

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Wednesday, Dec. 4

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, mixed vegetables, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Cheese stuffed breadstick, Marinara Sauce.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; DFC Youth supper, 6 p.m.; Advent Service, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

Groton Chamber Board Meeting, 6 p.m., at the Jungle

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

**Groton Daily Independent**  
**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**  
**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**



## Thursday, Dec. 5

Senior Menu: Chicken cordon bleu hot dish, catalina blend, oranges, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Italian Rice Bake, corn.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

MS/HS Christmas Program, 7 p.m., GHS Gym

## Friday, Dec. 6

Senior Menu: New England Ham Dinner, California blend, peaches, dinner roll.

School Breakfast: Breakfast cookie.

School Lunch: Potato soup, ham sandwich.

St. John's Lutheran: Preschool Christmas Program, 7 p.m.

GBB hosts Timber Lake (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow)

Girls Varsity Wrestling at Watertown, 4 p.m.

Christmas Tour of Trees at Wage Memorial Library, 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

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# 1440

**Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.**

## South Korea Tensions

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law in the country late Tuesday local time, the first such declaration since the country democratized in the 1980s. The opposition-held National Assembly quickly voted to overturn the declaration, and the president formally lifted the order early Wednesday local time. The opposition party is now urging Yoon to resign or face impeachment.

Yoon's announcement implemented temporary military rule, banning political activities and labor actions while placing media under government control. Violators were subject to arrest without a warrant. Thousands gathered around the National Assembly to protest through the night and were met by military police, though no violence was reported.

South Korea is the world's 14th-largest economy and a major US ally in Asia. Its conservative president, elected in May 2022, based his decree on the alleged presence of antistate, pro-North Korean influences within the country. Yoon's decision comes as the opposition liberal coalition, which widened its control of the legislature in elections this year, has sought to reduce his budgets and impeach several cabinet members in recent days.

## Probing the Sun's Corona

The Indian Space Research Organization and the European Space Agency are set to launch the Proba-3 solar probe today from Sriharikota, India. The mission consists of two satellites that will study the sun's corona—the outer layer that can reach temperatures of around 2 million degrees and significantly influences Earth through solar flares and mass ejections.

Proba-3 aims to demonstrate precision formation flying, with the satellites maintaining a 150-meter separation to create artificial solar eclipses. The approach allows for extended observations of the sun's corona, lasting up to six hours per orbit, and can generate approximately 50 artificial eclipses annually. The mission has been in development for more than a decade, involving contributions from 14 European countries.

The launch follows the success of ISRO's past missions such as Aditya-L1, India's first space-based solar observatory, and Chandrayaan-3, which made history by achieving a soft landing in the moon's south polar region.

## US-China Trade Fight

China yesterday banned the export of specific rare minerals to the US that are used for technology and military applications, citing national security concerns. The decision came a day after the US expanded its restricted-trade list of Chinese companies for certain types of chips and reflects an escalating tech rivalry between the world's two largest economies.

The banned minerals include gallium, germanium, antimony, and other elements needed for manufacturing advanced technologies like semiconductors. China accounts for roughly 63% of US antimony imports, 54% of germanium imports, and 53% of gallium imports. China is also the world's largest producer of all three elements, particularly gallium. Gallium and germanium are used to produce things like mobile phones, solar panels, fiber optic cables, and infrared technology, while antimony is used in flame retardants, batteries, and nuclear weapons.

Trade tensions between the US and China have been rooted in national security concerns, a battle for technological leadership, and more.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Oregon, Texas, Penn State, and Notre Dame top final College Football Playoff rankings before conference championship week; see complete 12-team bracket.

Israel Vázquez, three-time boxing world champion, dies of cancer at age 46.

Georgia's longest-ever criminal trial, which involved Grammy-winning rapper Young Thug and 28 total codefendants, ends as two codefendants found not guilty of racketeering charges.

"A Different Man" wins best feature at Gotham Awards for independent films.

Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, Rihanna, and Drake top Billboard's list of the 21st century's greatest pop stars.

## Science & Technology

Amazon reportedly partnering with AI startup Anthropic to build an AI supercomputer; "Ultracluster" will combine hundreds of thousands of Amazon's in-house Trainium chips.

Theoretical study suggests evidence for primordial black holes—hypothetical objects made right after the Big Bang that could be microscopic in size—may be found in hollowed planetoids.

Researchers discover gene involved in photosynthesis that can boost poplar tree height by about 30% in the field, 200% in a greenhouse; gene also increases the biomass of other plant species.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.1%, Dow -0.2%, Nasdaq +0.4%), with S&P 500, Nasdaq closing at record highs.

US job openings rose to 7.7 million in October, beating analyst expectations; the figure is up 372,000 jobs from September's 3.5-year low.

Walmart buys TV maker Vizio for \$2.3B in all-cash deal; the acquisition, first announced in February, enables Walmart to expand its advertising business and collect data on customers' viewing, shopping habits to serve targeted ads.

BlackRock to buy credit manager HPS Investment Partners for \$12B.

Food production giant Cargill, the US' largest privately held company, says it will lay off 5% of its global workforce, or an estimated 8,000 employees, amid dropping food prices following the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Politics & World Affairs

US Supreme Court to hear oral arguments today in US v. Sormetti, a case surrounding a Tennessee law banning puberty blockers, hormones for minors; decision expected by June.

Florida Sheriff Chad Chronister withdraws as President-elect Donald Trump's nominee to lead the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Trump says he will block Japanese Nippon Steel's \$14.9B acquisition of US Steel.

Bangladesh summons India's top envoy after an attack on a consulate in India sparks protests in Bangladesh's capital; tensions between the two countries have been elevated as India refuses to extradite former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was ousted in August.

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When the winters get tough, the Cub Cadet<sup>®</sup> 2X gets tougher. This two-stage snow blower is engineered for clearing between 12-18 inches of powder and slush. If you measure snow in feet instead of inches, step up to the commercial-grade 2X MAX<sup>™</sup> trim package to help tackle the deep stuff. Featuring trigger-controlled power steering, push-button electric start, dual LED headlights, 16-inch X-Trac<sup>™</sup> tires and a 3-year limited warranty.\*\*

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Additional models available with 26", 28" clearing width



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- ✦ Heavy-duty 14-gauge steel side plates and auger housing
- ✦ 23" intake height
- ✦ Heated hand grips
- ✦ High-arc steel chute
- ✦ Cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty\*\*

**\$1,999\***



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- ▶ 23" intake height
- ▶ Heated hand grips
- ▶ High-arc steel chute
- ▶ Cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty\*\*

**\$2,399\***

✦ Indicates step-up feature

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\*\* See owner's manual for warranty details and information.

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## City Council denies special exception to build garage before house by Elizabeth Varin

The Groton City Council narrowly voted to deny a special exception that would have allowed a secondary structure before a primary one.

Groton resident Larry Harry had proposed building a garage at 906 North Second Street before building a house on the property. However, a city ordinance requires a primary structure to be built before a secondary one.

The council's decision, made during Tuesday night's meeting, upheld a November ruling by the city's Planning and Zoning Commission, which found the proposed project conflicted with an ordinance requiring a primary structure to be built first. Harry had sought to build a garage with a bedroom and bathroom, intending to construct a house within a year.

The council's vote was split, with council members Brian Bahr and Karyn Babcock supporting the denial and council members Jon Cutler and Shirley Wells against denying the special exception. Mayor Scott Hanlon cast the deciding vote, ultimately rejecting the special exception.

"I guess, bottom line is, I know you guys have been part of our community and built beautiful homes, but we have to back up our planning and zoning commission," Hanlon said. "Otherwise, there's no use to have them."

Councilman Cutler said he didn't see a negative in allowing the build to move forward. While it's not the "right way" of going about it, Cutler said he thinks if Harry builds the house it would be another asset for the community.

And it's not like the city would be allowing everyone moving forward to build a secondary building before a primary, he added.

Councilman Babcock said if the council approves the exception, why wouldn't they do so for everyone else wanting to build a garage before a house.

"I'm conflicted because typically it wouldn't be that big of a deal if it wasn't an ordinance," she said. "We have a standing ordinance, and if we don't follow it, it opens us up to issues."

Babcock asked Harry why he planned to build a garage before a house.

Harry replied that he wanted to get something done this fall, but he couldn't get the concrete done for the house. However, his contractor said he could pour the concrete foundation for a garage as it's a smaller structure.

"I've lived in this town for 52 years," he said. "I'm not going to ..." he trailed off.

Councilman Bahr told Harry and his wife Kathy that if he was voting with his heart, he would approve the project to move forward. However, he has to follow the rules and back the Planning and Zoning Commission. They made a tough decision, wanting to see the city ordinance followed.

"It opens up everybody to do it this way," he said. "Put up a little toy shed and say, 'I'm going to put up a house next year.'"

Bahr made the motion to deny the special exception, and, after a prolonged pause, Babcock seconded the motion. After the split vote, Mayor Hanlon made the deciding call.

He told Harry that the city wants to work with him, but he's got back up the planning commission. If the secondary structure is built before the primary structure, it "opens a can of worms. I try not to do that if we don't have to."

- The City Council held off on deciding what direction to pursue related to the city's aging electric and water meter systems. Technology Specialist Paul Kosel presented prices from two companies and asked the council if they were ready to move forward with a decision. Councilman Brian Bahr said he didn't feel comfortable making the decision before hearing from Electric Utility Supervisor Todd Gay. Councilman Jon Cutler and Mayor Scott Hanlon agreed, saying it would be nice to know what his thoughts are on the meters.

- Mayor Scott Hanlon told the council he plans to speak with the police chief about pressing harder

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on those who don't move vehicles for plowing.

- The council approved hiring six skating rink employees for the upcoming winter season. Hourly wages are set to be discussed at the council's next meeting. New hires include

- o Tenth grader Leah Jones
- o Tenth grader Addison Hoffman
- o Tenth grader Claire Schuelke
- o Ninth grader Sydney Locke
- o Eighth grader Abby Fjeldheim
- o Jamie Mitchek (Krueger)

- The ice skating rink at Garfield Street and West Third Avenue has been flooded to make the rink. However, weather is expected to warm up. However, Public Works Coordinator and Street/Water Superintendent Terry Herron said they shouldn't have an issue having the rink done before Christmas.

- City offices will be closed December 23, 24 and 25 for the Christmas holiday.
- The council voted to reappoint Les Hinds for a 5-year term as a Planning and Zoning Commissioner.



## 8th Annual Holiday Party Live & Silent Auctions Olive Grove Golf Clubhouse Groton, SD

**Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024**

**Holiday Party - 6 p.m. to close  
A variety of snacks served.**

**Silent Auction Basket Items**

**Bidding closes at 8:30 p.m.**

**Live Auctions begin at 8:30 p.m.**

**Proceeds  
raised to  
replace  
cooler in  
clubhouse!**

**Come on out for a fun evening and  
support your local golf course!**

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## SDPB Statement regarding Governor Noem's Budget Address

We are sad and disappointed to hear that Governor Noem has recommended what amounts to deep cuts to South Dakota Public Broadcasting's budget, amounting to a 65% decrease in our state budget allocation.

SDPB provides South Dakotans with one-of-a-kind local programming, including high school sports and fine arts, Dakota Life, In the Moment with Lori Walsh, South Dakota Focus and live legislative coverage.

SDPB also plays critical roles in education, public safety, and helps ensure open government for all citizens of our state.

A cut of this size and scale will force significant reductions to all these important services. This cut is likely to disproportionately affect rural service, where SDPB's programming is most valued.

SDPB has worked hard for over 50 years to earn the public's trust and support. We will be counting on our fellow South Dakotans and their collective voices to ensure our state continues to have a viable, free, public broadcasting service for the next generations to enjoy.

We look forward to working with legislators through the budget process during the 100th South Dakota Legislative Session.

For those with concerns, we encourage them to reach out to Friends of SDPB, the non-profit organization that advocates on behalf of SDPB. They can be reached at [friends@sdpb.org](mailto:friends@sdpb.org).

### **\*\*LAND AUCTION\*\***

Up for auction is 66+/- acres land. 22.91 acres of tillable, 24.10 acres of CRP/CREP, 19.12+/- acres of hunting in Groton, SD on US Hwy 12. No easements on any of the acres. Unlimited possibilities ranging from recreational property of development property. You can bid online at [HIBid.com](http://HIBid.com) up until we start the live auction Dec. 7th at 1 p.m. From there we will be taking live bids and internet bids. Auction will be held at the American Legion in Groton at 1 p.m.

Terms of the auction, 10% down on sale day (non-refundable). Closing within 20 days of auction at Kolker Law Office in Groton SD.

SAM HANSON, EXIT REALTY CONNECTION  
1001 9th Ave SE., Watertown, SD 57201, 605-520-6349  
[shauctioneer@hotmail.com](mailto:shauctioneer@hotmail.com)

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## 2024 Budget Address

By: Gov. Kristi Noem

December 3, 2024

Remarks as-prepared for delivery

### Intro

Good afternoon, Lieutenant Governor Rhoden, Mr. Speaker, members of the House and Senate, and my fellow South Dakotans.

I am once again blessed to be here to discuss South Dakota's budget. The past six years have been one of the greatest honors of my life. I love our state and everything about it. I love our natural beauty. But what I love most is our people.

Our state motto is "Under God, the People Rule." In 2018, the people elected me as their 33rd Governor, and we accomplished an incredible amount in those first four years. Then, in 2022, they once again gave me the opportunity to lead and reelected me. They sent a clear message: they appreciated the direction our state was going. I made decisions to uphold the Constitution while focusing on the people and the families of our state. That is our charge as elected leaders. And it is how we must approach this budget.

As is always the case following an election, we have some new legislators here this year. So I'm going to repeat my philosophy when it comes to taxpayer dollars. During my time as Governor, I have always kept my budget proposals focused on our people, not government programs. After all, this is the people's money. They entrust it to us and expect us to spend it wisely and responsibly. Every dollar that we invest, every policy that we support – every vote that you take in these legislative chambers – should be focused on our people, on making them safer, stronger, and freer. And we should always look to the future – on what will be best for our kids and our grandkids.

We focus on the core purposes of state government as outlined in our South Dakota Constitution. That focus is further underscored in a year like this one – as a result of the Biden-Harris policies, the national economy remains anemic. However, the great American comeback will soon take off. Until then, we have to make some tough decisions to deliver the 136th consecutive balanced budget for South Dakota.

As former Governor Bill Janklow once said, "We watch our cash, we watch our projections, and if it ever becomes necessary to make the budget cuts, we'll make them unhesitatingly. Whether or not that involves any political flak or criticism, frankly, I couldn't care less. My first primary responsibility as the chief executive of this state is to make sure that our books always stay in balance and that we never spend any more money than we have available to spend. Frankly, the people of our state do their business that way, and they wouldn't expect any less of us." Wise words from a strong leader.

Make no mistake – South Dakota's economy remains the strongest of any state in America. We have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, the fastest growing incomes of any state, and folks continue to move here by the thousands to share in our Freedom. Even so, our revenue picture has tightened this year. We have \$44 million in ongoing revenue available – that's less than in recent years when I've addressed this body.

For one-time revenue, we have \$175 million available, primarily as a result of another large infusion of unclaimed property receipts. Last year, you heard me talk about historic unclaimed property receipts of \$134 million. Due to our excellent business climate, we attracted yet another large holder of unclaimed property. This year, unclaimed property funds exceeded that. They are \$229 million, of which \$60 million is ongoing revenue that we can safely and responsibly plan for moving forward. We are considering everything above that amount to be one-time revenue.

The people of South Dakota have repeatedly voted for fiscally conservative policy, and they expect their elected representatives to enact the same. Our budgets should always focus on our core priorities. That is what I have done in my first six years as governor, and that is what South Dakota will continue to do.

Today, I'm going to talk to you about our priorities – and how this year's budget achieves those priorities. Our budget sets our state economy up with the Freedom to succeed; it educates our kids so that our



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next generation has the best opportunity for success; it promotes access to quality healthcare across the state; it preserves and protects the safety of our people; and it achieves all this while maintaining fiscal responsibility to taxpayer dollars.

## Economy

We've accomplished a lot over the past six years. One of the things that makes me proudest is how strong we have made South Dakota's economy. When I first ran for governor, I saw an economy that needed to grow. Our young people were leaving the state. Our businesses weren't thriving. And major projects weren't moving here. But I knew we had an opportunity to turn South Dakota around.

I declared South Dakota "Open for Business." And that proclamation was put to the ultimate test during COVID when the rest of the nation shut down. Not South Dakota. We trusted our people to exercise their Freedom and personal responsibility to make the best decisions for themselves and their loved-ones. Our economy took off! So we made wise investments as a state to tell our story and capitalize on our economic strength.

We were able to make ten years' worth of broadband infrastructure investments in just one year because of our strong tax revenues. We invested in tourism and workforce marketing campaigns so that people would be drawn to South Dakota's Freedom and open spaces. We knew that childcare and housing availability were concerns that kept our workforce from growing as quickly as it could – so we made targeted investments in those areas to keep the momentum going. We prioritized grants to companies across the state to increase competition. And we made smart investments in communities to set them up for success – like building the DEX and the SHED at our State Fair to bring it into the 21st Century.

I am blown away by what we've been able to accomplish as South Dakotans. You heard me talk proudly about our economic strength – but did you know that since I've taken office, we have had the lowest average unemployment rate of any state over that six-year timeframe? That's incredible – and it's because we gave our people the opportunity to go to work.

My budget proposal will continue to invest in our state's workforce. One way we do that is by investing in our state employees and our healthcare providers. Over the last few years, we've provided targeted increases for both. Last year, we passed legislation to guarantee that teachers get opportunities to earn more when we make increases to education funding. Together, those make up the "Big Three." This year, I am proposing that we do what we can to offset inflation once again. I am recommending a 1.25% increase for the "Big Three" – our schools, our state employees, and our healthcare providers. Since I took office, the Consumer Price Index has increased by 24.9%. With this budget, we will have provided inflationary increases of 27.9%. This should keep us ahead of the increase in inflation. We are not going back to the days when our kids, providers, and employees are left behind. Thank you for getting it done.

One of the best ways that we can keep South Dakota's economy strong is to keep taxes low for our people. Last year during this speech, I asked you to make a permanent tax cut for the people of South Dakota – and I am reiterating that request today. Our people deserve better than a temporary sales tax holiday.

## Education

In order to meet our workforce needs, our kids and our grandkids need to be equipped for the jobs of the future. But education holds a more fundamental place in our society than just filling open jobs.

I have prioritized education over the last six years. Let's start with the cornerstone of education: reading. We have invested in the Science of Reading because it works. Returning to this phonics-based method ensures our educators know how to teach our kids to read efficiently and with confidence. We will bolster these efforts with a five-year \$54 million federal grant to support Science of Reading programs at the district level. My Department of Education is Moving Literacy Forward.

We also emphasized Jobs for America's Graduates to make sure that high-risk South Dakota kids can make it to graduation ready for college or a career. We invested in higher education to meet our workforce needs: like providing equipment for key professions at our state's technical colleges; expanding training opportunities for nurses at colleges and universities across the state; and supporting the growth of the

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cybersecurity program at Dakota State University to guarantee that the jobs of the future will be right here in South Dakota. We provided full tuition for our South Dakota National Guard soldiers to thank them for their service to our state and nation. And we guaranteed that teachers will get increases to match state funding for education.

We will continue to prioritize education with this year's budget. My budget focuses on making sure that our students have the best opportunity for success. Good education starts in the home. And parents should have the tools to choose what educational path is best for their kids.

I am proposing that we establish Education Savings Accounts for South Dakota students in this upcoming legislative session. I am setting aside \$4 million in ongoing dollars to stand up the program to start providing support for South Dakota students. This investment will pay for a portion of private school tuition or curriculum for alternative education – beginning with about \$3,000 per-student. Because this is a starting point and a limited initial investment, we must first provide for the South Dakota students who need it most. But our goal is to expand, and my hope is that these ESAs will ultimately be available to every student in South Dakota. Now, let me be clear, we will not be cutting any dollars from our public schools, as many might try to argue. Public schools are very important to our state's educational future. And as I've mentioned, education has seen historic funding increases. It's important to remember that South Dakota supports all students. We want those students to receive the education that's best for them and to have the Freedom to do so. I look forward to working with both legislative chambers to get this done.

In 2019, I started the School Safety Center within the Department of Public Safety. This Center operates a tip line and provides training to help keep our students safe. They have completed over 150 school safety assessments, and they have made recommendations for security upgrades and improvements. However, schools sometimes struggle to afford these improvements. This year, I am proposing that we invest \$10 million in one-time funds over five years to create school safety grants. These grants will support identified security upgrades and protect the next generation of South Dakotans.

## Health

In my time as Governor, I am proud of the work that we have done to support the public health of South Dakotans. Every citizen in our state should have the Freedom to live where they want and the opportunity to have good health outcomes – even if they choose a rural lifestyle.

In my time as Governor, South Dakota has become the standard for how to revolutionize rural emergency medical services. Innovative efforts like Telemedicine in Motion are setting an example for the nation. And we've put modern LifePaks in the back of ambulances across the state to save lives. We expanded the Bright Start program to support moms and babies before birth and after. We've started construction on a brand new state-of-the-art Public Health Lab. And we have added resources to this lab to enhance our services.

We have invested to help build and support regional mental health facilities across South Dakota. In the past, when a South Dakotan was experiencing a mental health crisis, they would end up in jail or in the emergency room. Now they can get appropriate help closer to home. This effort is a big reason why South Dakota continues to lead the nation with the largest drop in overdoses of any state. And my budget this year provides \$1.2 million in additional ongoing funding for these regional facilities.

I am also recommending a \$1.5 million investment into Agency with Choice at the Department of Human Services. This will continue to allow families utilizing our Family Support 360 services to choose who is providing services in their homes. And they can do so without an arbitrary cap on the hours of service that can be provided. This investment will provide greater care for South Dakotans utilizing our developmental disability services.

Public Health is influenced by so many things – including the water that we drink. My Administration has made historic investments into water infrastructure across South Dakota to make 20- to 30-years' worth of water investments in a very short timeframe. I am proud that we have improved the quality of South Dakota's drinking water for decades to come – and provided infrastructure to help our state grow our economic opportunities.

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We are also managing the increased demand on our state's Medicaid system with fiscal responsibility. We have \$86 million in mandatory ongoing spending increases in this year's budget – and those are primarily tied to Medicaid. This includes the remaining \$33.7 million to fully fund the cost of Medicaid Expansion. I want to thank the legislature for taking steps to ramp up to that total amount in the last couple of years. That smart planning will help us afford this total in the years to come. Because our state's economy has done so well, we have to take on a higher share of Medicaid costs. This will cost us another \$27.8 million.

With all of these investments, we will continue to strengthen public health in South Dakota for years to come.

## Safety

One of the core responsibilities of the government is to guarantee the safety and security of our people – to protect their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I am proud of all that we have done in the last six years to improve the safety of our people.

We've strengthened our physical infrastructure to keep our people safer. We've repaired highways and bridges, including some innovative new ways to achieve safety on the roadways. We have consistently invested in our State Radio infrastructure to support public safety communications in every corner of South Dakota. We've fixed dams across the state. When we saw a 1,000-year flood this past summer, we didn't have major dam breaks in South Dakota like we saw in a neighboring state. In order to continue this important work, I am recommending an additional \$13 million to finish the Richmond Dam project.

We have invested in readiness centers for our South Dakota National Guard in communities around the state. Our National Guard is consistently awarded for being the best in the nation. They do every mission with excellence – whether responding to natural disasters, deploying overseas, or helping secure our border. By supporting and building training facilities, these readiness centers will help keep us safe into the future.

I have increased resources to combat the horror of human trafficking. And when President Trump secures the Southern Border, we'll cut off the primary pipeline for human trafficking into our country.

Threats to public safety can take many forms – including attacks to our cybersecurity. Our state government systems endure countless cybersecurity attacks every year. My Administration has focused on modernizing our IT systems to protect the personal information of our people. And we've identified cybersecurity as South Dakota's "next big industry" to protect our people for many years to come.

Finally, we have made historic investments into building new prisons that have been a need for our state for decades. Thank you for fully funding the new women's prison in Rapid City – construction is well underway on that project. And as for the new men's prison, we now have an estimated total cost of \$825 million. Our current State Penitentiary is older than the state of South Dakota. The current building is falling down. It is long past time to replace it for the safety of our people. The new facility will be built to meet our medium- and maximum-security needs far beyond our lifetimes. You have already set aside \$567 million in the Incarceration Construction Fund towards this project. We are estimating \$76 million in interest on those dollars in the coming years as the prison is being built. My budget meets the remaining need of \$182 million in one-time dollars to fully fund this new prison. Paying cash for this facility will save more than \$600 million in interest, fees, and annual debt service payments. Thank you for saving ahead for this project.

## Fiscal Responsibility

South Dakota has always been an example of fiscal responsibility. After all, this budget will reflect the 136th consecutive balanced budget for our state. We recognize that these dollars belong to the people of South Dakota. They work hard to earn money for their families. It is our responsibility to manage those dollars wisely.

Since I've been Governor, we have taken fiscal responsibility to new heights. We have truly made South Dakota an example for the rest of the nation to follow. We're one of the only states with a fully-funded pension, and we have a AAA credit rating. We paid off tens of millions of dollars in debt. We have broken records for the largest surpluses in state history. The legislature worked with me to pass the largest tax cut in South Dakota history. And we've advanced long-term fiscal responsibility by implementing new IT

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systems – like BISON and 605 Drive – that will guarantee that taxpayer dollars are protected.

This year's budget will continue to maintain responsible management of taxpayer dollars. I am recommending that we maintain our longstanding practice of having a minimum of 10% budget reserve balance for a rainy day. Additionally, due to the unprecedented influx of unclaimed property receipts, I am recommending that we set aside \$43 million of our one-time revenues to pay future claims. This money belongs to the people, and we must be ready to pay this back. This will set our reserve balance at about 12% of our state budget.

I told you earlier that we had only \$44 million in available ongoing revenue, but \$86 million in mandatory new ongoing expenditures. And we've discussed other new spending items today. To balance the budget, we're proposing \$71.9 million in budget reductions and discretionary changes. You may have other things that you'd like to fund – but as President George Washington said, "We must consult our means rather than our wishes." That is what South Dakota families do every day.

