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USC PRICE / L.A. TIMES POLL

L.A.'s voters mostly upbeat

Traffic, schools and housing are top gripes, but Angelenos are optimistic about the future under incoming mayor Eric Garcetti.

By MICHAEL FINNEGAN

Los Angeles voters are upbeat about the city's quality of life as Eric Garcetti prepares to take over as mayor — even if they remain frustrated by traffic jams, substandard schools, costly housing and the backlog of unrepaired streets, according to a new USC Price/Los Angeles Times poll.

Those long-standing gripes aside, solid majorities said they were satisfied with the city's police, parks, libraries, public transportation, emergency services and healthcare system.

Most were also optimistic that after four years with Garcetti as mayor, Los Angeles will be better off than it is today. The councilman from Silver Lake will hold an inaugural ceremony at City Hall on Sunday and start work as mayor Monday.

Garcetti opens his term with a positive, if undefined, public image: 53% of voters viewed him favorably, 17% unfavorably. The rest offered no opinion.

"Garcetti's still a blank slate with most voters," said pollster Jeff Harrelson of M4 Strategies, the Republican firm on the bipartisan team that conducted the survey [See Poll, A21]

Split approval for outgoing mayor

Poll shows Villaraigosa's favorable rating at 47%, unfavorable at 40%. A29

Campaign to prevent pandemic goes viral

By ERYN BROWN

ATLANTA — In a war room of sorts in a neatly appointed government building, U.S. officers dressed in crisp uniforms arranged themselves around a U-shaped table and kept their eyes trained on a giant screen. PowerPoint slides ticked through the latest movements of an enemy that recently emerged in Saudi Arabia — a mysterious virus that has killed more than half of the people known to have been infected.

Here at the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, experts from the U.S. Public Health Service and their civilian counterparts have been meeting twice a week since the beginning of June to keep tabs on the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus. MERS-CoV, as the pathogen is known, attacks the lungs and causes fever, severe cough and rapid renal failure.

Since it was first isolated in June 2012 in the city of Jidda, MERS has infected at least 77 people and killed at least 40 of them. The number of confirmed cases has quadrupled since April, and people as far away as Tunisia [See Virus, A12]



WALLY SKALIJ Los Angeles Times

ARMY SGT. Michael Potoczniak, left, and Todd Saunders exchange rings during their marriage ceremony at San Francisco City Hall.

Their ideal wedding gift: legality

Frustrated in the past, same-sex couples want this marriage window to stay open for good.

By MARIA L. LA GANGA, CHRIS MEGERIAN AND JOSEPH SERNA

SAN FRANCISCO — They piled into their white Prius in Los Alamitos at midnight and arrived at City Hall here not long after sunrise Saturday with one simple goal in mind: A marriage

license. Right now.

Sandy Palmer and Mary Dang knew they couldn't get the crucial piece of paper over the weekend in Orange County, where they have lived together for 10 years. And they worried that the right to marry granted by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday afternoon could be taken away again Monday morning.

Such a matrimonial bait and switch had happened to gay and lesbian couples before — not once, but twice. Hence the sleepless night, the moonlit sprint up Inter-

Prop. 8 backers try to halt weddings

As gay couples race to marry, sponsors of the measure contend the court ruling is not yet legally final. A19

A shifting view of equal justice

The Supreme Court's landmark decisions this term mark the end of one era of civil rights laws. A14

state 5, the 90-minute wait on the steps of City Hall as early morning traffic rushed by and the line for licenses swelled.

"We had a wedding in 2010," said Palmer, 33, a pirate-themed affair with

swords and hats, friends and family. "It was amazing, but the legal piece was missing. I wanted to make this a part of my personal history, to grab the moment, be part of something special — not just for me, but for the country."

That combination of joy and tension radiated throughout the beaux-arts building all day Saturday, as couples from throughout the state converged on what was believed to be the only government office in California issuing marriage licenses. By the time the ornate doors swung open at 9:10 a.m., a line of more than 100 people snaked along the building's north side.

And on its south side? That's where a miniature tent city for the San Francisco Pride Celebration & [See Legality, A18]



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JIMMY LUCIA, an actor by day, transports passengers in Hollywood at night. The job is a hit with entertainment-industry workers for its flexible hours.

It's a win-win situation, unless you're a cabbie

App-driven businesses put paying riders in private cars that aren't subject to taxi rules.

By SALVADOR RODRIGUEZ

By day, Jimmy Lucia is an actor. By night, he roams the streets of Los Angeles as BatLyft.

Cruising in his blue 2013 Kia Rio hatchback, Batman-masked Lucia picks up strangers and takes them wherever they want to go. On a Friday or Saturday

night, Lucia will transport as many as 60 people.

But while Lucia's a nice guy, he doesn't give them a lift for free. He is one of hundreds of actors, musicians and filmmakers who are making extra cash with their cars by hooking up as drivers with the taxi-like firm Lyft, which bills itself as a ride-sharing service.

"Everybody has a survival job, and some people, like me, are lucky to have a 'thrival' job — I can thrive in this job while I pursue my dreams," Lucia said.

Lyft is only a year old but already has attracted thousands of customers a week

who get around the city in rides by Lyft drivers — usually at a lower price than they would pay for a taxicab. The service uses smartphone apps to connect ride-needy users with car-ready drivers.

Lyft and rivals Sidecar and Uber Technologies Inc., which operates the Uber and [See Ride services, A22]

Two shrine towns: Worlds apart yet united in battle

In Syria, Christians and Shiites say they face constant threat from Sunni rebels.

By PATRICK J. McDONNELL

SEDNAYA, Syria — This prosperous hillside town north of Damascus appears a universe away from another capital suburb, Sayyida Zainab, a cluttered, frenzied urban patch off the road to the international airport.

Sednaya is a Christian mountain bastion ringed by monasteries; Sayyida Zainab is a lowland Shiite Muslim island in the midst of a largely Sunni Muslim nation.

But, in war-ravaged Syria, the two are in a similar position: Both are renowned shrine towns whose residents say they live under constant threat of attack — even annihilation — by Islamist Sunni rebels active in

the outskirts of each locale. And both are fighting back.

Here in Sednaya, a cadre of Christian militiamen armed with AK-47 rifles and other weapons staff checkpoints and closely scrutinize everyone who comes and goes, day and night, coordinating closely with the Syrian military. The militia chief is a burly pizza shop owner who goes by the moniker "the Whale."

About 12 miles away, on the southeast fringes of the capital, Shiite militiamen, including a contingent of fighters from the Lebanon-based Hezbollah movement, head the defense of the golden-domed shrine said to house the remains of a granddaughter of the prophet Muhammad.

"We will forfeit our blood and lives for Sayyida Zainab," says a brown-uniformed volunteer manning the checkpoint leading to the mausoleum, one of the most revered sites in the [See Syria, A4]



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Weather Mostly sunny, hot. L.A. Basin: 98/70. A36

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