

SANTA MARIA TIMES

'WE ARE ONE'

Santa Maria pride event celebrates inclusivity **CENTRAL COAST, B1**



Pitcher perfect

Munoz strikes out 17 of 18 batters for Northside in District 65 tourney. **SPORTS, D1**



LOW CLOUDS, THEN SUN 73 • 57 FORECAST, B6 | **SUNDAY, JULY 1, 2018** | santamariatimes.com



LEN WOOD PHOTOS, STAFF

Rudy Ruiz, owner of World 1-1 Games in the Santa Maria Town Center, has installed numerous security cameras to combat shoplifting. Proposition 47 is an effort to reduce recidivism by reducing certain felonies to misdemeanors, which has led to recent increases in thefts at stores.

Shoplifters taking toll on local economy after Prop. 47

Small businesses resorting to hidden cameras, 'public shaming'

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Rudy Ruiz owns World 1-1, a video game store at the Santa Maria Town Center mall. Shoplifters hit his store so often, he said, that he stopped calling police two years ago.

Thieves know they're "only going to get a citation, which is equivalent to a slap on the wrist," he said.

The problem stems from Proposition 47, which was approved by voters in 2014 and reduced crimes like petty theft and shoplifting from felonies to misdemeanors, if less than \$950 in merchandise is stolen.

Lofty goals

Prop. 47 aimed to curb recidivism and reduce the state's inmate population by making nonviolent, nonserious property and drug crimes misdemeanors unless a person has prior convictions for serious offenses. That means crimes like shoplifting,



A security camera at World 1-1 Games in the Santa Maria Town Center, is one of numerous security cameras installed to combat shoplifting. Proposition 47 is an effort to reduce recidivism that reduced certain theft crimes to misdemeanors which, in turn, has led to recent increases in thefts at stores.

grand theft and receiving stolen property earn the offender a citation instead of jail time, as long as the value of the stolen property does not exceed \$950 per incident.

The penalty for passing forged or fraudulent checks that don't exceed \$950 carries the same misdemeanor penalty.

Prior to the passage of Prop. 47, misdemeanor theft was capped

at \$400, and while research cited in the Safe Neighborhood and Schools Act shows prison inmate populations began to decrease statewide following its passage, business owners large and small are feeling the pinch.

Cameras, public shaming

Ruiz has experienced so much theft that he's taken matters into his own hands — setting up hidden cameras around his store

and even resorting to the "public shaming" of any shoplifter caught on his surveillance tapes, which he posts on his social media pages begging the public to help him identify them.

He said he catches a shoplifter at least once a week, but speculates that accounts for about 30 percent of the shoplifters that actually get away with stealing from his store.

"This is costing me way more money to deal with it, and I shouldn't have to," he said.

Tracy Ruiz, Rudy's wife, helps run World 1-1 and said she believes voters who passed Prop. 47 didn't understand the maximum theft threshold was \$950 per incident, rather than per day.

"That value of \$950 is not accumulated — it's each separate incident, each time a shoplifter comes in," said Tracy. "That means they'll do it over and over again, and make off with a lot more than \$949 per day if they're given the chance."

She added: "This legislation had a lot of social goals which is good, but unfortunately it hits retailers, big or small like us, really hard and people didn't think

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Family separation protests flood cities

ELLEN KNICKMEYER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — They wore white. They shook their fists in the air. They carried signs reading: "No more children in cages," and "What's next? Concentration Camps?"

In major cities and tiny towns, hundreds of thousands of marchers gathered Saturday across America, moved by accounts of children separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border, in the latest act of mass resistance against President Donald Trump's immigration policies.

Protesters flooded more than 700 marches, from immigrant-friendly cities like New York and Los Angeles to conservative Appalachia and Wyoming. They gathered on the front lawn of a Border Patrol station in McAllen, Texas, near a detention center where migrant children were being held in cages, and on a street corner near Trump's golf resort at Bedminster, New Jersey, where the president is spending the weekend.