We'll achieve a balanced budget by making needed changes to both revenues and expenditures. As technology evolves, it is important for state government to look at past decisions to ensure they are still relevant for today. Over a decade ago, we encouraged businesses to electronically file sales taxes by providing a credit incentive. This collections process is now normal business practice, and this incentive is no longer necessary.

We will continue to strengthen our fiscal foundation by paying off debt with one-time money. This will free up ongoing money for this year. We'll reduce the money we set aside for Maintenance & Repair. We'll right-size funding for programs in the Department of Social Services and Department of Human Services to match utilization – these programs had been reverting money at the end of the fiscal year over the last several years. We'll reduce the state match in funds for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families – our economy is strong, and South Dakotans are working. And I have asked the Board of Regents to propose \$2 million in budget reductions of their own.

I propose reducing funding for South Dakota Public Broadcasting to bring us in line with the national average. Currently, South Dakota has the 3rd highest per-capita funding of public broadcasting of any state in the nation. We've been paying more than double the national average.

Finally, I am proposing further steps to strengthen our fiscal fortitude. We will expand resources to assist the Board of Internal Controls. We need to strengthen our Department of Legislative Audit and clarify the work they do. My budget includes adding two new employees to this department. These steps will build on the actions that we've already taken. Also, we will continue to strengthen our financial systems to make sure that we are transparent with taxpayer dollars. The new BISON accounting system will have safeguards in place to control processes and protect taxpayer dollars – things that simply were not possible with our decades-old system. And 605 Drive will strengthen financial security and transparency within the Department of Revenue. And last week, I signed an Executive Order to stand up state employee trainings around public trust, duty to act, internal controls, conflict of interest, and a service mindset for the citizens of South Dakota.

## Conclusion

Our state is an example of fiscal responsibility; of limited government; of what can be accomplished when we trust in our people and respect their Freedom. We don't just talk about these things. We make the tough decisions to back up those words with action. And the results prove our approach is correct.

I want to thank my team at the Bureau of Finance and Management for putting together this budget. Would you all give them a round of applause?

Commissioner Jim Terwilliger and his team have been so fantastic to work with. They will be around to answer whatever questions you may have throughout this upcoming legislative session.

South Dakota has been home all my life – and always will be. Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to serve you. I want to thank all of you for joining me on this incredible journey and for serving the people of South Dakota alongside me.

Thank you all. God bless you. And Merry Christmas!



DACOTAH BANK

HOLIDAY  
OPEN HOUSE

Cookies & Calendars

DECEMBER 10 -13

9:00 - 4:00 PM

*Stop in for cookies,  
coffee and a calendar!*

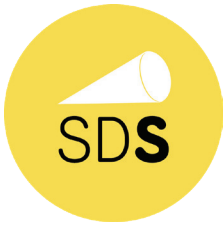
7 E. US Hwy 12 | Groton

MEMBER FDIC



## Chamber recognizes new owner at Train Fitness

The Groton Chamber was pleased to welcome the new owner of Train Fitness! Josey Heupel took over in October and is excited to start this new business endeavor. Train Fitness offers Venmo as a payment option as well as monthly autopay. Reach out to Josey at 605-467-9698 for information on her 24/7 access gym or check out her Facebook page for monthly prize drawings. Look for the green logo as a new page has been created. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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### Noem budget includes cuts, but also new school choice program and more prison money

**Governor targets assistance programs, public broadcasting, university system and others for reductions**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 3, 2024 4:55 PM**

PIERRE — South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem proposed a leaner state budget Tuesday with a small increase for schools and cuts to some departments and programs, yet with new money to create a school-choice program and continued contributions to a prison construction fund.

In her fiscal year 2026 budget address, Noem outlined a \$7.29 billion spending plan, which would be a reduction of about \$20 million, or 0.27%, compared to the current fiscal year budget of \$7.31 billion. The reduction is driven primarily by lower-than-expected sales tax collections and the depletion of pandemic-era federal relief and stimulus funds.

"We're going to have to make some tough decisions to deliver the 136th consecutive balanced budget for South Dakota," Noem said.

Noem delivered her speech to lawmakers in the state House of Representatives chamber at the Capitol. Legislators will take her proposals into consideration next month when they gather for their annual lawmaking session.

Noem is expected to resign as soon as late January to accept an appointment as secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, if she's confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden would then take over as governor and appoint a new lieutenant governor.



**Gov. Kristi Noem delivers the fiscal year 2026 budget address at the Capitol in Pierre on Dec. 3, 2024.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

### School choice and public education funding

The governor proposed the creation of a \$4 million education savings account program, which she said would offer \$3,000 per student toward private school tuition or alternative education curricula.

She said the money would not cut into public school funding.

"Public schools are very important to our state's educational future," Noem said.

Yet she proposed only a 1.25% increase in funding for public education, health care providers and state employees.

Noem said she and legislators have provided 27.9% worth of inflationary increases for those "big three" parts of the state budget since she took office, while inflation during that time has been 24.9%

But this year's proposed increase would fall short of the current 3.2% inflation rate reported by the

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Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

Incoming House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, praised the governor's support for education savings accounts.

"This could be a game-changer for education in South Dakota," he said.

Speaking after the speech to South Dakota Public Broadcasting, which carried the speech live, incoming Senate Minority Leader Liz Larson, D-Sioux Falls, expressed skepticism.

"One of our core beliefs as Democrats is that we protect public education," Larson said. "So we would need to make sure those types of programs are not a slippery slope leading to less investment in our public schools.

## Cuts

Noem proposed nearly \$72 million in "reductions and discretionary changes," many of which are cuts to state departments and programs.

Those include \$38 million in combined reductions for the Department of Social Services and the Department of Human Services.

"They have been reverting money for years at the end of the fiscal year, and it's time we right-size these budgets," Noem said.

Other proposed cuts include a \$17 million reduction in maintenance and repairs of state property, and a \$5.3 million reduction for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, which is designed to provide assistance and build economic self-sufficiency for children and families.

Noem also wants to cut \$3.6 million from South Dakota Public Broadcasting and \$2 million from the Board of Regents, which oversees the state's public universities.

"We must consult our means rather than our wishes," Noem said, quoting President George Washington.

Incoming House Assistant Minority Leader Jamie Smith, D-Sioux Falls, expressed concerns about cuts to social programs.

"We need to understand how these cuts will impact the most vulnerable people in our state," he said.

While he applauded Noem's proposal of \$10 million to help schools make safety upgrades and improvements, he questioned the necessity of her proposed 12% budget reserve.

"Today is a starting point," Smith said. "And there are things we can work together on, but we need to closely examine areas where the most vulnerable might be affected."

South Dakota Public Broadcasting, which relies on the state for part of its funding and the nonprofit Friends of SDPB for additional funding, issued a statement Tuesday saying Noem's proposal would be a 65% decrease to the organization's state budget allocation.

The organization highlighted the importance of its online, radio and television coverage of topics including high school sports, fine arts, education, public policy and the Legislature.

"A cut of this size and scale will force significant reductions to all these important services," SDPB said in a statement. "This cut is likely to disproportionately affect rural service, where SDPB's programming is most valued."

## Prison money

Noem proposed putting \$182 million in a fund to build a new state prison south of Sioux Falls, which would largely replace the antiquated Sioux Falls penitentiary, parts of which date to 1881.

The state has already set aside \$567 million for the project, which is expected to cost \$825 million. Noem said the state expects \$76 million in interest earnings from the prison fund. The interest and the proposed \$182 million would fully fund the project, she said.

The prison location and price have been controversial, and Odenbach said he expects significant lawmaker attention to the project.

"We're going to have a lot of discussions about this," he said.



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## Unclaimed property record

The budget will receive a boost from a record-setting \$229 million in unclaimed property revenue, exceeding last year's historic haul.

That money comes from an array of abandoned or forgotten private assets, including bank accounts, stocks, life insurance payouts, uncashed checks and the contents of safe deposit boxes. The holders of the money or items — such as banks, including some large ones chartered in South Dakota due to the state's favorable finance laws — try to find the owners. But after three years of dormancy, the property reverts to the state.

Noem proposed reserving \$43 million of unclaimed property revenue for potential claims from people seeking to recover their money. The state Treasurer's Office maintains a list and makes efforts to help people reclaim the money.

"This money belongs to the people, and we must be ready to pay it back when those claims come in," Noem said.

## Sunsetting sales tax reduction

During the 2023 legislative session, when the state was flush with federal pandemic relief and stimulus funding, lawmakers temporarily reduced the state sales tax rate from 4.5% to 4.2%, with a sunset in 2027. Noem appeared to call for that reduction to be made permanent.

"Our people deserve better than a temporary sales tax holiday," she said.

## Other spending

Among other highlights, the governor noted that the state faces \$86 million in mandatory ongoing spending increases, mostly due to the joint federal-state Medicaid program that provides health care for people with low incomes.

She also proposed \$1.2 million in additional ongoing funding for regional mental health facilities, and a \$1.5 million investment in Agency with Choice, a Department of Human Services program that families use to choose companion care, respite care, personal care or supported employment services for people with developmental disabilities.

To continue work on replacing the Richmond Dam at the state Richmond Lake Recreation Area near Aberdeen, the governor proposed \$13 million.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

## Noem proposes school choice program to 'prioritize education.' Critics say it'll undermine it.

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 3, 2024 6:17 PM

PIERRE — A \$4 million proposal by South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem to help students enroll in private school and other forms of alternative instruction would undermine public education by diverting state money to unaccountable entities, opponents say.

Supporters of the plan say it would allow the state to start educational reform that's gained momentum nationwide while lowering education costs, forcing public education to innovate and offering South Dakota students tailored education to best meet their learning needs.

Noem pitched the creation of education savings accounts, or ESAs, to lawmakers at her annual budget address Tuesday in Pierre as a way to continue to "prioritize education" without cutting public education funds.

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"Good education starts in the home," Noem said. "And parents should have the tools to choose what educational path is best for their kids."

The program would cover about \$3,000 per student annually to pay for a portion of private school tuition or curriculum for alternative education, Noem said. She hopes to expand the program eventually, but she might not be around to act on that plan. President-elect Donald Trump has picked her as his nominee to lead the federal Department of Homeland Security, which means she could resign as governor as soon as late January, elevating Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden to serve the rest of her term.

The program would be for "families who meet eligibility requirements," according to information in Noem's budget, and Noem's spokesman said the requirements will include being low-income. Sixteen other states already allow families to use taxpayer funds for ESAs.

The proposal comes as South Dakota sees one of the highest rises in alternative instruction in the nation. Across the state, alternatively enrolled students account for about 6.5% of the school-age population, based on public, non-public and alternative enrollment data from the state Department of Education. Alternative instruction includes homeschooling and private schools that are unaccredited or accredited by an entity other than the state, such as online, hybrid and microschools.

Lawmakers and education lobbyists in Pierre are eager to learn the details about Noem's proposed legislation – especially how the state will ensure oversight and accountability, how students are chosen for the program and how it'll fit into the state's ongoing expenses.

"We have homework to do," said incoming Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, a former member of the legislative budgeting committee who supports the school choice movement. "We have to go look at this and figure out how to implement this responsibly."

Sandra Waltman, director of public affairs for the South Dakota Education Association, said any entity that accepts public funding should be held to the same standards as public education, such as testing requirements and anti-discrimination policies. Alternative instruction students are currently not required to take standardized tests or present a portfolio to demonstrate educational progress. Private schools aren't obligated to serve all students, so they can deny admission and educational services, Waltman added.

"When you're taking those precious funds and diverting them from public schools, you're undermining what public schools can do for students," Waltman said. "There's no assurance the money they're investing in education is actually making a difference."

Noem didn't propose cutting public education to fund the program, but proposed a state funding increase to public education of 1.25%. The inflation rate this year is 3.2%, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

Lower-than-expected sales tax collections primarily drive the leaner \$7.29 billion budget Noem proposed Tuesday, which also includes cuts to some state departments and programs.

That signals to Rob Monson, executive director of School Administrators of South Dakota, that lawmakers



**Gov. Kristi Noem delivers the fiscal year 2026 budget address at the Capitol in Pierre on Dec. 3, 2024. Seated behind her, from left, are House Speaker nominee Jon Hansen and Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

will challenge the feasibility of ESAs.

"Some legislators will look at public education serving over 80% of students in the state and think, 'If we have extra money, maybe we should obligate that to a program we're already obligated to fund instead of funding a new program with ongoing dollars,'" Monson said.

Efforts to create ESA programs failed twice in the Legislature in recent years, largely due to questions about financial feasibility, said Brookings Republican Rep. Mellissa Heermann, a member of the House Education Committee.

South Dakota must be intentional with the "small pot" of tax revenue it has to work with, Heermann said. She added that there are already school programs in place to help address students' mental health, behavioral and learning needs.

"I don't know that vouchers would be as impactful as other programs," Heermann said. "The timing doesn't feel right to me to embark on something like this when we're already trying to reduce costs as much as possible."

Incoming House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, said the proposal focuses on educating students, rather than supporting a public education system that's weighed down by overhead costs and top-heavy administrative costs. An ESA program could force local districts to decentralize, adapt and focus more on students' education, he said.

"No entity evolves until it's forced," Odenbach said.

*Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.*

## State prisons turn to extended lockdowns amid staffing shortages, overcrowding

**Lockdowns lasting weeks or months have intensified tensions among inmates and staff**

**BY: AMANDA HERNÁNDEZ - DECEMBER 3, 2024 9:31 AM**

Across the United States, state prison systems are grappling with chronic understaffing and overcrowding — dual crises that are keeping incarcerated people confined to their cells for far longer periods than in recent decades.

Lockdowns are common in jails and prisons nationwide, but most usually last only a few hours or days. During lockdowns, access to rehabilitative classes, religious activities, work and visitation is limited or completely suspended. Incarcerated people on lockdown can lose their usual routines, which may include exercise, calls to loved ones and other structured activities. And meals are typically eaten inside the prisoner's cell, further isolating them.

Recently, lockdowns have been extended for weeks or even months at many facilities suffering staff shortages.

"What's unusual here is that you've got these more sustained lockdowns," Michele Deitch, the director of the Prison and Jail Innovation Lab at the University of Texas at Austin, told Stateline. "People are not in that situation because of disciplinary reasons. They're in there for the convenience and management of the institution."

Prisons in many states have implemented prolonged lockdowns. In some cases they have intensified tensions within prison walls, at times contributing to violence between incarcerated people and staff, increased drug use and deaths by suicide.

For example, the Green Bay Correctional Institution in Wisconsin resumed normal operations in July after being on lockdown for more than a year. As of Nov. 29, the facility housed 1,080 people, nearly 45%

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above its designed capacity of 749.

Meanwhile, the Waupun Correctional Institution, also in Wisconsin, has been under some form of lockdown for more than a year. At least five incarcerated people have died since June 2023. Nine current and former staff members, including the facility's previous warden, are facing felony charges in connection with two of the deaths.

The facility has resumed normal operations "for the most part since this summer when in-person visitation resumed," wrote Beth Hardtke, the Wisconsin Department of Correction's director of communications, in an email to Stateline.

As of mid-November, the vacancy rate for corrections officers and sergeants across the state's adult correctional facilities was nearly 12%, down significantly from the peak of 35% in August of last year, according to the department's staffing dashboard. In the state's juvenile facilities, the vacancy rate stands at about 10%.

"The past months of modified movement have allowed staff to examine our policies to enhance safety while offering persons in our care high-quality educational and therapeutic programming and services," said Wisconsin Department of Corrections Secretary Jared Hoy in a June news release.

The South Dakota Department of Corrections in October ended a 17-day lockdown of nearly 1,300 people at the state penitentiary in Sioux Falls. During the lockdown, corrections officers discovered contraband, including handmade weapons and unauthorized electronics.

Tennessee has fined private prison operator CoreCivic \$29.5 million for failing to meet staffing requirements in four facilities since 2022.

In Texas, some facilities operate with a 70% corrections officer vacancy rate — meaning those prisons are trying to maintain security with fewer than half the officers they need, according to a September report from the Sunset Advisory Commission, a legislative agency tasked with evaluating state departments. The evaluation came in the wake of a statewide prison lockdown that lasted just over a month last year, prompted by a rise in contraband and drug-related homicides among inmates.

The report highlighted that the state's incarcerated population is projected to outgrow the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's bed capacity by the end of fiscal year 2025.

And a federal investigation into Georgia's state prison system found conditions that violate the U.S. Constitution, including rampant violence, sexual assault, drug smuggling and gang activity, according to a report released in October by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The report also revealed that sexual violence remains prevalent in isolation areas, and that the Georgia Department of Corrections places some people in lockdown with others who sexually abuse them.

An investigation by the nonprofit news outlet Truthout found that at least 33 state prison systems had



**Inmates exercise in the maximum security yard of the Lansing Correctional Facility on April 18, 2023, in Lansing, Kansas.** (John Moore/

Getty Images)

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placed incarcerated adults under non-disciplinary lockdowns at least once — and often repeatedly or for extended periods — between 2016 and 2023.

Despite the many extended lockdowns and mounting pressure to fill vacancies and manage growing prison populations, most states neither report nor are legally required to disclose the frequency of lockdowns or what types of incidents occur during them, according to some prison policy experts.

“Lockdowns are one of those things that just fly under the radar,” Deitch, of the Prison and Jail Innovation Lab, told Stateline. “We’re underestimating the number of people that are affected by these kinds of policies.”

## Rising tensions and dire consequences

The long-standing issues of understaffing and overcrowding in U.S. prisons were brought into sharper focus during the COVID-19 pandemic, when widespread lockdown restrictions and severe staffing shortages further strained correctional facilities.

These shortages extend beyond corrections officers, affecting prison health care staff and other essential personnel.

In 2021, one incarcerated Missouri man who was in severe pain pulled out his own teeth after he was unable to secure a dental appointment due to staffing shortages, according to the Jefferson City News Tribune.

These extended lockdowns have become increasingly similar to restrictive housing, or solitary confinement, which is when incarcerated people are confined to their cells for up to 24 hours a day with minimal human contact or access to activities, according to Deitch.

“You’re going to see a lot more tension rising among the population, which could lead to more assaults and other kinds of abuses. You’re more likely to see people using drugs or something to kind of escape from all of that,” Deitch said.

In September, an incarcerated person attacked two prison staff members at the Iowa State Penitentiary. Union leaders said the staff assault was symptomatic of the agency’s understaffing; it was the 33rd such attack of the year at the prison.

In Illinois, employees from more than 24 state correctional facilities rallied in October to protest unsafe working conditions. Officers reported a rise in violent assaults on staff and exposure to narcotics, synthetic drugs and other toxic substances. As of Dec. 2, at least four state correctional facilities, all of which experienced officer protests, are under either partial or full lockdown.

The Illinois Department of Corrections’ operation and management reports show a major uptick in the number of lockdowns across facilities, with 635 in fiscal year 2019 and 1,814 in fiscal year 2024.

## The strain on workers

Across the country, corrections staff are frequently required to work mandatory overtime because of severe staffing shortages.

These extra hours leave little time for officers to rest, spend time with their families or manage personal responsibilities, making it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance, according to Andy Potter, a former corrections officer and the founder of One Voice United, a national advocacy group representing corrections staff.

The demanding schedules also can take a significant toll on staff’s physical and mental health, leading to burnout and further exacerbating the staffing crisis, as some officers leave the profession entirely. This cycle creates an even greater strain on the remaining staff, perpetuating a system stretched beyond its limits.

State prison populations also grew by 2% between 2021 and 2022, according to the most recent data from the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, reversing a longtime downward trend.

The growth could continue: Several states recently have enacted laws aimed at cracking down on violent crimes, drug-related crimes, retail theft and other crimes that could send more people to prison. The states include Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Louisiana, Oregon and Tennessee.

Yet prisons across the country have long struggled to recruit and retain staff. In 2023, the number of people working in state prisons fell to its lowest level this century, according to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Some states have tried to address prison understaffing by raising starting wages and offering comprehensive benefits packages. But the strategies that attract new hires won't retain them if mandatory overtime and poor working conditions continue, say worker advocates.

"There's a real blind spot when it comes to how employees are treated, how they are trained, how they are looked at in this paramilitary structure," said Potter, who worked as a Michigan state corrections officer for more than 20 years.

"I don't think you'll ever see a level of success from locking down a prison," he said, "other than you have to be able to maintain the security and the safety of those that are in your custody and those that are in your employment."

*Amanda Hernández covers criminal justice for Stateline. She has reported for both national and local outlets, including ABC News, USA Today and NBC4 Washington.*

## Republicans will control Congress. But a slim House majority may trim their ambitions.

**Thune says opportunities exist with budget reconciliation process**

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - DECEMBER 3, 2024 5:56 PM**

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans huddled behind closed doors Tuesday to plot the path forward for the unified control of government they won in the November elections, though GOP senators said afterward a very narrow House majority will likely determine how sweeping their policy proposals will be.

Republicans are planning to use the complicated budget reconciliation process to address immigration and energy in one bill before turning their attention to taxes later next year in a separate bill. The specifics of those measures or how they might affect policy are not yet clear.

That budget reconciliation process will allow the GOP to get around the 60-vote legislative filibuster in the Senate that typically forces bipartisanship on big-ticket items. Reconciliation is generally used when one party controls the House, Senate and the White House, since it requires a majority vote in each chamber.



**U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., arrives for the Senate Republican leadership elections at the U.S. Capitol on Nov. 13, 2024, in Washington, D.C. Thune was elected majority leader for the Congress that convenes in January.** (Photo by Kevin

Dietsch/Getty Images)

But with House Republicans likely to hold just 220 or 221 seats during the upcoming session of Congress,

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there will be very little room for GOP lawmakers in that chamber to vote against reconciliation bills, since Democrats are not likely to be included in negotiations or to vote for the final versions.

The last time Republicans held unified control of Congress and the White House in 2017, when they passed their tax package via reconciliation, they held 241 House seats, a significantly wider margin than they'll have next year.

## Thune says options presented

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, who will become majority leader in January, said lawmakers are working through "how best to maximize the opportunity we have through reconciliation to achieve a lot of the president's and our objectives and things that he campaigned on."

"And, you know, there obviously is the tax piece, but we've got until the end of the year to do that," Thune said, referring to 2025. "So the question is how do we execute on using the opportunity of reconciliation.

"So we presented some different options, all of which our members are considering. And so, you know, we'll see in the end where it lands but we've got to work with the House of Representatives and with obviously incoming President Trump to get the best path forward."

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis said Republicans still have a lot of work to do ironing out the details of the two packages, given the narrow margins for passage.

"If you take a look at the priorities of one end of the spectrum for the House caucus and the other end on border, there's some reconciliation, pun intended, that needs to be done before reconciliation," Tillis said.

House Republican leaders have struggled at times during this Congress to keep centrist GOP lawmakers and far-right members both supportive of large-scale policy bills. Adding in proposals or amendments from one side meant the GOP often lost votes from the other, forcing leaders to constantly walk a metaphorical tightrope when drafting legislation.

Republicans could have a more narrow House majority during the next Congress, likely causing headaches for leadership as they hold "family discussions" on the reconciliation bills.

## Johnson stops by Senate GOP huddle

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., attended the Senate Republican meeting as the two chambers work to stay on the same page heading into January.

"I think we're pretty unified on where we want to go. It's just getting there," she said. "You know, the devil's in the details."

Capito, who will become Republican Policy Committee chair next year, said election results sent a clear message to the GOP about what policy changes Americans expect to see during the next two years.

"What the voters are telling us they want us to do is very clear in some ways," Capito said. "And we can go through the clearest ones first."

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, who will become the first Republican woman to chair the Senate Appropriations Committee next year, cautioned the reconciliation process requires a lot of coordination and planning.

"Reconciliation is extremely complex, as those of us who have been through it before know," Collins said. "And I think we're going to have a very busy beginning of the year, which is why I'd like to see the disaster supplemental pass before we leave here for Christmas.

"And I would also still argue that it would be important to try to finish up the FY 25 appropriations bills. I realize that's going to have to go into January at this point. But I'm still hoping we don't go into March, because with reconciliation coming down the pike, the president's new budget, which is due the first Monday of February, also coming at us, there's going to be a ton of work to do."

## Delayed spending bills

Congress was supposed to complete work on the dozen annual government funding bills by Oct. 1, but instead relied on a stopgap spending bill to extend the deadline until Dec. 20.

Since they haven't made any real progress on the full-year bills, congressional leaders are now debating

how long a second continuing resolution should last.

That appropriations work will likely pile up at the beginning of next year, overlapping with Republican efforts to push through their first reconciliation package before turning their attention to the second one.

Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley said he's confident House GOP leaders will be able to whip the votes necessary amid another razor-thin majority to approve the two reconciliation packages next year.

"We need to show that we're recognizing the mandate of the last election, and have something smaller and hard-hitting before we take on the big issues," Grassley said.

House Republicans, he said, "know there's a mandate to deliver on. And they know that they better deliver."

### **'We have a directive from the American people'**

Alabama GOP Sen. Katie Britt said Johnson will be able to keep the centrist and far-right members of the House Republican Conference united as details emerge in the weeks and months ahead about how exactly the two reconciliation packages will change policies.

"We know we have a slim majority in the House, but Speaker Johnson is aware of that," Britt said. "And I think that they will work through issues over there, because we know that we have a directive from the American people to actually get things done. And I think that that's what we're unified to do."

Asked about the narrow margins Republicans will have, Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson said "hopefully, this will all be things that we can form consensus on."

"It's what President Trump ran on and we're going to try and, obviously, pass his agenda," he said.

Arkansas Sen. John Boozman, a Republican, said their timeline is "as soon as possible" but that they'll have to wait.

"It's going to be a lot going on, but the budget is number one — we have to do that to start the process, and then just as quickly as possible," Boozman said.

Congress must adopt a budget resolution in order to unlock the reconciliation process. That tax and spending blueprint is not a bill and does not become law. Instead, it sets Congress' goals for the 10-year budget window.

In order to actually fund government departments and agencies, Congress must pass the dozen appropriations bills, which they've mostly ignored for the last several months.

