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# VENTURA COUNTY STAR

FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

# Court's timing in appeal win for Trump

Meanwhile, Illinois latest to bar him from ballot

Maureen Grope and Bart Jansen  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it will decide whether former President Donald Trump can be tried for trying to steal the 2020 election, setting an accelerated schedule to hear the case in April while his criminal trial remains delayed.

The court will hear arguments the week of April 22 on whether a president can be charged criminally for conduct

that involved official acts while he was in the White House.

The move is a win for Trump, who is appealing a lower court's decision that he's not immune from prosecution. Even if Trump loses that appeal, the Supreme Court may not reach a decision quickly enough for a trial to proceed in time for a verdict before the November election.

"Without Presidential Immunity, a President will not be able to properly function, or make decisions, in the best interest of the United States of America," Trump said in a statement.

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Even if former President Donald Trump loses his appeal of a lower court's decision that he's not immune from prosecution for election interference, the Supreme Court may not reach a decision quickly enough for a trial to proceed in time for a verdict before the November election.  
MARK J. TERRILL/AP FILE



Matthew Fienup, from left, executive director of California Lutheran University's Center for Economic Research and Forecasting, interviews David Bahnsen, managing partner and chief investment officer at the Bahnsen Group, at the 2024 Ventura County Economic Forecast Event Wednesday. JUAN CARLO/THE STAR

## CLU economists: Lack of housing holds back local area economy

Tony Biasotti  
Ventura County Star  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Ventura County has lagged behind the rest of the state and nation economically and will continue to do so for the next few years, and a lack of new housing is among the biggest reasons why, according to the latest forecast report from economists at California Lutheran University.

The CLU Center for Economic Research and Forecasting released its 2024 forecast report for Ventura County Wednesday with a launch event at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. The report predicts that the U.S. will stay out of a recession, and the local economy will grow more slowly than that of the state or nation for the next couple of

years.

Ventura County's home prices will continue to rise and its population will continue to shrink, said Matthew Fienup, CLU CERF's executive director.

Nationally, CLU CERF is not predicting a recession in the next few years. In a recession, the economy shrinks, and Fienup told the audience at the launch event that the national economy should grow in the coming years, albeit slowly. Still, he said the U.S. economy is "fragile," and "could be tipped into recession fairly easily" by a natural disaster, geopolitical crisis or other unforeseen event.

Ventura County's economy has never really recovered from the Great Recession of 2008, Fienup said.

The county's real gross domestic product — the total economic output,

adjusted for inflation — peaked in 2007. In 2022, the last year for which data is available, it was still 12.4% lower than it had been 15 years before, a period in which the national and state economies both grew substantially.

"This is a demonstration of prolonged economic weakness for the county," Fienup said.

Fienup and his team are predicting that Ventura County's GDP will shrink by an average annual rate of 0.1% over the next two years. During that time, the GDP of the United States is projected to grow by 1.9% per year.

One of the reasons the region's GDP is shrinking is because the population is shrinking. It peaked in 2016 and is down 2.9% since then. While many

See **HOUSING**, Page 5A

## Landslide danger still looms with rain in forecast

Cheri Carlson  
Ventura County Star  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Landslides buried Southern California roads and highways in mud and debris as storms last week drenched already-soaked hillsides. Now, more rain is on the way.

A stretch of Highway 150 near Santa Paula remained closed indefinitely with a pile of mud roughly 15-feet high covering lanes. The slide — one of at least four reported locally during the recent days-long storm — prompted an evacuation warning for several nearby homes.

Another slide just north of Ventura sent soupy mud into backyards.

With steady, but lighter rain expected Friday and Saturday, authorities don't expect major flooding. But they urged anyone near a slide or another problem-prone spot to watch for changing conditions.

"Anybody living near those areas should be very vigilant about knowing their surroundings and keeping an eye on things," county geologist Jim O'Tousa said.

Forecast calls for up to an inch of rainfall

After some drizzle or light showers Thursday, steadier rain could start overnight.

The best chance for rain likely will run Friday through Saturday night, said David Gomberg, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Oxnard. Most areas are expected to see a half-inch to an inch of rainfall over that 48-hour period. Some foothill and mountain areas could see slightly higher totals.

