

## Federal judge shortage 'will seriously hinder the administration of justice' in Kern County

BY STEVEN MAYER  
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Take a stroll through the multi-story federal courthouse in Fresno, suggests Bakersfield attorney Matthew Clark.

"What you don't see might surprise you."

"Walk through the halls," he says. "There's no one there."

Clark is exaggerating, but just barely.

Federal Judge Dale A. Drozd

of the U.S. Eastern District Court of California, the federal judicial district that includes Bakersfield and the southern San Joaquin Valley, has instituted a "judicial emergency" order that he acknowledges "will seriously hinder the administration of justice" in the district.

"These are uncharted waters for this court," Drozd writes in his order, signed Feb. 3. "The emergency procedures... are being

implemented reluctantly."

The emergency is already affecting hundreds of local cases and local families, including cases The Californian has covered in years past.

The district, which serves 8 million Californians, is supposed to have six full-time judges — three in Fresno and three in Sacramento.

But in the past two months, three judges in Fresno have as-

sumed reduced work status or inactive status.

"We have one judge" in Fresno, Clark says.

"We are the single most impacted district in the country."

What does that mean for individuals and families with cases pending?

For William "Lee" Johnson and his family, it's a matter of financial survival. Johnson, now 60, was nearly killed in a December

2018 explosion at a compressed natural gas fueling station in Buttonwood.

The accident has made him unemployable, and his wife, Joan, has had to tap her retirement fund to keep the family stable financially.

Joan Johnson has penned letters to local elected officials, including House Minority Leader

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## SPREADING SMILES WITH RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Elderly residents and CSUB students join forces in endeavor



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

Brookdale Riverwalk resident Betty Newman, 94, shares a carnation with Sydney Pedersen in celebration of Random Acts of Kindness Day on Thursday. See more photos online at Bakersfield.com.

BY EMA SASIC  
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Brookdale Riverwalk resident Betty Newman needs a little reason to smile and get out of her home every once in a while these days.

It's been difficult for her lately ever since her husband died, and sometimes it's been easier to stay home and sequester herself in order to grieve.

But she got the chance to bring some cheer Thursday to Cal State Bakersfield students — and herself — by passing out red, pink and white carnations as random acts of kindness. A CSUB alumna herself, she said this was exactly what she needed to help her see some sunshine again — figuratively and literally.

"When I first heard about it, I thought, 'Why in the world would these young people want to have any interaction with old people?' That

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CSUB student Cecilia Velazquez, left, Brookdale Riverwalk resident Betty Newman and CSUB student Lexie Chavez gather carnations that they will pass out to students on campus for Random Acts of Kindness Day.

## Trump, Sanders come to town with different intentions

BY JOHN COX  
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One day the president drops by, two days later it's the leading Democratic candidate for the White House. Could it be that winning Bakersfield is suddenly key to becoming leader of the free world?

**ELECTION 2020**

Not yet. Political observers say Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and President Donald Trump are looking to Kern County for entirely different reasons: Sanders hopes to energize young Latinos and pick up every last delegate, they say, while Trump dropped by to help an important ally in a part of the state where he feels welcome.

Their dual visits this week — Trump drew a local crowd of 3,000 Wednesday and Sanders is expected to speak from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. today at the Spectrum Amphitheatre — have showered rare attention to a city not used to being in the political spotlight.

There is a sense that both stops are geared toward seizing

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Despite tough debate, Bloomberg says he's not 'going to go away'

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Garces, Centennial and BHS stay alive in Central Section playoffs

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## Priest sues Fresno Diocese, its chancellor for defamation

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

Monsignor Craig Harrison filed a defamation lawsuit Thursday against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fresno and Teresa Dominguez, the chancellor/director of communications for the diocese.

According to a news release sent by Harrison's attorneys, the lawsuit alleges Dominguez made defamatory statements on behalf

of the Fresno Diocese in a May 2019 article on the website KQED.org. The lawsuit was filed in Kern County Superior Court.

Representatives of the diocese did not return messages seeking comment Thursday.

The lawsuit states that in the May 19, 2019, article, Dominguez said she visited the house of one of Harrison's alleged victims to apologize. According to the lawsuit, Dominguez said she personally expressed her concern for the alleged victim and told him that she believed him and apologized for the pain the alleged incident caused.

"I told him that I will support him and be an advocate for him in any way that I can," Dominguez said, according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit says that because

of the "aforementioned false, defamatory, libelous and slanderous statements, plaintiff Craig Harrison has sustained general and non-economic damages for past present and future emotional distress, anxiety, shame, humiliation, and mortification all to his general damage in an amount according to proof."

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ALEX HORVATH / CALIFORNIAN FILE  
Monsignor Craig Harrison during a June interview.



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