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Thursday, Jan. 23

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, creamy noodles, normandy blend, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Beef sticks, baby bakers.

Basketball Double Header at Milbank (Boys C/ Girls JV at 4 p.m.; Boys JV/Girls C at 5:15 p.m.; Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

Friday, Jan. 24

Senior Menu: Beef stew, Waldorf salad, peas, whole wheat bread.

HOSA Winter Formal, GHS Gym

No School (Staff Development Day)

Boys JH Basketball hosts Redfield, 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.

Girls Wrestling at Pierre, 4 p.m.

Boys Varsity Wrestling hosts Deuel, 6 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

HAPPY
Thursday



I can see
Friday
from here!

Saturday, Jan. 25

HOSA Winter Formal, GHS Gym

Girls and Boys Varsity Wrestling at Arlington, 10 a.m.

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

United Methodist: PEO (outside group), 1:30 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 26

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; annual meeting; no Sunday School; Choir, 6 p.m.

Groton Robotics Pancake Feed 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Groton Community Center

Carnival of Silver Skates, 2 p.m. and 6:30 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 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.

Border Buildup

Around 1,500 active-duty troops will be sent to the US-Mexico border in the coming days to assist with security measures, defense officials said yesterday. The move operationalizes one of President Donald Trump's central campaign promises—to stem the flow of migrants entering the country—and a declaration of national emergency he signed shortly after being sworn in Monday.

Border Patrol reported roughly 100,000 migrant encounters in December, a figure that is historically high but down from a record of more than 300,000 the year prior. The troops will join roughly 2,500 Army Reserve and National Guard personnel, though their specific tasks remain to be seen (federal troops are generally prohibited from domestic policing).

In related news, the Justice Department said it would shift focus to immigration priorities, including utilizing the FBI's terrorism task force to assist in efforts and ordering federal prosecutors to probe interference by state and local officials.

Separately, Trump issued an order putting federal staff working in diversity, equity, and inclusion roles on paid leave as the administration seeks to eliminate the positions.

Prince Harry Reaches Settlement

Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, reached a settlement yesterday with Rupert Murdoch's News Group Newspapers after accusing the company of unlawful gathering of private information. The decision to settle—which includes NGN's first-ever admission of wrongdoing on behalf of The Sun tabloid—concludes a six-year battle and avoids a lengthy court trial.

Prince Harry filed the initial lawsuit in 2019 and vowed to take the case to trial to hold British media accountable for their alleged invasive practices, including hacking phones, hiring private detectives, and using deceptive methods. For years, NGN denied the allegations, which included intrusions into the prince's private life from 1996 to 2011. The apology also admitted to unlawful behavior by The Sun toward his late mother, Princess Diana, who died in 1997 while being pursued by paparazzi.

Murdoch's NGN has previously averted trials with lucrative payoffs in around 1,300 cases, spending over \$1.2B on previous claims.

Bipolar Disorder Decoded

An international team of researchers has pinpointed 36 genes linked to bipolar disorder in the largest study conducted to date on the biological mechanisms underlying the condition. The findings could potentially help doctors intervene early and better diagnose and treat individuals at risk.

Bipolar disorder is largely genetic, with an estimated heritability of around 80%, meaning there is a significant genetic predisposition to developing the chronic mental health condition. The disorder is characterized by intense mood swings between manic and depressive episodes, which can alter a person's energy levels, behavior, thinking patterns, and ability to function in daily life. Around 40 million to 50 million people worldwide experience bipolar disorder.

The findings also identified 298 genomic regions—specific locations in our DNA sequence—associated with bipolar disorder, of which 267 are newly discovered. Roughly 158,000 individuals with bipolar disorder and 2.8 million healthy individuals worldwide participated in the study.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

2025 Academy Awards nominations to be announced this morning (8:30 am ET).

2025 Sundance Film Festival kicks off today from Park City, Utah.

Singer Chris Brown files \$500M defamation lawsuit against Warner Bros., alleging he was falsely labeled a serial rapist and abuser in 2024 docuseries.

George Clinton, Mike Love, and Michael McDonald highlight 2025 inductees into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

SEC and Big Ten athletic directors to meet next month to discuss potential changes to College Football Playoff format, including expanding the field from 12 to 14 teams.

Science & Technology

Astronomers detect fast radio bursts—pulses of radiation typically from neutron stars or black holes—originating from a long dead galaxy; findings not explained by current understanding of the phenomena.

Study reveals immune cells perform unique and specialized functions within the gut depending on their location within the small intestine; discovery may lead to new ways to boost the immune system.

Cownose ray tails act as a finely tuned antenna to sense water movements, researchers discover; the function of the tail on many manta rays and related species was previously unknown.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +1.3%); S&P 500 closes shy of record high as technology shares, including Oracle (+6.8%) and Nvidia (+4.4%) rise on artificial intelligence enthusiasm.

Google invests additional \$1B in generative AI startup Anthropic, bringing its total investment to over \$3B and building on a previous 10% ownership stake.

Electronic Arts shares fall over 11% in after-hours trading after the video game giant slashes full-year bookings guidance due to underperforming games, particularly its soccer franchise.

Politics & World Affairs

Seventeen-year-old male student fatally shoots female student and himself, wounds a male student in cafeteria of Antioch High School in Nashville; motive is unclear.

Hughes Fire—north of Santa Clarita in Los Angeles County—breaks out, burning more than 10,000 acres as of this writing.

Winter storm continues spreading across southern US.

Yemen's Houthi rebels release crew of vessel they captured in November 2023, a step toward ending Red Sea vessel attacks following Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal.

Iraq passes bill that critics say effectively legalizes child marriage.

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This beloved mother, grandmother, and teacher is requesting a card shower.

Card Shower
Dorene Nelson will be celebrating her



on January 29, 2025.
Greetings may be sent to
PO Box 675
Groton, SD 57445



**2025
GROTON
AREA
HOMECOMING**

FRIDAY,
SEPTEMBER 5TH,
2025



2024 Shows Growth for South Dakota's Tourism Industry

PIERRE, S.D. – The tourism industry in South Dakota continues to thrive, with 2024 marking another year of record growth and economic contributions statewide.

According to the annual study conducted by Tourism Economics, South Dakota welcomed 14.9 million visitors, an increase of 1.4% over 2023. Those visitors spent \$5.09 billion, an increase of 2.8% over 2023. James Hagen, the Secretary of the Department of Tourism, announced the state's success at the 2025 South Dakota Governor's Conference on Tourism.

"We are thrilled with the industry's steady growth, and these accomplishments reflect our ongoing efforts to market South Dakota across the globe," said Hagen. "We will continue our strategic efforts to promote South Dakota as a premier vacation destination."

The tourism industry remains essential to South Dakota's economy, providing an indispensable source of job creation and household income to thousands. 58,824 jobs in South Dakota were supported by the tourism industry, generating \$2.24 billion of income for those families.

In 2024, tourism generated \$398.7 million in state and local tax revenue. Tourism reduced the tax burden on South Dakota households by \$1,105.

"These numbers display the vital role that tourism plays in South Dakota and our local economies," said Hagen. "We are proud of the positive impact this industry has on our communities. Tourism in South Dakota creates jobs, generates state and local revenue, and enhances the quality of life for all South Dakota residents – greatly contributing to the strongest economy in America."

As one of South Dakota's leading industries, tourism fuels local business, and generates state and local tax revenue while showcasing the state's rich heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and vast outdoor offerings.

Travel South Dakota indicates that a strong fall season, an excellent pheasant hunting season, and a rebound in international visitation, including visitors from Canada, contributed to 2024's success.

To view the full 2024 Tourism Economics report, visit SDVisit.com.

The South Dakota Department of Tourism is comprised of Travel South Dakota and the South Dakota Arts Council. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen.

KEY STATS

Visitor spending reached \$5.09 billion, an increase of 2.8% over 2023

14.9 million – number of visitors that came to South Dakota, an increase of 1.4% from 2023

5.2 million – the number of hotel room nights booked in 2024

8.7 million visitors to South Dakota's state parks and 3.8 million visitors explored national parks in 2024

All data reflects 2024 calendar year (January – November) numbers over 2023 unless otherwise noted.

Sources: Tourism Economics, Longwoods International, Smith Travel Research, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

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Groton Area C Basketball Jamboree

Date: Saturday, January 25th,
2025

Place: Groton Area High
School Arena

Time: 10:00AM

Teams: Groton, Oakes, Tiospa Zina, Warner,
Webster

Spectator Admission: Adults \$5, Students \$3 –
Good for all day!



| | HOME (white) | | AWAY (dark) |
|----------|---------------------|----|--------------------|
| 10:00 AM | Groton | vs | Warner |
| 11:00 AM | Groton | vs | Oakes |
| 12:00 PM | Warner | vs | TZ |
| 1:00 PM | Warner | vs | Oakes |
| 2:00 PM | Groton | vs | TZ |

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The Life of Elroy "Sarge" Likness



Elroy "Sarge" Likness of Groton and formerly of Andover passed away peacefully on January 13, 2025 at Avantara Groton. Services will be held later this spring. Inurnment with military honors will follow in Falnes Lutheran Cemetery, rural Langford under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Elroy Leon Likness was born September 15, 1939 in Britton to Elmer Rudolph and Louise Lorraine (Liknes) Likness. Sarge graduated high school from Langford in 1957. He went on to join the US Army and returned home following his honorable discharge. Sarge continued his education at Northern State College, graduating in 1966. Throughout his lifetime, he was a beloved teacher, coach, realtor and friend.

He loved watching sports, playing bingo, card games, pinochle and hanging out at the Senior Center with all of his dear friends. Sarge was very active in the community.

Celebrating his life is his sister, D. Mae Olla (Ken) Saeger of Milbank, special friends, David Kleinsasser of Groton, Debra Castles of Spearfish and extended family and friends.

Preceding him in death were his parents and his sister, Carol in infancy.

Memorials and condolences may be sent to Debra Castles, 3416 10th Ave., Spearfish, SD 57783.

Coming up on GDILIVE.COM

Thursday, Jan. 23

Groton Area
Tigers

**Double Header
at Milbank**

GT

Games start at 4 p.m.

C games sponsored by Larry & Val Flihs
Junior Varsity games sponsored by
David and Tammy Dohman

Varsity Games

Sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Farmers Union Co-op of Ferney and Conde, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, Groton Subway, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meat-house in Andover



\$5 ticket or

GDI Subscription

required to watch the games.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Change is 'eminent': Property-rights fight transforms this year's SD Legislature

New leaders rode wave of opposition against carbon capture project

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 22, 2025 9:05 AM

When the majority leaders of South Dakota's two legislative chambers introduced legislation last January that they described as a compromise on carbon dioxide pipelines, they predicted "a consequential year for lawmakers in Pierre."

They didn't think they'd be the ones suffering the consequences.

Their legislation passed in March and promptly sparked a backlash. Voters ousted 14 Republican legislators in the June primary election, including 11 who voted for the most controversial bill in the pipeline package. Pipeline opponents gathered enough petition signatures to refer that bill to voters, who rejected it in the Nov. 5 general election.

A few days after that, Republican legislators went behind closed doors and voted to replace their leadership team, mostly with members who voted against the spurned pipeline bill.

Last year's Republican majority leaders, Rep. Will Mortenson of Fort Pierre and Sen. Casey Crabtree of Madison, are back in the Legislature after winning reelection in their districts, but have been cast out of leadership. The annual lawmaking session began earlier this month at the Capitol in Pierre and continues through March 13.

Michael Card is an associate professor emeritus of political science at the University of South Dakota. He said Mortenson and Crabtree probably did not realize they were sowing the seeds of an intra-party rebellion when they introduced their pipeline bills last January.

"I do think they were blindsided," Card said. "They thought they'd done a really good job for landowners."

Scott Odenbach, the new Republican House majority leader from Spearfish, put it more bluntly in a recent interview with South Dakota Public Broadcasting. He said the supporters of last year's legislation "awakened a sleeping giant" and "fundamentally miscalculated the depth of passion amongst landowners in South Dakota" for property rights.

The spark

The \$9 billion pipeline proposal at the center of the drama is from Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions.

The pipeline would transport carbon dioxide captured from 57 ethanol plants in five states to an underground sequestration site in North Dakota, along a route that includes 700 miles in eastern South Dakota. Federal tax credits intended to incentivize the removal of heat-trapping carbon from the atmosphere are motivating the project.

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission rejected Summit's first permit application in 2023, in part because of the route's conflicts with local ordinances mandating minimum distances between pipelines and existing features. Summit reapplied late last year with what it described as "major reroutes."

The company says it has about 80% of the land access agreements it needs in South Dakota. Landowners who've refused to sign easements say they're protecting their property rights and are concerned about potential leaks that could release deadly carbon dioxide plumes. They've attracted supporters from across the political spectrum, including some Republican climate change deniers who view carbon capture projects as boondoggles and some Democrats concerned about the fate of family farms.

To gain access to the rest of the land, Summit may have to pursue eminent domain, a legal process in

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which a court determines fair compensation for landowners. The state Supreme Court ruled last year that Summit had not proven its project is eligible for eminent domain. The high court sent the matter back to a lower court, where the company is trying to prove its case.

One of the members of the new Republican legislative leadership team is Rep. Karla Lems, R-Canton, who was chosen to assist the House speaker as speaker pro tempore. The Summit pipeline would cross her land, and her opposition to eminent domain motivated her to run for the Legislature and win in 2022.

Lems introduced a bill in 2023 to ban carbon pipelines from using eminent domain in the state. The legislation passed the House but died in a Senate committee.

Some senators who opposed the bill said South Dakota's corn and ethanol industries could collapse without the pipeline. The project would lower ethanol production's carbon footprint and keep the gasoline additive eligible for sale in markets such as California, where stricter laws on carbon emissions are in place.

Lems said testimony on the bill reflected a divide in the Republican Party. She described it as "constitutional conservatives versus the corporatists."

Crabtree disagrees with that. He said President Donald Trump's nominee to lead the U.S. Interior Department, former North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, is a supporter of Summit's project.

"The Trump administration supports this project, too," Crabtree said. "So, are they corporatists or constitutional conservatives?"

No legislation addressing pipeline opponents' concerns passed by the end of the 2023 legislative session. The following summer, hundreds of people descended on the state Capitol for a rally, demanding lawmakers reconvene in Pierre to pass a bill prohibiting eminent domain for carbon pipelines.

Mortenson had voted for the eminent domain ban in the House, but he did not attend the summer rally. He said in a statement at the time that unless "we get agreement with the Senate on some proposals, we shouldn't call a special session and neither should the governor. It would be a waste of taxpayer dollars and legislator time."

"For my part, I'll be spending the next couple months working with senators to gather consensus on protecting landowners. I hope we get the job done," he added.

A 'path forward' creates division

Mortenson's determination to find consensus with senators resulted in the three-bill package that he and Crabtree unveiled for the 2024 legislative session. Their jointly written statement promoting the legislation did not mention eminent domain. Legislation banning eminent domain had failed, so Mortenson and Crabtree were pursuing a different path.

They described it as "a path forward that benefits landowners and sets clear expectations of regulatory and procedural requirements for those who want to do business in South Dakota."

In other words, the legislation would not ban eminent domain or stop any company from pursuing a pipeline, but would implement new protections for landowners and local governments affected by pipelines.

All three bills passed. Of the two that remain in effect today, one requires pipeline companies to provide more information to landowners when giving them notice of a land survey, forces pipeline companies to pay each landowner \$500 for a survey, and empowers landowners to file court challenges against a company's right to conduct a survey. The other law defines carbon pipeline easements, limits them to 99 years, voids them if a project isn't commenced within five years of the easement's signing or the issuance of a permit, and says they cannot be transferred without the consent of the property owner.

The third bill, which has since been tossed out by voters, had new protections for landowners and local governments.

Those included the right of counties to impose a surcharge on carbon pipelines, with half of the revenue going to property tax relief for affected landowners; a requirement that pipelines be buried at least 4 feet deep; an imposition of liability on pipeline companies for leaks and for damages caused to underground drain tile that farmers use to remove excess moisture from fields; a requirement for pipeline companies

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to file agricultural impact mitigation plans and carbon dioxide dispersal models; and a mandate that land agents acting on behalf of pipeline companies be either a resident of South Dakota or a real estate agent licensed in the state.

But all of those aspects of the third bill were ultimately tossed out by voters, largely because of another provision in the bill that pipeline opponents found most offensive. That was a requirement for local governments to demonstrate that their restrictions on pipeline locations are reasonable, rather than a pipeline company having to prove those regulations unreasonable. Pipeline opponents said that provision would make it easier for state regulators to override local ordinances and approve pipeline permits, thereby paving the way for pipeline companies to use eminent domain.

Mortenson said the bill had nothing to do with eminent domain, but it became a rallying cry for the activists who referred the bill to a public vote.

"There was a lot of enthusiasm stemming from the eminent domain question," Mortenson said. "I think that enthusiasm mapped itself onto the referral effort."

Pipeline opponents have seen how important it is to protect local siting ordinances. The conflicts between those ordinances and Summit's original route played a major role in the Public Utilities Commission's decision to reject Summit's first permit application in 2023.

So pipeline opponents drew a line in the sand with Senate Bill 201, which became Referred Law 21 on the Nov. 5 ballot.

"Lawmakers either stood with property rights, or they put corporate greed first," said Ed Fischbach, a farmer from Mellette. "Leadership sided with ethanol and the pipeline — Republican and Democrat both. Guys like me, a former Democrat, were reregistering to vote for conservatives who were willing to take a stand, because property rights is the biggest issue in this state right now."

Mortenson said the burden-of-proof flip was not as significant as it was made out to be, because supporters and opponents would still have had to present their best evidence to the Public Utilities Commission, regardless of which side had the burden of proof regarding local ordinances.

Grassroots mobilization

After last year's legislative session, pipeline opponents organized rallies at barns, rural community centers and county fairs.

Joy Hohn, R-Sioux Falls, took part in the effort as she ran successfully for a seat in the state Senate.

"We showed up everywhere people cared about property rights," Hohn said.

In a few months, they submitted an estimated 28,000 petition signatures to put Senate Bill 201 on the ballot as Referred Law 21.

They also spread the word about lawmakers who voted for the bill and encouraged voters to toss them out, resulting in 11 of those lawmakers losing in the June primary.

Mortenson said a large and motivated group can have an outsized influence on a primary. Turnout in June was 17%.

"We've had common sense conservative governance for decades," Mortenson said. "When people are happy with how things are going, they're more likely to stay home. When people are really fired up, they go and vote. I don't doubt there was an enthusiasm gap in that election."

The movement's momentum carried into the November general election, where Referred Law 21 was thrown out by South Dakota voters. That happened despite supporters of the bill, including ethanol companies, spending 10 times more on their campaign.

Mark Lapka is a Republican farmer from Leola and pipeline opponent who won a seat in the state Senate in November.

"When property rights were being put at risk for climate change, people just had enough," he said. "People just wanted to be left alone."

Eminent domain ban proposed

As the Legislature convened earlier this month for its annual lawmaking session, one bill that would ban eminent domain for carbon pipelines was already prefiled in the Senate, and a similar bill soon followed

in the House.

Lems said she's confident the legislation will pass, and Crabtree also said it could pass. Gov. Kristi Noem would then have to decide whether to sign it into law. Or the decision could fall to Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, who will be elevated to governor if the U.S. Senate confirms Noem as President Donald Trump's Homeland Security secretary.

The Governor's Office did not immediately respond to a question about whether Noem or Rhoden would be willing to sign a ban on eminent domain for carbon pipelines.

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

Noem's proposed medical residency cut could worsen SD doctor shortage, opponents say

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 22, 2025 2:42 PM

PIERRE — Health care organizations opposed to Gov. Kristi Noem's proposed funding cut for the South Dakota medical residency program say the decision could leave the state bereft of doctors.

Noem's proposal comes as South Dakota and the rest of the country grapple with a worsening physician shortage, making states compete for medical professionals. The Association of American Medical Colleges projects the country's doctor shortage will worsen to 86,000 vacancies by 2036.

South Dakota ranks 35th in the nation for patient-to-physician ratio, with 763 people for every one primary care physician. Fifty-one of South Dakota's 66 counties are health professional shortage areas, according to the state Department of Health.

Earlier this week, Iowa Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds proposed creating 460 new medical residency slots in the state within the next four years to combat her state's growing shortage.

Jacob Parsons, director of advocacy and reimbursement for the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations, spoke against South Dakota's proposed cut Tuesday during a meeting of the Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee.

"I think the message we'd be sending to our potential residents is that, 'Why not go to Iowa?' They're going to put funding forward there," Parsons said.

A residency, or graduate medical education, is an intensive, on-the-job training period for doctors after the completion of medical school.

The programs are funded by health systems, Medicare and state funds tied to Medicaid. Noem's proposal would eliminate the state's \$1.7 million share from the general fund, as well as the \$1.86 million match in federal Medicaid funds.

Since the program receives general funds and there aren't any laws regarding the residency program funding, there won't be a bill introduced about the funding cut. Lawmakers on the Appropriations Committee will decide whether to keep the money in the budget that's ultimately presented to the full Legislature and the governor.

Appropriators heard the testimony after the state Department of Social Services presented its recommended budget on Tuesday. Residency programs in the state range from pediatrics to family medicine to internal medicine. South Dakota does not offer an obstetrics-gynecology residency.

Departmental Chief Financial Officer Jason Simmons said the state funding is based on the number of Medicaid patients served by residencies.

There are 78 residency programs impacted by the state general medical education funding between Sanford, Avera and Monument health systems, department Secretary Matt Althoff said. As of this year, there are 154 residents participating in the programs, Parsons said.

State funding for the rural residency program is separate from the general medical education funding.

Noem proposed increasing general funds for the rural residency program by \$70,821.

More than 80% of residents who complete their training in South Dakota stay and practice in the state, Parsons added.

Avera Health's Vice President of Public Policy Kim Malsam-Rysdon, who served as state Department of Health secretary from 2015 until 2022, said the health care system is grateful Noem recommended continuing funding for the state's rural residency program. But if South Dakota doesn't have the same capacity for residencies as other states, she said, "we'll lose doctors to other states where they're being trained."

If the state doesn't continue to support the programs with state Medicaid funding, Malsam-Rysdon said, some residency slots will be at risk of being cut altogether.

"If those funds aren't continuously appropriated," Malsam-Rysdon said, "we'll have some hard questions to answer about the ability to continue to support medical students who are training in our space."

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.

SD's Rep. Johnson votes yes as Congress clears immigrant detention bill for Trump's signature

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 22, 2025 6:19 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House Wednesday passed legislation that greatly expands mandatory detention requirements of immigrants charged and arrested on petty crimes, among other crimes.

In a 263-156 vote, 46 House Democrats voted with Republicans to send the bill, S. 5, to President Donald Trump's desk to be signed into law. The passage of the measure gave Trump — who campaigned on an immigration crackdown and promised mass deportations — an early victory for a president not even a full week into his second term.

The GOP-led bill is named after 22-year-old Georgia nursing student Laken Riley. The man convicted in her murder was said by immigration officials to have entered the country without proper authorization and was later charged in the United States with shoplifting.

"I am proud the Laken Riley Act will be the very first landmark bill President Trump signs into law, and it is proof that President Trump and the Republican Senate Majority stand ready to come turn promises made into promises kept," Alabama GOP Sen. Katie Britt, who led the bill, said in a statement.

Many immigration attorneys and advocates have argued the passage of the bill will help fuel Trump's promise of mass deportations, because it would require mandatory detention of immigrants without the ability for an immigration judge to grant bond.

Additionally, there is no carve-out for immigrant children in the bill, meaning if they are accused or charged with shoplifting, the bill would require them to be detained.

And while the bill aims to target immigrants who are in the country without proper legal authorization, immigration attorneys have argued that some immigrants with legal status could be ensnared as well.

Another concerning provision pointed to by some Democrats and immigration attorneys is the broad legal standing the bill gives state attorneys general to challenge federal immigration policy and the bond decisions from immigration judges.

That same authority could also force the secretary of state to halt the issuing of visas on the international stage.

There's also the issue of resources. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement estimated the cost of enforcing the law would be at least \$26.9 billion in its first year, according to NPR. The budget for ICE for fiscal year 2024 is about \$9 billion.

Twelve Senate Democrats joined with Republicans to pass the bill out of the upper chamber on Monday.

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The House already passed the bill earlier this month, but because amendments were added to the measure in the Senate, it went back to the House for final passage.

Those Senate Democrats included Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, Ruben Gallego and Mark Kelly of Arizona, Maggie Hassan and Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock of Georgia, Gary Peters and Elissa Slotkin of Michigan, Jacky Rosen of Nevada and Mark Warner of Virginia.

A majority of those Senate Democrats are up for reelection in 2026 or hail from a battleground state that Trump won in November.

Senators also agreed to attach two amendments to the bill that expand the mandatory detention requirements even further.

One amendment by Texas GOP Sen. John Cornyn requires mandatory detention for assault of a law enforcement officer. Another from Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa includes mandatory detention requirements to apply to the serious harm or death of a person.

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

Trump to send 1,500 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 22, 2025 6:05 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump Wednesday invoked an executive order he signed on his first day in office to send 1,500 military troops to the southern border, despite encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border being the lowest in several years.

"President Trump is sending a very strong message to people around this world – if you are thinking about breaking the laws of the United States of America, you will be returned home. You will be arrested. You will be prosecuted," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters, according to pool reports.

While Leavitt said 1,500 troops would be sent, she did not specify from where or when they would arrive at the border.

The comments by Leavitt followed a flurry of immigration-related orders that Trump signed on his first day in office cracking down on immigration in multiple ways.

One declared a national emergency at the southern border that outlined military support would be deployed "through the provision of appropriate detention space, transportation (including aircraft), and other logistics services in support of civilian-controlled law enforcement operations."

Other orders, some of which are already facing legal challenges, include the end of asylum and the move to end birthright citizenship for immigrants in the country without authorization, among other stipulations.

It's not the first time an administration has sent U.S. military to the southern border. The Biden administration did so in 2023 amid high encounters of migrants. In fiscal year 2023, there were about 2.5 million encounters, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data.

Troops largely handle administrative work, rather than law enforcement work, due to the Posse Comitatus Act, which bars the U.S. military from performing civilian law enforcement duties.

However, that could change.

A separate executive order Trump signed Monday directs the secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense to evaluate within 90 days if the Insurrection Act should be invoked, which allows military action to be used in civilian law domestically.

The troops heading to the southern border will be doing so at a relatively quiet time period, as the most recent CBP data in December showed 96,000 encounters, compared to the December of fiscal year 2023, when there were 252,000 encounters.

