

Protests ignite over Trump policies

Donald Trump has issued 75 executive orders and counting, focused on DEI, immigration and funding.

Kaia Mann,
Editor-in-chief

Hundreds of people around the country are using their voices to fight against the Trump administration's recent policies regarding DEI funding and immigration through street demonstrations, walkouts and product boycotts.

Since his inauguration on Jan. 20, Trump has signed over 75 executive orders, primarily targeting increased border security and reducing what he has labeled "useless" and "wasteful" expenses. In the weeks that followed, protests and demonstrations have surged across the country and entire world, reflecting widespread opposition to the administration's actions.

"I guess there's a lot of hispanics where I live so I've seen a lot of protests especially against ICE," said Giselle Reyes, a child development major. "I feel like it's a good time to come together and speak up for what we believe is right."

Some of Trump's executive orders on immigration and border security include ending the "catch-and-release" program, requiring asylum-seekers to remain in Mexico, resuming border wall construction, and redefining birthright citizenship. Since taking office, his administration has planned mass deportations and large-scale ICE operations in cities like Los Angeles, with federal agents deporting over 37,000 people.

On Feb. 3, thousands of anti-ICE Angelinos marched from Olivara street to City Hall, blocking the 101 freeway, waving Mexican and Central American flags.

Undocumented individuals make up 27 percent of the U.S. population, with over 9 million at serious risk of deportation. In California alone, an estimated 2 million undocumented immigrants reside. On Feb. 3, the nationwide movement "A Day Without Immigrants" took place, urging both documented and undocumented immigrants to withdraw from economic activities, including work and school. In California, many students



Victoria Saxson for the Valley Star

Flor Martinez Zaragoza and hundreds of anti-ICE protestors take to Downtown LA marching past City Hall on Feb. 17. There have been dozens of similar protests around the nation as a result of Donald Trump's actions.

participated in walkouts, with Los Angeles Unified reporting a 34 percent absentee rate.

"We are the future of this country. What would the U.S. say, what would America do without immigrants?" said Valley Student Sambrano Pinto. "I just want to say that even if we can see the dark right now, we're going to see the light in the future. How? We don't know, but we've got to keep positive."

Another major point of contention in the nation is diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). On his first day back in office, Trump signed an execu-

tive order titled "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferences," placing all federal DEI staff on paid leave with plans for eventual layoffs. This order aims to dismantle programs designed to remove barriers and expand access to education and employment for marginalized communities.

Major companies, including Target, Amazon and McDonald's, have scaled back or distanced themselves from DEI initiatives following Trump's order. In response, many consumers have organized boycotts against companies

that rolled back DEI policies while supporting businesses like Costco and Ben & Jerry's, which have opposed the administration's stance.

On Presidents' Day, protests under the banners "Not My President's Day" and "No Kings Day" swept across the nation. From Alaska to Florida, demonstrators rallied against both Trump and billionaire Elon Musk, who was appointed to lead the new Department of Government Efficiency, tasked with slashing federal spending. Critics argue that the department consolidates power in the

hands of the wealthy, further fueling tensions and protests against the administration.

On Tuesday, Trump threatened to cut federal funding for any college that permits what he called "illegal" protests, warning demonstrators on social media of potential deportation, expulsion, and arrest. Despite this, protests continue, with groups like Indivisible planning demonstrations every Monday throughout March.

"They (protestors) are trying to make a change, this is all they can do to make their voice heard," said Victoria Tellez, Kinesiology major.

Know your rights

Valley issues Red Cards to help defend immigrant students from ICE.

Elmira Muradkhanian and Davrin Abrego,
Staff Writers

Los Angeles Valley College and its eight sister campuses have been informing students of their rights in light of President Trump's immigration policies, but some students are saying their efforts are not enough.

The law prohibits colleges and universities from disclosing information about ICE's presence on campus, yet they are still trying to keep students informed. The campus's main defense against the height-

ened immigration policies is through the distribution of the Know Your Rights "Red Cards" that detail students' rights when dealing with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents (ICE) on and off campus. The cards come in multiple languages, including Spanish, and Russian.

The Fourth and Fifth amendments outlined on these cards include the ability to refrain from speaking to any officer, or allow officers to search their person, car, or home without a warrant. If students choose to speak with ICE agents, they

have the right to ask for identification and badge numbers.

In addition to the cards, Dream Resource Center Coordinator and counselor Javier Carabajal attended Tuesday's ASU meeting to inform the executive board about students' rights.

"This isn't a political conversation; this is a conversation about student rights," Carabajal said at the meeting. "There is no actual safe space. There are only brave spaces."

However, several students said The Red Cards are an insufficient

effort. "I would like to see some sort of link or QR code that would send students to websites with more in depth supportive information," said Vanessa, a Valley College student.

She emphasized that students who feel threatened may utilize their constitutional rights to not open any

doors for officers or release any information regarding themselves and their families. One campus official said they

spotted ICE at the nearby Orange Line on the corner of Fulton Avenue and Burbank Boulevard a few weeks ago. Officers were reported stopping passersby. If ICE agents make their way on campus, instructors, staff and students have been advised to refer them to the President Barry Gribbons' office.

Some news reports suggest that ICE agents will become more visible over the next few days. A recent article by the Los Angeles Times states, "ICE plans to carry out 'large scale' immigration enforcement action in the Los Angeles area at the end of [February]."

