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WEEKLY DIGEST
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WITH CRIME THIS BAD, NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR A PARKS TAX

October 5, 2018 | *Darius Assemi*

This is the reality of life in Fresno, and it doesn't matter where you live. Every time you park your car, you wonder if a window will be smashed and everything inside will be stolen. This has happened to me twice in the

For example, 64 percent of eighth graders failed to meet or exceed standards on mathematics assessment testing.

last year. You go to work every day hoping that you won't return to find power tools taken from your garage, electronics swiped from your home, or even your pet missing. Why should we be surprised when local businesses and longtime residents pack up and leave Fresno when these crimes happen more than they should? Over the past few years, Fresno has averaged 900 robberies and 4,500 burglaries annually.

It pains me to admit these things because I love Fresno with all my heart. It's where I and other members of my immigrant family chose long ago to live and to build our businesses. But until our city corrals this out-of-control crime, I can't support the effort to raise the Fresno sales tax by 3/8 of a cent for public parks, trails, and cultural arts. If the hike is approved, Fresno's sales tax climbs to 8.35%.

Meanwhile, the Clovis sales tax stays at 7.975%, with ample parks and trails. You can bet that Fresno consumers seeking a better deal on big-ticket items like cars and furniture will head to Clovis. Consider what our own DA, Lisa Smittcamp, has to say about Measure P: "Without proper law enforcement staffing in the city of Fresno, parks become a breeding ground for increased criminal activity. We need to focus on making the city and the parks we already have, safer before we fund additional parks."

I Love Parks and Cultural Arts

Parks provide many benefits to our community. That's why every Granville neighborhood built over the last 10 years includes parks and trails. We even helped the city of Fresno secure the \$2.5 million dollars in state grants

to build the Cultural Arts Park in downtown Fresno. Well-maintained, parks and trails make for a better Fresno. They create a sense of community, a place for families to gather and engage in recreation. And, clearly, we do need more parks in our southern neighborhoods. But there is something you should know about Fresno's parks situation.

The taxpayer's dollar doesn't go very far in the hands of city parks crews. When I drive through many of the neighborhoods built by my company, I see the degradation of the perimeter landscape, parks, and trails. Our homeowners each pay the city the close to \$1,000 a year to have these amenities maintained. In the case of the Granville neighborhood at Willow and Teague avenues, we and our homeowners even replanted the shrubs and trees — only to see those die, too, because of the city's neglect. We have repeatedly funded cultural arts programs especially for underprivileged kids in our schools.

I understand the value that art brings to a community. But art without safety is a trap that creates a hopeless future for us. Measure P supporters calculate that if the sales tax hike passes the city will reap an additional \$38 million annually for parks and trails — about \$1.1 billion over 30 years. But with population growth and a solid economy, that total could become \$2 billion. That money would be managed by a group of private citizens appointed to a new board to oversee the expenditures.

Don't forget, the city already spends nearly \$13 million a year on parks. And here's something that people aren't talking about. Measure P locks in that \$13 million, which in a recession could subject police and fire to cuts. Is that what we want?

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TEAMWORK REPLACES CHAOS IN FRESNO UNIFIED

October 3, 2018 | Myles Barker

One year ago, Fresno Unified teachers **threatened to go out on strike** over stalled contract negotiations with the district. Among the issues contributing to the impasse: a demand by teachers that the district make a commitment to reducing class sizes to help address deficiencies in student achievement. On Wednesday, the district and teachers union joined together to announce the progress they've made on bridging the divide.

"Since August of this year, we eliminated combination classes in our elementary schools and we reduced class sizes in our secondary schools in language classes," said Fresno Unified Superintendent Bob Nelson. In situations where student numbers were high and extra classroom space was unavailable, Nelson said a second teacher or paraprofessional educator was added. "It is important to note that these efforts all took place outside of the formal bargaining process, which is markedly different from anything that we have done before," Nelson said. "We are trying to operate differently."

