

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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

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



## 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

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# 1440

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

## TikTok Hearing

The Supreme Court is set to hear oral arguments today in a case that could determine TikTok's fate in the US.

At issue is a bipartisan law requiring ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, to sell its stake in the app or face a ban by Jan. 19. TikTok, with more than 170 million US users, is asking the court to block the law's enforcement, citing First Amendment concerns. The Biden administration says the law is necessary to address national security risks posed by ByteDance's potential ties to the Chinese government.

TikTok said it could shut down the app by Jan. 19 if the Supreme Court does not intervene. President-elect Donald Trump filed a brief last month requesting the court delay the deadline, seeking time for his incoming administration to pursue a political resolution, a reversal from previous attempts to ban TikTok during his first term.

Separately, ByteDance appears to be preparing for a potential TikTok ban by promoting its Lemon8 app, encouraging users to migrate to the platform as a contingency plan.

## Ancient Ice Exposed

A nearly two-mile ice core extracted from Antarctica's ice sheet contains what is likely the world's oldest ice, estimated to have formed over 1 million years ago. The extensive ice core—which is longer than eight Eiffel Towers—is expected to shed light on the timeline of ice age cycles on Earth and reveal connections between the planet's temperature and atmospheric conditions.

Researchers with the European-funded team of 16 scientists drilled at the remote site over the course of four summers at temperatures nearing minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit. As snow falls and freezes on the continental ice sheet, it solidifies layer upon layer of ice and effectively traps samples of the atmosphere over millennia, including air, particles, and even viruses. The ice then becomes a historical record of Earth's climate shifts.

A previous, slightly shorter ice core extracted by the group demonstrated heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels over the last 800,000 years never reached the amounts seen since the Industrial Revolution.

## LA Fires Continue

Devastating fires in Southern California continued unabated yesterday, including a number of blazes tearing through prominent Los Angeles neighborhoods. At least ten deaths have been confirmed—though officials say the toll is likely higher—and nearly 180,000 people have been ordered to evacuate.

Officials said the largest of the blazes, the Palisades Fire, destroyed thousands of structures in affluent coastal neighborhoods between Malibu and Santa Monica and was just 6% contained as of early this morning. On the east side of the city, the Eaton Fire was also completely uncontained though growth had significantly slowed.

Exceptionally high wind gusts, in particular Santa Ana winds sweeping westward from the desert and toward the coast, carried flaming embers for miles, raising the risk of new fires across the city. Conditions are expected to improve today but persist into the weekend.

The fires could be the costliest in US history, with early estimates of \$20B in insured losses and \$50B in economic impact.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Notre Dame tops Penn State 27-24 to advance to college football national championship; Texas takes on Ohio State tonight (7:30 pm ET, ESPN) in the other semifinal matchup.

NFL postseason kicks off tomorrow with the Wild Card round.

"Wicked" hauls in \$70M in its first week of video-on-demand sales, a record for a Universal release.

WWE's "Monday Night Raw" brings in 2.6 million US viewers in its Netflix debut, more than double their 2024 average.

NBA postpones Los Angeles Lakers-Charlotte Hornets game last night due to wildfires; Lakers head coach JJ Redick loses home in fire.

Actress Jamie Lee Curtis donates \$1M to fire relief efforts.

## Science & Technology

Jeff Bezos-owned Blue Origin delays first launch of its heavy-lift New Glenn rocket from early this morning to Sunday; see updates here.

New study suggests the outer ear structure of mammals evolved from the gills of ancient fishes and marine invertebrates.

Researchers engineer two new CRISPR enzymes that operate without triggering an immune system response; results may lead to safer, more efficient gene editing technologies.

## Business & Markets

December US jobs report to be released today; economists expect a gain of 155,000 jobs, down from 227,000 jobs in November, with the unemployment rate forecast to hold steady at 4.2%.

Kroger to pay \$110M to settle Kentucky lawsuit accusing the supermarket chain's pharmacies of helping to fuel the opioid epidemic between 2006 and 2019.

JCPenny merges with Sparc Group, owner of brands including Aéropostale and Brooks Brothers, to form new joint venture called Catalyst Brands.

## Politics & World Affairs

President-elect Donald Trump faces sentencing in New York today in criminal hush money case; he was found guilty in May for falsifying business records to cover up payments made to Stormy Daniels in run-up to the 2016 election.

Accused mastermind of 9/11 attacks scheduled to plead guilty today in war court on Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba; details of plea deal haven't been publicly released but include avoiding the death penalty.

Lebanon's army chief, Joseph Aoun, elected as country's president after 12 failed attempts to fill the role since October 2022, when the former president's term ended.

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado arrested following antigovernment protests on eve of

**GDILIVE.COM**

Groton Area  
Tigers



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

Text Paul at  
605-397-7460

## Traphagen's Last-Second Heroics Propel Groton Area to Dramatic Victory Over Clark-Willow Lake

The Northeast Conference clash between Groton Area and Clark-Willow Lake came down to the wire, but it was Taryn Traphagen's clutch three-pointer with just 1.7 seconds remaining that secured a thrilling 32-30 win for the Tigers.

The game started with both teams locked in a back-and-forth battle. The lead changed hands three times in the first quarter, with neither team able to gain a significant edge. The quarter ended tied at 12, showcasing efficient shooting from Clark-Willow Lake, who hit 50% of their shots (5-of-10), compared to Groton's 31% (5-of-16).

The second quarter saw Clark-Willow Lake assert themselves defensively, holding Groton Area to just one field goal in nine attempts (11%). Despite their own shooting struggles (18%), the Cyclones built a four-point halftime lead at 19-15. Brynn Roehrlich was key for Clark-Willow Lake, pacing her team with nine points on the night.

The Cyclones came out strong in the third quarter, extending their lead to 23-15, the largest of the game. However, Groton Area refused to back down. Behind gritty defense and persistence on the boards, the Tigers slowly chipped away, closing the gap to 25-23 by the end of the quarter. Jerrica Locke and Riley Dunker were instrumental, combining for 22 rebounds on the night, with Locke adding seven points and Dunker chipping in eight.

The fourth quarter turned into a tense battle of wills. Groton Area tied the game three times, at 25, 27, and 29, as both teams struggled to find consistent offense. The Tigers' defense held the Cyclones to just 17% shooting (2-of-12) in the final frame, while Groton shot a steady 36% (4-of-11).

With the game tied at 30 and the clock winding down, the Tigers put the ball in the hands of their playmaker, Taryn Traphagen. In the game's defining moment, Traphagen calmly drained a three-pointer from the right wing with just 1.7 seconds left, sending the Groton fans into a frenzy. A desperation heave from Clark-Willow Lake fell short, sealing the win for Groton Area.

While no player scored in double figures for Groton Area, the team's balanced effort and relentless rebounding made the difference. The Tigers capitalized on Clark-Willow Lake's 12 team fouls, sinking three crucial free throws, and limited their turnovers to stay in the game.

Clark-Willow Lake, who entered the game undefeated in Northeast Conference play, suffered their first conference loss and dropped to 5-2 on the season. Despite their solid defense, their 28% shooting (11-of-38) and 40% free-throw shooting (4-of-10) ultimately hampered their chances.

With the win, Groton Area improved to 6-1 on the season, showcasing their resilience and ability to perform under pressure. The Tigers will look to build on this momentum as they continue their campaign



**Taryn Traphagen made this 3-pointer with 1.7 seconds left in the game to lift Groton Area to a 32-30 win over Clark/Willow Lake. Defending Traphagen is Clark/Willow Lake's Shelby Begeman.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Rylee Dunker led the Tigers in scoring with eight points.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

against Lennox on Saturday, while Clark-Willow Lake, now 5-2, will aim to bounce back in their next outing by hosting Webster Area on Saturday at Willow Lake.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover. Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel were on hand for the event.

#### Groton Area:

Rylee Dunker: 8 points 10 rebounds, 1 steal, 3 fouls, 1 block.

Jerica Locke: 7 points, 12 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals, 3 fouls.

Jaedyn Penning: 4 points, 3 rebounds, 3 fouls.

Kennedy Hansen: 4 points, 1 rebound, 3 assists, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 3 points, 2 rebounds.

Faith Traphagen: 3 points, 2 rebounds, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Taryn Traphagen: 3 points, 1 assist, 1 steal.

Laila Roberts: 1 rebound, 2 fouls, 1 block.

Chesney Weber: 3 rebounds, 1 steal.

Totals: 2-pointers: 10-34 29%, 3-pointers: 3-15 20%, Free Throws: 3-8 38%, 34 rebounds, 13 turnovers, 6 assists, 7 steals, 15 fouls, 2 blocks.

Clark/Willow Lake: Brynn Roehrich 9, Johanna Vandersnick 8, Tehya Vig 7, Kamryn Nesheim 6.

Field Goals: 11-38 28%, Free Throws: 4-10 40%, 12 fouls, 10 turnovers.

Groton Area made it a clean sweep with subvarsity wins as well. Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 34-15. The Tigers had a 7-2 lead at the end of the first quarter, had an eight point run at the end of the second quarter to take a 22-8 lead at halftime, and led, 29-14, at the end of the third quarter.

Groton Area scoring: Talli Wright 11, Chesney Weber 7, Ashlynn Warrington 6, Sydney Locke 3, Taryn Traphagen 3, Mia Crank 2, Teagan Hanten 2.

Clark/Willow Lake: Jenny Bevers 6, Lexie Schmidt 5, Maddie Brenden 3, Ella Sass 1.

The game on GDILIVE.COM was sponsored by Weber Landscaping.

The Groton Area C team led at the quarterstops at 8-4, 15-11 and 24-15 en route to a 28-21 win.

Groton Area scoring: Kella Tracy 11, Makenna Krause 4, Ashlynn Warrington 4, Emerlee Jones 3, Sydney Locke 2, Brenna Imrie 2, Tevan Hanson 2.

Clark/Willow Lake: Ella Sass 6, Brenna Ahrens 5, Gracie Larson 4, Faith Roehrich 4, Alayna Arthur 2.

The game on GDILIVE.COM was sponsored by Locke Electric.

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## Groton Area Second Quarter Honor Roll

### Seniors

**4.0 GPA:** Payton Mitchell, Gretchen Dinger, Faith Traphagen, Axel Warrington, Elizabeth Flihs, Blake Pauli, Diego Eduardo Nava Remigio, Emma Kutter, Kennedy Hansen, Kayla Lehr, Laila Roberts,

**3.99-3.50:** Brooklyn Hansen, Logan Pearson, Ashly Johnson, Turner Thompson, Abby Yeadon, Kaden Kampa, Corbin Weismantel, Christian Ehresmann, Brevin Flihs, Jeslyn Kosel, Korbin Kucker

**3.49-3.00:** Easten Ekern, Carter Simon, Ashlyn Feser, Aiden Heathcote, Drew Thurston, Kellen Antonsen, Blake Dennert, Emma Bahr, Teylor Diegel

### Juniors

**4.0 GPA:** Nathan Unzen, Carly Gilbert, Jaedyn Penning, Ryder Johnson, Gage Sippel, De Eh Tha Say, Mia Crank, Karsten Flihs, Jerica Locke, Rylee Dunker, Raelee Lilly, Keegen Tracy, Natalia Warrington, Talli Wright

**3.99-3.50:** Becker Bosma, London Bahr, Paisley Mitchell, Jayden Schwan, Karter Moody, Olivia Stiegelmeier, Logan Warrington, Aiden Meyers, Hannah Sandness, Garrett Schultz,

**3.49-3.00:** Drake Peterson, Cali Tollifson, Lincoln Krause, Lucas Carda, Breslyn Jeschke, Cambria Bonn

### Sophomores

**4.0 GPA:** Kira Clocksene, Teagan Hanten, Carlee Johnson, Brody Lord, Ashlynn Warrington

**3.99-3.50:** Liby Althoff, McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Halee Harder, Colt Williamson, Brenna Imrie, Gavin Kroll, Kella Tracy, Walker Zoellner, Avery Crank, Emerlee Jones, Leah Jones, Claire Schuelke

**3.49-3.00:** Jackson Hopfinger, Addison Hoffman Wipf, Hailey Pauli, Aiden Strom, Zander Harry, Blake Lord, Hayden Zoellner, Dylan Alexander Lopez Marin, Logan Clocksene

### Freshmen

**4.0 GPA:** Elizabeth Cole, Makenna Krause, Sydney Locke, Thomas Schuster

**3.99-3.50:** Layne Johnson, Kyleigh Kroll, Ethan Kroll, Chesney Weber, Mya Feser, Jace Johnson, Easton Weber, Taryn Thompson, Rylen Ekern, Ryder Schuelle, Addison Hoelt, Brayden Barrera, Rylie Rose

**3.49-3.00:** Karson Zak, Thomas Aalseth, Gracie Pearson, Brysen Sandness, Alex Abeln, Kinsley Rowen, Braeden Flihs, Trinity Dallaire

### Eighth Grade

**4.0 GPA:** Neely Althoff, Wesley Borg, Zachary Flihs, Tevan Hanson, Asher Johnson, Brooklyn Spainer, Novalea Warrington

**3.99-3.50:** Aspen Beto, Abby Fjeldheim, Kolton Antonsen, Madison Herrick, Lincoln Shilhanek, Sydney Holmes, Jordan Schwan, Samuel Crank, Connor Kroll

**3.49-3.00:** Raquel Tracy, Arianna Dinger, Logan Olson, Kaedynce Bonn, Wesley Morehouse, Kyrie Yeigh, Mathias Walters Weidner, Tenley Frost, Aurora Washenberger

### Seventh Grade

**4.0 GPA:** Hudson Eichler, Amelia Ewalt, Sophia Flihs, Gavin Hanten, Liam Johnson, Liam Lord

**3.99-3.50:** Axel Abeln, Asher Zimmerman, Andi Gauer, Ryder Schwan, Trey Tietz, Keegan Kucker, Jameson Penning, Ilyanna Dallaire, Trayce Schelle

**3.49-3.00:** Nolan Bahr, Haden Harder, Rowan Patterson, Major Dolan, Dawson Feist, Elias Heilman, Kyson Kucker

### Sixth Grade

**4.0 GPA:** Gracie Borg, Lillian Davis, Brynlee Dunker, Ayce Warrington

**3.99-3.50:** Liby Johnson, Rylee Stoltenburg, Amara El Salahy, Easton Larson, Victoria Schuster, Brinley Guthmiller, Rylee Hofer, Zoe Olson, Taylynn Traphagen, Mason Locke, Kinley Sandness, Addison Steffes, Hank Hill, Knox Mulder, Ambrielle Feist, Bella Barrera, Hadley Heilman, Charli Jacobsen, Kendyll Kroll, Maycee Moody, Drew Fjeldheim, Andi Iverson, Mya Moody

**3.49-3.00:** Parker Zoellner, Rylan Blackwood, Keith Furman, Ivan Schwan, Gram Rose, Emmett Zoellner, Colton Morehouse, Kinton Tracy, Preston Hinkelman

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## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

### School Board Meeting

January 13, 2025 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

#### AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

#### POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

#### CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of December 9, 2024 school board meetings as drafted.
2. Approval of December 2024 District bills for payment.
3. Approve Open Enrollment Applications 25-19, 25-20, and 25-21

#### OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

4. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
5. Approval of December 2024 Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.
6. Approval of December 2024 School Transportation Report.
7. Approval of December 2024 School Lunch Report.
8. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

#### NEW BUSINESS:

1. Adopt 2025-2026 School Calendar.
2. Set date and time for school board election – April 8, 2025 (7:00 AM to 7:00 PM), and authorize Business Manager to designate officials, with voting precincts in Andover, Bristol, Columbia, and Groton. [3-year terms expiring: Tigh Fliehs, Travis Harder, Deb Gengerke]
3. Approve Service Contract with OTIS Elevator.
4. Approve Proposal from ARS Roofing for Roof Inspections.
5. First reading of recommended changes to Job Descriptions: Teacher, Paraprofessional, Maintenance Team Member
6. Approve hiring Kelly Oswald, Special Education Paraprofessional.

#### ADJOURN

Coming up on [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)

Groton Area  
Tigers  
**GT**



Friday, Jan. 10

**Groton Area at  
Clark/Willow Lake**

**5:00 Boys C**

**Sponsored by  
Larry & Val Fliehs**

**6:00 Boys JV**

**Anonymous Sponsor  
7:15 Boys Varsity Game**

**\$5 ticket or  
GDI Subscription  
required to watch the games.**



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### School choice groups split over Noem's education savings account plan

Regulation concerns cause division; other opponents critique bill's income provisions

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 9, 2025 7:02 PM



**Gov. Kristi Noem presents her annual budget address to lawmakers in the South Dakota State Capitol on Dec. 3, 2024.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

School choice advocates are fracturing over a bill outlining Republican Gov. Kristi Noem's \$4 million plan to provide families with public money for private school, homeschooling or other forms of alternative instruction.

After sponsors released a draft of the bill Wednesday, Families for Alternative Instruction Rights in South Dakota (FAIRSD) announced Thursday that it opposes the legislation in its current form.

The group said on its website that Noem's educational savings account (ESA) program, as drafted, would invite government interference into the currently unregulated alternative instruction space.

Meanwhile, public education advocates have coalesced as an outspoken group, arguing that the program would erode public education in the state.

And some lawmakers oppose the plan on budgetary grounds, due to lower-than-anticipated state revenues. Noem has proposed cuts across much of state government and an increase of only 1.25% for public schools, Medicaid providers and state workers.

Sioux Falls Republican Rep. Brian Mulder called the proposal a "luxury item."

"I'm not necessarily opposed to the idea, but with the current budget situation, we're not funding other parts of our government," Mulder said. "How can we take on more when we can't fund these core obligations?"

The mounting opposition creates headwinds that Noem must face to get the education savings account bill to her desk, while she prepares to resign as soon as this month to accept President-elect Trump's nomination to serve as secretary of Homeland Security. Assuming she's confirmed by the U.S. Senate, she'll be succeeded as governor by Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden.

The proposal comes as alternative instruction enrollment accelerates in South Dakota. It nearly tripled over the last decade from 3,933 students in 2014 to 11,489 — now making up about 7% of school-age children in the state, according to the state Department of Education.

South Dakota's annual legislative session begins Tuesday. Noem has support for the ESA bill from all three top Republican legislative leaders, including incoming House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach of Spearfish and incoming Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhoff of Pierre, who jointly pre-filed the bill. Speaker-elect of the House Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, is also sponsoring the bill. It's one of several school choice bills



that public school advocates said they anticipate this session.

## **FAIRSD: Keep alternative instruction 'unharmful' & 'free of government money'**

State Department of Education Secretary Joseph Graves said in a news release Wednesday that the Noem-backed proposal ascertains that parents are the "first and primary educators of their children," adding that the proposal offers options to students whose needs aren't met at their public school.

"Education savings accounts unleash the positive, powerful forces of competition in the educational marketplace," he said.

Odenbach said a "vast majority" of homeschool families are "excited" about the program.

Julie Christian, president of FAIRSD, said the ESA program should be established as its own lane of education separate from current forms of alternative instruction. That would allow alternative instruction families to withstand any proposed changes to state regulation and oversight, she said.

"FAIRSD has been communicating regularly with the school choice proponents over the past year," the organization wrote on its website. "We are confident they understand our position and the desire to keep alternative instruction laws unharmful and free of government money."

Americans for Prosperity-South Dakota, which is part of a national political advocacy network supported by the billionaire Koch family, helped draft the bill, said Deputy State Director Jen Beving. She hopes the two organizations can "iron out" the language and their differences.

"We're all on the same side," she said. "I hope we'll be able to come together on this. I want to protect homeschooling freedom as much as anyone else."

## **Critics question proposal's low-income prioritization**

Beving said Americans for Prosperity pushed back against initial language to restrict the program to low-income students.

Instead, the bill allows all non-public school students to apply for education savings accounts. If accepted, a student would receive about \$3,000.

The program only sets income-based priorities if there are more applicants than money allocated to the program. Otherwise, it's on a first come, first serve basis.

The first tier of income eligibility is limited to \$86,580 for a family of four, Odenbach said. The second tier is limited to an income of \$115,440 for a family of four. South Dakota's median family income is \$71,810, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Such limitations "cover a large share of South Dakota families," said Sandra Waltman, director of public affairs for the South Dakota Education Association, which represents public school educators.

"Is this really aimed at helping low-income families?" Waltman said. "Or is this finding a way to divert public dollars from public schools?"

Odenbach said that assessment is inaccurate.

"The overall intent of this is to stand up a good, solid program and make it available to as many people as possible," Odenbach said.

Waltman said \$3,000 per student doesn't cover the cost of tuition for private schools, meaning low-income families could struggle to pay for the remaining tuition and other educational services. She said lawmakers should ensure all students receive a good education, rather than diverting money from public education and "picking and choosing" which families receive the ESA money.

But it's "a really good start," Beving said, adding that lawmakers should provide educational options for students who don't succeed in the traditional public school system.

The details of the program — how the program will be operated and audited, and how purchases and applicable schools will be approved — are largely left unanswered. The bill reserves those for the state Department of Education.

The bill does not include any additional oversight or regulation for alternative instruction families. Alternative instruction students do not currently have to take standardized tests or submit portfolios to the state

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to prove educational progress. Public school leaders have criticized the lack of oversight since Noem and legislators changed alternative instruction laws during the 2021 legislative session.

"You can call it accountability, but it makes it pretty clear that we're not going to be asking folks to show whether or not these dollars taxpayers are investing are actually educating students," Waltman said.

## **Budgetary constraints depend on lawmakers' spending priorities**

The state's tight budget might prevent other lawmakers from supporting the ESA plan, but not Odenbach. "Getting education right" by maximizing parental freedoms and cutting education costs "is a necessity," he said.

"If we'll ever have meaningful, long-term property tax relief, we need to require our public education system to evolve and change and decentralize," he said. "Part of that is through a program like this to empower parents to decide where the best education option is for their child."

Sioux Falls Republican Rep. Tony Venhuizen serves as vice chair of the House budgeting committee. He's "open to the idea" of an education savings account program, but said because of this year's budget, its success will come down to "a question of priorities."

Relying on it to dramatically cut property taxes for South Dakotans is unrealistic, he added.

Venhuizen has introduced a bill to cut education-related property taxes for homeowners by increasing the state sales tax rate from 4.2% to 5%.

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

## **Run of prosecutions against SD state employees continues with alleged grocery voucher fraud**

**Criminal case is fifth filed against former state workers since July**

**BY: SETH TUPPER - JANUARY 9, 2025 5:28 PM**

A wave of criminal prosecutions against former South Dakota state employees continued Thursday with a new charge against a woman accused of using grocery vouchers intended for foster families.

The case is at least the fifth brought against a former state employee by Attorney General Marty Jackley since last summer, all for fraud-related allegations.

"The Attorney General's Office intends to continue to prosecute these cases to regain the public's trust in state government," Jackley said Thursday in a press release.

### **New case details**

The new charge is against Amalia Escalante Barrientos, 28, of Brookings, who began working for the state Department of Social Services in 2023. In her role as a family service specialist, she was authorized to provide one-time



**Clouds gather over the South Dakota Capitol building in Pierre on Sept. 17, 2022.** (Seth Tupper/South

Dakota Searchlight)

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\$150 grocery vouchers to foster families.

According to a court document filed by a state Division of Criminal Investigation agent, department officials became suspicious when Barrientos provided two vouchers to one foster parent in a short period of time. Barrientos allegedly used one of the vouchers to purchase \$149.98 worth of groceries for herself, while allegedly using her own loyalty account number with the grocery store.

