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CAROLINE BREHMAN Bloomberg

ADDITIONAL vote counts have narrowed GOP gubernatorial candidate Steve Hilton's lead over Democrats.

Trump, without proof, says state vote was rigged

Newsom and other officials rebuff the assertion; president says probe underway.

By KEVIN RECTOR

To the surprise of few, President Trump has once again claimed without evidence that Democrats are somehow cheating to win California's primary elections — writing on social media late Wednesday that federal prosecutors in Los Angeles are investigating the matter.

"The Democrats are at it again! They are trying to STEAL THE GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA PRIMARY, AND THE MAYOR OF LOS ANGELES, PRIMARY, AWAY FROM TWO GREAT REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES. Here we go with the very late and massive numbers of MAIL IN BALLOTS," Trump posted to his social media website.

"There's BIG cheating by the Democrats in California. Votes are all tied up. May not be in for weeks. Under investigation by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Los Angeles," he wrote in a second post.

"Why the vote counting DELAY???"

A spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office in Los Angeles — run by Trump loyalist First Assistant U.S. Atty. Bill Essayli — declined to comment Thursday morning on Trump's claims of an investigation.

The White House declined to say what Trump was basing his cheating claims on, if anything, or provide details about the inquiry. Trump also provided no proof when he doubled down on his claims at a Thursday event in the Oval Office, where he alleged that California Democrats had "found a lot of mail-in ballots" the night prior and were "rigging the election" with them.

California Secretary of State Shirley Weber defended the state's election process in a statement, saying "accuracy comes before speed" when counting millions of ballots in the nation's most populous state.

"Taking the time to do this work correctly protects voters' rights and ensures the integrity of our elections," Weber said. "California has built a strong system that expands access, em- [See Claims, A7]"

State Bar charges DTLA attorneys

Lawyers accused of finding clients outside California where they were not licensed.

By REBECCA ELLIS

The State Bar of California has charged the partners of Downtown LA Law Group, a law firm at the center of a scandal that has consumed Los Angeles County's \$4-billion sex abuse settlement, with signing up clients in states where they had no license to practice.

The bar charged Farid Yaghoubtil and Daniel Azizi, two founding partners of the personal injury firm, and Igor Fradkin, a litigation attorney, on Monday with signing up accident victims across the U.S., despite having no attorneys who could litigate the cases outside California. The firm took on clients in Texas, Florida, Maryland, Arizona, Iowa, Michigan, Tennessee and Virginia, according to the complaint.

Downtown LA Law Group, or DTLA, said in a statement that the cases highlighted by the bar "are multi-jurisdiction with California defendants."

"DTLA is confident they will be able to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of both the State Bar and our law firm," the firm said.

Yaghoubtil faces 16 counts, including practicing law without a license, charging illegal fees, and continuing to represent a client who had fired the firm. Azizi faces 11 counts and Fradkin faces four.

"The public depends on attorneys to follow the law and to be transparent about where they are authorized to practice," said George Cardona, the State Bar's chief [See DTLA, A8]

Clock ticking for CBS News

With new season nearing, '60 Minutes' is in turmoil and at risk of losing its loyal viewers

By Stephen Battaglio

In recent months, the iconic ticking stopwatch of the CBS News magazine "60 Minutes" began to sound like a time bomb.

The explosive detonated Tuesday as the prestigious program's most high-profile correspondent, Scott Pelley, was fired after openly challenging the moves and motives of the news division's leadership and questioning the credentials of new "60 Minutes" executive producer Nick Bilton.

Pelley accused CBS News Editor in Chief Bari Weiss of "murdering" the program and berated Bilton, a former New York Times journalist, for lacking TV news experience.

His forced exit, along with the departure of several other veterans, is raising fears about the future of the most-watched TV news program that has managed to retain its vitality and importance in the face of major changes across the

media landscape.

The turmoil inside "60 Minutes" also comes at an inopportune time for CBS and for Weiss, who has faced a series of controversies since she was tapped by her boss, David Ellison, to run the network. Weiss and Ellison — the chief executive of CBS News parent Paramount Skydance — have been by accused of making changes to "60 Minutes" intended to placate the Trump administration, which they have denied.

Pelley is the fourth correspondent to depart "60 Minutes" since Weiss took over as editor in chief.

Weiss praised Pelley's contribution to the network when she discussed his termination at the network's morning editorial meeting Wednesday, but cited a loss of "trust and mutual respect" as the reason for moving on.

