### Gloria seeks to navigate troubled waters



**Michael Smolens** COLUMNIST

Mayor Todd Gloria recently noted that back in January he warned San Diegans, both in what he said and symbolically, that austere times were ahead.

"That's precisely where we are," he said last week, reflecting on his State of the City speech given in the City Council chambers, eschewing more ornate locales often used in the past.

The day after presenting his revised budget that seeks to close − for now − a \$350 million shortfall, the mayor sat down for a wide-ranging interview that touched on reducing spending, efforts to increase revenue, the push for more housing, federal cuts and how the confluence of faraway events affects San

The budget, among other things, relies on a partial hiring freeze and reduced library and recreation center hours while prioritizing police operations and the cuts have received widespread attention.

SFGate, a Bay area news website, even did a story on Gloria's plans to close numerous restrooms at beaches and parks.

Road repair funding would be reduced, though a report last year said San Diego streets have deteriorated significantly.

Some of that has been met with criticism that lower-income and underserved areas will be hurt the most by the cuts.

Nevertheless, Gloria had a hopeful, if not optimistic outlook, about things stabilizing in the future, even while acknowledging matters could get worse before they get better.

He noted that San Diego is not alone and that the state and other cities are grappling with

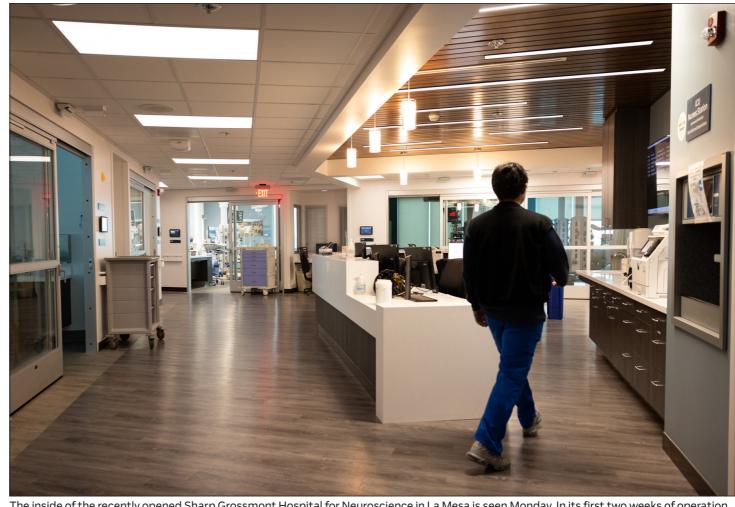
budget shortfalls. Here are some of the areas he touched on during the inter-

Budget cuts: This has been a major topic at City Hall and beyond for weeks.

"I'd like to say it's better, but the cuts are half of what they could have been. I'm still not happy about it," he said. At this stage, the budget

likely will have to tap the city's currently underfunded reserve for \$10 million - something that hasn't happened in a decade. Gloria said he'd rather not do that, but wasn't overly

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The inside of the recently opened Sharp Grossmont Hospital for Neuroscience in La Mesa is seen Monday. In its first two weeks of operation,

# Hospital's new neuroscience center already is nearly full

Facility expected to enhance level of stroke, other brain care at Sharp Grossmont

By Paul Sisson **UNION-TRIBUNE** 

LA MESA — In its first two weeks of operation, the new neuroscience center at Sharp Grossmont Hospital has averaged an 84% occupancy rate. That number is not terribly surprising, given that the La Mesa medical facility treated the 10th-most acute strokes in the state and handled the largest volume in San Diego County in 2023, according to state data.

Retired New York firefighter

Thomas Daniels, 88, was among and I said, 'vote for me' like I was patients will receive medical interthe first to occupy one of the 50 beds at what is officially called the Sharp Grossmont Hospital for Neuroscience. Admitted to Grossmont's emergency department after having a stroke April 29, he was transferred to the new center one day after it opened on May 1.

