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K.C. ALFRED U-T

SOARING ABOVE SURF

Daniel Traxler kiteboards in Ocean Beach as high winds and heavy surf hit the coastline on Sunday. All of San Diego County was under a wind advisory through 7 p.m. Sunday. Sunny skies are expected today with continued below-average temperatures.

CONGRESS' LEADERS AGREE ON SPENDING LEVELS

With shutdown looming, time is short to pass necessary legislation

BY CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON

Senate and House leaders announced Sunday that they had struck an overarching agreement on 2024 government funding, but it was not clear whether they would be able to cement the deal and pass it into law in time to avert a partial government shutdown in less than two weeks.

After weeks of negotiations and on the eve of Congress returning from its holiday break, top Senate and House members said they had agreed to set the total amount of spending at nearly \$1.66 trillion, bringing funding in line with the deal struck last year between President Joe Biden and then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy that met with vehement conservative opposition.

The agreement includes an increase in Pentagon spending to \$886.3 billion and holds nondefense funding essentially flat at \$772.7 billion, including \$69 billion of added money agreed to through a handshake deal between McCarthy and the White House. That additional spending is offset by speeding up \$10 billion in cuts to IRS enforcement and clawing back \$6 billion in unspent COVID dollars and other emergency funds. Officials said the agreement did not include an additional \$14 billion sought by the Republican and Democratic appropriators in the Senate to beef up both domestic and military spending.

"By securing the \$772.7 billion for nondefense discretionary funding, we can protect key domestic priorities like veterans benefits, health care and nutrition assistance from the draconian cuts sought by right-wing extremists," Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., the majority leader, and Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., the House Demo-

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BLOCK LATEST MOVE IN GUN LAW TUG OF WAR

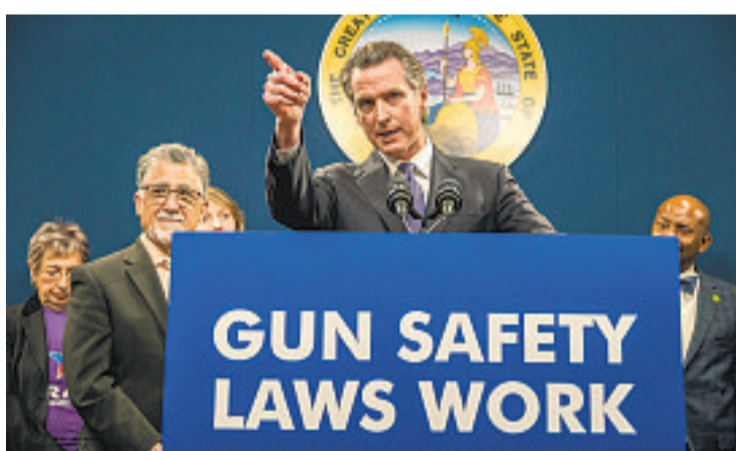
Decision puts hold on SB 2, which seeks to bar guns in more places

BY TERI FIGUEROA

The new year was supposed to usher in a controversial new California law tightly narrowing where people can carry firearms — including those licensed to carry a concealed weapon.

But instead it's been whiplash, as courts grapple with a host of legal challenges by gun owners and advocacy groups.

A federal district court judge had blocked the law in December, calling it "sweeping, repugnant to the Second Amendment, and openly defiant of the Supreme Court." The state appealed his ruling, and a federal appeals court said on Dec. 30 the law could go into effect. It referred the case to a



RENÉE C. BYER AP FILE

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed SB 2 in September, but continuing legal challenges have prevented it from going into effect.

special 9th Circuit merit panel.

On Saturday, a federal appellate panel again blocked the law from going into effect. Arguments before the merit panel are slated

for April.

Enforcement has been up in the air, given the legal uncertainty.

San Diego police said last week they are waiting for the City Attor-

ney's Office to provide legal analysis of the new law to be able to craft enforcement policies or provide direction for their officers.

