

Local, State & Nation

DEADLY WILDFIRES IN CALIFORNIA

Search continues for fire victims

By Gillian Flaccus and Don Thompson
Associated Press

PARADISE, Calif. — As wildfires raged at both ends of California, officials released another grim statistic: Six more dead in a swath of Northern California wiped out by fire, raising the death toll there to 29. It matched California's record for deaths in a single fire and brought the statewide total to 31 as authorities stepped up searches for bodies and missing people.

Another 228 remain unaccounted for. Two people were killed in a wildfire in Southern California.

Ten search teams were working in Paradise — a town of 27,000 that was largely incinerated last week — and in surrounding communities in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Authorities called in a DNA lab and teams of anthropologists to

help identify victims. Statewide, 150,000 remained displaced as more than 8,000 fire crews battled wildfires that have scorched 400 square miles, with out-of-state crews continuing to arrive. Whipping winds and tinder-dry conditions threaten more areas through the rest of the week, fire officials warned.

"This is truly a tragedy that all Californians can understand and respond to," Gov. Jerry Brown told reporters. "It's a time to pull together and work through these tragedies."

Brown, who has declared a state of emergency, said California is requesting aid from the Trump administration. President Donald Trump has blamed "poor" forest management for the fires. Brown said federal and state governments must do more forest management but that climate change is the greater

source of the problem. "And those who deny that are definitely contributing to the tragedies that we're now witnessing, and will continue to witness in the coming years," he said.

Drought and warmer weather attributed to climate change, and the building of homes deeper into forests have led to longer and more destructive wildfire seasons in California. While California officially emerged from a five-year drought last year, much of the northern two-thirds of the state is abnormally dry.

Firefighters battling fire with shovels and bulldozers, flame retardant and hoses expected wind gusts up to 40 mph overnight Sunday.

In Southern California, firefighters beat back a new round of winds Sunday and the fire's growth and destruction are believed to have been largely stopped. Malibu

celebrities and mobile-home dwellers in nearby mountains were slowly learning whether their homes had been spared or reduced to ash. Two people were killed and the fire had destroyed nearly 180 structures.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Daryl Osby stressed there were numerous hotspots and plenty of fuel that had not yet burned, but at sunset he said there had been huge successes despite "a very challenging day."

Flames also besieged Thousand Oaks, the Southern California city in mourning over the massacre of 12 people in a shooting rampage at a country music bar on Wednesday night.

In Northern California, where more than 6,700 buildings have been destroyed, the scope of the devastation was beginning to set in even as the blaze raged on.

COUNCIL

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City staff recommends councilors award the bid to Cascade Industrial Services LLC of Rathdrum, Idaho, which submitted the lowest of six bids, at \$84,280.47. The city has budgeted money for the project.

The reservoir, which was built in the early 1960s, has not required any significant repairs to this point, but the exterior concrete has worn, according to a report to councilors.

INFANT

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The infant, Coree Welch, born on Aug. 17, was found unresponsive Sunday at about 6:30 a.m. at 1304 Valley Ave. The girl's parents, Justin K. Welch, 35, and Destinee L. Ross-Man, 21, were in the home.

Shirtcliff said an autopsy was scheduled for this morning in Portland.

The Baker County Major Crime Team is investigating the death. Toxicology results related to the parents and child are pending.

After three babies died of what doctors refer to as "positional asphyxiation" in 2009 and two more died of the same cause in 2015, Shirtcliff and his staff worked to create a "Cribs for Kids" program that makes cribs available to parents of newborns.

The most recent co-sleeping death happened in September 2016. Beth Marie Speelman, whose infant son, Tracin Ryan Jay Givens, died on Sept. 3, 2016, pleaded guilty to criminally negligent homicide in May 2017. Speelman was the first parent charged in a local co-sleeping death.

Oregon Democrats see election wins as mandate

By Gary A. Wamer
WesCom News Service

SALEM — With sweeping wins in races for governor and the Legislature, Oregon Democrats see a clear mandate to move on their agenda for 2019.

Voters increased the Democratic majorities in the state House and Senate to three-fifths supermajorities, capable of passing tax and finance bills without Republican votes. Democrats last had a supermajority in the 2009 session.

After a race that analysts had called "a toss-up," Gov. Kate Brown won by a comfortable 6-percent margin over Republican Knute Buehler.

