

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 1 of 65

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- GDILIVE Subvarsity Sponsor List](#)
- [4- Today's basketball game information](#)
- [5- Sarah Sippel Named to Southeast Tech President's List](#)
- [5- Outage in north part of Groton](#)
- [5- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [6- SD SearchLight: SD congressman drafts bill to authorize Trump's potential purchase of Panama Canal](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: Noem's former opponent heading back to Pierre as she prepares to leave](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: A few lessons to include while SD is force-feeding civics](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Trump huddles with U.S. Senate GOP but no agreement yet on big tax, immigration overhaul](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: U.S. House Dem, former police officers lambaste Trump's Jan. 6 pardon pledge](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Democrats say U.S. Senate Republicans rushing Burgum confirmation; Noem hearing scheduled](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Trump asks U.S. Supreme Court to suspend sentencing in New York hush money case](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Major legal brawl may decide what types of cars Americans can buy](#)
- [20- Weather Pages](#)
- [24- Daily Devotional](#)
- [25- Subscription Form](#)
- [26- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [27- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [28- News from the Associated Press](#)

Thursday, Jan. 9

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, peaches, garlic toast.

School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.

School Lunch: Sweet and sassy chicken, rice.

Girls Basketball hosts Clark/Willow Lake (C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow)

Groton Lions Club meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main

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



Friday, Jan. 10

Senior Menu: Breaded chicken on bun, oven roasted potatoes, peas and carrots, honey fruit salad.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Soup and sandwich.

Boys Basketball at Clark (JH in Field House - 8th at 4 p.m., 7th at 5 p.m.; C at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m., varsity to follow)

Girls Wrestling at Miller, 4 p.m.

Silver Skates costumer handout, 4-7 p.m., Emmanuel Lutheran

Saturday, Jan. 11

Boys JV Wrestling at Madison, 9 p.m.

Boys Varsity at Garretson, 9:30 a.m.

Girls Varsity Wrestling at Lyman, 10 a.m.

Basketball Double Header hosts Lennox ((Boys C/ Girls JV at 1 p.m.; Boys JV/Girls C at 2:15 p.m.; Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

© 2025 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 2 of 65

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.

Fires in LA

At least five people are dead, and more than 1,000 buildings were destroyed as several wildfires burned in Los Angeles County yesterday amid record-strong winds. The coastal Pacific Palisades saw restaurants, a library, schools, and more go up in flames as tens of thousands evacuated, many of whom were forced to leave their cars on the highway. Over 300,000 customers were without power.

The largest of the blazes, the Palisades Fire, has burned over 15,000 acres with zero containment as of this writing. Inland northerly breezes, known as Santa Ana winds, blew over the mountains to the coast at speeds as high as 100 mph, accelerating the flames through dry brush and forest. Farther north and east, the Hurst and Eaton Fires grew to over 2,500 and 500 acres, respectively, while two more blazes were sparked late Wednesday.

LA officials sought help from nearby counties and states amid the fires' rapid pace and intensity, with reports of million-gallon fire hydrant wells running dry repeatedly.

Greenland's Future

Denmark's foreign minister said yesterday Greenland could pursue independence from Danish control if desired, but the world's biggest island is unlikely to join the US. The minister's comments came as President-elect Donald Trump has repeatedly expressed interest in acquiring the mineral-rich territory, declining to rule out potential military or economic action.

Greenland has been a part of Denmark for 600 years, though the Arctic island has been gradually moving toward greater autonomy, achieving self-rule status in 2009. Greenland's strategic significance is partly due to its mineral, oil, and gas resources. The island's location between Russia, Europe, and the US is also advantageous for defense and trade purposes, including being home to the northernmost US military base.

In related news, Denmark's king updated the country's royal coat of arms as a symbolic response to Trump's attempts to purchase Greenland. The update includes removing a panel of crowns and enlarging a polar bear and ram to represent the importance of Greenland and the Faroe Islands, respectively.

College Football Playoff

The semifinals of the College Football Playoff begin tonight, with No. 7 Notre Dame taking on No. 6 Penn State in the Orange Bowl (7:30 pm ET, ESPN). The winner will face either No. 5 Texas or No. 8 Ohio State, who meet tomorrow night (7:30 pm ET, ESPN) in the Cotton Bowl. All four programs are in the top seven in terms of all-time wins.

Notre Dame, led by third-year coach Marcus Freeman, rides a 12-game winning streak into the matchup after a second-week upset against Northern Illinois. Penn State, entering as a slight 1.5-point underdog, features 1,000-yard rusher Kaytron Allen and Mackey Award-winning tight end Tyler Warren. Each program is chasing its first title since the 1980s (Notre Dame, 1988; Penn State, 1986).

Ohio State enters tomorrow's game, having beaten No. 9 Tennessee and No. 1 Oregon by an average of 23 points each. Texas, led by QB Quinn Ewers, beat No. 4 Arizona State in double overtime to advance.

The championship game will be held Monday, Jan. 20, in Atlanta.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 3 of 65

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Olivia Rodrigo, Luke Combs, and Tyler, the Creator among headliners tapped for 2025 Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival in Manchester, Tennessee (June 12-15); see full lineup.

NHL postpones Los Angeles Kings' game due to wildfires; NFL officials monitoring fire ahead of Monday's NFC wild-card matchup.

"Wicked" and "Shogun" lead 2025 Screen Actors Guild Awards nominations with five apiece.

Critics Choice Awards rescheduled for Jan. 26 due to Los Angeles wildfires.

Mark Hamill, Eugene Levy, and James Woods among Hollywood stars whose homes were impacted by fires.

Science & Technology

Researchers discover two exceptionally well-preserved, 430-million-year-old mollusk fossils with intricate spike structures; scientists name species "punk" and "emo".

AI-powered analysis determines the best time to begin hormonal injections into eggs during the in-vitro fertilization process, leading to increased yield of mature eggs. The technique that may one day replace IVF.

First large-scale assessment of its type finds roughly 25% of the world's freshwater animals are vulnerable to or at risk of extinction; such ecosystems make up 1% of the Earth's surface but support 10% of its animal populations.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.2%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq -0.1%) after Federal Reserve's meeting minutes from December show officials support gradual pace of interest rate cuts.

EBay shares close up nearly 10% to highest level since November 2021 after Meta says it will allow some eBay listings to appear on Facebook Marketplace.

Quantum computing stocks, including Rigetti (-45%) and IonQ (-30%), plunge as Nvidia CEO says useful applications of the tech is 15-30 years away.

OpenAI's Sam Altman denies sexual abuse accusations from his sister, Ann, who filed a lawsuit this week alleging he abused her regularly from 1997 to 2006.

Politics & World Affairs

Justice Department to release report related to President-elect Donald Trump's 2020 election interference case, will withhold information on classified documents case.

CIA releases documents from 1968 to 1983 showing past surveillance of Latino civil rights groups.

Southern US braces for first major snow storm in years, beginning today through the weekend; weather warnings and advisories stretch across 10 states from Texas to Tennessee.

Former President Jimmy Carter's funeral to be held today in Washington, DC, concluding three days of services; Carter died last week at age 100.

GDILIVE.COM



Groton Area
Tigers

Text Paul at
605-397-7460

Any interest in any of
these basketball games on
GDILIVE.COM?
They are \$25 each.

Girls Clark/Willow Lake JV

Boys Clark/Willow Lake JV

Boys Lennox C

Boys Lennox JV

Girls Lennox JV

Girls Lennox C

Boys Tiospa Zina JV

Girls Tiospa Zina JV

Boys Dakota Valley JV

Girls Northwestern JV

Girls Milbank C

Girls Milbank JV

Boys Milbank C

Boys Milbank JV

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 4 of 65



GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT 06-6

MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

P.O. Box 410
502 North 2nd Street
Groton, SD 57445
Fax: (605) 397-8453

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 410
810 North 1st Street
Groton, SD 57445
Fax: (605) 397-2344

Groton Area School Board

Grant Rix, President
Nick Strom, VP
Debra Gengerke
Martin Weismantel
Tigh Flihs
Travis Harder
Dr. Heather Lerseth-Flihs,
DVM

Superintendent

Joseph J. Schwan
(605) 397-2351 ext. 1003
Joe.Schwan@k12.sd.us

High School Principal

Shelby Edwards
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1004
Shelby.Edwards@k12.sd.us

Elementary Principal

Brett Schwan
(605) 397-2317
Brett.Schwan@k12.sd.us

Business Manager

Becky Hubsch
(605) 397-2351 ext. 1008
Becky.Hubsch@k12.sd.us

Athletic Director

Alexa Schuring
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1068
Alexa.Schuring@k12.sd.us

Opportunity Coordinator

Jodi Schwan
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1015
Jodi.Schwan@k12.sd.us

K-12 School Counselor

Emily Neely
(605) 397-2317
Emily.VanGerpen@k12.sd.us

Technology Coordinator

Aaron Helvig
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1025
Aaron.Helvig@k12.sd.us

Girls Basketball Game

Clark/Willow Lake @ Groton Area
Thursday, January 9th, 2025

Game Times/Locations: Main Court in Arena

- 5:00 PM CT → Girls C
- 6:00 PM CT → Girls JV
- 7:30 PM CT → Girls Varsity

Prior to the Girls Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.

ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$5.00 Students: \$4.00.

CONCESSIONS: Will be available

LOCKER ROOM: Clark/Willow Lake will use the far back locker room down the JH Locker Room Hallway.

Team Benches – Groton: South Bench
Clark/Willow Lake: North Bench

ATHLETIC TRAINER: There will be an athletic trainer on site. AED is located near the ticket booth.

Livestream: www.GDlive.com or [Groton High School | High School Sports | Home | Hudl](#)

C Game Officials: Kasey Kurtz, Kristi Zoellner, Quintin Biermann

C Game Shot Clock: Joe Schwan

JV/Varsity Officials: Kris Frericks, Daren Lorenz, Jordon Moench

Announcer: Mike Imrie

C/JV/V Scoreboard: Kristen Dolan

C/JV/V Official Book: Alexa Schuring

Shot Clock Operator: Kristi Zoellner

National Anthem: Groton HS Pep Band, under the direction of Desiree Yeigh

Groton Area's HOSA Chapter will be selling Cold Stone Ice Cream at the game as well!

Thank you,
Alexa Schuring, Athletic Director

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 5 of 65

Sarah Sippel Named to Southeast Tech President's List

SIOUX FALLS, SD (01/08/2025)-- Sarah Sippel of Groton was named to the Southeast Technical College President's List for the fall 2024 semester. To be named to the President's List, students must be seeking a degree and have a semester GPA of 3.5 or higher.

Sippel is enrolled in STC's Surgical Technology program.

Outage in north part of Groton

The north part of Groton experienced a power outage Wednesday morning when an insulator came off of a crossarm pin which then created a short. The breakers tripped in the substation. Once the repairs were done, the breakers were closed in again and power was restored.

Coming up on GDILIVE.COM

Groton Area
Tigers



Thursday, Jan. 9

Clark/Willow Lake
at Groton

5:00 Girls C

Sponsored by
Locke Electric

6:00 Girls JV

Sponsored by

Weber Landscaping

7:15 Girls Varsity Game

\$5 ticket or

GDI Subscription

required to watch the games.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

SD congressman drafts bill to authorize Trump's potential purchase of Panama Canal

BY: SETH TUPPER - JANUARY 8, 2025 9:08 PM

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, said Wednesday he will introduce legislation that would authorize President-elect Donald Trump to purchase the Panama Canal "if he can get a good deal."

"I don't know if it's a good idea or not," Johnson said, "but I do know I want to give President Trump the flexibility he needs to examine it."

Those comments came during a Wednesday evening tele-town hall with constituents. Earlier in the day, Johnson spoke about the idea on Fox News. He will introduce the bill Friday, he said, ahead of a dinner he plans to attend Sunday with the president-elect and other guests at Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club in Florida.

Trump said Tuesday during a press conference that he would not rule out using military force to take control of the canal.

The United States built the Panama

Canal in the early 1900s. In 1977, in response to Panamanian demands for control of the canal, then-President Jimmy Carter signed treaties that led to a full transfer in 1999.

Carter gave a speech at the time saying the agreements would convert Panama from a "passive and sometimes deeply resentful bystander into an active and interested partner," and would lead to "cooperation and not confrontation" between the U.S. and Panama.

A company in Hong Kong, CK Hutchison Holdings, currently operates seaports on each side of the canal. Hong Kong is a former British Colony that has maintained a separate government and economic system since being handed over to China in 1997.

Fears have risen about China's potentially growing influence over the canal as China has exerted more influence over Hong Kong in recent years.

Johnson said that's a problem for the United States, which sends 40% of its ocean shipping container traffic through the canal.

"Donald Trump wants to kill the trade deficit," Johnson said. "We can't do that if we can't count on the Panama Canal."

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.



U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, speaks with students on May 19, 2023, in Sioux Falls. (Joshua Haiar/SD Searchlight)

Noem's former opponent heading back to Pierre as she prepares to leave

Smith says outnumbered Democrats will be 'playing defense'

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 8, 2025 6:18 PM

SIOUX FALLS — Three years ago, Kristi Noem kept her job in Pierre, and Jamie Smith left. Now the situation is reversed.

Kind of like Smith predicted. "Everyone knew she had national ambitions," he said Wednesday.

Smith, a Democrat, gave up his legislative seat in 2022 and ran against Noem, a Republican, who wound up winning a second term as governor.

Now Noem is preparing to leave South Dakota for Washington, D.C., where she is nominated to serve as secretary of Homeland Security under President-elect Donald Trump. Her nomination hearing is scheduled for next Wednesday.

Smith, meanwhile, won a state Senate seat in a Sioux Falls district during November's election. He'll go back to Pierre on Tuesday for the start of the annual legislative session, where he'll serve as Senate assistant minority leader.

Addressing members of Change Agents at a Sioux Falls library, Smith acknowledged the challenges he and the other Democrats face in the Legislature. They're outnumbered 96-9 by Republicans.

"We are very limited in what we can do this year, with the number of Democrats that we have in the Legislature," Smith said. "We are essentially left playing defense."

Members of Change Agents, formed in 2021, say they support pragmatic candidates and oppose extremist rhetoric and policies. Founders include former Sioux Falls Mayor Rick Knobe, financial planner Mike Huber and entrepreneur Craig Brown.

After the meeting, Smith told South Dakota Searchlight why he came back to politics.

"Because I truly believe that I have the skills to try and help people," he said. "I do believe that one person can make a difference for the people of South Dakota."

Smith said finding ways to build relationships across the aisle will be crucial for Democrats this session, like the one he said he built with incoming Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, based partly on a simple starting point.

"We share a birthday," Smith said.

Outlining his priorities, Smith said he plans to introduce a bill that would end incarceration for drug ingestion in South Dakota. South Dakota's ingestion law is the only one in the nation that allows prosecutors to charge people with felony drug possession for a failed drug test.



State Senator-elect Jamie Smith, D-Sioux Falls, left, talks with Craig Margulies on Jan. 8, 2025, at the Caille Branch library in Sioux Falls. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

Instead, he advocates for expanding treatment programs and diversion efforts, calling incarceration for ingestion punitive and ineffective.

Smith also addressed his desire to amend the state's abortion ban, his opposition to Noem's \$4 million proposal to fund private and homeschool education, and his resistance to raising sales taxes as a means of lowering property taxes.

South Dakota's near-total abortion ban allows an exception only to save the life of the mother and lacks clear definitions, said Smith, who called the ban "cruel and unusual."

"We need to stop it," he said.

Smith said women's health care is a top priority for Democrats, but they don't currently have a bill to increase access to abortion. He said some members want to introduce bills to expand exceptions beyond the life of the mother, while others are arguing for a broader abortion access ballot measure. Voters rejected an abortion-rights measure in November.

Smith also criticized a proposal from some Republicans to reduce property taxes by increasing sales taxes, calling it a potentially unfair shift that could disproportionately impact low-income people.

Smith attacked Noem's \$4 million plan for education savings accounts, calling it a voucher program that would divert public dollars to private schools and homeschoolers. Smith said the program would lack accountability, because alternative schools and homeschoolers are not required to follow the same transparency, testing and other standards as public schools.

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.

COMMENTARY

A few lessons to include while SD is force-feeding civics

by Dana Hess

It seems that South Dakotans are going to be good citizens ... or else. There are plenty of efforts to get us all to learn about civics: new social studies standards for the public schools, plans for a Civic Engagement Center at Black Hills State University and even new college course requirements.

One thing about being a journalist is that, like it or not, civic engagement is part of the job. Because of my job, I have been to more than my share of public meetings. Over the years I've learned some lessons that should be included in any sort of civics curriculum.

1. Keep your eyes and ears open.

As a reporter, I was from the Jack Webb, just the facts ma'am, school of writing. That meant avoiding too much capitalization or the overuse of certain punctuation marks. I mention that so you'll know I mean it when I say that good citizenship starts with PAYING ATTENTION!

As a reporter and editor, I saw this scenario play out too many times: A city, school or county would



The South Dakota Capitol is reflected in Capitol Lake. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 9 of 65

have a big project that depended on more tax dollars and a vote of the people. They dutifully held multiple public meetings to discuss the options and provide their reasoning for the project. Of course someone — sometimes me — would have to cover those meetings for the newspaper.

Essentially that meant finding a different way to write the same meeting story three or four times. Then, when the public hearings were done, at its next meeting the council would get ready to vote. After all that outlay of public information, after all those news stories, there was always one person who would stand up at the meeting and say, "Now hold on. Where did all this come from? You can't just spend that much money without discussing it with the people. We need public meetings. We need to get something in the newspaper."

Good citizenship relies on doing something on your part to stay informed. Read the newspaper. Follow local government on Facebook. Talk to your neighbors. Do something. Just don't be that bewildered guy who's surprised when the county starts talking about raising his taxes.

2. Never underestimate the power of the purse strings.

The Civic Engagement Center at Black Hills State University was rejected in two different legislative sessions. Sure, the votes were close, but it's likely some legislators were put off by their colleagues who seemed to want students to be more patriotic, even if they had to beat it into them. When some of them talked about the project, it seemed less like a Civic Engagement Center and more of a propaganda machine extolling the virtues of America.

Despite its rejection by lawmakers, the Joint Committee on Appropriations slipped Black Hills State University almost \$1 million for the creation of the center. The votes in the House and Senate didn't seem to matter. Now there's a civics lesson. And how do we know about all this? Because a South Dakota Searchlight reporter was at the committee hearing PAYING ATTENTION. It's not uncommon for these lessons to be connected.

3. There's no power like executive power.

Sometimes there are civics lessons in the implementation of the very things that are supposed to be teaching us about civics. A case in point is the K-12 social studies standards set to be implemented next year. Those standards traveled a rocky road.

The first 40-member work group didn't pan out, so Gov. Kristi Noem appointed a different 15-member group including a facilitator from that darling of conservatives, Hillsdale College in Michigan. The standards the new work group put together were the subject of four public hearings across the state and nearly 1,300 public comments. An estimate by South Dakota Searchlight said roughly 80% of the comments were opposed to the changes.

So much negativity didn't stop the South Dakota Board of Education Standards — a group appointed by the governor — from approving the new standards on a vote of 5-2. Right after the vote, Noem and state Department of Education Secretary Joseph Graves issued a news release saying how happy they were with the new standards. The lesson here: It's good to be the governor.

4. We need to handle our civics with a little more civility.

Any sort of civics curriculum, in the public schools or the universities, should include a few lessons about the importance of good manners in civic affairs. Too often our public meetings, particularly on hot-button issues, can lack decorum. When the subject is banning library books or protecting property rights or investigating election integrity, emotions can run high and voices can get loud.

For an example of the right way to conduct a meeting, look no further than the committee hearings in the Legislature. Everyone gets a chance to speak, sometimes multiple times, but they do so with respect for the committee chair and the process.

Check that out while you can, because the budget cuts Noem has proposed have placed in jeopardy South Dakota Public Broadcasting's ability to provide those committee hearings on the internet. If that comes to pass, it will amount to a civics lesson that the state of South Dakota has failed.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Trump huddles with U.S. Senate GOP but no agreement yet on big tax, immigration overhaul

Thune declines to say whether senators convinced Trump to support two-bill strategy

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 8, 2025 9:22 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans and President-elect Donald Trump met behind closed doors Wednesday evening to plot how to enact sweeping changes to immigration, energy and tax policy, though they didn't appear to make significant progress.

Republicans want to use the complicated budget reconciliation process to approve legislation without relying on Democrats for votes in the Senate, where a 60-vote legislative filibuster typically forces bipartisanship. But the GOP has yet to agree on whether their proposals should move in one large package or two bills, a necessary decision to begin the multistep undertaking.

Leaders also haven't figured out exactly what changes to make, an endeavor that will likely require months of talks between centrist and far-right members of the party, nearly all of whom need to support the final version if it's going to get through Congress.

Trump said after the meeting there is "great unity" among Republicans, despite strong differences of opinion between the House and Senate about whether to try to pass all of the policies in one bill or break them up into two packages.

"Whether it's one bill or two bills, it's going to get done one way or another. I think there's a lot of talk about two and there's a lot of talk about one, but it doesn't matter. The end result is the same," Trump said. "We're going to get something done that's going to be reducing taxes and creating a lot of jobs and all of the other things that you know about."



President-elect Donald Trump and wife Melania Trump arrive at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 8, 2025, ahead of Senate Majority Leader John Thune, center. Trump met with Senate Republicans Wednesday evening. (Photo by Tasos Katopodis/

Getty Images)

One bill or two?

GOP senators leaving the two-hour meeting that was held inside the Capitol said no final decisions were made, but that GOP leaders will keep talking.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, a South Dakota Republican, said lawmakers in that chamber were "united on (Trump's) agenda, which is securing the border, rebuilding the military, creating energy dominance for this country, strengthening the economy ... and avoiding and preventing a huge tax increase if we don't act to extend the 2017 Trump tax cuts."

Thune declined to say whether GOP senators were able to convince Trump to support their two-bill strategy.

"We're all in line with getting the result and the process arguments that we have around here are certainly less important, certainly, to people across the country than accomplishing the things I just mentioned," Thune said.

But, he said, there is "a lot of interest" among Senate Republicans in seeing legislation addressing the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 11 of 65

border, national security and energy move quickly.

