



BOB HUMPHRIES, an ex-surfboard shaper from Costa Mesa, is treated at Catalina Island Health last week.

FCC OKS LIFTING CAP ON STATION OWNERS

Split decision relaxes 39% coverage limit on local TV affiliates. It could face legal battle.

By STEPHEN BATTAGLIO

The Federal Communications Commission voted 2 to 1 in favor of allowing TV station ownership groups to own more outlets, easing the way for more consolidation and deepening concerns the agency could further disrupt the broadcast industry that has been rattled by battles with the Trump administration.

The Thursday vote means companies can own local stations that cover more than 39% of the U.S. They can also own more than two stations in a single market.

The measure supported by FCC Chair Brendan Carr allows the agency to approve deals that put station ownership groups over the cap if the agency determines that they are promoting the public interest.

The controversial Trump appointee has said the agency will consider such issues as a commitment to local journalism and “viewpoint diversity.” But critics will be watching to see whether the rule change is used to reward President Trump-friendly media companies such as Sinclair Broadcasting, which aims to acquire more stations, while punishing the broadcast networks that Trump often attacks.

Carr has made his name by threatening to pull the broadcast licenses of TV stations that irritate Trump with their coverage and commentary. Even Trump-supporting Republicans such as Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) have raised concerns that the FCC’s scrutiny of broadcast content could be violating the right to free speech.

“Sometimes the FCC scares me right now,” Kennedy said at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing this week. “I don’t like some of the stuff that is said on television, but what business is it of the FCC?”

Jeff McCall, a professor of communications at DePaul University, said having the FCC decide who benefits from the rule change will face resistance. “It will give the FCC wide discretionary powers and open up any decisions to second-guessing and, of course, court challenges,” he said.

Carr already has shown a willingness to use the FCC rules on the books to threaten broadcasters whose news

Catalina’s lone hospital is barely staying afloat

Vital center has county funding, but not for long

By CONNOR SHEETS

The Saturday morning calm at Catalina Island Health’s two-bed emergency room was broken just before noon, when two tourists with arm injuries burst in within minutes of one another.

Praveen Biln, the registered nurse on duty in the ER, kicked into gear checking vital signs on the first arrival, a woman in her 50s who broke a bone in her elbow when she fell while roller skating at the Catalina Casino.

Minutes later, 8-year-old Carter Olsen hobbled in with his worried mother after hurting his arm in a fall. An X-ray ultimately revealed it wasn’t fractured.

“Can I ask you a silly question: Did you hit your head? Can you turn your neck?” Biln asked him to be sure he wasn’t hurt anywhere else. Carter, of Newport Beach, told the nurse that he had not, and that he could. “Awesome,” Biln told him. “You’re doing so good.”

As the only full-time medical provider

on the island, Catalina Island Health is a vital resource for approximately 4,000 residents and 1 million annual visitors. But Tim Kielpinski, the hospital’s CEO, says it was “in dire straits” and on the brink of having to shut its doors last year before it received an emergency multimillion-dollar bailout from Los Angeles County.

“We just had six days of cash on hand in June of 2025,” he said Saturday evening at a fundraiser for the hospital. “Six days,” he added, “before we would have faced impossible decisions.”

Its financial picture has improved somewhat since that nadir, but Catalina Island Health remains one of several hospitals across the county that are struggling to stay open in the face of strong financial headwinds. Inflation has soared since the COVID-19 pandemic, government reimbursement for Medi-Cal pa-

ICE’s broken healthcare system

Unpaid claims could cost detainees vital treatment

BY ANDREA CASTILLO AND GABRIELLE LAMARR LEMEE

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security’s system for paying for detainee medical care has collapsed, records show, leaving a backlog of unpaid claims probably costing millions of dollars.

With a new payment system still not in place, advocates for immigrant detainees fear some are going without necessary treatment as medical providers near a year without compensation.

Newly released federal records reveal what that treatment could be for, detailing more than 233,000 claims for off-site medical and dental care between January and early October of 2025. The claims, for which Homeland Security spent \$96 million, show detainees were treated for a wide variety of conditions, including strokes, pregnancy, suicide attempts and frostbite.

For years, Homeland Security relied on a unit of the Department of Veterans Affairs, its financial services center, to process claims for detainee medical care. But

since that arrangement abruptly ended Oct. 3, the company hired to create a new payment processing system has yet to start reimbursing the medical clinics, dental practices and pharmacies that treat detained patients.

The documents were released by the VA to the nonprofit watchdog group American Oversight through the Freedom of Information Act and shared exclusively with The Times. They paint the clearest picture yet of the off-site medical care received by immi-

Unregulated peptide use alarms researchers

Consumer demand driven by online hype and distrust of health guidance

By CORINNE PURTILL



PINCHAS Cohen, a USC gerontologist, is concerned about the online marketing of his peptide discovery.

A few months ago, Pinchas Cohen learned of a thriving online trade in MOTS-c — a peptide that, when injected into mice, seems to mimic the effects of exercise.

