

The Fresno Bee



Judge cites Fresno County racism in discovery order

BY THADDEUS MILLER
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A Native American man who has been convicted of murder gained a legal win Friday in a racial justice case after a judge cited Fresno County’s history of racism as a factor in ordering the Fresno County District Attorney’s Office to turn over evidence it sought to withhold.

Judge Alvin M. Harrell III sided with attorneys for Douglas “Chief” Ray Stankewitz when he found the defense met its burden to be given access to discovery evidence, which may include demographic information on cases in which the Fresno County DA charged defendants with murder going back to 1972.

Exactly what the defense wants will be unclear until after the judge issues the official order, according to Curtis Briggs, an attorney for Stankewitz.

“It’s monumental, and there’s also moral reasons, but they will carry over into the future hearings,” Briggs said after the hearing. “We just had a judge in a very conservative county agree with us, and then go further and make factual findings that racism has occurred in Fresno. That’s something that the prosecution hasn’t wanted to acknowledge.”

Stankewitz, a Monache man, was 19 when first convicted in 1978 and has been through multiple re-trials after prosecutors accused him of killing Theresa Greybeal, a 22-year-old white woman. He has maintained his innocence, saying he did not pull the trigger.

The victory for him came through the California Racial Justice Act of 2020, which was signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police.

Prosecutors argued Friday the defense had not met its burden

SEE JUDGE, 2A

High-speed rail board OKs \$3.5B Central Valley track contract

BY ERIK GALICIA
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After more than a decade of construction in the Central Valley, the California High-Speed Rail Authority could be fewer than six months from laying the system’s first tracks.

The rail authority’s board on Monday awarded a track and systems construction contract of up to \$3.5 billion to an operation between rail and engineering contractors Kiewit, Stacy Witbeck and Herzog. The joint venture is expected to do the track work between Merced and Bakersfield in various phases

that will each require board approval.

The board’s new chair, Steve Kawa, described the award as a turning point for a project that has been slow to clear environmental rules, acquire the necessary right-of-way and build out infrastructure.

“Today the conversation

changes,” he said during the meeting. “Track and system construction is the moment this project truly begins to become a railroad.”

California voters first approved \$9.95 billion in bonds for a Los Angeles-to-San Francisco system initially projected to cost \$45 billion. The rail authority today is focused on first completing a 171-mile Merced-to-Bakersfield route by 2033 for \$34.76 billion on the low end.

WHEN WILL CONTRACTOR START LAYING CENTRAL VALLEY TRACKS?

The rail authority expects work to begin on the first 22 miles that are ready for tracks

SEE CONTRACT, 2A



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Susan Grote’s son Mathew Bonds was one of four family members killed in January 2024. Grote is still waiting for a transfer hearing for the teen charged in the homicides.

Fresno families push for justice after Reedley killings

BY THADDEUS MILLER
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After more than two years since a quadruple homicide in Reedley rocked the Fresno County community, a mother continues to wait to see if the teen accused of the violence will be tried as an adult.

Susan Grote said she has tried to be patient even as the hearings for the accused killer, who was 17 at the time, come and go about every other month with little detail.

Since the Fresno County District Attorney’s Office charged the teen, who is now at least 19, Grote has seen newer cases involving young offenders move along to the transfer hearing, where a judge rules whether the accused minor can be charged as an adult. Grote said she sympathizes with those cases, calling them “heart-breaking,” while she awaits progress in her family’s ordeal.

“It wasn’t like there was a barroom fight and somebody died. This was just cold-blooded, premeditated murder,” the 60-year-old said.

Grote’s son, Matt Bonds, 43, and daughter-in-law, Guada-



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Susan Grote cleans the bench dedicated to her daughter-in-law Guadalupe “Kiki” Chavez Bonds, located at Reedley Cemetery District Tuesday, May 26, 2026 in Reedley. Four family members including Grote’s son Mathew Bonds were found killed in January 2024. Grote is still waiting for a transfer hearing for the teen charged in the homicides.

lupe Chavez Bonds, 44, were among four killed in a south Reedley neighborhood in January 2024. Bonds was found in a detached garage at the accused 17-year-old’s home, which was next door to where Bonds lived with his wife of 24 years and the two other victims in the case, Bonds’s father, Darrell Bonds, 61, and Bonds’s

grandfather, Billy Bonds, 81, according to Reedley police.