New Attitude in the District

The changes came following joint labor-management committee meetings that were created as a condition of a new contract between the district and the Fresno Teachers Association. The agreement was reached in January, just before teachers were scheduled to walk out for the first time in 40 years. Leaders say there is a new attitude at work. "When we move from a place of chaos and conflict to collaboration and cooperation, the 74,000 students of Fresno Unified transform, our city transforms, and this Valley transforms," said FTA President Michael Bonilla.

Nelson echoed the sentiment. "It has not been an easy journey," Nelson said. "We are still working on our development of creating a joint relationship of mutual trust, but we are committed in working forward together," Nelson said.

School Board Member Claudia Cazares, who represents Fresno Unified Hoover area region, commended both Bonilla and...

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SPLIT DISTRICT? MORE CHARTERS? RATCHFORD SHAKES UP AREA 3 RACE.

October 3, 2018 | Myles Barker

Is Fresno Unified too big and too stuck in its ways to deliver the upgraded quality of education that many of its students need? Mark Ratchford, a candidate for the Sunnyside High School area trustee seat, says that he wants the district split in half. He wants more charter schools, too. "It is just too big, it is too much to handle," Ratchford said. "We've gotten so big that we've lost control of our \$1 billion-a-year budget."

Ratchford, a small businessman, and teacher Karl Diaz are challenging incumbent Valerie Davis, who has been on the board for 14 years. The idea of splitting up the district isn't new. It has been proposed and studied previously. Some of the challenges include duplicating all of the district's services — including transporting and feeding students — and ensuring that the new districts are racially balanced...

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GV Wire Photo/Jahz Tello



Photo: Shutterstock

MORE WOMEN IN BOARDROOMS? FRESNO COMPANIES TALK ABOUT NEW LAW.

October 3, 2018 | David Taub

More women could join the boardrooms of at least three Fresno companies thanks to a new state law **signed by Gov. Jerry Brown**. SB 826 mandates the presence of women on the boards of companies publicly traded on stock exchanges such as NASDAQ or NYSE. Three such companies are headquartered in Fresno, all banks — **United Security Bank**, **Fresno First Bank**, and **Central Valley Community Bank**.

The law establishes a timeline of when companies need to implement changes. By Dec. 31, 2019, each board needs to have at least one woman. Companies with more than six board members would need three female directors by the end of 2021. Those with fewer than six members would need two women. The law imposes a \$100,000 fine for a first violation and a \$300,000 penalty for subsequent violations...

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STATE

THE BATTLE TO DECIDE CALIFORNIA'S EDUCATION FUTURE

October 4, 2018 | Nancy Price

By many measures, the majority of California's 6.2 million schoolchildren are failing to make the grade. Earlier this year California's K-12 education was ranked 44th by U.S. News & World Report and 36th on Education Week's "Quality Counts" report. These numbers are sobering for a state that once boasted of having the **best education system in the United States**, if not the world. The state's assessment tests in 2017 reveal poor performance across all grade levels.

For example, 64 percent of eighth graders failed to meet or exceed standards on mathematics assessment testing. The results were only slightly better for eighth graders on the English language arts test in 2017, on which 51 percent did not meet or exceed standards. The state reported even worse results for Fresno Unified's eighth graders on the 2017 tests — 82 percent of students tested in math and 70 percent tested in language arts did not meet or exceed standards.

November Elections Will Decide Who's in Charge
Whoever is elected California's next governor and state superintendent of public instruction in November will be tasked with improving the state's education system. Both races — Gavin Newsom vs. John Cox for governor and Tony Thurmond vs. Marshall Tuck for the top education spot — are being bankrolled by influencers who want to shape, if not put their own stamps, on the all-important next steps in public education.

For example, many California leaders say that **charter schools** and **career tech** education are the way to help boost student performance and close achievement gaps, and they have backed candidates seen as charter

school advocates with large sums. The biggest beneficiary of such contributions in June's primary election was former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, whose campaign for governor was boosted by independent expenditures supporting him and opposing both frontrunner Newsom, a Democrat, and Republican businessman Cox. But Villaraigosa, a Democrat who was seen as the education reform candidate by charter supporters because of his efforts to reform struggling schools in Los Angeles, failed to finish in the top two in the primary.