Trump has backed away from family separations amid bipartisan and international uproar. His "zero tolerance policy" led officials to take more than 2,000 children from their parents as they tried to enter the country illegally, most of them fleeing violence, persecution or economic collapse in their home countries.

Those marching Saturday demanded the government quickly reunite the families that were already divided.

A Brazilian mother separated from her 10-year-old son more than a month ago approached the microphone at the Boston rally.

"We came to the United States seeking help, and we never imagined that this could happen. So I beg everyone, please release these children, give my son back to me," she said through an

Please see **PROTESTS**, Page A8

Supervisors to consider county redistricting commission

Petition, proposal to be discussed at Tuesday's meeting

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A petition calling for an independent commission to redraw Santa Barbara County supervisorial district boundaries every 10 years has gathered enough valid signatures to go before the Board of Supervisors at its meeting Tuesday.

But what appears to be a competing directive to form a redistricting commission will also be presented to the board for a public hearing at the same meeting.

Supervisors will consider certifying the petition as sufficient along with three possible responses when they meet at 9 a.m. in the County Administration Building at 105 E. Anapamu St. in Santa Barbara.

Just prior to discussing the petition, however, the board is scheduled to hold a public hearing on Board Chairman and 1st District Supervisor Das

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Trump: Saudis will boost oil production

KEN THOMAS AND JON GAMBRELL
Associated Press

BERKELEY HEIGHTS, N.J. — President Donald Trump said Saturday that he had received assurances from King Salman of Saudi Arabia that the kingdom will increase oil production, "maybe up to 2,000,000 barrels" in response to turmoil in Iran and Venezuela. Saudi Arabia acknowledged the call took place, but mentioned no production targets.

Trump wrote on Twitter that he had asked the king in a phone call to boost oil production "to make up the difference...Prices to (sic) high! He has agreed!"

A little over an hour later, the state-run Saudi Press Agency reported on the call, but offered few details.

"During the call, the two leaders stressed the need to make efforts to maintain the stability of

oil markets and the growth of the global economy," the statement said.

It added that there also was an understanding that oil-producing countries would need "to compensate for any potential shortage of supplies." It did not elaborate.

In a statement issued Saturday night, the White House did not specify that Saudi Arabia would increase production but that "King Salman affirmed that the Kingdom maintains a two million barrel per day spare capacity, which it will prudently use if and when necessary to ensure market balance and stability, and in coordination with its producer partners, to respond to any eventuality."

Oil prices have edged higher as the Trump administration has

Please see **OIL**, Page A6



ALEX BRANDON, ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this Oct. 22, 2017, file photo, Saudi King Salman speaks during a meeting of the Saudi-Iraqi Bilateral Coordination Council with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. President Donald Trump says he has received assurances from Salman that the kingdom will increase oil production, "maybe up to 2,000,000 barrels," in response to turmoil in Iran and Venezuela.

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STEVEN SENNE, ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this Dec. 17, 2017, photo, Julian Clark, of Westerly, R.I., smells a strain of marijuana flowers called “Cookie Pebbles,” at a trade show in Worcester, Mass. Three New England states legalized recreational marijuana, but there is still no place to buy pot legally in the region.

New England cannabis legalization a slow burn

BOB SALSBERG
Associated Press

BOSTON — New England may still be the next U.S. frontier for legal cannabis; just don't try shopping for it quite yet.

After early successes for the cannabis industry in western states, the region seemed the next logical foothold. But while its famous independent streak, liberal politics and ample supply of college activism all made for fertile ground, the legalization movement has often collided with old-fashioned Yankee sensibilities — particularly in towns weary of the stigma around pot.

“While a lot of these communities voted for (legalization), they didn't really mean ‘down the street from my house.’ It was more like, ‘Can we have it in the next town over?’” said Jim Smith, a Boston attorney who works with companies seeking commercial licenses in Massachusetts. “The reality is that the next town over also wants it in the next town over.”