"It's an ongoing conversation, but in the end we all want the same result and that's what we're going to be focused on," Thune said.

Budget resolution needed

The budget reconciliation process requires the House and Senate to adopt a budget resolution with reconciliation instructions before they can bring the actual reconciliation bill to the floor.

That means House and Senate GOP leaders will need to agree sooner or later on which committees get reconciliation instructions and what those instructions say.

Senate Republican Policy Committee Chair Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., said no final decisions were made during the meeting, but that GOP senators made their case to Trump for moving the policy changes in two different bills.

"He heard from us and from our leader that a two-bill strategy is very much alive over here and something we're still very interested in," she said.

Capito, who moderated the conversation and ran the meeting, said she was able to "get the president's ear" at a few points to discuss policy, but didn't detail what exactly she might have pressed him for.

Capito said she expected Thune and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., to get together at some point with Trump to make a final decision on one or two bills.

A 'fun' meeting

Missouri Republican Sen. Eric Schmitt said the border and energy are two of the top policy priorities, though he didn't get into the weeds on what exactly would change on those two topics.

Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa said that the meeting with Trump was "fun" and that Republicans had the opportunity to ask the incoming president questions.

"There's so much energy," she said, adding that her preference for handling reconciliation would be two bills rather than one.

Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, who was the lead Republican on the bipartisan border security bill deal that Trump eventually tanked in 2024, said that during the meeting Trump expressed his intent for the White House to work closely with Congress.

Lankford added that Trump was "really open" to various strategies on reconciliation.

"I think (with) two bills, you get things done faster," he said. "And we can start moving quicker, rather than waiting till May or June to try to get something done."

Sen. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma said that GOP senators are leaning towards two reconciliation bills, "but at the same time, Leader Thune made it very clear that he's going to do what the president wants us to do."

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.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

U.S. House Dem, former police officers lambaste Trump's Jan. 6 pardon pledge

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JANUARY 8, 2025 5:07 PM

WASHINGTON — Tennessee Democratic U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen and two former police officers who protected the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, on Wednesday condemned President-elect Donald Trump's pledge to pardon those charged in connection with the insurrection.

Cohen, former U.S. Capitol Police Sgt. Aquilino Gonell and former D.C. police officer Michael Fanone said on a call organized by the Not Above the Law coalition, a collection of pro-democracy groups often critical of Trump, that pardons for those who took part in the 2021 attack would be a blow to the rule of law.

Trump has said he would issue pardons for those prosecuted for charges stemming from the deadly riot four years ago in which a mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol in an effort to block Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's 2020 election victory.

Cohen, a member of the House Judiciary Committee who has sought to limit the presidential pardon power, said Trump should be held accountable for the attack.

The Tennessee Democrat said that in pardoning those charged with crimes on Jan. 6, Trump would be "absolving himself" and argued that the president-elect bears the responsibility for the riot.

"If it weren't for Donald Trump, this would not have occurred, and this is a way for him to absolve to some extent, I guess — assuming he has a conscience — to absolve his conscience by pardoning these people that are in jail because of him and, of course, he should be there as well, in my opinion," Cohen said.

Gonell, who defended the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, said it was "devastating" to listen to what Trump has said about pardons. Gonell also testified in 2021 in front of the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol.

"History is going to remember those officers who died as a result of the insurrection — not the 'victims' or 'warriors,' as (Trump) claimed to be saying about the insurrectionists," he said Wednesday.

He invoked the names of the five police officers who died in connection with the attack.

"Officers like Brian Sicknick, Howard Liebengood, Jeffrey Smith, Gunther Hashida and Kyle DeFreytag — those are the names that people need to remember and not allow Donald Trump and his acolytes to erase history, to rewrite it, because at the end of the day, some of these officers who defended the Capitol against the mob on Jan. 6, 2021, are also going to be there for his swearing in in a couple of weeks."

Fanone was also one of the police officers who defended the Capitol on Jan. 6 and testified in front of



Michael Fanone, a former Metropolitan Police Department officer who defended the U.S. Capitol and suffered injuries on Jan. 6, 2021, is pictured at the attack's second anniversary. Fanone on Wednesday denounced President-elect Donald Trump's plans to pardon people charged in connection with the attack. (Photo by Ariana Figueroa/States Newsroom)

the House committee.

"I was beaten and repeatedly tased, I suffered a heart attack and was left with a severe concussion," Fanone said, noting that he "came face-to-face with the hatred and violence that MAGA extremism represents."

Trump on pardons

More than 1,500 people were charged in connection with the 2021 attack on the Capitol.

Trump, who has described the Capitol rioters as "political prisoners" and "hostages," did not specify during a Tuesday press conference whether he would pardon those charged with violent offenses, including attacking a police officer, but did say he would issue at least some pardons.

"We'll be looking at the whole thing, but I'll be making major pardons," Trump said at Mar-a-Lago when asked about the violent offenses. Questioned about pardoning those who were charged with assaulting a police officer, Trump went into a rant filled with falsehoods, including saying Ashli Babbitt was the only person killed in the riot.

Three other people part of the crowd at the Capitol also died.

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.

Democrats say U.S. Senate Republicans rushing Burgum confirmation; Noem hearing scheduled

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 8, 2025 3:23 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Democrats raised concerns Wednesday that Republicans have scheduled a hearing for one of President-elect Donald Trump's nominees before he completed the necessary paperwork and an FBI background check.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and Energy and Natural Resources Committee ranking member Martin Heinrich separately criticized the decision, saying it sets a troubling precedent.

"Yesterday, the Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources noticed a hearing for Governor Doug Burgum to serve as the next secretary of the Interior, without minority consent, as has long been standard practice," Schumer said during a floor speech. "Senate Democrats on the committee expressed reasonable objections to proceeding to this hearing, because the committee has not yet received basic information on Governor Burgum's background."



Gov. Doug Burgum, at the time the governor of North Dakota and now President-elect Donald Trump's pick for secretary of the Interior, presents his budget recommendations before a joint session of the Legislature on Dec. 4, 2024. (Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

Heinrich, a New Mexico Democrat, released a written statement that he was extremely disappointed

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 14 of 65

Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee, chairman of the committee, scheduled the hearing for Burgum, the former governor of North Dakota.

"The Senate has a constitutional duty to advise and, if it determines, consent to the President's nominees. This requires careful consideration of each nominee," Heinrich wrote. "To achieve this, for decades, nominees that have come before the ENR Committee have submitted responses to a standard questionnaire and a completed financial disclosure form, approval from the Department's ethics office, and completion of an FBI background check. Until these steps have been completed, I will not consent to notice of nomination hearings.

"Every nominee, every party, every administration should be subject to the same standards. I would urge Chairman Lee to reconsider his decision."

A committee spokesperson said Heinrich has not yet received confirmation the FBI completed Burgum's background check.

Heinrich also hasn't received Burgum's financial disclosure report, called Form 278e, or paperwork from the Office of Government Ethics saying their personnel have reviewed his financial disclosures and ethics agreements, and they believe he is in compliance with ethics laws, as required by the Ethics in Government Act, according to the spokesperson.

Lee in his own statement wrote that it was "disappointing to see Ranking Member Heinrich seeking to delay issuance of a hearing notice instead of focusing on delivering what voters demanded in November's election: restoring American energy dominance after years of high energy prices and policy failures."

"Governor Burgum submitted his paperwork to the Office of Government Ethics last week, and the committee has the same amount of paperwork that Energy and Natural Resources Committee Democrats had in 2009 when they noticed confirmation hearings," Lee wrote. "I, as chairman, have made every effort to work with our Democratic colleagues, but we won't give in to delays that undermine the American people's mandate. It's time to move forward and focus on solutions that will unleash America's full energy potential, and I hope Democrats will work with us to deliver results for the American people."

Burgum hearing anticipated next week

Burgum's hearing is scheduled for Tuesday at 10 a.m., making it one of the first hearings for any of Trump's nominees. Trump announced in November that he wanted Burgum, who ended his second term as North Dakota's governor in December, to lead the Interior Department.

Burgum, 68, graduated from North Dakota State University in 1978 before going on to attend Stanford University Graduate School of Business, where he received a master's of business administration in 1980.

He worked at Great Plains Software, becoming CEO before Microsoft bought the company in 2001. Burgum then worked as senior vice president for that company until 2007. A year later, he co-founded venture capital firm Arthur Ventures.

Yahoo Finance estimated in 2002 that Burgum's net worth was approximately \$1.1 billion.

Burgum was first elected as governor of North Dakota in 2016 with 76.5% of the vote and then reelected in 2020 with 65.8%.

Other confirmation hearings scheduled for Tuesday include a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing for former U.S. Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia, whom Trump plans to nominate for VA secretary, and an Armed Services Committee hearing for Pete Hegseth, whom Trump wants to lead the Department of Defense.

The confirmation process is expected to continue Wednesday with hearings for Trump's pick for Homeland Security secretary, Kristi Noem of South Dakota, in the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee; his selection for secretary of State, Marco Rubio of Florida, in the Foreign Relations Committee; and the pick for Office of Management and Budget director, Russ Vought, in the Homeland Security committee.

Others are likely to be scheduled in the days and weeks ahead, but the Senate cannot take floor votes on the nominees until after Trump takes the oath of office on Jan. 20.

No hearing yet for RFK Jr.

Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Bill Cassidy said during a brief interview earlier this week he didn't know when he would begin committee hearings with Trump's nominees for public health agencies, like the National Institutes of Health or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since they hadn't yet completed their paperwork and background checks.

The Louisiana Republican said he hoped to begin those hearings before the end of January, but wasn't sure if that would be possible.

"The only reason I hesitate is because, obviously, we have other hearings and I'm not sure if everything ... that we need to receive, we have received. So partly, this is outside my hands," Cassidy said.

Other committees, he said, were also waiting on paperwork and background checks from some of Trump's nominees before scheduling hearings.

"I know other committees have had issues that they've not yet received everything they need to receive, in which case I don't control that process," Cassidy said.

The ongoing outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza, also known as bird flu, or H5N1, is one reason Cassidy gave for why he wants to quickly confirm public health nominees.

"Well, H5N1 is serious, absolutely. And, of course, you want to get people in there, you want it to be the right person, on and on and on," Cassidy said. "So I think we proceed with all due haste."

Louisiana reported the country's first human death related to the ongoing bird flu outbreak on Monday, shortly after Cassidy gave his comments about the confirmation process.

Cassidy met on Wednesday with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Trump's nominee for Health and Human Services secretary, in the senator's Capitol Hill office, a typical part of the nomination process.

Cassidy, a physician who earned his medical degree from Louisiana State University Medical School in 1983, wrote on social media afterward that he had "a frank conversation" with Kennedy.

"We spoke about vaccines at length," Cassidy wrote. "Looking forward to the hearings in HELP and Finance."

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.

Trump asks U.S. Supreme Court to suspend sentencing in New York hush money case

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 8, 2025 12:31 PM

WASHINGTON – President-elect Donald Trump asked the U.S. Supreme Court late Tuesday to pause his sentencing in a New York hush money case, arguing it cannot go forward in light of the high court's presidential immunity ruling last summer.

Trump, who is days away from his second inauguration, is scheduled to be sentenced Friday in Manhattan on 34 felony convictions for falsifying business records. He is asking for a stay to prevent future proceedings in the case.

New York Justice Juan Merchan wrote in the sentencing order that he is not seeking jail time for Trump, but rather an "unconditional discharge" that would leave the president-elect with a criminal record in New York but avoids any serious penalties.

A jury convicted Trump in May after a weeks-long trial focusing on his bookkeeping maneuvers to cover up a \$130,000 payment made by his personal lawyer ahead of the 2016 presidential election to silence a porn star about a past sexual encounter.

Trump's request to the Supreme Court's emergency docket asks the justices to expediently take up the questions of whether immunity extends to presidents-elect, whether the evidence admitted in the New York case violated his immunity, and whether he's entitled to a delay in his sentencing.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 16 of 65

"President Trump is currently engaged in the most crucial and sensitive tasks of preparing to assume the Executive Power in less than two weeks, all of which are essential to the United States' national security and vital interests," read a brief signed by Trump's attorney D. John Sauer, whom Trump has nominated to be the next U.S. solicitor general.

"Forcing President Trump to prepare for a criminal sentencing in a felony case while he is preparing to lead the free world as President of the United States in less than two weeks imposes an intolerable, unconstitutional burden on him that undermines these vital national interests," Sauer wrote.

Trump attorney Todd Blanche's name also appeared on the request. The president-elect has chosen Blanche to be the nation's next deputy attorney general.

Merchan has given Trump the option to appear virtually for the sentencing.



President-elect Donald Trump has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to pause his sentencing in a New York hush money case. Shown is the court on Oct. 9, 2024. (Photo by Jane Norman/States Newsroom)

Supreme Court ruling forced delays

Merchan on Monday denied Trump's request to that state court to cancel the sentencing hearing, saying the request recycled earlier requests from Trump's legal team to toss the case.

"This Court has considered Defendant's arguments in support of his motion and finds that they are for the most part, a repetition of the arguments he has raised numerous times in the past," Merchan wrote.

A state appeals court affirmed Merchan's decision Tuesday.

In December, Merchan rejected another Trump attempt to throw out the hush money case based on an argument that evidence had been impermissibly admitted.

The Supreme Court's immunity ruling restricted prosecutors' ability to investigate presidents and Trump's team argued the evidence gathered in the case violated that restriction.

Merchan had delayed Trump's initial sentencing date following the Supreme Court's July decision that former presidents enjoy criminal immunity for official acts and presumptive immunity for some actions on the office's perimeter.

The Supreme Court took up Trump's question of presidential immunity as he fought against Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith's case alleging interference in the 2020 election.

The court ruled, 6-3, in Trump's favor, in a July 1 decision. Three justices appointed by Trump are part of the court's conservative majority.

Trump is set to take the oath of office on Jan. 20.

Jacob Fischler contributed to this report.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Major legal brawl may decide what types of cars Americans can buy

State climate efforts hinge on California's authority to set emissions standards stricter than federal rules

BY: ALEX BROWN, STATELINE - JANUARY 8, 2025 10:02 AM

Blue states are bracing for a battle with the Trump administration over their authority to limit tailpipe emissions, a showdown that will have major repercussions on the types of cars and trucks sold to American drivers.

All sides expect President-elect Donald Trump to try to revoke states' authority to adopt California's strict rules on the pollution spewed by vehicles.

Many states' efforts to fight climate change hinge on a federal process that allows them to adopt stringent regulations for transportation, the country's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions.

This long-standing waiver authority allows California — and the dozen or so states that follow its lead — to apply rules that go beyond federal limits and cover everything from specific pollutants to sales of certain vehicles. The states following the stricter California standards make up a significant portion of the U.S. auto market and exert major leverage over the cars that are offered to American consumers.

"It becomes a de facto national standard," said Ethan Elkind, director of the climate program at the Center for Law, Energy & the Environment at the UC Berkeley School of Law. "The combined might of California and those other states is pretty significant."

During his first term, Trump attempted to revoke California's waiver authority, an action many states challenged as unlawful. The effort to deny the waivers was tied up in legal challenges until President Joe Biden took office. This time, Trump will have a "much more cohesive plan" to block state efforts to clean up their cars and trucks, Elkind said.

California is urging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to finalize several pending waivers before Trump returns to the White House. Officials in blue states are preparing to defend their authority in court should Trump seek to revoke the waivers. And attorneys general in some red states are pushing to end the waivers altogether — mounting a legal challenge to California's power to set its own rules.

"Without [California's waiver authority], we would probably be a decade or more behind where we are today in terms of the U.S. automotive market," said Mary Nichols, former chair of the California Air Resources Board, the agency that issues the state's auto regulations. "In terms of reaching our climate goals, it's essential."

Nichols now serves as the distinguished counsel for the Emmett Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the UCLA School of Law.



Heavy traffic moves along Interstate 395 on Nov. 22, 2022, in Washington, D.C. (Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 18 of 65

State efforts

When Congress enacted federal air quality laws in the 1960s, it gave California the authority to go above and beyond national standards because it was the only state to already have passed its own auto emissions rules. The state's geography, with mountains that trap harmful pollution in heavily populated areas, also contributed to California's unique status. Over 50-plus years, the state has received more than 100 waivers from the feds covering everything from particulate matter to catalytic converters to "check engine" lights.

The EPA allows other states to adopt the regulations set by California. Seventeen other states and the District of Columbia have adopted some portion of California's regulations — representing 40% of the light-duty vehicle market and more than 25% of the heavy-duty market.

"These waivers are a really important part of our strategy to reduce emissions in line with what climate science tells us what we need to do," said Joel Creswell, climate pollution reduction program manager with the Washington State Department of Ecology. "They're also really important for our air quality near road communities."

In the waning days of the Biden administration, California leaders have urged the EPA to finalize an assortment of pending waivers that cover issues including electric car sales, heavy-duty fleets, yard equipment and refrigerated trucks. The agency approved several of those waivers in December and January, including a landmark rule that will ban the sale of gas-powered cars by 2035.

California Democratic Attorney General Rob Bonta, who spoke to Stateline in November, said the law requires the feds to grant and uphold the waivers unless the state's actions are "arbitrary and capricious."

"If there's an attempt to revoke them by the Trump administration or a denial of them that's unlawful, we'll be very aggressive in taking action to protect California's ability to seek its waivers," he said.

Elkind, the legal expert, said Biden's administration likely has delayed the waivers until the last minute because officials want to build a strong case that will make it difficult for Trump to revoke them.

"EPA is having to be more careful and specific about the justification for granting them," he said, building the case that "California has an obligation to reduce emissions of these very specific pollutants, and it's not going to be able to meet its Clean Air Act requirements without zero-emission vehicles."

Pushing back

California's waivers have faced opposition from a slew of industry groups, including automakers, trucking associations, railroads, agriculture interests and fossil fuel providers. In many cases, they argue that the standards require a switch to cleaner technologies that aren't yet in wide supply or cost-effective. For instance, trucking groups say there are few semitruck engines available that meet the new standard for nitrogen oxide emissions.

"They [federal regulators] put in an aggressive standard and gave little time for the manufacturers to come up with that product," said Mike Tunnell, senior director of energy and environmental affairs with the trade group American Trucking Associations. "As it turned out, they didn't give them enough time."

Tunnell said trucking dealerships in California have struggled with product shortages. As a result, some companies are continuing to use existing trucks, keeping dirty engines on the road. His group opposes another pending waiver sought by California that would require companies to transition their truck fleets to zero-emission models. Current trucks that meet that standard are significantly more expensive than typical models, Tunnell said.

Truckers in New York — which has adopted the California standard — already are struggling to buy the equipment they need, said Kendra Hems, president of the Trucking Association of New York. She noted that the state lacks charging infrastructure to support a transition to electric trucks, and that current models have a limited range that would force drivers to stop frequently along their routes.

"We're not opposed to it, we're simply not ready," Hems said. "They're asking an industry to comply with something that there's simply not supporting infrastructure for."

Automakers have made a similar argument about California's electric vehicle sales mandate, saying in a statement that it will "take a miracle" to phase out new gas-powered cars by 2035.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 19 of 65

The industry groups have argued for a consistent national standard, a cause backed by 17 Republican-led states. A coalition of attorneys general filed a lawsuit in 2022 challenging California's power to set stricter rules.

"This is not the United States of California," said Ohio Republican Attorney General Dave Yost, who has led the legal effort, in a 2021 news release challenging California's waivers.

In a letter to the EPA opposing Biden's reinstatement of a waiver, Yost argued that California's rules create a de facto national standard for automakers, which results in more expensive cars for consumers in every state. That violates states' right to equal sovereignty, he asserted.

Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court said it would review whether fuel producers — which have joined the case against the waivers — have enough cause to sue. But the court declined to consider the lawfulness of California's underlying waiver authority.

While the legal fight continues, Elkind asserted that opponents of California's long-standing status don't have a strong case.

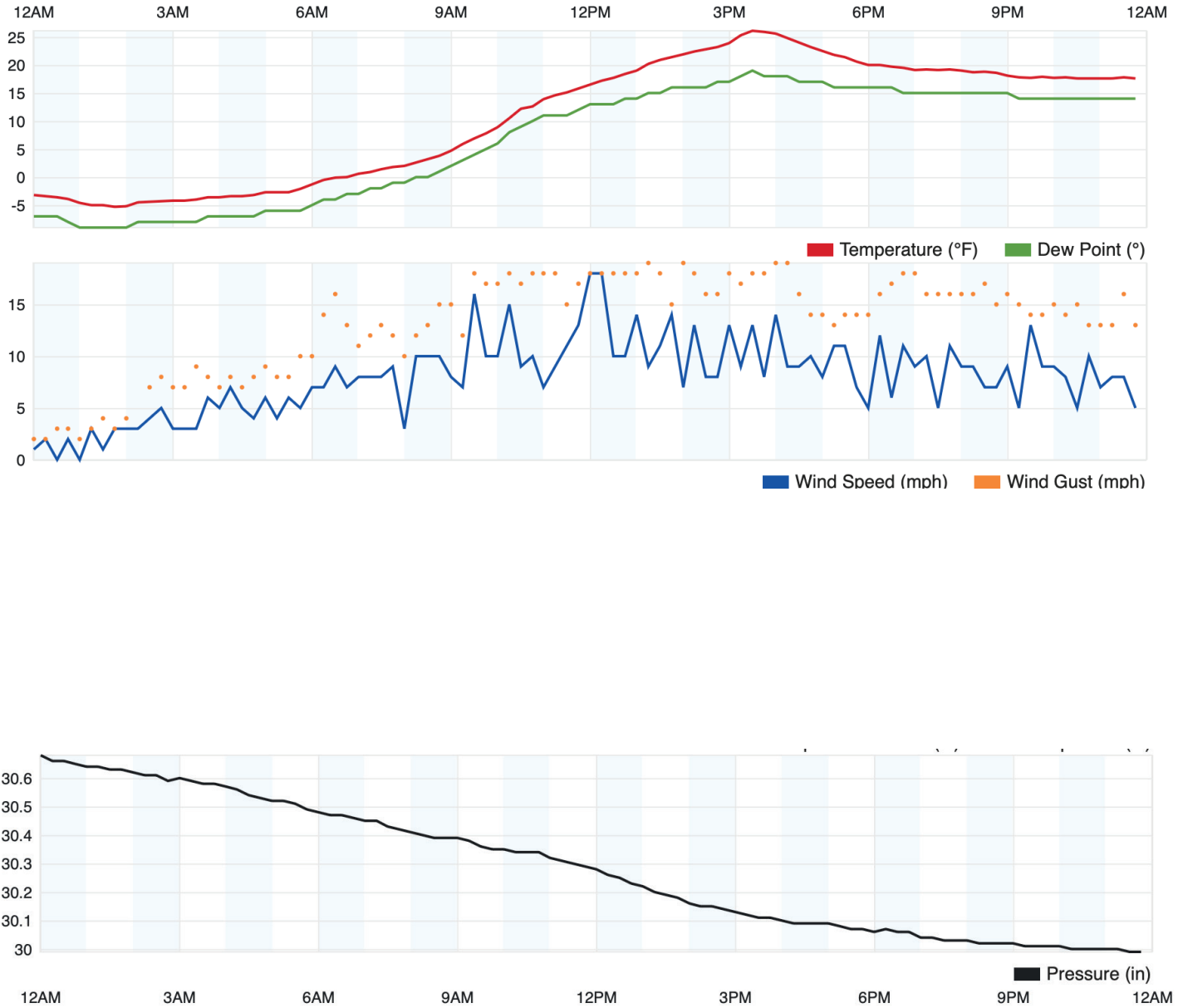
"The waiver has been granted to California repeatedly for more than a half century," he said. "There's solid legal ground in the Clean Air Act, and the justification is extremely well documented."