Thirteen days later, he is still there, feeling significant pain in his face, but able to chuckle over the enthusiastic welcome that occurred when the center's first patients arrived.

"They were cheering for me

running for governor," he said. "That's my way, just having fun."

His ability to recall those memories made such a short amount of time after suffering a major neurological emergency is the entire point of building this new hospital within a hospital in the first place.

By dedicating space for neurological maladies, and filling that space with nurses, technicians and physicians all specifically trained to handle brain-related care, the idea is to make it more likely that

ventions they need as quickly as possible.

Especially with stroke, the phrase "time is brain" has been the mantra in neurological care since the 1990s.

The speed and precision with which clot-busting drugs can be administered and surgery performed is literally the difference between full recovery and living the rest of one's life with severely impaired movement. Or

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## Pier's burned end closed 2 more years

Oceanside officials discussing designs for new buildings

By Phil Diehl **UNION-TRIBUNE** 

OCEANSIDE — The fire-charred end of the Oceanside Municipal Pier will remain off limits to visitors for at least another two summers, city offi-

Talks are underway with the lease holder of the restaurant

Engineer Luis Cardenas said in two five-year extensions. an email Friday.

options in regards to rebuilding the restaurant and kiosk," Cardenas said. "In the meantime, we've asked the tenant to move forward with developing the building plans."

Once plans are ready, obtaining the necessary permits will take six months to a year, and construction could start in the fall of 2026, Cardenas said. The City Council approved a 10-year

and food knosk destroyed by a extension on the lease June 21, blaze in April 2024, Associate 2023, including the option for

City officials have said the "We are still assessing our repairs will cost as much as \$17 million, excluding the buildings, and that insurance should cover most of the expense. State and federal elected officials have offered to help where possible, which may include obtaining grant money to help pay for construction.

"If we do move forward with the rebuild of the restaurant and kiosk, the tenant will be responsible for it, including obtain-

ing all necessary permits and approvals," Cardenas said.

Permits will be needed from agencies including the California Coastal Commission, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, state Department of Fish and Wildlife, federal Fish and Wildlife, State Water Resources Control Board, and the city's Building Division and Water Utilities Department.

Investigators said a short in old electrical wires beneath the pier's deck started the blaze.

Fire departments from across

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### Orphaned bear cub gets rehab

At 3-4 months old, it's youngest ever taken in by Ramona Wildlife Center

UNION-TRIBUNE

RAMONA — Campers in the Los Padres National Forest were out hiking last month when they made a heartbreaking discovery: They heard an animal crying and found a tiny black bear on the trail, alone. His mother was nowhere to be found.

They scooped him up and carried him to a campground manager, who notified the California Department of Fish and

Wildlife biologists initially hoped the cub might be reunited with his mother. They returned him to the forest trail and left him overnight, but the mother didn't come back.

That's when the cub was brought to the San Diego Humane Society's Ramona Wildlife Center to be nursed back to health. Staff said the cub, thought to be 2 or 3 months old when he arrived, was extremely fragile since he had gone days without eating, calling his condition "touch and go."

Over the past month in Ramona, though, he's gained weight and become more active, even starting to climb little branches and logs

brought into his enclosure. Staff members typically don't



This black bear cub was extremely fragile when he arrived at the Ramona Wildlife Center but now weighs more than 10 pounds and is beginning to learn how to climb. SAN DIEGO HUMANE SOCIETY

name the wild animals at the as wild as possible, with the hope center but have taken to calling him "Baby Bear," said Autumn Welch, the center's wildlife operations manager.

