

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, Jan. 17

Senior Menu: Oven baked chicken, sweet potato, carpi blend, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast cookie.

School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.

Girls Varsity Wrestling at Harrisburg, 2 p.m.

Boys JH Basketball hosts Milbank, 7th at 5 p.m., 8th at 6 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 18

Girls Basketball at the Hanson Classic at the Corn Palace, Mitchell, 4 p.m., vs. Dakota Valley.

Boys Basketball at Dakota Valley (C game at 2 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity)

Girls and Boys Varsity Wrestling and JV./JH Wrestling at Gettysburg, 10 a.m.

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

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



**No matter how bad
your life may seem, there
are millions of other
people who have it ten
times worse than you. So,
Thank God for all the
blessings He has placed
in your life.**

Sunday, Jan. 19

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:15 a.m.; Groton worship, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Time, 10:30 a.m.; Britton worship, 11:15 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.;

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

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1440

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

Cancer Rates Fall

The American Cancer Society's latest report reveals a significant shift in cancer trends. The overall cancer mortality rate in the US declined by 34% from 1991 to 2022, preventing approximately 4.5 million deaths.

However, cancer rates are rising among women and younger adults, with women under 50 now having cancer rates 82% higher than men, up from 51% in 2002. Pancreatic cancer remains a concern, with increasing incidence and mortality rates and an 8% five-year survival rate for pancreatic exocrine tumors. Cancer incidence among children (ages 14 and younger) has declined after decades of increases but continues to rise among adolescents (ages 15 to 19).

Cancer remains the second-leading cause of death in the US and the primary cause for those under 85. In 2025, the ACS estimates there will be 2,041,910 new cancer diagnoses in the US, with 618,120 cancer deaths. Researchers attribute these shifts to environmental influences, lifestyle changes, and potential genetic factors.

David Lynch Dies

Acclaimed director David Lynch passed away at the age of 78, his family announced via social media yesterday. Details of his death were not provided; however, Lynch, a lifelong smoker, revealed last year he had been diagnosed with emphysema and was largely unable to leave the house.

Often employing dark themes and surreal aesthetics, Lynch was known for "Elephant Man" (1980), "Blue Velvet" (1986), and "Mulholland Drive" (2001), as well as the TV series "Twin Peaks" (1990-91, 2017). His 1977 debut feature film "Eraserhead" garnered a cult following and remains a topic of debate—Lynch was notoriously cryptic about its themes and symbolism. Even Lynch's 1984 adaptation of the novel "Dune"—which struggled at the box office and saw Lynch remove his name from certain credits due to disagreement over the final cut—has seen renewed interest in recent years.

Lynch received the Academy Honorary Award for lifetime achievement in 2019, and his unique style has been enshrined in its own descriptor of "Lynchian."

Blue Origin Reaches Orbit

Jeff Bezos-owned Blue Origin successfully launched its New Glenn rocket into orbit early Thursday on its first attempt, 25 years after the Amazon founder started the space company. The 320-foot rocket's payload, Blue Ring, is a spacecraft designed to move satellites to different orbits.

The launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida, demonstrated the company's viability amid years of industry dominance by Elon Musk's SpaceX and its workhorse Falcon 9 and Falcon Heavy rockets. The seven-engine, two-stage, partially reusable New Glenn rocket is designed to launch spacecraft into orbit and is contracted with NASA to launch a lunar lander as part of the third Artemis mission in 2027. Up to eight more New Glenn launches are anticipated this year.

Elsewhere in space, astronaut Suni Williams conducted her first spacewalk during her current mission, seven months after being stranded on the International Space Station following the malfunction of the Boeing Starliner vehicle.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NFL playoffs Divisional Round kicks off tomorrow; see schedule and predictions for all four matchups. Saudi-backed LIV Golf league signs multiyear broadcasting deal with Fox Sports.

Comedian and five-time Emmy winner Conan O'Brien selected as 26th recipient of prestigious Mark Twain Prize for American Humor.

Bob Uecker, longtime baseball broadcaster, comedian, and actor known as "Mr. Baseball," dies at age 90.

Science & Technology

DNA mutation responsible for brain cell death in Huntington's disease found to act over the span of decades; discovery solves mystery of why symptoms arise in middle age despite it being an inherited disease.

Google says it won't add fact-checks to Google searches or YouTube videos despite a forthcoming European Union law requiring the practice.

Ancient human relative Homo erectus lived in extreme desert environments as early as 1 million years ago; study suggests ancient humans were much more adaptable to harsh climates than previously believed.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow -0.2%, Nasdaq -0.9%).

Average US 30-year fixed mortgage rate rises above 7% for first time since May.

Electric, hybrid vehicle sales reach record 20% of total US vehicles sold last year.

American Express to pay \$230M to settle federal probe into alleged deceptive marketing practices.

Digital payments company Block to pay \$255M to federal and state regulators to settle Cash App's banking law violations.

Toyota's truck division Hino to pay \$1.6B over US emissions scandal.

Oil giant BP to lay off around 4,700 employees, roughly 5% of its total workforce.

Spirit Airlines to lay off 200 employees amid Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

Politics & World Affairs

Israeli cabinet delays ratifying ceasefire and hostage-release plan to today following last-minute disagreement with Hamas; Israel continues strikes in Gaza day after ceasefire deal announced.

Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody (R) to fill Sen. Marco Rubio's (R) seat in US Senate; Rubio was nominated to be the US secretary of state.

Senate confirmation hearings continue, including for treasury secretary nominee Scott Bessent and interior secretary nominee Doug Burgum; see recap.

Rudy Giuliani, former New York City mayor, reaches settlement deal to end \$148M defamation case with two former Georgia election workers.

Flags Raised to Full-Staff for Inauguration Day

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem ordered that flags be raised to full-staff statewide on January 20, 2025 in honor of the Inauguration of the 47th President of the United States, Donald J. Trump. Flags should return to half-staff on January 21 and remain at half-staff until sunset on January 28 in honor of former President Jimmy Carter.

Groton Area Sweeps Tiospa Zina in Dominant Basketball Performances

The Groton Area Tigers showcased their prowess on the hardwood with commanding victories over the Tiospa Zina Wambdi in both girls' and boys' basketball action.

Girls: Groton Defeats Tiospa Zina 50-21

Groton jumped out to a strong start, leading 13-2 after the first quarter and extending their advantage to 26-7 by halftime. By the end of the third quarter, the Tigers held a 36-14 lead before closing out the game with a decisive 50-21 victory.

Taryn Traphagen led Groton with 10 points, while Latice Rodlund and Krius Haukaas paced Tiospa Zina with 6 points each. Rodlin's points all came from the free throw line, where she went 6-of-14.

Groton's defense was a force to be reckoned with, forcing turnovers and racking up 21 steals. The Tigers had 41 rebounds, 13 assists, and committed 11 turnovers. They were called for 21 team fouls, which sent the Wambdi to the free throw line frequently. Tiospa Zina capitalized by shooting 15-of-28 from the line (54%). The Tigers, in contrast, made 11 of their 23 attempts (48%).

Shooting efficiency told the story of the game, with Groton hitting 19 of 64 field goal attempts (30%), while Tiospa Zina managed just 3 of 28 (11%).

Rylee Dunker led the boards with 10 rebounds while Laila Roberts had five assists and Taryn Traphagen had five steals.

Boys: Groton Cruises to 87-32 Victory

The boys' game was a fast-paced, high-scoring affair, with Groton running away to an 87-32 win. The Tigers built a 25-9 lead in the first quarter and blew the game open by halftime, leading 56-17. The mercy rule kicked in late in the first half when Groton's lead hit 30 points at 45-15.

Groton's offense was electric, with four players scoring in double figures. Keegan Tracy led the way with 19 points, followed by Ryder Johnson and Becker Bosma with 17 each, and Gage Sippel adding 11. Tiospa Zina's Ashden Sierra was the lone bright spot for the Wambdi, finishing with 20 points.

The Tigers put on a shooting clinic, connecting on 10 of 22 three-point attempts (45%). Tracy drained three from deep, while Johnson and Turner Thompson added two each. Bosma, Blake Pauli, and Jace Johnson each contributed one three-pointer.

Groton dominated in all facets of the game, grabbing 42 rebounds, dishing out 20 assists, and tallying 15 steals. Ryder Johnson led the rebounding effort with seven boards, while Pauli had five assists, and Tracy notched six steals. The Tigers also recorded three blocks, courtesy of Sippel, Thompson, and Ethan Kroll.

Both teams stayed active at the free throw line. Tiospa Zina made six of eight attempts (75%), while Groton hit seven of 11 (64%).

The Wambdi struggled offensively, committing 21 turnovers and finishing with 13 fouls. Despite their effort, they were unable to keep pace with Groton's high-octane attack.

Summary

Groton's sweep of Tiospa Zina highlighted the Tigers' depth, defensive tenacity, and offensive efficiency. Both the girls' and boys' teams demonstrated why they're a force to be reckoned with this season.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

Boys Stats

Keegan Tracy: 19 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 6 steals, 1 foul.

Ryder Johnson: 17 points, 7 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Becker Bosma: 17 points, 5 rebounds, 4 assists, 2 steals.

Gage Sippel: 11 points, 6 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 foul, 1 block.

Turner Thompson: 8 points, 4 rebounds, 3 steals, 1 foul, 1 block.

Karson Zak: 6 points, 6 rebounds, 3 assists, 1 steal and 1 foul.

Jace Johnson: 3 points, 1 rebound, 2 fouls.

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Blake Pauli: 3 points, 1 rebound, 5 assists, 1 foul.

Jayden Schwan: 2 points, 5 rebounds, 1 foul.

Ethan Kroll: 1 point, 3 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 2 fouls, 1 block.

Ryder Schelle: 2 rebounds.

Totals: 2-pointers: 25-29 64%, 3-pointers: 10-22 45%, Free Throws: 7-11, 64%, 42 rebounds, 18 turnovers, 20 assists, 15 steals, 12 fouls, 3 blocks.

Tiospa Zina: Ashden Sierra 20, Devon Bluehorse 7, Blake Dumarce 3, Eric Jens Jr. 1. Field Goals: 10-44 23%, Free Throws: 6-8 75%, 21 turnovers, 13 fouls.

Groton Area, now 6-3 on the season, will travel to Dakota Valley on Saturday with a C game starting at 2 p.m. Tiospa Zina goes to 0-8.

Girls Stats

Taryn Traphagen: 10 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 5 steals, 2 fouls.

Jaedyn Penning: 8 points, 6 rebounds, 1 assist, 3 steals.

Kennedy Hansen: 7 points, 2 rebounds, 2 steals, 4 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 6 points, 5 rebounds, 1 assist, 3 steals, 2 fouls.

Chesney Weber: 6 points, 7 rebounds, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Faith Traphagen: 4 points, 1 rebound, 1 assist, 2 steals, 1 foul.

Laila Roberts: 4 points, 3 rebounds, 5 assists, 1 steal, 4 fouls.

Jerica Locke: 2 points, 4 assists, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

Talli Wright: 2 points, 2 rebounds.

Rylee Dunker: 1 point, 10 rebounds, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Mia Crank: 1 rebound.

McKenna Tietz: 1 rebound, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Totals: 2-pointers: 18-57 32%, 3-pointers: 1-13 8%, Free Throws: 11-23 48%, 41 rebounds, 11 turnovers, 13 assists, 21 steals, 21 fouls.

Tiospa Zina: Lattice Rodlund 6, Krius Haukaas 6, Journee Haley 4, Maya Deutsch 1, #21 4. Field Goals: 3-28 11%, Free Throws: 15-28 54%, 20 fouls, 26 turnovers.

Groton Area, now 7-2, will play Dakota Valley at 4 p.m. on Saturday at the Corn Palace in Mitchell. Tiospa Zina is now 3-6.

Groton Area wins girls JV game

Groton Area won the girls junior varsity game, 43-9, leading at the quarterstops at 12-0, 25-8 and 35-8.

Groton Area Scoring: Ashlynn Warrington 11, Chesney Weber 10, Kella Tracy 8, McKenna Tietz 6, Teagan Hanten 3, Talli Wright 2, Tevan Hanson 2, Mai Crank 1.

Tiospa Zina: Emma JEns 3, Milani Smith 2, Stevie Marks 2, Aiyonna Eder 1, Majessa Loudner 1.

There was no boys junior varsity game.

All three games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The girls junior varsity game was sponsored by Rich and Tami Zimney. The varsity games were 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 and The Meathouse in Andover. Jeslyn Kosel and Paul Kosel were on hand for the action.

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Wrestling squad beats Redfield, Webster Area

Groton Area hosted a triangular wrestling meet Thursday with the host team winning both matches. Groton Area defeated Redfield, 41-39, after Gavin Englund pinned Dalton Rathjen to give the Tigers six points to secure the win. Groton Area won nine matches to defeated Webster Area, 52-29.

Groton area 41, Redfield 39

- 106: Maddon Odland (Redfield) over Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) (Fall 4:00)
- 113: Chace Odland (Redfield) over Keegan Kucker (Groton Area) (MD 16-4)
- 120: Kyson Kucker (Groton Area) over Unknown (For.)
- 126: Noah Scepaniak (Groton Area) over Caleb Nelson (Redfield) (TF 16-1 4:52)
- 132: Kasey Hermann (Redfield) over Grayson Flores (Groton Area) (Fall 1:03)
- 138: Donavon Block (Groton Area) over Ayden Understock (Redfield) (Fall 5:38)
- 144: Conner Zens (Redfield) over Kason Oswald (Groton Area) (Fall 0:36)
- 150: Chris Schwab (Groton Area) over Unknown (For.)
- 157: Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) over Kevin Brabant (Redfield) (Fall 0:32)
- 165: Collin Dean (Redfield) over Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) (TF 19-1 4:00)
- 175: Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) over Tavian Schwartz (Redfield) (Fall 0:21)
- 190: Dylan Murray (Redfield) over Layne Johnson (Groton Area) (Fall 3:15)
- 215: Camden Murray (Redfield) over Charlie Frost (Groton Area) (Fall 1:10)
- 285: Gavin Englund (Groton Area) over Dalton Rathjen (Redfield) (Fall 3:49)

Groton Area 52, Webster Area 29

- 144: Kason Oswald (Groton Area) over Unknown (For.)
- 150: Trace Shoemaker (Webster Area) over Chris Schwab (Groton Area) (Fall 3:47)
- 157: Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) over Unknown (For.)
- 165: Gage Baumgarn (Webster Area) over Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) (TF 16-0 5:00)
- 175: Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) over Hunter Bourassa (Webster Area) (TF 17-1 4:26)
- 190: Nathan Hubsch (Webster Area) over Layne Johnson (Groton Area) (Fall 0:47)
- 215: Isaac Nelson (Webster Area) over Charlie Frost (Groton Area) (Fall 1:05)
- 285: Gavin Englund (Groton Area) over Matthew Angiolelli (Webster Area) (TF 18-1 5:42)
- 106: Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) over Unknown (For.)
- 113: Keegan Kucker (Groton Area) over Unknown (For.)
- 120: Kyson Kucker (Groton Area) over Karstyn Schlechter (Webster Area) (Fall 0:23)
- 126: Noah Scepaniak (Groton Area) over Unknown (For.)
- 132: Grayson Flores (Groton Area) over Casen Fish (Webster Area) (Fall 0:36)
- 138: Haeden Jorgenson (Webster Area) over Donavon Block (Groton Area) (Fall 0:43)

Enrich Groton SoDak year in review

Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. made significant strides in 2024, enriching the Groton SD Community with the unwavering support of volunteers and donors. Some of the key activities included:

Educational Outreach: Volunteers engaged with BIO Girls and Table Talks, raising awareness about Enrich Groton SoDak Inc., The Pantry and Common Cents. They also promoted eco-friendly practices like recycling, reducing, and reusing.

Collaboration with Feeding SD: Volunteers worked alongside Feeding SD to provide essential Senior Nutrition Boxes, supporting the most vulnerable members of the community.

Community Education: Volunteers spoke at the Dacotah Prairie Museum, educating the public about the organization's impact. Additionally, GHS FACS classes had the opportunity to shop at Common Cents, learning about resource management.

Generosity and Support: Enrich Groton SoDak participated in various local events, including donating to the FEZtival of Trees and the Fruit Fusion holiday giveaway. They also decorated a Giving Tree at Wage Memorial Library, collecting items to be gifted to families.

Holiday Support: Volunteers packed and organized food deliveries for Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, ensuring that families received festive meals.

Empowering Youth: One scholarship was awarded to a GHS senior, and Kindness Kash was gifted to encourage goodwill throughout the community.

Advocacy and Fundraising: Enrich Groton SoDak played an active role in the mayor's proclamation for Hunger Action Day and Hunger Action Month. They also organized fundraising efforts, selling raffle tickets and reusable bags to support their mission.

Practical Assistance: The nonprofit organization hosted drives for school supplies and winter gear, as well as distribution days to ensure individuals had what they needed. Enrich also provided support for SNAP Application Assistance, helping families navigate the process.

As we look ahead to 2025, the board members of Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. are excited for the continued opportunity to enrich the Groton SD Community. Building on the successes of 2024, we are eager to expand our efforts, strengthen existing partnerships, and create new initiatives that will have an even greater impact. With the unwavering support of volunteers, donors, and community members, we will continue making a meaningful difference!

Death Notice: Sandra Oliver

Sandra Oliver, 83, of Sioux Falls and formerly of Groton passed away January 14, 2025 at Dougherty Hospice House in Sioux Falls. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State receives notice of potential lawsuit over McCook Lake flood response

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 16, 2025 3:23 PM

PIERRE — The state of South Dakota has received notice that it could be sued by McCook Lake property owners, who say their community suffered catastrophic damage as a direct result of flood diversion efforts carried out by state and local officials.

In June, record rainfall fueled a record flood that destroyed or damaged dozens of homes in McCook Lake. It also carved deep scars in the land, uprooted trees and disrupted utilities.

Some residents said they were blindsided by the results of a temporary levee that the state helped local authorities construct across Interstate 29 to divert Big Sioux River water toward the lake. The temporary levee connected with permanent levees as part of a system designed to send overflow water into the lake, where it could drain toward the Missouri River. The plan had been executed before, but never with so much water coming down the Big Sioux.

Some state and local authorities have defended the action as necessary to prevent a bigger catastrophe in nearby and more-populated North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes.

Hunter Roberts, secretary of the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, mentioned the potential litigation Thursday while appearing before a legislative committee at the Capitol.

State Sen. Kevin Jensen, R-Canton, asked Roberts about allegations that the state decided to sacrifice the McCook Lake area to save North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes.

"The state is going to get sued over this," Roberts said. "So, I don't think it's in our best interest to go into the weeds on this."

Roberts said modeling indicated that the levee added 8 inches of water to McCook Lake, but was not responsible for all of the "8-plus feet of water that went through there." He added that local officials made the decision to build the temporary levee.

"North Sioux is the one that made that final determination," Roberts said. "We executed."

Some residents said they were not properly warned of the severity of the flooding, and didn't realize floodwaters were being diverted toward them or what the impact would be.

On the afternoon of the June 23 nighttime flood, local, state and federal authorities held a press conference in North Sioux City. None of the authorities in attendance clearly explained that the temporary levee was intended to direct Big Sioux River floodwaters toward McCook Lake.

When somebody in the audience asked what McCook Lake residents should do, Gov. Kristi Noem said they should protect their personal property, "because we do anticipate that they will take in water."

"That's what we're preparing for," Noem said during the press conference. "If we don't, then that's wonderful that they don't have an impact, but they could see water flowing into McCook Lake."

Noem flew out to a political fundraiser in Tennessee that evening. While she was there, water suddenly swamped homes around McCook Lake, causing residents to frantically flee and triggering rescue efforts by emergency responders.

Noem declined to call out the National Guard for the flood preparation or response, saying it would be "extremely expensive" and that the Guard should only be used for "a very crisis situation."

McCook Lake resident Morgan Speichinger, whose house was inundated, said the flood was devastating. "So, the community down here got together and are filing a lawsuit," she said Thursday.

South Dakota Searchlight obtained a copy of the formal notice of claim sent to the state. The notice is

a procedural step that provides the defendant in a potential lawsuit the opportunity to investigate and respond to the claim prior to litigation.

The notice attributes the execution of the flood diversion plan to the state departments of Transportation, Public Safety and Emergency Management, as well as Union County and its Department of Emergency Management, and North Sioux City.

Noem defended the handling of the flood Tuesday during her State of the State address.

"We know that planning can only go so far in preparing for a 1,000-year flood," she said.

She also announced a group of state and local officials who responded to the flood as recipients of her Governor's Award for Heroism.

On Friday, Noem will appear in Washington, D.C., for a hearing on her nomination to lead the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The department includes the Federal Emergency Management Agency, known by the acronym FEMA.

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

South Dakota roads, bridges will worsen in next decade, transportation leader says

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 16, 2025 1:33 PM

The condition of South Dakota's state-managed highways and bridges is expected to worsen over the next decade, state Department of Transportation Secretary Joel Jundt told lawmakers Thursday in the House Transportation Committee.

By 2034, nearly 30% of state-maintained roads are expected to be in fair or poor condition, which would exceed the department's target of 20%. The state maintains about 8,800 miles of the 80,000 miles of roads in South Dakota. Bridge conditions are also expected to worsen, but are not expected to fall below the state's goal of 95% of bridges in good or fair condition.

Jundt said the department relies heavily on federal funding. The most recent round of surface transportation funding from the federal government came through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, which expires in the fall of 2026. Reauthorization discussions are expected to begin this year.

If the federal government doesn't provide enough funding, Jundt said, "then we're going to be back to you, proposing some recommendations."

Jundt said the state has big funding needs for several Missouri River bridge projects, including replacement of the Pierre-Fort Pierre bridge, which is underway at a cost of about \$50 million. The Platte-Winner bridge, which is next on the state's list, will cost about \$250 million. The Forest City Bridgenear Gettysburg will cost more than \$400 million.

The state has sought funding from the federal government for the Platte-Winner project, but has not been successful.

"It's to the point where we've got to replace it," Jundt said. "What is that effect going to have on the rest of our system — highways, bridges, everything?"

State legislators began their annual lawmaking session Tuesday in Pierre. It continues through March 13.

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.

Prevention groups fear consequences from Noem's proposal to reduce funding for anti-tobacco efforts

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 16, 2025 8:49 AM

An anti-smoking group is warning of "devastating effects" if South Dakota lawmakers approve Gov. Kristi Noem's proposal to reduce funding for a tobacco use prevention fund by more than half.

A bill backed by Noem's administration would drop the Tobacco Prevention and Reduction Trust Fund's annual allocation from \$5 million to \$2 million. Legislators will consider the bill during the annual legislative session that began Tuesday in Pierre.

The fund sustains the South Dakota Tobacco Control Program, aimed at preventing South Dakotans from using tobacco products and helping residents quit through the South Dakota QuitLine.

Much of the funding goes toward contractual services for QuitLine. The state currently holds a one-year, \$824,000 contract with Avera Health to provide telephone and other tobacco counseling services for Quitline and a one-year, \$1 million contract with Pierre-based Vilas LTC Pharmacy to provide medication for QuitLine participants. The state allocated nearly \$400,000 toward grants and subsidies last fiscal year for other prevention and counseling initiatives, according to the Bureau of Finance and Management.

Ben Hanson, North and South Dakota government relations director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, said the cut "robs" money that was "promised" and overwhelmingly supported by South Dakota voters in 2006, when they passed an initiated measure to increase the tax on tobacco products and create the fund.

"We think it'd have long-term pretty devastating effects on respiratory health and eventually youth smoking rates," Hanson said.

The trust fund receives revenue from the tobacco tax on cigarette, cigar and chewing tobacco sales. State law currently requires that the first \$30 million from the tax goes to the state's general fund, the next \$5 million goes to the trust fund, and any further revenue goes to the general fund. Noem's bill would keep that formula but change the \$5 million trust fund allocation to \$2 million.

Noem's proposal comes as the state faces a tight budget year due to lower-than-anticipated sales tax revenues. Tobacco tax revenues are also falling. Noem's administration projects the state will collect about \$42 million in tobacco taxes this fiscal year, its lowest amount since 2006.

The QuitLine and other funded prevention efforts extend to non-tobacco nicotine products that have grown in popularity, including e-cigarettes, vape pens and nicotine pouches. But the tax doesn't include those products. The state Department of Revenue cannot track non-tobacco nicotine product sales, a spokesperson told South Dakota Searchlight in an email.

Between 2022 and 2023, the percentage of U.S. high school students reporting tobacco and nicotine product use — including e-cigarettes — declined from 16.5% to 12.6%, but the percentage among middle school students increased from 4.5% to 6.6%, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In South Dakota, 14.7% of high schoolers reported using e-cigarettes last fiscal year, according to the Bureau of Finance and Management, which was three times higher than the percentage that reported smoking and seven times higher than the percentage that reported spit tobacco use.

The Carroll Institute in Sioux Falls received about \$17,000 in funding last fiscal year from the Tobacco Prevention and Reduction Trust Fund to purchase prevention curriculum for elementary school students. About 85% of the Carroll Institute's funding comes from state government, including grants from other sources than the trust fund, said Carroll Institute Executive Director Tiffany Butler.

A decade ago, the institute focused on alcohol. Now, it focuses on vaping education, said Kristi VanDeRostyne, prevention services program manager. She said some students vape in the school bathroom or even the classroom during the day, using devices that look like pens, water bottles or USB flash drives.

"I know our state and nation are all worried about fentanyl and meth. It's everywhere," VanDeRostyne said. "Where do you prevent that from happening? By building those prevention skills at a young age while you still have that captive audience."

Instead of reducing contributions to the trust fund, Butler said she'd prefer to see the fund's grants expanded to cover more costs, including reimbursing staff time.

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.

Immigration advocates prep for Trump mass deportations, vow legal challenges

South Dakota's Noem set to be in middle of fight as nominee to lead Homeland Security

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 16, 2025 5:26 PM

WASHINGTON — As President-Elect Donald Trump is set to be sworn in for a second term next week, immigration advocates said Thursday they are prepared to combat the incoming president's campaign promise of enacting mass deportations of undocumented people.

