

Local

B2 Local reports B3 Editorial & Opinion B4 Obituaries

S.D. VOTE MARCH 5 TO FILL MONTGOMERY STEPPE'S SEAT

Candidates seeking to run have until Dec. 14 to gather enough signatures

BY DAVID GARRICK

SAN DIEGO

San Diego will hold a special election to fill the City Council seat of Monica Montgomery Steppe on March 5, combining it with the state primary election that day.

Montgomery Steppe said last

week that she was resigning her District 4 council seat effective Dec. 5, after winning a seat on the county Board of Supervisors in a special election to replace Nathan Fletcher.

Leading candidates to replace Montgomery Steppe include her chief of staff Henry Foster, mayoral aide Chida Warren-Darby and civil rights activist Shane Harris.

District 4 includes some of San Diego's lowest-income neighborhoods in the southeastern part of the city. The district won't have a

representative for several months.

The absence of Montgomery Steppe will reduce the number of council members from nine to eight, potentially leading to more frequent 4-4 deadlocks on contentious issues.

Candidates seeking to replace Montgomery Steppe have until Dec. 14 to gather enough signatures to qualify for the ballot. The nomination period opened Wednesday.

If no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the votes on March 5, there will be a runoff be-

tween the top two finishers. The runoff, which would have to be held within 90, would likely be in June.

The City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to combine the special election with the state primary, which will also include city elections for mayor, city attorney and five council seats.

The council couldn't appoint a replacement for Montgomery Steppe because there is more than one year remaining in her council term, which began last December and is scheduled to run

through December 2026.

San Diego's election rules require special elections — and prohibit appointments — when an elected leader leaves office more than one year before their term ends.

The council could have held the special election on a different date than the state primary, but that would have prevented the city from sharing election costs with other agencies and been more expensive.

The possible runoff for Mont-
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TRI-CITY HOSPITAL HACKING FALLOUT: LAYOFFS

Letter from CEO says 60-day notices given to number of staff

BY PAUL SISSON

NORTH COUNTY

Tri-City Medical Center appears to be recovering from a recent cyberattack, but remains mum on news of an apparent 100-employee layoff that has occurred since the digital breach happened on Nov. 9.

In a short statement, hospital management said that the Oceanside facility is "making significant progress in the restoration of systems, though we do not yet have a firm timetable for full restoration."

No information was provided on whether patient information was stolen during the attack, and Tri-City says its investigation of the incident is still ongoing.

A recent letter sent to members of the "Tri-City Family" by Dr. Gene Ma, the organization's chief executive officer, dated Nov. 13, mentions that 60-day layoff notices have gone out to an unspecified number of employees, with the executive noting in writing that staffing levels are designed to serve a number of patients that was 24 percent higher than is currently the case.

"This reduction includes staff at all levels of the organization, including administration," Ma's letter states.

The letter did not specify the number of layoffs that are to occur, and no notice had yet been posted on the California Employment Development Department's website, but an employee, who asked to remain anonymous, said that 100 workers are affected.

That employee added that the attack on Tri-City
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SUPPORTING HOMELESS YOUTH



ALEJANDRO TAMAYO U-T

San Diego Youth Services staff, advocates and young people walk in the rain Wednesday in downtown San Diego holding signs to raise awareness for youth who are experiencing homelessness. The event started with speakers at San Diego City Hall.

POWAY UNIFIED SCHOOLS CHIEF ACCUSED OF HARASSMENT

Allegations involve softball players; superintendent says claims are not true

BY JULIE GALLANT

POWAY

Poway Unified School District trustees are seeking an independent investigation into concerns about the Del Norte High School softball program, following accusations that the district's top adminis-

trator abused her power.

The school board held a special meeting Wednesday after parents, students and coaches raised their allegations at a school board meeting last week, alleging Superintendent Marian Kim Phelps harassed students because she believed they had not clapped enough when her daughter, a pitcher on the team, won an award at a banquet in May.

Del Norte softball coach Tom Peronto told trustees at the meeting that Phelps contacted students late at night after the awards cere-

mony, threatened graduating seniors that they could not participate in graduation unless they apologized and saying junior players would lose their right to participate in school activities. Phelps has denied those allegations.

School board President Darshana Patel read a statement from the board Wednesday after the closed session. She said the board "is aware that some members of the public are making misinformed claims about student and employee conduct involving the Del Norte

High School softball program."

Patel said the board had met three times about the matter and had reviewed hundreds of pages of witness statements and supporting documents related to the Del Norte administration's investigation of and issues regarding the softball program.

She said the board "took action within the purview of our authority regarding employee conduct." She did not elaborate.

"Our priority in classrooms and
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CLOSED FOR MONTHS, PEDWEST CROSSING SET TO REOPEN TODAY

Northbound pedestrians can use border entry from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.

BY ALEXANDRA MENDOZA

SAN YSIDRO

Just in time for the holidays, U.S. Customs and Border Protection announced that the PedWest pedestrian crossing at the San Ysidro Port of Entry will reopen today, after being closed for two months.

The border crossing will be in operation only in the northbound direction from Tijuana into San Diego during limited hours from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., a spokesperson with CBP said.

"CBP will continue to assess its resources and operational tempo with the goal of resuming normal operations as quickly as possible," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Mexican authorities have said they are in conversation with CBP officials to also reopen for southbound traffic soon.

The reopening does not include



ANA RAMIREZ U-T FILE

The PedWest crossing closed in September so CBP could help process a large number of arriving migrants.

the I-94 permit office that was previously located outside the crosswalk, the spokesperson confirmed.

In mid-September, PedWest temporarily closed so that the agency could assist Border Patrol in processing an increasing number of asylum seekers arriving at the border, officials said.

Since then, all pedestrian flow

through San Ysidro has been concentrated at the PedEast border crossing.

In a press release Wednesday CBP said it will "continue to evaluate the situation along the border and make operational changes as necessary."

"We will continue to support
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MARINE IN TEEN SEX CASE WILL FACE COURT-MARTIAL

Missing girl, 14, found in June in man's barracks at Camp Pendleton

BY TERI FIGUEROA

NORTH COUNTY

A Camp Pendleton Marine accused of having sex with a missing 14-year-old girl who was found in his barracks last summer will face court-martial, military officials said Wednesday.

The decision comes three months after a preliminary hearing for Pfc. Avery Rosario, whose case grabbed attention after the girl's aunt posted a TikTok video raising questions and alleging the girl had been trafficked. The decision was made by Brig. Gen. Andrew Niebel, commanding general of 1st Marine Logistics Group.

Rosario is due in a Camp Pendleton court for arraignment today. A trial date likely will be set then, officials said.

"As always, the command respects the legal process, the rights of the accused, as well as any other individuals affected by the case," reads a statement issued by the 1st

Marine Logistics Group. "We will continue to release information as transparently as possible without interfering with the legal process."

Earlier this year, Rosario was charged with sexual assault and violating liberty restrictions for leaving the base without permission. The charges indicated the alleged crimes or violations happened June 27. His preliminary hearing in the case was Aug. 17 at Camp Pendleton.

Rosario's attorneys argued at that hearing that their client met the girl on Tinder — a dating app for adults — where her profile said she was 21 years old. They said Rosario believed she was in her early 20s, and that she had told their client and his friends as much.

Military police at Camp Pendleton found the girl in a barracks June 28. The military notified the county Sheriff's Department, and the girl was reunited with her family.

According to the Sheriff's Department, the teen's grandmother said the girl ran away from home June 9. She had run away on previous occasions but quickly returned. This time, with the teen
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