Based in Seattle, Alex Brown covers environmental issues for Stateline. Prior to joining Stateline, Brown wrote for The Chronicle in Lewis County, Washington state.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 20 of 65

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 21 of 65

Thursday

Thursday Night

Friday

Friday Night

Saturday



High: 34 °F

Low: 14 °F

High: 24 °F

Low: 13 °F

High: 34 °F

Breezy. Snow then Mostly Cloudy

Chance Flurries

Partly Sunny

Mostly Cloudy

Snow Likely



Light Snow and Gusty Winds Today

January 9, 2025
5:05 AM

Key Messages



Light snow will exit central SD by mid morning and shift into northeast SD and west central MN during the morning into early afternoon.

- Snow accumulations of a trace to possibly an inch will be possible



Light snow along with wind gusts of 30-40 mph will cause **patchy blowing snow** across the Missouri Valley into portions of James Valley

- ◆ Could impact the morning commute

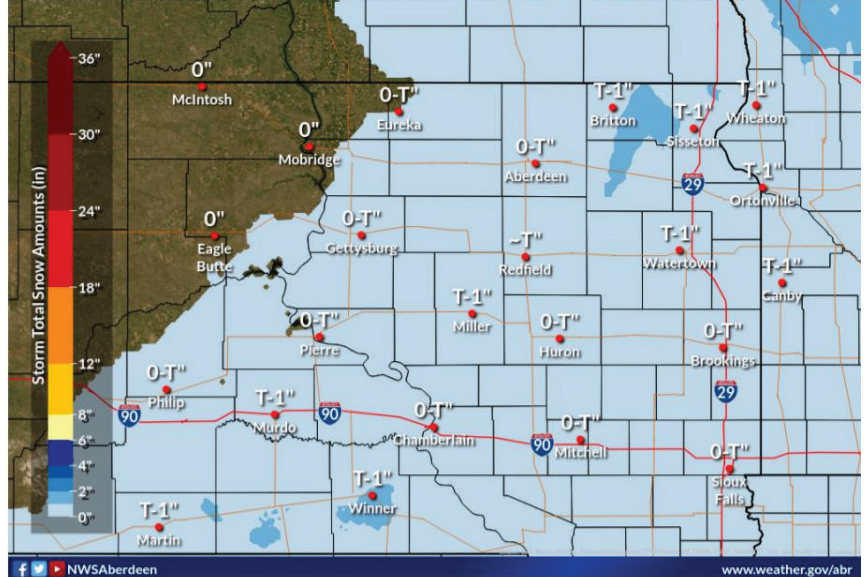


Roads will be slippery where snow is falling

Expected Snowfall - Official NWS Forecast

Valid Thu 6:00AM through Fri 6:00AM CST

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Jan 09, 2025 2:38 AM CST



NWSAberdeen

www.weather.gov/abr

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A clipper system moving through the region will bring a round of light snow to portions of central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota today. This disturbance will quickly move through the area, so expect the snowfall to end from west to east during the morning hours and linger across far northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota this afternoon. Most locales will see accumulations generally 1 inch or less. Gusty northwest winds will lead to blowing snow and reduced visibilities through the afternoon across central and northeast South Dakota.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 22 of 65

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 26 °F at 3:32 PM

Low Temp: -5 °F at 1:51 AM

Wind: 19 mph at 11:19 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 1 minute

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 2012

Record Low: -31 in 2010

Average High: 23

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.19

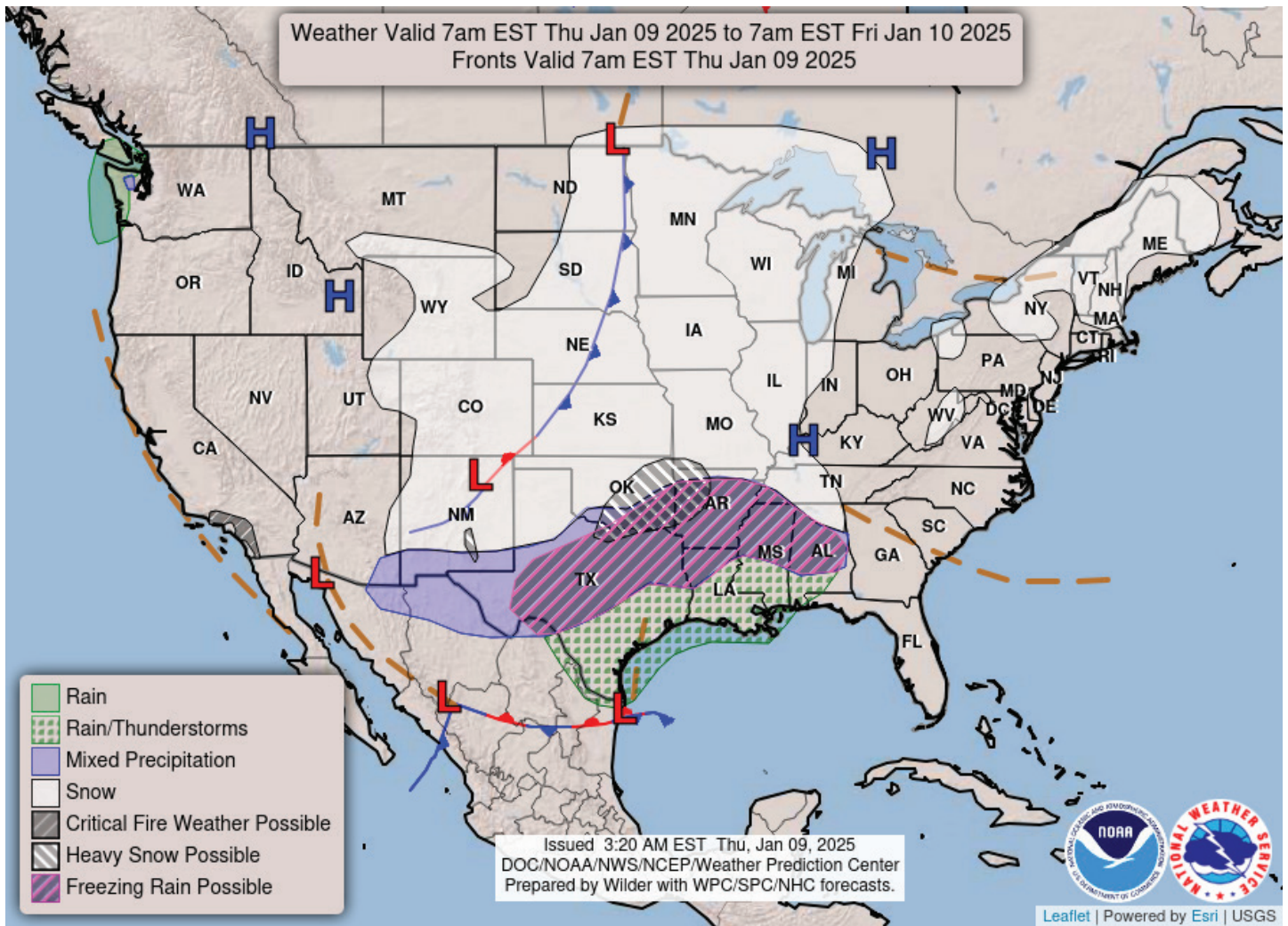
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.19

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:10:17 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:08:47 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 23 of 65

Today in Weather History

January 9, 1982: Winds of 20 to 40 mph accompanied by 1 to 3 inches of snow created ground blizzard conditions and extreme wind chills from the 9th through mid-afternoon on the 12th. There were two deaths from the exposure attributed to the storm, including a 69-year old Scotland woman and a woman from Veblen in Marshall County. Both tried to walk after their vehicles stalled. Near zero visibilities and snowdrifts to 5 feet high forced closures of numerous highways. Also, minor power outages were reported.

January 9, 1997: A powerful Alberta Clipper and a deep Arctic High brought widespread and prolonged blizzard conditions, heavy drifting snow, and dangerous wind chills of 40 to 80 below to central and north-east South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. North winds were from 30 to 50 mph gusting to 60 mph. The clipper dropped from 2 to 7 inches of snowfall on top of an already solid 2 to the 5-foot snowpack. As with previous storms, most roads again became blocked by huge snowdrifts. As a result of the blockage and the blizzard conditions, both Interstates 29 and 90 closed along with all state highways leaving hundreds of people stranded to wait out the storm. This winter has been the worst for road closings. Many people became stuck in snowdrifts or went off the road because of low visibility and had to be rescued. One dramatic rescue near Webster, involving tens of rescue workers, occurred after a woman was stranded in her vehicle for nearly 40 hours. A couple with a one-year-old was rescued after spending a night in their car, and they were unharmed. A Wakpala woman died from carbon monoxide poisoning in her stalled pickup on Highway 1806 near Wakpala. Emergency personnel had a tough time responding to emergencies. Some emergencies took up to several hours to go short distances. A rural Leola man died when emergency workers could not get to him in time. In McLaughlin, seven people had to be taken by air ambulance because there was no way out.

All area schools were closed on the 9th and 10th, with most schools at this point in the winter season missing over 7 days. A state record was set when Faulkton School had closed for its 13th day. Mail was delayed, and area airports had flight delays or were closed. Many businesses were also closed and were suffering from economic losses due to this storm and previous storms because customers could not get to them. Many grocery stores ran low or out of bread, milk, and other food necessities. There were some power outages across the area, but they were not widespread. The power was out at Isabel, Timber Lake, and Firesteel for as much as 8 hours. The power outage in Isabel resulted in extensive water pipe breaks at the Isabel School. Willow Lake was without power for over 2 days. Some homes across the area were also without heat for several days in the bitter cold. The majority of ranchers were unable to access feed for cattle, sheep, and hogs. As a result of the extreme conditions and lack of food, over fifty thousand livestock died. Also, many livestock suffered frostbite and were significantly weakened. There was also a lot of wildlife and pheasants killed. As a result, the Emergency Feed Grain Donation Program was activated for the ranchers. One rancher said that he had been ranching in this area for 34 years and had never lost cattle before. Also, some dairy farmers had to dump their milk because trucks could not get them in time.

Some people were trapped in their homes for up to several days as snowdrifts buried their homes and blocked the roads, with some people having to crawl out their windows. In Wilmot, a 12-foot drift covered the community home, where residents had to turn the lights on during the day. As a result of snow removal budget depletions and other storm damages, President Clinton declared all of the counties a disaster area. Snowplows from Iowa, Nebraska, and plows and workforce from the South Dakota National Guard helped break through hundreds of roads. The snowdrifts in some places were packed so hard and were measured at 300 pounds per square inch. Some longtime residents said this had been the worst winter they had seen in their lifetimes. The total damage estimate for this January blizzard and the previous January winter storm is 50 million dollars. This includes the added snow removal costs, livestock losses, building damages, and other economic losses.

1880: A rapidly deepening low-pressure system produced powerful winds along the Pacific Northwest coast. While wind measurements were limited, there were widespread reports of wind damage.

2006: With cold air sweeping in from the Himalayas, New Delhi reports frost for the first time in 70 years with a low temperature of 0.2°C (32.3°F). The cold prompted officials to order all schools to close for three days.



DON'T STOP NOW!

Some time ago it was my privilege to be the commencement speaker at a high school graduation. At the end of the service, the students came forward and walked up to the headmaster to receive their diplomas. As he shook their hands, he looked into their eyes and said softly to each one of them, "Don't stop now, keep moving forward!"

Great advice – not only for the graduates but for everyone, every day. Whatever we do, wherever we go, we must keep on keeping on. We must keep forgiving! Keep growing! Keep helping! Keep loving! Keep witnessing! Keep serving! Keep worshipping! Keep working! Keep laughing! Keep moving forward! We must never stop doing good, but keep on keeping on!

If this is important for life in general, it is even more important in the life of a Christian. Paul said that "I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be." "Keep working" means "Keep on keeping on doing good!"

What great advice Paul offers us. Nothing must ever interfere with, nor cause us, to take our eyes off of knowing and serving Christ. We must focus on Him, and His will for our lives, as Paul did, to win the race and receive the prize He will award us by being faithful to Him.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to focus on "the prize" You have for each of us, as we run life's race. Help us to keep focused on You as we grow into Your likeness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Philip-pians 3:8-14

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 devo-tional 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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 25 of 65

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White.....\$48.99/year
- Colored.....\$79.88/year
- Colored.....\$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly*.....\$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent www.397news.com Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month.....\$15.98
- 3 Months.....\$26.63
- 6 Months.....\$31.95
- 9 Months.....\$42.60
- 12 Months.....\$53.25

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul

Pay with Venmo: [@paperpaul](https://venmo.com/paperpaul) Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 26 of 65



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.07.25

20 24 33 39 48 18

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$77,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 3
DRAW: Mins 10 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.08.25

4 15 33 39 41 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,870,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 18
DRAW: Mins 10 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.08.25

13 14 24 37 38 13

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 33 Mins
DRAW: 10 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.08.25

5 15 25 26 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 33
DRAW: Mins 10 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.08.25

22 29 36 61 65 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 2
DRAW: Mins 9 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.08.25

1 20 36 38 43 24

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$263,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 2
DRAW: Mins 9 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 27 of 65

Upcoming Groton Events

- 01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
- 01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
- 03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
- 04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 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 Day of Play
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Minessale and St. Thomas defeat South Dakota State 73-72

By The Associated Press undefined

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Nolan Minessale scored 17 points and Drake Dobbs secured the victory with a free throw with 13 seconds left as St. Thomas took down South Dakota State 73-72 on Wednesday night.

Minessale shot 7 for 12, including 1 for 4 from beyond the arc for the Tommies (13-5, 3-0 Summit League). Dobbs scored 12 points and added five assists. Kendall Blue shot 3 for 5, including 2 for 3 from beyond the arc to finish with 10 points.

The Jackrabbits (10-7, 1-1) were led by Kalen Garry, who recorded 19 points. Oscar Cluff added 13 points, 19 rebounds and seven assists for South Dakota State. Joe Sayler also had 12 points and four assists.

Minessale scored 12 points in the first half and St. Thomas went into halftime trailing 40-36. Dobbs scored a team-high 10 points for St. Thomas in the second half, including his game-winning shot in the final minute.

Both teams play again on Saturday. St. Thomas hosts South Dakota and South Dakota State travels to play Omaha.

More than 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war, officials say

By WAFAA SHURAFU and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — More than 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war, Gaza's Health Ministry said Thursday, with no end in sight to the 15-month conflict.

The ministry said a total of 46,006 Palestinians have been killed and 109,378 wounded. It has said women and children make up more than half the fatalities, but does not say how many of the dead were fighters or civilians.

The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. It says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames Hamas for their deaths because the militants operate in residential areas. Israel has also repeatedly struck what it claims are militants hiding in shelters and hospitals, often killing women and children.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza. Israeli authorities believe at least a third of them were killed in the initial attack or have died in captivity.

The war has flattened large areas of Gaza and displaced around 90% of its 2.3 million people, with many forced to flee multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into sprawling tent camps along the coast with limited access to food and other essentials.

In recent weeks, Israel and Hamas have appeared to inch closer to an agreement for a ceasefire and the release of hostages. But the indirect talks mediated by the United States, Qatar and Egypt have repeatedly stalled over the past year, and major obstacles remain.

"What we are living is not a life. Nobody could bear the situation we're experiencing for a single day," Munawar al-Bik, a displaced woman, told The Associated Press in an interview this week.

"We wake up at night to the sounds of men crying, because of the bad situation," she said. "The situation is unbearable. We have no energy left: we want it to end today."

Al-Bik spoke on a dusty road in the southern city of Khan Younis next to a destroyed building. Behind her, a sea of makeshift tents filled with displaced families stretched into the distance.

On Thursday, dozens of people took part in funeral prayers outside the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah for people killed in Israeli strikes the day before.

In the hospital morgue, a man could be seen kneeling and bidding farewell to a relative before slamming

a refrigerator door in an outburst of grief.

Palestinian health officials said Israeli airstrikes killed at least nine people in Gaza on Wednesday, including three infants — among them a 1-week-old — and two women.

Los Angeles wildfires burn thousands of homes and other structures

By MANUEL VALDES, HALLIE GOLDEN and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A fast-moving fire broke out in the Hollywood Hills on Wednesday night, threatening one of Los Angeles' most iconic spots as firefighters battled to get under control three other major blazes that killed five people, put 130,000 people under evacuation orders and ravaged communities from the Pacific Coast to inland Pasadena.

The Sunset Fire started Wednesday evening as officials were holding a news conference to update residents on efforts to fight massive fires in Pacific Palisades and Altadena and to warn that fire danger remained high. Los Angeles Fire Department Chief Kristin Crowley made a hasty exit after announcing the new fire and soon after an evacuation order was issued.

The Hollywood Walk of Fame was bustling and the streets around the TCL Chinese Theatre and Madame Tussauds were packed with stop-and-go traffic as sirens blared and low-flying helicopters flew overhead to dump water on the flames, which were only about a mile away. People toting suitcases left hotels while some onlookers walked toward the flames, recording the fire on their phones.

Within a few hours, firefighters had made major progress. Los Angeles Fire Department Capt. Erik Scott said they were able to keep the fire in check because "we hit it hard and fast and mother nature was a little nicer to us today than she was yesterday."

A day earlier, hurricane-force winds blew embers through the air, igniting block after block in the coastal neighborhood of Pacific Palisades as well as in Altadena, a community near Pasadena that is about 25 miles (40 kilometers) east.

Nearly 2,000 homes, businesses and other structures have been destroyed in those blazes — called the Palisades and Eaton fires — and the number is expected to rise. The five deaths recorded so far were from the Eaton Fire.

The Palisades Fire already is the most destructive in Los Angeles history, with at least 1,000 structures burned.

More than half a dozen schools in the area were either damaged or destroyed, including Palisades Charter High School, which has been featured in many Hollywood productions, including the 1976 horror movie "Carrie" and the TV series "Teen Wolf," officials said. UCLA has canceled classes for the week.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said air operations were dousing flames. She warned they still faced "erratic winds," though not like Tuesday evening, when aircraft had to be grounded and much of the destruction occurred.

In Pasadena, Fire Chief Chad Augustin said the city's water system was stretched and was further hampered by power outages, but even without those issues, firefighters would not have been able to stop the fire due to the intense winds fanning the flames.

"Those erratic wind gusts were throwing embers for multiple miles ahead of the fire," he said.

As flames moved through his neighborhood, Jose Velasquez sprayed down his family's Altadena home with water as embers rained down on the roof. He managed to save their home, which also houses their family business selling churros, a Mexican pastry. Others weren't so lucky. Many of his neighbors were at work when they lost their homes.

"So we had to call a few people and then we had people messaging, asking if their house was still standing," he said. "We had to tell them that it's not."

In Pacific Palisades, a hillside area along the coast dotted with celebrity homes, the scope of the destruction was just becoming clear:

Block after block of California Mission Style homes and bungalows were reduced to charred remains.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 30 of 65

Ornate iron railing wrapped around the smoldering frame of one house Swimming pools were blackened with soot, and sports cars slumped on melted tires.

The apocalyptic scenes spread for miles.

Actors lost homes

The flames marched toward highly populated and affluent neighborhoods, including Calabasas and Santa Monica, home to California's rich and famous.

Mandy Moore, Cary Elwes and Paris Hilton were among the stars who lost homes. Billy Crystal and his wife Janice lost their home of 45 years in the Palisades Fire.

"We raised our children and grandchildren here. Every inch of our house was filled with love. Beautiful memories that can't be taken away," the Crystals wrote in the statement.

In Palisades Village, the public library, two major grocery stores, a pair of banks and several boutiques were destroyed.

"It's just really weird coming back to somewhere that doesn't really exist anymore," said Dylan Vincent, who returned to the neighborhood to retrieve some items and saw that his elementary school had burned down and that whole blocks had been flattened.

Fast-moving flames allowed little time to escape

The fires have consumed a total of about 42 square miles (108 square kilometers) — nearly the size of the entire city of San Francisco.

Flames moved so quickly that many barely had time to escape. Police sought shelter inside their patrol cars, and residents at a senior living center were pushed in wheelchairs and hospital beds down a street to safety.

In the race to get away in Pacific Palisades, roadways became impassable when scores of people abandoned their vehicles and set out on foot.

Higher temperatures and less rain mean a longer fire season

California's wildfire season is beginning earlier and ending later due to rising temperatures and decreased rainfall tied to climate change, according to recent data. Rains that usually end fire season are often delayed, meaning fires can burn through the winter months, according to the Western Fire Chiefs Association.

Dry winds, including the notorious Santa Anas, have contributed to warmer-than-average temperatures in Southern California, which has not seen more than 0.1 inches (2.5 millimeters) of rain since early May.