*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

*Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.*

## **U.S. Education Department pings states, schools to set policies on cellphone use**

**BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - DECEMBER 3, 2024 12:56 PM**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Education Department called on every state, school and district on Tuesday to adopt policies on cell phone use in schools.

The department asks schools to have well-thought-out policies on the matter, but does not dictate exactly what those policies should be. An accompanying resource for schools notes the risk social media can pose to students' mental health.

"In this digital age, every elementary, middle, and high school should have a clear, consistent, and research-informed policy to guide the use of phones and personal devices in school," U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said in a written statement.

"The evidence makes clear: there is no one-size-fits-all policy," Cardona added, noting that "different school communities have different needs, and the nuances of this issue demand that local voices — parents,



educators, and students — inform local decisions around the use of personal devices in school.”

The department acknowledged the role cell phones can play in keeping parents connected to their kids, especially in emergency situations, while also highlighting the increasing evidence on the harms social media can have on youth mental health, such as sleep deprivation and depression.

### **Increasing state policies**

An increasing number of states and school districts have enacted policies either prohibiting or restricting students from using their cell phones in the classrooms.

Across the country, schools and districts continue to grapple with how to deal with kids’ cell phone use, and more than half of all states have sought to ban or restrict cell phone use in classrooms.

As of early November, at least eight states have passed statewide policies that either limit or prohibit cell phone use in the classrooms, according to KFF.

That includes California, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio, South Carolina and Virginia. A Minnesota law forces schools to adopt a policy on cell phone use by March 2025.

A handful of other states’ education departments have issued policy recommendations or pilot programs, while lawmakers in several more have introduced statewide legislation regarding cell phone use.

The guidance from the U.S. Education Department coincides with the release of a resource for education officials and local communities on adopting cell phone use policies.

In the playbook, Cardona points to U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy’s public warning in 2023 on social media’s effects on youth mental health.

Murthy warns: “More research is needed to fully understand the impact of social media; however, the current body of evidence indicates that while social media may have benefits for some children and adolescents, there are ample indicators that social media can also have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.”

*Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom’s Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.*

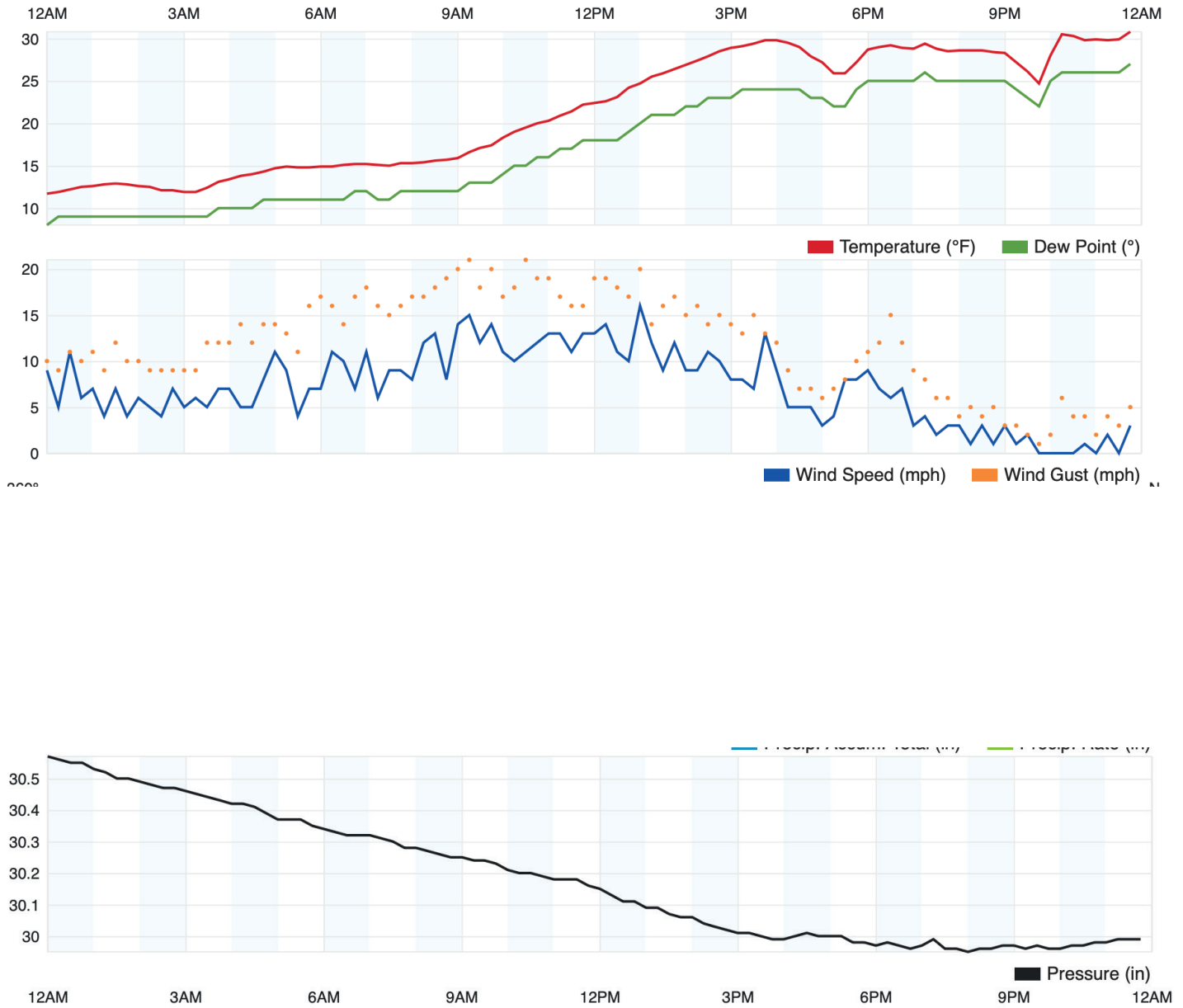


**The U.S. Education Department urged schools and districts on Tuesday to set policies governing smartphone use in schools.** (Photo by SDI Productions via Getty Images)

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

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Advisory

Wednesday



High: 34 °F ↓

Slight Chance  
Rain/Snow and  
Patchy  
Blowing Snow

Wednesday  
Night



Low: -3 °F

Partly Cloudy  
and Blustery  
then Mostly  
Clear

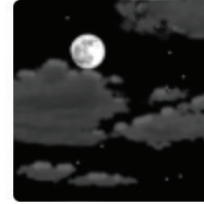
Thursday



High: 15 °F

Partly Sunny

Thursday  
Night



Low: 6 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 32 °F

Mostly Sunny



## Arctic Blast

December 4, 2024  
3:37 AM

### Key Messages

- Increasing northwest winds this morning
- Persist through the day, with peak winds of 40 to 50 mph
- Weaken this evening
- Falling temperatures through the day 📉
- Some local very light precipitation (Sprinkles/Flurries)
- Pockets of blowing snow - Sisseton hills

Today



Morning:  
30 to 35  
Afternoon:  
10 to 25

Tonight



Lows:  
0 to 10

Thursday



Highs:  
10 to 25



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A blast of arctic air will cause temperatures to tumble today. Thankfully, with the mild temperatures overnight, widespread blowing snow is not likely to be an issue, but we cant rule out a few spots in the Sisseton hills region seeing some issues. Thursday will be cold again, but milder air works its way back in late in the week and for the weekend!

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 31 °F at 10:21 PM

Low Temp: 12 °F at 12:00 AM

Wind: 22 mph at 9:06 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 57 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 56 in 1979

Record Low: -18 in 1927

Average High: 33

Average Low: 12

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.08

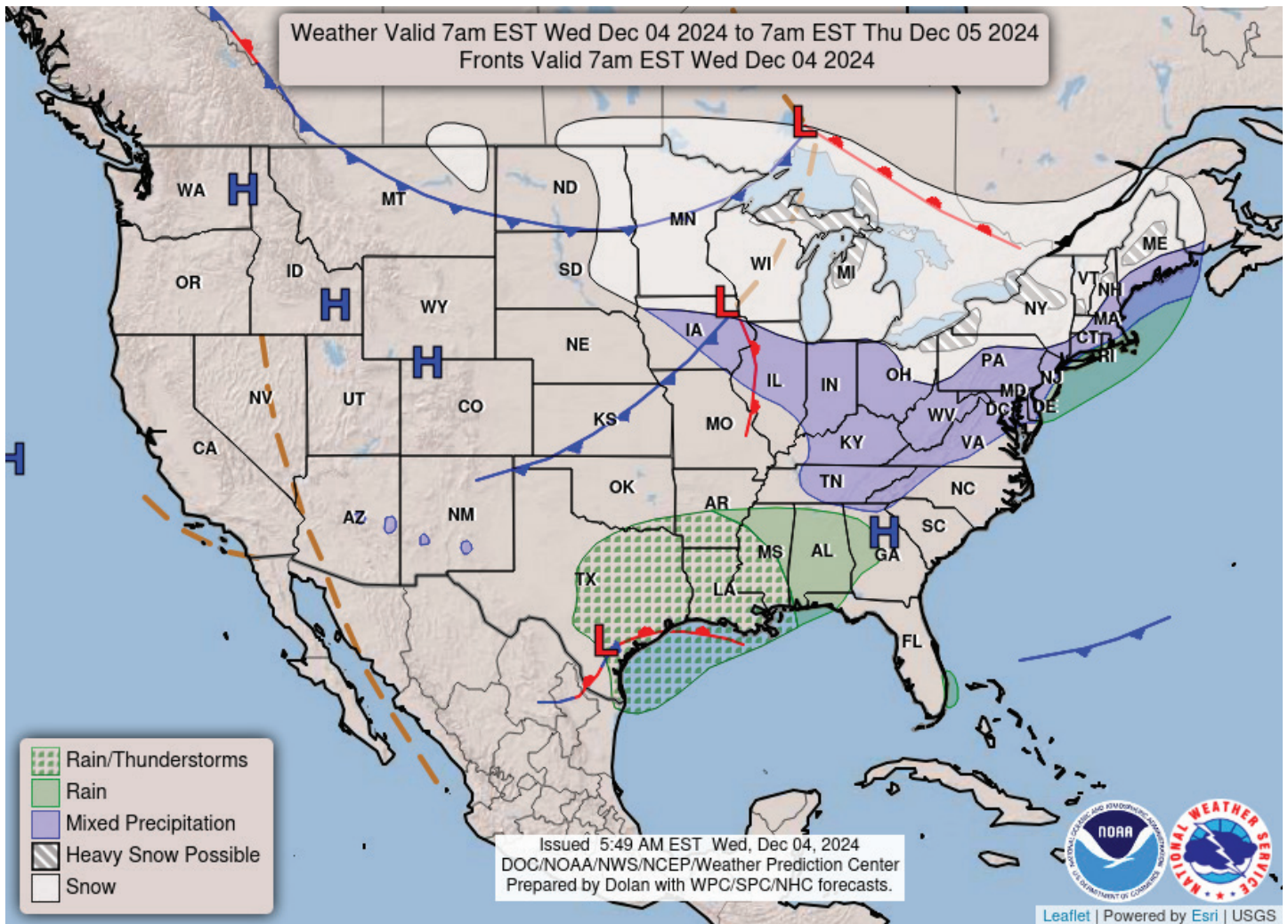
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.29

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:29 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:55:20 am



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## Today in Weather History

December 4, 1993: Winds gusting to 40 to 60 mph combined with snow cover along with new snow to cause blizzard conditions making travel hazardous across north central and northeast South Dakota. Several vehicles were stranded or slid into ditches. The winds toppled a private building under construction at Selby in Walworth County. New snowfall amounts were generally from one to three inches.

December 4, 1952: The month of December started off with chilly temperatures in London. This cold resulted in Londoners to burn more coal to heat up their homes. Then on December 5, a high pressure settled over the Thames River causing a dense layer of smog to develop. The smog became so thick and dense by December 7 that virtually no sunlight was seen in London. Most conservative estimates place the death toll at 4,000, with some estimating the smog killed as many as 8,000 individuals.

1856 - A severe blizzard began to rage across Iowa and Kansas. It produced as much as 16 inches of snow in Iowa. (David Ludlum)

1926 - Yuma, AZ, was soaked with 1.10 inch of rain, and by the 10th of the month had received 4.43 inches, making it the wettest December of record. The average annual rainfall for Yuma is 3.38 inches. (3rd-10th) (The Weather Channel)

1983 - Birmingham, AL, was drenched with 9.22 inches of rain in 24 hours. The rains caused severe flash flooding which literally submerged traffic. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Stormy weather in the northwestern U.S. finally began to abate, but not before Gold Beach OR was drenched with 7.94 inches of rain in 24 hours. Low pressure spread snow from the Upper Mississippi Valley to the Central Appalachians. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Gale force winds ushered cold air into the northeastern U.S., and produced snow squalls in the Lower Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 48 mph at Buffalo NY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Heavy snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in northern New England. Snowfall totals in Maine ranged up to 31 inches, at Limestone. Presque Isle ME reported a record 30 inches of snow in 24 hours, along with wind gusts to 46 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

December 4, 2002: A total solar eclipse was experienced by millions of people from Africa to Australia, and from space.



## What's In A Name?

Initially, He was named Jesus. Now we also call Him Christ.

Jesus was the name given to Him when He was born. It means the same as the Jewish name, Joshua, which literally means God is salvation! So, the message that God sent to Joseph through His angels was, "You shall call Him 'God is salvation' for He shall save His people from their sins." That name, Jesus, tells us all that we need to know because it reveals God's plan and purpose: God will save humanity through His only begotten Son.

Christ is more than a name. It is a title. It comes from the Greek word Christos, meaning "anointed" or "anointed one." Its meaning is the same as the Hebrew word Messiah. John quoted Andrew in a conversation that he had with his brother Peter. Said Andrew, "We have found the Messiah (which translated means Christ)." So the terms Messiah and Christ are titles given to Jesus that assure us that He is the anointed one. Jesus is the One whom God anointed to fulfill the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament.

The name Jesus proves that He was human, lived life on our level and faced the same issues and problems that we face. But the title Christ assures us that this One, once called Jesus, can lift us up to God's level because He is the One whom God anointed to be our Savior.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for what You did for us through Your Son, our Savior. We rejoice in Your love, mercy and grace that brought our salvation through Him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: John 1:41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ).

*We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him*

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.03.24

52 60 61 66 67 23

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$579,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs  
DRAW: 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.02.24

1 20 37 39 47 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$16,280,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 15 Mins  
DRAW: 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.03.24

6 11 28 30 37 9

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 30 Mins  
DRAW: 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
11.30.24

9 19 28 31 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$129,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 30 Mins  
DRAW: 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.02.24

14 27 34 39 40 4

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 59 Mins  
DRAW: 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.02.24

3 9 26 61 67 13

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$240,000,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 59 Mins  
DRAW: 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



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## Upcoming Groton Events

07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/09/2024 FREE SNAP Application Assistance 1-6pm at the Community Center  
07/14/2024 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
07/17/2024 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm  
07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/25/2024 Dairy Queen Miracle Treat Day  
07/25/2024 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm  
07/25/2024 Treasures Amidst The Trials 6pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
07/26/2024 Ferney Open Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
07/27/2024 1st Annual Celebration in the Park 1-9:30pm  
08/05/2024 School Supply Drive 4-7pm at the Community Center  
**Cancelled:** Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
08/08/2024 Family Fun Fest 5:30-7:30pm  
08/9-11/2024 Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament  
08/12/2024 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-7pm  
09/07/2024 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/07-08/2024 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
09/08/2024 Sunflower Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am  
10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/16/2024 Groton American Legion "Turkey Raffle" 6:30-11:30pm  
11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm  
12/01/2024 Groton Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m.  
12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close  
12/14/2024 Santa Day at Professional Management Services, downtown Groton  
04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp  
04/05/2025 Dueling Duo at the Legion (Baseball/softball foundation fundraiser)  
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm  
06/07/2025 Second Annual Day of Play at Groton Baseball Complex  
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary Salad Luncheon  
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/20/2025 NSU Gypsy Day  
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### **South Korea's opposition parties submit a motion to impeach President Yoon over sudden martial law**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's opposition parties Wednesday submitted a motion to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol over the shocking and short-lived martial law that drew heavily armed troops to encircle parliament before lawmakers climbed walls to reenter the building and unanimously voted to lift his order.

Impeaching Yoon would require the support of two-thirds of parliament, and at least six justices of the nine-member Constitutional Court would have to endorse it to remove him from office. The motion, submitted jointly by the main liberal opposition Democratic Party and five smaller opposition parties, could be put to a vote as early as Friday.

Yoon's senior policy advisers and Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun offered to resign as the nation struggles to make sense of what appeared to be a poorly-thought-out stunt. The Democratic Party on Wednesday submitted a separate motion to impeach Kim, who it alleged recommended the martial law declaration to Yoon.

In his speech announcing the abrupt order Tuesday night, Yoon vowed to eliminate "anti-state" forces and continued to criticize the Democratic Party's attempts to impeach key government officials and senior prosecutors. But martial law lasted only about six hours, as the National Assembly voted to overrule Yoon before his Cabinet formally lifted it around 4:30 a.m.

The Democratic Party, which holds a majority in the 300-seat parliament, said Wednesday that its lawmakers decided to call on Yoon to quit immediately or they would take steps to impeach him.

"President Yoon Suk Yeol's martial law declaration was a clear violation of the constitution. It didn't abide by any requirements to declare it," a party statement said. "His martial law declaration was originally invalid and a grave violation of the constitution. It was a grave act of rebellion and provides perfect grounds for his impeachment."

What happens if Yoon is impeached?

Impeaching him would require support from 200 of the National Assembly's 300 members. The Democratic Party and other small opposition parties together have 192 seats. But the rejection of Yoon's martial law declaration in a 190-0 vote included the votes of 18 lawmakers from Yoon's ruling People Power Party, according to National Assembly officials. PPP leader Han Dong-hun and Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon, also a member, criticized Yoon's martial law declaration.

Cho Jinman, a professor at Seoul's Duksung Women's University, said it's highly likely that lawmakers will back Yoon's impeachment motion given that some from the ruling party already voted down his edict.

If Yoon is impeached, he'll be stripped of his constitutional powers until the Constitutional Court rules. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the No. 2 position in the South Korean government, would take over his presidential responsibilities. Han issued a public message pleading for patience and calling for Cabinet members to "fulfill your duties even after this moment."

The Constitutional Court has only six incumbent justices following three retirements. That means all six must approve Yoon's possible impeachment motion for it to succeed. They include those appointed after Yoon took office, so the Democratic Party is expected to speed up the process of exercising its rights to recommend two of the three new justices.

Yoon's martial law declaration, the first of its kind in more than 40 years, harkened to South Korea's past military-backed governments when authorities occasionally proclaimed martial law and other decrees that allowed them to station combat soldiers, tanks and armored vehicles on streets or at public places like schools to prevent anti-government demonstrations. Such scenes of military intervention had not been seen since South Korea achieved a democracy in the late 1980s until Tuesday night.

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Dramatic hours at the parliament

After Yoon's declaration, troops carrying full battle gear, including assault rifles, tried to keep protesters away from the National Assembly as military helicopters flew overhead and landed nearby. One soldier pointed his assault rifle at a woman who was among protesters outside the building demanding that the martial law be lifted.

It wasn't clear how the 190 lawmakers were able to enter a parliamentary hall to vote down Yoon's martial law decree. Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung and National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik were seen climbing over walls. As troops and police officers blocked some from entering, they didn't aggressively restrain or use force against others.

No major violence has been reported. The troops and police personnel were later seen leaving the grounds of the National Assembly after the parliamentary vote to lift the martial law. Woo said: "Even with our unfortunate memories of military coups, our citizens have surely observed the events of today and saw the maturity of our military."

Under South Korea's constitution, the president can declare martial law during "wartime, war-like situations or other comparable national emergency states" that require the use of military force to restrict the freedom of press, assembly and other rights to maintain order. Many observers question whether South Korea is currently in such a state.

The constitution also states that the president must oblige when the National Assembly demands the lifting of martial law with a majority vote.

A presidential official said that Yoon decided to impose martial law as a way to resolve a political deadlock and did it in the middle of night to minimize its negative impacts on the economy. The official requested anonymity to discuss sensitive nature of the issue.

Some experts say Yoon clearly violated the constitution in how he imposed martial law. While martial law allows "special measures" to restrict individual freedoms and the authority of agencies and courts, the constitution does not permit the functions of parliament to be restricted. But in following Yoon's declaration on Tuesday, South Korea's military proclaimed parliamentary activities were suspended and deployed troops to try to block lawmakers from entering the National Assembly.

Park Chan-dae, the Democratic Party's floor leader, called for Yoon to be immediately investigated on charges of rebellion over the way he deployed troops to the parliament. While the president mostly enjoys immunity from prosecution while in office, the protection does not extend to alleged rebellion or treason.

In Washington, the White House said the U.S. was "seriously concerned" by the events in Seoul. A spokesperson for the National Security Council said President Joe Biden's administration was not notified in advance of the martial law announcement and was in contact with the South Korean government.

In Seoul, the streets seemed busy like a normal day Wednesday.

Tourist Stephen Rowan, from Brisbane, Australia, who was touring Gyeongbokgung Palace, said he was not concerned at all.

"But then again, I don't understand too much about the political status in Korea," he said. "But I hear they are now calling for the current president's resignation, so ... apparently there's going to be a lot of demonstrations. ... I would have been concerned if martial law had stayed enforced."

Natalia Slavney, research analyst at the Stimson Center's 38 North website that focuses on Korean affairs, said Yoon's imposition of martial law was "a serious backslide of democracy" that followed a "worrying trend of abuse" since he took office in 2022.

## Middle East latest: Jewish settlers attack Palestinian towns and clash with Israeli troops

By The Associated Press undefined

Jewish settlers mounted a string of attacks on Palestinian towns in the occupied West Bank overnight, burning homes and clashing with Israeli troops.

There were no immediate reports of any Palestinian casualties.

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The Israeli military said Jewish settlers attacked the village of Beit Furik after troops arrived in the area to dismantle an unauthorized farming outpost they had built nearby. It said the settlers hurled stones, wounding two members of the paramilitary Border Police, and one group entered the village and burned property.

The West Bank has seen a surge in settler violence since the start of the war.

In Lebanon, a tenuous ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah has held despite Israeli forces carrying out several new drone and artillery strikes on Tuesday, killing a shepherd in the country's south. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed keep striking "with an iron fist" against perceived Hezbollah violations of the ceasefire.

Hezbollah began launching rockets, drones and missiles into Israel last year in solidarity with Hamas militants who are fighting in the Gaza Strip. The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage.

Israel's blistering retaliatory offensive has killed at least 44,500 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were combatants. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war in Gaza has destroyed vast areas of the coastal enclave and displaced 90% of the population of 2.3 million, often multiple times.

Here's the Latest:

Settlers attack Palestinian towns, burning homes and clashing with Israeli troops

BEIT FURIK, West Bank — Jewish settlers mounted a string of attacks on Palestinian towns in the occupied West Bank overnight, burning homes and clashing with Israeli troops.

There were no immediate reports of any Palestinian casualties.

The Israeli military said one group entered the village, where they threw stones and burned property. An Associated Press reporter saw a blackened home and a destroyed car on Wednesday morning.

The military said Jewish settlers attacked the village of Beit Furik after troops arrived in the area to dismantle an unauthorized farming outpost they had built nearby on land privately owned by Palestinians. It said the settlers hurled stones, wounding two members of the paramilitary Border Police.

Settlers also attacked the village of Huwara, which has been the target of several previous attacks — even before the outbreak of the war in Gaza — and clashed with troops near Rujeib, another Palestinian village.

Israeli police and the Shin Bet security agency said in a statement that they were investigating the settler attacks. They said they arrested eight Israelis for suspected property damage and assaulting security forces.

The West Bank has seen a surge in settler violence since the start of the war, which was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack into Israel. Settlers have also raced to establish new farming outposts that rights groups say are among the biggest drivers of the violence.

The UN's humanitarian office said settler attacks on Palestinian farmers during the recent olive harvest season "at least tripled" in 2024 compared to the last three years.

Israel captured the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories for an independent state.

The West Bank is home to some 3 million Palestinians who live under Israeli military rule, with the Western-backed Palestinian Authority exercising limited autonomy in cities and towns. Some 500,000 Jewish settlers with Israeli citizenship live in more than 100 settlements across the West Bank, many of which resemble suburbs or small towns.

Most of the international community considers the settlements to be illegal and an obstacle to peace.

4 children killed in Gaza strike

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Palestinian medics said an Israeli airstrike on the Gaza Strip killed at least five people, including four children, on Wednesday.

The Awda Hospital, which received the bodies, said the five were gathered outside of shelters in the built-

up Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, which dates back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

The hospital said another 15 people, mostly children, were wounded in the strike.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's offensive has killed over 44,500 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Israel returns bodies of militants who crossed border from Jordan

JERUSALEM — Israel's military said Wednesday it had returned the bodies of two militants who crossed into Israel from Jordan in October and shot two soldiers.

The militants entered Israeli territory south of the Dead Sea on Oct. 18, shooting and wounding two soldiers before being shot dead by Israeli troops. Hamas praised the incursion but not claim responsibility for it.

The Israeli military did not release the names of the militants who carried out the attack.

## Transgender rights case lands at Supreme Court amid debate over ban on medical treatments for minors

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is hearing arguments Wednesday in just its second major transgender rights case, which is a challenge to a Tennessee law that bans gender-affirming care for minors.

The justices' decision, not expected for several months, could affect similar laws enacted by another 25 states and a range of other efforts to regulate the lives of transgender people, including which sports competitions they can join and which bathrooms they can use.

The case is coming before a conservative-dominated court after a presidential election in which Donald Trump and his allies promised to roll back protections for transgender people.

Four years ago, the court ruled in favor of Aimee Stephens, who was fired by a Michigan funeral home after she informed its owner that she was a transgender woman. The court held that transgender people, as well as gay and lesbian people, are protected by a landmark federal civil rights law that prohibits sex discrimination in the workplace.

The Biden administration and the families and health care providers who challenged the Tennessee law are urging the justices to apply the same sort of analysis that the majority, made up of liberal and conservative justices, embraced in the case four years ago when it found that "sex plays an unmistakable role" in employers' decisions to punish transgender people for traits and behavior they otherwise tolerate.

