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As storms stack up, Big Sur residents prepare for the worst

By CHRIS COUNTS

IF THE predictions of weather forecasters come true, Big Sur could be buried in mud by this time next week. That's because a strong Pineapple Express is headed this way — and it appears to have the Monterey County coast in its sights.

"By Saturday, moderate to heavy rainfall could return to Big Sur," said Matt Mehle, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service. "That's going to continue Sunday, and possibly, into Monday."

Mehle told The Pine Cone that so far this season, Big Sur residents have been fortunate. With many of its hillsides stripped bare of vegetation by last summer's Soberanes Fire, the risk of mudslides is great.

"We've seen no major problems so far," Mehle reported. "We've had a few storms, but in grand scheme of things, we've been pretty lucky." But that could change if the next storm brings enough rain.

"The ground is saturated, and we're going to be putting a lot more rain on top of it," explained Mehle, who said 10 inches of rain was recorded over a 36-hour period at a Big Sur weather station earlier this week.

So far, Big Sur residents have experienced fallen trees, falling rocks, clogged culverts, power outages, flooded parking areas and road closures as heavy rains battered the coast.

"There's either a train passing in Palo Colorado, or it's raining really hard," resident Jeremy Slate posted Jan. 4 on

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PHOTO/LUCAS HANDY

After a boulder landed on Highway 1 in Big Sur Wednesday, a tourist tried valiantly — but futilely — to move it. But more-experienced help soon arrived and the rock was dispatched. With more storms predicted, the rain of boulders will no doubt continue.

Rio Road speeder damages five cars, lands in yard

By MARY SCHLEY



PHOTO/DAVID JEDINAK

These two cars had been parked on the side of Rio Road until a San Francisco man hit them while driving an estimated 60 mph down Rio Road Dec. 31. He was arrested for DUI.

Panetta sworn in, challenge of job begins

By KELLY NIX
REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

WITH HIS father, Leon, and two young daughters, Siri and Gia, by his side, Jimmy Panetta took the oath of office at the U.S. Capitol Tuesday, becoming the Monterey Peninsula's congressional representative and embarking on a two-year term that promises to be highly eventful as Republicans and Democrats jockey to advance their agendas with a very unpredictable President Donald Trump in the White House.

The 47-year-old Panetta, an attorney and Democrat who handily defeated Republican Casey Lucius last November, succeeds Congressman Sam Farr, who retired after two dozen years in the role. In an interview with The Pine Cone in a very noisy corridor just outside the floor of the House of Representatives Tuesday afternoon, Panetta talked candidly about his first day as a lawmaker, and weighed in other topics, including the Affordable Care Act, Trump, immigration, and working with Republicans.

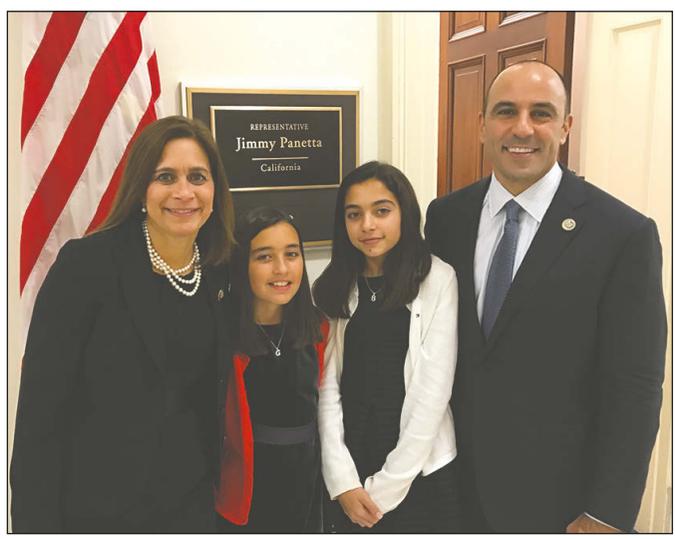
A humbling moment

Panetta said being sworn in as a member of the 115th Congress — in the same chamber that has hosted some of the most momentous legislative events in the nation's history — was "humbling." His mother, Sylvia, wife, Carrie, and his in-laws also watched the ceremony.

"It was a proud moment individually, and it was a proud moment for my family, my father, and most of all, my daughters," who are 10 and 12 years old, Panetta told The Pine Cone. "What is amazing is you see them quickly learn and develop a knowledge about what is going on politically and party-wise."

No longer a "member-elect," Panetta — whose new office is in Room 228 of the Cannon Building next to the Capitol — said the realization he'll play a part in creating,

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PHOTOS/KELLY NIX (TOP), CSPAN

(Top) New Congressman Jimmy Panetta poses for a photo outside his office in the Cannon Building in Washington Tuesday with his wife, Carrie, and daughters, Siri, 12, and Gia, 10. Earlier (above), CSPAN was broadcasting live when Leon Panetta introduced his son to House Speaker Paul Ryan.

Tomasi, a 20-year veteran, becomes police chief

By MARY SCHLEY

PAUL TOMASI officially became chief of Carmel Police Department Friday, when his wife, Amy, pinned the new badge to his chest during an informal ceremony at city hall, and outgoing Chief Mike Calhoun attached the "stars and bars" to his collar. Tomasi took the formal oath of office and then "spoke about his leadership tenets: trust, respect and love," city administrator Chip Rerig said. "It was a very special event."

With his ascent to the top police job, Tomasi became the city's 11th chief in its 100-year history, and with that, Calhoun — who followed Chief George Rawson — officially retired.

Tomasi worked in law enforcement at California State

University Monterey Bay and in Citrus Heights before being hired as a sergeant by Carmel in 2008. He was promoted to commander in January 2013, and when Calhoun was serving as interim city administrator following Doug Schmitz' retirement in October 2015, Tomasi was effectively running the police department. He also oversaw public works for several months, until Rob Mullane was tapped to run it.

At the ceremony, Tomasi said he described the "three pillars I follow for success," which he developed throughout his career.

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PHOTO/KERRY BELSER

City administrator Chip Rerig congratulates Paul Tomasi, who became Carmel's 11th police chief at a swearing-in ceremony in city hall Friday morning.