Additionally, those immigration advocacy groups are ready for an onslaught of executive orders and a return of harsh Trump-era immigration policies.

"The terrain that we are facing is dangerous and terrifying," said Greisa Martínez Rosas, the executive director of United We Dream Action, the political arm of the youth advocacy group.

That terrain she's expecting includes the return of the so-called Remain in Mexico policy that required asylum seekers to often remain in dangerous parts of Mexico while their cases were pending, and another health-related policy like Title 42, which allowed the U.S. to expel and bar migrants from claiming asylum due to the 2020 pandemic.

Additionally, she said, she expects the legal fate to be decided for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. Trump tried to end it during his first term, but said recently that he's open to working with Democrats to create a legal pathway for DACA recipients.

"One, we will remain calm," Martínez Rosas said. "Two, we will ensure that our communities have the support necessary that they need to be able to navigate such terrible and terrifying moments. Three ... where litigation is possible and where our rights are usurped, we will litigate. We are ready for the next four years."

Immigrant defense coalition

Advocates are prepared to fight back, said Gustavo Torres, the executive director of the grassroots immigrant advocacy group known as CASA.

That includes organizing "Know Your Rights" events to inform immigrant communities of their legal rights when confronted with potential enforcement actions from Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the creation of an immigrant defense coalition.

Torres said CASA has held those legal workshops in places where the organization has offices based in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

"We have constructed an immigrant defense coalition of faith communities, businesses, community organizations, donors, elected officials, educators, attorneys and other people, all whom stand ready to act alongside us," Torres said. "We will not stand by while families are separated and lives are disrupted."

Deportations team formed

Trump has already tapped his team to craft and carry out those mass deportations plans with border czar Tom Homan and White House deputy chief of staff for policy Stephen Miller.

Homan was the architect behind one of the harshest Trump-era immigration policies, known as "Zero Tolerance," that led to the separation of thousands of parents from their children in an effort to deter people from crossing the southern border.

"They are poised to use the immense power of the federal government to force their radical nationalist ideology onto the American people, irrespective of the cost," said Zachary Mueller, a senior research

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director for America's Voice, an immigrant advocacy group.

Mueller said he's curious how independent South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, Trump's nominee for secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, will be from Miller and Homan. Noem's confirmation hearing in the U.S. Senate is set for Friday.

"We have seen in the first Trump administration, in particular ... the DHS secretary's role in facilitating family separation, and what we've already heard from Tom Homan and many others, is a willingness not to just reinstate some of the horrific effects of family separation, but to go much further," he said.

Angelica Salas, the executive director of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, or CHIRLA, said that since November, her organization has held "Know Your Rights" presentations in schools, community centers, apartment groups and places of worship. Additionally, CHIRLA has a hotline for legal services.

"On the other side of the spectrum, dozens of immigration attorneys have been working and taking cases of families and individuals most likely to feel the brunt of Trump's enforcement apparatus, and collaborating and coordinating with city, county and state officials," Salas said.

She said they are also continuing to push for Democrats in Congress to not allow for additional funding for DHS to carry out mass detention and deportations.

"What is certain today is that we're more organized, we're more prepared, we're more resilient and united and ready to face the incoming president and his administration," Salas said.

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

Interior nominee Burgum, of ND, promises to pursue 'energy dominance'

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JANUARY 16, 2025 3:11 PM

WASHINGTON — Former North Dakota Republican Gov. Doug Burgum on Thursday got a step closer to securing his spot as secretary of the Department of the Interior following a rather breezy confirmation hearing before a U.S. Senate panel.

Burgum made it clear he's on board with President-elect Donald Trump's pledges to spur domestic energy and gas production. Speaking to members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Burgum said the "American people have clearly placed their confidence in President Trump to achieve energy dominance."

"And by energy dominance, that's the foundation of American prosperity, affordability for American families and unrivaled national security," he said.

Trump tapped the wealthy businessman to lead Interior, whose wide portfolio includes the protection and management of public lands and fulfilling federal trust responsibilities to tribal nations.

Climate policy and the energy transition have come to the forefront of the department, which has a roughly \$18 billion budget.

If confirmed by the GOP-controlled Senate, which appears likely, Burgum would succeed Deb Haaland, who made history as the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary.

Burgum, elected to two terms as North Dakota's governor, dropped his bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 2023 before backing Trump.

'Drill, baby, drill'

Trump will take a "drill, baby, drill" approach to oil and gas production throughout his second term.

The incoming president also vowed to reverse President Joe Biden's decision earlier in January to prohibit future oil and gas drilling off the entire East and West coasts, the eastern Gulf of Mexico and the remaining portions of Alaska's Northern Bering Sea.

When Trump chose Burgum as Interior secretary nominee in November, he announced that the North Dakota Republican would also lead the new National Energy Council. Trump said the council will "consist

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of all Departments and Agencies involved in the permitting, production, generation, distribution, regulation, transportation, of ALL forms of American Energy.”

Burgum touted his record to the panel in leading North Dakota, noting that his “time as governor has been a valuable preparation for the opportunity and the privilege to potentially serve (in) the role as secretary of Interior, as our state and my duty, specifically as governor there, put me in contact with many of the bureaus inside the department.”

If confirmed, he would be tasked with the department’s Bureau of Indian Affairs.

“State and tribal relationships in North Dakota have sometimes been challenged, but the current partnership is historically strong because we prioritize tribal engagement through mutual respect, open communication, collaboration and a sincere willingness to listen,” he said, noting that the state shares geography with five sovereign tribal nations.

‘America’s balance sheet’

Senators from both sides of the aisle focused questions on how his efforts would affect their respective states when it comes to: housing shortages across the West where there are federal lands; staying true to conservation history; working with the administration to increase natural gas production and new export terminals; and federal disaster aid, especially in light of the devastating California wildfires.

At one point during the hearing, Burgum noted that “not every acre of federal land is a national park or a wilderness area.”

“Some of those areas we have to absolutely protect for their precious stuff, but the rest of it, this is America’s balance sheet,” he said.

“This agency, the Department of the Interior, has got close to 500 million acres of surface, 700 million acres of subsurface and over 2 billion acres of offshore — 2 billion — that’s the balance sheet of America, and if we were a company, they would look at us and say, ‘Wow, you are really restricting your balance sheet.’”

Questioned about the existence of climate change, Burgum said he believes that “climate change is a global phenomenon for sure.”

North Dakota GOP Sens. John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer praised Burgum’s record and qualifications for the post.

Cramer said “one of the things that oftentimes maybe doesn’t get talked about with (former) Gov. Burgum is: He’s not just an oil man from an oil and gas-producing state, he is — first and foremost — a conservationist.”

West Virginia GOP Sen. Jim Justice also lauded Burgum, saying: “If anybody is the pick of the litter, it’s got to be this man.”

Concern among environmental advocates

Burgum has faced scrutiny for his ties to fossil fuel companies, and environmental advocacy groups have voiced concerns over his nomination.

Jennifer Rokala, executive director of the Center for Western Priorities, said Burgum “appears eager to use America’s public lands to exacerbate the climate crisis while invoking made-up concepts like ‘clean coal’ to justify his real aim — enriching oil and mining billionaires while raising energy prices for American consumers and businesses,” per a Thursday statement.

He is also reported to have a close relationship with billionaire Harold Hamm, the founder and executive chairman of Continental Resources — a major oil and gas company.

According to reporting by the North Dakota Monitor and ProPublica, Burgum voted roughly 20 times on the North Dakota Industrial Commission regarding oil and gas companies that involve him.

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

U.S. Senate GOP blocks lifeline for TikTok, though CEO will sit with Trump at inaugural

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 16, 2025 2:53 PM

WASHINGTON — Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer slammed Republicans Thursday for blocking a last-ditch effort to extend TikTok's lifespan in the U.S. — even as the video platform's CEO is expected to be among the tech moguls at President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration.

Unless the U.S. Supreme Court intervenes, Sunday marks the deadline set by bipartisan lawmakers and President Joe Biden for the social media app's parent company, ByteDance, to sell it or have TikTok banned from U.S. app stores.

Schumer said on the Senate floor that "more time is needed to find an American buyer and not disrupt the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans, of so many influencers who have built up a good network of followers."

TikTok estimates 170 million Americans use the platform.

"That's why, last night, Senate Democrats tried to pass a bill that would extend the deadline to give everyone more time to come up with a workable solution. But Senate Republicans blocked our bill, which is stunning because time is running short," Schumer continued.

Late Wednesday, GOP Sens. Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Pete Ricketts of Nebraska objected to the deadline extension bill brought forward by Democratic Sens. Ed Markey of Massachusetts, Ron Wyden of Oregon and Cory Booker of New Jersey.

Cotton said ByteDance and TikTok "had plenty of additional warning for years about the possibility of such action, long before Congress set this firm Sunday deadline. The Trump administration, in 2020, attempted to shut down TikTok."

"We didn't pull the rug out from under TikTok, and we didn't ban it. Instead, Congress simply demanded that the app could no longer be owned and controlled by our nation's worst enemy, communist China," Cotton said.

Citing warnings from intelligence officials that the app poses national security risks, lawmakers crossed the aisle last April to pass the legislation and Biden signed it into law. An initial vote in the U.S. House in March garnered overwhelming bipartisan support at 352-65.

However, according to NBC News, Biden does not plan to enforce the law during his last day in office, leaving it to the incoming Trump administration to levy fines against app stores or internet hosting companies that make the platform available in the U.S. beyond the law's deadline.

However, according to NBC News, Biden is seeking ways to keep the platform available beyond Sunday's deadline. The White House did not immediately respond to States Newsroom's request for confirmation.

Trump, who signed an executive order in 2020 banning TikTok unless it broke from ByteDance, reversed his position last year.

A source familiar with Trump's inauguration plans confirmed to States Newsroom Thursday that TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew will be seated on the dais as Trump takes the oath of office Monday.

TikTok sued to block the law, eventually appealing to the Supreme Court.

Justices heard arguments Friday but have yet to issue their decision on whether to block the law requiring ByteDance to sell TikTok.

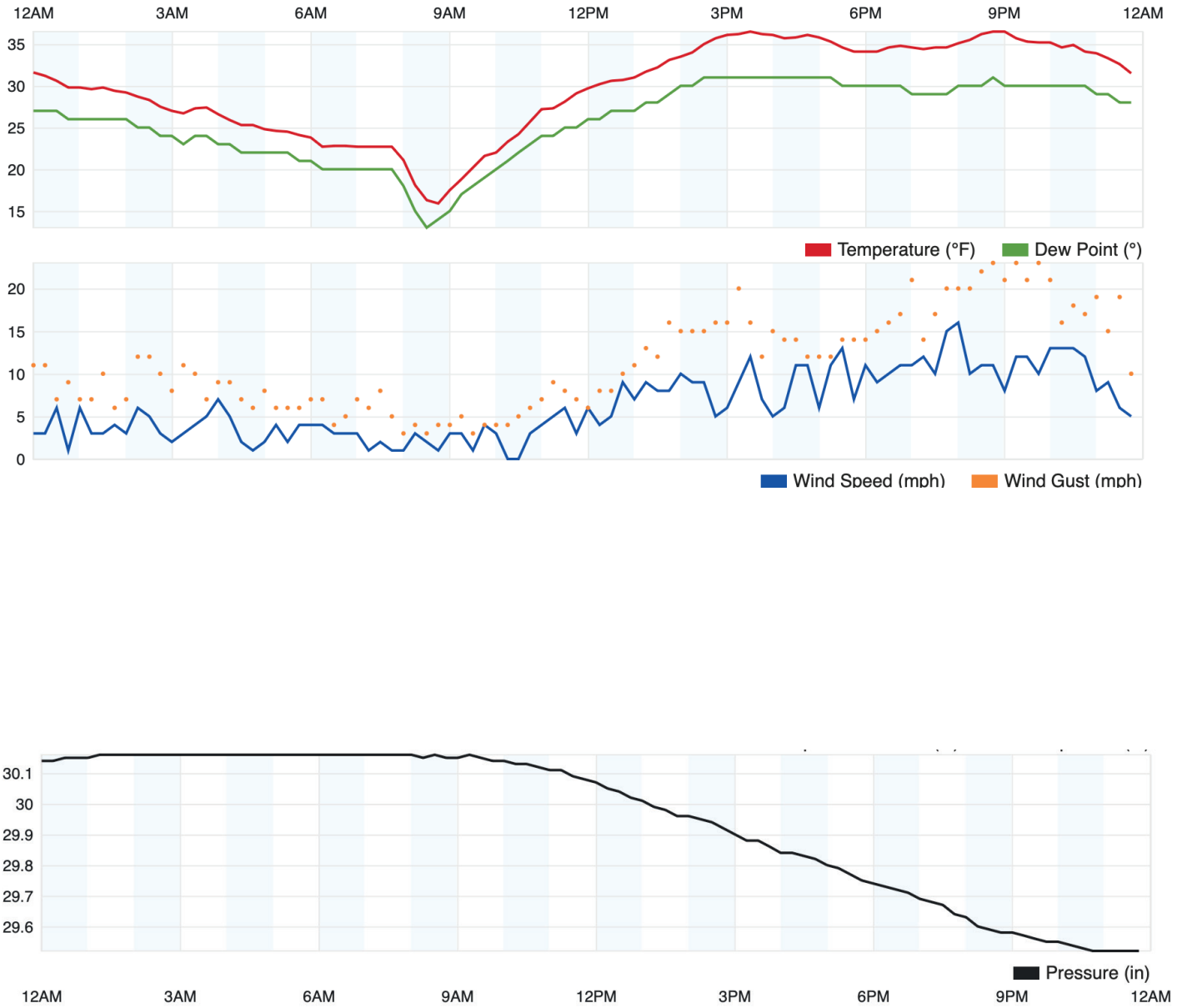
The company maintains it is not owned by China. TikTok's lawyer Noel Francisco said in a press conference following Supreme Court arguments that ByteDance is incorporated in the Cayman Islands, though 21% is owned by a Chinese national who lives in Singapore. Francisco also said TikTok's source code for the algorithm is stored on servers in Virginia.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today

High: 35 °F

Breezy.
Partly Sunny
then Slight
Chance Snow


Tonight



Low: 0 °F

Mostly Cloudy
and Blustery
then Partly
Cloudy


Saturday



High: 8 °F

Partly Sunny
then Partly
Sunny and
Blustery


Saturday Night



Low: -13 °F

Partly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 2 °F

Cold



Upcoming Highs/Lows

January 16, 2025
3:17 PM

	Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)						Minimum Temperature Forecast (°F)							
	1/17 Fri	1/18 Sat	1/19 Sun	1/20 Mon	1/21 Tue	1/22 Wed	1/17 Fri	1/18 Sat	1/19 Sun	1/20 Mon	1/21 Tue	1/22 Wed	1/23 Thu	
Aberdeen	36	9	1	-3	13	28	Aberdeen	9	-5	-10	-17	-14	7	15
Britton	34	4	-4	-8	4	23	Britton	6	-9	-14	-19	-18	5	12
Chamberlain	37	15	5	0	15	31	Chamberlain	17	4	-6	-12	-8	13	18
Clark	33	6	-2	-8	5	21	Clark	9	-7	-12	-18	-16	5	10
Eagle Butte	37	10	1	-4	12	28	Eagle Butte	10	-4	-10	-15	-14	13	18
Eureka	33	6	-1	-5	13	26	Eureka	6	-8	-13	-18	-15	8	10
Gettysburg	32	9	0	-5	10	26	Gettysburg	9	-5	-11	-16	-15	10	15
McIntosh	36	8	1	-3	17	28	McIntosh	7	-7	-12	-16	-13	10	13
Milbank	37	6	-3	-6	10	25	Milbank	10	-7	-10	-15	-14	5	10
Miller	36	11	2	-3	11	28	Miller	12	-2	-8	-13	-13	10	17
Mobridge	34	11	4	0	18	31	Mobridge	12	-3	-8	-14	-11	13	18
Murdo	35	14	3	-1	18	30	Murdo	15	3	-7	-14	-10	15	15
Pierre	37	15	5	0	18	31	Pierre	17	2	-6	-11	-11	14	15
Redfield	37	11	3	-2	14	29	Redfield	11	-4	-9	-14	-12	4	16
Sisseton	36	5	-4	-8	6	24	Sisseton	9	-7	-11	-16	-14	7	11
Watertown	35	6	-3	-7	5	24	Watertown	9	-7	-13	-18	-16	4	10
Webster	32	3	-5	-9	3	22	Webster	7	-9	-13	-18	-17	4	13
Wheaton	35	7	-6	-8	2	22	Wheaton	8	-8	-12	-17	-16	3	8

Forecast high and low temps for the next several days.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 37 °F at 8:52 PM

Low Temp: 15 °F at 8:40 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 8:20 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 15 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 48 in 1947

Record Low: -32 in 1997

Average High: 23

Average Low: 1

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.33

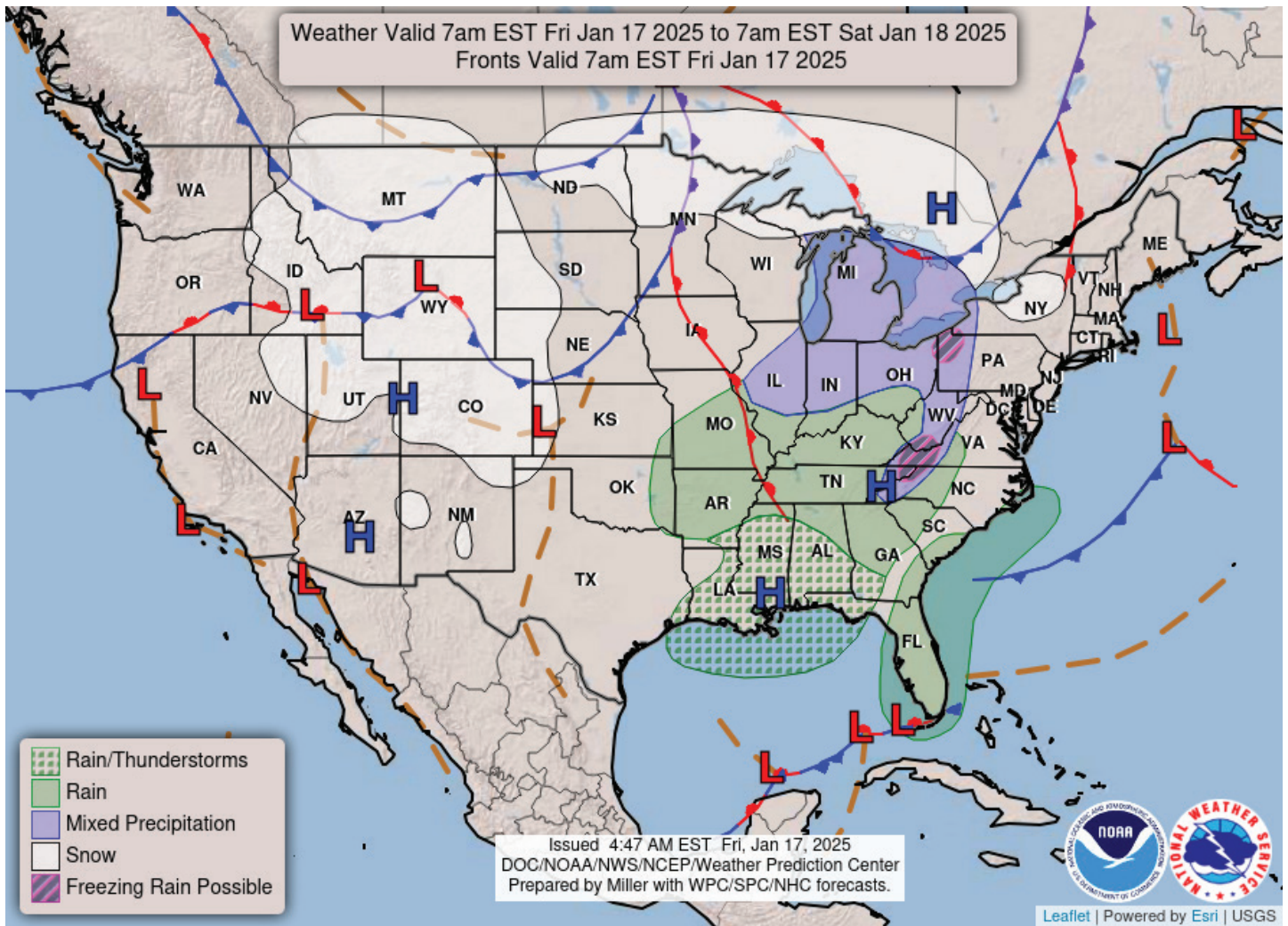
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.33

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:20:12 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04:23 am



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Today in Weather History

January 17, 1996: Two to as much as fifteen inches of snow, high winds from 40 to 60 mph, and cold arctic air resulted in blizzard conditions and extreme wind chills from 40 below to 70 below from the mid-morning of the 17th to the early evening of the 18th. Most schools, federal, state, and county offices were closed. Various activities are also canceled. Travel was challenging due to the near-zero visibility, with some vehicles stranded. Highway 12 from Webster to the Minnesota border and Interstate-29 closed on the 18th. Hundreds of people were stranded, with some people stranded in their vehicles. Some pheasants and wildlife were lost due to the snow-packed so hard they could not dig out. Some snowfall amounts include; 2 inches at Highmore, 3 inches at Pierre and 9NE Reliance, 5 inches at Mobridge, Presho, Roscoe, 10SE Stephan, and Ree Heights, 6 inches at Tulare, 7 inches 12W Tulare and 5E 3S Faulkton, 8 inches 11E 2S Hosmer and at Doland, 9 inches at Mellette, Aberdeen, and Redfield, and 10 inches at Eureka and Britton, and 12 inches at Wilmot, Rosholt, and Ortonville, Minnesota. Fifteen inches occurred at Wheaton, Clinton, and Graceville. The extreme wind chills and some blowing snow continued across central and north-central South Dakota into the early evening of the 18th.

January 17, 2012: Below are some very rare lake effect waterspouts. Chris Westcott took these pictures in the vicinity of Lower Brule. The waterspouts form from the instability created when the air associated with the Missouri River's relatively warm open waters interacts with the frigid air located just above the surface. These types of waterspouts have a very short lifespan and dissipate just as quickly as they form. Chris saw six of them at one time.

1490: On the night of January 17 through the 18th, a "certain fine rain, which froze whilst it fell, and make icicles upon trees" occurred in Florence, Italy. "There was such a quantity of it that the weight bowed the trees down to the ground and broke the branches." The above is from "A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516" by Landucci, Luca.

1706: Scientist, inventor, and founding father Benjamin Franklin was born on this day. He is credited with discovering electricity, inventing lightning rods, and mapping the Gulf Stream. After the Icelandic volcanic eruption of Laki in 1783 and the subsequent harsh winter of Europe in 1784, Franklin connected the causal nature of these two events.

The journal article, Benjamin Franklin as Meteorologist, was written by Cleveland Abbe in 1906.

1837: The green flash was first documented by Captain Back of the H. M. S. Terror while in the Arctic during 1836-1837. He wrote: "In the morning, however, at a quarter before ten o'clock while standing on an ice hummock about 17 feet high, and looking toward the east, I had observed the upper limb of the sun, as it filled a triangular cleft on the ridge of the headland, of the most brilliant emerald color, a phenomenon which I had not witnessed before in these regions."

1893: Delaware's coldest temperature of -17 F occurred on January 17th, 1893, in Millsboro.

1916: Reno, Nevada, received 22.5 inches of snow, its greatest 1-day snowfall total ever. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the Reno Gazette-Journal.

1982: Strong chinook winds caused severe wind damage in Boulder, Colorado. A wind gust of 118 mph was recorded on the roof of the Environmental Research Laboratories (ERL), and a wind gust of 137 mph was measured atop the roof of the NCAR building (in the southwest part of the city, 600 feet above ground level). The high winds uprooted trees and damaged roofs.

1999: An F4 tornado tracked across southern Jacksonville, Tennessee, damaging more than 200 homes and 55 buses. The storm killed six people and injured 106.

2016: A potent storm system developed and tracked quickly eastward across the Gulf of Mexico and toward Florida on Saturday, January 16, 2016. The impacts from this storm reached west-central and southwest Florida during the early morning hours of Sunday, January 17, 2016. A squall line of strong to severe thunderstorms, just ahead of the cold front, produced periodic wind damage and isolated tornadoes as it quickly moved ashore across west-central and southwest Florida and pushed across the state. Two EF2 tornadoes touched down, one near Siesta Key in Sarasota County and the other near Duette in Manatee County. Two adults were killed and four others injured when their mobile home rolled over and was destroyed by the tornado in Manatee County. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the NWS Office in Tampa Bay, Florida.



LIFE WITHOUT PAIN

Little Beverly of Akron, Ohio was born with a very rare disease that has no cure and no symptoms. No matter what happens to her, she feels no pain. If she places her hand on something hot and is burned, she cannot feel the anguish. If she cuts herself or falls down or even breaks a bone, she has no sensation. No matter what physical discomfort comes into her life, she will not feel the pain or cry.

It is a very rare disease and makes it necessary for someone to watch her constantly. Because she feels no pain, life is very difficult for her and those who must provide care for her.

This rare sickness, however, reveals the value of pain. James, the brother of Jesus wrote, "Dear Brothers and Sisters, when troubles come your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested your endurance has an opportunity to grow."

James does not say if trouble comes your way, but when trouble comes your way. He, from his own experience and the experiences of his brother, knew and endured pain and was an expert witness about the true value of pain. And James assures us that it is possible for each of us, if we chose, to profit from the pain and problems, trials and temptations if we endure.

When God brings obstacles into our lives, He is in fact, providing us with an opportunity to grow!