The winds increased to 80 mph (129 kph) Wednesday, according to reports received by the National Weather Service. Forecasters predicted wind gusts of 35-55 mph (56 to 88 kph) that could rise higher in the mountains and foothills. Fire conditions could last through Friday.

Landmarks get scorched and studios suspend production

President Joe Biden signed a federal emergency declaration after arriving at a Santa Monica fire station for a briefing with Gov. Gavin Newsom, who dispatched National Guard troops to help.

Several Hollywood studios suspended production, and Universal Studios closed its theme park between Pasadena and Pacific Palisades.

As of Wednesday evening, more than 330,000 people were without power in southern California, according to the tracking website PowerOutage.us.

Several Southern California landmarks were heavily damaged, including the Reel Inn in Malibu, a seafood restaurant. Owner Teddy Leonard and her husband hope to rebuild.

"When you look at the grand scheme of things, as long as your family is well and everyone's alive, you're still winning, right?" she said.

Schools cancel classes across the Southern US as another burst of winter storms move in

By JAMIE STENGLE and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Schools and buildings from Texas to Georgia were shut down Thursday or prepared to close ahead of freezing rain and snow forecast for much of the Southern U.S. as another burst of plunging

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 31 of 65

temperatures and winter storms threatened to again snarl travel.

Texas schools canceled classes for more than 1 million students in anticipation of icy and potentially dangerous conditions that could last into Friday. Closures also kept students home in Kansas City and Arkansas' capital, Little Rock, while Virginia's capital, Richmond, remained under a weather-related boil advisory.

The cold snap coincided with rare January wildfires tearing through the Los Angeles area, forcing residents to flee from burning homes through flames, ferocious winds and towering clouds of smoke.

Texas braces for snow

In the Dallas area, crews treated roads ahead of the expected arrival of 2 to 4 inches (about 5 to 10 centimeters) of snow Thursday. Up to 5 inches (12.7 centimeters) was expected farther north near Oklahoma, according to the National Weather Service.

Gov. Greg Abbott said the state deployed emergency crews in advance and urged residents to avoid driving in bad weather if possible.

Boston native Gina Eaton, who stocked up on groceries in Dallas ahead of the storm, said she has some trepidation sharing roads with drivers unaccustomed to ice and snow.

"Even if there is ice, I'm very comfortable driving in it," Eaton said. "It's just other people that scare me."

Roads could be slick Friday as 75,000 fans were expected head to AT&T Stadium in Arlington for the college football championship semifinal between Texas and Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl. Arlington spokesperson Susan Shrock said crews will be ready to address any hazardous road conditions.

Southern discomfort

A mix of sleet, snow and freezing rain was expected along a stretch from New Mexico to Alabama. Forecasters said the heaviest amounts were likely in parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas.

The system was expected to push northeastward by Friday with heavy snow and freezing rain all the way to the Virginia and North Carolina coasts. As much as 8 inches (about 20 centimeters) of snow could fall in parts of Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia through Saturday, the weather service said.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp announced the closure of some state offices on Friday. Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens said city offices would be closed, with employees working remotely.

Tennessee Emergency Management Agency Director Patrick Sheehan said he expected schools across the state to close Friday, although decisions will be made at the local level.

The polar vortex of ultra-cold air usually spins around the North Pole, but it sometimes ventures south into the U.S., Europe and Asia. Some experts say such events are happening more frequently, paradoxically, because of a warming world.

The agricultural impact

Some parts of Kansas have received nearly an entire year's average of snow over the past few days, hitting farmers and ranchers "in ways that we haven't seen in this area for a very, very long time, potentially a lifetime," said Chip Redmond, a meteorologist at Kansas State University.

Calves are especially at risk and can die when temperatures slip below zero. And so much snow in rural areas can keep farmers from reaching herds with food and water.

In northern Florida, growers were most concerned about ferns that are cultivated for floral arrangements, with Valentine's Day only a month away.

A boil-water order for Virginia's capital

Richmond will remain under the boil-water advisory until at least Friday as officials work to restore the water reservoir system, which malfunctioned after a storm caused a power outage, Mayor Danny Avula said.

The city of more than 200,000 was distributing bottled water at 11 sites and delivering it to older residents and others who are unable to get to those locations, officials said.

"We've got families in the city, they don't have any water," Gov. Glenn Youngkin said Wednesday. "We've got young children where mothers are asking, 'What do I do about baby formula?'"

Travel dangers and delays

Thousands of flights across the U.S. have been delayed or canceled this week amid the winter storms.

Hundreds of car accidents have also been reported this week in Virginia, where three people were killed, Indiana, Kansas and Kentucky.

Other weather-related fatal accidents have occurred since last weekend in West Virginia, North Carolina and Kansas.

Jimmy Carter will be honored at Washington funeral before burial in Georgia hometown

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

Jimmy Carter, who considered himself an outsider even as he sat in the Oval Office as the 39th U.S. president, will be honored Thursday with the pageantry of a funeral at Washington National Cathedral before a second service and burial in his tiny Georgia hometown.

President Joe Biden, who was the first sitting senator to endorse Carter's 1976 presidential campaign, will eulogize his fellow Democrat 11 days before he leaves office. All of Carter's living successors are expected to attend the Washington funeral, including President-elect Donald Trump, who paid his respects before Carter's casket Wednesday.

The rare gathering of commanders in chief is one example of how Thursday will be an unusual moment of comity for the nation. Days of formal ceremonies and remembrances from political leaders, business titans and rank-and-file citizens have honored Carter for decency and using a prodigious work ethic to do more than obtain political power.

"He set a very high bar for presidents, how you can use voice and leadership for causes," said Bill Gates, the Microsoft co-founder whose foundation funded Carter's work to eliminate treatable diseases like the Guinea worm. Gates spoke to The Associated Press on Wednesday shortly before flying to Washington for the funeral.

"Whatever prestige and resources you are lucky enough to have, ideally you can take those and take an even broader societal view in your post private sector career," Gates said.

Bernice King, daughter of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., compared the two Georgians and Nobel Peace Prize winners.

"Both President Jimmy Carter and my father showed us what is possible when your faith compels you to live and lead from a love-centered place," said King, who is also planning to attend the Washington service.

Ted Mondale, son of Walter Mondale, Carter's vice president, is expected to read a eulogy his father wrote for Carter before his own death in 2021.

Thursday will conclude six days of national rites that began in Plains, Georgia, where Carter was born in 1924, lived most of his life and died Dec. 29 at the age of 100. Ceremonies continued in Atlanta and Washington, where Carter, a former Naval officer, engineer and peanut farmer, has lain in state since Tuesday.

Long lines of mourners waited several hours in frigid temperatures to file past his flag-draped casket in the Capitol Rotunda, as tributes focused as much on Carter's humanitarian work after leaving the White House as what he did as president from 1977 to 1981.

After the morning service in Washington, Carter's remains, his four children and extended family will return to Georgia on a Boeing 747 that serves as Air Force One when the sitting president is aboard.

The outspoken Baptist evangelical, who campaigned as a born-again Christian, will then be remembered in an afternoon funeral at Maranatha Baptist Church, the small edifice where he taught Sunday School for decades after leaving the White House and where his casket will sit beneath a wooden cross he fashioned in his own woodshop.

Following a final ride through his hometown, past the old train depot that served as his 1976 presidential campaign headquarters, he will be buried on family land in a plot next to former first lady Rosalynn Carter, who died in 2023 after more than 77 years of marriage.

Carter, who won the presidency promising good government and honest talk for an electorate disillusioned by the Vietnam War and Watergate, signed significant legislation and negotiated a landmark peace agree-

ment between Israel and Egypt. But he also presided over inflation, rising interest rates and international crises and lost a landslide to Republican Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Two years later he and Rosalynn established The Carter Center in Atlanta as a nongovernmental organization that took them across the world fighting disease, mediating conflict, monitoring elections and advocating for racial and gender equity. The center, where Carter lay in repose before coming to Washington, currently has 3,000 employees and contractors globally.

Billy Crystal, Mandy Moore among those who lost homes in Los Angeles fires

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Fires burning in and around Los Angeles have claimed the homes of numerous celebrities, including Billy Crystal, Mandy Moore and Paris Hilton and led to sweeping disruptions of entertainment events.

Three awards ceremonies planned for this weekend have been postponed. Next week's Oscar nominations have been delayed. And tens of thousands of Angelenos are displaced and awaiting word Thursday on whether their homes survived the flames — some of them the city's most famous denizens.

More than 1,900 structures have been destroyed and the number is expected to increase. More than 130,000 people are also under evacuation orders in the metropolitan area, from the Pacific Coast inland to Pasadena, a number that continues to shift as new fires erupt.

Late Wednesday, a fire in the Hollywood Hills was scorching the hills near the famed Hollywood Bowl and Dolby Theatre, which is the home of the Academy Awards.

Here are how the fires are impacting celebrities and the Los Angeles entertainment industry:

Stars whose homes have burned in the fires

Celebrities like Crystal and his wife, Janice, were sharing memories of the homes they lost.

The Crystals lost the home in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood that they lived in for 45 years.

"Janice and I lived in our home since 1979. We raised our children and grandchildren here. Every inch of our house was filled with love. Beautiful memories that can't be taken away. We are heartbroken of course but with the love of our children and friends we will get through this," the Crystals wrote in the statement.

Mandy Moore lost her home in the Altadena neighborhood roughly 30 miles east of the Palisades.

"Honestly, I'm in shock and feeling numb for all so many have lost, including my family. My children's school is gone. Our favorite restaurants, leveled. So many friends and loved ones have lost everything too," Moore wrote on Instagram in a post that included video of devastated streets in the foothill suburb.

"Our community is broken but we will be here to rebuild together. Sending love to all affected and on the front lines trying to get this under control," Moore wrote.

Hilton posted a news video clip on Instagram and said it included footage of her destroyed home in Malibu. "This home was where we built so many precious memories. It's where Phoenix took his first steps and where we dreamed of building a lifetime of memories with London," she said, referencing her young children."

Elwes, the star of "The Princess Bride" and numerous other films, wrote on Instagram Wednesday that his family was safe but their home had burned in the coastal Palisades fire. "Sadly we did lose our home but we are grateful to have survived this truly devastating fire," Elwes wrote.

Awards season upended

The blazes have thrown Hollywood's carefully orchestrated awards season into disarray.

Awards ceremonies planned for this weekend have been postponed due to the fires. The AFI Awards, which were set to honor "Wicked," "Anora" and other awards season contenders, had been scheduled for Friday.

The AARP Movies for Grownups Awards, which honor movies and television shows that resonate with older audiences, were set for Friday but have been postponed.

The Critics Choice Awards, originally scheduled for Sunday, have been postponed until Feb. 26.

Each of the shows feature projects that are looking for any advantage they can get in the Oscar race

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 34 of 65

and were scheduled during the Academy Awards voting window.

The Oscar nominations are also being delayed two days to Jan. 19 and the film academy has extended the voting window to accommodate members affected by the fires.

History lost, and more in danger

Flames burned parts of the Palisades Charter High School, which has been featured in many Hollywood productions including the 1976 horror movie "Carrie," the 2003 remake of "Freaky Friday" and the TV series "Teen Wolf."

The Palisades fire also destroyed the historic ranch house that belonged to Hollywood legend Will Rogers. It was among multiple structures destroyed at both Will Rogers State Historic Park and Topanga State Park. The historic Topanga Ranch Motel, built by William Randolph Hearst in 1929, also burned down.

Rogers' ranch, built on land he bought in the 1920s, occupied some 359 acres in what is now Pacific Palisades. It included a 31-room ranch house, a stable, golf course and riding trails. His wife donated it to California State Parks in 1944.

The Hollywood Hills fire is burning close to several Hollywood landmarks, including the Walk of Fame, TCL Chinese Theatre and the Hollywood Bowl.

Harrowing escapes from Los Angeles wildfires were made by foot, by car or by the grace of strangers

By JAIMIE DING, BEATRICE DUPUY, HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH, GENE JOHNSON and CLAIRE RUSH
Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — Flames and pillars of smoke rose from both sides of the road and a woman yelled in panic as firefighters ushered a crowd of fleeing residents along. Aaron Samson positioned his 83-year-old father-in-law behind his blue walker, and they began shuffling down the sidewalk.

"My father-in-law was saying, 'Aaron, if we are ever in a position where the flames are right there, you just run and leave me here,'" Samson recounted Wednesday.

It didn't get to that point. For the second time in a matter of hours, a good Samaritan picked them up, then drove them to safety in Santa Monica.

Their escape came as thousands of people fled wildfires in the Los Angeles area that turned picturesque neighborhoods into smoldering wasteland, with chimneys or wrought-iron staircases about all that remained of homes. Driven by powerful Santa Ana winds, the flames obliterated more than 1,000 structures, scorched landmarks made famous by Hollywood and killed at least five people. One of the fires was the most destructive in the modern history of the city of LA.

The escapes were perhaps the most harrowing from a disaster that Los Angeles has ever seen. People abandoned their cars and fled on foot as tree limbs crashed down and howling winds sent flames flying in every direction. Others flagged down rides from friends or strangers. With so many cars abandoned in the middle of Sunset Boulevard in Pacific Palisades, authorities had a bulldozer push the vehicles out of the way to clear a path for emergency vehicles.

Hard-hit Altadena produced one of the most heart-wrenching scenes: As flames closed in, about 100 elderly residents at senior care facilities were hurried out in hospital beds and wheelchairs. Many were wearing flimsy bedclothes in the chilly night air as they were wheeled to a parking lot about a block away. As wind-whipped embers swirled around them in the smoky air, they waited for help to arrive. Eventually all were taken to a shelter.

More evacuations were ordered late Wednesday after a new fire broke out in the Hollywood Hills.

Losing a childhood home of 30 years

Hundreds of evacuees wound up at the Pasadena Convention Center, many of them older residents of assisted living facilities. They sat wheelchair to wheelchair or lay on green cots, and some family members tearfully reunited there Wednesday as ash rained outside.

EJ Soto described leaving her childhood Altadena home of 30 years with her mother, two nieces, sister and husband at 3:25 a.m. after staying up overnight and watching the flames creep closer.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 35 of 65

"We had already decided, we're not going to sleep," Soto said.

She instructed her family to pack their bags with two days of clothing and put them in the car, along with food and supplies for their cat, Callie. They drove to the Rose Bowl stadium and waited for two hours, then returned to check on their neighborhood.

They saw three homes on their block burning — and finally their own, engulfed in flames two stories high.

Saved by strangers — twice

Samson, 48, was in Pacific Palisades at his father-in-law's home caring for him when the time came to flee Tuesday. They had no car, however, and were unable to secure a ride through Uber or by calling 911. Samson flagged down a neighbor, who agreed to take give them and their two bags a lift.

After a little more an half an hour in traffic, the flames closed in. The tops of palm trees burned like giant sparklers in the incessant wind.

With vehicles at a standstill, police ordered people to get out and flee on foot. Samson and his father-in-law left their bags and made their way to the sidewalk. The father-in-law, who is recovering from a medical procedure, steadied himself against a utility pole as Samson retrieved his walker and recorded the ordeal on his cellphone.

"We got it, Dad, we got it," Samson said.

They walked for about 15 minutes before another good Samaritan saw them struggling, stopped and told them to get in his vehicle.

By Wednesday afternoon, Samson did not know if the home survived. But he said they were indebted to the two strangers.

"They saved us," he said. "They really stepped up."

Ready to seek safety in a pool

Another Pacific Palisades resident, Sheriece Wallace, didn't know about the fire until her sister called — just as a helicopter made a water drop over Wallace's house.

"I was like, 'It's raining,'" Wallace said. "She's like, 'No, it's not raining. Your neighborhood is on fire. You need to get out.'"

She opened her door and saw the hillside behind her home was ablaze. The street below was choked with abandoned cars and boulders that had tumbled down the canyon. She thought she might have to jump into a pool to save herself, but instead walked to a street corner and lucked upon a neighbor who offered her a ride.

"There was no other way for me to get out," Wallace said. "And if it had not been for the grace of God, my neighbor's son coming to get their mother and me going to the corner to just try to flag someone down ..."

Losing family heirlooms and a community

Altadena resident Eddie Aparicio was dumbstruck as he and his partner evacuated Tuesday evening, inching through bumper-to-bumper traffic as nearly hurricane-force winds howled around them.

"Limbs were falling everywhere. Massive trees were on top of cars," Aparicio said. "Seeing the embers and flames jump off the mountain, skip 30 blocks and land on a house — it's insane."

They finally reached the home of his partner's mother. The next morning a neighbor sent a video showing that his house — like so many others on his block — had burned down. The chimney alone was still standing.

While they lost some family mementos, such as paintings by Aparicio's grandmother and father, the saddest part was the loss of a beloved community.

"It makes me feel very existential," Aparicio said. "You never know what's going to happen."

A beloved beachside seafood shack, gone

Among the landmarks devoured by the flames was the historic ranch house that belonged to Hollywood legend Will Rogers and the Topanga Ranch Motel, built by newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst in 1929.

The Reel Inn, an iconic Malibu seafood shack across the Pacific Coast Highway from Topanga Beach, a famous surf spot, also burned. Restaurants had operated in that location since the 1940s; the Reel Inn —

where surf boards dating back almost a century hung from the rafters — opened in 1986.

Owner Teddy Leonard said she and her husband, Andy, watched it burn on television Tuesday evening from their home a few miles away. They then drove their Kawasaki Mule — a four-wheel utility vehicle that looks like a souped-up golf cart — to the top of a ridge that overlooks the ocean. The sky was bright red, and the winds were so strong that she felt she was about to be blown out of the vehicle.

"You could see sparks of fires," Leonard said. "At one point there's the whole ridge burning."

Far to the left, she spotted another fire, and then to the right, a flare-up.

"You realize that the wind is picking up the embers and dropping them in different spots, that there's no way that those firemen could fight this fire," Leonard said.

The couple evacuated to an Airbnb that her son rented after his apartment in Malibu burned. Leonard did not yet know if their home survived, but they were grateful to be alive and to have each other and their family.

"You're in this disaster, and it's nature," she said. "There's no controlling what's happening."

Trump, the 'America First' candidate, has a new preoccupation: Imperialism

By JILL COLVIN and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump ran on a return to his "America First" foreign policy platform. The U.S., he said, could no longer afford to be the world's policeman. On his watch, he pledged, there would be no new wars.

But since winning a second term, the president-elect has been embracing a new imperialist agenda, threatening to seize the Panama Canal and Greenland — perhaps by military force — and saying he will use economic coercion to pressure Canada to become the nation's 51st state.

"Canada and the United States, that would really be something. You get rid of that artificially drawn line, and you take a look at what that looks like and it would also be much better for national security," Trump said of the world's longest international border and the U.S.'s second-largest trade partner.

Such talk of undermining sovereign borders and using military force against allies and fellow NATO members — even if said lightly — marks a stunning departure from decades-old norms about territorial integrity. And it is rhetoric that analysts say could embolden America's enemies by suggesting the U.S. is now OK with countries using force to redraw borders at a time when Russia is pressing forward with its invasion of Ukraine and China is threatening Taiwan, which it claims as its own territory.

"If I'm Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping, this is music to my ears," said John Bolton, Trump's former national security adviser-turned-critic, who also served as ambassador to the United Nations.

Trump's language, reflecting a 19th century world view that defined European colonial powers, comes as international allies were already grappling with the implications of his return to the world stage.

Gerald Butts, outgoing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's former top adviser and a longtime close friend, said Trump seems more emboldened than when he first took office in 2017.

"I think he's feeling a lot less unencumbered than he was the last time. There are no restraints. This is maximum Trump," he said.

Butts is part of a WhatsApp group with others who staffed heads of state and government during the first Trump term. "Someone joked that the big fear the last time was that he didn't know what he was doing and the big fear this time is that he does," he recounted.

Trump's swaggering rhetoric also marks a continuation of the kind of testosterone-heavy energy that was a signature of his campaign, particularly as he worked to win over younger male voters with appearances on popular podcasts.

Charlie Kirk, a key Trump ally who joined Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., on a trip to Greenland this week, argued on his podcast Wednesday that it was imperative for the U.S. to control Greenland. The island is an autonomous territory of Denmark, a longtime U.S. ally and a founding NATO member.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 37 of 65

Beyond the country's strategic location in the Arctic and its rich resources, Kirk said, "there is this other component. It makes America dream again, that we're not just this sad, low-testosterone, beta male slouching in our chair, allowing the world to run over us."

"It is the resurrection of masculine American energy. It is the return of Manifest Destiny," said Kirk, whose Turning Point group helped with Trump's get-out-the-vote effort.

Trump allies have long argued that his bluster and most audacious statements are all part of his complex negotiating tactics. Aides note that nearly half of U.S. shipping containers travel through the Panama Canal and that key canal ports are controlled by a Hong Kong-based firm.

Greenland is home to the Pituffik Space Base, the northernmost U.S. post, which plays a key role in missile warnings and space surveillance. And China and Russia have been making their own investments in the Arctic at a time when new potential shipping routes are opening as ice caps melt.

Canada, Trump's team notes, spends far less on defense than its southern neighbor.

"Every decision President Trump makes is in the best interest of the United States and the American people. That's why President Trump has called attention to legitimate national security and economic concerns regarding Canada, Greenland and Panama," said Trump-Vance Transition spokesperson Karoline Leavitt.

But Michael McFaul, the Obama-era ambassador to Russia who now serves as director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, said Trump's language is counterproductive to U.S. national security interests.

"President Trump is about to take over at one of the most dangerous times in American history," he said. "We will be best at addressing those threats with allies. Allies are our superpower. And so I wish he would focus on the real threats and not invent threats."

Trump's trolling is not the negotiating ploy of "crazy genius," he said, and will have consequences.

"We've got serious enemies and adversaries in the world, and we're better off with the Canadians and the Danes with us than pissed off with us," he said.

Indeed, Canadian officials have responded with increasing anger.

"The joke is over," Dominic LeBlanc, the country's finance minister and point person for U.S.-Canada relations, said Wednesday. "It's a way for him, I think, to sow confusion, to agitate people, to create chaos knowing this will never happen."