Grote said she’s been cautioned about what she can say about the case involving an accused teen offender, because she wants to protect the investigation. She said she also only knows so much and few details have come out of court.

The information revealed

during routine hearings can be sparse, but the hearings at the Fresno County Juvenile Justice Center are particularly closed-lipped because minors have more protections than accused adult offenders. In general, Grote’s situation is common for juvenile criminal cases in California as the changes to the laws are relatively new and there is no specific timetable.

Grote’s frustration with the legal system has been compounded by another high-profile local case that has moved much faster than the Reedley case. Caleb Quick was killed by two teenaged offenders, according to Clovis police, on April 23, 2025, about 15 months after the killing of the Bonds family members.

The teen girl charged in the Clovis case has already been through a transfer hearing, and a teen boy accused in the case could go through the same process in early June.

“It was three generations (of DNA) — my son, his father and his grandfather — so I don’t know if that makes it more difficult or not. We’re not really getting clear answers on why

SEE JUSTICE, 2A

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FROM PAGE 1A

CONTRACT

— a space between the Shafter area and the Tulare-Kern County line — by Nov. 30.

That work is expected to be completed by June of next year, rail authority Chief of Construction Ed Fenn said during the meeting. From there, track work will advance north toward Fresno until it is complete on the initial 119 miles between Shafter and Madera County.

In recent months, the rail authority started awarding contracts to manufacturers who will be shipping track and system materials — including overhead poles, rails, ballast and more — to the agency’s 150-acre railhead yard near Wasco. From there, the materials will be

moved north as needed.

RAIL BOARD MEMBERS CONCERNED ABOUT SINGLE BIDDER FOR TRACK CONTRACT

Though the process for choosing the track construction contractor was competitive, only the joint venture that was chosen actually bid a price to the rail authority. The only other bidder was disqualified for failing to show it had at least one key personnel who was a professional engineer registered in this state.

Board member Jeffrey Worthe said during the meeting he was concerned whether “locking ourselves” into a single bidder is a responsible use of taxpayer dollars.



A rendering shows what a train would look like traveling on high-speed rail tracks.

The contractor’s work will be broken into nine packages, each requiring board approval. Fenn, the rail authority’s construction chief, said this strate-

gy allows the agency to “ensure we have the proper pricing going forward for each package.”

“We always have the opportunity to off ramp,

but that’s certainly not what we want to do,” he said. “We have to trust that our partners are going to come to terms with us.”

FROM PAGE 1A

JUDGE

and offered little if any new evidence.

While explaining his decision, Harrell noted the law does not ask for any of the facts in the case to be weighed but rather for a defense attorney to show that racism was plausibly was a factor.

“This is a fairly low bar to gain access to the discovery,” Harrell said. “The court is going to find the defense has met their burden.”

The judge granted the request with parameters around how much is reasonably available, including third-party privacy rights and that the request adequately describes the evidence sought along with other factors.

FRESNO COUNTY JUDGE CITES FRESNO COUNTY RACISM

Harrell pointed to docu-

mented examples Fresno County has shown racism historically, and one as recent as three weeks ago. The Fresno County District Attorney’s Office wrote in a news release on May 8 about the sentencing of a killer in which they described the Yokuts Valley in which he lives as “Squaw Valley,” using a racist term for Native American women.

The state Legislature passed a bill in 2022 enacting the town’s name change to Yokuts Valley. Fresno County fought the change, but ultimately gave up after losing an appeal.

“The fact that this was a public statement which went without correction by any Fresno District Attorney management official shows why the Racial Justice Act challenges both explicit and

implicit bias because this is discriminatory whether the person who made the statement intended it or not,” the defense wrote in arguments.

Harrell also pointed to arguments the defense made about Fresno City College’s former Eulless Baseball Park, which was named after a known leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Fresno for about 60 years until the school moved to change it in 2020. He cited other history the defense used as arguments, including archived stories from The Bee about Klan activity and California’s history of discrimination against Native Americans.