The issue in the Tennessee case is whether the law violates the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, which requires the government to treat similarly situated people the same.

Tennessee's law bans puberty blockers and hormone treatments for transgender minors, but not "across the board," lawyers for the families wrote in their Supreme Court brief. The lead lawyer, Chase Strangio of the American Civil Liberties Union, is the first openly transgender person to argue in front of the justices.

The administration argues there is no way to determine whether "treatments must be withheld from any particular minor" without considering the minor's sex.

"That is sex discrimination," Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar wrote in her main court filing.

The state acknowledges that the same treatments that are banned for transgender minors can be prescribed for other reasons. But it rejects the claim that it is discriminating on the basis of sex. Instead, it says lawmakers acted to protect minors from the risks of "life-altering gender-transition procedures."

The law "draws a line between minors seeking drugs for gender transition and minors seeking drugs for other medical purposes. And boys and girls fall on both sides of that line," Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti wrote in the state's Supreme Court brief.

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While the challengers invoke the 2020 ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County* for support, Tennessee relies on the court's precedent-shattering *Dobbs* decision in 2022 that ended nationwide protections for abortion and returned the issue to the states.

The two sides battled in their legal filings over the appropriate level of scrutiny the court should apply. It's more than an academic exercise.

The lowest level is known as rational basis review and almost every law looked at that way is ultimately upheld. Indeed, the federal appeals court in Cincinnati that allowed the law to be enforced held that lawmakers acted rationally to regulate medical procedures, well within their authority.

The appeals court reversed a trial court that employed a higher level of review, heightened scrutiny, that applies in cases of sex discrimination. Under this more searching examination, the state must identify an important objective and show that the law helps accomplish it.

If the justices opt for heightened scrutiny, they could return the case to the appeals court to apply it.

Gender-affirming care for youth is supported by every major medical organization, including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychiatric Association.

But Tennessee is pointing to health authorities in Sweden, Finland, Norway and the United Kingdom that found that the medical treatments "pose significant risks with unproven benefits."

None of those countries has adopted a ban similar to the one in Tennessee and individuals can still obtain treatment, Prelogar wrote in response.

The Williams family of Nashville, Tennessee are among those challenging the state law. Brian Williams said that as a result of puberty blockers and hormone treatments, his transgender daughter, L.W., is a "16-year-old planning for her future, making her own music and looking at colleges."

But because of Tennessee's ban, she has to travel to another state to receive the health care that "we and her doctors know is right for her."

## Hamas and Fatah are near an agreement on who will oversee postwar Gaza

By SAMY MAGDY and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Palestinian officials say Fatah and Hamas are closing in on an agreement to appoint a committee of politically independent technocrats to administer the Gaza Strip after the war. It would effectively end Hamas' rule and could help advance ceasefire talks with Israel.

The rival factions have made several failed attempts to reconcile since Hamas seized power in Gaza in 2007. Israel has meanwhile ruled out any postwar role in Gaza for either Hamas or Fatah, which dominates the Western-backed Palestinian Authority.

A Palestinian Authority official on Tuesday confirmed that a preliminary agreement had been reached following weeks of negotiations in Cairo. The official said the committee would have 12-15 members, most of them from Gaza.

It would report to the Palestinian Authority, which is headquartered in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and work with local and international parties to facilitate humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.

A Hamas official said that Hamas and Fatah had agreed on the general terms but were still negotiating over some details and the individuals who would serve on the committee. The official said an agreement would be announced after a meeting of all Palestinian factions in Cairo, without providing a timeline.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media on the talks. There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until Hamas is dismantled and scores of hostages are returned. He says Israel will maintain open-ended security control over Gaza and continue to hold corridors within the territory, with civilian affairs in the rest administered by local Palestinians unaffiliated with the Palestinian Authority or Hamas.

No Palestinians have publicly volunteered for such a role, and Hamas has threatened anyone who coop-

erates with the Israeli military.

The United States has called for a revitalized Palestinian Authority to govern both the West Bank and Gaza ahead of eventual statehood. The Israeli government, which is opposed to Palestinian statehood, is reportedly discussing a postwar plan with the United Arab Emirates, which normalized relations with Israel in 2020 and backs a rival Fatah faction.

The Hamas official said the emerging Palestinian agreement would fulfill one of Israel's war goals by ending Hamas' rule in Gaza. It's unclear if Israeli officials would see it that way.

Previous attempts at unity between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas have fallen apart, often because of competition for power between the two rivals — and there are opponents to the current talks within Fatah.

Jibril Rajoub, secretary-general of Fatah's central committee, denounced the agreement, saying it was "a mistake that we even accepted the principle of discussing this matter." He said the arrangement would entrench the division between the West Bank and Gaza by accepting two administrations. He said Hamas should instead let the Palestinian Authority retake administration of the territory. "We represent the unity of the land and the government," he told journalists in the West Bank town of al-Bira.

The Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the occupied West Bank, recognizes Israel and cooperates with it on security matters, a policy that is deeply unpopular among Palestinians, many of whom view it as a subcontractor of the occupation. Israel says the authority has not done enough to combat militancy or curb incitement.

The committee would assume its responsibilities after a ceasefire agreement with Israel, the Hamas official said. American and Arab mediators have spent nearly a year trying to broker such an agreement, but the negotiations have repeatedly stalled.

Hamas ignited the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, attack into Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. Some 100 hostages remain inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 44,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to local health authorities, who do not say how many of the dead were combatants. The offensive has leveled much of the coastal territory and displaced the vast majority of its 2.3 million residents.

## **Shock martial law edict in South Korea follows chaotic recent history: A look at the crucial context**

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — It may seem that the wild predawn scenes in Seoul, with hundreds of armed troops and frantic lawmakers storming South Korea's parliament building after the president suddenly declared martial law, came out of nowhere.

But the chaotic events, which were still playing out Wednesday as opposition leaders introduced an impeachment motion and called for President Yoon Suk Yeol's immediate resignation, should be seen in the context of South Korea's recent tumultuous political and social history.

These moments resonate with South Koreans in their daily lives, and as they look to explain Yoon's short-lived declaration of emergency martial law, even if there's still widespread confusion and anger over his decision.

From a nationwide doctors' strike, to an opposition leader narrowly avoiding prison amid a raft of court cases, to millions of people filling the streets in protest to drive out an elected leader, here is a look at some of those recent crucial developments.

A nationwide doctors' strike

For months, it has been health, not politics, that has been a major focus of many South Koreans.

An extended strike by thousands of junior doctors who have refused to see patients or attend surgeries has disrupted operations at hospitals across the country.

The strife is especially acute in a nation facing a major demographic crisis. South Korea has one of the

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fastest aging, fastest shrinking populations in the developed world. There is hardly a family that has not struggled with medical care for loved ones.

The strike, which is ongoing, began Feb. 20 in response to a government push to recruit more medical students.

Yoon's government has taken a hard line, warning that doctors must return to work or face license suspensions and prosecutions. He has said the strike poses "a grave threat to our society."

At issue is the government plan to raise South Korea's annual medical school admission cap by 2,000 from the current 3,058. The enrollment plan is meant to add up to 10,000 doctors by 2035 to cope with the country's fast-aging population. Officials say South Korea has 2.1 physicians per 1,000 people — far below the average of 3.7 in the developed world.

The striking doctors-in-training predict that doctors in greater competition would overtreat patients, increasing public medical expenses. Some critics say the striking junior doctors simply oppose the government plan because they believe adding more doctors would result in lower incomes.

A powerful opposition in turmoil

Investigations and legal proceedings against major political figures are common in South Korea. Almost all former presidents, or their family members and key associates, have been mired in scandals near the end of their terms or after they left office.

The current opposition leader, Lee Jae-myung, a firebrand liberal who narrowly lost the 2022 election to Yoon, has also been dogged by corruption claims.

Lee, who was stabbed in an attack and underwent surgery earlier this year, says Yoon's promotion of divisive politics has worsened an already toxic national discourse.

Last month Lee was convicted of violating election law and sentenced to a suspended prison term for making false statements during a presidential campaign. He faces three other trials over corruption and other criminal charges.

It remains unclear whether the Supreme Court will decide on any of the cases before the next presidential vote in March 2027.

Lee has steadfastly denied wrongdoing.

It's unclear, of course, how events in coming days will play out, but the martial law declaration could be a boon to Lee, especially if it results in an early exit for Yoon and a presidential by-election.

On Wednesday, he livestreamed himself climbing over a wall near parliament, one of a wave of lawmakers who dodged troops and police to get into the National Assembly.

Massive protests drive an elected president out of office

Perhaps the most epochal event in recent South Korean political history — and the one many people will be thinking of as Yoon faces the consequences of his declaration — was the downfall of conservative former President Park Geun-hye.

After near-daily protests in 2016 that saw millions take to the streets around the country, Park was the first democratically elected leader to be forced from office since democracy came to South Korea in the late 1980s.

Park, who was pardoned in late 2021 by her liberal rival and successor, former President Moon Jae-in, was serving a lengthy prison term for bribery and other crimes.

Park, the daughter of assassinated dictator Park Chung-hee, won election as South Korea's first female president in late 2012 by beating Moon by a million votes. Conservatives celebrated her father as a hero who pulled the country up from postwar poverty despite his suppression of human rights.

She was impeached by lawmakers in late 2016 and was formally removed from office and arrested the following year.

Among the main charges she faced was collusion with her longtime confidante, Choi Soon-sil, to take millions of dollars in bribes and extortion from some of the country's largest business groups, including Samsung, while she was in office.

Park has described herself as a victim of political revenge.



## Trump's defense pick Pete Hegseth faces deepening scrutiny in Senate

By LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for Defense Secretary, spent a second day Tuesday on Capitol Hill, meeting privately with Republican senators amid rising questions about his ability to effectively lead the Pentagon.

Hegseth told reporters he was planning to sit down with senators, even with those potentially skeptical of his nomination.

"We're going to meet with every senator that wants to meet with us, across the board," Hegseth as he went from office to office Tuesday. "And we welcome their advice as we go through the advice and counsel process."

Trump tapped the Fox News co-host, a former Army National Guard major and combat veteran who deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan, as his Secretary of Defense, typically among the first Cabinet posts to be considered by the U.S. Senate for confirmation.

But Hegseth is running into questions amid a sexual assault allegation, which he has denied, and other emerging reports about his work conduct and history.

GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham said some of the reports are "disturbing."

"I want to make sure that every young woman that joins the military feels respected and welcomed," Graham told CBS News.

The South Carolina lawmaker told the AP later that he doesn't know whether to believe the allegations, and Hegseth "has a chance to say that's true or not true."

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said he's seen the reports. "I'll get the chance to talk to him, and I'm sure he'll address them," he said. "But my view is, have the hearing."

Before he was tapped to serve as a weekend host of "Fox & Friends," Hegseth served at two veterans advocacy groups, Concerned Veterans for America and Veterans For Freedom.

In new allegations this week, the New Yorker cited what it described as a whistleblower report and other documents about his time leading CVA that alleged multiple incidents of alcohol intoxication at work events, inappropriate behavior around female staffers and financial mismanagement.

NBC News reported that several unnamed current and former Fox employees who worked with Hegseth that his drinking habits raised concerns, including some who said he would show up smelling of alcohol.

The Associated Press spoke to four people who had either worked at CVA or were familiar with Hegseth's time there who insisted on anonymity because they were not allowed to speak to the media or had signed nondisclosure agreements.

While the group's all-day conferences could run late and often wind up at a nearby bar, three of the four said they had not seen Hegseth intoxicated at events.

One person who had been connected to CVA told the AP, however, that some employees had raised concerns about Hegseth's alcohol use but said that his departure from the group was more connected to growing ideological differences between him and the network of conservative nonprofits funded by billionaire donors Charles Koch and his late brother, David Koch.

Trump is drawing from the ranks of loyalists to fill his administration and to Cabinet positions, often stunning Washington with unusual choices that are provocative and testing the senators who will be asked to confirm them under the chamber's advise and consent role.

An early pick, Matt Gaetz, the former congressman from Florida, abruptly withdrew from consideration when it became clear that Senate support was crumbling. Gaetz, who had been investigated but never charged in a federal sex trafficking probe, faced a House Ethics investigation over sexual misconduct.

Trump's choices can only afford to lose a few detractors in the Senate, where it takes majority approval to be confirmed. Republicans will have a 53-seat majority in the new year, meaning four GOP votes could sink a nominee, if all Democrats are opposed.

Republican senators have been weighing their options.

If confirmed, Hegseth would not only be part of critical command and control of the nation's nuclear weapons, he would be sixth in the line of succession to the presidency. It's a position that ages its occupants and demands constant response, due to the number of middle-of-the-night contingencies that can occur when U.S. service members are put in harm's way.

There have been private discussions among senators about the allegations and how to approach the situation, according to one person granted anonymity to discuss the private conversations.

During a closed-door meeting with about a dozen senators late Monday evening, none asked Hegseth about the allegations against him.

"You know what? The American people care about restoring our military," said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, after the meeting. He decried as "shameful" the criticism of Hegseth.

While Republican senators are reluctant to raise questions publicly — and several dismissed the reports outright — many of them indicated he could face tough questions in a confirmation hearing.

"That's what the process is for," said Utah Rep. John Curtis, an incoming freshman senator.

Questions about Hegseth and other nominees are "why a background check is important, why a committee investigation is critical," said Maine Sen. Susan Collins.

Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville said after meeting Monday with Hegseth that he is very supportive of the nomination.

But Tuberville said of the allegations: "If it's to a certain degree, people aren't going to vote to confirm him."

Hegseth, 44, was a co-host of Fox News Channel's "Fox and Friends Weekend" and had been a contributor with the network since 2014. He developed a friendship with Trump, who made regular appearances on the show.

Hegseth served in the Army National Guard from 2002 to 2021, deploying to Iraq in 2005 and Afghanistan in 2011 and earning two Bronze Stars. He lacks senior military and national security experience and would oversee global crises ranging from Europe to the Middle East.

A woman told police that she was sexually assaulted in 2017 by Hegseth after he took her phone, blocked the door to a California hotel room and refused to let her leave, according to a detailed investigative report recently made public.

Hegseth told police at the time that the encounter had been consensual and has denied any wrongdoing.

## Who is Abu Mohammed al-Golani, the leader of Syria's shock insurgency?

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Over the past dozen years, Syrian militant leader Abu Mohammed al-Golani has worked to remake his public image and the insurgency he commands, renouncing longtime ties to al-Qaida and consolidating power before emerging from the shadows.

Now al-Golani, 42, seeks to seize the moment yet again, leading his fighters in a stunning offensive that has put them in control of Syria's largest city, reigniting the country's long civil war and raising new questions about President Bashar Assad's hold on power.

The surge and al-Golani's place at the head of it are evidence of a remarkable transformation. Al-Golani's success on the battlefield follows years of maneuvering among extremist organizations while eliminating competitors and former allies.

Along the way he moved to distance himself from al-Qaida, polishing his image and his extremist group's de-facto "salvation government" in an attempt to win over international governments and the country's religious and ethnic minorities.

Putting himself forward as a champion of pluralism and tolerance, al-Golani's rebranding efforts sought to broaden his group's public support and legitimacy.

Still, it had been years since Syria's opposition forces, based in the country's northwest, made any sub-

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stantial military progress against Assad. The Syrian president's government, with backing from Iran and Russia, has maintained its control of about 70 percent of the country in a stalemate that had left al-Golani and his jihadi group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, out of the spotlight.

But the rebels' descent on Aleppo and nearby towns, alongside a coalition of Turkish-backed armed groups dubbed the Syrian National Army, has shaken up Syria's tense detente and left the war-torn country's neighbors in Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon worried about this flareup spilling over.

Al-Golani's beginnings in Iraq

Al-Golani's ties to al-Qaida stretch back to 2003 when he joined extremists battling U.S. troops in Iraq. The native of Syria was detained several times by the U.S. military, but remained in Iraq. During that time, al-Qaida usurped likeminded groups and formed the extremist Islamic State of Iraq, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

In 2011, a popular uprising against Syria's Assad triggered a brutal government crackdown and led to all-out war. Al-Golani's prominence grew when al-Baghdadi sent him to Syria to establish a branch of al-Qaida called the Nusra Front. The United States labeled the new group as a terrorist organization. That designation still remains in place and the U.S. government has put a \$10 million bounty on him.

The Nusra Front and the Syrian conflict

As Syria's civil war intensified in 2013, so did al-Golani's ambitions. He defied al-Baghdadi's calls to dissolve the Nusra Front and merge it with al-Qaida's operation in Iraq, to form the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS.

Al-Golani nonetheless pledged his allegiance to al-Qaida, which later disassociated itself from ISIS. The Nusra Front battled ISIS and eliminated much of its competition among the Syrian armed opposition to Assad. In his first interview in 2014, al-Golani kept his face covered, telling a reporter for Qatari network Al-Jazeera that he rejected political talks in Geneva to end the conflict. He said his goal was to see Syria ruled under Islamic law and made clear that there was no room for the country's Alawite, Shiite, Druze, and Christian minorities.

Consolidating power and rebranding

In 2016, al-Golani revealed his face to the public for the first time in a video message that announced his group was renaming itself Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and cutting its ties to al-Qaida.

"This new organization has no affiliation to any external entity," he said in the video, filmed wearing military garb and a turban.

The move paved the way for al-Golani to assert full control over fracturing militant groups. A year later, his alliance rebranded again as HTS as the groups merged, consolidating al-Golani's power in northwest Syria's Idlib province.

Afterward HTS clashed with independent Islamist militants who opposed the merger, further emboldening al-Golani and his group as the leading power in northwestern Syria, able to rule with an iron fist.

With his power consolidated, al-Golani set in motion a transformation that few could have imagined. Replacing his military garb with shirt and trousers, he began calling for religious tolerance and pluralism. He appealed to the Druze community in Idlib, which the Nusra Front had previously targeted, and visited the families of Kurds who were killed by Turkish-backed militias.

In 2021, al-Golani had his first interview with an American journalist on PBS. Wearing a blazer, with his short hair gelled back, the now more soft-spoken HTS leader said that his group posed no threat to the West and that sanctions imposed against it were unjust.

"Yes, we have criticized Western policies," he said. "But to wage a war against the United States or Europe from Syria, that's not true. We didn't say we wanted to fight."

## 'Amtrak Joe' Biden uses his visit to Angola to promote a major African rail project

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

LUANDA, Angola (AP) — Even in the waning days of his presidency and thousands of miles from home, U.S. President Joe Biden is finding ways to celebrate trains.

Biden is using his third and final day in Angola to showcase the Lobito Corridor railway, where the U.S. and key allies are investing heavily to refurbish 800 miles (1,300 kilometers) of train lines in Zambia, Congo and Angola.

The project aims to advance the U.S. presence in a region rich in cobalt, copper and other critical minerals used in batteries for electric vehicles, electronic devices and clean energy technologies. By the end of the decade, the rail line could even go a long way toward linking southern Africa's western coast with the continent's eastern edge.

"I'm probably the most pro-rail guy in America," Biden, the first U.S. president to visit Angola, said during a speech Tuesday evening.

Biden has long had the nickname Amtrak Joe for the 36 years he spent commuting by U.S. train from his home in Delaware to Washington while in the Senate. He said the Lobito Corridor constituted the largest U.S. investment in a train project outside the country.

On Wednesday, Biden will fly from the capital of Luanda to Lobito on Africa's western coast to tour port facilities with Angolan President João Lourenço, Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema, Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi and Tanzanian Vice President Philip Mpango.

The leaders also plan to meet with representatives from companies that stand to benefit from the corridor project, including a telecommunication firm expanding cell service in the region, a food-production firm and Acrow Bridge, a Pennsylvania company that makes prefabricated steel bridges and has a contract to deliver nearly 200 to Angola.

The Biden administration says the corridor will help business interests and counter China's growing influence in Africa — in addition to satisfying a president obsessed with riding the rails.

In Lobito, Biden will announce \$600 million in new U.S. investment for projects associated with the corridor, which has also drawn financing from the European Union, the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations, a Western-led private consortium and African banks.

The administration says it currently can take cargo loads of materials about 45 days to get from eastern Congo or Zambia to the market, and usually involves going by truck to South Africa. Test loads run using the new rail corridor made the same journey in around 40 to 50 hours.

China, meanwhile, already has heavy investments in mining and processing African minerals, and has used its Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure strategy to promote its economic and political influence around the world.

In September, China said it had signed a deal with Tanzania and Zambia to revamp a separate railway line going east from Zambia to Tanzania's Dar es Salaam on the east coast of Africa.

The countries had previously worked together to build the railway line in the 1970s, but it fell into disrepair. China's move to renovate it — announced on the sidelines of this year's China-Africa forum — is seen by some analysts as the Chinese response to the Lobito Corridor.

A senior U.S. administration official called the Lobito Corridor the heart of competing with China, not as a political adversary but from a business standpoint.

The idea is, rather than pumping in simple aid, Washington will attempt to grow U.S. influence by promoting projects that can spark investment and therefore help communities and countries over the long haul. The Lobito Corridor has become a model approach that the U.S. is looking to replicate in other parts of the world, said the official, who briefed reporters during Biden's Angola visit on condition of anonymity to offer project details that haven't yet been made public.

The corridor won't be completed for years, meaning much of the continued work would come during the

administration of Republican Donald Trump, who takes office Jan. 20. The Biden White House says that Republicans in Congress and elsewhere have supported past efforts to promote African business interests through targeted investments and that such initiatives have appealed to Trump and his key advisers in the past.

## **Australia is banning social media for people under 16. Could this work elsewhere — or even there?**

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

It is an ambitious social experiment of our moment in history — one that experts say could accomplish something that parents, schools and other governments have attempted with varying degrees of success: keeping kids off social media until they turn 16.

Australia's new law, approved by its Parliament last week, is an attempt to swim against many tides of modern life — formidable forces like technology, marketing, globalization and, of course, the iron will of a teenager. And like efforts of the past to protect kids from things that parents believe they're not ready for, the nation's move is both ambitious and not exactly simple, particularly in a world where young people are often shaped, defined and judged by the online company they keep.

The ban won't go into effect for another year. But how will Australia be able to enforce it? That's not clear, nor will it be easy. TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram have become so ingrained in young people's lives that going cold turkey will be difficult.

Other questions loom. Does the ban limit kids' free expression and — especially for those in vulnerable groups — isolate them and curtail their opportunity to connect with members of their community? And how will social sites verify people's ages, anyway? Can't kids just get around such technicalities, as they so often do?

This is, after all, the 21st century — an era when social media is the primary communications tool for most of those born in the past 25 years who, in a fragmented world, seek the common cultures of trends, music and memes. What happens when big swaths of that fall away?

Is Australia's initiative a good, long-time-coming development that will protect the vulnerable, or could it become a well-meaning experiment with unintended consequences?

Platforms will be held liable

The law will make platforms including TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X and Instagram liable for fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (\$33 million) for systemic failures to prevent children younger than 16 from holding accounts. "It's clear that social media companies have to be held accountable, which is what Australia is trying to do," said Jim Steyer, president and CEO of the nonprofit Common Sense Media.

Leaders and parents in countries around the world are watching Australia's policy closely as many seek to protect young kids from the internet's dangerous corners — and, not incidentally, from each other. Most nations have taken different routes, from parental consent requirements to minimum age limits.

Many child safety experts, parents and even teens who have waited to get on social media consider Australia's move a positive step. They say there's ample reason to ensure that children wait.

"What's most important for kids, just like adults, is real human connection. Less time alone on the screen means more time to connect, not less," said Julie Scelfo, the founder of Mothers Against Media Addiction, or MAMA, a grassroots group of parents aimed at combatting the harms of social media to children. "I'm confident we can support our kids in interacting in any number of ways aside from sharing the latest meme."

The harms to children from social media have been well documented in the two decades since Facebook's launch ushered in a new era in how the world communicates. Kids who spend more time on social media, especially when they are tweens or young teenagers, are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, according to multiple studies — though it is not yet clear if there is a causal relationship.

What's more, many are exposed to content that is not appropriate for their age, including pornography and violence, as well as social pressures about body image and makeup. They also face bullying, sexual harassment and unwanted advances from their peers as well as adult strangers. Because their brains are

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not fully developed, teenagers, especially younger ones the law is focused on, are also more affected by social comparisons than adults, so even happy posts from friends can send them into a negative spiral.

What unintended harms could be caused?

Many major initiatives, particularly those aimed at social engineering, can produce side effects — often unintended. Could that happen here? What, if anything, do kids stand to lose by separating kids and the networks in which they participate?

Paul Taske, associate director of litigation at the tech lobbying group NetChoice, says he considers the ban “one of the most extreme violations of free speech on the world stage today” even as he expressed relief that the First Amendment prevents such law in the United States

“These restrictions would create a massive cultural shift,” Taske said.

“Not only is the Australian government preventing young people from engaging with issues they’re passionate about, but they’re also doing so even if their parents are ok with them using digital services,” he said. “Parents know their children and their needs the best, and they should be making these decisions for their families — not big government. That kind of forcible control over families inevitably will have downstream cultural impacts.”

David Inserra, a fellow for Free Expression and Technology, Cato Institute, called the bill “about as useful as an ashtray on a motorbike” in a recent blog post. While Australia’s law doesn’t require “hard verification” such as an uploaded ID, he said, it calls for effective “age-assurance” that includes an array of ways companies can estimate someone’s age. He said no verification system can ensure accuracy while also protecting privacy and not impacting adults in the process.

Privacy advocates have also raised concerns about the law’s effect on online anonymity, a cornerstone of online communications — and something that can protect teens on social platforms.

“Whether it be religious minorities and dissidents, LGBTQ youth, those in abusive situations, whistleblowers, or countless other speakers in tricky situations, anonymous speech is a critical tool to safely challenge authority and express controversial opinions,” Inserra said. “But if every user of online platforms must first identify themselves, then their anonymity is at risk.”

Other countries are trying to figure it out, too

Parents in Britain and across Europe earlier this year organized on platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram to promise not to buy smartphones for children younger than 12 or 13. This approach costs almost no money and requires no government enforcement. In the United States, some parents are keeping kids off social media either informally or as part of an organized campaign such as Wait Until 8th, a group that helps parents delay kids’ access to social media and phones.