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to accept every good and perfect gift that You bring into our lives as an opportunity to grow into Your likeness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today : Dear Brothers and Sisters, when troubles come your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested your endurance has an opportunity to grow. James 1:2-4

Tags: James 1:2-4

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: 01.14.25

4 14 35 49 62 6

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$113,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 6 Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.15.25

2 11 28 40 47 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$22,020,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 21 Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.16.25

13 20 29 32 37 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 36 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.15.25

13 18 20 27 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 36 Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.15.25

11 15 25 51 54 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 5 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.15.25

8 41 52 53 58 7

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$331,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 5 Mins 10 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

Arlington 65, Elkton-Lake Benton 30
Burke 54, Colome 12
Centerville 53, Irene-Wakonda 33
Chester 54, Baltic 36
Corsica/Stickney 43, Winner 38
Deubrook 45, Estelline-Hendricks 35
Elk Point-Jefferson 52, Ponca, Neb. 36
Freeman 75, Bon Homme 54
Gayville-Volin High School 55, Viborg-Hurley 48
Great Plains Lutheran 42, Castlewood 25
Groton 50, Tiospa Zina 21
Hamlin 68, Webster 28
Hanson 48, Parker 39
Harding County 68, Sundance High School, Wyo. 36
Highmore-Harrod 50, Sunshine Bible Academy 20
Hill City 60, Lead-Deadwood 20
Howard 59, Canistota 46
Kimball-White Lake 53, Gregory 46, OT
McIntosh High School 45, Bison 30
Milbank 57, Redfield 15
Miller 50, Sully Buttes 28
Mobridge-Pollock 89, Crow Creek Tribal School 41
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 49, Platte-Geddes 18
Northwestern 54, Ipswich 35
Potter County 56, Aberdeen Christian 19
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 66, James Valley Christian School 10
Sioux Falls Jefferson 51, Tea 50
Sioux Valley 58, McCook Central-Montrose 45
Vermillion 59, Lennox 47
Wagner 57, Parkston 55, OT
Waverly-South Shore 53, Wilmot 43
Wessington Springs 48, Wolsey-Wessington 38

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 56, Potter County 39
Aberdeen Roncalli 70, Sisseton 37
Alcester-Hudson 66, Akron-Westfield, Iowa 58
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___ Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Forte's 18 lead South Dakota past Oral Roberts 92-82

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Chase Forte had 18 points in South Dakota's 92-82 win against Oral Roberts on Thursday night.

Forte had six assists and three steals for the Coyotes (11-8, 2-2 Summit League). Paul Bruns added 15 points while going 5 of 9 (4 for 6 from 3-point range) while they also had five rebounds. Isaac Bruns shot 5 of 11 from the field and 5 of 5 from the free-throw line to finish with 15 points.

The Golden Eagles (5-12, 1-3) were led in scoring by Issac McBride, who finished with 22 points and three steals. JoJo Moore added 14 points, 12 rebounds and four assists. Darius Robinson Jr. had 13 points.

Both teams next play Saturday. South Dakota hosts North Dakota State and Oral Roberts plays South Dakota State on the road.

Sayler's 25 lead South Dakota State past North Dakota 109-73

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Joe Sayler had 25 points in South Dakota State's 109-73 win over North Dakota on Thursday night.

Sayler shot 10 for 13, including 4 for 7 from beyond the arc for the Jackrabbits (11-8, 2-2 Summit League). Isaac Lindsey scored 13 points and added three steals. Oscar Cluff and Kaley Garry both scored 12 points.

The Fightin' Hawks (7-13, 1-4) were led in scoring by Amar Kuljuhovic, who finished with 14 points. Treysen Eaglestaff added 12 points and four assists for North Dakota. Mier Panoam had 10 points and six rebounds.

NEXT UP

Both teams next play Saturday. South Dakota State hosts Oral Roberts and North Dakota plays UMKC at home.

Kristi Noem, Trump's homeland security pick, faces scrutiny on immigration plans

By REBECCA SANTANA and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, Donald Trump's pick to lead the agency central to his vision of cracking down on illegal immigration, will face senators Friday at confirmation hearing that will be her first chance to lay out her vision for the sprawling Department of Homeland Security.

Noem, a two-term governor and former U.S. congresswoman, was chosen by the president-elect to lead the department responsible for key immigration and border-related actions that will be central to his plans for mass deportations and tightened access at the border.

The immigration and border-related agencies Noem would oversee include U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Citizenship and Immigration Services. Beyond those agencies, the department is also responsible for securing airline transportation, protecting high-profile dignitaries, responding to natural disasters and more.

She would replace outgoing DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who was so vilified by Republicans angry at the number of migrants crossing the country's southern border that they impeached him in early 2024.

Noem would be entering a job that was a pressure cooker under the first Trump administration. Six people cycled through the homeland security secretary position during his four years in office.

So far, she appears to have strong backing from GOP senators who will be crucial to her confirmation.

Sen. Rand Paul, the Republican chair of the Senate Homeland Security Committee where Noem will testify, said he expected a straightforward hearing.

"I'm not aware of any real specific complaints from the Democrats on Kristi Noem," Paul said. "I think there's a reasonable chance that she gets some Democrat support."

Still, Democrats are ready to question whether she is qualified to lead a department that is crucial to the country's safety.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat on the committee, said he had "serious doubts" about her ability to manage "this huge organization of such serious consequence to national security."

Noem in recent years became a regular presence in Trump's orbit and at one point was even considered to be his running mate.

After becoming governor, Noem started working closely with Corey Lewandowski, Trump's 2016 campaign manager. Then, during the pandemic, she rose to prominence in conservative circles for resisting most government regulations to slow the spread of infections.

The South Dakota governor has echoed Trump's tough immigration talk.

"Now, the situation at our southern border is nothing short of an invasion. And over the last four years, America's border security has been purposely weakened and ignored. Our laws have not been enforced," Noem said during her State of the State address Tuesday.

Noem joined other Republican governors who sent troops to Texas to assist Operation Lone Star, which sought to discourage migrants. The decision was met with particularly harsh criticism because Noem covered most of the deployment cost with a \$1 million donation from a Tennessee billionaire who has often donated to Republicans.

Bill to protect South Dakota farms from spying could limit access to data

By BART PFANKUCH/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch

Proposed legislation aimed at protecting South Dakota farmers from potential "agro-terrorism" activities could have a secondary effect of limiting access to some information about the state's largest animal feeding operations.

Senate Bill 14 seeks to strengthen a set of existing laws that make it a crime for anyone to steal farm animals, release animals, trespass on farms or interfere with farm operations.

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As written, the bill also would add criminal penalties for using deception to enter or gain employment at an agricultural operation or to use cameras or other surveillance methods to spy on a farm or agricultural research facility. The bill also would make it a crime to interfere with or destroy crops or structures at farms and agricultural research facilities.

"Essentially, it's a property protection, property rights bill for farmers and ranchers," the bill's lead sponsor, Sen. Casey Crabtree (R-Madison), told News Watch.

The measure, Crabtree said, is similar to laws passed over roughly the past 15 years in Iowa that sought to prevent animal-rights activists or anyone else from entering or recording activities at farms in order to find evidence of possible animal mistreatment or abuse.

Dubbed "ag-gag" laws by opponents, the laws were challenged in court on First Amendment grounds. Despite some lower court rulings, the Iowa laws most similar to Crabtree's proposal were upheld as constitutional by a federal appeals court in 2024.

Crabtree said he hasn't heard of widespread efforts to infiltrate or interfere with South Dakota farm operations, but a mink farm in Arlington has experienced problems in the past.

Operators of that farm did not return a call seeking comment.

The intent of the bill is to stop "bad actors" from using deception or technology to possibly paint an unfair picture of what is happening on South Dakota farms, Crabtree said.

"We've got reports back about environmentalist groups that are attacking production facilities, or that they might be using drones and cameras, is really where this comes from," he said.

Ag groups push for Senate Bill 14

The drafting of SB 14 was aided by a number of farm groups that gathered last summer to identify ways to help agricultural producers in the 2025 legislative session, said Matthew Bogue, public policy director for the South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation.

South Dakota farmers deserve protection from anyone who may have "intent to cause physical or economic harm" to a farmer or farm operation, he said.

State farm groups have heard concerns from producers that people could break into their farms or trespass with ill intent, Bogue said.

"It's never a bad time to be proactive," he said. "In our opinion, this modernizes the existing statutes."

Bill would limit information on CAFOs

But the bill also would add a new section to state law that would make it more difficult for the public, the press and even local governments from obtaining information about the state's largest animal operations.

Concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, are large livestock operations where several hundred or even tens of thousands of cattle, hogs, chickens and turkeys are fed within a single farm, often in enclosed structures.

CAFOs are heavily regulated in South Dakota, and operators must obtain a permit and undergo inspection of their operations and their records to ensure proper waste management and protection of water resources.

Section 6 in SB 14 would bar the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources – which oversees CAFO permitting and inspection – from releasing a list of permitted CAFOs and their locations in South Dakota to anyone unless required by federal law.

The bill also would provide DANR discretion on whether to release a list of CAFOs to any "South Dakota state agency or local government for information regarding a permitted operation in the jurisdiction of the agency or local government."

Information could be obtained in person

Crabtree said an individual or government entity could still obtain a list of CAFOs and their locations by making an in-person request at the offices of DANR in Pierre.

The restriction on obtaining information about CAFOs worries Jay Gilbertson, manager of the East Dakota Water Development District, which promotes conservation and management of water resources in eastern South Dakota.

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The reason CAFOs are permitted in the first place is to maintain oversight of their operations and to allow for the state and others to ensure the large farms are not polluting the land and water, he said.

Restricting public access to CAFO permits could make it more likely that large livestock operators would cut corners or avoid expensive waste management or water protection systems without anyone knowing, Gilbertson said.

"The permits are pretty explicit and contain all sorts of things 'thou shall or shan't do,' which makes it easy to adhere to because the operator knows exactly what is expected," he said.

"At the same time, if I'm somebody who is concerned about a facility, I can look at the permit requirements and it will tell me, 'This is exactly what is supposed to be going on.' And if it is, fine. But if it isn't, there isn't any debate that there's a problem."

CAFOs expanding in South Dakota

State officials said CAFOs are generally well operated and follow state laws. But problems do occur and fines have been levied against permit violators.

According to prior research by News Watch, permitted CAFOs in South Dakota violated state regulations 217 times from October 2009 to August 2019. The state received, on average, about two complaints about CAFOs from the public each month, and animal wastes from CAFOs leaked into state waterways on nine occasions during that time period, according to state records.

The number of animals raised and fed in CAFOs has increased steadily over the past decade.

The state and lawmakers have taken steps in recent years to make it easier for development of CAFOs and harder for residents and local governments to fight them. The state also has offered financial incentives to livestock producers to expedite development of new CAFO operations.

Brian Walsh, deputy secretary of DANR, wrote in an email to News Watch that the department already denies release of CAFO information to some who request it.

"DANR reviews and considers each individual request for information on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) as they are submitted. DANR has received requests for an aggregated listing of all CAFOs including specific location information (addresses, geographic coordinate systems locations, or legal locations) with the express purpose of sharing those locations online," Walsh wrote. "DANR has denied such requests in the past due to the issue of biosecurity and agro-terrorism risks. The bill as drafted would not change how DANR currently responds to requests for CAFO records requests."

But Gilbertson said it seems odd that language in the bill could prevent the public or local governments from knowing where CAFOs are located.

"The department (DANR) has the tools to allow people to look things up for all the permits they issue," he said. "But when it comes to animal feeding operations, if you really want to know, you have to go to Pierre, and try to get in the DANR building and dig through the paper files? That would just be silly."

A South Dakota tribe lifts its ban on Gov. Kristi Noem ahead of her hearing to join Trump's cabinet

FLANDREAU, S.D. (AP) — One tribe in South Dakota lifted its order banning Gov. Kristi Noem from its territories just days before the Republican was set to appear before a U.S. Senate committee on her nomination to head one of the federal government's largest agencies.

Noem was cut off from entering a wide swath of tribal lands in South Dakota early last year after making public comments that tribal leaders were catering to drug cartels on their reservations.

The Flandreau Santee Sioux tribe, one of the state's nine tribes, issued a statement Wednesday dissolving its order that banned Noem from setting foot on their land and to lend support to her nomination by President-elect Donald Trump to secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

"The Governor issued an apology to us for the misunderstanding, which was exacerbated by misinformation," the tribe's press release reads. "Since our first meeting, the Governor has shown us that she is committed to protecting the people of South Dakota including the citizens of the nine Tribal Nations, who

share mutual borders with the state.”

The Flandreau Santee Sioux tribe was not alone in the formal banishment of Noem last year. The Associated Press left messages Thursday with the other eight tribes in the state to seek information on Noem’s status on their land.

Addressing the South Dakota Legislature in an annual State of the Tribes address, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Chairman J. Garrett Renville on Wednesday mentioned Noem’s comments, among other examples, in describing what has become “an environment of distrust between our sovereign nations and the state.”

But Renville proposed a turn of the page.

“Today, let’s reset. Today, let’s rebuild,” Renville said. “Today, let’s start to listen and actually hear.”

Noem is Trump’s pick to head the agency that will be integral to his pledge to secure the border and carry out a massive deportation operation, and she will appear before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on Friday. Her hearing was initially scheduled for Wednesday.

3 lawyers for the late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny are jailed by a Russian court

PETUSHKI, Russia (AP) — Three lawyers who once represented the late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny were convicted by a court Friday as part of the Kremlin’s crackdown on dissent that has reached levels unseen since Soviet times.

Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin and Alexei Liptser were already in custody and were given sentences from 3 1/2 to five years by a court in the town of Petushki, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of Moscow. They were arrested in October 2023 on charges of involvement with extremist groups, as Navalny’s networks were deemed by authorities.

The case was widely seen as a way to increase pressure on the opposition to discourage defense lawyers from taking political cases.

At the time, Navalny was serving a 19-year prison term on several criminal convictions, including extremism. He died in a Russian prison camp in February 2023.

The independent Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta reported that Kobzev said in his final statement in court on Jan. 10 that “we are being tried for transmitting Navalny’s thoughts to other people.”

The independent Russian news outlet Mediazona reported three journalists attending the sentencing were detained and taken to a police station.

Navalny’s networks were deemed extremist following a 2021 ruling that outlawed his organizations — the Foundation for Fighting Corruption and a network of regional offices — as extremist groups.

That ruling, which exposed anyone involved with the organizations to prosecution, was condemned by Kremlin critics as politically motivated and designed to stifle Navalny’s activities.

According to Navalny’s allies, authorities accused the lawyers of using their position to pass information from him to his team.

Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner and outspoken opponent of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested in 2021 upon his return from Germany, where he was recuperating from a nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. He was ordered to serve 2 1/2 years in prison.

After two more trials, his sentence was extended to 19 years. He and his allies said the charges were politically motivated and accused the Kremlin of seeking to jail him for life.

In December 2023, Navalny was moved from a penal colony in the Vladimir region east of Moscow to one above the Arctic Circle, where he died in February at the age of 47 under still-unexplained circumstances. His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, and members of his team alleged he was killed on orders from the Kremlin. Officials have rejected the accusation.

Two other Navalny lawyers, Olga Mikhailova and Alexander Fedulov, are on a wanted list but no longer live in Russia. Mikhailova, who defended Navalny for a decade, said she was charged in absentia with extremism.

Kobzev, Liptser and Sergunin have been deemed to be political prisoners, according to human rights

advocates from Memorial, Russia's most prominent rights group that won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022. The group demands their immediate release.

Independent Russian media reported Friday that Konstantin Kotov, an activist accused of donating to Navalny's organization, left Russia before he was due to appear in a Moscow court Friday. He told Media-zona he decided to leave after a heart surgeon, Ivan Tishchenko, was jailed for four years for donating around \$34 to Navalny's organization.

Texas judge says states can revive challenge to abortion pill access nationwide

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

The Texas judge who previously halted approval of the nation's most common method of abortion ruled Thursday that three states can move ahead with another attempt to roll back federal rules and make it harder for people across the U.S. to access the abortion drug mifepristone.

Idaho, Kansas and Missouri requested late last year to pursue the case in federal court in Amarillo, Texas, after the U.S. Supreme Court issued a narrow ruling finding that abortion opponents who first filed the case lacked the legal right to sue.

The only federal judge based in Amarillo is Matthew Kacsmaryk, a nominee of former President Donald Trump who in recent years ruled against the Biden administration on several issues, including immigration and LGBTQ protections.

The states want the federal Food and Drug Administration to prohibit telehealth prescriptions for mifepristone and require that it be used only in the first seven weeks of pregnancy instead of the current limit of 10 weeks. They also want to require three in-person doctor office visits instead of none to get the drug.

That's because, the states argue, efforts to provide access to the pills "undermine state abortion laws and frustrate state law enforcement," according to court documents.

Meanwhile, Kacsmaryk said they shouldn't be automatically discounted from suing in Texas just because they're outside the state.

The American Civil Liberties Union said Thursday that the case should have been settled when the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously preserved access to mifepristone last year, where the justices issued a narrow ruling finding that abortion opponents who first filed the case lacked the legal right to sue.

Kacsmaryk's decision "has left the door open for extremist politicians to continue attacking medication abortion in his courtroom," the ACLU said.

The ruling comes days before Trump begins his second term as president, so his administration will likely be representing the FDA in the case. Trump has repeatedly said abortion is an issue for the states, not the federal government, though he's also stressed on the campaign trail that he appointed justices to the Supreme Court who were in the majority when striking down the national right to abortion in 2022.

In the years since, abortion opponents have increasingly targeted abortion pills, largely due to most U.S. abortions being carried out using drugs rather than through surgical procedures. So far, at least four states — Indiana, Missouri, New Hampshire and Tennessee — have seen Republicans introduce bills aimed at banning pills. None take the same approach as Louisiana, which last year classified the drugs as controlled dangerous substances.

Previously, Kacsmaryk sided with a group of anti-abortion doctors and organizations that wanted the FDA to be forced to rescind entirely its approval of mifepristone in 2000.

Yet the states are pursuing a narrower challenge. Rather than target the approval entirely, they sought to undo a series of FDA updates that have eased access.

But while the states' leaders are pushing to severely limit access to the drugs, voters in Missouri sent a different message in November when they approved a ballot measure to undo one of the nation's strictest bans. In Idaho, abortion is banned at all stages of pregnancy. In Kansas, abortion is generally legal up until the 22nd week of pregnancy.

Across the U.S., 13 states under Republican legislative control bar abortion at all stages of pregnancy,

with some exceptions, and four more ban it after the first six weeks — before women often know they're pregnant.

Some Democratic-controlled states have adopted laws seeking to shield from investigations and prosecutions the doctors who prescribe the pills via telehealth appointments and mail them to patients in states with bans. Those prescriptions are a major reason a study found that residents of states with bans are getting abortions in about the same numbers as they were before the bans were in place.

Mifepristone is usually used in combination with a second drug for medication abortion, which has accounted for more than three-fifths of all abortions in the U.S. since the Supreme Court's ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

The drugs are different than Plan B and other emergency contraceptives that are usually taken within three days after possible conception, weeks before women know they're pregnant. Studies have found they're generally safe and result in completed abortions more than 97% of the time, which is less effective than procedural abortions.

Israel's security cabinet convenes to approve deal to release hostages and pause the 15-month war

By SAM MEDNICK and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

JERUSALEM, Israel (AP) — Israel's security cabinet convened Friday to decide whether to approve a deal that would release dozens of hostages held by militants in Gaza and pause the 15-month-war.

If the cabinet approves, the deal will then go to the government for final sign-off before the ceasefire goes into effect.

U.S. President Joe Biden and key mediator Qatar announced the deal on Wednesday, which is aimed at releasing scores of hostages held in Gaza and winding down the war that has destabilized the Middle East and sparked worldwide protests.

Friday's meeting comes after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said earlier there were last minute snags in finalizing the agreement. Israel had delayed a security cabinet vote Thursday, blaming the dispute with Hamas for holding up approval. However, a pre-dawn statement appeared to clear the way for the deal to be voted on by the security cabinet.

Netanyahu said he had instructed a special task force to prepare to receive the hostages returning from Gaza, and that their families were informed the deal had been reached. The Prime Minister's office said that if a deal is passed, the ceasefire could start Sunday with the first hostages released.

Under the deal, 33 of some 100 hostages who remain in Gaza are set to be released over the next six weeks in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces will pull back from many areas, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be able to return to what's left of their homes, and there would be a surge of humanitarian assistance.

The remainder of the hostages, including male soldiers, are to be released in a second — and much more difficult — phase that will be negotiated during the first.

Hamas has said it will not release the remaining captives without a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal, while Israel has vowed to keep fighting until it dismantles the group and to maintain open-ended security control over the territory.

Longer-term questions about postwar Gaza remain, including who will rule the territory or oversee the daunting task of reconstruction.

An Egyptian official and a Hamas official confirmed that the last-minute issues were over the list of Palestinian prisoners to be released from Israeli jails during phase one of the deal, but those have now been resolved. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations. The Hamas official said mediators showed the group Israel's approval.

The Egyptian official added that an Israeli delegation from the military and Israel's Shin Bet internal security agency arrived in Cairo Friday morning to discuss the reopening of Rafah crossing, a key link between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. An Israeli official who also spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss

the negotiations confirmed a delegation was going to Cairo to discuss the crossing.

The agreement has drawn fierce resistance from Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners, which the Israeli prime minister depends on to remain in power. On Thursday, Israel's hard-line national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, threatened to quit the government if Israel approved the ceasefire. On Friday, Ben-Gvir wrote on X "if the 'deal' passes, we will leave the government with a heavy heart".

Ben-Gvir's resignation would not bring down the government or derail the ceasefire deal, but the move would destabilize the government at a delicate moment and could lead to its collapse if Ben-Gvir were joined by other key Netanyahu allies.

Meanwhile, the fighting continues in Gaza, with Israeli strikes killing at least 72 people on Thursday. In previous conflicts, both sides have stepped up military operations in the final hours before ceasefires as a way to project strength.

Hamas triggered the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage.

Israel responded with a devastating offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half of those killed.

AP Exclusive: Egypt's chief diplomat urges Israel and Hamas to enact ceasefire 'without any delay'

By VICTORIA EASTWOOD and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

NEW ADMINISTRATIVE CAPITAL, Egypt (AP) — Egypt's chief diplomat on Thursday called on Israel and Hamas to implement a Gaza ceasefire plan "without any delay," raising pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept the deal.

Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty delivered the message at a sensitive time in efforts to end a devastating 15-month conflict. A day after President Joe Biden and other international mediators announced the ceasefire agreement, Netanyahu insisted there still was no deal.

In an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, Abdelatty declined to comment on Netanyahu's claims that Hamas has "reneged" on certain pledges in the agreement. But he said a deal had been reached thanks to "deep involvement" by American, Qatari and Egyptian mediators, including officials from the incoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump.

"We have a deal. What's very important is to start implementation," Abdelatty said from the foreign ministry's headquarters in The New Administrative Capital, a newly built sprawling city about 45 kilometers (28 miles) east of Cairo that houses government offices.

"What we are doing now is to push for final approval and implementation, without any delay."

Egypt, which has a peace agreement with Israel and shares a border with Hamas-ruled Gaza, has been a key mediator between the enemies for years and a leading player in ongoing ceasefire negotiations.

Cairo is supposed to be the location for continued talks between the U.S., Qatar and Egypt on implementing the deal. Abdelatty said the talks were set to begin soon, and that the mediators would have an "operation room" overseeing the deal in the Egyptian capital.

"We are fully committed to fulfill our own commitments and we are expecting that others to fulfill their own commitments," he said.

Egyptian and Israeli officials said an Israeli delegation from the military and its Shin Bet internal security agency were going to Cairo Friday to discuss the reopening of the Rafah crossing. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations.

Hamas has suffered heavy losses during the war, but the group appears to remain intact. Its fighters have continued to stage deadly attacks against Israeli troops and its government continues to provide some basic services.

Abdelatty declined to discuss Hamas' capabilities, but signaled it will not play a role in governing Gaza

after the war.

He said the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which governs from the occupied West Bank after being ousted by Hamas in 2007, is the proper Palestinian entity to lead postwar Gaza.

"We have to empower the Palestinian Authority," he said, adding that Egypt is ready to work with the U.S. "to empower the Palestinians and the Palestinian police in order to provide security in Gaza."

He said the only solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state that includes the West Bank and Gaza. The outgoing Biden administration has called for a revitalized Palestinian Authority to return to post-war Gaza, an idea Netanyahu and his far-right partners reject.

Under the emerging deal, hundreds of truckloads of desperately needed humanitarian aid are expected to flow into Gaza through Egypt's Rafah border crossing. The crossing, Gaza's main gateway to the outside world, has been closed since the Israeli army took over the area last May.

Abdelatty said Egypt aims to open the crossing as soon as possible to allow in 600 trucks a day "because people are starving on the ground."

He said arrangements are still being worked out, but that Egypt would welcome the return of civilian observers from the European Union.

An EU operation helped run the crossing, in coordination with Israel and the Palestinian Authority, for two years until Hamas seized control of Gaza.

In Brussels, European Commission spokesman Anouar El Anouni confirmed Thursday that the EU is considering a return to the crossing. Egyptian officials said an EU mission is expected in Cairo next week.

"The EU presence would be of great importance," Abdelatty said.

Egypt has also been harmed by the ongoing war, with seaborne attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen halting much of the shipping traffic through the Suez Canal.

Abdelatty said Egypt has lost about \$600 million in revenue each month as a result of the ongoing tensions. He said the presence of an estimated 10 million refugees and migrants – including tens of thousands of Palestinians from Gaza — has created an additional burden.

"We are not a rich country," he said.

What lies ahead for South Korea's impeached president as investigators seek his arrest?

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Law enforcement authorities on Friday requested a court warrant to formally arrest South Korea's impeached president, Yoon Suk Yeol, who was in his third day at a detention center after his lawyers failed in a last-minute effort to secure his release.

Yoon, who was apprehended on Wednesday in a massive law enforcement operation at his residence, faces potential rebellion charges linked to his declaration of martial law on Dec. 3, which set off the country's most serious political crisis since its democratization in the late 1980s.

Yoon's detention, authorized by a court warrant compelling him to face investigation after repeatedly ignoring summonses from law enforcement, was valid until 9:05 p.m. Friday. But he will remain in custody as a Seoul court deliberates whether to put him under formal arrest.

If Yoon is arrested, investigators can extend his detention to 20 days, during which they will transfer the case to public prosecutors for indictment.