The Sheriff's Department — the local agency that issues permits to carry concealed weapons — said Friday it was not aware of deputies responding to calls for potential violations, and is "actively monitoring" the federal court actions.

Nearly 17,000 people in San Diego County have a permit to carry a concealed weapon. On Saturday, the head of San Diego County Gun Owners advised its members that the Saturday decision means they can continue carrying guns as they had been before the new law was to go into effect.

The new law, part of Senate Bill 2, bars people from bringing guns to more than two dozen specific "sensitive places," including

SEE BLOCK • A5

BUDGET CUTS ARE COMING FOR SAN DIEGO SCHOOLS

District faces \$70M deficit as pandemic relief funds run out

BY KRISTEN TAKETA

San Diego Unified officials are pondering how to cut their budget to close a projected \$70 million deficit in the school district's general unrestricted fund for next school year, as public schools across California grapple with the double whammy of a major state budget shortfall and expiring pandemic recovery money.

But San Diego Unified's projected deficit may actually be higher — more to the tune of \$100 million — once the district factors in experts' updated projections of lower state school funding, according to officials' discussions during a district budget workshop Thursday.

The district's budget projections are preliminary and may change as the state budget process unfolds through the summer. Districts will learn more next week when Gov. Gavin Newsom unveils his budget proposal.

But staffing will inevitably be impacted by any cuts, considering that 95 percent of San Diego Unified's unrestricted spending goes toward salaries and benefits, district officials said.

District officials said they want to prioritize attrition rather than

SEE SCHOOLS • A5

JUDGE RECOMMENDS \$4K CIVIL FINE FOR ASH ST.

Top California real estate official to decide penalty for broker Jason Hughes

BY JEFF MCDONALD

The broker behind the city of San Diego's notorious Ash Street lease, which is costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars for a still unusable building, should pay a \$4,000 fine for working both sides of the transaction, a state ad-

ministrative law judge found.

But the top California Department of Real Estate official rejected the proposed penalty against Jason Hughes. He alone will now decide whether or how the San Diego broker should be disciplined.

"You are hereby notified that the proposed decision herein dated Dec. 21, 2023 is not adopted," wrote state real estate Commissioner Douglas McCauley, who did not explain his reasoning.

"The disposition of this case

will be determined by me after consideration of the record," he added.

An attorney working for Hughes declined to comment on the decision and referred questions to a public-relations professional.

The spokesperson said in a statement that the administrative law judge had considered the evidence and correctly decided not to suspend or revoke Hughes' license.

"We are disappointed that the

commissioner rejected the Judge's determination, but we look forward to continuing our efforts to resolve this matter fairly with the Department of Real Estate," the statement said.

Hughes, the co-founder of the Hughes Marino real estate services firm who presented himself for years as an unpaid city volunteer, pleaded guilty to a single misdemeanor conflict-of-interest violation last March.

Without appearing in court,

SEE FINE • A6

IT'S LIGHTS OUT FOR NIGHT GOLF AT MISSION BAY COURSE

BY DAVID GARRICK

Mission Bay Golf Course, the only lighted course in San Diego County, is closed at night indefinitely for complex repairs to its lighting system at the most inconvenient time — when the early sunsets of winter make night golf an appealing option.

The closure, which began just after Thanksgiving, does not affect the lights on the 68-year-old course's adjacent driving range, which remain operational. That allows golfers at least to practice af-

ter the sun sets.

Mission Bay is an 18-hole "executive" course, meaning it's shorter than an ordinary course and has only par-3 and par-4 holes. That makes it particularly popular with seniors, beginners and young golfers.

The closure of night golf could impact the finances of the course, which had gone from losing money to breaking even in recent years thanks partly to a surge in golf playing during and after the pandemic.

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K.C. ALFRED U-T

Golfers practice on the driving range, which is still open and illuminated at night, at Mission Bay Golf Course.

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