Barrientos resigned during the ensuing investigation and allegedly admitted to the agent that she used a total of three vouchers for herself, all last year.

The agent wrote that Barrientos was supposed to obtain verbal approval from a supervisor before issuing a voucher, but "often her supervisor was unavailable, so field workers were permitted to generate the vouchers provided they just make their supervisor aware at some point."

Barrientos is charged with one misdemeanor count of "obtaining money, property or assistance by fraud from social services or related programs." The maximum penalty if she's convicted is one year in jail and a \$2,000 fine.

## Updates on earlier cases

The recent rash of revelations about alleged criminal behavior by state employees dates to at least July, when Lonna Carroll, 68, of Algona, Iowa, was accused of embezzling \$1.8 million from the state by creating and approving fraudulent financial support orders for children over the course of 13 years while she worked for the Department of Social Services. Her case is scheduled for an April trial.

In August, Jackley said a deceased former three-decade employee of the state Department of Revenue, Sandra O'Day, had allegedly created 13 fake vehicles to help her secure \$400,000 in loans. No charges were filed, because O'Day died before her alleged behavior came to light.

In October, Jackley announced charges against two more former Department of Revenue employees, Lynne Hunsley, 64, and Danielle Degenstein, 51, both of Pierre.

Hunsley has since pleaded guilty to forgery and grand theft by deception for creating a fake vehicle title that she used as proof of a trade-in to help her avoid excise taxes. She was sentenced to three years of probation and ordered to pay a \$1,000 fine and \$1,200 in restitution to the state.

Degenstein is charged with a misdemeanor for allegedly concealing her knowledge of a crime committed by a person identified in court documents only as "S.O." — a set of initials that matches O'Day's. Degenstein's case is pending.

In another pending case announced last month, Renee Strong, 55, of Springfield, faces 26 felony counts for allegedly submitting falsified reports of food-serve health inspections she never conducted while working for the state Department of Public Safety.

## Legislation introduced

Jackley announced a legislative package Wednesday intended to help prevent and catch state employee crimes. The bills include proposed new requirements for supervisors to report suspected wrongdoing, protections for whistleblowers, a greater investigatory role for the state auditor, and requirements for state agencies to conduct annual risk reviews.

Lawmakers will consider the bills during the annual legislative session that begins Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre.

Gov. Kristi Noem responded to the string of charges in November by adding an extra internal control officer position to the executive branch and by ordering state employees to undergo annual training aimed at preventing criminal activity.

*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.*

## COMMENTARY

### Attorney general and others know: Noem's public broadcasting cut threatens public safety System's towers are vital to an array of federal, state and local communications and public alerts

by Brad Johnson

It seems absurd that Gov. Kristi Noem would harm the U.S. Department of Homeland Security just before she is expected to be confirmed as its leader.

But that is what she is doing with her ill-advised plan to destroy South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Noem launched her surprise attack on SDPB in her Dec. 3 budget address, proposing to cut slightly more than \$3.6 million of its \$5.6 million in state funding.

"If it goes though as proposed," said SeVern Ashes, SDPB's director of engineering and operations, "there is not enough funding left to support the infrastructure, engineering salaries, buildings, power or service contracts for the equipment."

It costs \$4.8 million annually to "cover engineering expenses for the networks, studio engineering, and 24-7 coverage," he said.

SDPB's system is on 45 towers, and 17 of those co-host public safety communication equipment. The network is critical "to all emergency communication from the SD Division of Criminal Investigation on down to county-level emergency management systems such as ambulance, fire and local police departments such as Sioux Falls and Rapid City," Ashes said.

Additionally, Verizon, T-Mobile and AT&T wireless systems lease space on SDPB towers.

One federal Homeland Security agency using the tower network for communications is U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Ashes said. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S Forest Service and Federal Aviation Administration also use the system, as does the Civil Air Patrol.

Fighting fires in the Black Hills will be difficult without radio communication. County sheriffs, the state Highway Patrol, city and tribal police departments and ambulance systems will all be seeking alternatives.

The potential loss of that emergency communication system is unacceptable to South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley.

"Law enforcement relies heavily on public broadcasting," he said in a Monday interview. "We rely on it to a great degree for public safety from weather conditions to missing children and endangered individuals. I mean, that is who we go to for our Amber Alert."

The public best understands the tower system as the way SDPB transmits its programming, which is the real target of Noem's ire. Conservatives tend to dislike National Public Radio, which is only one part of SDPB's programming and is funded by private donations and the federally funded Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The state's money primarily is used to maintain SDPB's transmission system.



**A South Dakota Public Broadcasting tower stands atop a hill above Rapid City on Jan. 7, 2025.** (Seth Tupper/

South Dakota Searchlight)

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Ashes oversees seven SDPB-employed engineers, three in Rapid City, three in Sioux Falls and one in Pierre. They maintain about 30% of South Dakota's communication network, with the State Radio System under the Bureau of Information and Technology maintaining the rest.

Ashes said in addition to the towers, SDPB buildings house the state's radio equipment as well as backup generators. Federal law requires 72 hours of backup power, but SDPB's sites have seven days of capability.

The sharing of tower space with the State Radio System allows the two organizations to ensure coverage to about 98% of the state.

SDPB is the state's connection to the federal Emergency Alert System, Ashes said. "We cover every county in the state. Any statewide alert system — Amber Alert, Blue Alert, endangered persons — those are activated out of our facilities in Vermillion."

If there is a national emergency, something involving the Homeland Security Department soon to be led by Noem, "Our infrastructure is taken over by the federal government for those alerts."

If \$3.6 million is cut and SDPB is unable to maintain the system, the state radio communications system likely would have to find money to maintain it, or SDPB's portion goes dark.

At risk would be the state's television and radio broadcast licenses. Incoming Gov. Larry Rhoden would have to be involved in relinquishing those vital assets.

Noem's actions basically are those of a person showing malice against NPR, which explores ideas that differ with her worldview.

She never asked anyone at SDPB what might happen if they lost funding, and it's clear Noem had no understanding of what would happen.

"The first thing we heard was when the governor made the speech," said Ryan Howlett, CEO of Friends of South Dakota Public Broadcasting. "We weren't asked about the implication of a cut."

The bottom line, Howlett said, is that Noem's proposed cut will "compromise the safety of about 1 million people."

That's something Jackley said is unacceptable. "That infrastructure is very significant and important."

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Brad Johnson is married to a retired former employee of the nonprofit Friends of South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

*Brad Johnson is a Watertown businessman and longtime journalist. He is past president of South Dakota Lakes and Streams Association, president of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation and served 16 years on the South Dakota Board of Water and Natural Resources.*

## Landowners appeal Summit carbon storage decision

BY: JEFF BEACH - JANUARY 9, 2025 9:00 PM

A group of North Dakota landowners is appealing the state's approval of an underground carbon storage area for Summit Carbon Solutions, the company attempting to build the world's largest carbon capture and storage project.

The group represented by Bismarck attorney Derrick Braaten on Thursday filed the appeal in Burleigh County District Court, asserting that the North Dakota Industrial Commission withheld information and violated state law in approving the storage permit plan on Dec. 12.

The permanent underground carbon storage sites in western North Dakota are a key piece of Summit's planned five-state pipeline network (including South Dakota) capturing greenhouse gas emissions from ethanol plants. Approving the storage wells was one of the last decisions of Gov. Doug Burgum as chair of the Industrial Commission, which also included Attorney General Drew Wrigley and Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring.

The unanimous vote by the commission means that landowners who had not signed an agreement with Summit will be forced to allow the carbon storage on their property.

The landowners assert that the Industrial Commission, which includes the state Department of Mineral Resources, illegally refused to disclose information to landowners under North Dakota open records laws.

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Braaten and his clients were seeking computer-generated models that predict where the carbon dioxide will go when it is pumped underground for permanent storage.

The appeal says former Department of Mineral Resources Director Lynn Helms refused to provide the models before, during and after public hearings on the case in June, shortly before Helms retired.

The order passed by the Industrial Commission said that if any open records requests were not fulfilled, it is because the Braaten Law Firm did not inform the agency that it had not received the records.

"That's a lie," Braaten told the North Dakota Monitor.

The appeal said Braaten's firm was able to obtain the records in November. Braaten contends the computer models aren't accurate but landowners were not given a chance to dispute that. He said multiple requests for a rehearing were ignored.

Another issue raised in the appeal are the state's rules on underground storage. Under a process called amalgamation, if 60% of the landowners in a proposed storage area agree to the plan, the state can force the other 40% to comply.

Summit has obtained more than 92% of the pore space lease agreements across all three areas, according to the order approved in December.

After the commission's Dec. 12 decision, Summit Executive Vice President Wade Boeshans said the permits resulted from "years of rigorous scientific study, engineering design, and input from regulators, landowners, and local leaders."

Braaten also is representing the Northwest Landowners Association that has a separate lawsuit before the North Dakota Supreme Court on the amalgamation issue that he contends is unconstitutional.

He said a ruling on either that lawsuit or the storage decision appeal should clarify the constitutionality of the rules.

Braaten's law firm also is representing Emmons County in a separate legal challenge to the state Public Service Commission's approval of the pipeline route through North Dakota. Emmons County and Burleigh County are challenging the PSC's interpretation of state law that concluded state zoning rules preempt local ordinances on where pipelines are allowed.

Another group of landowners also is appealing the PSC permit decision.

Braaten said those appeals may be combined into one case.

*North Dakota Monitor Deputy Editor Jeff Beach is based in the Fargo area. His interests include agriculture, renewable energy and rural issues.*



**Lynn Helms, center, director of the North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources, listens June 11, 2024, during a public hearing in Bismarck on proposed carbon dioxide storage that would be connected to the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline.**

(Kyle Martin/For the North Dakota Monitor)

## Trump to face sentencing Friday in NY case after Supreme Court denies attempt to delay

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 9, 2025 8:31 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court late Thursday denied President-elect Donald Trump's eleventh-hour attempt to stop his sentencing in his New York hush money trial from going forward Friday morning.

Trump appealed to the court's emergency docket late Tuesday to intervene in his forthcoming sentencing for 34 felony convictions, arguing that presidential immunity should protect him in the days before he takes the oath of office, and, as he has in the past, that evidence introduced at trial violated the immunity doctrine.

The court denied Trump's request, in part, because his concerns over evidence introduced in state trial court can be dealt with on a state-

level appeal, and because the burden the sentencing will place on him as a president-elect amounts to "a brief virtual hearing," according to an unsigned order entered on the docket Thursday evening.

Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh "would grant the application," according to the order.

Trump spoke by phone with Alito just hours before Trump submitted his request to the court, ABC News first reported early Thursday. Alito told the network the two spoke about a different topic.

New York Justice Juan Merchan scheduled Trump's sentencing for 10 a.m. Friday, making clear that he would not seek jail time or fines for the president-elect. Rather, Trump will receive an "unconditional discharge," meaning he'll retain a criminal record in New York but face no other punishment. Merchan also agreed to give Trump the option for a virtual sentencing.

### Immunity ruling

A jury convicted Trump in May after a weeks-long trial focusing on his bookkeeping maneuvers to hide 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. The conviction cemented Trump's place in history as the first American president to become a convicted felon.

Trump fought the conviction after a Supreme Court ruling last summer that former presidents enjoy immunity from criminal prosecution for official duties, and presumptive immunity for duties on the outer limits of the office.

Merchan last month denied Trump's motion to dismiss the case based on presidential immunity, writing



**Donald Trump walks to speak to the media after being found guilty following his hush money trial at Manhattan Criminal Court on May 30, 2024, in New York City. Trump, the president-elect, is set to be sentenced on Friday, Jan. 10.** (Seth Wenig-Pool/Getty Images)

that the evidence introduced was “related entirely to unofficial conduct entitled to no immunity protection.”

## Manhattan DA slams Trump’s request

In his response to Trump’s request to the Supreme Court, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg argued the high court lacks jurisdiction because Trump has not exhausted his appeals at the state level. Jurisdiction aside, he argued, neither of Trump’s claims “comes close to justifying a stay of the forthcoming sentencing.”

In the application to the Supreme Court’s emergency docket, Trump’s lawyers argued that New York state committed a “grave error” in holding that a president-elect is not protected by immunity.

Bragg called this argument “extraordinary” and “unsupported by any decision from any court.”

“It is axiomatic that there is only one President at a time. Non-employees of the government do not exercise any official function that would be impaired by the conclusion of a criminal case against a private citizen for private conduct,” Bragg wrote.

He also wrote that the trial court has taken “extraordinary steps to minimize any burdens” on Trump. Bragg wrote that Trump “has provided no record support for his claim that his duties as President-elect foreclose him from virtually attending a sentencing that will likely take no more than an hour.”

“The current schedule is also entirely a function of defendant’s repeated requests to adjourn a sentencing date that was originally set for July 11, 2024,” Bragg wrote.

Trump’s lawyers rebutted Bragg in a reply Thursday, saying that the Manhattan district attorney “downplays the importance of the Presidential transition and the need for an energetic executive.”

## Trump reaction

In a post on his online platform Truth Social Thursday night, Trump criticized Merchan as “highly political and corrupt” and said he plans to continue to fight the conviction.

“For the sake and sanctity of the Presidency, I will be appealing this case, and am confident that JUSTICE WILL PREVAIL. The pathetic, dying remnants of the Witch Hunts against me will not distract us as we unite and, MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!,” he wrote.

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

## Strong bipartisan support in U.S. Senate advances bill expanding immigration detention

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 9, 2025 6:27 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans gained more than enough Democratic support Thursday to advance a bill that would greatly expand immigration detention, following a presidential election in which border security was a main theme for President-elect Donald Trump.

In an 84-9 procedural vote, 32 Senate Democrats and one independent backed the bill, S. 5, sponsored by Alabama’s Katie Britt. With the 60-vote threshold met, the legislation now can advance for debate and a final vote.

The only Democrats who voted against the procedural motion were Sens. Tina Smith of Minnesota, Jeff Merkley of Oregon, Andy Kim and Cory Booker of New Jersey, Ed Markey and Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Brian Schatz and Mazie Hirono of Hawaii. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, also opposed it.

Hours before the vote, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said that he planned to vote to allow the bill to proceed because Democrats want a debate on the measure and an amendment process.

“This is not a vote on the bill itself,” Schumer said on the Senate floor Thursday. “It’s a motion to proceed, a vote that says we should have a debate and should have amendments.”



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## Petty crimes targeted

The bill, named after 22-year-old Georgia nursing student Laken Riley, would expand mandatory detention requirements for immigrants — including some with legal status — charged with petty crimes like shoplifting.

María Teresa Kumar, the president and CEO of the civic engagement group Voto Latino, said in a statement that the bill “is a chilling first step toward widespread family separation while dismantling critical protections for due process.”

“The legislation’s broad detention requirements would impact even those legally permitted to enter the United States to seek asylum, subjecting them to immediate incarceration based on accusations of minor offenses such as theft, burglary, or shoplifting,” she said. “Such measures not only undermine due process but also disproportionately target migrants who are already fleeing violence and instability in search of safety.”

The legislation would also give broad legal standing for state attorneys general to challenge federal immigration law and bond decisions of immigration judges.

It would include not only immigrants in the country without documentation, but also those with a discretionary legal status such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA.



**Migrants wait throughout the night on May 10, 2023, in a dust storm at Gate 42, on land between the Rio Grande and the border wall, hoping they will be processed by immigration authorities before the expiration of Title 42.** (Photo by Corrie Boudreaux for Source NM)

## Georgia murder

Riley was out on a run when her roommates became concerned after she did not return home. Jose Antonio Ibarra, a 26-year-old migrant from Venezuela, was charged and convicted of her murder last month. According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Ibarra allegedly entered the country illegally in 2022.

Ibarra was previously arrested on a shoplifting charge and released, so the bill Republicans have pushed for would require the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to detain an immigrant charged or arrested with local theft, burglary or shoplifting.

“Her killer, who came to this country illegally, should have never been in the United States, and once he had been arrested for multiple crimes before committing the most heinous, unimaginable crime, he should have been detained by ICE immediately,” Britt said on the Senate floor.

Trump often spoke of Riley’s murder on the campaign trail and blamed the Biden administration’s immigration policies for her death.

## GOP trifecta

The House passed its version of the bill, H.R. 29, on Tuesday, with 48 Democrats joining Republicans. The measure also passed the House on a bipartisan basis last Congress, with 37 Democrats voting with

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the GOP. It stalled in the Senate, where Democrats maintained a slim majority.

With a Republican-controlled trifecta in Washington after Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, and only seven Senate Democrats needed to break the 60-vote threshold, the bill has a decent chance of becoming law once it gets to a final vote, drawing concern from immigration advocates.

"With just days before Trump's inauguration and what we know will be an onslaught of more attacks against immigrants, there is no excuse for complicity in the hateful demonization of immigrant communities and violent expansion of the detention and deportation apparatus," Juliana Macedo do Nascimento, the deputy director of federal advocacy of the largest youth immigrant advocacy group United WeDream Action, said in a statement.

## Democratic backers

Democrats, still reeling from the losses of the November election, have shifted toward the right on immigration.

The bill gained votes from senators from swing states that Trump carried, like Arizona freshman Ruben Gallego and Michigan freshman Elissa Slotkin.

"Michiganders have spoken loudly and clearly that they want action to secure our southern border," Slotkin said in a statement.

She said that while the bill "isn't perfect," she's hopeful for an amendment process.

Gallego and Slotkin both voted for the bill last Congress when they were members of the House.

Both Georgia Democratic Sens. Jon Ossoff — who is up for reelection next year — and Raphael Warnock voted for the procedural motion.

"I'm voting to begin floor debate on the Laken Riley Act because I believe the people of Georgia want their lawmakers in Washington to address the issues in this legislation," Warnock said in a statement before Thursday's vote.

Michigan's Democratic Sen. Gary Peters, who is also up for reelection next year, also voted for the procedural motion.

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

## Former President Jimmy Carter honored at state funeral

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JANUARY 9, 2025 2:40 PM

WASHINGTON — On a wintry Thursday morning, mourners and dignitaries gathered at Washington National Cathedral to honor the life of former President Jimmy Carter.

Speakers at Carter's state funeral, including President Joe Biden and the sons of Carter's political contemporaries delivering eulogies written by their fathers, described the Georgia native and U.S. Navy veteran as a man committed to civil and human rights who led a courageous life of faith and service.

In his eulogy, Biden said Carter, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002, established "a model post-presidency," depicting the Georgian as a man of "character" who held a "deep Christian faith in God."

"Jimmy Carter's friendship taught me, and through his life, taught me, that strength of character is more than title or the power we hold — it's the strength to understand that everyone should be treated with dignity, respect — that everyone, and I mean everyone, deserves an even shot," he said.

Carter died at 100 in his hometown of Plains, Georgia, on Dec. 29. Thursday's funeral marked his final memorial in Washington after his body arrived in the nation's capital Jan. 7.

The former Peach State governor lived the longest of any U.S. president. Despite serving just one White House term from 1977 to 1981, his presidency featured key diplomatic deals and energy policy initiatives, among other achievements.

After leaving the White House, he established the Carter Center in Atlanta. He authored books and spent a great deal of time volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit that works to build affordable homes.

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The many state funeral attendees also included the four living former U.S. presidents: Donald Trump, Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

## A life of service

Biden said his fellow Democratic president's life was "the story of a man who never let the tides of politics divert him from his mission to serve and shape the world."

Steven Ford delivered a eulogy written by his late father, former President Gerald Ford.

"Honesty and truth telling were synonymous with the name Jimmy Carter," Gerald Ford wrote. "Those traits were instilled in him by his loving parents, Lillian and Earl Carter, and the strength of his honesty was reinforced by his upbringing in the rural South poised on the brink of social transformation."

Carter won the presidency against Gerald Ford, the Republican incumbent, in 1976. The two were dear friends, Steven Ford said.

Andrew Young, who was U.S. ambassador to the United Nations during the Carter administration, offered the homily.

"I don't mean this with any disrespect, but it's still hard for me to understand how you could get to be president from Plains, Georgia," Young jokingly remarked as he paid tribute to Carter.

"I've known President Carter for more than half of my life, and I never ceased to be surprised, I never ceased to be enlightened, I never ceased to be inspired by the little deeds of love and mercy that he shared with us every day of his life," said Young, who also served as mayor of Atlanta and represented Georgia in Congress.

"It was President James Earl Carter that, for me, symbolized the greatness of the United States of America."

Ted Mondale, son of Carter's vice president, Walter Mondale, read the eulogy written by his late father.

Though he and Carter only had four years in the Oval Office, Carter "achieved so much in that time — it stood as a marker for Americans dedicated to justice and decency," Walter Mondale wrote.

Three of Carter's grandsons — Josh, James and Jason — honored their late grandfather during the service.

Josh Carter said his late grandfather spent the entire time he knew him helping people in need.

"He built houses for people who needed homes, he eliminated diseases in forgotten places, he waged peace anywhere in the world, wherever he saw a chance," Josh Carter said.

"He loved people, and whenever he told these stories in Sunday school, he always said he did it for one simple reason: He worshiped the Prince of Peace, and he commanded it."

Country stars Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood, who are among Habitat for Humanity's most recognizable volunteers, sang John Lennon's "Imagine."



**The late President Jimmy Carter's casket is pictured leaving the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 9, 2025, before it was transported to Washington National Cathedral.** (Photo by U.S.

Army Spc. David A. Carvajal/Department of Defense)

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## Back to Plains

Carter, who was a peanut farmer, and his late wife, Rosalynn Carter, hailed from the small southwest Georgia town of Plains, where they returned after living in the White House.

Rosalynn Carter died in November 2023 at the age of 96. She and Jimmy Carter were married for 77 years.

The state funeral followed Carter's body lying in state at the U.S. Capitol throughout this week. Mourners paid their respects to the former president in a public viewing that began Tuesday night and ended Thursday morning. Biden declared Jan. 9 a national day of mourning to honor the former president.

