Los Angeles Times

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ERIC THAYER Los Angeles Times

HEAVY SURF slams homes on Malibu's Sea Level Drive in September. A sinkhole opened up in one driveway.

White House issues threat over investigations

Democrats' planned inquiries into Trump could bring criminal action, lawyer warns.

BY ANA CEBALLOS

WASHINGTON — The White House's top lawyer has warned House Democrats that their planned investigations into President Trump could expose them to criminal action, a threat that serves as an early sign of how combative the administration intends to be once Democrats take control of the House in January.

White House counsel Will Scharf raised the possibility of criminal inquiries into Democratic lawmakers in a letter Monday to Rep. Robert Garcia (D-Long Beach), who is expected to lead the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee next year.

Scharf argued that Democrats' public promises to investigate and subpoena Trump administration officials "may cross the line into blatant criminality" and could amount to an illegal abuse of power if they do not identify "a legitimate" legislative purpose for their investigations.

He added that "issuing unlawful subpoenas with the intention of depriving citizens of their constitutional rights and privileges may warrant further investigation."

Although past administrations have resisted congressional subpoenas, Scharf's letter goes further, suggesting that lawmakers who issue them could face criminal consequences — a claim legal experts say has little basis, given that the letter cites no specific crime and that the Constitution broadly protects congressional oversight.

Garcia dismissed the threats in the letter, calling it an attempt by the White House to infringe on the committee's constitutionally protected right to conduct congressional oversight.

"It appears Donald Trump has something to hide," Garcia said in a statement. "Let's be clear: Congress' authority comes from Article I of the Constitution, not from the permission of the White House."

He added: "We are a co-equal branch of government and will not be deterred by baseless threats from a weaponized DOJ or from the President's lawyers."

[See **White House,** A6]

Is this the end of living coastal dream?

El Niño-fueled storms, rising insurance have some Californians reassessing the costs.

BY JACK FLEMMING

For a worst-case glimpse into Los Angeles' future, look at Egypt's past.

Alexandria was a cultural and intellectual hub for a millennium until a torrent of earthquakes and tsunamis pulled its coast underwater. Today, much of the iconic city sits at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.

L.A.'s semiarid climate largely mirrors Alexandria's: ocean abutting desert, heaps of sun and a plethora of natural disasters.

As monster waves flood coastal communities, and with a super El Niño on the horizon — all intensified by climate change — some are asking an existential question: How long will the quintessential California dream of living on the coast even be possible?

There is something striking about the way humans have conquered the landscape. Seaside bluffs are lathered with concrete so mansions can overlook the ocean. Beaches are punctured 80 feet deep with structural anchors so homes can hover above the surf.

Depending on whom you ask, such properties are either a testament to human ingenuity or an affront to the natural world — a manifest destiny-esque declaration that Californians will live wherever they want, environments be damned.

But going forward, this unnatural lifestyle along the coast could be much more challenging — and more expensive. It's happening else-

[See **Coast,** A14]

China's spy network in the Golden State

Beijing targets California's tech, research and innovators in its quest for superiority

By Richard Winton and Jenny Jarvie

Over the last half a century, Chinese spies have taken aim at a wide swath of California targets.

They have worked as a Boeing aerospace engineer and a naval engineer at defense contractor Power Paragon to obtain highly classified information on U.S. space shuttle and Navy projects. They have assumed the roles of electrical engineering professor at UCLA and software engineer at Google and even worked as a driver and aide to the late U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein when she chaired the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Intelligence experts say that China continues to ramp up its network of spies and assets across California, as underscored this week after Nvidia Chief Executive Jensen Huang admitted he was embroiled in an extramarital affair when allegations surfaced that he had a relationship with a suspected Chinese spy.

"For years, the FBI has been sounding the alarm regarding China's ambitious efforts to gain technological, economic and geopolitical superiority," said former Assistant Chief Horace Frank of the Los Angeles Police Department, who oversaw intelligence. "Their activities constitute a long-term strategic threat — not only to the United States, but to the world. Their counterintelligence strategy is not only about stealing secrets today; it's about securing strategic advantages tomorrow. They recognize that human vulnerabilities (sex, money, ego and ambition) can be crucial when it comes to them attaining this quest for global dominance."

For China, California is a key espionage hub because it combines three attractive targets: advanced technology industries, major research universities and a large concentration of scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs, according to William Hannas, lead analyst at Georgetown's Center for Security and Emerging Technology. China's main objectives are to accelerate its technological development, reduce dependence on foreign suppliers and achieve leadership in strategically important fields, including artificial intelligence,

[See **Espionage,** A11]



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

DURING HER mayoral campaign, Nithya Raman said she would replace Jim McDonnell as LAPD chief.