This fall, Norway announced plans to ban kids under 15 from using social media, while France is testing a smartphone ban for kids under 15 in a limited number of schools — a policy that could be rolled out nationwide if successful.

U.S. lawmakers have held multiple congressional hearings — most recently in January — on child online safety. Still, the last federal law aimed at protecting children online was enacted in 1998, six years before Facebook’s founding. In July, the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly passed legislation designed to protect children from dangerous online content, pushing forward with what would be the first major effort by Congress in decades to hold tech companies more accountable. But the Kids Online Safety Act has since stalled in the House.

While several states have passed laws requiring age verification, those are stuck in court. Utah became the first state to pass laws regulating children’s social media use in 2023. In September, a judge issued the preliminary injunction against the law, which would have required social media companies to verify the ages of users, apply privacy settings and limit some features. NetChoice has also obtained injunctions temporarily halting similar laws in several other states.

And last May, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said there is insufficient evidence to show social media is safe for kids. He urged policymakers to address the harms of social media the same way they regulate things like car seats, baby formula, medication and other products children use.

Said Scelfo: "Why should social media products be any different? Kids may try to get around the restrictions — just like they do for alcohol, tobacco or drugs — but nobody is saying that because they try, we should give them unfettered access to them. Parents cannot possibly bear the entire responsibility of keeping children safe online, because the problems are baked into the design of the products. And so we need policies that hold Big Tech accountable for ensuring their products are safe."

## Judge to consider first lawsuit to overturn Missouri's near-total abortion ban

By SUMMER BALLENTINE and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Abortion-rights advocates are asking a judge Wednesday to overturn Missouri's near-total ban on the procedure, less than a month after voters backed an abortion-rights constitutional amendment.

Jackson County Circuit Judge Jerri Zhang was set to hear arguments from Planned Parenthood and the state's Republican Attorney General's Office over whether to issue a temporary order blocking enforcement of Missouri's numerous abortion laws.

"If left in place, the above-described restrictions will continue to be catastrophic for Missourians," lawyers for abortion-rights supporters wrote in a court brief. "They will either prevent care altogether or severely delay or interfere with care."

Missouri is one of five states where voters approved ballot measures this year to add the right to an abortion to their state constitutions. Nevada voters also approved an amendment, but they'll need to pass it again in 2026 for it to take effect. Another that bans discrimination on the basis of "pregnancy outcomes" prevailed in New York.

Reproductive rights advocates in Arizona on Tuesday sued to undo a 15-week abortion ban that conflicts with that state's new constitutional amendment expanding access up to fetal viability.

The Missouri amendment does not specifically override any state laws. Instead the measure leaves it to advocates to ask courts to knock down bans that they believe would now be unconstitutional.

Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey, an abortion opponent, last week issued an opinion agreeing that most abortions will be legal when the amendment takes effect Thursday.

But Bailey's office is still fighting for a ban on most abortions after viability, along with a number of regulations that Planned Parenthood argues made it nearly impossible to offer abortions in the state even before abortion was almost completely banned in 2022.

Missouri's constitutional amendment allows lawmakers to restrict abortion after viability, with exceptions to "protect the life or physical or mental health of the pregnant person."

The term "viability" is used by health care providers to describe whether a pregnancy is expected to continue developing normally or whether a fetus might survive outside the uterus. Though there's no defined time frame, doctors say it is sometime after the 21st week of pregnancy.

Other abortion laws that Bailey is defending include a 72-hour waiting period before an abortion can be performed; bans on abortions based on race, sex or a possible Down syndrome diagnosis; and a requirement that medical facilities that provide abortions be licensed as ambulatory surgical centers.

The Attorney General's Office argued that Planned Parenthood has not proven it will be negatively impacted by those laws, noting that no abortions have been scheduled yet.

"Planned Parenthood concedes they have no appointments scheduled for right after the amendment goes into effect and have not even tried to obtain relevant licenses or create necessary complication plans," state attorneys wrote in a court brief.

It is unclear when Zhang will rule on the request for a preliminary injunction.

## Miami's playoff hopes nosedive as Alabama rises in the latest College Football Playoff rankings

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

Miami's playoff hopes took an all-but-final nosedive while Alabama's got a boost Tuesday night in the last rankings before the 12-team College Football Playoff bracket is set next weekend.

The Hurricanes (10-2) moved down six spots to No. 12 — the first team out of the projected bracket after suffering their second loss of the season. They are one spot behind the Crimson Tide (9-3), who won last week and moved up two spots to No. 11, where they are projected as the last team in and the fourth from the Southeastern Conference.

To make things worse for the 'Canes, selection committee chair and Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said there was no way for them to leapfrog Alabama since neither team plays next weekend. The odds of them moving up based on lopsided results in the weekend's conference title games are virtually zero.

The Miami-Alabama sorting was the strongest indication yet that the selection committee is looking at more than mere wins and losses, but also at strength of schedule and other factors that appear to give the SEC an edge.

"We still think Miami is a very strong team," Manuel said. "It came down to a difference in their body of work ... not just wins, not just losses but the totality of the season and how those teams performed."

He mentioned three key data points: Alabama was 3-1 against current Top 25 teams and Miami is 0-1; Alabama is 6-1 against winning teams while Miami is 4-2; and Miami has lost two of its last three games.

Oregon stayed at No. 1 for the fifth straight week and will head into Saturday's Big Ten title game against Penn State as the only undefeated team in big-time college football.

The pairings for college football's first 12-team playoff will be set Sunday, the day after the conference title games. The playoffs start Dec. 20, with the title game set for Jan. 20 in Atlanta.

Ohio State moved down four spots to No. 6 after its loss to Michigan.

That bumped Texas up a spot to No. 2, Penn State to No. 3, Notre Dame to No. 4 and Georgia to No. 5.

The selection committee all but designated the Big 12 as a one-bid league, moving Arizona State and Iowa State up only one spot each to Nos. 15 and 16.

The top five ranked conference champions are guaranteed bids, which means the winner of the Big 12 title game is in even it doesn't reach the top 12 — another factor in Miami's likely ouster.

SMU, on a nine-game winning streak, moved up a notch to No. 8 and is the Atlantic Coast Conference's highest-ranked team, but is still potentially vulnerable if it loses the title game to No. 17 Clemson.

The crux of this week's drama comes from — where else? — the SEC.

Alabama is only two weeks removed from an ugly 24-3 loss at Oklahoma. The Tide still got better treatment than Miami, which fell 42-38 at Syracuse last week with a spot in the ACC title game at stake.

Also in the SEC, Mississippi was ranked 13th and South Carolina 14th — answering a question of just how deep into the SEC pool the committee was willing to go. Neither team has another chance to build its resume.

Other rankings: No. 7 Tennessee, No. 9 Indiana and No. 10 Boise State. The projected bracket includes four teams each from the Big Ten and SEC and one each from the ACC, Mountain West and Big 12, plus independent Notre Dame.

This week's key games

SEC: This will be awkward for the loser of Texas vs. Georgia. The Longhorns are perched too high to miss the playoff, though a loss would make them 0-2 vs. Georgia and 11-0 against everyone else, and they also have the conference's easiest schedule. For Georgia, it would be a third loss, but the committee doesn't seem likely to punish the Bulldogs for playing in the title game.

Big 12, Mountain West: The winner of ASU-Iowa State is still likely outside of the group of four conference champs that receive first-round byes unless UNLV upsets Boise State.

ACC: If Clemson beats SMU, it puts the 17th-ranked team in the bracket and makes the ACC a potential



snub for the second straight year. (Remember Florida State last season?)

Projected first-round matchups

Based on this week's rankings. Teams listed by seed.

No. 12 Arizona State at No. 5 Penn State: This game between two teams nobody wants to play right now highlights the obvious benefits of avoiding the first round — which is still possible for both.

No. 9 Tennessee at No. 8 Ohio State: What could be worse for Ohio State fans than hearing "Rocky Top" blaring through their home stadium after a loss?

No. 11 Alabama at No. 6 Notre Dame: Bear Bryant went 0-4 vs. the Fighting Irish. Alabama won both 21st-century matchups in the playoffs.

No. 10 Indiana at No. 7 Georgia: The Hoosiers' welcome to the big time would come between the hedges.

## Missouri executes a man for sexually assaulting and strangling a 9-year-old girl in 2007

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

BONNE TERRE, Mo. (AP) — Rowan Ford knew Christopher Collings as "Uncle Chris" after he spent several months living with her family. On Tuesday, Collings was executed for sexually assaulting and killing the child, then dumping her body in a sinkhole outside a small Missouri town.

Collings, 49, was put to death with a single dose of pentobarbital on Tuesday evening at the state prison in Bonne Terre, Missouri. The execution was the 23rd in the U.S. this year and the fourth in Missouri. Only Alabama with six and Texas with five have performed more executions in 2024.

Collings spoke with a spiritual adviser who was at his side as the process began. Shortly thereafter, the inmate appeared to breathe heavily and swallow hard. After a few seconds, all movement stopped. He was officially declared dead nine minutes after the injection.

Collings' fate was sealed Monday when the U.S. Supreme Court turned aside an appeal and Republican Gov. Mike Parson denied clemency.

"Right or wrong I accept this situation for what it is," Collings said in a written final statement. "To anyone that I have hurt in this life I am sorry. I hope that you are able to get closure and move on." He added, "I hope to see you in heaven one day."

Parson, in a statement, said he hopes that "all those who knew and loved Rowan may find peace in knowing that justice has been done."

Rowan was a fourth-grader described by teachers at Collings' trial as a hard-working and happy student, a lover of Barbie who had her room painted pink. Collings was a friend of Rowan's stepfather, David Spears, and lived for several months in 2007 at the home Rowan shared with her mother, Colleen Munson, and Spears. Collings sometimes helped Rowan with her homework.

Collings told authorities that he drank heavily and smoked marijuana with Spears and another man in the hours before the attack on Rowan, according to court records. Collings said he picked up the still-sleeping child from her bed, took her to the camper where he lived, and assaulted her.

Collings planned to take Rowan back home, leading her outside the camper facing away from him so that she couldn't identify him, he said in his confession. But when moonlight lit up the darkness, Rowan was able to see Collings, he told police. He said he "freaked out," grabbed a rope from a nearby pickup truck, and strangled her.

Munson returned home from work at 9 a.m. on Nov. 3 and was alarmed when she couldn't find Rowan, walking the neighborhood looking for her. Court records said Spears insisted Rowan was at a friend's house. But when Rowan failed to return home by the afternoon, the mother called the police, prompting a massive search.

Collings, Spears and the third man became the focus of police attention because they were the last people seen at Rowan's home. Collings confessed to the crime and told police that after killing Rowan, he took the body to a sinkhole. He burned the rope used in the attack, along with the clothes he was wearing and his blood-stained mattress, prosecutors said.

Court documents and the clemency petition said Spears also implicated himself in the crimes. A transcript of Spears' statement to police, cited in the clemency petition, said Spears told police that Collings handed him a cord and Spears killed Rowan.

"I choke her with it. I realize she's gone. She's ... she's really gone," Spears said, according to the transcript. Meanwhile, court documents said it was Spears who led authorities to the sinkhole where the body was found.

But Spears was allowed to plead to lesser charges. It wasn't clear why. Prosecutors at the original trial didn't respond to messages seeking comment.

Spears served more than seven years in prison before being released in 2015. No phone listing for him could be found.

Collings' attorney, Jeremy Weis, said the inmate was a loving father and a changed man in prison and didn't deserve to die, despite his crimes.

"We share Chris's desire that his death will provide a measure of closure for the victim's family and that the people hurt by him will be able to carry on," Weis said in a statement. "What occurred today, though, was an act of vengeance, but it will not define Chris, nor will it be how we remember him."

## President-elect Donald Trump's lawyers urge judge to toss his hush money conviction

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump's lawyers formally asked a judge Monday to throw out his hush money criminal conviction, arguing that continuing the case would present unconstitutional "disruptions to the institution of the Presidency."

In a filing made public Tuesday, Trump's lawyers told Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan that anything short of immediate dismissal would undermine the transition of power, as well as the "overwhelming national mandate" granted to Trump by voters last month.

They also cited President Joe Biden's recent pardon of his son, Hunter Biden, who had been convicted of tax and gun charges.

"President Biden asserted that his son was 'selectively, and unfairly, prosecuted,' and 'treated differently,'" Trump's legal team wrote. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, they claimed, had engaged in the type of political theater "that President Biden condemned."

Prosecutors will have until Dec. 9 to respond. They have said they will fight any efforts to dismiss the case but have indicated a willingness to delay the sentencing until after Trump's second term ends in 2029. In their filing Monday, Trump's attorneys dismissed the idea of holding off sentencing until Trump is out of office as a "ridiculous suggestion."

Following Trump's election victory last month, Merchan halted proceedings and indefinitely postponed his sentencing, previously scheduled for late November, to allow the defense and prosecution to weigh in on the future of the case. He also delayed a decision on Trump's prior bid to dismiss the case on immunity grounds.

Trump has been fighting for months to reverse his conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records to conceal a \$130,000 payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels to suppress her claim that they had sex a decade earlier. He says they did not and denies any wrongdoing.

The defense filing was signed by Trump lawyers Todd Blanche and Emil Bove, who represented Trump during the trial and have since been selected by the president-elect to fill senior roles at the Justice Department.

Taking a swipe at Bragg and New York City, as Trump often did throughout the trial, the filing argues that dismissal would also benefit the public by giving him and "the numerous prosecutors assigned to this case a renewed opportunity to put an end to deteriorating conditions in the City and to protect its residents from violent crime."

Clearing Trump, the lawyers added, would also allow him to "to devote all of his energy to protecting

the Nation.”

Merchan hasn't yet set a timetable for a decision. He could decide to uphold the verdict and proceed to sentencing, delay the case until Trump leaves office, wait until a federal appeals court rules on Trump's parallel effort to get the case moved out of state court or choose some other option.

An outright dismissal of the New York case would further lift a legal cloud that at one point carried the prospect of derailing Trump's political future.

Last week, special counsel Jack Smith told courts that he was withdrawing both federal cases against Trump — one charging him with hoarding classified documents at his Florida estate, the other with scheming to overturn the 2020 presidential election he lost — citing longstanding Justice Department policy that shields a president from indictment while in office.

The hush money case was the only one of Trump's four criminal indictments to go to trial, resulting in a historic verdict that made him the first former president to be convicted of a crime.

Prosecutors had cast the payout as part of a Trump-driven effort to keep voters from hearing salacious stories about him. Trump's then-lawyer Michael Cohen paid Daniels. Trump later reimbursed him, and Trump's company logged the reimbursements as legal expenses — concealing what they really were, prosecutors alleged.

Trump has said the payments to Cohen were properly categorized as legal expenses for legal work.

A month after the verdict, the Supreme Court ruled that ex-presidents can't be prosecuted for official acts — things they did in the course of running the country — and that prosecutors can't cite those acts to bolster a case centered on purely personal, unofficial conduct.

Trump's lawyers cited the ruling to argue that the hush money jury got some improper evidence, such as Trump's presidential financial disclosure form, testimony from some White House aides and social media posts made during his first term.

Prosecutors disagreed and said the evidence in question was only “a sliver” of their case.

If the verdict stands and the case proceeds to sentencing, Trump's punishments would range from a fine to probation to up to four years in prison — but it's unlikely he'd spend any time behind bars for a first-time conviction involving charges in the lowest tier of felonies.

Because it is a state case, Trump would not be able to pardon himself once he returns to office.

## South Korea lifts president's martial law decree after lawmakers reject military rule

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The president of South Korea early Wednesday lifted the martial law he imposed on the country hours earlier, bending to political pressure after a tense night in which troops surrounded parliament and lawmakers voted to reject military rule.

President Yoon Suk Yeol, who appeared likely to be impeached over his actions, imposed martial law late Tuesday out of frustration with the opposition, vowing to eliminate “anti-state” forces as he struggles against opponents who control parliament and that he accuses of sympathizing with communist North Korea.

Police and military personnel were seen leaving the grounds of parliament following the bipartisan vote to overrule the president, and the declaration was formally lifted around 4:30 a.m. during a Cabinet meeting.

Parliament acted swiftly after martial law was imposed, with National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik declaring that the law was “invalid” and that lawmakers would “protect democracy with the people.”

In all, martial law was in effect for about six hours.

The president's surprising move harkened back to an era of authoritarian leaders that the country has not seen since the 1980s, and it was immediately denounced by the opposition and the leader of Yoon's own conservative party.

Lee Jae-myung, leader of the liberal Democratic Party, which holds the majority in the 300-seat parliament, said the party's lawmakers would remain in the Assembly's main hall until Yoon formally lifted his order.

Woo applauded how troops quickly left the Assembly after the vote.

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"Even with our unfortunate memories of military coups, our citizens have surely observed the events of today and saw the maturity of our military," Woo said.

While announcing his plan to lift martial law, Yoon continued to criticize parliament's attempts to impeach key government officials and senior prosecutors. He said lawmakers had engaged in "unscrupulous acts of legislative and budgetary manipulation that are paralyzing the functions of the state."

Jo Seung-ae, a Democratic lawmaker, claimed that security camera footage following Yoon's declaration showed that troops moved in a way that suggested they were trying to arrest Lee, Woo and even Han Dong-hoon, the leader of Yoon's People Power Party.

Officials from Yoon's office and the Defense Ministry did not respond to requests for comment early Wednesday.

Seemingly hundreds of protesters gathered in front of the Assembly, waving banners and calling for Yoon's impeachment.

Some protesters scuffled with troops ahead of the lawmakers' vote, but there were no immediate reports of injuries or major property damage. At least one window was broken as troops attempted to enter the Assembly building. One woman tried unsuccessfully to pull a rifle away from one of the soldiers, while shouting "Aren't you embarrassed?"

Under South Korea's constitution, the president can declare martial law during "wartime, war-like situations or other comparable national emergency states" that require the use of military force to maintain peace and order. It was questionable whether South Korea is currently in such a state.

When martial law is declared, "special measures" can be employed to restrict freedom of press, freedom of assembly and other rights, as well as the power of courts.

The constitution also states that the president must oblige when the National Assembly demands the lifting of martial law with a majority vote.

Following Yoon's announcement of martial law, South Korea's military proclaimed that parliament and other political gatherings that could cause "social confusion" would be suspended, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said. The military said anyone who violated the decree could be arrested without a warrant.

In Washington, the White House said the U.S. was "seriously concerned" by the events in Seoul. A spokesperson for the National Security Council said President Joe Biden's administration was not notified in advance of the martial law announcement and was in contact with the South Korean government.

Pentagon spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said there was no effect on the more than 27,000 U.S. service members based in South Korea.

The South Korean military also said that the country's striking doctors should return to work within 48 hours, Yonhap said. Thousands of doctors have been striking for months over government plans to expand the number of students at medical schools.

Soon after martial law was declared, the parliament speaker called on his YouTube channel for all lawmakers to gather at the National Assembly. He urged military and law enforcement personnel to "remain calm and hold their positions."

All 190 lawmakers who participated in the vote supported the lifting of martial law.

At one point, television footage showed police officers blocking the entrance of the National Assembly and helmeted soldiers carrying rifles in front of the building. An Associated Press photographer saw at least three helicopters, likely from the military, that landed inside the Assembly grounds, while two or three helicopters circled above the site.

The leader of Yoon's conservative party called the decision to impose martial law "wrong." Lee, who narrowly lost to Yoon in the 2022 presidential election, said Yoon's announcement was "illegal and unconstitutional."

Yoon said during a televised speech that martial law would help "rebuild and protect" the country from "falling into the depths of national ruin." He said he would "eradicate pro-North Korean forces and protect the constitutional democratic order."

"I will eliminate anti-state forces as quickly as possible and normalize the country," he said, while asking the people to believe in him and tolerate "some inconveniences."

Yoon — whose approval rating dipped in recent months — has struggled to push his agenda against an opposition-controlled parliament since taking office in 2022.

His party has been locked in an impasse with the liberal opposition over next year's budget bill. The opposition has also attempted to impeach three top prosecutors, including the chief of the central Seoul prosecutors' office, in what the conservatives have called a vendetta against their criminal investigations of Lee, who has been seen as the favorite for the next presidential election in 2027 in opinion polls.

During his televised announcement, Yoon also described the opposition as "shameless pro-North Korean anti-state forces who are plundering the freedom and happiness of our citizens." He did not elaborate.

Yoon has taken a hard line on North Korea over its nuclear ambitions, departing from the policies of his liberal predecessor, Moon Jae-in, who pursued inter-Korean engagement.

Yoon has also dismissed calls for independent investigations into scandals involving his wife and top officials, drawing quick, strong rebukes from his political rivals.

Yoon's move was the first declaration of martial law since the country's democratization in 1987. The country's last previous martial law was in October 1979, following the assassination of former military dictator Park Chung-hee.

Sydney Seiler, Korean chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, argued that the move was symbolic for Yoon to express his frustration with the opposition-controlled parliament.

"He has nothing to lose," said Seiler, comparing Yoon's move to the Hail Mary pass in American football, with a slim chance of success.

Now Yoon faces likely impeachment, a scenario that was also possible before he made the bold move, Seiler said.

Natalia Slavney, research analyst at the Stimson Center's 38 North website that focuses on Korean affairs, said Yoon's imposition of martial law was "a serious backslide of democracy" that followed a "worrying trend of abuse" since he took office in 2022.

South Korea "has a robust history of political pluralism and is no stranger to mass protests and swift impeachments," Slavney said, citing the example of former President Park Geun-hye, the country's first female president, who was ousted from office and imprisoned for bribery and other crimes in 2017.

## **Chad Chronister, Donald Trump's pick to run the DEA, withdraws name from consideration**

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Chad Chronister, Donald Trump's pick to run the Drug Enforcement Administration, said Tuesday he was withdrawing his name from consideration, becoming the second person selected by the president-elect to bow out quickly after being nominated for a position requiring Senate confirmation.

Sheriff Chronister, the top law enforcement officer in Hillsborough County, Florida, said in a post on X that he was backing away from the opportunity, which he called "the honor of a lifetime."

"Over the past several days, as the gravity of this very important responsibility set in, I've concluded that I must respectfully withdraw from consideration," Chronister wrote. He did not elaborate, and Trump's transition team did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Chronister follows former Republican congressman Matt Gaetz, Trump's first pick to serve as attorney general, in withdrawing his name for a post in the administration. Gaetz withdrew following scrutiny over a federal sex trafficking investigation that cast doubt on his ability to be confirmed as the nation's chief federal law enforcement officer.

Trump's pick of Chronister for the DEA job drew backlash from conservatives, who raised concerns over his actions during the COVID-19 pandemic and his saying that his office "does not engage in federal immigration enforcement activities."

In March 2020, Chronister arrested the pastor of a megachurch who held services with hundreds of people and violated a safer-at-home order in place aimed at limiting the spread of the Covid virus.

"Shame on this pastor, their legal staff and the leaders of this staff for forcing us to do our job. That's not what we wanted to do during a declared state of emergency," Chronister said at the time. "We are hopeful that this will be a wakeup call."

U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky, was among those airing public complaints, saying Chronister should be "disqualified" for the arrest.

Others flagged comments Chronister made in a video about Florida's immigration laws that he released in 2023 that circulated again online after Trump named him last weekend.

In the video, Chronister praised the "rich diversity" of his community and called it "a place where people from all walks of life come together."

He said it was important to note his office "does not engage in federal immigration enforcement activities. We do not target individuals based on their immigration status. That's the authority of federal agencies."

Trump has made a sweeping crackdown on immigration a central focus of his campaign and his aims for his coming administration.

## **Democrats stick with Schumer as leader.**

### **Their strategy for countering Trump is far less certain**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats reelected Chuck Schumer as party leader on Tuesday as the party moves into a deeply uncertain time, with no real consensus on a strategy as President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office.

Schumer faced no opposition in the party leadership elections, in which Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin was also reelected to the No. 2 spot and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar became the new No. 3. In a statement, Schumer, of New York, said he was honored to move the party forward "during this crucial period for our country."

"Our preference is to secure bipartisan solutions wherever possible and look for ways to collaborate with our Republican colleagues to help working families," Schumer said. "However, our Republican colleagues should make no mistake about it, we will always stand up for our values."

While Schumer remains popular with his colleagues, it is a bleak moment for Senate Democrats, who had been hopeful that they could hold the majority for the third election in a row. Instead they lost four seats and will be in the minority, 53-47, as Trump takes office and pressures the Senate to quickly confirm his Cabinet nominees.

Unlike eight years ago, when opposition to Trump's narrow election win fueled enthusiasm in their party, Democratic lawmakers and many of their voters are exhausted and looking for answers.

So far, Democrats have stayed relatively quiet on Trump's nominees and plans for office — a stark contrast from the loud opposition to Trump when he was elected eight years ago. Schumer has declined to comment on specifics of any nominees, instead allowing Republican reaction to dominate the conversation.

On Monday, Schumer wrote a public letter to South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the incoming Republican majority leader, asking him to resist Trump's pressure to allow him to appoint some of his nominees without a Senate vote and to insist on full FBI background checks for all nominees. But he has said little else about Trump's upcoming presidency.

While some have been more aggressive — Washington Sen. Patty Murray, a former chairwoman of the Senate Health, Labor, Education and Pensions Committee, said that Trump's nomination of Robert Kennedy Jr. to lead the Health and Human Services Department is "dangerous" and "nothing short of disaster" — several Democratic senators say they are saving their strength and figuring out a focus.

"Everybody's in kind of in a wait-and-see mode right now," said Nevada Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, who is part of Schumer's leadership team. "Under the previous Trump administration, there was chaos all the time, all the time. And I do think it is important to pick your battles."

It's still unclear which battles they will pick. And Democrats have differing opinions on how to fight them.

Hawaii Sen. Brian Schatz, who is also in Democratic leadership, says that "anyone who has a grand

strategy is full of crap," but thinks that Democrats, for now, "need to keep things simple."

"We need to talk about people, protect people, advocate for people," Schatz said. "Do not talk about protecting institutions. Do not talk about advocating for institutions. It's a not just a rhetorical shift, but an attitudinal shift. We have to remind ourselves, that we're not fighting for programs and projects and line items and agencies or norms. We're fighting for people."