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

Thune and Rounds vote yes, but first abortion bill pushed in GOP-led Congress blocked by Democrats

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 22, 2025 3:08 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Democrats blocked legislation Wednesday that would have established penalties for health care professionals who don't provide medical care for infants born following an attempted abortion, arguing the bill would have kept parents from making decisions about care for newborns delivered early following a fatal fetal diagnosis.

Republicans said the issue should lend itself to common ground between the two political parties, citing a "loophole" in federal law that could potentially permit health care providers to allow an infant to die, instead of using medical interventions.

The 52-47 procedural vote needed the support of at least 60 senators to advance under the chamber's legislative filibuster rules, but no Democrats voted to move the bill toward final passage. Tennessee Republican Sen. Bill Hagerty didn't cast a vote.

The vote marked the first time this year Republicans, who now control both the House and Senate, brought up an abortion bill for debate. The vote took place on the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision that established a constitutional right to abortion in 1973, but was overturned by the Supreme Court in 2022.

Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford, who sponsored the eight-page bill, said debate on the legislation was "not just an academic issue," but one with real-world implications.

"It's rare, but the question is, what do we do in those situations? How do we track this? How do we engage on it?" he said.

When an abortion results in a live child, Lankford said, "the current practice is everyone kind of backs away and allows the child to die on the table by exposure because it is against American law in every single state to take the life of a child. But if everybody just steps back and watches the child die that's okay."

Lankford cited the story of Melissa Ohden, a woman he says lived following an attempted abortion because a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, or NICU, nurse noticed her crying and breathing in a pile of medical waste, before rushing her to the emergency department for medical care. Ohden is founder and CEO of the Abortion Survivors Network.

"It was years later that she learned her adopted mom had adopted her because her birth mom literally didn't know she still existed. Her birth mom was never told that the abortion, quote unquote, didn't work," he said.

'Killing a baby is illegal in every single state'

Washington state Democratic Sen. Patty Murray said during a floor speech Tuesday the bill was a "sham" and a "disgrace," before noting that "killing a baby is illegal in every single state."

"In fact, we passed a law in 2002 that made that crystal clear. I would know because I was here. It passed unanimously," Murray said. "Doctors already have a legal obligation to provide appropriate medical care to any infant born in this country."

The legislation, she said, would have created "a new government mandate that would override the best judgment of grieving families who find out their fetus has a fatal condition."

"And it would create new, medically unnecessary barriers for doctors and patients, at a time when doctors already have their hands tied when it comes to providing basic reproductive health care," Murray said.

New Hampshire Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen said during a press conference on Wednesday ahead of the vote she wasn't concerned about Republicans using the vote against vulnerable incumbents up for reelection in 2026.

"I have run now in seven statewide races in New Hampshire and in every single one of those races, I have been attacked by Republicans for my support for allowing women to make their own decisions," Shaheen said.

"It's not a decision that I should make as a senator, that the court should make, that the men who are in

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the Senate should make," she added. "It's a decision for women and their families. And for those people who don't understand that, they are on the wrong side of morality on this one."

Georgia Sen. Jon Ossoff and Michigan Sen. Gary Peters are the two most vulnerable Democrats up for election in 2026, both representing states President Donald Trump won in November's presidential election.

Details of Senate legislation

Lankford's bill would have required medical providers "to preserve the life and health of the child as a reasonably diligent and conscientious health care practitioner would render to any other child born alive at the same gestational age."

The bill adds that anyone who "intentionally performs or attempts to perform an overt act that kills a child" would be charged with "intentionally killing or attempting to kill a human being."

It is already illegal to kill children, or adults, under federal law as well as state laws.

The House is set to vote on its own version of the bill, sponsored by Missouri Republican Rep. Ann Wagner and co-sponsored by 130 GOP lawmakers, later this week. But without Democratic backing in the Senate, the bill won't make it to Trump's desk.

Wagner's House bill appeared extremely similar to the Senate version, though the two weren't marked as "related bills" on Wednesday in the congressional database.

The House approved a version of the bill two years ago following a mostly party-line 220-210 vote, with one Democrat voting for the measure and one voting "present."

The bill didn't come up for a vote in the Senate, which was controlled by Democrats at the time.

Congress approved a similarly named, Born-Alive Infants Protection Act of 2002, more than two decades ago, with broadly bipartisan support.

Groups weigh in

Dr. Stella M. Dantas, president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, wrote in a statement sent to States Newsroom that the "offensively named legislation does not reflect the reality of abortion later in pregnancy, harms families who receive devastating diagnoses and restricts their ability to choose the path of medical care that is right for them."

"This legislation is not evidence-based," Dantas wrote. "Its impacts fall with crushing weight on families trying to access reproductive care in devastating circumstances and limits how clinicians are able to provide care."

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists writes on a webpage about the differences between abortion and perinatal palliative care that "the idea of 'abortions' being performed after delivery of a fetus is" misinformation and that "no such procedure exists."

Perinatal palliative care, ACOG explains, "encompasses a coordinated care strategy that centers on maximizing quality of life and comfort for newborns who have life-limiting conditions in early infancy."

"When providing perinatal palliative care, obstetrician-gynecologists' chief aim is to alleviate the newborn's suffering and honor the values of the patients involved—namely, the newborn's parent or parents," the website states. "Ultimately, the parent or parents, in consultation with their physician, decide which course of perinatal palliative care to pursue."

Eighteen medical organizations — including ACOG, the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, the American Academy of Nursing and the American Academy of Pediatrics — sent a letter to Congress on Wednesday urging lawmakers not to pass the bill.

Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America President Marjorie Dannenfelser released a written statement that the 2024 election showed Americans "have clearly rejected the extreme pro-abortion agenda."

"We cannot continue to turn a blind eye to that baby fighting for his or her life, whether in a hospital or an abortion center, whether that little one is deemed 'wanted' or not," Dannenfelser wrote. "These children must not be discarded like trash. With a new administration in Washington and new majorities in the Senate and House, there has never been a better or more urgent time to protect the life of every

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newborn equally.”

A SBA webpage about the legislation notes that while the 2002 law was “a step in the right direction,” it didn’t include any “enforcement mechanisms.”

“Federal law and 31 states do not adequately protect the lives of infants born alive after botched abortions (state and federal laws are not necessarily redundant, either),” the webpage states.

Anna Bernstein, principal federal policy adviser at the Guttmacher Institute, wrote in a statement to States Newsroom the bill “misrepresents the reality of care later in pregnancy and seeks to criminalize and intimidate health care providers, despite existing laws that already ensure appropriate medical care is provided.”

“By perpetuating disinformation and stigma, this bill undermines reproductive autonomy and paves the way for political interference in deeply personal and painful decisions, particularly for families facing tragic situations such as fatal fetal diagnoses,” Bernstein wrote.

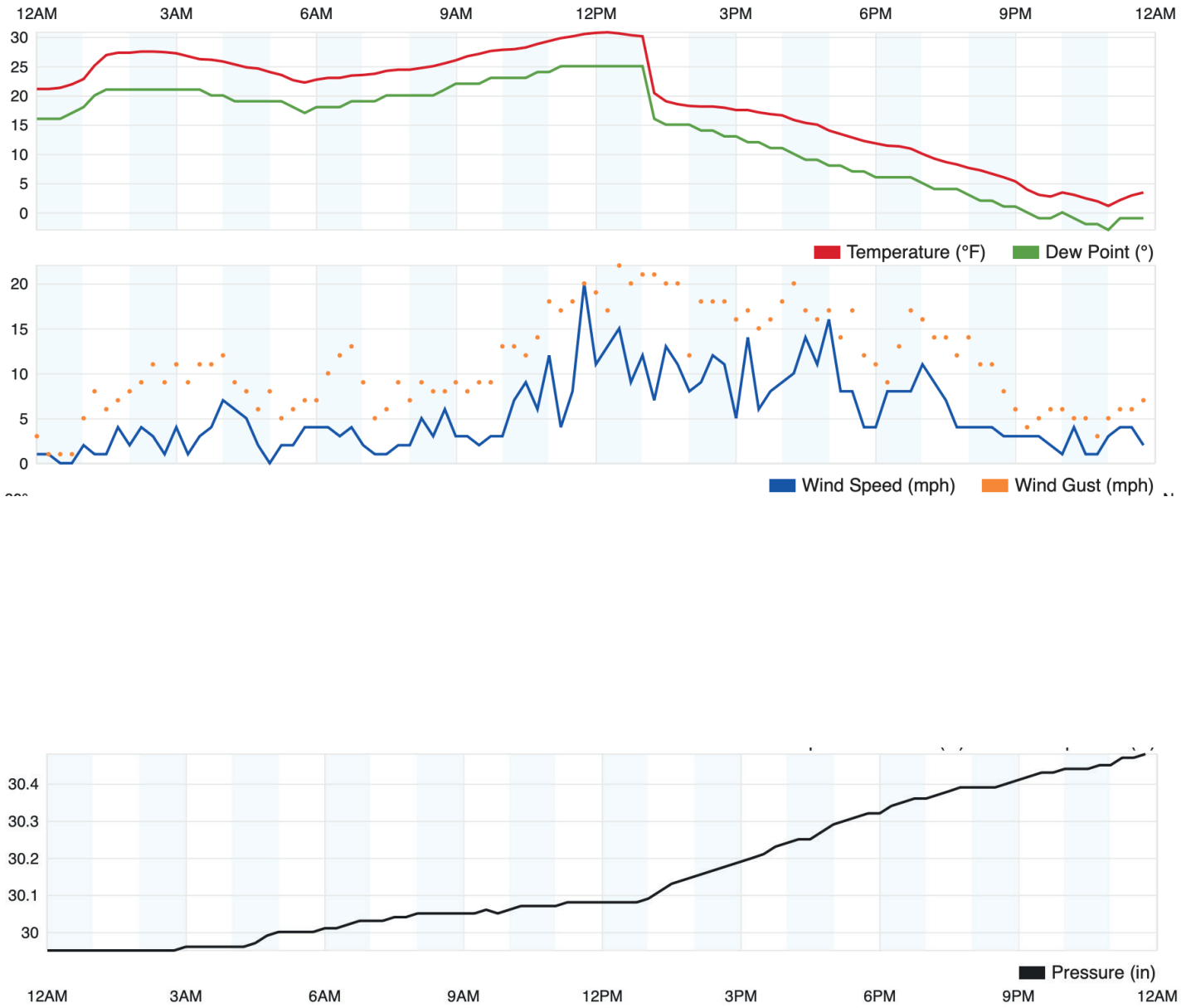
The Guttmacher Institute, she wrote, “strongly opposes this bill, as it disregards the complexities of people’s lives, attempts to criminalize providers, and perpetuates misinformation about abortion care.”

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 20 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 7 °F

Partly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance Snow

Friday



High: 35 °F

Chance Snow
then Mostly
Cloudy

Friday Night



Low: 15 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 25 °F

Mostly Sunny
and Blustery

Thursday

January 23rd, 2025


 **11-24°**

Cooler across the Prairie Coteau

Cloudy west of James River
Mostly sunny east

Friday

January 24th, 2025

 **28-36°**

Warmest across west of
James River

Chance of light snow east of
James River



weather.gov/aberdeen

January 22, 2025 8:12 PM BDDOT

Thursday will be slightly cooler with highs in the teens to low 20s but Friday will be warmer again with highs in the upper 20s to mid 30s. Some light snow (accumulations of a couple tenths) will be possible Friday morning for areas east of the James River.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 31 °F at 11:58 AM

Low Temp: 1 °F at 11:00 PM

Wind: 22 mph at 12:27 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 27 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1981

Record Low: -34 in 1897

Average High: 24

Average Low: 1

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.42

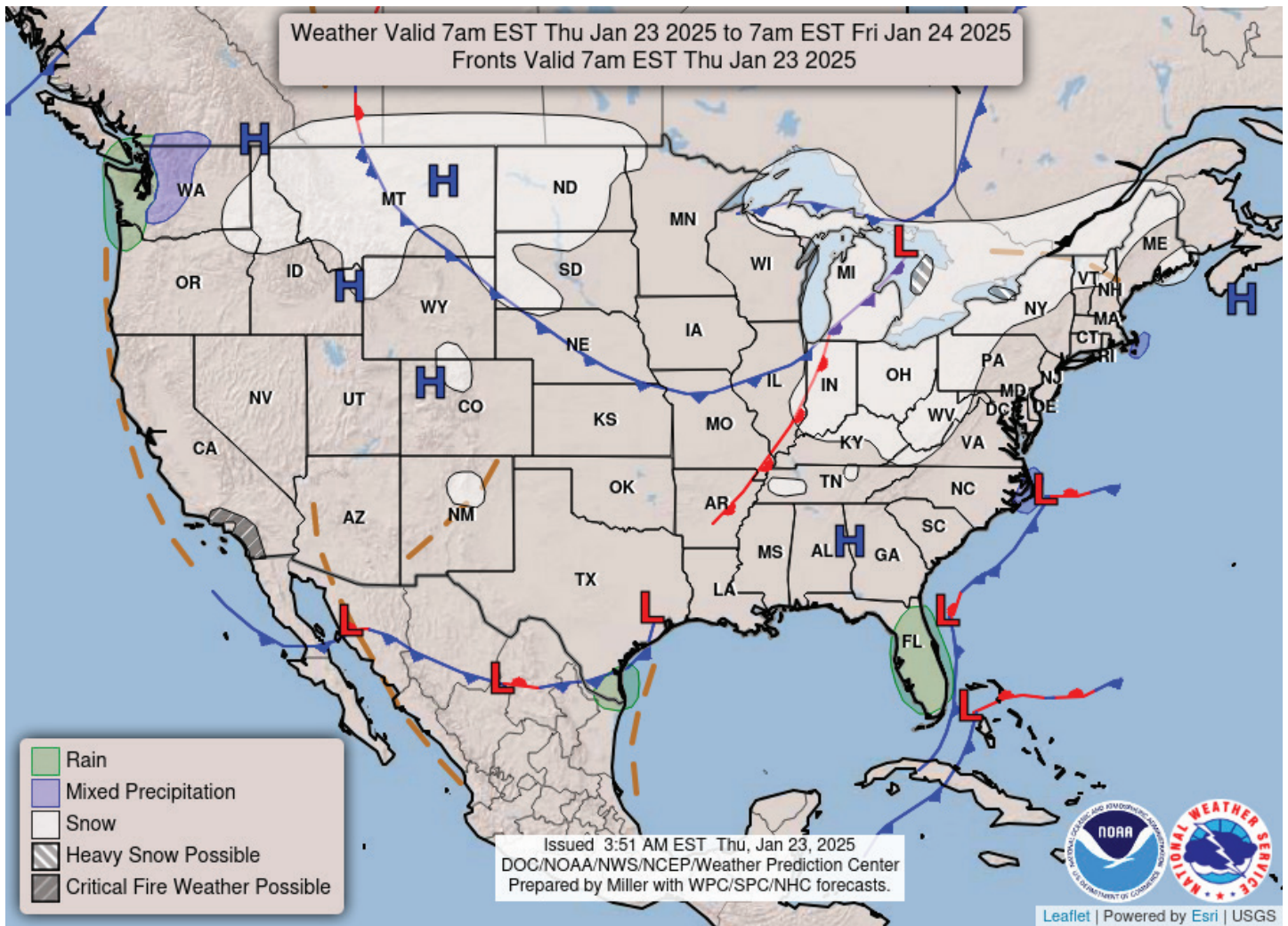
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.42

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:28:20 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7 :59:26 am



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Today in Weather History

January 23, 1969: Intermittent freezing rain on the 20th to the 22nd changed to snow on the 22nd, which continued through the 24th. Snowfall of 2 to 6 inches fell across Minnesota and far northeast South Dakota. Blizzard conditions developed on the 23rd and 24th with 30 to 45 mph winds and temperatures dropping to below zero by the 24th. Most of the traffic was halted, with many roads blocked from snow drifting. Some rural roads had been blocked for 3 to 4 weeks. Stranded motorists were common in the area. Some snowfall amounts included 2 inches at Wilmot and Victor, 3 inches at Milbank and Artichoke Lake, and 4 inches at Clear Lake.

1556: An earthquake in Shaanxi, China, kills an estimated 830,000 people. The estimated 8.0 to 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck in the middle of a densely populated area where many homes were a form of an earth shelter dwelling known as a yaodong. Much is known about this disaster as a scholar named Qin Keda survived the earthquake and recorded the details.

1780 - The coldest day of the coldest month of record in the northeastern U.S. A British Army thermometer in New York City registered a reading of 16 degrees below zero. During that infamous hard winter the harbor was frozen solid for five weeks, and the port was cut off from sea supply. (David Ludlum)

1812: A second major series of earthquakes was felt as part of the New Madrid Shocks of the winter of 1811-1812. Many observers reported that the January 23 shocks were as strong as the main earthquake on December 16th of the preceding year.

1916: Browning, Montana, saw the temperature plummet 100 degrees in 24 hours on January 23-24, from a relatively mild 44 to a bone-chilling 56 degrees below zero.

1969: An F4 tornado cut a 120-mile long path from Jefferson through Copiah, Simpson, Smith, Scott, and Newton Counties in Mississippi, killing 32 and injuring 241 others. Property damage was estimated at \$2 million. An inbound Delta Airlines aircraft reported a hook echo on its scope with this storm.

1971: Alaska, and the US, lowest official temp, -80F (-62.2C), was set at Prospect Creek, a Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline construction camp. Fun fact: the low was initially recorded as -79F but adjusted after thermometer calibration.

1987 - Strong winds ushered bitterly cold air into the north central U.S., and produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in northwest Lower Michigan ranged up to 17 inches in Leelanau County. Wind chill temperatures reached 70 degrees below zero at Sault Ste Marie MI and Hibbing MN. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Northeastern Colorado experienced its most severe windstorm in years. A wind gust to 92 mph was recorded at Boulder CO before the anemometer blew away, and in the mountains, a wind gust to 120 mph was reported at Mines Peak. The high winds blew down a partially constructed viaduct east of Boulder, as nine unanchored concrete girders, each weighing forty-five tons, were blown off their supports. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure brought heavy snow to Wyoming, with 18 inches reported at the Shoshone National Forest, and 17 inches in the Yellowstone Park area. Gunnison CO, with a low of 19 degrees below zero, was the cold spot in the nation for the twelfth day in a row. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A Pacific cold front brought strong and gusty winds to the northwestern U.S. Winds in southeastern Idaho gusted to 62 mph at Burley. Strong winds also prevailed along the eastern slopes of the northern and central Rockies. Winds in Wyoming gusted to 74 mph in Goshen County. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



UNSEEN POWER

A snowflake is a remarkable object in size and shape. Sometimes they appear as though they are floating through space. Other times they arrive in force and fury. Occasionally they fall on an eyelash and can be seen but not felt. They are weightless wonders until they are massed together. Then, they can provide a beautiful country scene or bring a city to a complete halt. Snowflakes give us a unique picture of the strength and power of numbers. What a lesson for the church!

From the very beginning God has intended for His followers to come together for strength and service, power and productivity. We find throughout Scripture that a community of believers can accomplish much more than an individual acting on his own behalf. God established the church and empowered it with the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel and provide healing and hope, energy and encouragement, to its members.

When a Christian feels lonely or deserted, afraid or abandoned, overwhelmed or overpowered, the church is to be a refuge for healing hearts and holding hands. God wants the church to provide protection and peace to all who seek His love, grace and mercy. Within the church, believers can link their lives together to offer protection from sin and work together as God's witness to the world.

Prayer: Lord, may Your church, even if only two or three are gathered in Your name, be faithful to fulfill Your purpose as they worship, work and witness together. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

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: 01.21.25

27 30 56 64 65 22

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$28,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 14 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

8 16 27 32 43 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$22,410,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 29 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

24 25 37 44 45 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 44 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

6 17 21 24 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 44 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

1 12 39 40 52 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 13 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

5 6 27 40 49 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$46,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 13 Mins 15 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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Cracks emerge in House GOP after speaker's threat to saddle California wildfire aid with conditions

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California Republicans are pushing back against suggestions by President Donald Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson and other Republicans that federal disaster aid for victims of wildfires that ravaged Southern California should come with strings attached, possibly jeopardizing the president's policy agenda in a deeply divided Congress at the outset of his second term.

With Trump planning to visit the fire-ravaged state this week, resistance from even a few House members to his efforts to put conditions on disaster aid could further complicate an already fraught relationship between reliably liberal California and the second Trump administration.

Several Republicans who narrowly won California House seats in November have expressed dismay that the state relief could be hitched to demands in exchange for helping the thousands of Californians in their districts still reeling from this month's disaster.

"Playing politics with people's livelihoods is unacceptable and a slap in the face to the Southern California wildfire victims and to our brave first responders," Republican Rep. Young Kim, whose closely divided district is anchored in fire-prone Orange County, southeast of Los Angeles, said in a statement.

In an interview aired Wednesday night, Trump said he may withhold aid to California until the state adjusts how it manages its scarce water resources. He falsely claimed that California's fish conservation efforts in the northern part of the state are responsible for fire hydrants running dry in urban areas.

"I don't think we should give California anything until they let the water run down," Trump told Fox News' Sean Hannity.

Local officials have said the conservation efforts for the delta smelt had nothing to do with the hydrants running dry as firefighters tried to contain blazes around Los Angeles. They said intense demand on a municipal system not designed to battle such blazes was to blame.

The wind-driven firestorms wiped out whole neighborhoods of Los Angeles County, left thousands homeless and killed more than two dozen people.

Trump said earlier this week that discussions are underway in the White House to bring more water to perennially parched Los Angeles, alluding to rainfall runoff lost to the Pacific and the state's vast water storage and delivery system.

"Los Angeles has massive amounts of water available to it. All they have to do is turn the valve," the president said.

California has long been a favorite target of Trump, who also referred to the fires in his inaugural address Monday. In LA, he said, "we are watching fires still tragically burn from weeks ago without even a token of defense."

"That's going to change."

Trump has made no mention of the multinational firefighting force deployed to contend with multiple blazes. Firefighters were gaining ground on the two major fires Wednesday when a third blaze broke out north of Los Angeles and quickly burned through hundreds of acres of dry brush.

Johnson, a Louisiana Republican echoing Trump's complaints, has said there are "serious" problems in how the state is managed. Those include insufficient funding for forestry programs and water storage. He also noted the public dispute between the LA fire chief and City Hall over budget cuts.

Johnson said Wednesday that Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass did not prepare the state or the city for what was to come. He particularly cited a 117-million-gallon reservoir left unfilled for nearly a year. Newsom has called for an independent investigation of the reservoir.

Bass didn't directly respond to a question about possible conditions on disaster aid, saying in a statement: "Our work with our federal partners will be based on direct conversations with them about how we

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can work together.”

Some Republicans have suggested that the congressional relief package could become entangled with efforts to raise the nation’s debt limit — and with the House so closely divided, even a few breakaway votes from either party could alter the outcome.

That leaves GOP lawmakers from California in a political quandary: whether to forcefully stand up for their home state, often pilloried by the GOP as representing all that is wrong with America, while Republicans in Congress are eager to show a unified front and parlay their November election wins into what Trump has called a new “golden age” for the nation.

Several California representatives agreed that the federal government must guard against the misuse of funds but argued that the money should not be held up or saddled with restrictions not placed on other states after tornadoes and hurricanes.

The dilemma played out in social media posts by Republican Rep. Ken Calvert, who narrowly prevailed in November in his swing district east of Los Angeles.

“Californians are entitled to receive federal disaster assistance in the same manner as all Americans,” he wrote on X. But, he quickly added, “Some federal policy changes may be needed to expedite rebuilding as well as improve future wildfire prevention. Those kind of policies are not conditions.”

Republican Rep. Kevin Kiley, whose sprawling district runs from east of Sacramento south to Death Valley, told KCRA-TV in Sacramento last week that Johnson’s use of the word conditions was not “especially helpful.” Speaking at the Capitol Wednesday, he said there is a lot of ambiguity about what constitutes conditions for disaster aid.

He said his focus is to make sure the money doesn’t get wasted through government inefficiency.

“We want to make sure the money actually gets to the victims and they can use it to rebuild their homes and to recover,” Kiley said.

Politicians in Washington have feuded for years over how to restrain the growing wildfire threat across the West. Republicans have long complained that inadequate land management practices have exacerbated damage from wildfires, while Democrats have emphasized the role of climate change and the failure of the federal government to address it.

About the only thing they agree on is that the problem persists.

Some lawmakers have noted that disaster aid over the years for Johnson’s home state of Louisiana did not come with conditions. Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries called the idea a “non-starter.”

Republican Rep. Doug LaMalfa, whose largely rural district runs from the Sacramento area north to the Oregon border, said he wasn’t too concerned about talk of conditions.

“Everything has conditions, especially the way California wastes money,” LaMalfa said. “We want to help people and we want to help with that, like we’ve helped with others. But California is very, very irresponsible.”

Trump plans to visit the state to see the damage firsthand on Friday. Newsom hasn’t said publicly if he’ll accompany him on his tour.

With the fragile GOP majority in the House — there are 219 Republicans, 214 Democrats and one vacancy — Johnson cannot afford defections on any vote. And it could be several weeks before a fuller accounting of the state’s recovery needs is ready and a formal request submitted to the White House.

Following major natural disasters, the president typically makes supplemental spending requests, as happened after hurricanes Helene and Milton.

Congress also could provide more disaster aid to California through legislation. Sen. Lindsey Graham, the Republican chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, said he would work to include disaster aid in a filibuster-proof bill Republicans hope to craft this year that would pay for some of Trump’s top policy priorities.

Newsom urged Johnson and other congressional leaders to quickly approve assistance for the state, where fires are still burning and strong winds continue to threaten new ones. In an email to supporters from his campaign committee, he warned that “Republicans are holding federal aid hostage” and said Democrats might be able to peel off a handful of GOP votes to push through an aid package.

“In times of natural disaster — from Hurricane Katrina to Hurricane Helene — Americans have always

stood together, setting aside politics to extend a helping hand to those in need," the governor wrote. "Historically, federal disaster aid has been provided without conditions."

Firefighters battle to maintain the upper hand on a huge fire north of Los Angeles

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER and MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ Associated Press

CASTAIC, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters fought to maintain the upper hand on a huge and rapidly moving wildfire that swept through rugged mountains north of Los Angeles and resulted in more than 50,000 people being put under evacuation orders or warnings.

The Hughes Fire broke out late Wednesday morning and in less than a day had charred nearly 16 square miles (41 square kilometers) of trees and brush near Castaic Lake, a popular recreation area about 40 miles (64 kilometers) from the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires that are burning for a third week.

