

Hundreds flee fire in California wine country

By JOCELYN GECKER AND NOAH BERGER
Associated Press

GEYSERVILLE, Calif. — Hundreds of people were forced to flee Northern California wine country early Thursday as a wildfire exploded in size amid dangerous winds that prompted utilities throughout the state to impose electrical blackouts to prevent fires.

Authorities ordered the entire community of Geyserville to evacuate after the fire in the Sonoma County wine region north of San Francisco grew to more than 15 square miles. The town has about 900 residents and is a popular stop for wine country tourists.

The cause of the blaze was not yet known, but strong, dry winds with gusts of up to 70 mph have affected much of the state, including that area. There were no immediate reports of any injuries.

Winds slowed after daybreak, helping firefighters get a handle on the blaze, but it was still growing, said California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman Jonathan Cox. He did not have an estimate on the number of buildings destroyed.

A series of deadly blazes tore through the same area two years ago, killing 44 people.

Mary Ceglarski-Sherwin and her husband, Matt Ceglarski-Sherwin, lost their Santa Rosa rental home during one of those fires and fled the flames again early Thursday when Mary's asthma awakened her around 2:30 a.m. Their power was still on when they grabbed their small dogs, some clothes and emergency kits they acquired during the last fire.

"I told him, 'We gotta go, we gotta go; I can feel it changing,'" Mary Ceglarski-Sherwin told the *Santa*



AP Photo/Kent Porter
Firefighters prepare to defend their ground as the Kincadee fire spreads down Black Mountain in the Geysers on Thursday in Sonoma County, Calif.

Rosa Press-Democrat. "By the time we got out there, we could feel the heat and see the smoke."

At least two fires have erupted in Southern California in January as it faced small.

Utilities in California have said the power shut-offs are designed to keep winds that could gust to 60 mph or more from knocking branches into power lines or toppling them, sparking wildfires.

The state's largest utility, Pacific Gas & Electric, filed for bankruptcy protection in January as it faced billions of dollars of damages from wildfires sparked by its equipment that have killed scores of people and destroyed thousands of homes over the past couple of years. The investor-owned energy company has set aside billions of dollars for insurance compa-

nies and wildfire victims while facing a public backlash over its handling of the incidents.

PG&E began rolling power outages Wednesday stretching from the Sierra foothills in the northeast to portions of the San Francisco Bay Area, affecting a half-million people — or nearly 180,000 customers. PG&E warned that a second round of outages could occur over the weekend when winds were forecast to return.

In Southern California, hot and dry Santa Ana winds prompted Southern California Edison to cut power to more than 15,000 customers. The utility was considering additional power cuts to more than 286,000 customers.

The San Diego Gas & Electric utility said it cut power to about 328 customers.

The latest outages come two weeks after PG&E shut down power for several days to about 2 million people in northern and central California.

"We understand the hardship caused by these shutoffs," PG&E CEO Bill Johnson said. "But we also understand the heartbreak and devastation caused by catastrophic wildfires."

Sonoma County Supervisor James Gore said PG&E was better this time about getting information to people who would be affected, but he was still astonished by the need to resort to large-scale blackouts.

"I am a big believer in shutdowns to prevent fires. But the thing that erodes public trust is when it doesn't make sense," he said. "You say, 'God, I know if we can put a man on the moon ... we can manage a (power) grid.'"



AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File

Commuters walk through a corridor in the World Trade Center Transportation Hub in New York. The United States will add 79 million people in the next 40 years.

Census report: U.S. will get older, more diverse

By MIKE SCHNEIDER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. population will grow older and more diverse over the next four decades, according to new Census Bureau projections presented Thursday at a meeting of demographers.

As the U.S. median age increases, there will be a smaller ratio of workers in the labor force able to pay the payroll tax that funds Social Security payments to people of retirement age. In 15 years, the number of people over age 65 will be larger than the number of children for the first time in U.S. history, according to the presentation at a Southern Demographic Association meeting in New Orleans.

At the same time the U.S. is growing older, it will also become more diverse, with children leading the way. By next year, no single race group alone will make up more than half of U.S. children, the projections show.

Although non-Hispanic whites currently are a majority in the U.S., their numbers will dip below 50% of the population in 40 years, declining from 199 million next year to 179 million in 2060, the projections show.

People who identify as two or more races will be the

fastest-growing group in the next 40 years, its population expanding as births outpace deaths.

Other fast-growing groups include Asians, whose growth will be driven by migration, and Hispanics, whose growth will be driven by natural increases, according to the projections.