The judge’s decision to point to a history of racism came as something of a surprise to Laura Wass, an activist based in the San Joaquin Valley who is Central California director of the American Indian Movement and who was in the courtroom.

“When I walk in a court-

room, I expect prejudice, pure and simple,” she said after the hearing. “(The judge) was truthful, reasonable, very fair, and he listened to the facts.”

The District Attorney’s Office issued a statement late Friday to The Bee: “As a matter of longstanding policy, the Fresno County District Attorney’s Office does not comment on the merits of pending litigation outside of court and will continue to address these issues through the judicial process.”

DOUGLAS STANKEWITZ CONVICTED OF MURDER

Stankewitz was the longest tenured condemned inmate at San Quentin State Prison until he was taken off of death row. He is now at California Men’s Colony outside San Luis Obispo, and will turn 68 on Sunday.

Prosecutors have said Stankewitz plotted with three others to rob and kidnap Greybeal in Mo-

desto. Greybeal was driven to Fresno before she was shot and killed.

Stankewitz’s case has been litigated from Superior Court to the state Supreme Court. The case was tried twice, and both resulted in a guilty verdict. After the first trial, the California Supreme Court reversed the conviction because Stankewitz’s competency to stand trial was not addressed.

He was found competent prior to the second trial, and he was convicted again. His attorneys have noted in the second trial the only known Native American juror was questioned and excused.

In 2009, a federal judge affirmed Stankewitz’s guilt but reversed his death sentence. Three years later, an appeals court agreed with the decision to throw out Stankewitz’s death penalty sentence saying the jury should have heard evidence of Stankewitz’s troubled childhood.

FROM PAGE 1A

JUSTICE

ours is moving so slow,” Grote said. “We have had a change in DAs, so that might even slow things down more, or it might speed it up. I don’t know. We’re hopeful.”

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE REEDLEY QUADRUPL HOMICIDE

A Fresno County judge has ordered the teen’s name to not be publicized outside the courtroom, only identifying him as R.I. when he first appeared in court.

Grote said she and other family members had not seen Matt Bonds or his wife the day before they were first discovered, and called police for a welfare check.

Reedley police said three bodies were discovered about 9 a.m. Jan. 6, 2024, in the Reedley home owned by Billy Bonds in the 1100 block of Church near Dinuba avenues. Darrell Bonds was in a shallow grave and a tarp covered

the others, police said.

The fourth body was found about 2:30 a.m. Jan. 9 in the garage of the home next door, according to police. The 17-year-old was arrested later that day, as was his 34-year-old mother. He’s been charged with the four murders.

R.I.’s mother was initially arrested on suspicion of accessory after the fact, but she has not been charged with any crimes related to the Reedley case, according to Taylor Long, spokesperson for the Fresno County District Attorney’s Office.

Long noted Chief Deputy District Attorney Deborah Miller, who was prosecuting the case, recently retired. Long said that would likely mean the next hearing for R.I. — June 29 — would be continued as the new prosecutor gets caught up.

“Cases of this magnitude require extensive investigation and careful review to ensure the integrity of the process and that justice is pursued responsibly,” Long said. “While we are limited in what we can publicly discuss due to the ongoing investigation, our office remains committed to seeking justice for the victims and their families.”

She declined to discuss further why the Quick case in Clovis has moved along while the Bonds case in Reedley has lingered, citing a need to protect the investigation. The same goes for whether other people are still being investigated as potential conspirators.

MATT BONDS AND THE TEEN ACCUSED OF THE QUADRUPL MURDER

Grote said her son had begun to interact with R.I. for three or four weeks before he was killed. Matt Bonds saw himself as something of a mentor to the young man, who was in need of jacket during the cold month, she said.

“I realized my son felt like he was his big brother and protective, because it was cold and he (Matt Bonds) went and bought him a jacket. He would bring him clothes and food, and you know, he just felt bad. It was a bad environment,” Grote said. “The day that this happened, they were all playing RC (remote control) cars together.”

The grandfather was known as “Banker Billy” to many in his circle, Grote said, because he had a tendency to loan out money.

Police said in the days after the killing that a safe in the home was empty and had been pried open. Neither police nor prosecutors have publicly dis-

cussed a potential motive other than to say the safe was known to hold money and guns.