Though the region was under a red flag warning for critical fire risk, winds were not as fast as they had been when those fires broke out, allowing for firefighting aircraft to dump tens of thousands of gallons of fire retardant on the latest blaze. By Wednesday night, about 14% of the Hughes Fire had been contained.

"The situation that we're in today is very different from the situation we were in 16 days ago," Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said Wednesday evening.

Red flag warnings were extended through 10 a.m. Friday in LA and Ventura counties. Officials remained concerned that the Palisades and Eaton fires could break their containment lines as firefighters continue watching for hot spots.

An evacuation warning was issued for Sherman Oaks after a brush fire broke out on the Sepulveda Pass near the I-405 Freeway. The blaze was first reported just after 11 p.m. Wednesday, but the Los Angeles Fire Department announced early Thursday that forward progress had been stopped at about 40 acres (16 hectares) and the evacuation warning was lifted. No structures were damaged and no injuries were reported, fire officials said, but firefighters remained at the scene.

More than 31,000 people have been ordered to evacuate from the Hughes Fire, and another 23,000 are under evacuation warnings, LA County Sheriff Robert Luna said. There were no reports of homes or other structures burned.

Parts of Interstate 5 near the Hughes Fire that had been closed reopened Wednesday evening.

A 30-mile (48-kilometer) stretch of the major north-south artery had been closed for emergency vehicles, to move equipment and to prevent accidents due to smoke billowing across it. Crews on the ground and in water-dropping aircraft tried to prevent the wind-driven fire from moving across the interstate and toward Castaic.

Marrone said that because winds were not as strong as they were two weeks ago, aircraft crews were able to drop fire retardant on the south side of the fire, where the flames were moving, he said. More than 4,000 firefighters were assigned to the fire, he said.

Winds in the area were gusting at 42 mph (67 kph) in the afternoon. They had reached as high as 65 mph (105 KPH) in some mountain pockets by Wednesday night, according David Roth, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Kayla Amara drove to Castaic's Stonegate neighborhood to collect items from the home of a friend who had rushed to pick up her daughter at preschool. As Amara was packing the car, she learned the fire had exploded in size and decided to hose down the property.

"Other people are hosing down their houses, too. I hope there's a house here to return to," Amara said as police cars raced through the streets and flames engulfed trees on a hillside in the distance.

Amara, a nurse who lives in nearby Valencia, said she's been on edge for weeks as major blazes devastated Southern California.

"It's been stressful with those other fires, but now that this one is close to home it's just super stressful," she said.

To the south, Los Angeles officials began to prepare for potential rain even as some residents were al-

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lowed to return to the charred Pacific Palisades and Altadena areas. Gusty weather was expected to last through Thursday and precipitation was possible starting Saturday, according to the weather service.

"Rains are in the forecast and the threat of mud and debris flow in our fire-impacted communities is real," Supervisor Kathryn Barger said during a Wednesday morning news conference.

Fire crews were filling sandbags for communities while county workers installed barriers and cleared drainage pipes and basins.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass warned that winds could carry ash and advised Angelenos to visit the city's website to learn how to protect themselves from toxic air during the latest Santa Ana wind event. LA County public health director Barbara Ferrer cautioned that the ash could contain heavy metals, arsenic and other harmful materials.

"Even a brief exposure can potentially cause skin irritation and lead to more serious problems," Ferrer said Wednesday, asking people to wear protective gear while cleaning up.

California Republicans are pushing back against suggestions by President Donald Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson and other Republicans that federal disaster aid for victims of wildfires should come with strings attached. Trump plans to visit the state to see the damage firsthand Friday, but it wasn't clear whether he and Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom will meet during the visit.

The low humidity, bone-dry vegetation and strong winds came as firefighters continued battling the Palisades and Eaton fires, which have killed at least 28 people and destroyed more than 14,000 structures since they broke out Jan. 7. Containment of the Palisades Fire reached 70%, and the Eaton Fire was at 95%.

Luna said Wednesday his department was still investigating 22 active missing person reports in both fire zones. All reported missing are adults, he said.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is investigating the causes of the fires but has not released any findings.

Several lawsuits have been filed by people who lost their homes in the Eaton Fire, alleging Southern California Edison's equipment sparked the blaze. On Tuesday, a judge overseeing one of the lawsuits ordered the utility to produce data from circuits in the area where the fire started.

South Korean investigators call for indictment of detained President Yoon

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean investigators asked prosecutors to indict the country's detained President Yoon Suk Yeol over his short-lived imposition of martial law last month, as it accused him of rebellion, abuse of power and obstruction of parliament on Thursday.

Yoon defended his actions again as he appeared at a court hearing for the second time Thursday, saying the Dec. 3 martial law decree was only meant to inform the public of the danger of an opposition-controlled National Assembly. He argued that the martial law imposition ended early because he quickly withdrew troops after the assembly voted down his decree.

"The reason for the declaration of martial law wasn't about a warning to the opposition. I was trying to appeal to the people to draw their strict supervision and criticism of the opposition," Yoon told a hearing at the Constitutional Court. "No matter how many warnings I would issue to the opposition, they would have been useless."

Yoon was impeached and suspended by the assembly on Dec. 14. The Constitutional Court is now deliberating to determine whether to formally throw Yoon out of office or reinstate him.

Appearing at the same hearing, Yoon's defense minister at the time of the martial law enforcement, Kim Yong Hyun, supported the president's argument, saying that he drew up the decree and proposed it to Yoon.

Kim, a close associate of Yoon who is also in detention, claimed that Yoon asked him to remove a public curfew from the decree, deploy a much smaller number of soldiers to the assembly than he initially proposed, and prevent troops from carrying live ammunition.

Kim's arguments couldn't immediately be independently verified. He has previously said all responsibility

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for the imposition of martial law rests solely with him. He was stopped from attempting suicide while in detention, days after the ill-fated martial law enactment.

Since taking office in 2022, Yoon, a conservative, has grappled with near-constant frictions with the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which has obstructed his agenda and impeached some of his top officials. In his announcement of martial law, Yoon called the assembly "a den of criminals" that was bogging down government affairs, and vowed to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces."

Yoon's martial law, the first of its kind in South Korea for more than 40 years, lasted only six hours. Yoon sent troops and police officers to the National Assembly, but enough lawmakers managed to enter the assembly chamber and called for an end to the emergency decree in a unanimous vote.

Yoon and Kim have said that his dispatch of troops and police forces was designed to maintain order. But the opposition and investigative authorities believe they tried to seal the assembly to prevent lawmakers from overturning his decree and plotted to detain some politicians. Yoon and Kim denied that.

Earlier Thursday, the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials said that Yoon, in collaboration with Kim and other military commanders, allegedly committed rebellion by staging a "riot" and seeking to undermine the constitution when he declared martial law. The CIO also accused Yoon of abusing his power by mobilizing troops for an illegitimate purpose and obstructing parliament's right to vote on ending martial law.

By law, the leader of a rebellion can face life in prison or the death penalty. Since being detained by the CIO last week, Yoon has rebuffed efforts to question him. He argues that the investigation and his detention are illegal.

"As you know, despite facing a nationally grave allegation as ringleader of a rebellion, the suspect has been constantly maintaining uncooperative stance and defying criminal judicial proceedings," Lee Jae-seung, deputy chief prosecutor at the CIO, told a televised briefing.

Yoon's defense team issued a statement accusing the CIO of "humiliating" Yoon by trying to pressure him to speak to investigators and abusing his human rights by preventing him from contacting family members.

In his first appearance at a Constitutional Court hearing on Tuesday, Yoon denied that he ordered the military to drag lawmakers out of the National Assembly to prevent them from voting. Commanders of military units that were sent to the assembly have testified that Yoon ordered them to pull lawmakers out.

Yoon's martial law decree has shaken South Korean politics and financial markets and hurt its international image. Yoon's subsequent defiance and the opposition's push to oust him have also intensified South Korea's already-serious internal divide.

Australian Open: Aryna Sabalenka overpowers Paula Badosa to near 3rd consecutive title in Melbourne

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Aryna Sabalenka moved one win away from becoming the first woman since 1999 to win three consecutive Australian Open titles, recovering from a slow start to beat good friend Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-2 Thursday night and return to the final.

"I have goosebumps. I'm so proud of myself. I'm proud of my team that we were able to put ourselves in such a situation," said the No. 1-seeded Sabalenka, who will face No. 2 Iga Swiatek or No. 19 Madison Keys for the championship. "If I'll be able to put myself in the history (books), it's going to mean a lot. It's going to mean the world to me."

Just 10 minutes into her semifinal, Sabalenka was down a break and trailed 2-0, 40-love. She was making unforced errors, shaking her head or gesturing toward her entourage in the stands after many.

But the 26-year-old from Belarus quickly figured things out, especially once Rod Laver Arena's retractable roof was shut late in the first set because of a drizzle. She straightened her strokes, frequently using huge returns and groundstrokes to overpower the 11th-seeded Badosa, who had eliminated No. 3 Coco Gauff on Tuesday to reach her first major semifinal.

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Sabalenka grabbed four games in a row and five of six to lead 5-3 and soon was ending that set with a 114 mph (184 kph) ace. She broke to lead 2-1 in the second set — helped by two double-faults by Badosa — and again to go up 4-1.

“She started to be very, very aggressive. Everything was working. Everything she was doing today, touching today, could become gold,” said Badosa, who thought about retiring last year while dealing with a stress fracture in her back.

“If she plays like this, I mean,” Badosa said about Sabalenka, “we can already give her the trophy.”

The key statistic: Sabalenka finished with a 32-11 advantage in winners.

That’s the sort of excellence that helped Sabalenka win her first major trophy at Melbourne Park in 2023, and she since has added two more — in Australia a year ago and at the U.S. Open last September.

The last woman to reach three finals in a row at the year’s first Grand Slam tournament was Serena Williams, who won two from 2015-17. Martina Hingis was the most recent woman with a threeppeat, doing it from 1997-1999.

Thursday night’s second match featured Swiatek against Keys.

Swiatek is a five-time major champion who entered the semifinals having dropped a total of just 14 games through five matches as she bids to reach the final at Melbourne Park for the first time. Keys went in on a 10-match winning streak, including taking the title at a tuneup event in Adelaide, and was hoping to reach her second Grand Slam title match after finishing as the runner-up at the 2017 U.S. Open.

The men’s semifinals are Friday: Novak Djokovic vs. Alexander Zverev, followed by defending champion Jannik Sinner vs. Ben Shelton.

The women’s final is Saturday; the men’s is Sunday.

Sabalenka and Badosa did their best to avoid any eye contact for much of the evening, whether up at the net for the coin toss or when they crossed paths at changeovers.

One exception came early in the second set, when Badosa tumbled to the court and flung her racket away to avoid injury. Badosa immediately put up a thumb to make clear she was fine. When a replay was shown on stadium video screens, Sabalenka pantomimed to indicate Badosa took a dive, and they both smiled.

When the match was over, they met at the net for a lengthy hug.

During Sabalenka’s on-court interview, she joked about maybe taking Badosa — who by then was sitting in a hallway, her head bowed — on a shopping spree to make things up to her, paying for whatever the Spaniard wants.

“After a couple of battles against each other, we spoke and decided to put it aside,” said Sabalenka, who leads their head-to-head series 6-2. “She wanted it badly. We both wanted it badly. ... No matter what happens on the court, were going to be friends after our matches.”

Then Sabalenka paused, before joking: “I hope she’s still my friend. I’m sure she’ll hate me for the next hour or day. I’m OK with that.”

On her way to the locker room, Sabalenka stopped to console Badosa.

Later, when Badosa was told what Sabalenka said about footing the bill at some stores, Badosa said: “It’s going to be something really expensive, because now I think she doubled the prize money. So she won’t have a problem.”

7 police officers wounded in San Antonio shooting

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Seven San Antonio police officers were shot while responding to a “suicide in progress” call and the suspect was later found dead inside an apartment after a standoff, the city’s police chief said.

The officers were shot Wednesday night and a SWAT team was called to the Stone Oak neighborhood, San Antonio Police Chief Bill McManus said early Thursday. After several hours, the suspect was dead but it wasn’t immediately known how he died, McManus said.

He described the suspect as a man in his 40s and said the original call to police came from a family member.

Earlier, McManus had said four officers were wounded and none of those officers' injuries were believed to be life-threatening. In his later remarks, he didn't address the specific conditions of the officers.

Middle East latest: Israeli forces kill 2 Palestinian militants who carried out West Bank bus attack

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli forces have killed two Palestinian militants who carried out a deadly attack on a bus in the West Bank earlier this month.

The Israeli military said Thursday that the two men barricaded themselves in a structure in the West Bank village of Burqin and exchanged fire with Israeli troops before they were killed overnight. The army said a soldier was moderately wounded.

The military said Mohammed Nazzal and Katiba al-Shalabi were operatives with the Islamic Jihad militant group.

The Hamas militant group released a statement claiming the two men were members of its armed wing and praising the bus attack. Hamas and the smaller and more radical Islamic Jihad are allies that sometimes carry out attacks together.

The Jan. 6 attack on the bus carrying Israelis killed three people and wounded six others.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want it to form the main part of their future state.

Here's the latest:

24-year-old Hamas attack survivor will represent Israel at Eurovision

TEL AVIV — A survivor of the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas attack will represent Israel at the Eurovision Song Contest to be held in Switzerland in May.

Yuval Raphael, 24, won first place in a singing contest on Israeli television that determines Israel's entry to Eurovision, a pan-continental pop extravaganza. She won with a performance of the Swedish group ABBA's pop hit "Dancing Queen," which she dedicated to the victims of the attack.

Raphael survived the Nova music festival in southern Israel as Palestinian militants stormed the event, killing hundreds and taking many hostage during Hamas' cross-border raid. She has testified in the Israeli parliament about her experience on Oct. 7. She described hiding from gunmen under piles of dead bodies for eight hours, and said "I'm going to deal with this thing for the rest of my life."

Last year's Eurovision was overshadowed by the war in Gaza, with large demonstrations protesting Israel's participation. Israel's representative, Eden Golan, who ended up taking fifth place in the competition, was kept under tight security.

Israel will not compromise on dismantling Hamas, foreign minister says

BUDAPEST, Hungary - Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said Thursday that Israel would not compromise on its objectives of dismantling Hamas' military and governing capabilities, and that there were no guarantees for the success of the three-phase cease fire in the war in the Gaza Strip.

Speaking alongside his Hungarian counterpart in Budapest, Hungary, Saar said Hamas leaders had declared their intent to carry out more attacks on Israel similar to the deadly raids on Oct. 7, 2023, and could therefore not be allowed to retain any military capabilities.

"They are committed to the idea of eliminating the Jewish state," Saar said. "Israel will not accept Hamas' rule in Gaza. As long as Hamas remains in power, there will be no peace, security or stability in the Middle East."

"We hope that the framework for the hostage release will continue until its end, but of course I cannot guarantee that," he continued. "We will not abandon our objectives."

Heavy rain and floods worsen misery for Palestinians displaced in Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Although the ceasefire in Gaza has brought an influx of humanitarian aid and a rare respite from Israeli bombardment, it has done little to change the miserable conditions endured

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by most of the 2 million people displaced by fighting.

The winter weather has compounded the hardships of those eking out an existence in tattered tents and makeshift shelters. Heavy rains were flooding tents across the territory, leaving Palestinians shivering in the cold.

At one makeshift camp in the central city of Deir al-Balah, the downpour Thursday quickly soaked through flimsy tents that seemed to float on pools of muck. Some used sandbags to keep their tents from washing away, while others tried to clear the huge puddles of mud outside their shelters. Barefoot children trod through paths that had become filthy rivers. A cacophony of coughs emanated from every corner, raising concerns about the spread of illness.

Tareq Deifallah, a displaced resident in Deir al-Balah originally from Beit Hanoun, in northern Gaza, said water was seeping through his tent from all sides. He said "the truce is useless" when it came to changing his living conditions.

"Before the truce we were suffering, after the truce we are suffering, from the rain and the winter," Deifallah said.

Monira Faraj, a mother of two young girls, said rain flooded her tent and soaked through her mattress as her family was sleeping.

"We're afraid we're going to drown if it becomes too much," she said.

Residents of the tent camp said they had no choice but to stay put. Even though the ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war that took effect Sunday allows Palestinians displaced by the fighting to return to their homes, those who set out to check on their houses in recent days said they found only ruins.

Commercial plane from Turkey lands in Damascus for first time in 13 years

DAMASCUS, Syria — A commercial plane from Turkey landed in Damascus for the first time in 13 years on Thursday, Syrian state media said.

The Turkish Airlines plane flew from Istanbul to the Syrian capital, SANA reported, two weeks after the first international commercial flight landed, from Qatar, since former Syrian President Bashar Assad's fall.

Ankara backed opposition groups in northwestern Syria that fought against Assad and his allies during the uprising-turned-conflict and never restored ties, even when most Mideast countries did in 2023.

Now Turkey, a key ally of the new authorities under the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, has expressed its intention to invest in Syria's economy and help its ailing electricity and energy sectors.

Israel's ambassador to US says the 2 countries are discussing Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon

JERUSALEM — Israel's ambassador to the United States says the two countries are in talks about the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon as a deadline in the ceasefire with Hezbollah militants approaches. Israeli media have reported that Israel is seeking to postpone the completion of its pullout.

Michael Herzog said in an interview with Israeli Army Radio on Thursday that he believed Israel would "reach an understanding" with the Trump administration, without elaborating.

Under the U.S.-brokered ceasefire that ended more than a year of fighting linked to the war in the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces are supposed to complete their withdrawal from southern Lebanon by Sunday.

Israeli media have reported that Israel reached an understanding with the Biden administration on staying longer but that President Donald Trump is urging it to withdraw on time.

There was no immediate comment from the United States.

Israeli officials have said Lebanese troops are not deploying fast enough in the areas Israeli troops are supposed to vacate. Under the ceasefire, the Lebanese army is to patrol a buffer zone in southern Lebanon alongside United Nations peacekeepers.

Hezbollah has threatened to resume its rocket and drone fire if Israel does not withdraw on time.

Al Jazeera says the Palestinian Authority arrested one of its reporters

The Al Jazeera news network says the Palestinian Authority arrested one of its reporters after preventing him from covering an Israeli operation in the occupied West Bank.

The Qatar-based news network reported Thursday that its reporter, Mohammed al-Atrash, was arrested from his home.

It said Palestinian security forces had earlier prevented him from reporting on a large Israeli military

operation in Jenin, an epicenter of Israeli-Palestinian violence in recent years. The Palestinian Authority launched its own crackdown on militants in the city late last year.

There was no immediate comment from the Palestinian Authority.

Both Israel and the Western-backed Palestinian Authority banned Al Jazeera last year. Israel accuses it of being a mouthpiece of Hamas over its coverage of the war in the Gaza Strip and says some of its reporters are also militants.

The pan-Arab broadcaster has rejected the allegations and accused both Israel and the Palestinian Authority of trying to silence critical coverage.

The internationally recognized Palestinian Authority administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and cooperates with Israel on security matters. It is unpopular among Palestinians, with critics portraying it as a corrupt and authoritarian ally of Israel.

Israel's Netanyahu will probably visit Trump in the next few weeks, official says

UNITED NATIONS – Israel's ambassador to the United Nations believes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will travel to Washington to meet President Donald Trump "in a few weeks."

Danny Danon told reporters Wednesday: "I'm sure he would be one of the first foreign leaders invited to the White House."

Danon said he expects their discussions to include the current ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and the release of hostages taken during Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack in southern Israel.

Love is a many-gendered thing: Thai LGBTQ+ couples register marriages as law gives them equal status

By CHALIDA EKVITTHAYAVECHNUKUL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — LGBTQ+ couples in Thailand made Thursday a life-changing occasion, registering their marriages legally on the first day a law took effect granting them the same rights as heterosexual couples.

The enactment of the Marriage Equality Act makes Thailand the first country in Southeast Asia and the third place in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage, after Taiwan and Nepal.

As many as 300 couples had been expected to complete the formalities at a daylong gala celebration in an exhibition hall at a shopping mall in central Bangkok, though by late afternoon the total was less than half of that.

Hundreds more were predicted to register at district offices around the country, though actual numbers were not immediately available. They included actors Apiwat "Porsch" Apiwatsayree and Sappanyoo "Arm" Panatkoool, who tied the knot at the Phra Nakorn district office in central Bangkok.

"We can love, we love equally, legally," said Sappanyoo.

"And we can build our family in our own way because I believe that every kind of love, every kind of family is beautiful as it is," his partner Apiwat said.

They posed afterwards on a terrace at the office, smiling and waving while clutching a bouquet of flowers.

Similar sentiments were voiced at the mall mass event, where same-sex couple Pisit Sirihirunchai, 36, a policeman, and his partner Chanatip Sirihirunchai, 42, registered.

"Don't put a limit just because they are same sex or whatever they are. Love is a beautiful thing. We should not stop them," Pisit said.

"I want to see the same-sex marriage law available in every country where LGBTQ+ couples are," Chanatip chimed in.

Activists said they hoped at least 1,448 same-sex marriages would take place nationwide Thursday, in a nod to Civil and Commercial Code's Article 1448, that they had successfully lobbied to get amended.

Thailand's marriage equality bill, which sailed through both houses of parliament, amended Article 1448 to replace the words "man and woman" and "husband and wife" with "individuals" and "marriage partners." It is intended to grant full legal, financial and medical rights to LGBTQ+ couples.

Partners will have equal rights and responsibilities in dealing with joint assets, tax obligations and deduc-

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tions, inheritance rights and survivor benefits.

At the Siam Paragon mall, former Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin led a parade of newlyweds on a rainbow-colored carpet outside of the exhibition hall.

Current Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra addressed the crowd by video message, declaring, "From now on, all love will be certified by law. All couples will live with honor and dignity in Thailand."

Srettha, under whose government the ruling Pheu Thai party introduced the new law, offered a sharper and more timely comment, obviously referencing U.S. President Donald Trump's inauguration speech on Monday, in which he declared it will be the official policy of his government "that there are only two genders, male and female."

While he did not mention Trump by name, Srettha said "a powerful country's" new leader "announced clearly that there are only two genders in his country."

Striking a comparison between that "powerful country" and Thailand's mid-sized population and smaller economy, he said, "I believe our heart is bigger."

Thailand has a reputation for acceptance and inclusivity, and thousands of people from around the world attend the annual Bangkok Pride parade. But rights advocates have struggled for decades to pass a marriage equality law in a largely conservative society where members of the LGBTQ+ community say they face discrimination in everyday life, although they note that things have improved greatly in recent years.

Bangkok's city government has said that it organized workshops for district office staff who are in charge of handling marriage registration. They included lectures raising awareness about gender diversity and guidance on how to properly communicate with those who come for the service. The Interior Ministry has offered similar guidance.

"It's like a missing piece of the jigsaw," Bangkok Deputy Gov. Sanon Wangsrangboon said at one of the workshops earlier this month. "Society is ready. The law is getting ready. But the last piece of the jigsaw is the understanding from officials."

About three dozen countries around the world have legalized some form of same-sex marriage, more than half in Europe. In Taiwan, which in 2019 was the first place in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage, 526 people registered on the first day, according to its government's Department of Household Registration.

NATO chief says Russian victory over Ukraine would have a costly impact on alliance's credibility

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte warned on Thursday that a Russian victory over Ukraine would undermine the dissuasive force of the world's biggest military alliance and that its credibility could cost trillions to restore.

NATO has been ramping up its forces along its eastern flank with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, deploying thousands of troops and equipment to deter Moscow from expanding its war into the territory of any of the organization's 32 member countries.

"If Ukraine loses then to restore the deterrence of the rest of NATO again, it will be a much, much higher price than what we are contemplating at this moment in terms of ramping up our spending and ramping up our industrial production," Rutte said.

"It will not be billions extra; it will be trillions extra," he said, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Rutte insisted that Ukraine's Western backers must "step up and not scale back the support" they are providing to the country, almost three years after Russia's full-fledged invasion began.

"We have to change the trajectory of the war," Rutte said, adding that the West "cannot allow in the 21st century that one country invades another country and tries to colonize it."

"We are beyond those days," he said.

Anxiety in Europe is mounting that U.S. President Donald Trump might seek to quickly end the war in talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on terms that are unfavorable to Ukraine, but Rutte appeared

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wary about trying to do things in a hurry.

"If we got a bad deal, it would only mean that we will see the president of Russia high-fiving with the leaders from North Korea, Iran and China and we cannot accept that," the former Dutch prime minister said. "That would be geopolitically a big, big mistake."

Trump's new envoy for special missions, Richard Grenell, criticized allies who talk of continuing the war but still won't increase their defense spending to NATO guidelines. He said Americans think it is "outrageous" that the Biden administration refused to talk to Putin.

NATO leaders have agreed that each member country should spend at least 2% of gross domestic product on their military budgets. The alliance estimates that 23 members will reach that level this year, although almost a third will still fall short. Poland and Estonia spend most in GDP terms.

"You cannot ask the American people to expand the umbrella of NATO when the current members aren't paying their fair share," Grenell said. The United States spends most within NATO on its own budget, in dollar terms, and allies rely on its military might for their defense.

"When we have leaders who are going to talk about more war, we need to make sure that those leaders are spending the right amount of money," Grenell said. "We need to be able to avoid war, and that means a credible threat from NATO."

He also insisted that former President Joe Biden was wrong not to talk to Putin, who was indicted for war crimes in 2023 by the International Criminal Court for the "unlawful deportation" of children from Ukraine to Russia.

"You should be able to talk to people," Grenell said. "Talking is a tactic, and you're not going to be able to solve problems peacefully unless you actually have conversations," he said.

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski welcomed Trump's acknowledgement that it must be Russia which should make the first peace moves, but he cautioned that "this is not the Putin that President Trump knew in his first term."

On Wednesday, Trump threatened to impose stiff taxes, tariffs and sanctions on Moscow if an agreement isn't reached to end the war, but that warning will probably fall on deaf ears in the Kremlin. Russia's economy is already weighed down by a multitude of U.S. and European sanctions.

Sikorski warned that Putin should not be put at the center of the world stage over Ukraine.

"The president of the United States is the leader of the free world. Vladimir Putin is an outcast and an indicted war criminal for stealing Ukrainian children," Sikorski said.

"I would suggest that Putin has to earn the summit, that if he gets it early, it elevates him beyond his significance and gives him the wrong idea about the trajectory of this," he said.

Europe posts record year for clean energy use as Trump pulls US toward fossil fuels

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

A record 47% of the European Union's electricity now comes from solar and other renewables, a report Thursday said, in yet another sign of the growing gap between the bloc's push for clean energy and the new U.S. administration's pursuit of more fossil fuels.