Attempting to break through legislative gridlock, Yoon imposed military rule and sent troops to the National Assembly and election offices, but the standoff lasted only hours after lawmakers who managed to get through a blockade voted to lift the measure. The opposition-dominated assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14.

A court-ordered arrest could lead to an extended period in custody for the conservative president, who faces both criminal charges and a Constitutional Court ruling in the coming weeks that will determine whether he is dismissed or reinstated to office.

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Here's what Yoon faces at a moment that could determine his political fate:

What's ahead?

On Friday afternoon, the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and the military, requested the Seoul Western District Court to grant a warrant for Yoon's formal arrest.

The court will hold a hearing Saturday afternoon, which Yoon may or may not attend, before it decides whether to grant his arrest. That could come sometime over the weekend or early Monday.

Details of the arrest warrant request wasn't immediately available. In issuing a warrant for Yoon's detention this month, the court stated that he was facing potential charges of leading a rebellion.

After undergoing more than 10 hours of questioning on Wednesday at the anti-corruption agency's headquarters in Gwacheon, during which he exercised his right to remain silent, Yoon boycotted questioning for a second straight day on Friday as his supporters maintained that the investigation was illegal.

In a message to his supporters, conveyed through lawyers, Yoon said he was doing well in detention and thanked them for coming out to the streets in cold weather to show their "fervent patriotism." Hundreds of Yoon supporters gathered near the Seoul Western District Court, shouting slogans calling for his release.

Yoon's lawyers had asked the Seoul Central District Court to order his release, questioning the validity of the detention warrant issued by the Western District Court, but the Central District Court denied their petition late Thursday. The failure gave anti-corruption officials nearly 11 extra hours to keep Yoon in detention as their 48-hour clock to request an arrest warrant was on hold while the Central District Court reviewed his petition.

Yoon's defense minister, police chief, and several top military commanders have already been arrested for their roles in the enforcement of martial law.

What happens if Yoon is arrested?

If Yoon is formally arrested, that could mark the beginning of an extended period in custody for him, lasting months or possibly longer.

If prosecutors indict Yoon on rebellion and abuse of power charges, which are the allegations being examined by investigators, they can possibly keep Yoon under arrest for up to six months until an initial court ruling. If the first court convicts him and issues a prison term, Yoon would serve that sentence as the case possibly moves up to the Seoul High Court and Supreme Court. Under South Korean law, orchestrating a rebellion is punishable by up to life imprisonment or the death penalty.

Yoon's lawyers have argued that there is no need to detain him during the investigation, saying he doesn't pose a threat to flee or destroy evidence.

Investigators point out that Yoon ignored several requests to appear for questioning, and the presidential security service blocked an attempt to detain him on Jan. 3.

Yoon has steadfastly denied accusations that his martial law decree was an attempt at rebellion, contradicting the testimonies of military commanders who have described an attempt to shut down the legislature. Critics say this makes him a potential threat to destroy or tamper with evidence.

What key points will be contested in court?

To avoid conviction on rebellion charges, Yoon would need to support his claim that martial law was intended as a temporary and "peaceful" warning to the liberal opposition, which he accuses of obstructing his agenda and paralyzing state affairs with its legislative majority.

Yoon and his lawyers have claimed that he had no intention of stopping the functioning of the National Assembly, stating that the deployment of troops was intended to maintain order, not prevent lawmakers from entering and voting to lift martial law. They have claimed that the troops sent to the assembly were unarmed and denied allegations that Yoon ordered the arrest of key politicians, including National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik and opposition leader Lee Jae-myung.

Military commanders, however, have described a deliberate attempt to seize the legislature that was thwarted by hundreds of civilians and legislative staff who helped lawmakers enter the assembly, and by the troops' reluctance or refusal to follow Yoon's orders.

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Prosecutors' indictment of Kim Yong Hyun, Yoon's now-arrested former defense minister, states that Yoon ordered the military and police to arrest key politicians or any lawmaker attempting to enter the assembly, desperate to prevent the 300-member legislature from gathering the 150 votes necessary to overturn his martial law order. It describes Yoon as becoming impatient as lawmakers continued getting inside, placing calls to military commanders to destroy the main chamber's door, and even use guns or axes if necessary, and to drag the lawmakers out.

Those details align with the legislative testimony of Kwak Jong-keun, the now-arrested commander of the Army Special Warfare Command, who said Yoon directly instructed him to have troops pull out the lawmakers but that he didn't carry out those orders.

How long will it take and how much will it cost to rebuild Gaza?

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are eager to leave miserable tent camps and return to their homes if a long-awaited ceasefire agreement halts the Israel-Hamas war, but many will find there is nothing left and no way to rebuild.

Israeli bombardment and ground operations have transformed entire neighborhoods in several cities into rubble-strewn wastelands, with blackened shells of buildings and mounds of debris stretching away in all directions. Major roads have been plowed up. Critical water and electricity infrastructure is in ruins. Most hospitals no longer function.

And it's unclear when — or even if — much will be rebuilt.

The agreement for a phased ceasefire and the release of hostages held by Hamas-led militants does not say who will govern Gaza after the war, or whether Israel and Egypt will lift a blockade limiting the movement of people and goods that they imposed when Hamas seized power in 2007.

The United Nations says that it could take more than 350 years to rebuild if the blockade remains.

Two-thirds of all structures destroyed

The full extent of the damage will only be known when the fighting ends and inspectors have full access to the territory. The most heavily destroyed part of Gaza, in the north, has been sealed off and largely depopulated by Israeli forces in an operation that began in early October.

Using satellite data, the United Nations estimated last month that 69% of the structures in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, including over 245,000 homes. The World Bank estimated \$18.5 billion in damage — nearly the combined economic output of the West Bank and Gaza in 2022 — from just the first four months of the war.

Israel blames the destruction on Hamas, which ignited the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, attack into Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were fighters.

Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. The military has released photos and video footage showing that Hamas built tunnels and rocket launchers in residential areas, and often operated in and around homes, schools and mosques.

Mountains of rubble to be moved

Before anything can be rebuilt, the rubble must be removed — a staggering task in itself.

The U.N. estimates that the war has littered Gaza with over 50 million tons of rubble — roughly 12 times the size of the Great Pyramid of Giza. With over 100 trucks working full time, it would take over 15 years to clear the rubble away, and there is little open space in the narrow coastal territory that is home to some 2.3 million Palestinians.

Carting the debris away will also be complicated by the fact that it contains huge amounts of unexploded ordnance and other harmful materials, as well as human remains. Gaza's Health Ministry says thousands of people killed in airstrikes are still buried under the rubble.

No plan for the day after

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The rubble clearance and eventual rebuilding of homes will require billions of dollars and the ability to bring construction materials and heavy equipment into the territory — neither of which is assured.

The ceasefire agreement calls for a three- to five-year reconstruction project to begin in its final phase, after all the remaining 100 hostages have been released and Israeli troops have withdrawn from the territory.

But getting to that point will require agreement on the second and most difficult phase of the deal, which still must be negotiated.

Even then, the ability to rebuild will depend on the blockade, which critics have long decried as a form of collective punishment. Israel says it is needed to prevent Hamas from rebuilding its military capabilities, noting that cement and metal pipes can also be used for tunnels and rockets.

Israel might be more inclined to lift the blockade if Hamas were no longer in power, but there are no plans for an alternative government.

The United States and much of the international community want a revitalized Palestinian Authority to govern the West Bank and Gaza with the support of Arab countries ahead of eventual statehood. But that's a nonstarter for Israel's government, which is opposed to a Palestinian state and has ruled out any role in Gaza for the Western-backed authority.

International donors are unlikely to invest in an ungoverned territory that has seen five wars in less than two decades, which means the sprawling tent camps along the coast could become a permanent feature of life in Gaza.

Biden sets record by commuting sentences of nearly 2,500 people convicted on nonviolent drug charges

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden announced Friday that he was commuting the sentences of almost 2,500 people convicted of nonviolent drug offenses, using his final days in office on a flurry of clemency actions meant to nullify prison terms he deemed too harsh.

The recent round of clemency gives Biden the presidential record for most individual pardons and commutations issued. The Democrat said he is seeking to undo "disproportionately long sentences compared to the sentences they would receive today under current law, policy, and practice."

"Today's clemency action provides relief for individuals who received lengthy sentences based on discredited distinctions between crack and powder cocaine, as well as outdated sentencing enhancements for drug crimes," Biden said in a statement. "This action is an important step toward righting historic wrongs, correcting sentencing disparities, and providing deserving individuals the opportunity to return to their families and communities after spending far too much time behind bars."

The White House did not immediately release the names of those receiving commutations.

Still, Biden said more could yet be coming, promising to use the time before President-elect Donald Trump is inaugurated Monday to "continue to review additional commutations and pardons."

Friday's action follows Biden's commutations last month of the sentences of roughly 1,500 people who were released from prison and placed on home confinement during the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the pardoning of 39 Americans convicted of nonviolent crimes. That was the largest single-day act of clemency in modern history.

All of this comes as Biden continues to weigh whether to issue sweeping pardons for officials and allies who the White House fears could be unjustly targeted by Trump's administration. Though presidential pardoning powers are absolute, such a preemptive move would be a novel and risky use of the president's extraordinary constitutional power.

Last month, Biden also commuted the sentences of 37 of the 40 people on federal death row, converting their punishments to life imprisonment just weeks before Trump, an outspoken proponent of expanding capital punishment, takes office. Trump has vowed to roll back that order after his term begins.

Biden also recently pardoned his son Hunter, not just for his convictions on federal gun and tax violations

but for any potential federal offense committed over an 11-year period, as the president feared Trump allies would seek to prosecute his son for other offenses.

If history is any guide, meanwhile, Biden also is likely to issue more targeted pardons to help allies before leaving the White House, as presidents typically do in some of their final actions.

Just before midnight on the final night of his first term, Trump, a Republican, signed a flurry of pardons and commutations for more than 140 people, including his former chief strategist, Steve Bannon, rappers Lil Wayne and Kodak Black and ex-members of Congress.

Trump's final act as president in his first term was to announce a pardon for Al Pirro, ex-husband of Fox News Channel host Jeanine Pirro, one of his staunchest defenders. Al Pirro was convicted of conspiracy and tax evasion charges and sentenced to more than two years in prison in 2000.

China's population falls for a third straight year, posing challenges for its government and economy

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — China's population fell last year for the third straight year, its government said Friday, pointing to further demographic challenges for the world's second most populous nation, which is now facing both an aging population and an emerging shortage of working age people.

China's population stood at 1.408 billion at the end of 2024, a decline of 1.39 million from the previous year.

The figures announced by the government in Beijing follow trends worldwide, but especially in East Asia, where Japan, South Korea and other nations have seen their birth rates plummet. China three years ago joined Japan and most of Eastern Europe among other nations whose population is falling.

The reasons are in many cases similar: Rising costs of living are causing young people to put off or rule out marriage and child birth while pursuing higher education and careers. While people are living longer, that's not enough to keep up with rate of new births.

Countries such as China that allow very little immigration are especially at risk.

China has long been among the world's most populous nations, enduring invasions, floods and other natural disasters to sustain a population that thrived on rice in the south and wheat in the north. Following the end of World War II and the Communist Party's rise to power in 1949, large families re-emerged and the population doubled in just three decades, even after tens of millions died in the Great Leap Forward that sought to revolutionize agriculture and industry and the Cultural Revolution that followed a few years later.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution and leader Mao Zedong's death, Communist bureaucrats began to worry the country's population was outstripping its ability to feed itself and began implementing a draconian "one child policy." Though it was never law, women had to apply for permission to have a child and violators could face forced late-term abortions and birth control procedures, massive fines and the prospect of their child being deprived an identification number, effectively making them non-citizens.

Rural China, where the preference for male offspring was especially strong and two children were still ostensibly allowed, became the focus of government efforts, with women forced to present evidence they were menstruating and buildings emblazoned with slogans such as "have fewer children, have better children."

The government sought to stamp out selective abortion of female children, but with abortions legal and readily available, those operating illicit sonogram machines enjoyed a thriving business.

That has been the biggest factor in China's lopsided sex ratio, with as many as millions more boys born for every 100 girls, raising the possibility of social instability among China's army of bachelors. Friday's report gave the sex imbalance as 104.34 men to every 100 women, though independent groups give the imbalance as considerably higher.

More disturbing for the government was the drastically falling birthrate, with China's total population

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dropping for the first time in decades in 2023 and China being narrowly overtaken by India as the world's most populous nation in the same year. A rapidly aging population, declining workforce, lack of consumer markets and migration abroad are putting the system under severe pressure.

While spending on the military and flashy infrastructure projects continues to rise, China's already frail social security system is teetering, with increasing numbers of Chinese refusing to pay into the underfunded pension system.

Already, more than one-fifth of the population is aged 60 or over, with the official figure given as 310.3 million or 22% of the total population. By 2035, this number is forecast to exceed 30%, sparking discussion of changes to the official retirement age, which one of the lowest in the world. With fewer students, some vacant schools and kindergartens are meanwhile being transformed into care facilities for older people.

Such developments are giving some credence to the aphorism that China, now the world's second largest economy but facing major headwinds, will "grow old before it grows rich."

Government inducements including cash payouts for having up to three children and financial help with housing costs have had only temporary effects.

Meanwhile, China continued its transition to an urban society, with 10 million more people moving to cities for an urbanization rate of 67%, up almost a percentage point from the previous year.

Border app that became 'a salvation' for migrants to legally enter the US may end

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — A nurse who fled Cuba as part of the Caribbean nation's largest exodus in more than six decades needed a place to stay in Mexico as she waited to legally enter the U.S. using a government app. A woman who had lived her whole life in the same Tijuana neighborhood was desperate for medical help after a dog attack left her with wounds to her legs.

A mutual acquaintance brought the two women together. Nurse Karla Figueredo stayed with Martha Rosales for three days in October 2023, waiting for a border appointment booked through the CBP One app and treating Rosales' dog bites. When Figueredo left for the U.S., she got Rosales' permission to give her name to other migrants.

Word quickly spread and Rosales made her home part of a roster of at least three dozen migrant shelters in her hometown on the U.S.-Mexico border, temporarily housing people who use the CBP One app.

"I told God that if they didn't amputate my feet, I would help every Cuban," said Rosales, 45, who was using a wheelchair after being attacked by five dogs until Figueredo helped heal her wounds.

CBP One has brought nearly 1 million people to the U.S. on two-year permits with eligibility to work but could go away once President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

Figueredo, 25, now works as a medical assistant in the Houston area and keeps in touch with Rosales, who quit her job as a bank cleaner to focus on her migrant shelter. The people Rosales houses, mostly Cubans, refer to her as "Tía Martha" (Aunt Martha) as she cooks pancake breakfasts, throws birthday parties and shuttles them to their CBP One appointments.

Supporters say CBP One has helped bring order to the border and reduced illegal crossings. But Trump has said he would end it as part of a broader immigration crackdown. Critics say it prioritizes a lottery system over people who have long lived in the U.S. illegally while paying taxes and people who have waited years for visas.

Dayron Garcia, a doctor in Cuba who heard about Rosales from a nephew, applied with his wife and children and plans to settle with a friend in Houston. He said Rosales' house "feels like family" and that "CBP One has been a salvation."

"It's a guarantee," Garcia, 40, said. "You enter with papers, with parole."

CBP One began under Trump and changed under Biden

U.S. Customs and Border Protection debuted CBP One near the end of Trump's first term as a way for customs brokers to schedule inspections and for visitors with short-term visas to extend stays.

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The Biden administration extended its use to migrants to replace an opaque patchwork of exemptions to a pandemic-related asylum ban that was then in place.

CBP One is popular with Cubans, Venezuelans, Haitians and Mexicans, likely because advocates in their communities promote it.

Illegal border crossings by Cubans plunged under CBP One from a peak of nearly 35,000 in April 2022 to just 97 in September.

Demand for appointments has far outstripped supply, with an average of about 280,000 people competing for 1,450 daily slots toward the end of last year, according to CBP. Winners must report to a border crossing in three weeks.

A night owl

Migrant shelters along Mexico's border with the U.S. are now occupied primarily by people seeking the online appointments.

Rosales' house is in a neighborhood with ramshackle homes where old tires are stacked to stop flash floods. Migrants watch television, play billiards, do chores and look after their children at Rosales' house or a rental home nearby. Those who don't yet have appointments work their phones for slots made available daily at eight U.S. border crossings with Mexico, a task likened to trying to buy Taylor Swift concert tickets.

Rosales works throughout the night. A helper drives to the airport in an SUV Rosales bought with retirement pay from her bank job.

Shortly after midnight, she shuttles guests from her house to Tijuana's main border crossing with San Diego for the day's first appointments at 5 a.m. She chats with them, smiles for photos and hugs people goodbye.

By 3 a.m., she is at a television station for a four-hour shift cleaning the newsroom and fetching coffee for journalists, who give her the latest information on immigration and the city.

She checks her phone for migrants needing shelter who heard about her on social media or from friends and family. Her contact list identifies them by size of party and appointment date: "3 on the 16th," "6 on the 17th."

Rosales, one of 13 children, dropped out of school in third grade. Reading the Bible taught her enough to barely understand texts, which she generally responds to with voice messages or calls.

Enrique Lucero was Tijuana's director of migrant affairs when she came to City Hall for advice. He helped Rosales establish a legal entity to raise money and made himself available for emergencies, such as when a woman missed her CBP One appointment to give birth. Lucero talked to CBP to make sure the woman and her baby got in.

"She worries about them. She cries for them," Lucero said.

The exodus from Cuba

Border arrests of Cubans increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and after anti-government protests in 2021. Nicaragua had recently eased rules for Cubans to fly from Havana, allowing them to avoid walking through the Darien Gap, a dangerous jungle in Colombia and Panama. By the spring of 2022, Cubans eclipsed all nationalities but Mexicans in illegal crossings.

"CBP One came like a gift from God," said Yoandis Delgado, who flew to Nicaragua in 2023, paid a smuggler \$1,000 to reach southern Mexico and was repeatedly robbed by Mexican authorities while trying to reach the U.S. border. "CBP One gave us a sense of possibility, of hope."

Delgado, a cook in Cuba, said Rosales' home and neighborhood don't stand out for people seeking to prey on migrants, giving a sense of security he wouldn't get at hotels or other shelters.

"She lives in the same condition that we do, not any better," Delgado said after a pancake breakfast. "She cries for everything that happens to us, for what we have suffered to get here from Cuba."

A grim future for CBP One

Biden administration officials portray CBP One as a key success in its strategy to create legal pathways at the border while deterring illegal crossings. They note people in life-threatening circumstances can come to a border crossing without an appointment to plead their case.

Anxiety is spreading among migrants in Mexico who fear Trump will end CBP One. Even those in the

U.S. are uneasy because parole expires after two years.

The Trump transition team didn't respond to a question about CBP One's future, but his allies say it's overly generous and encourages immigration. A bill that stalled in the Senate in 2023 would have prohibited using the app to admit migrants.

Figueredo, the nurse who helped Rosales, plans to get a green card under a 1966 law that applies to Cubans. She says she and her partner, a barber, came to "continue to grow professionally and support our future children."

She writes Rosales often, telling her that her job is "crazy" busy and asking about her health. "I hope you're very happy," she wrote.

Kamala Harris made history as vice president. The rest didn't go as planned

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With Donald Trump's return to the White House only days away, Kamala Harris' staff packed into her ceremonial office to watch her sign the desk, a tradition performed by her predecessors for decades. Her husband, Doug Emhoff, stood behind her to take a photo as she wielded her Sharpie marker.

"It is not my nature to go quietly into the night," Harris said Thursday. "So don't worry about that."

But what is next for her?

"I'll keep you posted," she said.

Harris hasn't made any plans for after leaving office Monday, apart from flying home to California. It will be the first time since 2004, when she became San Francisco's district attorney, that she hasn't held elected office.

There's talk that she'll write a book and speculation that she could run for governor or maybe president again. At 60 years old, Harris is still young in a political world where the last two presidents have set records as the oldest ever elected.

Donna Brazile, a longtime leader in the Democratic Party, recalled telling Harris that she needs to take a break and "learn what it's like to oversleep" for a while. They both laughed, and Brazile said, "Yeah, you'll never go back to being ordinary."

Brazile was campaign manager for Al Gore, the last sitting vice president to run for the top job.

"I've had more people call me about what's next for Kamala Harris than called me about what's next for Al Gore," she said.

Harris' term was both ordinary and extraordinary. Like many of her predecessors, she spent her time tending to a portfolio of issues — migration, abortion rights and maternal health among them — and representing the country overseas. Sometimes she struggled to distinguish herself, a common challenge in a job that comes with little constitutional responsibility.

But Harris also made history as the first woman, Black person or person of South Asian descent to serve as vice president. And last year, Harris was thrust into an unprecedented situation when President Joe Biden ended his reelection bid and endorsed her as his successor.

There were only 107 days left in the campaign, leaving Harris in a sprint for the presidency. She instantly reset the terms of the race against Trump, who is nearly two decades older than her, but was unable to defeat him.

Many Democrats blamed Biden for running in the first place and putting Harris in an impossible position. Harris faced her own criticism, too.

Some said she should have sent a more populist message instead of focusing on Trump's antidemocratic threats by campaigning with Liz Cheney, a former Republican congresswoman. She also failed to separate herself from Biden, who remains deeply unpopular with voters.

Minyon Moore, who chaired last year's Democratic National Convention, downplayed the criticisms by saying "ifa, woulda, coulda, shoulda."

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With Harris facing such an unusual campaign, Moore said, "there was no road map for what she should have done."

Harris hasn't answered questions about her loss, nor has she shared her own perspective on the election. Her public remarks have been limited to rallying cries for students and others who are disappointed by Trump's victory, especially after Democrats described him as an existential threat to the country.

"No one can walk away," Harris said in one speech. "We must stay in the fight. Every one of us."

Harris hoped to close out her term with an around-the-world trip to Singapore, Bahrain and Germany, a final opportunity to showcase her role on foreign policy. But she decided to stay in Washington as wildfires spread around Los Angeles. Her own house, in the Brentwood neighborhood, has been in an evacuation zone.

Harris didn't travel to the area because she was concerned about diverting local resources from responding to the fire, according to an official in her office who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss her planning.

Despite canceling her overseas trip, Harris has signaled her interest in remaining involved on the global stage. She's spent time in her final week in office making calls to foreign leaders including King Abdullah II of Jordan, Israeli President Isaac Herzog, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo.

On Wednesday, she was in the Oval Office to watch Biden give his farewell address. He described her as "a great partner," and they embraced after the speech.

Biden chose Harris as his running mate after her first presidential campaign stalled four years ago. After taking office, her schedule was limited by the coronavirus pandemic and her obligations on Capitol Hill. With the U.S. Senate evenly divided, she was often called on to cast tiebreaking votes, eventually setting a record as she helped advance judicial nominees and landmark legislation.

"She had to find her role," said Joel Goldstein, a historian who has studied the vice presidency. "It took some time to figure it out."

Moore remembered an Oval Office meeting with Harris and other senior advisers as Biden deliberated whom to nominate for the U.S. Supreme Court. Although it was unlikely that a liberal justice would have many opportunities to write majority opinions on a court dominated by conservatives, Moore said Harris focused on which candidate would harness the platform to issue dissenting opinions.

Harris wanted "somebody who could think through the nuances of writing those dissensions," Moore said. Biden nominated Ketanji Brown Jackson, fulfilling his promise to put a Black woman on the bench, and she's often drawn attention for her sharp dissenting opinions.

One of Harris' original tasks, reducing migration from Central America, became a political burden. Republicans described her as the "border czar" and blamed her for illegal crossings. However, fewer migrants came from the countries where Harris focused her efforts.

She met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Munich shortly before the Russian invasion began three years ago, and she spent a week in Africa to lay the groundwork for renewed U.S. engagement.

Harris also traveled three times to Southeast Asia as the administration tried to reorient foreign policy to confront China's influence.

"She had the perception that we could use even more of an emphasis on this occasionally overlooked part of the world," said Phil Gordon, Harris' national security adviser.

Abortion rights became a defining issue for Harris after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Biden was more hesitant on the topic, and Harris started headlining the White House's efforts.

Lorraine Voles, Harris' chief of staff, said the court decision was "a turning point" for the vice president.

"That opened up a lane for her in a way that maybe wasn't there previously," she said. "People were not focused on the issue of maternal health and reproductive health until people began to see it threatened."

Nadia Brown, a Georgetown University government professor who focuses on Black women and politics, said Harris will "certainly go down in the history books" for breaking down racial and gender barriers in politics.

She said Harris' time as vice president helped expand the views of "everyday Americans who might have

misconceptions about what a leader could be or should be.”

The only question left is what Harris decides to do now.

“It’s not over,” Brown said. “But I’m not sure what that next chapter is.”

How Trump’s political and business interests will intersect in the White House

By MEG KINNARD and ALEX CONNOR Associated Press

As he assumes the presidency for a second time, Donald Trump brings with him a broad expanse of business relationships and financial entanglements — and the possibility that those associations could influence his decision-making in the White House.

Trump’s team dismisses such concerns. “President Trump removed himself from his multibillion-dollar real estate empire to run for office and forewent his government salary, becoming the first President to actually lose net worth while serving in the White House,” Trump spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said in a statement. “Unlike most politicians, President Trump didn’t get into politics for profit — he’s fighting because he loves the people of this country and wants to make America great again.”

But questions remain. Here’s a look at the various connections and potential conflicts in Trump’s second administration.

Winning Team Publishing

Launched in 2021, Winning Team Publishing is run by Donald Trump Jr. and Sergio Gor, a Trump adviser selected by the president-elect to run the White House personnel office. Gor also led the pro-Trump super PAC Right for America.

Trump has earned at least \$11.6 million in royalties over the last two years from two of his books produced by Winning Team, according to financial disclosure statements filed with the U.S. Office of Government Ethics.

“Letters to Trump” is an anthology of correspondence from celebrities and politicians written to him over the years. “Our Journey Together” features hundreds of photos from his first presidential term with captions “handpicked” by Trump. Another coffee table book, “Save America,” features reminiscences from Trump’s presidential campaigns and term in office, as well as a lengthy reflection about his brush with death during a July assassination attempt during a rally in Pennsylvania.

