



CARLOS BECERRA For The Times

## SOUTHLAND HELPS VENEZUELA

A firefighter, center, part of an L.A. County team, joins a rescue effort in the coastal city of Catia La Mar on Sunday. Meanwhile, volunteers are collecting donations to ship to quake survivors. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

## Plans to retry Palisades fire case criticized

‘They don’t have the goods,’ a resident says as prosecutor signals intent to renew effort.

By ALENE TCHEKMEDYIAN

After a jury failed to reach a verdict in the trial of a man accused of starting the Palisades fire, First Assistant U.S. Atty. Bill Essayli quickly announced that his office would retry the case.

Observers say the jury’s 10-2 vote in favor of acquitting Jonathan Rinderknecht was a major blow to Essayli’s office. Some went as far as to say a retrial would be a waste of time and prosecutors should walk away from the case altogether.

“They don’t have the goods,” said Lisa Sweetingham, a longtime Palisades resident and journalist who attended the trial in federal court after losing her home in the fire. “Ten jurors saw that, and a lot of people in the audience saw that. They really don’t have the evidence to bring it home.”

Several defense witnesses poked holes in the prosecution’s theory that Rinderknecht deliberately started the Lachman fire on Jan. 1, 2025, which reignited on Jan. 7 into the Palisades fire, killing 12 people and destroying thousands of homes.

A Palisades resident said he saw several teens leaving the hill behind his house after the Lachman fire started, acting “boastful.” A Los Angeles firefighter testified that he saw flashes of light and heard loud noises that sounded like fireworks in the area around midnight. A defense expert testified that the most likely cause of the blaze was fireworks.

On top of that, Sweetingham said, Rinderknecht called 911 more than a dozen times on Jan. 1. She felt it was a stretch to hold him accountable for the rekindling six days later, after a series of mistakes by fire commanders and others in failing to put out the earlier blaze, a sentiment echoed by a juror who spoke publicly after the trial.

“We’d like to see the government put that much focus and money and human capital into examining the institutions and the infrastructure, and the various departments that failed us, from Jan. 1 through Jan. 7, rather than retry a 30-year-old Uber driver who may or may not have started this fire at all,” Sweetingham [See Palisades, A7]

## Comcast is spinning off assets of NBCUniversal

News and entertainment will be in a separate firm

By Stephen Battaglio and Meg James

Comcast is spinning off its NBCUniversal entertainment and news media businesses into a separate publicly traded company, a move that would unwind an audacious play the cable giant made for the storied Hollywood assets 15 years ago.

The plan would put broadcast networks NBC and Telemundo, NBC News, cable network Bravo, streaming service Peacock, the Los Angeles-based Universal film and television studios, Universal theme parks and British TV service Sky in a new stand-alone company.

Comcast, based in Philadelphia, would remain in its core business of distributing pay-TV channels, broadband internet and wireless services.

The spinoff would be the second such move by Comcast in two years. Late last year, the Brian L. Roberts-controlled company cast off most of its cable portfolio, including CNBC, USA Network, MS NOW and Golf Channel, to form a new entity called Versant.

But the maneuver failed to budge Comcast’s listless stock, which has languished for years as its primary busi-

ness lost thousands of broadband customers.

Comcast executives needed to make a bolder move to mollify frustrated investors.

Comcast stock peaked at nearly \$26 per share Monday before closing at \$24.22, up roughly 4.5% from Friday. Still, the stock remains below its 52-week high of \$34.34.

The plan announced Monday would unravel Comcast’s bold decision to acquire NBCUniversal from General Electric Co. in 2011. At the time, Comcast saw [See Comcast, A10]

## From office space to affordable housing

Downtown L.A. complex is first part of plan to create 4,000 units

By Roger Vincent



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

**THE 10-STORY** center, built in the mid-1970s, will be redubbed Sky Castle when it opens in early 2028.

An aging downtown office complex will be converted into apartments as part of an ambitious plan by local real estate companies to create 4,000 affordable housing units in Los Angeles.

The first project will be a \$200-million makeover of the L.A. World Trade Center, a sprawling white elephant of an office complex on Figueroa Street built in the 1970s that will be turned into 512 apartments in one of the largest affordable housing conversions to date downtown.

Future projects being planned in the central city for delivery over the next five years will include other office-to-apartment conversions and new housing built from the ground up.