Nearly three-quarters of the EU's electricity doesn't emit planet-warming gases into the air — with 24% of electricity in the bloc coming from nuclear power which also doesn't release greenhouse gases, a report released by the climate energy think tank Ember found. This is far higher than in countries like the United States and China, where nearly two-thirds of their energy is still produced from carbon-polluting fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

Experts say they're encouraged by Europe's fossil fuel reductions, particularly as the U.S. looks set to increase its emissions as its new president pledges cheaper gas prices, has halted leases for wind projects and pledged to revoke Biden-era incentives for electric vehicles.

"Fossil fuels are losing their grip on EU energy," said Chris Rosslowe, an energy expert at Ember. In 2024,

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solar power generated 11% of EU electricity, overtaking coal which fell below 10% for the first time. Clean wind power generated more electricity than gas for the second year in a row.

2024 data wasn't available for all countries. Ember's data for the world's largest generators of electricity for 2023 show Brazil with the largest share of its electricity from renewables, almost 89%, with much of that coming from hydroelectric power. Canada had about 66.5%, China 30.6%, France 26.5%, the U.S. 22.7% and India 19.5%.

Green policies and war drive clean energy growth

One reason for Europe's clean power transition moving at pace is the European Green Deal, an ambitious policy passed in 2019 that paved the way for climate laws to be updated. As a result of the deal, the EU made their targets more ambitious, aiming to cut 55% of the region's emissions by the end of the decade. The policy also aims to make Europe climate neutral — reducing the amount of additional emissions in the air to practically zero — by 2050.

Hundreds of regulations and directives in European countries to incentivize investment in clean energy and reduce carbon pollution have been passed or are in the process of being ratified across Europe.

"At the start of the Deal, renewables were a third and fossil fuels accounted for 39% of Europe's electricity," Rosslowe said. "Now fossils generate only 29% and wind and solar have been driving the clean energy transition." The amount of electricity generated by nuclear energy has remained relatively stable in the bloc.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also spurred the move to clean energy in Europe. Gas prices skyrocketed — with much of Europe's gas coming from Russia becoming unviable — forcing countries to look for cheaper, cleaner alternatives. Portugal, Netherlands and Estonia witnessed the highest increase in clean power in the last five years.

Europe cements its place as a clean energy leader

The transition to clean power helped Europe avoid more than \$61 billion worth of fossil fuel imports for generating electricity since 2019.

"This is sending a clear message that their energy needs are going to be met through clean power, not gas imports," said Pieter de Pous, a Brussels-based energy analyst at European think tank E3G. De Pous said the EU's origins were "as a community of coal and steel because those industries were so important," but it is now rapidly becoming a "community of solar and wind power, batteries and smart technologies."

Nuclear growth in the bloc, meanwhile, has slowed. Across the European Union, retirements of nuclear plants have outpaced new construction since around the mid-2000s, according to Global Energy Monitor.

As President Trump has pulled the United States out of the Paris Agreement aimed at curbing warming and is pursuing a "drill, baby, drill" energy policy, Rosslowe said the EU's leadership in clean power becomes all the more important. "It's about increasing European energy independence, and it's about showing this climate leadership," he said.

On Tuesday, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said: "Europe will stay the course, and keep working with all nations that want to protect nature and stop global warming."

Yemen's Houthi rebels release crew of commercial vessel seized in Red Sea in November 2023

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels on Wednesday released the crew of the *Galaxy Leader*, a vehicle carrier seized in November 2023 at the start of their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea corridor over the Israel-Hamas war.

The move by the Iranian-backed Houthis marks their latest effort to de-escalate their attacks following a ceasefire in Gaza. However, it came as U.S. President Donald Trump moved to reinstate a terrorism designation he made on the group late in his first term that had been revoked by President Joe Biden, potentially setting the stage for new tensions with the rebels.

The Houthis said they released the sailors after mediation by Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge

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of the Arabian Peninsula that's long been an interlocutor with the Houthis. A Royal Air Force of Oman jet took a flight to Yemen earlier Wednesday and took off again about an hour after the Houthi announcement with the crew, who smiled as they stepped off into freedom in Muscat.

The Houthis also said Hamas separately requested the release of the ship's crew of 25, who included mariners from the Philippines, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Mexico.

"This step comes in support of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza," the Houthis said in a statement on rebel-controlled SABA news agency.

In the Philippines, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. confirmed the release of 17 Filipino crew members, describing the moment as an "utmost joy." The Filipinos, who were in the custody of the Philippine Embassy in Muscat, Oman, would be flown home soon, Marcos said.

Bulgaria's Foreign Ministry confirmed the release of two Bulgarians identified by officials as the ship's captain, Lyubomir Chanev, and assistant captain, Danail Veselinov. A government jet was on the way to Oman to bring the Bulgarians home, the ministry said.

Hans Grundberg, the United Nations' special envoy to Yemen, called the crew's release "heartwarming news that puts an end to the arbitrary detention and separation that they and their families endured for more than a year."

"This is a step in the right direction, and I urge Ansar Allah to continue these positive steps on all fronts, including ending all maritime attacks," he added, using another name for the Houthis.

Vessel's link to Israeli billionaire

The Houthis said they hijacked the Galaxy Leader over its connection to Israel. The attack launched the rebels' campaign targeting ships in international waters in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that connects them.

A representative for the Galaxy Leader's owners had no comment on Wednesday.

The Bahamas-flagged vessel is affiliated with an Israeli billionaire, Abraham "Rami" Ungar, who is known as one of the richest men in Israel.

The Houthi attack on the Galaxy Leader saw the rebels launch a helicopter-borne raid. Propaganda footage of the raid has been played constantly by the Houthis, who even shot a music video aboard the ship at one point.

On Monday, the Houthis signaled they now will limit their attacks in the Red Sea corridor to only Israeli-affiliated ships after a ceasefire began in the Gaza Strip, but warned wider assaults could resume if needed.

However, it likely won't be enough to encourage global firms to reenter the route that's crucial for cargo and energy shipments moving between Asia and Europe. Their attacks have halved traffic through the region, cutting deeply into revenues for Egypt, which runs the Suez Canal linking the Red Sea to the Mediterranean.

The release of the vessel's crew now may have been an effort to curry favor with the U.S., though the ship still remains moored off the Yemeni port city of Hodeida.

"This gesture by the Houthis may be intended as a goodwill measure towards the new Trump administration," said Yemen expert Mohammed al-Basha, of the Basha Report risk advisory firm.

However, Trump signed an order urging Secretary of State Marco Rubio to reinstate a foreign terrorist organization designation on the Houthis. Rubio separately called Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates, who have led a coalition battling the Houthis since 2015.

"Under President Trump, it is now the policy of the United States to cooperate with its regional partners to eliminate the Houthis' capabilities and operations, deprive them of resources, and thereby end their attacks on U.S. personnel and civilians, U.S. partners, and maritime shipping in the Red Sea," the White House said.

Biden lifted the designation early in his term, citing the humanitarian threat that the sanctions posed to ordinary Yemenis and to back an de facto ceasefire that still broadly holds in Yemen's war.

Houthi attacks targeted over 100 commercial ships

The Houthis have targeted over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones since the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip started in October 2023, after Hamas' surprise attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 250 others taken hostage. Israel's military offensive has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants but say women and children make up more than half the fatalities.

The Houthis have sunk two vessels in their campaign that has also killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have either been intercepted by separate U.S.- and European-led coalitions in the Red Sea or failed to reach their targets, which have also included Western military vessels.

The rebels had maintained that they only targeted ships linked to Israel, the U.S., or the U.K. However, many of the ships attacked had little or no connection, including some bound for Iran.

The tempo of Houthi attacks has slowed in recent weeks, particularly involving ships at sea. That may be due in part to the U.S. airstrike campaign. The U.S. and its partners alone have struck the Houthis over 260 times, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Families sue TikTok in France over teen suicides they say are linked to harmful content

By TOM NOUVIAN Associated Press

CASSIS, France (AP) — In the moment when her world shattered three years ago, Stephanie Mistre found her 15-year-old daughter, Marie, lifeless in the bedroom where she died by suicide.

"I went from light to darkness in a fraction of a second," Mistre said, describing the day in September 2021 that marked the start of her fight against TikTok, the Chinese-owned video app she blames for pushing her daughter toward despair.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at 988lifeline.org. Helplines outside the U.S. can be found at www.iasp.info/suicidalthoughts.

Delving into her daughter's phone after her death, Mistre discovered videos promoting suicide methods, tutorials and comments encouraging users to go beyond "mere suicide attempts." She said TikTok's algorithm had repeatedly pushed such content to her daughter.

"It was brainwashing," said Mistre, who lives in Cassis, near Marseille, in the south of France. "They normalized depression and self-harm, turning it into a twisted sense of belonging."

Now Mistre and six other families are suing TikTok France, accusing the platform of failing to moderate harmful content and exposing children to life-threatening material. Out of the seven families, two experienced the loss of a child.

Asked about the lawsuit, TikTok said its guidelines forbid any promotion of suicide and that it employs 40,000 trust and safety professionals worldwide — hundreds of which are French-speaking moderators — to remove dangerous posts. The company also said it refers users who search for suicide-related videos to mental health services.

Before killing herself, Marie Le Tiec made several videos to explain her decision, citing various difficulties in her life, and quoted a song by the Louisiana-based emo rap group Suicideboys, who are popular on TikTok.

Her mother also claims that her daughter was repeatedly bullied and harassed at school and online. In addition to the lawsuit, the 51-year-old mother and her husband have filed a complaint against five of Marie's classmates and her previous high school.

Above all, Mistre blames TikTok, saying that putting the app "in the hands of an empathetic and sensitive teenager who does not know what is real from what is not is like a ticking bomb."

Scientists have not established a clear link between social media and mental health problems or psy-

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chological harm, said Grégoire Borst, a professor of psychology and cognitive neuroscience at Paris-Cité University.

"It's very difficult to show clear cause and effect in this area," Borst said, citing a leading peer-reviewed study that found only 0.4% of the differences in teenagers' well-being could be attributed to social media use.

Additionally, Borst pointed out that no current studies suggest TikTok is any more harmful than rival apps such as Snapchat, X, Facebook or Instagram.

While most teens use social media without significant harm, the real risks, Borst said, lie with those already facing challenges such as bullying or family instability.

"When teenagers already feel bad about themselves and spend time exposed to distorted images or harmful social comparisons," it can worsen their mental state, Borst said.

Lawyer Laure Boutron-Marmion, who represents the seven families suing TikTok, said their case is based on "extensive evidence." The company "can no longer hide behind the claim that it's not their responsibility because they don't create the content," Boutron-Marmion said.

The lawsuit alleges that TikTok's algorithm is designed to trap vulnerable users in cycles of despair for profit and seeks reparations for the families.

"Their strategy is insidious," Mistre said. "They hook children into depressive content to keep them on the platform, turning them into lucrative re-engagement products."

Boutron-Marmion noted that TikTok's Chinese version, Douyin, features much stricter content controls for young users. It includes a "youth mode" mandatory for users under 14 that restricts screen time to 40 minutes a day and offers only approved content.

"It proves they can moderate content when they choose to," Boutron-Marmion said. "The absence of these safeguards here is telling."

A report titled "Children and Screens," commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron in April and to which Borst contributed, concluded that certain algorithmic features should be considered addictive and banned from any app in France. The report also called for restricting social media access for minors under 15 in France. Neither measure has been adopted.

TikTok, which faced being shut down in the U.S. until President Donald Trump suspended a ban on it, has also come under scrutiny globally.

The U.S. has seen similar legal efforts by parents. One lawsuit in Los Angeles County accuses Meta and its platforms Instagram and Facebook, as well as Snapchat and TikTok, of designing defective products that cause serious injuries. The lawsuit lists three teens who died by suicide. In another complaint, two tribal nations accuse major social media companies, including YouTube owner Alphabet, of contributing to high rates of suicide among Native youths.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg apologized to parents who had lost children while testifying last year in the U.S. Senate.

In December, Australia enacted a groundbreaking law banning social media accounts for children under 16.

In France, Boutron-Marmion expects TikTok Limited Technologies, the European Union subsidiary for ByteDance — the Chinese company that owns TikTok — to answer the allegations in the first quarter of 2025. Authorities will later decide whether and when a trial would take place.

When contacted by The Associated Press, TikTok said it had not been notified about the French lawsuit, which was filed in November. It could take months for the French justice system to process the complaint and for authorities in Ireland — home to TikTok's European headquarters — to formally notify the company, Boutron-Marmion said.

Instead, a TikTok spokesperson highlighted company guidelines that prohibit content promoting suicide or self-harm.

Critics argue that TikTok's claims of robust moderation fall short.

Imran Ahmed, the CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, dismissed TikTok's assertion that over 98.8% of harmful videos had been flagged and removed between April and June.

When asked about the blind spots of their moderation efforts, social media platforms claim that users

are able to bypass detection by using ambiguous language or allusions that algorithms struggle to flag, Ahmed said.

The term "algospeak" has been coined to describe techniques such as using zebra or armadillo emojis to talk about cutting yourself, or the Swiss flag emoji as an allusion to suicide.

Such code words "aren't particularly sophisticated," Ahmed said. "The only reason TikTok can't find them when independent researchers, journalists and others can is because they're not looking hard enough," Ahmed said.

Ahmed's organization conducted a study in 2022 simulating the experience of a 13-year-old girl on TikTok. "Within 2.5 minutes, the accounts were served self-harm content," Ahmed said. "By eight minutes, they saw eating disorder content. On average, every 39 seconds, the algorithm pushed harmful material."

The algorithm "knows that eating disorder and self-harm content is especially addictive" for young girls. For Mistre, the fight is deeply personal. Sitting in her daughter's room, where she has kept the decor untouched for the last three years, she said parents must know about the dangers of social media.

Had she known about the content being sent to her daughter, she never would have allowed her on TikTok, she said. Her voice breaks as she describes Marie as a "sunny, funny" teenager who dreamed of becoming a lawyer.

"In memory of Marie, I will fight as long as I have the strength," she said. "Parents need to know the truth. We must confront these platforms and demand accountability."

Teen fatally shoots a female student and himself at Antioch High School in Nashville, police say

By KRISTIN M. HALL, TRAVIS LOLLER and JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A shooting in a Nashville high school cafeteria Wednesday left a female student dead and another student wounded, nearly two years after another deadly school shooting in the city that ignited an emotional debate about gun control in Tennessee.

The 17-year-old shooter, who was also a student at Antioch High School, later shot and killed himself with a handgun, Metro Nashville Police spokesperson Don Aaron said during a news conference. Police identified him as Solomon Henderson.

Police Chief John Drake said the shooter "confronted" student Josselin Corea Escalante, 16, in the cafeteria and opened fire, killing her.

The wounded student was grazed by a bullet. He was treated and released from the hospital, Drake said. Another student was taken to a hospital for treatment of a facial injury that happened during a fall, Aaron said.

Metro Nashville Police, federal and state agencies are examining "very concerning online writings and social media posts connected to 17-year-old Solomon Henderson" as they work to establish a motive, police said in a statement Wednesday evening.

Investigators at this point have not established a connection between Henderson and the victims, and police said the gunfire may have been random, according to the statement.

Two school resource officers were in the building when the shooting happened around 11 a.m., Aaron said. They were not in the immediate vicinity of the cafeteria and by the time they got down there the shooting was over and the gunman had killed himself, Aaron said.

The school has about 2,000 students and is in Antioch, a neighborhood about 10 miles (16 kilometers) southeast of downtown Nashville.

At a family safety center close to a hospital, officials helped shocked parents reunite with their children.

Dajuan Bernard was waiting at a Mapco service station to reunite with his son, a 10th grader, who was being held in the auditorium with other students Wednesday afternoon. He first heard of the shooting from his son, who "was a little startled," Bernard said. His son was upstairs from the cafeteria but said he heard the gunfire.

"He was OK and let me know that everything was OK," Bernard said.

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"This world is so crazy, it could happen anywhere," he said. "We've just got to protect the kids, and raise the kids right to prevent them from even doing this. That's the hardest part."

Fonda Abner said her granddaughter had called her a couple of times but that she only heard commotion and thought it was a pocket dial. They spoke briefly before being cut off.

"It's nerve-racking waiting out here," Abner said.

United Family Fellowship, a church in Antioch, was hosting a vigil Wednesday night "for anyone in the community who needs a space to pray, process, and find comfort," the church said on Facebook.

Adrienne Battle, superintendent of Nashville schools, said earlier Wednesday that public schools have implemented a "range of safety measures," including partnerships with police for school resource officers, security cameras with weapon-detection software, shatter-resistant film for glass, and security vestibules that are a barrier between outside visitors and the main entrance.

"Unfortunately, these measures were not enough to stop this tragedy," Battle said.

She said there are questions about whether stationary metal detectors should be considered.

"While past research has shown they have had limitations and unintended consequences, we will continue to explore emerging technologies and strategies to strengthen school safety," Battle said.

In October, a 16-year-old Antioch High School student was arrested after school resource officers and school officials discovered through social media that he had taken a gun to school the day prior. When he was stopped the following morning, officials found a loaded gun in his pants, police said.

Wednesday's school shooting comes nearly two years after a shooter opened fire at a separate Nashville private elementary school and killed six people, including three children.

The tragedy prompted a monthslong effort among hundreds of community organizers, families, protesters and others pleading with lawmakers to consider passing gun control measures.

GOP lawmakers in the Republican-dominant state refused to do so. With the Republican supermajority intact after November's election, it's unlikely attitudes have changed enough to consider any meaningful bills that would address gun control.

Instead, lawmakers have been more open to adding more security to schools — including passing a bill last year that would allow some teachers and staff to carry concealed handguns on public school grounds, and bar parents and other teachers from knowing who was armed.

Antioch, a growing and diverse area of Nashville, has endured other prominent shootings in recent years. A 2017 fatal shooting at Burnette Chapel Church of Christ killed one woman and wounded seven people. And in 2018, a shooter killed four people at a Waffle House.

State Rep. Shaundelle Brooks ran for office in large part due to her son's death in the Waffle House shooting and was elected last year after the Covenant shooting. She said the Antioch High shooting reinforces the need for gun control reforms. "We must do better," she said.

"Ever since I lost my son, Akilah, in a mass shooting in 2018, I have been fighting to ensure this never happens again," the Nashville Democrat said in a statement. "Here we are almost 7 years later, and our communities are still being impacted by gun violence."

Samantha Dickerson had taken her 14-year-old son's phone away as a punishment, so when she got a message from his school about the shooting, she had no way to reach him.

"I was nervous," she said. "I really was about to break down."

After about three hours of waiting, she finally got a call from his English teacher and spoke with her son.

"When I heard his voice, I just broke down and started crying," she said.

Immigrant detention beds may be maxed out as Trump moves to deport 'millions and millions'

By MORGAN LEE and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — President Donald Trump's inauguration-day executive orders and promises of mass deportations of "millions and millions" of people will hinge on securing money for detention centers.

The Trump administration has not publicly said how many immigration detention beds it needs to achieve

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its goals, or what the cost will be. However, an estimated 11.7 million people are living in the U.S. illegally, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement currently has the budget to detain only about 41,000 people.

The government would need additional space to hold people while they are processed and arrangements are made to remove them, sometimes by plane. The Department of Homeland Security estimates the daily cost for a bed for one adult is about \$165.

Just one piece of Trump's plan, a bill known as the Laken Riley Act that Congress has passed, would require at least \$26.9 billion to ramp up capacity at immigrant detention facilities to add 110,000 beds, according to a recent memo from DHS.

That bill — named after a Georgia nursing student whose murder by a Venezuelan man last year became a rallying cry for Trump's White House campaign — expands requirements for immigration authorities to detain anyone in the country illegally who is accused of theft and violent crimes.

Trump also is deploying troops to try and stop all illegal entry at the southern U.S. border. He triggered the Alien Enemies Act to combat cartels. The rarely used 1798 law allows the president to deport anyone who is not a U.S. citizen and is from a country with which there is a "declared war" or a threatened or attempted "invasion or predatory incursion."

Detention infrastructure also will be stretched by Trump's ban of a practice known as "catch and release" that allows some migrants to live in the U.S. while awaiting immigration court proceedings, in favor of detention and deportation.

ICE uses facilities around the U.S. to hold immigrants

ICE currently detains immigrants at its processing centers and at privately operated detention facilities, along with local prisons and jails under contracts that can involve state and city governments. It has zero facilities geared toward detention of immigrant families, who account for roughly one-third of arrivals on the southern U.S. border.

"There's a limitation on the number of beds available to ICE," said John Sandweg, who was acting director of ICE under President Barack Obama. "There are only so many local jails you contract with, private vendors who have available beds. And if the administration wants to make a major uptick in detention capacity, that's going to require the construction of some new facilities."

Trump's declaration of a national emergency at the U.S. border with Mexico leverages the U.S. military to shore up mass deportations and provide "appropriate detention space." The Pentagon also might provide air transportation support to DHS.

Private investors are betting on a building boom, driving up stock prices at the top two immigration detention providers — Florida-based GEO Group and Tennessee-based CoreCivic.

A fast-track budgeting maneuver in Congress called "reconciliation" could provide more detention funding as soon as April. At the same time, the Texas state land commissioner has offered the federal government a parcel of rural ranchland along the U.S.-Mexico border for deportation facilities.

Where could ICE add detention space?

The American Civil Liberties Union estimates that ICE is considering an expansion of immigrant detention space across at least eight states, in locations ranging from Leavenworth, Kansas, to the outskirts of major immigrant populations in New York City and San Francisco, said Eunice Cho, senior staff attorney for the group and its National Prison Project.

The ACLU sued for access to correspondence from private detention providers after ICE solicited feedback last year on a potential expansion. Related emails from detention providers suggest the possible redeployment of a tent facility at Carrizo Springs, Texas, previously used to detain immigrant children, and the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas — one of two major immigrant family detention centers that the Biden administration phased out in 2021.

"Under the Trump administration, Homeland Security will be working to try to detain everyone that it possibly can and also expand its detention capacity footprint well beyond what is currently available in the United States at this point," Cho said.

Cho added that Congress ultimately holds the purse strings for immigrant detention infrastructure — and that the Pentagon's involvement under Trump's emergency edict — warrants a debate.

"How does this detract from our own military's readiness?" she said. "Does the military actually have the capacity to provide appropriate facilities for detention of immigrants?"

Using the military

Advocates for immigrant rights are warning against a hyper-militarized police state that could vastly expand the world's largest detention system for migrants. Immigrant detention facilities overseen by ICE have struggled broadly to comply with some federal standards for care, hindering safety for staff and detainees, a Homeland Security Department inspector general found during 17 unannounced inspections from 2020-2023.

During Trump's first administration, he authorized the use of military bases to detain immigrant children -- including Army installations at Fort Bliss, Texas, and Goodfellow Air Force Base. In 2014, Obama temporarily relied on military bases to detain immigrant children while ramping up privately operated family detention centers to hold many of the tens of thousands of Central American families caught crossing the border illegally.

U.S. military bases have been used repeatedly since the 1970s to accommodate the resettlement of waves of immigrants fleeing Vietnam, Cuba, Haiti, Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Saudi crown prince says kingdom intends to invest \$600 billion in US during call with Trump

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia's crown prince said Thursday the kingdom wants to invest \$600 billion in the United States over the next four years, comments that came after President Donald Trump earlier put a price tag on returning to the kingdom as his first foreign trip.

Trump's 2017 trip to Saudi Arabia upended a tradition of U.S. presidents first heading to the United Kingdom as their first trip abroad. It also underscored his administration's close ties to the rulers of the oil-rich Gulf states as his eponymous real estate company has pursued deals across the region as well.

The comments from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, reported early Thursday by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, came in a phone call with Trump.

"The crown prince affirmed the kingdom's intention to broaden its investments and trade with the United States over the next four years, in the amount of \$600 billion, and potentially beyond that," the report said.

The readout did not elaborate on where those investments and trade could be placed. The U.S. in recent years has increasingly pulled away from relying on Saudi oil exports, which once was the bedrock of their relationship for decades. Saudi sovereign wealth funds have taken large stakes in American businesses while also looking at sports as well.

Saudi Arabia does, however, rely predominantly on U.S.-made weapons and defense systems, which could be a part of the investment.

There was no immediate readout from the White House on the call. It also wasn't immediately clear if Trump's call with the crown prince was his first with a foreign leader since re-entering the White House. However, it was the first reported abroad.

The crown prince, the de facto ruler of the oil-rich kingdom, also spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio early Thursday.

On Monday after his inauguration, Trump talked about possibly heading to the kingdom again as his first foreign trip, like he did in 2017.

"The first foreign trip typically has been with the U.K. but ... I did it with Saudi Arabia last time because they agreed to buy \$450 billion worth of our products," Trump told journalists in the Oval Office. "If Saudi Arabia wanted to buy another \$450 billion or \$500 — we'll up it for all the inflation — I think I'd probably go."

The 2017 visit to the kingdom set in motion a yearslong boycott of Qatar by four Arab nations, including the kingdom.

Trump maintained close relations with Saudi Arabia, even after Prince Mohammed was implicated in the

2018 killing and dismemberment of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. The kingdom also had been talking for years with the Biden administration about a wider deal to diplomatically recognize Israel in exchange for U.S. defense protections and other support.

The \$600 billion pledge, which dwarves the gross domestic product of many nations, also comes as the kingdom faces budgetary pressures of its own. Global oil prices remain depressed years after the height of the coronavirus pandemic, affecting the kingdom's revenues.

Meanwhile, Prince Mohammed also wants to continue his \$500 billion project at NEOM, a new city in Saudi Arabia's western desert on the Red Sea. It also will need to build tens of billions of dollars' worth of new stadiums and infrastructure ahead of it hosting the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

Over 50,000 under evacuation orders or warnings as wildfire imperils homes north of Los Angeles

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER and MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ Associated Press

CASTAIC, Calif. (AP) — More than 50,000 people were under evacuation orders or warnings Wednesday as a huge and fast-moving wildfire swept through rugged mountains north of Los Angeles, but fire officials said a rapid ground and air assault was giving them the upper hand.

The Hughes Fire broke out in the late morning and within six hours charred about 15 square miles (39 square kilometers) of trees and brush near Lake Castaic, a popular recreation area about 40 miles (64 kilometers) from the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires that are burning for a third week. Though the region was under a red flag warning, winds were not as fast as they had been when those fires broke out, allowing for firefighting aircraft to dump tens of thousands of gallons of fire retardant.

"The situation that we're in today is very different from the situation we were in 16 days ago," Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said Wednesday evening.

There were no reported homes or other structures burned.