“In a way we want to get it over with, but in a way we’re dreading it, because you saw what Stephen (Quick) had to go through and then for nothing,” Grote said.

Quick, the father of Caleb Quick in Clovis, was in the courtroom for several days of hearings to see the teen girl, Cassandra Michael, accused of being the getaway driver in the killing of the younger Quick remanded to the juvenile system by a Fresno judge, who denied the DA’s request to try the girl who was 16 on the day of the accused crime as an adult.

In the two years since the Reedley killings, Grote has become part of a network of families who lost loved ones to violence and are seeking justice. She said it began primarily with victims of young offenders, but has begun to expand.

A major focus of the group is the repeal of Prop 57, which was adopted by voters in 2016.

Advocates for Proposition 57 said it would amend the state constitution to allow parole consideration for nonviolent felons, and opponents argued it would endanger public safety through an early release of offenders convicted of violent crimes such as rape and

assault with a deadly weapon.

It also changed the process for transferring a minor accused of a crime from juvenile court to an adult trial. Prior to Prop 57, a district attorney made the decision on whether to file an adult case, but now the DA must ask a judge to allow it. The judge must decide if the request meets a high standard.

Grote and many of the families in the support group, like Stephen Quick, have worked with area politicians to push first for reform of Prop 57, but now are calling for a repeal. Those area leaders include Republican Assembly members Alexandra Macedo of Tulare (District 33) and David Tangipa of Fresno (District 8).

Bonds’s mom said she supports the idea of rehabilitation, but she’s not convinced the state’s system has shown it can do so for a young offender who has committed a serious crime. She said she’d want R.I. to be sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.

“I feel in my heart, and it’s taken me a while, I’ve forgiven him because that’s what God wants me to do, and I want to do that,” she said. “But I still want him to pay for what he did to my child and the rest of his family, because it’s just not, it’s not right.”

PEOPLE

Van Der Beek’s ex Heather McComb gets married

Us Weekly Trending

James Van Der Beek’s ex-wife, Heather McComb, has tied the knot with Scott Michael Campbell.

“Yesterday @scottmichaeltcampbell and I under the covenant of God got officially married by my beautiful sister @essence_says surround[ed] by the people we love most in the world in our most favorite city Missoula Montana,” McComb, 49, wrote via Instagram on Sunday, announcing the pair’s nuptials. “Our hearts are full and humbled by all of the love that we were surrounded by. God is so good. Thank you to all of our family and friends who traveled from all over the country to be with us. Thank you Jesus the way maker miracle worker!”

She continued, “You all made it so special and a truly magical weekend that we will never forget. We are sitting here counting our many blessings. Thank you to everyone who made this so special for us!”

McComb also shared a series of photos from the celebratory event, including one image where she was seen smiling as she wrapped her arms around Campbell while at the altar.

McComb was previously married to the late Van Der Beek from 2003 to 2010. That same year, James exchanged vows with **Kimberly Van Der Beek**. The pair went on to welcome six children.

BIRTHDAYS: JUNE 3

Britannica

Biographical information from June 3 is from Encyclopædia Britannica. Explore more at britannica.com.

Rafael Nadal, Spanish tennis player (b. 1986).

Anderson Cooper, American television journalist (b. 1967).

Allen Ginsberg, American poet (b. 1926).

Tony Curtis, American actor (b. 1925).

Josephine Baker, French entertainer (b. 1906).

George V, king of United Kingdom (b. 1865).

Jefferson Davis, president of Confederate States of America (b. 1808).

ON THIS DATE: JUNE 3

Historical events from June 3 are brought to you by Encyclopædia Britannica. Explore more at britannica.com.

2016: American boxer and social activist Muhammad Ali—who justified his self-proclaimed nickname “the Greatest” by becoming arguably the most admired and dominant heavyweight boxer in the history of the sport—died at age 74.

2006: Montenegro’s parliament declared the republic’s independence, severing some 88 years of union with Serbia.

2001: Mel Brooks’s musical *The Producers*, starring Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane, won a record-setting 12 Tony Awards.

1989: On this day in 1989, the Chinese government called in the military to put down a pro-democracy demonstration staged by more than 100,000 people in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, resulting in hundreds of deaths.

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