The Dream Resource Center and the Mental Health Center on campus offer students the opportunity to speak with counselors about their concerns.

"Schools should give students the tools to equip themselves in scenarios where they do not feel as protected, whether it is at their home or their workplace," said Valley student Star Jalanugraha.



Illustration by Melvin Garcia

Nearly \$1 billion of construction inches toward finish line

Officials say a portion of the two-decade long revitalization project is set to be completed by 2026.



Jeremy Ruiz for the Valley Star

Workers install windows on Academic Complex 1, set to house multiple departments. The building sits at Burbank Boulevard and Ethel Avenue.

Kaia Mann,
Editor-in-chief

Valley College's \$704 million "ReVitalizing Valley" project is now more than 75 percent complete, with three major construction projects in progress set to be completed by 2026.

This project was set in motion over 20 years ago when Los Angeles Voters approved

proposition A and AA, to improve the facilities on campus. Measure J and CC were later approved in 2008 and 2016 respectively to further construction projects and expand educational programs.

The revitalization plan includes both renovations and new developments and aims to modernize student facilities, consolidate academic departments, and integrate sustainable building practices. The largest projects—the Academ-

ic Complex 1, Academic Building 2, and the Valley Academic and Cultural Center—are expected to reshape the campus.

The \$90 million Academic Complex 1, at Burbank Boulevard and Ethel Avenue, replaces bungalows built in the 1950s. Construction began in May 2023 and is scheduled for completion later this year. The three-story, 84,000-square-foot facility will house more than two dozen classrooms, labs, and offices, bringing

together the Business Administration, Emergency Services, Mathematics, Psychology, and Sociology departments under one roof.

A short walk away, Academic Building 2 stands between the library and music building, replacing the now-demolished theater complex. The 60,951-square-foot facility will serve as the home for communication and technology studies.

According to NAC Architecture, the building's programming architect, the design incorporates "movable desks" to accommodate different learning environments and offers a variety of informal gathering spaces for "meeting, studying, teaming, eating, and relaxing."

The Valley Academic and Cultural Center (VACC), has been in the works for nearly a decade. The more than \$100 million, three-story facility will unify the arts, media, and design departments in the northwest corner of campus upon its scheduled opening in 2026. It promises state-of-the-art features, including smart classrooms, four theaters, rehearsal spaces, audio/visual labs, a radio station and a newsroom. However, the VACC has been marred by delays and criticism, most notably due to a \$35 million wrongful termination lawsuit filed in May of last year between its

previous construction firm, Pinner Construction, and the LACCD. Since the initial filing, neither party has publicly commented on the matter.

Beyond the VACC, ongoing construction projects have reshaped the campus in several ways. Fenced-off areas and blocked pathways have become common sights, with the former field between the art building and the old theater, once a space for classes and events, now gone. The theater department has also had to move its productions off-campus, adapting to the loss of its performance space.

Despite the controversy, the ReVitalizing Valley project has maintained a strong focus on sustainability. All three of the current projects have earned LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, with both Academic Building 2 and Academic Building 1 achieving a Silver rating. LEED-certified buildings are designed to reduce energy consumption, water use, and carbon emissions.

Valley College has been a leader in green building efforts within the Los Angeles Community College District. In 2006, it unveiled the Maintenance & Operations / Sheriff's Station, the first new campus building in over 30 years—and the first in the entire LACCD to earn LEED certification.

College aid at stake

Milan Rafaelov,
Layout/Opinion Editor

Within his first month in office, Donald Trump has unleashed a deluge of executive orders that threaten to defund colleges and universities who fail to comply.

The new Trump administration and its political appointees aim to leverage the Supreme Court's interpretation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to advance its campaign promises, including dismantling the Department of Education, eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, and enforcing America First policies that would mandate mass deportations.

"The Department will no longer tolerate the overt and covert racial discrimination that has become widespread in this nation's educational institutions," Craig Trainor, acting assistant secretary for civil rights, wrote in a nationwide letter to schools.

"The law is clear: treating students differently on the basis of race to achieve nebulous goals such as diversity, racial balancing, social justice, or equity is illegal under controlling Supreme Court precedent.

The Department of Education's Feb. 14 "Dear Colleague" letter reinforces the 2023 Supreme Court ruling that federally struck down affirmative action in college admissions. The letter sets a Feb. 28 deadline for "measures to assess compliance," but established programs and student protections will remain unless the Republican-led Congress makes legislative changes to existing laws.

As part of its effort to curb diversity initiatives, the Department of Education launched the "End DEI" portal on Feb. 27, allowing students, faculty and parents to report programs that they believe discriminate based on race or violate the administration's new policies. The portal is part of a broader push to monitor and restrict DEI efforts, raising concerns that institutions may be forced to dismantle long-standing programs.

"While the letter mentions a potential loss of federal funding for noncompliance, it's crucial for our faculty and staff to understand that this letter does not change existing law nor carry legal force," said Dr. Alberto J. Román, Interim Chancellor for the LACCD. "For our day-to-day operations, you should know that LACCD will continue adhering to all applicable state and federal laws."

This is not the first time California has faced contentious legal restrictions on race-conscious policies. The Prohibition Against Discrimination or Preferential Treatment by State and Other Public Entities, known as Proposition 209, passed in 1996. It bars public educational institutions from considering race, ethnicity, or gender in admissions, scholarships and programing. This measure ended affirmative action in the UC and CSU systems, which led to declines in enrollment among underrepresented groups.