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum responded with sarcasm Wednesday to another Trump proposal: to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America." Standing before an old map, she quipped that North America should be renamed "América Mexicana," or "Mexican America," because a founding document dating from 1814 that preceded Mexico's constitution referred to it that way.

"That sounds nice, no?" she said.

Denmark and Panama have responded similarly, with Panama's foreign minister, Javier Martínez-Acha, saying, "The sovereignty of our canal," which the country has controlled for more than 25 years, "is not negotiable and is part of our history of struggle and an irreversible conquest."

Mike O'Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said he has been surprised by Trump's recent comments given his previous relative disinterest in using force.

While Trump boasted that he had a bigger and more powerful "nuclear button" than North Korea and bombed Iranian general Qassim Soleimani during his first term, he also cast himself during the campaign as a president who had started no new wars and who would be able to prevent World War III.

O'Hanlon noted that NATO members are sworn to defend each other if they are attacked, creating what would be an unprecedented situation were Trump to actually try to forcefully take Greenland.

"You could make a strong argument that the rest of NATO would be obliged to come to Denmark's defense," he said. "It does raise the possibility, at whatever crazy level, of direct military force."

Bolton has long criticized Trump for lacking a coherent policy strategy, saying his approach is "transactional, ad hoc, episodic and really viewed from the prism of how it helps Donald Trump."

He said Trump has never liked Trudeau, and was clearly enjoying trolling the Canadian leader as he railed against the nations' trade imbalance. Canada, a resource-rich nation, sells more goods to the U.S.

than it buys.

But Bolton said the president-elect's expansionist talk about Canada and Greenland is likely to backfire, adding: "When you do things that make it less likely you're going to achieve the objectives, that's not master bargaining, that's crazy."

Trump gives GOP senators no set strategy as leaders struggle to craft his priorities

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump likes the idea of "one, big beautiful bill" for his top legislative priorities, but he emerged from a lengthy closed-door meeting with Republican senators late Wednesday open to other strategies as GOP leaders strain to develop a plan before the party gains full power in Washington.

Trump said it "feels great" to be back inside the U.S. Capitol for the first time since he left office four years ago, after the Jan. 6, 2021, riot by his supporters. With his wife, Melania, he also paid tribute to the late President Jimmy Carter lying in state in the Rotunda ahead of funeral services Thursday.

With Trump taking the oath of office on Jan. 20, Republicans have no time to waste.

"We're looking at the one bill versus two bills, and whatever it is, it doesn't matter," Trump said about the conflicting strategies as he arrived. "We're going to get the result."

More than 90 minutes later, after bantering with GOP senators on a wide range of topics, Trump exited with the same message: "One bill, two bills, doesn't matter."

Trump's return to Capitol Hill marked a changed era in Washington as he strode through the corridors where four years ago a mob of his supporters had laid siege to the U.S. Capitol as senators fled to safety in a failed attempt to salvage Trump's election defeat to President Joe Biden.

Inside the private meeting, Trump received applause and bursts of laughter from the Republican senators, staying late into the evening to confer with him behind closed doors. He took questions as the conversation roamed — from his designs on Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal to the fires raging in California and even the North Dakota Bison game, senators said.

At stake are tax cuts, border security, money to deport immigrants and efforts to boost oil and gas energy production — priorities for Republicans coming to the White House, House and Senate.

He first met privately with Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., and is also expected to huddle over the weekend with House GOP lawmakers at his private club Mar-a-Lago.

Thune said afterward the Republican senators and Trump want the same results. "It's an ongoing conversation," he said.

Political capital is almost always at its peak at the start of a new presidential term, even more so because this is Trump's second and he is prevented under the Constitution from a third. Moving swiftly is all the more important because the GOP majorities are slim, particularly in the House, where House Speaker Mike Johnson can't afford to lose hardly any votes.

Johnson, who greeted Trump at the Capitol, has said he sees himself operating as the GOP quarterback with Trump as their coach calling plays. But Republicans are quickly finding themselves in a dilemma: What happens when the coach changes his mind?

Trump has given Republicans on Capitol Hill mixed signals, flip-flopping over what is the best approach. Over the weekend, he said he wanted "one big, beautiful bill." By Monday, he had reopened the door to two.

House Republicans want a single package. Senate GOP leaders are proposing at least two.

At one point during the meeting, Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D. said he suggested, "Well, Mr. President, you love a horse race and then whatever works best is great."

Hoeven said, "He prefers one big, beautiful bill but hey you know he wants to get all this done."

Budget reconciliation carries high risk, but potentially high reward

Republicans are relying on perhaps the most complicated legislative tool at their disposal, the budget

reconciliation process, as the vehicle to advance Trump's priorities.

It's a strategy with high risk, but also potentially high reward.

Reconciliation allows Congress to pass bills on a majority basis, without the threat of a filibuster in the Senate that could delay or kill action. But it is also a difficult, strict and time-consuming process that can fall apart at any moment.

Democrats used the same tool during the Obama era to approve the Affordable Care Act in 2010 without any Republican support. Republicans used it during Trump's first term to pass the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act without Democrats.

Using reconciliation is a herculean task. Doing it twice could prove doubly difficult.

Democrats are trying to stand their ground

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Pete Aguilar of California said what's at stake is that Trump and the Republicans are proposing a tax giveaway to the wealthy and budget cuts that will cut social services and other programs that Americans rely on.

Republicans are "huddling behind closed doors" focused on "how they provide tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires and how they cut programs that hurt people," he said.

Thune has said one could be approved within the first 30 days of the new administration with provisions for border security and mass deportations, energy development and military funds. The tax cuts would come later, in a second package.

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, a member of GOP leadership who invited the president-elect to meet with senators, said she could go with one or two bills.

"But I still think the two-bill strategy is better simply because I think we can get a victory in early, which will show the American people and the president we mean business," she said.

Trump plans meetings at Mar-a-Lago with House Republicans

Johnson, R-La., revived his football metaphor Tuesday.

"We have very well-designed plays," he said. "Now we are working out the sequence of those plays, working with a new head coach, in that metaphor, President Trump."

Rep. Kevin Hern, R-Okla., among those House Republicans headed to Florida for this weekend's meetings, said he supports the House's one-bill approach.

"You're not going to get everything that you want," he said. "So how do we put something together that everybody can get something?"

Once back in Florida on Thursday, Trump is hosting Republican governors for dinner at Mar-a-Lago.

Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo is one of the governors headed to South Florida, according to an official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the details were not public. Utah Gov. Spencer Cox is also expected to attend the dinner, according to a schedule released by the governor's office earlier this week.

During his first term, Trump was known for changing his mind, a habit that members of Congress became accustomed to as they navigated his presidency.

Trump ally Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., said Trump just "wants all of it done."

Body of an Israeli hostage is found in Gaza, possibly alongside his son's remains, army says

By TIA GOLDENBERG and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli soldiers recovered the body of a 53-year-old hostage in an underground tunnel in southern Gaza, the military said Wednesday, and the army was determining if another set of remains belongs to the man's son.

The discovery of Yosef AlZayadni's body comes as Israel and Hamas are considering a ceasefire deal that would free the remaining hostages and halt the fighting in Gaza. Israel says about a third of the remaining 100 hostages have died, but believes as many as half could be dead.

Yosef and his son Hamzah AlZayadni were thought to still be alive before Wednesday's announcement, and news about their fate could ramp up pressure on Israel to move forward with a deal.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 40 of 65

The military said it found evidence in the tunnel that raised "serious concerns" for the life of Hamzah AlZayadni, 23, suggesting he may have died in captivity. Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an Israeli military spokesperson, said the circumstances behind Yosef AlZayadni's death were being investigated.

AlZayadni and three of his children were among 250 hostages taken captive after Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing 1,200 people.

AlZayadni had a total of 19 children and had worked for 17 years at the dairy farm of a kibbutz that was among the communities attacked, said the Hostages Families Forum, a group representing the relatives of captives. AlZayadni's teenage children, Bilal and Aisha, were released along with about 100 hostages in a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023.

The bodies of around three dozen hostages have been recovered in Gaza and eight hostages have been rescued by the army.

The Hostages Families Forum said the ceasefire deal being negotiated "comes far too late for Yosef — who was taken alive and should have returned the same way."

"Every day in captivity poses an immediate mortal danger to the hostages," the group said in a statement. The deaths of previous high-profile hostages have sparked large protests in Israel calling for a deal.

Yosef AlZayadni's name appeared on a list of 34 hostages shared by a Hamas official with The Associated Press earlier this week, who the militant group said were slated for release. Israel said this was a list it had submitted to mediators last July, and that it has received nothing from Hamas.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that a ceasefire and hostage deal between Israel and Hamas is "very close" and he hopes "we can get it over the line" before handing over U.S. diplomacy to President-elect Donald Trump's administration later this month.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed sorrow at the news of AlZayadni's death, and said in a statement he had "hoped and worked to bring back the four members of the family from Hamas captivity." Defense Minister Israel Katz initially said the bodies of both Yosef and Hamzah AlZayadni had been recovered, but the military said the some of the remains were not yet identified.

The AlZayadni family are members of the Bedouin community, part of Israel's Palestinian minority who have Israeli citizenship. The traditionally nomadic community is particularly impoverished in Israel and has suffered from neglect and marginalization. Palestinians make up some 20% of Israel's 10 million population, and millions more live in Gaza and under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank.

Eight members of Israel's Bedouin minority were abducted in the October 2023 attacks.

"We expected to bring them back alive," said Talal Alkernawi, mayor of the city of Rahat where the men were from. "Instead of returning them alive to their families, to raise their children, we receive them dead."

Many families fear their loved ones' fate is at risk as long as the war in Gaza rages on. Israeli forces are pressing their air and ground war against Hamas, and Palestinian health officials said Israeli airstrikes killed at least nine people in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, including three infants — among them a 1-week-old — and two women. Israel's military says it only targets militants, accusing them of hiding among civilians.

The war has killed over 45,800 Palestinians, according to the territory's Health Ministry. It does not say how many were fighters, but says women and children make up over half the fatalities. The military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Israel has destroyed vast areas of the impoverished territory and displaced some 90% of its population of 2.3 million, often multiple times.

The fighting has also spilled over into the broader Middle East, including a war between Israel and Hezbollah now contained by a fragile ceasefire, and direct conflict between Israel and Iran.

Iran-backed rebels in Yemen have targeted shipping in the Red Sea for more than a year and recently ramped up missile attacks on Israel, saying they seek end to the war in Gaza. And on Wednesday, the U.S. military said it carried out a wave of strikes against underground arms facilities of the Houthi rebels.

Hollywood Hills fire breaks out as deadly wildfires burn out of control across Los Angeles area

By MANUEL VALDES, HALLIE GOLDEN and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A fast-moving fire broke out in the Hollywood Hills on Wednesday night, threatening one of Los Angeles' most iconic spots as firefighters battled to get under control three other major blazes that killed five people, put 130,000 people under evacuation orders and ravaged communities from the Pacific Coast to inland Pasadena.

The Sunset Fire was burning near the Hollywood Bowl and about a mile (1.6 kilometers) from the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

The streets around Grauman's Chinese Theatre and Madame Tussauds were packed with stop-and-go traffic as sirens blared and low-flying helicopters soared by on their way to dump water on the flames. People toting suitcases left hotels on foot, while some onlookers walked toward the flames, recording the fire on their phones.

Winds eased up some Wednesday, a day after hurricane-force winds blew embers through the air, igniting block after block, and hundreds of firefighters from other states have arrived to help, but the four fires burning out of control showed the danger is far from over.

More than half a dozen schools in the area were either damaged or destroyed, including Palisades Charter High School, which has been featured in many Hollywood productions, including the 1976 horror movie "Carrie" and the TV series "Teen Wolf," officials said. UCLA has canceled classes for the week.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said air operations were dousing flames. She warned they still faced "erratic winds," though not like Tuesday evening, when aircraft had to be grounded and much of the destruction occurred.

In Pasadena, Fire Chief Chad Augustin said between 200 and 500 structures have been damaged or lost from the Eaton Fire that started Tuesday night.

He said the city's water system was stretched and was further hampered by power outages, but even without those issues, firefighters would not have been able to stop the fire due to the intense winds fanning the flames.

"Those erratic wind gusts were throwing embers for multiple miles ahead of the fire," he said.

On the Pacific Coast west of downtown Los Angeles, a major fire leveled entire blocks, reducing grocery stores and banks to rubble in the Pacific Palisades, a hillside area along the coast dotted with celebrity homes and memorialized by the Beach Boys in their 1960s hit "Surfin' USA."

The Palisades fire was the most destructive in the Los Angeles history, with at least 1,000 structures burned.

The scope of the destruction was just becoming clear: Block after block of California Mission Style homes and bungalows were reduced to nothing but charred remains dotted by stone fireplaces and blackened arched entryways. Ornate iron railing wrapped around the smoldering frame of one house. The apocalyptic scenes spread for miles.

Swimming pools were blackened with soot, and sports cars slumped on melted tires.

As flames moved through his neighborhood, Jose Velasquez sprayed down his family's Altadena home with water as embers rained down on the roof. He managed to save their home, which also houses their family business of selling churros, a Mexican pastry. Others weren't so lucky. Many of his neighbors were at work when they lost their homes.

"So we had to call a few people and then we had people messaging, asking if their house was still standing," he said. "We had to tell them that it's not."

Beyond the burned areas, residents worked wearing N95 masks, unable to escape the toxic smoke wafting over huge sections of the city.

Actors lost homes

The flames marched toward highly populated and affluent neighborhoods, including Calabasas and Santa

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 42 of 65

Monica, home to California's rich and famous.

Mandy Moore, Cary Elwes and Paris Hilton are among the stars who said Wednesday they lost homes. Billy Crystal and his wife Janice lost their home of 45 years in the Palisades Fire.

"We raised our children and grandchildren here. Every inch of our house was filled with love. Beautiful memories that can't be taken away," the Crystals wrote in the statement.

In Palisades Village, the public library, two major grocery stores, a pair of banks and several boutiques were destroyed.

"It's just really weird coming back to somewhere that doesn't really exist anymore," said Dylan Vincent, who returned to the neighborhood to retrieve some items and saw that his elementary school had burned down and that whole blocks had been flattened.

The fires have consumed a total of about 42 square miles (108 square kilometers) — nearly the size of the entire city of San Francisco.

Fast-moving flames allowed little time to escape

Flames moved so quickly that many barely had time to escape. Police sought shelter inside their patrol cars, and residents at a senior living center were pushed in wheelchairs and hospital beds down a street to safety.

In the race to get away in Pacific Palisades, roadways became impassable when scores of people abandoned their vehicles and fled on foot.

Higher temperatures and less rain mean a longer fire season

California's wildfire season is beginning earlier and ending later due to rising temperatures and decreased rainfall tied to climate change, according to recent data. Rains that usually end fire season are often delayed, meaning fires can burn through the winter months, according to the Western Fire Chiefs Association.

Dry winds, including the notorious Santa Anas, have contributed to warmer-than-average temperatures in Southern California, which has not seen more than 0.1 inches (2.5 millimeters) of rain since early May.

The winds increased to 80 mph (129 kph) Wednesday, according to reports received by the National Weather Service. Forecasters predicted wind gusts of 35-55 mph (56 to 88 kph) that could rise higher in the mountains and foothills. Fire conditions could last through Friday.

Landmarks get scorched and studios suspend production

President Joe Biden signed a federal emergency declaration after arriving at a Santa Monica fire station for a briefing with Gov. Gavin Newsom, who dispatched National Guard troops to help.

Several Hollywood studios suspended production, and Universal Studios closed its theme park between Pasadena and Pacific Palisades.

As of Wednesday evening, more than 456,000 people were without power in southern California, according to the tracking website PowerOutage.us.

Several Southern California landmarks were heavily damaged, including the Reel Inn in Malibu, a seafood restaurant. Owner Teddy Leonard and her husband hope to rebuild.

"When you look at the grand scheme of things, as long as your family is well and everyone's alive, you're still winning, right?" she said.

Fire hydrants ran dry in Southern California just when they were needed most

By BRITTANY PETERSON and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

The water system used to fight the Palisades fire in Los Angeles buckled under the demands of what turned out to be the most destructive fire in city history, with some hydrants running dry as they were overstressed without assistance from firefighting aircraft for hours early Wednesday.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power was pumping from aqueducts and groundwater into the system, but demand was so high that it wasn't enough to refill three 1-million gallon tanks in hilly Pacific Palisades that help pressurize hydrants for the neighborhood. Many went dry as at least 1,000 buildings were engulfed in flames.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 43 of 65

The dry hydrants prompted a swirl of criticism on social media, including from President-elect Donald Trump, against Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and Gov. Gavin Newsom's water management policies.

But state and local officials and experts forcefully hit back, saying critics were connecting unrelated issues and spreading false information during a crisis. State water distribution choices were not behind the hydrant problems, they said, nor was a lack of overall supply in the region.

In a post on his Truth Social media network, Trump connected it to criticism of the state's approach to balancing the distribution of water to farms and cities with the need to protect endangered species including the Delta smelt. Trump has sided with farmers over environmentalists in a long-running dispute over California's scarce water resources.

Janisse Quiñones, head of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, said later at a news conference that 3 million gallons of water were available when the Palisades fire started but the demand was four times greater than "we've ever seen in the system."

Hydrants are designed for fighting fires at one or two houses at a time, not hundreds, Quiñones said, and refilling the tanks also requires asking fire departments to pause firefighting efforts. Mayor Bass said 20% of hydrants went dry.

"People are literally fleeing. People have lost their lives. Kids lost their schools. Families completely torn asunder. Churches burned down. And this guy wanted to politicize it," Newsom said of Trump on CNN. He contrasted the former president's accusations with President Joe Biden standing by the devastated communities.

Peter Gleick, senior fellow at the Pacific Institute, a nonprofit that focuses on global water sustainability, dismissed Trump's criticism as well.

"Those fights have been going on for a long time, and they have not affected in any way water supply for firefighting in southern California," Gleick said.

About 40 percent of Los Angeles city water comes from state-controlled projects connected to northern California, where the Delta smelt live, and the state has limited the water it delivers this year. Yet the southern California reservoirs these canals help feed are at above-average levels for this time of year.

Rick Caruso, a real estate developer and former Los Angeles Department of Water and Power commissioner who lost to Bass in the last mayoral race, said officials needed to answer for the system's failures.

"You got thousands of homes destroyed, families destroyed, businesses destroyed," he said. "I think you can figure out a way to get more water in the hydrants. I don't think there's room for excuses here."

A widening problem

Los Angeles isn't the only city to see its public water system stressed by firefighting demand as human-caused climate change makes wildfires worse, experts say.

Large urban fires can also melt or otherwise damage pipes, causing them to leak large amounts of water, draining pressure from the system, said Andrew Whelton, an engineering professor at Purdue University. Individual homes with water meters that have a remote shutoff can help utilities quickly stem such losses, Whelton said.

In Hawaii the 2023 fire that ripped through the historic town of Lahaina and killed more than 100 people burned so quickly in a dense area that pipes burst, making it hard to maintain enough water pressure for firefighting efforts. In the 2021 Marshall Fire in Colorado, the city of Louisville's water department had workers manually open valves to let untreated water from the Colorado River and Boulder Creek into pipes to restore pressure. That helped firefighters but also led to water contamination.

Greg Pierce, professor of urban environmental policy at the University of California who had a family member lose a house in one of the blazes, pushed back on Caruso's assertion that the loss of water pressure was a clear sign of mismanagement.

Providing enough water could amount to a subsidy for very high-income areas, he said. "I think the conversation has to be more about whether these areas are habitable."

John Fisher, a retired battalion chief with San Diego Fire-Rescue, said California is among the best in the world at ensuring communities share resources and staffing to put out big fires.

"We get it done. We pre-position resources, we staff up reserve engines," he said. "Yesterday, there

(was) a lot more fire than there is firefighters. That will start to change as the wind dies out and additional firefighters arrive and we'll get the upper hand on it."

A Russian missile attack in southern Ukraine has killed at least 13 civilians, officials say

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A daytime Russian missile attack on the southern Ukraine city of Zaporizhzhia killed at least 13 civilians and wounded about 30 others on Wednesday, officials said.

Footage posted on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Telegram channel shows civilians lying in a city street littered with debris. The post shows them being treated by emergency services and taken away on gurneys.

Russian has frequently launched aerial attacks on civilian areas during the almost three-year war. Thousands of civilians have been killed in Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

Zelenskyy and regional Gov. Ivan Fedorov said Wednesday's attack killed at least 13 civilians. Minutes before the attack, Fedorov had warned of a threat of high-speed missiles and devastating glide bombs being fired at the Zaporizhzhia region.

Russian troops started launching the glide bombs at Zaporizhzhia in the middle of the afternoon, and at least two bombs struck residential buildings in the city, Fedorov said.

He announced that Thursday would be a day of mourning in the region.

"There is nothing more brutal than aerial bombing of a city, knowing that ordinary civilians will suffer," Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram.

Zelenskyy said earlier Wednesday that countries wanting to end the war should offer Ukraine assurances about its future defense. Kyiv officials fear that any ceasefire or peace deal will just give the Kremlin time to rearm and invade again unless it is deterred by military force.

"To be honest, I believe that we have a right to demand serious security guarantees from ... the countries that aim for the peace in the world," Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy was responding at a news conference in Kyiv to comments the previous day by President-elect Donald Trump that he understood Russia's opposition to neighboring Ukraine joining NATO.

The United States, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia have stood in the way of Ukraine immediately joining the 32-nation alliance, Zelenskyy noted. The alliance has said only that the country is on an "irreversible path" to membership.

Earlier, the Ukrainian military said it struck a fuel storage depot deep inside Russia, causing a huge blaze at the facility that supplies an important Russian air base.

Russian officials acknowledged a major drone attack in the area, and said that authorities had set up an emergency command center to fight the fire.

Ukraine's General Staff said the assault hit the storage facility near Engels, in Russia's Saratov region, about 600 kilometers (370 miles) east of the Ukrainian border. The depot supplied a nearby airfield used by aircraft that launch missiles across the border into Ukraine, a statement on Facebook said.

Ukraine has been developing its arsenal of domestically produced long-range missiles and drones capable of reaching deep behind the front line as it faces restrictions on the range that its military can fire its Western-supplied missiles into Russia.