While the forecast shows a less intense storm, any additional rain could cause issues with mud or landslides, Gomberg said. The recent storms rolled through week after week, leaving little time for the ground to dry out

See **LANDSLIDES**, Page 4A

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**TODAY IN HISTORY**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Today is Friday, March 1, the 61st day of 2024. There are 305 days left in the year. On this date in:

**1815:** Napoleon, having escaped exile in Elba, arrived in Cannes, France, and headed for Paris to begin his “Hundred Days” rule.

**1867:** Nebraska became the 37th state as President Andrew Johnson signed a proclamation.

**1893:** Inventor Nikola Tesla first publicly demonstrated radio during a meeting of the National Electric Light Association in St. Louis by transmitting electromagnetic energy without wires.

**1932:** Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., the 20-month-old son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh, was kidnapped from the family home near Hopewell, New Jersey. (Remains identified as those of the child were found the following May.)

**1945:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt, back from the Yalta Conference, proclaimed the meeting a success as he addressed a joint session of Congress.

**1954:** Four Puerto Rican nationalists opened fire from the spectators’ gallery of the U.S. House of Representatives, wounding five members of Congress.

**1966:** The Soviet space probe Venera 3 impacted the surface of Venus, becoming the first spacecraft to reach another planet; however, Venera was unable to transmit any data, its communications system having failed.

**1971:** A bomb went off inside a men’s room at the U.S. Capitol; the radical group Weather Underground claimed responsibility for the pre-dawn blast.

**1974:** Seven people, including former Nixon White House aides H.R. Halde-man and John D. Ehrlichman, former Attorney General John Mitchell and former assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian, were indicted on charges of conspiring to obstruct justice in connection with the Water-gate break-in. (These four defendants were convicted in January 1975, though Mardian’s conviction was later reversed.)

**2005:** Dennis Rader, the churchgoing family man accused of leading a double life as the BTK serial killer, was charged in Wichita, Kansas, with 10 counts of first-degree murder. (Rader later pleaded guilty and received multiple life sentences.)



**Bailiff Kalani Horney, of Valley View Middle School in Simi Valley, swears in a witness during the middle school finals of the Ventura County Mock Trial Competition at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center on Tuesday.**

PHOTOS BY ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR

# Trinity Pacific sweeps county mock trial finals

**Isaiah Murtaugh**

Ventura County Star  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Trinity Pacific Christian School in Thousand Oaks dominated the 2024 Ventura County Mock Trial finals this week for the second year running, topping both the middle and high school divisions.

The high school semifinal and final rounds took place Saturday and Sunday in chambers at Ventura County Superior Court, and winners were announced during a Monday ceremony.

The middle school final followed on Tuesday afternoon at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center, and winners were announced in an evening ceremony.

In all, 21 high schools and 14 middle school teams took part in litigating a fictitious trial dealing with the alleged murder of a tech executive.

In the high school event, a team from Simi Valley’s Royal High School took second, followed in third by a second team from Trinity. In the middle school division, a team from Valley View Middle School in Simi Valley was runner up and a team from Mesa Union Middle School in Somis took third.

Trinity’s high school team will move



**Students from Trinity Pacific Christian School in Thousand Oaks and Valley View Middle School in Simi Valley take part in the middle school finals of the Ventura County Mock Trial Competition at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center on Tuesday.**

on to represent the county during the California mock trial finals in March in Los Angeles. The school won the state title in 2021.

A full list of team and individual awards for the high school and middle school divisions, as well as more details about the the competition, is available at [www.vcoe.org/mocktrial](http://www.vcoe.org/mocktrial).

*Isaiah Murtaugh covers education for the Ventura County Star in partnership with Report for America. Reach him at [isaiah.murtaugh@vcstar.com](mailto:isaiah.murtaugh@vcstar.com) or 805-437-0236 and follow him on Twitter @isaiahmurtaugh and @vcsschools. You can support this work with a tax-deductible donation to Report for America.*

**PUBLIC SAFETY BRIEFS**

**Man pleads guilty in fatal stabbing of father**

A defendant originally charged with murder in the 2022 stabbing death of his 73-year-old father has pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter.