In Massachusetts, where voters approved of recreational marijuana in November 2016, today is when retail sales are allowed to finally start. But no pot stores have been licensed yet, and only a few may open for business in the coming months. Key factors cited for the delay are community resistance, the need to complete background checks on applicants and the lack of marijuana testing facilities.

In Vermont, possession of small amounts of recreational marijuana becomes legal today, but with no provisions in the law for pot shops, users must either grow it themselves or continue buying from illicit dealers.

Voters in Maine also backed a recreational-marijuana law in 2016 but, partly

because of stiff opposition from Republican Gov. Paul LePage, pot shops probably won't open in the state before next year.

“It's definitely frustrating as a consumer who wants to buy this in a safe manner,” said Kamani Jefferson of the delays that have plagued the rollout of legal pot in Massachusetts. He has been organizing consumers to push for full implementation of the law so above-board sales can begin.

“I've been fortunate to travel to Oregon, Colorado, California,” he said. “It's very convenient to go into a store, talk to someone in a not-sketchy way and understand what you are buying.”

Since the 2016 election in Massachusetts that had seemed to settle the matter, dozens of municipalities have voted to outright ban retail marijuana sales, and more than 100 have imposed some type of moratorium while local officials develop zoning rules for the businesses.

Attorney General Maura Healey, a Democrat who opposed legalization, angered cannabis advocates and entrepreneurs by allowing some municipalities to extend their moratoriums into next year, after previously ruling that they must expire by Dec. 31.

The setbacks can wreak financial havoc with companies that rented space or hired staff in anticipation of earlier openings. Many are “bleeding money,” said Smith, the attorney.

State regulators have awarded only a single recreational license, for Sira Naturals, a cultivation facility in Milford. It already grows medical marijuana there and dispenses it at three locations, but it needs local approval before it can apply for licenses to sell retail.

Prop. 47

From A1

about that. People also don't realize that the more theft losses we incur, we'll probably have to raise our prices which we don't want to do for our community.”

Santa Maria crime statistics

According to Santa Maria Police Department statistics, burglary and larceny incidents steadily decreased between 2013 and 2017.

But the numbers don't tell the real story, said Santa Maria Police Lt. Russ Mengel.

What really happened, he said, “was a change in the definition of what burglary/certain theft crimes were, which means that these crimes aren't being defined in the same way anymore, which may explain the drop.”

“Petty theft is on the rise in Santa Maria,” said Mengel. “It's gotten to the point where theft is so frequent that retailers have completely stopped reporting it, so the stats are perceived as having decreased.”

Mengel recalled one instance in which police apprehended a man three times in one day for shoplifting from the same store but had to let him go with a citation each time because he “met” the \$950 cap each time.

“We take theft reports from big businesses like Walmart, Kohl's, Target, Macy's, JC Penney and department stores at the mall,” said Mengel. “For example, Macy's reported an average loss of \$1 million a year for the last few years. People walk in, steal, then come back and steal over and over again. “Retailers are all frus-

trated, but don't call because at the end of the day, what're the consequences for these actions?”

Spike could change local economy

Ruiz said on average his store sees about 100 customers a day, and each purchase averages between \$25 and \$30. His profit, he said, “is pretty decent — we have enough to pay the bills, our staff and still make a good profit.”

However, each loss is significant, Ruiz said, because he counts each dollar from every single sale he makes.

“Citations don't scare anyone,” he said. “The majority of these shoplifters don't get caught nor do they care, but to fix it, we have to get some system into place where there should be more serious consequences.”

Tracy Ruiz explained that World 1-1 usually matches the prices of a bigger company like Gamestop but often sets prices at least 25-percent lower than other stores in places like Ventura or Los Angeles counties to support the economic budget of the local demographic in the Santa Maria Valley.

“Obviously, there's MS-RPs (manufacturer's suggested retail prices), but a lot of our items are set at the minimum price,” Tracy said. “We mirror prices for video games with Gamestop because video game prices are set no matter what, because you make no money off new video games.”