"We cannot do our work without it," Weiss said. [See '60 Minutes,' A12]

Senate rejects an initial attempt to ban Trump's \$1.8-billion fund

Congress' second recent effort to rebuke the president shows fractures within GOP.

By JUSTINE MCDANIEL

WASHINGTON — A battle unfolded in the Senate on Thursday over the Trump administration's controversial \$1.8-billion payout fund for people who claim the government wronged them, as Democrats and some Republicans sought to block the fund but fell short after they rejected each other's proposals.

The episode underscored how President Trump's plan for the fund — widely seen as a way to pay his political allies, including those who participated in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol —

has created divisions within the Republican Party. But it also revealed apparent limits on how far Republicans who are frustrated with Trump are willing to go in opposing him.

Republicans narrowly voted down a Democratic amendment to ban the payout fund. Democrats then killed a Republican proposal to prohibit the use of federal money for the fund but instead direct \$1.7 billion to the Justice Department's fraud division.

Thursday's drama in the Senate was underpinned by midterm politics, as Republican senators who are not up for reelection played key roles in the discussion and others who will face voters in November weighed whether to stay in line with the president or oppose his fund, which is unpopular with voters. [See Vote, A7]

The dueling amendments were attached to the reconciliation bill that would fund Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol, a high priority for Republicans. They were proposed by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.).

Schumer framed the vote as a choice for Republicans: "Do you support Donald Trump's \$2-billion taxpayer-funded slush fund, or do you want to protect the American people and their paychecks?" he said on the Senate floor before the vote.

The episode was the second effort in Congress to rebuke Trump in two days, following the successful House vote Wednesday to rein in Trump's war powers in Iran. [See Vote, A7]

Slow count leaves room for surprises

Many mail ballots are untallied. Final results in some previous races have swung left.

By GRACE TOOHEY AND HANNAH FRY

After the 2022 Los Angeles mayoral primary, developer Rick Caruso looked to have a surprising, and sizable, lead over then-U.S. Rep. Karen Bass.

The morning after the polls closed, Caruso was ahead by 5 percentage points — 42% to Bass' 37% — and the former Republican called the early results "a victory story."

But that lead did not last as the vote count continued. By the time all votes were tabulated two weeks after election day, Bass had come out on top, with 43% of the vote compared with Caruso's 36%.

Welcome to the post-

Raising hotel bed tax is out of favor

But proposal to extend a tax to short-term rentals on booking sites finds support. CALIFORNIA, B1

election vote-count slog in California, where tight races are often impossible to call even when the initial results seem clear-cut.

The California governor's race still has not been called even though Republican Steve Hilton has been the top voter-getter and Democrat Xavier Becerra has been in second place since election night. The same is true in the battle over who will face Bass in the mayoral election: reality TV personality Spencer Pratt, who is now in second place, or L.A. City Councilmember Nithya Raman, who is in third place.

At this point in the vote tally, "everybody has an [See Tallies, A8]"

A toxic metal stayed in air long after 2 wildfires

By TONY BRISCOE

After the Eaton and Palisades fires devastated Southern California, a highly toxic metal stayed in the air much longer and probably traveled much farther than expected, according to a new study.

More than two months after the Eaton and Palisades fires were extinguished, researchers from UCLA and UC Davis detected elevated levels of hexavalent chromium — a potent carcinogen — in the burn areas, the paper in the journal Nature Communica-



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

JENNA ZWEIG, center, and her parents scour the ruins of their Pacific Palisades home early last year.

tions Earth & Environment says. The chrome was in ultrafine particles, more than 1,000 times smaller than width of a human hair, meaning it can more easily travel into the lungs, bloodstream and even cross cell membranes.

"When it's in this nanoparticle form, it basically invades the barrier of our lungs, going into our blood and gets into our circulation," said Michael Jerrett, environmental health professor at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health. "That raises the specter that you've got a lot [See Toxic, A8]"



CARLIN STIEHL For The Times

LANDMARKS IN DANCE

L.A. Dance Project is performing free public shows at notable sites this month. Dancers, above, rehearse at LACMA. ENTERTAINMENT, E1

Blanche likely to face challenges

President wants to make acting attorney general's leadership of the Justice Department long-term. NATION, A5

Weather
Mostly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 80/61. **B6**

Markets **A12**
Opinion Voices **A13**

Oakland to get coal terminal

Trump administration argues that energy is an issue of national security. NATION, A6

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