"This fire had a robust response today, and as you can see behind us, the responders are doing great work to try to contain this fire," Joe Tyler, director of Cal Fire, said. "Certainly, we are not out of the woods yet."

More than 31,000 people have been ordered to evacuate, and another 23,000 are under evacuation warnings, LA County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

Parts of Interstate 5 that had been closed reopened Wednesday evening.

A 30-mile (48-kilometer) stretch of the major north-south artery had been closed for emergency vehicles, to move equipment and to prevent accidents due to smoke billowing across the freeway. Crews on the ground and in water-dropping aircraft tried to prevent the wind-driven fire from moving across the interstate and toward Castaic.

Marrone said that because winds were not as strong as they were two weeks ago, aircraft crews were able to drop fire retardant on the south side of the fire, where the flames were moving, he said. More than 4,000 firefighters were assigned to the fire, he said.

Winds in the area were gusting at 42 mph (67 kph) in the afternoon but were expected to increase to 60 mph (96 kph) by later in the evening and Thursday, the National Weather Service said on the social platform X.

Kayla Amara drove to Castaic's Stonegate neighborhood to collect items from the home of a friend who had rushed to pick up her daughter at preschool. As Amara was packing the car, she learned the fire had exploded in size and decided to hose down the property.

"Other people are hosing down their houses, too. I hope there's a house here to return to," Amara said as police cars raced through the streets and flames engulfed trees on a hillside in the distance.

Amara, a nurse who lives in nearby Valencia, said she's been on edge for weeks as major blazes devastated Southern California.

"It's been stressful with those other fires, but now that this one is close to home it's just super stressful," she said.

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To the south, Los Angeles officials began to prepare for potential rain even as some residents were allowed to return to the charred Pacific Palisades and Altadena areas. Gusty weather was expected to last through Thursday and precipitation was possible starting Saturday, according to the National Weather Service.

"Rains are in the forecast and the threat of mud and debris flow in our fire-impacted communities is real," Supervisor Kathryn Barger said during a Wednesday morning news conference.

Fire crews were filling sandbags for communities while county workers installed barriers and cleared drainage pipes and basins.

Red flag warnings for critical fire risk were extended through 10 a.m. Friday in LA and Ventura counties. Officials remained concerned that the Palisades and Eaton fires could break their containment lines as firefighters continue watching for hot spots.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass warned that winds could carry ash and advised Angelenos to visit the city's website to learn how to protect themselves from toxic air during the latest Santa Ana wind event. LA County public health director Barbara Ferrer cautioned that the ash could contain heavy metals, arsenic and other harmful materials.

"Even a brief exposure can potentially cause skin irritation and lead to more serious problems," Ferrer said Wednesday, asking people to wear protective gear while cleaning up.

The low humidity, bone-dry vegetation and strong winds came as firefighters continued battling the Palisades and Eaton fires, which have killed at least 28 people and destroyed more than 14,000 structures since they broke out Jan. 7. Containment of the Palisades Fire reached 68%, and the Eaton Fire was at 91%.

Luna said Wednesday that his department was still investigating 22 active missing person reports in both fire zones. All of those reported missing are adults, he said.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is investigating the causes of the fires but has not released any findings.

Several lawsuits have been filed by people who lost their homes in the Eaton Fire, alleging Southern California Edison's equipment sparked the blaze. On Tuesday, a judge overseeing one of the lawsuits ordered the utility to produce data from circuits in the area where the fire started.

Trump says he may withhold federal aid for Los Angeles if California doesn't change water policies

By LISA MASCARO and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday threatened to withhold federal disaster aid for wildfire-ravaged Los Angeles unless California leaders change the state's approach on its management of water.

In a Fox News interview, Trump repeated false claims that the state's fish conservation efforts in the northern part of the state are responsible for fire hydrants running dry in urban areas. He says the blame for Los Angeles' struggles to tame some of the deadly fires lies with Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, a political foe who has called for partnership and mutual respect as the state fights the blazes.

"I don't think we should give California anything until they let the water run down," Trump said.

The president leveled the threat as he prepares for the first presidential trip of his second term. On Friday, he will visit Southern California in addition to western North Carolina, which is recovering after Hurricane Helene pummeled the area more than three months ago.

Trump in the interview also called for reform of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, claiming it is "getting in the way of everything."

"I'd rather see the states take care of their own problems," he said. He did not elaborate on his proposed reforms, only saying that the agency is "going to be a whole big discussion very shortly."

In other developments for the new administration, Trump met Wednesday with a small contingent of the most politically endangered House Republicans as the party struggles to agree on a strategy for implementing the tax cuts and other priorities that it promised voters.

The meeting happened as Trump tried to advance other priorities during the first week of his second

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term. Roughly 160 aides at the National Security Council were sent home while it is determined whether they align with Trump's agenda. The Pentagon has begun deploying 1,500 active-duty troops to support border security efforts.

"The American people have been waiting for such a time as this," said Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary.

Stephen Miller, a top Trump adviser, met with Senate Republicans to update them on plans for deportations and reinstating Title 42, a policy that was put in place during the coronavirus pandemic to stop border crossings.

Although Republicans control the White House and both chambers of Congress, they have only thin majorities on Capitol Hill, and there are disagreements on how to move forward with so many issues on the table.

Trump's meeting unfolded amid a series of private "listening sessions" with House Speaker Mike Johnson, whose ability to unite his conference will be sorely tested in the weeks and months ahead. Trump has held his own dinners with Republican lawmakers at Mar-a-Lago, and he's preparing to address them next week at their private retreat in Doral, Florida, where the president owns a resort.

"We're working very closely in close coordination with the White House because this is an America First agenda that takes both of those branches of government to work in tandem," Johnson said Wednesday at a news conference.

Trump on Wednesday also announced his picks for U.S. Secret Service director and European Union ambassador.

He's nominating former fast food executive Andrew Puzder to serve as his EU envoy and Secret Service veteran Sean Curran as his pick to head the U.S. Secret Service.

Puzder, a former chief executive of CKE Restaurants, the parent company of Carl's Jr. and Hardee's restaurants, was nominated by Trump to serve as labor secretary early in his first term, but abruptly withdrew his nomination after Senate Republicans balked at supporting him, in part over taxes he belatedly paid on a former housekeeper not authorized to work in the U.S. Puzder didn't pay taxes on the housekeeper until after Trump nominated him to the Cabinet post and five years after he had fired the worker.

Curran was among the agents who rushed to Trump's aid after he was shot in the ear in a failed assassination attempt at a July campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. He served as the assistant special agent in charge of the presidential protective division during Trump's first term.

In a posting on Truth Social, Trump praised Curran for his "fearless courage" during the Pennsylvania assassination attempt.

"Sean has distinguished himself as a brilliant leader, who is capable of directing and leading operational security plans for some of the most complex Special Security Events in the History of our Country, and the World," Trump said.

Trump in the Fox News interview also suggested he would like to see investigations into former President Joe Biden.

Trump is the first president to be convicted of a felony — in a case relating to business records of hush money payments — and had faced criminal charges over his role in trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

"It's really hard to say that they shouldn't have to go through it also," he says.

Teen fatally shoots a female student and himself at Antioch High School in Nashville, police say

By KRISTIN M. HALL, TRAVIS LOLLER and JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A shooting in a Nashville high school cafeteria Wednesday left a female student dead and another student wounded, nearly two years after another deadly school shooting in the city that ignited an emotional debate about gun control in Tennessee.

The 17-year-old shooter, who was also a student at Antioch High School, later shot and killed himself

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with a handgun, Metro Nashville Police spokesperson Don Aaron said during a news conference. Police identified him as Solomon Henderson.

Police Chief John Drake said the shooter "confronted" student Josselin Corea Escalante, 16, in the cafeteria and opened fire, killing her.

The wounded student was grazed by a bullet. He was treated and released from the hospital, Drake said. Another student was taken to a hospital for treatment of a facial injury that happened during a fall, Aaron said.

Metro Nashville Police, federal and state agencies are examining "very concerning online writings and social media posts connected to 17-year-old Solomon Henderson" as they work to establish a motive, police said in a statement Wednesday evening.

Investigators at this point have not established a connection between Henderson and the victims, and police said the gunfire may have been random, according to the statement.

Two school resource officers were in the building when the shooting happened around 11 a.m., Aaron said. They were not in the immediate vicinity of the cafeteria and by the time they got down there the shooting was over and the gunman had killed himself, Aaron said.

The school has about 2,000 students and is in Antioch, a neighborhood about 10 miles (16 kilometers) southeast of downtown Nashville.

At a family safety center close to a hospital, officials helped shocked parents reunite with their children.

Dajuan Bernard was waiting at a Mapco service station to reunite with his son, a 10th grader, who was being held in the auditorium with other students Wednesday afternoon. He first heard of the shooting from his son, who "was a little startled," Bernard said. His son was upstairs from the cafeteria but said he heard the gunfire.

"He was OK and let me know that everything was OK," Bernard said.

"This world is so crazy, it could happen anywhere," he said. "We've just got to protect the kids, and raise the kids right to prevent them from even doing this. That's the hardest part."

Fonda Abner said her granddaughter had called her a couple of times but that she only heard commotion and thought it was a pocket dial. They spoke briefly before being cut off.

"It's nerve-racking waiting out here," Abner said.

United Family Fellowship, a church in Antioch, was hosting a vigil Wednesday night "for anyone in the community who needs a space to pray, process, and find comfort," the church said on Facebook.

Adrienne Battle, superintendent of Nashville schools, said earlier Wednesday that public schools have implemented a "range of safety measures," including partnerships with police for school resource officers, security cameras with weapon-detection software, shatter-resistant film for glass, and security vestibules that are a barrier between outside visitors and the main entrance.

"Unfortunately, these measures were not enough to stop this tragedy," Battle said.

She said there are questions about whether stationary metal detectors should be considered.

"While past research has shown they have had limitations and unintended consequences, we will continue to explore emerging technologies and strategies to strengthen school safety," Battle said.

In October, a 16-year-old Antioch High School student was arrested after school resource officers and school officials discovered through social media that he had taken a gun to school the day prior. When he was stopped the following morning, officials found a loaded gun in his pants, police said.

Wednesday's school shooting comes nearly two years after a shooter opened fire at a separate Nashville private elementary school and killed six people, including three children.

The tragedy prompted a monthslong effort among hundreds of community organizers, families, protesters and others pleading with lawmakers to consider passing gun control measures.

GOP lawmakers in the Republican-dominant state refused to do so. With the Republican supermajority intact after November's election, it's unlikely attitudes have changed enough to consider any meaningful bills that would address gun control.

Instead, lawmakers have been more open to adding more security to schools — including passing a bill last year that would allow some teachers and staff to carry concealed handguns on public school grounds,

and bar parents and other teachers from knowing who was armed.

Antioch, a growing and diverse area of Nashville, has endured other prominent shootings in recent years. A 2017 fatal shooting at Burnette Chapel Church of Christ killed one woman and wounded seven people. And in 2018, a shooter killed four people at a Waffle House.

State Rep. Shaundelle Brooks ran for office in large part due to her son's death in the Waffle House shooting and was elected last year after the Covenant shooting. She said the Antioch High shooting reinforces the need for gun control reforms. "We must do better," she said.

"Ever since I lost my son, Akilah, in a mass shooting in 2018, I have been fighting to ensure this never happens again," the Nashville Democrat said in a statement. "Here we are almost 7 years later, and our communities are still being impacted by gun violence."

Samantha Dickerson had taken her 14-year-old son's phone away as a punishment, so when she got a message from his school about the shooting, she had no way to reach him.

"I was nervous," she said. "I really was about to break down."

After about three hours of waiting, she finally got a call from his English teacher and spoke with her son.

"When I heard his voice, I just broke down and started crying," she said.

Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes visits Capitol Hill after Trump clemency

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who was convicted of orchestrating his far-right extremist group's Jan. 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol, showed up Wednesday on Capitol Hill, a day after he was released from prison as part of President Donald Trump's sweeping clemency order.

Rhodes who was convicted of seditious conspiracy in one of the most serious cases brought by the Justice Department met with at least one lawmaker during his visit and chatted with others, defending his actions that day and taking no responsibility in violent siege that halted the certification of 2020 election.

"I didn't lead anything. So why should I feel responsible for that?" Rhodes said.

It was an extraordinary moment just days into Trump's new administration after the president granted clemency for the more than 1,500 people charged in the riot. At the same time, judges who sentenced hundreds of rioters criticized the presidential pardons that have freed scores of them from prison.

Rhodes' surprise visit also came on the same day that Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson revived a special committee to investigate the riot, an effort to defend Trump's actions that day and dispute the work of a bipartisan committee that investigated the siege two years ago.

Johnson said he would not second-guess Trump's decision to pardon the rioters and "we believe in redemption, we believe in second chances."

On Wednesday, Rhodes stopped in at a Dunkin' Donuts inside the House office building in the Capitol complex before delivering a lengthy defense of himself and his actions.

Wearing a Trump 2020 hat, Rhodes said he was at the Capitol to advocate for the release of another defendant. Rhodes was among 14 Jan. 6 defendants whose sentences were commuted. He told reporters he would be pushing Trump to grant him a full pardon.

"I think all of us should be pardoned," Rhodes said.

Rhodes said he hoped to eventually speak with the president, but had not done so yet.

"Right now, I like to come here as much as I can," Rhodes said.

Rhodes was convicted of seditious conspiracy in the siege that halted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory and left more than 100 police officers injured. He was found guilty of orchestrating a weekslong plot that culminated in his followers attacking the U.S. Capitol in a desperate bid to keep Trump in power.

Rhodes did not enter the building on Jan. 6 and said it was "stupid" that members of the Oath Keepers did.

"My guys blundered through doors," he insisted.

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Judges in Washington's federal court spent Wednesday dismissing a slew of cases against Jan. 6 defendants that were still pending. Several judges took the opportunity in written orders to lament the abrupt end to the prosecutions, saying Trump's mass pardons won't change the truth about the mob's attack on a bastion of American democracy,

U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly said evidence of the assault on the Capitol is preserved through the "neutral lens" of riot videos, trial transcripts, jury verdicts and judicial opinions.

"Those records are immutable and represent the truth, no matter how the events of January 6 are described by those charged or their allies," she wrote.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who presided over Trump's election interference case before its dismissal, said the president's pardons can't change the "tragic truth" about the attack. Chutkan added that her order dismissing the case against an Illinois man who was charged with firing a gun into the air during the riot cannot "diminish the heroism of law enforcement officers" who defended the Capitol.

"It cannot whitewash the blood, feces and terror that the mob left in its wake," Chutkan wrote. "And it cannot repair the jagged breach in America's sacred tradition of peacefully transitioning power."

Chutkan and Kollar-Kotelly are among over 20 judges to handle the hundreds of cases produced by the largest investigation in the Justice Department's history. Kollar-Kotelly issued her written remarks in an order dismissing the case against Dominic Box, a Georgia man who was among the first group of rioters to enter the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Other judges at the federal courthouse in Washington spoke out against pardons for Capitol rioters before Trump's second inauguration Monday, when the Republican president pardoned, commuted the prison sentences or ordered the dismissal of charges in all of the 1,500-plus Capitol riot criminal cases.

District Judge Carl Nichols, a Trump nominee, said in November that handing out blanket pardons to Capitol rioters would be "beyond frustrating and disappointing." Nichols expressed his criticism during a hearing at which he agreed to postpone a Jan. 6 riot defendant's trial until after Trump's return to the White House.

During a hearing last month, District Judge Amit Mehta said it would be "frightening" if Rhodes was pardoned.

In Congress, lawmakers were stunned by Rhodes' arrival at the Capitol complex many had fled that day.

"Does he still constitute a threat to public safety? Does he constitute a threat to American constitutional democracy?" asked Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md. He led the House's impeachment of Trump, who was acquitted by the Senate on charges inciting the insurrection.

Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-Calif., said, "It's new and interesting that they're using the front door this time."

At an emotional news conference in the Capitol, two of the police officers who fought the rioters said they are angry and exhausted but will continue to speak out.

Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges, who was crushed in the main center doors of the Capitol's West front as rioters grabbed his gas mask and tried to gouge his eyes, said he had been working 12-hour shifts to protect Trump and his supporters during the inauguration. "It doesn't matter," Hodges said. "I'll be there."

Box, who was featured in the HBO documentary "Four Hours at the Capitol," was found guilty of charges including interfering with police during a civil disorder, a felony. He was scheduled to be sentenced Feb. 21. More than 130 other convicted rioters were awaiting sentencing when Trump issued pardons.

John Banuelos, 39, of Illinois, was awaiting trial in a Washington jail when Chutkan dismissed charges that he climbed scaffolding outside the Capitol, pulled what appeared to be a gun from his waistband and fired two shots into the air.

"In hundreds of cases like this one over the past four years, judges in this district have administered justice without fear or favor," Chutkan wrote. "The historical record established by those proceedings must stand, unmoved by political winds, as a testament and as a warning."

Nearly 1,600 people were charged with Capitol riot-related federal crimes. More than 1,000 of them pleaded guilty. Approximately 250 others were convicted by a judge or jury after trials. Over 1,100 were

sentenced, with more than 700 receiving a term of imprisonment ranging from several days to 22 years.

Over 130 police officers were injured during the riot. At least four officers who were at the Capitol later died by suicide. And Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick collapsed and died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner later determined he died of natural causes.

Kollar-Kotelly said the heroism of officers who defended the Capitol "cannot be altered or ignored."

"Grossly outnumbered, those law enforcement officers acted valiantly to protect the Members of Congress, their staff, the Vice President and his family, the integrity of the Capitol grounds, and the Capitol Building — our symbol of liberty and a symbol of democratic rule around the world," she wrote.

To secure Gaza ceasefire, dealmakers overcame enemies' deep distrust

By SAM MAGDY, ADAM GELLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

Inside a lavish clubhouse on Doha's waterfront, tensions strained by months of fruitless back-and-forth weighed on negotiators as the hour neared 3 a.m.

On the first floor, a Hamas delegation whose leader had once evaded an Israeli airstrike that killed seven family members combed through the details of yet another proposal to halt the war in Gaza. On the second floor, advisers to Israel's intelligence chief, who had vowed to hunt down those responsible for the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that ignited the war, did the same.

With Qatari, U.S. and Egyptian mediators pushing for resolution, did the sides — such bitter enemies that they refused to speak directly to one another — at last have a deal to pause the fighting and bring dozens of Israeli hostages home?

"They were extremely suspicious towards each other. No trust at all," said an Egyptian official involved in the negotiations, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The talks that night a week ago dragged on over disagreements about maps showing where Israel would begin withdrawing troops and its demand that Hamas provide a list of hostages who remained alive, he said.

"Both parties were looking at each word in the deal as a trap."

By the time Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, announced a ceasefire deal last Wednesday evening, mediators had scrambled again to defuse objections by both sides. Even then, disagreements and delays continued over the two days that followed.

But as the fighting in Gaza paused this week, three young Israeli women were released from captivity and dozens of Palestinian prisoners were freed by Israel, the agreement, however tenuous, has held.

After months of deadlock, a singular moment for dealmaking

The story of how Israel and Hamas found their way to a deal stretches back over more than a year. But the timing and unlikely partners who coalesced to push negotiations across the line help explain why it finally happened now.

"Over the course of the last week all of the stars aligned finally in a way that, after 15 months of carnage and bloodshed, negotiations came to fruition," said Mehran Kamrava, a professor of government at Georgetown University's campus in Qatar.

The agreement was the product of a singular political moment, with one U.S. president preparing to hand power to another.

Both were pushing for a deal to free some 100 Israeli hostages and bring an end to a war that began with the Hamas attack that killed about 1,200 in Israel. Palestinian health officials say more than 47,000 people in Gaza have been killed in the conflict.

The health officials do not distinguish between civilians and militants, but say more than half of those killed were women and children.

In tiny but wealthy Qatar, the talks had a steward that positions itself as a go-between in a region on edge, one that hosts the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East even as it provides offices for leaders of Hamas and the Taliban. Egypt, eager to ease instability that has driven an influx of Palestinians across its border and sparked attacks on sea lanes by Houthi rebels, worked to keep the talks on track.

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The circumstances partnered Sheikh Mohammed with improbable allies. Then-President Joe Biden sent Brett McGurk, a veteran Middle East hand in both Republican and Democratic administrations. Donald Trump dispatched Steve Witkoff, a Bronx-born real estate billionaire with little if any diplomatic experience, but a longtime friendship with the then-president-elect.

The deal they brought together calls for continued negotiations that could be even more fraught, but with the potential to release the remaining hostages and end a war that has destroyed much of Gaza and roiled the entire region.

Pressure mounted on Israel and Hamas

In the end, negotiators got it done in a matter of days. But it followed months of deadlock over the number of Israeli hostages that would be freed, the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released and the parameters of a pullback by Israeli troops in the embattled enclave.

In late May, Biden laid out a proposed deal, which he said had come from Israel. It drew heavily on language and concepts hammered out with Qatari and Egyptian mediators, calling for a phased agreement with continued negotiation toward a "sustainable calm" – verbiage designed to satisfy both sides.

But talks had stalled even before the detonation of a bomb, attributed to Israel, in late July killed Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas' political bureau. And efforts by mediators to restart them were derailed when Israeli forces found the bodies of six hostages in a Gaza tunnel in August.

"Whoever murders hostages does not want a deal," Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said.

Pressure on Hamas increased after Israeli forces killed leader Yahya Sinwar — an architect of the Oct. 7 attack — and launched a devastating offensive against Lebanon's Hezbollah, the group's longtime ally.

But Qatari officials, frustrated by the lack of progress, announced they were suspending mediation until both sides demonstrated willingness to negotiate.

Weeks later, Trump dispatched Witkoff, a golfing buddy whose most notable prior link to the Middle East was his \$623 million sale of New York's Park Lane Hotel to Qatar's sovereign wealth fund in 2023.

Flying to Doha in late November, Witkoff asked mediators to lay out the problems undermining the talks, then continued on to meet officials in Israel. The talks restarted soon after, gaining ground through December.

"Witkoff and McGurk were pushing the Israelis. Qatar was pushing Hamas," said an official briefed on the talks who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Cooperation between Biden and Trump advisers was key

Assigning credit for the progress depends on viewpoint.

The Egyptian official recounted the frustration of successfully pushing Hamas to agree to changes last summer, only to find Netanyahu imposing new conditions.

An Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity last week because the negotiations were ongoing said Sinwar's death and Iran's weakening influence in the region forced Hamas' hand, leading to real give-and-take rather than "playing a game of negotiation."

He and others close to the process said Trump's rhetoric and dispatch of an envoy had injected new momentum. The Egyptian official pointed to a statement by Trump on social media that there would be "hell to pay" if the hostages were not released, saying it had pressured both Hamas and Israeli officials to get a deal done.

And mediators said the willingness of Witkoff and McGurk -- representing leaders loathe to give one another credit for the deal -- to partner up was critical.

"How they have handled this as a team since the election, without yet being in office, has really helped close the gaps that allowed us to reach a deal," Majed Al Ansari, the adviser to Qatar's prime minister and spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said in a statement.

In early January, there was a breakthrough in the talks when Hamas agreed to provide a list of hostages it would release in the first phase of a deal, an official briefed on the talks said.

McGurk flew from Washington to Doha hours later. Witkoff followed at week's end.

The following day -- Saturday, January 11 -- Witkoff flew to Israel, securing a meeting with Netanyahu

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even though it was the Jewish Sabbath. McGurk called in. Netanyahu agreed to send the heads of Israeli intelligence and internal security back to Doha for negotiations.

That led to extended negotiations, most convening in the Qatari prime minister's private office, that lasted late into the night.

At points, mediators shuttled back and forth between adversaries on different floors. At others, the chief negotiators for the two sides cycled separately into the prime minister's office to hash out details.

"But the Hamas and Israeli delegations never crossed paths," said the official briefed on the talks.

Ceasefire conditions debated up until the last moment

After the lead negotiators for each side left Sheikh Mohammed's office late Tuesday, the work shifted to the waterfront club owned by the foreign affairs ministry, where "technical teams" from both sides pored over the specific language, a floor apart.

"Until late the first hours of Wednesday we were working tirelessly to resolve last-minute disputes," said the Egyptian official involved in the negotiations.

After extended discussions focused on the buffer zone Israel is to maintain in Gaza and the names of prisoners to be released, the long night ended with an agreement seemingly at hand, said the official briefed on the talks.

But with reporters gathering Wednesday evening for an announcement, "a last-minute hiccup, last-minute requests from both sides" forced a delay, the official said.

Israel accused Hamas of trying to make changes to already agreed upon arrangements along Gaza's border with Egypt. Hamas called the claims "nonsense."

A senior U.S. official involved in the talks said Hamas negotiators made several last-minute demands, but "we held very firm."

After calling the Hamas negotiators into his office, with the media and the world still anxiously waiting, the Qatari prime minister met separately with the Israelis and U.S. envoys. Finally, three hours behind schedule, Sheikh Mohammed stepped to a lectern to announce the parties had reached an agreement.

Even then, negotiations resumed the following day to wrangle with questions about final implementation of the deal and mechanisms for doing so. By the time the talks ended, it was 4 a.m.

Hours later, Israeli President Isaac Herzog voiced his hope that the deal would bring a national moment of goodwill, healing and rebuilding.

But no one can say how long it will last.

The deal calls for Israel and Hamas to resume talks just over a week from now, to work out the second phase. That is supposed to include the release of all remaining hostages, living and dead, and a permanent ceasefire. But getting there, observers say, will likely be even tougher.

Lions defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn agrees to terms with Jets to be their head coach

By DENNIS WASZAK Jr. AP Pro Football Writer

Aaron Glenn is back where his NFL journey began nearly 31 years ago.

He was a game-changing cornerback for the New York Jets then. Now he's tasked with helping turn around the fortunes of the franchise.

The Jets and Glenn agreed to terms Wednesday on making the Detroit Lions defensive coordinator their head coach.

Glenn, who oversaw the Lions' defense the past four seasons, beat out 15 other candidates for the job as the Jets went through an extensive search.

And they ended up choosing one of their former players — a first-round draft pick in 1994 who was mentored by Bill Parcells, became one of the Jets' best playmakers and developed into a well-respected and highly sought coach.

"This place is special for me," Glenn said in a statement issued by the Jets, who announced the agreement Wednesday night. "From the time I was drafted and practiced on Long Island to the time I came

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back as a scout in New Jersey, this organization has always felt like home.”

The 52-year-old Glenn, who turned Detroit’s defense into one of the best in the league, interviewed with Washington, Atlanta, Tennessee and the Los Angeles Chargers last year. And he met with the Jets, Jacksonville, Las Vegas and Chicago this year.