The attacks have disrupted Russian logistics in the war, which began on Feb. 24, 2022, and embarrassed the Kremlin.

Zelenskyy said last year that his country has developed a weapon that could hit a target 700 kilometers (400 miles) away. Some Ukrainian drone attacks have hit targets more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) away.

The governor of the Saratov region, Roman Busargin, said that an unspecified industrial plant in Engels sustained damage from the falling drone debris that sparked a fire, but nobody was hurt.

Engels, which has a population of more than 220,000, is on the left bank of the Volga River, and is home

to multiple industrial plants. Saratov, a major industrial city of about 900,000, faces Engels across the river. "The damage to the oil base creates serious logistical problems for the strategic aviation of the Russian occupiers and significantly reduces their ability to strike peaceful Ukrainian cities and civilian objects. To be continued," the statement from Ukraine's General Staff said.

Russian authorities restricted flights early Wednesday at the airports of Saratov, Ulyanovsk, Kazan and Nizhnekamsk, in an apparent response to the Ukrainian attack.

The main base of Russia's nuclear-capable strategic bombers is just outside Engels. It has come under Ukrainian drone attacks since the early stages of the war, forcing the Russian military to relocate most of the bombers to other areas.

Ex-FBI informant who fabricated bribery story about Biden and his son Hunter gets 6 years in prison

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former FBI informant who fabricated a story about President Joe Biden and his son Hunter accepting bribes that became central to Republicans' impeachment effort was sentenced Wednesday to six years in prison.

Alexander Smirnov pleaded guilty last month in Los Angeles federal court to tax evasion and lying to the FBI about the phony bribery scheme in what prosecutors say was an effort to influence the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

Smirnov, a dual U.S. and Israeli citizen, falsely claimed to his FBI handler that executives from the Ukrainian energy company Burisma had paid then-Vice President Biden and his son \$5 million each around 2015.

Smirnov's explosive claim in 2020 came after he expressed "bias" about Joe Biden as a presidential candidate, according to prosecutors. In reality, investigators found Smirnov had only routine business dealings with Burisma starting in 2017 — after Biden's term as vice president.

Prosecutors noted that Smirnov's false claim "set off a firestorm in Congress" when it resurfaced years later as part of the House impeachment inquiry into President Biden, a Democrat who defeated Republican then-President Donald Trump in 2020. The Biden administration dismissed the House impeachment effort as a "stunt."

Before Smirnov's arrest, Republicans had demanded the FBI release the unredacted form documenting the unverified allegations, though they acknowledged they couldn't confirm if they were true.

"In committing his crimes he betrayed the United States, a country that showed him nothing but generosity, including conferring on him the greatest honor it can bestow, citizenship," Justice Department special counsel David Weiss' team wrote in court papers. "He repaid the trust the United States placed in him to be a law-abiding naturalized citizen and, more specifically, that one of its premier law enforcement agencies placed in him to tell the truth as a confidential human source, by attempting to interfere in a Presidential election."

Smirnov will get credit for the time he has served behind bars since his arrest last February in the case accusing him of lying to the FBI. Prosecutors in November brought new tax charges alleging he concealed millions of dollars of income he earned between 2020 and 2022.

Smirnov's lawyers had sought no more than four years behind bars, noting the "substantial assistance" he provided to the U.S. government as an FBI informant for more than a decade. Smirnov's lawyers noted in court papers that he suffers from serious health issues related to his eyes and argue that a lengthy sentence would "unnecessarily prolong his suffering."

"Mr. Smirnov has learned a very grave lesson and proffers to this Honorable Court that he will not find himself on this side of the law again," attorneys Richard Schonfeld and David Chesnoff told the judge in court papers.

Smirnov was prosecuted by Weiss, who also brought gun and tax charges against Hunter Biden. Hunter Biden was supposed to be sentenced in December after being convicted at a trial in the gun case and pleading guilty to tax charges. But he was pardoned by his father, who said he believed "raw politics has

infected this process and it led to a miscarriage of justice.”

In seeking a lighter sentence, Smirnov’s lawyers wrote in court papers that both Hunter Biden and President-elect Trump — who was charged in two federal cases by a different special counsel — “have walked free and clear of any meaningful punishment.”

Special counsel Jack Smith abandoned the two federal cases against Trump — accusing him of conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss and hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida — after Trump’s presidential victory over Vice President Kamala Harris in November.

Monstrous wildfires blanket Southern California with smoky air, threatening the health of millions

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Massive wildfires burning in the Los Angeles area have filled the air with a thick cloud of smoke and ash, prompting air quality advisories across a vast stretch of Southern California.

Three major fires broke out Tuesday amid dangerously high winds, killing at least five people and destroying more than 1,000 structures. Tens of thousands of people have been told to evacuate, many in harrowing conditions.

In Altadena where one of the major fires raged, the smoke was so thick a person used a flashlight to see down the street. A dark cloud hovered over downtown Los Angeles and smoky air and ash drifted well beyond the city to communities to the east and south.

What are the risks?

Wildfire smoke increases tiny particles in the air known as particulate matter that can be harmful to people’s health. Children, the elderly and people with conditions such as heart and lung disease are more sensitive to the effects.

Dr. Puneet Gupta, the assistant medical director for the Los Angeles County Fire Department, said wildfire smoke is known to cause heart attacks and worsen asthma, and that burning homes can also release cyanide and carbon dioxide. He said sickened patients are showing up in emergency rooms when hospitals already are full because of flu season, and some hospitals could also face evacuations due to the fires.

“We have a number of hospitals that are threatened, and if they have to be evacuated, it could become a crisis,” said Gupta, also a spokesperson for the American College of Emergency Physicians. “So that is one of the things that we have to consider.”

U.S. Health Secretary Xavier Becerra raised concerns Wednesday about the smoke’s impact on people’s health in the aftermath of fires that have charred massive amounts of vegetation and buildings.

“That air that’s being spewed is no longer just the kind of smoke that we used to see from wildfires, where it was natural vegetation that was burning,” said Becerra, a former California Attorney General. “Now you got a whole bunch of toxic materials that are getting burned and put into the air.”

What areas are affected?

About 17 million people living across Southern California are covered by smoke and dust advisories issued for the three wildfires, according to the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

The smoke advisory was expected to last until late Thursday. A dust advisory was also in effect until late Wednesday as gusty winds could kick up ash and dust from prior fires and further worsen air conditions, the district said.

The worst conditions were in the vicinity of the fires with some areas covered in thick, gray smoke. In East Los Angeles, the air quality index hit an unhealthy 173. Good air quality is considered to be 50 or less.

But dozens of miles away, air quality also was deemed unhealthy for sensitive groups including the elderly and young children. Officials in the city of Long Beach about 20 miles (32 kilometers) south of Los Angeles warned residents to take precautions due to the smoky air, and in coastal Rancho Palos Verdes the air quality index measured 108, which is considered unhealthy for those sensitive to pollution.

Winds from the northwest were expected late Wednesday and Thursday to push air from the regions where fires were still burning toward the south across Los Angeles and Orange counties and east toward San Bernardino County.

What can people do to protect themselves?

People living in areas affected by wildfire smoke should try to stay indoors and keep windows and doors shut to limit their exposure.

They should avoid vigorous physical activity and run air conditioning or an air purifier, and should not use house fans that draw in outside air.

For those who must be outside, a respirator mask can offer some protection, according to air quality regulators.

Meta rolls back hate speech rules as Zuckerberg cites 'recent elections' as a catalyst

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

It wasn't just fact-checking that Meta scrapped from its platforms as it prepares for the second Trump administration. The social media giant has also loosened its rules around hate speech and abuse — again following the lead of Elon Musk's X — specifically when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity as well as immigration status.

The changes are worrying advocates for vulnerable groups, who say Meta's decision to scale back content moderation could lead to real-world harms. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said Tuesday that the company will "remove restrictions on topics like immigration and gender that are out of touch with mainstream discourse," citing "recent elections" as a catalyst.

For instance, Meta has added the following to its rules — called community standards — that users are asked to abide by:

"We do allow allegations of mental illness or abnormality when based on gender or sexual orientation, given political and religious discourse about transgenderism and homosexuality and common non-serious usage of words like 'weird.'" In other words, it is now permitted to call gay people mentally ill on Facebook, Threads and Instagram. Other slurs and what Meta calls "harmful stereotypes historically linked to intimidation" — such as Blackface and Holocaust denial — are still prohibited.

The Menlo Park, California-based company also removed a sentence from its "policy rationale" explaining why it bans certain hateful conduct. The now-deleted sentence said that hate speech "creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion, and in some cases may promote offline violence."

"The policy change is a tactic to earn favor with the incoming administration while also reducing business costs related to content moderation," said Ben Leiner, a lecturer at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business who studies political and technology trends. "This decision will lead to real-world harm, not only in the United States where there has been an uptick in hate speech and disinformation on social media platforms, but also abroad where disinformation on Facebook has accelerated ethnic conflict in places like Myanmar."

Meta, in fact, acknowledged in 2018 that it didn't do enough to prevent its platform from being used to "incite offline violence" in Myanmar, fueling communal hatred and violence against the country's Muslim Rohingya minority.

Arturo Béjar, a former engineering director at Meta known for his expertise on curbing online harassment, said while most of the attention has gone to the company's fact-checking announcement Tuesday, he is more worried about the changes to Meta's harmful content policies.

That's because instead of proactively enforcing rules against things like self-harm, bullying and harassment, Meta will now rely on user reports before it takes any action. The company said it plans to focus its automated systems on "tackling illegal and high-severity violations, like terrorism, child sexual exploitation, drugs, fraud and scams."

Béjar said that's even though "Meta knows that by the time a report is submitted and reviewed the content will have done most of its harm."

"I shudder to think what these changes will mean for our youth, Meta is abdicating their responsibility

to safety, and we won't know the impact of these changes because Meta refuses to be transparent about the harms teenagers experience, and they go to extraordinary lengths to dilute or stop legislation that could help," he said.

It's not really the right time for nasty California fires. What are the factors that changed that?

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Southern California is experiencing its most devastating winter fires in more than four decades. Fires don't usually blaze at this time of year, but specific ingredients have come together to defy the calendar in a fast and deadly manner.

Start with supersized Santa Ana winds whipping flames and embers at 100 mph — much faster than normal — and cross that with the return of extreme drought. Add on weather whiplash that grew tons of plants in downpours then record high temperatures that dried them out to make easy-to-burn fuel. Then there's a plunging and unusual jet stream, and lots of power lines flapping in those powerful gusts.

Experts say that's what is turning wildfires into a deadly urban conflagration.

Speed is the killer

"Tiny, mighty and fast" fires have blazed through America's west in the last couple of decades as the world warms, said University of Colorado fire scientist Jennifer Balch. She published a study in the journal *Science* last October that looked at 60,000 fires since 2001 and found that the fastest-growing ones have more than doubled in frequency since 2001 and caused far more destruction than slower, larger blazes.

"Fires have gotten faster," Balch said Wednesday. "The big culprit we're suspecting is a warming climate that's making it easier to burn fuels when conditions are just right."

Summer fires are bigger usually, but they don't burn nearly as fast. Winter fires "are much more destructive because they happen much more quickly" said U.S. Geological Survey fire scientist Jon Keeley.

AccuWeather estimated damage from the latest fires could reach \$57 billion, with the private firm's chief meteorologist, Jonathan Porter, saying "it may become the worst wildfire in modern California history based on the number of structures burned and economic loss."

Conditions are ideal

"It's really just the perfect alignment of everything in the atmosphere to give you this pattern and strong wind," said Tim Brown, director of the Western Regional Climate Center.

Wind speed and the speed of spreading flames are clearly linked.

"The impact increases exponentially as wind speed increases," said fire scientist Mike Flannigan of Thompson Rivers University in Canada. If firefighters can get to the flames within 10 minutes or so, it's spread can be contained, but "15 minutes, it's too late and it's gone. The horse has left the barn."

There's no sure link between Santa Ana winds — gusts from the east that come down the mountains, gain speed and hit the coast — to human-caused climate change, said Daniel Swain, climate scientist for the California Institute for Water Resources.

But a condition that led to those winds is a big plunge in the temperature of the jet stream — the river of air that moves weather systems across the globe — which helped bring cold air to the eastern two-thirds of the nation, said University of California Merced climate and fire scientist John Abatzoglou. Other scientists have preliminarily linked those jet stream plunges to climate change.

Santa Ana winds are happening later and later in the year, moving more from the drier fall to the wetter winter, Keeley said. Normally, that would reduce fire threats, but this isn't a normal time.

Dry fuel makes it worse

After two soaking winters, when atmospheric rivers dumped huge amounts of water on the region causing lots of plants to grow, a fast onset of drought dried them out, providing perfect tinder, according to Swain and Abatzoglou.

Swain says this weather whiplash is happening more often.

There is a clear link between climate change and the more frequent dry falls and winters that provide

fuel for fires, Swain said.

These devastating fires couldn't happen without the dry and hot conditions, nor would they be blazing without the extreme wind speed, Abatzoglou and others said.

It's also a people problem

The human factor in this can't be ignored, said Keeley.

"I think that we need to look at it from the perspective of global changes. And climate is just one global change. And certainly one of the other important global changes is population growth. And California has been growing at a phenomenal rate in the last 20 years," Keeley said. "You add more people and that means you add more power lines and more potential for failure to occur."

While the ignition sources for these fires have yet to be determined, Flannigan bets they'll end up being power lines blown down by high winds. That's what started California's devastating fires in 2016 and 2017, leading to utility Pacific Gas & Electric declaring bankruptcy after facing \$30 billion in lawsuits.

The calendar seems wrong

An analysis of 423 California wildfires that have grown to at least 15 square miles (39 square kilometers) since 1984 shows only four of those burned during the winter. About two-thirds of those larger fires sparked in June, July or August.

Federal data shows just six wildfires have burned more than 2 square miles (5 square kilometers) in any January in California since 1984. Until the Palisades and Eaton fires this year, the largest had been the Viejas Fire, which burned 17.1 square miles (44.3 square kilometers) in 2001 in the mountains east of San Diego.

"Winter wildfires should be an oxymoron," University of Colorado's Balch said. "Well, because, you know, temperatures drop and we get precipitation. We're supposed to get precipitation."

Fire officials used to talk about fire seasons, said David Acuña, a battalion chief for Cal Fire: "Now we talk about fire years."

Justice Department says it plans to release only part of special counsel's Trump report for now

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department said Wednesday that it intends to release special counsel Jack Smith's findings on Donald Trump's efforts to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election but will keep under wraps for now the rest of the report focused on the president-elect's hoarding of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

The revelation was made in a filing to a federal appeals court that was considering a defense request to block the release of the two-volume report while charges remain pending against two Trump co-defendants in the Florida case accusing the Republican former president and current president-elect of illegally holding classified documents. Aileen Cannon, the Trump-appointed judge presiding over the classified documents case, granted the request Tuesday, issuing a temporary block on the report.

The Justice Department said it would proceed with plans to release the first of two volumes centered on the election interference case but would make the classified documents section of the report available only to the chairmen and ranking members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees for their private review as long as the case against Trump's co-defendants — Trump valet Walt Nauta and Mar-a-Lago property manager Carlos De Oliveira — is ongoing.

"This limited disclosure will further the public interest in keeping congressional leadership apprised of a significant matter within the Department while safeguarding defendants' interests," the filing said.

The decision lessens the likelihood that the report on the classified documents investigation, which of all inquiries against Trump had once seemed to carry the greatest legal threat, would ever be released given that the Trump Justice Department almost certainly will not make the document public even after the case against Nauta and De Oliveira is resolved.

Lawyers for Nauta and De Oliveira objected to the Justice Department's proposal in a filing of their own Wednesday evening, asking the appeals court to send the case back to Cannon for a hearing.

They said sharing the report with members of Congress creates the potential for it to leak and “reflects an improper attempt to remove from the district court the responsibility to oversee and control the flow of information related to a criminal trial over which it presides, and to place that role instead in the hands of the prosecuting authority — who unlike the trial court has a vested interest in furthering its own narrative of culpability.”

Trump has repeatedly denied wrongdoing and been bitingly critical of Smith, including during a wide-ranging news conference at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida, on Tuesday in which he said, “It’ll be a fake report just like it was a fake investigation.”

It was not immediately clear when the election interference report might be released. The filing asks the Atlanta-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit to reverse Cannon’s order that appeared to at least temporarily halt the release of the entire report. The Justice Department asked the appeals court to undo the freeze and make clear that its “resolution of this question should be the last word,” though it also acknowledged the potential that the Supreme Court may be asked to weigh in.

In its brief, the Justice Department said that the attorney general’s authority to publicly release the election interference section of the special counsel’s report is “clear” and that Trump’s co-defendants have no legal argument to block the disclosure of a section that has nothing to do with them.

“Indeed, with respect to Volume One of the Final Report, defendants are hardly differently situated than any other member of the public,” the department said.

The report is expected to detail findings and explain charging decisions in Smith’s two investigations.

The classified documents inquiry was dismissed in July by Cannon, who concluded that Smith’s appointment was illegal. Smith’s appeal of the dismissal of charges against Nauta and De Oliveira, who were charged alongside Trump with obstructing the investigation, is still active, and their lawyers argued this week that the release of a report while proceedings were pending would be prejudicial and unfair.

The election interference case was significantly narrowed by a Supreme Court ruling on presidential immunity. The court ruled then for the first time that former presidents have broad immunity from prosecution, all but ending prospects Trump could be tried before the November election.

Smith’s team abandoned both cases in November after Trump’s presidential victory, citing Justice Department policy that prohibits the federal prosecutions of sitting presidents.

Justice Department regulations call for special counsels appointed by the attorney general to submit a confidential report at the conclusion of their investigations. It’s then up to the attorney general to decide what to make public.

Attorney General Merrick Garland has made public in their entirety the reports produced by special counsels who operated under his watch, including Robert Hur’s report on President Joe Biden’s handling of classified information and John Durham’s report on the FBI’s Russian election interference investigation.

The court request from De Oliveira and Nauta to block the report also included a letter from Trump’s legal team, including Todd Blanche, his pick for deputy attorney general, that made similar points and used language that echoed some of Trump’s own attacks on Smith and his work.

Blanche told Garland that the “release of any confidential report prepared by this out-of-control private citizen unconstitutionally posing as a prosecutor would be nothing more than a lawless political stunt, designed to politically harm President Trump and justify the huge sums of taxpayer money Smith unconstitutionally spent on his failed and dismissed cases.”

Trump asks the Supreme Court to block sentencing in his hush money case in New York

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump is asking the Supreme Court to call off Friday’s sentencing in his hush money case in New York.

Trump’s lawyers turned to the nation’s highest court on Wednesday after New York courts refused to postpone the sentencing by Judge Juan M. Merchan, who presided over Trump’s trial and conviction last

May on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. Trump has denied wrongdoing.

Prosecutors were expected to file a response by Thursday morning.

Trump's team sought an immediate stay of the scheduled sentencing, saying it would wrongly restrict him as he prepares to take office. While Merchan has indicated he will not impose jail time, fines or probation, Trump's lawyers argued a felony conviction would still have intolerable side effects.

The sentencing should be delayed as he appeals the conviction to "prevent grave injustice and harm to the institution of the Presidency and the operations of the federal government," they argued.

The emergency motion is from lawyers John Sauer, Trump's pick for solicitor general, who represents the government before the high court, and Todd Blanche, in line to be the second-ranking official at the Justice Department.

They also pointed to the Supreme Court ruling giving Trump and other presidents broad immunity from prosecutions over their actions in office, saying it supports their argument that his New York conviction should be overturned.

Their filing said the New York trial court "lacks authority to impose sentence and judgment on President Trump — or conduct any further criminal proceedings against him— until the resolution of his underlying appeal raising substantial claims of Presidential immunity, including by review in this Court if necessary."

The Republican president-elect's spokesman, Steven Cheung, said in a statement that the case was politically motivated and should be dismissed.

Trump's lawyers also asked New York's highest court for an emergency stay to halt all proceedings Wednesday afternoon, urging quick action to avoid the threat of disrupting the presidential transition.

In a filing that largely echoed their Supreme Court arguments, the attorneys charged that Merchan and the state's mid-level appellate court both "erroneously failed" to stop the sentencing, arguing that the constitution requires an automatic pause as they appeal the judge's ruling upholding the verdict.

The Manhattan district attorney's office, meanwhile, said it will respond in court papers. The emergency motion was submitted to Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who hears appeals from New York.

Trump's convictions arose from what prosecutors said was an attempt to cover up a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels just before the 2016 presidential election.

Daniels claims she had a sexual encounter with Trump in 2006. He denies it.

The Supreme Court's immunity opinion came in a separate election interference case against him, but Trump's lawyers say it means some of the evidence used against him in his hush money trial should have been shielded by presidential immunity. That includes testimony from some White House aides and social media posts made while he was in office.

Merchan has disagreed, finding they would qualify as personal business. The Supreme Court's immunity decision was largely about official acts of presidents while in office.

Jimmy Carter's life intersected with slavery's legacy. His record on Civil Rights is complicated

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Young Jimmy Carter and his friends were walking across a pasture after a day's farm labor during the Great Depression. As they came to a gate, his companions stood aside and let Carter enter first.

This was no act of kindness or intuitive deference to a future U.S. president. The teens stopped because they were Black, and James Earl Carter Jr. was white, a 14-year-old whose father owned the Georgia land they all worked.

After years of playing and working as equals, his friends' silent statement opened Carter's eyes.

"We only saw it vaguely then, but we were transformed at the place," Carter wrote in a poetry collection published years after his presidency. "A silent line was drawn between friend and friend, race and race."

Carter, who died Dec. 29 at the age of 100, spent his life intertwined with America's and the world's enduring legacy of slavery. His approach revealed a dualism in Carter that, at least earlier in life, pitted

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 52 of 65

his political ambitions against the idealism of his religious and social values.

He was a governor, president and humanitarian who climbed political ladders with calculated moderation, while still using his powerful platforms to break down racial barriers and advance human rights.

Carter "sometimes juggled the line to get into office," said Bernice King, daughter of Martin Luther King Jr., who was assassinated two years before Carter's election as Georgia governor. But he was "a real friend to the Black community," she said, and, once elected, "did things that most elected officials from the South just didn't dare do."