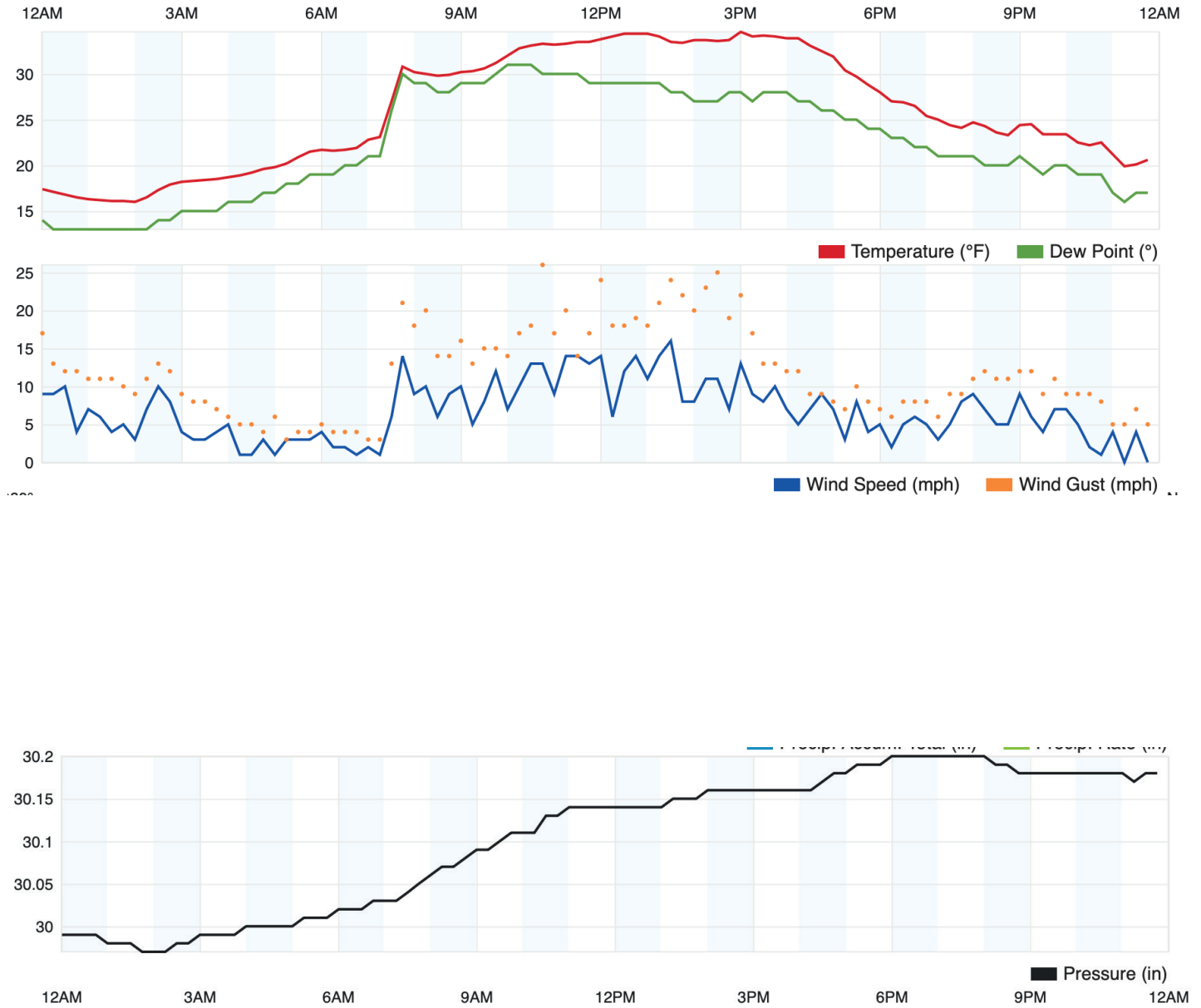
Carter's body will make its way to Georgia on Thursday, where he will have a private funeral service and interment in Plains.

*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.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Friday

Friday Night

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 23 °F

Decreasing  
Clouds



Low: 14 °F

Chance Snow



High: 35 °F

Chance Snow



Low: 9 °F

Chance Snow



High: 16 °F

Chance Snow  
then Partly  
Sunny and  
Blustery



## Light Precipitation Tonight Through Sunday

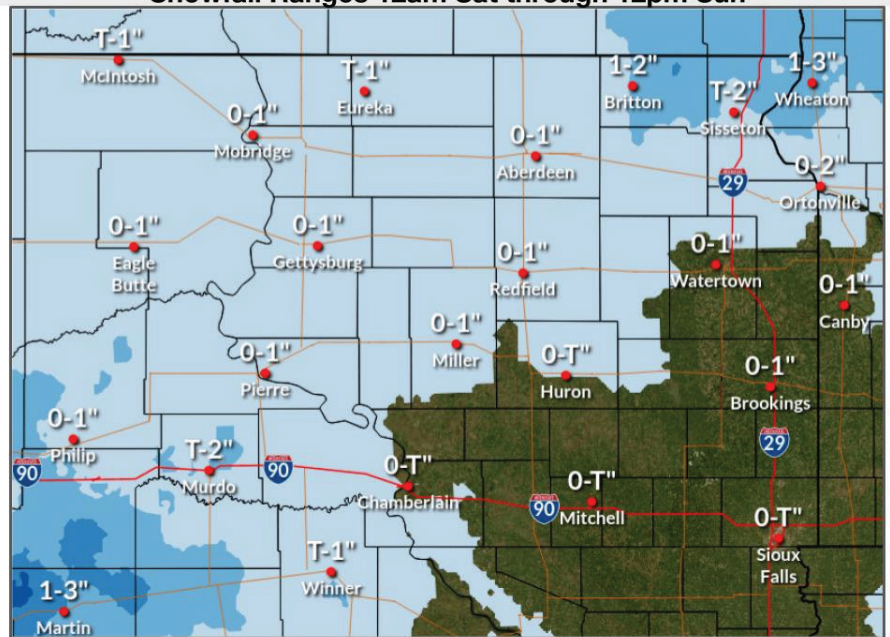
January 10, 2025  
2:59 AM

### Snowfall Ranges 12am Sat through 12pm Sun

#### Key Messages

- Increasing clouds and flurries today
- Steady temperatures today  
Highs between 20-30 degrees
- Saturdays Clipper
  - Tonight, a mix of very light freezing rain & snow
  - A brief lull Saturday morning
  - Increasing chances for rain/snow in the afternoon
  - Snow showers Saturday night lingering into midday Sunday

When to expect  
most accumulation



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Ahead of a clipper system we will continue to see fairly mild conditions, though increasing clouds will limit warmth. Light precipitation moves in tonight, though most of the precipitation, including snow accumulations, are focused across Saturday night into Sunday morning

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 35 °F at 3:00 PM

Low Temp: 16 °F at 1:50 AM

Wind: 28 mph at 2:19 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 2 minute

## Today's Info

Record High: 56 in 2012

Record Low: -30 in 1978

Average High: 23

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.21

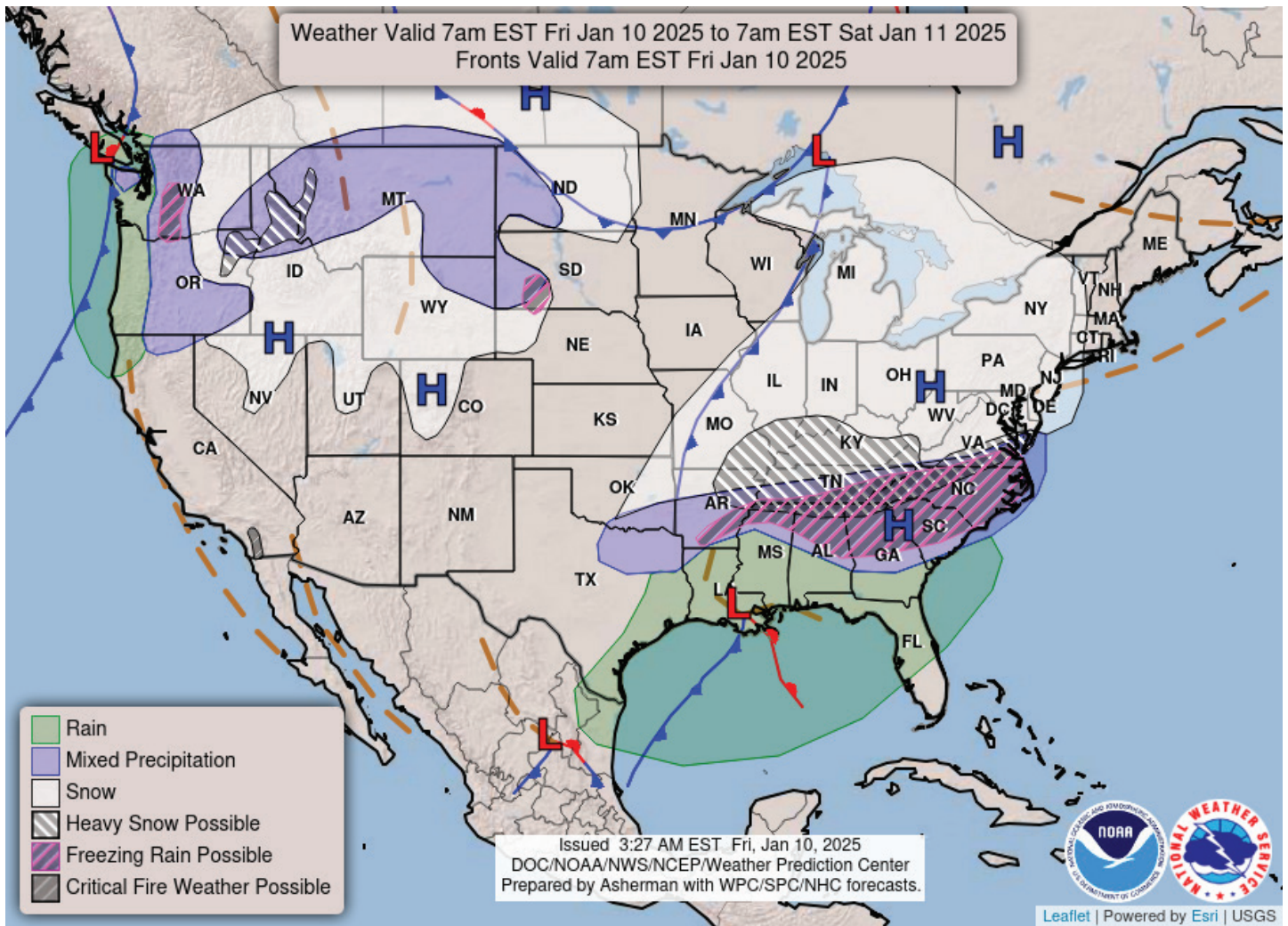
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.21

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:11:27 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:08:23 am



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## Today in Weather History

January 10, 1911: The temperature at Rapid City, South Dakota, plunged 47 degrees in just fifteen minutes. At 7 AM, the temperature was 55 degrees. Fifteen minutes later, it was 4 degrees below zero.

January 10, 1975: An intense area of low pressure moved from eastern Iowa through eastern Minnesota. The storm center set many low-pressure records as it moved across eastern Minnesota. New snow of 3 to 6 inches across much of Minnesota began to blow and drift on the morning of the 10th and then developed into a full-blown blizzard with heavy snowfall developing. The blizzard continued through the 11th with winds of 30 to 50 mph with gusts of 60 to 80 mph. Drifts up to 20 feet high in west-central Minnesota paralyzed the area. Snowfall amounts from 1 to 2 feet occurred. Numerous roads were closed due to drifting and low visibility. Numerous sustained power outages occurred, particularly in rural sections. Thousands of people were stranded, with 168 people trapped in a train in Willmar. Wind chills ranged from 50 below to 80 below the storm. Extensive losses to life and property occurred. There were 35 deaths during the storm and many injuries. Tens of thousands of livestock and poultry losses also occurred, with 140 farm buildings damaged or destroyed. Losses to livestock and property were over 20 million. It took 11 days to clear some areas.

In South Dakota, snow began to fall on the 10th in the afternoon, and then the winds increased and reached blizzard conditions by evening. These severe blizzard conditions continued through the 11th and the morning of the 12th. Wind chills fell to 50 below to 70 below zero. Many cars stalled on roads due to poor visibility, icy roads, and blowing and drifting snow. Eight people lost their lives. Thousands of livestock and poultry were lost. During the blizzard, a 2000 foot radio and TV antenna just east of Sioux Falls collapsed.

January 10, 2000: High winds gusting to over 60 mph caused some spotty damage across central and north-central South Dakota. Near Mobridge, the high winds blew a semi-tractor-trailer off the road and tipped it over while heading westbound on Highway 12. The semi-tractor-trailer sustained quite a bit of damage as a result. The high winds also damaged the windmill at the museum in Mobridge, breaking off the tail and bending several blades. Some high wind reports include; 56 mph at McLaughlin, 58 mph at Onida and Mobridge, and 63 mph at Pierre.

1800: According to David Ludlum, Savannah, Georgia, received a foot and a half of snow and ten inches blanketed Charleston, SC. It was the heaviest snowfall of record for the immediate Coastal Plain of the southeastern U.S.

1911 - The temperature at Rapid City, SD, plunged 47 degrees in just fifteen minutes. (The Weather Channel)

1949: Snow was reported in San Diego, California, for the first time since 1882. The snow was noted on some of the beaches in parts of the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

1973: A powerful F5 tornado struck San Justo, a town in the province of Santa Fe, Argentina, on January 10, 1973. At least 63 people were reported dead, and 350 were reported injured as it cut a 300-yard wide swath through the town.

1975 - The "Storm of the Century" hit Minnesota. A severe blizzard moved northward across the state producing up to two feet of snow. High winds drove wind chill readings to 80 degrees below zero, and at Duluth MN the barometric pressure dipped to 28.55 inches. The storm, which claimed 35 lives, occurred on the 102nd anniversary of the infamous "Pioneer Blizzard" in Minnesota. (David Ludlum)

1982: Bitterly cold weather was found across Illinois. Of the 109 weather reporting stations in the state, 48 of those reported lows of 20 degrees below zero or colder. Some of the most frigid temperatures included 27 below zero at Rockford, 26 below zero at Chicago, and 25 below zero at Kankakee and Peoria. The Freezer Bowl was played between the Cincinnati Bengals and the San Deigo Chargers in bitterly cold wind chills. The air temperature was  $-9^{\circ}\text{F}$ , but the wind chill, factoring in a sustained wind of 27 mph, was  $-37^{\circ}\text{F}$ .

2001 - Storms dumped more than seven inches of rain on parts of southern California, including Los Angeles, where nearly four inches of rain fell. The heavy rains caused mudslides and road closures along much of California's central coast and up to three feet of snow was deposited in some coastal mountain areas. (NCDC)





## BREAKTHROUGH

It was the first time she, JoAnn, had ever competed in the Special Olympics. She had trained hard but had no expectations of winning her race. But, she did win.

After the medal was placed around her neck, she ran to her parents and said, "Look mom and dad – I won! I won my race!" Tears fell from their eyes and ran down their cheeks.

Noticing their tears, the judge approached them and asked, "Aren't you happy that your daughter won the race? Why are you crying?"

Wiping the tears from her eyes, JoAnn's mother said, "Of course we are happy she won her race. But what brought tears to our eyes was the joy we had in hearing the first words she ever uttered."

It is easy for Christians to do good works and kind deeds in the name of the Lord without mentioning His name. And that is good. But we must also willingly and without hesitation boldly tell others of His blessings in our lives and give Him the credit.

Prayer: Give us courage, Lord, to share Your message of love, hope, and salvation with the lost. Also, Father, give us the courage to praise Your blessings, too. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies. Psalm 107:2

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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.07.25

20 24 33 39 48 18

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$77,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 1 Mins 15  
DRAW: 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 1 Days 16 Hrs 16  
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.09.25

2 4 14 17 28 11

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

NEXT 16 Hrs 31 Mins  
DRAW: 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.08.25

5 15 25 26 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$20,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 31  
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.08.25

22 29 36 61 65 17

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

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 15  
DRAW: 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 1 Days 17 Hrs 15  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## 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

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

### Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 55, Burke 41  
Britton-Hecla 36, Redfield 26  
Canton 62, Dell Rapids 51  
Chamberlain 36, Crow Creek Tribal School 28  
Chester 60, Beresford 58  
Colman-Egan 72, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 39  
Corsica/Stickney 61, Platte-Geddes 11  
DeSmet 66, Arlington 47  
Dell Rapids St Mary 63, Estelline-Hendricks 22  
Deubrook 58, Iroquois-Lake Preston 16  
Edgemont 40, Crawford, Neb. 29  
Ethan 64, Avon 31  
Florence-Henry 45, Wilmot 34  
Freeman 56, Bridgewater-Emery 31  
Groton 32, Clark-Willow Lake 30  
Hamlin 62, Tiospa Zina 25  
Herreid-Selby 44, Faulkton 29  
Hettinger-Scranton, N.D. 62, Bison 16  
Kadoka 55, White River 45  
Kimball-White Lake 50, Colome 23  
Lakota Tech 54, Chadron, Neb. 31  
Lemmon High School 60, New England, N.D. 20  
Mahpiya Lúta Red Cloud 78, Custer 34  
McLaughlin 43, Stanley County 16  
Mobridge-Pollock 45, Miller 40  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 44, Tri-Valley 39  
Northwestern 43, Hitchcock-Tulare 42  
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 52, Howard 38  
Spearfish 44, Hill City 38  
Tea 47, West Central 43  
Vermillion 70, Baltic 35  
Viborg-Hurley 55, Hanson 33  
Wagner 67, Bon Homme 26  
Waverly-South Shore 45, Aberdeen Christian 18  
Webster 47, Deuel 29  
Wessington Springs 58, Sunshine Bible Academy 29  
Winner 68, Todd County 24  
Wolsey-Wessington 46, James Valley Christian School 13

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

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## BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 67, Burke 37  
Beresford 70, Chester 45  
Britton-Hecla 74, Redfield 49  
Crawford, Neb. 58, Edgemont 38  
Dell Rapids 67, Canton 39  
Dell Rapids St Mary 65, Estelline-Hendricks 52  
Deubrook 65, Iroquois-Lake Preston 53  
Deuel 64, Webster 38  
Ethan 71, Avon 47  
Florence-Henry 54, Wilmot 37  
Freeman 65, Bridgewater-Emery 62, OT  
Hamlin 84, Tiospa Zina 26  
Howard 52, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 37  
Jones County 44, Philip 30  
Kimball-White Lake 54, Colome 10  
Lac qui Parle Valley, Minn. 76, Milbank 66  
Leola-Frederick High School 56, Aberdeen Roncalli 47  
Miller 51, Mobridge-Pollock 46  
Platte-Geddes 49, Corsica/Stickney 32  
Spearfish 57, Hill City 49, OT  
Stanley County 66, McLaughlin 33  
Sully Buttes 71, Highmore-Harrold 46  
Timber Lake 71, Faith 43  
Tri-Valley 42, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 27  
Vermillion 59, Baltic 47  
Viborg-Hurley 71, Hanson 61  
Wagner 62, Bon Homme 40  
Warner 52, Ipswich 48  
Waubay/Summit 63, Langford 27  
Waverly-South Shore 45, Aberdeen Christian 42  
Wessington Springs 57, Sunshine Bible Academy 39  
Wolsey-Wessington 87, James Valley Christian School 57

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

## South Korea's acting leader accepts resignation of presidential security chief

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's acting leader on Friday accepted the resignation of the chief of the presidential security service, Park Jong-joon, as he faced police questioning over how his forces blocked law enforcement efforts to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol last week.

The acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, also expressed regret over the clashes between law enforcement officials and the presidential security service and called for lawmakers to reach a bipartisan agreement to launch an independent investigation.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police are planning a second attempt to bring Yoon into custody as they jointly investigate whether his brief martial law declaration on Dec. 3 amounted to an attempted rebellion. The presidential security service blocked an earlier attempt to detain Yoon at his official residence, which he has not left for weeks.

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It wasn't immediately clear how Park's resignation and Choi's call for an independent investigation to take over the probe on Yoon would affect the push to bring Yoon into custody.

"The government has been deliberating to find a wise solution, but unfortunately, within our current legal framework, it's difficult to find a clear resolution to end the conflict between the two agencies," Choi said about the tensions between the anti-corruption office and presidential security service over Yoon's potential detention.

"We urge the ruling and opposition parties to work together to agree on a bill to launch a special prosecutor investigation that is free from constitutional issues. This will naturally resolve the ongoing intense standoff."

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party accused Choi of legitimizing Yoon's refusal to comply with a court-issued warrant under the guise of neutrality.

"It amounts to a public declaration of support for the leader of a rebellion," said Noh Jong-myun, a party lawmaker and spokesperson.

The Democrats and other opposition parties on Thursday introduced a bill calling for an independent investigation into allegations of rebellion against Yoon.

An earlier bill by the opposition proposing an independent investigation was scrapped after members of Yoon's conservative party opposed a clause allowing only opposition parties to recommend special prosecutor candidates.

The conservatives also aren't endorsing the new bill, which proposes that the Supreme Court's chief justice recommend two candidates to Yoon, who would then select one as the special prosecutor. If Yoon refuses to appoint anyone, the older of the two candidates would automatically assume the role, according to the bill.

Park ignored two summonses before appearing for questioning on Friday over allegations of obstructing justice, a week after his forces repelled dozens of anti-corruption and police investigators from Yoon's official residence. Park said his duty is to protect the president and warned of "bloodshed," as critics said that his agency is becoming Yoon's private army.

The embattled president remains holed up at his official residence in Seoul, where the presidential security service has fortified the grounds with barbed wire and rows of vehicles blocking the roads.

Yoon made a short-lived declaration of martial law and deployed troops to surround the National Assembly on Dec. 3, which lasted only hours before lawmakers managed to get through the blockade and voted to lift the measure.

His presidential powers were suspended when the opposition-dominated Assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14 and accused him of rebellion. His fate now rests with the Constitutional Court, which has begun deliberating on whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reject the charges and reinstate him.

A Seoul court on Tuesday issued a new warrant to the anti-corruption agency to detain Yoon after the previous one-week warrant expired. The agency and police have not publicly disclosed how long the new warrant will remain valid.

Speaking to reporters upon arriving for police questioning, Park again criticized the efforts to detain Yoon, saying that the investigation should proceed in a manner "appropriate for the status of an incumbent president" and the "dignity of the nation."

"Many citizens are surely deeply concerned about the possible conflict and confrontation between government agencies," Park said. "I came here today with the belief that under no circumstances should there be any physical clashes or bloodshed, and am hoping to prevent such incidents from occurring."

Park said he made several calls to Choi, urging him to mediate an alternative approach with law enforcement and also made similar requests to Yoon's lawyers, but did not receive a satisfactory response. The anti-corruption agency had also criticized Choi for refusing to instruct the presidential security service to cooperate with its execution of the detainment warrant.

While the presidential security act mandates protection for Yoon, it does not authorize the service to block court-ordered detainments and some legal experts say the presidential security service's action last

week may have been illegal.

Asked in parliament about the presidential security service's effort to block the detention, National Court Administration head Cheon Dae-yeop said Friday that "resistance without a legitimate reason can constitute a crime, such as obstruction of official duties."

Although the president himself has wide-ranging immunity from prosecution while in office, that does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason.

Yoon's lawyers have questioned the legitimacy of the new detention warrant against Yoon issued by the Seoul Western District Court, arguing that the anti-corruption agency lacks legal authority to investigate rebellion charges or order police to detain suspects.

They also argue that detention and search warrants against Yoon cannot be enforced at his residence, citing a law that protects locations potentially linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge — which would be Yoon.

Yoon's lawyers have urged the agency to either indict the president or seek a formal arrest warrant, a process that requires a court hearing. However, they have said that Yoon would only comply with an arrest warrant issued by the Seoul Central District Court, which handles most key requests in high-profile cases.

They accuse the agency of deliberately choosing another court with an allegedly favorable judge, even though the official residence is located in the jurisdiction of the Western District Court.

## LA area's 2 biggest blazes burn at least 10,000 structures, while new fire leads to more evacuations

By JAIMIE DING, JULIE WATSON and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The two biggest wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area have killed at least 10 people and burned more than 10,000 homes and other structures, officials said as they urged more people to heed evacuation orders after a new blaze ignited and quickly grew.

The Kenneth Fire started in the late Thursday afternoon in the San Fernando Valley just 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from a school serving as a shelter for evacuees from another fire. It moved into neighboring Ventura County but a large and aggressive response by firefighters stopped the flames from spreading.

About 400 firefighters remained on scene overnight to guard against the fire flaring up.

Only hours before the Kenneth Fire roared to life officials expressed encouragement after firefighters aided by calmer winds and help from crews from outside the state saw the first signs of successfully beating back the region's two devastating wildfires.

