

# Los Angeles Times

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PAUL AIKEN Boulder Daily Camera

## DESTRUCTION IN COLORADO

An aircraft works against a fire outside Boulder that has burned 7,100 acres and destroyed at least 92 structures since it began Monday morning. Winds had calmed, but a high-pressure system was frustrating firefighting efforts, and evacuated residents were still unable to return to their homes. **NATION, A8**

# State seeks big fines on PacifiCare

Alleged lost files, underpayment and mismanaged claims carry a potential penalty of \$9.9 billion.

DUKE HELFAND

California regulators are seeking fines of up to \$9.9 billion from health insurer PacifiCare over allegations that it repeatedly mismanaged medical claims, lost thousands of patient documents, failed to pay doctors what they were owed and ignored calls to fix the problems.

tients in California, and the pursuit of cutting costs at any means possible," said Adam Cole, the insurance department's general counsel. "It's a story of intense corporate greed."

PacifiCare and United-Health Group have rejected the state's assertions, and they are fighting the proposed fines in a lengthy legal hearing that began 10 months ago in Oakland and could conclude as early as next month.

The insurers maintain that the state's case largely involves administrative errors that did little harm to anyone. They point out that three-quarters of the allegations relate to PacifiCare's alleged failure during a short period in 2007 to inform doctors and patients in correspondence of their right to appeal coverage decisions.

"The allegations concerning claims processing by PacifiCare are simply not true," spokeswoman Cheryl Randolph said. "By all objective measures, PacifiCare [See PacifiCare, A15]

## Health Net gets OK for rate hike

Premiums will jump an average of 16% for 38,000 policyholders after regulators find no basis to block them. **BUSINESS, B1**

## Nibbling away at a leafy carnivore

Scientists are on the trail of meat-eating plants like the cobra lily and Venus' flytrap, in decline amid human encroachment.

AMINA KHAN REPORTING FROM QUINCY, CALIF.

"This is the easy part," says Barry Rice, half-sliding, half-falling down a ravine through a latticework of dead branches.

Decades ago, lush stands of *Darlingtonia californica* — emerald plants coiled like fanged cobras ready to pounce — grew at this spot in the northern reaches of the Sierra Nevada.

Deep in the ravine, the air is hot and dead. Pieces of bark that have sloughed off trees make every step a danger — nature's equivalent of a thousand forgotten skateboards cluttering a driveway. Slate tinkles underfoot, and the ground feels like stale angel-food cake: stiff yet porous.

Rice, a botanist at UC Davis, is not the first to hunt the cobra lily here in Butterfly Valley. In 1875, amateur botanist Rebecca Austin fed the plants raw mutton and carefully observed how they digested it.

Yet to this day, much of the plants' biology and habitat remain unknown — which is why Rice is here, trying to find established populations.

Near the bottom of the crevice, the ground becomes moist. The air cools and softens. This is where the cobra lilies would be. "When you see them, they look almost like animals," Rice says.

But there are none to be seen.

Rice does find meat-eaters in some of the other places he checks out on this July weekend. But in three of seven places where they used to be, the plants have vanished. It's a sad story that is playing out across the country in the valleys, bogs and bottoms where carnivorous plants once thrived.

The cobra lily, also known as the California pitcher plant, is comparatively lucky: Its stocks may be dwindling but its broad habitat affords something [See Plants, A10]

# Abuse issues at border

In the last 18 months, five U.S. agents have been accused or convicted of assaults or sex crimes.

KEN DILANIAN REPORTING FROM DEL RIO, TEXAS

One by one, Border Patrol agents took the witness stand in the federal courthouse here last week to testify against a fellow officer, their faces creased with anguish.

By their accounts, Agent Jesus Enrique Diaz Jr., a husband and father with seven years on the job, tortured a 16-year-old drug smuggler two years ago by wrenching his handcuffed arms upward as he pressed a knee into his back. In an effort to make the boy reveal where he had hidden marijuana bundles near the Rio Grande, Diaz also kicked him and dropped him face-first on the ground, agents testified.

No one stopped the al-



MARK LAMBIE El Paso Times

**RALLY:** Alondra Rojas, 9, demonstrates in El Paso to protest a fatal border shooting in June.

leged assault as the 110-pound juvenile screamed, but some agents talked afterward about the "disgust" they felt and reported it.

"I knew that what he was doing was wrong," Agent Gabriel Lerma testified.