Initially, he was given formula he balked at a bottle so he laps it up from a bowl. Now that he's over 10 pounds, he's being fed some dried pellets and fruit, as well as also smell like the bears in addibeetles and mealworms, and grass tion to looking as best as we can and leaves

The goal is to have him remain

that eventually he will be released. When care workers interact with the cub, they don a bear mask and fur coat that smells like black bears, which is stored with bedding provided by the Lions, Tigers and Bears sanctuary in Alpine. That way, Welch said, "we

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## La Jolla cityhood faces added hurdle

S.D. council votes to authorize city attorney to move forward with litigation over signatures

By Ashley Mackin-Solomon **U-T COMMUNITY PRESS** 

SAN DIEGO — Efforts for La Jolla to separate from San Diego as its own city could face a new obstacle after the San Diego City Council decided during a closed session last week to authorize legal action over the regional Local Agency Formation Commission's handling of petition signatures promoting La Jolla's potential cityhood.

Having previously called the process for verifying the signatures "outrageous," San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria sought to initiate litigation against the San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO, which provides guidance to communities seeking to incorporate as cities.

The City Council voted 6-0 on May 12 to authorize the city attorney's office to proceed with litigation.

Councilman Joe LaCava, whose District 1 includes La Jolla overrule the registrar underand who lives in Bird Rock, voted in favor. He did not comment

further, and a representative said last week that he was "out of the office due to illness."

Council members Stephen Whitburn and Marni von Wilpert recused themselves from the vote, and Councilman Raul Campillo was absent.

The dispute centers on LAFCO's actions during the verification process that ultimately reversed the San Diego County registrar of voters office's initial determination that the petition drive by the Association for the City of La Jolla had failed to gather enough valid signatures to continue the cityhood effort.

'From the outset, I've made it clear that the city of San Diego has serious concerns about LAFCO's exceptionally broad and questionable interpretations that led them to overturn the county registrar of voters' official determination that the La Jolla secession petition was insufficient," Gloria said last week.

"The decision by LAFCO to

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North County responded quickly and confined the damage to the buildings, the decking and railings at the T-shaped western end of the nearly 2,000-footlong pier.

Though the flames' spread was stopped within hours, the preservative-soaked timbers continued to smolder for days.

The two-story restaurant and the small, separate, single-story kiosk were 1950s-style, burgers-andleased to RAV LLC, a San Francisco company owned by attorney Alex Leff, under a contract approved by the City Council.

Leff also has other restaurant interests and is involved in a partnership renovating the famed Cliff House restaurant in San Francisco, according to the news website SFGate.

The pier's Brine Box kiosk opened in July 2023 and until the day of the fire was operated by husband-

and-wife restaurateurs Jessica and Davin Waite, known for their Wrench & Rodent, The Plot, and Shootz Fish & Beer restaurants in Oceanside.

Oceanside's first pier was built in 1888 a few blocks south of the present one.

The wooden portion of today's pier is the sixth version, completed in 1987. The eatery there opened in 1988 as the upscale seafood Fisherman's Restaurant and Lounge, according to news archives.

The more affordable shakes Ruby's Diner arrived in 1996 after the Fisherman's Restaurant failed because of slow business, states a 2008 San Diego Union-Tribune story.

Ruby's went to takeout orders only early in 2020 because of the pandemic and about a year later closed permanently.

The building remained vacant at the time of the fire, although Brine Box employees had been using the kitchen.

point-in-time homeless

a substantial reduction

has been on the rise for

provide details.

within the city limits — it

years - though he did not

Federal cuts: "I don't

like what I see," Gloria said

about the Trump adminis-

housing and homelessness

programs and more. But

he had a glimmer of hope.

back in Washington, D.C.,

and saw the concern was

"Even Republican

members of Congress are

trying to figure it out," the

Democratic mayor said. "Hopefully, the econ-

omy will settle down, the

federal government will

figure out a new equilib-

rium with the change in

administration and then

a more stable way."

we'll be able to perform in

Tariffs: He said Pres-

increased tariffs are affect-

He stressed, however,

ident Donald Trump's

ing city finances like -

potentially — everyone

the increased levies on

foreign goods were not

responsible for the depth

of the city's budget prob-

lems, some of which have

more money than it takes

in, expensive real estate

deals that went awry and

an electorate reluctant to

Still, he gave a small

example of how this shift

in international trade can

make budgeting unpre-

replaced worn tents at

a safe-sleeping site for

homeless people.

dictable and cost money.