Before his public career, Carter and his wife Rosalynn, who died in November 2023, were called "n--- lovers" because of stands they took as private citizens. Yet in politics, he sometimes found himself cast an Old Confederacy racist, and he carefully managed relationships with erstwhile segregationists like Alabama Gov. George Wallace.

"Jimmy Carter had as strong a rural, south-Georgia accent as anybody I know," recalled Andrew Young, a King aide in the 1960s who would become a congressman, Atlanta mayor, then Carter's U.N. ambassador and enduring friend. "When you first heard him say something, you got a negative vibe. I just assumed he was another segregationist."

Instead, Young, now 92, came to see Carter as "an exceptional man" who tried "to show everybody how to live together."

Early years defined by relationships with Black Georgians

Seeds for his future as a Civil Rights champion were planted on his family's farm in Archery, just outside of Plains. Carter's father employed about two dozen Black families as tenant farmers, and Carter recalled that as a child he never thought about social and legal distinctions on the farm.

He hunted, fished and crafted toys together with his Black friends, and the close proximity provided a window into how they lived.

His mother offered a counter to his father. A Southerner who quietly flouted Jim Crow segregation without crusading against it, "Miss Lillian" was the harbinger of her son's political arc. She was known as the white nurse who treated Black patients, and welcomed Black women to her parlor for tea — though only when Earl was not home.

At the U.S. Naval Academy, Carter met fellow midshipman Wesley Brown, eventually the academy's first Black graduate who was the target of discrimination. Reflecting his mother's example, Carter was not outspoken in Brown's defense but publicly befriended his cross-country track teammate.

Facing more tests as his political star rose

After leaving the Navy and returning to Plains in 1953 after his father's death, Carter refused to join the White Citizens Council despite pressure from other businessmen. Yet as appointed chairman of the local school board, Carter never pushed to integrate schools, even though he and Rosalynn privately thought it was morally right.

As a state senator during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, Carter was silent on President Lyndon Johnson's Civil Rights legislation, and never tried to meet King, his fellow Georgian.

Running for governor in 1966, Carter positioned himself as a racial moderate, saying he ran to block white supremacist Lester Maddox. But when Carter finished a close third in the primary, he declined to endorse the more liberal Democrat, whom Maddox defeated.

"Carter was looking towards running again and didn't want to make anybody mad," said Bill Baxley, an Alabama attorney general who successfully prosecuted Klan members years after they bombed Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church in 1963.

In the 1970 Democratic gubernatorial primary, then tantamount to winning the general election, Carter lampooned liberals and emphasized his opposition to federal overreach — a campaign Young recalled as racially coded. Running for Congress the same year, Young recognized a different side of Carter when they campaigned at Pascal's, a famous Atlanta restaurant where King and other Civil Rights leaders once strategized.

"We were shaking hands with people," Young recalled. "He said, 'Just a minute, you can't forget anybody.'"

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 53 of 65

And he went into the kitchen and shook every hand" on the all-Black staff.

Carter's needle-threading worked. He won the primary, carrying the same rural areas that propelled Maddox four years earlier.

The new governor immediately surprised supporters and critics alike using his inaugural address to declare "the time for racial discrimination is over." He landed on the cover of Time magazine as an example of the so-called New South. He opened state government contracting to Black-owned businesses, appointed Black Georgians to key posts and formed a friendship with King's parents and his widow.

On the big stage

Reaching for the White House, Carter again walked a fine line.

After defeating Wallace in the key Florida primary, Carter visited the Alabamian for an endorsement. Carter later caused a firestorm with comments that seemingly justified whites-only neighborhoods and had to apologize.

Then, Carter tapped Texas Rep. Barbara Jordan as the first Black woman to deliver a keynote convention address for either major party. King Sr. delivered the benediction.

"I was still in high school, and I got to look at my television and see Barbara Jordan, a woman who looked like me," said Donna Brazile, who went on to become the first Black woman to manage a U.S. presidential campaign, running Al Gore's 2000 effort. "I owe that in many ways to Jimmy Carter."

Once in the Oval Office, Carter appointed more nonwhites and women to top government jobs than his predecessors combined, most notably federal judgeships. He pushed for official observances of King's birthday, increased funding for historically Black colleges, and promoted fair housing and banking policies.

Carter applied the rhetoric and ideas of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement to global affairs, elevating human rights in foreign policy. Through the Carter Center, after their White House years, the Carters concentrated their democracy and public health advocacy in developing nations, most with nonwhite populations.

Carter remained conscious of racial politics until his last days.

In 2024, frail, widowed and more than a year into hospice care, Carter told his son he was determined to keep going because he wanted to vote for Kamala Harris, the first Black woman and person of south-Asian descent to be a major party presidential nominee.

Harris, who as vice president eulogized Carter on Tuesday in Washington, lost.

"Sometimes it seems like we are going backward," said Angela Cooper, a 59-year-old Black woman from Duluth, Georgia, after she filed past Carter's flag-draped casket Sunday in Atlanta. "But President Carter showed that one man can do right just by standing up and saying, 'Enough.'"

The polar vortex readies to dump snow on Texas and its neighbors

By JAMIE STENGLE and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — An area stretching from Texas to Tennessee braced Wednesday for the expected arrival of freezing rain and snow, as some other parts of the country that already received an arctic blast this week prepared to go another round with the plunging polar vortex.

Arkansas' capital, Little Rock, closed schools on Thursday and Friday in preparation for the storm, which could start dumping heavy snow on the region overnight. Although certain parts of the U.S. began to emerge from a deep freeze, life still hadn't returned to normal in other locales, including the Kansas City area, which canceled classes Wednesday for a third-straight day, and the Virginia capital, Richmond, which was still under a weather-related water-boil advisory until at least Friday.

The cold snap coincided with rare January wildfires that were tearing through the Los Angeles area, forcing residents to flee from burning homes through flames, ferocious winds and towering clouds of smoke.

Southern discomfort

A mix of sleet, snow and freezing rain is expected to fall on a stretch of the U.S. from New Mexico to Alabama starting Wednesday night and early Thursday, with the heaviest amounts likely in parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas, according to the National Weather Service. In the most southern locations, the snow could turn into sleet and freezing rain, which meteorologists warn could

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 54 of 65

cause hazardous driving conditions.

That system is expected to push northeastward by Friday with a mix of heavy snow and freezing rain forecast from southeastern Oklahoma and northeastern Texas all the way to the Virginia and North Carolina coasts.

As much as 8 inches (about 20 centimeters) of snow could fall in scattered parts of Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia through Saturday, the weather service said.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp announced the closure of some state offices on Friday, while Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens said all city offices would be closed that day, with employees working remotely.

The polar vortex of ultra-cold air usually spins around the North Pole, but it sometimes ventures south into the U.S., Europe and Asia. Some experts say such cold air outbreaks are happening more frequently, paradoxically, because of a warming world.

North Texas braces for snow

In the Dallas area, crews treated the roads ahead of the expected arrival of 2 to 4 inches (about 5 to 10 centimeters) of snow on Thursday, along with sleet and rain. Up to 5 inches is expected farther north near the Oklahoma state line, the weather service said.

Mark Reid said Wednesday that he has been very busy delivering groceries for Instacart.

"I'm going to be done probably about 5 or 6 (p.m.) today and then tomorrow I'm going to be in the house," Reid said outside of a Dallas grocery store as he loaded his fourth order of the day into his car.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said Wednesday that the state had deployed several emergency agencies and opened hundreds of warming centers ahead of the storm.

"The lives of our fellow Texans are by far the most important thing," he said, warning affected residents to avoid driving if possible.

Abbott also expressed confidence in the state's power grid, which failed during an unusually cold storm in 2021, leaving more than 3 million residents without power and resulting in the deaths of more than 200 people. He said that if an outage occurs this week, it's likely due to a downed power line.

"If there is a loss of power, it's not going to be because of the power grid," the governor said.

The storm could make the roads slick on Friday as 75,000 fans head to AT&T Stadium in Arlington to see Texas play Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl. Arlington spokesperson Susan Shrock said crews will be ready to address any hazardous road conditions around the stadium.

The weather's impact on farmers and ranchers

Some parts of Kansas have received nearly an entire year's average of snow over the past few days, hitting farmers and ranchers "in ways that we haven't seen in this area for a very, very long time, potentially a lifetime," said Chip Redmond, a meteorologist at Kansas State University.

The risk is real: Calves, especially, can die when temperatures slip below zero. And so much snow in rural areas can keep farmers from reaching herds with food and water.

In northern Florida, growers were most concerned about the ferns grown for floral arrangements, with Valentine's Day only a month away.

Major damage to citrus trees, which typically occurs when temperatures drop to 28 degrees (minus 2 degrees Celsius) or below for several hours, is less likely. Most of Florida's commercial citrus groves are far south enough that they haven't been affected by this week's recent cold snap.

A boil-water order for Virginia's capital

Richmond will remain under a boil-water advisory until at least Friday as officials work to restore the city's water reservoir system, which malfunctioned after a storm this week caused a power outage, Mayor Danny Avula said.

The city of more than 200,000 residents is distributing bottled water at 11 sites, and is delivering it to older residents and others who are unable to get to those sites, officials said.

"We've got families in the city, they don't have any water," Gov. Glenn Youngkin said Wednesday. "We've got young children where mothers are asking, 'What do I do about baby formula?'"

Due to the problems in Richmond, the first working day of the legislative session was postponed, as the

state Capitol and General Assembly buildings remained closed on Wednesday.

Travel dangers and delays

More than 50,000 customers were without power on Wednesday in Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Virginia and West Virginia, according to the tracking website PowerOutage.us.

More than 2,000 flights in the U.S. were delayed or canceled before midday on Wednesday, according to tracking platform Flight Aware. More than 5,000 flights into or out of the U.S. were delayed Tuesday.

Hundreds of car accidents were reported in Virginia, Indiana, Kansas and Kentucky earlier this week, and a state trooper was treated for injuries after his patrol car was hit.

Three people died in vehicle crashes in Virginia, according to state police. Other weather-related fatal accidents occurred Sunday near Charleston, West Virginia, and Monday in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Kansas, where over a foot (30 centimeters) of snow fell in places, had two deadly weekend crashes.

And in Birmingham, Alabama, where temperatures fell below freezing, the Jefferson County coroner's office said Wednesday that it was investigating three possible deaths from hypothermia that had occurred over the past 24 hours.

'Wicked' tops SAG Awards nominations as many big names are snubbed

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

"Wicked" topped nominations to the 31st Screen Actors Guild Awards on Wednesday, landing a leading five nominations including best ensemble, and individual nods for Cynthia Erivo, Ariana Grande and Jonathan Bailey.

Out-of-control wildfires that swept across Los Angeles and Southern California on Tuesday night forced the Screen Actors Guild to cancel its plans to announce the nominations live Wednesday morning. The nominations were instead issued by press release by SAG, which last year began a multiyear deal with Netflix to stream the awards.

The smash hit musical "Wicked" saw its Oscar chances rise with the nominations to the SAG Awards, one of the most predictive Academy Awards bellwethers. The movie's big morning — it even scored a nod for stunt ensemble — came after a celebratory night, too. The film was honored by the National Board of Review Awards in New York on Tuesday.

The other nominees for best ensemble are "Anora," "Conclave," "Emilia Pérez" and "A Complete Unknown."

It was an especially strong showing for the Bob Dylan drama "A Complete Unknown." It came away with four nominations, including Timothée Chalamet for best male actor, and supporting nods for both Edward Norton and Monica Barbaro.

The best male lead nominees were largely as expected: Adrien Brody ("The Brutalist"), Daniel Craig ("Queer"), Colman Domingo ("Sing Sing"), Ralph Fiennes ("Conclave") and Chalamet.

Coming off her rousing victory at the Golden Globes, Demi Moore was among the nominees for best female actor in a leading role for "The Substance." She was joined by Erivo, "Emilia Pérez" breakout Karla Sofía Gascón, Mikey Madison of "Anora" and Pamela Anderson for "The Last Showgirl."

Snubbed stars

That surprisingly left out some big names. Angelina Jolie ("Maria") missed out, as did Nicole Kidman ("Babygirl"). A few of the most acclaimed female actors of the year, Marianne Jean-Baptiste ("Hard Truths") and Globe winner Fernanda Torres ("I'm Still Here"), also were overlooked.

"The Last Showgirl" had more to celebrate, too, with an unexpected nomination for Jamie Lee Curtis in supporting female actor. Her fellow nominees are Barbaro, Grande, Danielle Deadwyler ("The Piano Lesson") and Zoe Saldaña ("Emilia Pérez").

Jeremy Strong was nominated for his supporting performance as Roy Cohn in the Donald Trump film "The Apprentice," but his co-star, Sebastian Stan, went un-nominated for both "The Apprentice" and his Golden Globe-winning role in "A Different Man." The other nominees for best supporting male actor were Bailey, Norton, Yura Borisov ("Anora") and the category frontrunner, Kieran Culkin ("A Real Pain").

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 56 of 65

A few widely forecast supporting performances were snubbed there, too, including Denzel Washington ("Gladiator II") and Guy Pearce ("The Brutalist").

Predictive power of the SAGs

The SAG Awards are arguably the most telling Oscar forecast there is. Their picks don't always align exactly with those of the film academy, but they often come very close to mirroring them.

The last three best ensemble winners — "Oppenheimer," "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and "CODA" — all went on to win best picture at the Academy Awards. All but one of the SAG acting winners of the last three years has also won at the Oscars. The sole exception was Lily Gladstone, who won SAG's award for female actor last year for "Killers of the Flower Moon," but the Oscar trophy went to Emma Stone ("Poor Things").

In all likelihood, the Oscar field will look a lot like the SAG nominees. While some overlooked performances might still land an Oscar nomination, any eventual Academy Award winner, including the best picture recipient, is almost surely coming from those nominated Wednesday.

That's bad news for Brady Corbet's "The Brutalist," which triumphed at the Globes but missed out on a SAG ensemble nomination. Best picture contender "Sing Sing" also came away with a single SAG nod.

In nominations also announced Wednesday, the Directors Guild favored most of the same films. For outstanding directorial achievement, it nominated Sean Baker ("Anora"), Jacques Audiard ("Emilia Pérez"), Edward Berger ("Conclave"), James Mangold ("A Complete Unknown") and Corbet ("The Brutalist"). That left out "Wicked" filmmaker Jon M. Chu, as well as "Dune: Part Two" director Denis Villeneuve. The guild also failed to nominate a female filmmaker, like "The Substance" director Coralie Fargeat.

Those nominations only further muddied the waters in a hard-to-predict best picture race. Rarely does a film win the Academy Awards' top prize without a DGA nomination. The only exceptions in recent history are "Driving Miss Daisy" (1989) and "CODA" (2022). That means that as well as "Wicked" did with the screen actors, it still can't be called an Oscar favorite.

'Shōgun' continues to dominate

Coming off sweeps at the Emmys and the Golden Globes, FX's "Shōgun" continued to run roughshod through the competition, landing a leading five nominations Wednesday, including best ensemble and individual nods for Hiroyuki Sanada, Anna Sawai and Tadanobu Asano.

Also faring well were "The Bear" (nominations for Jeremy Allen White, Ayo Edebiri and Liza Colón-Zayas), "Hacks" (Jean Smart) and "The Diplomat" (Keri Russell, Allison Janney).

The Screen Actors Guild Awards will be held Feb. 23 at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. The ceremony, hosted by Kristen Bell, will be streamed live on Netflix. In addition to the competitive awards, Jane Fonda will be presented with the guild's Life Achievement Award.

Federal Reserve officials at December meeting expected slower pace of rate cuts ahead

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve officials at their meeting Dec. 17-18 expected to dial back the pace of interest rate cuts this year in the face of persistently elevated inflation and the threat of widespread tariffs and other potential policy changes.

Minutes from the meeting, released after the typical three-week lag, also showed clear division among the Fed's 19 policymakers. Some expressed support for keeping the central bank's key rate unchanged, the minutes said. And a majority of the officials said the decision to cut rates was a close call.

Ultimately, the Fed choose to cut its key rate by a quarter-point to about 4.3%. One official, Cleveland Fed President Beth Hammack, dissented in favor of keeping rates unchanged.

Still, there was widespread agreement that after reducing rates for three straight meetings, it was time to undertake a more deliberate approach to their key rate. Economists said the minutes strongly suggest that Fed officials will forego a rate cut at their next meeting in January.

Fewer rate cuts will likely mean that borrowing costs for consumers and businesses — including for

homes, cars, and credit cards — will remain elevated this year.

Policymakers said that the Fed “was at or near the point at which it would be appropriate to slow the pace of policy easing,” the minutes said. In projections released after the meeting, Fed officials said they expect just two cuts next year, down from an earlier projection of four.

The minutes also showed that “almost all” Fed policymakers see a greater risk than before that inflation could stay higher than they expect, in part because inflation has lingered in several recent readings and because of “the likely effects of potential changes in trade and immigration policy.”

The Fed’s staff economists considered the economy’s future path particularly uncertain at the December meeting, in part because of the incoming Trump administration’s “potential changes to trade, immigration, fiscal, and regulatory policies,” which the staff said are difficult to assess in terms of how they will impact the economy. As a result they included several different scenarios for the economy’s future path in their presentation to policymakers.

And the staff projected that inflation this year would be about the same as in 2024 because they expected Trump’s proposed tariffs would keep inflation elevated.

Fed officials sent stock markets plummeting Dec. 18 after they reduced their outlook for rate cuts. Fed Chair Jerome Powell said at a news conference after the meeting that the decision to reduce rates had been a “close call.”

Powell also said that recent signs of stubborn inflation have caused many Fed officials to pare back their expectations for rate cuts. Inflation, according to the Fed’s preferred measure, ticked up to 2.4% in November, compared with a year ago, above the Fed’s target. Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, it was 2.8%.

In addition, some officials have started to consider the potential impact of President-elect Trump’s proposals, such as widespread tariffs, on the economy and inflation next year, the minutes said.

Economists at Goldman Sachs, for example, have estimated that Trump’s tariff proposals could push inflation up by nearly a half-percentage point later this year.

Earlier Wednesday, Fed governor Christopher Waller said that he still supported rate reductions this year, in part because he expects inflation to steadily head down to the Fed’s 2% target. He also said he didn’t expect tariffs would worsen inflation and wouldn’t change his preference for lowering borrowing costs.

Waller also said, in a question and answer session, that he didn’t think Trump would ultimately impose the universal tariffs he promised in the campaign.

New research shows a quarter of freshwater animals are threatened with extinction

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly a quarter of animals living in rivers, lakes and other freshwater sources are threatened with extinction, according to new research published Wednesday.

“Huge rivers like the Amazon can appear mighty, but at the same time freshwater environments are very fragile,” said study co-author Patricia Charvet, a biologist at Brazil’s Federal University of Ceará.

Freshwater habitats – including rivers, lakes, ponds, streams, bogs and wetlands – cover less than 1% of the planet’s surface, but support 10% of its animal species, said Catherine Sayer, a zoologist at the International Union for Conservation of Nature in England.

The researchers examined around 23,500 species of dragonflies, fish, crabs and other animals that depend exclusively on freshwater ecosystems. They found that 24% were at risk of extinction – classified as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered – due to compounding threats from pollution, dams, water extraction, agriculture, invasive species, climate change and other disruptions.

“Most species don’t have just one threat putting them at risk of extinction, but many threats acting together,” said Sayer, a study-co-author.

The tally, published in the journal *Nature*, is the first that time researchers have analyzed the global risk to freshwater species. Previous studies have focused on land animals including mammals, birds

and reptiles.

Duke University ecologist Stuart Pimm, who was not involved in the study, called it "a long-awaited and hugely important paper."

"Almost every big river in North America and Europe is massively modified" through damming, putting freshwater species at risk, he said.

In South America, the vast Amazon River ecosystem also faces threats from deforestation, wildfires and illegal gold mining, said Charvet.

Illegal fires to clear forest result in waves of ash polluting the river, and unlicensed gold miners dump mercury into the water, she said.

Rivers and wetlands "concentrate everything that happens around them," she said. "If something goes really wrong, like an acid or oil spill, you can threaten an entire species. There's nowhere else for these animals to go."

Imprisoned Belarus activist resurfaces after being held incommunicado for over 700 days

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — An imprisoned opposition activist in Belarus resurfaced Wednesday in a video shot by a pro-government blogger after over 700 days of no contact with his family, weeks before an election that is all but certain keep the country's strongman leader in power.

Viktar Babaryka, 61, has been denied meetings with his family and lawyers while serving a 14-year sentence in a penal colony after failing to get on the ballot against authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko in a 2020 election.

Babaryka was last heard from in February 2023, and other prisoners said later that year he was hospitalized with signs of beatings. Since then, authorities haven't released any information about his condition and barred his lawyer from visits. The European Parliament has urged authorities to release him and other political prisoners.

Raman Pratasevich, a former opposition journalist who later became a government supporter after being arrested himself, posted photos and a brief video in which Babaryka greeted his family.

It wasn't clear when or under what conditions the images were taken, and The Associated Press could not independently verify them.

Babaryka, who looked visibly thinner than in his last appearance, was pictured wearing a prison uniform bearing a yellow tag designating him as a political prisoner and thus subjecting him to particularly harsh prison conditions.

Pavel Sapelka, a representative of the Viasna Human Rights Center, noted that the images were released ahead of the Jan. 26 presidential election, in which Lukashenko is seeking a seventh, five-year term to add to his more than three decades in power.

"The authorities decided to show Babaryka in the run-up to the election to avoid accusations of forced disappearance of opposition activists behind bars," Sapelka said. "The terribly emaciated Babaryka epitomizes the nightmare of repressions in Belarus, a sad reminder for others who dare to challenge Lukashenko."

In November, Pratasevich posted photos of Maria Kolesnikova, another prominent opposition activist who had been held for more than 20 months without any communication with relatives or friends.

Babaryka is one of 1,258 political prisoners in Belarus, according to Viasna, the country's leading human rights group. Top opposition figures were imprisoned or fled the country amid the sweeping crackdown that followed the 2020 election. Authorities responded to massive demonstrations protesting vote-rigging with brutal repressions in which about 65,000 people were arrested and thousands were brutally beaten by police.

