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KAYLA BARTKOWSKI Los Angeles Times

AS AN early adopter of LED, L.A. ended up with bright and white streetlights. Above, the Venice boardwalk.

Another tax hike could be hard sell in county

Usually generous L.A. voters will weigh healthcare measure amid rising costs.

By REBECCA ELLIS

It's been years since Los Angeles County voters met a sales tax they didn't like.

They agreed to pay half a cent more at the cash register to fund buses, trains and pothole fillings in 2016. The next year, they gave a quarter-cent more to fund homeless services. In 2024, voters bumped it up to a half-cent.

But with the electorate in a dour mood and reeling from rocketing gas prices, some speculate voters' willingness to tax themselves may be dwindling as ballots arrive for the June 2 primary election.

"This is going to be a tougher year for taxes than prior years," said former Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who pushed through a property tax ballot measure in 2002 to fund the county's trauma care network. "There's a limit to the tolerance people have for increasing their own taxes."

Los Angeles County voters will soon decide whether they want to pay a temporary half-cent sales tax to shore up the region's public healthcare system, which is facing dramatic federal funding cuts. Officials estimate the county will lose more than \$2 billion in healthcare funding over the next three years.

The county currently has a base sales tax rate of 9.75%, and cities impose local taxes on top of that. If approved, the tax would take effect Oct. 1 and last for five years. The exact tax rate would vary depending on the city.

Voters haven't said no to a sales tax hike since 2012, [See Tax, A8]

L.A. streetlights shed their golden glow

By Jack Flemming

Light and Los Angeles are intrinsically linked.

It's a light that elicits emotion and demands reaction. Filmmaker David Lynch said L.A.'s "muted golden sunshine" was the reason filmmakers flocked here. In the New Yorker, writer Lawrence Weschler rhapsodized about the soft glow in the air here, day and night. When watching O.J. Simpson's infamous car chase on television from across the country, Weschler burst into tears at the sight of the late-afternoon sun cutting through the smog.

For decades, L.A.'s hazy blue days and golden pink dusks have given way to nights speckled with golden orange, where amber streetlights twinkle across hills, valleys and coastal plain like stars in the sky.

But now, because of the harsh LEDs that light much of L.A., an ever-growing number of streets feel more like prison yards when the sun goes down.

"I feel like I'm under surveillance in my own home," said Linda Chen, a North Hollywood resident.

L.A. was an early adopter of LED. By 2013, the Bureau of Street Lighting had swapped more than half of the city's 220,000 high-pressure sodium lamps with LED bulbs, and the department has systematically converted the rest in the years since.

Progress came with some growing pains. At the time, most LEDs on the market were bright and white, so the city went with those. Modern LEDs are warmer, and the color can be adjusted even after [See Streetlights, A8]



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

IN HIS "The Old Stories: Moses," director Jon Erwin made abundant use of AI.

He sees AI as films' savior

Director says technology can rescue Hollywood jobs

By NILESH CHRISTOPHER

In 1926, director Cecil B. DeMille hired hundreds of workers to build a set of Jerusalem inside the DeMille Studios in Culver City for the classic silent film "The King of Kings."

A century later, Jon Erwin filmed his biblical epic "The Old Stories: Moses," starring Ben Kingsley, on the same studio lot now owned by Amazon MGM Studios.

Except now, much of the

architecture, desert location, and supernatural parts of the three-episode miniseries were generated through artificial intelligence. The prequel to "The House of David" series premieres on Amazon Prime on Thursday.

A production that traditionally would have taken months to shoot and require multiple locations was filmed entirely in one week with a crew of just 100 people — who never left Los Angeles.

"We did this massive

sword-and-sandal epic, and we never left a soundstage, very similar to how James Cameron does 'Avatar' or how Jon Favreau does 'The Mandalorian,'" said Erwin, the director of the series. "When you preserve the performance and the work of the crews and the department heads, then you can do things that are incredibly cost-effective for studios."

As Hollywood grapples with rapid technological change, a growing number of filmmakers and companies [See AI, A13]

Trump hails ties with China on eve of state visit

President is expected to seek Xi Jinping's cooperation on trade and critical minerals.

By MICHAEL WILNER AND KEVIN RECTOR

BEIJING — President Trump's first visit to China in nine years is a high-stakes trip reflecting the rivalry and mutual dependence of two superpowers hoping to avoid a collision course — even if Trump cast it as more of a meeting between close friends and business partners.

