

BONTA WARNS OF VOTE DENIAL

State’s top lawyer says it’s ‘naïve’ to assume Trump would accept passage of Prop. 50.

By DAKOTA SMITH

SACRAMENTO — State Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta said Monday that he anticipates the Trump administration, which last week announced plans to use federal election monitors in California, will use false reports of voting irregularities to challenge the results of the Nov. 4 special election.

Bonta, California’s top law enforcement officer, said on a call with reporters that he is “100%” concerned about false accusations of wrongdoing at the polling places.

Bonta said it would be “naïve” to assume President Trump would accept the results of the Nov. 4 election given his history of lying about election outcomes, including his loss to President Biden in 2020.

The attorney general also warned that Trump’s tactics may be a preview of what the country might see in the 2026 election, when control of the U.S. House of Representatives — and the fate of Trump’s controversial political agenda — will be at stake.

“All indications, all arrows, show that this is a tee-up for something more dangerous in the 2026 midterms and maybe beyond,” Bonta said.

The U.S. Department of Justice last week announced it would send election monitors to five California counties where voters are casting ballots in the Proposition 50 election to decide whether to redraw the state’s congressional boundaries.

Federal election monitor [See Bonta, A14]

President urges in-person voting

Trump claims mail-in and early balloting on Prop. 50 is “totally dishonest.” CALIFORNIA, B1



DAVID BUTOW For The Times

SANTA MONICA leaders want to tackle “quality of life” issues to bring crowds back to the tourist districts.

WHO OWNS YOUR FACE ON SORA?

Scrolling through the Sora app can feel a bit like entering a real-life multi-verse.

Michael Jackson performs stand-up; the alien from the “Predator” movies flips burgers at McDonald’s; a home security camera captures a moose crashing through a glass door; Queen Elizabeth dives from the top of a table at a pub.

Such improbable realities, fantastical futures, and absurdist videos are the mainstay of the Sora app, a new short-video app released by ChatGPT maker OpenAI.

The continuous stream of hyperreal, short-form videos made by artificial in-

As app’s AI-generated videos go viral, real humans press for control and pay

By Nilesh Christopher

telligence is mind-bending and mesmerizing at first. But it quickly triggers a new need to second-guess every piece of content as real or fake.

“The biggest risk with Sora is that it makes plausible deniability impossible to overcome, and that it erodes confidence in our ability to discern authentic from synthetic,” said Sam Gregory, an expert on deepfakes and executive director at WITNESS, a human rights organization. “Individual fakes matter, but the real damage is a fog of doubt settling over everything we see.”

All videos on the Sora app are AI-generated, and there is no option to [See Sora, A10]

GOP faces voter anger on healthcare

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI AND ALI SWENSON

WASHINGTON — The first caller on a telephone town hall with Maryland Rep. Andy Harris, leader of the House’s conservative Freedom Caucus, came ready with a question about the Affordable Care Act. Her cousin’s disabled son is at

risk of losing the insurance he gained under that law, the caller said.

“Now she’s looking at two or three times the premium that she’s been paying for the insurance,” said the woman, identified as Lisa from Harford County, Md. “I’d love for you to elucidate what the Republicans’ plan is for health insurance.”

Harris, a seven-term Re-

publican, didn’t have a clear answer. “We think the solution is to try to do something to make sure all the premiums go down,” he said, predicting Congress would “probably negotiate some off ramp” later.

His uncertainty reflected a familiar Republican dilemma: Fifteen years after the Affordable Care Act was enacted, the party remains

united in criticizing the law but divided on how to move forward. That tension has come into sharp focus during the government shutdown as Democrats seize on rising premiums to pressure Republicans into extending expiring subsidies for the law, often referred to as Obamacare.

President Trump and [See Healthcare, A5]



ETIENNE LAURENT For The Times

COMEDIAN Dante Capone performs in “The Story of Johnny Lightning” at New Theater Hollywood.

A tiny L.A. theater turns into a scene

By EMMA MADDEN

Five minutes before showtime, the lead actor of “The Story of Johnny Lightning” — billed as a fusion of stage play, musical and rock documentary — was standing in quiet panic at the end of a long line. The problem wasn’t nerves; it was the bathroom.