Brown called her win "a slam dunk," and a message that voters wanted action on a range of issues, from affordable housing to the environment to education.

"When our values are on the ballot, Oregonians will come together and fight like hell to stand up for what we believe in," Brown said on election night.

Specifics on the agenda will come into view when Brown releases her state budget proposal later this year.

Activists who backed Brown and legislative Democrats were quick to remind the victors of their agendas following election night.

"Gov. Brown has promised to pass the Clean Energy Jobs bill to cap pollution and invest in solutions next year,"

"Stronger Democratic majorities in the House and Senate will allow us to focus on the big things we said we were going to prioritize — funding our schools, dealing with climate change, and tackling our housing crisis."

— Tina Kotek, D-Portland

said Tera Hurst, executive director of the environmental group Renew Oregon. "We look forward to continuing to work with her and legislative leadership on this bold climate protection strategy."

A bill to cap emissions of the 100 top polluters in the state and use an estimated \$700 million in fees from the companies to fund "green" jobs and other programs stalled earlier this year. The plan is expected to return in 2019.

Also expected to be on the table is corporate tax reform, with a possible gross receipts tax that would generate \$1 billion earmarked for public schools. Requiring companies to offer paid family leave was a major campaign issue for some Democratic leaders.

In the House, Democrats picked up three seats, giving them a 38-22 majority. In the Senate, Democrats picked up one vote, giving them an 18-12 majority.

House Speaker Tina Kotek,

D-Portland, issued a statement Wednesday saying the new political landscape would speed legislative action.

"I'm optimistic about the possibilities," Kotek said. "Stronger Democratic majorities in the House and Senate will allow us to focus on the big things we said we were going to prioritize — funding our schools, dealing with climate change, and tackling our housing crisis."

House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, signaled her readiness to move quickly once the Legislature convenes Jan. 22.

"This caucus is ready to get to work," Williamson said.

House Minority Leader Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, said recently that with Democrats holding the reins of power, political negotiations have devolved to liberal Democrats negotiating with moderate Democrats.

Some of those Democrats are worried about post-election hubris.

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said Wednesday that he felt Oregon Democrats' election night celebrations were too strong.

"When you really beat someone, and you really put them down, you know, you can train an anger and a hatred that's so violent, that they'll go to every extreme they can think of to stop you," Courtney said.

Courtney said he worried

that Republicans might resort to hardball tactics — "legislative anarchy" — such as denying the chamber a quorum of 20 senators if they felt locked-out of discussions.

With only one vote to spare in their Senate supermajority, Republicans could try to bring a Democrat over to their side on key issues.

Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, noted that the Democrat's Senate caucus included moderate lawmakers, such as Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, who have voted with Republicans on some issues. Johnson was re-elected Tuesday while carrying the Democratic, Republican and Independent Party ballot nominations.

"Our caucus has worked well with Betsy in the past," Knopp said. "We believe there are other Democrats, as well that will work with us on issues of concern. I have hopes we can get good things done for Central Oregon."

Republicans in the past have resorted to championing ballot measures to send issues

to the electorate when votes in Salem have not gone their way. Knopp said that isn't a good plan of action.

"It's very difficult to legislate by ballot measure," Knopp said. "A lot of these complex issues don't lend themselves well to the ballot process. We have to resolve these issues in the Legislature."

Looming over everyone in Salem is how to handle the \$22 billion projected shortfall in unfunded liabilities of the Public Employees Retirement System. In the past Democrats have suggested increasing revenue through taxes as the key to solving the problem, while Republicans have advocated for reforms that would make union members pay more for their benefits.

Mark Henkels, a political science professor at Western Oregon University in Monmouth who specializes in state politics, said PERS is the keystone issue to whatever else Democrats hope to accomplish.

"I think they have to take action on PERS one way or another," Henkels said. "They are going to have a hard time if they do not come up with a solution. With the governorship and supermajorities, they now have a different level of responsibility than before."

Henkels said Democrats have been given a unique opportunity because voters may have come out to vote in the congressional races to send a message to President Donald Trump. While they were there, they voted for Brown, Democratic candidates, and the party's stands on ballot measures down the ballot.

"How much of this was a reaction to Trump and how much was native to Oregon candidates and issues is a question we will be looking at," Henkels said. "Even though he was pretty decisively defeated, Buehler's message on PERS and the quality of public school education, I think, resonated with a lot of voters. It's something to consider."

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