Glenn spoke with the Jets during a video call on Jan. 9 and then interviewed in person Tuesday.

The Jets also interviewed Brian Flores, Jeff Hafley, Vance Joseph, Mike Locksley, Josh McCown, Matt Nagy, Ron Rivera, Darren Rizzi, Rex Ryan, Bobby Slowik, Arthur Smith, Steve Spagnuolo, Jeff Ulbrich, Mike Vrabel and Joe Whitt Jr. for the job.

But only Glenn received a second interview. And New York didn’t need to think twice about talking to anyone else again.

“I’m excited to welcome Aaron Glenn home as the head coach of the New York Jets,” owner Woody Johnson said in a statement. “Aaron earned this opportunity through almost three decades of NFL experience — 10 with us as a player and a scout.

“He brings tremendous leadership skills and the vision this organization needs to be successful. I am thrilled to see him lead this team.”

Glenn becomes the third Black head coach in the franchise’s history, joining Herm Edwards and Todd Bowles. He’s also the first Black coach to be hired to lead an NFL team during this year’s hiring cycle.

“I’m thankful to Mr. Johnson for this opportunity,” Glenn said. “To our players, prepare to be coached with everything we have. That is our responsibility. I ask that we share the same vision and that’s working toward winning a championship.

“To our fans, simply put, expect a winning team that you will be proud of.”

The Jets also are going through a lengthy search for a general manager, and Washington assistant GM Lance Newmark was at the team’s facility Tuesday as well.

Newmark, one of 15 candidates to interview for the GM job, was the first to get a second meeting with the Jets — like Glenn — but hasn’t agreed to a deal. New York is expected to have second interviews with Denver assistant GM Darren Mougey and Cincinnati executive Trey Brown.

Glenn and the new GM will be tasked with trying to revamp a franchise that has the NFL’s longest active playoff drought at 14 seasons.

Glenn played eight seasons with New York and was selected as one of the cornerbacks on the franchise’s All-Time Four Decade team in 2003.

He later had stints with Houston, Dallas, Jacksonville and New Orleans and finished his career with 41 interceptions, including six returned for touchdowns, and made the Pro Bowl three times.

After his 15-year playing career, Glenn had a stint as the general manager for the Houston Stallions of the Lone Star Football League in 2012 before coming back to the Jets as a personnel scout later that year.

He served as Cleveland’s assistant defensive backs coach from 2014 to 2015 before being hired for the same position in New Orleans. After five seasons with the Saints, he was hired by the Lions as defensive coordinator in 2021.

Joe Namath, the quarterback who led the Jets to their only Super Bowl victory, in 1969, was pleased with the hiring of Glenn.

“I’m hoping all @nyjets fans are as thrilled as my family and I are that Aaron Glenn is our new Head Coach,” Namath wrote on X shortly after the news broke. “I wish the season would start next week!”

The Lions, who lost to Washington last Saturday in the NFC divisional round, now have lost both of their coordinators with Glenn joining the Jets and offensive guru Ben Johnson hired by the Bears.

Glenn will become the sixth first-time full-time head coach to be hired by the Jets since the end of the 2000 season. He joins Edwards, Eric Mangini, Ryan, Bowles and Robert Saleh. All had defensive backgrounds. The only coach the Jets hired during that stretch with an offensive background was Adam Gase in 2019.

Johnson hired The 33rd Team, a football media, analytics and consulting group founded by former Jets GM Mike Tannenbaum, to assist them in November. They’ll now turn their attention to bringing in a new front-office leader to replace Joe Douglas, who was fired with the Jets en route to a 5-12 season. Saleh

was fired after a 2-3 start and New York went 3-9 under interim coach Ulbrich, who was hired this week as Atlanta's defensive coordinator.

The major tasks for Glenn and the eventual new GM will be trying to build a roster that returns the Jets to the playoffs after a long absence and determining whether the franchise will have quarterback Aaron Rodgers back next season — if he still wants to play — and possibly beyond.

Justice Department orders investigation of local compliance with Trump immigration crackdown

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has ordered federal prosecutors to investigate state or local officials who they believe are interfering with the Trump administration's crackdown on immigration, saying they could face criminal charges, in an apparent warning to the dozens of so-called sanctuary jurisdictions across America.

The memo, from acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove, signals a sharp turnabout in priorities from President Joe Biden's Democratic administration, with the Justice Department's civil division told to identify state and local laws and policies that "threaten to impede" the Trump administration's immigration efforts and potentially challenge them in court.

It also tells prosecutors in no uncertain terms that they will be on the front lines of an administration-wide effort to crack down on illegal immigration and border crime and that they are expected to carry out the policy vision of President Donald Trump's Republican White House when it comes to violent crimes, the threat of international gangs and drug trafficking.

"Indeed, it is the responsibility of the Justice Department to defend the Constitution, and accordingly, to lawfully execute the policies that the American people elected President Trump to implement," wrote Bove, who prior to joining the administration was part of the legal team that defended Trump against two criminal cases brought by the Justice Department.

"Sanctuary" has no legal definition, but the term encompasses a range of protection for immigrants, particularly those living in the U.S. illegally. Most often, the laws put legal limits on how law enforcement in those jurisdictions can cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

Courts have repeatedly upheld most sanctuary laws, and legal experts said that while prosecutions are possible, they doubted the charges would have any traction in court.

"What would you charge these people with?" asked Robert J. McWhirter, a constitutional scholar and longtime Arizona-based immigration lawyer. "Nothing obligates local law enforcement to cooperate with federal law enforcement on any issue. Not even bank robbery."

In Chicago, which has some of the strongest sanctuary protections nationwide, city leaders brushed off word of potential investigations. The nation's third-largest city has been a sanctuary city for decades, limiting cooperation between police and federal immigration agents.

"If the federal government is going to investigate, that is their prerogative," said Alderman Andre Vasquez, who is Mayor Brandon Johnson's handpicked chair of the City Council immigration committee.

Vasquez, the son of two Guatemalan immigrants, noted a 2016 campaign rally at the University of Illinois Chicago that Trump abruptly scrapped as crowds of boisterous protesters grew. The cancellation remains a badge of honor for many young activists in the Democratic stronghold.

"There will always be that kind of relationship between Chicago, President Trump and the Republican Party," said Vasquez. "I was born and raised in Chicago, in an immigrant family. It will take more than that to make me feel a little scared."

Across the country, cities and towns were sending out reminders about the delicate balance of sanctuary laws, which draw distinctions between not cooperating with federal immigration officials, particularly U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and actively undermining those federal officials.

New York's police department, for example, told employees in a memo that they are not permitted to "assist in any manner with civil immigration enforcement," but also said they must not "take any action

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that will interfere with or impede civil immigration enforcement undertaken by federal authorities.”

Denver Mayor Mike Johnston said the city, where more than 40,000 migrants have arrived since early 2023, would work with ICE to arrest violent criminals. But he said the city would go to court if immigration raids targeted schools, among other places.

“We’re not going to be bullied or blackmailed out of our values,” he told The Associated Press.

Bove’s memo directs prosecutors to investigate for potential criminal charges against state and local officials who obstruct or impede federal functions. As potential avenues for prosecution, the memo cites a conspiracy offense as well as a law prohibiting the harboring of people in the country illegally.

“Federal law prohibits state and local actors from resisting, obstructing and otherwise failing to comply with lawful immigration-related commands and requests,” the memo says. “The U.S. Attorney’s Offices and litigating components of the Department of Justice shall investigate incidents involving any such misconduct for potential prosecution.”

But in Colorado, where state law bars local law enforcement from helping federal immigration agents make an arrest without a court order, the attorney general’s office said it knew of no state or local officials obstructing immigration enforcement.

“The federal government—not local law enforcement—is responsible for enforcing federal immigration laws,” the office of Phil Weiser, a Democrat, said in a statement.

The memo includes a series of directives beyond those related to sanctuary jurisdictions. It suggests there will be a spike in immigration cases under the new administration, instructing U.S. attorney’s offices across the country to inform courts of its policy “and develop processes for handling the increased number of prosecutions that will result.” Any decisions by federal prosecutors to decline to prosecute immigration violations must be disclosed to Justice Department headquarters in so-called urgent reports, which are used to update leadership on law enforcement emergencies or significant matters of national interest.

The memo also says the department will return to the principle of charging defendants with the most serious crime it can prove, a staple position of Republican-led departments meant to remove a prosecutor’s discretion to charge a lower-level offense. And it rescinds policies implemented by Biden Attorney General Merrick Garland, including one designed to end sentencing disparities that have imposed harsher penalties for different forms of cocaine.

“The most serious charges are those punishable by death where applicable, and offenses with the most significant mandatory minimum sentences,” Bove wrote.

It is common for Justice Departments to shift enforcement priorities under a new presidential administration in compliance with White House policy ambitions. The memo reflects the constant push-and-pull between Democratic and Republican administrations over how best to commit resources to what officials regard as the most urgent threat of the time.

The edict to charge the most readily provable offense, for instance, is consistent with directives from prior Republican attorneys general including John Ashcroft and Jeff Sessions, while Democratic attorneys general including Eric Holder and Garland have replaced the policy and instead encouraged prosecutorial discretion.

House passes immigrant detention bill that would be Trump’s first law to sign

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Wednesday gave final approval to a bill that requires the detainment of unauthorized immigrants accused of theft and violent crimes, marking the first legislation that President Donald Trump can sign as Congress, with some bipartisan support, swiftly moved in line with his plans to crackdown on illegal immigration.

Passage of the Laken Riley Act, which was named after a Georgia nursing student who was murdered last year by a Venezuelan man, shows just how sharply the political debate over immigration has shifted to the right following Trump’s election victory. Immigration policy has often been one of the most entrenched

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issues in Congress, but a crucial faction of 46 politically vulnerable Democrats joined with Republicans to lift the strict proposal to passage on a 263-156 vote tally.

"For decades, it has been almost impossible for our government to agree on solutions for the problems at our border and within our country," said Sen. Katie Britt, an Alabama Republican. She called the legislation "perhaps the most significant immigration enforcement bill" to be passed by Congress in nearly three decades.

Still, the bill would require a massive ramp-up in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's capabilities, but does not include any new funding.

Meanwhile, the new president has launched a slew of executive orders intended to seal off the border of Mexico to immigration and ultimately deport millions of immigrants without permanent legal status in the U.S. On Wednesday, Trump also canceled refugee resettlement and his administration has signaled intentions to prosecute local law enforcement officials who do not enforce his new immigration policies.

Republican congressional leaders have made it clear they intend to follow suit, though their toughest challenge will be finding a way to approve the funding to actually implement Trump's hard-line plans.

"What he's doing is kickstarting what will ultimately be our legislative agenda," said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La.

House Republicans initially passed the legislation last year with support from 37 Democrats in a move that was intended to deliver a political rebuke to then-President Joe Biden's handling of the southern border. It then languished in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

This year, Republicans, now with control of both congressional chambers, have made it their top priority. When it came before the Senate, 12 Democrats voted in favor of passage, and when the House voted on a version of the bill earlier this month, 48 Democrats supported it.

The vast majority of U.S. adults favor deporting immigrants convicted of violent crimes, according to a recent survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. However, only about 37% of U.S. adults are in favor of deporting immigrants in the U.S. illegally who have not been convicted of a crime.

"While the bill is not perfect, it sends a clear message that we think that criminals should be deported," said Rep. Tom Suozzi, a New York Democrat who has called on his party to support tougher immigration enforcement.

Under the legislation, federal authorities would be required to detain any migrant arrested or charged with crimes like shoplifting. The scope of the proposal was widened in the Senate to also include those accused of assaulting a police officer or crimes that injure or kill someone.

The bill also gives legal standing to state attorneys general to sue the federal government for harm caused by federal immigration decisions. That gives states new power in setting immigration policy when they have already been trying to push back against presidential decisions under both the Trump and Biden administrations. Democrats unsuccessfully pushed to have that provision stripped from the bill in the Senate, saying it would inject even more uncertainty and partisanship into immigration policy.

Ultimately, even the Trump administration is likely to struggle to implement the new requirements unless Congress follows up later this year with funding. Republicans are currently strategizing how to push their priorities through Congress through a party-line process known as budget reconciliation. They have put the cost of funding Trump's border and deportation priorities at roughly \$100 billion.

Trump has "laid out the largest domestic logistical undertaking of our lifetimes -- that being the deportation of the vast majority of illegal aliens present in the United States," Ken Cuccinelli, who directed U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services during Trump's first presidency, told a Senate panel recently.

Cuccinelli said it would require a surge of immigration judges, prosecutors and other staff, but Trump has also paved the way to use military troops, bases and other resources to carry out the mass deportations.

The Department of Homeland Security has estimated the Laken Riley Act would cost \$26.9 billion in the first year to implement, including an increase of 110,000 ICE detention beds.

Most Democrats criticized the lack of funding in the bill as proof that it is a piecemeal approach that would

do little to fix problems in the immigration system, but saddle federal authorities with new requirements.

"The bill's authors claimed it's going to result in the arrest and detention of serious criminals, but it will not do that because it's a totally unfunded mandate," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn.

Others raised concerns that the bill would strip due process rights for migrants, including minors or recipients of the Deferred Action for Unaccompanied Arrivals program. Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., said that federal authorities would now be forced to prioritize the detention of migrants arrested for low-level crimes like shoplifting, rather than those who commit violent felonies.

On the whole, there is no evidence that immigrants are more prone to violent crime. Several studies have found immigrants commit lower rates of crime than those born in the U.S. Groups that advocate for restrictive immigration policies dispute or dismiss those findings.

But Republicans pointed to the bill's namesake, Laken Riley, and how she was killed by a Venezuelan migrant who had previously been arrested by local authorities but released as he pursued his immigration case.

"If this act had been the law of the land, he never would have had the opportunity to kill her," said Rep. Mike Collins, R-Ga.

160 national security staffers are sent home as the White House aligns its team to Trump's agenda

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's national security adviser on Wednesday sidelined about 160 National Security Council aides, sending them home while the administration reviews staffing and tries to align it with Trump's agenda.

The career government employees, commonly referred to as detailees, were summoned Wednesday for an all-staff call and told they will be expected to be available to the council's senior directors but would not need to report to the White House. The council provides national security and foreign policy advice to the president.

Brian McCormack, chief of staff to national security adviser Mike Waltz, delivered the news in a two-minute phone call, telling the detailees they "are directed to be on call and report to the office only if contacted by the NSC leadership."

"As anyone who has had the privilege of working here in the White House knows, it's a tremendous honor to support the executive office of the president and the presidency itself," said McCormack, according to a recording of the call obtained by The Associated Press. "We also know that every president is entitled to have a staff and the advisers that they need to implement the goals that the American people elected him to pursue."

Trump, a Republican, is sidelining these nonpolitical experts on topics that range from counterterrorism to global climate policy at a time when the United States is dealing with a disparate set of complicated foreign policy matters, including conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. Such structuring could make new policy experts brought in to the NSC less likely to speak up about policy differences and concerns.

Waltz had signaled before Inauguration Day that he would look to return holdover civil servants who worked in the council during President Joe Biden's administration to their home agencies. That was meant to ensure the council is staffed by those who support Trump's goals.

By the end of the review, Waltz will look to have a "more efficient, flatter" NSC, one official said. The officials declined to comment on the ultimate number of personnel — nonpolitical detailees as well as political appointees — whom Trump and Waltz would like to see as part of the council once the review is completed.

Officials said they have already begun bringing detailees from agencies with expertise that the new administration values, including some who had served during the first Trump administration.

Some directors have made decisions to inform detailees they will be sent back to their home agencies.

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For example, multiple holdover detailees assigned to the counterterrorism directorate were told on Tuesday that their assignments were being cut short, according to two people familiar with the move who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

At least some holdover detailees sent home Wednesday had their White House emails turned off soon after the call ended, but were told to remain reachable on their personal cellphones. It is unlikely they will be assigned any substantive work during the review.

Waltz "promised and authorized a full review of NSC personnel," council spokesperson Brian Hughes said in a statement. "It is entirely appropriate for Mr. Waltz to ensure NSC personnel are committed to implementing President Trump's America First agenda to protect our national security and wisely use the tax dollars of America's working men and women. Since 12:01 pm on Monday personnel reviews and decisions based on the evaluations are being made."

The dozens of staff members affected by the decision are largely subject matter experts from the State Department, the FBI and the CIA on temporary duty that typically lasts one year to two years.

Incoming senior Trump administration officials this month also had questioned some career civil servants about which 2024 candidate they voted for, their political contributions and whether they have made social media posts that could be considered incriminating by Trump's team, a person familiar with the matter told the AP. That person spoke on the condition of the anonymity to discuss the sensitive personnel matter.

Waltz in a recent interview with Breitbart News said that he wanted the NSC to be staffed by personnel who are "100% aligned with the president's agenda."

The NSC was launched as an arm of the White House during the Truman administration. It was tasked with advising and assisting the president on national security and foreign policy and coordinating among various government agencies. It is common for experts detailed to the NSC to carry over from one administration to the next, even when the White House changes parties.

Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, made a case for the incoming Trump administration to hold over career government employees assigned to the NSC, at least through the early going. He called the career appointees "patriots" who have served "without fear or favor for both Democratic and Republican administrations."

Trump, during his first term, was scarred when two career military officers detailed to the NSC became whistleblowers, raising their concerns about Trump's 2019 call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in which Trump sought an investigation of Biden and his son Hunter. That episode led to Trump's first impeachment.

Alexander Vindman was listening to the call in his role as an NSC official when he became alarmed at what he heard. He approached his twin brother, Eugene, who at the time was serving as an ethics lawyer at the NSC. Both Vindmans reported their concerns to superiors.

Pentagon is sending 1,500 active duty troops to help secure the US-Mexico border

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon said Wednesday it has begun deploying 1,500 active duty troops to help secure the southern border, putting in motion plans President Donald Trump laid out in executive orders shortly after he took office to crack down on immigration.

Acting Defense Secretary Robert Salesses said the troops will fly helicopters to assist Border Patrol agents and help in the construction of barriers. The Pentagon also will provide military aircraft for Department of Homeland Security deportation flights for more than 5,000 detained migrants.

The number of troops and their mission may soon change, Salesses said in a statement. "This is just the beginning," he said.

"In short order, the department will develop and execute additional missions in cooperation with DHS, federal agencies, and state partners to address the full range of threats outlined by the President at our nation's borders," Salesses said.

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Defense officials added that the department is prepared to provide many more troops if asked, including up to 2,000 more Marines.

Officials said there was no plan now for the troops to do law enforcement, which would put them in a dramatically different role for the first time in decades. Any decision on this would be made by the White House, they said.

The active duty forces will join the roughly 2,500 U.S. National Guard and Reserve forces already there. Until this deployment, there were no active duty troops working along the roughly 2,000-mile border.

A couple hundred troops started moving to the border earlier Wednesday, according to a senior military official. The military official and a defense official briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity to provide additional details on the deployment. The troops will include 500 Marines from Camp Pendleton in California, and the remainder will be Army.

The U.S. forces being used for the deportation flights are separate from the 1,500 deployed for the border mission. Those flights will involve four Air Force aircraft based in San Diego and El Paso, along with crews and maintenance personnel.

Troops have done similar duties in support of Border Patrol agents in the past, when both Trump and former President Joe Biden sent active duty troops to the border.

Troops are prohibited by law from doing law enforcement duties under the Posse Comitatus Act, but that may change. Trump has directed through executive order that the incoming secretary of defense and incoming homeland security chief report back within 90 days if they think an 1807 law called the Insurrection Act should be invoked. That would allow those troops to be used in civilian law enforcement on U.S. soil.

The last time the act was invoked was in 1992 during rioting in Los Angeles in protest of the acquittal of four police officers charged with beating Rodney King.

The widely expected deployment, coming in Trump's first week in office, was an early step in his long-touted plan to expand the use of the military along the border. In one of his first orders on Monday, Trump directed the defense secretary to come up with a plan to "seal the borders" and repel "unlawful mass migration."

"This is something President Trump campaigned on," said Karoline Leavitt, White House press secretary. "The American people have been waiting for such a time as this -- for our Department of Defense to actually implement homeland security seriously. This is a No. 1 priority for the American people."

On Tuesday, just as Trump fired the Coast Guard commandant, Adm. Linda Fagan, the service announced it was surging more cutter ships, aircraft and personnel to the "Gulf of America" — a nod to the president's directive to rename the Gulf of Mexico.

Trump said during his inaugural address on Monday that "I will declare a national emergency at our southern border. All illegal entry will immediately be halted, and we will begin the process of returning millions and millions of criminal aliens back to the places in which they came."

Military personnel have been sent to the border almost continuously since the 1990s to help address migration, drug trafficking and transnational crime.

In executive orders signed Monday, Trump suggested the military would help the Department of Homeland Security with "detention space, transportation (including aircraft), and other logistics services."

There are about 20,000 Border Patrol agents, and while the southern border is where most are located, they're also responsible for protecting the northern border with Canada. Usually agents are tasked with looking for drug smugglers or people trying to enter the country undetected.

More recently, however, they have had to deal with migrants actively seeking out Border Patrol in order to get refuge in America — taxing the agency's staff.

In his first term, Trump ordered active duty troops to the border in response to a caravan of migrants slowly making its way through Mexico toward the United States in 2018. More than 7,000 active duty troops were sent to Texas, Arizona and California, including military police, an assault helicopter battalion, various communications, medical and headquarters units, combat engineers, planners and public affairs units.

At the time, the Pentagon was adamant that active duty troops would not do law enforcement. So they

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spent much of their time transporting Border Patrol agents to and along the border, helping them erect additional vehicle barriers and fencing along the border, assisting them with communications and providing some security for border agent camps.

The military also provided Border Patrol agents with medical care, pre-packaged meals and temporary housing.

It also was not yet clear if the Trump administration will eventually order the military to use bases to house detained migrants. The defense officials said such a request has not been made as of yet.

Bases previously have been used for that purpose, and after the 2021 fall of Kabul to the Taliban, they were used to host thousands of Afghan evacuees. The facilities struggled to support the influx.

In 2018, then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis ordered Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas, to prepare to house as many as 20,000 unaccompanied migrant children, but the additional space ultimately wasn't needed and Goodfellow was determined not to have the infrastructure necessary to support the surge.

In March 2021, the Biden administration greenlighted using property at Fort Bliss, Texas, for a detention facility to provide beds for up to 10,000 unaccompanied migrant children as border crossings increased from Mexico.

The facility, operated by DHS, was quickly overrun, with far too few case managers for the thousands of children that arrived, exposure to extreme weather and dust and unsanitary conditions, a 2022 inspector general report found.

Winter storm spreads across the Deep South, creating icy danger and snowy fun

By KATE PAYNE and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

A major storm spread heavy snow, sleet and freezing rain across the southern United States on Wednesday, breaking snow records and treating the region to unaccustomed perils and wintertime joy.

From Texas through the Deep South, down into Florida and to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, snow and sleet made for accumulating ice in major cities such as New Orleans, Atlanta, Jacksonville, Florida. In Alabama, the weight of the snow collapsed the dome of the Mobile Civic Center, which was being demolished to make way for a new entertainment facility.

At least eight deaths were attributed to the storm as dangerous below-freezing temperatures with even colder wind chills settled in. Arctic air also plunged much of the Midwest and the eastern U.S. into a deep freeze, grounding hundreds of flights. Government offices remained closed, as were classrooms for more than a million students more accustomed to hurricane dismissals than snow days.

New Englanders know what to do in weather like this: Terry Fraser of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, didn't have her trusty windshield scraper while visiting her new granddaughter in Brunswick, Georgia, so she used a plastic store discount card to remove the snow and ice from her rental SUV in a frozen hotel parking lot.

"This is what we do up north when you don't have a scraper," Fraser said. "Hey, it works."

In Tallahassee, Florida, the Holmes family set their alarms early on Wednesday and found a snow-covered slope before it melted away. Nine-year-old Layla and 12-year-old Rawley used what they had: a boogie board and a skimboard.

"Gotta get creative in Florida!" mom Alicia Holmes said.

Anchorage wants its snow back

The record 10-inch (25-centimeter) snowfall in New Orleans was more than double what Anchorage, Alaska, has received since the beginning of December, the National Weather Service said.

"We'd like our snow back," the weather service office in Anchorage joked in a post on X. "Or at least some King Cake in return."

It also was warmer Wednesday morning in Anchorage than in New Orleans, Atlanta, Jacksonville or Charlotte, North Carolina, according to the weather service.

Dangerously cold temperatures and wind chills are forecast to persist through southern areas Thursday

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morning with widespread frost continuing in some places through the weekend, the weather service said. High temperatures are expected to rebound well above freezing Thursday in places like New Orleans, and by Friday in Tallahassee and the coastal Carolinas.

Even the interstate closes

The snow and ice also closed highways — including many miles of the nation's southernmost interstate, I-10. Especially prone to freezing were the elevated roads and bridges that run over Louisiana's bayous.

"Louisiana, if you can, just hang in there," Gov. Jeff Landry said, warning that Tuesday's "magical" snow day would turn dangerous Wednesday as conditions worsened.

In Charleston, South Carolina, it took crews nearly 16 hours to reopen travel in one direction along the massive 2.5-mile (4-kilometer) Ravenel Bridge that carries about 100,000 vehicles a day.

The icy conditions plagued drivers in Georgia, where troopers responded to more than 1,000 calls for help.

Who needs a beach when there's snow

Some people took advantage of the Ravenel bridge's steep overpasses, turning them into impromptu sled runs. On the Outer Banks, children sledded down snow-covered sand dunes near where the Wright Brothers first took flight, while adults tried to navigate waist-high snow drifts that had piled up on the Kitty Hawk Pier. A ferry system suspended service between the barrier islands.

"It's maybe once every 10 years that we get a good one like this," said Ryan Thibodeau, 38, co-owner of Carolina Designs Realty, a vacation rental company.

The storm that prompted the first ever blizzard warnings for some places along the Texas and Louisiana coast also covered the white-sand beaches of normally balmy Gulf Shores, Alabama, and Pensacola Beach, Florida. Snow covering South Carolina sand from Hilton Head Island to the giant Ferris wheel in Myrtle Beach created more opportunities to turn surf gear into sleds.

"It didn't have the speed of a toboggan," Alex Spiotta said as his family glided on a boogie board in Isle of Palms, South Carolina. "But in the South, you have to use what you have."

Other sledding tools included a laundry basket in Montgomery, Alabama; a pool tube in Houston; and kayaks, cardboard boxes and inflatable alligators on the snow-covered Mississippi River levees in Louisiana. A car pulled a skier down a street in Pensacola, Florida. In Metairie, Louisiana, several nuns enjoyed throwing powdery snow at a priest.