The Eaton Fire near Pasadena that started Tuesday night has burned more than 5,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles. Firefighters were able to establish the first bit of containment Thursday.

To the west in Pacific Palisades, the largest of the fires burning in the LA area has destroyed over 5,300 structures and firefighters had no containment.

All of the major fires that have broken out this week are located in a roughly 25-mile (40-kilometer) band north of downtown Los Angeles, spreading a sense of fear and sadness across the nation's second-largest city. No cause has been identified for the largest fires.

Several weather monitoring agencies announced Friday that Earth recorded its hottest year ever in 2024. "Hurricane Helene, floods in Spain and the weather whiplash fueling wildfires in California are symptoms of this unfortunate climate gear shift," University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd said.

The level of devastation is jarring even in a state that has grown used to massive wildfires. A large portion of scenic Pacific Palisades has been obliterated. Dozens of blocks in the seaside neighborhood were flattened to smoldering rubble. In neighboring Malibu, blackened palm strands were all that was left above debris where oceanfront homes once stood.

At least five churches, a synagogue, seven schools, two libraries, boutiques, bars, restaurants, banks and groceries were burned. So too were the Will Rogers' Western Ranch House and Topanga Ranch Motel, local landmarks dating to the 1920s.



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The government has not yet released figures on the cost of the damage or specifics about how many structures burned.

AccuWeather, a private company that provides data on weather and its impact, on Thursday increased its estimate of the damage and economic loss to \$135-\$150 billion.

Firefighters made significant gains Thursday at slowing the spread of the major fires, but containment remained far out of reach.

Crews also knocked down a blaze in the Hollywood Hills with the help of water drops from aircraft, allowing an evacuation to be lifted Thursday. The fire that sparked late Wednesday near the heart of the entertainment industry came perilously close to igniting the famed Hollywood Bowl outdoor concert venue.

The enormity of the destruction emerges

Earlier in the week, hurricane-force winds blew embers, that ignited hillsides.

Right now, it's impossible to quantify the extent of the destruction other than "total devastation and loss," said Barbara Bruderlin, head of the Malibu Pacific Palisades Chamber of Commerce.

"There are areas where everything is gone, there isn't even a stick of wood left, it's just dirt," Bruderlin said.

Of the 10 deaths so far, Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley confirmed two were in the Palisades Fire. County officials said the Eaton Fire had killed five. Cadaver dogs and crews are searching through rubble to see if there are more victims.

Two of the dead were Anthony Mitchell, a 67-year-old amputee, and his son, Justin, who had cerebral palsy. They were waiting for an ambulance to come and did not make it to safety when the flames roared through, Mitchell's daughter, Hajime White, told The Washington Post.

Shari Shaw told KTLA that she tried to get her 66-year-old brother, Victor Shaw, to evacuate Tuesday night but he wanted to stay and fight the fire. Crews found his body with a garden hose in his hand.

On Thursday, recovery crews pulled a body from rubble of what was a beachfront residence in Malibu. A charred washer and dryer were among the few things that remained identifiable in the home along the Pacific Coast Highway.

There have been evacuations, school closures and arrests

At least 180,000 people were under evacuation orders, and the fires have consumed about 45 square miles (117 square kilometers), which is roughly the size of San Francisco. The Palisades Fire is already the most destructive in Los Angeles' history.

All schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest, will be closed again Friday because of the heavy smoke wafting over the city and ash raining down in parts.

At least 20 arrests have been made for looting. The city of Santa Monica, which is next to Pacific Palisades, declared a curfew because of the lawlessness, officials said.

National Guard troops arrived in Los Angeles on Thursday evening. They'll be stationed near fire-ravaged areas to protect property.

Actors among those who lost homes

Many celebrities live in areas devastated by fire. Among those who lost their homes were Billy Crystal, Mandy Moore and Paris Hilton.

Jamie Lee Curtis pledged \$1 million to start a "fund of support" for those affected by the fires that touched all economic levels from the city's wealthy to its working class.

State seeing 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.

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.

Some losses feel greater than others

Robert Lara sifted through the remains of his home in Altadena on Thursday with tears in his eyes, hoping to find a safe containing a set of earrings that once belonged to his great-great-grandmother.

"All our memories, all our sentimental attachments, things that were gifted from generation to generation to generation are now gone," he said.

## Middle East latest: Body recovered in Gaza confirmed to be 23-year-old Hamzah AlZayadni

By The Associated Press undefined

Israel's army confirmed Friday that one of the bodies recovered from Gaza earlier this week was that of 23-year-old hostage Hamzah AlZayadni.

His body was retrieved with that of his father, Yosef AlZayadni, who were taken together when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel 15 months ago. His father was quickly identified, while his son's remains were sent for verification.

In recent weeks, Israel and Hamas have appeared to inch closer to an agreement for a ceasefire and the release of hostages. Palestinians and family members of hostages who were killed in captivity have been imploring the Israeli government and world leaders for a ceasefire deal.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Thursday that 46,006 Palestinians have been killed and 109,378 wounded in the Israel-Hamas war, with no end in sight. It has said women and children were 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 blames Hamas for civilian deaths because it says militants operate in residential areas. Israel's air and ground operations have driven hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into sprawling tent camps along the coast with limited access to food and other essentials.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and abducting around 250. A third of the 100 hostages still held in Gaza are believed to be dead.

Here's the latest:

President of Cyprus to meet Lebanon's new president

NICOSIA, Cyprus — The president of Cyprus says he will be the first head of state to meet with the newly elected president of Lebanon, Joseph Aoun.

President Nikos Christodoulides told reporters Friday that he would be meeting Aoun when he departs for Lebanon around midday Friday.

Christodoulides said he knows Aoun "well" from his tenure as chief of Lebanon's armed forces.

He said the meeting is indicative of the role that Cyprus, as a European Union member closest to the Middle East, can play in helping to "meet the challenges that have arisen in the region."

In a written statement, Cyprus government spokesman Constantinos Letymbiotis said Christodoulides will also discuss with Aoun Lebanon's internal issues and to convey Cyprus' readiness to provide any needed assistance and to strengthen relations with its neighbor.

Cyprus is less than 200 kilometers (130 miles) from the Lebanese capital Beirut and has provided the country with military assistance to prop up its armed forces.

Body of hostage Hamzah AlZayadni identified after recovery in Gaza

JERUSALEM — Israel's army confirmed Friday that one of the bodies recovered from Gaza earlier this week was that of 23-year-old hostage Hamzah AlZayadni.

The army said Friday that the identification was made by the National Institute of Forensic Medicine and Israel's police and the family has been notified. The army said its forces recovered the bodies of Hamzah and his father from an underground tunnel in the Rafah area and returned them to Israel.

His father, Yosef AlZayadni, had been identified earlier this week. The father and son were thought to still be alive before this week's announcement. They were kidnapped together from Kibbutz Holit, when Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

The news comes as Israel and Hamas are considering a ceasefire deal that would free 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. Their fates could ramp up pressure on Israel to move forward

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with a deal.

The Hostages Families Forum, which represents families of the hostages, said Hamzah was a nature lover who had deep affection for animals and was beloved by his friends. He leaves behind a wife and two children.

Oil tanker that threatened Red Sea spill has been salvaged

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — An oil tanker that burned for weeks and threatened a massive oil spill in the Red Sea has been salvaged, a security firm said Friday.

The Sounion had been a disaster-in-waiting in the waterway, with 1 million barrels of crude oil aboard that had been struck and later sabotaged with explosives by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. It took months for salvagers to tow the vessel away, extinguish the fires and offload the remaining crude oil.

The Houthis initially attacked the Greek-flagged Sounion tanker on Aug. 21 with small-arms fire, projectiles and a drone boat. A French destroyer rescued its crew of 25 Filipinos and Russians, as well as four private security personnel, and took them to nearby Djibouti.

The Houthis later released footage showing they planted explosives on board the Sounion and ignited them in a propaganda video, which the rebels have done before.

The Houthis have targeted some 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones since the war in Gaza started in October 2023. The rebels maintain they target ships linked to Israel, the U.S. or the U.K. to force an end to Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the conflict.

## **Notre Dame gets late pick and field goal to make title game with 27-24 win over Penn State**

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — Penn State quarterback Drew Allar said he was trying to throw the ball into the ground. Notre Dame defensive back Christian Gray dove for it anyway and — luck of the Irish — the ball ended up right in his hands.

A few seconds later, Gray and Notre Dame found themselves with a spot in the national title game after a thrill-a-minute 27-24 victory Thursday night in the Orange Bowl.

Gray's snag of Allar's ill-advised pass across the middle at the Penn State 42 with 33 seconds left, set up a 19-yard drive that ended with Mitch Jeter's winning 41-yard field goal.

The Irish (14-1), seeded seventh in this, the first 12-team college playoff, will have a chance to bring their 12th title and first since 1988 back under the Golden Dome with a game Jan. 20 in Atlanta. Their opponent will be the winner Friday night of the Texas-Ohio State semifinal in the Cotton Bowl.

"Just catch the ball. Just catch the ball," Gray said about his interception. "That was going through my mind and I knew I was going to make a play."

Penn State QB was trying to throw it away

Allar explained he saw his first two options covered on the play, then wanted to throw the ball into the dirt. But the throw, under pressure and across his body, didn't have enough zip on it to reach either receiver Omari Evans or the ground before Gray slid in.

"Honestly, I was trying to 'dirt' it at his feet," said the junior quarterback. "I should've thrown it away when I saw the first two progressions were not open. I didn't execute."

It was the most memorable play of a game that was the best of what's been a sleepy few weeks of playoff football. It featured three ties and three lead changes, along with 31 points in the fourth quarter alone.

In the final, Irish coach Marcus Freeman will try to become the first Black coach to win the title at college football's highest level. Freeman, whose mother is South Korean, also is the first coach of Asian heritage to get this far.

"We found a way to make a play when it mattered the most," Freeman said. "In my opinion, great teams, great programs, find a way to do that."

Penn State coach James Franklin fell to 4-20 with the Nittany Lions against teams ranked in the AP Top

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10. The sixth-seeded Nittany Lions ended the season at 13-3.

"Everyone wants to look at a specific play," Franklin said. "But there's probably eight to 12 plays in that game that could have made a difference. I'm not going to call out specific plays or specific players. There are a ton of plays where we could have done better."

Hit on Leonard shook up the QB and shook up the Irish

Notre Dame quarterback Riley Leonard shook off a hit late in the second quarter that sent him to the medical tent to be checked for a concussion. He came back and led the Irish on four scoring drives in the second half, including the last one.

"He's a competitor and competitors find a way to win, and that's what Riley does," Freeman said. "That's what this team does."

Leonard finished with 223 yards passing, including a key 10-yard dart to Jaden Greathouse to convert third-and-3 on the last drive. Leonard also had 35 yards rushing, and passed and ran for a score each.

With 4:38 left in the game, the senior quarterback hit Greathouse for a 54-yard score to tie it at 24 after a defender slipped.

The game started slow (and boring), but Riley's injury injected life into things. He led Notre Dame on TD drives of 75 and 72 yards in the third quarter to take a 17-10 lead.

At that point, the fun was just getting started.

Penn State had its chances, and Allar, considered a first-round pick by some if he leaves for the NFL, will spend the offseason reliving that last throw — or trying to forget it.

Penn State forced a Notre Dame punt and looked assured of at least going to overtime when they took over at their 15 with 47 seconds left.

After a gain of 13, Allar dropped to pass and had pressure coming. He threw across his body to the middle of the field, where Gray dove for the pick.

A review showed it was a catch, and the Irish were onto the next step on a road that looked all but impossible when they fell 16-14 to Northern Illinois back in September.

"To see how far we've come after the hiccup early on, just to know that we have one more guaranteed, one last one guaranteed, it's just so exciting," Notre Dame linebacker Jack Kiser said.

Nick Singleton ran for 84 yards and all three Penn State touchdowns. Off target for much of the day, Allar finished 12 for 23 for 135 yards with the interception.

"He's hurting right now. He should be. We're all hurting," Franklin said.

The quarterback didn't duck questions about the play or his role in the loss.

"We didn't win the game so it wasn't good enough, it's plain and simple," Allar said. "I'll try to learn from it, do everything in my power to get better and just grow from it."

Cameo from Notre Dame's backup

When Leonard went out, backup Steve Angeli came in and injected life into the Fighting Irish offense on the way to its first score.

Angeli went 6 for 7 for 44 yards and moved Notre Dame to field goal range to trim its deficit to 10-3 just before halftime.

"We have a lot of confidence in Steve," Freeman said when asked why he allowed the Irish to play aggressively when he entered.

Chilly Orange Bowl

The kickoff temperature was 56 degrees, unseasonably cool for South Florida — and making it the second-coldest Orange Bowl ever, next to the Georgia Tech-Iowa game in 2010 that started at 49 and felt like the upper 30s.

Up next

Notre Dame will face either Ohio State or Texas in the CFP national championship game on Jan. 20. Penn State opens its 2025 season at home against Nevada on Aug. 30.

## What to know about thousands of evacuations and homes burned in Los Angeles-area fires

LOS ANGELES (AP) — At least 10 people were killed and thousands of structures were burned as fierce wildfires raged in the Los Angeles area, officials said. Fast-moving flames blazed through homes and businesses as residents fled smoke-filled canyons and picturesque neighborhoods that are home to many celebrities.

Many of the towering fires that began Tuesday were fueled by powerful Santa Ana winds, which gusted to more than 70 mph (112 kph) in some spots. The winds dropped Thursday, but the National Weather Service warned that even the reduced gusts could still spread fire rapidly and the wind is expected to strengthen again Thursday evening. Another round of strong winds may form Tuesday.

The exact death toll remained unclear, but it was expected to rise as crews begin to search the rubble.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said California has deployed more than 1,400 firefighting personnel to battle the blazes. Oregon, Washington, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona dispatched teams to assist.

AccuWeather, a private company that provides data on weather and its impact, increased its estimate of the damage and economic loss to \$135 billion to \$150 billion. Government officials have not yet released any damage estimates.

Here's what to know about the fires:

The Palisades Fire is the most destructive in LA history

More than 5,300 structures have been damaged or destroyed in the hilly coastal neighborhood of Pacific Palisades, making it the most destructive fire in Los Angeles history. Dozens of blocks were flattened to smoldering rubble, with only the outlines of homes and their chimneys left.

The wreckage surpassed that of the Sayre Fire of November 2008, which destroyed 604 structures in Sylmar, the northernmost suburb of the city, according to statistics kept by the Wildfire Alliance, a partnership between the city's fire department and MySafe:LA.

Over 30 square miles (77 square kilometers) burned in Pacific Palisades, which is dotted with celebrity homes and was memorialized by the Beach Boys in their 1960s hit "Surfin' USA." The flames torched iconic landmarks including part of Palisades Charter High School, which has been featured in many Hollywood productions, including the 1976 horror movie "Carrie" and the TV series "Teen Wolf." Actor Billy Crystal and his wife Janice lost their home of 45 years.

Other fires are also causing havoc

Farther inland, the Eaton Fire north of Pasadena burned more than 5,000 structures, which includes homes, apartment or commercial buildings and vehicles. It also substantially damaged five school campuses in Altadena and scorched more than 21 square miles (54 square kilometers).

Employees at a senior center pushed dozens of residents in wheelchairs and hospital beds to a parking lot to escape.

The Los Angeles Fire Department issued evacuation orders Thursday afternoon for a new blaze, named the Kenneth Fire, which broke out near West Hills, a neighborhood densely packed with homes in the San Fernando Valley about 11 miles (18 kilometers) northwest of Pacific Palisades. It ballooned in size, charring more than 1 square mile (2.6 kilometers) within hours of igniting, and forced evacuations.

The Hurst Fire, which started Tuesday night, prompted evacuations in Sylmar in the San Fernando Valley.

And in the Hollywood Hills, the Sunset Fire broke out Wednesday evening and burned near the Hollywood Bowl and other iconic landmarks. Firefighters were able to manage the flames, and evacuation orders were lifted Thursday morning.

Altogether the fires have consumed about 55 square miles (142 square kilometers) — larger than the size of San Francisco.

Biden approves additional funding

President Joe Biden said during a White House briefing with staff Thursday that he was making federal resources available and approved additional funding to help California battle the fires, saying they were

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the "worst fires to ever hit Los Angeles. Ever."

The new funding will cover 100% of the cost for 180 days for hazardous materials removal, temporary shelters, first responder salaries and measures to protect life, he said.

Biden said he was not in a position to answer whether California would continue to receive federal funding to help combat the fires after President-elect Donald Trump takes office Jan. 20. "I pray to God they will," Biden said.

Thousands have been ordered to evacuate

Nearly 180,000 people were under evacuation orders Thursday.

The flames threatened highly populated and affluent neighborhoods, including Calabasas and Santa Monica, home to California's rich and famous. Hollywood stars including Mark Hamill, Mandy Moore and James Woods were among those forced to flee, and Moore later said she lost her home in Altadena.

Bad air quality is affecting millions

A thick cloud of smoke and ash filled the skies, prompting air and dust advisories for 17 million people across a vast stretch of Southern California, according to the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

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

Dr. Puneet Gupta, the assistant medical director for the Los Angeles County Fire Department, said wild-fire smoke can cause heart attacks and worsen asthma, while burning homes can release cyanide and carbon dioxide.

Several events have been canceled and postponed

The Critics Choice Awards rescheduled Sunday ceremonies in Santa Monica for Jan. 26.

The organization that puts on the Oscars extended the voting window for Academy Award nominations and delayed next week's planned nominations announcement.

Film studios canceled two movie premieres.

The Universal Studios Hollywood theme park closed for the day, but Disneyland, which is farther from the fires in Anaheim, remained open.

Universal Studios also canceled shooting for numerous series, including "Hacks," "Ted Lasso" and "Suits LA."

All schools were closed Thursday and were to remain closed Friday in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

The NFL has moved the Los Angeles Rams' wild-card playoff game against the Minnesota Vikings to Arizona because of the fires. The game will be played Monday night at the home of the Arizona Cardinals in suburban Glendale, Arizona.

The NBA postponed the Lakers' game against the Hornets, and the NFL said it is monitoring conditions to determine if Monday's playoff game between the Los Angeles Rams and Minnesota Vikings will be affected.

Many people are without power and water

More than 285,000 customers were without electricity in Southern California, nearly half of them in Los Angeles County, according to PowerOutage.us, which tracks outages nationwide.

Sewer, water and power infrastructure across the region has been significantly damaged, officials said.

Authorities warn looters

Looters who take advantage of the wildfire crisis by targeting vulnerable communities will be prosecuted, officials promised. There have been at least 20 arrests.

"This is simply unacceptable," Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Chair Kathryn Barger said. "I promise you, you will be held accountable."

Officials planned to implement a curfew around the two main fires as early as Thursday evening, and National Guard members were expected to be stationed near burn areas.

## Winter storm plods into the Deep South, prompting states of emergency and school closures

By JAMIE STENGLE and KENDRIA LAFLEUR Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — A powerful winter storm that dumped heavy snow and glazed roads with ice across much of Texas and Oklahoma lumbered eastward into southern U.S. states overnight, prompting governors to declare states of emergency and shuttering schools across the region.

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders mobilized the National Guard to help stranded motorists. School was canceled Friday for millions of children across a wide tract of southern states from Texas to Georgia and as far east as South Carolina.

Some of the heaviest snowfall was expected Friday across the northern half of Arkansas and much of Tennessee, with totals in some parts of those states ranging from 6 to 9 inches (about 15 to 22 centimeters), according to the National Weather Service.

Further south and east into Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, a wintry mix of sleet and freezing rain made travel treacherous.

The storm dumped as much as 7 inches (about 18 centimeters) in some spots in central Oklahoma and northern Texas before pushing into Arkansas. More than 4,500 flights were delayed and another 2,000 canceled on Thursday, with more delays and cancellations expected on Friday.

"I have not seen any accidents, but I have seen a couple of people get stuck out on the road and sliding around," said Charles Daniel, a truck driver hauling a 48-foot (14.6-meter) trailer loaded with paint, auto parts and other supplies through slick, slushy roads in central Oklahoma on Thursday. "People do not need to be driving."

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 cold snap coincided with rare January wildfires tearing through the Los Angeles area.

Snow, sleet hammers Texas, Oklahoma

Paul Kirkwood, a National Weather Service meteorologist, said the storm that swept through the Dallas area will create a "swath of snow" impacting parts of Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina and South Carolina.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott urged residents to avoid driving if possible. Roads could be dangerous as 75,000 fans were expected Friday at AT&T Stadium in Arlington for the college football championship semifinal between Texas and Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl.

Southern discomfort

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 declared a state of emergency on Thursday as the northern half of the state girded for snow and ice beginning Friday morning. Weather service forecasters warned snow and ice are likely to accumulate across metro Atlanta, making roadways treacherous and possibly causing power outages.

Public school systems across metro Atlanta and north Georgia called off in-person classes for Friday, with more than 1 million students getting a snow day or being told to stay at home to learn online.

In Tennessee, Memphis-Shelby County Schools, the largest district in the state with more than 100,000 students, closed all schools Friday. With Memphis forecast to receive up to 8 inches (20.3 centimeters) of snow, officials said two warming centers are open 24 hours to provide shelter for people who need to escape the cold.

The Carolinas prepare

Parts of South Carolina prepared for the first wintry weather in three years. The state Department of

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Transportation dusted off its brine and salt supply and began treating interstates and other major highways from Columbia north on Thursday. School systems in those areas either will close early or all day Friday or hold online learning days.

In North Carolina, Gov. Josh Stein declared a state of emergency in advance of the storm, which forecasters say could bring up to 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) of snow to many parts of the state, with higher amounts in mountain areas. Sleet and freezing rain was also likely.

The approaching storm prompted the cancellation of a public outdoor inauguration ceremony for Stein and other statewide elected officials in Raleigh on Saturday.

A boil-water order for Virginia's capital

Richmond, Virginia, was under a boil-water advisory as officials worked to restore the water reservoir system, which was shut down Monday 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 unable to get to those locations, officials said.

## Trump to be sentenced in hush money case, days before return to White House

By MICHAEL R. SISA, JENNIFER PELTZ and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In a singular moment in U.S. history, President-elect Donald Trump faces sentencing Friday for his New York hush money conviction after the nation's highest court refused to intervene.

Like so much else in the criminal case and the current American political landscape, the scenario set to unfold in an austere Manhattan courtroom was unimaginable only a few years ago. A state judge is to say what consequences, if any, the country's former and soon-to-be leader will face for felonies that a jury found he committed.

With Trump 10 days from inauguration, Judge Juan M. Merchan has indicated he plans a no-penalty sentence called an unconditional discharge and prosecutors aren't opposing it. That would mean no jail time, no probation and no fines would be imposed, but nothing is final until Friday's proceeding is done.

Regardless of the outcome, Trump will become the first person convicted of a felony to assume the presidency.

Trump, who is expected to appear by video from his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, will have the opportunity to speak. He has pilloried the case, the only one of his four criminal indictments that has gone to trial and possibly the only one that ever will.

The judge has indicated that he plans the unconditional discharge — a rarity in felony convictions — partly to avoid complicated constitutional issues that would arise if he imposed a penalty that overlapped with Trump's presidency.

The hush money case accused him of fudging his business' records to veil a \$130,000 payoff to porn actor Stormy Daniels. She was paid, late in Trump's 2016 campaign, not to tell the public about a sexual encounter she maintains the two had a decade earlier. He says nothing sexual happened between them, and he contends that his political adversaries spun up a bogus prosecution to try to damage him.

