you stop working, you will enter a Medicare Special Enrollment Period (SEP), during which you can enroll in Medicare without incurring a Late Enrollment Penalty.

Whenever you decide to enroll in Medicare (or Social Security), you will not need to visit your local SSA office to do so. You can enroll in Medicare either online at www.ssa.gov/medicare/ sign-up or you can call SSA at 1.800.772.1213 to make an appointment to enroll in Medicare on the telephone. Similarly, when you are ready to claim Social Security, you can do so online at www.ssa.gov/apply or you can call 1.800.772.1213 to make an appointment to apply for SS over the phone. To apply online, however, you should first create your personal "my Social Security" online account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount. Creating your online SS account now (at age 65) will facilitate later online enrollment and will also provide you with an estimate of your SS benefit amounts at various ages – e.g., now at age 65, at your FRA of 67, or at age 70. And that should help you decide when it is best for you to enroll in Medicare.

- You should verify with your employer's health insurance provider that they don't require you to enroll in Medicare at age 65. Most employer plans don't, but some do.
- You don't need to enroll in Medicare Part A or Part B now as long as your employer's coverage is creditable. And it's

okay to enroll in Medicare a couple of months prior to your employer's creditable healthcare coverage ending (when you stop working), requesting that your Medicare coverage starts when your employer's healthcare ends. This will ensure that there is no gap in your healthcare coverage. If your employer coverage is creditable, you will not suffer a Medicare Late Enrollment Penalty for enrolling after age 65.

- If you claim Social Security benefits at any time prior to your full retirement age (FRA) and are still working, you will be subject to Social Security's Annual Earnings Test (AET), which limits how much you can earn before they take away some of your benefits. The AET lasts until you reach your FRA (67), after which you can earn as much as you like without your SS benefits being affected.

- Whenever you claim your Social Security benefits, you will be required to take Medicare Part A, which is coverage for inpatient hospitalization services. Medicare Part A is free because you are also eligible for Social Security. But you don't need to enroll in Part A at age 65 unless you also claim Social Security.

- Medicare Part B, which is coverage for outpatient healthcare services (doctors, medical tests, etc.), is optional if you have creditable employer coverage as explained above. You do not need to enroll in Medicare Part B (for which there is a monthly premium of \$202.90 in 2026) until your employer's creditable healthcare coverage ends, even if you claim Social Security earlier. ★



Iran's Other Enemies

through the waterway.

The Iranians have struck the Gulf states with missiles and drones by the thousands. The ongoing blitz is damaging energy infrastructure and destroying the reputation of the Gulf states as an oasis of calm and economic development in an otherwise turbulent region.

There's no insurance policy against having a fanatic millenarian state as a neighbor, while nothing quite concentrates the mind like an unprovoked drone attack on one of your luxury hotels -- or your airports, oil fields and data centers.

Iran likes to pretend that it is only striking at military infrastructure, but that's absurd.

As long as Iran is run on its current basis, it is a grave danger to these countries, which, prior to the war, tried to keep their heads down or even get closer to Iran as a way to mitigate the threat.

This is the approach that the Saudis tried after an Iran-backed attack hampered the country's oil production in 2019.

That experiment is now done. According to published reports, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, privately urged Trump to launch the war even as the Saudis talked up diplomacy in public, and now MBS has been telling Trump to go all the way and topple the Iranian government.

The New York Times relates that the Saudi

leader "is concerned that if Mr. Trump pulls back now, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East will be left to confront an emboldened and furious Iran on their own."

The UAE has been a particular Iranian target. Its ambassador to the U.S. wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* recently, "We need a conclusive outcome that addresses Iran's full range of threats: nuclear capabilities, missiles, drones, terror proxies and blockades of international sea lanes."

One is tempted to conclude that the Gulf states are "all neocons now." That would be overstating it, though. Despite getting hit by Iran, Oman is maintaining its traditional posture as a mediator and Qatar is always a bad actor.

Much depends on how the war ultimately turns out, but it is easy to see the Gulf states looking to the United States for greater security guarantees and warming up further to Israel, which is demonstrating the military might to confront an Iran that has no compunction about lashing out at states that are doing it no harm.

It may be easy for hostile U.S. observers to portray the Iran war as about Israel and only Israel, but the Gulf states unfortunately know better -- and have the battle damage to prove it.

Rich Lowry is editor of *The National Review*.

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