Campaign finance records show Trump’s political fundraising committees have paid Winning Team Publishing more than \$242,000 for unspecified books and printing services.

The company also publishes titles written by Trump’s staunchest supporters, including GOP Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, Fox News host Jeanine Pirro and conservative provocateur Charlie Kirk.

Licensing deals

Trump’s name and image are branded on a dizzying array of merchandise that he promotes and profits from through licensing agreements, including Bibles, diamond-encrusted watches, gold-colored sneakers and guitars that cost as much as \$10,000.

Thousands of copies of the “God Bless the USA” Bible Trump sells were printed in China, a country he has repeatedly accused of stealing American jobs and engaging in unfair trade practices. As president, Trump would be able to exempt Bibles and other religious texts from hefty tariffs he’s threatened to impose on imported Chinese products.

Trump’s endorsement of a line of guitars led to a “cease and desist” letter from Nashville-based Gibson Guitars. A company representative said in a brief statement the design of the Trump guitars infringes upon Gibson’s exclusive trademarks, particularly the body shape of the company’s iconic Les Paul model.

Civil judgments

Judgments of more than half a billion dollars from civil lawsuits hang over Trump and will be more difficult to avoid than the criminal cases brought by the federal government and then abandoned after his election in November.

A New York judge ordered Trump and his companies earlier this year to pay more than \$450 million after

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ruling he had manipulated his net worth in financial statements to secure favorable loans. That penalty came shortly after Trump was ordered to pay \$83.3 million to the writer E. Jean Carroll for damaging her reputation after she accused him of sexual assault. A separate jury awarded Carroll \$5 million from Trump for sexual abuse and defamation.

Trump has appealed the rulings in the fraud case and one of the Carroll cases. His latest financial disclosure list more than \$101 million in liabilities stemming from the two cases.

As president, Trump can't pardon himself for penalties imposed in civil cases unrelated to his official government duties, said Richard Briffault, a professor at Columbia Law School in New York. And because the trials have already occurred, he'll have difficulty arguing the cases are an undue burden on his time.

Golf courses

The constellation of high-end golf resorts Trump owns or manages generated hundreds of millions of dollars for him in 2024 and may pull in even greater sums once he's back in the Oval Office.

Trump's financial disclosure reported close to \$267 million in "golf-related" income, with another \$161 million in combined "golf and hotel" proceeds from his Doral golf club in Miami.

During his first term, Trump frequently promoted his golf courses and routinely played at them with a large, taxpayer-funded entourage in tow, leading to criticism that he was using the power of the presidency to enrich himself. Trump pushed to host the international Group of Seven summit at the Doral property in 2019. But he dropped the plan amid accusations he would violate the emoluments clause of the Constitution that bans presidents from receiving gifts or payments from foreign governments.

The golf courses may also attract foreign officials and special interest groups hoping to gain access and curry favor by spending large sums at Trump properties.

Mar-a-Lago fees and Secret Service costs

Since the start of Trump's first term in office, the cost to join his private Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, has soared to \$1 million, allowing wealthy people to mix pleasure with politics and government business during his frequent visits to the club.

While Trump collects income from Mar-a-Lago — \$111 million over the last two years — he's been accused of charging the U.S. Secret Service "exorbitant" room rates of more than \$800 per night for agents assigned to protect him when he traveled there and to other Trump family properties.

Who Trump meets with while at Mar-a-Lago and what he discusses are largely hidden from public view. The Secret Service has no electronic systems to screen or monitor presidential visitors to the estate, according to a 2020 federal appeals court ruling.

Truth Social

Trump launched his social media platform, Truth Social, in early 2022, after he was banned from major sites such as Facebook and the platform formerly known as Twitter following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

While he's since been reinstated to both, Trump has often used Truth Social for more personal commentary, leaving traffic on X and other platforms for more formal statements and pronouncements. The company hasn't disclosed how many users it has, so it's hard to know how broad Trump's reach there is.

But what is clear is that Trump is the primary player in Trump Media & Technology Group, which started trading on the NASDAQ stock market in March. The incoming president has a majority stake in the company, and said shortly after his general election win that he had "NO INTENTION OF SELLING" his shares, which have significantly boosted Trump's net worth, and at that time were valued at around \$3.5 billion.

Cryptocurrency

Trump has promised to make America the "crypto capital of the planet" as he returns to the White House, a promise that would likely pay off for him personally.

Amidst the 2024 campaign, Trump launched a new venture to trade cryptocurrencies that he has promoted on the same social media accounts he used for his campaign. His two eldest sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, have also posted about their new platform, called World Liberty Financial, as has his daughter-in-law, Lara Trump, who is married to Eric and also serves as co-chair of the Republican National Committee.

The new moneymaking venture could explode in value if Trump pushes through legislative and regulatory changes long sought by crypto advocates.

During his first term, Trump said he was “not a fan” of cryptocurrency but he has since taken a more favorable view — from announcing in May that the campaign would begin accepting donations in cryptocurrency to attending a Bitcoin conference in Nashville, promising to make the U.S. the “crypto capital of the planet” and create a Bitcoin “strategic reserve” using the currency that the government currently holds.

Several of Trump’s cabinet nominees, including Commerce Secretary nominee Howard Lutnick and Trump’s pick for the Securities and Exchange Commission, Paul Atkins, have substantial cryptocurrency investments.

Fires scorched campuses across Los Angeles. Many schools are seeking places to hold classes

By KRISTA FAURIA, JOCELYN GECKER and CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Days after losing her home in the same fire that destroyed her Los Angeles elementary school, third-grader Gabriela Chevez-Muñoz resumed classes this week at another campus temporarily hosting children from her school. She arrived wearing a t-shirt that read “Pali” — the nickname for her Pacific Palisades neighborhood — as signs and balloons of dolphins, her school’s mascot, welcomed hundreds of displaced students.

“It feels kind of like the first day of school,” Gabriela said. She said she had been scared by the fires but that she was excited to reunite with her best friend and give her hamburger-themed friendship bracelets.

Gabriela is among thousands of students whose schooling was turned upside down by wildfires that ravaged the city, destroying several schools and leaving many others in off-limits evacuation zones.

Educators across the city are scrambling to find new locations for their students, develop ways to keep up learning, and return a sense of normalcy as the city grieves at least 27 deaths and thousands of destroyed homes from blazes that scorched 63 square miles (163 square kilometers) of land.

Gabriela and 400 other students from her school, Palisades Charter Elementary School, started classes temporarily Wednesday at Brentwood Science Magnet, about 5 miles (8 kilometers) away. Her school and another decimated Palisades elementary campus may take more than two years to rebuild, Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said.

Students from seven other LAUSD campuses in evacuation zones are also temporarily relocating to other schools.

As Layla Glassman dropped her daughter off at Brentwood, she said her priority after her family’s home burned down was making sure her three children feel safe and secure.

“We have a roof over our heads. We have them back in school. So, you know, I am happy,” she said, her voice cracking. “But of course, there’s a lot of grief.”

Many schools have held off on resuming instruction, saying their focus for now has been healing, and trying to restore a sense of community. Some are organizing get-togethers and field trips to keep kids engaged in activities and with each other as they look for new space.

The Pasadena Unified School District kept all schools closed this week for its 14,000 students. It offered self-directed online activities but said the work was optional.

Between 1,200 and 2,000 students in Pasadena Unified School District are known to be displaced but the number could be as high as 10,000 based on heat maps of where families lived, district Superintendent Elizabeth Blanco said Thursday. The district aims to reopen some schools by the end of next week and have all students back in classrooms by the end of the month.

Schools that did not burn down were damaged by falling trees, debris, ash and smoke that requires extensive cleaning and environmental testing, she said. Hundreds of school staff members citywide lost their homes or had to relocate, compounding the challenges.

Some schools are passing on online learning altogether.

“We all did COVID. We did online instruction. We saw the negative impacts,” said Bonnie Brimecombe, principal of Odyssey Charter School-South, which burned to the ground. Families have been dropping their

children off at the local Boys and Girls Club so students can be with each other, she said.

A total of 850 students attend her school and a sister school in Altadena, Odyssey Charter School-North, which emerged undamaged but is still expected to remain closed for months. At least 40% of the students lost their homes in the fire, she said, making it especially urgent for their well-being to find new space and resume school as soon as possible. "At this point we are trying to reopen in-person the very first day that we can," she said.

Over the long term, disruptions can have profound effects on students' learning and emotional stability. Children who experience natural disasters are more prone to acute illness and symptoms of depression and anxiety, research shows. The physical and mental health impacts put them at greater risk of learning loss: Absences can undermine achievement, as can the effects of trauma on brain function.

Among the schools seeking space for temporary classrooms is Palisades Charter High School, which has 3,000 students. Nestled between Sunset Boulevard and the Pacific Coast Highway, "Pali High" is the kind of California school that Hollywood puts on the big screen and has been featured in productions including the 1976 horror movie "Carrie" and the TV series "Teen Wolf."

Most of the buildings are still standing, but about 40% of the campus was damaged, officials said. The school is looking into other campuses, nearby universities and commercial real estate spaces that would allow all its students to stay together until it's safe to return, said principal and executive director Pamela Magee. The school delayed the start of the second semester until Tuesday and will temporarily revert to online learning.

Axel Forrest, 18, a junior on the lacrosse team, is planning to gather with friends for online school. His family home is gone and for now they are at a hotel near the Los Angeles airport.

"I feel so out of it, every day. Do I cry? Do I mourn the loss of my home and school? I am trying not to think about it," he said. The longer school is out, the more idle time his mind has to wander.

"As time is passing I'm realizing this is going to be my reality for the next year or two. I am not going to have anywhere to live permanently for a while," he said. "And what am I going to do for school now? It's going to be online but for how long? Where will the temporary campus be? How far away is it?"

At Oak Knoll Montessori, educators have been holding meetups for its 150 students at locations including museums, parks, and a library in an effort for students to find some joy. The fire destroyed the school and several dozen students lost their homes.

The only thing that survived the fire was the school's chicken coop, and its five chickens.

"The chickens have been a nice beacon of hope," said Allwyn Fitzpatrick, the head of school. "All the buildings blew up. We have nothing. Not one chair."

Fitzpatrick has found a potential new location for the school and hopes to reopen before the end of the month.

"We have been trying to focus all our attention on the children and how we can temporarily help them normalize all this. Which is an insurmountable task," Fitzpatrick said.

SpaceX loses spacecraft after catching rocket booster at the launch pad in latest Starship test

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

SpaceX launched its Starship rocket on its latest test flight Thursday, but the spacecraft was destroyed following a thrilling booster catch back at the pad.

Elon Musk's company said Starship broke apart — what it called a "rapid unscheduled disassembly." The spacecraft's six engines appeared to shut down one by one during ascent, with contact lost just 8 1/2 minutes into the flight.

The spacecraft — a new and upgraded model making its debut — was supposed to soar across the Gulf of Mexico from Texas on a near loop around the world similar to previous test flights. SpaceX had packed it with 10 dummy satellites for practice at releasing them.

A minute before the loss, SpaceX used the launch tower's giant mechanical arms to catch the returning

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booster, a feat achieved only once before. The descending booster hovered over the launch pad before being gripped by the pair of arms dubbed chopsticks.

The thrill of the catch quickly turned into disappointment for not only the company, but the crowds gathered along the southern tip of Texas.

"It was great to see a booster come down, but we are obviously bummed out about ship," said SpaceX spokesman Dan Huot. "It's a flight test. It's an experimental vehicle," he stressed.

The last data received from the spacecraft indicated an altitude of 90 miles (146 kilometers) and a velocity of 13,245 mph (21,317 kph).

Musk said a preliminary analysis suggests leaking fuel may have built up pressure in a cavity above the engine firewall. Fire suppression will be added to the area, with increased venting and double-checking for leaks, he said via X.

The 400-foot (123-meter) rocket had thundered away in late afternoon from Boca Chica Beach near the Mexican border. The late hour ensured a daylight entry halfway around the world in the Indian Ocean. But the shiny retro-looking spacecraft never got nearly that far.

SpaceX had made improvements to the spacecraft for the latest demo and added a fleet of satellite mockups. The test satellites were the same size as SpaceX's Starlink internet satellites and, like the spacecraft, were meant to be destroyed upon entry.

Musk plans to launch actual Starlinks on Starships before moving on to other satellites and, eventually, crews.

It was the seventh test flight for the world's biggest and most powerful rocket. NASA has reserved a pair of Starships to land astronauts on the moon later this decade. Musk's goal is Mars.

Hours earlier in Florida, another billionaire's rocket company — Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin — launched the newest supersized rocket, New Glenn. The rocket reached orbit on its first flight, successfully placing an experimental satellite thousands of miles above Earth. But the first-stage booster was destroyed, missing its targeted landing on a floating platform in the Atlantic.

Giuliani settles legal fight with former Georgia election workers and agrees to stop defaming them

By LARRY NEUMEISTER and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Rudy Giuliani reached a deal Thursday that lets the cash-strapped ex-New York City mayor keep his homes and belongings, including prized World Series rings, in exchange for unspecified compensation and a promise to never again speak ill of two former Georgia elections workers who won a \$148 million defamation judgment against him.

The agreement resolves all pending litigation between Giuliani and the former election workers, Ruby Freeman and her daughter, Wandrea "Shaye" Moss. It also led to the cancellation of a trial that was supposed to begin Thursday to decide the ownership of his Florida condominium and three World Series rings that Giuliani, a prominent New York Yankees fan, had received from the team.

Giuliani, 80, was supposed to be the trial's first witness, but he never showed up to the federal courthouse in Manhattan.

Instead, his and the women's lawyers were there, toiling toward a resolution. After several hours without any court action, the lawyers emerged from a side room, shook hands and congratulated each other. Giuliani's son, Andrew, who had claimed ownership of the rings, beamed as he left the courtroom.

"Today is a good day," the younger Giuliani told reporters afterward.

Left unanswered: How much Giuliani agreed to pay the women, how he's footing the bill and whether anyone is helping him.

Giuliani had already begun turning over assets prior to the settlement, including his Manhattan apartment, which is worth about \$5 million, a 1980 Mercedes once owned by movie star Lauren Bacall, numerous luxury watches and other belongings. His total assets are worth about \$10 million.

Freeman and Moss won the massive judgment after saying Giuliani's lies about them following President-

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elect Donald Trump's 2020 election loss led to death threats.

"The past four years have been a living nightmare. We have fought to clear our names, restore our reputations, and prove that we did nothing wrong," the women said in a statement. "Today is a major milestone in our journey."

With the agreement, they said, "we can now move forward with our lives."

They added that they had "agreed to allow Mr. Giuliani to retain his property in exchange for compensation and his promise not to ever defame us."

Giuliani said in a statement posted on social media and read to reporters by his lawyer that the settlement satisfies the judgment against him but "does not involve an admission of liability or wrongdoing."

"I am satisfied with and have no grievances relating to the result we have reached," Giuliani said, adding that it allowed him to retain his Manhattan apartment and Florida condominium, as well as all of his personal belongings.

"No one deserves to be subjected to threats, harassment, or intimidation," the former mayor wrote. "This litigation has taken its toll on all parties. This whole episode was unfortunate. I and the Plaintiffs have agreed not to ever talk about each other in any defamatory manner, and I urge others to do the same."

Giuliani's lawyer, Joseph Cammarata, said the deal sprung from negotiations over the last three days that went "into the wee hours of the night."

Had an agreement not been reached, Giuliani would have been in court Thursday testifying before the same judge who last week found him in contempt for failing to turn over information on some of his assets to the women's lawyers. As punishment, Judge Lewis J. Liman banned Giuliani from using certain evidence.

The trial, now averted, was not intended to relitigate whether Giuliani defamed the women or the size of the judgment against him.

Rather, it was to decide the fate of some of his prized assets, including his Florida condo, which is believed to be worth more than \$3 million, and the World Series rings, which he touted as mementos of his time as "New York's No. 1 Yankee fan."

Giuliani argued that he established residence near Trump in Palm Beach, Florida, a year ago, but lawyers for Freeman and Moss say he continued to operate as if his New York apartment was his residence until he surrendered it last fall as part of the process of satisfying the judgment. Giuliani said he gave the rings to his son in 2018.

Andrew Giuliani said it's his understanding that he'll keep the rings.

Giuliani was also found in contempt last week in Washington, D.C. The judge there found that he continued to slander the election workers by repeating false claims that they counted votes corruptly during the 2020 presidential contest.

Giuliani, once heralded as "America's Mayor" for his post-9/11 leadership, served for a time as Trump's personal attorney during the president-elect's first term.

"SAVE RUDY!!!" Trump posted Sunday on his Truth Social platform.

As the lawyers were finalizing the settlement, Giuliani posted a video on social media showing a dog named Vinny on the grounds of Trump's Florida estate. The dog, the post said, "loves hanging out at Mar-a-Lago" but is "ready to spend a lot more time in Washington, D.C.," supporting Trump. It wasn't clear when the recording was made.

Giuliani filed for bankruptcy within days of the defamation verdict, pausing collection. After a judge threw out the case last July, finding that the former mayor had thumbed his nose at the process, Freeman and Moss sued to enforce payment.

As of last May, Giuliani had just over \$1 million in a retirement account, nearly \$94,000 in personal cash and about \$237,000 in his company's account, according to court filings.

At a recent hearing, Giuliani said he was "not impoverished" but that he didn't have access to most of his remaining assets.

"Everything I have is tied up," he lamented.

Giuliani said in sworn deposition testimony last month that after leaving office in 2002, the late Yankees

owner George Steinbrenner gave him rings commemorating each of the four World Series the team won while he was mayor.

Giuliani testified that he insisted on paying for the rings, which were the same as the ones the players received, and told Steinbrenner: "These are for Andrew." He said he immediately gave one to Andrew, a teen at the time, and kept three others for safekeeping. He estimated their total worth at \$27,000.

Netanyahu says deal to release hostages held in Gaza has been reached after last minute snags

By TIA GOLDENBERG, WAFAA SHURAFU and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday a deal to return hostages held in the Gaza Strip has been reached, after his office said earlier there were last minute snags in finalizing a ceasefire that would pause 15 months of war.

Netanyahu said he would convene his security Cabinet later Friday, and then the government to approve the long-awaited hostage deal.

Netanyahu's pre-dawn statement appeared to clear the way for Israeli approval of the deal, which would pause the fighting in the Gaza Strip and see dozens of hostages held by militants in Gaza released in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. The deal would also allow hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to return to the remains of their homes in Gaza.

Israeli airstrikes, meanwhile, killed at least 72 people in the war-ravaged territory on Thursday.

Netanyahu said he had instructed a special task force to prepare to receive the hostages returning from Gaza, and that their families were informed the deal had been reached.

Israel had delayed a vote Thursday on the ceasefire, blaming a last-minute dispute with Hamas for holding up approval as rising tensions in Netanyahu's government coalition raised concerns about the implementation of the deal just a day after U.S. President Joe Biden and key mediator Qatar announced it was complete.

Netanyahu's office had accused Hamas of reneging on parts of the agreement in an attempt to gain further concessions. In a briefing Thursday, David Mencer, an Israeli government spokesman, said Hamas' new demands dealt with the deployment of Israeli forces in the Philadelphi corridor, the narrow strip bordering Egypt that Israeli troops seized in May.

Hamas denied the claims, with Izzat al-Rishq, a senior Hamas official, saying the militant group "is committed to the ceasefire agreement, which was announced by the mediators."

The ceasefire agreement has drawn fierce resistance from Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners, which the Israeli prime minister depends on to remain in power. On Thursday, Israel's hard-line national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, threatened to quit the government if Israel approved the ceasefire. There was no immediate comment from Ben-Gvir following Netanyahu's announcement Friday.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty called on Israel and Hamas to implement a Gaza ceasefire plan "without any delay" in an exclusive interview Thursday with The Associated Press. Egypt has been a key mediator between the enemies for years and a leading player in ongoing ceasefire negotiations.

The deal announced Wednesday would pause the fighting with a view to eventually winding down a 15-month war that has destabilized the Middle East and sparked worldwide protests.

Hamas triggered the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage.

Israel responded with a devastating offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half of those killed.

The military campaign has leveled vast swaths of Gaza, and pushed about 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million from their homes. Hundreds of thousands are struggling with hunger and disease in squalid tent camps on the coast.

Netanyahu faces heavy internal pressure

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The Israeli prime minister has faced great domestic pressure to bring home the hostages, whose families have pleaded with Netanyahu to prioritize the release of their loved ones over politics.

But Israeli divisions over the deal were on stark display Thursday, as Ben-Gvir threatened to resign, saying the ceasefire was "reckless" and would "destroy all of Israel's achievements."

The departure of Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power party would reduce the number of the ruling coalition's seats in the Israeli parliament, or Knesset, from 68 to 62 — leaving Netanyahu's government with just the slimmest of majorities. Ben-Gvir said his party would return to the coalition if Israel resumes its war.

Ben-Gvir's resignation would not bring down the government or derail the ceasefire deal. But the move would destabilize the government at a delicate moment and could lead to its collapse if Ben-Gvir were joined by other key Netanyahu allies.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, for instance, is vehemently opposed to the agreement and has demanded that Netanyahu promise to resume the war against Hamas after the first phase of the ceasefire as a condition of his party staying in the coalition.

A night of heavy Israeli strikes

Palestinians in Gaza reported heavy Israeli bombardment Thursday. In previous conflicts, both sides have stepped up military operations in the final hours before ceasefires as a way to project strength.

"We were expecting that the (Israeli) occupation would intensify the bombing, like they did every time there were reports of progress in truce talks," said Mohammed Mahdi, who was sheltering in Gaza City.

Gaza's Health Ministry said the toll of 72 from Thursday's strikes only included bodies brought to two hospitals in Gaza City and the the number killed was likely higher.

"Yesterday was a bloody day, and today is bloodier," said Zaher al-Wahedi, a Health Ministry official.

The Israeli military said it had struck approximately 50 militant targets across the Gaza Strip over the past day, including weapons storage facilities and rocket launch sites.

Anxiety spread across Gaza on Thursday with the news of last-minute quarreling between Hamas and Israeli officials.

"We ask our brothers in Hamas to communicate with mediators to end the war," said Omar Jendiya, in Deir al-Balah. "Enough with the destruction and killing."

A phased withdrawal and hostage release with potential pitfalls

Under the deal reached Wednesday, 33 of some 100 hostages who remain in Gaza are set to be released over the next six weeks in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces will pull back from many areas, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be able to return to what's left of their homes, and there would be a surge of humanitarian assistance.

The remainder of the hostages, including male soldiers, are to be released in a second — and much more difficult — phase that will be negotiated during the first. Hamas has said it will not release the remaining captives without a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal, while Israel has vowed to keep fighting until it dismantles the group and to maintain open-ended security control over the territory.

Ceasefire leaves questions about Gaza's future unanswered

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's Mideast envoy joined the talks in the final weeks, and both the outgoing administration and Trump's team took credit for the breakthrough.

Longer-term questions about postwar Gaza remain, including who will rule the territory or oversee the daunting task of reconstruction.

Israel has come under heavy international criticism, including from its closest ally, the United States, over the civilian toll in Gaza. It also blames Hamas for the civilian casualties, accusing it of using schools, hospitals and residential areas for military purposes.

Hamas has come under overwhelming pressure from Israel's invasion of Gaza's largest cities and towns and seizure of the border between Gaza and Egypt. Its top leaders, including Yahya Sinwar, who was believed to have helped mastermind the 2023 attack, have been killed.

But its fighters have regrouped in some of the hardest-hit areas after the withdrawal of Israeli forces, raising the prospect of a prolonged insurgency if the war continues.

Ash and other dangers mean LA area residents who fled fires a week ago won't be going home soon

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and JAIMIE DING Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It has been more than a week since two massive fires forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in the Los Angeles area, and officials said Thursday residents won't be going home soon. As the search continues for human remains in the leveled neighborhoods, properties also face new dangers with burned slopes at risk of landslides and the charred debris laden with asbestos and other toxins.

More than 80,000 people are still under evacuation orders, and many do not know what, if anything, is left of their houses, apartments and possessions. Scores of people have gathered at checkpoints to plead with police and soldiers restricting access to their neighborhoods.

Officials said they understand their frustration, but they asked residents for patience as hazardous materials teams and cadaver dogs comb the sites block by block. They said it will be a week or more before people can go back.

"The properties have been damaged beyond belief," Los Angeles County Public Works Director Mark Pestrella said at a briefing. "They are full of sediment, debris, silt and hazardous materials."

Hillsides have become unstable behind some damaged homes, and a small landslide in Pacific Palisades this week sent debris into the streets, he added.

As firefighters continued to battle the two largest fires, which have killed 27 people and destroyed more than 12,000 structures, heartbroken families and burned-out business owners began to confront another monumental task: rebuilding what was lost.

The scale of the effort will be vast — the area scorched by the major fires is equal to three times the size of Manhattan. It is one of the most devastating natural disasters in Southern California history.

Recognizing the health risks, the county on Thursday prohibited any cleanup or removal of fire debris until a hazardous materials inspection is completed by government officials.

The city is also working on ensuring the region's storm drainage system does not get clogged when rain begins to return in the coming weeks. Rain also poses the risk of mudslides.

The fires struck at a challenging time, with the city in the midst of a post-pandemic transition that has reordered work life and left many downtown buildings with high vacancy rates.

In addition, planning is underway to host the 2028 Olympics, and the region has perhaps the nation's worst homelessness crisis, which had been Mayor Karen Bass' priority before the fires broke out last week.

The government has not yet released damage estimates, but private firms expect losses to climb into the tens of billions of dollars. The blazes could become the costliest fire disaster in U.S. history.

Alex Rosewood and nearly her entire family in Altadena, northeast of Los Angeles, lost their homes — her father, whom she and her husband were living with, and her aunt, uncle and cousin next door.

Lost were the keepsakes of a lifetime: Rosewood's grandmother's playing cards and unfinished quilt. Her wedding photos. Heirlooms from her grandfather, who served in the Navy. None of them could be saved as smoke turned the sky gray and her cousin's house began to burn.

But Altadena remains home.