"I never falsified business records. It is a fake, made up charge," the Republican president-elect wrote on his Truth Social platform last week. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, whose office brought the charges, is a Democrat.

Bragg's office said in a court filing Monday that Trump committed "serious offenses that caused extensive harm to the sanctity of the electoral process and to the integrity of New York's financial marketplace."

While the specific charges were about checks and ledgers, the underlying accusations were seamy and deeply entangled with Trump's political rise. Prosecutors said Daniels was paid off — through Trump's personal attorney at the time, Michael Cohen — as part of a wider effort to keep voters from hearing about Trump's alleged extramarital escapades.

Trump denies the alleged encounters occurred. His lawyers said he wanted to squelch the stories to protect his family, not his campaign. And while prosecutors said Cohen's reimbursements for paying Daniels



were deceptively logged as legal expenses, Trump says that's simply what they were.

"There was nothing else it could have been called," he wrote on Truth Social last week, adding, "I was hiding nothing."

Trump's lawyers tried unsuccessfully to forestall a trial. Since his May conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records, they have pulled virtually every legal lever within reach to try to get the conviction overturned, the case dismissed or at least the sentencing postponed.

They have made various arguments to Merchan, New York appeals judges, and federal courts including the Supreme Court. The Trump attorneys have leaned heavily into assertions of presidential immunity from prosecution, and they got a boost in July from a Supreme Court decision that affords former commanders-in-chief considerable immunity.

Trump was a private citizen and presidential candidate when Daniels was paid in 2016. He was president when the reimbursements to Cohen were made and recorded the following year.

On one hand, Trump's defense argued that immunity should have kept jurors from hearing some evidence, such as testimony about some of his conversations with then-White House communications director Hope Hicks.

And after Trump won this past November's election, his lawyers argued that the case had to be scrapped to avoid impinging on his upcoming presidency and his transition to the Oval Office.

Merchan, a Democrat, repeatedly postponed the sentencing, initially set for July. But last week, he set Friday's date, citing a need for "finality." He wrote that he strove to balance Trump's need to govern, the Supreme Court's immunity ruling, the respect due a jury verdict and the public's expectation that "no one is above the law."

Trump's lawyers then launched a flurry of last-minute efforts to block the sentencing. Their last hope vanished Thursday night with a 5-4 Supreme Court ruling that declined to delay the sentencing.

Meanwhile, the other criminal cases that once loomed over Trump have ended or stalled ahead of trial.

After Trump's election, special counsel Jack Smith closed out the federal prosecutions over Trump's handling of classified documents and his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss. A state-level Georgia election interference case is locked in uncertainty after prosecutor Fani Willis was removed from it.

## **New LA-area fire prompts more evacuations while over 10,000 structures lost to the 2 biggest blazes**

By JAIMIE DING, JULIE WATSON and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The two biggest wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area have burned at least 10,000 homes, buildings and other structures, officials said Thursday as they urged more people to heed evacuation orders after a new blaze ignited and quickly grew.

The fast-moving Kenneth Fire started in the late afternoon in the San Fernando Valley just 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from a school serving as a shelter for fire evacuees and then moved into neighboring Ventura County by the evening.

Only hours earlier officials expressed encouragement after firefighters aided by calmer winds and help from crews from outside the state saw the first signs of successfully beating back the region's devastating wildfires that have killed seven people so far.

"We are expecting this fire to rapidly spread due to high winds," Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said, echoing the forecast that called for winds to strengthen Thursday evening through Friday morning.

The orders came as Los Angeles County officials announced the Eaton Fire near Pasadena that started Tuesday night has burned more than 5,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles. To the west in Pacific Palisades, the largest of the fires burning in the LA area has destroyed over 5,300 structures.

All of the large fires that have broken out this week in the Los Angeles area are located in a roughly 25-mile (40-kilometer) band north of downtown, spreading a sense of fear and sadness across the nation's

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second-largest city.

Dozens of blocks were flattened to smoldering rubble in scenic Pacific Palisades. Only the outlines of homes and their chimneys remained. In Malibu, blackened palm strands were all that was left above debris where oceanfront homes once stood.

At least five churches, a synagogue, seven schools, two libraries, boutiques, bars, restaurants, banks and groceries were lost. So too were the Will Rogers' Western Ranch House and Topanga Ranch Motel, local landmarks dating to the 1920s. The government has not yet released figures on the cost of the damage or specifics about how many structures burned.

AccuWeather, a private company that provides data on weather and its impact, on Thursday increased its estimate of the damage and economic loss to \$135-\$150 billion.

Firefighters made significant gains Thursday at slowing the spread of the major fires, but containment remained far out of reach.

Crews also knocked down a blaze in the Hollywood Hills with the help of water drops from aircraft, allowing an evacuation to be lifted Thursday. The fire that sparked late Wednesday near the heart of the entertainment industry came perilously close to igniting the famed Hollywood Bowl outdoor concert venue.

Fire officials don't yet know the cause of the fires but are actively investigating.

The enormity of the destruction emerges

Earlier in the week, hurricane-force winds blew embers, igniting the Southern California hillsides.

Right now, it's impossible to quantify the extent of the destruction other than "total devastation and loss," said Barbara Bruderlin, head of the Malibu Pacific Palisades Chamber of Commerce.

"There are areas where everything is gone, there isn't even a stick of wood left, it's just dirt," Bruderlin said.

Of the seven deaths so far, Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley confirmed two were in the Palisades Fire. County officials said the Eaton Fire had killed five.

Cadaver dogs and crews are searching through rubble, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

Anthony Mitchell, a 67-year-old amputee, and his son, Justin, who had cerebral palsy, were waiting for an ambulance to come, but they did not make it out, Mitchell's daughter, Hajime White, told The Washington Post.

Shari Shaw told KTLA that she tried to get her 66-year-old brother, Victor Shaw, to evacuate Tuesday night but he wanted to stay and fight the fire. Crews found his body with a garden hose in his hand.

On Thursday, recovery crews pulled a body from rubble of what was a beachfront residence in Malibu on the scenic Pacific Coast Highway. A charred washer and dryer were among the few things that remained.

There have been evacuations, school closures and arrests

At least 180,000 people were under evacuation orders, and the fires have consumed about 45 square miles (117 square kilometers) — roughly the size of San Francisco. The Palisades Fire is already the most destructive in Los Angeles' history.

All schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest, will be closed Friday because of the heavy smoke wafting over the city and ash raining down in parts, and classes will not resume until the conditions improve, officials said.

At least 20 arrests have been made for looting, and the city of Santa Monica declared a curfew because of the lawlessness, officials said. National Guard troops arrived in Los Angeles on Thursday evening. The county sheriff said to protect properties they'll be stationed near the areas ravaged by fire and a curfew was expected to go into effect from 6 p.m. until 6 a.m.

Actors among those who lost homes

Flames destroyed the homes of several celebrities, including Billy Crystal, Mandy Moore and Paris Hilton.

Jamie Lee Curtis pledged \$1 million to start a "fund of support" for those affected by the fires that touched all economic levels from the city's wealthy to its working class.

State seeing 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.

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.

Some losses feel greater than others

Robert Lara sifted through the remains of his home in Altadena on Thursday with tears in his eyes, hoping to find a safe containing a set of earrings that once belonged to his great-great-grandmother.

"All our memories, all our sentimental attachments, things that were gifted from generation to generation to generation are now gone," he said.

## Venezuela's opposition leader defies Maduro to lead protests that end in confusing arrest claims

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela opposition leader María Corina Machado's aides said she was detained Thursday, followed moments later by official denials of her arrest, in a confusing episode that capped a day of protests seeking to block President Nicolás Maduro from clinging to power.

It remained unclear what exactly happened after Machado bid farewell to hundreds of supporters, hopped on a motorcycle and raced with her security convoy down a main Caracas avenue.

At 3:21 p.m. local time, Machado's press team said in a social media post that security forces "violently intercepted" her convoy. Her aides later told The Associated Press that she had been detained, and international condemnation poured in from leaders in Latin America and beyond, demanding her release.

But about an hour later, a proof-of-life, 20-second video of Machado emerged online in which she says she was followed after leaving the "wonderful" rally and had dropped her purse. Her aides later claimed in a social media post that the video message had been coerced, and that after recording it, she was freed. They said she would provide details of her "kidnapping" later.

In recent years, the word kidnapping has been associated with the government practice of detaining real or perceived opponents without following the law. It's seen as part of a campaign to repress anti-government protests that broke out after the election results were announced.

Late Thursday, Machado in a post on X said she was "in a safe place and with more determination than ever" to continue her effort to get Maduro out of office. She also said that a person was shot "when the repressive forces of the regime arrested me."

The Associated Press was unable to contact Machado for clarification of her statement. She told supporters she would explain the day's events in more detail on Friday.

Meanwhile, Maduro's supporters denied Machado had been detained, claiming that government opponents were trying to spread fake news to generate an international crisis.

"Nobody should be surprised," Communications Minister Freddy Nanez said. "Especially since it's coming from the fascists, who were the architects of the dirty trick."

Earlier Thursday, Machado addressed hundreds of supporters who heeded her call to take to the streets a day before the ruling party-controlled National Assembly was scheduled to swear in Maduro to a third six-year term despite credible evidence that he lost the presidential election.

"They wanted us to fight each other, but Venezuela is united, we are not afraid," Machado shouted from atop a truck in the capital minutes before she was reported detained.

Machado, 57, is a hard-liner and former lawmaker who stayed and fought against Maduro even after many of her allies among opposition leaders went into exile in the face of repression, joining an exodus of more than 7.7 million Venezuelans who've abandoned their homeland since 2013.

Loyalists who control the country's judiciary banned her from running against Maduro last year. In a deft move, she backed an unknown outsider — retired diplomat Edmundo González — who crushed Maduro by a more than two-to-one margin, according to voting machine records collected by the opposition and validated by international observers.

González, invoking the title of president-elect recognized by the United States and other countries, de-

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manded her immediate release.

"To the security forces, I warn you: don't play with fire," he said in a social media post from the Dominican Republic, where he met with President Luis Abinader and a delegation of former presidents from across Latin America.

President-elect Donald Trump weighed in on Machado and Gonzalez's efforts. "These freedom fighters should not be harmed, and MUST stay SAFE and ALIVE!" Trump said on Truth Social.

There was a relatively small turnout for Thursday's protests as riot police were deployed in force. Venezuelans who have witnessed Maduro's security forces round up scores of opponents and regular bystanders since the July election were reluctant to turn out in large numbers as they have in the past.

"Of course, there's fewer people," empanada vendor Miguel Contreras said as National Guard soldiers carrying riot shields buzzed by on motorcycles. "There's fear."

Demonstrators blocked a main avenue in one opposition stronghold. Many were senior citizens and dressed in red, yellow and blue, answering Machado's call to wear the colors of the Venezuelan flag. All condemned Maduro and said they would recognize González as Venezuela's legitimate president.

The deployment of security forces as well as pro-government armed groups known as "colectivos" to intimidate opponents betrays a deep insecurity on the part of Maduro, said Javier Corrales, a Latin America expert at Amherst College.

Since the elections, the government has arrested more than 2,000 people — including as many as 10 Americans and other foreigners — who it claims have been plotting to oust Maduro and sow chaos in the oil rich South American nation. This week alone, masked gunmen arrested a former presidential candidate, a prominent free speech activist and even González's son-in-law as he was taking his young children to school.

"It's an impressive show of force but it's also a sign of weakness," said Corrales, who co-authored this month an article, "How Maduro Stole Venezuela's Vote," in the Journal of Democracy.

"Maduro is safe in office," said Corrales, "but he and his allies recognize they are moving forward with a big lie and have no other way to justify what they are doing except by relying on the military."

Venezuela's National Electoral Council, also stacked with government loyalists, declared Maduro the winner of the election. But unlike in previous contests, authorities did not provide any access to voting records or precinct-level results.

The opposition, however, collected tally sheets from 85% of electronic voting machines and posted them online. They showed that its candidate, González, had thrashed Maduro by a more than two-to-one margin. Experts from the United Nations and the Atlanta-based Carter Center, both invited by Maduro's government to observe the election, have said the tally sheets published by the opposition are legitimate.

The U.S. and other governments have also recognized González as Venezuela's president-elect. Even many of Maduro's former leftist allies in Latin America plan to skip Friday's swearing-in ceremony.

President Joe Biden, meeting González at the White House this week, praised the previously unknown retired diplomat for having "inspired millions."

"The people of Venezuela deserve a peaceful transfer of power to the true winner of their presidential election," Biden said following the meeting.

## Earth records hottest year ever in 2024 and the jump was so big it breached a key threshold

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Earth recorded its hottest year ever in 2024, with such a big jump that the planet temporarily passed a major climate threshold, several weather monitoring agencies announced Friday.

Last year's global average temperature easily passed 2023's record heat and kept pushing even higher. It surpassed the long-term warming limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since the late 1800s that was called for by the 2015 Paris climate pact, according to the European Commission's Copernicus Climate Service, the United Kingdom's Meteorology Office and Japan's weather agency.

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The European team calculated 1.6 degrees Celsius (2.89 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming. Japan found 1.57 degrees Celsius (2.83 degrees Fahrenheit) and the British 1.53 degrees Celsius (2.75 degrees Fahrenheit) in releases of data coordinated to early Friday morning European time.

American monitoring teams — NASA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the private Berkeley Earth — were to release their figures later Friday but all will likely show record heat for 2024, European scientists said. The six groups compensate for data gaps in observations that go back to 1850 — in different ways, which is why numbers vary slightly.

“The primary reason for these record temperatures is the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere” from the burning of coal, oil and gas, said Samantha Burgess, strategic climate lead at Copernicus. “As greenhouse gases continue to accumulate in the atmosphere, temperatures continue to increase, including in the ocean, sea levels continue to rise, and glaciers and ice sheets continue to melt.”

Last year eclipsed 2023’s temperature in the European database by an eighth of a degree Celsius (more than a fifth of a degree Fahrenheit). That’s an unusually large jump; until the last couple of super-hot years, global temperature records were exceeded only by hundredths of a degree, scientists said.

The last 10 years are the 10 hottest on record and are likely the hottest in 125,000 years, Burgess said.

July 10 was the hottest day recorded by humans, with the globe averaging 17.16 degrees Celsius (62.89 degrees Fahrenheit), Copernicus found.

By far the biggest contributor to record warming is the burning of fossil fuels, several scientists said. A temporary natural El Nino warming of the central Pacific added a small amount and an undersea volcanic eruption in 2022 ended up cooling the atmosphere because it put more reflecting particles in the atmosphere as well as water vapor, Burgess said.

Alarm bells are ringing

“This is a warning light going off on the Earth’s dashboard that immediate attention is needed,” said University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd. “Hurricane Helene, floods in Spain and the weather whiplash fueling wildfires in California are symptoms of this unfortunate climate gear shift. We still have a few gears to go.”

“Climate-change-related alarm bells have been ringing almost constantly, which may be causing the public to become numb to the urgency, like police sirens in New York City,” Woodwell Climate Research Center scientist Jennifer Francis said. “In the case of the climate, though, the alarms are getting louder, and the emergencies are now way beyond just temperature.”

The world incurred \$140 billion in climate-related disaster losses last year — third highest on record — with North America especially hard hit, according to a report by the insurance firm Munich Re.

“The acceleration of global temperature increases means more damage to property and impacts on human health and the ecosystems we depend on,” said University of Arizona water scientist Kathy Jacobs.

World breaches major threshold

This is the first time any year passed the 1.5-degree threshold, except for a 2023 measurement by Berkeley Earth, which was originally funded by philanthropists who were skeptical of global warming.

Scientists were quick to point out that the 1.5 goal is for long-term warming, now defined as a 20-year average. Warming since pre-industrial times over the long term is now at 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 degrees Celsius).

“The 1.5 degree C threshold isn’t just a number — it’s a red flag. Surpassing it even for a single year shows how perilously close we are to breaching the limits set by the Paris Agreement,” Northern Illinois University climate scientist Victor Gensini said in an email. A 2018 massive United Nations study found that keeping Earth’s temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius could save coral reefs from going extinct, keep massive ice sheet loss in Antarctica at bay and prevent many people’s death and suffering.

Francis called the threshold “dead in the water.”

Burgess called it extremely likely that Earth will overshoot the 1.5-degree threshold, but called the Paris Agreement “extraordinarily important international policy” that nations around the world should remain committed to.

More warming is likely

European and British calculations figure with a cooling La Nina instead of last year's warming El Nino, 2025 is likely to be not quite as hot as 2024. They predict it will turn out to be the third-warmest. However, the first six days of January — despite frigid temperatures in the U.S. East — averaged slightly warmer and are the hottest start to a year yet, according to Copernicus data.

Scientists remain split on whether global warming is accelerating.

There's not enough data to see an acceleration in atmospheric warming, but the heat content of the oceans seem to be not just rising but going up at a faster rate, said Carlo Buontempo, Copernicus' director.

"We are facing a very new climate and new challenges — climate challenges that our society is not prepared for," Buontempo said.

This is all like watching the end of "a dystopian sci-fi film," said University of Pennsylvania climate scientist Michael Mann. "We are now reaping what we've sown."

## Wildfires latest: At least 10,000 structures have burned in a series of fires around Los Angeles

By The Associated Press undefined

Firefighters battled Thursday to control a series of major fires in the Los Angeles area that have killed seven people, burned at least 10,000 structures from the Pacific Coast to Pasadena and sent thousands of people frantically fleeing their homes.

Ferocious winds that drove the flames and led to chaotic evacuations calmed somewhat, though forecasters warned the high fire weather risk would continue into Friday.

Firefighters struggled against blazes that have hopscotched across the sprawling region, including massive ones in Pacific Palisades and Altadena that were still burning Thursday evening.

Here's the latest:

Steve Kerr's mother among those who lost their home to the blazes

The 90-year-old mother of Golden State Warriors head coach Steve Kerr is among thousands who have lost their homes as fierce wildfires rage in the Los Angeles area.

"My mom is in good hands, but her house is gone," Kerr said Thursday night before the Warriors played the Detroit Pistons. "I've been on the phone with my siblings quite a bit."

Kerr said his mother, Ann, left her home in Pacific Palisades — Kerr's hometown — after the evacuation orders earlier in the week.

### Death toll rises to 7 in Los Angeles-area fires

County and city officials have confirmed that the death toll from the two main fires in and around Los Angeles has risen to seven.

There have been five deaths from the Eaton Fire near Pasadena, according to Carlos Herrera, a public information officer with the LA County Fire Department.

To the west in Pacific Palisades, two people have died in the fire burning in the LA area, according to LA Fire Department spokesperson Margaret Stewart.

### Firefighters have achieved some containment of the Palisades Fire, officials say

The Palisades Fire, which started Tuesday and has burned through the seaside enclave of Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles, remained uncontained until Thursday evening, when officials said containment was at 6%.

"Thank you to our brave firefighters working around the clock to combat the blaze fueled by hurricane-force winds," Gov. Gavin Newsom said in a social media post.

### All Los Angeles Unified schools to remain closed Friday

All Los Angeles Unified schools and offices will remain closed on Friday because of the fires, district Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said Thursday evening.

Classes will not resume until the conditions improve, he said.

Carvalho said the district has lost two elementary schools and that one high school is significantly dam-

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aged. He also said the district's foundation is working to support district employees who have lost their homes.

## **900 more firefighters to battle fast-moving Kenneth Fire, governor says**

Gov. Gavin Newsom in a social media post Thursday evening said 900 additional firefighters are now being deployed to battle the fast-moving Kenneth Fire near the West Hills and Calabasas.

The fire ballooned in size — charring over a square mile (2.6 square kilometers) — within hours of igniting.

More than 10,000 structures have burned between the Eaton and Palisades fires

More than 5,300 structures have been damaged or destroyed in the Palisades Fire, Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said at a media briefing Thursday afternoon.

And the Eaton Fire has destroyed over 5,000 structures, authorities said Thursday afternoon. Authorities expect those numbers could change depending on additional mapping and surveying.

## **NFL moves Vikings-Rams playoff game to Arizona due to fires**

The NFL is moving the Rams' wild-card playoff game against the Minnesota Vikings to Arizona after days of devastating wildfires in the Los Angeles area.

The playoff game will be played Monday night at State Farm Stadium, the home of the Arizona Cardinals, in suburban Glendale, Arizona.

While none of the fires is burning near SoFi Stadium in Inglewood where the teams were set to face off, the NFL made the decision due to concerns about air quality and the strain put on the community, as well as the possible demands on police and fire department personnel.

## **High fire weather risk to continue through Friday, forecasters say**

The high fire weather risk will continue through Friday, National Weather Service Los Angeles meteorologists said Thursday afternoon in a social media post.

Santa Ana winds will be moderate to strong Thursday night, keeping the fire weather threat in the area focused on Los Angeles and Ventura County into Friday morning.

"The threat doesn't end after Friday however," the post said. Offshore winds will continue into early next week, peaking Sunday as well as Tuesday into Wednesday.

## **Los Angeles County officials mistakenly send evacuation alert countywide**

Officials with Los Angeles County say an evacuation order alert for residents near the Kenneth Fire in the West Hills was mistakenly sent countywide on Thursday afternoon.

Officials said in a social media post that the alert was only intended for residents of Calabasas and Agoura Hills.

## **Vice President Harris cancels final foreign trip of her term due to wildfires**

Vice President Kamala Harris is canceling the final foreign trip of her term because of the wildfires in her home state of California, her office announced on Thursday.

Her decision follows a similar one made by President Joe Biden, who was due to travel this week to Rome to visit Pope Francis and meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy but instead stayed in Washington.

Harris had planned to visit Singapore, Bahrain and Germany from Jan. 13 to 17.

## **Total damage due to wildfires could reach \$150 billion, AccuWeather estimates**

AccuWeather, a private company that provides data on weather and its impact, on Thursday increased its estimate of the damage and economic loss to \$135-\$150 billion.

Previously, the company had estimated the damage could reach \$57 billion.

## **Canada readies resources to help 'American neighbors' battle wildfires**

Canada's emergency preparedness minister says Canadian military personnel, their equipment and another 250 firefighters stand "ready to support our American neighbors" as wildfires devastate parts of Southern California.

Harjit Sajjan says Canada is ready to deploy 250 firefighters, aircraft equipment, and other resources

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as early as Thursday night.

Sajjan's pledge comes as the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre said Thursday that the U.S. National Interagency Fire Centre asked for two of its CL-415 Skimmer Airtankers to join the fight against the fires.

Alberta is preparing to send water bombers, night-vision helicopters and incident command team support. Premier Danielle Smith said on social media that the province was working with the agency and the federal government to assess California's needs.

"Good neighbors are always there for each other in times of need, and we will assist our American friends in any way they need during this crisis," Smith said.

## **Biden tells Los Angeles fire victims the federal government will be with them**

Biden said his message to the people of Southern California is: "We are with you. We're not going anywhere."

But with less than two weeks left in his term, it's a promise he might not hold.

Republican Donald Trump takes over on Jan. 20, and he was at odds with California's Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, over wildfires the first time he was president.

Trump lately has been referring to Newsom by putting a derogatory spin on his last name. He also has blamed Newsom for the fire currently raging in Los Angeles.

## **New fire near West Hills neighborhood forces more evacuations**

More evacuations are underway across Los Angeles because of another fire that ignited Thursday afternoon.

The Los Angeles Fire Department issued orders for what's being called the Kenneth Fire near the West Hills neighborhood of LA in the San Fernando Valley. The fire quickly triggered mandatory evacuations in the area, which has many homes.