Many California leaders say that charter schools and career tech education are the way to help boost student performance.

Supporters Pouring Millions into Education Race
The race for the state's top education position mirrors the election in 2014 when Tuck came close to unseating incumbent state schools Superintendent Tom Torlakson. That was the most expensive state superintendent's race in California history — outstripping even the governor's race. As of Oct. 2, independent expenditure groups have backed Tuck with slightly more than \$16 million since the start of his current campaign, bringing his campaign total to \$22.8 million. Thurmond has attracted \$6.4 million from independent expenditures, almost exclusively from unions, including the California Teachers Association.

His total contributions are \$9.32 million, according to the filings with the secretary of state. Tuck's independent expenditure support has come, directly or indirectly, from EdVoice, a group sponsored primarily by charter school advocates. Bill Bloomfield, a philanthropist and retired entrepreneur who is passionate about charter schools, has donated \$4.1 million to Tuck and expenditure groups supporting him.

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GV Wire Graphic/Alexis DeSha



BROWN SIGNS BILL SUPPORTING A VALLEY MEDICAL SCHOOL

Photo: UCSF

September 27, 2018 | GV Wire

Gov. Jerry Brown [signed legislation](#) Thursday establishing the San Joaquin Valley Regional Medical Education Endowment Fund. The bill's author, Assemblyman Adam Gray (D-Merced), said in a Facebook post that the fund will provide "a dedicated opportunity for the collection of public and private donations to support the construction and operation of a medical school in the San Joaquin Valley."

Legislation Doesn't Fund a Medical School

The bill, however, does not require the Legislature to fund a medical school in the San Joaquin Valley. The final paragraph of the new law states: "Nothing in this article shall re-

quire the University of California to take any action towards developing a branch campus of the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine in the San Joaquin Valley region unless the endowment fund has a balance of five hundred million dollars (\$500,000,000) and the Controller, after consultation with the University of California, has determined that the funds to be allocated are sufficient to support annual operating expenses for a San Joaquin Valley branch campus of the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine supporting 50 students per class." Said Gray said in a [news release](#): "The promise of a medical school in the Valley has been just talk and no action for too long. I am...

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AP Photo/Tony Avelar, File

LAX ALLOWS POT IN AIRPORT BUT TSA SAYS IT'S STILL A CRIME

September 28, 2018 | AP News

LOS ANGELES — Here's another thing travelers can consider bringing when a trip takes them through Los Angeles International Airport — marijuana. Just be careful about carrying it onto the plane. A written policy posted by airport police says small amounts of weed may now be brought into one of the world's busiest airports. But, police warn, possession of any amount is still a federal crime and TSA agents may find your stash.

What happens if they do remains a little murky. TSA spokeswoman Lorie Dankers said Thursday that agents won't take it away but will summon the police and let them deal with it. "TSA's focus is on terrorism and security threats to the aircraft and its passengers," Dankers said in an email. "Whether or not the passenger is allowed to travel with marijuana is up to law enforcement's discretion," she added. If it turns out a traveler is carrying no more than 28.5 grams...

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BROWN EASES CRIME PENALTIES, BOOSTS SCRUTINY OF POLICE

October 3, 2018 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — California is continuing a years-long easing of criminal penalties even as it increases public scrutiny of law enforcement. In his final action on legislation before leaving office in January, Gov. Jerry Brown this weekend stuck with his long-term goal of reducing mass incarceration, rehabilitating juvenile offenders, trimming lengthy prison sentences and offering second chances to the criminally convicted. One new law will automatically erase or reduce marijuana-related convictions now that the drug is legal recreationally.