At least seven political prisoners have died in custody, according to Viasna.

Like Babaryka, many other opposition activists have been held incommunicado.

Lukashenko pardoned some political prisoners last year but authorities launched a new wave of arrests

before the election, seeking to uproot any sign of dissent.

Opposition leader-in-exile Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who was forced to leave the country after challenging Lukashenko in the 2020 vote, said she was happy to see Babaryka alive and demanded that authorities release information about others who have been held incommunicado, including her husband, activist Sjarhei Tsikhanouski.

"We must now demand to see all others who have been held in complete isolation, and the cruel and inhumane incommunicado practice must stop," she said.

Pratasevich ran a Telegram messaging app channel widely used by participants in the 2020 protests. He was living in exile when he was arrested in 2021 after being pulled off a Ryanair flight from Greece to Lithuania that was diverted to Minsk by a bomb threat. Once in custody, he made several confessional appearances on state television that critics claimed were made under duress. He was later released and pardoned.

"We consider Pratasevich a hostage. He's doing all what is ordered by the Belarusian authorities," Sapelka said.

Biden casts doubt on his fitness to serve another four years days before term ends

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden, in a new interview days before he leaves office, cast doubt on his fitness to serve another four years even as he maintained that he could have won election to a second term.

The outgoing Democratic president also told USA Today in the interview published Wednesday that he tried during his Oval Office meeting with President-elect Donald Trump to discourage the Republican from going after his political opponents, as he has said he would. And Biden said he had not decided whether to issue sweeping pardons to preemptively protect those individuals from any possible retribution by Trump or the incoming administration.

"I don't know," Biden responded when USA Today Washington Bureau Chief Susan Page asked if he would've had the vigor to serve another four years in office. Biden and Page sat down at the White House on Sunday for the president's rare interview with a print publication.

Biden, 82, talks about how he didn't intend to run for president in 2020, but says that when Trump sought reelection last year, "I really thought I had the best chance of beating him. But I also wasn't looking to be president when I was 85 years old, 86 years old."

"But I don't know. Who the hell knows?" he added. "So far, so good. But who knows what I'm going to be when I'm 86 years old?"

Did he believe he could have been reelected? "It's presumptuous to say that, but I think yes," Biden said. He said his assessment was "based on the polling" he reviewed, but he did not elaborate.

Concerns about Biden's age and fitness had followed him since he announced his bid for reelection, but he dropped out of the presidential race under pressure last July after faltering in a debate against Trump. He endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris. She lost to the Republican.

In the interview, Biden said he was considering preemptive pardons but had not decided whether to issue any. When he and Trump met in the Oval Office after the election, Biden said, "I tried to make it clear that there was no need, and it was counterintuitive for his interest to go back and try to settle scores."

Trump didn't answer one way or the other, Biden said, adding, "He just basically listened."

Biden said his "greatest fear" is that Trump will eliminate parts of major climate legislation Biden signed in 2022. He also took Trump to task for implying that the driver of the deadly New Year's Day vehicle attack in New Orleans was an immigrant who had entered the U.S. from Mexico.

The FBI has identified the driver, Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a U.S. citizen from Texas and an Army veteran. Fourteen people were killed and nearly three dozen were injured in the attack. Jabbar was killed by police.

Biden said he bets many people read what Trump said about the attacker and believe it. "How do you deal with that?" he said, referring to his successor as someone "not known for telling the truth."

IRS has improved taxpayer services but is slow to resolve ID theft, an independent watchdog says

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The IRS boosted taxpayer services through Democrats' Inflation Reduction Act but still faces processing claims from a coronavirus pandemic-era tax credit program and is slow to resolve certain identity theft cases, according to an independent watchdog report released Wednesday.

"For the first time since I became the National Taxpayer Advocate in 2020, I can begin this report with good news: The taxpayer experience has noticeably improved," Erin M. Collins wrote in her 2024 annual report to Congress.

She said "the IRS has made major strides" with the help of the billions of dollars in multiyear funding, though she notes that "IRS service remains far from perfect."

Remaining service gaps include prolonged delays in resolving claims from the nearly half a million taxpayers whose identities were stolen by fraudsters who received a refund on their behalf. The delays have increased from 19 months in 2023 to 22 months in 2024, according to the report.

In addition, the report says there have been lengthy delays in the resolution of eligible Employee Retention Credit claims submitted by employers who rely on those refunds to stay in business.

The Employee Retention Credit, or ERC, was designed to help businesses retain employees during pandemic-era shutdowns, but it quickly became a magnet for fraud. Its complex eligibility rules allowed scammers to target small businesses, offering help applying for it for a fee — even if they didn't qualify.

In September 2023, the IRS announced a pause in accepting claims for the tax credit until 2024 because of rising concerns that an influx of applications were fraudulent.

"Although the IRS has processed several hundred thousand claims in recent months, it was still sitting on a backlog of about 1.2 million claims as of October 26, 2024," Collins said in her Wednesday report. "Many claims have been pending for more than a year."

IRS Commissioner Daniel Werfel said "things are trending in a very positive direction in terms of our performance in taxpayer service," but still, "I view the identity theft issue as our largest current service gap." He said the agency is seeing higher numbers of theft victims overall since before the pandemic, in part because scammers are increasingly moving to online schemes.

Werfel said the agency is adding more resources to the issue and streamlining identity theft cases by distinguishing between complex and simpler cases to resolve taxpayer issues faster.

Among other recommendations, the taxpayer advocate is calling on Congress to expand the U.S. Tax Court's jurisdiction to hear refund cases, give the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic program more financial leeway to help taxpayers and require the IRS to process claims for refund or credits in a timely manner.

Collins said many IRS improvements, including faster service and quicker phone response times, have been made possible by multiyear funding provided by Congress. However, that funding is at risk of being cut.

The federal tax collection agency originally received an \$80 billion infusion of funds under the Inflation Reduction Act, though a 2023 debt ceiling and budget cut deal between Republicans and the Democratic White House resulted in \$1.4 billion rescinded from the agency and a separate agreement to take \$20 billion from the IRS over the next two years and divert those funds to other nondefense programs.

Now, Treasury Department officials are calling on Congress to unlock another \$20 billion in IRS enforcement money that is tied up in legislative language that has effectively rendered the money frozen.

Werfel said the boost in the IRS budget "has played an absolutely critical role" in improvements to taxpayer services. "We've put the money to good use," he said.

If Congress does slash Inflation Reduction Act enforcement funding, Collins recommends that it not make

cuts to taxpayer services and information technology. Congress should not, Collins said, “inadvertently throw out the baby with the bathwater.”

Flying taxis are on the horizon as aviation soars into a new frontier

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — When he was still a boy making long, tedious trips between his school and his woodsy home in the mountains during the 1980s, JoeBen Bevirt began fantasizing about flying cars that could whisk him to his destination in a matter of minutes.

As CEO of Joby Aviation, Bevirt is getting closer to turning his boyhood flights of fancy into a dream come true as he and latter-day versions of the Wright Brothers launch a new class of electric-powered aircraft vying to become taxis in the sky.

The aircraft — known as “electric vertical take-off and landing vehicle, or eVTOL — lift off the ground like a helicopter before flying at speeds up to 200 miles per hour (322 kilometers per hour) with a range of about 100 miles (161 kilometers). And these craft do it without filling the air with excessive noise caused by fuel-powered helicopters and small airplanes.

“We are just a few steps from the finish line. We want to turn what are now one- and two-hour trips into five-minute trips,” Bevirt, 51, told The Associated Press before a Joby air taxi took off on a test flight in Marina, California — located about 40 miles south from where he grew up in the mountains.

Archer Aviation, a Silicon Valley company backed by automaker Stellantis and United Airlines, has been testing its own eVTOLs over farmland in Salinas, California, where a prototype called “Midnight” could be seen gliding above a tractor plowing fields last November.

The tests are part of the journey that Joby Aviation and other ambitious companies that collectively have raised billions of dollars are taking to turn flying cars into more than just pie-in-the-sky concepts popularized in 1960s-era cartoon series, “The Jetsons,” and the 1982 science fiction film, “Blade Runner.”

Archer Aviation and nearby Wisk Aero, with ties to aerospace giant Boeing Co. and Google co-founder Larry Page, are also at the forefront in the race to bring air taxis to market in the United States. Joby has already formed a partnership to connect its air taxis with Delta Air Lines passengers while Archer Aviation has lined up a deal to sell up to 200 of its aircraft to United Airlines.

Flying taxis have made enough regulatory inroads with the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration to result in the recent creation of a new aircraft category called “powered lift,” a step that the agency hadn’t taken since helicopters were introduced for civilian use in the 1940s.

But there are more regulatory hurdles to be cleared before air taxis will be allowed to carry passengers in the U.S., making Dubai the most likely place where eVTOLs will take commercial flight — perhaps by the end of this year.

“It’s a tricky business to develop a whole new class of vehicles,” said Alan Lim, director of Alton Aviation Consultancy, a firm tracking the industry’s evolution. “It is going to be like a crawl, walk, run situation. Right now, I think we are still crawling. We are not going to have the Jetsons-type reality where everyone will be flying around everywhere in the next two to three years.”

China is also vying to make flying cars a reality, a quest that has piqued President-elect Donald Trump’s interest in making the vehicles a priority for his incoming administration during the next four years.

If the ambitions of eVTOL pioneers are realized in the U.S., people will be able to hop in an air taxi to get to and from airports serving New York and Los Angeles within the next few years.

Because its electric taxis can fly unimpeded at high speeds, Joby envisions transporting up to four Delta Air Lines passengers at a time from New York area airports to Manhattan in about 10 minutes or less. To start, air taxi prices almost certainly will be significantly more than the cost of taking a cab or Uber ride from JFK airport to Manhattan, but the difference could narrow over time because eVTOLs should be able to transport a higher volume of passengers than ground vehicles stuck in traffic going each way.

“You will see highways in the sky,” Archer Aviation CEO Adam Goldstein predicted during an interview at the company’s San Jose, California, headquarters. “There will be hundreds, maybe thousands of these

aircraft flying in these individual cities and it will truly change the way cities are being built.”

Investors are betting Goldstein is right, helping Archer raise an additional \$430 million late last year from a group that included Stellantis and United Airlines. The infusion came shortly after a Japanese automaker poured another \$500 million into Joby to bring its total investment in that company to nearly \$900 million.

Those investments were part of the \$13 billion that eVTOL companies have raised during the past five years, according to Alton Aviation.

Both Joby Aviation and Archer Aviation went public in 2021 through reverse mergers, opening up another fundraising avenue and making it easier to recruit engineers with the allure of stock options. Both companies have been able to attract workers away from electric automaker Tesla and rocket maker SpaceX and, in Archer’s instance, raiding the ranks of Wisk Aero.

The Wisk defections triggered a lawsuit accusing Archer of intellectual property theft in a dispute that was resolved with a 2023 settlement that included an agreement for the two sides to collaborate on some facets of eVTOL technology.

Before going public, Joby also acquired eVTOL technology developed by ride-hailing service Uber in an \$83 million deal that also brought those two companies together as partners.

But none of the deals or technological advances have stopped the losses from piling up at the companies building flying cars. Joby, whose roots date back to 2009 when Bevirt founded the company, has sustained \$1.6 billion in losses since its inception while Archer has amassed nearly \$1.5 billion in losses since its founding in 2018.

While they moved to commercial air taxi services, both Joby and Archer are trying to bring in revenue by negotiating contracts to use their eVTOLs in the U.S. military for deliveries and other short-range missions. Archer has forged a partnership with Anduril Industries, a military defense technology specialist founded by Oculus headset inventor Palmer Luckey, to help it win deals.

The uncertain prospects have left both companies with relatively low market values by tech industry standards, with Joby’s hovering around \$7 billion and Archer’s \$6 billion.

But Bevirt sees blue skies ahead. “eVTOLs are going to transform the way we move,” he said. “It’s a dramatically better way to get around. Seeing the world from the air is better than being stuck in the traffic on the interstate.”

ALS sidelined this Israeli TV journalist. AI is helping him make a comeback.

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — When a renowned Israeli TV journalist lost his ability to speak clearly because of ALS, he thought his career might be over. But now, using artificial-intelligence software that can recreate his widely recognized gravelly voice, Moshe Nussbaum — known to generations of viewers simply as “Nussi” — is making a comeback.

Nussbaum, 71, was diagnosed two years ago with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a progressive disease also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease that attacks nerve cells that control muscles throughout the body.

At the time, he vowed to viewers of Israel’s Channel 12 News to continue working as long as he was physically able. But, gradually, it became more and more difficult.

It was a devastating blow to the career of a leading, no-nonsense reporter who for more than 40 years had covered many of Israel’s most important stories from the field. He had appeared from the scenes of suicide bombing attacks and the front lines of wars in Gaza and Lebanon, and had covered scandals in Israel’s parliament and high-profile court cases.

After Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war in Gaza, Nussbaum was unable to report from the field. It was the first war of his career he had ever sat out, he noted in a recent interview with colleagues at Channel 12, the country’s largest station.

Even though he was having trouble moving and speaking, he launched a segment interviewing injured

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 63 of 65

soldiers from Israeli hospitals. His questions were slow and halting, but he kept it up for the first half of the war. Then, as it became increasingly difficult to speak, and to be understood, his interviews became less frequent.

On Monday, Channel 12 made the surprising announcement that it would bring Nussbaum back to the air in the coming weeks as a commentator— with the help of AI.

“It took me a few moments to absorb it and to understand that it is me speaking now,” Nussbaum told The Associated Press via text message. “Slowly, slowly, I’m understanding the incredible meaning of this device for everyone with disabilities, including me.”

Nussbaum will report his stories, and then write them up, using an AI program that has been trained to speak using Nussbaum’s voice. He will be filmed as if he were presenting, and his lips will be “technologically adjusted” to match the words.

People with speech disorders have used traditional text-to-speech technology for years, but those voices sound robotic and flat, and lack emotion. In contrast, AI technology is trained using recordings of a person’s voice — there are thousands of hours of Nussbaum speaking thanks to his lengthy career in TV and radio — and it can mimic their intonations and phrasing.

Thrilled by the possibilities the technology affords him, Nussbaum said he is also worried about the ease with which the technology could be used by bad actors to spread fake news and falsehoods.

In its current form, the technology will not work for live broadcasts, so Nussbaum won’t be able to go out into the field, which is his favorite part of the job, he said. Instead, he will focus on commentary and analysis about crime and national security, his areas of expertise for decades.

Ahead of the broadcasts, Channel 12 released a preview showing snippets of Nussbaum speaking naturally — garbled and difficult to understand — followed by the new “Nussi AI.” The new version sounds strikingly like the old Nussbaum, speaking quickly and emphatically. Nussbaum was filmed as if he was presenting the report, sitting straight with his trademark bushy eyebrows moving up and down for emphasis.

“Honestly, this is my first time sitting here in the studio after more than a year,” AI Nussbaum says in the preview. “It feels a bit strange, and mostly, it tugs my heart.”

AI-powered voice cloning has grown exponentially in recent years. Experts have warned that the technology can amplify phone scams, disrupt democratic elections and violate the dignity of people — living or dead — who never consented to having their voice recreated to say things they never said.

It’s been used to produce deepfake robocalls mimicking President Joe Biden. In the U.S., authorities recently charged a high school athletic director with using AI to generate a fake audio clip of the school’s principal making racist remarks.

But the technology also has tremendous potential to help people who have lost their ability to speak clearly. A U.S. congresswoman who cannot speak due to complications from Parkinson’s and a related palsy has used a similar AI program to give a speech on the House floor, and the technology has also helped a young woman who lost her voice due to a tumor.

Channel 12 declined to say which AI program it was using.

Nussbaum had worried that ALS would rob him of the career he loved. In an interview with Channel 12, he recounted telling his managers “don’t feel like you’re pitying me, doing me a favor,” he said. “The day you come to the conclusion that this is it — tell me. I’ll know how to accept it without a problem.”

He calls his new AI-enabled persona a “magic trick” that enabled his comeback, and believes it will raise awareness in Israel of ways that people with disabilities — especially progressive disabilities — can continue to work.

“The fact that Channel 12 and my news managers are allowing me to reinvent myself anew, that is one of the most important medicines I can get in my fight with this disease,” he said.

Scarves over headscarves, Muslim women's outdoors group tackles snow tubing in Minnesota

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MAPLE GROVE, Minn. (AP) — Ice crystals clung to the eyelashes, parka hood, beanie hat and headscarf of Ruqayah Nasser as she took a break after her first-ever snow tubing runs in a Minnesota park on a subzero (-18 Celsius) January morning.

She had joined two dozen other members of a group founded by a Somali-American mother in Minneapolis to promote all-seasons activities among Muslim women, who might otherwise feel singled out in the great outdoors, especially when wearing hijabs.

"They understand my lifestyle. I don't have to explain myself," said Nasser, who recently moved to the Twin Cities from Chicago and whose family hails from Yemen. "My religion is everything. It's my survival kit."

As one of the most visible signs of the Muslim faith, hijabs often attract controversy. Within Islam, some women want to wear the headscarves for piety and modesty, while others oppose them as a symbol of oppression. In the sports world, including in the last Olympics, devout athletes have often faced extra hurdles on and off the field in finding accommodations for religious practices.

Concerned about safety as a woman — particularly one wearing a head covering — but determined to get outdoors to beat seasonal depression, Nasrieen Habib put out a social media post about creating a hiking group three years ago.

From the nine women who responded, her Amanah Rec Project has grown to more than 700 members. There's a core group for Muslim women only — for "more sisterhood and modesty," Habib says — as well as a group for families. In addition to weekly outings, they organize longer trips and education on everything from appropriate winter clothing — a challenge for many migrant communities — to health and environmental sustainability from the perspective of Islam.

"It's a way to live your whole life according to a set of beliefs and rules. And part of those beliefs and rules is taking care of creation," Habib said as her 4-year-old son took a break from tubing in a toasty chalet at Elm Creek Park Reserve near Minneapolis. "How can we be more sustainable in a time where we see the impact of climate change, especially impacting people who look like us in the Global South?"

Two sisters, Ruun Mahamud and Nawal Hirsi, moved to the United States from Somalia as children about two decades ago.

They found a safe haven in Minnesota where, since the late 1990s, growing numbers of East African refugees have created an increasingly vocal Muslim community. Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar was the first lawmaker to wear a hijab while on the U.S. House floor, and Minneapolis was the first large city in the United States to allow the Islamic call to prayer to be broadcast publicly by its two dozen mosques.

Even though she feels "safe and accepted" in her hijab, Hirsi joined the group for extra support.

"I love being outdoors and joining this group has made me more comfortable to participate," she said on the tubing hill, where she had convinced Mahamud to come along for the first time.

"Oh my gosh, it's the most amazing thing I've ever done," Mahamud gushed after speeding downhill on a tube attached to her sister's as their daughters recorded the adventure on their phones.

The sisters said it's important to include love for the outdoors and physical activity in their children's religious upbringing.

"Taking care of one's health is part of our faith," Hirsi said.

Muslim women who wear hijabs can face multiple barriers to sports participation, said Umer Hussain, a Wilkes University professor who studies religion and sports. They range from activities where genders mix or head coverings pose logistical hurdles to conservative families who might frown on it.

Groups like Habib's tackle empowering women in their communities as well as raising awareness about religious accommodations like single-sex spaces or locations for prayer.

"The biggest barrier, for women specifically, is having access to spaces that allow us to practice our religion while keeping our modesty and abiding by the Islamic laws that tell us we are not supposed to be in mixed spaces without covering up," Habib said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 198 ~ 65 of 65

She appears to have tapped into a great demand.

"When she told me she was going to start a hiking group to get sisters out in nature ... it was like actually something I've been looking for for a very long time," Makiya Amin said as she climbed up the tubing hill in a long white skirt, bright-red headscarf, and heavy winter coat. "I didn't really have those type of people who were outdoorsy already around me."

Isho Mohamed joined the group for the wide-ranging conversations as much as for the outdoors, which as a self-described "homebody" she had largely avoided since college days.

"It's a safe space that takes me out of my comfort zone," she said of the group outings. During them, the women share about work experiences but also life as immigrants and, most importantly, their faith.

"We also talk about spiritual connection and connecting with God as well, and just say a little prayer here and there when we're walking," Mohamed added.

Her cheeks glowing above her ski mask after two hours on the hill, Jorida Latifi was with her 7-year-old son among the last to hang up their snow tubes. Originally from Albania, Latifi has gone out with the group almost weekly since joining more than a year ago.

"With Muslim sisters ... they do understand you, what you go through, even with the clothing and hijabs," Latifi said. "It feels way, way more like, you know, where you are with family."

Today in History: January 9, the iPhone makes its debut

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Jan. 9, the ninth day of 2025. There are 356 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 9, 2007, Apple CEO Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone at the Macworld conference in San Francisco.

Also on this date:

In 1861, Mississippi became the second state to secede from the Union, the same day the Star of the West, a merchant vessel bringing reinforcements and supplies to Federal troops at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, retreated because of artillery fire.

In 1916, the World War I Battle of Gallipoli ended with an Ottoman Empire victory as Allied forces withdrew.

In 1945, during World War II, American forces began landing on the shores of Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines as the Battle of Luzon got underway, resulting in an Allied victory over Imperial Japanese forces.

In 2005, Mahmoud Abbas was elected president of the Palestinian Authority, following the death of Yasser Arafat the previous November.

In 2018, downpours sent mud and boulders roaring down Southern California hillsides that had been stripped of vegetation by a gigantic wildfire; more than 20 people died and hundreds of homes were damaged or destroyed.

In 2022, 17 people, including eight children, died after a fire sparked by a malfunctioning space heater filled a high-rise apartment building with smoke in the New York City borough of the Bronx; it was the city's deadliest blaze in three decades.

Today's birthdays: Musician-activist Joan Baez is 84. Rock musician Jimmy Page (Led Zeppelin) is 81. Singer Crystal Gayle is 74. Actor J.K. Simmons is 70. Actor Imelda Staunton is 69. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchú is 66. Actor Joely Richardson is 60. Musician Dave Matthews is 58. Singer AJ McLean (Backstreet Boys) is 47. Golfer Sergio Garcia is 45. Catherine, Princess of Wales, is 43. Actor Nina Dobrev is 36.