## **Officials plan to implement a curfew Thursday night around the fires**

Officials plan to implement a curfew around the two major fires starting Thursday night that would be in place from 6 p.m. until 6 a.m. the next day, but it could take until Friday to put in place, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said at a media briefing Thursday.

The curfews will only affect areas that are heavily impacted by the fires, Luna said, adding that authorities were looking primarily at the mandatory evacuation zones.

"The mission is to protect those neighborhoods from anybody who wants to do harm, and unfortunately we've had some people who have been trying to do that," he said.

## **Several thousand structures destroyed in wildfires in the Los Angeles area**

More than 4,000 structures have been destroyed in the Eaton Fire in the Los Angeles area, LA County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said during a media briefing Thursday afternoon.

Los Angeles city officials say thousands more structures burned in the Palisades Pacific community.

Structures could include homes, apartment buildings, commercial buildings or even vehicles, Marrone said.

## **Biden prompts energy secretary to explain why Los Angeles hydrants couldn't pump water**

President Joe Biden took some time during a White House briefing to debunk President-elect Donald Trump's claims that the hydrants were running dry because of water conservation priorities, without naming Trump directly.

Biden asked his deputy energy secretary David Turk to help explain why power lines were shut down in the fire and how that impacts hydrants.

Turk said it was a power and pressure issue — hydrants need power in order to pump water up, but during such disasters, power lines are cut in order to curb the potential for power surges and line breakdowns.

## **Man dies trying to save his home, sister says**

Victor Shaw was found holding a garden hose in his hand after the Eaton Fire swept through his neighborhood.

Shari Shaw told KTLA that she tried to get her 66-year-old brother to evacuate with her on Tuesday



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night as the fire moved toward the home they shared. He told her he wanted to stay behind and try to fight the fire, she recalled.

"When I went back in and yelled out his name, he didn't reply back, and I had to get out because the embers were so big and flying like a firestorm — I had to save myself," she said. "And I looked behind me, and the house was starting to go up in flames, and I had to leave."

Family friend, Al Tanner, told KTLA that the next morning, they found Victor's body on the side of the road still holding the hose.

"It looks like he was trying to save the home that his parents had for almost 55 years," Tanner said.

## **Federal resources have been approved to help battle fires in California, Biden says**

President Joe Biden said during a White House briefing with staff that that he was making federal resources available and has approved additional funding to help California battle the devastating fires, saying they were the "worst fires to ever hit Los Angeles. Ever."

The new funding will cover 100% of the cost for 180 days for hazardous materials removal, temporary shelters, first responder salaries and measures to protect life, he said.

"We're sticking with this," Biden said. "We expect there may be a temporary break in the winds, but in some areas, the winds are likely to continue well into next week."

As Biden turned the floor over to Vice President Kamala Harris, he noted she was "directly affected." Harris is a former California senator, and her home there was in the evacuation zone, but it wasn't clear if it was damaged. She described the scene as "apocalyptic."

"This is something that is going to have an impact for months and years to come," she said.

## **'He was not going to leave his son behind'**

Anthony Mitchell, a 67-year-old amputee, and his son, Justin, who has cerebral palsy, were waiting for an ambulance to come for them.

"They didn't make it out," said Mitchell's daughter, Hajime White.

She said that authorities told the family Mitchell was found by the side of his son's bed in Altadena. The Washington Post reported that the family believes Mitchell was trying to save his son, who was in his early 20s.

"He was not going to leave his son behind. No matter what," White said.

White, a doula in Warren, Arkansas, and Justin's step-sister, said her father had called her Wednesday morning to tell her they were going to have to evacuate.

"Then he said, 'I've got to go — the fire's in the yard,'" she recalled Thursday.

Another son, also in his 20s, lived with the pair but was in the hospital, White said.

"It's very hard," White said. "It's like a ton of bricks just fell on me."

White didn't immediately respond to a Facebook message from The Associated Press seeking comment.

## **On the ground in Altadena**

Juan Perez, 54, returned to his destroyed home where he raised his kids in Altadena on Thursday, a day after seeing it still in flames as he drove by.

"Not just me, the whole neighborhood is gone," he told an Associated Press reporter, his voice choked with emotion. "I don't know how we're going to come back from this. I don't even know where to start."

Perez, wearing two masks to protect his lungs from the smoky air, said he and his family didn't wait for an evacuation order when they fled soon after 3 a.m. on Wednesday. He said he had some bags ready, but wished they had left even earlier.

Back outside on Thursday, Perez didn't find much salvageable. His niece found two coffee mugs that were a gift to her from his mother, who passed away nearly four years ago.

"And they were there untouched," he said. "That's unbelievable."

## **The Eaton Fire is approaching Mount Wilson**

"There are firefighters on the grounds but the power is out at the Observatory so communication is limited," the Mount Wilson Observatory said in a statement on social media Thursday afternoon.

Most of the staff at the mountain-top observatory had already evacuated, it said in an earlier post.

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## **FEMA's administrator is in Los Angeles**

FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell is in Los Angeles on Thursday, at the direction of President Joe Biden, to hear from state and local officials and firefighting personnel to assess immediate and anticipated needs from the wildfires.

FEMA also has a team embedded at the California State Emergency Operations Center to help with the wildfire response, the White House said.

## **'There are areas where everything is gone'**

There's no way to quantify the extent of the destruction yet other than "total devastation and loss," said Barbara Bruderlin, CEO of the Malibu Pacific Palisades Chamber of Commerce.

"I don't know what's still standing and I'm not allowed in," Bruderlin said. She's sent an email asking everyone to check in but doesn't know where people have gone.

Bruderlin recalls the damage and what it took to rebuild after the Woolsey Fire in 2019 that burned in a different part of Malibu. But this time is different.

"There are areas where everything is gone, there isn't even a stick of wood left — it's just dirt," Bruderlin said. "There's nothing left in Pacific Palisades except for Caruso Village ... and there's no gas stations, there's no grocery stores, there's no banks."

## **Horses rescued in a 'crazy, dangerous' evacuation**

Owners evacuating from the Altadena fire, left five horses locked in their stalls on Wednesday. They huddled in a small exterior pen attached to the stalls, but couldn't entirely escape the flames.

By the time a neighbor called for help and firefighters used bolt cutters to free them, one of the horses was badly hurt, recalled Julia Bagan, who is part of a Facebook group called Southern California Equine Emergency Evacuation.

Bagan drove through the remnants of the fire Wednesday night to help, damaged power lines sparking overhead. She described it as "the most crazy, dangerous" evacuation yet.

The injured horse suffered burns to her legs. Her halter had been burned off, along with her tail and mane. And the embers left her with ulcers in her eyes.

A vet said the mare's best hope was an emergency equine hospital, which Bagan drove her to in her trailer.

## **Wildfires lead to second day of postponed games**

The NBA postponed the Los Angeles Lakers' home game against the Charlotte Hornets on Thursday because of the wildfires burning across the greater LA area.

It is the second straight day a game slated to be played in downtown Los Angeles has been postponed.

The NHL's Los Angeles Kings were scheduled to host the Calgary Flames on Wednesday night. The date for the rescheduled games will be announced later.

## **The Los Angeles landmarks from film and TV damaged by wildfires**

Los Angeles is a town full of landmarks, thanks to its co-starring role in over a century of filmed entertainment. The fires have taken a toll on some familiar sites.

Here's where you know them from:

1. Palisades Charter High School: Brian De Palma's 1976 adaptation of "Carrie," the 2003 remake of "Freaky Friday," the television series "Teen Wolf" and "American Vandal" and the music video for Olivia Rodrigo's "good 4 u."

2. Will Rogers' Western Ranch House: The late actor's former home, now a state park, was featured in the 1975 Barbra Streisand sequel "Funny Lady."

3. Topanga Ranch Motel: The 1970s television series "Mannix" as well as an episode of "Remington Steele;" the 1986 Judd Nelson and Ally Sheedy movie "Blue City" and the 1991 Bridget Fonda movie "Leather Jackets."

4. Reel Inn Malibu: It's been featured on shows like "24," "Man vs. Food" and "The Chew" and counted the likes of Cindy Crawford, Paris Hilton and Jerry Seinfeld as fans of its fried seafood fare.

5. The Bunny Museum: The Altadena oddity has made the Guinness Book of World Records, and been

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featured in Ripley's Believe It Or Not!, the Smithsonian Magazine and an episode of "Visiting...With Huell Howser."

## **Jamie Lee Curtis pledges \$1 million for fire relief efforts**

The actor announced the pledge on Instagram on Thursday. The previous night, she tearfully appeared on "The Tonight Show."

"As you know, where I live is on fire right now," Curtis said. "This is literally where I live, everything — the market I shop in, the schools my kids go to, friends, many, many, many, many, many friends have lost their homes now."

The Oscar winner wrote that she had been in touch with state and city leaders about how the money might be distributed "for the most impact."

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

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.

□ Read more about what experts say has changed

## **'It looked apocalyptic'**

Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman said at a news conference on Thursday that he had gone to the Pacific Palisades neighborhood where his sister and her husband had raised four sons to find it burned to the ground along with those of her neighbors.

"Up and down each one of the blocks I traveled, those houses no longer exist. They are basically rubble," Hochman said. "It looked apocalyptic. Not since the 1990s when Los Angeles was hit with the fires, the flood, the earthquake and the riots, have I seen such disaster occur here in our city."

Here is where containment of the fires currently stands

Pasadena: 0%

Eaton: 0%

Hurst: 10%

Sunset: 0%

The causes of the fires are still under investigation.

## **Gusty Santa Ana winds expected to strengthen**

In its latest forecast discussion, the National Weather Service's Los Angeles office said there's a high likelihood of "damaging wind gusts across the mountains into the foothill areas again tonight and into Friday."

Computer models are also beginning to show another "strong and damaging Santa Ana wind event" forming next Tuesday night into Wednesday.

"There is great concern that fire weather conditions could become exacerbated given the antecedent conditions, little rain across the area since the Spring of 2024, and another offshore wind event on top of all of what we have seen, so far," the agency said.

## **Defense secretary says the department will be ready if more help is needed**

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters on Thursday that California has made only a "few requests" so far for aid from the military to fight the fires, but he has taken steps to ensure troops are ready if needed.

"We stand ready to surge capability in as quickly as possible," Austin said during a press conference in Germany. "I've done some things to cause our troops to get in a three-point stance to make sure that ... if the whistle blows we are ready to move in and provide assistance."

He said the department has "a lot more capability" that can be requested, and officials are working with FEMA and California's leaders to determine any next steps.

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He did not provide details on what troops may have been asked to prepare to deploy.

## **Houses of worship try to lift the spirits of those impacted by the fires**

"We are here. We are strong. We will rebuild," the Pasadena Jewish Temple & Center proclaimed on its website.

The temple campus, which had been a "spiritual home" for the organization for more than 100 years, was destroyed in the Eaton Fire, but all of the Torah scrolls at the site were saved.

The Parish of St. Matthew, an Episcopal Church in Pacific Palisades, wrote on Facebook that both of its rectories were destroyed but other buildings were still standing.

"Please know that we hold each of you dear during this heartbreaking time," church leaders wrote in the post on Wednesday, and invited parishioners to take part in a special livestreamed prayer.

Altadena Community Church, which was also destroyed, posted a photo of parishioners singing together on Thursday morning. "WE are the church! We can worship anywhere," the church wrote.

## **The death toll is expected to rise**

Cadaver dogs and search crews are beginning to search the rubble, said Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna. "Right now, frankly, we don't know yet," he said.

Crews are working around the clock to restore power, official says

There are currently 118 crews deployed, Quiñones said. Downed power lines remain a priority for the agency.

"If you see a wire down, please call 911 and we will send crews immediately to make the area safe," said Janisse Quiñones, CEO and chief engineer of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

"Some customers may experience some longer outages because some power equipment has been damaged or "compromised" by the fires," she added.

## **Sewer, water and power infrastructure 'significantly damaged,' official says**

The "life safety" infrastructure in some of the Los Angeles-area communities ravaged by wildfires has been destroyed, Los Angeles County Public Works Director Mark Pestrella said Thursday.

Crews are focusing on utility restoration, Pestrella said, but sewer, water and power infrastructure has all been "significantly damaged."

Before repair work can begin, massive amounts of debris — including fallen tree limbs and hazardous materials from burned structures — must be removed, he said.

Ash and other materials have contaminated some water supplies, so boil orders have been issued in areas including Palisades, said Janisse Quiñones, the CEO of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

Officials were working to deliver water to residents who have partial damage or have remained behind, Pestrella said.

Area water reservoirs are full and available for aerial water drops by firefighting aircraft, he said.

## **LA fire chief says thousands of homes, other structures burned in Palisades fire**

"Damage assessments are ongoing at the Palisades fire. Preliminary reports estimate the damage or destroyed structures to be in the thousands," Los Angeles city Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said during a news conference Thursday morning.

"It is safe to say that the Palisades fire is one of the most destructive natural disasters in the history of Los Angeles."

At least 180,000 residents are under evacuation orders for all blazes in the county, officials said.

## **First responders are still focused on rescuing people, officials say**

More than 400 sheriff's office personnel have been deployed to the fire response in addition to the deputies handling normal patrols, said L.A. County Sheriff Robert Luna.

"The people that are working under very difficult conditions are doing their best to do what they do," Luna said. Some of the areas impacted by wildfires "look like a bomb was dropped in them."

It's too soon to conduct major searches of burned areas, and it's not clear what authorities will find when they do search, Luna said. Special K-9 search teams and other tools will be brought in when possible.

The best way to help emergency responders is to stay informed, be prepared to evacuate and follow

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all evacuation orders, said Los Angeles City Fire Chief Kristin Crowley.

Others should stay off the road when possible, officials said, to reduce the risk of car accidents and other issues during the wildfire response.

## **Eaton Fire remains uncontained, officials say**

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone says the number of resources deployed to the "fire siege" in southern California has increased significantly, but the Eaton Fire remains uncontained.

Marrone made the comments during a press conference on Thursday morning.

"We have several reported injuries and over 1,000 structures damaged and destroyed," Marrone said. "The cause of the fire remains unknown, and it continues to be under active investigation."

Winds are suspected to subside "somewhat" on Thursday but the danger remains, said Los Angeles city Fire Chief Kristin Crowley.

"We are still under red flag warning with extreme fire behavior possibilities," Crowley said.

Wind speeds are up to 60 miles per hour, and are expected to continue throughout the day, she said.

"It is safe to say that the Palisades fire is one of the most destructive natural disasters in the history of Los Angeles," she said.

## **People who are looting will be prosecuted, officials say**

"This is simply unacceptable," Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Chair Kathryn Barger said during a news conference on Wednesday. "I promise you, you will be held accountable."

The city of Santa Monica declared a curfew Wednesday night because of the looting, said L.A. County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath.

## **'Wildfires do not care about jurisdictional boundaries'**

A Los Angeles County official said the region was mourning the loss of lives and property after several wildfires wreaked destruction in southern California.

Kathryn Barger, the chair of the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, made the comments during a news conference on Thursday morning.

"While we are still facing significant threats, I am hopeful the tide is turning," Barger said. Authorities are working "hand in hand" across jurisdictions, she said.

"Wildfires do not care about jurisdictional boundaries," she said.

## **Evacuation order lifted in Hollywood Hills West near the Sunset Fire**

The Los Angeles Fire Department made the announcement on Thursday morning. Fire crews are still working in the area, and the department asked that people be careful as they return to their homes.

The Sunset Fire is a brush fire that broke out Wednesday evening in the Hollywood Hills. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said Thursday morning that it had burned 43 acres (17 hectares), well under a square mile.

## **Hundreds of thousands without power across California**

More than 425,000 customers statewide are without power as wildfires continue to rage in southern California, according to the tracker PowerOutage.us.

Southern California Edison wrote on its website that several community resource centers have been set up around the region and work crews have been deployed within impacted communities. The resource centers allow customers to charge mobile devices and medical equipment and get information.

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power said Wednesday night that it had restored power to more than 150,000 customers since the start of the windstorm. Roughly 94,000 of the utility's customers remained without power Thursday morning, as wind and fire conditions continued to present hazards for work crews.

## **'This is unlike anything I've seen in my 25 years on the fire department'**

Firefighters in Southern California are accustomed to dealing with the strong Santa Ana winds that blow in the fall and winter, but the hurricane-force gusts earlier in the week took them by surprise.

"This is unlike anything I've seen in my 25 years on the fire department," Los Angeles Fire Capt. Adam VanGerpen told CBS This Morning.

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VanGerpen called the fire historic. Erratic winds gusted up to 99 mph the first night, spitting embers that rapidly spread the fire.

While gusts are dying down, VanGerpen said winds forecast through Friday were still cause for concern.

## **Saved by strangers — twice**

Aaron 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 give them and their two bags a lift.

After a little more than 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."

## **Biden to be briefed on full federal response to Los Angeles wildfires**

President Joe Biden will gather senior White House and administration officials for the briefing after he returns from delivering the eulogy at the state funeral for former President Jimmy Carter.

He was briefed earlier Thursday on the latest updates of the wildfires across Los Angeles.

## **Regional alert systems can help keep residents up to date**

Many communities, including several in California, have warning alert systems that allow residents to sign up for push notifications to their mobile phones or email accounts.

FEMA has a downloadable app that provides real-time alerts on mobile phones, and public safety agencies can also push alerts to television, radio and wireless devices through the Integrated Public Alert & Warning System. The NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards is a nationwide network of radio stations that broadcast continuous weather information as well as official Weather Service warnings, forecasts and other hazard information.

A battery- or crank-operated portable radio can also be a critical tool for receiving emergency alerts, especially in areas where cellular service is unreliable or when regional cellular towers might be threatened by wind, fire or other hazards.

## **Fire in the Hollywood Hills held to under 1 square mile**

The latest flames broke out Wednesday evening in the Hollywood Hills, striking closer to the heart of the city and the roots of its entertainment industry and putting densely populated neighborhoods on edge during exceptionally windy and dry conditions.

Within a few hours, firefighters had made major progress on the Sunset Fire in the hills. 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."

## **Satellite imagery shows stark destruction of neighborhoods scorched by the fires**

The dramatic level of destruction in some places was apparent in a comparison of satellite images before and after the fire.

A swath of about 250 homes in an Altadena neighborhood dotted with the green canopies of leafy trees and aquamarine swimming pools was reduced to rubble. Only a few homes were left standing and some were still in flames in the images by Maxar Technologies.

Along a stretch of about 70 wall-to-wall homes overhanging the Pacific Ocean in Malibu, fewer than 10 appeared to be intact.

## Jimmy Carter lauded for humility and service in Washington before being laid to rest in Georgia

By BILL BARROW and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jimmy Carter was celebrated Thursday for his personal humility and public service before, during and after his presidency in a funeral at Washington National Cathedral featuring the kind of pageantry the 39th U.S. president typically eschewed. It was followed by an intimate hometown funeral near where he was born a century ago.

All of Carter's living successors attended in Washington, with President Joe Biden, who was the first sitting senator to endorse his 1976 run for the White House, eulogizing his longtime friend. Biden and others took turns in the morning praising Carter's record — which many historians have appraised more favorably since he lost his bid for a second term in 1980 — and extolling his character.

The dual ceremonies in Washington and Plains, Georgia, provided a moment of national comity in a notably partisan era and offered a striking portrait of a president who was once judged a political failure, only for his life ultimately to be recognized as having lasting national and global impact.

"He built houses for people who needed homes," said Joshua Carter, a grandson who recalled how Carter regularly taught Sunday school in Plains after leaving the White House. "He eliminated diseases in forgotten places. He waged peace anywhere in the world, wherever he saw a chance. He loved people."

Jason Carter, another grandson, wryly noted his grandparents' frugality, such as washing and reusing Ziploc bags, and his grandfather's struggles with his cellphone.

"They were small-town people who never forgot who they were and where they were from, no matter what happened in their lives," said Jason, who chairs the Carter Center, a global humanitarian operation founded by Jimmy and his late wife, Rosalynn Carter.

At the national service, former President Barack Obama and President-elect Donald Trump, who have mocked each other for years going back to Trump fanning conspiracy theories about Obama's citizenship, sat next to each other and talked for several minutes, even sharing a laugh.

As Trump went to his seat, he shook hands with Mike Pence in a rare interaction with his former vice president. The two split over Pence's refusal to help Trump overturn his election defeat to Biden four years ago. Karen Pence, the former second lady, did not rise from her chair when her husband did so to greet Trump.

Vice President Kamala Harris, who lost to Trump in November, entered afterward and was not seen interacting with him. Former first lady Michelle Obama did not attend.

All politics were not left outside the cathedral, though. Biden, who leaves office in 11 days, repeated several times that "character" was Carter's chief attribute. Biden said Carter taught him that "everyone should be treated with dignity and respect."

"We have an obligation to give hate no safe harbor," Biden said, also noting the importance of standing up to "abuse in power." Those comments echoed Biden's typical criticisms of Trump.

In Plains, Carter's personal pastor, Tony Lowden, touched on the political as well, saying Carter was "still teaching us a lesson" with the timing of his death as a new Congress begins its work and Trump prepares for a second administration. Lowden, who did not name Trump or others, urged the nation to follow Carter's example: "not self, but country."

"Don't let his legacy die. Don't let this nation die," Lowden said. "Let faith and hope be our guardrails."

Carter died Dec. 29 at age 100, living so long that two of Thursday's eulogies were written by people who died before him — his vice president, Walter Mondale, and his presidential predecessor, Gerald Ford.

"By fate of a brief season, Jimmy Carter and I were rivals," Ford said in his eulogy, which was read by his son Steven. "But for the many wonderful years that followed, friendship bonded us as no two presidents since John Adams and Thomas Jefferson."

Carter defeated Ford in 1976, but the presidents and their wives became close friends, and Carter eulogized Ford at his own funeral.

Days of formal ceremonies and remembrances from political leaders, business titans and rank-and-file

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citizens have honored Carter for his decency and using a prodigious work ethic to do more than obtain political power.

Proceedings began Thursday morning as military service members carried Carter's flag-draped casket down the east steps of the U.S. Capitol, where the former president had been lying in state since Tuesday. There was also a 21-gun salute.

At the cathedral, the Armed Forces Chorus sang the hymn "Be Still My Soul" before Carter's casket was brought inside.

Mourners also heard from 92-year-old Andrew Young, a former Atlanta mayor, congressman and U.N. ambassador during the Carter administration. Carter outlived much of his Cabinet and inner circle but remained especially close to Young — a friendship that brought together a white Georgian and Black Georgian who grew up in the era of Jim Crow segregation.

"Jimmy Carter was a blessing that helped create a great United States of America," Young said.

"Hail to the Chief" was performed by military bands multiple times as Carter's casket arrived and departed various points. Carter once tried to stop the traditional standard from being played for him when he was president, seeing it as an unnecessary flourish.

Thursday concluded six days of national rites that began in Plains, where Carter, a former Naval officer, engineer and peanut farmer, was born in 1924, lived most of his life and died after 22 months in hospice care.

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

An outspoken Baptist who campaigned as a born-again Christian, Carter received his second service at Maranatha Baptist Church, the small edifice where he taught Sunday school for decades. His casket sat 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 campaign headquarters, Carter was interred on family land in a plot next to Rosalynn, who died in 2023.

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 agreement between Israel and Egypt. But he also presided over inflation, rising interest rates and international crises — most notably the Iran hostage situation, in which Americans were held in Tehran for more than a year. Carter lost in a landslide to Republican Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Former White House aide Stu Eizenstat used his eulogy to reframe the Carter presidency as more successful than voters appreciated at the time.