Brown signed a bill redefining the state's felony murder rule that held accomplices to the same standard as if they had personally killed someone. Prosecutors warned that hundreds of people can seek resentencing, sometimes forcing near re-trials of cases that may be decades old or the product of plea bargains. "California's murder statute irrationally treated people...

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Photo: Inside CDCR



WHO WAS QUESTIONED BY FBI IN KAVANAUGH PROBE?

October 5, 2018 | AP News

WASHINGTON — The FBI has wrapped up its background investigation of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, but much of what it did remains a mystery, including its decisions about whom to interview. Investigation details have not been publicly disclosed. Republicans say the probe was thorough and reinforces their support of President Donald Trump's nominee. But Democrats decry it as incomplete and constrained, and Kavanaugh's accusers say the FBI didn't interview witnesses who could have corroborated their accounts. Republicans say the FBI reached out to 11 people, 10 of whom agreed to be interviewed, and produced detailed summaries of the questioning.

Among those not interviewed were Kavanaugh and Christine Blasey Ford, the California college professor who testified last week to Congress that a drunken Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her when they were high school students. Kavanaugh denies the allegations. Here's a look at who was questioned — and who was not:

Who Has the FBI Interviewed?

Sen. Chuck Grassley, the Republican chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the 10 witnesses questioned include several of Kavanaugh's high school friends, some of whom are listed in the judge's calendar as having attended a July 1, 1982 party that Kavanaugh attended. Also questioned was Deborah

The FBI questioned Mark Judge, a high school friend of Kavanaugh. Ford says Judge was in the room when Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her in the early 1980s.

Ramirez, who told the FBI that Kavanaugh exposed himself to her at a party in the early 1980s when they were stu-

dents at Yale. The FBI also interviewed a close friend of Ramirez's from college and two other people who Grassley said were identified by Ramirez as eyewitnesses. A third potential witness declined to be interviewed,

though Grassley did not identify any of them. An unidentified lawyer for one of the witnesses was also interviewed. The FBI questioned Mark Judge, a high school friend of Kavanaugh. Ford says Judge was in the room when Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her in the early 1980s. Judge has said he did not recall the events described by Ford and that he never saw Kavanaugh act in the manner that she describes. Agents also spoke with two people who Ford said attended the party where she said she was attacked, though she says they did not witness the incident.

Ford's friend Leland Keyser was questioned Saturday and said she didn't know Kavanaugh and doesn't remember being at a party with him. Keyser believes Ford's account but is "unable to corroborate it because she has no recollection of the incident in question," her attorney, Howard Walsh, said. Patrick "P.J." Smyth, who Ford said had also attended the party, told investigators he had "no knowledge" of the gathering Ford described or any allegation of

Several of Kavanaugh's Yale classmates also reached out to the FBI, but were never contacted.

misconduct by Kavanaugh, according to his attorney, Eric Bruce. The FBI also spoke with two more of Kavanaugh's high school classmates, Chris Garrett, whom Ford has said she "went out with for a few months," and Timothy Gaudette, who is listed in Kavanaugh's calendars as having hosted the 1982 gathering that Kavanaugh attended. A member of Ford's legal team said in a statement that had Ford been interviewed, she would have told the FBI that the assault did not occur at the party because she knew well the people who were listed as having attended and would have remembered if they were there.

Who Hasn't Been Interviewed?

Top on the list are Ford and Kavanaugh. The FBI also hasn't interviewed several potential witnesses...

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October 2, 2018 | GV Wire

Student debt now could lead to an economic catastrophe in the future. The New York Times reports that student borrowing is at \$1.5 trillion. “Many borrowers are already falling behind. During the second quarter of 2018, more than 10 percent of student loans were at least 90 days past due,” the Times warned. Corporate debt is also increasing. What does this mean for the country’s financial future?

More From The New York Times

“The global financial crisis is fading into history. But the roots of the next one might already be taking hold. Financial crises

strike rich countries every 28 years on average. Often, the break between busts is much shorter. Fast-growing pockets of debt, as in the last time around, look like potential sources of problems. They’re nowhere near as big as the mortgage bubble, and no blow-ups appear imminent.