"We all plan to rebuild, for sure," she said.

There will also be inevitable questions about whether it's sensible to keep rebuilding in known high-risk areas, especially in an age of climate change.

What will the new neighborhoods look like? Will fire-resistant materials and designs be used? Are more and wider roads needed to allow swifter evacuations and easier access for fire engines during future infernos?

"It's going to be a while before we can get in there and build anything," said Michael Hricak, an adjunct professor of architecture at the University of Southern California, referring to the dangerous chemicals and rubble left behind.

As for new construction, "it's not being tougher than Mother Nature. It's being somewhat respectful of Mother Nature and knowing what the challenges are."

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"Are we just inviting another problem down the road?" Hricak said.

The Northern California community of Paradise, where the state's deadliest wildfire killed 85 people in 2018, offers a glimpse into how painstaking and difficult recovery and rebuilding can be.

That fire destroyed about 11,000 homes — some 90% of the community's structures. About 3,200 homes and apartments have been rebuilt.

The town, which previously had a population of 26,000, has struggled under high construction costs, expensive insurance premiums and the uncertainty over money to be paid to people who lost homes by Pacific Gas & Electric, which was found liable for sparking the devastating blaze.

In Los Angeles — a city notorious for dense layers of bureaucracy and government red tape — Bass issued an executive order this week intended to clear the way for residents to rebuild quickly.

The federal government already has approved spending \$100 million to remove paint, cleaners, asbestos, batteries and other household waste from the rubble before crews can begin clearing debris. Robert Fenton Jr., a regional administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, called the plan a first step to getting people back in homes.

Elsewhere, the agency is handing out assistance to help people with short-term lodging.

Michele Baron and her daughter were among those who came to a recovery center in West Los Angeles to figure out how to get new birth certificates and Social Security cards.

Baron lost nearly everything when her Pacific Palisades apartment of 21 years burned to the ground. Her daughter made her way back to the property and salvaged a ring and pottery she made as a child.

Despite the trauma, the plan is to stay put.

"Now that I can go anywhere, I kind of don't want to," Baron said.

Donald Trump vows to help 'troubled' Hollywood with Mel Gibson, Jon Voight and Sylvester Stallone

By LINDSEY BAHR and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump wants to make Hollywood "bigger, better and stronger" and has cast Mel Gibson, Jon Voight and Sylvester Stallone as stars of what he is calling his "Special Ambassadors to a great but very troubled place, Hollywood, California."

On Wednesday, the President-elect announced on his social media site that the three actors would be his eyes and ears to the moviemaking town.

"It will again be, like The United States of America itself, The Golden Age of Hollywood!" he wrote on Truth Social.

He also called the trio special envoys. Special ambassadors and envoys are typically chosen to respond to troubled hot spots like the Middle East, not California.

Gibson said in a statement that he got the news "at the same time as all of you and was just as surprised. Nevertheless, I heed the call. My duty as a citizen is to give any help and insight I can."

Gibson, who lost his home in the Palisades fire, added, "Any chance the position comes with an Ambassador's residence?"

U.S. film and television production has been hampered in recent years, with setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hollywood guild strikes of 2023 and, in the past week, the ongoing wildfires in the Los Angeles area. Overall production in the U.S. was down 26% from 2021, according to data from ProdPro.

In the greater Los Angeles area, productions were down 5.6% from 2023 according to FilmLA, the lowest since 2020. This past October, Governor Gavin Newsom proposed expanding California's Film & Television Tax Credit program to \$750 million annually (up from \$330 million). Other U.S. cities like Atlanta, New York, Chicago and San Francisco have used tax incentives to lure film and TV productions to their cities. Actor Mark Wahlberg is even making plans for a Las Vegas production hub.

"I'm old enough to have touched some years of the Golden Age of Hollywood, and I've seen its slow deterioration since. Today, we are in pretty bad shape," Voight said. "Very few films are made here now, but we are fortunate to have an incoming President, who wants to restore Hollywood to its former glory,

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and with his help, I feel we can get done.”

It’s unclear what exactly Gibson, Voight and Stallone will be doing in this effort to bring productions back to the U.S. Representatives for Stallone did not immediately respond to request for comment.

Trump’s decision to select the actors as his chosen “ambassadors” underscores his preoccupations with the 1980s and ‘90s, when he was a rising tabloid star in New York, and Gibson and Stallone were among the biggest movie stars in the world.

Stallone is a frequent guest at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago club and introduced him at a gala in November shortly after the election.

“When George Washington defended his country, he had no idea that he was going to change the world. Because without him, you could imagine what the world would look like,” Stallone told the crowd. “Guess what? We got the second George Washington. Congratulations!”

The decision also reflects Trump’s willingness to overlook his supporters’ most controversial statements.

Gibson’s reputation has been altered in Hollywood since 2006, when he went on an antisemitic rant while being arrested for allegedly driving under the influence. But he’s also continued to work in mainstream movies and directed the upcoming Wahlberg thriller “Flight Risk.”

Voight is a longtime Trump supporter who has called Trump the greatest president since Abraham Lincoln.

Trump offered a bountiful batch of campaign promises that come due on Day 1

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After Donald Trump becomes president again on Monday, he is on the hook for achieving a hefty chunk of his promises even before the day is out. One of those promises is to make you dizzy.

“Your head will spin when you see what’s going to happen,” he said of Day 1.

Steady yourself. This is some of what the Republican promised voters he would get done on his first day in office:

- Launch the largest deportation in U.S. history to remove all people in the country illegally.
- Close the border.
- End automatic citizenship for everyone born in the U.S., known as birthright citizenship.
- Sign pardons for some or many of those convicted or charged in the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol.
- Impose a 25% tariff on everything imported from Mexico and Canada and add a 10% tariff to duties already imposed on goods from China.
- Even before Monday, end the Russia-Ukraine war.
- End what he calls the “electric vehicle mandate.”
- Declare a national energy emergency to spur the approval of more drilling, pipelines, refineries, power plants and reactors.
- Cut federal money to schools that push “critical race theory, transgender insanity and other inappropriate racial, sexual, or political content onto the shoulders of our children.” Also cut money to any schools that have a vaccine or mask mandate.
- Take steps to uproot the “deep state.”

All of that on Monday?

Not likely. Trump simply can’t accomplish all he said he will do on Day 1 because there are two more branches of government — Congress and the courts. The constitutional right to birthright citizenship, for example, cannot be ended with a stroke of his pen. (Moreover, in 2017 he considered Jan. 21 — his first full day on the job after the Jan. 20 inauguration — to be his Day 1.)

But as other presidents have done — and as Trump did aggressively and with decidedly mixed results in his first term — he will quickly test the limits of his executive power.

The power to pardon is within his grasp, and he can steer border enforcement efforts, tweak tariffs and

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find ways to spur energy production without Congress necessarily having to pass a law. Yet many of his executive orders will essentially be statements of intent — stage setters for struggles to come.

Here's a closer look at what he promised to do on Day 1:

IMMIGRATION The promise

"On Day 1, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history."

Under this core promise, Trump would unilaterally declare a national emergency to set the stage for tracking down millions of people in the United States illegally and holding them in huge detention centers until they can be removed from the country.

What could he do?

Domestic police forces and the National Guard in some states could be empowered to help federal agents in an extraordinary effort to track down and deport millions of people. As a disincentive to cross into the U.S. illegally, it is untested. Illegal crossings surged during the Biden administration before dropping recently and hovering near a four-year low.

How serious is he?

Trump made this central promise in rally after rally and in other public comments. It's unclear whether the declaration of a national emergency would come as part of his Day 1 launch or after.

What he said in the campaign

"The day I take the oath of office, the migrant invasion ends and the restoration of our country begins. ... On Day 1, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history. I will rescue every city and town that has been invaded and conquered." — Kinston, North Carolina, rally, Nov. 3, 2024.

Since the election ...

— Trump said in an interview with Time magazine that the federal prohibition on using military forces for most domestic security enforcement should not apply "if it's an invasion of our country, and I consider it an invasion of our country."

"And I think in many cases, the sheriffs and law enforcement is going to need help. We'll also get National Guard," he said during the November 2024 interview.

— In a possible hedge to his vow to deport everyone who's in the U.S. illegally, Trump said, "We're starting with the criminals, and we've got to do it. And then we're starting with others, and we're going to see how it goes." — "Meet the Press," Dec. 8, 2024.

In the past

The Dwight Eisenhower administration in the 1950s and Franklin Roosevelt's in the 1930s carried out mass deportations, specifically of Mexicans. Estimates of the number of people taken out of the U.S. in the 1950s deportation range from several hundred thousand to 1.3 million. Many were U.S. citizens descended from Mexican migrants. An FDR-era deportation ejected an estimated 1 million or more people, most of whom held U.S. citizenship.

The promise

Close the U.S. border.

What he said in the campaign

"And on Day 1, I will close the border, and I will stop the invasion of illegal criminals coming into our country." — Coachella, California, rally, Oct. 12, 2024.

How serious is he?

Not serious about closing U.S. land borders, as promised. Instead, he aims to come forward with Day 1 administrative action tightening enforcement against criminal entry.

Since the election ...

Trump adviser Jason Miller walked it back: "Now, when you say close the border, the impression is that nobody's allowed to go back and forth. What the border will be closed to is for people trying to enter the United States illegally. So there's a distinction. I want to make sure people don't think that all of a sudden, like all trade between the countries or traditional commerce or it's going to be shut down." — Interview with NPR News, Dec. 17, 2024.

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The promise

On Day 1, end automatic citizenship for everyone born in the U.S., including children of parents who came to the country illegally.

What he said

"I will sign a Day 1 executive order ending automatic citizenship for the children of illegal aliens." — Pickens, South Carolina, rally, July 1, 2023.

What it means if he keeps the promise

This is a broken promise waiting to happen.

Trump is extremely unlikely to be able to achieve his promise by mere executive order, because birthright citizenship is enshrined in the Constitution. He could only embark on a daunting quest to build the support that would be needed not just to win congressional approval but to change the 14th Amendment, which states: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."

Since the election ...

In a remark conceding an executive order may not be enough to end birthright citizenship: "We'll maybe have to go back to the people." — NBC's "Meet the Press," Dec. 8, 2024.

TARIFFS The (post-election) promise

Impose a 25% tariff on all imports from Canada and Mexico and put an additional 10% tariff on everything from China, as one of his first executive orders upon becoming president.

What it means if he keeps the promise

A seismic shock to the highly integrated North American economies, almost certainly resulting in higher prices for consumers and probably retaliation against U.S. exports. It would also strengthen incentives to produce more in the U.S. and step up pressure to restrain migrant flows and drug smuggling.

How serious is he?

Serious in general terms, maybe not in the specifics here.

Trump clearly supports raising tariffs to induce more domestic manufacturing. But his threat could be a bargaining chip in part. The size and scope of the tariffs may change, depending how the three countries respond before he takes office.

He has tied this heavy round of tariffs to what he calls the failure of these countries to stem the flow of Chinese-made fentanyl smuggled into the U.S. or to take effective steps from their side against migration surges at the borders. That stance may leave room for negotiation or revision.

What he said

"On January 20th, as one of my many first Executive Orders, I will sign all necessary documents to charge Mexico and Canada a 25% Tariff on ALL products coming into the United States." In addition, "we will be charging China an additional 10% Tariff, above any additional Tariffs, on all of their many products coming into the United States" until China stems the flow of drugs into the U.S. — Truth Social posts, Nov. 25, 2024.

Post-election hedge

"We adjust it somewhat" if tariffs are merely passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices, as is usually the case. — "Meet the Press," Dec. 8, 2024.

He gave Mexican and Canadian leaders an opening to avoid the tariff by saying he will impose it "if it doesn't stop," meaning the flow of drugs and illegal crossings.

In the past

Trump imposed higher tariffs on \$360 billion in Chinese goods in his first term. Democrat Joe Biden not only retained those penalties as president but imposed a 100% tariff on Chinese electric vehicles. Trump also renegotiated parts of the free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico on terms he considered more favorable to the U.S.

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TRANSGENDER RIGHTS The promise

"On Day 1, I will sign a new executive order to cut federal funding for any school, pushing critical race theory, transgender insanity, and other inappropriate racial, sexual, or political content onto the shoulders of our children. And I will not give one penny to any school that has a vaccine mandate or a mask mandate. — Atlanta rally, Aug. 3, 2024.

What it means if he keeps his promise

Such broad cuts are unlikely to be achieved through executive action, absent legislation, which certainly won't be in place on his first day. Still, Trump may be able to use his threat as a cudgel in certain situations.

Trump had also promised on Day 1 to roll back Biden administration Title IX protections barring discrimination against students based on gender identity and sexual orientation. But this month a federal judge struck down those regulations, ruling that they overstepped presidential authority.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE The promise

"I will end the electric vehicle mandate on Day 1." — Republican National Convention speech, July 18, 2024.

What it means if he keeps his promise

Not totally clear, because there is no specific federal EV mandate to end. But he is likely to try to loosen Biden-era tailpipe pollution and fuel economy standards that are an incentive for automakers to sell and consumers to buy more EVs. It's also unclear whether Trump intends to revoke a federal tax credit of up to \$7,500 for buying a new EV.

How serious is he?

He made the Day 1 promise in rally after rally, often in identical words. He told podcaster Joe Rogan it might take him two days.

What he said

"I will cancel Kamala's insane electric vehicle mandate." — Grand Rapids, Michigan, Nov. 4, 2024.

Since the election

"We want people to buy electric cars" but "we're going to end the electric mandate immediately for the cars. It's ridiculous." — "Meet the Press," Dec. 8, 2024.

In the past

Trump rolled back a variety of Obama-era limits on auto pollution in his first term. Biden acted quickly to reverse that course.

JAN. 6 The promise

Pardon some or many of the people convicted of or charged with crimes from the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol: "I will sign their pardons on Day 1."

What it means if he keeps his promise

Freedom and cleared criminal records for some of those imprisoned for Jan. 6 crimes and impunity for others convicted or awaiting trial. As he has described his promised process, it also means his transition team is reviewing Jan. 6 cases to deem who merits a Jan. 20 pardon, independently of how courts ruled.

How serious is he?

A key promise, made repeatedly, though the scope of his promised pardons has ranged from covering all rioters who were charged or convicted, to most, to those who are innocent in his estimation, whether convicted or not.

What he said in the campaign

"The moment we win, we will rapidly review the cases of every political prisoner unjustly victimized by the Harris regime, and I will sign their pardons on Day 1." — Mosinee, Wisconsin, rally, Sept. 7, 2024.

"Oh, absolutely, I would," he said when asked about pardoning Jan. 6 rioters. "If they're innocent -- if they're innocent, I would pardon them." This could include some who were convicted under "a very tough system." — National Association of Black Journalists interview, July 31, 2024.

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Since the election ...

Asked if he still intends to pardon Jan. 6 rioters on his first day: "We're looking at it right now. Most likely, yeah. ... Most likely, I'll do it very quickly." — "Meet the Press," Dec. 8, 2024.

We're going to look at each individual case, and we're going to do it very quickly, and it's going to start in the first hour that I get into office. And a vast majority of them should not be in jail." — Time magazine, Dec. 12, 2024.

In the past

Trump's remarks from the White House on Jan. 13, 2021, before reversing course and characterizing the rioters as patriots who protested mostly peacefully: "I would like to begin by addressing the heinous attack on the United States Capitol. Like all Americans, I am outraged by the violence, lawlessness and mayhem. I immediately deployed the National Guard and federal law enforcement to secure the building and expel the intruders. America is, and must always be, a nation of law and order. The demonstrators who infiltrated the Capitol have defiled the seat of American democracy."

ENERGYThe promise

Declare a national energy emergency and approve new energy projects "starting on Day 1."

What it means if he keeps his promise

A national emergency might give him more authority to act unilaterally. It remains questionable how much can be accomplished on this front without action from Congress. But he can reverse Biden executive orders on renewable energy and environmental protections.

How serious is he?

Very. "Drill, baby, drill" was a mantra rivaling "Make America great again" in his public remarks.

What he said in the campaign

"Starting on Day 1, I will approve new drilling, new pipelines, new refineries, new power plants, new reactors, and we will slash the red tape." — Potterville, Michigan rally, Aug. 29, 2024.

"I will immediately issue a national emergency declaration to achieve a massive increase in domestic energy supply." — New York Economic Club speech, Sept. 5, 2024.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WARThe promise

End the war before taking office.

What he said in the campaign

"I'll get the war with Ukraine and Russia ended. If I'm president-elect, I'll get it done before even becoming president." — Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends," Sept. 11, 2024.

Post-election hedge

His promise to end the war before taking office — or to end it in 24 hours, as he sometimes put it — is about to be broken.

He's been bending to that reality: "I think that the Middle East is an easier problem to handle than what's happening with Russia and Ukraine. OK, I just want to say that up front. The Middle East is going to get solved." — Time magazine, Dec. 13, 2024.

Trump spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said the day after the election that Trump would bring the Russian and Ukrainian leaders to the negotiating table on Day 1. That's not ending a war, as promised, before Monday.

'DEEP STATE'The promise

Launch an effort to fire or otherwise neutralize the influence of federal workers he considers disloyal and an impediment to his agenda. Also, use legal intimidation or other means to crush those he regards as his political enemies.

What he said in the campaign

"We will demolish the 'deep state.' We will expel the warmongers from our government. We will drive

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out the globalists. We will cast out the communist, Marxists and fascists. We will throw off the sick political class that hates our country. We will rout the fake news media." — Windham, New Hampshire, rally, Aug. 8, 2023.

"We're going to find the 'deep state' actors who have buried into government, fire them and escort them from federal buildings, and it'll go very quickly." — Columbia, South Carolina, rally, Jan. 28, 2023.

"You'll see that, on the very first day of my presidency, the 'deep state' is destroying our nation. But the tables must turn, and we will quickly destroy the 'deep state.'" — speech to Alabama GOP dinner in Montgomery, Aug. 4, 2023.

What it means if he keeps his promise

A likely first step is an executive order seeking to reclassify tens of thousands of job-protected and apolitical civil servants as political appointees, subject to being fired at will. He would do so by reviving his Schedule F order from 2020, which Biden reversed when he took office.

Post-election, ABC News settled a defamation lawsuit brought by Trump, agreeing to contribute \$15 million to his presidential foundation, and he sued The Des Moines Register and its pollster for "brazen election interference" in publishing a flawed survey the weekend before the election that found Democrat Kamala Harris leading Trump in the state.

American accused of assaulting a Pennsylvania student is extradited from France to the US

By NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY, SYLVIE CORBET and MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — An American accused of sexually assaulting a Pennsylvania college student in 2013 and later sending her a Facebook message that said "So I raped you" was extradited Thursday from France to the United States.

Ian Cleary, 31, of Saratoga, California, arrived in the U.S. and was being flown to Pennsylvania, a U.S. Marshals Service spokesman said. Cleary had been detained in April in Metz, France, after a three-year search. A French appeals court later said he could be extradited.

The court prosecutors' office in Metz, in northeastern France, said Cleary was handed over to U.S. authorities at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport.

Former Gettysburg University student Shannon Keeler, who pursued the case for more than a decade, said the news gave her "renewed faith" in the justice system.

"This arrest and extradition give me renewed faith that, after many years of waiting, the justice system can work, when survivors persist with the help and support of family, friends, advocates, and attorneys," Keeler said in a press release issued through her attorney.

Cleary had been the subject of an international search since authorities in Pennsylvania issued a 2021 felony warrant in the case, weeks after an Associated Press story detailed the reluctance of local prosecutors to pursue campus sex crimes.

The arrest warrant accuses Cleary of stalking the 18-year-old Keeler at a campus party in 2013, sneaking into her dorm and sexually assaulting her while she texted friends for help. He was a 20-year-old Gettysburg student at the time, but didn't return to campus.

Keeler had a rape exam done the same day. She gathered witnesses and evidence and spent years urging officials to file charges. She went to authorities again in 2021 after discovering the Facebook messages that seemed to come from Cleary's account.

"So I raped you," the sender wrote in a string of messages.

"I'll never do it to anyone ever again."

"I need to hear your voice."

"I'll pray for you."

According to the June 2021 warrant, police verified that the Facebook account used to send the messages belonged to Cleary.

The AP doesn't typically identify sexual assault victims without their permission, which Keeler has granted.

No hearing dates have been set in Adams County, Pennsylvania, which includes Gettysburg, and Cleary did not yet have a lawyer listed in court files. A woman who answered his mother's phone on Thursday disconnected a reporter's call, while phone numbers for his father were no longer working.

"It took an incredible amount of courage and unwavering resolve for Shannon to get this far," lawyer Andrea Levy said in the statement, "and she is deeply grateful to law enforcement at every level who worked to locate, capture and extradite Ian Cleary."

David Lynch, visionary filmmaker behind 'Twin Peaks' and 'Mulholland Drive,' dies at 78

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

David Lynch, the filmmaker celebrated for his uniquely dark and dreamlike vision in such movies as "Blue Velvet" and "Mulholland Drive" and the TV series "Twin Peaks," has died just days before his 79th birthday.

His family announced the death in a Facebook post on Thursday.

"There's a big hole in the world now that he's no longer with us. But, as he would say, 'Keep your eye on the donut and not on the hole,'" the family's post read. "It's a beautiful day with golden sunshine and blue skies all the way."

The cause of death and location was not immediately available. Last summer, Lynch had revealed to Sight and Sound that he was diagnosed with emphysema and would not be leaving his home because of fears of contracting the coronavirus or "even a cold."

"I've gotten emphysema from smoking for so long and so I'm homebound whether I like it or not," Lynch said, adding he didn't expect to make another film.

"I would try to do it remotely, if it comes to it," Lynch said. "I wouldn't like that so much."

Lynch broke through in the 1970s with the surreal "Eraserhead" and rarely failed to startle and inspire audiences, peers and critics in the following decades. His notable releases ranged from the neo-noir "Mulholland Drive" to the skewed gothic of "Blue Velvet" to the eclectic and eccentric "Twin Peaks," which won three Golden Globes, two Emmys and even a Grammy for its theme music. Pauline Kael, the film critic, called Lynch "the first populist surrealist — a Frank Capra of dream logic."

"'Blue Velvet,' 'Mulholland Drive' and 'Elephant Man' defined him as a singular, visionary dreamer who directed films that felt handmade," director Steven Spielberg said in a statement. Spielberg noted that he had cast Lynch as director John Ford in his 2022 film "The Fabelmans."

"It was surreal and seemed like a scene out of one of David's own movies," Spielberg said. "The world is going to miss such an original and unique voice."

"Lynchian" became a style of its own, yet one that ultimately belonged only to him. Lynch's films pulled disturbing, surrealistic mysteries and unsettling noir nightmares out of ordinary life. In the opening scenes of "Blue Velvet," among suburban homes and picket fences, an investigator finds a severed ear lying in a manicured lawn.

Steven Soderbergh, who told The Associated Press on Thursday that he was a proud owner of two end tables crafted by Lynch (his numerous hobbies included furniture design), called the biographical drama "Elephant Man" a perfect film.

"He's one of those filmmakers who was influential but impossible to imitate. People would try but he had one kind of algorithm that worked for him and you attempted to recreate it at your peril," Soderbergh told the AP. "As non-linear and illogical as they often seemed, they were clearly highly organized in his mind."

Lynch, who was married four times and had four children, never won a competitive Academy Award. He received nominations for directing "The Elephant Man," "Blue Velvet" and "Mulholland Drive" and, in 2019, was presented an honorary Oscar for lifetime achievement.

"To the Academy and everyone who helped me along the way, thanks," he said in characteristically off-beat remarks. "You have a very nice face. Good night."

Actors regularly appearing in his movies included Kyle McLachlan, Laura Dern, Naomi Watts and Richard

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Farnsworth. McLachlan, who starred in "Blue Velvet" and "Twin Peaks," said Lynch "was in touch with something the rest of us wish we could get to."

"I always found him to be the most authentically alive person I'd ever met," McLachlan said on Instagram. "David was in tune with the universe and his own imagination on a level that seemed to be the best version of human."

Aside from furniture making and painting, Lynch was a coffee maker, composer, sculptor and cartoonist. He exuded a Zen peacefulness he attributed to Transcendental Meditation, which his David Lynch Foundation promoted. In the 2017 short film "What Did Jack Do?" he played a detective interrogating a monkey. He regularly ate at, and espoused the joys of, the Los Angeles fast-food restaurant Bob's Big Boy.

Lynch was himself a singular presence, almost as beguiling and deadpan as his own films. For years, he posted videos of daily weather reports from Southern California. When asked for analysis of his films, Lynch typically demurred.

"I like things that leave some room to dream," he told the New York Times in 1995. "A lot of mysteries are sewn up at the end, and that kills the dream."

Lynch was a Missoula, Montana, native who moved around often with his family as a child and would feel most at home away from the classroom, free to explore his fascination with the world. Lynch's mother was an English teacher and his father a research scientist with the U.S. Agriculture Department. He was raised in the Pacific Northwest before the family settled in Virginia. Lynch's childhood was by all accounts free of trauma.

"David's always had a cheerful disposition and sunny personality, but he's always been attracted to dark things," a childhood friend is quoted as saying in "Room to Dream," a 2018 book by Lynch and Kristine McKenna. "That's one of the mysteries of David."

He praised his parents as "loving" and "fair" in his memoir, though he also recalled formative memories that shaped his sensibility.

One day near his family's Pacific Northwest home, Lynch recalled seeing a beautiful, naked woman emerge from the woods bloodied and weeping.

"I saw a lot of strange things happen in the woods," Lynch told Rolling Stone. "And it just seemed to me that people only told you 10% of what they knew and it was up to you to discover the other 90%."

He had an early gift for visual arts and a passion for travel and discovery. He dropped out of several colleges before enrolling in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, beginning a decade-long apprenticeship as a maker of short movies. He was working as a printmaker in 1966 when he made his first film, a four-minute short named "Six Men Getting Sick (Six Times)." That and other work landed Lynch a place at the then-nascent American Film Institute.

