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Lam's exit draws scrutiny by Dems

Congressmen ask if U.S. attorney in San Diego was forced out over her role in corruption case.

By GREG KRAMERMAN
Times Staff Writer

Two prominent Democratic congressmen asked the U.S. Justice Department on Wednesday whether the Bush administration forced San Diego U.S. Atty. Gen. Lynn to resign because of her vigorous prosecution of public corruption cases, including that of a longtime Republican lawmaker.

In a letter to Atty. Gen. Alberto R. Gonzales, Reps. John Conyers of Michigan, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, and Howard Berman of California, a member of the committee, said they were "perplexed" that Lam was being removed at a time when her leadership of the office has drawn praise from law enforcement officials in San Diego.

"Since her appointment as U.S. attorney in 2002, we have heard no suggestion that she was either unqualified for the position or that she was guilty of misconduct in her office," the congressmen wrote.

Moreover, they noted, Lam had been leading a continuing high-profile public corruption probe that already has led to federal convictions and imprisonment of former Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham for bribery and tax evasion.

"We do not doubt that removing Lam from the U.S. attorney's office in San Diego now will disrupt this investigation," the congressmen wrote, adding that the forced resignation "raises the appearance that this growing public corruption problem may be part of the administration's intention to renege on it."

"That is unfair. It is vitally important that this corruption be corrected, and we ask you to show us the basis of your request for her resignation," they said.

What Lam has not been available to comment, a Justice Department spokesman denied that the former prosecutor and former Superior Court judge was asked to resign because of her work in public corruption cases.

"These allegations are not correct. It is not the department's policy to comment on speculation about any U.S. attorney that may have been encouraged to leave. However, it is inappropriate to believe that anyone would be encouraged to resign in an effort to retaliate against them or interfere with or suppress any information a particular investigation, criminal prosecution or civil case," he said.

The department's recent notice of public corruption in transactions. These cases are brought by the career prosecutors hired by DOJ leadership to seek out corruption wherever it exists.

In a Senate speech Tuesday, California Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein (except that Lam and six other U.S. attorneys, including the top federal prosecutor in San Francisco, Kevin V. Ryan, had been forced to resign recently without explanation. Feinstein said she plans to raise the issue today with Gonzales at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing.

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Farewell to a grand master

Actor Tom Laughlin, above, gave a picture of Grand Master George Skelton during a memorial service for the Santa Monica mermaid on Wednesday. He wore a slant double eye. Laughlin is in the "Tilly Jack" at right. Above him, the grand master's daughter cries during the service.



GEORGE SKELTON
CAPITOL JOURNAL

Governor's fall appears to lift his oratory skills

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's fall from grace has lifted his oratory skills, according to a political analyst. The analyst noted that Schwarzenegger's speech during his resignation ceremony was "one of the best I have ever heard."

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Judge is in race for U.S. attorney job

Dickran Tevzirian was asked to apply as L.A.'s top prosecutor, a move many find unusual because he could retire or be a private jurist.

By HENRY WEINSTEIN
AND GREG KRAMERMAN
Times Staff Writers

In a highly unusual development, veteran Judge Dickran M. Tevzirian has emerged as one of the top contenders for the job of top federal prosecutor in Los Angeles.

Tevzirian, who has been a federal judge for 21 years, was considered being in the private sector. But he was recruited by local lawyers to apply for the position, according to a number of people in the legal community.

Tevzirian, 66, declined to comment. But several lawyers who are conversant with the selection process said he is among half a dozen people, including the former federal prosecutor, seeking to fill the vacancy left by former U.S. Atty. Debra Wang Yang, who resigned to join a private law firm.

Tevzirian's candidacy is "highly unusual," said Lynn LaRocca, former Los Angeles County prosecutor and current partner at the law firm of Los Angeles lawyer, who worked at the U.S. attorney's office in Los Angeles from 1981 to 1988. She noted that at least six U.S. attorneys have succeeded to the federal bench after serving as the top federal prosecutor in Los Angeles.

There are no precedents for the reverse. To get up a federal judge, which is a lifetime appointment, for the U.S. attorney's position, which has no term limit, is a rare occurrence.

LaRocca said Yang's successor will take the job as a "probationary" judge. Tevzirian, at an age when he could retire or make a bid to move to a private law firm, which has been under appeal since 2001, would be a significant move.

Other candidates for the position include Daniel O'Connell, partner at Munger, Tuller & Collins in Los Angeles and former clerk to Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and William D. Dillan, a top lawyer in the U.S. Department of Justice.

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A COURT VIEW: Dickran Tevzirian has been a federal judge for 21 years.

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