‘But what we saw last time around is that things can creep up on you,’ said Wesley Phoa, a bond-fund manager at the Capital Group. “You can turn around and in three years’ time you can go from not much of a problem to a pretty big problem.’ The amount of American student debt — roughly \$1.5...

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Justin Tang/The Canadian Press via AP

HOW NAFTA 2.0 WILL SHAKE UP BUSINESSES

October 2, 2018 | AP News

WASHINGTON — American dairy farmers get more access to the Canadian market. U.S. drug companies can fend off generic competition for a few more years. Automakers are under pressure to build more cars where workers earn decent wages. The North American trade agreement hammered out late Sunday between the United States and Canada, following an earlier U.S.-Mexico deal, shakes up — but likely won’t revolutionize — the way businesses operate within the three-country trade bloc.

The new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement replaces the 24-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement, which tore down trade barriers between the three countries. But NAFTA encouraged factories to move to Mexico to take advantage of low-wage labor in what President Donald Trump called a job-killing “disaster” for the United States...

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TRUMP PREDICTS HAVOC IF DEMOCRATS TAKE OVER CONGRESS

October 2, 2018 | AP News

JOHNSON CITY — As the fate of his Supreme Court pick hangs in the balance, President Donald Trump barnstormed for a Republican Senate candidate in Tennessee, warning that Democrats will unleash havoc if they gain control of Congress and accusing them of trying to sink his nominee.

“A Democratic takeover of Congress will plunge our country into gridlock and chaos and take away all of the wealth that you’ve earned over the last 20 months,” Trump warned Monday night, claiming without evidence that the stock market would plummet, 401(k)s disappear, taxes rise beyond “your wildest imagination,” and crime go through the roof. It was a dire picture painted by a president eager to convince his raucous supporters of what’s at stake in November as he headlined a high-dollar, closed-door fundraiser and appeared at a packed rally in Johnson City to boost U.S...

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AP Photo/Mark Humphrey



AS IMMIGRANTS FLOW ACROSS US BORDER, AMERICAN GUNS GO

October 1, 2018 | AP News

Among the thousands of immigrants who have been coming across the U.S.-Mexico border in recent months, many are seeking to escape gang and drug violence raging in their homelands. The weapon of choice used to intimidate them? Often an American-made gun. While the flow of drugs and immigrants into the U.S. has been well-documented for decades and become a regular part of the political debate, what is often overlooked is how gangs and drug cartels exploit weaknesses at the border to smuggle guns from the U.S. into Latin America. A 2013 report by the University of San Diego says the number of firearms smuggled from the United States was so significant that nearly half of American gun dealers rely on that business to stay afloat.

On average, an estimated 253,000 firearms each year are purchased in the United States expressly to be sent to Mexico, the report said, the vast majority of the sales originating in the border states of California, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Once in Mexico, the weapons end up in the hands of drug cartels or get shipped to gangs in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador — countries that are dealing with an epidemic of gun violence. Armed holdups on public transportation are a regular occurrence in Honduras, where nearly half of the unreg-

“If the Trump administration were serious about wanting to stop refugees from fleeing violence in Latin America and Mexico to come north, they would be doing something about the southward gun trafficking that is fueling a lot of that migration.”

— Adam Skaggs, chief counsel Giffords Law Center

istered weapons originated in the U.S., the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives reported in recent years.

More Than One Shootout a Day

Gun violence in El Salvador is so rampant that the country has been averaging more than one shootout a day between police and gangs this year, said Ricardo Sosa, a criminologist specializing in gangs and security

in El Salvador. “In every one of these operations, police are able to seize between two and six firearms at the scene,” he said. “That is one of the indicators that the gangs are armed on many occasions with long guns and short guns for each one of their members.” Mexico last year recorded its highest number of murders in nearly two decades, with more than 31,000 people killed, higher than even during the country’s drug war in 2011. It continues unabated with an average of 88 people killed each day in the first five months of this year. The bloodshed in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador has been a big driver of immigration into the U.S., with the government saying nearly 16,000 families came across the border in August alone — many of them from those three countries.