The result was a rare Justice Department prosecution of a Border Patrol agent on civil rights charges, and the latest indication of problems within the Border Patrol, which has grown rapidly in recent years to become the second-largest police agency in the country with sworn officers after the New York Police Department.

Diaz denies the allegations — he is also charged with lying to investigators — and the case ended in mistrial Thursday because a juror was taking notes in violation of the judge's instruction. A retrial is planned, and Diaz remains on unpaid suspension.

Regardless of the outcome, the Border Patrol is [See Border Patrol, A12]



JOHN RAOUX Associated Press

**GAINESVILLE, FLA.:** The Rev. Terry Jones is pastor of the 50-member Dove World Outreach Center. The church says supporters have mailed Korans to burn.

# Pastor takes defiant stance

Amid global outrage, a Florida church rebuffs a plea to refrain from its planned burning of Muslim holy books.

DAVID ZUCCHINO

The pastor of a tiny, fringe evangelical church in Florida on Tuesday rebuffed a plea for restraint from Gen. David H. Petraeus, who warned that a plan to burn the Muslim holy book could provoke violence against

American troops and citizens overseas.

"Instead of possibly blaming us for what could happen, we put the blame where it belongs — on the people who would do it," Pastor Terry Jones of the 50-member Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Fla., told the Associated Press. "We should address radical Islam and send a very clear warning that they are not to retaliate in any form."

Jones also said he was still praying over his decision and hinted that he might change his mind. "We

understand the general's concerns and we are taking those into consideration," he told WOFL-TV in Orlando.

A coalition of Muslim, Christian and Jewish leaders held a news conference in Washington on Tuesday to condemn Jones' statements and other slurs aimed at Muslims nationwide.

"The threatened burning of copies of the Holy Koran this Saturday is a particularly egregious offense that demands the strongest possible condemnation by all who value civility in public [See Koran, A14]

# Extreme thinker, even for Alaska

Republican Senate candidate Joe Miller wants to phase out Social Security and Medicare.

KIM MURPHY REPORTING FROM FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

For campaign volunteer Amy Walker, the Republican U.S. Senate race in Alaska never was about money, so it didn't matter that Sen. Lisa Murkowski outspent her man several times over. Joe Miller, the 43-year-old Fairbanks lawyer who wrested the nomination from the influential incumbent, would show up in people's living rooms, she said, share a cup of coffee, and walk away with 20 votes.

"When they can meet you

face-to-face and answer a question and look you in the eye, that is a powerful thing," said Walker, who coordinates volunteers in Alaska for former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee's political fundraising arm.

"Joe is very down-to-earth; he doesn't stand on ceremony.... And he is an absolutely rock-solid constitutional conservative."

Miller managed to do exactly what his political mentor, Sarah Palin, did four years earlier when she won the Alaska governorship: run outside the party hierarchy with a feisty network of committed, grass-roots volunteers. His conservative message rebuffs Alaska's traditional pork barrel politics that depend on billions of dollars in federal aid.

Miller, a graduate of West Point and Yale Law School, and — perhaps more telling [See Miller, A14]

## A new look for Hero Complex

The Times relaunches its destination for in-depth coverage of sci-fi, fantasy, superheroes, and visual arts. It's all at [www.herocomplex.com](http://www.herocomplex.com).

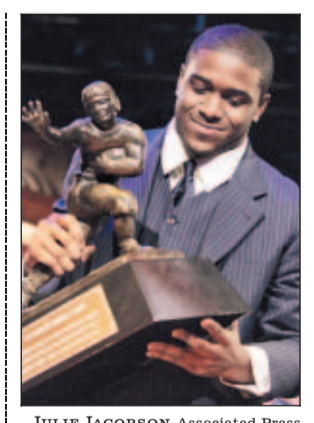
## Businesses want more tax relief

Industry groups welcome Obama's plan to expand a write-off for capital purchases but also want Bush-era cuts extended. **BUSINESS, B1**

## No longer an outsider in Bell

The insular local Lebanese community was an unlikely launching place for a leader of the largely Latino city's BASTA group. **LATEXTRA, AA1**

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JULIE JACOBSON Associated Press

## Will passing the buck stop here?

Bill Plaschke wonders if it's too much to ask that Reggie Bush, above, turn in his Heisman in a rare show of accountability for USC's football program. **SPORTS, C1**

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