Flight cancellations, fatalities and sports postponements

Nearly 2,000 U.S. flights were canceled and 2,300 more were delayed by midday Wednesday, according to online tracker FlightAware.com.

Record demands for electricity to stay warm were met by the Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides power to more than 10 million customers in seven states, and PJM Interconnection, which operates the 13-state mid-Atlantic grid. But more than 100,000 customers were without power across the region Wednesday morning, according to the website PowerOutage.us.

The Texas Department of Safety said five people died early Tuesday when a tractor-trailer collided with other vehicles on an icy road southwest of San Antonio. Two people died in the cold in Austin, Texas, which said emergency crews responded to more than a dozen "cold exposure" calls. In Georgia, authorities said one person died from hypothermia.

The storm also prompted several sports-related postponements.

And yet, the planet is getting warmer

In Southern California, where blazes have killed at least 28 people and burned thousands of homes, Santa Ana winds and dry conditions worsened by climate change remained a concern.

Even as the United States, which is about 2% of the Earth's surface, shivers through abnormally cold temperatures, the world as a whole is breaking heat records. So far, 2025 has had the hottest first 20 days of a year on record, according to Europe's Copernicus climate service, breaking last year's record, according to data going back to 1940.

So far this year, U.S. weather has set or tied 697 daily records for coldest temperature, not much more than the 629 daily records reported so far this year for warmest temperatures for the date. In the past 365 days, U.S. weather stations have recorded five times as many heat records than cold, according to

the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Scientists say they seem to be seeing more frequent cold air outbreaks — but not cooler weather in general — and theorize that a warming Arctic is altering the jet stream and polar vortex to allow cold air to escape and plunge further south.

Former El Salvador President Mauricio Funes dies in exile in Nicaragua at age 65

By MARCOS ALEMÁN Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Former El Salvador President Mauricio Funes, who spent the final years of his life in Nicaragua to avoid various criminal sentences, died late Tuesday. He was 65.

Nicaragua's Health Ministry said in a statement that Funes had died of a serious chronic illness.

Funes governed El Salvador from 2009 to 2014. He lived his final nine years under the protection of Nicaragua President Daniel Ortega, whose government had given him citizenship, allowing him to avoid extradition.

Nicaragua's Foreign Affairs Ministry said that Funes' family had decided he would be buried in Nicaragua.

The former president had pending sentences in El Salvador for corruption and making deals with the country's powerful street gangs that amounted to 28 years, but he never set foot in prison.

The journalist-turned-politician came to power with the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, the leftist party born of El Salvador's civil war and a powerful national political force for three decades that was left with no seats in the Congress after last year's election.

On Wednesday, his party said in a statement that "Mauricio Funes as an investigative journalist and incisive generator of public opinion, as well as in his time as president of the republic, enjoyed broad acceptance and support from the Salvadoran people and the international community."

Current Labor Minister Rolando Castro said via X that Funes' "skills and contributions to the country as a journalist are undeniable, just as are his mistakes in public office."

Funes was born in San Salvador on Oct. 18, 1959. He worked as a teacher in Catholic schools, but later made his name as a war reporter and hosted a highly popular interview show that took on controversial topics. He interviewed multiple heads of state, worked at two television stations and was a correspondent for CNN from 1991 to 2007, winning multiple awards.

Then the FMLN came calling, offering to make him their candidate and he won the 2009 elections, defeating Rodrigo Ávila of the conservative National Republican Alliance, better known as Arena, that had governed the country since 1989.

Funes was a fresh face, not someone directly involved in the civil war as the party tried to remake itself with a less bellicose image.

At the time, Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez praised Funes as "tenacious" and someone who wouldn't shy away from El Salvador's problems.

But by the time he left office, Funes was hounded by accusations of corruption. In 2016, he fled to Nicaragua. He always denied the accusations and said his troubles were all part of political persecution.

But he was tried in absentia six times and convicted in each one.

For one, Funes was sentenced in May 2023 to 14 years in prison for negotiating a truce with the gangs to lower the homicide rate during his administration in exchange for giving imprisoned gang leaders perks.

His last sentence came just last year in June. He was sentenced to eight years in prison for receiving an airplane as a kickback for awarding a construction contract for a bridge project. He was also being prosecuted for allegedly diverting some \$351 million in government funds.

A number of former officials in his administration, as well as his ex-wife Vanda Pignato, his children and various former partners have also been prosecuted for corruption. His former security minister, David Munguía Payés, was sentenced to 18 years in prison for his role in negotiating the gang truce.

Despite Funes' troubled presidency, the FMLN won again with President Salvador Sánchez Cerén who governed from 2014 to 2019. Sánchez Céren had been one of the five guerrilla commanders in the civil war.

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In recent years, Funes and current El Salvador President Nayib Bukele frequently sparred on social platforms, trading insults. Bukele pushed prosecutions of the former president, especially for his negotiations with the gangs.

Bukele himself had been accused of negotiating with gang leaders, but vehemently denied that and later crushed the gangs in a yearslong all-out offensive.

To secure Gaza ceasefire, dealmakers overcame enemies' deep distrust

By SAM MAGDY, ADAM GELLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

Inside a lavish clubhouse on Doha's waterfront, tensions strained by months of fruitless back-and-forth weighed on negotiators as the hour neared 3 a.m.

On the first floor, a Hamas delegation combed through the details of yet another proposal to halt the war in Gaza. On the second floor, advisers to Israel's chief negotiator did the same.

With Qatari, U.S. and Egyptian mediators pushing for resolution, did the sides — such bitter enemies that they refused to speak directly to one another — at last have a deal to pause the fighting and bring dozens of Israeli hostages home?

"Both parties were looking at each word in the deal as a trap," said an Egyptian official involved in the negotiations who spoke on condition of anonymity. The talks that night a week ago dragged on over disagreements about where Israel would begin withdrawing troops and its demand that Hamas provide a list of living hostages, he said.

By the time Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, announced a ceasefire last Wednesday evening, mediators had scrambled again to defuse objections by both sides.

But as the fighting in Gaza paused this week, three young Israeli women were released from captivity and dozens of Palestinian prisoners were freed by Israel, the agreement, however tenuous, has held.

The agreement was the product of a singular political moment, with one U.S. president preparing to hand power to another.

Both were pushing for a deal to free some 100 Israeli hostages and bring an end to a conflict that began with Hamas' attack that killed about 1,200 in Israel. More than 47,000 have been killed in Gaza, according to Palestinian health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say more than half of those killed were women and children.

The circumstances partnered Sheikh Mohammed with improbable allies. Then-President Joe Biden sent Brett McGurk, a veteran Middle East hand in both Republican and Democratic administrations. Donald Trump dispatched Steve Witkoff, a real estate billionaire with little if any diplomatic experience, but a longtime friendship with the then-president-elect.

The deal they brought together calls for continued negotiations that could be even more fraught, but with the potential to release the remaining hostages and end a war that has destroyed much of Gaza and roiled the entire region.

In late May, Biden laid out a proposed deal that would move the sides toward a "sustainable calm."

But talks had stalled even before the detonation of a bomb, attributed to Israel, in late July killed Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas' political bureau. And efforts by mediators to restart them were derailed in August when Israeli forces found the bodies of six hostages in a Gaza tunnel.

Pressure on Hamas increased after Israeli forces killed leader Yahya Sinwar — an architect of the Oct. 7 attack — and launched a devastating offensive against Lebanon's Hezbollah, the group's longtime ally.

But Qatari officials announced they were suspending mediation until both sides demonstrated willingness to negotiate.

Weeks later, Trump dispatched Witkoff, whose most notable prior link to the Middle East was his \$623 million sale of New York's Park Lane Hotel to Qatar's sovereign wealth fund.

Talks restarted soon after.

"Witkoff and McGurk were pushing the Israelis. Qatar was pushing Hamas," said an official briefed on

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the talks who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Egyptian official recounted the frustration of successfully pushing Hamas to agree to changes last summer, only to find Netanyahu imposing new conditions.

An Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity last week because the negotiations were ongoing, said Sinwar's death and Iran's weakening influence in the region forced Hamas' hand, leading to real give-and-take.

He and others close to the process said Trump's rhetoric and dispatch of an envoy had injected new momentum. The Egyptian official pointed to a statement by Trump that there would be "hell to pay" if the hostages were not released, saying it had pressured both Hamas and Israeli officials.

Mediators said the willingness of Witkoff and McGurk to partner up was critical.

In early January, there was a breakthrough in the talks when Hamas agreed to provide a list of hostages it would release in the first phase of a deal, an official briefed on the talks said.

On January 11, Witkoff flew to Israel, securing a meeting with Netanyahu. McGurk called in from Doha. Netanyahu agreed to send the heads of Israeli intelligence and internal security back to Doha for negotiations, which mostly took place in the Qatari prime minister's private office.

At points, mediators shuttled back and forth between adversaries on different floors. At others, the chief negotiators for the two sides cycled separately into the prime minister's office.

"But the Hamas and Israeli delegations never crossed paths," said the official briefed on the talks.

After lead negotiators for each side left Sheikh Mohammed's office late Tuesday, the work shifted to the waterfront club owned by the government.

"Until late the first hours of Wednesday we were working tirelessly to resolve last-minute disputes," said the Egyptian official involved in the negotiations.

After extended discussions focused on the buffer zone Israel is to maintain in Gaza and the names of prisoners to be released, the long night ended with an agreement seemingly at hand, said the official briefed on the talks.

But "a last-minute hiccup, last-minute requests from both sides" forced a delay, the official said.

Israel accused Hamas of trying to make changes to already agreed upon arrangements along Gaza's border with Egypt. Hamas called the claims "nonsense."

A senior U.S. official involved in the talks said Hamas negotiators made several last-minute demands, but "we held very firm."

After calling the Hamas negotiators into his office, Sheikh Mohammed met separately with the Israelis and U.S. envoys. Three hours behind schedule, he stepped to a lectern to announce the parties had reached an agreement.

Israel and Hamas are set to resume talks just over a week from now, to work out the second phase. That is supposed to include the release of all remaining hostages, living and dead, and a permanent ceasefire. But getting there, observers say, will likely be even tougher.

White House would have many ways to upend lives of Trump's enemies

By BYRON TAU Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the many people considered enemies by President Donald Trump, his return to the White House has sparked anxiety about how much power he has to upend their lives.

The White House has ways to reward friends or punish foes, putting aside the long expectation that federal agencies are supposed to act apolitically. Any lawsuits challenging attempts to wield government power would likely take years to resolve and offer little immediate comfort to those targeted.

Here are some examples of what Trump's rivals and opponents fear he could do:

Launch criminal investigations

The gravest step that a president can take is ordering the Justice Department to open investigations or bring prosecutions. That can upend a person's life and finances even if they are acquitted or never charged.

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While there is a longstanding practice that presidents don't interfere in the department's operations, it's only a norm. President Trump has said he has "every right" to go after political opponents.

Put people on no-fly lists

Presidential power is at its maximum when presidents invoke national security. Numerous lists can either prohibit air travel entirely or subject travelers to additional scrutiny. People have occasionally challenged their inclusion on such lists, but courts have been broadly deferential to government claims of national security.

Strip access to trusted traveler programs

Likewise, multiple programs can speed travelers through passport control or security screenings, such as Global Entry or TSA PreCheck. Could a president order political opponents to be stripped of their status? It's never been tested.

Cancel passports

State Department-issued documents are required for international travel and can be canceled under certain circumstances. A president arbitrarily canceling the passport of a critic or political opponent would undoubtedly spark a massive legal battle, but that battle would take time to resolve and create a major inconvenience.

Take away security clearances

More than 4 million Americans hold security clearances and need those clearances to do their jobs. In many instances, they hold those clearances at the pleasure of the executive branch. Trump has already canceled clearances for numerous former officials.

Prevent the publication of critical books

Current and former security clearance holders are required to submit written works to the government for review before publication to ensure that they don't accidentally disclose classified information. It's common for former government officials to write memoirs about their time in office, and a president bent on retribution could mire books in years of delay and dispute over what is and isn't classified.

When former national security adviser John Bolton tried to publish a memoir in 2020, the career official who reviewed his manuscript said she was improperly pressured by Trump political appointees to say it contained sensitive material.

Withhold licenses and permits

Federal permits are required for businesses across the U.S. economy. Imports, exports, commercial fishing, mining, drilling, manufacture and distribution of alcoholic beverages, operation of planes and trucks, and broadcast licenses for media outlets, to name a few, require some sort of federal permit. Critics worry a president could use that process to reward supporters and punish enemies.

Use the regulatory state

Independent regulatory agencies conduct civil and criminal investigations into securities and financial fraud, consumer protection issues and election law violations, among other things. Russell Vought, Trump's nominee to be head of the Office of Management and Budget, has indicated that the administration would like to take more control over those agencies. "The whole notion of independent agencies is anathema," he said on Fox Business.

Open IRS audits

While it's a crime for political officials, including the president, to weaponize the Internal Revenue Service, as Richard Nixon suggested to aides in the 1970s, the Supreme Court ruled last year that presidents are entitled to a broad degree of immunity for official actions. The scope of that immunity has yet to be litigated, especially as it applies to agencies like the IRS.

Award or revoke contracts

The federal government is the largest buyer of goods and services in the world. While federal procurement by law is supposed to be decided on merit and value for taxpayers, the Supreme Court's ruling on immunity raises new questions about to what extent a president can direct the contracting process. Amazon alleged in 2019 that Trump tried to steer a Pentagon contract to a competitor. Trump has long griped about coverage in the Washington Post, which is owed by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

Murdoch's UK tabloids apologize to Prince Harry and admit intruding on the late Princess Diana

By BRIAN MELLEY and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry claimed a “monumental” victory Wednesday as Rupert Murdoch’s U.K. tabloids made an unprecedented apology for intruding in his life for years, and agreed to pay substantial damages to settle his privacy invasion lawsuit.

News Group Newspapers acknowledged its private investigators and journalists targeted Harry with phone hacking, surveillance and misuse of private information. The company offered him a “full and unequivocal apology” for intrusion by the now-defunct News of the World and its sister tabloid The Sun.

The statement, read out at the High Court in London by Harry’s attorney David Sherborne, even went beyond the scope of the case to acknowledge intruding on the life of Harry’s mother, the late Princess Diana, and the impact it had on his family.

“We acknowledge and apologize for the distress caused to the duke, and the damage inflicted on relationships, friendships and family, and have agreed to pay him substantial damages,” the settlement statement said.

His phone was hacked and he was spied on

News Group has long acknowledged that phones were hacked by staff at the News of the World, the weekly newspaper that Murdoch shut down in 2011 amid a public outcry over tabloid snooping. But this is the first time the company accepted wrongdoing at The Sun, a paper that once sold millions of copies with its formula of sports, celebrities and sex — including topless women on Page 3.

Harry, 40, the younger son of King Charles III, had vowed to take his case to trial to publicly expose The Sun’s misdeeds and win a court ruling upholding his claims. He and Tom Watson, a former Labour Party member of Parliament, were the only two remaining claimants out of more than 1,300 others who had settled lawsuits against News Group Newspapers.

The trial was due to start Tuesday, but was postponed amid last-minute negotiations that led to the dramatic settlement announcement.

Although the settlement means Harry will not get his day in court, his lawyer said it delivered the accountability he sought for himself and hundreds of others who were snooped on with intercepted voicemails, tapped phones, bugged cars and various forms of deception.

News Group acknowledged “phone hacking, surveillance and misuse of private information by journalists and private investigators” aimed at Harry. NGN had strongly denied those allegations before trial.

“This represents a vindication for the hundreds of other claimants who were strong-armed into settling without being able to get to the truth of what was done to them,” Sherborne said outside court.

Source of a bitter feud

Harry’s feud with the press dates back to his youth, when the tabloids took glee in reporting on everything from his injuries to his girlfriends to dabbling with drugs.

But his fury with the tabloids goes much deeper.

He blames the media for the death of his mother, who was killed in a car crash in 1997 while being chased by paparazzi in Paris. He also blames them for the persistent attacks on his wife, actor Meghan Markle, that led them to leave royal life and flee to the U.S. in 2020.

The litigation has been a source of friction in his family, Harry said in the documentary “Tabloids On Trial.”

He revealed in court papers that his father opposed his lawsuit. He also said his older brother William, Prince of Wales and heir to the throne, had settled a private complaint against News Group that his lawyer has said was worth over 1 million pounds (\$1.23 million).

“I’m doing this for my reasons,” Harry told the documentary makers, though he said he wished his family had joined him.

Harry and the other holdout

Watson, who was targeted by NGN when he was part of an investigation into allegations of tabloid wrongdoing, also said the intrusion had taken a heavy toll on himself and his family.

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"I once said that the big beasts of the tabloid jungle have no predators," Watson said. "I was wrong, they have Prince Harry. ... We are grateful to him for his unwavering support and his determination under extraordinary pressure."

Watson, who also received an apology and substantial settlement, called on Murdoch to issue a personal apology to Harry, the king and "countless others" affected by tabloid intrusion.

An end to the story?

News Group Newspapers said the settlement "draws a line under the past" and ends more than a decade of litigation.

The company has now settled more than 1,300 claims without going to trial. In doing so, it has spent more than 1 billion pounds (\$1.24 billion) in payouts and legal costs.

Harry's attorney said the company still had questions to answer. Sherborne said the company engaged in "perjury and cover-ups" to obscure the truth for years, deleting 30 million emails and other records.

"There was an extensive conspiracy," the statement said, in which "senior executives deliberately obstructed justice."

News Group said in a statement that it would have disputed at trial that evidence was destroyed and it continues to deny those allegations.

Sherborne took aim at former Sun editor Rebekah Brooks, now the CEO overseeing News Group, who was acquitted of phone hacking a decade ago.

"At her trial in 2014, Rebekah Brooks said, 'When I was editor of The Sun, we ran a clean ship,'" he said. "Ten years later when she is CEO of the company, they now admit, when she was editor of The Sun, they ran a criminal enterprise."

NGN apologized for wrongdoing by private eyes hired by The Sun, but not for anything done by its journalists, adding: "There was no voicemail interception on The Sun."

Two cases down, one to go

Harry's case against NGN was one of three he brought accusing British tabloids of violating his privacy by eavesdropping on phone messages or using private investigators to unlawfully help them score scoops.

His case against the publisher of the Daily Mirror ended in victory when the judge ruled that phone hacking was "widespread and habitual" at the newspaper and its sister publications.

During that trial in 2023, Harry became the first senior member of the royal family to testify in court since the late 19th century, putting him at odds with the monarchy's desire to keep its problems out of view.

The outcome in the News Group case raises questions about how his third case — against the publisher of the Daily Mail — will proceed. That trial is scheduled next year.

Trump's perceived enemies worry about losing pensions, getting audited and paying steep legal bills

By BYRON TAU Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's not just criminal prosecutions that worry those who have crossed President Donald Trump. There are more prosaic kinds of retaliation: having difficulty renewing passports, getting audited by the IRS and losing federal pensions.

For the many people who have made an enemy of Trump, his return to the presidency this week sparked anxiety. Some are concerned they could go bankrupt trying to clear their names.

Less than 24 hours after taking office, Trump fired an opening shot, ordering the revocation of security clearances held by dozens of former intelligence officers who he believes sided with Joe Biden in the 2020 campaign or have turned against him. The loss of such clearances can be costly for former officials who work for defense contractors and require ongoing access to classified information to do their private sector jobs.

"Anybody who ever disagrees with Trump has to worry about retribution," said John Bolton, who served as Trump's national security adviser and has become a vocal critic of the president. "It's a pretty long list. I think there are a lot of people who are very worried."

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Bolton was among a half dozen former officials who spoke to The Associated Press about their rising apprehensions about Trump's potential for vengeance. In the hours before Trump took the oath of office on Monday, the officials noted, outgoing President Biden took the extraordinary step of issuing preemptive pardons for frequent Trump targets such as Dr. Anthony Fauci, retired Gen. Mark Milley and lawmakers and staff who served on the congressional panel that investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Biden also pardoned members of his family, saying "baseless and politically motivated investigations wreak havoc on the lives, safety and financial security of targeted individuals and their families."

The risk of being on Kash Patel's list

Many of the former officials were listed in an index of "deep state" operatives in a book by Kash Patel, Trump's nominee to be FBI director. Patel has promised to launch a campaign against what he calls "government gangsters."

Most of those interviewed spoke about their fears on the condition of anonymity because they did not want to draw more attention to themselves. They are concerned about being on the receiving end of a presidential social media post or being targeted in an online harassment campaign.

They are also worried about being criminally investigated and prosecuted for actions they took as government employees, though few expressed genuine concern about being convicted. All said they were more concerned about having to incur steep legal bills from criminal probes, congressional investigations or defamation suits.

Trump has long been interested in revenge

Revenge played a central role in many of Trump's remarks after he left the presidency in 2021. He said at a 2023 rally, "For those who have been wronged and betrayed, I am your retribution."

In his inaugural address Monday, Trump said his "proudest legacy will be that of a peacemaker and unifier," and he signed an executive order aimed at ending what he called the weaponization of the federal government under Biden. He alleged that the previous administration took actions "oriented more toward inflicting political pain than toward pursuing actual justice or legitimate governmental objectives."

But hours after being sworn in, he issued executive orders aimed at settling scores, including the one stripping clearances from 50 former intelligence officers. He also rescinded Secret Service protection for Bolton, whose life has been threatened by Iran.

A White House spokeswoman did not return a request for comment.

In ways big and small, the federal government has tremendous power. It's the largest single purchaser of goods and services in the world. It can audit, investigate, prosecute and cajole. It controls everything from TV broadcast licenses to passport renewals. It has the power to both add citizens to a no-fly list or to smooth their way through passport control and TSA security checkpoints.

While most of the functions of the federal government have been depoliticized for more than a century, there are many ways a president bent on revenge could upend the lives of private citizens.

"If you have the control of the executive branch and you don't care very much about whether you're following the rules or following the law, there's a lot you could do that's quite hard to stop," said Barton Gellman, a senior adviser at the nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice.

Simulation examined punishing political foes

Gellman helped run a series of simulations last year aimed at testing the U.S. response to an authoritarian presidency. The aim was to see how institutions — both public and private — would react to a president giving unlawful or unethical orders.

The bipartisan group assembled for the simulation included several former governors and cabinet officials, retired military personnel, ex-members of Congress and many prominent leaders in civil society. Participants played the role of institutions such as the Justice Department, the military and the majority and minority parties in Congress, as well as universities and the press. Some of the scenarios involved a president using the power of the government to punish political foes.

What they found was that the institutions of government would ultimately bend to a president's wishes. Gellman believes the only check might be that the American people might not stand for it.

"Public opinion might actually be one of the major constraints on Trump. I don't think a majority of

Americans wants to see him abusing his legal powers to try to harm his political enemies. If a pattern like that emerges, I don't think it will be popular," Gellman said.

A recent New York Times/Ipsos poll found that 73% of Americans oppose the idea of Trump trying to prosecute his adversaries, including 49% of Americans who consider themselves "strongly opposed."

Attorneys gear up to help

Attorneys and civil society groups are raising money and organizing on behalf of current and former federal employees who might be in the crosshairs. Norm Eisen, a veteran lawyer and former U.S. ambassador to the Czech Republic, said he's advising individuals who have been targeted by Trump with his colleagues at State Democracy Defenders Fund, a nonprofit watchdog group.

Mark Zaid, a Washington attorney who represents several of the people whose security clearances were revoked this week, has been organizing an effort to help those who might be targeted. That includes lining up attorneys, accountants and even mental health professionals who could offer services for free.

"There's not a lot we can do in advance," Zaid said, "other than just be prepared for when or if he acts."

Afghans who fled Taliban rule urge Trump to lift refugee program suspension

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Afghans who fled after the Taliban seized power appealed Wednesday to U.S. President Donald Trump to exempt them from an order suspending the relocation of refugees to the United States, some saying they risked their lives to support U.S. troops.

An estimated 15,000 Afghans are waiting in Pakistan to be approved for resettlement in the U.S. via an American government program. It was set up to help Afghans at risk under the Taliban because of their work with the U.S. government, media, aid agencies and rights groups, after U.S. troops pulled out of Afghanistan in 2021, when the Taliban took power.

But in his first days in office, Trump's administration announced the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program would be suspended from Jan. 27 for at least three months. During that period, the White House said the secretary of homeland security in consultation with the secretary of state will submit a report to the president on whether the resumption of the program is in the U.S. interest.

Refugees who had been approved to travel to the United States before Jan. 27 have had their travel plans canceled by the Trump administration. Among those affected are the more than 1,600 Afghans cleared to resettle in the U.S. That number includes those who worked alongside American soldiers during the war as well as family members of active-duty U.S. military personnel.

There was no immediate comment from Pakistan, where authorities have urged the international community to decide the fate of 1.45 million Afghan refugees, saying they cannot stay indefinitely.

"Many of us risked our lives to support the U.S. mission as interpreters, contractors, human rights defenders, and allies," an advocacy group called Afghan USRAP Refugees — named after the U.S. refugee program — said in an open letter to Trump, members of Congress and human rights defenders.

"The Taliban regard us as traitors, and returning to Afghanistan would expose us to arrest, torture, or death," the group said. "In Pakistan, the situation is increasingly untenable. Arbitrary arrests, deportations, and insecurity compound our distress."

Women fled abroad after the Taliban closed schools

Hadisa Bibi, a former student in Kabul who fled to neighboring Pakistan last month, said she read in newspapers that Trump suspended the refugee program.

"Prior to restrictions on women's education in Afghanistan, I was a university student," she said. "Given the risks I face as a women's rights advocate, I was hoping for a swift resettlement to the United States. This would not only allow me to continue my higher education but also offer a safer and brighter future."

She said she witnessed several Afghans arrested by Pakistani police, which left her in fear, "confined to my room like a prisoner."

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Mahnoosh Monir said she was a medical student in Afghanistan when her education was “cruelly suspended by the Taliban.” Before fleeing to Pakistan, she worked as a teacher at a language center but it also was shut by the Taliban.

“Afghanistan is no longer a place for any girl or woman to survive,” she said, adding she was disappointed by Trump’s move.

“I didn’t expect this suspension to happen. A long span of waiting makes us think of very disappointing probabilities like being sent back to Afghanistan or waiting for a long time in Pakistan as a refugee at risk, which are like nightmares to all case holders,” she said.

The Taliban have deprived 1.4 million Afghan girls of schooling through bans, according to the United Nations. Afghanistan is the only country in the world that bans female secondary and higher education.

Both Bibi and Monir applied for relocation and are still waiting. Over time, the visa process for Afghans who demonstrate they are at risk of persecution has become protracted.