For example, she said, a backpack distributed by an outside vendor costs \$50 at World 1-1 because \$50 is the minimum, compared to the \$80 it would cost elsewhere, according to its MSRP.

“That means I'm saving

my customers \$30,” she said. “But if the theft keeps happening like this, I'm going to have to change the status quo. Bigger places can afford the shrink, but we can't.”

“I don't want to have to do that to our Santa Maria Valley customers,” she continued, “because our prices fit their budget. This hurts everyone.”

Chamber of Commerce concerns

Theft is hitting small business owners like Rudy and Tracy Ruiz harder financially than corporate department stores because they don't have the same profit margin and most can't afford to hire security guards, said Glenn Morris, with the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Morris said hiring more security wouldn't deter shoplifters, anyway.

“I do understand what lawmakers were trying to do with this legislation — they wanted to decriminalize some of the social crimes, especially things like marijuana-related offenses, and wanted to fix prison overcrowding,” Morris said.

However, the chamber opposed the proposition because “it was a bad policy” from an economic perspective, he said.

“Our minds haven't changed,” Morris said. “It played out exactly the way we thought it would — police will literally just catch and release shoplifters and it's negatively impacting our local market. Unfortunately, it's just become another cost of doing business anywhere and has become part of the economy.”

Deasees' Boutique

The Ruiz's experience with shoplifters is not uncommon.

Terri Deasee, owner of

the clothing store Deasees' Boutique in Orcutt and Lompoc, has been hit frequently by shoplifters and is currently on the lookout for a female shoplifter who stole about \$350 worth of clothes and accessories a few weeks ago from her Orcutt store.

Deasee, like Rudy and Tracy Ruiz, ended up publicly blasting the shoplifter on social media using video surveillance that caught her in the act, she said. The stolen items ended up being “anonymously returned to the police,” Deasee said.

“We're a lot more vigilant now and you just have to be,” Deasee said. “That proposition definitely impacted a lot of the local retailers in town, and many of these crimes won't even be prosecuted and people can walk out with whatever they want as long as they steal the minimum value of \$950.”

“I know there are bigger, more dangerous crimes out there, and police don't have time to look for shoplifters when there's violent stuff that's hurting people out there but at the same time, it's not fair to businesses,” she continued. “It's a double-edged sword.”

Like the Ruizes, Deasee is worried that the more losses she sustains, the more likely it will be that she has to raise her prices.

“I don't want to do that because that's not fair to our consumers,” she said. “The small businesses take huge hits and can't afford to account for theft losses like the bigger businesses. Every single dollar counts for every small retailer.”

Gina Kim covers crime and courts for Santa Maria Times. Follow her on Twitter @gina_k210

Commission To join supervisors' meeting

From A1

Williams' proposal to create the Citizens' Independent Redistricting and Voting Rights Protection Commission.

As of Friday afternoon, supporting information regarding Williams' proposal was not available on the Board of Supervisors' agenda website other than noting supervisors can introduce an ordinance establishing the commission and set a public hearing for its adoption, or order that the proposed ordinance be placed before the voters in the November election.

But staff reports on the petition had been posted Friday.

A group calling itself Reason in Government gathered more than 16,550 signatures on the petition that calls for placing an initiative on the ballot to create the Independent Redistricting Commission

sors to redraw supervisorial district boundaries.

County Clerk Joseph Holland signed a certificate of sufficiency indicating a sample of 500 of the signatures were checked, with 408 found sufficient and 92 insufficient, so based on the sample, the petition had 12,447 sufficient signatures, enough to qualify as a valid petition.

As with Williams' submission, supervisors could either adopt the petition's proposed ordinance or order it to be placed on the Nov. 6 ballot.

The petition calls for a commission of five members — one from each supervisorial district — with not more than two of the same political party would be chosen by a random drawing of applicants.

Five alternates of the same political parties as the main members would also be chosen.