There, he began working on what would become his 1977 feature debut, "Eraserhead." The film, featuring Jack Nance with high-rising hair to rival the Bride of Frankenstein, took four years to make and debuted in theaters at midnight. It took nearly as long to develop a cult following and the interest of Hollywood. Stanley Kubrick became an advocate and George Lucas approached him about directing a "Star Wars" film. Another fan was Mel Brooks, who produced Lynch's next movie, "The Elephant Man."

"He is very sensitive, and he really understands human nature," Lynch told Bomb magazine of Brooks. "Otherwise he couldn't do those great comedies. I guess 'Eraserhead' spoke to him, and off we went."

"The Elephant Man," about Joseph Merrick, a severely deformed man who became a circus attraction in 19th century Europe, earned eight Oscar nominations. Producer Dino De Laurentiis then hired Lynch to direct a big-budget adaptation of Frank Herbert's "Dune." The film was a flop with critics and audiences — Lynch described producers' trims and tweaks in post-production as "a nightmare" — but, still, the movie attracted a cult following over the years.

After that came 1986's "Blue Velvet," starring Isabella Rossellini, Dennis Hopper, Laura Dern and McLachlan. Kicked off by the Bobby Vinton song, the detective story that twists its way to Hopper's oxygen-mask maniac, peeled back the superficial veneer of Reagan-era America.

"There are things lurking in the world and within us that we have to deal with," Lynch told The Los Angeles Times in 1986. "You can evade them for a while, for a long time maybe, but if you face them and

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name them, they start losing their power. Once you name the enemy, you can deal with it a lot better.”

In 1990, Lynch debuted both the Palme d’Or-winning “Wild at Heart,” with Nicolas Cage and Dern, and the radical TV series “Twin Peaks.” The show, a surreal sensation about the mysterious death of high-school homecoming queen Laura Palmer, was a sensation, earning five Emmy nominations for its first season.

“Twin Peaks,” which Lynch created with writer Mark Frost, remains one of the most enigmatic and singularly director-driven series to ever find a wide American audience on television. It clung to Lynch, too, who returned to it with the 1992 prequel “Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me” and a 2017 series.

After the nocturnal noir “Lost Highway” (1997) and the comparatively simple road movie “The Straight Story,” starring Richard Farnsworth as a 73-year-old man who travels cross country by lawn mower, Lynch directed his last masterpiece, 2001’s “Mulholland Drive.”

The film, starring Laura Elena Harring and Naomi Watts as young actors in Hollywood, was assembled out of a failed TV pilot. But that restructuring only enhanced the movie’s intoxicating puzzle, a doppel-ganger murder mystery. In the 2022 Sight and Sound poll, it ranked as the eighth greatest film of all time.

Lynch’s last feature was 2006’s “Inland Empire,” a fragmented and experimental thriller made without a script and shot on digital video.

In 2005’s “Lynch On Lynch,” edited by Chris Rodley, Lynch addressed some of the mysteries at the heart of his work.

“The more you throw black into a color, the more dreamy it gets,” he said. “It’s like a little egress. You can go into it, and because it keeps on continuing to be dark, the mind kicks in, and a lot of things that are going on in there become manifest. And you start seeing what you’re afraid of. You start seeing what you love, and it becomes like a dream.”

Doug Burgum, Trump’s pick for public lands boss, questions reliability of renewable power

By MATTHEW BROWN, JENNIFER McDERMOTT and JACK DURA Associated Press

President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee for interior secretary told a Senate panel Thursday the U.S. can leverage development of fossil fuels and other energy sources to promote world peace and voiced concerns about the reliability of renewable power sources promoted under the Biden administration.

Former North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum described Trump’s aspiration to achieve U.S. “energy dominance” as a way to counter demand for fossil fuels from autocratic nations — Russia, Iran and Venezuela — that have fewer environmental safeguards.

Burgum also said the U.S. needs to make more “baseload” electricity from coal and other sources as it seeks to power data centers for the nation’s tech industry. If confirmed, Burgum would become the chief steward of federal lands.

“This is something that is critical to our national security,” Burgum said. “Without baseload we’re going to lose the AI arms race to China.”

The Republican’s security claims were challenged by Hawaii Democrat Sen. Mazie Hirono who said military leaders have described global warming as a threat that could trigger instability and wars.

“For you to take a position that you are going to engage in actions that result in burning more fossil fuels is troubling,” Hirono said.

Fossil fuels — oil, natural gas and coal — cause climate change. When they burn, greenhouse gases are released. Asked if he thinks climate change is a problem, Burgum said he believed it’s a “global phenomenon.”

The Interior Department oversees a half-billion acres of federal land and vast areas offshore. Combined those areas produce about one-quarter of U.S. oil, or more than 1 billion barrels of crude annually, making them a flashpoint in the debate over how to address climate change.

President Joe Biden’s administration scaled back new oil and gas sales from public reserves as part of its efforts to curb climate change. Nevertheless, oil production hit record levels under the Democrat as high prices spurred drilling on lands that were previously leased.

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Trump has vowed to increase drilling for oil and gas. And he's been hostile to renewable energy including offshore wind. Burgum said Thursday that he wouldn't try to convince his boss about its benefits.

Sen. Angus King, I-Maine noted that North Dakota gets more than one-third of its electricity from on-shore wind turbines.

Burgum replied that the electric grid needs more resources that provide power continuously, as opposed to "intermittent" sources such as solar and wind that fluctuate.

"We've got massive tax incentives for people that want to do intermittent" power, Burgum said. "The balance is out of whack."

Trump has vowed to end the offshore wind industry when he returns to the White House. Trump tasked Rep. Jeff Van Drew, who is a vocal critic of offshore wind, with writing an executive order he could issue to halt wind energy projects. The New Jersey Republican told The Associated Press Wednesday that he emailed that draft order to Burgum.

King also asked Burgum if he would commit to continuing with offshore wind leases that have been issued. Burgum said projects already approved that make sense will continue.

Burgum is an ultra-wealthy software industry entrepreneur who grew up in a small North Dakota farming community working at his family's grain elevator. The two-term governor of the oil-rich state endorsed Trump after ending his own 2024 presidential bid.

Trump in November tapped him to be interior secretary and to chair a new energy council charged with promoting oil and gas development. The council could play a key role in Trump's effort to sell more oil and other energy sources to allies in Europe and around the globe.

Burgum as governor outlined plans to make the state carbon neutral by 2030. And he touted a pipeline that would be used to capture and store greenhouse gases that fuel climate change. Burgum told lawmakers Thursday the U.S. has an opportunity to remove the carbon from burning fossil fuels while promoting new development.

"If we can decarbonize traditional fuels cheaper than we can subsidize some of the renewables, that's something we should look at," he said.

Carbon-capture skeptics say the technology is untested at scale and allows the fossil-fuel industry to continue largely unchanged.

The Interior Department's mandate extends beyond fossil fuels to include grazing, mining, fish and wildlife conservation, the National Park system and has oversight responsibilities for more than 500 Native American and Alaska Native tribes.

Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee, chair of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, questioned Burgum about the expansion of national monuments, including Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante in his home state, under the Antiquities Act.

The monuments were created over the objections of state officials. Burgum appeared to sympathize with Lee's concerns. The nominee said the original intent of the 1906 law was for "Indiana Jones-type archaeological protections" of objects within the smallest possible area.

Burgum later touted the many potential uses for public lands including recreation, logging and oil and gas production that can boost local economies.

"Not every acre of federal land is a national park or a wilderness area. Some of those areas we have to absolutely protect for their precious stuff, but the rest of it – this is America's balance sheet," he said.

Blinken defends US policy on Gaza as his final State Department briefing is interrupted by protests

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Outgoing Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday defended Biden administration policies on Israel's war with Hamas after a ceasefire agreement in Gaza was reached, facing protests that interrupted his final news conference at the State Department.

He said he expected the deal — announced by President Joe Biden and Qatar on Wednesday — to

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be implemented over the weekend. He called it “a moment of historic possibility for the region and well beyond” even as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said a last-minute dispute with Hamas was holding up Israeli approval.

“It’s going to take tremendous effort, political courage, compromise to realize that possibility, to try to ensure that the gains that have been achieved over the past 15 months at enormous, excruciating cost are actually enduring,” Blinken said.

As he touted the deal, two people in the room accused him of complicity in Israeli violence against Palestinian civilians in loud outbursts that forced him to pause. One shouted, “Why aren’t you in the Hague?” referring to the International Criminal Court based in the Dutch city, and the other called him “a monster.”

Blinken asked them to “respect the process.” Both men were physically removed by Diplomatic Security officers.

While protests are common in large public gatherings, including just this week when Blinken delivered an address on the Middle East at a Washington-based think tank, they are rare, if not unprecedented, in the State Department briefing room.

After recovering from the interruptions, Blinken said in response to other questions that the U.S. has had “real differences” with Israel in how it has gone about defending its people and has “expressed those clearly at various points.”

But “we’ve mostly done it privately, precisely because we didn’t want to feed into Hamas’ clearly held views that if that pressure was mounting, and if there was daylight, they could do nothing,” Blinken said. That “they could refuse to engage on the negotiations, hold back on a ceasefire and releasing the hostages, and thus perpetuate the suffering, the loss for the people that they purport to represent.”

Blinken and other members of the Biden administration have faced severe criticism for not imposing meaningful restrictions on the supply of weapons to Israel or pushing its key ally hard enough to ease a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Israel’s military offensive against Hamas militants — who triggered the war with their Oct. 7, 2023, cross-border attacks that killed some 1,200 people — has leveled vast swaths of Gaza and pushed around 90% of the population of 2.3 million from their homes. Hundreds of thousands are struggling with hunger and disease in squalid tent camps on the coast.

The campaign has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half of those killed.

Blinken said the administration was acutely aware of the civilian suffering in Gaza, but said it had stopped short of accusing Israel of war crimes because of the “uniquely challenging situation” in the territory.

“Uniquely in Gaza, besides having a population that’s been trapped there that has nowhere else to go, you have an enemy that embeds itself in and amongst civilians, houses, hospitals, mosques, schools, and getting a clear picture and a clear understanding of whether any one incident in that context constitutes a violation of international law — it’s an incredibly complicated thing to do, especially to do it in real time,” he said.

Blinken traveled to the Mideast 12 times in a bid to halt the fighting. President Joe Biden and President-elect Donald Trump are both claiming credit for the ceasefire deal after the White House brought Trump’s Middle East envoy into the stalled negotiations.

Trump offered a bountiful batch of campaign promises that come due on Day 1

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After Donald Trump becomes president again on Monday, he’s on the hook for achieving a hefty chunk of his promises even before the day is out. One of those promises is to make you dizzy.

“Your head will spin when you see what’s going to happen.,” he said of Day 1.

Steady yourself. This is some of what he promised voters he would get done on his first day in office:

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- Launch the largest deportation in U.S. history to remove all people in the country illegally.
- Close the border.
- End automatic citizenship for everyone born in the U.S., known as birthright citizenship.
- Sign pardons for some or many of those convicted or charged in the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol.

— Impose a 25% tariff on everything imported from Mexico and Canada and add a 10% tariff to duties already imposed on goods from China.

— Even before Monday, end the Russia-Ukraine war.

All of that — and more — on Monday?

Not likely.

Trump simply can't accomplish all he said he will do on Day 1 because there are two more branches of government — Congress and the courts. (Moreover, in 2017 he considered Jan. 21 — his first full day on the job after the Jan. 20 inauguration — to be his Day 1.)

But as other presidents have done — and as Trump did aggressively and with decidedly mixed results in his first term — he will quickly test the limits of his executive power. He's told lawmakers to expect more than 100 executive orders out of the gate.

Some will be consequential, others will be cosmetic. Some will be tied up in courts.

All will display the bravado of a president reaching for maximum solo power. Trump, a Republican, won't be alone in this. When Republicans cried foul about President Barack Obama's expansive executive actions in 2014, the Democrat met the uproar with a curt response: "So sue me."

Here are some things to know about Trump's promises:

Trump can't always act unilaterally

The constitutional right to birthright citizenship, for example, cannot be ended with a stroke of his pen. On many other fronts, Trump's most contentious executive actions are sure to meet a thicket of court challenges.

On some issues he can

The power to pardon is within his grasp, and he can steer border enforcement efforts, tweak tariffs and find ways to spur energy production without Congress necessarily having to pass a law. Yet many of his executive orders will essentially be statements of intent — stage setters for struggles to come.

Trump has walked back some promises since winning election

In the campaign, he vowed repeatedly to "close the border" on Day 1. Post-election, his advisers said he wasn't speaking literally. He intends to take administrative action to tighten enforcement against illegal entry, not shut borders.

Trump also vowed to end the Russia-Ukraine war even before taking office. Now, he's bending to the reality that he couldn't solve the conflict on the timetable he'd promised, telling Time magazine in a post-election interview: "I think that the Middle East is an easier problem to handle than what's happening with Russia and Ukraine."

On birthright citizenship, he appeared to concede after the election that ending that may not be so easy, either: "We'll maybe have to go back to the people," Trump said on NBC's "Meet the Press" in December.

Some promises may be posturing or part of negotiations

Trump posted on social media after the election: "On January 20th, as one of my many first Executive Orders, I will sign all necessary documents to charge Mexico and Canada a 25% Tariff on ALL products coming into the United States." He added that all products from China will be hit with an additional 10% tariff right away.

As definitive as that sounded, Trump later said of the tariffs, "We adjust it somewhat" if they are merely passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices, as is usually the case. And he gave the three countries an opening to avoid or minimize the tariffs if they show enough progress in reducing the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S.

Should he go ahead with the tariffs as laid out — and draw trade penalties from the targeted countries in turn — the economy would be subject to a seismic shock, given the decades of U.S. dependence on

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goods from China and of free trade within the integrated North American market.

But he's serious about wielding the power of the pen

Under his core promise on immigration, Trump would unilaterally declare a national emergency to set the stage for tracking down millions of people in the U.S. illegally and holding them in detention centers until they can be removed from the country.

Domestic police forces and the National Guard in some states could be empowered to help federal agents in an extraordinary effort to track down and deport millions of people. As a disincentive to cross into the U.S. illegally, it's untested. Illegal crossings surged during the Biden administration before dropping recently and hovering near a four-year low.

Trump also vowed to declare a national energy emergency and approve new energy projects "starting on Day 1."

A national emergency might give him more authority to act unilaterally. It remains questionable how much can be accomplished on this front without action from Congress. But he can reverse President Joe Biden's ambitious executive orders on renewable energy, environmental protections and climate change.

On pardons, presidents have a free hand when it comes to federal crimes, and Trump will be closely watched Monday to see how he uses it. Through the campaign, he held up those imprisoned for attacking the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, as patriots and vowed, "I will sign their pardons on Day 1."

Yet he has vacillated on who and how many in that crowd will be pardoned and on what grounds.

Standoff in South Africa ends with 87 miners dead and anger over police's 'smoke them out' tactics

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

STILFONTEIN, South Africa (AP) — The death toll in a monthslong standoff between police and miners trapped while working illegally in an abandoned gold mine in South Africa has risen to at least 87, police said Thursday. Authorities faced growing anger and a possible investigation over their initial refusal to help the miners and instead "smoke them out" by cutting off their food supplies.

National police spokesperson Athlenda Mathe said that 78 bodies were retrieved in a court-ordered rescue operation, with 246 survivors also pulled out from deep underground since the operation began on Monday. Mathe said nine other bodies had been recovered before the rescue operation, without giving details.

Community groups launched their own rescue attempts when authorities said last year they would not help the hundreds of miners because they were "criminals."

The miners are suspected to have died of starvation and dehydration, although no causes of death have been released.

South African authorities have been fiercely criticized for cutting off food and supplies to the miners in the Buffelsfontein Gold Mine last year. That tactic to "smoke them out," as described by a prominent Cabinet minister, was condemned by one of South Africa's biggest trade unions.

Police and the mine owners were also accused of taking away ropes and dismantling a pulley system the miners used to enter the mine and send supplies down from the surface.

A court ordered authorities last year to allow food and water to be sent down to the miners, while another court ruling last week forced them to launch a rescue operation.

Many say the unfolding disaster underground was clear weeks ago, when community members sporadically pulled decomposing bodies out of the mine, some with notes attached pleading for food to be sent down.

"If the police had acted earlier, we would not be in this situation, with bodies piling up," said Johannes Qankase, a local community leader. "It is a disgrace for a constitutional democracy like ours. Somebody needs to account for what has happened here."

South Africa's second biggest political party, which is part of a government coalition, called for President Cyril Ramaphosa to establish an independent inquiry to find out "why the situation was allowed to get so badly out of hand."

"The scale of the disaster underground at Buffelsfontein is rapidly proving to be as bad as feared," the

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Democratic Alliance party said.

Authorities now believe that nearly 2,000 miners were working illegally in the mine near the town of Stilfontein, southwest of Johannesburg, since August last year. Most of them resurfaced on their own over the last few months, police said, and all the survivors have been arrested, even as some emerged this week badly emaciated and barely able to walk to waiting ambulances.

A convoy of mortuary vans arrived at the mine to carry away the bodies.

Mathe said at least 13 children had also come out of the mine before the official rescue operation.

Police announced Wednesday that they were ending the operation after three days and believed no one else was underground. To be sure, a camera was sent down Thursday in a cage that was used to pull out survivors and bodies.

Two volunteer rescuers from the community had gone down in the small cage during the rescue operation to help miners as authorities refused to allow any official rescue personnel to go into the shaft because it was too dangerous.

"It has been a tough few days, there were many people who (we) saved but I still feel bad for those whose family members came out in body bags," said Mandla Charles, one of the volunteer rescuers. "We did all we could." The two volunteers were being offered trauma counselling, police said.

The mine is one of the deepest in South Africa and is a maze of tunnels and levels and has several shafts leading into it. The miners were working up to 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) underground in different groups.

Police have maintained that the miners were able to come out through several shafts but refused out of fear of being arrested. That's been disputed by groups representing the miners, who say hundreds were trapped and left starving in dark and damp conditions with decomposing bodies around them.

Police Minister Senzo Mchunu denied in an interview with a national TV station that the police were responsible for any starvation and said they had allowed food to go down.

The initial police operation last year to force the miners to come out and give themselves up for arrest was part of a larger nationwide clampdown on illegal mining called Vala Umgodi, or Close the Hole. Illegal mining is often in the news in South Africa and a major problem for authorities as large groups go into mines that have been shut down to extract leftover deposits.

Gold-rich South Africa has an estimated 6,000 abandoned or closed mines.

The illicit miners, known as "zama zamas" — "hustlers" or "chancers" in the Zulu language — are usually armed and part of criminal syndicates, the government says, and they rob South Africa of more than \$1 billion a year in gold deposits. They are often undocumented foreign nationals and authorities said that the vast majority who came out of the Buffelsfontein mine were from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, and were in South Africa illegally.

Police said they seized gold, explosives, firearms and more than \$2 million in cash from the miners and have defended their hardline approach.

"By providing food, water and necessities to these illegal miners, it would be the police entertaining and allowing criminality to thrive," Mathe said Wednesday.

But the South African Federation of Trade Unions questioned the government's humanity and how it could "allow anyone — be they citizens or undocumented immigrants — to starve to death in the depths of the earth."

While the police operation has been condemned by civic groups, the disaster hasn't provoked a strong outpouring of anger across South Africa, where the mostly foreign zama zamas have long been considered unwelcome in a country that already struggles with high rates of violent crime.

UK leader Starmer signs '100-year partnership' agreement with Ukraine during trip to Kyiv

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer signed a 100-year partnership agreement with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday, part of a European show of support and promises

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to keep helping Ukraine endure in its nearly three-year war with Russia.

The announcement came days before Donald Trump is sworn in as U.S. president with skepticism of America's military burden in Europe and what he says is a plan to end the continent's biggest conflict since World War II.

"We are with you not just today or tomorrow, for this year or the next, but for 100 years — long after this terrible war is over and Ukraine is free and thriving once again," Starmer told Zelenskyy during a visit to Kyiv, promising that the U.K. would "play our part" in guaranteeing Ukraine's post-war security.

Starmer said that the landmark century-long agreement commits the two sides to cooperate on defense — especially maritime security against Russian activity in the Baltic Sea, Black Sea and Sea of Azov — and on technology projects including drones, which have become vital weapons for both sides in the war. The treaty also includes a system to help track stolen Ukrainian grain exported by Russia from occupied parts of the country.

Ukraine's alignment with the West, and potential future membership in NATO, have angered Russian President Vladimir Putin, who still wants to exert influence over the independent nation.

While Starmer was meeting with Zelenskyy at the presidential palace, debris from Russian drones shot down by Ukraine's air defenses fell in at least four districts of Kyiv, according to city administration chief Tymur Tkachenko. One was close to the Baroque presidential palace where the two men met.

Starmer said that the drones were "a reminder" of what the Ukrainian people are up against and their resolve.

Starmer's unannounced visit is his first trip to Ukraine since he took office in July, though he said that it was his seventh meeting with Zelenskyy.

The Italian defense chief was also in Kyiv on Thursday, two days after Germany's defense minister visited and three days after Zelenskyy talked by phone with French President Emmanuel Macron.

The flurry of diplomatic activity came in the days leading up to Trump's inauguration on Monday, which is expected to bring a departure from the outgoing U.S. administration's pledge to stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes to defeat Russia. Trump has also indicated that he wants Europe to shoulder more of the burden for helping Ukraine.

Kyiv's allies have rushed to flood Ukraine with as much support as possible before Trump's inauguration, with the aim of putting Ukraine in the strongest position possible for any future negotiations to end the full-scale invasion, which began on Feb. 24, 2022.

Ukrainians worry that Trump's plan will demand unpalatable concessions, such as giving up territory. Zelenskyy has also said that he wants security guarantees to deter Russia from invading again in the future.

"We must look at how this war could end, the practical ways to get a just and lasting peace ... that guarantees your security, your independence and your right to choose your own future," Starmer said at a joint news conference.

Zelenskyy said that the two leaders had discussed an idea floated by Macron for Western troops to monitor a future ceasefire, but said that it's "a bit too early to talk about details."

Starmer left the door open to U.K. participation, telling Ukraine's leader that "we will work with you and all of our allies on steps that would be robust enough to guarantee Ukraine's security."

"Those conversations will continue for many months ahead," Starmer said.

Zelenskyy has previously discussed a potential peacekeeping force with Baltic countries, France and Poland. But he said that it could only be part of the security solution and noted that "we do not consider security guarantees without the United States."

Starmer agreed that Washington's role in Ukraine is "vital." The United States is the biggest provider of military support and advanced weaponry to the country.

"We will continue to work with the U.S. on this," Starmer said.

Starmer said that in 2025, the U.K. will give Ukraine "more military support than ever before." He said that his country has already committed 3 billion pounds (\$3.6 billion) for military aid this year, including 150 more artillery barrels and a U.K.-designed mobile air defense system named Gravehawk. The U.K. has pledged 12.8 billion pounds (\$15.6 billion) in military and civilian aid since the war broke out.

During the daylong visit, Starmer and Zelenskyy laid flowers at a wall of remembrance for those killed in the war. The wall outside St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery, a Kyiv landmark, is covered in photos of the slain, stretching for a city block. It has become a place of pilgrimage for families paying tribute to their lost loved ones.

Starmer also visited a Kyiv hospital specializing in burns treatment and an exhibition of drone technology.

As the grinding war nears the three-year mark, both Russia and Ukraine are pushing for battlefield gains before possible peace talks. Ukraine has started a second offensive in Russia's Kursk region, where it is struggling to hang onto a chunk of territory it captured last year, and has stepped up drone and missile attacks on weapons sites and fuel depots inside Russia.

Moscow is slowly taking territory at the cost of high casualties along the 600-mile (1,000-kilometer) front line in eastern Ukraine and launching intense barrages at Ukraine's energy system, seeking to deprive Ukrainians of heat and light in the depths of winter. A major Russian ballistic and cruise missile attack on regions across Ukraine on Wednesday compelled authorities to shut down the power grid in some areas.

Some immigrants are already leaving the US in 'self-deportations' as Trump's threats loom

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

TRACY, Calif. (AP) — Michel Bérrios left the United States a few days before the new year, giving President-elect Donald Trump's campaign for mass deportations a small victory before they even started.

A former leader of a Nicaraguan student uprising, Bérrios had been in the U.S. legally, with nearly a year remaining under President Joe Biden's unprecedented use of humanitarian parole authority for citizens of certain vulnerable countries. But harsh talk during the U.S. election campaign filled her with anxious memories of hiding from authorities back home.

Advocates and immigration experts who have noticed such departures say Bérrios' decision to leave the U.S., despite her legal status, shows how uncertainty and threats have led a growing number of people to leave before Trump takes office on Monday.

There isn't data on these departures, but history has seen other eras of public backlash that drove migrants — with or without legal status — out.

Trump and his allies are counting on this "self-deportation," the idea that life can be made unbearable enough to make people leave.

"Because (the U.S.) is not a Third World country like the ones many of us come from, I thought there would be a different culture here, and it was a rude awakening to realize that you and your family are not welcome," Bérrios, 31, said days before her departure.

Self-deportation helps Trump to achieve his goals without the government having to spend or do anything. Trump has long said he wanted to deport millions of migrants but never deported more than 350,000 a year in his first term. Only 41,500 detention beds are funded this year, so carrying out massive deportations has significant logistical hurdles.

"If you wanna self-deport, you should self-deport because, again, we know who you are, and we're gonna come and find you," Trump's incoming border czar Tom Homan has said.

Bérrios had been living legally with her cousin in California, east of San Francisco, working at the front desk of an auto repair shop with Trump supporters, but she knew it was temporary — especially once Trump was elected. Anti-immigrant comments by her colleagues increased, and her discomfort grew.

In Nicaragua, "I spent five years hiding. I had to change my routine. I had to completely change my life. I stopped visiting my parents, my friends," Bérrios said of President Daniel Ortega's crackdown on dissent. With Trump returning to power, "that uncertainty has returned."

Such fear is natural for anyone without permanent legal status, said Melanie Nezer, vice president for advocacy and external relations at the Women's Refugee Commission. People with temporary permission to live and work, like Bérrios, may see that status end soon.