Since then, universities and colleges have adapted to create race-neutral programs that support the needs of underrepresented students through "diversity-focused" initiatives that do not specifically use race as criterion.

In California, because higher education was already sued in the federal courts and in state court for, what they felt was race-based admissions or race-based programming, we've gone through the process of identifying what is allowable and what is not allowable." Said Martin De Mucha Flores, dean of student equity at Valley.

Dean De Mucha Flores is not shaken by the "Dear Colleagues" letter or its implications. He explains that most programs consisting within the Mosaic Village, such as the Umoja Black Scholars, Rainbow Pride, or the Dream Resource Center, are state-funded and financially secure. Some federally funded programs, like student work-study or EOPS may be exposed to cuts, but the extent is still unclear. However, Flores' primary concern is the potential "chilling effect," a phenomenon in which uncertainty and ambiguity cause people to refrain from exercising their legal rights due to fear of retaliation or repercussions.

VALLEY LIFE

College bound students visit Valley for music and mentorship

Umoja Black Scholars hosted the third annual Young Black Scholars Day, welcoming middle and high school students to campus.

By Kaia Mann,
Editor-in-Chief

The Umoja Black Scholar program hosted close to 250 students on the Valley College campus Tuesday for its third annual Young Black Scholars Day. The event blended work and play, offering students valuable insights into their

and his crew charged into the South Gym, the audience was invited to join in, upping the energy with dance battles. The celebration represents one of several events hosted on campus in honor of Black History Month. Led by Umoja counselor and coordinator Elliott Coney, the program aims to support the educational journey of African American students through counseling and career guidance.

“I think it’s revolutionary in a sense to see this many black students at LAVC and be able to reach these students, get them to come here and build relationships.”

Dr. Elliott Coney

post-graduation opportunities while providing resources, guidance, and an opportunity to dance it out. “I think it means everything to let students know that they are represented in spaces that they haven’t even entered yet,” said Valley student and former BSU president Sable Thomas. “They can make their own spaces and make their presence known and felt while connecting with other students that look like them.” Tommy the Clown, the “father of hip-hop clowning”

dance. Umoja supports marginalized students in taking that next step, whether it be receiving their associate’s degree, transferring to a four year, or joining the workforce. “This was by far the best event we’ve had, it far exceeded my expectations,” said Coney. “I think it’s revolutionary in a sense to see this many black students at LAVC and be able to reach these students, get them to come here and build relationships.” According to a report by the ACLU California Action, Black



Kaia Mann for the Valley Star

More than 200 middle and high school students received insight into their post-graduation journey at Umoja event.

student enrollment in California has decreased by 47 percent from 2003. Additionally, Black students have the lowest graduation rates in California universities, with only about 78 percent graduating high school compared to 90 percent of white students. The Black Student Union and Umoja seek to support black students throughout their experience in higher education, carrying

them all the way to graduation. These programs are potentially at risk given the Trump administration’s recent orders to cut diversity, equity and inclusivity (DEI) funding. When asked about the state of Umoja at Valley, Coney asserted that they will remain visible and not back down. “Despite what anybody says politically, DEI exists on this campus and exists for our

students,” said Coney. “They will not be silenced, I will not be silenced, we are going to continue to move the agenda forward and keep it inclusive.” The event aimed to provide middle and high school students a glimpse into college life, eat soul food, and gather information on the next phase of their lives. Speakers from the National college resource foundation

and various colleges shared scholarship opportunities and potential pathways. “So far this has been like the best field trip I have been to,” said Mailan Machey, a junior at Granada High School. “I really loved being around my community and learning more about college opportunities.”



Valley’s Free Wednesday Concert Series kicked off Feb. 26 with “A Musical Celebration for Black History Month,” featuring the band Restorem Brass. The brass quartet performed musical pieces from the Harlem Renaissance, offering descriptions of each piece, followed by an audience Q&A. Danielle Ondarza played the horn, Professor Dillon Macintyre was on trombone, Joseph Jackson played the tuba, and Cameron Wilkins and Mike Zonshine were on trumpet. This concert series is open to both Valley students and community members, with each performance available on Zoom. (Rebecca Balin and Elie Sfeir for The Valley Star)



Assembly Bill 247 looks to level the playing field for inmates.

California operates 35 fire camps to train and employ incarcerated firefighters who are paid less than minimum wage.

By Bruna de Mello,
Staff Writer

As record-breaking wildfires tore through Los Angeles County in early January, more than 900 incarcerated firefighters were on the front lines battling the flames for a fraction of what their non-incarcerated counterparts earn. A new bill introduced in the California Assembly seeks to change that. The multiple fires that occurred in Los Angeles, aided by the almost 100 mph Santa Ana winds, resulted in 29 fatalities and the destruction of over 16,000 houses and businesses. “The problem is the wind... I personally have seen wind-driven fires where a hillside will light up faster than a horse can run, said Alan Cowen, professor of fire technology and emergency medical technology at Valley College.” If there is a fire south of the freeway it will go all the way to the ocean. There are very few things that can stop a wind-driven fire.” Smoke was first seen in Ma-

libu on Jan. 7 at 10:30 a.m., with its origin point in the Pacific Palisades area. At 11:06 a.m. Cal Fire issued its first report, naming it the “Palisades Fire” and measuring its size to 10 acres. At 6:49 p.m., another fire erupted in Altadena, the “Eaton Fire.” It spread rapidly, prompting evacuations less than 40 minutes later. Many residents had already begun fleeing as flames approached. Historically, California’s wildfire season peaks in summer. But prolonged drought conditions, coupled with unrelenting Santa Ana winds, have made fires