Virginia Sen. Mark Warner said that he's spent a lot of time reflecting, and "I don't think anyone can claim this was a policy election," and Democrats need to look at cultural issues. Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman says Democrats just need to "pace ourselves" and avoid the "massive freakout" of Trump's last term.

Democrats should be preparing, says Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal. He says Schumer is picking his battles "very thoughtfully and strategically."

"We're thinking about how we protect against using the FBI, or the prosecutorial authority of the Justice Department for retribution against critics," said Blumenthal. "How we elevate these issues in a way that American people understand them."

Democrats know better now, after eight years, "the extraordinary challenges we're going to face," Blumenthal said.

## **Global warming fills New England's rich waters with death traps for endangered sea turtles**

By RODRIQUE NGOWI and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

QUINCY, Mass. (AP) — As global warming fills the plankton-rich waters of New England with death traps for sea turtles, the number of stranded reptiles has multiplied over the last 20 years, filling one specialized animal hospital with the endangered creatures.

The animals enter areas such as Cape Cod Bay when it is warm, and when temperatures inevitably drop, they can't escape the hooked peninsula to head south, said Adam Kennedy, the director of rescue and rehabilitation at the New England Aquarium, which runs a turtle hospital in Quincy, Massachusetts.

More than 200 cold-stunned young turtles were being treated there Tuesday, Kennedy said.

"Climate change certainly is allowing those numbers of turtles to get in where normally the numbers weren't very high years ago," he said.

Cold-stunned sea turtles, sometimes near death, wash up on Cape Cod every fall and winter. The aquarium expects the number of turtles it rescues to climb to at least 400, Kennedy said. In 2010, the average was 40, he said.

High wind speeds and falling temperatures have fueled recent strandings, he said.

The total five-year average of cold-stunned sea turtles in Massachusetts was around 200 in the early 2010s, according to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration data, growing to more than 700 in recent years.

All the turtles at New England Aquarium's hospital are juveniles, mostly critically endangered Kemp's ridley turtles whose migratory patterns lead to strandings here. They were being treated for maladies ranging from pneumonia to sepsis.

The Kemp's — the world's smallest sea turtle — lives largely in the Gulf of Mexico and ventures into the Atlantic Ocean when juvenile. Some recent science, including a 2019 study in the journal PLoS One, says the warming of the ocean increases the chance of cold-stunning events once the turtles reach the Northwest Atlantic. Warmer seas may push the turtles north in a way that makes stranding more likely, the study said.

Upon arrival, the turtles are often critically ill.

"The majority of the turtles arrive with serious ailments such as pneumonia, dehydration, traumatic injuries, or sepsis," said Melissa Joblon, director of animal health at the aquarium.

The turtle hospital rehabilitates the animals so they can be safely returned to the wild, sometimes locally and sometimes in warmer southern waters, Kennedy said. Around 80% survive.

Some of the turtles that arrive at the hospital are green turtles or loggerheads, which are not as endan-

gered as the Kemp's ridley, but still face numerous threats.

"At the end of the day, getting these turtles back to the wild is what we are doing and what we want," Kennedy said. "We want them back in the ocean." \_\_\_\_\_

Whittle reported from Portland, Maine.

## US job openings rose last month, though hiring slowed, in mixed picture for labor market

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of job postings in the United States rebounded in October from a 1/2 year low in September, a sign that businesses are still seeking workers even though hiring has cooled.

Openings rose 5% to 7.7 million from 7.4 million in September, the Labor Department said Tuesday. The increase suggests that job gains could pick up in the coming months. Still, the latest figure is down significantly from 8.7 million job postings a year ago.

Last month, job openings rose sharply in professional and business services, a category that includes engineers, managers, and accountants, as well as in the restaurant and hotel and information technology industries.

The number of people quitting their jobs rose in October, a sign of confidence in the job market. And layoffs tumbled to just 1.6 million — below the lowest figures in the two decades that preceded the 2020 pandemic.

Taken as a whole, Tuesday's figures suggest that the job market might be stabilizing at a modest level, with hiring moderate but layoffs uncommonly low. The unemployment rate is at a low 4.1%, even though job gains slowed sharply in October, according to the monthly jobs report. The slowdown in job growth last month reflected mainly the impact of hurricanes and a strike at Boeing.

"There's a lot of cause for optimism," said Cory Stahle, an economist at Indeed, the job listings website. "The fact that job openings ticked up is always an encouraging sign."

Tuesday's figures mean there are now 1.1 available jobs for each unemployed worker, a healthy figure. Before the pandemic there were usually more unemployed people than openings.

Still, the latest ratio is down from a peak of roughly two job openings per unemployed person two years ago. Businesses have pulled back from the hiring frenzy that occurred as the economy emerged from the pandemic recession.

Tuesday's report, known as the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS, showed that overall hiring slowed in October. Total hiring slipped to 5.3 million from 5.6 million, though that decline reflected hurricane-related disruptions.

The JOLTS report is separate from the monthly jobs figures, which will be released Friday. That report is forecast to show a net gain of nearly 210,000 jobs in November, up from an anemic 12,000 in October.

Tuesday's report also showed that the number of Americans who quit their jobs rebounded in October to 3.4 million, after having reached a four-year low in September. An increase in quitting is a good sign for the economy, because it suggests that people are confident enough to search for new job opportunities.

The Federal Reserve is watching the jobs data closely. Any sign that hiring is sharply weakening could encourage Fed officials to cut their key interest rate more quickly, to try to bolster borrowing and spending and support the economy.

## US biathletes fear retaliation for speaking out about sexual harassment, report finds

By MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

U.S. biathletes face "misogynistic" behavior while racing and fear retaliation if they report their concerns, according to an inquiry by an independent contractor hired to assess athlete safety.

The investigation of U.S. Biathlon was ordered following an Associated Press report that a female team



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member had been sexually harassed and abused for years while racing on the World Cup circuit.

"It is very uncomfortable as a woman ... to be in that environment," one biathlete said in the report released Monday, which did not identify the athletes to preserve confidentiality.

Many biathletes said they feared if they complained they would be denied training opportunities, financial support and selection for relay teams, according to the assessment by outside auditor Vestry Laight.

The AP reported in January that a U.S. Center for SafeSport investigation found that two-time Olympian Joanne Reid had been sexually harassed by a ski-wax technician from 2016 to 2021. Wax technicians play a critical role in biathlon, which combines cross-country skiing with target shooting.

SafeSport suspended the wax tech for six months and put him on probation through December. U.S. Biathlon fired him from the team and ordered the audit.

Investigators interviewed athletes, parents, coaches and staff, and studied U.S. Biathlon policies as part of the review. They also sent a confidential survey to 57 biathletes who have competed since 2020.

The report found the U.S. Biathlon Association code of conduct failed to provide clear examples of prohibited behavior. There was also no way to file complaints online or anonymously, making it less likely people would come forward, it said.

The survey showed that while 92% of male respondents said they felt comfortable raising concerns about athlete safety, only 52% of women did. Women were far more likely to say they feared negative consequences to their careers for reporting misconduct — 57% compared to 8% of men.

In addition, 43% of women said they had observed conduct in violation of the USBA code in the past year, compared to 25% of men.

Biathlon officials said they were adopting an "action plan" in response to the report, including workshops with staff and athletes to define core values and create a way to measure progress.

"We have full confidence in the USBA leadership to implement the necessary improvements and build a culture that will enable the athletes and our community to thrive," Bob Hall, USBA board chair, told members in an email.

Reid told the AP on Tuesday that she believes U.S. Biathlon's response is inadequate, calling it "mostly a promise to develop metrics and plans, with nothing concrete that they can be held accountable to."

She said it was "really rugged" to see how many women had witnessed abuse but feared reporting it.

Many athletes interviewed said they feared retaliation for reporting abuse after what happened to Reid. Six months after SafeSport's investigation, U.S. Biathlon retroactively changed the criteria for being pre-qualified for the World Cup team — and Reid was bumped off. The change didn't affect the status of anyone else on the team.

U.S. Biathlon CEO Jack Gierhart told the AP in January the World Cup rule change was not retaliation.

SafeSport has launched a new investigation into whether Gierhart and High Performance Director Lowell Bailey retaliated against Reid by changing the qualification criteria. Gierhart said in an interview Tuesday that he could not comment on that inquiry.

Athletes interviewed for the audit said the way U.S. Biathlon officials handled the Reid case made them feel powerless and unsafe.

"It was clearly demonstrated by USBA that if an athlete, especially a female athlete, were to bring up this topic they would risk their spot on the team in the upcoming year," one athlete wrote in the survey.

"Not speaking out is the best bet if you want to keep competing for USBA," another said.

## **Goodell speaks to Congress about the security issue of drones on NFL game days, AP source says**

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell met with congressional leaders Monday to speak to them about the ongoing security issue of drones on game days, a person with knowledge of the meeting told The Associated Press.

The person, speaking to the AP on condition of anonymity because the discussions weren't publicized,

said Goodell also joined Washington Commanders controlling owner Josh Harris in a series of meetings concerning the RFK stadium proposal and other league matters.

Unapproved drones have become a problem for various sports leagues. There was a stoppage during the AFC championship game in Baltimore last January because a drone violated the restricted airspace. Another game in Baltimore in November 2023 was delayed twice because of a drone.

The NFL said there were 2,845 drone flights into restricted air space during games in 2023. That number was up from 2,537 in 2022.

The Federal Aviation Administration prohibits drones from flying within 3 nautical miles — about 3.45 miles — of stadiums during major sporting events with a seating capacity of 30,000 or more. The ban starts one hour before the scheduled time of a game or event and extends until one hour after it ends.

The FAA banned drones within a radius of 30 nautical miles — about 35 miles — of Allegiant Stadium for the Super Bowl last February.

## **Tiger Woods has no firm answers on a deal with Saudis or his future as a player**

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

Tiger Woods could not offer much of a timetable Tuesday on PGA Tour negotiations with the Saudi backers of LIV Golf or his own future as a player.

Woods is the tournament host of the Hero World Challenge this week, and that's his only role at Albany Golf Club in the Bahamas. He has played the holiday tournament only once since 2019, missing this year while recovering from a sixth surgery on his lower back.

"I'm not tournament sharp yet, no. I'm still not there," Woods said. "These are 20 of the best players in the world and I'm not sharp enough to compete against them at this level. So when I'm ready to compete and play at this level, then I will."

A big part of his time is occupied by PGA Tour business matters. Woods was appointed to the PGA Tour board a year ago with no term limits, and he also is on the board of the commercial PGA Tour Enterprises.

There has been movement on negotiations for the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia to become a minority investor in PGA Tour Enterprises — the tour already has a \$1.5 billion investment from Strategic Sports Group and a player equity program. PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan played in the Dunhill Links Championship on the European tour with the PIF governor, Yasir Al-Rumayyan.

Monahan also played golf with President-elect Donald Trump, who had said he could fix golf's mess in about 15 minutes.

"I think all of us who have been a part of this process would have thought it would have happened quicker than this," Woods said.

He suggested any deal still would have required Justice Department approval.

"But things are very fluid, we're still working through it, it's happening daily," Woods said. "From a policy board standpoint or from an enterprise standpoint, things are moving and they're constructive."

In the meantime, Bloomberg reported last week the European tour is talking with PIF separately, leading to suggestions of a shared schedule in which players from the European tour and LIV Golf could play on each circuit.

"We all want to get past this and to do what's best for the tour and in trying to do that, there's going to be ... some eggs are going to be knocked over and it's going to be a little bit difficult at times," Woods said. "But in the end we're going to get a product that's better for all the fans and all the players that are involved and get some peace that the game desperately needs."

As for his own future, Woods was not certain. He was not asked if he planned to play in two weeks at the PNC Championship with his son, Charlie. It's a 36-hole event hosted by the PGA Tour Champions, so Woods could ride in a cart. He has played it each of the last four years.

He looked back at 2024 as a lost year, primarily because of his ailing back that began to spasm as the year went on.

Woods had set a goal of playing a big tournament once a month through the majors season, but that fell apart early when he missed The Players Championship in March. He set a Masters record by making his 24th consecutive cut, but then only played at the next three majors and was gone by the weekend at each of them.

He had a microdiscectomy in September to alleviate pain down his legs, but he had no idea how often he could play in 2025.

"Whether my commitment going forward is once a month, yeah, I could say that all over again," Woods said. "But I truly don't know. I'm just trying to rehab and still get stronger and better and feel better, really give myself the best chance I can going into next year.

"This year, I had to toss it away and I wasn't as sharp as I needed to be and I didn't play as much as I needed to going into the major championships and I didn't play well at them," he said. "Hopefully next year will be better. I'll be physically stronger and better. I know the procedure helped and hopefully that I can then build upon that."

## **They fled war in Sudan. But they haven't been able to flee the hunger**

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

ADRE, Chad (AP) — For months, Aziza Abraham fled from one village in Sudan to the next as people were slaughtered. Yet the killing of relatives and her husband's disappearance aren't what forced the 23-year-old to leave the country for good. It was hunger, she said.

"We don't have anything to eat because of the war," Abraham said, cradling her 1-year-old daughter under the sheet where she now shelters, days after crossing into Chad.

The war in Sudan has created vast hunger, including famine. It has pushed people off their farms. Food in the markets is sparse, prices have spiked and aid groups say they're struggling to reach the most vulnerable as warring parties limit access.

Some 24,000 people have been killed and millions displaced during the war that erupted in April 2023, sparked by tensions between the military and a powerful paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces. Global experts confirmed famine in the Zamzam displacement camp in July. They warn that some 25 million people — more than half of Sudan's population — are expected to face acute hunger this year.

"People are starving to death at the moment ... It's man-made. It's these men with guns and power who deny women and children food," Jan Egeland, head of the Norwegian Refugee Council, told The Associated Press. Warring parties on both sides are blocking assistance and delaying authorization for aid groups, he said.

Between May and September, there were seven malnutrition-related deaths among children in one hospital at a displacement site in Chad run by Doctors Without Borders, known by its French acronym MSF. Such deaths can be from disease in hunger-weakened bodies.

In September, MSF was forced to stop caring for 5,000 malnourished children in North Darfur for several weeks, citing repeated, deliberate obstructions and blockades. U.S. President Joe Biden has called on both sides to allow unhindered access and stop killing civilians.

But the fighting shows no signs of slowing. More than 2,600 people were killed across the country in October, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, which called it the bloodiest month of the war.

Violence is intensifying around North Darfur's capital, El Fasher, the only capital in the vast western Darfur region that the RSF doesn't hold. Darfur has experienced some of the war's worst atrocities, and the International Criminal Court prosecutor has said there are grounds to believe both sides may be committing war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

Abraham escaped her village in West Darfur and sought refuge for more than a year in nearby towns with friends and relatives. Her husband had left home to find work before the war, and she hasn't heard from him since.

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She struggled to eat and feed their daughter. Unable to farm, she cut wood and sold it in Chad, traveling eight hours by donkey there and back every few days, earning enough to buy grain. But after a few months the wood ran out, forcing her to leave for good.

Others who have fled to Chad described food prices spiking three-fold and stocks dwindling in the market. There were no vegetables, just grains and nuts.

Awatif Adam came to Chad in October. Her husband wasn't making enough transporting people with his donkey cart, and it was too risky to farm, she said. Her 6-year-old twin girls and 3-year-old son lost weight and were always hungry.

"My children were saying all the time, 'Mom, give us food,'" she said. Their cries drove her to leave.

As more people stream into Chad, aid groups worry about supporting them.

Some 700,000 Sudanese have entered since the war began. Many live in squalid refugee camps or shelter at the border in makeshift displacement sites. And the number of arrivals at the Adre crossing between August and October jumped from 6,100 to 14,800, according to government and U.N. data., though it was not clear whether some people entered multiple times.

Earlier this year, the World Food Program cut rations by roughly half in Chad, citing a lack of funding.

While there's now enough money to return to full rations until the start of next year, more arrivals will strain the system and more hunger will result if funding doesn't keep pace, said Ramazani Karabaye, head of the World Food Program's operations in Adre.

During an AP visit to Adre in October, some people who fled Sudan at the start of the war said they were still struggling.

Khadiga Omer Adam said she doesn't have enough aid or money to eat regularly, which has complicated breastfeeding her already malnourished daughter, Salma Issa. The 35-year-old gave birth during the war's initial days, delivering alone in West Darfur. It was too dangerous for a midwife to reach her.

Adam had clutched the baby as she fled through villages, begging for food. More than a year later, she sat on a hospital bed holding a bag of fluid above her daughter, who was fed through a tube in her nose.

"I have confidence in the doctors ... I believe she'll improve, I don't think she'll die," she said.

The MSF-run clinic in the Aboutengue camp admitted more than 340 cases of severely malnourished children in August and September. Staff fear that number could rise. The arid climate in Chad south of the Sahara Desert means it's hard to farm, and there's little food variety, health workers said.

People are fleeing Sudan into difficult conditions, said Dr. Oula Dramane Ouattara, head of MSF's medical activities in the camp.

"If things go on like this, I'm afraid the situation will get out of control," he said.

## The year in review: Influential people who died in 2024

By BERNARD McGHEE Associated Press

It was a murder case almost everyone had an opinion on. O.J. Simpson's "trial of the century" over the 1994 killings of his ex-wife and her friend bared divisions over race and law enforcement in America and brought an intersection of sports, crime, entertainment and class that was hard to turn away from.

In a controversial verdict, the football star-turned-actor was acquitted in the criminal trial but later found civilly liable in the deaths of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. Years later, he served nine years in prison on unrelated charges. His death in April brought an end to a life that had become defined by scrutiny over the killings.

But he was just one of many influential and noteworthy people who died in 2024.

Alexei Navalny, who died in prison in February, was a fierce political foe of Russian President Vladimir Putin, crusading against corruption and staging protests against the Kremlin. He had been jailed since 2021 when he returned to Russia to face certain arrest after recovering in Germany from nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin.

Other political figures who died this year include: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi; former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney; Vietnamese politician Nguyen Phu Trong; U.S. congresswoman Sheila Jackson

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Lee; former Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov; pundit Lou Dobbs; Greek politician Vasso Papandreou; former U.S. senators Joe Lieberman, Jim Inhofe, Tim Johnson and Jim Sasser; Namibian President Hage Geingob; and former Lebanese prime minister Salim Hoss.

The year also brought the deaths of several rights activists, including the reverends Cecil L. "Chip" Murray and James Lawson Jr.; Dexter Scott King; Hydeia Broadbent; and David Mixner.

Business leaders who died this year include: Indian industrialist Ratan Tata, The Home Depot co-founder Bernard "Bernie" Marcus, financier Jacob Rothschild and Daiso retail chain founder Hirotake Yano.

Simpson wasn't the only athlete with a complex legacy who died this year. Pete Rose, who died in September, was a career hits leader in baseball whose achievements were tarnished when it was revealed he gambled on games. Other noteworthy sports figures who died include: basketball players Jerry West and Dikembe Mutombo; baseball players Willie Mays and Fernando Valenzuela; and gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi.

The music industry lost a titan in producer Quincy Jones, who died in November. His many contributions included producing Michael Jackson's "Thriller" album and working with hundreds of other musicians over a long and storied career.

Other artists and entertainers who died this year include: actors James Earl Jones, Chita Rivera, Donald Sutherland, Gena Rowlands, Louis Gossett Jr., Shelley Duvall, Kris Kristofferson, Sandra Milo, Anouk Aimée, Carl Weathers, Joyce Randolph, Tony Todd, Shannen Doherty and Song Jae-lim; musicians Sergio Mendes, Toby Keith, Phil Lesh, Melanie, Dickey Betts, Françoise Hardy, Fatman Scoop, Duane Eddy and Frankie Beverly; filmmakers Roger Corman and Morgan Spurlock; authors Faith Ringgold and N. Scott Momaday; TV fitness guru Richard Simmons; sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer; talk show host Phil Donahue; and poets Shuntaro Tanikawa, John Sinclair and Kazuko Shiraishi.

Here is a roll call of some noteworthy figures who died in 2024 (cause of death cited for younger people, if available):

## JANUARY

Zvi Zamir, 98. A former director of Israel's Mossad spy service who warned that Israel was about to be attacked on the eve of the 1973 Mideast war. Jan. 2.

Glynis Johns, 100. A Tony Award-winning stage and screen star who played the mother opposite Julie Andrews in the classic movie "Mary Poppins" and introduced the world to the bittersweet standard-to-be "Send in the Clowns" by Stephen Sondheim. Jan. 4.

David Soul, 80. The actor-singer was a 1970s heartthrob who co-starred as the blond half of the crime-fighting duo "Starsky & Hutch" and topped the music charts with the ballad "Don't Give Up on Us." Jan. 4.

Franz Beckenbauer, 78. He won the World Cup both as a player and coach and became one of Germany's most beloved personalities with his easygoing charm. Jan. 7.

Joyce Randolph, 99. A veteran stage and television actor whose role as the savvy Trixie Norton on "The Honeymooners" provided the perfect foil to her dimwitted TV husband. Jan. 13.

Jack Burke Jr., 100. He was the oldest living Masters champion and staged the greatest comeback ever at Augusta National for one of his two majors. Jan. 19.

Marlena Shaw, 81. The jazz and R&B vocalist whose "California Soul" was one of the defining soul songs of the late 1960s. Jan. 19.

Mary Weiss, 75. The lead singer of the 1960s pop group the Shangri-Las, whose hits included "Leader of the Pack." Jan. 19.

Gigi Riva, 79. The all-time leading goalscorer for Italy's men's national team was known as the "Rombo di Tuono" (Rumble of Thunder). Jan. 22.

Dexter Scott King, 62. He dedicated much of his life to shepherding the civil rights legacy of his parents, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King. Jan. 22.

Charles Osgood, 91. He anchored "CBS Sunday Morning" for more than two decades, was host of the long-running radio program "The Osgood File" and was referred to as CBS News' poet-in-residence. Jan. 23.

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Melanie, 76. The singer-songwriter who rose through the New York folk scene, performed at Woodstock and had a series of 1970s hits including the enduring cultural phenomenon "Brand New Key." Jan. 23.

N. Scott Momaday, 89. A Pulitzer Prize-winning storyteller, poet, educator and folklorist whose debut novel "House Made of Dawn" is widely credited as the starting point for contemporary Native American literature. Jan. 24.

Herbert Coward, 85. He was known for his "Toothless Man" role in the movie "Deliverance." Jan. 24. Car crash.

Sandra Milo, 90. An icon of Italian cinema who played a key role in Federico Fellini's "8½" and later became his muse. Jan. 29.

Jean Carnahan, 90. She became the first female senator to represent Missouri when she was appointed to replace her husband following his death. Jan. 30.

Chita Rivera, 91. The dynamic dancer, singer and actress who garnered 10 Tony nominations, winning twice, in a long Broadway career that forged a path for Latina artists and shrugged off a near-fatal car accident. Jan. 30.

## FEBRUARY

Carl Weathers, 76. A former NFL linebacker who became a Hollywood action movie and comedy star, playing nemesis-turned-ally Apollo Creed in the "Rocky" movies, starring with Arnold Schwarzenegger in "Predator" and teaching golf in "Happy Gilmore." Feb. 1.

Ian Lavender, 77. An actor who played a hapless Home Guard soldier in the classic British sitcom "Dad's Army." Feb. 2.

Hage Geingob, 82. Namibia's president and founding prime minister who played a central role in what has become one of Africa's most stable democracies after returning from a long exile in Botswana and the United States as an anti-apartheid activist. Feb. 4.

Bob Beckwith, 91. A retired firefighter whose chance encounter with the president amid the rubble of ground zero became part of an iconic image of American unity after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Feb. 4.

Toby Keith, 62. A hit country crafter of pro-American anthems who both riled up critics and was loved by millions of fans. Feb. 5. Stomach cancer.

John Bruton, 76. A former Irish prime minister who played a key role in bringing peace to Northern Ireland. Feb. 6.

Sebastián Piñera, 74. The two-time former president of Chile faced social upheaval followed by a pandemic in his second term. Feb. 6. Helicopter crash.

Seiji Ozawa, 88. The Japanese conductor amazed audiences with the lithe physicality of his performances during three decades at the helm of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Feb. 6.

Henry Fambrough, 85. The last surviving original member of the iconic R&B group The Spinners, whose hits included "It's a Shame," "Could It Be I'm Falling in Love" and "The Rubberband Man." Feb. 7.

Robert Badinter, 95. He spearheaded the drive to abolish France's death penalty, campaigned against antisemitism and Holocaust denial, and led a European body dealing with the legal fallout of Yugoslavia's breakup. Feb. 9.

Bob Edwards, 76. He anchored National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" for just under 25 years and was the baritone voice who told many Americans what had happened while they slept. Feb. 10.

Hirotake Yano, 80. He founded the retail chain Daiso known for its 100-yen shops, Japan's equivalent of the dollar store. Feb. 12.

Alexei Navalny, 47. The fiercest foe of Russian President Vladimir Putin who crusaded against official corruption and staged massive anti-Kremlin protests. Feb. 16.

Lefty Driesell, 92. The Hall of Fame coach whose folksy drawl belied a fiery on-court demeanor that put Maryland on the college basketball map and enabled him to rebuild several struggling programs. Feb. 17.

Hydeia Broadbent, 39. The HIV/AIDS activist came to national prominence in the 1990s as a young child

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for her inspirational talks to reduce the stigma surrounding the virus she was born with. Feb. 20.

Jacob Rothschild, 87. The financier and philanthropist was part of the renowned Rothschild banking dynasty. Feb. 26.

Richard Lewis, 76. An acclaimed comedian known for exploring his neuroses in frantic, stream-of-consciousness diatribes while dressed in all-black, leading to his nickname "The Prince of Pain." Feb. 27.

Nikolai Ryzhkov, 94. A former Soviet prime minister who presided over botched efforts to shore up the crumbling national economy in the final years of the USSR. Feb. 28.

Brian Mulroney, 84. The former Canadian prime minister forged close ties with two Republican U.S. presidents through a sweeping free trade agreement that was once vilified but is now celebrated. Feb. 29.

## MARCH

Iris Apfel, 102. A textile expert, interior designer and fashion celebrity known for her eccentric style. March 1.