New Theater Hollywood, a 49-seat black box on a corner of Santa Monica Boulevard, has just one, tucked behind the stage curtain. To reach it, audience members must cross the stage itself, brushing past the set before the play begins. “I highly recommend not going to the bathroom during the per-

formance,” co-founder Calla Henkel warned the crowd, half in jest. But when the line grew long, the performers peeked out in horror, and the audience kindly let them cut to the front. It was, in miniature, the theater’s whole ethos: a porous boundary between art and life.

In a city where the so-called Theater Row has more “For Lease” signs than marquees, New Theater Hollywood feels improbable. Yet since opening in early 2024, it has already become something of a small cult phenomenon. Co-founded by artists Henkel and Max Pitegoff, the theater hosts an ever-mutable lineup of plays — with titles like “The [See Theater, A6]

Jamaica braces for catastrophe

Melissa could become the strongest recorded hurricane to ever hit the small Caribbean island nation. WORLD, A3

State euthanizes four gray wolves

California officials took the unusual step after the predators killed 70 livestock over several months. CALIFORNIA, B1

Weather Sunny and warmer. L.A. Basin: 86/63. B5



ERIC THAYER Los Angeles Times

A BLUE WAVE

For online coverage of Game 3 of the World Series between the Dodgers and Toronto Blue Jays, go to latimes.com/sports and latimes.com/enewspaper.

Santa Monica tries to reverse its slide

Plan would add cops, ease business permits in hopes of bringing back shops, tourists.

By RONG-GONG LIN II

It’s been a rough few years for Santa Monica.

Businesses have abandoned its once-thriving downtown. Its retail and office vacancy rates are among the highest in Los Angeles County. The crowds that previously packed the area surrounding the city’s famous pier have dwindled.

Homelessness has risen. City officials acknowledge crime incidents had become more visible and volatile.

The breadth and depth of the issues became apparent just last month when the city was forced to declare itself in fiscal distress after paying \$229 million in settlements related to alleged sexual abuse by Eric Uller, a former city dispatcher.

Now, Santa Monica is trying to plot a new path forward. A significant first step could come Tuesday.

That’s when the City Council is set to consider a plan to reverse its fortunes.

The plan includes significantly increasing police patrols and enforcing misdemeanor ordinances, investing in infrastructure and new community events, and taking a more business-friendly brush to permits and fees. Officials also plan to be more aggressive in making sure property owners maintain unused properties.

The blueprint tackles many “quality of life” issues that critics say have contributed to lower foot traffic in the city’s tourist districts since the COVID-19 pandemic.

It’s far from clear the tactics will work. But given the city’s current trajectory, officials say bold action is necessary.

“We’re trying to usher in a rebirth — a renaissance of the city — by investing in ourselves,” Councilmember Dan Hall said.

Hall, 38, is part of a relatively youthful City Council majority that swept into office in recent years as voters opted for new leadership and a fresh approach. Five of the seven council members are millennials, and six members first joined the council in either 2022 or 2024.

Also new on the scene is City Manager Oliver Chi, who five months ago was hired away from the same position in Irvine.

“The city is in a period of distress, for sure,” said Chi, 45. “We’re not in a moment where the city is broke. The city still has resources... But right now, if we do nothing, the city’s general fund operating budget is projected to run a structural deficit of nearly \$30 million a year, and that’s because we’ve seen big drops” in revenues, such as from hotel taxes, sales tax and parking.

“But part of that is the private sector hasn’t been investing in the city. And we haven’t had people traveling to the city,” Chi said.

Santa Monica is far from the only city — in California or nationwide — to face the pain of a downtown in decline. Brick-and-mortar retailers have long bled business to online offerings, and the pandemic upended the cadence of daily life that was the lifeblood of commercial districts, with many people continuing to work from home at least part of the week.

But the hope is that, through concerted, planned investment, Santa Monica can shine once again and modernize to be competitive in the postpandemic era.

[See Turnaround, A14]