A car sits in a yard in Pasadena on Feb. 25 from the Eaton fire. “Not EV” is spray painted on the side of the car, alerting officials that the car is not an electronic vehicle.

an increasingly year-round threat. Cal Fire officials say the causes of January’s blazes remain under investigation. Per the World Resources

Institute, a “combination of heat, dryness and wind is compounded by the fact that communities are increasingly being built near vegetated areas

(known as the ‘wildland-urban interface’) putting both people and their built environment at greater risk.” The Palisades and Eaton fires, among the three most destructive wildfires in California history, burned for 24 days before being fully contained. As thousands of acres went up in flames, firefighting crews from Texas, Arizona, Oregon, Colorado, Washington, and Utah, along with reinforcements from Mexico and Canada, were deployed to assist. Meanwhile, the reliance on incarcerated firefighters reignited debate over their wages, with many questioning whether their com-

pensation reflected the risks they faced on the front lines. Currently, incarcerated firefighters, who volunteer through the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Conservation Camp program, earn between \$5.80 and \$10.24 per day. When assigned to an active fire, they receive an additional \$1 per hour, far less than the hourly wages of state-employed firefighters. Valley Wildland Fire Technology instructor Brian Anderson states that the entry-level training is relatively the same for all firefighters. “We work in a pretty hazardous environment and I don’t know that the pay discrepancy should necessarily be significantly different,” said Anderson. “They are expected to do the very same work.” Assembly Bill 247, which was introduced by Isaac Bryan, aims to higher these incarcerated firefighters’ pay, and is set for a committee hearing on March 11 at the State Capitol.

Nickel Boys makes a visual impact with its POV style.

Set in the Jim Crow era, the film follows two friends navigating a corrupt reform school in southern Florida.

By Kaia Mann,
Editor-in-Chief

The heartbreaking Nickel Boys weaves hope and despair into a gripping tale of friendship forged in the face of unimaginable adversity, confronting the lingering traumas of the past and reminding audiences that history’s darkest chapters are far from closed. Adapted from Colson Whitehead’s 2019 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, ‘Nickel Boys’ follows Elwood (Ethan Herisse), an intelligent black teenager in early-’60s Florida who unjustly lands in a brutal reform school (based on an actual, infamous institution). There, he meets streetwise teen Turner (Brandon Wilson), and the two forge a bond as they navigate an institution designed to break them. Nickel Boys marks RaMell Ross’s narrative feature

debut, standing out both technically and thematically while earning acclaim from critics and audiences alike. What sets Nickel Boys apart is its point-of-view, first-person perspective. The camera acts as the character’s eyes, presenting events as they see and feel them. This paired with the naturalistic music of Scott Alario and Alex Somers immerses audiences in the cruel world of Nickel. Moments of peace—Elwood watching the blue sky drift past through the branches of a fruit tree or finding comfort in his grandmother’s kitchen—create a vivid sense of place and security. When that world is shattered by injustice and cruelty, the pain feels all the more profound. While some could argue this style of filmmaking emphasizes gimmick more than story, they would be mistaken in the case of Nickel

Boys. The dreamlike essence of the film supports its narrative tale of painful recollection, blurring the lines between memory and reality. The fictional Nickel Academy is based on the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys, a real-life reform school in Florida that operated for over a century after its founding in 1900 before getting shut down in 2011. Though Elwood and Turner’s story is fictional, it represents just one of countless untold tragedies buried within the nation’s dark and deeply twisted past. The powerful, yet gentle, performances of Herisse and Wilson shine. Herisse cradles Elwood’s character, capturing his evolution from a hopeful high school student, deeply inspired by his teacher to reject a whitewashed version of history and embrace the civil rights movement, to his harrowing time

at Nickel Academy, where he clings to his idealism despite the cruelty around him. Wilson’s Turner provides a slightly more cynical perspective that is still imbued with a certain softness. This softness, carried throughout the entire movie, is what sets it apart from so many other films revolving around the transgressions faced by the black community. In its 2-hour and 20-minute runtime, Nickel Boys delivers a powerful, decade-spanning story that echoes the traumas of the past, still ever-present today. The immersive filmmaking and committed performances solidify all involved as talents to watch. While the horrific events and real-life inspirations serve as a dark mark in the nation’s history, the quiet beauty of Nickel Boys shines bright.



Nickel Boys has earned over \$3 million in the worldwide box office and can be streamed on multiple paid services.

OPINION

Congressional Democrats on the retreat

A Republican majority in every branch of government have Democrats backed into a corner.