The dean of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology was very familiar with this particular short chain of amino acids. His lab identified it years ago as one of the thousands of peptides that act as chemical messengers in the human body, one he believed might someday have therapeutic uses for humans.

But Cohen was alarmed to learn that his discovery was being promoted by legions of longevity seekers, fitness enthusiasts and wellness influencers as “exercise in a bottle.” Though not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, it was widely available online, often in vials marked “for research use only.”

“Turns out that tens of thousands of people are injecting themselves with MOTS-c [that’s] black market, illegal, from unknown

Confirmation of Blanche on a razor’s edge

The tight Senate vote exposes the depth of skepticism of Trump’s Justice Department.

By MICHAEL WILNER AND BEN WIEDER

WASHINGTON — President Trump’s choice for attorney general is facing a tight vote for confirmation in a Republican-controlled Senate nearly halfway through his second term, reflecting mounting doubts about his leadership of the Justice Department as bipartisan concerns over the weaponization of justice intensify.

The confirmation of Todd Blanche hangs on the support of two Republicans who repeatedly have criticized Trump’s stewardship of the department, where Blanche has served as deputy and acting attorney general, roles he assumed after working as the president’s personal lawyer for nearly two years.

Republican senators resisted Trump’s approach to the Justice Department from the start of the presidential transition, rejecting

his first choice to lead it, Matt Gaetz, amid concerns he would use the department to pursue political retribution. But after Gaetz withdrew, Trump’s replacement, Pam Bondi, won bipartisan confirmation with the support of the entire Republican caucus.

Blanche already is guaranteed a narrower margin, with Sen. Susan Collins of Maine announcing she will vote to reject his confirmation, and with Sen. Mitch McConnell absent for now for health reasons. Democrats are expected to be united in opposition against him.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, a figure the president has referred to as a “terrible,” “Trump-deranged” “loser” who “should never be elected,” has refused to comment on her plans.

Her staff has said she is reviewing a commitment Blanche made in writing to formally rescind a controversial, \$1.8-billion “Anti-Weaponization Fund,” announced in May to compensate Trump’s political allies, including those who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Blanche also said he

A housing fix, one empty lot at a time

Initiative aims to show how small multiunit projects can chip away at L.A.’s shortage.

By GRACE TOOHEY

It is perhaps one of the biggest contradictions of Los Angeles’ housing crisis.

How can a city where homes are in such short supply and financially out of reach for so many have more than 20,000 lots that are zoned for housing but remain vacant?

It’s been a long-missed opportunity, but one that some housing experts hope could now create a fresh wave of attainable homeownership.

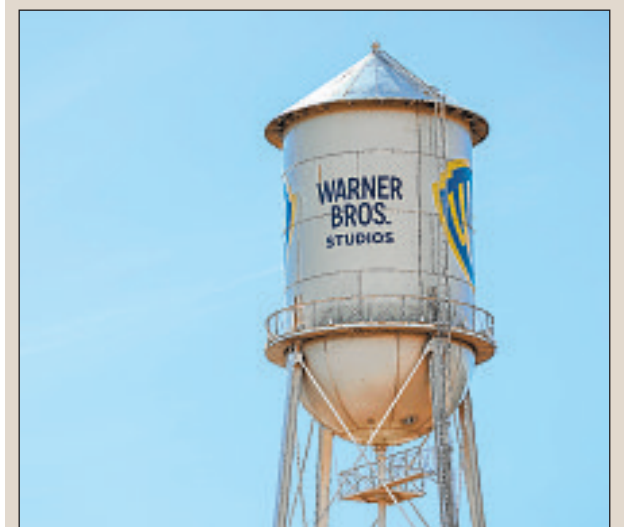
A newly launched novel experiment aims to demonstrate how these vacant lots, while small, can be transformed into thoughtfully designed “gentle density”

housing — such as duplexes, fourplexes and townhome communities — to be sold at more reasonable prices than L.A.’s long-venerated single-family home.

“There hasn’t been a new generation of starter homes since post-WWII. How do we get back to that?” said Dana Cuff, director of UCLA’s city-LAB, which is spearheading this phase of the “Small Lots, Big Impacts” initiative, focused on turning vacant, privately owned parcels into affordable homeownership opportunities.

Small-scale, multiunit housing has been a mainstay of L.A. architecture for more than a century — from grand Spanish Colonial duplexes in places such as Carthay Circle to tidy courtyard apartments and boxy mid-century “dingbat” complexes across Hollywood and the Fairfax District.

But such small-scale



ONE STEP CLOSER

British authorities approved Paramount’s bid to buy Warner Bros. Discovery, but Ellison still faces an antitrust suit at home. **BUSINESS, A10**

Midterm races to watch in West

These states hold four of the nation’s 18 toss-up contests as rated by political observers. **NATION, A4**

Possible measles exposure at park

An infected visitor spent a full day at Universal Studios in July. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Weather

Mostly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 88/69. **B6**

Markets

..... **A12**

Opinion Voices

..... **A13**

For the latest news, go to **latimes.com**.



7 85944 00200 5