The US program’s suspension leaves exiles in a limbo

Another Afghan woman, Farzana Umeed, and a man, Sarfraz Ahmed, said in an interview on the outskirts of Islamabad they were traumatized by the suspension of the program.

“I virtually wept last night when we heard this news,” Umeed said. She said it was difficult for her to live in Pakistan, and she could not travel to America either. “Returning to my home country also means taking a huge risk. What should I do? she asked, and urged Trump to reverse his decision.

Those in exile in Pakistan include Afghan journalists who were forced to escape Taliban rule to save their lives, and now face “extreme anxiety under the recurring threat of arbitrary arrest, police harassment and deportation to Afghanistan,” Reporters Without Borders said Wednesday.

The media watchdog urged Pakistan to ensure the protection of these journalists, who say their visa is extended only for a month for a \$100 fee.

According to the Afghan USRAP Refugees group, flights to the U.S. for many Afghans had been scheduled for January, February and March after they were interviewed by the International Organization for Migration and U.S. Embassy officials.

“We seek the reversal of the ban on the refugee program on humanitarian grounds,” said Ahmad Shah, a member of the group, who was hoping to leave Pakistan for the United States in March after undergoing all interviews and medical tests.

In addition to Pakistan, more than 3,200 Afghans are staying in Albania. A NATO member, Albania first agreed to house Afghans for one year before they moved for final settlement in the United States, then pledged to keep them longer if their visas were delayed.

On “Farmtok,” agriculture gets its moment in the spotlight. What would it mean if that disappeared?

By MELINA WALLING and JOSHUA A. BICKEL Associated Press

BUCYRUS, Ohio (AP) — Zoe Kent hopes people get a little joy out of her talking about farming on the Internet. In one of her latest videos, she compares pesticide application to dry shampoo. “Farming is for the girls,” she quips.

On Instagram and TikTok, under the handle “farmwithzoe,” Kent films herself putting on boots to load corn into a massive truck bed, posts memes about the price of grain and documents just about everything else about farm life from getting rocks stuck in her equipment to eating lunch on long days out in a combine.

Now, the future of TikTok — and “Farmtok,” as some creators call the ecosystem of farm-related influencers online — has become more uncertain, thanks to a ban the U.S. government briefly implemented on TikTok over the weekend. That was followed by the new Trump administration rescinding that ban, at least for now, but farmers are all too aware that things could change, and with them, the ways that they share farm life with the rest of the world. But most say they’ll keep adapting to whatever the platforms throw their way.

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"It's building your business on rented land, if you will," Kent said. "It's not guaranteed to be there."

Even before the uncertain threat to TikTok's future, farm creators had to contend with social media's evolution. As algorithms changed, they faced greater challenges communicating with a public that many see as increasingly disconnected from agriculture.

But most say they'll keep adapting to whatever the platforms throw their way. Some producers make extra money by building a following on TikTok or Instagram. Others use social media to advertise to local customers like restaurants or farmers' markets. Perhaps most importantly, they want to continue to build community with other farmers in the face of industry challenges like the toll of the profession on mental health, economic pressure and climate change.

Multiple farmers said that disconnection has grown over the years as social media algorithms have changed. "I know for a fact our social media reach is greatly diminished now," said Beth Satterwhite, who has been posting about her small organic vegetable farm in McMinnville, Oregon on Instagram for over a decade now. "On the ground stories of people working in agriculture are a little less interesting to the consumer — I don't know if it's actually less interesting or just less visible," she said.

Neil Denton, who farms corn, soybeans, wheat and rye in Barlow, Kentucky, shared a similar sentiment. He thinks that many of his over 80,000 followers on Instagram and 33,000 followers on TikTok are fellow producers, not members of the public. He calls that "disappointing" and worries about how little people know about the food that ends up on their plates.

But he does think there's a silver lining: "Farming is a lonely occupation because you're not with a lot of coworkers," Denton said. "I think some farmers use social media as an outlet...to be able to express yourself and to be able to feel like you're not lonely."

Within the farming community, it can also be useful to learn from other farmers, many producers said. Megan Dwyer, who grows corn and soybeans and raises beef cattle in northwest Illinois, uses social media, especially X and Facebook, to gauge what matters to other farmers. "It's a great source for information, especially rapid information," she said.

However, all that rapid information does have a price. Satterwhite described a "language soup" around agriculture, saying it could be hard for an outsider to tell what farming practices are legitimately better for the climate or environment. "I see a lot of greenwashing," said Satterwhite, referring to the practice of falsely portraying a product or practice as eco-friendly to market it to an environmentally-conscious audience.

"There's definitely a lot of misinformation out there," Kent said. "I try to sift out who has genuine questions versus who just already has a stance and they're not willing to hear me out."

That's something many farming influencers agree on — that they still want a place to have the conversation.

As Dwyer put it: "You never know who you're influencing there or or what may happen."

Pardons by Trump and Biden reveal distrust of each other and wobbly faith in criminal justice system

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A day that began with the outgoing president's pardon of lawmakers and his own family ended with the incoming president's pardon of supporters who violently stormed the Capitol four years ago.

The clemency Monday by departing President Joe Biden and new President Donald Trump — one benefiting relatives and public servants not accused of criminal wrongdoing, the other aiding rioters convicted of violent felonies — are vastly different in scope, impact and their meaning for the rule of law.

But the remarkable flex of executive authority in a 12-hour span also shows the men's deeply rooted suspicion of one another, with both signaling to their supporters that the tall pillars of the criminal justice system — facts, evidence and law — could not be trusted as foundational principles in each other's ad-

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ministrations.

"It was a sad day for Lady Justice no matter which side of the political spectrum you're on," said John Fishwick Jr., a former U.S. attorney in Virginia during the Obama administration. "In alternative ways, both Biden and Trump were sending the same message. Trump was saying it was a corrupt system the last four years, and Biden was saying it's about to be a corrupt system. And that's a horrible message."

In pardoning his siblings and their spouses in one of his final actions in office, Biden said his family had been "subjected to unrelenting attacks and threats, motivated solely by a desire to hurt me — the worst kind of partisan politics." He said he had "no reason to believe these attacks will end," a similar rationale he cited when pardoning his son Hunter in December for tax and gun crimes despite having repeatedly pledged not to.

He also pardoned Dr. Anthony Fauci, retired Gen. Mark Milley and members of the House committee that investigated the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol — all considered potential targets of investigation in a Trump administration despite no public evidence of any criminal behavior. Trump's pick for FBI director, Kash Patel, has for instance singled out Fauci as someone deserving of investigation and prosecution over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The clemency reached beyond those who might have reason to fear retribution under Trump. In a move that went against the explicit urging of the recently-departed FBI Director Christopher Wray and angered law enforcement, Biden commuted the sentence of Indigenous activist Leonard Peltier, who had been imprisoned for nearly half a century for the 1975 killings of two FBI agents.

Even as Biden said he believed in the rule of law and was "optimistic that the strength of our legal institutions will ultimately prevail over politics," he acknowledged that "exceptional circumstances" compelled him to act.

That wobbly faith in the criminal justice system under Trump's watch appears to mirror the American public's perspective.

About half of Americans are "not very" or "not at all" confident that the Justice Department, the FBI or the Supreme Court will act in a fair and nonpartisan manner during Trump's second term. In each instance, roughly 3 in 10 are "somewhat" confident and about 2 in 10 are "extremely" or "very" confident, according to an AP-NORC poll from January.

While the outgoing Democratic resident was convinced his successor could not be trusted not to target his perceived adversaries, including his own relatives, the incoming Republican president seemed equally convinced the prior administration engaged in political persecution of his supporters.

Trump pardoned, commuted the prison sentences of or vowed to dismiss the cases of all of the 1,500-plus people charged with crimes in Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021. His action far exceeded the forecasts of other Trump administration officials, who suggested the clemency grants would be narrower.

The clemency wiped out the largest investigation in Justice Department history, the beneficiaries including members of the mob of Trump supporters who violently attacked police officers with weapons like flag poles, bats and bear spray, as well as leaders of far-right extremist groups convicted of failed plots to keep the Republican in power.

Trump has cast the rioters as "hostages" and "patriots" despite the breadth of evidence accumulated by prosecutors and has complained that the cases were politically motivated despite no evidence of any coordination between the Justice Department and the White House.

"That's breathtaking. This is a man who does not believe in the rule of law. He believes he can do as he pleases. He's made that clear for many years," said Chris Edelson, an assistant American University professor specializing in presidential powers.

He said he did not fault Biden for the preemptive pardons, given Trump's warnings of reprisal.

"It would be a lie or at the very least misleading for President Biden to assure Americans that they can trust the system," Edelson said.

Questions about faith in the rule of law have taken center stage as Trump looks for the Senate to confirm both Patel and his attorney general pick, Pam Bondi, who during her confirmation hearing last week told

senators that she would not play politics while also suggesting that the Justice Department over the last four years had become weaponized.

For critics of the pardons like Fishwick, the former U.S. attorney, the clemency risks adding to the misguided public perception that the criminal justice system is "rigged."

"I think both Biden and Trump were using the pardon power as part of political statements," Fishwick said, "and that's not how the Founding Fathers envisioned them being implemented by the president."

Trump administration directs all federal diversity, equity and inclusion staff be put on leave

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration has moved to end affirmative action in federal contracting and directed that all federal diversity, equity and inclusion staff be put on paid leave and eventually be laid off.

The moves Tuesday follow an executive order Trump signed on his first day ordering a sweeping dismantling of the federal government's diversity and inclusion programs that could touch on everything from anti-bias training to funding for minority farmers and homeowners. Trump has called the programs "discrimination" and insisted on restoring strictly "merit-based" hiring.

The executive order on affirmative action revokes an order issued by President Lyndon Johnson, and curtails DEI programs by federal contractors and grant recipients. It's using one of the key tools utilized by the Biden administration to promote DEI programs across the private sector — pushing their use by federal contractors — to now eradicate them.

The Office of Personnel Management in a Tuesday memo directed agencies to place DEI office staffers on paid leave by 5 p.m. Wednesday and take down all public DEI-focused webpages by the same deadline. Several federal departments had removed the webpages even before the memorandum. Agencies must also cancel any DEI-related training and end any related contracts, and federal workers are being asked to report to Trump's Office of Personnel Management if they suspect any DEI-related program has been renamed to obfuscate its purpose within 10 days or face "adverse consequences."

By Thursday, federal agencies are directed to compile a list of federal DEI offices and workers as of Election Day. By next Friday, they are expected to develop a plan to execute a "reduction-in-force action" against those federal workers.

The memo was first reported by CBS News.

The move comes after Monday's executive order accused former President Joe Biden of forcing "discrimination" programs into "virtually all aspects of the federal government" through "diversity, equity and inclusion" programs, known as DEI.

That step is the first salvo in an aggressive campaign to upend DEI efforts nationwide, including leveraging the Justice Department and other agencies to investigate private companies pursuing training and hiring practices that conservative critics consider discriminatory against non-minority groups such as white men.

The executive order picks up where Trump's first administration left off: One of Trump's final acts during his first term was an executive order banning federal agency contractors and recipients of federal funding from conducting anti-bias training that addressed concepts like systemic racism. Biden promptly rescinded that order on his first day in office and issued a pair of executive orders — now rescinded — outlining a plan to promote DEI throughout the federal government.

While many changes may take months or even years to implement, Trump's new anti-DEI agenda is more aggressive than his first and comes amid far more amenable terrain in the corporate world. Prominent companies from Walmart to Facebook have already scaled back or ended some of their diversity practices in response to Trump's election and conservative-backed lawsuits against them.

Here's a look at some of the policies and programs that Trump will aim to dismantle:

Diversity offices, training and accountability

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Trump's order will immediately gut Biden's wide-ranging effort to embed diversity and inclusion practices in the federal workforce, the nation's largest at about 2.4 million people.

Biden had mandated all agencies to develop a diversity plan, issue yearly progress reports, and contribute data for a government-wide dashboard to track demographic trends in hiring and promotions. The administration also set up a Chief Diversity Officers Council to oversee the implementation of the DEI plan. The government released its first DEI progress report in 2022 that included demographic data for the federal workforce, which is about 60% white and 55% male overall, and more than 75% white and more than 60% male at the senior executive level.

Trump's executive order will toss out equity plans developed by federal agencies and terminate any roles or offices dedicated to promoting diversity. It will include eliminating initiatives such as DEI-related training or diversity goals in performance reviews.

Federal grant and benefits programs

Trump's order paves the way for an aggressive but bureaucratically complicated overhaul of billions of dollars in federal spending that conservative activists claim unfairly carve out preference for racial minorities and women.

The order does not specify which programs it will target but mandates a government-wide review to ensure that contracts and grants are compliant with the Trump administration's anti-DEI stance. It also proposes that the federal government settle ongoing lawsuits against federal programs that benefit historically underserved communities, including some that date back decades.

Trump's executive order is a "seismic shift and a complete change in the focus and direction of the federal government," said Dan Lennington, deputy council for the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, which has pursued several lawsuits against federal programs. The institute recently released an influential report listing dozens of programs the Trump administration should consider dismantling, such as credits for minority farmers or emergency relief assistance for majority-Black neighborhoods.

He acknowledged that unwinding some entrenched programs may be difficult. For example, the Treasury Department implements housing and other assistance programs through block grants to states that have their own methods for implementing diversity criteria.

Pay equity and hiring practices

It's not clear whether the Trump administration will target every initiative that stemmed from Biden's DEI executive order.

For example, the Biden administration banned federal agencies from asking about an applicant's salary history when setting compensation, a practice many civil rights activists say perpetuates pay disparities for women and people of color.

It took three years for the Biden administration to issue the final regulations, and Trump would have to embark on a similar rule-making process, including a notice and comment period, to rescind it, said Chiraag Bains, former deputy director of the White House Domestic Policy Council under Biden and now a nonresident senior fellow with Brookings Metro.

Noreen Farrell, executive director of gender rights group Equal Rights Advocates, said that she was hopeful that the Trump administration "will not go out of its way to undo the rule," which she said has proved popular in some state and cities that have enacted similar policies.

And Biden's DEI plan encompassed some initiatives with bipartisan support, said Bains. For example, he tasked the Chief Diversity Officers Executive Council with expanding federal employment opportunities for those with criminal records. That initiative stems from the Fair Chance Act, which Trump signed into law in 2019 and bans federal agencies and contractors from asking about an applicant's criminal history before a conditional job offer is made.

Bains said that's what Biden's DEI policies were about: ensuring that the federal government was structured to include historically marginalized communities, not institute "reverse discrimination against white men."

Despite the sweeping language of Trump's order, Farrell said, "the reality of implementing such massive

structural changes is far more complex.”

“Federal agencies have deeply embedded policies and procedures that can’t simply be switched off overnight,” she added.

Ichiro Suzuki, CC Sabathia and Billy Wagner elected to Baseball Hall of Fame

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Used to leading off, Ichiro Suzuki got antsy when he had to wait.

Considered a no-doubt pick for baseball’s Hall of Fame and possibly the second unanimous selection, he waited by the phone for the expected call Tuesday. Fifteen minutes passed without a ring.

“I actually started getting kind of nervous,” he said through a translator. “I was actually relieved when I first got the call.”

Suzuki became the first Japanese player chosen for the Hall, falling one vote shy of unanimous when he was elected along with CC Sabathia and Billy Wagner.

Quite the journey for a 27-year-old who left the Pacific League’s Orix BlueWave in November 2000 to sign with Seattle as the first Japanese position player in Major League Baseball.

“I don’t think anybody in this whole world thought that I would be a Hall of Famer,” he said. “As a baseball player, this is definitely the top of the top.”

Suzuki received 393 of 394 votes (99.7%) from the Baseball Writers’ Association of America. Sabathia was on 342 ballots (86.8%) and Wagner on 325 (82.5%), which was 29 votes more than the 296 needed for the required 75%.

Sabathia and Suzuki were elected in their first appearance on the ballot, while Wagner made it on his 10th and final try. The trio will be inducted into the Hall at Cooperstown on July 27 along with Dave Parker and Dick Allen, voted in last month by the classic era committee.

Mariano Rivera remained the only player to get 100% of the vote from the BBWAA, appearing on all 425 ballots in 2019. Derek Jeter was chosen on 395 of 396 in 2020.

Seattle’s Space Needle was lit blue in honor of Suzuki, who joined Fred Lynn in 1975 as the only players to win Rookie of the Year and MVP in the same season. The Mariners announced plans to retire Suzuki’s No. 51 on Aug. 9.

Suzuki was a two-time AL batting champion and 10-time All-Star and Gold Glove outfielder, hitting .311 with 117 homers, 780 RBIs and 509 stolen bases with Seattle (2001-12, 2018-19), the New York Yankees (2012-14) and Miami (2015-17).

He is perhaps the best contact hitter ever, with 1,278 hits in Nippon Professional Baseball and 3,089 in MLB, including a season-record 262 in 2004. His combined total of 4,367 exceeds Pete Rose’s MLB record of 4,256.

In his role as a Mariners special assistant, he still gets dressed in baseball clothes for home workouts as an example for today’s players.

“I want to be able to show the players how I did it,” he said. “Also in the offseason I go to a few high schools in Japan and I want to be able to show them what a professional baseball player looks like.”

Sabathia, second to Suzuki in 2001 AL Rookie of the Year voting, was a six-time All-Star who won the 2007 AL Cy Young Award and a World Series title in 2009. He went 251-161 with a 3.74 ERA and 3,093 strikeouts, third among left-handers behind Randy Johnson and Steve Carlton, during 19 seasons with Cleveland (2001-08), Milwaukee (2008) and the New York Yankees (2009-19).

Sabathia prefers to have a Yankees cap on his Cooperstown plaque — the decision is made by the Hall.

“The Yankees is the place that wanted me,” he said. “I found a home in the Bronx and I don’t think I’ll ever leave this city.”

Sabathia almost retired after the Game 7 loss to Houston in the 2017 AL Championship Series but was persuaded to keep playing when MLB Network’s Harold Reynolds explained how close his statistics were

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to Hall level.

After adopting a cutter to compensate for diminished velocity, Sabathia won 37 games in his final four seasons.

"I turned myself into my version of Jamie Moyer, is what I felt like: backdoor sliders, changeups, cutters on your hands, two-seamers off the plate," he said. "I fought it for a long time. When you're a guy that is throwing 94, 95 (mph) your whole life, it's hard to buy in."

Wagner was five votes shy last year. He got only 10.5% support in his first appearance in 2016, and 10.2% the following year.

"It's not been an easy 10 years to sit here and swallow a lot of things that you have to swallow," Wagner said. "I didn't blow a save for 10 years, so I felt that might have had an input on being able to get in."

A natural right-hander, Wagner switched to throwing left-handed after breaking his right arm playing football as a 7-year-old, then breaking it again. His son Will, a 26-year-old infielder, made his big league debut with Toronto last August.

Wagner became the ninth pitcher in the Hall who was primarily a reliever after Hoyt Wilhelm, Rollie Fingers, Dennis Eckersley, Bruce Sutter, Goose Gossage, Trevor Hoffman, Lee Smith and Rivera. Wagner is the only left-hander among them.

"It means a lot," he said.

A seven-time All-Star, Wagner was 47-40 with a 2.31 ERA and 422 saves for Houston (1995-2003), Philadelphia (2004-05), the New York Mets (2006-09), Boston (2009) and Atlanta (2010). His 11.9 strikeouts per nine innings are the most among pitchers with at least 900 innings, though his 903 career innings are the fewest among Hall of Famers.

Carlos Beltrán fell 19 votes short at 70.3%, up from 57.1% last year and 46.5% in 2023 in his first ballot appearance. He was followed by Andruw Jones with 261 for 66.2%, an increase from 61.6% last year and 7.3% when he first appeared in 2018.

Jones has two more chances on the BBWAA ballot.

Chase Utley was sixth with 157 votes for 39.8%, an increase from 28.8% in his first appearance.

Alex Rodriguez and Manny Ramírez have lagged in voting, hurt by suspensions for performance-enhancing drugs. Rodriguez received 37.1% in his fourth appearance, up from 34.8%, and Ramírez got 34.3% in his ninth, an increase from 32.5%.

Andy Pettitte got 110 votes and 27.9% in his seventh appearance, doubling from 13.5% last year. Félix Hernández received 81 votes and 20.6% in his first ballot.

Players comprise 278 of 351 elected Hall of Famers, including 142 on the BBWAA ballot, of which 62 were elected in their first year of eligibility.

Carlos González, Curtis Granderson, Adam Jones, Ian Kinsler, Russell Martin, Brian McCann, Hanley Ramírez, Fernando Rodney, Troy Tulowitzki and Ben Zobrist will be dropped from future ballots after receiving less than 5%.

Cole Hamels, Ryan Braun and Matt Kemp join the ballot next year.

Trump demands an apology from bishop who asked him to 'have mercy' on LGBTQ+ people and migrants

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, TIFFANY STANLEY and GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday demanded an apology from the Episcopal bishop of Washington after she made a direct appeal to him during a prayer service marking his inauguration to have mercy on the LGBTQ+ community and migrant workers who are in the United States illegally.

Referencing Trump's belief that he was saved by God from assassination, the Right Rev. Mariann Budde said, "You have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now."

After he returned to the White House, Trump said, "I didn't think it was a good service" and "they could do much better." But later, in an overnight post on his social media site, he sharply criticized the "so-called

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Bishop” as a “Radical Left hard line Trump hater.”

“She brought her church into the World of politics in a very ungracious way. She was nasty in tone, and not compelling or smart,” said Trump, a Republican, adding that Budde didn’t mention that some migrants have come to the United States and killed people.

“Apart from her inappropriate statements, the service was a very boring and uninspiring one. She is not very good at her job!” Trump said. “She and her church owe the public an apology!”

A cathedral spokesperson did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment on Wednesday.

The Trump administration has already issued executive orders rolling back transgender rights and toughening immigration policies.

The Washington National Cathedral service was largely focused on national unity. Trump and Vice President JD Vance and their families attended, along with House Speaker Mike Johnson and Trump’s defense secretary nominee, Pete Hegseth.

In her sermon, Budde said they gathered “to pray for unity as a people and a nation — not for agreement, political or otherwise — but for the kind of unity that fosters community across diversity and division.”

She added, “Unity is not partisan.”

Evangelicals were at the service but not on the program

More than a dozen religious leaders spoke during the interfaith service, including those from Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu traditions.

Notably absent from the invited clergy with speaking roles were conservative evangelicals, who are among Trump’s strongest supporters.

Nonetheless, some of those evangelical supporters were in the pews.

In attendance were Robert Jeffress, a longtime Trump supporter and pastor of Dallas’ First Baptist Church; Paula White-Cain, a televangelist and key spiritual adviser during Trump’s first term; and Lorenzo Sewell, the pastor of Detroit’s 180 Church, who gave a spirited benediction at Monday’s inauguration.

A new kind of inaugural prayer service

The Washington National Cathedral has hosted 10 official inaugural prayer services for presidents of both major political parties. The tradition dates back to 1933.

The latest service had a different emphasis than previous ones. Its focus was on the nation instead of the new administration — a plan made before Election Day.

“We are in a unique moment in our country’s history, and it is time to approach this differently,” said the Very Rev. Randy Hollerith, dean of the Episcopal cathedral, in an October statement. “This will be a service for all Americans, for the well-being of our nation, for our democracy.”

The texts and songs revolved around themes of compassion and togetherness, including a reading from Deuteronomy 10:17-21, which speaks of taking care of orphans and widows and all who are in need.

Sermons at inaugural services have often been given by ministers aligned with the incoming administration. In 2021, the Rev. William Barber, a progressive civil rights leader, preached before President Joe Biden, a Democrat, at the cathedral.

Budde, who gave this year’s sermon, has joined other cathedral leaders in criticizing Trump previously, rebuking his “racialized rhetoric” and blaming him for inciting violence on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of his supporters attacked the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to keep him in power.

Budde was “outraged” in 2020 after Trump staged an appearance in front of St. John’s Episcopal Church, which is near the White House. He held up a Bible after the area had been cleared of peaceful protesters.

Her sermon directed at Trump on Tuesday provoked a lively reaction on social media. Austen Ivereigh, a biographer of Pope Francis, wrote on X that the bishop “named the truth” when she spoke to Trump and Vance. “Their expressions of fury and discomfort suggest she nailed it,” Ivereigh said.

Jeffress, in contrast, posted on X that Budde “insulted rather than encouraged our great president” and that “there was palpable disgust in the audience with her words.”

Music made for Trump

The one part of Tuesday’s service that seemed tailor-made for Trump was the inclusion of opera singer Christopher Macchio, who also sang the national anthem at the inauguration.

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The tenor sang "Ave Maria," a favorite song of Trump and one that Macchio sang at a Trump rally and the Republican National Convention.

Before the service began, Macchio performed hymns like "How Great Thou Art" and another Trump favorite, "Hallelujah," written by Leonard Cohen.

As the prayer service neared its end, Trump joined others in singing "America the Beautiful."

Trump also thanked many of the clergy members who participated as they processed past him — except for Budde, whom he did not acknowledge.

Today in History: January 23, the Baker Massacre in Montana

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Jan. 23, the 23rd day of 2025. There are 342 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 23, 1870, approximately 200 Piegan Blackfoot tribe members, mostly women, children and older adults, were killed by US Army troops under the command of Major Eugene Mortimer Baker in Montana, in what became known as the Baker Massacre.

Also on this date:

In 1368, China's Ming dynasty, which lasted nearly three centuries, began as Zhu Yuanzhang (zhoo whan-zhahng) was formally acclaimed Hongwu Emperor, following the collapse of the Yuan dynasty.

In 1789, Georgetown University was established in present-day Washington, D.C.

In 1849, Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to receive a medical degree in the United States.

In 1964, the 24th Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified, prohibiting poll taxes in federal elections.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon announced an accord had been reached to end the Vietnam War, and would be formally signed four days later in Paris.

In 1986, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inducted its first members, including Chuck Berry, Little Richard and Elvis Presley.

In 1997, Madeleine Albright was sworn in as the nation's first female secretary of state.

In 2018, at age 33, LeBron James became the youngest NBA player to reach the 30,000 career point milestone.

Today's birthdays: Football Hall of Famer Jerry Kramer is 89. Jazz musician Gary Burton is 82. Actor Gil Gerard is 82. Actor Richard Dean Anderson is 75. Aviator Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger is 74. Rock singer Robin Zander (Cheap Trick) is 72. Princess Caroline of Monaco is 68. Singer Anita Baker is 67. Actor Mariska Hargitay is 61. Hockey Hall of Famer Brendan Shanahan is 56. CBS Evening News anchor Norah O'Donnell is 51. Actor Tiffani Thiessen is 51.