Daimler Koch, Online Editor

America appears to be heading towards a constitutional crisis. President Trump has executed an avalanche of executive orders, and his coalition of Republicans are doing everything to advance his initiatives. Some of the people at the federal level that can stop them, the congressional Democrats, will have to play the long game and work to tear down the Republicans, vote by vote, over the next four years. Democrats are truly limited politically, with the executive, legislative and judicial branches all under the Republicans' thumb. In Congress specifically, the Republicans lead 53 to 47 in the Senate, and 218 to 215 in the House of Representatives, meaning that the Democrats can not pass or strike down legislation that requires a majority vote. Regardless, people are disappointed with Democrats for not taking a stronger stance against Trump, phoning in their complaints to Democratic lawmakers. Social media is aflame with Democratic voters who are upset with their representatives in Congress. In a poll hosted on Feb. 19, by Quinnipiac University, 54 percent of voters said they are dissatisfied with the system of checks and balances in the federal government, and 49 percent of Democrats from the same poll disapproved of their party's actions in Congress. Even Democratic Governor

Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania said that his party was not checking Trump's power in Congress as it should be. However, not all hope is lost. The only major way that Democrats can slow the Republicans in the short term is to be an active, raging nuisance. While there's no justification for brazenly breaking laws like Trump, there are still perfectly legal ways to slow the Republicans down. Take any opportunity to negotiate a bill and hold out until the last minute. If insults are thrown, throw them back. Use more aggressive language that attacks and shames the Republicans and their character. They have to get under the Republicans' skin, distract them from going forward with their plan, and hold their current base strong. In the long term, the Democrats will have to play and reinvent the Republicans' wider game of expanding their voter base. Nearly every major demographic and some traditionally blue districts shifted rightward during the November 2024 election - a shift attributed to the Republicans' populist approach appealing to wor-

king class voters without college degrees. The Democrats should chase this demographic and appeal to their beliefs, keeping the Republicans from holding onto them. If they do so, they might have an opportunity to flip Congress come November 2026, when the House of Representatives and a third of the Senate

will be up for reelection. This way, the Democrats can achieve a twofold result. Not only will they prevent further abuses of power against everyday Americans fighting for their rights in the years to come, but they will also prove that the Democratic party can change with the times and will always be a party of the underrepresented for generations after.

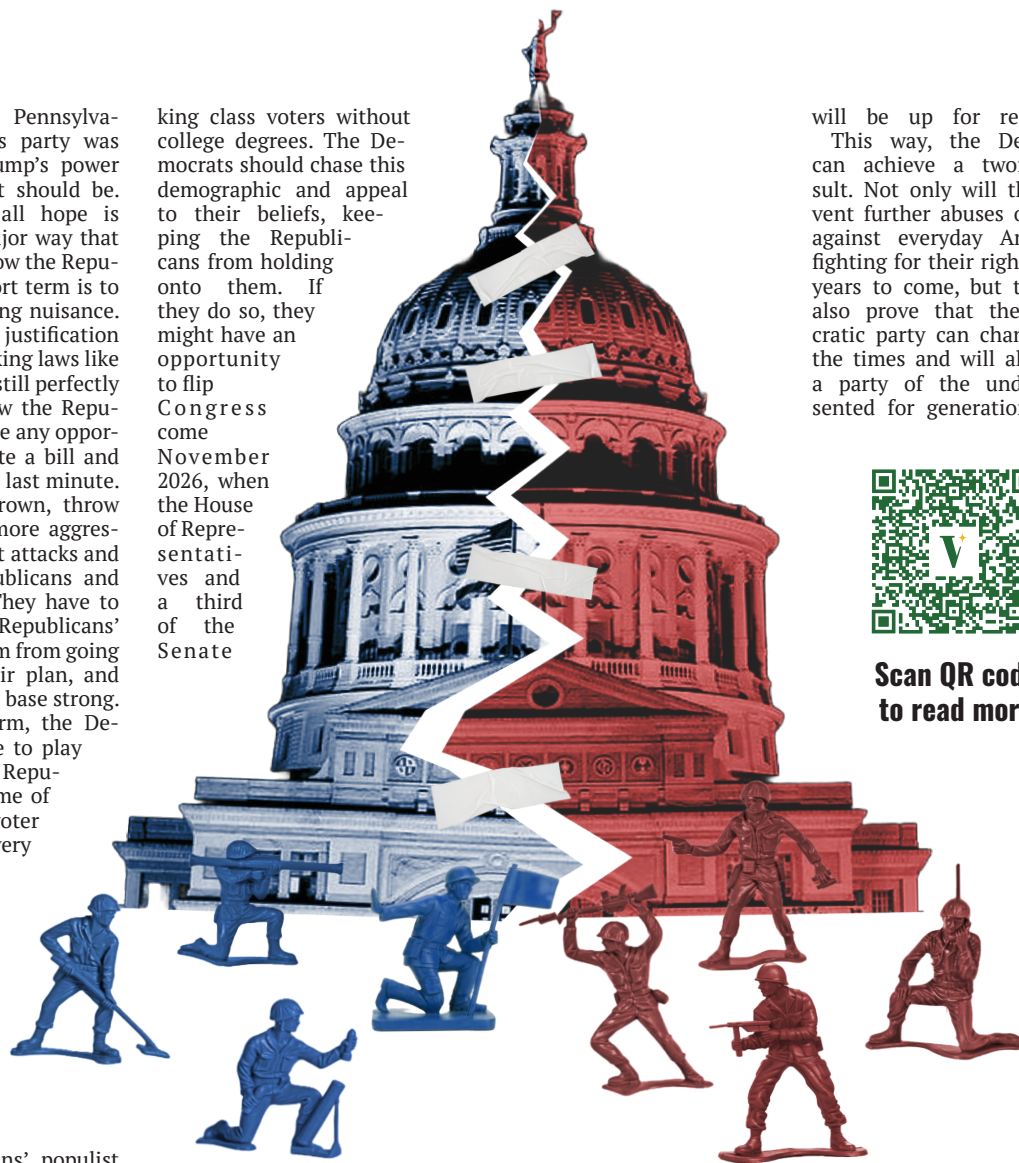


Illustration by Milan Rafaelov



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GOT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR?