“At the same time, Mexico has extremely prohibitive gun laws, yet has far worse crime than the U.S.” — The NRA said in a position paper, 2009

Gun-control groups contend that the U.S. government is essentially exporting gang violence to Latin America with permissive gun laws — which in turn creates an immigration crisis along the border. “If the Trump administration were serious about wanting to stop refugees from fleeing violence in Latin America and Mexico to come north, they would be doing something about the southward gun trafficking that is fueling a lot of that migration,” said Adam Skaggs, chief counsel with the Giffords Law Center. Gun-rights activists say the issue is overblown and mischaracterized.

Drug Cartels and Other Criminal Enterprises

The National Rifle Association and other gun-rights groups contend the most effective way to combat the problem is not with stricter gun laws but by eradicating drug cartels and other criminal enterprises. They say the numbers are inflated and that the industry has proactively sought to educate licensed gun dealers on how to detect “straw purchases,” in which a firearm is bought...

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OPINION: US HAS THE POWER TO END THE WAR IN YEMEN

October 1, 2018 | GV Wire

Blinded by its obsession with Iran, the Trump administration is perpetuating an unwinnable civil war in Yemen and undermining the likelihood of a political settlement, writes [Mohammed Buzzi in The Atlantic](#). Mohammed is the former Middle East bureau chief for Newsday.

“In his [speech](#) to the United Nations General Assembly (last) week, President Donald Trump signaled to Saudi Arabia that he would avoid criticizing its destabilizing actions in the Middle East,” Mohammed analyzes. “Instead, he blamed only Iran, the kingdom’s regional rival, for funding ‘havoc and slaughter.’ “Trump praised Saudi Arabia and the United Arab

Emirates for pledging billions in aid and ‘pursuing multiple avenues to ending Yemen’s horrible, horrific civil war.’ He failed to mention that Yemen’s current conflict escalated dramatically in early 2015, when Saudi Arabia led a coalition of Arab countries to intervene in the war.”

The war has triggered a humanitarian crisis in Yemen, which is one of the poorest countries in the world. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, nearly 50,000 people, including combatants, died between January 2016 and July 2018. Yemen’s population is 22 million. Reports of Saudi-directed bombs hitting villages and killing...

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UN COURT ORDERS US TO LIFT SOME IRAN SANCTIONS

October 3, 2018 | AP News

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The United Nations’ highest court on Wednesday ordered the United States to lift sanctions on Iran that affect imports of humanitarian goods and products and services linked to civil aviation safety. The ruling by the International Court of Justice is legally binding, but it remains to be seen if the administration of President Donald Trump will comply.

Trump moved to restore tough U.S. sanctions in May after withdrawing from Tehran’s nuclear accord with world powers. Iran challenged the sanctions in a case filed in July at the International Court of Justice. In a preliminary ruling, the court said that Washington must “remove, by means of its choosing, any impediments arising from” the re-imposition of sanctions to the export to Iran of medicine and medical devices, food and agricultural commodities and spare parts and equipment necessary to ensure the safety of civil aviation...

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AP Photo/Andrew Medichini

BONO OFFERS SOLUTION TO A FRACTURING EUROPE: ZAKARIA

September 27, 2018 | GV Wire

Bono, the lead singer for the band U2, thinks the European Union is misunderstood. He wants to increase EU pride as a way to counter the continent’s growing [nationalist sentiment](#). As he told Washington Post columnist Fareed Zakaria, “Europe needs to go from being seen as a bore, a bureaucracy, a technical project, to being what it is: a grand, inspiring idea.”