He noted that Carter deregulated U.S. transportation industries, streamlined energy research and created the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He emphasized that Carter's administration secured the release of the hostages in Iran, though they were not freed until after Reagan took office.

"He may not be a candidate for Mount Rushmore," Eizenstat said. "But he belongs in the foothills."

## Appeals court denies bid to block public release of special counsel's report on Trump Jan. 6 probe

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court on Thursday denied a bid to block the public release of special counsel Jack Smith's report on President-elect Donald Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals turned down a emergency challenge aimed at keeping under wraps the report expected to detail unflattering revelations about Trump's failed effort to cling to power in the election he lost to President Joe Biden.

A separate volume of the same special counsel report — related to Trump's hoarding of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate — will not become public while the case against two co-defendants of the president-elect remains pending, the Justice Department has said.



Even with the appeals court ruling, though, the election interference report will not immediately be released, and there's no guarantee it will be as more legal wrangling is expected. A lower court ruling from Trump-appointed U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon in Florida temporarily blocking the Justice Department from releasing the report remains in place for three days.

The defendants may now ask Cannon to rule on the merits of their request to block the report, which she did not do earlier when she granted their emergency motion. They could also conceivably ask the conservative-dominated Supreme Court to intervene.

A Trump spokesperson called Smith's report an "unconstitutional, one-sided, falsehood-ridden screed." "It is time for Joe Biden and Merrick Garland to do the right thing and put a final stop to the political weaponization of our Justice system," spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement after the ruling.

The two-volume report is expected to detail findings and explain charging decisions in Smith's two investigations, though the prospect for significant new information is unclear given the extensive details already disclosed in separate indictments against Trump.

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

The case accusing Trump of illegally hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate was dismissed in July by Cannon, who concluded that Smith's appointment was illegal. Smith's appeal of the dismissal of charges against Walt Nauta and Carlos 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 Justice Department's decision to withhold the classified documents section of the report for now lessens the likelihood it will ever be seen by the public, given that the Trump Justice Department almost certainly will not release it even after the case against Nauta and De Oliveira is resolved.

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.

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 investigation of Russian election interference.

## **Alec Baldwin sues for malicious prosecution after judge dismissed case of fatal 'Rust' set shooting**

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Actor Alec Baldwin has filed a civil lawsuit for malicious prosecution and civil rights violations in the fatal shooting of a cinematographer on the set of the Western movie "Rust."

The lawsuit was filed Thursday at state district court in Santa Fe, where a judge in July dismissed a charge of involuntary manslaughter against Baldwin in the death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins.

Baldwin also alleges defamation in the suit, saying that prosecutors and investigators intentionally mis-handled evidence as they pursued the case.

Defendants named in the lawsuit include special prosecutor Kari Morrissey and Santa Fe District Attorney Mary Carmack-Altewies, along with three investigators from the Santa Fe County sheriff's office and the county board of commissioners.

"Defendants sought at every turn to scapegoat Baldwin for the acts and omissions of others, regardless of the evidence or the law," the lawsuit states. It also says prosecutors and investigators targeted Baldwin for professional or political gain.

Hutchins died shortly after being wounded during a rehearsal for the movie "Rust" in October 2021 at

a film-set ranch on the outskirts of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Baldwin, the lead actor and co-producer, was pointing a pistol at Hutchins when it discharged, killing Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza. Baldwin has said he pulled back the hammer — but not the trigger — and the revolver fired.

Baldwin's trial was upended by revelations that ammunition was brought into the Santa Fe County sheriff's office in March by a man who said it could be related to Hutchins' killing. Prosecutors said they deemed the ammo unrelated and unimportant, while Baldwin's lawyers say investigators "buried" the evidence in a separate case folder and filed a successful motion to dismiss.

Morrissey said she learned more than a year ago that Baldwin was considering a lawsuit.

"In October 2023 the prosecution team became aware that Mr. Baldwin intended to file a retaliatory civil lawsuit," she told The Associated Press in a text message Thursday. "We look forward to our day in court."

Carmack-Altwies and the Santa Fe sheriff's office did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Baldwin's lawsuit argues that prosecutors should not be afforded immunity in their official roles.

The state attorney general declined to pursue and appeal the dismissal on behalf of prosecutors, closing out the case in December.

Separately, the shooting led to an involuntary manslaughter conviction at trial last year against movie weapons supervisor Hannah Gutierrez-Reed. She is serving out a maximum sentence of 1 1/2 years at a state penitentiary.

The tort claim by Baldwin also takes aim at a special prosecutor who initially oversaw the investigation, while seeking unspecified punitive damages, compensatory damages, attorneys' fees and interest.

It adds to a thicket of post-trial litigation, even as Baldwin has returned to comic appearances on "Saturday Night Live" with plans in the works for a family reality TV show with wife Hilaria and seven children.

The parents and younger sister of Hutchins have sued Baldwin and other producers of "Rust" in New Mexico state court. A settlement has been reached in a lawsuit by Hutchins widower and son.

## Supreme Court rejects Trump's bid to delay sentencing in his New York hush money case

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, MICHAEL HILL and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A sharply divided Supreme Court on Thursday rejected President-elect Donald Trump's final bid to put his New York hush-money case on hold, clearing the way for him to be sentenced for felony crimes days before he returns to the presidency.

The court's 5-4 order allows Judge Juan M. Merchan to impose a sentence Friday on Trump, who was convicted in what prosecutors called an attempt to cover up a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels. Trump has denied any liaison with Daniels or any wrongdoing.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Amy Coney Barrett joined with the court's three liberals in rejecting his emergency motion.

The majority found his sentencing wouldn't be an insurmountable burden during the presidential transition since Merchan has indicated he won't give Trump jail time, fines or probation.

Trump's attorneys had asked the sentencing be delayed as he appeals the verdict, but the majority of justices found his arguments can be handled as part of the regular appeals process.

Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh would have delayed the sentencing, the order states.

Trump said he respects the high court's order, and will pursue an appeal that could end up before the high court again. "I respect the court's opinion — I think it was actually a very good opinion for us because you saw what they said, but they invited the appeal and the appeal is on the bigger issue. So, we'll see how it works out," he said at a dinner with Republican governors at his private club in Florida.

The defeat comes after the conservative-majority court has handed Trump major victories over the past year, ensuring that states could not kick him off the ballot because of the 2021 attack on the Capitol and giving him immunity from prosecution over some acts he took as president in a ruling that delayed an

election-interference case against him.

The justices could also be faced with weighing other parts of the sweeping conservative changes he's promised after he takes office.

In the push to delay the New York sentencing, Trump's attorneys argued he is immune from criminal proceedings as president-elect and said some evidence used in the Manhattan trial violated last summer's immunity decision.

At the least, they have said, the sentencing should be delayed while their appeals play out to avoid distracting Trump during the White House transition.

Prosecutors pushed back, saying there's no reason for the court to take the "extraordinary step" of intervening in a state case now. Trump's attorneys didn't show that an hourlong virtual hearing would be a serious disruption, and a pause would likely mean pushing the case past the Jan. 20 inauguration, creating a delay that could last at least through his presidency.

"We brought a case. A jury of ordinary New Yorkers returned 34 guilty verdicts," Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said at an unrelated news conference Thursday afternoon. "Our function right now primarily is to continue to give voice to that verdict and respect, as a principle -- bedrock principle of the administration of justice -- that the jury's voice must not be rubbed out."

Trump's attorneys went to the justices after New York courts refused to postpone sentencing, including the state's highest court on Thursday.

Judges in New York have found that the convictions on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to personal matters rather than Trump's official acts as president. Daniels says she had a sexual encounter with Trump in 2006. He denies it.

Trump's attorneys called the case politically motivated, and they said sentencing him now would be a "grave injustice" that threatens to disrupt the presidential transition as the Republican prepares to return to the White House.

Trump is represented by D. John Sauer, his pick to be the solicitor general, who represents the government before the high court.

Sauer also argued for Trump in the separate criminal case charging him with trying to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which resulted in the Supreme Court's immunity opinion.

Defense attorneys cited that opinion in arguing some of the evidence used against him in the 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.

The decision comes a day after Justice Alito confirmed that he took a phone call from Trump the day before the president-elect's lawyers filed their emergency motion before the high court.

The justice said the call was about a clerk, not any upcoming or current cases, but the unusual communication prompted calls for Alito to recuse himself, including from the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee. Justices make their own decisions about whether to recuse and Alito still weighed in on the case.

## **Los Angeles Rams' playoff game moved to Arizona as wildfires disrupt sports in Southern California**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The NFL moved the Los Angeles Rams' playoff game against the Minnesota Vikings out of Southern California on Thursday, the biggest of several changes to the sports calendar after days of devastating wildfires in the area.

The wild-card game will be played Monday night at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. The home of the Arizona Cardinals is nearly 400 miles east of the Rams' home, SoFi Stadium in Inglewood.

The league announced the decision Thursday after another fire broke out several miles from the Rams' training complex in the Woodland Hills neighborhood, located about 13 miles north of fire-ravaged Pacific Palisades. While none of the fires were burning near the stadium — which is southwest of downtown Los Angeles — the NFL made the decision amid concerns about air quality and whether the community could

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handle such an event under the circumstances.

Several major fires were burning in areas of the vast Los Angeles metroplex following two days of extraordinary winds. A major threat broke out Wednesday evening in the Hollywood Hills, close to the heart of the entertainment industry, but had been contained by Thursday morning.

At least 180,000 people were under evacuation orders, and the fires have consumed about 45 square miles (117 square kilometers) — roughly the size of San Francisco. The Palisades Fire is already the most destructive in Los Angeles' history.

The Rams held their first practice on Thursday but canceled their player media availability so everyone could go home quickly. The Los Angeles area was to remain at a high fire risk through Friday, the National Weather Service said.

Relocations are rare in the NFL. In 2003, wildfires prompted the league to move a Monday night regular-season game between the Miami Dolphins and San Diego Chargers to Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Arizona. The Rams had a Monday night game against Kansas City relocated from Mexico City to Los Angeles in 2018 because of concerns about the playing surface at Azteca Stadium.

## NBA and NHL

The NBA postponed the Los Angeles Lakers' home game against the Charlotte Hornets on Thursday.

It was the second straight day a game slated to be played in downtown Los Angeles was postponed. The NHL's Los Angeles Kings were scheduled to host the Calgary Flames on Wednesday night.

The dates for the rescheduled games have not been announced. The Kings said tickets for their postponed game against Calgary will be good for the rescheduled date.

Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr said his 90-year-old mother was among thousands who had lost their homes.

## College basketball

The West Coast Conference postponed women's basketball games scheduled for Thursday night at Pepperdine and Loyola Marymount.

Pepperdine was scheduled to face Portland at Firestone Field House on the school's Malibu campus. Pepperdine canceled classes Wednesday, and access to its coastal campus was restricted.

Loyola Marymount had its game against San Diego postponed as a precautionary measure due to air quality concerns inside Gersten Pavilion while the facility is being renovated.

## Horse racing

Santa Anita Park postponed Friday's racing program until Jan. 16 because of poor air quality forecast in Arcadia, near the Eaton Fire.

The California Horse Racing Board approved the rescheduling of the 10-race card, which will be run with the horses previously entered.

"While Santa Anita continues to remain well outside of any active fire area, the smoke from the wildfires is affecting all of Los Angeles County," track general manager Nate Newby said. "We also want to respect the impact that this tragedy has had on many of our community, including our horsemen and women and our own Santa Anita team, who have been devastated by these fires."

A decision on Saturday and Sunday's racing will be made Friday.

The track was handing out N-95 masks to all backstretch and frontside workers as well as protective eyewear because of the smoke.

## Golf

The PGA Tour has not decided whether to play the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club, scheduled for Feb. 13-16.

Riviera, which will host golf in the 2028 Olympics, is in the Pacific Palisades community and was part of the evacuation order. In a memo to players Thursday, the tour said the course was not directly affected by the fire. Golf tournaments require building hospitality tents around the course.

Tiger Woods is the host of the tournament, a signature event with a \$20 million purse.

## Soccer

Ali Riley, a defender for Angel City in the National Women's Soccer League who also plays for the New Zealand national team, said her family's home was destroyed in the Palisades Fire.

Riley posted a photo on Instagram of the devastated neighborhood with an arrow pointing to where the house once stood.

"I was there Monday night eating dinner. Hanging with mom and dad. Watched the sunset," she wrote. "And now it's gone forever."

## **The Biden administration succeeds in temporarily blocking a plea deal for accused 9/11 mastermind**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration succeeded Thursday in temporarily blocking accused 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed from entering a guilty plea in a deal that would spare him the risk of execution for al-Qaida's Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

It is the latest development in a long struggle by the U.S. military and successive administrations to bring to justice the man charged with planning one of the deadliest attacks ever on the United States. It stalls an attempt to wrap up more than two decades of military prosecution beset by legal and logistical troubles.

A three-judge appeals panel agreed to put on hold Mohammed's guilty plea scheduled for Friday in a military commission courtroom at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

In an unusual move, the Biden administration is pushing to throw out a plea agreement that its own Defense Department had negotiated with Mohammed and two 9/11 co-defendants.

Mohammed is accused of developing and directing the plot to crash hijacked airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Another of the hijacked planes flew into a field in Pennsylvania.

A small number of relatives of some of the nearly 3,000 victims already had gathered in Guantanamo to hear Mohammed take responsibility in one of the most painful chapters in American history.

"It's very upsetting," said Elizabeth Miller, who lost her firefighter father, Douglas Miller, in the attacks and leads a group of 9/11 families supporting the plea agreements and opposing execution for the defendants. She sees the deals as "the best way for families to receive finality."

"It's unfortunate that the larger government isn't recognizing it," she said by phone Thursday from Guantanamo.

But Gordon Haberman, whose daughter, Andrea, was killed at the World Trade Center while on a business trip, took heart. "If this leads to a full trial for these guys, then I'm in favor of that," he said.

The appeals panel stressed that its order would hold only as long as it took to more fully consider arguments and that it should not be considered a final ruling.

The court scheduled some of the next steps for Jan. 22, meaning the fight would extend into the Trump administration.

Defense lawyers had worked to wrap up the pleas by President-elect Donald Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration. It's not clear whether Trump would seek to intervene in the military commission's work.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has led the fight to overturn the politically divisive plea deals, saying a decision on the death penalty in an attack as grave as Sept. 11 should only be made by the defense secretary.

Defense lawyers said in filings that attempts to throw out the agreement is the latest in the government's two decades of "fitful" and "negligent" mishandling of the case. They say the deal is already in effect and that Austin has no legal authority to throw it out after the fact.

The fight has put the Biden administration at odds with the U.S. military officials it appointed to oversee justice in the attacks.

The deal, negotiated over two years and approved by military prosecutors and the Pentagon's senior official for Guantanamo in late July, stipulated life sentences without parole for Mohammed and two co-defendants. It also obligates them to answer any lingering questions that families of the victims have

about the attacks.

Legal and logistical challenges have bogged down the 9/11 case in the 17 years since charges were filed against Mohammed. The case remains in pretrial hearings, with no trial date set.

The torture of Mohammed and other 9/11 defendants in CIA custody has posed one of the biggest obstacles, potentially rendering their later statements unusable in court.

With that in mind, military prosecutors notified families this summer that the senior Pentagon official overseeing Guantanamo had approved a plea deal. They called it "the best path to finality and justice."

Austin unexpectedly announced Aug. 2 that he was scrapping the agreement. After the Guantanamo judge and a military review panel rejected Austin's intervention, the Biden administration went to the District of Columbia federal appeals court this week.

Mohammed's attorneys argued that Austin's "extraordinary intervention in this case is solely a product of his lack of oversight over his own duly appointed delegate," meaning the senior Pentagon official overseeing Guantanamo.

The Justice Department said that if the guilty pleas were accepted, the government would be denied a chance for a public trial and the opportunity to "seek capital punishment against three men charged with a heinous act of mass murder that caused the death of thousands of people and shocked the nation and the world."

## **Far from wildfire flames, residents of sunny Los Angeles go about their lives in disquiet and fear**

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Pedestrians shuffled by the famed Chateau Marmont hotel, customers queued up at Starbucks on Sunset Boulevard and car horns bleated at gridlocked intersections. But overhead, shadowing the usual bustling Los Angeles scene, a blackish dome of wildfire smoke turned daybreak into an eerie twilight.

Even beyond the reach of the flames from five wildfires, Los Angeles residents accustomed to radiant sunshine and balmy weather are living with disquiet and even fear. Across the city are reminders of nearby danger: Thumping helicopters overhead. Wildfire ash tumbling like snowflakes. A lingering whiff of smoke just about everywhere. The familiar crystalline sky turned ashen gray.

"It is otherworldly," said Lydia Thelwell, a bartender visiting a hair salon where wildfire smoke could be seen from the front window. "You know it's happening, but we just go on with our day."

The sprawling, congested city of nearly 4 million has always been disjointed, what's been called dozens of separate cities in search of a unified whole. It's not uncommon for temperatures in different neighborhoods to vary by as much as 30 degrees, with cooler days at the beach and desert-like communities in the San Fernando Valley.

But nearly everywhere now is the sense of nearby danger from the fires, with smoke coiling for miles across the sky. L.A. hasn't seen fires like these, especially in winter months, any time in recent memory.

For coffee shop manager Pascal Loza, it was business as usual, with long lines of customers waiting for lattes and paninis in the Studio City business.

"It's hard to feel scared when it's so far" in a distant neighborhood, he said. "It's something you learn to live with."

Indeed, wildfires have long been part of living in L.A., where residents enjoy arguably the nation's finest climate but accept the tradeoff of wildfires, earthquakes, and drought — and the uncertainty that comes with them.

"You're in this disaster, and it's nature. There's no controlling what's happening," said Teddy Leonard, who with her husband Andy owns the landmark Reel Inn in Malibu, which was destroyed in the Pacific Palisades fire. Actor Billy Crystal and his wife Janice lost their home of 45 years in the same blaze.

Thousands of homes and a long list of iconic sites were destroyed. Will Rogers' ranch house, which the movie star owned until his death in 1935, was destroyed, park officials said. Also lost, the historic Topanga

Ranch Motel, built in 1929 and once owned by William Randolph Hearst. Another loss: popular film spot Palisades Charter High School, where the list of credits includes Brian De Palma's 1976 adaptation of "Carrie."

In the hazy morning light at Runyon Canyon Park, scorched hillsides could be seen through the steel gates that mark the trailhead of the popular hiking spot. A red and yellow fire truck inched slowly up the denuded grade as sprinkles of wildfire ash floated to the ground.

This once-serene corner of Los Angeles is a playground for John Klay, a broad-shouldered local who works in private security and walks here daily. But like many, his sense of place has been badly shaken by days of wildfire that indiscriminately gutted neighborhoods of the wealthy and not, this time nearly at his doorstep.

"You watch disasters on TV — hurricanes, tsunamis, tornados," he said. "You never consider that it will ever happen to you."

"Yesterday was that wake-up call," he said, referring to the Sunset Fire that burned across the park and the Hollywood Hills on Wednesday evening. "All the sudden, instantly, it happened."

Klay didn't think the fire could reach his apartment, but the traffic, panic and congestion of evacuating residents in his neighborhood "stressed me more."

"There was so much chaos," he said. "We didn't know where to go."

## **Senate Democrats join Republicans in voting to advance bill to detain migrants accused of crimes**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Newly in the minority, Democrats voted with Republicans on Thursday to advance legislation that would require federal authorities to detain unauthorized immigrants who have been accused of certain crimes — signaling that they will try and find spots to work with President-elect Donald Trump while simultaneously trying to block much of his agenda.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and most other Democrats voted to proceed with the legislation, advancing the bill 84-9. Trump and Republicans have pushed the bill and made it a priority since Georgia nursing student Laken Riley was killed last year by a Venezuelan man who entered the U.S. illegally and was allowed to stay to pursue his immigration case.

Still, Schumer hasn't promised to vote for the final bill — and he made clear that Democrats want Republicans to work with them on bipartisan amendments. Thursday's procedural vote will allow that process to begin.

On the Senate floor ahead of the vote, Schumer said that new Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., "has said he wants to make the Senate a place where all members should have a chance to make their voices heard. This bill would be a fine place to start."

Schumer's support for the bill comes after Democrats lost the Senate and the presidency in the November elections and are trying to thoughtfully pick their battles against Trump while still trying to block much of his agenda. Republicans will need seven Democratic votes to pass most major policy items in the 53-47 Senate, and Schumer has said repeatedly that Thune will have to work with them to get things done.

The new Democratic strategy is a shift from Trump's first term, when Democrats openly and aggressively fought Trump on most issues. And it's evidence of the delicate balance that Schumer is trying to strike after Republicans dominated last year's elections and as some of the more moderate members of his caucus are trying to show they can work with the new president.

Several Democrats who were up for election last year embraced stricter immigration controls partly to blunt GOP attacks as the Biden administration struggled to manage an influx of migrants at the Southwest border. Some of those Democrats suggested they could support the final bill.

Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin, a freshman Democrat who was elected in November, posted on X that "Michiganders have spoken loudly and clearly that they want action to secure our southern border. We must get past petty partisanship that continues to dominate the immigration debate."

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Slotkin said she hopes there will be an amendment process once debate begins next week. Alabama Sen. Katie Britt, a lead Republican on the bill, told reporters afterward that Republicans are open to working with Democrats on amendments but that they would oppose efforts to expand the bill beyond its original scope.

Beyond the immigration bill, some Democrats are showing their willingness to work with Trump by supporting some of his nominees.

Nevada Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen, for example, met with New York GOP Rep. Elise Stefanik, Trump's nominee to be ambassador to the United Nations, and posted on X, "I look forward to working with her." Pennsylvania Democratic Sen. Jon Fetterman has met with two of Trump's more controversial nominees, Secretary of Defense nominee Pete Hegseth and FBI Director nominee Kash Patel, and announced Thursday that he will visit Trump at his home in Florida.

Fetterman said on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday that he's been telling Democrats that "the constant freak out. It's not helpful."

Democratic leaders appear to agree. As he tries to navigate the new era, Schumer has been working to tie most of the Democrats' positions to the economy, not Trump himself.

"If Republicans want to work with us on real policies that lower costs for real working Americans, we're glad to partner with them," Schumer said.

On the immigration bill, Schumer noted in his morning remarks that Thursday's vote was "not a vote on the bill itself," but a vote to move to debate. "Democrats want to have a robust debate where we can offer amendments and improve this bill," he said.

It's unclear whether Schumer will vote for the final product or if it will have enough Democratic votes to pass.

The House passed the legislation earlier this week, making the legislation one of the first actions in the newly Republican-controlled Congress after they seized on Riley's murder as a rallying point during the election. It would require U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to arrest unauthorized migrants who commit theft, burglary, larceny, or shoplifting offenses and mandate that they are detained until they are removed from the U.S.

The bill also would allow states to sue the federal government if they can demonstrate harm caused by immigrants who enter the country illegally.

In a call ahead of the vote, former government officials and immigration advocates asked the Senate to not pass the bill and warned that the legislation, if approved, would be unconstitutional and would help President-elect Trump to implement an anti-immigration agenda.

"It strains Border Patrol and ICE resources, hamstringing their ability to focus on real security threats, and prioritizes the detention of individuals with minor infractions over violent, convicted offenders," said Jason Houser, former chief of staff at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement under President Joe Biden. "If enacted, it will leave fewer violent offenders in detention and weaken our ability to protect communities."