"Many, many people are in this situation," she said. About 1 million people have temporary protected

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status and about another 500,000 like Bérrios have humanitarian parole granted to asylum-seekers from four countries: Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Trump has said he wants to end both.

Until 2018, Bérrios led a fairly normal life in Nicaragua, working at a call center in Managua. She studied marketing and hoped to pursue a master's degree in dance.

Then changes to Nicaragua's social security system drove retirees to protest. When they were roughed up by police and Ortega supporters, students came to their aid.

Deadly clashes followed, and university campuses became strongholds of resistance in what became a referendum on the government itself. The government declared the protesters "terrorists" and alleged they were organized by foreign powers, especially the United States.

Bérrios became a protest leader at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua's Managua campus. Then known only by a code name, she told The Associated Press from hiding in July 2018, "Now, I really have no future."

Hundreds of other protesters were imprisoned, many were tortured, expelled from the country and stripped of citizenship.

"There was always the uncertainty that they could come after me, that they could take me to prison," Bérrios said last year of Nicaraguan authorities. "That's why I decided, well, maybe the United States can help me make a change for my peace of mind."

A cousin, a U.S. citizen in California, offered to sponsor Bérrios last year. Under Biden's strategy to create legal pathways while severely limiting asylum to those who cross the border illegally, people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela can apply online with a financial sponsor. They must fly to a U.S. airport at their expense.

About 100,000 Nicaraguans have come on two-year permits with eligibility to work since late 2022.

Bérrios arrived in 2023 as the U.S. election campaigns gained momentum. But talk of mass deportations eventually unnerved her. Returning to Nicaragua was not an option, so in December she settled on Ireland, where a couple of her friends from the student movement live.

"I felt like Ireland was a country of opportunity," she said.

Asylum systems in the European Union are largely standardized, but some differences make Ireland attractive, said Susan Fratzke, a senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute's International Program.

The resolution of asylum cases is faster than in the U.S., Fratzke said, and Ireland has not seen the strong pushback against asylum-seekers that has occurred in other European countries.

At Dublin's airport, Bérrios handed her passport to an immigration official and said she was requesting humanitarian protection. She was quizzed on the name of Ireland's president, answering correctly, and had her photo and fingerprints taken.

She got a government-issued identification card the next morning, valid for a year, and now shares a room with women from Somalia, Egypt and Pakistan in a hotel in a nearby town. They are free to come and go as they please, and the government pays for her lodging.

Bérrios looks forward to enrolling in school while she waits for her work permit. An in-depth interview about her case should come in eight or nine months and a decision on her asylum request will follow.

If all goes well, she could receive permanent residency in as soon as a year, she said.

Bérrios doesn't see her departure as a victory for Trump, but as a sign of deeper problems.

"The reasons I left the United States are not only the uncertainty you're living with as (Trump) returns to power, but also because it's a country where people don't have a sense of humanism. 'Love thy neighbor' doesn't exist," she said.

But she was buoyant as she marveled at her journey with the self-deportation twist: "You make sacrifices and always hope that things will turn out like you think, maybe not exactly, but pretty close."

Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody will fill Marco Rubio's Senate seat

By KATE PAYNE and STEPHANY MATAT Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody will take Marco Rubio's seat in the U.S. Senate, Gov. Ron DeSantis announced Thursday, making Moody only the second woman to represent Florida in the chamber.

Elected as the state's top law enforcement officer in 2018, Moody campaigned on a pledge to voters that she'd be a prosecutor, not a politician. But along with DeSantis, she boosted her political profile during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, calling on the federal government to "hold China responsible" for the outbreak.

In elevating her to the post, DeSantis praised Moody as a key player in his political battles, a law and order prosecutor who's prepared to help President-elect Donald Trump "secure and shut the border," rein in inflation, and overhaul what he described as a federal bureaucracy "run amok."

"I'm ready to show up and fight for this nation and fight for President Trump to deliver the America First agenda on Day 1," Moody said during Thursday's announcement at a hotel in Orlando.

"The only way to return this country to the people, the people who govern it, is to make sure we have a strong Congress doing its job, passing laws and actually approving the regulations that these unelected bureaucrats are trying to cram down on the American people," she added.

Before running for statewide office, Moody worked as a federal prosecutor. In 2006, she was elected to the post of circuit judge in Hillsborough County, home to Tampa. A fifth generation native of Plant City, Florida, Moody was once named queen of the city's famed strawberry festival. She's a three-time graduate of the University of Florida and she and her husband, a law enforcement officer, have two sons.

As the state's attorney general, Moody has been instrumental in defending DeSantis' conservative agenda in court and has joined other Republican-led states in challenging the Biden administration's policies, suing over changes to immigration enforcement, student loan forgiveness and vaccine mandates for federal contractors.

"I'm happy to say we've had an Attorney General that is somebody that has acted time and time again to support the values that we all share," DeSantis said. "We in Florida established our state as a beachhead of liberty, as the free state of Florida. And she was with us every step of the way."

Moody isn't the state's only AG to use the office as a stepping stone to a national post. Her predecessor, Pam Bondi, is Trump's pick to lead the Justice Department and is testifying Thursday in the Senate.

Moody will be the second woman to represent the state in the Senate, and the first in nearly 40 years; Republican Paula Hawkins served in the chamber from 1981-1987.

With the appointment announced, Moody is poised to take office once the vacancy occurs. Rubio is expected to have broad support from Republicans as well as Democrats, and his confirmation vote could come as soon as Monday evening.

Under Florida law, it was up to the Republican governor to choose Rubio's replacement after Trump picked the three-term senator to be his next secretary of state. Moody will serve in the Senate until the next general election in 2026, when the seat will be back on the ballot.

Moody has used her office to come to Trump's defense, pursuing a criminal case against a man accused of trying to assassinate Trump at his West Palm Beach country club in September. She was also among the state attorneys general to sign on to the lawsuit backed by Trump aimed at overturning Joe Biden's election victory in 2020.

The attorney general also fought unsuccessfully to keep an abortion rights measure off the ballot in Florida in 2024, saying proponents were waging "a war" to protect the procedure. The measure did go before voters but ultimately failed to get the 60% approval needed to pass.

Moody could play a key role in the hearings for Trump's Cabinet nominees, some of whom are expected to face a tough path to confirmation.

Republicans narrowly hold a majority in the Senate, 53-47, but they are down to 52 after Vice President-

elect JD Vance resigned his seat last week ahead of taking office. That means Trump's nominees need support from almost every GOP senator for majority confirmation over objections from Democrats.

Republican state Sen. Joe Gruters, a key Trump ally in the state, was among those who had pushed the president-elect's daughter-in-law Lara Trump as their top pick for the Senate seat. Lara Trump removed herself from consideration in December.

Still, Gruters praised Moody, calling her "a winner here in Florida."

"She's very popular. And I think people see the job that she does and they appreciate her work and her effort at trying to ... keep Florida safe," Gruters said ahead of the announcement.

Moody's appointment opens up a key vacancy in Florida's Cabinet, giving DeSantis another shot at expanding his influence in the state. Speaking to reporters Thursday, DeSantis said he plans to tap his chief of staff, James Uthmeier, for the job.

DeSantis will also get to pick a replacement for outgoing Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis, who's leaving his post to run for former Rep. Matt Gaetz's open seat in Congress.

Democrats' crisis of the future: The biggest states that back them are shrinking

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and KEVIN S. VINEYS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Texas and Florida are growing rapidly. California, Illinois and New York are shrinking.

With America's population shifting to the South, political influence is seeping from reliably Democratic states to areas controlled by Republicans. Coming out of a presidential election where they lost all seven swing states, Democrats are facing a demographic challenge that could reduce their path to winning the U.S. House of Representatives or the White House for the long term.

If current trends hold through the 2030 census, states that voted for Vice President Kamala Harris will lose around a dozen House seats — and Electoral College votes — to states that voted for President-elect Donald Trump. The Democratic path to 270 Electoral College votes, the minimum needed to win the presidency, will get much narrower.

"At the end of the day, Democrats have to be able to win in the South or compete in the South" if they want to control the levers of government, said Michael Li, senior counsel for the Democracy Program at New York University School of Law's Brennan Center for Justice. "Otherwise, it's a really uphill battle every time."

The Brennan Center, which is left-leaning, projects Democratic states in 2024 would lose 12 seats in the next census. The right-leaning American Redistricting Project forecasts a similar blue-to-red shift but pegged the loss at 11 seats, not 12.

The South's gains

Li's latest projection, which was released late last year, is based on the last two years of population changes and shows the South gaining more House seats than it has had in history. It would be the continuation of a decades-long trend of the population shifting from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and inland West. Americans and immigrants are gravitating toward warmer climates, cheaper housing, lower taxes and plentiful jobs.

The Brennan Center projects that California will lose four seats and New York two in the 2030 census. Illinois, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wisconsin would lose one seat each. Except for Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, which are swing states, all of those states have consistently backed Democrats for president and sent Democratic majorities to the House.

No GOP strongholds are projected to lose seats. Florida and Texas are projected to pick up four seats each. Arizona, Idaho, North Carolina and Utah are forecasted to each gain one. All of them backed Trump for president last year, though Arizona and North Carolina were competitive, and all have Republican majorities in their U.S. House delegations.

A changing map

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Entering Election Day, there was a broad consensus that Harris would comfortably win 226 electoral votes and Trump 219, with both campaigns fighting over seven battleground states to reach the 270 electoral votes required to win. Those seven battleground states had 93 electoral votes — and Trump won all of them.

If the projected map for the next decade were used in 2024, Trump's electoral college margin would have been even larger. He would have won the Electoral College 322-216 instead of 312-226.

On the flip side, Democrat Joe Biden still would have won in 2020 with the projected map for the 2030s, but the margin would have been closer. Instead of a 306-232 victory, Biden would have beat Trump 292-246.

Harris could have won last year by keeping the "Blue Wall" — Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania — along with one congressional district in Nebraska, a state that splits its electoral votes. In the next decade, that won't be enough, according to current projections. The Blue Wall strategy combined with safely Democratic states would net just 258 electoral votes, 12 short of victory.

How do Democrats remain relevant?

To control the White House, House or Senate, Democrats will likely need to do better in the three southern swing states. Arizona, Georgia and North Carolina lean conservative but have elected Democrats at a statewide level.

Alternatively, they could try to achieve their long-elusive goal of turning Texas blue or reverse the recent trend toward Republicans in Florida, once a swing state that has shifted hard to the right.

To be sure, Republican dominance in the 2030s is not a foregone conclusion. Not long ago, Democrats thought they were building an insurmountable majority due to their strength with voters of color and a growing Latino population across the country. But that fell apart when Trump and the GOP began making inroads with the Democrats' traditional working class base.

Hispanic voters were more open to Trump than they were in 2020. And while Harris won more than half of Hispanic voters, that support was down slightly from the roughly 6 in 10 Hispanic voters that Biden won, according to AP VoteCast. Roughly half of Latino men voted for Harris, down from about 6 in 10 who went for Biden.

Democratic resurgence will require much more investment in state parties and a frank assessment of how to appeal to parts of the country that supported Trump, said James Skoufis, a New York state senator who on Thursday ended his campaign to be chair of the Democratic National Committee.

"It requires a reorientation of how we speak with voters," Skoufis said. "It requires emphasizing our working class values again. And if we're being honest with ourselves and we're owning some of what just happened two months ago, we need to shed this perception that we are an elitist party."

Surprise finding sheds light on what causes Huntington's disease, a devastating fatal brain disorder

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Scientists are unraveling the mystery of what triggers Huntington's disease, a devastating and fatal hereditary disorder that strikes in the prime of life, causing nerve cells in parts of the brain to break down and die.

The genetic mutation linked to Huntington's has long been known, but scientists haven't understood how people could have the mutation from birth, but not develop any problems until later in life.

New research shows that the mutation is, surprisingly, harmless for decades. But it quietly grows into a larger mutation — until it eventually crosses a threshold, generates toxic proteins, and kills the cells it has expanded in.

"The conundrum in our field has been: Why do you have a genetic disorder that manifests later in life if the gene is present at conception?" said Dr. Mark Mehler, who directs the Institute for Brain Disorders and Neural Regeneration at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and was not involved in the research. He called the research a "landmark" study and said "it addresses a lot of the issues that have plagued

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the field for a long time.”

The brain cell death eventually leads to problems with movement, thinking and behavior. Huntington’s symptoms – which include involuntary movement, unsteady gait, personality changes and impaired judgment – typically begin between the ages of 30 and 50, gradually worsening over 10 to 25 years.

Scientists at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, McLean Hospital in Massachusetts and Harvard Medical School studied brain tissue donated by 53 people with Huntington’s and 50 without it, analyzing half a million cells.

They focused on the Huntington’s mutation, which involves a stretch of DNA in a particular gene where a three-letter sequence – CAG – is repeated at least 40 times. In people without the disease this sequence is repeated just 15 to 35 times. They discovered that DNA tracts with 40 or more such “repeats” expand over time until they are hundreds of CAGs long. Once CAGs reach a threshold of about 150, certain types of neurons sicken and die.

The findings “were really surprising, even to us,” said Steve McCarroll, a Broad member and co-senior author of the study, which was published Thursday in the journal *Cell*. The study was partly funded by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, an organization that also supports The Associated Press Health and Science department.

The research team estimated that repeat tracts grow slowly during the first two decades of life, then the rate accelerates dramatically when they reach about 80 CAGs.

“The longer the repeats, the earlier in life the onset will happen,” said neuroscience researcher Sabina Berretta, one of the study’s senior authors.

Researchers acknowledged that some scientists were initially skeptical when results were shared at conferences, since previous work found that repeat expansions in the range of 30 to 100 CAGs were necessary — but not sufficient — to cause Huntington’s. McCarroll agreed that 100 or fewer CAGs are not sufficient to trigger the disease, but said his study found that expansions with at least 150 CAGs are.

Researchers hope their findings can help scientists come up with ways to delay or prevent the incurable condition, which afflicts about 41,000 Americans and is now treated with medications to manage the symptoms.

Recently, experimental drugs designed to lower levels of the protein produced by the mutated Huntington’s gene have struggled in trials. The new findings suggest that’s because few cells have the toxic version of the protein at any given time.

Slowing or stopping the expansion of DNA repeats may be a better way to target the disease, researchers said.

Though there are no guarantees this would stave off Huntington’s, McCarroll said “many companies are starting or expanding programs to try to do this.”

Pope Francis hurts his right arm after falling for the second time in just over a month

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis fell Thursday and hurt his right arm, the Vatican said, just weeks after another apparent fall resulted in a bad bruise on his chin.

Francis didn’t break his arm, but a sling was put on as a precaution, the Vatican spokesman said in a statement

On Dec. 7, the pope whacked his chin on his nightstand in an apparent fall that resulted in a bad bruise.

The 88-year-old pope, who has battled health problems including long bouts of bronchitis, often has to use a wheelchair because of bad knees. He uses a walker or cane when moving around his apartment in the Vatican’s Santa Marta hotel.

The Vatican said that Thursday’s fall also occurred at Santa Marta, and the pope was later seen in audiences with his right arm in a sling. At one of the meetings, Francis apologetically offered his left hand for

a handshake when he greeted the head of the U.N. fund for agricultural development, Alvaro Lario.

"This morning, due to a fall at the Casa Santa Marta, Pope Francis suffered a contusion to his right forearm, without fracture. The arm was immobilized as a precautionary measure," the statement said.

Speculation about Francis' health is a constant in Vatican circles, especially after Pope Benedict XVI broke 600 years of tradition and resigned from the papacy in 2013. Benedict's aides have attributed the decision to a nighttime fall that he suffered during a 2012 trip to Mexico, after which he determined he couldn't keep up with the globe-trotting demands of the papacy.

Francis has said that he has no plans to resign anytime soon, even if Benedict "opened the door" to the possibility. In his autobiography "Hope" released this week, Francis said that he hadn't considered resigning even when he had major intestinal surgery.

NASA's stuck astronaut steps out on a spacewalk after 7 months in orbit

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — One of NASA's two stuck astronauts got a much welcomed change of scenery Thursday, stepping out on her first spacewalk since arriving at the International Space Station more than seven months ago.

Suni Williams, the station's commander, tackled some overdue outdoor repair work alongside NASA's Nick Hague. They emerged as the orbiting lab sailed 260 miles (420 kilometers) above Turkmenistan.

Williams got a close-up look at the SpaceX capsule that will bring her home this spring, floating just a few feet away from the parked vessel as she struggled with a chore. She eventually prevailed without damaging her ride.

Plans called for Williams to head back out next week with Butch Wilmore on another spacewalk. The two launched aboard Boeing's new Starliner capsule last June on what should have been a weeklong test flight.

But Starliner trouble dragged out their return, and NASA ordered the capsule to come back empty. Then SpaceX delayed the launch of their replacements, meaning the two won't be home until late March or early April — ten months after launching.

It was the first spacewalk by NASA astronauts since an aborted one last summer. U.S. spacewalks were put on hold after water leaked into the airlock from the cooling loop for an astronaut's suit. NASA said the problem has been fixed.

This was the eighth spacewalk for Williams, who has lived on the space station before.

South Korean court rejects petition to release impeached president detained over martial law

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Lawyers for impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol failed in their court effort to secure his release on Thursday, a day after he was detained at his residence for questioning over rebellion allegations linked to his martial law declaration last month.

Yoon was sent to a detention center near the country's capital, Seoul, after undergoing more than 10 hours of questioning on Wednesday at the headquarters of the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, during which he exercised his right to remain silent. Yoon refused further questioning by the anti-corruption officials on Thursday as his lawyers maintained that the investigation was illegal.

Lawyers had asked the Seoul Central District Court to consider his release, questioning the validity of the detention warrant for Yoon issued by the Seoul Western District Court.

But the Central District Court denied their petition late Thursday.

Yoon had avoided several requests to appear for questioning before the anti-corruption agency and police carried out a major law enforcement operation involving hundreds of personnel to detain him at his residential compound in Seoul.

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Investigators are expected to move to place him under arrest in the coming days.

The anti-corruption agency, which is leading a joint investigation with the police and the military over whether Yoon's martial law declaration amounted to attempted rebellion, has 48 hours either to request a court order for his formal arrest or to release him.

On Thursday, his lawyers formally declared that Wednesday's raid at the presidential residence, which led to the detention of a head of state, was illegal, in complaints filed with prosecutors.

Yoon didn't attend a hearing at the Central District Court on Thursday, which was part of the review over his detention warrant, because of security concerns, according to Seok Dong-hyeon, one of the president's lawyers.

Hundreds of Yoon's supporters rallied for hours in streets near the court and the detention center where Yoon was being held, waving banners and chanting slogans calling for his release.

Yoon set off the country's most serious political crisis since its democratization in the late 1980s when he attempted to break through gridlock in legislation by declaring martial law and deploying troops around the National Assembly on Dec. 3. The standoff 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, accusing 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.

Yoon and his allies have defied efforts to investigate his role in the chaos of Dec. 3. He ignored requests to appear for questioning for weeks, remaining in his official residence to avoid detention as his lawyers turned away police, citing a law that protects locations potentially linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge — Yoon himself. They also said that the anti-corruption agency had no legal authority to investigate rebellion allegations.

Yoon also resisted one attempt to detain him as the presidential security service barricaded the residence. He was finally brought into custody after hundreds of anti-corruption investigators and police raided the presidential compound for around five hours in a second attempt.

In a video message recorded shortly before he was escorted to the headquarters of the anti-corruption agency, Yoon lamented that the "rule of law has completely collapsed in this country." He echoed the arguments of his lawyers that the anti-corruption agency doesn't have the authority to investigate his actions, but said that he accepted detention to prevent violence.

The Constitutional Court rejected a request by Yoon's lawyers to postpone a hearing on his case scheduled for Thursday. It remains possible for Yoon to exercise his right to attend, even while under detention.

If a court grants a warrant for Yoon's formal arrest, the anti-corruption investigators can extend his detention to 20 days, during which it will transfer the case to public prosecutors for an indictment.

If prosecutors indict Yoon on the possible charges of rebellion and abuse of power, he could remain under arrest until the first court ruling, which is typically made within six months, said Park Sung-bae, an attorney specializing in criminal law. Under South Korean law, the leader of a rebellion can face the death penalty or life imprisonment, if convicted.

Many Americans doubt Trump will be able to lower prices in his first year, an AP-NORC poll shows

By LINLEY SANDERS and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Worries about everyday expenses helped return President-elect Donald Trump to the White House. But with his second term quickly approaching, many U.S. adults are skeptical about his ability to bring down costs.

Only about 2 in 10 Americans are "extremely" or "very" confident that Trump will be able to make progress on lowering the cost of groceries, housing or health care this year, according to a survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, while about 2 in 10 are "moderately" confident.

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Faith in Trump's ability to create jobs is a little higher — about 3 in 10 are extremely or very confident the Republican will make progress on this in 2025 — but the poll indicates that despite his sweeping promises about lowering prices, a substantial chunk of his own supporters don't have high confidence in his ability to quickly alleviate the economic pressures that continue to frustrate many households.

Those tempered expectations haven't dampened Republicans' hopes for Trump's second presidential term, though. And Democrats' pessimism about his return to office is more muted than it was when he exited the White House in 2020. About 8 in 10 Republicans say Trump will be a "great" or "good" president in his second term, according to the poll.

And while Democrats' assessments are much more negative — about 8 in 10 say he will be a "poor" or "terrible" president — they are less likely to say he'll be a "terrible" president in his second term than they were at the end of his first.

Only about 3 in 10 are highly confident in Trump's handling of the economy

Much of the 2024 presidential campaign revolved around prices — whether President Joe Biden, a Democrat, was to blame for inflation and whether Trump could fix it. AP VoteCast, an extensive survey of voters and nonvoters that aims to tell the story behind election results, showed that about 4 in 10 voters in the November election identified the economy and jobs as the most important issue facing the country and that about 6 in 10 of those voters cast their ballot for Trump.

As Trump takes office, though, the poll shows that many Americans don't anticipate that he will be able to immediately bring costs down. That includes some of his own supporters. Less than half of Republicans are at least "very" confident that Trump will make progress on lowering food costs, housing costs or health care costs, although about 6 in 10 are at least "very" confident in his ability to create jobs.

Confidence in Trump's ability to handle the broader economic situation is also fairly low. Only about one-third of Americans are "extremely" or "very" confident in his ability to handle the economy and jobs. Nearly 2 in 10 are "moderately" confident, and about half are "slightly confident" or "not at all confident."

Here, Republicans have more faith in Trump's abilities — about 7 in 10 are at least "very" confident in his ability to handle the economy in general.

But there are other policy areas where expectations for Trump aren't high across the board. Similar to the economy and jobs, about one-third of Americans are at least "very" confident in Trump's ability to handle immigration and national security, while about 2 in 10 are "moderately" confident and about half are "slightly" or "not at all" confident.

Health care is a particularly weak spot for Trump

Americans are especially skeptical of Trump's ability to bring down health care costs or handle the issue of health care at all, the poll found. Only about 2 in 10 Americans are extremely or very confident in his ability to tackle health care issues, and 16% are confident in his ability to make progress on lowering health care costs.

During the presidential campaign, Trump said he would look at alternatives to the Affordable Care Act. He has not offered a concrete plan of what his changes to the health care law would be, but he spent a lot of energy during his first term on efforts to dismantle it that were ultimately unsuccessful.

Only about half of Republicans are extremely or very confident in Trump's ability to handle health care, and about one-third are at least very confident he'll make progress on lowering the cost of health care.

About half of Republicans expect a 'great' second term from Trump

Trump's favorability rating has remained steady through four indictments, a criminal conviction and two attempted assassinations, and the new survey shows that Americans' expectations for his second term match their assessment of his first four years in office. Slightly fewer than half of U.S. adults expect Trump will be a "terrible" or "poor" president in his second term, essentially unchanged from when he left the White House in 2021.

But Republicans are expecting even bigger things from Trump this time, while Democrats' fears appear to be a little more muted. About half of Republicans say they think Trump will be a "great" president in his second term, while about 4 in 10 Republicans described him as a great president at the end of his first term. Democrats still overwhelmingly expect that Trump will be a "terrible" president, but that concern

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has lessened. About 6 in 10 Democrats think Trump will be a terrible president in his second term, down from three-quarters who said he was a terrible president at the end of his first term.

Today in History: January 17, US alcohol prohibition begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Jan. 17, the 17th day of 2025. There are 348 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 17, 1920, prohibition of alcohol began in the United States as the Volstead Act went into effect in support of the 18th Amendment.

Also on this date:

In 1950, the Great Brink's Robbery took place as seven masked men held up the Brink's Building in Boston, stealing \$1.2 million in cash and \$1.5 million in checks and money orders.

In 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered his farewell address in which he warned against "the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."

In 1977, convicted murderer Gary Gilmore, 36, was killed by a firing squad at Utah State Prison in the first U.S. execution in a decade.

In 1990, The Four Seasons, The Four Tops, The Kinks, The Platters, Simon and Garfunkel and The Who were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In 1994, the Northridge earthquake rattled the Los Angeles area; the magnitude 6.7 quake was responsible for 57 deaths, 9,000 injuries and an estimated \$25 billion in damages.

In 1995, more than 6,000 people were killed when an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.2 struck the city of Kobe (koh-bay), Japan.

In 2022, as Russian troops stationed near Ukraine's border launched drills, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov angrily rejected U.S. allegations that Moscow was preparing a pretext to invade Ukraine.

Today's birthdays: Rock musician Mick Taylor is 76. Politician-lawyer Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is 71. Singer-songwriter Steve Earle is 70. Singer Paul Young is 69. Actor-comedian Steve Harvey is 68. Singer Susanna Hoffs (The Bangles) is 66. Actor-comedian Jim Carrey is 63. Author-journalist Sebastian Junger is 63. Former first lady Michelle Obama is 61. Musician Kid Rock is 54. Rapper Lil Jon is 53. Actor-singer Zooey Deschanel is 45. Dancer Maksim Chmerkovskiy (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 45. Basketball Hall of Famer Dwyane Wade is 43. DJ-musician Calvin Harris is 41. Boxer Oleksandr Usyk is 38. Actor Kelly Marie Tran is 36. Boxer-actor Jake Paul is 28.