Behind the building campaign unveiled Monday are two of the region’s largest real estate companies, Jamison and Kennedy Wilson. Jamison is the city’s most prolific converter of offices to market-rate apartments and currently has a major makeover of a downtown of- [See Housing, A10]

## U.S., Iran send envoys; talks iffy

The two sides disagree on whether they will meet while they are in Qatar during a pause in hostilities. **WORLD, A2**

## Dribbling own World Cup path

Berhalter family is no stranger to U.S. team, but the midfielder has found success on his own terms. **SPORTS, B10**

**Weather**  
Clouds, then sun.  
L.A. Basin: 75/61. **B6**



ERIC THAYER Los Angeles Times

## BOYLE HEIGHTS CLEANUP

The mop-up after the warehouse fire will require pest traps, deodorizers and thousands of truck trips to haul away rotting food. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

## Justices allow late-arriving mail-in ballots

In a surprise decision, Barrett and Roberts join majority, dealing a setback to GOP.

By David G. Savage

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Monday dealt a surprise setback to the GOP and upheld state laws that allow for counting mail ballots that are postmarked by election day but arrive later.

The 5-4 decision in a Mississippi case rejects a Republican challenge to laws in California and 13 other mostly Democrat-led states that permit the counting of these late-arriving ballots.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett and Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. joined with the three liberals to form the majority.

The decision avoids an election-year change in the voting rules and may bolster Democrats in the fall election.

Barrett said the history of American elections shows that states and their voters have often followed different rules. Moreover, she said, Congress has let them do just that.

Since early in the 20th century, most have allowed absentee ballots from residents who are away on election day. “Today, roughly 30 states count at least some absentee ballots mailed by election day but received afterward,” she wrote.

Although Congress could have prohibited the counting of late-arriving ballots, it had not done so. That may be because states wanted to count ballots from members of the military stationed overseas even if they arrived late.

And more recently, states and their voters have turned to voting by mail.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mississippi changed its laws to accept mail ballots that were postmarked on time but arrived up to five days late.

The Republican National Committee sued and urged [See Ballots, A6]

## Sexual abuse verdict stands

Supreme Court rejects the president’s appeal in the E. Jean Carroll case.

## Justices put limit on police power

Location information about cellphone users is private and personal, the court rules. **NATION, A7**

## Ruling seen as ‘win for voters’

Newsom, other state leaders hail decision as they work to speed the counting process.

By Kevin Rector

California officials cheered a U.S. Supreme Court ruling Monday that allows states to continue counting mail ballots postmarked by election day but received in the days after — calling it a win for voter participation and access, including in the upcoming November midterm.

They also acknowledged delays in recent vote counting have spurred frustration, and promised to speed the process through other solutions — including by investing millions in new election infrastructure and vote processing capabilities.

Gov. Gavin Newsom — who called the court ruling a “win for voters, plain and simple” — has previously said the state should be able to count ballots faster, and his latest budget includes [See Mail, A6]

## Court grants Trump new power to fire officials, but not Fed’s

By David G. Savage

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Monday gave President Trump new power to fire the heads of most independent agencies created by Congress — but not the Federal Reserve.

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. announced two opinions, one of which bolstered the president’s power as the chief executive and a second which said this authority did not extend to the Federal Reserve board.

The first was a 6-3 decision that had the support of five conservatives, while the second had a 5-4 majority that included the three liberals.

Roberts, a former White House lawyer, has long been skeptical of independent agencies whose officials may wield regulatory power in conflict with the views of the president.

Since the 1880s, however, Congress has at times created independent agencies led by a bipartisan board of experts. In 1935, a unanimous Supreme Court had upheld these multimember boards and commissions.

But Roberts and the court overturned that precedent and declared it conflicts with the executive power of the president.

“Our Constitution creates three branches, but only one President,” he wrote. “To discharg[e] the



MARK SCHIEFELBEIN AP

**THE SUPREME COURT** blocked the firing of Fed Governor Lisa Cook.

duties of his trust, the President must have the assistance of officers he can trust. ... Subordinates who exercise the President’s power are subject to removal by him. Then, and only then, can they remain accountable to the President, and the President to the people.”

The decision upholds Trump’s firing of Rebecca Slaughter, one of two Democratic appointees on the five-member Federal Trade Commission.

In dissent, Justice Sonia Sotomayor said the ruling “distorts the structure of government to fit the majority’s theory of unitary, total executive control. The result is a President who emerges with far greater power than ever before. It is a power, however, that neither the People, nor Congress, nor the Constitution bestowed [See Agencies, A6]