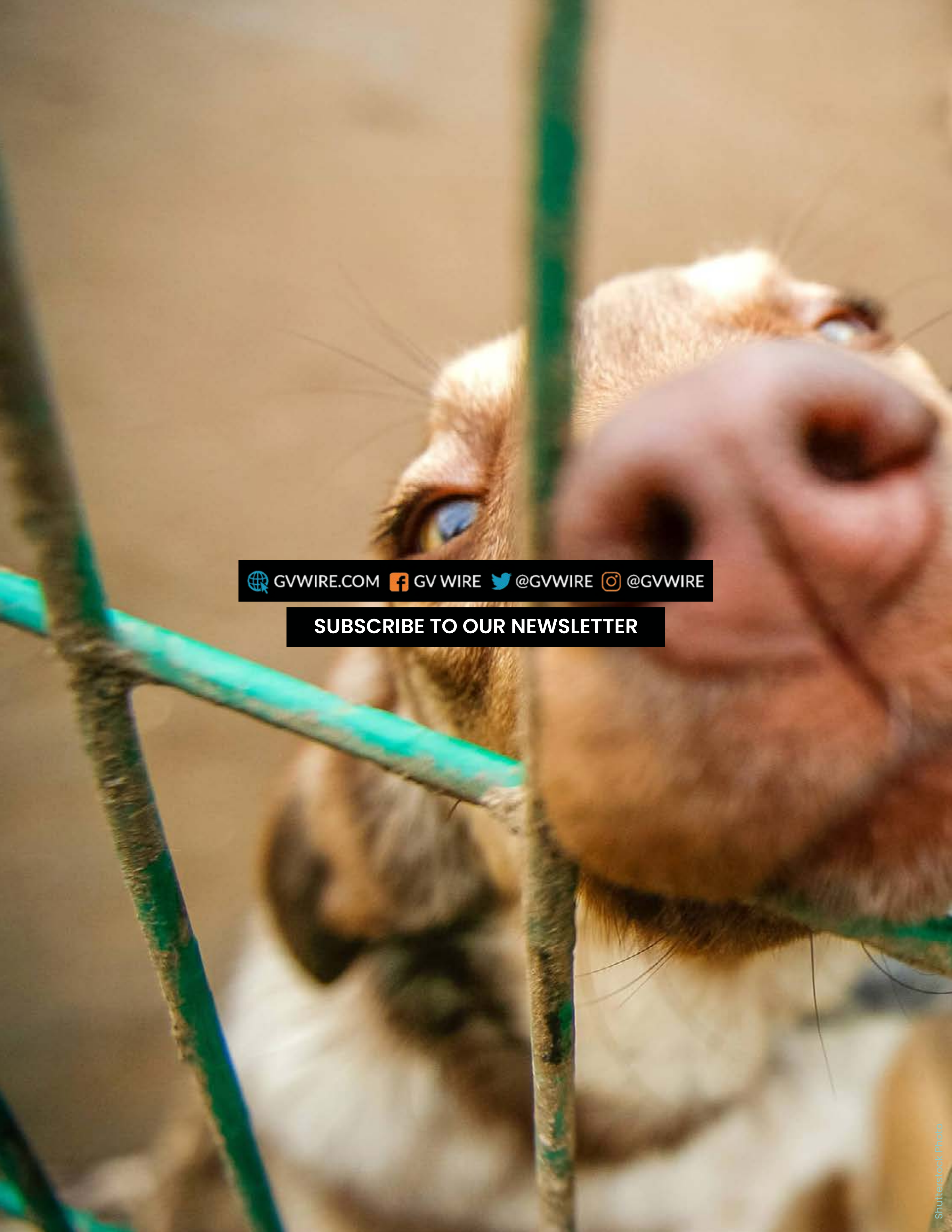



Waving the Flag

“To that end,” Zakaria writes in his [Sept. 20 commentary](#), “Bono’s band, U2, has been choosing a moment during its concerts to unfurl — wait for it — the flag of the European Union.” The point is to celebrate what the EU has achieved beyond its economic value. To Bono, “Europe is about the ability of countries that were once warring to live in peace, for people of many different lands and languages to come together,” Zakaria writes...

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Photo: NME

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