Speaking to reporters before departing Washington on Tuesday, Trump downplayed tensions between the two countries, including on trade, calling Chinese President Xi Jinping a "wonderful guy" and a friend and saying the working relationship between the two countries is "very good."

Trump acknowledged China's might — saying that the Asian nation and the U.S. are clearly the world's

two superpowers — and that the focus of the meeting "more than anything else will be trade."

"We're gonna have a great relationship for many, many decades to come," Trump said. "My relationship with President Xi is a fantastic one. We've always gotten along, and we're doing very well with China, and working with China's been very good — so we look forward to it."

Trump also downplayed the importance of the meeting for the war in Iran. He said Xi might be able to help the U.S. reach a deal to end the war, but the U.S. doesn't need it "because we have Iran very much under control."

The state visit marks the first by an American president to China since Trump's trip here in 2017, only months into his first term. President Biden never came, becoming the first to not do so since diplomatic ties were normalized, an absence that underscored simmering distrust and animosity between Washington and Beijing that has only worsened [See China, A5]

Becerra takes heat over crimes of aide

Prosecutors call him a victim in the case, but rivals talk up risk of allegations widening.

By DAKOTA SMITH

SACRAMENTO — As Xavier Becerra rose to the top echelons of power in Washington and Sacramento over the last two decades, his trusted advisor Sean McCluskie joined him at every step.

The son of a Scottish immigrant, McCluskie had a reputation as a political street fighter and his gruff style complemented Becerra's more measured, cerebral approach.

Now Becerra is under attack in California's wide-open governor's race after McCluskie, 57, pleaded guilty in December to stealing more than \$200,000 from the candidate's campaign account.

The charges were part of a broader scandal that implicated or brushed up against some of Sacra-

mento's most influential Democratic political advisors, a scheme prosecutors allege included payments, bank fraud and an FBI sting operation that swept McCluskie's incriminating private conversations and texts into evidence.

Rivals in the California governor's race have seized on the case to question whether Becerra, one of the front-runners in the contest to succeed outgoing Gov. Gavin Newsom, is fit for office and could be swept up in the case.

"We can't have someone who is running as a Democrat who could run into legal difficulties," said candidate Tom Steyer, who is close to Becerra in the polls.

Becerra has not been accused of wrongdoing, and prosecutors' court filings describe him as a victim. He told The Times that he cooperated with investigators, including appearing before the grand jury.

"Sean was as close as any staffer that I've ever had," Becerra said in an interview last week, describing how [See Becerra, A7]

Arcadians dread a racial backlash

U.S. accusation that mayor is agent of China has residents fearing anti-Asian bias.

By HANNAH FRY, BRITNEY MEJIA, CIERRA MORGAN AND SUMMER LIN



ROBERT GAUTHIER L.A. Times

Generations of Chinese immigrants have settled in Arcadia, transforming the San Gabriel Valley suburb, a typical bedroom community, into a "Chinese Beverly Hills" with high-end real estate and luxury shopping.

But the city's residents, many of them affluent, learned this week that a prominent local elected official had a relationship with the Chinese government that federal prosecutors said crossed the line into illegal conduct.

Authorities this week said Arcadia's mayor, Eileen Wang, was acting as an illegal foreign agent of China, a situation that has brought both shock and concern. Officials were quick to de-

notice supposed efforts by the People's Republic of China to influence U.S. policy, noting that Wang's alleged involvement occurred before she was elected to public office.

Wang, a U.S. citizen, stepped down from her post on the Arcadia City Council on Monday after entering into a plea agreement with prosecutors over charges that she acted under China's control to promote propaganda in the U.S. between 2020 and 2022. [See Arcadia, A7]



ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

LeBRON James and the Lakers now face decisions.

Time for James, Lakers to part?

For the sake of the team's future, the aging star forward should go, Bill Plaschke writes. SPORTS, B10

Trump's FDA chief steps down

Dr. Marty Makary angered health industry leaders, abortion foes and other allies of the president. NATION, A4

Weather

Partly sunny. L.A. Basin: 72/56. B6

LAUSD sues to recover millions

District says a manager steered \$22 million in contracts to tech firm and took kickbacks. CALIFORNIA, B1

Gas, rent, food push inflation up

The consumer price index rises 3.8% as the Iran war drives prices higher. BUSINESS, A10

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