Letters to the editor can be submitted online at www.valleystarnews.com. Letters must be limited to 300 words and may be edited for content. Full name and contact information must be supplied in order for letters to be printed.

Trump unleashes attacks on DEI

Colleges, universities and companies make missteps in eliminating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies.

Jessica Guo, Special to The Star

As colleges and universities grapple with the Trump administration's executive orders to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, some institutions have followed suit. However, LACCD is holding firm while keeping an eye on potential directives. This may be the best the colleges can do under the threat of losing federal funding. The Department of Education announced the closure of the Diversity & Inclusion Council on Jan. 23. Established under the Obama administration, the council was intended to promote diversity in higher education. The Department's letter suggests that policies promoting racial diversity may violate federal law, including policies considered race-neutral if they use 'proxies or indirect means' to advance diversity," wrote interim Chancellor Dr. Alberto J. Román in an email to district employees on Feb. 19. "While the letter mentions a potential loss of federal funding for noncompliance, it's crucial for our faculty and staff to un-

derstand that this letter does not change existing law nor carry legal force. It simply represents the Department's current interpretation, which will be subject to judicial review." Canceling DEI training and terminating service contracts totaling more than \$2.6 million, Trump has brought these initiatives under scrutiny, claiming that valuing diversity has led to race-based discrimination and an inefficient workforce. Unfortunately, opposition to equitable policies have been prominent since 2023, when 40 bills were introduced advocating for a crackdown on diversity initiatives. Several states in the South have passed these measures, leading to the shutdown of affinity groups that provide safe spaces for intercultural members of college communities. At the University of North Texas, these policies resulted in the elimination of networking groups for women of color. At the University of Florida, centers focused on building LGBTQ+ and interfaith communities were shut down. Trump continues to seize opportunities to attack DEI, even as the nation recovers from the first major commer-

cial airline crash since 2009. On Jan. 29, an American Airlines plane plunged into the Potomac River after colliding with a U.S. Army Black Hawk in Washington, D.C.'s most controlled airspace. The devastating crash left no survivors. A rescue team conducted a recovery mission, searching for 14 missing victims. Although the National Transportation Safety Board stated that further investigation was required, Trump pointed fingers. In his address amidst the national tragedy, he blamed the Federal Aviation Administration's DEI programs, implying that air traffic controllers were responsible for the collision. Trump's inflammatory rhetoric emphasized the need for "the best and the brightest," despite the fact that he fired the FAA's director and disbanded the Aviation Safety Advisory Committee just days before. Although his language demonizes DEI policies, these programs are not limited to race or gender. They also work to eliminate biased policies and practices against people of different socioeconomic statuses, those with disabilities, and members of other marginalized groups. DEI programs maintain a meritocracy,

The difference in likelihood of financial outperformance

Top quartile of companies with more diversity on board of directors, %
Bottom quartile of companies with less diversity on board of directors, %



McKinsey and Company, Diversity Matters Even More 2023 Study

ensuring a level playing field where opportunities manifest through hard work rather than personal connections. While Trump portrays DEI initiatives as harmful to government efficiency, his own cabinet appointments highlight the risks of placing unqualified people in positions of power. Pete Hegseth's confirmation as secretary of defense is a notable example. An ex-Fox News host with no experience in any executive role, Hegseth's appointment raises concerns, especially in a time of tense foreign relations. Additionally, appointing Elon Musk as head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has enabled Musk to secure sensitive personal data

for millions of federal workers. Many large companies including Amazon, Meta, McDonald's, and Target have already slashed their DEI programs in response to recent conservative backlash. Many anti-DEI shareholders believe that these policies stifle innovation and encourage quotas for certain groups, an action largely illegal under the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. As a result, the prioritization of shareholder value and high stock prices has become the death knell of policies designed to promote equity across the nation. Without DEI and measures to promote a meritocracy, democracy slides into darkness.

VALLEY VIEW | Have today's politics influenced your media consumption?

Text by Justin Rosenbaum

Photos by Astrid Cortez



"I am more aware and take more time to do research. I try not to get my information off of social media and more from journals and articles that are peer-reviewed."

-Jocelyn Romo, nursing major



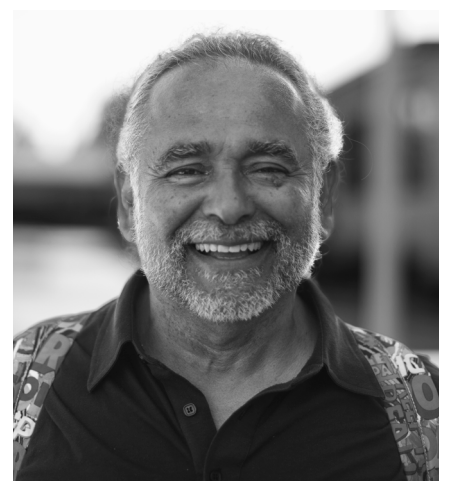
"I am skeptical of a lot of it, and I think that everything online now is fake and you really have to go online and do your own research. I feel like a lot of articles are one-sided and I like to check different articles to confirm they all have the same information."