The commission members would be charged

with redrawing district boundaries after each 10-year U.S. census using the federal census tracts and blocks so that the districts contain roughly the same number of residents, are geographically contiguous and compact.

But commissioners would also have to consider such criteria as topography, watersheds, natural and artificial barriers and the cohesiveness, contiguity, integrity and compactness of the population centers.

Existing neighborhoods, city limits and community boundaries as well as communities of interest, that is, contiguous populations that share the same economic or social interests, also would have to be taken into consideration in drawing boundaries.

The commission could not draw boundaries to favor or discriminate against any political party, candidate or incumbent.

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

SUPEA

DUIMH

DLORCE

TEMMON

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THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here: ○○○○○○

(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: WEIGH OFTEN FAULTY FEEBLE
Answer: With the oil field depleted, they shut down operations. But the owner was — WELL OFF

Oil

From A1

pushed allies to end all purchases of oil from Iran following the U.S. pulling out of the nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers. Prices also have risen with ongoing unrest in Venezuela and fighting in Libya over control of that country's oil infrastructure.

Members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries cartel led by Saudi Arabia and non-cartel members have agreed to pump 1 million barrels more crude oil per day, a move that should help contain the recent rise in global energy prices. However, summer months in the U.S. usually lead to increased demand for oil, pushing up the price of gasoline in a midterm election year. A gallon of regular gasoline sold on average in the U.S. for \$2.85, up from \$2.23 a gallon last year, according to AAA.

If Trump's comments are accurate, oil analyst Phil Flynn said it could

immediately knock \$2 or \$3 off a barrel of oil. But he said it's unlikely that decrease could sustain itself as demand spikes, leading prices to rise by winter-time.

“We'll need more oil down the road and there'll be nowhere to get it,” said Flynn, of the Price Futures Group. “This leaves the world in kind of a vulnerable state.”

Other analysts were more doubtful about immediate effects.

Trump appears to be trying to “talk the market down,” said Lawrence Goldstein, who directs the Energy Policy Research Foundation. He questioned whether Trump's words would do anything to reverse the effects on the market of declining Iranian oil production. He also noted it always takes at least two months before a change in shipping commitments affects the market.

Trump's aim may be to exert maximum pressure on Iran while at the same time not upsetting potential U.S. midterm voters with higher gas prices, said Antoine Halff, a Columbia

University researcher and former chief oil analyst for the International Energy Agency.

“The Trump support base is probably the part of the U.S. electorate that will be the most sensitive to an increase in U.S. gasoline prices,” Halff said.

Trump's comments came Saturday as global financial markets were closed. Brent crude stood at \$79.42 a barrel, while U.S. benchmark crude was at \$74.15.

Saudi Arabia currently produces about 10 million barrels of crude oil a day. Its record is 10.72 million barrels a day. Trump's tweet offered no time frame for the additional 2 million barrels — whether that meant per day or per month.

However, Saudi Aramco CEO Amin Nasser told journalists in India on Monday that the state oil company has spare capacity of 2 million barrels of oil a day. That was after Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said the kingdom would honor the OPEC decision to stick to a 1-million-barrel increase.

“Saudi Arabia obviously can deliver as much as the market would need, but we're going to be respectful of the 1-million-barrel cap — and at the same time be respectful of allocating some of that to countries that deliver it,” al-Falih said then.

The Trump administration has been counting on Saudi Arabia and other OPEC members to supply enough oil to offset the lost Iranian exports and prevent oil prices from rising sharply. But broadcasting its requests on Twitter with a number that stretches credibility opens a new chapter in U.S.-Saudi relations, Halff said.

“ Saudis are used to U.S. requests for oil,” Halff said. “They're not used to this kind of public messaging for them is to distinguish what is a real ask from what is public posturing.”

China is the largest importer of Iranian oil with 24 percent, followed by India with 18 percent. Turkey stood at 9 percent and Italy at 7 percent.

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