Raman facing an LAPD showdown

Mayor-elect will have to decide on fate of police chief as well as a new union contract.

BY LIBOR JANY AND RICHARD WINTON

The election of Nithya Raman, a democratic socialist, as the next mayor of Los Angeles promises to have a profound impact on the city's police force — although perhaps not right away.

Among the most important and widely watched decisions facing the mayor-elect is about what to do with LAPD Chief Jim McDonnell. Raman repeatedly said before her election that she would replace him as chief.

Raman frequently criticized McDonnell throughout her campaign, particularly over how he handled the Los Angeles Police Department's response to the Trump administration's immigration enforcement blitz last year.

She has taken issue with the LAPD's aggressive tactics under McDonnell toward demonstrators. Those have included firing tear gas and less-lethal weapons into crowds, officers mounted on horseback swinging batons and accusations of journalists being targeted, leading to court orders against the department that restrict how they can use such weapons.

She has questioned whether the LAPD should continue to work closely with the Trump administration on non-immigration matters that require data-sharing, potentially affecting investigations into cargo theft and human trafficking that involve local collaboration with federal law enforcement.

The events of the last year, she said, have shattered public trust.

In a since-deleted video with a progressive influencer that went viral, Raman said she would work to ensure the LAPD "is actually

[See **LAPD,** A7]

Fighting racial slurs in school

LAUSD educators say use of N-word is pervasive, despite a ban on hate speech.

BY HOWARD BLUME

One teacher reported that the N-word was written on the classroom wall for the fifth consecutive year.

Another teacher's inbox contained the message: "I really hate you, [N-word]. Black is ugly, and so are you."

A student addressed a teacher by shouting "stupid [N-word] four times," but when the teacher issued a two-day suspension, the principal returned the student to the classroom with no consequences, according to an account shared at an online forum over the summer.

After complaints such as these from Black teachers about students routinely hurling racist insults, especially the N-word, the Los Angeles Unified School District will strengthen measures to track such incidents and respond to them.

Too often, say teachers and advocates, nothing happens. Or worse, teachers are reprimanded or face retaliation for being complainers, such as being written up or getting worse class assignments.

Students too are targeted with racist language.

"Black students ... have told me that they've been called the N-word, a monkey and other degrading names," Shelly Castillo, a San Fernando Middle School history teacher, said at Tuesday's school board meeting. "They don't report it a lot because they have not been believed, and they've been targeted or isolated."

Citing "the centuries-long legacy of anti-Black racism, violence, discrimination, and intimidation," the Board of Education unanimously passed a resolution Tuesday calling for heightened student counseling related to the N-word and other hate speech, as well as staff training on responding to the incidents and reporting them. And staff must report back to the board in March on the progress made.

The resolution, which was brought forward by

[See **Slur,** A7]

Peptide parties hail a permissive policy

BY CORINNE PURTILL

SAN FRANCISCO — Tuxedo-clad party hosts moved through the crowd proffering trays of peptide creams and peptide-infused dissolvable strips as if they were hors d'oeuvres.

Jen Scott accepted a plastic cup and scooped up a pea-sized dab containing GHK-Cu, a copper tripeptide frequently used in topical beauty products for its reported skin-firming properties.

"I love it. I can't get enough," Scott said, massaging the white cream into her neck.

Scott, 59, was also interested in trying the sublingual strips containing BPC-157 and TB-500, two peptides often recommended by biohackers and wellness influencers for tissue repair and healing.

Neither BPC-157, TB-500 nor injectable GHK-Cu is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for human use in any form, though topical GHK-Cu is a legal cosmetic ingredient. The sublingual strips' foil packet read "Warning: For research use only" in tiny print on the back, an indica-

[See **Peptides,** A6]



JOSH EDELSON For The Times

GUESTS board the S.S. Jeremiah O'Brien in San Francisco to sample the unproven wellness products.

Historic upset in Mississippi election

Democrat Scott Colom will become the state's first Black senator since Reconstruction. **NATION, A5**

Trump willing to share arch honor

The D.C. monument he wants to build could also be dedicated to veterans, he says. **NATION, A5**

Banner year for Route 66 firms

Sales are up at businesses as the famed eight-state roadway turns 100. **BUSINESS, A9**

Weather
Sunny, not as warm.
L.A. Basin: 77/60. **B6**

Markets **A11**
Opinion Voices **A12**

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