Akira Toriyama, 68. The creator of the best-selling Dragon Ball and other popular anime who influenced Japanese comics. March 1. Blood clot.

Chris Mortensen, 72. The award-winning journalist covered the NFL for close to four decades, including 32 as a senior analyst at ESPN. March 3.

David E. Harris, 89. He flew bombers for the U.S. military and broke barriers in 1964 when he became the first Black pilot hired at a major U.S. airline. March 8.

Eric Carmen, 74. The singer-songwriter fronted the power-pop 1970s band the Raspberries and later had soaring pop hits like "All by Myself" and "Hungry Eyes" from the hit "Dirty Dancing" soundtrack. March 11.

Paul Alexander, 78. A Texas man who spent most of his life using an iron lung chamber and built a large following on social media, recounting his life from contracting polio in the 1940s to earning a law degree. March 11.

David Mixner, 77. A longtime LGBTQ+ activist who was an adviser to Bill Clinton during his presidential campaign and later called him out over the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer personnel in the military. March 11.

M. Emmet Walsh, 88. The character actor brought his unmistakable face and unsettling presence to films including "Blood Simple" and "Blade Runner." March 19.

Lou Whittaker, 95. A legendary American mountaineer who helped lead ascents of Mount Everest, K2 and Denali, and who taught generations of climbers during his more than 250 trips up Mount Rainier, the tallest peak in Washington state. March 24.

Joe Lieberman, 82. The former U.S. senator of Connecticut nearly won the vice presidency on the Democratic ticket with Al Gore in the disputed 2000 election and almost became Republican John McCain's running mate eight years later. March 27. Complications from a fall.

Louis Gossett Jr., 87. The first Black man to win a supporting actor Oscar and an Emmy winner for his role in the seminal TV miniseries "Roots." March 28.

William D. Delahunt, 82. The longtime Massachusetts congressman was a Democratic stalwart who postponed his retirement from Washington to help pass former President Barack Obama's legislative agenda. March 30.

Chance Perdomo, 27. An actor who rose to fame as a star of "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina" and "Gen V." March 29. Motorcycle crash.

Barbara Rush, 97. A popular leading actor in the 1950s and 1960s who co-starred with Frank Sinatra, Paul Newman and other top film performers and later had a thriving TV career. March 31.

## APRIL

Lou Conter, 102. The last living survivor of the USS Arizona battleship that exploded and sank during the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. April 1.

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John Sinclair, 82. A poet, music producer and counterculture figure whose lengthy prison sentence after a series of small-time pot busts inspired a John Lennon song and a star-studded 1971 concert to free him. April 2.

The Rev. Cecil L. "Chip" Murray, 94. An influential pastor and civil rights leader who used his tenure at one of Los Angeles' oldest churches to uplift the predominantly Black neighborhoods following one of the country's worst race riots. April 5.

Peter Higgs, 94. The Nobel prize-winning physicist proposed the existence of the so-called "God particle" that helped explain how matter formed after the Big Bang. April 8.

Ralph Puckett Jr., 97. A retired Army colonel awarded the Medal of Honor seven decades after he was wounded leading a company of outnumbered Army Rangers in battle during the Korean War. April 8.

O.J. Simpson, 76. The decorated football superstar and Hollywood actor who was acquitted of charges he killed his former wife and her friend but later found liable in a separate civil trial. April 10.

William Strickland, 87. A longtime civil rights activist and supporter of the Black Power movement who worked with Malcolm X and other prominent leaders in the 1960s. April 10.

Robert MacNeil, 93. He created the even-handed, no-frills PBS newscast "The MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour" in the 1970s and co-anchored the show with his late partner, Jim Lehrer, for two decades. April 12.

Faith Ringgold, 93. An award-winning author and artist who broke down barriers for Black female artists and became famous for her richly colored and detailed quilts combining painting, textiles and storytelling. April 12.

Carl Erskine, 97. He pitched two no-hitters as a mainstay on the Brooklyn Dodgers and was a 20-game winner in 1953 when he struck out a then-record 14 in the World Series. April 16.

Bob Graham, 87. A former U.S. senator and two-term Florida governor who gained national prominence as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks and as an early critic of the Iraq war. April 16.

Dickey Betts, 80. The guitar legend who co-founded the Allman Brothers Band and wrote their biggest hit, "Ramblin' Man." April 18.

Roman Gabriel, 83. The first Filipino-American quarterback in the NFL and the league MVP in 1969. April 20.

Terry Anderson, 76. The globe-trotting Associated Press correspondent became one of America's longest-held hostages after he was snatched from a street in war-torn Lebanon in 1985 and held for nearly seven years. April 21.

William Laws Calley Jr., 80. As an Army lieutenant, he led the U.S. soldiers who killed hundreds of Vietnamese civilians in the My Lai massacre, the most notorious war crime in modern American military history. April 28.

Duane Eddy, 86. A pioneering guitar hero whose reverberating electric sound on instrumentals such as "Rebel Rouser" and "Peter Gunn" helped put the twang in early rock 'n' roll and influenced George Harrison, Bruce Springsteen and countless others. April 30.

## MAY

Dick Rutan, 85. He, along with copilot Jeana Yeager, completed one of the greatest milestones in aviation history: the first round-the-world flight with no stops or refueling. May 3.

Jeannie Epper, 83. A groundbreaking performer who did stunts for many of the most important women of film and television action of the 1970s and '80s, including star Lynda Carter on TV's "Wonder Woman." May 5.

Bernard Hill, 79. An actor who delivered a rousing cry before leading his people into battle in "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" and went down with the ship as the captain in "Titanic." May 5.

Steve Albini, 61. An alternative rock pioneer and legendary producer who shaped the musical landscape through his work with Nirvana, the Pixies, PJ Harvey and more. May 7.

Kim Ki Nam, 94. A North Korean propaganda chief who helped build personality cults around the country's three dynastic leaders. May 7.



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Pete McCloskey, 96. A pro-environment, anti-war California Republican who co-wrote the Endangered Species Act and co-founded Earth Day. May 8.

Ralph Kennedy Frasier, 85. The last surviving member of a trio of African American youths who were the first to desegregate the undergraduate student body at North Carolina's flagship public university in the 1950s. May 8.

Roger Corman, 98. The "King of the Bs" helped turn out such low-budget classics as "Little Shop of Horrors" and "Attack of the Crab Monsters" and gave many of Hollywood's most famous actors and directors early breaks. May 9.

Alice Munro, 92. The Nobel laureate was a Canadian literary giant who became one of the world's most esteemed contemporary authors and one of history's most honored short story writers. May 13.

Dabney Coleman, 92. The mustachioed character actor who specialized in smarmy villains like the chauvinist boss in "9 to 5" and the nasty TV director in "Tootsie." May 16.

Peter Buxtun, 86. The whistleblower who revealed that the U.S. government allowed hundreds of Black men in rural Alabama to go untreated for syphilis in what became known as the Tuskegee study. May 18.

Ebrahim Raisi, 63. The Iranian president was a hard-line protege of the country's supreme leader who helped oversee the mass executions of thousands in 1988 and later led the country as it enriched uranium near weapons-grade levels, launched a major attack on Israel and experienced mass protests. May 19. Helicopter crash.

Hossein Amirabdollahian, 60. Iran's foreign minister and a hard-liner close to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard who confronted the West while also overseeing indirect talks with the U.S. over the country's nuclear program. May 19. Helicopter crash.

Ivan F. Boesky, 87. The flamboyant stock trader whose cooperation with the government cracked open one of the largest insider trading scandals in the history of Wall Street. May 20.

Morgan Spurlock, 53. The documentary filmmaker and Oscar nominee whose most famous works skewered America's food industry and who notably ate only at McDonald's for a month to illustrate the dangers of a fast-food diet. May 23. Complications of cancer.

Bill Walton, 71. He starred for John Wooden's UCLA Bruins before becoming a Hall of Fame center for his NBA career and one of the biggest stars in basketball broadcasting. May 27.

Robert Pickton, 74. A Canadian serial killer who took female victims to his pig farm during a crime spree near Vancouver in the late 1990s and early 2000s. May 31. Injuries from a prison assault involving another inmate.

## JUNE

Tin Oo, 97. One of the closest associates of Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi as well as a co-founder of her National League for Democracy party. June 1.

Janis Paige, 101. A popular actor in Hollywood and in Broadway musicals and comedies who danced with Fred Astaire, toured with Bob Hope and continued to perform into her 90s. June 2.

David Levy, 86. An Israeli politician born in Morocco who fought tirelessly against deep-seated racism against Jews from North Africa and went on to serve as foreign minister and hold other senior governmental posts. June 2.

Brigitte Bierlein, 74. The former head of Austria's Constitutional Court became the country's first female chancellor in an interim government in 2019. June 3.

Paul Pressler, 94. A leading figure of the Southern Baptist Convention who was accused of sexually abusing boys and young men and later settled a lawsuit over the allegations. June 7.

The Rev. James Lawson Jr., 95. An apostle of nonviolent protest who schooled activists to withstand brutal reactions from white authorities as the Civil Rights Movement gained traction. June 9.

Lynn Conway, 86. A pioneer in the design of microchips that are at the heart of consumer electronics who overcame discrimination as a transgender person. June 9.

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Françoise Hardy, 80. A French singing legend and pop icon since the 1960s. June 11.

Jerry West, 86. Selected to the Basketball Hall of Fame three times in a storied career as a player and executive, his silhouette is considered to be the basis of the NBA logo. June 12.

George Nethercutt, 79. The former U.S. congressman was a Spokane lawyer with limited political experience when he ousted Democratic Speaker of the House Tom Foley as part of a stunning GOP wave that shifted national politics to the right in 1994. June 14.

Kazuko Shiraishi, 93. A leading name in modern Japanese "beat" poetry, she was known for her dramatic readings — at times with jazz music. June 14.

Willie Mays, 93. The electrifying "Say Hey Kid" whose singular combination of talent, drive and exuberance made him one of baseball's greatest and most beloved players. June 18.

Anouk Aimée, 92. The radiant French star and dark-eyed beauty of classic films including Federico Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" and Claude Lelouch's "A Man and a Woman." June 18.

Donald Sutherland, 88. The Canadian actor whose wry, arresting screen presence spanned more than half a century of films from "M.A.S.H." to "The Hunger Games." June 20.

Bill Cobbs, 90. The veteran character actor became a ubiquitous and sage screen presence as an older man. June 25.

Martin Mull, 80. His droll, esoteric comedy and acting made him a hip sensation in the 1970s and later a beloved guest star on sitcoms including "Roseanne" and "Arrested Development." June 27.

Pål Enger, 57. A talented Norwegian soccer player turned celebrity art thief who pulled off the sensational 1994 heist of Edvard Munch's famed "The Scream" painting from the National Gallery in Oslo. June 29.

## JULY

Jim Inhofe, 89. A powerful fixture in Oklahoma politics for over six decades, the Republican U.S. senator was a conservative known for his strong support of defense spending and his denial that human activity is responsible for the bulk of climate change. July 9.

Joe Bonsall, 76. A Grammy award winner and celebrated tenor of the country and gospel group the Oak Ridge Boys. July 9.

Tommy Robinson, 82. A former U.S. congressman who gained notoriety as an Arkansas sheriff for tactics that included chaining inmates outside a state prison to protest overcrowding. July 10.

Shelley Duvall, 75. The intrepid, Texas-born movie star whose wide-eyed, winsome presence was a mainstay in the films of Robert Altman and who co-starred in Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining." July 11.

Dr. Ruth Westheimer, 96. The diminutive sex therapist became a pop icon, media star and best-selling author through her frank talk about once-taboo bedroom topics. July 12.

Shannen Doherty, 53. The "Beverly Hills, 90210" star whose life and career were roiled by illness and tabloid stories. July 13.

Richard Simmons, 76. He was television's hyperactive court jester of physical fitness who built a mini-empire in his trademark tank tops and short shorts by urging the overweight to exercise and eat better. July 13.

James Sikking, 90. He starred as a hardened police lieutenant on "Hill Street Blues" and as the titular character's kindhearted dad on "Doogie Howser, M.D." July 13.

Jacoby Jones, 40. A former NFL receiver whose 108-yard kickoff return in 2013 remains the longest touchdown in Super Bowl history. July 14.

Cheng Pei-pei, 78. A Chinese-born martial arts film actor who starred in Ang Lee's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." July 17.

Bob Newhart, 94. The deadpan accountant-turned-comedian became one of the most popular TV stars of his time after striking gold with a classic comedy album. July 18.

Lou Dobbs, 78. The conservative political pundit and veteran cable TV host was a founding anchor for CNN and later was a nightly presence on Fox Business Network for more than a decade. July 18.

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Nguyen Phu Trong, 80. He was general secretary of Vietnam's ruling Communist Party and the country's most powerful politician. July 19.

Sheila Jackson Lee, 74. The longtime congresswoman from Texas helped lead federal efforts to protect women from domestic violence and recognize Juneteenth as a national holiday. July 19.

Abdul "Duke" Fakir, 88. The last surviving original member of the beloved Motown group the Four Tops, which was known for such hits as "Reach Out, I'll Be There" and "Standing in the Shadows of Love." July 22.

Edna O'Brien, 93. Ireland's literary pride and outlaw scandalized her native land with her debut novel "The Country Girls" before gaining international acclaim as a storyteller and iconoclast that found her welcomed everywhere from Dublin to the White House. July 27.

Francine Pascal, 92. A onetime soap opera writer whose "Sweet Valley High" novels and the ongoing adventures of twins Elizabeth and Jessica Wakefield and other teens captivated millions of young readers. July 28.

Betty Prashker, 99. A pioneering editor of the 20th century who as one of the first women with the power to acquire books published such classics as Kate Millett's "Sexual Politics" and Susan Faludi's "Backlash" and helped oversee the careers of Jean Auel, Dominick Dunne and Erik Larson among others. July 30.

Ismail Haniyeh, 62. Hamas' top leader in exile landed on Israel's hit list after the militant group staged its surprise Oct. 7 attacks. July 31. Killed in an airstrike in Iran.

## AUGUST

Jack Russell, 63. The lead singer of the bluesy '80s metal band Great White, whose hits included "Once Bitten Twice Shy" and "Rock Me," and who was fronting his band the night 100 people died in a 2003 nightclub fire in Rhode Island. Aug. 7.

Juan "Chi Chi" Rodriguez, 88. A Hall of Fame golfer whose antics on the greens and inspiring life story made him among the sport's most popular players during a long professional career. Aug. 8.

Susan Wojcicki, 56. A pioneering tech executive who helped shape Google and YouTube. Aug. 9.

Wallace "Wally" Amos, 88. The creator of the Famous Amos cookie empire went on to become a children's literacy advocate. Aug. 13.

Gena Rowlands, 94. She was hailed as one of the greatest actors to ever practice the craft and a guiding light in independent cinema as a star in groundbreaking movies by her director husband, John Cassavetes. She later charmed audiences in her son's tear-jerker "The Notebook." Aug. 14.

Peter Marshall, 98. The actor and singer turned game show host who played straight man to the stars for 16 years on "The Hollywood Squares." Aug. 15.

Alain Delon, 88. The internationally acclaimed French actor embodied both the bad guy and the policeman and made hearts throb around the world. Aug. 18.

Phil Donahue, 88. His pioneering daytime talk show launched an indelible television genre that brought success to Oprah Winfrey, Montel Williams, Ellen DeGeneres and many others. Aug. 18.

Ruth Johnson Colvin, 107. She founded Literacy Volunteers of America, was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame and received the nation's highest civilian award: the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Aug. 18.

Al Attles, 87. A Hall of Famer who coached the 1975 NBA champion Warriors and spent more than six decades with the organization as a player, general manager and most recently team ambassador. Aug. 20.

John Amos, 84. He starred as the family patriarch on the hit 1970s sitcom "Good Times" and earned an Emmy nomination for his role in the seminal 1977 miniseries "Roots." Aug. 21.

Salim Hoss, 94. The five-time former Lebanese prime minister served during some of the most tumultuous years of his country's modern history. Aug. 25.

Leonard Riggio, 83. A brash, self-styled underdog who transformed the publishing industry by building Barnes & Noble into the country's most powerful bookseller before it was overtaken by the rise of Amazon.com. Aug. 27.

Edward B. Johnson, 81. As a CIA officer, he traveled into Iran with a colleague to rescue six American

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diplomats who fled the 1979 U.S. Embassy takeover in Tehran. Aug. 27.

Johnny Gaudreau, 31. An NHL player known as "Johnny Hockey," he played 10 full seasons in the league. Aug. 29. Killed along with his brother when hit by a car while riding bicycles.

Kiingi Tuheitia Pootatau Te Wherowhero VII, 69. As New Zealand's Māori King, he was the seventh monarch in the Kiingitanga movement. Aug. 30.

Fatman Scoop, 56. The hip-hop artist topped charts in Europe with "Be Faithful" in the early 2000s and later lent his distinctive voice and ebullient vibe to hits by artists including Missy Elliott and Ciara. Aug. 30. Died after collapsing on stage.

## SEPTEMBER

Linda Deutsch, 80. A special correspondent for The Associated Press who for nearly 50 years wrote glittering first drafts of history from many of the nation's most significant criminal and civil trials including Charles Manson, O.J. Simpson and Michael Jackson. Sept. 1.

James Darren, 88. A teen idol who helped ignite the 1960s surfing craze as a charismatic beach boy paired off with Sandra Dee in the hit film "Gidget." Sept. 2.

Sergio Mendes, 83. The Grammy-winning Brazilian musician whose hit "Mas Que Nada" made him a global legend. Sept. 5.

James Earl Jones, 93. He overcame racial prejudice and a severe stutter to become a celebrated icon of stage and screen, eventually lending his deep, commanding voice to CNN, "The Lion King" and Darth Vader. Sept. 9.

Frankie Beverly, 77. With his band Maze, he inspired generations of fans with his smooth, soulful voice and lasting anthems including "Before I Let Go." Sept. 10.

Jim Sasser, 87. He served 18 years in the U.S. Senate and six years as ambassador to China. Sept. 10.

Alberto Fujimori, 86. His decade-long presidency began with triumphs righting Peru's economy and defeating a brutal insurgency only to end in autocratic excess that later sent him to prison. Sept. 11.

Joe Schmidt, 92. The Hall of Fame linebacker who helped the Detroit Lions win NFL championships in 1953 and 1957 and later coached the team. Sept. 11.

Tito Jackson, 70. One of the brothers who made up the beloved pop group the Jackson 5. Sept. 15.

John David "JD" Souther, 78. A prolific songwriter and musician who helped shape the country-rock sound that took root in Southern California in the 1970s with his collaborations with the Eagles and Linda Ronstadt. Sept. 17.

Kathryn Crosby, 90. She appeared in such movies as "The 7th Voyage of Sinbad", "Anatomy of a Murder," and "Operation Mad Ball" before marrying famed singer and Oscar-winning actor Bing Crosby. Sept. 20.

John Ashton, 76. The veteran character actor who memorably played the gruff but lovable police detective John Taggart in the "Beverly Hills Cop" films. Sept. 26.

Maggie Smith, 89. The masterful, scene-stealing actor who won an Oscar for the 1969 film "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" and gained new fans in the 21st century as the dowager Countess of Grantham in "Downton Abbey" and Professor Minerva McGonagall in the Harry Potter films. Sept. 27.

Hassan Nasrallah, 64. The Hezbollah leader who transformed the Lebanese militant group into a potent paramilitary and political force in the Middle East. Sept. 27. Killed in an Israeli airstrike.

Kris Kristofferson, 88. A Rhodes scholar with a deft writing style and rough charisma who became a country music superstar and an A-list Hollywood actor. Sept. 28.

Drake Hogestyn, 70. The "Days of Our Lives" star appeared on the show for 38 years. Sept. 28.

Pete Rose, 83. Baseball's career hits leader and fallen idol who undermined his historic achievements and Hall of Fame dreams by gambling on the game he loved and once embodied. Sept. 30.

Dikembe Mutombo, 58. A Basketball Hall of Famer who was one of the best defensive players in NBA history and a longtime global ambassador for the game. Sept. 30. Brain cancer.

Gavin Creel, 48. A Broadway musical theater veteran who won a Tony Award for "Hello, Dolly!" opposite

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Bette Midler and earned nominations for "Hair" and "Thoroughly Modern Millie." Sept. 30. Cancer.

Humberto Ortega, 77. The Nicaraguan guerrilla fighter and a Sandinista defense minister who later in life became a critic of his older brother President Daniel Ortega. Sept. 30.

Ken Page, 70. A stage and screen actor who starred alongside Beyoncé in "Dreamgirls," introduced Broadway audiences to Old Deuteronomy in "Cats" and scared generations of kids as the voice of Oogie Boogie, the villain of the 1993 animated holiday film "The Nightmare Before Christmas." Sept. 30.

## OCTOBER

Megan Marshack, 70. An aide to Nelson Rockefeller who was with the former New York governor and vice president when he died under circumstances that spurred intense speculation. Oct. 2.

Mimis Plessas, 99. A beloved Greek composer whose music was featured in scores of films, television shows and theatrical productions and who provided the soundtrack to millions of Greeks' lives. Oct. 5.

Cissy Houston, 91. A two-time Grammy-winning soul and gospel artist who sang with Aretha Franklin, Elvis Presley and other stars and knew triumph and heartbreak as the mother of singer Whitney Houston. Oct. 7.

Tim Johnson, 77. The former U.S. senator was the last Democrat to hold statewide office in South Dakota and was adept at securing federal funding for projects back home during his nearly three decades in Washington. Oct. 8.

Ratan Tata, 86. One of India's most influential business leaders, the veteran industrialist was former chairman of the \$100 billion conglomerate Tata Group. Oct. 9.

Leif Segerstam, 80. The prolific Finnish conductor and composer was one of the most colorful personalities in the Nordic country's classical music scene. Oct. 9.

Ethel Kennedy, 96. The wife of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy raised their 11 children after he was assassinated and remained dedicated to social causes and the family's legacy for decades thereafter. Oct. 10.

Lilly Ledbetter, 86. A former Alabama factory manager whose lawsuit against her employer made her an icon of the equal pay movement and led to landmark wage discrimination legislation. Oct. 12.

Philip G. Zimbardo, 91. The psychologist behind the controversial "Stanford Prison Experiment" that was intended to examine the psychological experiences of imprisonment. Oct. 14.

Liam Payne, 31. A former One Direction singer whose chart-topping British boy band generated a global following of swooning fans. Oct. 16. Died after falling from a hotel balcony.

Yahya Sinwar, 61. The Hamas leader who masterminded the surprise Oct. 7, 2023, attack into southern Israel that shocked the world and triggered the longest, deadliest and most destructive war in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Oct. 16. Killed by Israeli forces in Gaza.

Mitzi Gaynor, 93. The effervescent dancer and actor starred as Nellie Forbush in the 1958 film "South Pacific" and appeared in other musicals with Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly. Oct. 17.

Vasso Papandreou, 79. A trailblazing Greek politician who served as a government minister, European commissioner and leading advocate for women's representation in politics. Oct. 17.

Thelma Mothershed Wair, 83. One of nine Black students who integrated a high school in Arkansas' capital city of Little Rock in 1957 while a mob of white segregationists yelled threats and insults. Oct. 19.

Fethullah Gülen, 83. A reclusive U.S.-based Islamic cleric who inspired a global social movement while facing unproven accusations that he masterminded a failed 2016 coup in his native Turkey. Oct. 20.

Fernando Valenzuela, 63. The Mexican-born phenom for the Los Angeles Dodgers who inspired "Fernandomania" while winning the NL Cy Young Award and Rookie of the Year in 1981. Oct. 22.

The Rev. Gustavo Gutiérrez, 96. The Peruvian theologian was the father of the social justice-centered liberation theology that the Vatican once criticized for its Marxist undercurrents. Oct. 22.

Phil Lesh, 84. A classically trained violinist and jazz trumpeter who found his true calling by reinventing the role of rock bass guitar as a founding member of the Grateful Dead. Oct. 25.

Teri Garr, 79. The quirky comedy actor rose from background dancer in Elvis Presley movies to co-star in such favorites as "Young Frankenstein" and "Tootsie." Oct. 29. Multiple sclerosis.

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Colm McLoughlin, 81. An Irishman who landed in the deserts of the United Arab Emirates and helped lead Dubai Duty Free into becoming an airport retail behemoth generating billions of dollars. Oct. 30.

## NOVEMBER

Quincy Jones, 91. The multi-talented music titan whose vast legacy ranged from producing Michael Jackson's historic "Thriller" album to writing prize-winning film and television scores and collaborating with Frank Sinatra, Ray Charles and hundreds of other recording artists. Nov. 3.

Bernard "Bernie" Marcus, 95. The co-founder of The Home Depot, a billionaire philanthropist, and a big Republican donor. Nov. 4.

Murray Sinclair, 73. A former First Nation judge, senator and chair of the commission that delved into Canada's troubled history of residential schools for First Nations students. Nov. 4.

Elwood Edwards, 74. He voiced America Online's ever-present "You've got mail" greeting. Nov. 5.

Tony Todd, 69. An actor known for his haunting portrayal of a killer in the horror film "Candyman" and for roles in many other films and television shows. Nov. 6.

Bobby Allison, 86. He was founder of racing's "Alabama Gang" and a NASCAR Hall of Famer. Nov. 9.

Reg Murphy, 90. A renowned journalist whose newsgathering career included stints as an editor and top executive at newspapers in Atlanta, San Francisco and Baltimore — and who found himself the subject of national headlines when he survived a politically motivated kidnapping. Nov. 9.

Vardis J. Vardinoyannis, 90. A powerful and pivotal figure in Greek shipping and energy who survived a terrorist attack and cultivated close ties with the Kennedy family. Nov. 12.

Timothy West, 90. A British actor who played the classic Shakespeare roles of King Lear and Macbeth and who in recent years along with his wife, Prunella Scales, enchanted millions of people with their boating exploits on Britain's waterways. Nov. 12.

Song Jae-lim, 39. A South Korean actor known for his roles in K-dramas "Moon Embracing the Sun" and "Queen Woo." Nov. 12.

Shuntaro Tanikawa, 92. He pioneered modern Japanese poetry — poignant but conversational in its divergence from haiku and other traditions. Nov. 13.