Jason Tyler Fernandes, now 25, was accused of stabbing his father with scissors on March 9, 2022, after an argument at the older man’s apartment in Moorpark. Ventura County Sheriff’s deputies had responded to the Vintage Crest Senior Apartments in the 4700 block of Park Lane shortly before 6 p.m. that evening for reports of a family disturbance.

The father, Michael Fernandes, had been stabbed in the upper torso, officials said. He later died at Los Robles Regional Medical Center. The cause of death was blunt and sharp force injuries, the Ventura County Medical Examiner’s Office determined.

Jason Fernandes, a Ventura resident, was arrested that night in a nearby arroyo, authorities said at the time. The son had previously pleaded not guilty to the murder charge when arraigned in March 2022.

In a plea agreement on Feb. 15 in Ventura County Superior Court, prosecutors filed an amended complaint that included the voluntary manslaughter charge, court records show. Voluntary manslaughter, a lesser charge than murder, generally covers a killing during a sudden quarrel or in the heat of pas-

sion, according to California law.

During the hearing, Fernandes pleaded guilty to the lesser charge and admitted to several special allegations, including that the crime involved great violence and the victim was vulnerable. Such allegations can impact sentencing.

“We considered all the facts and circumstances of the crime and the defendant in seeking to reach an appropriate result,” said Senior Supervising Deputy District Attorney Rafael Orellana in an email.

Sentencing is scheduled for the morning of March 18 in courtroom 37.

**Former credit union manager pleads guilty to grand theft, forgery**

The former manager of the credit union for Limoneira Co. employees pleaded guilty to eight felonies in a plea deal on Feb. 15.

Tina Torres, 55, of Santa Paula, had previously pleaded not guilty in June to 25 counts of grand theft and forgery involving the Limoneira Federal Credit Union, which was founded in the 1970s to benefit employees of the citrus company. The independent organization now goes by the name Valley Ag Federal Credit Union and serves employees of other agricultural companies as well as Limoneira, but is still located at the grower’s headquarters west of Santa Paula.

Investigators had accused Torres of stealing about \$250,000 while on the job between January 2016 and August 2019. She lost her job in August 2019 after discrepancies were found. Torres was arrested in Ojai in June after a lengthy investigation.

Prosecutors said she was responsible for managing the institution’s financial records but exploited her position by forging documents and defrauding the organization.

In the plea agreement, Torres pleaded guilty to eight grand theft and forgery charges and admitted to numerous special allegations including that crimes involved great monetary value and that they involved planning and sophistication. Such special allegations can impact sentencing.

The plea agreement involved a so-called Harvey waiver, Ventura County District Attorney’s officials said in an email. The waiver allows a judge to consider and sentence a defendant for all charged acts, including acts a defendant didn’t plea to, according to Deputy DA Susan Park.

Torres has remained out of custody on a \$40,000 bail bond. Sentencing is scheduled for the morning of April 3 in room 11 of Ventura County Superior Court.

**Fillmore deputies recover stolen ag equipment**

Ventura County Sheriff’s deputies in

Fillmore arrested two men from Tulare County who allegedly stole agricultural equipment in late February.

On Feb. 24, patrol deputies had responded to a call about an audible alarm at a residence in the 1400 block of San Cayetano Street. An estimated \$2,500 to \$3,500 worth of agricultural smudge pots had been taken, authorities said in a news release, and surveillance footage showed two strangers on the property at the time.

After midnight, in the early hours of Feb. 25, deputies responded to a similar call in the same block. A ranch manager remotely accessing surveillance cameras told dispatchers a stranger was actively stealing ag equipment. Responding deputies found one of the suspects, a 28-year-old Lindsay man, with about \$1,000 of the smudge pots, authorities said. The man reportedly also admitted responsibility for the Feb. 24 theft. He was arrested on suspicion of grand theft.

The alleged co-conspirator in the Feb. 24 incident, a 29-year-old Lindsay man, was arrested in Fillmore on Feb. 27 on suspicion of grand theft and conspiracy. Investigators recovered more of the stolen equipment and returned it to the victim.

Sheriff’s officials suggested members of the Fillmore ag community to take part in Farm Watch, a partnership between farmers and the sheriff’s office that serves as a county-wide electronic neighborhood watch program.

**VC Star.**

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