-Jazmin Beltran, biology major



"Many things I see from Trump and this administration is to get a rise out of people. Almost all of the news is bad. I'm not hearing that much good, and it's just political parties trying to sway you on how to think and I reject that. I was taught to formulate my own opinion based on facts."

-Lucas Nallar, administrative justice major



"I try to stay away from all the news because of our bigot president. I can't stand racism, and he was an entertainer before and now he thinks he's still running a show."

-Rony Folger, unknown major

SPORTS

Lady Monarchs' season comes to an end following second-round playoff

Woman's basketball squeaked into the playoffs as the final seed in the Western State Conference, upsetting first round opponent.



Valley Sophomore Gizelle Moreno looks to inbound the ball in the final seconds of the first-round playoff victory, 46-42 over Santa Ana College on Feb. 26.

Holdem Graff,
Sports Editor

In a season filled with ups and downs, the Monarchs were handled 72-61 by the Cerro Coso Coyotes Saturday evening and officially eliminated from the playoffs. Sophomore guard Gizelle Moreno dropped 24 and came one point shy of a career-high, but the rest of the squad shot just 11-38. Cerro Coso

guards Shaniyah McCarthy (22 points) and Alexis Stanton (12 points) led the charge in the starting lineup as forward Lia Sims poured in 16 off the bench. The Coyotes shot 49.1 percent from the field on the night, significantly outpacing Valley's mark of just 35.3. One thing, however, that the Monarchs never lacked all season, even in defeat, was their sense of togetherness.

"There's a lot of family [here]. We have a great, great program with good coaches that really have our back on and off the court," said sophomore guard Venus Gao following a victory against Antelope Valley back on February 21 that clinched the playoffs for the Monarchs. "I'm just grateful to be here." Following a competitive first quarter in which the two sides finished even at 12, the

Monarchs went on to drop the next two quarters 20-9 and 26-17 as their lack of shooting production outside of Moreno began to cause issues. They headed to the fourth trailing 58-38 with the final ten minutes left to play. While it was a disappointing finish to the 2024-2025 campaign, Valley still managed to produce a season with takeaways that the team can

be proud of as they turn the page to next year. Perhaps the most prominent of these was their 46-42 win over Santa Ana on Feb. 26 in the first round of the postseason. Despite barely making it into the bracket as the 24th and final seed in the tournament, they took down the nine-seeded Dons on the road to advance to the second round for the first time since 2022-2023.

The squad also produced a level of success at home that hasn't been as common over the past few years. Finishing 7-3 in games played at Valley this season, it was their second-highest home winning percentage of the past seven years. "The energy and crowd at home this year was definitely better than my previous year," said sophomore forward Samantha Maldonado, who led the team in scoring and averaged a double-double in conference play. "Having such a supportive fanbase and seeing family and loved ones every game makes the game extra personal...I didn't want their time to go to waste and I also wanted them to feel like it was worth coming out to watch us so they would come out to more games." As the women's basketball program continues to prove itself and develop an ongoing sense of continuity, the future remains bright. The Monarchs are one of only two teams in the Western State-South Conference to have playoff appearances each of the last three seasons. Additionally, they have only had a conference record below .500 one time since the 2012-2013 season. All of these factors certainly bode well for the program as it looks to recruit new talent and establish a constant cycle of competitive basketball for years to come. "The coaching is how I know this program will continue to thrive," says Maldonado. "I hope everyone who comes to play at Valley gets to experience that found family feeling. They helped me fall back in love with basketball."

Opinion: Transgender women belong in women's sports

The recent attacks on transgender women in sports exacerbates an already unequal playing field.

Alex Diaz,
Sports Editor

Transgender women are facing a new barrier in NCAA women's college sports. The organization has proposed a ban that explicitly prohibits transgender women from competing in women's events, allowing participation only for "student-athletes assigned female at birth." This decision was made after President Donald Trump issued an executive order threatening to cut federal funding to schools that permit transgender girls and women to participate.

It's essential to recognize that trans athletes in the NCAA represent fewer than 10 out of 500,000 athletes, as stated by NCAA President Charlie Baker. The NCAA's prompt response to the order just one day after its announcement clearly indicates that their actions are driven more by personal opinions and political pressures than by any evidence of harm to cisgender female athletes.

Trump's executive order, titled "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports," reinforces the administration's definition of Title IX. This 1972 Civil Rights law prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs that receive federal funding, ensuring a level playing field in sports for all. This order was one of the President's campaign promises.

California is one of 24 states to allow transgender athletes to play in sports matching their gender identity. During a recent Governors meeting with President Trump at the White House, the Governor of Maine, Janet Mills, commented on the executive order, telling Trump, "See you in court."

This ban is nothing more than a blanket distraction meant to obscure the pressing issues within the NCAA. It neglects the significant inequalities faced by girls and women in sports. Some

problems require focus, and it's time to confront them directly rather than sidestepping the conversation.

Riley Gaines, a former competitive swimmer from the University of Kentucky, gained national attention for her outspoken views on transgender athlete's participation in women's sports. In 2022, she competed against Lia Thomas, a transgender athlete, during the NCAA national championship.