Bela Karolyi, 82. The charismatic, if polarizing, gymnastics coach turned young women into champions and the United States into an international power in the sport. Nov. 15.

Olav Thon, 101. A billionaire entrepreneur recognizable for his bright red cap who went from selling leather and fox hides in his youth to building one of Norway's biggest real estate empires. Nov. 16.

Arthur Frommer, 95. His "Europe on 5 Dollars a Day" guidebooks revolutionized leisure travel by convincing average Americans to take budget vacations abroad. Nov. 18.

Alice Brock, 83. Her Massachusetts-based eatery helped inspire Arlo Guthrie's deadpan Thanksgiving standard, "Alice's Restaurant Massacre." Nov. 21.

Fred Harris, 94. A former U.S. senator from Oklahoma, presidential hopeful and populist who championed Democratic Party reforms in the turbulent 1960s. Nov. 23.

Chuck Woolery, 83. The affable, smooth-talking game show host of "Wheel of Fortune," "Love Connection" and "Scrabble" who later became a right-wing podcaster, skewering liberals and accusing the government of lying about COVID-19. Nov. 23.

Barbara Taylor Bradford, 91. A British journalist who became a publishing sensation in her 40s with the saga "A Woman of Substance" and wrote more than a dozen other novels that sold tens of millions of copies. Nov. 24.

Mary McGee, 87. A female racing pioneer and subject profiled in the Oscar-contending documentary "Motorcycle Mary." Nov. 27.

Prince Johnson, 72. The Liberian former warlord and senator whose brutal tactics shocked the world. Nov. 28.

Ananda Krishnan, 86. One of Malaysia's richest tycoons with a vast business empire including telecommunications, media, petroleum and real estate. Nov. 28.

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Lou Carnesecca, 99. The excitable St. John's coach whose outlandish sweaters became an emblem of his team's rousing Final Four run in 1985 and who was a treasured figure in New York sports. Nov. 30.

## 2024 in pop culture: In a bruising year, we sought out fantasy, escapism — and cute little animals

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — I'll get you, my pretty! And your little pygmy hippo, too!

Forgive us the shameless attempt to link the fantasy hit "Wicked" to the delightful Moo Deng. But, hear us out — there's something the two have in common as the year draws to a close. Escapism. Whether we found it on the yellow brick road, or in videos from a Thailand zoo, or perhaps in unlikely Olympic heroes, we gravitated toward fantasy and feel-good pop culture moments this year.

There were new trends, as always. "Brat summer" became a thing, as did "demure, mindful." And for some inexplicable reason, we became obsessed with celebrity lookalike contests.

There were breakups — Bennifer is, again, a thing of the past — and reunions: Oasis, please try to stay together for the tour. And some things stayed, remarkably, the same: Taylor Swift and Beyoncé kept on breaking records and making history.

So, after a year where much changed but some things held steady, here's our annual, very selective trip down pop culture memory lane:

January

It starts as a cheery tweet from a beloved "Sesame Street" figure: "ELMO is just checking in! How is everybody doing?" The answers hint at something deeper and more worrisome. "Not great, Elmo. Not great," says one milder reply. Doing much better is the viral phenomenon called "BARBENHEIMER," which makes its awards season debut at the GOLDEN GLOBES. But perhaps the most poignant moment comes from neither film: LILY GLADSTONE, first Indigenous winner of best actress in a drama for "Killers of the Flower Moon," begins her remarks in the language of her tribe, Blackfeet Nation.

February

Valentine's Day — a perfect time to settle into a sweet love saga via TikTok. Only that's not quite what we get with "Who TF Did I Marry?," REESA TEESA's depressing, fascinating, 50-part account of her disastrous marriage with a man who lied about absolutely everything. Meanwhile, if you're looking for a single week that encapsulates peak SWIFT cultural dominance, try this: she begins with the Grammys in Los Angeles (becoming the first artist to win album of the year four times AND announcing a new album), then heads to Tokyo for four tour dates, then jets back just in time for the Super Bowl in Las Vegas — where she shares a passionate smooch with boyfriend TRAVIS KELCE on the field of victory.

March

"What was I made for?" BILLIE EILISH sings at the OSCARS, channeling BARBIE. And what was KEN made for? Not entirely clear — but it's clear RYAN GOSLING was made to play him. His singalong version of "I'm Just Ken" is one of the most entertaining Oscar musical moments in years. Still, Christopher Nolan's "OPPENHEIMER" prevails, a rare case of the top prize going to a blockbuster studio film. Will it happen again in 2025? CYNTHIA ERIVO and ARIANA GRANDE sure hope so; as presenters, they make a sly reference to their upcoming juggernaut, "WICKED." Speaking of marketing, people are obsessed with that bizarre "DUNE" popcorn bucket. And BEYONCÉ carves her space in country music with "Act II: Cowboy Carter," which will make her the first Black woman to top the Billboard country chart.

April

Tennis, anyone? The game's been around for centuries, but it's having a cultural moment right now, helped mightily by "CHALLENGERS," the sweaty romance triangle starring ZENDAYA, MIKE FAIST and JOSH O'CONNOR (40-love? More like 40-sex.) Elsewhere, a new era dawns: At midnight, SWIFT drops "THE TORTURED POET'S DEPARTMENT," then drops another 15 songs two hours later. The fascinating and disturbing "BABY REINDEER," the story of a struggling comedian's extended encounter with a stalker, debuts on Netflix.

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May

It's MET GALA time — or as it's known in 2024, another early marketing moment for "WICKED." ERIVO and GRANDE make fashion waves on the carpet and then musical ones at dinner, with a soulful performance of "When You Believe." If the "Wicked" tour is in full force, another one stops in its tracks: JENNIFER LOPEZ cancels her summer tour amid reports of both poor ticket sales and trouble in her marriage to BEN AFFLECK. It's been an eventful year for J.Lo, who's released an album and movie called "THIS IS ME ... NOW" — both reflections on her renewed love with Affleck.

June

Welcome to BRAT SUMMER! CHARLI XCX releases her hit "Brat" album, with its lime green cover, and launches a thousand memes. Collins Dictionary defines "brat," its word of the year, as "characterized by a confident, independent, and hedonistic attitude." At the celeb-heavy SWIFT shows in London, we see PRINCE WILLIAM shaking it off, which is either charming or cringe, you decide. Even better: KELCE dons a top hat and tux and performs for one night. At another stadium across the pond, METS infielder JOSE IGLESIAS delights the crowd with his cheery number "OMG."

July

Bonjour, it's OLYMPICS time! In Paris! An audacious opening ceremony along the Seine is punctuated by a fabulous CELINE DION, perched on the EIFFEL TOWER, singing her heart out — in the rain, too. Controversy swirls over a scene critics feel mocks Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" (organizers say it does not). Olympic stars are born — including French swimming superstar LEON MARCHAND, rugby player ILONA MAHER, and bespectacled "pommel horse guy" gymnast STEPHEN NEDOROSCIK, who nets two bronze medals and comparisons to Clark Kent. Also capturing hearts: yep, MOO DENG, born this month. Her name means "bouncy pork."

August

This is them ... now: BENNIFER is no more. After two decades, two engagements and two weddings, J.Lo files for divorce. One union dissolves, another returns: OASIS announces a reunion tour. Will they be "DEMURE, MINDFUL"? Everyone seems to want to get in on TikToker JOOLS LEBRON'S act — even the WHITE HOUSE press team. Back at the Olympics, in the new sport of breaking, we meet Australia's RAYGUN, arguably neither demure nor mindful with her "kangaroo" move. Cute animal alert: It's DECOY OHTANI's Major League debut! SHOHEI OHTANI's perky pooch does a great "first pitch."

September

One of the year's biggest breakout artists, CHAPPELL ROAN, withdraws from a music festival after speaking out about frightening fan interactions. And more on the price of fame: In an excruciating moment, "Bachelorette" JENN TRAN, the franchise's first Asian American lead, is forced to sit through a painful viewing of her proposal to her chosen suitor, after tearfully explaining how he'd later dumped her over the phone. Tran is keeping busy though — she's announced as part of the new "Dancing with the Stars" lineup. Also on the list: rugby player Maher, and Pommel Horse Guy! Also, ANNA SOROKIN, dancing with an ankle monitor. Online fandom, meanwhile, is shaken when X is temporarily suspended in Brazil and celebrity stan accounts post tearful farewells, revealing to many across the globe that their favorite accounts are run by Brazilians.

October

"Dune" Chalamets! "Wonka" Chalamets! Thousands gather in Manhattan for a TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET lookalike contest, and things really get interesting when Chalamet himself shows up. He doesn't enter the contest, though, and with his mustache, he may not even have won. The trend continues with contests for JEREMY ALLEN WHITE, ZAYN MALIK, and — in a very Washington version — Kennedy scion JACK SCHLOSSBERG, who's been gathering a following with some interesting social media posts. Turning to basketball, who's that dancing with USHER? Why it's ELLIE THE ELEPHANT, the now-viral NEW YORK LIBERTY mascot.

November

MAYA RUDOLPH does a pretty good KAMALA HARRIS laugh on "Saturday Night Live," but you know who does it better? HARRIS herself. The Democratic candidate makes a surprise cameo three days before



the U.S. presidential election, following in the footsteps of HILLARY CLINTON, SARAH PALIN and others. Elsewhere in television, Bravo announces that "VANDERPUMP RULES," the Emmy-nominated reality show that has lived through countless scandals, is entirely recasting its 12th season — apart from namesake LISA VANDERPUMP. As for MOO DENG, she doesn't have her own TV series yet, but our favorite pygmy hippo is generating plenty of merch. And THAT brings us back to ...

December

"WICKED"! Director JON M. CHU'S emerald-hued fantasy remains very very popular, to quote one of its buzzy show tunes, dancing through life and defying gravity at the multiplex. Moviegoers also come for "GLADIATOR II" and, in a veritable tidal wave, Disney's "MOANA 2," which beckons us back to the seas of Oceania. Once again, 2024 seems to be telling us: Give people some whimsy, a place to escape, maybe some catchy tunes — and no one knows how far they'll go.

## Trump says he'll attend Notre Dame Cathedral reopening celebration in Paris this weekend

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump will attend the reopening celebration for Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris this weekend, his first foreign trip since the election.

The cathedral is set to reopen Saturday after more than five years of reconstruction following a devastating fire in 2019 that engulfed and nearly destroyed the soaring Paris landmark. The ceremonies being held Saturday and Sunday will be high-security affairs, with about 50 heads of state and government expected to attend.

Trump announced that he will be among them in a post on his Truth Social site Monday evening.

"It is an honor to announce that I will be traveling to Paris, France, on Saturday to attend the re-opening of the Magnificent and Historic Notre Dame Cathedral, which has been fully restored after a devastating fire five years ago," he wrote. "President Emmanuel Macron has done a wonderful job ensuring that Notre Dame has been restored to its full level of glory, and even more so. It will be a very special day for all!"

The trip will be Trump's first abroad since he won November's presidential election. He traveled to Scotland and Ireland in May 2023, as a candidate, to visit his local golf courses.

Trump was president in 2019 when a massive fire engulfed Notre Dame, collapsing its spire and threatening to destroy one of the world's greatest architectural treasures, known for its mesmerizing stained glass.

Trump watched the inferno in horror, along with the rest of the world.

"So horrible to watch the massive fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris," he wrote on what was then named Twitter, offering his advice to the city.

"Perhaps flying water tankers could be used to put it out. Must act quickly!" he wrote.

French officials appeared to respond shortly after, noting that "All means" were being used to extinguish the flames, "except for water-bombing aircrafts which, if used, could lead to the collapse of the entire structure of the cathedral."

Trump also spoke with Macron and Pope Francis at the time to offer his condolences and said he had offered them "the help of our great experts on renovation and construction."

Trump and Macron have had a complicated relationship.

During Trump's first term in office, Macron proved to be among the world leaders most adept at managing the American president's whims as he tried to develop a personal connection built in no small part on flattery.

Macron was the guest of honor at Trump's first state dinner and Trump traveled to France several times. But the relationship soured as Trump's term progressed and Macron criticized him for questioning the need for NATO and raising doubts about America's commitment to the mutual-defense pact.

As he ran for a second term this year, Trump often mocked Macron on the campaign trail, imitating his accent and threatening to impose steep tariffs on wine and champagne bottles shipped to the U.S. if France tried to tax American companies.

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After Trump won another term last month, Macron rushed to win favor with the president-elect. He was among the first global leaders to congratulate Trump — even before The Associated Press called the race in his favor — and beat UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer to the punch in delivering a congratulatory phone call.

“Congratulations, President @realDonaldTrump,” Macron posted on X early on Nov 6. “Ready to work together as we did for four years. With your convictions and mine. With respect and ambition. For more peace and prosperity.”

Macron and other European leaders are trying to persuade Trump not to abandon America’s support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia’s nearly three-year invasion. European leaders hope to convince Trump that a victory by Russia would be viewed as a defeat for the U.S. — and for the incoming president, by extension — hoping to sell him on the need to pursue an end to the war more favorable to Kyiv than he might otherwise seek.

Trump over the weekend announced that he intends to nominate real estate developer Charles Kushner, the father of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, to serve as ambassador to France. The elder Kushner was pardoned by Trump in December 2020 after pleading guilty years earlier to tax evasion and making illegal campaign donations.

The reopening of Notre Dame will be an elaborate, multi-day celebration, beginning Saturday.

Paris Archbishop Laurent Ulrich will preside at a reopening service that afternoon, banging on Notre Dame’s shuttered doors with his staff to reopen them, according to the cathedral’s website.

The archbishop will also symbolically reawaken Notre Dame’s thunderous grand organ. The fire that melted the cathedral’s lead roofing coated the huge instrument in toxic dust. Its 8,000 pipes have been painstakingly disassembled, cleaned and retuned.

Macron will attend and address the VIP guests.

After the service, opera singers Pretty Yende, from South Africa, and Julie Fuchs, from France; Chinese pianist Lang Lang; Paris-born cellist Yo-Yo Ma; Benin-born singer Angelique Kidjo; Lebanese singer Hiba Tawaji and others will perform at a concert Saturday evening, according to the show’s broadcaster, France Télévisions.

On Sunday morning, the Paris archbishop will lead an inaugural Mass and consecration of the new altar.

Nearly 170 bishops from France and other countries will join the celebration, along with priests from all 106 parishes in the Paris diocese. The Mass will be followed by a “fraternal buffet” for the needy.

Ile de la Cité, where the cathedral sits in the middle of the River Seine, will be blocked off to tourists for the events. A public viewing area with room for 40,000 spectators will be set up along the Seine’s southern bank.

## Venezuelan migrants keep arriving in Colombia. These faith leaders offer them a home away from home

By MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

PALMIRA, Colombia (AP) — It’s been three years since Douarleyka Velásquez abandoned her career in human resources. Her new job is not what she had planned for, but still feels rewarding. As a cleaning supervisor at a migrant shelter in Colombia, she gets to comfort Venezuelans who, just like herself, fled their homes hoping for a better life.

“I feel that in here I can help my brothers, my countrymen who come and go,” said Velásquez, 47, from Pope Francis Migrant Shelter in Palmira, a city in southwestern Colombia.

The U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, estimates that more than 7.7 million Venezuelans have left their homeland since 2014, the largest exodus in Latin America’s recent history, with most settling in the Americas, from neighboring Colombia and Brazil to more distant Argentina and Canada.

According to the International Organization for Migration, Colombia hosts the highest population of migrants from Venezuela. Colombian records show that as of mid-2024, more than 2.8 million Venezuelans were in the country.

Pope Francis Migrant Shelter was founded in 2020 to address this phenomena, said the Rev. Arturo Ar-

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rieta, who oversees human rights initiatives in the Catholic Diocese of Palmira.

The city is mostly a transit point, Arrieta said. Migrants pass through on their way to the Darien Gap, a treacherous route to reach North America. A few others, who found it impossible to keep migrating or yearned for their past life, make a stop before heading back home.

"It's one of the few shelters en route," Arrieta said. "The international community has stopped financing places like this, thinking that it would discourage immigration, but that will never happen. On the contrary, this leaves migrants unprotected."

People reaching the shelter can stay up to five days, though exceptions can be made. Velásquez was welcomed to the team when she settled in Palmira, which was also the case of Karla Méndez, who works in the kitchen and said that cooking traditional Venezuelan meals for her compatriots brings her joy.

According to Arrieta, the shelter is mostly sought out by families, women traveling alone and the LGBTQ+ population. Food, clothing and spiritual counsel are provided to those in need; facilities include showers, a playground for children, and cages for pets.

Aside from this, the team provides information on human trafficking and support to women who have been abused and to children who travel unaccompanied.

"We have also encountered Venezuelan mothers who are looking for their relatives and are coming from or towards the Darien Gap in a never-ending search," Arrieta said. "Families are searching for loved ones who disappeared while migrating."

While no official records track the number of migrants who have vanished – in part because some of them traveled illegally – their disappearances have been acknowledged by human rights organizations and Colombian institutions.

"In recent years, we have found unidentified bodies whose clothing or belongings indicate that they are migrants," said Marcela Rodriguez, who works at a local missing-persons search unit.

Arrieta knows he can't protect every migrant from stepping into territories controlled by illegal armed groups. But he does his best to comfort migrants at the shelter.

"Our motto is that we are a caress from God," he said. "We want them to find an oasis here."

Velásquez, whose husband, two children and a grandson left Venezuela with her, said that leaving everything behind was tough, but her family now feels at home.

"I feel very proud of what I do," she said. "I always try to provide encouragement and tell people that all will work out wherever they go."

One floor up, 20-year-old Mariana Ariza faces a dilemma that many migrants share: Where to go next?

After leaving Venezuela in 2020, she arrived in Bogotá with her 2-year-old and became a sex worker to support her child.

"It's really hard to migrate and not being able to get a job," said Ariza, now a mother of two. "I would do anything for my children. I would never let them starve."

She's undecided about going back to Venezuela to reunite with her family or heading to Ecuador, to look for better opportunities.

"Some people tell me, 'You have that job because you don't know how to do anything,' but that's not true," Ariza said. "I learned a lot of things, but I haven't had the money or the opportunity to move ahead."

In Bogotá, where she initially arrived, the Rev. René Rey has spent decades supporting Colombian sex workers and LGBTQ+ people with HIV. In recent years his work has broadened to aid Venezuelan migrants.

He noticed an increased influx starting in 2017, when protests flared in Venezuela in reaction to an attempt by the government to strip the National Assembly of its powers.

"It was a strong wave," Rey said. "Many of them, who were sexually abused or were victims of human and labor trafficking, got here."

According to Rey, about half of the sex workers in Santa Fe – the neighborhood where he works in Colombia's capital – are Venezuelan, most of them between 21 and 24 years old.

The building where he teams up with a Catholic organization called Eudes Foundation to provide information on HIV and cook lunches for homeless people is known as "The Refuge." It's also a place of prayer, where locals and migrants converge and a few transgender Venezuelan sex workers have found a safe

space to practice their faith.

"We just tell them: 'God is around here, how are you? We would like to be friends,'" Rey said. "I think these honest encounters provoke something new, where the Holy Spirit really is."

Out of the three prayer groups that he oversees at The Refuge, one is led by Lía Roa, a Colombian transgender woman who became a seminarian before her transition and later struggled for acceptance within the Catholic Church.

Rey initially invited her to participate in activities inclusive of transgender people during Holy Week but later thought: What if she could have a bigger role in our community? So he took his proposal to the cardinal, and he enthusiastically supported it.

The group of half a dozen transgender sex workers – most of them from Venezuela – meet at The Refuge most Saturdays. First, they share a meal. Afterwards, they pray, meditate and talk.

"It's been a challenge because Santa Fe is like Mecca for trans women," Roa said. "They carry a rough past that has made them become invisible to the point that they lose their dignity as humans and daughters of God."

Members of her prayer group often recount that they migrated because they could not find safe spaces for them as trans women in Venezuela. And even if many of them are just passing through Bogotá before heading back home or toward the Darien Gap, Roa feels that their meetings at The Refuge are meaningful and build loving, truthful friendships.

"In their own words, this process becomes spiritual nourishment for their way forward," Roa said.

"They leave with a new vision, because once you've been told that God hates you because you are trans, hearing a priest and another trans telling you that God loves you just the way you are definitely makes a difference."

## **China bans exports to US of gallium, germanium, antimony in response to chip sanctions**

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — China announced Tuesday it is banning exports to the United States of gallium, germanium, antimony and other key high-tech materials with potential military applications, as a general principle, lashing back at U.S. limits on semiconductor-related exports.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry announced the move after the Washington expanded its list of Chinese companies subject to export controls on computer chip-making equipment, software and high-bandwidth memory chips. Such chips are needed for advanced applications.

The ratcheting up of trade restrictions comes as President-elect Donald Trump has been threatening to sharply raise tariffs on imports from China and other countries, potentially intensifying simmering tensions over trade and technology.

China's Foreign Ministry also issued a vehement reproof.

"China has lodged stern protests with the U.S. for its update of the semiconductor export control measures, sanctions against Chinese companies, and malicious suppression of China's technological progress," Lin Jian, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said in a routine briefing Tuesday.

"I want to reiterate that China firmly opposes the U.S. overstretching the concept of national security, abuse of export control measures, and illegal unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction against Chinese companies," Lin said.

The minerals sourced in China are used in computer chips, cars and other products

China said in July 2023 it would require exporters to apply for licenses to send to the U.S. the strategically important materials such as gallium and germanium. In August, the Chinese Commerce Ministry said it would restrict exports of antimony, which is used in a wide range of products from batteries to weapons, and impose tighter controls on exports of graphite.

Such minerals are considered critical for national security. China is a major producer of antimony, which is used in flame retardants, batteries, night-vision goggles and nuclear weapon production, according to

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a 2021 U.S. International Trade Commission report.

The limits announced by Beijing on Tuesday also include exports of super-hard materials, such as diamonds and other synthetic materials that are not compressible and extremely dense. They are used in many industrial areas such as cutting tools, disc brakes and protective coatings. The licensing requirements that China announced in August also covered smelting and separation technology and machinery and other items related to such super-hard materials.

China is the biggest global source of gallium and germanium, which are produced in small amounts but are needed to make computer chips for mobile phones, cars and other products, as well as solar panels and military technology.

China says it's protecting itself from US trade restrictions

After the U.S. side announced it was adding 140 companies to a so-called "entity list" subject to strict export controls, China's Commerce Ministry protested and said it would act to protect China's "rights and interests." Nearly all of the companies affected by Washington's latest trade restrictions are based in China, though some are Chinese-owned businesses in Japan, South Korea and Singapore.

Both governments say their respective export controls are needed for national security.

China's government has been frustrated by U.S. curbs on access to advanced processor chips and other technology on security grounds but had been cautious in retaliating, possibly to avoid disrupting China's fledgling developers of chips, artificial intelligence and other technology.

Various Chinese industry associations issued statements protesting the U.S. move to limit access to advanced chip-making technology.

The China Association of Automobile Manufacturers said it opposed using national security as a grounds for export controls, "abuse of export control measures, and the malicious blockade and suppression of China."

"Such behavior seriously violates the laws of the market economy and the principle of fair competition, undermines the international economic and trade order, disrupts the stability of the global industrial chain, and ultimately harms the interests of all countries," it said in a statement.

The China Semiconductor Industry Association issued a similar statement, adding that such restrictions were disrupting supply chains and inflating costs for American companies.

"U.S. chip products are no longer safe and reliable. China's related industries will have to be cautious in purchasing U.S. chips," it said.

The U.S. gets about half its supply of both gallium and germanium metals directly from China, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. China exported about 23 metric tons (25 tons) of gallium in 2022 and produces about 600 metric tons (660 tons) of germanium per year.

The U.S. has deposits of such minerals but has not been mining them, though some projects underway are exploring ways to tap those resources.

The export restrictions have had a mixed impact on prices for those critical minerals, with the price of antimony more than doubling this year to over \$25,000 per ton. Prices for gallium, germanium and graphite also have mostly risen.

## Today in History: December 4

### Terry Anderson freed after nearly seven years as hostage

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 4, the 339th day of 2024. There are 27 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 4, 1991, after being abducted and held for nearly seven years as a hostage by Hezbollah militants in Lebanon, Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson was released from captivity.

Also on this date:

In 1783, Gen. George Washington bade farewell to his Continental Army officers at Fraunces Tavern in New York.

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In 1956, Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins, dubbed the "Million Dollar Quartet," gathered for the first and only time for a jam session at Sun Records in Memphis.

In 1964, police arrested some 800 students at the University of California, Berkeley, one day after the students stormed the administration building and staged a massive sit-in.

In 1965, the United States launched Gemini 7 with Air Force Lt. Col. Frank Borman and Navy Cmdr. James A. Lovell aboard on a two-week mission. (While Gemini 7 was in orbit, its sister ship, Gemini 6A, was launched on Dec. 15 on a one-day mission; the two spacecraft were able to rendezvous within a foot of each other.)

In 1969, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark of the Black Panther Party were shot and killed during a raid by Chicago police.

In 1997, the NBA suspended Golden State Warriors guard Latrell Sprewell for one year after Sprewell attacked Warriors coach P.J. Carlesimo three days earlier.

In 2016, a North Carolina man armed with an assault rifle fired several shots inside Comet Ping Pong, a Washington, D.C., pizzeria, as he attempted to investigate an online conspiracy theory that prominent Democrats were harboring child sex slaves at the restaurant; no one was hurt, and the man surrendered to police. (He was later sentenced to four years in prison.)

In 2018, long lines of people wound through the Capitol Rotunda to view the casket of former President George H.W. Bush.

Today's Birthdays: Game show host Wink Martindale is 91. Actor-producer Max Baer Jr. is 87. Actor Gemma Jones is 82. Actor Jeff Bridges is 75. Actor Patricia Wettig is 73. Jazz singer Cassandra Wilson is 69. Basketball Hall of Famer Bernard King is 68. Baseball Hall of Famer Lee Smith is 67. Olympic pole vault gold medalist Sergey Bubka is 61. Actor Marisa Tomei is 60. Actor-comedian Fred Armisen is 58. Rapper Jay-Z is 55. Actor-model Tyra Banks is 51. Football Hall of Famer Joe Thomas is 40. Musician Jelly Roll is 40.