Not long ago, the city

The tents were made in

China but sold to the city

by a U.S. company, he said.

"They were in transit

announced the tariffs). So

contracted for because of

"There is an interesting

when 'Liberation Day'

arrived (when Trump

the cost was ultimately

more than what we had

the tariffs," Gloria said.

confluence of economic

turmoil, political turmoil

and global turmoil. And

mayor added. "I under-

make that connection."

WHAT THEY SAID

the 184 economies analyzed by the WTTC

it does impact cities," the

stand why people may not

The New York Times.

"The United States is

the only country among

(World Travel & Tourism Council) and the global

economic advisory firm

forecast to see an inter-

2025.

Oxford Economics that is

national visitor decline in

San Diego's yearslong

practice of spending

raise taxes.

been self-inflicted through

bipartisan.

Gloria said he was just

tration's plans for sweep-

ing cuts to health care,

count in January will show

### **SMOLENS**

concerned about that amount in a multibillion-dollar budget.

As for the potential of the council leaning more on the reserve to restore programs, he said "that should not be done."

He pointed out that San Diego's credit rating was upgraded last year and predicted the budget difficulties wouldn't change

Revenues: Various tax sources of the city's income were down, some surprisingly so, as reported by David Garrick of The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Gloria pointed out that some of that was offset by \$150 million from higher taxes on hotel rooms and cannabis shops along with a boost in parking-meter

Despite narrow voter rejection of a sales tax increase in November, the mayor said eventually the public will need to pay more to help resolve municipal problems, particularly the multibillion-dollar shortfall in infrastructure funding.

"We'll get there eventually," he said. "New revenue is going to be the way we have to do it. People say, 'Can't you can belttighten your way to new infrastructure?' But that's \$10 billion-plus dollars ..."

Trash fee: The city plan to begin charging single-family homeowners for trash pickup is a big component of the budget-balancing act, but it remains mired in controversy and uncertainty.

Voters approved a ballot measure clearing the way for the fee when the estimated cost was between \$23 and \$29 a month. After the 2022 vote,

the estimate ballooned to \$53, with future increases, but was then lowered to \$47.59 per month.

Gloria noted the Independent Budget Analyst's office, which is not under the control of the mayor, "owned up" to its mistake in the original estimate. As for the current estimate, he said, "I suspect it will be further reduced."

If so, he cautioned that service may be less than what people expect. "You get what you pay for," he

**Housing:** The City Council is moving to amend the city's backyard apartment rules to prohibit rare oversized projects and require infrastructure fees.

Gloria has acknowledged some changes should be made, as long as it doesn't lead to a broad retreat from San Diego's pro-housing policies.

"I'm hopeful this is not a shift in the pendulum," he said.

He noted that an apartment construction boom in the region has flattened and even lowered rents in some areas, as reported by Phillip Molnar of the Union-Tribune.

He also said the upcoming results from the annual

### HOSPITAL From Page 1

not surviving at all. California hospitals are graded on their overall stroke mortality rates, a calculation of how many patients given a diagnosis of a stroke die during treatment that is adjusted to account for overall underlying health conditions and other factors.

In 2023, the most recent year for which data is available, Grossmont's state-issued stroke rating was "as expected," though results have been mixed, with some "below expected" ratings in previous years.

The goal of all hospitals is to consistently achieve a "better" rating, indicating that their risk-adjusted mortality rates are lower than would be expected when compared to similarly

While not explicitly referencing state ratings, Dr. Gregory Apel, an emergency medicine specialist and Grossmont's chief medical officer, said that breaking off neurological care into its own hospital on the larger medical campus, one with its own entrance and its own specially trained staff, will allow care to reach new heights.