The House passed the bill last year, but Schumer did not bring it up for a vote when Democrats were in the majority.

## Judge scraps Biden's Title IX rules, reversing expansion of protections for LGBTQ+ students

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration's Title IX rules expanding protections for LGBTQ+ students have been struck down nationwide after a federal judge in Kentucky found they overstepped the president's authority.

In a decision issued Thursday, U.S. District Judge Danny C. Reeves scrapped the entire 1,500-page regulation after deciding it was "fatally" tainted by legal shortcomings. The rule had already been halted in 26 states after a wave of legal challenges by Republican states.

President-elect Donald Trump, whose inauguration is days away, previously promised to end the rules "on day one" and made anti-transgender themes a centerpiece of his campaign.



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The decision came in response to a lawsuit filed by Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia.

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti called it a rejection of the Biden administration's "relentless push to impose a radical gender ideology."

"Because the Biden rule is vacated altogether, President Trump will be free to take a fresh look at our Title IX regulations when he returns to office," Skrmetti said in a statement.

The Education Department did not immediately comment on the decision.

Some civil rights groups called the ruling a step backward. GLAAD, a leading LGBTQ+ advocacy group, said transgender and nonbinary students are among the most bullied and harassed.

"Protections for the most vulnerable students make the entire school safer and stronger for everyone," said Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD.

The Biden administration ignited controversy when it finalized the new rules last year. The regulation expanded Title IX, a 1972 law forbidding discrimination based on sex in education, to also prevent discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. It also widened the definition of harassment to include a broader range of misconduct.

Civil rights advocates hailed it as a victory, saying it gave LGBTQ+ students new recourse against discrimination. But it drew outrage from conservatives who said it could be used to protect transgender athletes in girls' sports.

The rule didn't explicitly address athletics and mostly detailed how schools and colleges were required to respond to cases of discrimination and sexual assault. A separate proposal dealing with transgender athletes in sports was put on the back-burner and later revoked after it became a focal point of Trump's campaign.

In his decision, Reeves found the Education Department overstepped its authority by expanding the scope of Title IX.

There's nothing in the 1972 law suggesting that it should cover any more than it has since Congress created it, Reeves wrote. He called it an "attempt to bypass the legislative process and completely transform Title IX."

The judge also found that it violated free speech rights by requiring teachers to use pronouns aligning with a student's gender identity.

"The First Amendment does not permit the government to chill speech or compel affirmance of a belief with which the speaker disagrees in this manner," Reeves wrote.

Rather than carve out certain aspects of the rule, Reeves decided it was best to toss the regulation in its entirety and revert to a previous interpretation of Title IX. He said his decision will "simply 'cause a return to the status quo' that existed for more than 50 years prior to its effective date."

Among the biggest critics of the rule was Betsy DeVos, former education secretary during Trump's first term. On the social media site X, she wrote that the "radical, unfair, illegal, and absurd Biden Title IX rewrite is GONE."

Bill Cassidy, R-Louisiana, chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, said Biden's rule "betrayed the original intent of Title IX by removing longstanding protections that ensured fairness for women and girls."

"With President Trump and a Republican majority in Congress, we will ensure women and girls have every opportunity to succeed on the field and in the classroom," Cassidy said in a statement.

## The Los Angeles landmarks from film and TV damaged by wildfires

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

The high school where Brian De Palma brought Stephen King's "Carrie" to life, Will Rogers' ranch house and a motel owned by William Randolph Hearst are among some of the famous structures that have been damaged or destroyed by the California wildfires.

Los Angeles is a town full of landmarks, thanks to its co-starring role in over a century of filmed enter-

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tainment. Some famed spots — like the Hollywood Bowl, the TCL Chinese Theatre and the Dolby Theatre, where the Oscars are held — initially seemed imperiled by the Hollywood Hills fire, yet remained at least largely unharmed Thursday. But the fires have taken a toll on some familiar sites.

## Palisades Charter High School

There was “significant damage” to Palisades Charter High School, though the main campus building stands. Founded in 1961 and built for a reported \$6 million, the high school currently serves some 3,000 students throughout the Los Angeles area, though they were not in session this week.

FAMOUS CREDITS: De Palma’s 1976 adaptation of “Carrie,” starring Sissy Spacek as the outcast teen, is perhaps Pali High’s most recognizable credit. It’s also played high schools in the 2003 remake of “Freaky Friday,” with Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis, the Kirsten Dunst movie “Crazy/Beautiful,” the Anne Hathaway film “Havoc,” the television series “Teen Wolf” and “American Vandal” and the music video for Olivia Rodrigo’s “good 4 u.” Notable alumni include filmmaker J.J. Abrams, actors Jennifer Jason Leigh and Forest Whitaker, musician will.i.am, Los Angeles Lakers owner Jeanie Buss and Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr.

## Will Rogers’ ranch house

Will Rogers’ Western Ranch House, a property dating back to the 1920s, was completely destroyed in the Palisades Fire. Built on 186 acres in the Pacific Palisades area, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, it had 31 rooms, corrals, a stable, riding ring, roping arena, polo field, golf course and hiking trails. It was where the famed actor (once one of the highest paid) and radio personality would ride horses and practice roping before his death in 1935. His widow, Betty Rogers, gave the property to the state in 1944 and it became a historic state park.

FAMOUS CREDITS: The state park was featured in the 1975 Barbra Streisand sequel “Funny Lady.”

## Topanga Ranch Motel

The Palisades Fire also destroyed the Topanga Ranch Motel, a 30-room, bungalow-style motel built by William Randolph Hearst in 1929. The property had been uninhabited and deteriorating for nearly 20 years, but there were plans for a restoration and reopening in the works.

FAMOUS CREDITS: The 1970s television series “Mannix” as well as an episode of “Remington Steele,” the 1986 Judd Nelson and Ally Sheedy movie “Blue City” and the 1991 Bridget Fonda movie “Leather Jackets.”

## Reel Inn Malibu

This seafood shack on the Pacific Coast Highway and across the street from Topanga Beach State Park opened in 1986 and burned to the ground in the fire. In an Instagram post, the owners wrote that they weren’t sure what would remain of the beloved spot. “Hopefully the state parks will let us rebuild when the dust settles,” Teddy and Andy Leonard wrote.

FAMOUS CREDITS: It’s been featured on shows like “Man vs. Food” and “The Chew” and counted the likes of Cindy Crawford, Paris Hilton and Jerry Seinfeld as fans of its fried seafood fare. It also made a cameo in “24.”

## The Bunny Museum

A quirky Los Angeles-area oddity, The Bunny Museum, located in Altadena and dedicated to all things bunnies, was also destroyed. The museum had all sorts of bunny-themed items, from Trix boxes and bottles of Nesquik, Bugs Bunny paraphernalia and magazine covers of performer Bad Bunny. There was also a Chamber of Hop Horrors detailing the historical abuse of bunnies that had an age requirement: 13 and up.

FAMOUS CREDITS: It’s made the Guinness Book of World Records, and been featured in Ripley’s Believe It Or Not!, the Smithsonian Magazine and an episode of “Visiting...With Huell Howser.”

## Musk uses X livestream to amplify German far-right leader’s views ahead of an election

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Tech billionaire Elon Musk livestreamed his chat with a leader of Germany’s far-right party on Thursday, using the power of his social media platform, X, to amplify the party’s message

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ahead of an upcoming national election — and raising concerns across Europe about the world's richest man trying to influence foreign politics.

Musk, who worked last year to help reelect Donald Trump in the United States, told Alice Weidel, a co-leader of the Alternative for Germany party and its candidate for chancellor, that he was "strongly recommending that people vote for AfD," using the party's acronym. The audience for the livestream peaked at more than 200,000 X accounts.

Musk and Weidel agreed that Germany's taxes are too high, that there is too much immigration, and that it was a mistake for the country to shut down nuclear power plants.

Musk said he hoped the conversation showed people that Weidel is reasonable. "Nothing outrageous has been proposed, just common sense," Musk said. "People really need to get behind the AfD, otherwise things are going to get very, very much worse in Germany."

The AfD has been put under observation by Germany's domestic intelligence agency for suspected extremism, and mainstream parties have shunned working with it. The AfD has strongly rejected the designation, portraying it as a political attempt to discredit the party.

Musk and Weidel emphasized the importance of free speech, and Weidel used the topic as an opportunity to refute the idea that the AfD shares any affinity with the country's Nazi past. She said one of Adolf Hitler's first acts after seizing power was to restrict speech. She then emphasized that the AfD holds libertarian views, and contrasted that with Hitler, who she noted had nationalized Germany's economy.

"The biggest success after that terrible era in our history was to label Adolf Hitler as right and conservative. He was exactly the opposite. He wasn't a conservative. He wasn't a libertarian. He was a communist socialist guy," Weidel claimed.

The conversation later took a turn away from politics, with Weidel asking Musk when he thought humans could live on Mars and whether he believed in God — questions he gave long and inconclusive replies to. "I am open to the idea of God," he said at one point.

In her concluding remarks, Weidel told Musk that his views are "visionary."

Musk has previously used X to endorse AfD, and he authored an opinion article for the *Welt am Sonntag* newspaper, claiming Germany under center-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz is "teetering on the edge of economic and cultural collapse." Germany's election is scheduled for Feb. 23.

The foray into politics by the Tesla and SpaceX chief executive is raising alarm across Europe.

In addition to endorsing the AfD, Musk has demanded the release of jailed U.K. anti-Islam extremist Tommy Robinson and called British Prime Minister Keir Starmer an evil tyrant who should be in prison.

The chat between Musk and Weidel was being monitored by watchdogs from the European Commission, which has accused X of violating the 27-nation bloc's sweeping digital rulebook for cleaning up social media platforms and protecting internet users from online harm.

Commission officials say Musk has the right to express his views but that the rulebook — known as the Digital Services Act — is designed to rein in risks that platforms will be misused to amplify illegal content, including hate speech or election-related misinformation.

The commission has been investigating whether X complies. In preliminary findings issued last year, Brussels said the platform was in breach because its blue checkmarks originally intended as verification badges are deceptive, and because it falls short on transparency and accountability requirements. Regulators are still investigating other possible offenses.

Musk presented Weidel as "the leading candidate to run Germany" — but that isn't true.

Polls show that AfD has grown to be the second-most popular party in the country. The mainstream conservative Christian Democrats are favored to win the election, with the latest polling showing them at 31% support, compared with 20% for the AfD.

Still, the AfD has risen in popularity, as have parties with similar views across Europe, where a former taboo against far-right viewpoints is in decline.

AfD was formed in 2013 and has moved steadily to the right. Its platform initially centered on opposition to bailouts for struggling eurozone members, but its vehement opposition to then-Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow in large numbers of refugees and other migrants in 2015 established the party

as a significant political force.

AfD's support has grown as a result of discontent with Scholz's three-party coalition government. It's rising popularity also reflects a growing frustration among some with Germany's involvement with the European Union and NATO which some view as eroding national sovereignty.

## **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.

In recent weeks, Israel and Hamas have appeared to inch closer to an agreement for a ceasefire and the release of hostages. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said this week that a deal is "very close" and he hopes to complete it before handing over U.S. diplomacy to the incoming Trump administration.

But he and other U.S. officials have expressed similar optimism on several occasions over the past year, only to see the indirect talks stall.

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.

Fatma Abu Awad lost six family members on Tuesday in two Israeli strikes 15 minutes apart. An Israeli strike on a vehicle killed her son, while a separate strike on a tent in Muwasi Khan Younis wounded her son and killed his wife and four children.

"I swear we've been waiting for news about a truce every day — but there's no truce, only news of my son and my daughter-in-law and her children being killed," she said at a school in Khan Younis where she's sheltering alongside many other displaced families.

Later at a nearby cemetery, she prayed over the graves of her family, marked only by headstones of cinderblock rubble stuck in the dry earth.

"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 baby — and two women.

"There is hope every day that there would be truce and ceasefire negotiations would work but it's use-

less hope as we've been waiting for a year and two months for the war to end. On the contrary, we have more martyrs and are losing more of our loved ones," said Malak Abu Awad, part of the family that lost six people in airstrikes earlier this week.

In Israel, family members of hostages who were killed in captivity echoed the calls for a ceasefire, imploring the Israeli government and world leaders to reach a deal, a day after Israeli soldiers recovered the body of 53-year-old hostage Yosef AlZayadni in an underground tunnel in southern Gaza.

"Military pressure endangers the lives of the hostages," said Meirav Svirsky, sister of hostage Itay Svirsky, whose body was recovered from Gaza last month. "The policy that prioritizes the continuation of fighting must be replaced by a policy of saving lives and a policy committed to the return of all the hostages."

## Scientists drill nearly 2 miles down to pull 1.2 million-year-old ice core from Antarctic

By PAOLO SANTALUCIA Associated Press

An international team of scientists announced Thursday they've successfully drilled one of the oldest ice cores yet, penetrating nearly 2 miles (2.8 kilometers) to Antarctic bedrock to reach ice they say is at least 1.2 million years old.

Analysis of the ancient ice is expected to show how Earth's atmosphere and climate have evolved. That should provide insight into how Ice Age cycles have changed, and may help in understanding how atmospheric carbon changed climate, they said.

"Thanks to the ice core we will understand what has changed in terms of greenhouse gases, chemicals and dusts in the atmosphere," said Carlo Barbante, an Italian glaciologist and coordinator of Beyond EPICA, the project to obtain the core. Barbante also directs the Polar Science Institute at Italy's National Research Council.

The same team previously drilled a core about 800,000 years old. The latest drilling went 2.8 kilometers (about 1.7 miles) deep, with a team of 16 scientists and support personnel drilling each summer over four years in average temperatures of about minus-35 Celsius (minus-25.6 Fahrenheit).

Italian researcher Federico Scotto was among the glaciologists and technicians who completed the drilling at the beginning of January at a location called Little Dome C, near Concordia Research Station.

"It was a great a moment for us when we reached the bedrock," Scotto said. Isotope analysis gave the ice's age as at least 1.2 million years old, he said.

Both Barbante and Scotto said that thanks to the analysis of the ice core of the previous Epica campaign they have assessed that concentrations of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, even during the warmest periods of the last 800,000 years, have never exceeded the levels seen since the Industrial Revolution began.

"Today we are seeing carbon dioxide levels that are 50% above the highest levels we've had over the last 800,000 years," Barbante said.

The European Union funded Beyond EPICA (European Project for Ice Coring in Antarctica) with support from nations across the continent. Italy is coordinating the project.

The announcement was exciting to Richard Alley, a climate scientist at Penn State who was not involved with the project and who was recently awarded the National Medal of Science for his career studying ice sheets.

Alley said advancements in studying ice cores are important because they help scientists better understand the climate conditions of the past and inform their understanding of humans' contributions to climate change in the present. He added that reaching the bedrock holds added promise because scientists may learn more about Earth's history not directly related to the ice record itself.

"This is truly, truly, amazingly fantastic," Alley said. "They will learn wonderful things."

## **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.

"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 give them and their two bags a lift.

After a little more than 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.

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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.

Manifest Destiny?

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.

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.

Negotiating tactics or invented threats?

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



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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."

Allies balk

Trump's trolling is not the negotiating ploy of "crazy genius," McFaul 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."

Will the threats backfire?

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."

## Farming tech is on display at CES as companies showcase their green innovations and initiatives

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — When Russell Maichel started growing almonds, walnuts and pistachios in the 1980s, he didn't own a cellphone. Now, a fully autonomous tractor drives through his expansive orchard, spraying pesticides and fertilizer to protect the trees that have for decades filled him with an immense sense of pride.

"The sustainability of doing things perfectly the first time makes a lot of sense," the first-generation farmer told The Associated Press at CES 2025, where John Deere unveiled a fleet of fully autonomous heavy equipment, including the tractor Maichel has been testing on his northern California farm.

Sustainability is a key theme this year at the annual tech trade show in Las Vegas. From Volvo CEO Martin Lundstedt announcing their commitment to net-zero emissions by 2040 to Wisconsin-based Osh-Kosh Corporation showing off its electric fire engines and garbage trucks, companies big and small are showcasing their green innovations and initiatives.

"We absolutely need more climate-smart technologies," said Jacqueline Heard, CEO and co-founder of Enko Chem, which researches climate tech solutions in agriculture — an industry Heard says is "under a lot of pressure right now."

That much is clear on the CES show floor, where farming is on full display and company leaders are highlighting the impacts of climate change and labor shortages on farmers.

Not far from John Deere's booth where autonomous tractors and dump trucks are towering over conference attendees, Kubota, another equipment manufacturing company, is showcasing its AI technology that detects diseases in crops and sprays where pests have been identified.

Todd Stucke, president of Kubota Tractor Corporation, said AI is the future of farming, especially with "summers getting longer and storms getting stronger."

Stucke himself grew up on a potato farm in Ohio. Each night after dinner, his father would scour the field for bugs and then send Stucke out to spray the crops with insecticides.

"We sprayed the whole field, but we might've only needed to spray a part of the field or a plant," he said. "Take that analogy into vineyards, orchards and so forth, you don't have to spray everything."

This is known as "precision agriculture," Heard said. "It allows farmers to really optimize their land."

The idea, Heard said, is that farmers can expand the lifespan and improve the quality of their crops while using fewer chemicals, like pesticides and fertilizer.

"It's good for the environment. It's good for farmers," she said.

Heard said she wouldn't be surprised if AI can one day help farmers map out their land, showing them the different soil types and what kinds of crops would grow best there.

"It could be that with climate change, they should move to a crop that's much more adapted to this new world," she said.

Back at the John Deere booth, Maichel, a tree nut farmer, said he's hopeful that advancements in AI will help him better manage the unpredictability of farming. Each year on his orchard is different from the last.

"There's no sliding scale, per se, that we have to deal with as far as climate change goes," he said. "We really bend to the climate that we're dealt with. It's not something I can predict. It's really something we have to adapt to every growing season."

If someone had told him just 10 years ago that a tractor would one day be driving itself through his orchard, he said he wouldn't have believed it. But now, he says, he sees how this evolving technology can help him adapt to the changing industry and climate.

"We all need to eat, right?" Maichel said. "A farmer's job is one that we all need."

## TikTok's fate arrives at Supreme Court in collision of free speech and national security

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In one of the most important cases of the social media age, free speech and national security collide at the Supreme Court on Friday in arguments over the fate of TikTok, a wildly popular digital platform that roughly half the people in the United States use for entertainment and information.

TikTok says it plans to shut down the social media site in the U.S. by Jan. 19 unless the Supreme Court strikes down or otherwise delays the effective date of a law aimed at forcing TikTok's sale by its Chinese parent company.

Working on a tight deadline, the justices also have before them a plea from President-elect Donald Trump, who has dropped his earlier support for a ban, to give him and his new administration time to reach a "political resolution" and avoid deciding the case. It's unclear if the court will take the Republican president-elect's views — a highly unusual attempt to influence a case — into account.

TikTok and China-based ByteDance, as well as content creators and users, argue the law is a dramatic violation of the Constitution's free speech guarantee.

"Rarely if ever has the court confronted a free-speech case that matters to so many people," lawyers for the users and content creators wrote. Content creators are anxiously awaiting a decision that could upend their livelihoods and are eyeing other platforms.

The case represents another example of the court being asked to rule about a medium with which the justices have acknowledged they have little familiarity or expertise, though they often weigh in on meaty issues involving restrictions on speech.

The Biden administration, defending the law that President Joe Biden signed in April after it was approved by wide bipartisan majorities in Congress, contends that "no one can seriously dispute that (China's) control of TikTok through ByteDance represents a grave threat to national security."

Officials say Chinese authorities can compel ByteDance to hand over information on TikTok's U.S. patrons or use the platform to spread or suppress information.

But the government "concedes that it has no evidence China has ever attempted to do so," TikTok told the justices, adding that limits on speech should not be sustained when they stem from fears that are predicated on future risks.

In December, a panel of three appellate judges, two appointed by Republicans and one by a Democrat, unanimously upheld the law and rejected the First Amendment speech claims.

Adding to the tension, the court is hearing arguments just nine days before the law is supposed to take effect and 10 days before a new administration takes office.

In language typically seen in a campaign ad rather than a legal brief, lawyers for Trump have called on the court to temporarily prevent the TikTok ban from going into effect but refrain from a definitive resolution.

"President Trump alone possesses the consummate dealmaking expertise, the electoral mandate, and the political will to negotiate a resolution to save the platform while addressing the national security concerns expressed by the Government — concerns which President Trump himself has acknowledged," D. John Sauer, Trump's choice to be his administration's top Supreme Court lawyer, wrote in a legal brief filed with the court.

Trump took no position on the underlying merits of the case, Sauer wrote. Trump's campaign team used TikTok to connect with younger voters, especially male voters, and Trump met with TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, in December. He has 14.7 million followers on TikTok.

The justices have set aside two hours for arguments, and the session likely will extend well beyond that. Three highly experienced Supreme Court lawyers will be making arguments. Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar will present the Biden administration's defense of the law, while Trump's solicitor general in his first administration, Noel Francisco, will argue on behalf of TikTok and ByteDance. Stanford Law professor Jeffrey Fisher, representing content creators and users, will be making his 50th high court argument.

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If the law takes effect, Trump's Justice Department will be charged with enforcing it. Lawyers for TikTok and ByteDance have argued that the new administration could seek to mitigate the law's most severe consequences.

But they also said that a shutdown of just a month would cause TikTok to lose about one-third of its daily users in the U.S. and significant advertising revenue.

As it weighs the case, the court will have to decide what level of review it applies to the law. Under the most searching review, strict scrutiny, laws almost always fail. But two judges on the appellate court that upheld the law said it would be the rare exception that could withstand strict scrutiny.

TikTok, the app's users and many briefs supporting them urge the court to apply strict scrutiny to strike down the law.

But the Democratic administration and some of its supporters cite restrictions on foreign ownership of radio stations and other sectors of the economy to justify the effort to counter Chinese influence in the TikTok ban.

A decision could come within days.

## Today in History: January 10 "The Catch" sends 49ers to Super Bowl

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Jan. 10, the tenth day of 2025. There are 355 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 10, 1982, San Francisco 49ers receiver Dwight Clark caught a touchdown pass from Joe Montana with 58 seconds left in the NFC Championship Game; one of the most famous plays in NFL history, "The Catch" led the 49ers to a 28-27 victory over the Dallas Cowboys and a berth in Super Bowl XVI, where they defeated the Cincinnati Bengals for their first Super Bowl victory.

Also on this date:

In 1776, Thomas Paine anonymously published his influential pamphlet, "Common Sense," which argued for American independence from British rule.

In 1860, the Pemberton Mill in Lawrence, Massachusetts, collapsed and caught fire, killing as many as 145 people.

In 1861, Florida became the third state to secede from the Union prior to the Civil War.

In 1863, the London Underground was born when the Metropolitan Railway, the world's first underground passenger railway, opened to the public with service between Paddington and Farringdon Street.

In 1920, the League of Nations was established as the Treaty of Versailles (vehr-SY') went into effect.

Today's birthdays: Jan. 10: Olympic decathlon gold medalist Bill Toomey is 86. Singer Rod Stewart is 80. Rock singer-musician Donald Fagen (Steely Dan) is 77. Boxing Hall of Famer George Foreman is 76. Singer Pat Benatar is 72. Hall of Fame racing driver and team owner Bobby Rahal is 72. Actor-comedian Jemaine Clement is 51. Businessman Jared Kushner is 44.