Thomas made history as the first openly transgender athlete to win an NCAA Division I national championship, a milestone that sparked significant debate. Gaines articulated her feelings of discomfort and violation while competing alongside Thomas. She expressed her belief that it was fundamentally unfair to face someone whose hormone levels differed from hers.

"We are going back to 1972 by asking women to smile to step aside to allow these men onto our podiums, telling us that we're the problem if we don't want to or feel totally comfortable undressing next to a fully naked, fully intact man," Gaines said. "That's not progress." In an interview with The Megyn Kelly Show.

Testosterone does not inherently form an advantage or guarantee success in any sport. It can produce muscle mass, speed, and stronger bones but doesn't grant you a gold medal at the finish line. Furthermore, The sex assigned at birth should not automatically dictate one's athletic ability or talent. If the NCAA is to create a framework for fair competition, it must be prepared to uphold the outcomes without contesting them.

San Jose State's volleyball team has become a central topic in the ongoing debate surrounding gender and sports. During the 2023-2024 season, senior outside and right-side hitter Blaire Flemings faced

rumors after an alleged parent claimed that Fleming was transgender. The parents expressed concerns that Blaire's powerful hits could pose a risk to their child and that Blaire was taking up a roster position.

In the 2024-2025 season, San Jose senior Brooke Slusser spoke out, stating, "It has nothing to do with the way someone wants to live their life day to day; that's not an issue. But when it comes to the fairness and safety of women playing, there's a reason there's a difference in divisions for women and men." In an interview with KTVU News.

Slusser later joined a lawsuit against the NCAA alongside Riley Gaines. This led to the cancellation and forfeiture of several matches involving five Mountain West teams against San Jose State: Boise State, Wyoming, Utah State, Southern Utah, and Nevada. Since the end of the season, Flemings has not commented publicly, but several of her teammates have become more vocal about the situation. Many players have since entered the transfer portal.

Flemings held the 73rd position in kills per set for San Jose State in the division, contributing to a team record of 13 wins and 18 losses before the forfeits. While she played a role on the team, she was not considered a standout player and did not guide the team to any championships during her tenure.

The notion of excluding trans women from sports in the name of "protecting" cisgender women is fundamentally flawed. Such a stance not only undermines the inclusive spirit of athletic competition but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about gender identity. This misguided perspective prioritizes the fear of unfair advantage over the importance of acceptance and equality in sports.



Illustration by Milan Rafaelov

Men and women place second overall in first WSC swim meet

Valley College hosted Pierce, Santa Monica, Ventura and Citrus colleges in the Western State Conference competition Feb. 21.



Trinity Penny for the Valley Star

Swimmers compete in the women's 200 meter freestyle

Natalie Gazazian & Toby Douglas,
Staff Writers

Valley College men's and women's swim teams finished second overall at the first Western State Conference meet, scoring 318.7 points in the men's and 298.3 points in the women's events.

The Monarchs competed against Pierce College, Santa Monica College, Ventura College, and Citrus College. The meet featured 28 events, with the women's

team participating in nine and men's competing in 11. Despite a number of freshmen on both teams, the second-place showing displayed their competitiveness.

"Some of these guys, it's something they've never done before," said assistant coach Levon Gukasyan. "Training and consistency lead to us being successful at swim meets."

The Men's team showed steadiness throughout the meet. Freshman Chase Martsof has shown his success

by placing in the top five in a number of freestyle events.

Martsof took part in several swimming events. He won first place in the 200 meter freestyle, finishing at 1:57.12. In the 100 meter freestyle, he finished second with a time of 52.05. Martsof also swam in the 200 meter freestyle relay with Greg Carrillo and Ryan Nevsky, placing second at 1:33.72.

"It's [being repetitive]... you can't show up to a meet and just lock in," said Martsof. "It comes from weeks and months of training, your zone comes from training."

The Monarchs had another swimmer who displayed consistency in their efforts. Sophomore Greg Carrillo contributed to the team and placed in the top five.

In the 200 meter backstroke, Carrillo came in third at 2:14.06. Carrillo finished fifth in the 200 meter individual medley with a time of 2:13.35. In the 100 meter backstroke, Carrillo placed fourth with a time of 1:04.21. "Last swim meet was practice and getting back into shape," said Carrillo. "I warm up a bit

and practice my breathing...I step on the block and just close my eyes and go for it."

Ciera Center, Valley's newest diver in her freshman year, spent some time perfecting her dives before the beginning of the meet and is looking forward to the upcoming season.

"I feel pretty good. I'm confident about the season," Center said. "I do consistent training every day, Monday through Sunday."

Center's motivation is "to show everyone what I'm capable of."

She said visualizing the dives prepares her for meets before she competes in them. She also credits using muscle memory when locking in.

In a 200 meter freestyle relay, swimmers Brisa Chajan, Gianna Double, Mariane Avila, and Ann Donahoe combined to secure second place overall for the Monarchs.

The Monarchs head to Santa Monica College for the second Western State Conference on March 15 and take their mark at 11:30 a.m.



Alejandro Garcia for the Valley Star



Alejandro Garcia for the Valley Star

(TOP) Swimmer Arman Hovannisyan spreading his wings in the men's 100 meter butterfly. (BOTTOM) Valley swimmer Gianna Double gliding through the women's 200 meter backstroke.