The U.S. is expected to cross the 400 million-person threshold by 2058, as it adds 79 million more people in 40 years, but annual growth will slow down. The U.S. has about 326 million people today.

Population growth is expected to go from an additional 2.3 million per year currently to an additional 1.6 million people a year by 2060.

Growth comes from immigration and when births outpace deaths, but that natural increase will decline as the nation ages. The nation's median age is expected to go from 38 today to 43 by 2060.

As the number of people over age 65 grows, the share of working-age adults, who pay with their employers for Social Security through a payroll tax, will also decline.

Next year, there are expected to be 3.5 working-age adults for every person of retirement age, but that ratio declines to 2.5 by 2060, according to the projections.

Ukrainian leader concerned about becoming entangled in U.S. elections

By DESMOND BUTLER AND MICHAEL BIESECKER
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — More than two months before the phone call that launched the impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump, Ukraine's newly elected leader was already worried about pressure from the U.S. president to investigate his Democratic rival Joe Biden.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy gathered a small group of advisers on May 7 in Kyiv for a meeting that was supposed to be about his nation's energy needs. Instead, the group spent most of the three-hour discussion talking about how to navigate the insistence from Trump and his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani for a probe and how to avoid becoming entangled in the American elections, according to three people familiar with the details of the meeting.

They spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because of the diplomatic sensitivity of the issue, which has roiled U.S.-Ukrainian relations.

The meeting came before Zelenskyy was inaugurated but about two weeks after Trump called to offer his congratulations on the night of the Ukrainian leader's April 21 election.

The full details of what the two leaders discussed in that Easter Sunday phone call have never been publicly disclosed, and it is not clear whether Trump explicitly asked for an investigation of the Bidens.

The three people's recollections differ on whether Zelenskyy specifically cited that first call with Trump as the source of his unease. But their accounts all show the Ukrainian president-elect was wary of Trump's push

for an investigation into the former vice president and his son Hunter's business dealings.

Either way, the newly elected leader of a country wedged between Russia and the U.S.-aligned NATO democracies knew early on that vital military support might depend on whether he was willing to choose a side in an American political tussle. A former comedian who won office on promises to clean up corruption, Zelenskyy's first major foreign policy test came not from his enemy Russia, but rather from the country's most important ally, the United States.

The May 7 meeting included two of his top aides, Andriy Yermak and Andriy Bogdan, the people said. Also in the room was Andriy Kobolyev, head of the state-owned natural gas company Naf-togaz, and Amos Hochstein, an American who sits on the Ukrainian company's supervisory board. Hochstein is a former diplomat who advised Biden on Ukraine matters during the Obama administration.

Zelenskyy's office in Kyiv did not respond to messages on Wednesday seeking comment. The White House would not comment on whether Trump demanded an investigation into the April 21 call.

The White House has offered only a bare-bones public readout on the April call, saying Trump urged Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people to implement reforms, increase prosperity and "root out corruption." In the intervening months, Trump and his proxies have frequently used the word "corruption" to reference the monthslong efforts to get the Ukrainians to investigate Democrats.

Trump has said he would release a transcript of the

first call, but the White House had no comment Wednesday on when, or if, that might happen.

After news broke that a White House whistleblower had filed a complaint about his July 25 call with Zelenskyy, Trump said the conversation was "perfect" and that he had asked his Ukrainian counterpart to do "whatever he can in terms of corruption because the corruption is massive."

During the call, Trump asked Zelenskyy for "a favor," requesting an investigation into a conspiracy theory related to a Democratic computer server hacked during the 2016 election campaign. Trump also pushed Zelenskyy to investigate Biden and his son. Trump then advised Zelenskyy that Giuliani and Attorney General Bill Barr would be contacting him about the request, according to a summary of the call released by the White House.

Within days, Giuliani flew to Madrid to meet privately with Yermak, Zelenskyy's aide who was in the May 7 meeting.

Trump denied that an investigation of Biden was a condition for releasing military aid as a quid pro quo. But on Tuesday, the senior U.S. diplomat in Ukraine at the time, Ambassador William Taylor, starkly contradicted the president, saying that Trump had demanded that everything Zelenskyy wanted, including the aid and a White House meeting, was conditional on a public vow that he would open an investigation.

Taylor also detailed multiple previously undisclosed diplomatic interactions between Trump's envoys and senior Ukrainian officials in which the president's demand to investigate the Bidens in exchange for American aid was clear.

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