Having dedicated space, he said, allows the recruitment of physicians who specialize more deeply. Already, for example, Grossmont has recruited several endovascular neurosurgeons who are able to conduct both minimally invasive brain surgeries and larger "open" procedures that often require larger openings in the skull for access.

"We have specialists here that are coming from

fellowship programs to really provide that level of care that doesn't exist outside of a neuroscience center," Apel

The physical structure of the new hospital also enables deeper subspecialization. Several rooms in their own set-aside section of the larger facility are designated as an **Epilepsy Monitoring Unit** and are equipped with special seizure-monitoring equipment. This new feature justifies bringing in a whole new category of subspecial-

"There is actually a fellowship program for epileptologists who are neurologists who do nothing but seizure-related care," Apel said. "We are in the process of recruiting to get specifically that specialty for that unit to be able to deal with the most complex seizures."

It includes its own 16-bed neurological intensive care unit, as well as another 16-bed "progressive" care unit for those whose conditions are not severe enough to need intensive care. And there are 18 additional beds dedicated to rehabilitation, a major function of any neurology program.

Those with strokes and other conditions often must spend many hours with physical therapists relearning once routine movements affected by the temporary loss of blood flow in the

Rehabilitation beds are just a short walk from the neuroscience center's beating heart, a cavernous physical therapy gymnasium filled with specialized exercise equipment designed for the kind of tasks that, with proper guidance, can help reactivate damaged

atrophied muscle tissue.

It's an exponential upgrade over Grossmont's former gym, which filled a single hospital hallway.

Scott Evans, chief strategy officer and market CEO for Sharp HealthCare, pointed out a special "studio apartment" room just off the main gym floor. This space is configured with all of the equipment a person would need to use when he or she returns home after a serious neurological incident, such as a stroke.

"This is where we can simulate the activities of daily living," Evans said. "They can start practicing doing their own clothes again, washing the dishes, making meals, getting in and out of the bathtub."

The center treats far more than strokes. Brain and spine tumors, complex spine surgeries, movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease and vision problems related to neurological conditions are also services allocated to the neuroscience hospital, which does not have its own dedicated operating rooms. Surgeries will be performed in Grossmont's Burr Heart and Vascular Center that opened in 2019.

Many who use the new physical therapy gym will be staying in the hospital's rehabilitation unit, working daily to regain function before they can be discharged home. But the facility is also open to outpatients, those who are already home, but who require ongoing specialized workouts to help them handle neurological condi-

By 9 a.m. on a recent morning, a dozen people were already using the gym, including A.J. Fiume, as possible."

the highest institutions and nerve pathways and rebuild 27, a La Mesa resident with cerebral palsy. He spent time using a hand bike, then went through a specialized muscle-building session with a physical therapist.

"That was probably the second or third time I've been able to get on the bike like that in my life," he said. "You know, it's not like you can do this stuff at 24 Hour

There is more to come. An upstairs doctor's office will be staffed by a full complement of neurological special-

The point, stressed Apel, is to put as many neurological services as possible in one centralized location, decreasing the amount of travel necessary to make appointments.

"You will be able to walk in there and see your neurosurgeon, stroke neurologist, rehabilitation physician ... I mean, it's almost a revolving door of what specialties will be available to patients in one location," Apel said.

For now, stroke patients and others with emergency neurological problems must be pushed through long hospital corridors to get from the ER to the neuroscience hospital, which is on the opposite side of the sprawling medical campus.

But Evans said that there are plans for a much straighter and subterranean path in the future.

"We're going to dig a tunnel right under there to connect directly with the emergency department,' the executive said, gesturing south toward Grossmont's emergency entrance closer to Grossmont Center Drive. "That will make it even faster to get over here.

"We want to make it as fast

### LAWSUIT

From Page 1

mines public confidence in the integrity of this signature-verification process and sets a troubling precedent. This litigation aims to provide San Diegans with the transparency they deserve, hold LAFCO accountable for its arbitrary and capricious decisions and affirm the registrar's original certification of insufficiency."

Association for the City of La Jolla President Trace Wilson said the organization would not comment on the potential litigation.

Representatives of the city attorney's office said they on the potential for litiga-

LAFCO Assistant Executive Officer Priscilla Mumpower told the La Jolla Light, "We have, and will continue to remain, open and transparent with the LAFCO commission, the city, applicants and the public regarding the process and status of this proposal. We remain committed to fulfilling the obligations and responsibilities outlined to San Diego

LAFCO in state law, which that the group fell 1,027 grants LAFCO the authority to be inclusive in enfranchising residents, rather than disenfranchising them. We look forward to continuing our efforts in reviewing this proposal and working with all parties on next steps."

The next steps would include "initiating an administrative review on the proposal and ... selecting an outside consultant to prepare a comprehensive fiscal analysis evaluating the ability of La Jolla to fund a sufficient level of municipal services while assessing monetary impacts to the city of San Diego," Mumpower said.

ACLJ, the leading group of cityhood proponents, set out to gather signatures from 25% of La Jolla's registered voters, or 6,536, in support of the separation initiative. The petition drive was a required step to keep the cityhood application process going.

In mid-December, the group submitted nearly 8,000 signatures to the registrar of voters office and LAFCO for review and validation.

However, the registrar of voters office said in March the (registrar of voters)

short of the number required because of signatures determined to be invalid or in need of information such as a date or an address.

LAFCO gave the association from March 17 to April 1 to correct the invalid signatures, collect new ones or both to fill the gap. The group came up with 1,506. In late April, the associa-

tion received a letter saying it had collected a total of 6,772 valid signatures, putting it over the threshold Soon after, Gloria issued a

formal objection that argued LAFCO overstepped in the process of verifying the signatures, and he disputed many of the signatures that "can't provide any comment in a six-month effort last year ultimately were deemed valıd.

The city's objection said "the (registrar of voters) reviewed both the petition and supplemental petition (the second round of signature-gathering) and found them insufficient, with a shortfall of 218 valid signatures."

The city stated that ACLJ "requested to review the rejected signatures and contest those they believe

improperly rejected." LAFCO conducted a

secondary review of the contested signatures on the supplemental petition and ultimately "overruled the (registrar's) rejection on 239 signatures," the city said. Of the 239 "resurrected"

signatures, the city said it was "allowed to review 212." The city contended that of those, only 33 were valid, and it objected to the remaining

The city also said it "objects to LAFCO's secondary review of the signatures (ACLJ) contested" and believes the registrar of voters should be the authority on whether signatures are

On May 2, LAFCO issued a formal response to San Diego's objection, calling many of the city's claims "inaccurate" and saying it was moving forward with the cityhood application process

LAFCO Executive Officer Keene Simonds wrote in a letter to Gloria that "I want to assure you that the concerns outlined in your letter are readily addressable within the framework of LAFCO statute."

### CUB

From Page 1

like a bear."

During enrichment sessions that can last 60 to 90 minutes a day, they mimic maternal behaviors the cub would otherwise miss. "We're obviously not his mom, but we try our best to have him look at us as bears and not humans to avoid that early imprinting," she said.

They also use teddy bears to play and roughhouse as a sibling would.

"He does some playful grabbing. He will grab out, bite and wrestle," she said. "These stuffed animals really do help."

When he naps, the cub often holds onto a teddy bear, with the stuffed animal serving as sort of a "surrogate mom," Welch

Officials expect the cub rehab center, state officials been brought in to be rehain care for up to a year. At some point, he will be put can pair up. into an outdoor enclo-

likely will need to remain will consider housing it at Ramona so the two orphans

black bear cub comes into a the past five years that has month," Welch said.

bilitated.

"He's the youngest and smallest, so it's been amaz-State officials say this ingjust watching him grow sure by himself. If another is the fourth young cub in and learn over the past





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